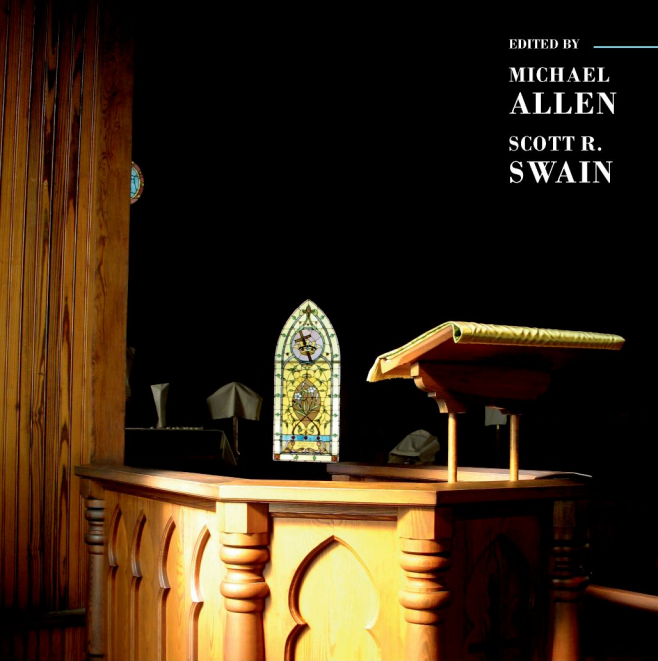


EDITED BY

**MICHAEL
ALLEN**

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SWAIN**



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
**REFORMED
THEOLOGY**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

REFORMED
THEOLOGY

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REFORMED THEOLOGY

Edited by

MICHAEL ALLEN

and

SCOTT R. SWAIN

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INTRODUCTION

SCOTT R. SWAIN

I.1 ON REFORMED THEOLOGY

THEOLOGY is reasoned discourse concerning God. *Theos*—God the holy Trinity—is that with which the *logos* of theology is primarily concerned, that from which theological understanding derives, and that to which theological discourse tends. God is theology’s supreme subject matter, source, and end (Turretin 1992: 2).

God is the supreme subject matter of theology, its ‘foremost, primary *locus*’ (te Velde 2014: 151). According to Herman Bavinck, theology ‘describes for us God, always God, from beginning to end—God in his being, God in his creation, God against sin, God in Christ, God breaking down all resistance through the Holy Spirit and guiding the whole of creation back to the objective he decreed for it: the glory of his name’ (Bavinck 2003: 112). Because theology attends to God not only in his being but also in his works, God’s status as the primary locus of theology does not make him the exclusive locus of theology. Theology devotes its attention to a wide range of topics common to ‘natural scientists, doctors, and philosophers’ (Junius 2014: 179). In each instance, theology is disciplined by a concern to relate the diverse objects of its attention to the primary object of its attention. Theology considers all things other than God ‘only according to that aspect by which they have their own relationship and reference toward God by the necessity of their nature, and God’s relation to them by the freedom of His own will’ (Junius 2014: 179–80). God is thus the generative and organizing subject matter of theology, the ‘starting-point’ from which all other topics ‘flow forth, by which they are held together, and to which they should be directed’ (te Velde 2014: 151). Theology is reasoned discourse concerning God and all things in relation to God.

Theology dares to speak about God and all things in relation to God only because God himself has spoken. *Deus dixit* is the supreme cognitive principle of theology (Bavinck 2003: 30; Barth 1991: 45–68). God is the supreme teacher in the economy of theological understanding, who addresses us in his Word, primarily by means of his

prophetic and apostolic embassy in Holy Scripture, and secondarily by means of those agencies of divine instruction that follow from the productive and regulative authority of the divine Word in the church (Allen and Swain 2015). Theology is possible because the Word of God comes to the church, creates the church, and directs the church. Though this work of the Word occurs within the sphere of the church's social and historical reality, it is not merely the product of that social and historical reality (Barth 1986: 49). Theology is reasoned discourse that seeks to follow divine discourse in Holy Scripture.

In seeking to follow Holy Scripture, theology is ordered to a number of ends. Theology serves a hermeneutical end insofar as 'the doctrine . . . taken out of the Scriptures . . . leads us, as it were, by the hand to the Scriptures,' making us more fluent in 'the reading, understanding, and exposition of the holy Scriptures' (Ursinus 1852: 10). Theology also serves a formational end. In scriptural idiom, theology concerns 'the truth, which accords with godliness' (Titus 1:1; van Mastricht 2018: 72–3). Theology 'articulates a vision of God, the world and ourselves in the service of piety, a settled disposition, and a way of living' (Ottati 2013: 25). Theology ultimately serves a doxological end. As theology is ordered to piety, so piety is ordered to human beatitude in the vision of God (Titus 2:11–14; te Velde 2014: 43). 'God is wisdom's goal, and that glimpse of God himself is saving and filled with glory, toward which we strive with this wisdom as our guide' (Junius 2014: 102). Theology is reasoned discourse concerning God and all things in relation to God that follows divine discourse in Holy Scripture and serves a number of ends, supremely, the knowledge, love, and service of God (van Mastricht 2018: 104).

Taught by God and directed to God, theological understanding does not partake of God's immediate, timeless grasp of all things. The pathos of theology is social and historical (Hütter 2000). For this reason, theological understanding is acquired and cultivated over a long period of time and with much difficulty (Ursinus 1852: 10). In the broadest sense, theology is conditioned by its participation in the various states of human beings as created, fallen, redeemed, and glorified, along with the various possibilities and pathologies endemic to those various states (Junius 2014). In a narrower sense, theology is conditioned by participation in a tradition of inquiry with its own distinctive culture, texts, and conversations (Lacoste 2014; Griffiths 2016; Webster 2019). In theology there is a process of transmission, *traditio*, and there are things transmitted, *tradita* (Webster 2019: 91). There are also disagreements and debates within theology as a tradition of inquiry and between theology and rival traditions of inquiry. These disagreements and debates are integral to the discourse of theology and the cultivation of theological understanding (Ford 2007).

How does the adjective 'Reformed' specify the genus of theology described above? Viewed from the perspective of its historic confessions, Reformed theology may be identified as a catholic, Protestant tradition of inquiry concerning God and all things in relation to God that takes Holy Scripture as its principal source and norm and that orders itself to the glory of God as its chief end. Reformed theology, thus understood, makes specific claims regarding the catholic substance of the faith as summarized in the

Ecumenical Creeds, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Reformed theology exhibits fundamental agreement with Roman Catholicism and other confessional Protestant traditions on what Martin Luther called 'articles of majesty': the being and attributes of the triune God and the person of Jesus Christ. Over against Rome, Reformed theology aligns itself with Lutheran theology on matters such as the authority of scripture and the nature of justification, while distinguishing itself from both Lutheran and Baptist traditions on matters related to biblical interpretation, the sacraments, and church polity (Perkins 1626; Kolb and Trueman 2017; Linebaugh 2018; Bingham et al. 2018). Though Reformed theological systems exhibit a significant degree of diversity, common architectonic patterns and emphases are observable (Allen 2010; Haykin and Jones 2011).

Modern tendencies toward deconfessionalization have transformed both the setting and substance of Reformed theology. Nevertheless, contemporary theologians continue to draw upon resources from the Reformed tradition, offering constructive formulations of Christian doctrine and wrestling with challenges generated inside and outside the Reformed tradition (Pauw and Jones 2006; Boesak 2015). Reformed theology in its various forms continues to exert influence in global, ecumenical, and populist contexts, provoking further conversations about its identity (Stroup 2003; Hansen 2008; Hart 2013). The retrieval of traditional expressions of Reformed theology continues to open up promising possibilities for biblical interpretation and dogmatics (Allen and Swain 2015).

Making sense of Reformed theology as described above requires consideration of various material claims, texts, and contexts. Though we do not claim to have arrived at the most 'apt arrangement of the different topics' (van Mastricht 2018: 69) of Reformed theology in this Handbook, we trust that the following chapters provide an up-to-date overview of some of the major settings, theologians, texts, and doctrines of the Reformed theological tradition that is responsible to the broader field and useful to the reader. The Handbook is divided into three parts.

I.2 CONTEXTS

Part I addresses the various cultures and conversations of Reformed theology. Chapters consider Reformed theology's interactions with the church fathers and medieval doctors. Others consider the development of Reformed theology within the context of the sixteenth-century Reformation(s), as a scholastic enterprise in the era of Reformed orthodoxy, and in relation to the rise of Enlightenment thought. Contributions in this part also discuss the relationship between Reformed theology and various academic disciplines such as the humanities and modern biblical studies. Part I rounds out with articles devoted to modern developments in Reformed theology in Europe, North America, and broader global contexts.

I.3 TEXTS

Part II comprises chapters devoted to representative texts of the Reformed theological tradition. Contributions here discuss texts that are ‘constitutional’ for Reformed churches, including the so-called ‘Three Forms of Unity’ (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt), the Westminster Standards, and the more recent Belhar Confession. Others consider texts from leading theologians of the Reformed tradition that have exercised influence inside and outside the sphere of Reformed theology. Texts discussed include Martin Bucer’s *Kingdom of Christ*, John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Heinrich Bullinger’s *Decades*, John Owen’s *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, Francis Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Jonathan Edwards’ *Religious Affections*, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith*, Abraham Kuyper’s *Lectures on Calvinism*, and Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*.

I.4 TOPICS

The third and final part treats theological topics central to the Reformed theological tradition. The contributions in this section address their topics from various disciplinary perspectives, sometimes historical, sometimes dogmatic, sometimes both. They also represent various theological perspectives on Reformed theology that exist within the Reformed tradition. Topics include theological prolegomena, God, the divine decree, creation and providence, covenant, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the application of redemption, the church, the sacraments, Holy Scripture, liturgy, ethics, politics, society, and law, and the last things.

The handbook concludes with a look at future prospects for Reformed theology.

I.5 CONCLUSION

Short of the eternal kingdom, Reformed theology remains a contested field of discourse, with debates and disagreements regarding the subject matter, sources, and ends of theology. Discerning the line where legitimate debate within Reformed theological discourse becomes dialogue between rival fields of discourse is not always easy, and it is possible to succumb to over-scrupulousness and apathy in making such judgements. The goal of the present volume is not to resolve such questions but rather to serve those who engage them by providing a responsible and representative overview of the major contexts, texts, and topics of Reformed theology and, thereby, it is hoped, to serve the good work of Reformed theology itself. *S.D.G.*

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PART I

CONTEXTS

CHAPTER 1

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH FATHERS

AZA GOUDRIAAN

THE purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the inherent ambivalence of the reception of patristic writers in (early modern) Reformed theology. A positive reception of early Christian theology, on the one hand, has been an integral element of Reformed confessions and theology since the Reformation. This positive reception has been accompanied, on the other hand, by a critical attitude towards the church fathers, or at least a keen awareness of their limitations, that could be motivated by various considerations but was in any case unavoidable given the Reformed principle that the Bible alone is authoritative in matters of faith and conduct.

The Reformed reception of the church fathers can be approached from multiple angles. This chapter concentrates on the early modern period, when patristic authority was intensely discussed, and on those aspects of the reception history that are, more or less strictly, concerned with theology (for recent reflections on usages of early Christian ‘authority’, see e.g. Pollmann 2013; Visser 2011). In the early modern period, Reformed estimations of the length of the age of the church fathers could differ considerably. Many thought that these authoritative ecclesiastical writers lived up until the year 600. Others stipulated that the patristic age ended in the fourth or fifth century, or asserted that their era lasted until the ninth century (Quantin 2009: 72–4). For this chapter, the differences between these chronological assumptions are immaterial.

The theological continuity between Reformed theology and the church fathers is visible most obviously in the adoption of early Christian creeds (see ‘Reformed Confessions, Creeds, and the Fathers’) and in the fact that Reformed theologians commented upon and explained their own confessions by means of compilations of patristic testimonies (‘Confessions Supported by Patristic Testimony’). The pursuit of catholicity evidenced by numerous other publications (‘Agreement with the Fathers’) and by the corresponding acceptance of patristic heresiology (‘Patristic Heresiology Actualized’),

however, had evident limitations, and was accompanied by caveats and criticisms that have been articulated from the sixteenth century onwards ('Limitations').

1.1 REFORMED CONFESSIONS, CREEDS, AND THE FATHERS

One of the most enduring, structural, and affirmative forms of reception of doctrinal beliefs is the inclusion of these beliefs in ecclesiastical confessions. Creeds and confessions articulate doctrines and standards that the church believes to be true and correct for any generation. For Reformed theology today, confessions from the Reformation era are still channelling early Christian theology, especially by their acceptance of early Christian creeds. As a matter of fact, the Reformed confessions of the early modern period include so many references to creeds and church fathers that the most recent edition of the Reformed confessions, published from 2003 onwards on behalf of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), saw reason to include indexes of patristic citations (Faulenbach and Busch 2002). An early modern confession that endorses an ancient creed thereby provides what is probably the strongest form of theological continuity that can be considered here.

These early modern endorsements are found in several confessions, both among Lutherans (e.g. *Formula concordiae*, 1584, Epitome 2; Schaff 2007: 95) and among the Reformed (Quantin 2009: 43–7). The Reformed French Confession of 1559, for example, states its adherence to the ancient creeds while indicating the supreme authority of the Bible: 'And therefore we confess the three creeds, to wit: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, because they are in accordance with the Word of God' (art. 5; Schaff 2007: 362). The Belgic Confession (1561) likewise admits, speaking on the Trinity and on heretics that were condemned by the early councils: 'Therefore, in this point, we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice[a], and of Athanasius; likewise that which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers' (art. 9; Schaff 2007: 393; Busch 2009: 347; Müller 1903: 236). Accordingly, the Confession also rejected the views of those heretics who 'rightly and for good reason have been condemned by the orthodox Fathers' (art. 9).

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1563; 1571) state: 'The *three Credes*, Nicene crede, *Athanasian Crede*, and that whiche is commonlye called the Apostles' Crede, ought *throughlye* to be receaued and beleued: for they may be proued by moste certayne warrauntes of holye scripture' (art. 8; Schaff 2007: 492; 1571 edn; for historical context, see Quantin 2009). This stance is repeated in the Irish Articles of 1615: 'All and every the Articles contained in the *Nicene Creed*, the *Creed of Athanasius*, and that which is commonly called the *Apostles' Creed*, ought firmly to be received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrant of holy Scripture' (art. 7; Schaff 2007: 528).

These examples are by no means exhaustive. The Apostles' Creed has been integrally included in the Spanish *Confession de Fe Christiana* (1559/60–1560/61), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and the *Zweibrücker Katechismus* (1588), and it is cited in the *Confessio Bohemica* (1575/1609) (cf. Vinzent 2006: 44–5). The Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed are also referred to in the *Confessio catholica* of Eger and Debrecen (1562; printed in Müller 1903 as the 'Erlauthaler Confession') and in the *Confessio Bohemica* (1575/1609).

By accepting these creeds, Reformed churches affirmed early Christian dogma and showed that the Reformed faith was catholic and orthodox, not heretical. Thus, when the Council of Trent reconfirmed the Nicene Creed specifically as a foundation for its proceedings (4 February 1546; Denzinger and Hünemann 1991: no. 1500), the Reformed lawyer Innocent Gentillet wrote: 'according to this [decree] they cannot hold us for heretics, since we receive and believe all the articles of the aforementioned creed' (*suiuant iceluy ils ne nous peuuent tenir pour heretiques, parce que nous receuons et croyons tous les articles dudit Symbole*). In fact, added Gentillet, the Reformed affirmed the Nicene Creed more fully than the Roman Catholics did by believing two comings (not numerous eucharistic appearances) of Christ and one catholic church (not a Church of Rome) (Gentillet 1586: 36; cf. Polman 1932: 256–7).

Accepting the Nicene Creed, or ancient creeds more generally, had primarily the theological motivation of confirming one's orthodoxy and catholicity, but it had also legal and political implications. As Albrecht Ritschl noted long ago, the Reformers' adherence to ancient creeds had the (perhaps unintended) political and legal implication that the Reformation remained catholic in the sense of the Justinian legal codex that was at the time still politically relevant. The Codex Justinianus required the observation of the Nicene faith that it considered the touchstone of 'the Catholic religion' (Ritschl 1903: 146–9; see also Coleman-Norton 1966: 364–6; *Codex Iustinianus* 1.1.2). Accordingly, subscribing to 'Nicaea' (325) had a political as well as a theological meaning.

For early modern Reformed theology, the authorship of the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed was not a significant issue. While assuming, for the Apostles' Creed, an origin in the apostolic times, John Calvin considered the authorship an issue of minor importance (Vinzent 2006: 44; Mooi 1965: 43). About a century later, writing after the historical investigations of Gerardus Joannes Vossius and others, Gisbertus Voetius argued that 'the Creed as it presently is has nowhere existed before the fourth century', having been written by 'unknown authors to whom should by no means be ascribed an authority equal to that of Christ and the Apostles' (Voetius 1648: 68 and 65; Vinzent 2006: 60–61; on the genesis of the *textus receptus*, see e.g. Westra 2002). What turned out to be controversial among Reformed writers was not the authorship of the Apostles' Creed but rather its article on Christ's descent into hell (Quantin 2009: 114–30; 253; Van Dixhoorn 2004). Still, Voetius expressed a more general hesitation when, considering the needs of his own time and especially the controversy with anti-trinitarians, he expressed his preference (*ausim praeferre*) for other confessions over the Apostles' Creed. More contemporary relevance was, in his opinion, possessed by the Reformed Catechisms, the *Harmonia Confessionum*, the Nicene(-Constantinopolitan) Creed, and the Athanasian Creed (Voetius 1648: 72–3).

The Athanasian authorship of the Athanasian Creed seems to have been widely assumed in the sixteenth century, but in 1606 the Heidelberg theologian Abraham Scultetus listed the Creed in the category of *dubia*: '[I]n no manuscript, at least those that I have seen, does it appear among the works of Athanasius. It can be read in one, but with the author's name suppressed. It is found in the historical fragments of Hilary' (Scultetus 1606: 74; Benrath 1963: 25). Johann Heinrich Hottinger of Zürich likewise counted the Athanasian Creed among the works of uncertain origin (Hottinger 1654: 77), but André Rivet, while quoting Scultetus' critical assessment, noted the Creed's orthodoxy and its 'great authority in the Church' and declared himself 'persuaded that it is from Athanasius' (Rivet 1660: 261). In the seventeenth century, historical arguments were made that denied the authorship of the Creed to the historical Athanasius: this basic conclusion of Gerardus Joannes Vossius' work was left intact by the subsequent investigations of James Ussher—both were Reformed scholars, though Vossius had a clear sympathy for the Remonstrants. Later in the century, the Anglican scholar Daniel Waterland, living in a country where the liturgy contributed to making the Athanasian Creed a much more central factor than it was on the Continent, defended the Creed as scripturally warranted, dating its origin between 420 and 431 (Kelly 1964: 3–5; Quantin 2009: 43–7).

Some Reformed confessions of the early modern era included references to the church fathers as a group. The *Confessio Helvetica posterior* (1566), for example, has a section 'On the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and on the Fathers, Councils, and Traditions' (Müller 1903: 172–3; Campi 2009: 275–6). The Helvetic Confession appreciated the 'interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin Fathers'—as well as the decisions of councils—only if these were in accordance with scripture. This conditional approval is said to be fully in line with the intentions of the fathers themselves, who submitted their writings to the norm of the biblical canon. The Swiss expressed a common Reformed conviction when they declared that in theological controversy scripture is decisive, not the 'naked opinions of the Fathers, or decisions of councils, much less received customs, or even the multitude of those who think the same, or the prescription of a long time'.

Particularly profuse in its patristic references is the *Confessio catholica von Eger und Debrecen* (1562). The opening sentence starts with an orthodox consensus: 'we confess unanimously with Holy Scripture, and in accordance with the right confession of the orthodox fathers and the tradition of truth that is in conformity with Scripture' (Müller 1903: 265; Bucsay and Csepregi 2009: 11). Throughout this confession, time and again the claim is being made that the professed doctrines are consonant with Scripture, the Fathers (occasionally even 'all Fathers', in rare cases the subcategory of 'the better Fathers' (*Patres saniora*), and ancient councils.

Being included, or acclaimed, in Reformed confessions, the early Christian creeds—and certain teachings of the Fathers—have clearly become part of the Reformed theological identity, expressing its catholicity and orthodoxy. Here especially, as Irena Backus has argued more generally (Backus 2003), the patristic heritage is used not so much as providing proof-texts but rather as a constructive element of the Reformed identity. At the same time, the subordination of patristic ideas to the norm of scripture

shows that a critical attitude towards the fathers was, likewise by confession, an integral part of the Reformed identity as well.

1.2 CONFESSIONS SUPPORTED BY PATRISTIC TESTIMONY

In the last few decades of the sixteenth century, Theodore Beza and other Genevan theologians felt the need to demonstrate that the large number of different Reformed confessions did not at all contradict the unity of the Reformed faith. Therefore, Beza and others stimulated the production of a harmony of confessions. This attempt resulted first in Jean François Salvard's *Harmonia confessionum*, published in Geneva in 1581. A few years later, the Genevan professor Gaspar Laurentius (1550–1636) published a work entitled *Catholicus et orthodoxus ecclesiae consensus, ex verbo Dei, patrum scriptis, Ecclesiae reformatae confessionum harmonia* (Geneva, 1595). This work provided a sizeable patristic dossier arranged according to doctrinal topics, without including the integral texts of different Reformed confessions. The step to a comprehensive volume that combined the integral texts of Reformed confessions with this patristic (and scholastic) dossier was made in 1612, when Laurentius published his *Corpus et syntagma confessionum fidei* in three parts (Faulenbach 2002: 26–30; Bakhuizen van den Brink 1939: 271–80). Laurentius gave the texts of the confessions as running texts and not, as the *Harmonia confessionum* had done, divided into sections according to different themes. The third part of the *Corpus et syntagma* was a considerably expanded version of the 1595 compendium of patristic and medieval testimonies. In the 1612 version, the patristic testimonies were arranged in an order that alluded to the Apostles' Creed but was in essence a Protestant series of *loci*: 1. Scripture; 2. God, the Trinity, Christology; 3. Divine providence; 4. The head of the Church; 5. Justification; 6. Free will, original sin, and election; 7. Sacraments; 8. Idolatry and superstition; 9. Worship of God and good works; 10. 'The Church and its pastors'; 11. Resurrection and eternal life. Chapters 9–11 were new in the 1612 edition. Combining the idea of a 'harmony' of Reformed confessions with patristic testimonies amounted to an argument that unity of faith did not only exist among Reformed churches but also extended historically to the early church.

Another case of a confessional document that received a patristic commentary was the Heidelberg Catechism. In this case, the main centre of inspiration was not Geneva but Heidelberg—in the early seventeenth century a very significant center of patristic editing and learning (Quantin 1993: 505; Selderhuis 2012: 62–4; Benrath 1963: 15). In 1603, Reiner Bachoff of Echt published his *Catechesis religionis christianae* (Hanau: Guilielmus Antonius), a work of more than 700 pages that gave the text of the Heidelberg Catechism with extensive commentary consisting mainly of biblical and patristic quotations. As he indicated on the title page, Bachoff provided testimonies of the fathers 'who lived in the first 500 years after the birth of Christ', adding biographies of the quoted

authors and short accounts of the cited councils. This collection of biblical verses and quotations, he wrote, ‘illustrated the doctrine of heavenly truth’ but also ‘proved nearly all elements [*membra*] of the Palatinate catechism’, showing ‘the deposit of Christ and the Apostles, in a wonderful consensus and great perspicuity in the main and most necessary chapters of Christian doctrine faithfully transmitted to and preserved for posterity’ (*Depositum Christi et Apostolorum, miro consensu maximaque perspicuitate in praecipuis et maxime necessariis doctrinae Christianae capitibus posteritati fideliter traditum et conservatum*). This essential doctrinal agreement—*uno quasi ore*, ‘as if by one mouth’—was visible first of all in the three parts that made up the Catechism’s main structure: human misery, the grace of Christ, and the life of thankfulness. Moreover, for Bachoff the relevance of patristic theology included the heresiological opposite of doctrinal truth and unity, and he therefore specifically listed the answers of the Catechism in which heresies were condemned that had already been extant in early times and rejected by the early church.

These examples show that the essentials of the Reformed faith, as expressed in Reformed confessions, was perceived, at least by these authors, as being strengthened by citing patristic parallels and as in fact enjoying patristic backing. The *Confessio christiana fidei* (1560) of Theodore Beza, itself not an officially adopted ecclesiastical confession, likewise included patristic references, and its Dutch translation (Leiden, 1578) even mentioned in its title that this was a confession ‘in accordance with the explanation of the Ancient Fathers of the earliest churches’ (*achtervolgende de wtlegginghe der Oude Vaderen der eerster Kercken*) (Polman 1932: 126). On a more personal level, Guy de Brès exemplifies a link between Reformed confession and patristics. He authored the *Belgic Confession* (1561) after having written, ‘as a confession of [his] faith’ (*pour confession de ma foy*) (Epistre, [ix]), a patristic anthology, *Le baston de la foy* (1555), that saw fourteen editions (Lane 1993: 74–5). The desire to show the theological continuity between the fathers and Reformed theology found its expression in numerous other publications as well.

1.3 AGREEMENT WITH THE FATHERS

Identifying the agreement with patristic doctrine was essential in order to show that the Reformation remained within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy and thus was a part of the one catholic church in terms of a succession of doctrine (rather than a succession of bishops). Without patristic endorsement, Reformed theology would seem to be not ancient but a late innovation and, therefore, sectarian rather than catholic. Therefore, numerous works were published with the purpose of demonstrating the genuine catholicity of the Reformed faith. William Perkins’ *A Reformed Catholike* of 1598 is a classic example with an eloquent title. It unleashed a fierce competition for the title ‘catholic’: *A Reformation of a Catholike Deformed* (1604) was the title under which William Bishop defended the catholicity of Rome against Perkins. Perkins, who had

died in 1602, was in turn defended by Robert Abbot in *A defence of the Reformed Catholicke of M.W. Perkins, lately deceased, against the bastard Counter-Catholicke of D. Bishop* (1606) (Patterson 2004). Another work of this period that clearly articulated the Protestant pursuit of catholicity was *A catholike appeale for Protestants* (1609), a book in which Thomas Merton responded to 'the mis-named Catholike apologie for the Romane faith' and wanted to demonstrate 'the antiquitie of our religion'. On the European continent, a similar objective motivated the compilation of an extensive patristic dossier that the Basel professor Amandus Polanus published under the title of *Symphonia catholica* (1607). This 'catholic symphony, or catholic and orthodox consensus' between the Reformed and the early churches was meant to refute the Roman Catholic charge of Protestant 'innovation'. Polanus admitted that this aim could as well be attained by biblical argument alone, but the Reformed case could still be bolstered by cataloguing evidence of agreement with the patristic church.

The effort to demonstrate the catholicity of Reformed Protestantism focused on doctrine primarily but not exclusively. It could also concern liturgy and church order. One significant example is the Genevan Psalter of 1542. According to the title, it followed 'the custom of the ancient Church' (*selon la coustume de l'Eglise ancienne*) (Old 1975: 93). Another example is Antoine du Pinet's book *La conformite des eglises reformees de France et de l'eglise primitive, en police et ceremonies, prouuee par l'Ecriture, Conciles, Docteurs, Decretz, et Canons anciens*, published in Lyons in 1564 (Polman 1932: 266). This was, again, an argument to show that the Reformed were by no means the innovators that they were charged to be. The controversies on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper had a more doctrinal character; there, too, the fathers played a significant role (Quantin 2009; Kim 2009; Polman 1932: 266–7).

This catholic consensus involved some fathers more than others. Augustine, always the major patristic authority in Western Christianity (Pollmann et al. 2013; Devillairs 2007; Flasch and De Courcelles 1998; Neveu 1990), was especially significant in the era of the so-called 'Augustinian revolution' (MacCulloch 2004: 114) that is known as the Reformation. The special role of Augustine in the Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Reformation has been noted in many investigations. John Calvin's reception of Augustine has been investigated numerous times and from different angles (Smits 1957–8; Mooi 1965; Meijering 1980; Lange van Ravenswaay 1990; Lane 1999; Van Oort 2001; 2015; Backus 2008; Scheiber 2014). Augustine was by far the most frequently cited author in Calvin (Mooi 1965), as he was in, for instance, Martin Bucer (S. E. Buckwalter in Pollmann et al. 2013: 715), Heinrich Bullinger (C. Moser in Pollmann et al. 2013: 722–3), and Franciscus Turretini (Meijering 1991: 22). In patristic anthologies up to 1566 alone, Augustine provided probably half of the included material (Lane 2013: 540; cf. Lane 1993: 95). In major Reformed synods, the situation seems to have been similar: in writings by delegations at the Synod of Dordrecht (1618–19; Goudriaan 2013) and in the papers and minutes of the Westminster Assembly (1643–52; Van Dixhoorn 2012: 148–61), Augustine was the most frequently cited church father.

When Calvin wrote about Augustine, whom he considered 'the best and most faithful witness of the entire antiquity', that 'Augustine is totally ours' (*Augustinus totus noster est*),

he expressed his conviction not only that Augustine was still relevant but that he was also entirely on Calvin's side theologically (Lange van Ravenswaay 1990; Scheiber 2014). The bishop of Hippo could even be hypothetically synchronized with the sixteenth century: 'If Augustine lived today and would publicly take up the cause of our defense, he could not express more clearly what is sufficient in order to refute' Pighius than he did already in his extant writings and than Calvin did in his own teaching (Scheiber 2014: 50; *Calvini Opera* 6: 264). A similar imagination of the fathers as sixteenth-century contemporaries can also be found in Guy de Brès (1555, Epistre, [ix, cf. x]), who decided that in this hypothetical scenario they, too, would not escape martyrdom: 'if the fathers were still alive today, they would cruelly be put to death as malicious heretics.'

Still, the supposed agreement with patristic teaching, broadly understood, meant that for the Reformed it was not only Augustine who was worth reading. Numerous other fathers were read, edited, and appreciated in different degrees. One example is Tertullian, who enjoyed some popularity among the first generations of Reformed Protestants. Calvin considered 'Tertullian totally ours' ('Tertullianus totus noster'; Lane 2002), as he did with Augustine. Beza, who acknowledged that Tertullian 'was inaccurate on several doctrinal points'—a caveat similar to the warning expressed by Beatus Rhenanus in his 1521 edition (Backus 2002: 38)—still considered Tertullian 'better' than any of the Greek and Latin fathers (Petitmengin 2007: 312). Beza began some preparatory work for an edition which never made it into print. Franciscus Junius, however, published an edition of Tertullian's works in which he gave the text of a Roman Catholic editor, Pamelius, together with his own notes (Backus 2002; Petitmengin 2007). Some of Tertullian's texts were translated by Lambert Daneau (Strohm 1996: 39–52; Backus 2002).

A shortlist of fathers who deserved reading is found in Voetius' disputations. In 1640 the Utrecht professor recommended students and young ministers to read polemical, moral, and historical works in an alternating sequence. In the genre of polemical writings he recommended authors in four sub-categories: against the pagans ('Athenagoras, Justin, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Lactantius, Arnobius, Theodoret'), against the Jews ('Justin, Tertullian, Chrysostom'), against Arians ('Athanasius and Hilary'), and against the 'Manicheans and Pelagians' (Augustine). As authors of 'moral and oratorical' works he recommended 'Cyprian, Chrysostom, Basil', and in the category of historical works he mentioned Epiphanius, Jerome, and Augustine (Voetius 1648: 87).

1.4 PATRISTIC HERESIOLOGY ACTUALIZED

If patristic testimony showed the catholic orthodoxy of the Reformed faith, by the same token the identified heresies of the patristic age remained relevant descriptions of non-orthodoxy (cf. Backus et al. 2012; Backus 2015). These heresies were identified and attacked in their new appearances from the sixteenth century onwards. Considering the

centrality of grace and predestination, Pelagianism was probably the most significant category in controversies between Roman Catholics and Protestants as well as in internal conflicts within these confessions. Anti-trinitarians revived Arius or Paul of Samosata—hence the polemics against early modern ‘Samosatenians’. Protestants were accused of being Donatists, and they in turn charged Anabaptists with Donatism (Wright 1998). After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), Augustine’s endorsement of repression of Donatists was being used in France to justify governmental persecution of Huguenots, which provoked a harsh criticism of this element in Augustine’s legacy not only from thinkers like Pierre Bayle but also from the the Reformed orthodox who otherwise endorsed major points of Augustine’s anti-Donatist position, as appears from the *Historia ecclesiae Africanae illustrata* (1690) of the Utrecht professor Melchior Leydecker (Goudriaan 2015). In the nineteenth century this aspect of Augustine’s thinking was still criticized by a German Reformed theologian such as Philip Schaff (Clark 2011: 340–41)

In the person of Theodore Beza, the Reformed tradition invented, it seems, a new heresiological term that has since become popular: that of ‘semi-Pelagianism’. Beza’s use of the term in or around 1556 is the earliest evidence of the term yet found. Beza originally used ‘semi-Pelagianism’ as a polemical term without any specific historical connotation. While the term has since retained its general, and widely applicable, dogmatic connotation of a ‘half-Pelagian’ theology, the term moved quickly into historical territory, becoming a term designating the fifth- and sixth-century critics of Augustine (Backus and Goudriaan 2014).

1.5 LIMITATIONS

Reformed Protestants sought to demonstrate their agreement with the early Fathers, but it was also widely acknowledged that the ‘consensus of the Fathers’—a concept defended by the Council of Trent when it famously prohibited an interpretation of the Bible ‘against the universal consensus of the Fathers’ (*contra unanimum consensum Patrum*, 8 April 1546; Denzinger and Hünermann 1991: no. 1507)—was a problematic notion. The fathers disagreed among themselves on various points, their mistakes could not be ignored, and it would be dangerous to find oneself in agreement with their theological errors.

As noted above, Reformed confessions emphasized that patristic writings were subordinate to scripture. Convinced of patristic fallibility, Reformed thinkers developed a remarkable tradition of open disagreement with, and frank discussion of, what they considered the theological mistakes of the fathers. Not even the catholic creeds were exempt from critical inquiry: in 1545, Calvin formulated a later frequently cited critique of what he considered the verbosity of the Nicene Creed, evidenced in its expression ‘God from God, light from light, true God from true God’—though he later endorsed these words even while still considering them a ‘hard expression’ (Quantin 2009: 347–8;

Nijenhuis 1972: 91–2). The Westminster Assembly, likewise, held a lengthy debate about the biblical basis of the ‘descent into hell’ mentioned in the Apostolic Creed (Van Dixhoorn 2004).

If the Creeds derived their authority only from the biblical basis of their contents, individual Fathers were *a fortiori* susceptible to critical scrutiny. Accordingly, in Abraham Scultetus’ *Medulla theologiae patrum* (1598–1613), descriptions of the fathers’ *naevi* or faults were part of the narrative. André Rivet likewise included an ‘admonition on the errors and mistakes of the ancients’ in the treatise on the authority of the fathers that served as the preface to his *Criticus sacer* (1612) (Rivet 1660: 56–62; Backus 2001: 855–61). Roman Catholics, too, he observed, had ‘often noted errors and mistakes in the Fathers’ (Rivet 1660: 63). These errors, however, did not mean the fathers should be put aside altogether. Their writings included both sound observations and errors, and should be read with discernment (Rivet 1660: 68). In his 1640 disputations on the church fathers, Gisbertus Voetius counted their ‘faults’ in a list of seven points: deficient knowledge of oriental languages, ignorance of philosophical concepts (Augustine being the great exception), lacking knowledge of history, a weak understanding of logic in exegesis, ridiculous biblical interpretations, deficient processing of exegetical findings into a systematic theology, and lack of argumentative efficiency in polemical discourse (Voetius 1648: 81–2). Obviously, these points have more to do with Voetius’ ideal of academic scholarship than with doctrinal orthodoxy, which illustrates that, along with a ‘biblical test’, an ‘academic test’ could also result in revealing the limitations of patristic authority.

Voetius held his disputations on the fathers nearly a decade after the Huguenot minister Jean Daillé published a strong critique of the authority of the church fathers. Daillé’s *Traicté de l’employ des Saintes Peres* appeared in 1632. English and Latin translations followed in the 1650s. A revised version of the English translation appeared again in the nineteenth century, apparently in order to make the point that not tradition but—as the editor put it by quoting bishop Richard Hurd—‘the Bible, and that only (interpreted by our best reason) is the Religion of Protestants’ (G. Jekyll in Daillé 1856: 16). Daillé’s two-fold message, amply elaborated in the two main parts of the book, was that the exact views of the fathers on the doctrinal controversies between the Church of Rome and the Reformation are hard to know, if they can be known at all, and in any case the fathers do not have the authority to decide what the correct view is. These two basic points were backed up by numerous references to patristic writings. Daillé pointed out that few writings from the first three centuries have actually survived, and those that have deal mostly with other issues than those that are contentious between Rome and Reformation. Numerous presumed patristic writings, moreover, are in fact forgeries, and even those that are basically authentic have frequently been corrupted. The fathers’ idiom and style often make it hard to ascertain their actual intentions, which they sometimes concealed by accommodating the views of others, and sometimes changed over time. When they dealt with themes that were controversial in the seventeenth century, it was hard to decide how common the view that they articulated actually was. In short, ‘the writings

of the ancients are altogether insufficient for proving the truth of any of those points which are at this day controverted amongst us' (Daillé 1856: 205; bk 1, c. 11).

In addition, Daillé argued that the fathers lacked the authority needed for deciding doctrinal issues. Their writings included many mistakes and errors. The fathers themselves did not intend their writings to be considered authoritative, and disagreed with one another even about significant issues. Since, moreover, neither side of the doctrinal divide took the fathers to be authoritative without further qualifications, any attempt to resolve theological controversy based on their writings was bound to fail (Daillé 1856 Backus 2013; Quantin 2009: 228–38; Quantin 2006). Daillé still valued the 'negative' form of patristic consensus: unanimous silence. If any particular theory or doctrine could nowhere be found in the writings of the fathers, this theory could not be a fundamental doctrine of Christianity (Daillé 1856: 407–14; Quantin 2009: 237–8).

Daillé's original and powerful critique incorporated points that had been made before. The issue of the corruption of patristic texts is a notable example. Thomas James, librarian in Oxford, wrote a treatise specifically devoted to listing and unmasking forgeries and textual corruptions. A renowned example was the debate about two versions of a passage in Cyprian's *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*, one of which seemed to elevate the primate and chair of Peter whereas the other ascribed equal 'honor and power' to all the apostles (Daillé 1856: 84 [1.4]; Petitmengin 1993: 25; Goudriaan 2010: 237–9; SC 500: 180–81). Moreover, the idea that the fathers and the early moderns lived in different times, asking different questions or taking positions depending on the circumstances, was also expressed by Guy de Brès. De Brès (1555: Epistre, [iii]) noted that the fathers lived in a time when they felt certain ceremonies and accommodations were necessary (*ayans esgard au temps et aux personnes*) which, however, should not be taken to remain valid once and for all but only 'for a limited period of time' (*pour quelque espace de temps*). Voetius, like Daillé before him, noted that 'most of our controversies, at least in the form that they now have, are not present in most [of the fathers]' (Voetius 1648: 101). It was perhaps a similar feeling of distance that led to the curricular reading agenda proposed by numerous Reformed theologians who recommended that students started by first reading works of contemporary authors and only then move on to study patristic writings (Quantin 2009: 83–7, 162, 166–7; Voetius 1648: 102).

The chronological distance that separates contemporary Reformed theology from the patristic era is even longer than the period between the early moderns and the ancient fathers. Arguably, however, the grounds for the ambivalent theological reception of the fathers in the early modern period are still in place as long as the ancient creeds, the early modern confessions, the catholicity of the church, and the priority of biblical authority over human thinking are recognized.

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Backus (2003); Lane (1999); Meijering (1991); Pollmann et al. (2013); Quantin (2009).

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CHAPTER 2

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

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IN the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers separated from the theology and practice of the medieval church. Turning to the original Greek and Hebrew of the scriptures, the Reformers moved away from the teaching of medieval theology and began to emphasize certain teachings that they felt were more biblical in orientation, such as divine sovereignty, justification *sola fide*, and the Mediatorial office of Christ.

This fact has tended to obscure the positive influence that the theology of the medieval church had upon Reformed thought. The great works of theological synthesis had been crafted in the medieval era. Thus when Reformed theologians came to the task of formulating their understanding of the doctrines of God, of providence, of predestination, of sanctification, and of the person of Christ, they utilized the formulations produced by medieval theologians in order to produce a truly catholic Reformed theology.

In addition, many of the Reformers had been deeply trained in the theology of the medieval church. Luther was trained in the nominalism of Gabriel Biel, and lectured upon Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences*. Martin Bucer was trained in Thomistic theology as a Dominican monk. Zwingli was trained in Scotism and Thomism. Thus when these men came to practise theology in the light of their Reformation beliefs, they did not wholly depart from the influence of those systems in which they had been trained. The influence of medieval thought can be seen from the earliest days of the Reformation through to the very end of the period of codification and confessionalization.

It is thus evident that the relationship between medieval theology and Reformed theology is very complex. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the nature of medieval influence upon Reformed theology from the beginning of the Reformation through the era of high orthodoxy (1640–1725). This period is chosen as it is the period in which the formulation and codification of Reformed thought reached its high point and conclusion. During the period of high orthodoxy, Reformed theology came to full maturity as

a coherent system of thought that was enshrined in the confessions of the faith and the great systematic works of Reformed theologians (Muller 2003: i:30–32). Further development after this period entailed departure from traditional Reformed teaching, and thus does not enter into the scope of this chapter.

2.1 THE TRAINING AND THEOLOGY OF THE REFORMERS

2.1.1 Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Martin Luther was trained in Erfurt in the Ockhamist training of the *via moderna* (Oberman 1990: 113–23; Bagchi 1999: 4; Urban 1981: 311–30). At the centre of this training was the teaching of Gabriel Biel, the late medieval nominalist theologian (Oberman 1990: 138; Janz 1983: 7). Luther began his career lecturing on the *Ethics* of Aristotle at the University of Wittenberg in 1509 (Oberman 1990: 139–40). He then returned to Erfurt and began lecturing on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard the very next year. In his marginal notes on Lombard's *Sentences*, it is clear that Luther was beginning to move away from the scholasticism of the medieval era (Janz 1983: 9–12). Returning to Wittenberg, Luther continued this shift in his lectures on the Psalms from 1513 to 1516, and in his lectures on Romans from 1515 to 1516 (Bagchi 1999: 6; Janz 1983: 1222). Finally, in the autumn of 1517, in Luther's *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam*, he broke strongly with the medieval tradition, denouncing the whole of scholasticism as Pelagian, and condemning Aristotle. While Luther sought to denounce the whole scholastic tradition, most of his critiques are actually directed at Gabriel Biel (Janz 1983: 24–7). Luther presented what would become a common theme in early Reformed thought: it was Christ, not Aristotle, who was the authority for the believer. And it was scripture, not philosophy, that should be the foundation for Christian faith and action.

2.1.2 Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

While Luther was in the process of rejecting scholastic theology, many of his later Reformed contemporaries were in the midst of scholastic training. Ulrich Zwingli was trained in scholastic theology at Basel. There he studied under Thomas Wyttenbach, who taught in the *via antiqua*, lecturing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Wyttenbach taught using the works of Thomas Aquinas and the *Commentary on the Sentences* by Duns Scotus. Thus Zwingli received a thorough training in the theology of the *via antiqua* (Stephens 1986: 6–7; Rilliet 1959: 27; Gabler 1983: 26). This influence is demonstrated quite prominently in his work *De vera et falsa religione commentarius*, where he explains the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 3 in a manner consistent with the scholastic

interpretations of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus (Stephens 1986: 84). Zwingli also makes great use of the *summum bonum* in his work *De Providentia*, explaining that God is the supreme good and all goodness is derived from Him (Locher 1981: 168–72).

2.1.3 Martin Bucer (1491–1551)

Martin Bucer was placed in the Dominican order by his family at a young age. In his training in the monastery at Sélestat, he was required to learn Aristotle's *Organon*, as well as the works of the physics and the metaphysics. He was also required to study the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (Greschat 2004: 14–17). The greatest influence upon Bucer, however, was Thomas Aquinas. In his inventory of books drawn up in 1518, Bucer includes all of Aquinas' major theological works, and also includes works by Thomistic authors such as Thomas Cardinal Cajetan (Greschat 2004: 24–5; Backus 1997: 644–6).

This Thomistic influence did not disappear once Bucer joined the Reformation. His work *That No One Should Live for Himself but for Others, and How We May Attain this* (*Das ym selbs niemant sonder anderen leben soll. vnd wie der mensch dahyn kummen mög*) (Strasbourg, 1523) demonstrates a clear dependence upon Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*. The structure of the book follows that of the *Summa*, as well as the core principle that all creatures are dependent upon the divine order of the law of God (Greschat 2004: 56; Wright 1994: 29). Bucer later used Aquinas in his formulation of the doctrine of the Eucharist (Thompson 2005: 103, 185, 240). Bucer's thought on predestination is also dependent upon Thomas (Krieger 1993: 83–99). While a complete assessment of the Thomistic influence upon Bucer's theology has yet to be written, the influence of Thomistic thought is nevertheless very much present throughout his writings.

2.1.4 John Calvin (1509–1564)

John Calvin began serious studies at the Collège de la Marche at Paris when he was about 14. After this he went to the Collège de Montaigu, which had a strong reputation for orthodoxy (Wendel 1963: 17–18). Although Calvin ultimately intended to go into ministry, he began as an arts student, and was not likely to have taken theology courses at Montaigu (Steinmetz 1995: 6).

There has been a great debate over the nature of Calvin's training at Montaigu, and whether or not he was influenced in any way by the Scottish theologian John Major (or Mair) (1467/8–1550), who taught at Montaigu through 1518, and then again from 1526 to 1531 (Lane 1999: 1–25; Muller 2000: 39–61). Major was a Scotist philosopher and theologian. The debate concerning his influence upon Calvin is significant in that it has become intimately connected to the question of medieval influence. Those who have argued for influence from Major have argued that he introduced Calvin to medieval theology, including the writings of Scotus and Bernard of Clairvaux. Those who have argued that Major did not instruct Calvin have argued that the latter did not receive any

significant training in medieval scholastic theology (Wendel 1963: 19; Reuter 1963; Torrance 1965: 76–98; Ganoczy 1987: 175–6; Lane 1999: 23, 87–95).

The question of influence by Major illustrates how difficult it is to discern Calvin's influences (Wendel 1963: 122–3). Calvin also followed the custom of the day in that he did not always reference his sources, and even when he did, these references are not the equivalent of a modern footnote. This makes it particularly difficult to discern influence from medieval theologians. Calvin was also plagued by limited resources and access to certain materials throughout his career, particularly when he was in Geneva. It is possible that he never even read certain authors such as Thomas Aquinas directly, encountering them only through secondhand sources (Lane 1999: 1, 5, 45).

Despite this ambiguity, Richard Muller has demonstrated that certain scholastic elements do appear in Calvin's writings, particularly in the structure of the *Institutes*. Muller notes that the fourfold structure of the *Institutes* reflects that of Lombard's *Sentences*, while the pattern of argument is reflective of the scholastic disputation (Muller 2000: 45). In addition, Muller notes that Calvin did read medieval theology after the publication of the first edition of the *Institutes*, and that he likely read late medieval biblical commentators such as Nicholas of Lyra and Denis the Carthusian (Muller 2000: 45). Moreover, many scholars have seen the influence of Scotist thought in Calvin. Steinmetz notes that Calvin is heavily influenced by Scotist thought, but that he still rejects the Scotist distinction between the absolute and the ordained power of God (Steinmetz 1995: 40–52). Wendel notes this rejection, but argues that there is a very close similarity between Calvin and Scotus on the will and power of God (Wendel 1963: 127–129).

One medieval author who does appear in Calvin's works prominently is Bernard of Clairvaux. Lane notes that in his early years, Calvin misrepresented Bernard, claiming that he was a semi-Pelagian (Lane 1999: 92–3). Calvin had limited recourse to Bernard until about the time that he went to Strasbourg, in 1543. After this, Calvin's appreciation of Bernard grew. Quotations and references to Bernard appear in Calvin's commentaries on Genesis and Psalms, published in 1554 and 1557 respectively, shortly after the *Omnia opera* of Bernard was published (Lane 1999: 134–5). Positive references also appear in Calvin's 1559 edition of the *Institutes* (Lane 1999: 97).

Calvin was in many ways an archetypal humanist. He placed a profound emphasis upon primary sources, and an eclectic variety of sources are present in his writings. He was not, however, as best can be determined, trained in any sort of scholastic theology. It would remain for other theologians to develop Reformed theology into a more strongly scholastic form.

2.1.5 Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and Jerome Zanchi (1516–1590)

One Reformer who was trained deeply in scholastic and Aristotelian thought was the Florentine theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli. Vermigli was trained at Padua, one of the

leading universities in the world at the time, and a major centre of Aristotelian thought. There he studied theology with two Dominican Thomists: Gasparus de Mansuetis Perusinus, and Albertus Vtinensis, who occupied the chair of Thomistic metaphysics (McNair 1967: 103–4).

Thomistic thought remained present in Vermigli's writings throughout his career. Vermigli strongly favoured Thomas, quoting him with precision and mentioning four of his major writings by name (Donnelly 1976a: 27). Vermigli references Thomas more than any other scholastic theologian save Peter Lombard (Donnelly 1976a: 24–5). Thomistic thought is present in the way that Vermigli understands the nature and task of theology, and the role of reason and revelation (Donnelly 1976b: 443; 1976a: 47–8). In addition to Thomas, Vermigli was also influenced by Gregory of Rimini. Rimini's thought was influential in Vermigli's understanding of predestination, particularly on the issue of double predestination (Donnelly 1976a: 24; James 1998: 126–50).

Vermigli left the Roman Catholic Church at the age of 43 to join the Reformation. He taught at Strasbourg with Bucer, where he lectured on the Old Testament (Anderson 1975: 79). He was then invited by Cranmer to come to Oxford, and subsequently made Regius Professor of Divinity (Anderson 1975: 85, 92). After the ascension of Mary to the throne of England, Martyr was exiled yet again to Strasbourg, where he lectured from 1553 to 1556. He ended his career in Zurich, where he taught from 1556 to 1562 (Anderson 1975: 171, 212, 250).

In 1541, Vermigli received a student at Lucca by the name of Girolamo Zanchi (Hieronymus Zanchius). Zanchi, like Vermigli, had joined the Augustinian canons when he was 15, and was subsequently trained heavily in Thomistic theology. Under Vermigli's tutelage, he became a Protestant in belief, but was so as a Nicodemite for ten years, until he fled in 1551 to Geneva (Donnelly 1976c: 88). There he studied with Calvin before going to Strasbourg, where he assumed the chair of divinity in the College of St Thomas (McNair 1967: 227). Zanchi went on to teach at Heidelberg and then finally at the new academy at Neustadt (McNair 1967: 228).

Zanchi's theology may be said to be the most Thomistic of any of the Reformed orthodox theologians of the sixteenth century (Donnelly 1976b: 444). He attempted to write a Reformed version of the *Summa Theologiae*, but this was not completed (Goris 2001: 123). One book in this work, *De Natura Dei*, on the existence and attributes of God, is heavily influenced by Thomas, and he references Thomas numerous times throughout the text (Goris 2001: 126; Gründler 1961). This influence is present in Zanchi's exposition of the divine names, particularly in the discussion of the name 'Qui est' (Zanchi 1577: 35–51; Goris 2001: 129–30). It is also present in his discussion of divine simplicity (Zanchi 1577: 82–90; Goris 2001: 129–30). Other Thomistic elements are present throughout Zanchi's thought, including in his discussions of the immortality of the soul and the nature of Christian virtues (Donnelly 1976b: 449).

Vermigli and Zanchi are significant in that they incorporated Thomistic elements into Reformed theology (Muller 2003: i:51, 64–5). Through their writings and teachings, a strain of Thomistic thought entered into Reformed theology in a manner in which it had not been present before. Vermigli and Zanchi are also significant in that their

influence as teachers was widespread, as they taught respectively at Oxford, Strasbourg, Zurich, Heidelberg, and Neustadt. Through their widespread influence a greater respect for Thomistic thought was introduced into Reformed theology.

2.2 CODIFICATION, CONFESSIONALIZATION, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Throughout the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Reformed theology began to be institutionalized in the church and society (Muller 2003: i:33–7). As Reformed Christians gathered together in their own churches, they began to write confessions expressing their understanding of the Christian faith. This confessionalization reached its high point in the writing of the Westminster Confession of Faith. In this great summary of Reformed teaching, there is still an interaction with and utilization of medieval thought. One notable example of this is found in chapter 5 concerning providence, where it is noted that God is the First Cause who causes all things to occur either necessarily, freely, or contingently. This language is derived directly from medieval scholasticism, particularly that of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus (*ST* I, q.2, a.3. Resp.; *ST* I, q.19, a.8, Resp.; Scotus 1994).

In addition to the confessionalization of Reformed thought, Reformed teaching became institutionalized through the universities and academies of Europe. As Reform spread, new places of learning arose and older institutions were taken over in the name of the Reform. Luther and Calvin's respective successors, Phillip Melancthon and Theodore Beza, were both instrumental in advancing the thought of the Reformation through education. The university curriculum was changed to reflect the principles of the Reformation (Maag 1995; Wengert 2013). Whereas many of the earlier Reformers had been trained in various forms of medieval thought in Roman Catholic institutions by teachers who followed Thomas, Scotus, or Ockham, Reformed theologians in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century had been trained by other Reformed theologians at Reformed institutions (Muller 2003: i:33–4). Thus medieval theology came to be utilized very deliberately in defence of Reformed theology. The approach of Reformed teaching would be to prepare the student to utilize the resources of both medieval and patristic thought in the defense of Reformed theology. An excellent example of this is the *De Studio Theologiae* of Thomas Barlow, the one-time Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford. Barlow's work recommends several books under specific categories in the approach to divinity, including grammars, editions of both the Old and New Testaments, and various editions of the fathers. He also gives precise instructions on the works and editions of the 'schoolmen' of the medieval era, and how they are to be of use (Barlow 1699).

After the institutionalization of Reformed theology, new threats such as Arminianism and Socinianism arose from within the midst of Protestant institutions. To combat these

threats, Reformed theologians turned to the resources of medieval thought. Two of the best examples of such retrieval are found in the theology of John Owen, the English Puritan divine, and Francis Turretin, professor at the Academy at Geneva in the mid-seventeenth century.

2.2.1 John Owen (1616–1683)

Owen began his career with the work *A Display of Arminianism*. In this work, written when Owen was 26, he uses Thomistic ideas to argue against Arminian theology. Owen argues that as God is pure act, the eternal acts of his will are identical with his immutable essence (Owen 1965: i:19–20; Cleveland 2013: 33–5). This makes the divine decrees inseparable from the immutable nature of God himself. The key to this is the Thomistic understanding of God as pure act of being without any potentiality. This concept also allows Owen to argue that the actions of the creature have their origin in God, who moves them to their proper end (Owen 1965: i:119–20; Cleveland 2013: 39–40). Owen uses similar arguments in *The Doctrine of the Saint's Perseverance* to explain how the salvation of the saints is secure because the divine decrees are inseparable from the divine nature (Owen 1965: xi:141–4; Cleveland 2011: 75–82). Owen also uses the Thomistic understanding of God as pure act to argue against the Socinian teaching of John Biddle, who argued that God possessed a physical body. In his work *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, Owen uses Thomistic concepts to demonstrate that God is not composed of elements of matter and form, but is pure act, and thus cannot possess a physical body (Owen 1965: xii:71–2; Cleveland 2013: 52–6).

Owen also uses Thomistic concepts in his moral theology. In his *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, Owen explains that the Holy Spirit infuses a new principle of spiritual life, or a habit of grace, into the soul of the believer at regeneration. What is interesting about Owen's argument and presentation is that he is arguing against Arminian and semi-Pelagian ideas of regeneration as a mere reformation of life and improved action. This parallels very closely Thomas' formulation of infused habits against an Aristotelianism which saw habits only arising from human action (Owen 1965: iii:219–24; Cleveland 2013: 78–89).

2.2.2 Francis Turretin (1623–1687)

In Francis Turretin's time, Reformed theologians were combatting new threats from rationalism, as well as various movements that had arisen within Reformed institutions, such as those from the school of Saumur. Thus a more polemical tone was necessary as classic Reformed theology came to be increasingly opposed from both within and without. This is seen in the elenctic nature of Turretin's *Institutes*, as each theological question centres upon a disputed point (Dennison 1999: 244–55; Muller 2003: i:73–81). Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* remains one of the great highpoints of Reformed

scholastic theology. Turretin utilized patristic, medieval, and humanistic resources in the construction of his distinctly Reformed theological treatise. In Turretin's *Institutes*, medieval theology is one valuable resource among many to be used in the service and defence of Reformed theology. One example of his use of medieval concepts is found in his discussion of the will of God. Here Turretin introduces the medieval distinction between the will as *signi* and *beneplaciti*. In the course of his explanation of this distinction, he mildly critiques medieval thought, noting that the *beneplaciti* is better understood as the decretive will of God, which is the decree of the divine purpose for all things (Turretin 1992: i.223). Here Turretin demonstrates familiarity with the medieval distinctions, and utilizes them in defence of Reformed theology.

After Turretin's death, Reformed orthodoxy experienced a rapid decline, as rationalism and the principles of the so-called 'Enlightenment' were in ascendance. Many in Reformed institutions began to leave the traditional principles of Reformed theology to follow a more rationalistic conception of Christianity, such as that found in Cartesian thought. Among the orthodox, the formulation and development of Reformed theology had more or less ceased. The theology of nineteenth-century Reformed theologians was nearly identical to that of the seventeenth-century theologians (Muller 2003: i.29).

2.3 THEOLOGY

Reformed theology inherited several elements of theology from the Middle Ages. The use of medieval theology naturally varied according to each theologian, but there are several doctrines where medieval influence is visibly evident. In each case, the purpose is not to adopt the medieval system completely, but to utilize certain elements of it in the service of Reformed theology.

2.3.1 Existence and the Divine Name

Reformed theologians followed medieval thought in affirming that the name revealed to Moses upon Mount Sinai 'I Am who I Am' (Exodus 3:14) was the proper name of God, and that it revealed his self-existence and necessity. This understanding of the divine name has a long pedigree in medieval thought, building upon exegesis of the patristic era. Aquinas affirmed that it was the proper name of God (*ST* I, q.13, a.11, Resp.). Duns Scotus in his *Tractatus de Primo Principio* likewise noted that this name indicated God's self-existence (Scotus, *Tractatus de Primo Principio* 1.2). This understanding of the divine name is nearly universal in Reformed thought. Calvin, for example, writes of this name, 'This is very plain, that God attributes to himself alone divine glory, because he is self-existent and therefore eternal; and thus gives being and existence to every creature' (Calvin 1979: 73–4). Francis Turretin explains that this name, Jehovah, reveals 'the eternity and independence of God, inasmuch as he is a necessary being, and existing of

himself, independent of any other, self-existent (*autoōn*)—"I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14)' (Turretin 1992: i.184). However, unlike the medieval scholastics, Reformed theologians used linguistic and exegetical tools to examine the texts more closely in their original languages. Jerome Zanchi, for example, devotes nearly 28 folio columns to the discussion of this name in his *De Natura Dei*, both examining the Hebrew text and utilizing Thomistic thought in his theological formulation (Zanchi 1577: 39–52).

This name revealed that God possesses the power of existence in himself, in his own essence. All else is thus contingent, and is capable of non-existence. But God is necessary, as he alone truly exists, and possesses in his own essence the very power of existing. All else exists because of him, and in dependence upon him.

2.3.2 Simplicity

Connected with this understanding of the divine name is divine simplicity. Medieval theology, building upon patristic thought, saw the doctrine of divine simplicity arising from the revelation of the Tetragrammaton. This understanding of divine simplicity was developed to a great extent by Aquinas, who argued that as God is 'Qui Est', he is not composed of act and potency or matter and form as creatures are, but is rather pure act of being without any potentiality (*ST* I, q.2, a.3; *ST* I, q.3, a.2). This understanding sees God as the sole being who is without any potential to be greater or more perfect, but who possesses all perfection actualized. He is his attributes and his perfections.

Reformed theologians affirmed this doctrine strongly. John Owen writes:

God says of himself that his name is Ehejeh, and he is I AM,—that is, a simple being, existing in and of itself; and this is that which is intended by the simplicity of the nature of God, and his being a simple act. The Scripture tells us he is eternal, I AM, always the same, and so never what he was not ever. (Owen 1965: xii.71)

Jerome Zanchi notes that this name reveals that God does not possess any quality or characteristic through another, but that his essence is his attributes, and that without composition (Zanchi 1577: 83). God cannot be other than himself or composed of parts in any way. Turretin notes that there is no composition of any kind in God, whether physical, logical, metaphysical, or between essence and existence (Turretin 1992: i.192).

The doctrine of divine simplicity became particularly relevant to Reformed orthodox theology as new heresies arose concerning the nature of God. Socinian theology in particular posed a threat to the traditional doctrine of God, as it argued that God was corporeal, and composed of passive potency. In response, Reformed theologians such as John Owen used the doctrine of divine simplicity to argue that God is simple act, without any parts to be separated from His being, or anything prior to him. (Owen 1965: xii.71) Likewise, Francis Turretin argued for divine simplicity against the anti-Trinitarian arguments of the Socinians, who argued that composition in the divine essence disproved the doctrine of the Trinity (Turretin 1992: i.191). Simplicity was essential to the

Reformed defence of the orthodox doctrine of the Triune God, and thus played a key role in Reformed treatments of the doctrine.

2.3.3 Causality, Providence, and Predestination

The understanding of God as pure act of being without potentiality indicates that God exists in a relation of precedence and priority to all creaturely existence. As he is pure act, he can bring that which is merely potential into actual existence. This means that God is the First Cause of all creation, bringing all things into existence. This argumentation is first laid down in the opening section of the *Summa Theologiae*, and is utilized extensively throughout the rest of the *Summa*. Thomas uses it not only to express the way in which God's existence is known and demonstrated in the world, (*ST* I, q.2, a.3) but also to demonstrate the necessity of grace for the creature to attain the end of salvation (*ST* I–II, q.109). Thus it is not only necessary that God be the unmoved mover with respect to creation. It is also necessary that God be the unmoved mover with respect to providence and predestination.

This Thomistic logic became very prominent in the *de auxiliis* controversy of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. When the Jesuit Luis de Molina developed the concept of *scientia media*, he was strongly opposed by Dominican theologians such as Domingo Banez and Diego Alvarez, who argued that the creature is incapable of action unless he is moved by divine physical premotion (Serry 1700; Eleutherius 1742; Bañez 1584; Molina 1588).

The Reformed utilized this same Thomistic logic in their debates with Arminian thought.

Every thing that is independent of any else in operation is purely active, and so consequently a god; for nothing but a divine will can be a pure act, possessing such a liberty by virtue of its own essence. Every created will must have a liberty by participation, which includeth such an imperfect potentiality as cannot be brought into act without some premotion (as I may so say) of a superior agent. (Owen 1965: 119–20)

For John Owen, the nature of the created will is that it exists in reliance upon God, and cannot act in any way without the previous action of God moving it. Francis Turretin notes that there is a previous and simultaneous concurrence of divine action moving the creature (Turretin 1992: i.506–7). Petrus van Mastricht argues that it is necessary for there to be a physical, not merely a moral or persuasive, premotion in the work of conversion (van Mastricht 1715: 660). Gisbertus Voetius notes that this premotion is the awakening of created power that is given to the creature in order that it may act (van Asselt et al. 2010: 151).

The purpose of the conception of physical premotion is to explain the manner in which God moves the creature by giving it life, power, and ability to act according to the divine will. The Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century found this Thomistic

conception to be consistent with Reformed orthodoxy. It provided for them a precise explanation of the way in which God works all things according to the counsel of his will.

2.3.4 Synchronic Contingency

In the same context of human freedom and divine sovereignty, several scholars, led principally by Antonie Vos, have argued that Reformed theologians were strongly influenced by the Scotist theory of synchronic contingency. Scotus argued that any event that occurs is contingent, and thus it is possible that the opposite event could have happened instead. For instance, instead of Caesar crossing the Rubicon, it was equally possible that he could not have done so at that moment. It was not a necessary event but a contingent event. The opposite event could have occurred at that exact moment instead. This applies to God, as there is no necessity upon him, and he could have ordained any number of contingent events instead of those that he did ordain to occur. It also applies to humans, as humans possess free choice to the extent that they could have chosen any number of contingent actions instead of the actions that they actually performed. This is known as synchronic contingency (Scotus 1994; Vos 2006).

Vos, Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde have argued that this line of thought is present in the thought of the majority of Reformed thought in the seventeenth century (Vos 2001; van Asselt et al. 2010: 1–49; Bac 2010). There is much evidence for their view. Voetius, for example, argues that God freely determines that the created will chooses a specific option (B) out of a number of options (A, B, C) that it could have equally chosen, removing the indifference that the created will has toward those options (van Asselt et al. 2010: 150).

This thesis has met with opposition. Carl Trueman notes that it is an insufficient way of viewing the whole of Reformed thought on freedom and predestination (Trueman 2007: 24). Richard Cross notes that synchronic contingency is important, but that it is one of many that constitute Scotus' thought and contribution (Cross 1999: 154). Paul Helm has argued that this view of synchronic contingency makes God subject to time (Helm 2003). Nevertheless, the scholars arguing for the Scotist influence of synchronic contingency upon Reformed thought have helped bring clarity and depth to the understanding of the medieval influence upon Reformed theology.

2.3.5 Infused Habits of Grace

The Reformed doctrine of justification rejected the medieval concept of an infused habit of grace with respect to justification, affirming instead justification through the imputation of Christ's righteousness alone. Despite this fact, Reformed thought did not reject the idea of infused habits completely. Several theologians saw it as an appropriate concept for expressing the work of regeneration and sanctification in the life of the Christian believer.

Thomas Aquinas led the medieval appropriation of the concept of habits, and developed the Aristotelian notion of habits in a Christian direction. Thomas argued not only that there are habits that are obtained through repeated action, but also that there are habits obtained through the infusion of the Holy Spirit. This allowed Thomas to argue that certain qualities and patterns of action were only gifts of the Spirit, such as faith, hope, and love. These were obtained only through the gift of God, and not through human action (Kent 2002; Wisse 2003; Cleveland 2013: 69–78).

Reformed theologians utilized this same concept, arguing that regeneration occurs with the infusion of a habit of divine grace into the believer. Peter Martyr Vermigli argues that Aristotle fails to realize that the virtues of faith, hope, and love are infused into the believer at the moment of their conversion (Vermigli 2006: 296). Jerome Zanchi wrote that true and justifying faith is a habit which is infused by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the elect (Zanchi 1619: vii.1.348). Turretin argued that conversion itself is two-fold: it is both the infusion of the supernatural habit by the Spirit and the actual exercise of that habit in genuine faith and repentance (Turretin 1992: ii.522–3). Edward Reynolds, a member of the Westminster Assembly, likewise divided the habit and act of faith, and emphasized the importance of action in defeating the habit of lust (Reynolds 1826: i.451; iv.323–4). John Owen went further than others in his *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, where he argues that the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is the infusion of a habit of grace by the Holy Spirit, not merely a moral reformation of life.

Reformed theologians of a more Thomistic orientation, such as Owen, Vermigli, and Zanchi, utilized the concept to argue against Arminian and semi-Pelagian thought. They saw the infusion of a habit of grace as an appropriate concept for conveying the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit and the inability of human action to obtain salvation. Others, such as Turretin and Reynolds, emphasized the division between habit and act in order to underscore the necessity of action in sanctification.

2.3.6 The Person of Christ

In the great Christological formulas developed at the councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, the church confessed that the person of Jesus Christ was truly and fully divine, and truly and fully human, in one person, without confusion or mixture of the two natures. These doctrinal formulations became the foundation of orthodox teaching concerning the person of Christ. In the medieval era these formulations were approached with ever greater precision as new questions began to arise. Anselm of Canterbury addressed the question of the purpose of the incarnation in his work *Cur Deus Homo*. Anselm argued that it was necessary for the Son to become incarnate in order that God and man might be reconciled. Christ had to be fully divine in order for divine honor and justice to be satisfied. He had to be truly man in order for humanity to be reconciled to God. According to Anselm, the constitution of the person of Christ was necessitated by the work of Christ.

Peter Lombard posited several different models of the hypostatic union: the *assumptus homo* theory, in which elements of humanity were assumed by the Logos; the subsistence

theory, in which the divine nature assumed an anhypostatic human nature to itself; and the *habitus* theory, in which the divine nature was clothed with humanity as with a cloak (Lombard 2010: iii.26–8; Colish 1994: 400–401). Thomas Aquinas argued that these first and third theories entailed Nestorianism, noting that the *habitus* theory posited an accidental union between the divine and human natures. It was the subsistence theory that was the catholic teaching of the church. Thomas also explained in detail the concepts of assumption and union, noting that assumption was an action in which one party actively assumed another party, which was passive, into union. Furthermore, there are two aspects to this act of assumption: the principle, by which the action was done, and the term, or terminus, which is the end point of the action. In the assumption of a human nature, the principle was the divine nature, because it was accomplished by divine power. The terminus was the person of the Logos, because it was in his person that this union was accomplished (*ST* III, q.3, a.1, Resp.; *ST* III, q.3, a.2, Resp.). This terminology appears in Scotus as well, although Scotus argues for an accidental union (Scotus, *Ordinatio* 3.1.1; Cross 1999: 113–26; 2002).

When Reformed theologians developed their Christological formulations, the great majority followed Anselm and Aquinas in their thought upon the incarnation. The Reformed followed the Anselmic logic that the incarnation occurred so that the one person might reconcile God and man by representing God to man and man to God. Archbishop James Ussher argued that it was necessary for Christ to have reference to both parties in order to reconcile them (Ussher 1847: iv.588). Francis Turretin noted that it is necessary for Christ's person to be divine and human in order to perfectly complete the office of Mediator as the Prophet, Priest, and King of the church (Turretin 1992: iii.302–3). The office itself required the incarnation. John Owen took this Anselmic logic to its greatest point, arguing that the incarnation was necessary for all true religion whatsoever (Owen 1965: i.44–53).

With respect to the hypostatic union, the Reformed to a great degree followed Thomas. John Owen argues that the act of assumption is spoken of by scripture sometimes actively, with respect to the divine nature, sometimes passively, with respect to the human nature assumed, nearly quoting Thomas (Owen 1965: i.224; *ST* 3a.2, 8.). Owen also notes that the divine nature is the principle of the act of assumption, while the term of assumption was the person of the Son (Owen 1965: i.225). Turretin also nearly quotes Thomas verbatim in his explanation of this same terminology of principle and term (Turretin 1992: iii.311). Jerome Zanchi references Thomas on the various conceptions of the hypostatic union, and concurs with Thomas' judgement against Eutychian and other heretical conceptions of union (Zanchi 1593: 201–3).

2.4 CONCLUSION

The relationship between medieval and Reformed theology is an example of the pursuit of catholicity in Reformed thought. Reformed theologians for the most part

did not simply discard the teaching of previous eras, but rather utilized it as they thought necessary and appropriate. While there is much use of the medieval theologians, however, the Reformed theologians cannot be called truly 'Thomist' or 'Scotist' or 'Ockhamist' in the pure sense of the terms. Rather, their use of medieval thought represents a diverse and eclectic use of varied sources in order to build and strengthen Reformed thought as a whole. The Reformed use of medieval thought in the end represents Reformed catholicity at its finest and most profound, as the wisdom of the church in earlier ages was put to the service of the truths of Reformed Christian theology.

SUGGESTED READING

Cleveland (2013); Lane (1999); Muller (2003); Trueman (2007); Clark and Trueman (1999).

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CHAPTER 3

REFORMED THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REFORMATION(s)

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

It is now generally acknowledged that the various movements of religious and ecclesiastical protest and reform in the sixteenth century are too diverse to be considered as part of a single European Reformation at anything other than the most general level. They were geographically, theologically, ecclesiastically, and politically diverse (Lindberg 2009; MacCulloch 2003). Within this diversity, however, certain specific theological traditions can be identified which exhibit considerable intellectual coherence. Thus, it is possible to talk of Lutheranism because there were a group of churches and territories which identified with the Augsburg Confession and later with the Formula, and Book, of Concord. Anglicanism possessed the Book of Common Prayer, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the two Books of Homilies. Reformed theology, while not having the same formal confessional or ecclesiastical unity of either of these groups, yet does have sufficient internal doctrinal coherence and distinctiveness to be considered as a tradition in itself. Yet it also existed in a variety of social and political contexts in the sixteenth century, contexts which shaped its individual and distinct manifestations.

3.2 PROTESTANT CONSENSUS IN THE REFORMATION

While Lutheran and Reformed traditions of Protestantism parted ways early on and the Lutherans came in significant ways to define themselves over against the Reformed,

there were significant areas of agreement. On the crucial issue of justification, there was no real division on the matter in terms of content. It is true that justification was not a major doctrine in the writings of Zwingli, and never occupied the central principal place which Lutheranism ascribed to it, yet the basic elements of the doctrine—the importance of the Word, the instrumentality of faith, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness—were held by both sides. This is why Calvin was able to subscribe the Augsburg Confession (*variata*) of 1540. On basic soteriology, Lutheran and Reformed were in agreement. Further, on the issue of the will's bondage and the priority of God's grace, there was no difference in substance between Luther and the Reformed. Thus, *Of the Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Calvin's reply to the Catholic theologian Pighius, offered a position which is in accordance with Luther in maintaining a fundamentally anti-Pelagian position but which is more nuanced in its treatment of necessity (Choy 2013). Nevertheless, whatever the differences between Luther and Calvin in the detail, Melancthon's modifications of Luther in an arguably Erasmian direction definitely caused some tension between himself and Calvin (Kolb 2005: 88–90). Both were common heirs of a strong, anti-Pelagian Augustinian tradition which stretched through the Middle Ages and back to the early church (Mozley 1883). For this reason, Luther in particular enjoyed a high reputation among many of the Reformed, though not among those of a more Zwinglian persuasion, particularly on the issue of the sacraments.

3.3 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LUTHERAN/REFORMED CONFESSIONAL DIVISION

The origins of the major confessional division between Luther and the Reformed lie in the debates about the Lord's Supper between Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli in the 1520s. Luther's eucharistic theology was rooted in a number of personal convictions which drew their intensity because of aspects of his personal autobiography. His first Mass had been a traumatic experience, given the fact that he, a sinful priest, had to make and to handle God. Further, he was convinced that God only gave himself as gracious to his people in the flesh of Christ. Thus, for the Eucharist to be Gospel, the flesh of Christ had to be present (Jensen 2014).

To these positive impulses towards the Real Presence, we should add Luther's negative encounters with symbolic views of the elements. While Luther was absent in the Wartburg in 1521–2, his colleague Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt had implemented iconoclastic reforms through student riots and had hosted a radical spiritualist group, the Zwickau Prophets. He also advocated a symbolic view of the Eucharist. This fixed in Luther's imagination a connection between political radicalism, social unrest, and spiritual/symbolic understandings of the Eucharist (Lohse 1999, 170).

Zwingli, by contrast, was trained as an Erasmian, his autobiography lacks all signs of the inner existential struggle, and his theology was rooted much more in the notion of a general reform of church, state, and doctrine in light of scripture than in the more specific Christological and soteriological concerns of Luther. He was very influenced by the insight of Cornelis Hoen that the word 'is' in 'This is my body' could mean 'symbolizes', and developed a strongly symbolic view of the sacrament. For him, the Supper was more of a horizontal event which publicly bound together Christians by mutual oath. The metaphysics of presence were at best irrelevant to his theology (Potter 1976: 326; Stephens 1986: 232–4).

The clash with Zwingli, therefore, needs to be understood against the broader background of Luther's own personal struggles and also of his clash with the radicals. After 1522, he always associated talk of a symbolic Eucharist with spiritualist excess. Zwingli, as advocate of a symbolic view, appeared to Luther merely as the polite, well-educated face of fanaticism.

The pamphlet war between Lutheran and Zwingli and their cohorts came to a climax at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. The Luther and Reformed delegates reached agreement on fourteen and a half of fifteen points. The key area of disagreement was that of the Real Presence. Luther and his followers maintained an objective presence of the whole Christ in the bread and wine, while the Reformed maintained a symbolic, and at best spiritual, presence. The difference is more than merely a sacramental point, however. It is rooted in a fundamentally different understanding of the communication of attributes in the person of Jesus Christ. Lutherans maintained that the communication between the divine and human took place directly between the natures. The Reformed believed the communication was indirect, to the person (Lohse 1999: 174–5, 231; Arnold 2014: 282–3; Stephens 1986: 112–17).

This point became the primary issue of confessional divergence between Lutherans and Reformed. While there were other points where the two traditions differed (for example, in their attitudes to physical representations of Christ), the Christological issue was primary, rooted in the difference over the communication of attributes. Lutheran orthodoxy developed an elaborate taxonomy so as to be able to discuss the communication of attributes in a very subtle and precise way. The Reformed, holding to the basic, catholic understanding of the Incarnation and to a view of the Lord's Supper, which denied Christ's local presence according to his human nature, had no need for such.

The Reformed, however, were not monochrome on the issue of how Christ was connected to the Lord's Supper. Zurich tended to hold to a more strictly symbolic view, while Geneva, under John Calvin (1509–64), moved to an emphasis not so much on the symbolism as upon the spiritual eating of Christ which takes place by faith, as set forth by Calvin in his 1559 *Institutes*, book 4, chapter 17. That there was no substantial Christological difference between these two approaches is reflected by the fact that both Geneva and Zurich signed a joint understanding on the Eucharist, the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549. But the role of the sacrament in the tradition of Calvin was much richer, not merely a symbol of grace but a sign and a seal with real spiritual and

existential significance. Indeed, the background to the *Consensus* indicated some misgivings on Calvin's part (Gordon 2009: 179–80).

The Eucharist also played a role in more positive attempts at Lutheran–Reformed ecumenism. In 1540, Melanchthon modified the Augsburg Confession (1530) in a manner which made the statement about the Real Presence somewhat more ambiguous. It was this version of the Confession (the *variata*) to which Calvin was able to subscribe (Gordon 2009: 236). It was also this version of the Confession that played a part in the post-1546 division within Lutheranism between Philippists (followers of Melanchthon) and the Gnesio-Lutherans. The former favoured the *variata*, the latter the original 1530 text, the *invariata*. This shaped the dynamics of the battle for Luther's legacy, and indeed the ongoing politics of the relationship between Lutheran and Reformed (Kolb 1996: 1–17).

Thus, this division within Lutheranism was of immense significance to the development of confessional Reformed theology in the sixteenth century. In the early 1560s, the Elector Palatine, Frederick III, converted from Philippist Lutheranism to the Reformed faith and commissioned a catechism. The result—the Heidelberg Catechism (1563)—was intended in part as an ecumenical document to which Reformed and Philippists could subscribe, while excluding the more hardline Gnesios. Thus, the Catechism contains no explicit teaching on predestination (a point which would have alienated the Philippists) and yet does have a significant number of questions (7 out of 129) detailing the ascension and session of Christ (thus emphasizing a Reformed/Philippist as opposed to a Gnesio Christological context for understanding Christ's presence in the Eucharist) (Bierma 2013: 63–4). The Heidelberg Catechism was to become a standard confessional document of the continental Reformed churches. For example, it was given normative confessional status at the Synod of Dordt (1618) (Gunnøe 2005).

3.4 THE CONTEXT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

If the autobiography of Luther was central to the distinctive shape of both his theology and his Reformation, then it is instructive to note how different was the background of Zwingli. Unlike Luther, Zwingli came to Protestantism from a background in Erasmian Humanism. He also pursued ministry in a distinctly urban context with relatively modern governance. While Luther had to be mindful of the whims of the local prince and of the wider politics of the Holy Roman Empire, Zwingli was able to work closely with the city council. The Zurich Reformation began symbolically with the breaking of the Lenten Fast by Christoph Froschauer, the printer, and his workmen. This is significant. While Luther's Reformation started with that most medieval of actions—the advertising of a disputation at a university—the Zurich Reformation starts when agents of the early modern economy break with the practices of the medieval calendar which are inhibiting their productivity.

Neither the Erasmian background nor the urban context were unique to the Reformed. Melanchthon, Luther's intellectual lieutenant, was also a leading humanist and admirer of Erasmus, and the Lutheran Reformation took deep root in cities such as Nuremberg. Yet the lack of Luther's dominant personality, with its personal distinctives, in the Reformed churches meant that humanism and the urban context had a more formative impact upon Reformed theology and practice. For example, the notion of the social implications of theology was always somewhat stronger in the Reformed tradition. This is a function of the differences both in origins and in possibilities.

As to origins, Erasmian humanism appears to have had a deeper vision of the social and ethical implications of Christianity. Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that within Lutheranism it was Erasmus' admirer, Melanchthon, who developed the notion of the third use of the law. Within Reformed theology, Erasmus' philosophy of Christ was too reductive in terms of Christology and soteriology to be a dominant motif, but it is clear that those first influenced by Erasmus developed a stronger practical and social view of the Christian life than Luther. Thus, in England William Tyndale (c.1495–1536) and John Frith (1503–33) were both heavily influenced by Lutheran texts, but accented good works in a distinctively un-Lutheran manner (Trueman 1994). On the continent, Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), Huldrych Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), and John Calvin (1509–64) were all indebted to Erasmus, and all offered visions of the Christian life that placed a greater premium on practical ethics than we find in Luther (MacCulloch 2003: 94–102; Greschat 2004: 25–9).

As to urban context, the Reformed churches in cities such as Zurich, Berne, Strasbourg, and Geneva developed close working relationships with the civil magistrates which had a much more formal character than, say, Luther in Wittenberg, where influence tended to be more informal, though undoubtedly significant.

In Zurich, Zwingli was appointed preacher at large by the city council in the 1520s and worked closely to coordinate social and religious policy, particularly in relationship to the rise of Anabaptism. Bullinger, his successor, was to continue this relationship, and even argued that excommunication was the prerogative of the magistrate. Bucer, however, sought a more distinct role for church and state, seeking to have matters of ministerial ordination, liturgy, and discipline placed in the hands of church authorities. He was never able to achieve this perfectly at Strasbourg, but his aspirational model was highly influential on John Calvin, who pastored in Strasbourg after the end of his first Genevan ministry. (Gordon 2009: 88–90)

While Bucer may have provided Calvin with one of his initial models, Calvin's own struggles with the civil authorities in Geneva gave a distinct shape to later Reformed ministry. The Consistory and the Company of Pastors provided models for church governance and ministerial fraternals. Research into the records of the Consistory have provided fascinating insights not only into the types of pastoral problems with which the pastors dealt on a regular basis but also into the pastoral approach adopted towards such matters. (Witte and Kingdon 2005; Naphy 2003: 144–66; Manetsch 2013: 182–220)

3.5 SCRIPTURE

Magisterial Protestantism established the centrality of the Word early on in its development. The Word, written and then preached, was the primary means by which God revealed himself to the church, and thus occupied a central place in Protestant practice. For the Reformed, this manifests itself in the central importance given to preaching in the tradition, as evidenced by the prophesyings in Zurich and London, the development of academies such as those at Geneva which were focused on the training of men to handle the Word of God in the pulpit, and the production of handbooks and pastoral manuals which placed Word-based ministry, primarily preaching but also catechizing, at the centre of the minister's tasks (Green 1996: 45–79; Maag 1995; Manetsch 2013: 145–81; Todd 2003: 24–83).

The scripture principle which developed in Reformed theology reflected the fact that scripture occupied a fundamental epistemological role in Protestantism from its inception. While a fully elaborated doctrine of scripture did not emerge until the seventeenth century, the notion was implicit from the start and was the point upon which early Roman Catholic controversialists, such as John Eck and Thomas More, applied acute pressure. Having said that, there is a difference between the Reformation approach to scripture and that which was codified in the seventeenth century. The Reformers, along with their Roman Catholic opponents, tended to assume the objective inspiration of scripture and thus focused their attention more on the sufficiency of scripture and upon its inspired power when preached (Muller 2003a).

The most famous early exposition of perspicuity was that offered by Martin Luther in his response to Erasmus, *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525). Luther distinguished two kinds of perspicuity: external and internal. External perspicuity referred to the public aspects of interpretation: the idea that anyone with a knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax used could find the meaning of the biblical text. Internal perspicuity referred to the faith aspect: this was not so much the meaning of the text as the reception of the text by the individual in faith. Thus, by external perspicuity everyone could know that Christ died; only by the action of the Spirit could they know (believe) that Christ died for them (Thompson 2005: 191–247). Luther's position was one with which the Reformed agreed. As time wore on, more and more emphasis was placed upon the nature of external perspicuity and thus upon the need for acquiring linguistic and theological skills.

Perspicuity and sufficiency were vitally important because they were the key to opposing the notion of extra-scriptural traditions. This was part of Calvin's famous *Reply to Sadoleto*, where he defended, not scripture versus tradition, but a true tradition (i.e. that was derived from and regulated by scripture) over against the broader, less scripturally oriented approach of Rome.

Thus both perspicuity and sufficiency need to be understood in a nuanced way, and should not be understood as meaning that nothing but the biblical text was necessary in

any general sense. The Reformed used the commentary tradition of the early church and the Middle Ages, both Christian and (increasingly throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries) Jewish, and (as we will note below) played an important part in the development of linguistic and lexicographical tools. The doctrines of sufficiency and perspicuity were thus not understood in a reductive sense but were related specifically to the regulative, normative authority of scripture as being unique in the formulation of theological statements, in the critical appropriation of tradition, and in the regulation of the church's life.

The retrenchment of Roman Catholicism in the latter half of the sixteenth century and the rise of the Jesuits as the intellectual force of the Catholic Reformation also inevitably posed very distinct challenges to Protestantism in general and the Reformed in particular on the doctrine of scripture. Thus, in the late sixteenth century, English theologian William Whittaker wrote a major response to the Roman Catholics, defending the Protestant doctrine of scripture as it then stood (Whittaker 1588). Yet this was just the early phase of a polemical war on this and related points which would stretch throughout the next century. The denial of scriptural sufficiency and perspicuity was critical to the Roman cause, because this is what prepared the ground for understanding the teaching magisterium of the church as critical to theology and to the faith. As much as Protestants needed a sufficient and clear Bible, their Roman opponents needed an obscure one.

Of course, Protestant diversity and institutional fragmentation had been a problem for Protestants trying to maintain scriptural perspicuity from early on in the Reformation. The debate noted above, between the Lutherans and the Reformed over the meaning of 'This is my body', is only the most obvious case. Post-Reformation, the rise of Anabaptist and then Baptist groups in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries would merely exacerbate the problem. Nevertheless, the development in the late sixteenth century of Arminianism and then Socinianism brought the problem to a head. Unlike earlier radical groups, which often eschewed the authority of scripture for a more loosely understood leading of the Spirit, these groups adhered to the Protestant understanding of scripture, even though the agreement was ultimately superficial, given the rejection (particularly by Socinians) of any ministerial authority to the exegetical tradition of a kind that was so central to the approach of the magisterial Reformers. And of these two groups, the Socinians proved in the long run to be the more radical and lethal foe.

3.6 WORSHIP

Perhaps the doctrine of scripture's sufficiency had no more practical an impact than upon notions of what constituted acceptable forms of worship. Both Lutheran and Reformed churches placed preaching at the centre of Christian worship. It was in the Word preached that the promise of Christ was declared and, to put it more theologically, that the presence of God was mediated to the congregation.

Nevertheless, there were obvious aesthetic differences between the two traditions, and these rest upon fundamentally different understandings of the regulative scope and authority of scripture. Lutheranism had no real difficulty with crucifixes, ornate church buildings, and elaborate liturgies. Reformed churches, however, generally opted for a much simpler aesthetic. There are a number of reasons for the aesthetic reserve of the Reformed. First, they understood the Second Commandment as forbidding the physical representation of God, and even of the incarnate Christ. Thus, when the Reformed reformation took root, images were removed from churches and stained glass was also destroyed.

The most radical exponents of this approach were the Zurich Reformers. Zwingli even came to the conviction that music was to be forbidden in worship, and thus the Zurich Reformation became the embodiment of austere simplicity. This model had impact elsewhere in Europe as refugees who sojourned in the city returned home and brought with them the Zurich model. Thus, in England the first Book of Common Prayer (1549) was a source of major contention in 1550 when John Hooper, recently returned from exile in Zurich, objected to various provisions made by the Book for the consecration of bishops. When called to be Bishop of Gloucester, Hooper objected to the requirement that he wear the plain white surplice for his consecration. This led to an acrimonious confrontation with Nicholas Ridley, then Bishop of London, and to eventual imprisonment for Hooper. Finally, he agreed to be consecrated wearing the offensive garment (MacCulloch 1996: 471–85).

A second conflict surrounding the Book of Common Prayer occurred in 1552, when John Knox (c.1514–72), a Scottish exile who had been influenced by the preaching of Zwinglian Scot George Wishart (c.1513–46), objected to the requirement in the second edition of the Book that communicants should kneel to receive the elements. With King Edward VI sympathetic to Knox's position, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) found it expedient to paste a further rubric (the so-called Black Rubric) into the copies which had already been printed, explaining that kneeling did not imply worship of any Real Presence in the elements. (MacCulloch 1996: 525–33; Dawson 2015: 72–5).

Both the Hooper and Knox controversies foreshadowed future conflicts over the Book of Common Prayer. Knox was further involved in struggles over the status of the book during his short and ill-fated pastorate in the church of the English exiles in Frankfurt-am-Main (Dawson 2015: 92–3). Such struggles pointed towards the battles under Elizabeth I, especially those surrounding the legitimacy of clerical vestments which dominated the religious debates of the 1560s in the Anglican Church. Indeed, the authority and provisions of the Book of Common Prayer remained contentious until the Act of Uniformity (1662).

These specifically English struggles highlight a number of significant factors in the development of Reformed faith and practice. First, they witness to the development of the Regulative Principle of Worship, whereby anything that was not specifically required in the Word of God in relation to worship was considered to be implicitly forbidden. Debates over this point were to become increasingly sophisticated as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wore on, with distinctions such as that between the elements and

the circumstances of worship being introduced. Elements were deemed to be those things which were of the essence of worship, such as the reading and preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments. Circumstances were matters such as the time and location of the service.

Second, these debates also indicate the problems that occurred when different models and visions of Reformation collided with each other and also with the political realities of specific regions. Both Hooper and Knox were influenced by patterns of reform coming from Zurich and (later with Knox) Geneva. Cranmer and Ridley were operating within the political realities of an English context where Roman Catholic nobility enjoyed significant power and influence even under a Protestant monarch such as Edward. Even Calvin expressed concern to Knox that he was allowing his dislike of the Book of Common Prayer to distract him from the larger gains which the Protestants under Edward had made, and potentially to put these at risk.

Third, underlying such debates about worship was also the question of the relative power and spheres of competence of church and state. Did the state *as the state* have the power to impose a liturgy or to require something as religiously necessary which was not required by the Bible? This again is a complicated question which assumes the answers to a number of other contested questions, but it clearly connects both to the kind of church–state struggles in which Calvin was involved in Geneva and to the deeper theological and philosophical question of the nature of freedom of conscience. These debates reached their peak of sophistication among the Scottish Presbyterians of the 1630s and 1640s, as they wrestled with the attempts by the Scottish Crown to impose Prayer Book Anglicanism on Scotland.

Before that, however, the discussion bore fruit in the development of the notion of the legitimacy of rebellion under certain circumstances. In the early Reformation, Luther's understanding of the relationship of the Christian to the civil magistrate had been straightforward. The magistrate was set in place by God and therefore should be respected as such. Positive rebellion was thus forbidden. One might—indeed, one should—refuse to obey the wicked order of an evil prince, but one must then accept that the prince has the right to punish for disobedience.

After 1530, Luther modified his opinion. In that year, Emperor Charles V had refused to subscribe the Augsburg Confession, and Protestant hopes for a Lutheran Holy Roman Empire were at an end. At this point, Luther came to believe that power was given to the emperor by the seven electors, and so they stood in a sense above him in the hierarchy and could therefore resist him if necessary.

Luther's later position is similar to that of John Calvin, who allowed for a lower-order magistrate to resist one higher up in the hierarchy. As with all Reformers, the question of how to operate in the context of a civil magistrate hostile to the programme of reform, whether Lutheran or Reformed, was a pressing matter, given that persecution and death were very real possibilities.

It is thus not a coincidence that the radicalizing of Reformed views of church and state was closely connected to John Knox, the opponent of state-imposed kneeling at communion. Knox's thinking on church and state was in many ways profoundly shaped by

the Old Testament in its basic categories. For Knox, and others such as Christopher Goodman (1520–1603), the nation was accountable to God under covenant for its religious practices. To engage in idolatrous practice was therefore to bring the nation under God's judgement. This is clear in a most extreme form in Knox when he fulminates against Mary, Queen of Scots, for having private Masses at Holyrood Palace. The head of state is not a private individual but the individual embodiment of the state as a whole. When Mary takes Mass, Scotland engages in idolatry and is thus vulnerable to divine wrath (Dawson 2015: 213–16). When such a position emerged in Reformed thinking, the notion of rebellion became a matter of Christian obedience to God.

3.7 THE RISE OF REFORMED ORTHODOXY

The consolidation of the Reformation in Europe involved a number of factors. Politically, territories became confessionally defined, a matter which helped fuel the production of church confessions. The Council of Trent (1545–63) gave clear definition to the doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church, which then gave theological impetus to precise Protestant confessionalization. An increasingly complicated polemical environment caused by the fragmentation of the church into Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed parties generated more sophisticated polemical engagement and the development of rarefied arguments for theological positions. And the move of Protestant theology into established universities and the founding of new universities committed to Protestant thought also helped to shape the way in which theology was articulated.

Reformed theology from the 1550s onwards was subject to elaboration for all of the above reasons. The 1560s and beyond witnessed the production of a large number of confessions of faith (Mueller 1903). Further, the Tridentine decrees gave the Reformed something specific to define themselves over against when it came to Roman Catholicism. Trent finally clarified teaching on justification and sacraments in a manner previously unknown, and also laid the foundations for much more rigorous theological training of priests. This both galvanized Roman Catholic theology and intensified the conflict between Rome and Protestantism.

One immediate result of the new emphasis by Rome on theological education was the increasing metaphysical sophistication of Roman theology. The medieval scholastics had left a wealth of such discussion, and these provided leading Roman theologians with the tools both to articulate the clearly defined dogmatic positions of the Church and to mount vigorous assaults on Protestantism. As so many of the issues of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were common to both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism—the nature of grace, predestination, free will, etc.—it was inevitable that, as an earlier generation had plundered the patristic authors for insight and fought over their legacy, so a similar phenomenon would occur relative to the medieval scholastics.

Central to this narrative was the figure of Roberto Bellarmino (1542–1621), a Jesuit priest, professor, and rector at the Roman College and then Archbishop of Capua.

Of all the figures of the Roman Catholic Reformation, he was by far the most intellectually accomplished anti-Protestant polemicist and most feared intellectual foe of Protestants. His *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus hujus temporis hereticos* ('Disputations on Controversies of the Christian Faith against the Heretics of This Time') went through numerous editions and remained the standard handbook of anti-Protestant polemic through the nineteenth century. Bellarmine is the pre-eminent example of the intellectual Roman Catholic response to the Reformation, and his skill in both logic and metaphysics forced Protestantism to respond in kind.

There was also, of course, a more material factor to this. As Protestantism established itself within universities which have medieval origins, such as Oxford and Cambridge, it also had to accommodate itself to the medieval curriculum and to established pedagogical patterns. It also inevitably drew upon well-established library holdings, which were dominated by medieval authors. The university curriculum had not remained entirely unchanged by the Renaissance and the Reformation. Logic had been simplified and rhetoric had risen in prominence. In addition, the Reformation emphasis upon scripture as the Word of God written and as the normative principle of theology had led to the rapid development of the study of Greek and Hebrew and then to cognate languages such as Syriac.

This is one reason why Reformed theology in the later sixteenth century began to exhibit an increasing concern for metaphysical questions. Medieval theologians, such as Thomas and Scotus, start to reappear in a positive manner in Reformed works, along with various appropriations of the eclectic Aristotelian traditions of the later Middle Ages (Pleizier and Wisse 2011). A previous generation of theologians and historians saw this as a sinister move, a regression to a form of pre-Reformation theology which exalted natural theology, human reason, and logic and developed systems of doctrine which were predicated on deduction rather than on exegesis and careful doctrinal synthesis. This narrative was given subtle plausibility by the identification of *scholasticism* with *rationalism*.

More recent scholarship has demonstrated that such an approach is deeply flawed to the extent that it is simply incorrect. First, much of its impetus came from twentieth-century theological models which, under the impact of the work of Karl Barth, took a dogmatically critical line against anything smacking of natural theology. Second, the identification of scholasticism with rationalism is both a category mistake and far too simplistic. Scholasticism and its cognates denotes a method of disputative procedure, that of 'the schools', i.e. the university classroom, and not a specific perspective on the relationship between faith and reason, or special and general revelation. Third, much recent scholarship has demonstrated the profound and increasing sophistication of textual and linguistic studies, and of the corresponding exegesis of the later Reformers, such that notion of proof-texting and arid deductive theology have been shown to be ridiculous. Finally, the older approach failed to take into account the history of the times, of the changing nature of theological education, and of polemics in the later sixteenth century (Muller 2003a).

One good example of how the older approach is demonstrably deficient has been the treatment of Theodore Beza's *Table of Predestination*, a diagrammatic representation of

salvation. The diagram appears to show election and reprobation deduced from the sovereignty of God. This document was then picked up and elaborated by William Perkins. The result, according to the older scholarship is that the diagram both represents and, via Perkins, reinforces as normative a deductive pattern of reasoning about predestination (Torrance 1982).

There are a number of problems with this approach. First, as Karl Barth himself noted, such diagrams were intended to be read from the bottom up, not from the top down. Read that way, the chart is not a deductive system at all but offers an account of predestination whereby each step in the process is understandable only when referred to the step above it in the chart.

Second, and perhaps more importantly: the Beza–Perkins genealogy of corruption is predicated on a simplistic notion of the sources of Reformed theology. In part, this is the result of the later reception of Reformed theology which has tended to focus on the work of John Calvin, a point again made linguistically more plausible by the use of the term ‘Calvinism’ to refer to generic Reformed theology. In fact, Reformed churches never granted any single individual, or even any tiny cluster of individuals, overwhelming influence on the formulation of confessional Reformed orthodoxy.

3.8 THE RISE OF ARMINIANISM

In the latter years of the sixteenth century, significant internal tension on the matter of predestination and election began to appear. In Cambridge in the 1590s, for example, Peter Baro was accused of teaching which deviated from the Reformation line and conceded too much to human free will, weakening predestination, and compromising on the issue of the saints’ perseverance. The underlying issues appear to have been the typical concerns about moral imperatives to which classical Protestantism has often been vulnerable. The particular target of his ire was the Lambeth Articles of 1595.

The Thirty-Nine Articles contained a brief statement on predestination (Article XVII) which, taken in the context of the theology of the Articles as a whole, should have been sufficient to safeguard an anti-Pelagian view of grace. Over time, however, the accepted reading of said Articles had clearly become more loose. The result was that Archbishop John Whitgift responded by having William Whitaker, then Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, compose the so-called Lambeth Articles (1595) which elaborated upon the various issues. The nine articles asserted double predestination, denied that this was on the basis of foreseen merits, affirmed perseverance, and emphasized the irresistibility of grace. While the articles never achieved official confessional status in Anglicanism, Whitgift regarded them as an explanation of Anglican doctrine. They were later to be embodied in the Irish Articles, composed by Archbishop Ussher in 1615 (Ford 2007: 85–103). That Baro attacked these is indicative of a growing dissent within Anglican ranks over the precise nature of grace.

At around the same time on the Continent, a former student of Theodore Beza, the Dutchman Jacob Arminius, was also starting to modify classical Reformed understandings of predestination. The background to Arminius is twofold: the supralapsarianism of his teacher, against which he was reacting, and the appropriation of aspects of the metaphysics being developed by leading Jesuit theologians.

As to the first, Reformed theology had reflected upon the implications of election and predestination, it had started to debate a point which might at first seem somewhat abstruse: when God decreed to elect a people for himself, did he do so with a view to their being already fallen or not yet fallen? To put this another way, did he decree to elect before he decreed the fall? These are of course logical, not really chronological, distinctions, but they are important for clarifying the issues involved.

A superficial glance at this debate might lead one to conclude that it provides some evidence for the plausibility of the older narrative of the development Reformed theology—that whereby it becomes increasingly embroiled in logic-chopping and less concerned for exegesis. Yet the issue is more subtle than a mere quest for logical consistency or the overwhelming of time by eternity. In fact, it arises in the context of wanting to safeguard salvation by grace in a way that excludes any possible notion of merit being smuggled into equation. If God predestines individuals drawn from an unfallen mass, then there can clearly be no merit involved (Boughton 1986).

Arminius' response was to modify Reformed predestinarianism on two points. First, he appropriated the Jesuit notion of middle knowledge, or *scientia media*. Medieval scholasticism had typically made a distinction in God's knowledge between his knowledge of simple intelligence (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*) and his knowledge of vision (*scientia visionis*). The former referred to God's knowledge of all the things which he could hypothetically do. The latter referred to that subset of possibles which God had in fact decreed to actualize. Thus, in making this distinction, medieval theologians developed a conceptual vocabulary that allowed for the preservation of God's infinitude and freedom but also the certainty and stability of the actual world he had brought into being.

To these two distinctions the Jesuits, drawing on earlier writers, had added a third, middle knowledge. Middle knowledge refers to the knowledge that God has of what free creatures will do in specific sets of contingent circumstances. In other words, God knows what free creatures will do in every possible world that he might create. This distinction was picked up by Arminius and then developed by subsequent generations (Muller 1991: 163–6; Dekker 1993: 110–12; Stanglin and McCall 2012: 63–9).

Where this is useful to the Jesuits, and then to Arminius and his later followers, is in the possibility it offers for defending human free will while maintaining a concept of divine priority and sovereignty. God chooses which world to realize and thus is sovereign, but the world he chooses is the one where individuals freely do the things which he desires.

There is an obvious logical problem here: if God realizes a specific world based on his foreknowledge of what will happen therein, are the creatures of that world really free in any meaningful sense? It is not my place here to comment on the problems of the scheme

so much as the modifications it required in Reformed theology. These are in one sense slight but nonetheless highly significant.

First, while the scheme maintained salvation by grace, grace ceased to be the unilateral, decisive category it was in classical anti-Pelagianism. It was still a necessary concomitant in salvation but could be resisted. Second, the impact of original sin needed to be moderated. For a Reformed Orthodox theologian, it would not matter how many hypothetical worlds God could conceive. The nature of human depravity in them all would mean that grace needed to be at some level unilateral and decisive. By allowing possible worlds where grace might merely assist and support, a small but significant moderation of human depravity was required.

The long-term results of these shifts were profound and both theologically and politically devastating. In the Low Countries, the clash between the Arminians, or Remonstrants, and their opponents, the Counter-Remonstrants, became the theological idiom for a political struggle which led to the crushing of the Arminian party at the Synod of Dordt in 1618. On the theological front, affinities rapidly emerged between some of Arminius' more radical followers and the rising collection of even more radical theologies embraced under the term Socinianism.

On the Reformed side, the Arminian challenge paved the way for even more rarefied discussions of theological and philosophical issues, from contingency to atonement to justification. Thus, the tendency of the Reformed to mine earlier theological traditions was reinforced by the need to combat increasingly sophisticated challenges to classical Protestant orthodoxy. This reinforced the tendency of the Orthodox to present their theology in terms of the precise terminology developed during the Middle Ages, and thus paved the way toward the era of so-called High Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The development of Reformed theology was shaped both by the wider Reformation context and by certain debates and conflicts within the Reformed tradition itself. The early break with Lutheranism on the issue of the Lord's Supper and the underlying Christological differences which that involved proved decisive for its polemical positioning both in opposition to Roman Catholicism and to the developing theology of the Lutheran churches. This polemical context, combined with the need to establish itself within the university system, led to theological formulations that drew significantly on the patristic and medieval theological and exegetical tradition both for content and conceptual vocabulary. Thus, the early emphasis on scripture alone was enriched and elaborated both in terms of the tradition and with reference to the linguistic developments which marked the intellectual world of the early modern university. The Reformed tradition also distinguished itself liturgically from Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism by its regulative application of the notion of scripture alone to its worship practices.

As Reformed theology underwent this process of elaboration and consolidation, however, internal tensions began to play a significant role. Debates over divine sovereignty and the status of metaphysics in relation to the scripture principle proved fractious, and by the middle of the seventeenth century Arminianism and Socinianism had taken over from Rome and Wittenberg as providing the primary polemical threats to the Reformed tradition. The stage was thus set for the later assault of Enlightenment trajectories of thought.

SUGGESTED READING

Kolb (1996); Lindberg (2009); Naphy (2003); van Asselt (2011).

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CHAPTER 4

REFORMED THEOLOGY IN SCHOLASTIC DEVELOPMENT

MAARTEN WISSE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

IN this chapter, we aim at introducing the reader to the field of studies in Reformed scholasticism. As the historiography of Reformed scholasticism is complicated, we will have to pay attention to it, but we will do this after we have discussed terminological problems. We need to know what we are talking about before we can discuss it. This chapter also aims to make a modest contribution to the ongoing historiography of Reformed scholasticism by calling attention to the polemical nature of Reformed scholasticism. Traditional scholarship tended to suggest that Reformed orthodoxy, as they called it, was a form of traditionalism, a relapse into medieval darkness after the light of the Reformation. In response to this, recent scholarship emphasized the confessionalizing aspects of Reformed scholasticism. They portrayed Reformed scholasticism as basically a consolidation and further elaboration of both medieval and Reformation traditions. In the last part of this chapter, I will sketch a slightly different picture and propose a way ahead for scholarship in terms of seeing the many innovative aspects of Reformed scholasticism in terms of the strongly polemical character of this type of theology.

In a final section, I will plead for a hermeneutical approach to Reformed scholasticism as a way in which the study of this part of the Reformed tradition can be made fruitful for contemporary theology. Rather than attempting to repeat distinction from the scholastic tradition directly in our theological reflection, as if such distinctions were

* This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Willem J. van Asselt, who was slated to contribute this chapter prior to his sudden death in May 2014.

direct windows to theological truths, I plead for a creative unpacking of insights and contextualizing distinctions from the past.

4.2 TERMINOLOGY AND DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD

What are we talking about? The editors of this volume wisely formulated the topic of this chapter as ‘Reformed Theology in Scholastic Development’. As I said in the introduction, the idea is that to some extent, the Reformation included a critique of the scholastic tradition—for example Luther, who criticizes Aristotelianism, and Calvin, who criticizes the speculations of the ‘scholastics’ in the *Institutes* (Muller 2000). Afterwards, Reformed (and Lutheran) mainstream theology quickly returned to scholastic forms of theology. This period of return to medieval ways of thinking was generally called, especially in German historiography, ‘Reformed orthodoxy’ and ‘Lutheran orthodoxy’. ‘Orthodoxy’ is a slightly pejorative term in the sense that it may point to the consolidating and even conservative character of this type of theology. But it does not need to. The Brill *Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* uses it in a merely descriptive way (Selderhuis 2013: 1–2). Other terms used are ‘Reformed scholasticism’ and ‘Post-Reformation Reformed theology’. The latter is used by Richard Muller (Muller 2003b) and the former was preferred by Willem van Asselt (van Asselt et al. 2011). Both terms have their advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of Muller’s phrase is that it leaves open what kind of theology this post-Reformation theology exactly is. This avoids the problem of having to say exactly what ‘scholasticism’ is supposed to be, when in fact it is quite hard to define. The disadvantage of Muller’s phrase is that it has a strong diachronic connotation, and Muller himself has strongly contributed to our insight that the ‘post-’aspect of Reformed scholasticism is in fact nonexistent, in the sense that even Calvin himself could be seen as a scholastic theologian to some extent (Muller 2000).

This diachronic division between the Reformation and post-Reformation period, however, is part of the myth that I mentioned at the beginning. The myth is not only that Calvin is the criterion for what has to count as Reformed, but also regards the typical diachronic way of thinking of the Reformed tradition. One will often find schemes like this (even in van Asselt’s *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*): first, there was a Reformation; afterwards, there was a period of confessionalization; after that, there was Reformed scholasticism. Even Richard Muller, in spite of being one of the key figures in renewing interest in Reformed scholasticism, labels his magnum opus *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. He is well aware that this title has its problematic aspects, because the Reformed scholastic tradition was in fact already present during the Reformation (Muller 2003a).

This is why the term ‘Reformed scholasticism’ has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that it avoids the diachronic aspect, so that it is capable of including the period of the Reformation. On the other hand, the disadvantage is that this term puts a distinct emphasis on a certain method which is clearly reflective of the historiographic

school that favours this term. In the Utrecht approach to Reformed scholasticism (of which this author is himself very grateful to be a pupil), scholars such as Willem van Asselt and Antonie Vos aimed to understand Reformed scholasticism as a method rather than a matter of content. The problem here (and Willem van Asselt was totally aware of this) is that the boundaries of what counts as 'scholastic' are very hard to draw. The theologian van Asselt specialized in following his dissertation, Johannes Cocceius, is a notable example of one who is hard to characterize (van Asselt 2001:101–5; more elaborately, van Asselt 2001a). Somehow, he is indeed a scholastic theologian, but he is influenced by an emerging philological approach more typical of what we used to call 'humanism', one that paves the way towards the Enlightenment.

Terminology matters, because terminology reinforces divisions and classifications and thus directs our scholarly representations of a period that escapes such classifications in many ways (Brümmer 1993: 4–10). In the past, we have seen explicit or implicit oppositions between scholastic and humanist theology, scholastic and biblical theology, scholastic theology and pietism, etc.; many such oppositions are based on overly drastic classifications that do no justice to historical reality. Many scholastic theologians were primarily exegetical scholars, many were outstanding philologists and devout Puritans or prominent advocates of the Dutch Second Reformation. It is very important to realize that in this regard, 'Reformed scholasticism' does not exist. It is our anachronistic way of describing a period or a strand in the Reformed tradition in which the genres and styles of the medieval tradition were used to tackle theological problems.

A final issue that we have to address is another often overlooked consequence of labeling: classification tends to blur internal diversity within a class. This is very much the case with Reformed scholasticism. Giving it one name makes it seem like a unified whole. This is increased by the idea that Reformed scholasticism symbolizes a form of 'classical' Christianity. In spite of everything that can be said in support of this, it is historiographically misleading. First, it tends to reserve the term 'Reformed scholasticism' only for those who are supposed to belong to 'classical' Reformed theology, excluding all others. Fortunately, this has been addressed in recent research, for example, by paying due attention to the work of Jacob Arminius (den Boer 2010; Dekker 1993; Muller 1991) and the school of Saumur (Gootjes 2013); nevertheless, the risk remains regarding other minority figures who were on the borderline of being called 'scholastic'. Second, it blurs the internal divisions and differences that are part of what is being classified. Various studies have paid attention to internal divisions and varieties of opinions, but there is still a tendency towards creating a unified tradition (a tendency to which we shall return).

4.3 HISTORIOGRAPHY OF REFORMED SCHOLASTICISM

The historiography of Reformed scholasticism has been divided by recent scholarship into two categories, popularly phrased as the 'old school' and the 'new school'. I will be rather brief about historiography because there are a number of excellent introductory

texts available (Muller 2003a: ch. 1; van Asselt 2013: 11–26; van Asselt et al. 2011: chs 1 and 2). I will not discuss the old school separately, because this has already been done. I will only describe the main aspects of the new school and its key figures, hinting towards the old school only insofar as the new school responds to it. Richard Muller and researchers linked to what is called the ‘Utrecht School of scholasticism research’ have been prominent in developing the new school. Here, I will introduce a few of the main methodological characteristics of the new school. In the next section, I will take stock of major findings in terms of content.

Richard Muller started his critique of old school research by scrutinizing one of the aspects of the idea of predestination as ‘*Zentraldogma*’. The question here is how Christ and predestination relate to each other, since a popular reason to condemn Reformed scholasticism was the idea that in Reformed scholasticism, as opposed to Calvin, predestination is entirely separate from Christ (Muller 1986; Muller 2012). This objection to Reformed scholasticism has to be seen against the background of the influence of the theology of Karl Barth on theology-historical research, one of the reasons why, throughout his career, Richard Muller has been quite critical of ‘neo-orthodox’ scholarship of the post-Reformation Reformed tradition—much less so of Barth himself because of his extensive and nuanced reception of Reformed scholasticism. Linked to this is Muller’s critique of other aspects of old school research, such as the connection between the idea of *Zentraldogma* and the ordering of a dogmatic handbook. In older research, the idea had become prominent that the ordering of the loci in a dogmatic handbook from Reformed scholasticism had not only formal status but also a material relation to the centrality of the doctrine of predestination. Muller’s historical research showed that this idea cannot be justified by an appeal to the sources. In dogmatic handbooks from Reformed scholasticism, we find all kinds of orderings of topics (*loci*), and predestination only sometimes plays a central role (Muller 2003b: i.123–32).

A next major step in his work was the first edition of the *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, which addressed the most commonly held misunderstandings about Reformed scholasticism including the charge of rationalism, the role of philosophy and its relation to scripture, and again the idea of *Zentraldogma*. Muller started developing a broad framework for how research into the period should proceed in a way that is closer to the historical shape of the period. This was followed by volumes in which the doctrine of scripture, the essence and attributes of God, and God as Trinity were extensively researched throughout Reformed scholasticism. Eventually, the four volumes of the *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* appeared in a revised version and in a uniform layout (Muller 2003b).

Intimately related to the idea of predestination as *Zentraldogma* was the idea that Reformed scholasticism would include a form of determinism. This material objection of older research into Reformed scholasticism was particularly taken up by the Utrecht school of Reformed scholasticism research, stimulated by its founders Antonie Vos and Willem van Asselt. Antonie Vos’ lifelong theological project can be seen as an attempt to show that the kernel of the Christian tradition circles around the notion of God’s freedom to choose this world rather than another, and that even after this particular world

had been created, it remained contingent and did not become a closed, internally deterministic system. Even the doctrine of predestination does not imply determinism, and does not transform human beings into 'senseless stocks and blocks' (see the Canons of Dort, ch. III/IV, art. 16).

Apart from the rejection of the idea of *Zentraldogma*, a number of other misunderstandings had to be refuted in order to make a fresh approach to Reformed scholasticism possible. The Utrecht researchers in particular have drawn much inspiration from the work of the medievalist L. M. de Rijk (Bac and Pleizier 2010: 31–54; Otten 2010: 55–72). In earlier research, it was said that scholasticism was intrinsically determined by the structures of Aristotelianism, and was therefore necessarily determined by the Hellenistic and pagan philosophical ways of thinking that were alien to the Christian message. De Rijk, on the contrary, saw medieval scholasticism as a collection of reasoning techniques from the schools and, similarly, as a collection of intellectual genres that the university teachers had at their disposal. Within those genres, there was much room for development in place of static repetition of Aristotelian concepts, because the Aristotelian concepts were constantly adapted to the Christian context in which they were used. Aristotelianism was not forcing medieval thinkers to specific convictions, nor was it fully accepted or incorporated by medieval scholastics in one and the same way. Vos, van Asselt, and others applied these insights to the study of Reformed scholasticism, examining how De Rijk's claims about medieval scholasticism similarly applied to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholasticism, not only Reformed, but also Lutheran or Roman Catholic (Wisse 2003; Wisse and Meijer 2013).

Another necessary change of perspective between old and new way of approaching Reformed scholasticism relates to the relationship between Reformed scholasticism and the Reformation, and also specifically with Renaissance humanism. Earlier research made a sharp distinction between the blessings of humanism and the Reformation and the curse of scholasticism, often viewed as a residue of the Middle Ages. Building upon new research into the history of humanism and the broader development of intellectual culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the new research nuanced this sharp distinction drastically. On the one hand, the theology of the Reformation is still full of scholastic influences. In this regard, Muller has elaborated on the work of Reformation scholars such as Heiko Oberman (Oberman 1963) and David Steinmetz (e.g. Steinmetz 1995). Thus, Muller showed how scholastic influences can be traced in Calvin, although he did not receive a late medieval theological scholastic training. In the opposite direction, figures that are now famous because of their contributions to Reformed scholasticism were in fact deeply involved in the characteristically humanist endeavour of the critical publication and study of classical texts and classical languages. For example, Gisbertus Voetius was a professor of Eastern languages. Many figures that we now call Reformed scholastics were equally famous for their contribution to biblical exegesis. A sharp distinction between humanist and scholastic thinking is anachronistic and not justified by the sources (Muller 2003a: ch. 4). At most, one could say that certain radical forms of humanism were closer to early forms of Enlightenment thinking, whereas mainstream Reformed theologians were mostly more moderate in their use of the

harvest of Renaissance humanism. The relationship between the radical Reformation and humanism is complex, however, and apart from certain black-and-white cases of conflict between scholastic and humanistic traditions, there are many shades of grey in which scholastic and humanist traditions go smoothly together (cf. Rummel 1995).

In conclusion, the new approach to Reformed scholasticism led to an emphasis on both continuity and discontinuity with both medieval scholasticism and the Reformation. Analyses of continuity and discontinuity must be made on the basis of concrete and specific material and a detailed analysis of the sources, and they cannot be generalized without many reservations concerning the period of post-Reformation scholasticism as a whole.

4.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

In the previous section, we have explored the key characteristics of the new approach to the study of Reformed scholasticism. Most aspects discussed so far were rather methodological and less focused on particular *loci*. In this section, we will do two things. On the one hand, we will now zoom in more closely on the results from the new school of research, focusing on studies about particular loci or trends of research. On the other hand, I will take a first step towards critical evaluation of what the new research has delivered and what it has still left open for further scrutiny. It is in the best traditions of the new approach to Reformed scholasticism to search always for new ways of approaching the scholastic tradition, and to move new research forward by designating the limitations of what has been achieved before. The designation of certain limitations is therefore not at all intended to play down the significance of the new approach.

To begin with a first general limitation of the new approach: Reformed scholasticism is still predominantly seen as ‘dogmatics’. The new approach to Reformed scholasticism did not really break with this frame of reference. It is evident from the topics that are chosen for specialized studies (e.g. God, creation, providence). It is also evident from the descriptions current in the new approach of what Reformed scholasticism is—namely, a period of consolidation and systematization of what the Reformation has achieved (Muller 2003b: i.27). One also sees this in the recent handbook of the period, the *Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, where in the second part of the volume a select number of loci from dogmatics are discussed as a presentation of the most important issues in Reformed scholasticism.

Of course, dogmatics is a part of Reformed scholasticism, but as far as I can see, the idea that Reformed scholastic theology is simply ‘handbook theology’ still dominates too much. Older research has reinforced this image very strongly, albeit only because of Heppes omnipresent handbook (Heppes 1861); but older research also reinforced the image because of its own interest in a system, and its presumption that predestination is the hallmark of that system. Also, before the digitization of old prints, the handbooks especially were most readily available because they had been reprinted typically at their

time of origin. However, the availability of sources through various digitization projects (such as www.prdl.org) show us that the idea of Reformed scholasticism as handbook theology is far from justified. If Reformed scholasticism is to be characterized as a collection of methods and genres from the schools, the phenomenon is much broader in terms of genre. Not only is it handbook theology, but it is also very much pamphlet theology insofar as it is elenctic or polemical theology. Also, exegetical works are more or less influenced by scholastic methods so that it is indeed artificial and anachronistic to regard dogmatic handbooks as the limits within which the Reformed scholastic tradition is to be defined.

Although we are now in a better position than ever to access the many and varied sources, scholars' positions get worse in another respect. Precisely those many and varied sources—such as pamphlets, small polemical works, individual disputations, commentaries—that we now have readily at our disposal are untranslated and mostly only available in Latin. The vast number of works makes it unrealistic to translate them into English, and the knowledge of Latin among students and scholars is generally decreasing.

Even with the loci that receive the most attention in the new research, I see a certain level of one-sidedness when it comes to the topics and figures chosen for scrutiny. This is not a problem as such—one has to start somewhere—but varying inception points have different consequences. If we try to summarize the topics chosen so far, we can roughly designate the following:

1. The doctrine of God. By far the greater number of studies from the new school of research deal with an aspect of the doctrine of God (Rehnman 2013; Muller 2003b: iii–iv; te Velde 2013; Hoek 2013; Beck 2007; Ellis 2012; Burton 2012; van den Brink 2010; Neele 2009; Dekker 2008). Even in this regard, it seems that the new approach still bears traces of the old, partially of course because if you want to refute claims from older research, you have to scrutinize the same sources again. But more is involved. The Enlightenment reinforced a strong interest in the concept and doctrine of God. This did not change, even in spite of what was being said, in the twentieth century, during which there was more reflection on the inner being of God than ever before, even more than in the Christian tradition of the Middle Ages, the Reformation and Reformed scholasticism (Wisse 2011). The attention to the existence and the nature of God in modern theology, and also in the new research into Reformed scholasticism, is a trend that is not equal to the level of attention that it received in Reformed scholasticism itself. This is not as such a problem, but is worthy of note. For example: it is one thing to plead for a classical concept of God, as some do (me included) who take an interest in the history of Reformed scholasticism, but it is quite another to make such a concept of God as all important as a modern concept of God, as if the two had to compete with each other. Perhaps the credibility of the traditional way of thinking about God and God's attributes is as much a matter of limiting one's attention to it as of elaborating the concept of God itself.

2. Prolegomena. More or less the same applies regarding the importance of prolegomena. By prolegomena, I mean the level of attention that goes into questions such as the

role of philosophy in theology (Goudriaan 2013), the question of natural theology (Goudriaan 1999; 2006), the doctrine of scripture, the question of what theological reflection is (Fesko 2013; Muller 2003b: i–ii; Rehnman 2002). Against the background of the older research, the level of attention to these issues is perfectly comprehensible, but an exaggerated attention to method and prolegomena is basically a post-Enlightenment interest. A dogmatic handbook often has only one or two chapters or disputations devoted to preliminary matters. If we take into account works other than handbooks, the level of attention to prolegomena is even lower. Cocceius, for example, discussed hermeneutics most extensively in the introduction to his commentary on Romans. And this is almost all we have from him about exegetical method (Wisse 2013: 642–7).

3. Freedom and predestination. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, freedom and predestination were enormous issues. Much has been achieved in this area (Rouwendal 2013; Goudriaan and van Lieburg 2011; De Boer 2010; Dekker 1993; Muller 1991; Gootjes 2013), because it has been shown from different angles that freedom of the will is more a typically Reformed notion than it might seem at first (van Asselt et al. 2010). But even then, the question of freedom and predestination receives much attention in contemporary research, and the risk here is that we approach it through our own contemporary view rather than the eyes of the period itself. Both in the Dutch, British (or should I say Scottish), and American contexts, freedom and predestination are still very much live issues. This might lead to some narrowing of focus and an overload of attention.

4. *Ordo salutis* and doctrine of the covenants. Partially due to the oppositions in earlier research between a covenant-oriented and a predestination-oriented theology, the doctrine of the covenant received much attention (Clark 2013; van Asselt 2001; Muller 2012; Trueman 2010; Clark 2005; Bierma 1996). And insofar as the doctrine of the covenant is related to soteriology, this is also related to the *ordo salutis*. This already highlights that it seems the interest in soteriology is still closely linked to the question of predestination—namely to what extent soteriology is dominated by it, and in what way Christology or the doctrine of the covenants plays a role. Nothing is wrong with this as such. After all, a covenantal theology is an innovation from the Reformation and was only truly elaborated afterwards, so a great interest in its development is fully justified. However, especially because of the returning question of grace and predestination, it can be asked whether this interest in covenantal thinking should not be broadened and the interest in soteriology also broadened to other areas of reflection.

Next to a few studies in Christology (Lindholm 2016; Jones 2010; Daniels 2004), the aforementioned fields are mostly the areas in which newer research has been active. Roughly speaking, except for the interest in the covenants and *ordo salutis*, one might say that the new approach has been to some extent stuck at what is the beginning of most dogmatic handbooks of the period. This implies much uncovered ground for new research projects. If we restrict ourselves for a moment to the traditional dogmatic loci, an almost unexplored field of research is sacramentology. In the period itself, sacramentology was a lively field of reflection in many different directions, both towards the Roman-Catholic post-Tridentine tradition and towards of the consolidating Lutheran

tradition. And if we look at the future of Reformed theology today, sacramentology is certainly not the least relevant area for theological reflection and retrieval of the past. One only needs to think of emerging traditions of weekly communion, and also of the burning questions concerning believers' baptism. It would be fascinating to see how the refined distinctions developed by Reformed scholastics might be brought to bear on these contemporary questions.

Ecclesiology has also gone unexplored. To explore it would demand a turn away from the dogmatic handbooks. From Gisbertus Voetius, no doubt a major representative of what we call 'high' Reformed scholasticism, we have no handbook of Reformed theology. Instead, we have a few groundbreaking works in which the scholastic method is clearly applied to themes regarding the church. Voetius' *Politica Ecclesiastica* deals with ecclesiology, but subsequently discusses church order and liturgy (Voetius 1663). In neo-Calvinism, his work on practical ecclesiology has been very influential, as Kuyper found much inspiration for his reinvention of the Reformed tradition in the seventeenth-century scholastics (Voetius 1888; 1887; 1891). What makes ecclesiology in Reformed scholasticism all the more interesting is that it, much more than the doctrine of God, provides a reflection of both the innovations and of the internal diversity of views within Reformed theology at that time. This is all the more so because these internal differences are not only a matter of theological reflection, but are intimately related to the historical and national context in which various Reformed theologians work, whether in the Church of England or Scotland, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, France, Germany or Switzerland. These differences make clear that, although the scholastic treatment of these themes feels technical and has an appearance of massiveness and timelessness, these technical expositions are contextually determined and rooted in very concrete and diverse historical circumstances. These concrete and historical circumstances lead to sometimes fundamental ecclesiological differences.

What becomes clear from Voetius' work is equally true of many other authors and works. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a rich culture of pamphlets and a lively public debate about religious issues in which Reformed scholastics were actively involved, not only with their own specific pamphlets, but also with academic disputations. Much scholastic theology is very local and polemical. Apart from this, it is also very much what we now call 'practical theology'. Voetius' *Politica Ecclesiastica* discusses the practical dimensions of ecclesiology extensively, but nevertheless with the technical instruments of the scholastic method (Voetius 1663). The separation of piety and scholastic theology is our anachronistic distinction, but is not grounded in the traditions of Puritanism and Further Reformation. Piety and systematic-theological reflection were always closely linked to each other. A good example of this is of course William à Brakel's *A Christian's Reasonable Service*, in which very personal piety and systematic theology go hand in hand (à Brakel 1999).

How practical scholastic theology can be is evident from Voetius' collection of disputations published as the *Disputationes Selectae* (van Asselt and Dekker, 1995: 167–93). The overview of disputations shows a remarkable broadness of issues. They deal with magic, astrology, Islam, and practical piety, and are also full of ethical debates

(Baschera 2013; Ballor 2012; Strohm 2008). Many dogmatic handbooks from the period of Reformed scholasticism still include ethics as a part of dogmatics. Therefore, the Decalogue is often treated as an integral part of the handbook. In this respect, Karl Barth's innovation of discussing ethics as part of his *Church Dogmatics* is less innovative than it seems. We can only hope that the study of Reformed scholasticism will see a turn to the study of ethics, as has occurred in recent studies of Barth's theology.

4.5 A PLEA FOR REFORMED SCHOLASTICISM AS A PERIOD OF RENEWAL

There is yet another aspect of the new research that I want to highlight and for which I would like to propose a slightly different way ahead. Again, this is merely intended to open up new avenues for research, not to downplay the importance of what the new school of research has achieved. Old school research suggested that Reformed scholasticism was a conservative period, a return to old patterns and strict repetitions of the classical theological tradition. There was little internal diversity and very little theological innovation. Newer research has not challenged this characterization, emphasizing the continuity of Reformed scholasticism with the medieval and Reformation tradition. Key words are still 'consolidation', 'further development' etcetera. Newer research suggests that Reformed scholasticism is a catholic form of Christianity that, in this way, inspires an ecumenical theological endeavour.

No one ought to deny the double continuity and discontinuity with the Middle Ages and the Reformation, because it is a matter of fact. However, we have to realize that this idea of catholic continuity with the church of all ages is not only a historical observation but often also an existential hope of the contemporary believer and theologian. In this respect, it can be ideologically loaded. This can be discerned in some contributions from the new school of research. It is evident, for example, that Richard Muller, speaking as a believer and a theologian, sees much more future for contemporary theology in a retrieval (Crisp 2010: preface; Webster 2007) of the Reformed scholastic tradition than in the inventions of modern theology (Muller 2010). This is true of quite a few others in Reformed scholasticism research, the author of this overview included. This is not necessarily a problem, but it deserves our attention, because it easily allows us to close our eyes to those aspects of the tradition we are studying that remain alien and counter-intuitive to our contemporary theological inclinations.

From this perspective, there is a tendency to see Reformed scholasticism representing a classical tradition as a tower of strength, as if this tradition is uniform and as if the distinctions made in the tradition can be accepted as valid in the present without much further ado. Thus, Reformed scholasticism could easily be viewed as a timeless body of truth that does not need to be substantially retrieved in order to help us with our own questions from the present. Yet I think this is a mistake and a misunderstanding of the

period of Reformed scholasticism. It is important to stress that Reformed scholasticism takes many forms and is very much rooted in the questions and conflicts of its own time, more than newer research has yet shown.

Admittedly, scholars working along the lines of the new school pay attention to innovations and the influence of polemics with Arminians and Socinians in their research, but I would like to see more of this, and I would also like to call for a change of perspective. While certain *loci* in handbooks may seem largely undisturbed (te Velde 2012), other topics and genres manifest greater change. Here too, the focus on the beginning of a dogmatics handbook in research plays a role. In the doctrine of God, it may seem that little changes compared to Christianity of all ages. Polemics play a major role in this as well. Studies pay attention to controversy, but it often seems as if the polemics are merely a matter of defending classical Christianity against its enemies, thus suggesting that these polemics do not have a constitutive bearing on the theology of the period. Reformed scholastic theology, however, is polemical theology through and through. And, as we often say, one who is engaged in a polemic is always partially influenced by this polemic, if only because he has to sharpen his own view in order to refute the objections raised against his position. Rather than suggesting that Reformed scholasticism represented the catholic stream of Christianity, defending it against its enemies, I would like to propose that Reformed scholasticism is a specifically sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and early eighteenth-century form of Christianity that reshaped and transformed the heritage from the Middle Ages and the Reformation under the conditions of rapid intellectual change present in its late humanist and early Enlightenment context.

Therefore, it is an innovative rather than a conservative period in the history of Christianity, or at least it is not more conservative than the Reformation, the Middle Ages, or the Enlightenment. The Reformed scholastics found their particular voice within the spectrum of protestant theologies through a polemics and through an ongoing discovery of what belonged to truly Reformed theology. This process was a painstaking endeavour whose outcome was not a given beforehand, but was instead a matter of discernment and of trial and error.

This picture of Reformed scholasticism as an innovative period is also related to a somewhat different view of the relationship between the mainstream and the radical Reformation (cf. Nellen 2015; Duker 1897). Confessionalized historiography has often painted the image of the mainstream Reformation as a stable deposit, almost God-given, that subsequent Reformed theologians only had to consolidate and clarify further. In fact, nothing was that easy. What was to become the distinctly Reformed strand of theology was to be discovered gradually and polemically. What it became was initially a matter of finding a way in between Lutherans on the one hand and Anabaptists on the other, avoiding the traps of the one and the pitfalls of the other. But even then, a few decades later, an issue that had been lurking behind the scenes from the start became terribly urgent: what to think of predestination? Already during the same time, those moderately Reformed figures who had their hesitations about predestination had also begun to sympathize with those who had reservations about the Trinity and atonement—this was Socinianism in the making (van Veen and Spohnholz 2014; van Gelderen 2014).

It was not always crystal clear who was on what side because of political risks. And even then, philosophy was preparing itself for a sea change toward Cartesianism and Spinozism, forms of philosophy which would have dramatic implications for the relationship between theology and philosophy (Bac 2010; Goudriaan 2006; 1999).

We are not always in a position to designate exactly to what extent these developments influenced the development of Reformed orthodoxy. In sacramentology, one of the identity-shaping forces influencing the distinctly Reformed theology was the controversy with Roman Catholic and also more refined Lutheran views of the Eucharist. Against the Lutherans, Reformed theology stressed that real presence, although it is real, is always through the Spirit, and not through Christ's omnipresent body. So, initially, the polemical step to assert that Christ's presence is real, and that it is pneumatologically grounded, was a matter of keeping track with the theological tradition, but finding a way in between material presence and no presence at all (cf. Janse 2008). What we see, however, is that gradually, this real presence through the Spirit merged into 'spiritual' presence; and this 'spiritual' presence was so strongly linked to the disposition of the believer that one could hardly speak of real presence at all (Wisse and Meijer 2013). Along with a deteriorating significance of the practice of the Lord's Supper in general, this leads to something new which, however you look at it, differs markedly from the early church and medieval Christian tradition, although, in the sense of infrequent communion, it is a return to it. It is hard to decide to what extent this development is determined by the polemic with the Lutherans, but it is certain that the polemical context in which Reformed theology gradually found its particular identity was co-constitutive for what ordinary sacramental practice eventually became.

Atonement and anti-Trinitarianism are other examples. Faustus Socinus' vehement attack on the doctrine of substitutionary atonement in *De Jesu Christo servatore* (1594) was a major shock in sixteenth-century theology. As John Owen shows in his *Diatriba de Iustitia divina* (1653), better known as the *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, answers among the Reformed differed (Trueman 1998: 199–226; te Velde 2013: 219–30). In Owen's view, some of his respected colleagues, such as Samuel Rutherford, went too far with Socinus by admitting that atonement was based on God's will rather than on necessity. Indeed, Owen was not satisfied with his own earlier attempt to address this distinction. A bit further along the spectrum between heresy and orthodoxy was Hugo Grotius' defence of substitutionary atonement, although it was formally intended to prove his orthodoxy on this point. What played a role in this debate was not the simple question of what was orthodox and what was not. Rather, it was a quest for a proper way of speaking about the necessity of atonement under new cultural and theological conditions.

A similar story can be told about anti-Trinitarianism. Here too, the Socinians challenged the Reformed tradition to come to terms with their concept of God. One way to look at the distinctly Trinitarian spirituality and theology in the work of John Owen, for example, is to see it as an attempt to respond to Socinian heresy and ground Trinitarian theology strongly in Trinitarian spirituality. But in doing this, Owen and others probably developed something that had not been a part of the Christian tradition before—the idea that Christians live in a relationship with the triune God, even with every divine

person distinctly. This went along with a change in intellectual culture more broadly, where the idea of a subject as a centre of consciousness became more important, so that personal piety could also become more significant. This was partially enabled because city culture and the personal independence implied by it made the idea of an independent subject culturally comprehensible and even self-evident. It is no surprise that these innovations on the part of Owen resonate particularly with our contemporary Christian culture, in which a personal relationship with God is seen as of primary importance. This should not close our eyes, however, to the fact that such an idea of a personal relationship with God was then still very new (Wisse and Meijer 2013). Similarly, as Simon Burton has shown in his dissertation (Burton 2012), Richard Baxter initiated an attempt to develop a Trinitarian logic through which the whole of theology could be construed in a Trinitarian way. This too was new. Here again, it is hard to say to what extent exactly the Socinian polemic or the developments in general culture forced theologians to explore new paths. It is quite clear that these were new paths, however, and it is very likely that polemics and cultural shifts were influencing them.

In short, although the technical form of Reformed scholastic works has a classical air, especially for those who are children of modernity and postmodernity, the content is much more innovative and novel than research seems to have highlighted so far. The conservative air of Reformed scholasticism is the result of a hermeneutical and methodological clash between traditions from the Enlightenment onwards on the one hand and pre-modern genres and intellectual ways of thinking on the other. This clash hides a process of renewal that was aiming to retain the catholic Christian tradition but did so under the conditions of its own time and intellectual context.

4.6 A PLEA FOR A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

What we need is not only a more historical-contextual approach to Reformed scholasticism, but also a more historical-contextual approach to our own appropriation of it. If it is the case that Reformed scholasticism is less stable and less uniform than has emerged from research thus far, then a large-scale or repetitive integration of its heritage into contemporary theological reflection is also much less easy. What I would plead for is to take seriously the internal diversity within the period as well as the historical dynamics involved. Individuals were forced to make their own choices—sometimes choices which were neither available with the church fathers or the medieval tradition (e.g. Voetius's ecclesiology) and which were not uniformly accepted by all Reformed theologians of the time. For our own theological reflection, this may help us to avoid oversimplified incorporations of theological distinctions and arguments into our own time. What we have to do to make the rich heritage from this period fruitful for our own time is to integrate insights and distinctions from the period hermeneutically, bringing them into dialogue with the presuppositions and questions of our own time and our own conditions. As the famous phrase from the period has it: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*.

SUGGESTED READING

Muller (2003a; 2003b); Selderhuis (2013); van Asselt (2013).

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CHAPTER 5

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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THE notion of a single Enlightenment identified with French *philosophes*, once so forcefully argued by Peter Gay in his *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, is now passé. Scholars prefer to speak of multiple Enlightenments (or at least a spectrum of perspectives), including moderate and religious Enlightenments, which, while advancing new religious and philosophical ideas, were also severely critical of the radical Enlightenment represented by Spinoza, deism, and the *philosophes* (Sorkin 2008: 1–11; Israel 2006: 27, 372–405). Leading seventeenth-century Arminians played an important role in less radical forms of Enlightenment, forming personal relations with influential thinkers such as John Locke (Nuovo 2011; Marshall 2000: 111–82).¹ Yet Arminianism was a separate tributary alongside new philosophical developments, and a single ‘line of descent’ from Arminianism to the Enlightenment, as Hugh Trevor-Roper (1972: 207) supposed, can no longer be sustained (Heyd 1983: 100–109; Sorkin 2006: 8–9). There were thinkers, such as Jonathan Edwards, who were favourably disposed to new philosophical trends while vigorously opposed to Arminianism (Marsden 2003: 137–41, 175–82, 433–58).

Not only Arminians but Reformed theologians from Geneva to Harvard contributed to the rise of a less radical or moderate Enlightenment, both in their nearly unanimous opposition to radical philosophies and as facilitators of new religious and philosophical trends. Yet, from the advent of Cartesian philosophy, the Reformed tradition became deeply divided over questions of philosophy and its relation to theology, so that the relationship of Reformed theology to the formation of the moderate Enlightenment is in many respects an ambivalent one. Within this divided community of faith, the

¹ There is disagreement on the extent of Locke’s Socinian sympathies (he was at least an avid collector of Socinian and Unitarian works).

participation of a large segment of Reformed theologians in the growth of the moderate Enlightenment no doubt appeared to some of their Reformed critics as the ‘treason of the clerks’, to use Gay’s memorable phrase (Gay 1966: 336–57).

Since Reformed theologians both promoted and opposed significant philosophical trends, such as Cartesianism and Christian Epicureanism, which advanced the moderate Enlightenment, we will first survey the relation of Reformed theologians to the growth of new philosophy. Reformed theology was also affected by religious currents which, although often reinforced by philosophical trends, did not entirely coincide with them. While acknowledging many sources of theological change, the present chapter will highlight the impact of Anglican Latitudinarianism on Reformed theology as a highly significant factor in eighteenth-century theological transition.

5.1 THE CHALLENGE OF NEW PHILOSOPHY

From almost the inception of the Reformed tradition, theologians both argued for the value of philosophy conceived as propaedeutic to theology and actively integrated philosophical concepts in their theological work. Martin Bucer included a preface to his commentary on Romans (1536) with the title ‘Whether there is in philosophy something which agrees with Paul’s teaching’, wherein he described the disciplines of logic, ethics, and natural philosophy as divine gifts (Bucer 1536: 28b–40b). John Calvin provided a qualified commendation of philosophical wisdom with respect to ‘earthly’ matters such as logic and natural philosophy (Calvin 1960: II.ii.13–17), incorporated elements of classical philosophy into his account of the soul and its faculties (1960: I.xv.6–7), and beginning with his seminal Romans commentary (1540) regularly utilized the fourfold causality of Aristotle—the ‘greatest philosopher’ (*summus philosophus*) (Calvin 1863–1900: xv.197)—when explaining doctrines such as predestination and justification (Calvin 1863–1900: xlix.61 [Rom. 3:24]; Calvin 1863–1900: li.147–50 [Eph. 1:4–8]; Calvin 1960: II.xvii.2, III.xi.7, III.xiv.17, III.xiv.21). In 1545 Otto Werdmüller imitated Philipp Melancthon in arguing for the ‘dignity, use, and method’ of Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* (Baschera 2014). He was followed by Peter Martyr Vermigli and Girolamo Zanchi, who lectured respectively on Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Physics* concurrently in 1554 at Strasbourg. In 1559 the statutes of the Genevan academy, which Calvin probably wrote, stipulated that the Greek professor ‘explain some book of philosophy concerning morals. It shall be a book of Aristotle or Plutarch or of some Christian philosopher’ (Sinnema 1993: 16). Andreas Hyperius wrote popular Aristotelian works: *De dialectica...* *De arte Rhetorica* (1562; 1570; 1581), *Compendium physices Aristoteleae* (1574; 1583; 1585), and *In Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachica annotationes* (1586). Zacharius Ursinus wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s logical *Organon* (1586) (Sinnema 1990). The example set by such theologians ensured a deep appreciation of philosophy in the Reformed tradition, and resulted in the flowering of an eclectic Christian Aristotelian philosophy in the seventeenth century (Muller 2003: 1:360–76).

At the same time, this appreciation for philosophy had clear limits. Bucer said that Aristotle ‘rashly produced foul errors’ (Bucer 1536: 29b). Calvin held that with respect to ‘heavenly’ matters of the ‘kingdom of God’ the best philosophers are ‘blinder than moles’ (Calvin 1960: II.ii.13, 18), and reminded readers that Aristotle had argued for the eternity of the world (Calvin 1863–1900: 15:197). Even when commenting on Aristotle, Reformed theologians sought to point out his errors and, as Vermigli explained, ‘note and discuss those passages that agree or disagree with scripture’ (Vermigli 2006: 13; Baschera 2009). Certain disciplines, notably logic, physics, and ethics, were initially viewed as of greater utility to theology, and flourished immediately, whereas the discipline of metaphysics—which bridged theological topics more directly—returned to Reformed curricula only at the end of the sixteenth century and amidst considerable controversy over its proper limits in relation to theology (Muller 2003: iii.167–70; Prost 1907: 55–6; Dray 1988: 472–3). The production of works by Reformed authors on ‘Mosaic physics’, ‘Christian physics’, ‘Christian ethics’, and ‘Christian politics’ also illustrates their intention to purge philosophical knowledge of tenets which would contradict Christian doctrines—an intention in some cases with antecedents in Calvin (Sytsma 2015; Sinnema 1993: 21–31). Thus, prior to the advent of new philosophies in the seventeenth century, Reformed theology had become integrated with philosophy, with theology not only making use of logical tools and physical ideas for formulating doctrine but also reciprocally shaping and critiquing philosophical tenets. At the root of this relationship, which one historian has characterized as ‘an ambivalent appreciation of philosophy’, lay both a mistrust of fallen reason and an appreciation for the goodness of philosophy as a gift of God inasmuch as it functioned as an ancillary handmaiden to theology (Goudriaan 2013: 27–8). Given the importance attached to philosophical education by Reformed theologians, philosophical change inevitably invited theological controversy.

During the decades c.1640–1660, new philosophies began to take hold at Reformed schools across Europe and displace older varieties of eclectic Christian Aristotelianism. In the Netherlands, an initial crisis at Utrecht University (1641–3) developed when the physician and erstwhile disciple of Descartes, Henricus Regius (1598–1679), adumbrated a highly mechanical physics which rejected older Aristotelian concepts regarding substance, matter, form, motion, and the soul. It was especially Regius’ thesis of an accidental rather than essential union between body and soul that led the leading voice of Utrecht orthodoxy and opponent of Descartes, Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), to attack Descartes’s philosophy and defend Aristotelian substantial forms (Verbeek 1992: 13–33; Van Ruler 1995). Voetius’s early polemics at Utrecht were followed by attacks on Descartes at Leiden in 1647 by the theologian and regent Jacobus Revius (1586–1658) (Verbeek 1992: 34–51; Revius 2002). Despite the attempts of Voetius and Revius to suppress Descartes’s philosophy, a network of Dutch Reformed Cartesians, including both philosophers and theologians, developed during the late 1640s and 1650s (Verbeek 1992: 70–77). Cartesianism was especially attractive to followers of the theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), leading scholars to refer to an ‘alliance’ between Dutch Cartesians and Cocceians (Van der Wall 1996: 445–55). Leiden became a stronghold of Reformed

Cartesianism for the remainder of the seventeenth century (Van Bunge 2001: 44–6). Given the importance of Utrecht and Leiden as international centers of learning, Reformed Cartesianism quickly spread to philosophy departments at other Reformed centres of learning (Israel 2001: 29–34; King 1974: 210–76, 334–8; Heyd 1982; Rother 1982; 1992).

In England, a parallel situation developed with Reformed thinkers actively involved in discussing and promoting philosophical transition. From the early 1650s, the philosophy of both Gassendi and Descartes were ‘widely discussed’ at English universities (Kargon 1966: 78), and Gassendi’s Christian Epicurean philosophy received a relatively greater reception than in the Netherlands. At Oxford, which even after the Restoration continued to enjoy a strong Reformed presence (Hampton 2008), the reception of Pierre Gassendi’s Christian Epicurean philosophy rivaled if not exceeded that of Descartes (Feingold 1997: 405–6). As in the Netherlands, Reformed philosophers and theologians in England were divided over the reception of new philosophy. John Wilkins (1614–72), while Warden of Wadham College (1648–59), led the ‘experimental philosophy club’ at Oxford, which included among its members Robert Boyle (1627–91), and which constituted an important nucleus for what would become the Royal Society (Shapiro 1969: 118–47, 191–223).² Such theologically Reformed leaders of English experimental philosophy joined forces with anti-Calvinist Latitudinarians including Henry More (1614–87) and Joseph Glanvill (1636–80) in promoting anti-Aristotelian philosophy (Gascoigne 1989: 40–68; Griffin 1992: 25, 38–9, 45; Sytsma 2017: 35–43). Until roughly the turn of the century, English Nonconformist tutors were just as divided over philosophy as the Dutch. Around 1700, Samuel Palmer remarked, ‘some [Nonconformist] *Tutors* are more inclin’d to the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, others to the *Cartesian Hypothesis*, while my own had a due Regard for both, but strictly adhered to neither’ (Palmer 1705: 23–4).

Like the Voetians in the Netherlands, Reformed theologians in the British Isles raised concerns that philosophical transition would be followed by theological transition. During the Interregnum, English Presbyterians opposed to the incipient Latitudinarianism at Cambridge were credited with the view that ‘*Philosophy and Divinity* are so inter-woven by the School-men, that it cannot be safe to separate them; *new Philosophy* will bring in *new Divinity*; and freedom in the one will make men desire a liberty in the other’ (Patrick 1662: 14, 22–3; Gascoigne 1989: 53). The philosophies of Gassendi and Descartes were attacked by prominent Reformed theologians, including Richard Baxter (1615–91) and Thomas Barlow (1608/9–91) (Sytsma 2017; 2018b; Muller 2010). In addition to various theoretical objections to mechanical philosophy, Baxter expressed concerns about the methodological impact of philosophical transition. He thought the revival of interest in Epicurean philosophy and Cartesianism was leading to ill-formed prejudice against Platonist and Aristotelian philosophy among a younger generation of students (Sytsma 2017: 53, 70, 102). Late in life Baxter complained that his scholastic *Methodus Theologiae Christianae* (1681) was neglected by ‘ye multitude of younger students

² On the Reformed theological leanings of Wilkins and Boyle, see Hampton (2008: 16–19).

uncapable of things very accurate & methodicall, (& crying downe Aristotle & the Schoolmen to hide their ignorance of their Learning)' (Baxter c.1683–91: fol. 68v). Baxter's friend Samuel Gott (1613–71) complained about the 'reviving and renewing old Errors' of Epicureanism, which he speculated would eventually usher in an age of scepticism (Sytsma 2018b: 134). Robert Ferguson (1637–1714) charged that Cartesianism 'is like to prove as disserviceable to Religion, as any Philosophy hitherto entertained in the World; and lays 'a ground for Universal Scepticism' (Sytsma 2018b: 132). Despite the inroads of Cartesianism into the Scottish universities, theologically motivated objections to Cartesianism continued to be expressed until the 1680s by Robert Forbes (d. 1687), regent at Marischal College and King's College, Aberdeen (Gellera 2013). Scottish Presbyterians also had a reputation for opposing Cartesian philosophy as theologically dangerous. In 1690 John Cockburn (1652–1729) complained about the 'Narrowness of the Presbyterian Spirit' and wrote, 'You may easily guess how squeamish they [Presbyterians] are about Points of Divinity, when they make the *Cartesian*, and other Systems of new Philosophy to be gross and damnable Heresies. So that if Presbyterianism prevail, all freedom of Spirit, all improvements of reason and knowledge will be banish'd' (Cockburn 1691: 48–9).

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the earlier theologically motivated objections of previous generations diminished as mechanical philosophy (supplemented by Lockean epistemology and Newtonianism) became widely adopted among new generations of Reformed theologians in the Netherlands, Switzerland, England, Scotland, and New England. By the early eighteenth century, Dutch theologians Ruardus Andala (1665–1727) and Taco Hajo van den Honert (1666–1740) were referring to Descartes as 'the Philosopher' (*Philosophus*)—a title previously reserved for Aristotle (Van Ruler 2003: 133; Van den Honert 1735: fol. 5v). In Geneva, the Cartesian philosophy previously introduced into the philosophy curriculum by Jean-Robert Chouet was folded into a larger apologetic enterprise by Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671–1737). Turretin was critical of the syllogistic reasoning of the scholastics and argued that logic would be better served by the mathematical and empirical method represented by Descartes (Heyd 1980; 1979; 1982: 198–202, 223–4; Pitassi 1992: 22–5, 41–50).

A similar phenomenon occurred at select Nonconformist academies in England. Beginning in the 1680s, the tutor Thomas Rowe (c.1657–1705) introduced his students to Cartesian Port-Royal logic, attacked Aristotelian substantial forms, and adopted a Cartesian account of the soul as 'Unextended Thinking Substance' (Burden 2012: 176–7, 223–4). Rowe's curriculum still utilized the older logic of Franco Burgersdijck alongside newer philosophy, but favourably disposed his most famous student, Isaac Watts (1674–1748), toward subsequent adoption of Cartesian and Lockean philosophy. Watts praised Rowe in an ode subtitled 'Free Philosophy' (Watts 1810: iv.466), attributed the origin of his 'freedom of thought' to reading Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy* (Watts 1810: v.500), and dismissed substantial forms while promoting laws of motion as expressed in the 'corpuscular philosophy, improved by Descartes, Mr Boyle, and Sir Isaac Newton' (Watts 1810: v.340; cf. v.47, 112, 120–21, 590–91). The Nonconformist tutor John Jennings (c.1687–1723) encouraged his students, including Philip Doddridge

(1702–51), to transition to Lockean epistemology and consider the logic of Burgersdijck as ‘unmeaning Jargon’ (Strivens 2015: 69). In his posthumously published *Course of Lectures* (1763), Doddridge took Cartesian and Lockean philosophy as his point of departure for pneumatology (Doddridge 1763: 1–4; Strivens 2015: 67–82). The writings of both Watts and Doddridge, including Doddridge’s *Course of Lectures*, were translated into Dutch and remained popular in the Netherlands in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Dutch translation of Doddridge’s works was recommended by leading ministers and the Leiden theological faculty, thereby illustrating a similarity of outlook that transcended regional differences (Van den Berg and Nuttall 1987: 90–91).

Upon his reading of Harvard masters’ theses, Nathaniel Mather (1631–97) observed in 1686, ‘I perceive the Cartesian philosophy begins to obteyn in New England’ (Mather 1868: 63). From about this time Harvard tutor William Brattle (1662–1717) introduced students to Cartesian Port-Royal logic and Henry More’s *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* (1671), and his efforts were supported by fellow tutor John Leverett (1662–1724), who later served as Harvard’s president (1708–24). Brattle was regarded by at least one contemporary as ‘father to the students of the College’, and in his capacity as minister at Cambridge, acted as ‘unofficial chaplain to the college and *de facto* “professor” of divinity’ (Kennedy 1990: 558; on Leverett, see Kaledin 1965). But this was no quick philosophical transition. Benjamin Wadsworth (1670–1737) reports of the Harvard curriculum in 1725 that ‘New Logick’ was used alongside older works of philosophy, including Burgersdijck’s logic and Adrian Heereboord’s *Meletemata philosophica* (Wadsworth 1725–36: 27). Brattle’s *Compendium Logicae* was introduced to students at Yale by Timothy Cutler (1684–1765) in the 1720s and remained in use until 1765. From the 1720s, Cutler and Jonathan Edwards were among the early Yale tutors to introduce Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and by the 1730s Locke and Newton were well established as philosophical authorities (Warch 1973: 205–18).

Pockets of strong resistance to philosophical change persisted among theological leaders into the eighteenth century. According to the biographer of Samuel Johnson (1696–1772), at the time of Johnson’s bachelor’s degree (1714) students at Yale ‘were told that a new philosophy would soon bring in a new divinity, and corrupt the pure religion of the country’ (Chandler 1805: 7). Cartesian philosophy was also opposed by Melchior Leydekker (1642–1721) at Utrecht, Johannes Regius (1656–1738) at Franeker, and Bernardinus de Moor (1709–80) at Leiden (Bizer 1958: 363–72; Steenbakkers 2003: 821–2; Rester 2016: 239–90). The greater persistence of Dutch opposition to Cartesianism proved significant over the long term, as authors such as Voetius and De Moor provided a source of inspiration for leading neo-Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). Drawing throughout his dogmatics on the work of De Moor and like-minded Reformed scholastics, Bavinck cited positively Voetius’ critique of Descartes, and regarded ‘the whole of modern philosophy’ as problematic and in need of revision (Bavinck 2003–8: i.222, 224–5).

Although a large segment of Reformed theological leadership came to accept new philosophical trends associated with Cartesianism, followed by Lockean and Newtonian philosophy (Israel 2001: 477–85), both those for and against accommodation consistently

opposed radical forms of Enlightenment represented by Hobbes, Spinoza, and deism (Pitassi 1988; Van Bunge 2001: 108–22; Kato 2013: 129–80; Muller 2015; Sytsma 2017: 216–48). The accommodating majority of the eighteenth-century Reformed tradition therefore fits broadly into what Henry May labeled the ‘moderate’ Enlightenment (May 1976: 3–25). In his *Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, Samuel Miller (1769–1850) reflected widespread sentiment in his disdain for the ‘mystical nonsense of the schoolmen’ and in his praise for Locke’s *Human Understanding* as a ‘great work’, which superseded Descartes, although the latter ‘had done much, before the time of Mr. Locke, to correct the errors which abounded in the ancient systems of metaphysics’ (Miller 1805: ii.165–7). At the same time, Miller wished to correct latent sceptical tendencies in Locke later manifested in David Hume, by following the lead of Thomas Reid’s common sense philosophy (Miller 1805: ii.169–85). Miller’s *Brief Retrospect* illustrates the continuance into the nineteenth century of the philosophical direction generally established by Reformed theologians in the first half of the eighteenth century, which accepted the polemic of Descartes and Locke against older scholastic philosophy, while trying to avoid radical philosophical implications (Loetscher 1983: 161–7; Yeager 2011: 30–31). By contrast, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s early appropriation of Spinoza’s monism expressed in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799) represents a departure from the moderate Enlightenment of eighteenth-century Reformed theology (Lamm 1996; Meckenstock 1988).

5.2 TRANSITIONS IN THEOLOGY

Given the anxiety expressed by various seventeenth-century theologians that philosophical transition would lead to theological innovation, it is worth considering the extent to which the altered philosophical climate actually altered patterns of theological thinking among eighteenth-century Reformed theologians. Although much work remains before a complete picture can be drawn, scholars have identified a number of controversial issues arising out of the new philosophical context. Controversy centred on such issues as Cartesian doubt, the idea of God, a univocal correspondence between God and man, divine voluntarism, body–soul dualism, epistemology (both intellect and senses), laws of motion, the infinity or indefiniteness of the world, the mechanical origination of the cosmos from matter and motion, the denial of substantial forms, the denial of sensitive (animal) souls, necessitarianism, natural-law theory, and the separation of philosophy and theology (Goudriaan 2013: 43–53; van den Brink and Goudriaan 2016; Sytsma 2017).

Scholars have also begun to identify various theological consequences of philosophical adaptation, although here research is less advanced. Seventeenth-century Dutch Cartesians had argued for a separation between theology and philosophy, and this resulted in the strict separation of natural and revealed theology in the seminal *Compendium of Natural Theology* (1704) by Salomon van Til (1643–1713) (Mangold 2014). Doctrines relating to the nature and faculties of the soul were also affected. Scholarship

on Jonathan Edwards now argues that his idealism grew out of his early exposure to Cartesian epistemology and mechanical philosophy (Rehnman 2015). Other studies argue that Edwards departed from older concepts of free choice, and that his determinism derives from the acceptance of new definitions of causality, necessity, and contingency (Muller 2011; Helm 2014a; Muller 2014; Helm 2014b; Fisk 2016: 40). According to George Hill (1750–1819), Edwards' determinism was paralleled by continental Reformed theologians Daniel Wytttenbach (1706–79) and Johann Friedrich Stapfer (1708–75), who drew on the philosophy of Christian Wolff. In the opinion of Richard Muller, this eighteenth-century development is mostly responsible for the modern misconception of Reformed theology as a form of determinism (Muller 2011: 9, 21–2).

Partly as a result of philosophical transition, theologians began to lose interest in scholastic theology. To be sure, many ministers and some professors kept rigorously to the old scholastic ways, and sources such as Johannes Marckius' *Christianae theologiae medulla* and Francis Turretin's *Institutio theologiae elencticae* were used throughout much of the century at many English Nonconformist academies and Scottish universities (McLachlan 1931: 21–2, 201, 204, 302–3; Emerson 2016: 71–2; Loetscher 1983: 189–92; Marsden 2003: 318). But the overall direction at Reformed academic institutions, especially after mid-century, showed a decline of interest in scholastic sources and terminology (Emerson 2016: 72; Strivens 2015: 58, 63–4; McNutt 2013: 58, 66, 208–9).

Reformed theologians also faced pressure from increasing textual criticism. This situation was partly generated by the rigorous attention to exegetical detail of Reformed exegetes themselves. Louis Cappel, Matthew Poole, and Matthew Henry recognized the activity of anonymous authors and editors in the Old Testament. Even when Reformed exegetes admitted editorial activity in scripture, their hermeneutics typically employed the intra-canonical comparison of texts required by *analogia fidei* and included a sympathy for the broader Christian exegetical tradition. Consequently, the historical critical theory put forward by Richard Simon of 'public scribes', as well as the questioning of biblical chronology and miracles by the even more radical figures Isaac La Peyrère, Lodewijk Meijer, and Baruch Spinoza, met with fierce opposition (Muller 2003: ii.130–40). Herman Witsius, for example, while allowing for some later editorial additions to the Pentateuch, defended the traditional attribution of Mosaic authorship against recent critics, particularly Jean Le Clerc, who had attacked the Protestant principle of *analogia fidei* (Witsius 1692: I.xiv; Witsius 1877; Le Clerc 1685: 449; Klauber 1993: 621). Although Reformed theologians such as Witsius and Henry resisted radical hermeneutical change while incorporating some advances in textual criticism, beginning with Jean-Alphonse Turretin an alternative historical critical exegesis emerged which resembled that of Le Clerc and was hostile to the older employment of *analogia fidei* as a hermeneutical rule (Muller 2003: ii.140–48; Merk 1988; Turretin 1776: 45–7).

Another change involved the increasing certainty granted reason in matters of faith. Theologians such as Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722), Herman Venema (1697–1787), Daniel Wytttenbach (1706–79), and Jacob Vernet (1698–1789) elevated the certainty of reason and accorded it a foundational status parallel to revelation in the construction of theology. As Vitringa wrote, 'There are two certain principles upon which this science [of theology] is established, reason and revelation' (Vitringa 1702: i.16;

Muller 2003: i.305–8). Vernet likened reason and scripture to two torches (Klauber 2001: 382). This continental trend was mirrored elsewhere. Glasgow professor John Simson (1667–1740) defended the idea that reason is a principle of theology, and his position has been compared to Locke (Skoczylas 2001: 105–13). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, George Hill was recommending Locke's *Essay* as containing a 'just view of reason in judging of the truths of religion' (Hill 1825: i.428; recommending Locke 1975: IV. xvi–xx). An increasing confidence in reason was paralleled by the application of an ideal of free inquiry to theological methodology (Wykes 1996: 127–8; Skoczylas 2001: 15, 23). Geneva gained a reputation for 'freedom of opinion' (Pitassi 2009: 151). This approach differed from late seventeenth-century Reformed theologians, who sought to carefully circumscribe the use of reason in theology on account of the noetic effects of the fall, with Francis Turretin specifically denying that reason is a principle of theology (Muller 2003: i.394–8). Even Richard Baxter, who has often been viewed (in my judgement incorrectly) as a proto-rationalist, did not oblige a method of free inquiry, but rather advocated a method of theological study in which students progress from Reformed catechisms and confessions to 'three or four of the soundest systemes of Divinity', by which he meant Reformed systems such as those by Ames, Calvin, Musculus, and Sohnius (Baxter 1673: iii.920, 924; Sytsma 2017: 254–5).

Scholars have also identified a number of specific doctrinal shifts beginning in the early Enlightenment. Whereas Reformed theologians since Calvin had insisted upon the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit as more certain than rational evidence in establishing the divine authority of the Bible, theologians such as Herman Alexander Röell (1653–1718) at Franeker and Jean-Alphonse Turretin at Geneva either overtly rejected or simply ignored the need for such supernatural illumination or persuasion (Goudriaan 2011; Klauber 1994: 190). This declining emphasis on the subjective need for the Spirit was paralleled by a remarkable growth in attention to the objective evidences of scripture (Lee 2013). There were also important changes to the understanding of biblical accommodation, which anticipated late eighteenth-century German developments (Lee 2014). A new anti-creedal perspective also emerged in eighteenth-century English Nonconformity that went beyond even Baxter's credal minimalism (Strivens 2015: 29–31, 47–52). This new emphasis on non-subscription emerges in the early eighteenth century and has been linked to the spread of Arminian ideas among English and Irish Presbyterians (Steers 2009).

5.3 REFORMED RECEPTION OF ANGLICAN LATITUDINARIANISM

Clearly, much Reformed theology was adapting to a changing cultural context. While many different explanations could be posited for the theological transitions of the eighteenth century, including no doubt the changed philosophical climate, there is a religious

factor that should be highlighted: the growing influence of Anglican Latitudinarians. In a seminal essay, Norman Fiering argued that 'philosophical Anglicanism' (a term he thought more precise than Latitudinarianism) played a major role in the formation of the moderate Enlightenment in America (Fiering 1981a). His insight can be extended beyond America. The works of Latitudinarians were immediately accessible to a broad readership in the British Isles, where a large segment of the Reformed theological world resided. During the eighteenth century, the international reputation of English theology benefited from the widespread popularity in Reformed lands of English philosophy associated with Locke, Newton, and the Royal Society (Feingold 1996). English theologians were also involved in advancing various theological traditions in dialogue with continental theologians. Recent research has shown that the post-Restoration Church of England was deeply divided along the lines of Reformed and Arminian Continental theology. As Stephen Hampton remarks, post-Restoration Arminianism was 'a far more formidable beast' and 'there was a much more explicit alliance between English and continental European Arminianism than there had been in the days of Lancelot Andrewes and William Laud' (Hampton 2008: 271). Since late seventeenth-century Latitudinarians participated in this growing alliance, their relations to Reformed theologians shed light on Reformed theological transition.

According to Gilbert Burnet, the most famous of the early generation of those labelled Latitudinarians included Henry More and Ralph Cudworth at Cambridge, and John Wilkins at Oxford. Among 'those who were formed under them' were Simon Patrick, John Tillotson, Edward Stillingfleet, and Joseph Glanvill (Burnet 1897: i.335; Sytsma 2017: 35–6). Burnet observed that the original Cambridge men 'allowed a great freedom both in philosophy and in divinity' (Burnet 1897: i.334). This description was shared by contemporaries. Baxter, for example, wrote that the Latitudinarians 'were much for new and free Philosophy, and especially for *Cartes*' (Baxter 1696: iii.19–20; Baron 1706: 49). In his revealingly titled 'Anti-fanatical Religion, and Free Philosophy', Glanvill explicitly connected Latitudinarian embrace of new philosophy with a rejection of the '*disputes, niceties, and distinctions*' of the scholastics: 'And they judg'd, There was less cause in the latter ages to reckon of *School-Divinity*, since the *Peripatetick Philosophy*, on which it was grounded, grew every where into discredit' (Glanvill 1676: 54–5 [essay VII]). While many Latitudinarians promoted new philosophy, they were opposed to the radical philosophy represented by Hobbes and Spinoza, and remained critical of aspects of Descartes's philosophy (Colie 1957: 49–93; Hutton 1996). The Latitudinarians presented themselves as reasonable and moderate men opposed to all forms of atheism, enthusiasm, and superstition (Rivers 1991–2000: i.34–37). Such an outlook was not too far removed from Reformed theologians wishing to adapt to the new philosophical climate while avoiding the radical implications of Spinoza and deism. This similarity of philosophical outlook and a sense of shared enemies helps to explain why Latitudinarians enjoyed widespread and international popularity in the face of rising deism and radical philosophies (Fiering 1981a: 327, 334–5).

After the balance of power in the Church of England shifted in favour of the Latitudinarians in the 1690s (Tyacke 2012), Reformed theologians began reading their

works more avidly. Tillotson's sermons were widely distributed and particularly popular in both England and New England. In the opinion of Fiering, 'Tillotson was an extraordinary popular force, a literary phenomenon whose sermons were probably the most widely read works of religious literature in America between 1690 and 1750' (Fiering 1981a: 309). Henry More's *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* (1671) and *Enchiridion Ethicum* (1668) were already being used at Harvard as textbooks from 1688 and 1694 respectively (Kennedy 1990: 556), and More's *Enchiridion Ethicum* continued to be used until c.1730 (Fiering 1981b: 251). Under the presidency of Leverett, the popularity of works by Tillotson, Patrick, Stillingfleet, Wilkins, and Sherlock increased among students (Corrigan 1991: 18–24). Latitudinarian authors were important to the early intellectual formation of New England liberals Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew (Corrigan 1987: xi–xii, 33). Latitudinarians also increased in popularity at Nonconformist academies in England (Burden 2012: 198, 201, 239). They were translated and eagerly read in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Scotland. Tillotson's sermons have been described as 'especially popular' in the Netherlands, with a partial translation in 1722 followed by a complete six-volume translation (1730–33) (Van den Berg 1979: 209; Tillotson 1730–33; Van Eijnatten 2003: 156–60). A few years later a French edition of the sermons came out of Basel (1738), and this was followed by multiple editions of Tillotson's *Works* at Edinburgh (1748; 1759–60; 1772).

The significance of this growth of interest in Latitudinarian writings has not been sufficiently appreciated by historians who see Anglican theology as relatively insulated from international theological currents. But in fact these English theologians were just as interested in Continental theology as were contemporary Puritans. Although the Latitudinarians should not be entirely equated with Dutch Arminianism, there are good grounds for viewing them as a channel for the dissemination of Remonstrant theological opinions. Multiple contemporaries, both sympathetic and critical, observed that Latitudinarians were particularly fond of reading the Remonstrant Simon Episcopius (1583–1643). Burnet said, 'They read Episcopius much' (Burnet 1897: i.334; cf. Thorndike 1844–56: v.343, 439, vi.241–2; Birch 1753: 219–20). Glanvill referred to the 'great Episcopius' as 'an Author infinitely more valuable' and said, 'His Authority, I confess, is considerable' (Glanvill 1676: 45 [essay VI]). Such interest is also suggested by the correspondence of More and Cudworth with Philip van Limborch (1633–1712) over a twenty-year period (Colie 1957: 22–48). Among the harshest critics, the account of William Baron (b. 1636), a graduate of Caius College, Cambridge (BA, 1658–9; MA, 1662), is particularly interesting, for he asserts from personal experience that Latitudinarians read and recommended both Remonstrant and Socinian authors:

... so that taking *Amsterdam* in their Passage, they Consulted *Episcopius*, *Cyrcellius*, and some other *Dutch Remonstrants* there, (who paid too little regard to Antiquity, and the *Primitive Church*) they went forward to *Crellius*, *Volkellius*, *Eujedimus*, &c. with the whole set of those *Racovian Authors*, Admiring them for great Masters of Reason, and such as had very happily explain'd all holy Scripture according to that *Tenor*. And this I personally know further, that *Crellius de Uno Deo*, was the Author

recommended to every Young Student they had hopes of, when he first Apply'd himself to *Divinity*, with several other private Advices tending that way.

(Baron 1706: 50)³

The Puritan Thomas Manton (1620–77), while not specifying a particular theological group, viewed Episcopius as a major source for those English divines most opposed to ‘that blessed servant of God, John Calvin’. Manton remarked that Episcopius was ‘their great master in divinity’ and ‘a Man from whom all the Modern Divinity is derived, as is evident from their homilies and printed discourses’ (Manton 1870–75: xi.390). Daniel Waterland (1683–1740), a critic of Samuel Clarke and Daniel Whitby, referred suggestively to ‘our Divines following the *Remonstrants* abroad’, and observed that ‘Episcopius, Limborch, and Curcellaeus often come into the Hands of our young Divines’ (Waterland 1730: 48). Such English interest in the Dutch Arminianism was reciprocated by the Remonstrants, who translated into Dutch works by Tillotson, Whitby, Clarke, and William Warburton (Van den Berg 1979: 203, 206, 209; on Warburton see Sorkin 2008: 54–61).

Where there is smoke there is fire. Recent research has shown that post-Restoration Anglicans and Latitudinarians reproduced specific theological argumentation from Remonstrants, and in some cases Socinians, on the doctrines of justification and God, and this influx of Remonstrant opinion into the Church of England is a major factor in the rise of moralism and Trinitarian subordinationism (Hampton 2008). These Anglicans also carried forward the anti-scholastic polemic of earlier Remonstrants, particularly Episcopius, with Tillotson for example referring dismissively in his sermons to ‘inconsistent and unintelligible notions of the schoolmen’ (Hampton 2008: 218). In the judgement of Hampton, ‘there is a great deal of common ground’ between the views of Johann Crell, Conrad Vorst, and Episcopius on the divine nature, and those of Tillotson, Clarke, and Whitby. These Latitudinarians were ‘openly contemptuous of the scholastic methods and terminology traditionally used by Reformed authors to express their views’ (Hampton 2008: 220). We can gauge the contemporary import of this appropriation of Episcopius by the fact that the irenic Baxter attempted to reconcile moderate Calvinists with ‘moderate Arminians, Lutherans, and Jesuits’ but did not attempt reconciliation with Episcopius’s theology. For Baxter, Episcopius represented an extreme end of the theological spectrum (Baxter 1675: I/1, 124).

While Hampton has identified a Remonstrant pedigree to post-Restoration Latitudinarian views on justification and God, there are good grounds for adding the topic of biblical authority and interpretation to this list of continuities. Recent scholarship has shown that while Episcopius retained an affirmation of the truth and inspiration of Scripture, he rejected the Reformed insistence that the Holy Spirit must inspire or illuminate the mind both to recognize the authority of Scripture and to interpret its contents. Instead, Episcopius argued that anyone exercising right reason (*ratio recta*) free from prejudice, false confidence, and corrupt passions (*praejudicio, vana confidentia*,

³ This source has been generally neglected in the secondary literature. On Baron’s career, see Venn (1897–1901: i.390).

aliisve pravis affectibus) could interpret scripture correctly (Daugirdas 2010–11: 44; cf. Calvin 1960: i.vii; Muller 2003: ii.266–7). Episcopius aroused considerable opposition from Dutch Reformed theologians for denying the need for a ‘supernatural light’ in order to understand Scripture, and his hermeneutic entailed ‘the marginalization of spiritual meanings in favor of the literal-grammatical sense alone’. This was a view that went beyond Arminius and likely reflects an appropriation of Socinian exegesis (Stanglin 2014: 38, 41, 43). Older scholarship on late seventeenth-century Anglican approaches to scripture was not aware of this Remonstrant development and is in need of revision (Reedy 1985).

The controversial rejection of the need for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which by mid-century was a recognized Remonstrant innovation, reappears in post-Restoration Anglican works. In his account of the English ‘moderate divines’, Edward Fowler rejected the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit as the ordinary means by which Christians are persuaded of the truth of Scripture. Instead, Fowler held, ‘I say that the external and rational Motives of Credibility are as sufficient to give unprejudiced persons an undoubted belief of the truth of our Religion; as any rational Arguments are to persuade a man of the truth of any thing, he desireth satisfaction concerning’ (Fowler 1670: 54–7). Glanvill, Burnet, and Patrick expressed similar sentiments (Glanvill 1681: 419–20; Burnet 1699: 79; Patrick 1669: 5–10). Although Tillotson thought the Holy Spirit is responsible for ‘an abiding and effectual perswasion’ of the Gospel, he did not think it necessary that the Holy Spirit ‘elevate our understandings above their natural pitch’ in order to assent to the Gospel. Rather, ‘our understandings are naturally endowed with a sufficient power to assent to any truth that is sufficiently propounded to them’, provided they are free from ‘their Lusts, or Passions, or interest’ (Tillotson 1695–1704: xii.129, 132; cf. Reedy 1985: 57, who only notes the affirmation of the Spirit). In Tillotson’s account of discerning true from false doctrine and revelation, he makes no mention of the need for supernatural illumination, but makes the faculty of reason the means ‘whereby we are to judge what *Spirits are of God, and what not*’ (Tillotson 1696: 210 [serm. XXI]). At least one Nonconformist, Robert Ferguson (d. 1714), a close friend of John Owen, saw the contemporary externalization of the work of the Spirit in objective evidences as drawn from Remonstrant and Socinian theology. He illustrated this continuity with three pages of citations from Remonstrant and Socinian authors in order to ‘better understand...from whom these Notions are derived that are with so much confidence obtruded of late upon us’ (Ferguson 1673: 259–62; responding to Parker 1671: 334).

To the extent that eighteenth-century Reformed authors absorbed the theological sentiments of Latitudinarians such as Tillotson and Clarke, they also absorbed a polemical disposition toward scholastic method and vocabulary, together with a rejection or downplaying of the need for supernatural illumination in their approach to scripture. While we should not discount the independent pressure of new philosophy, these theological forces were also an important factor in Reformed theological transition. In the seventeenth century, there was widespread interest in medieval theology and scholasticism among Reformed theologians, including an awareness and sympathy for Aquinas’ understanding of the authority and interpretation of Scripture, whose balance of literal

and spiritual interpretation was attractive to Reformed theologians (Sytsma 2018a). Such interest declined among many leading Reformed theologians during the eighteenth century, and this decline was paralleled by a growing interest in Latitudinarian and Remonstrant works.

In Geneva, there were thick relations between leading theologians and Anglican divines. Jean-Alphonse Turretin was ‘linked closely’ to Latitudinarians. After he finished studies at Geneva, in 1693 he travelled to England and met with then Archbishop Tillotson, William Wake, and Gilbert Burnet (Heyd 1980: 27). Turretin not only developed early relationships with leading Latitudinarians, but also had a close relationship with Remonstrant leader Jean Le Clerc (Pitassi 2009: 152–7; Klauber 1994: 10, 54, 59, 64). He led the way toward repealing the Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675) in the Swiss cantons, and to this end enlisted the support of Archbishop Wake, who in addition to personal correspondence with Turretin wrote a letter in 1722 to the Swiss cantons in support of Turretin’s position (Klauber 1994: 157–63). Like earlier Remonstrants and Latitudinarians, Turretin was openly hostile to scholastic method and terminology. He painted his rejection of scholastic theology and advocacy of a ‘new form of theology’ (*novam Theologiae formam*) as a return to the Reformation (Turretin 1774–6: iii.431–3; cf. Klauber 1994: 69; Heyd 1980: 34), although in private correspondence his close colleague Jean-Frédéric Ostervald was complaining that ‘[o]ur reformers [including Calvin] have terribly disfigured’ worship (Klauber 1994: 150–51). However, along with most other theologians of the day—including Remonstrants, Latitudinarians, and Reformed—Turretin and other pastors continued to hold to the necessity of revelation, which contains truths above reason (McNutt 2013: 195–202; Klauber 1994: 106–7).⁴ While Turretin mentioned the guiding role of the Holy Spirit in liturgical contexts (McNutt 2013: 210), his published works ignored the testimony of the Holy Spirit in establishing the authority of Scripture, and his hermeneutics advanced a literal-grammatical approach similar to that of Episcopius and Le Clerc (Pitassi 2009: 155; Klauber 1994: 104–6, 141, 190; Le Clerc 1696: 58, 102–4). The liturgical revision carried out by Ostervald took the Church of England as a model (Klauber 1994: 151). The perception from abroad, as related by the Scotsman Thomas Harvie while studying in Leiden in 1715, was that ‘the Church of Switzerland and at Geneva, I think, is generally thought to be corrupting by degrees... which is imputed to a triumvirate of their ministers [Turretin, Ostervald, and Samuel Werenfels] who have correspondence with the Church of England’ (Skoczylas 2001: 89). Current scholars agree that Turretin’s successor, Jacob Vernet (1698–1789), espoused Arminian theological views (Sorkin 2008: 74–84; McNutt 2013: 217), and older scholarship consistently read Vernet as departing from orthodox views of the full divinity of Christ and the Trinity while criticizing traditional terminology as scholastic (Klauber 2001: 386–7). Vernet greatly valued English philosophy and religion, and in the opinion of one scholar, ‘English Moderation became a model for “enlightened Orthodoxy” in Calvinist Geneva’ (Sorkin 2008: 9).

⁴ McNutt interprets such affirmations as evidence of distinctive continuity with Reformed theology, but these views were widely held. See e.g. Locke (1975: IV.xviii.7–9).

In Scotland, unlike Geneva, theological transition occurred more gradually and the influence of Continental Reformed scholastic theology persisted well into the eighteenth century. At the same time, Latitudinarian works were widely read. Glasgow professor John Simson (1667–1740), while teaching from the works of Johannes Marckius, Bénédicte Pictet, and Herman Witsius, introduced his students to English Latitudinarians. In the 1730s, John Lumsen (d. 1770) of King's College, Aberdeen, recommended his students read a variety of seventeenth-century Reformed scholastics, and with them English Latitudinarians such as Stillingfleet, Tillotson, Clarke, and Sherlock. In 1781, James Gillespie (1720–91) of St Mary's College, St Andrews, was still recommending Marckius, Pictet, and Turretin alongside the 'Good English Sermons' of Tillotson and other Latitudinarians (Emerson 2016: 71–2; Suderman 2001: 16). Edinburgh professor William Hamilton (1669–1732), who is generally regarded along with Simson as an important transitional figure in moving Scottish theology in a more moderate direction, was reputed to have encouraged students to read 'the Great English divines which were universally read'. These were Tillotson and Latitudinarian authors (Emerson 2008: 237–8).

The introduction of English Latitudinarian works into Scotland spurred controversy and change. Samuel Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) was at the centre of one of the most famous moments in eighteenth-century Scottish church history: the suspension of professor John Simson by the General Assembly in 1727. Simson had been studying Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* in the 1720s, which led him to downplay the importance of 'terms of art' not found in scripture or the Westminster Confession of Faith. Simson preferred not to speak of Christ as 'self-existent', 'independent', or 'necessary being' (*ens necessarium*) (Dundas 1728: 40–46; cf. Skoczylas 2001: 260–61). By the late seventeenth century, Calvin's assertion against anti-Trinitarians that Christ was God of himself (*autotheos*) had become 'to the Reformed mind, the litmus test of [Trinitarian] orthodoxy', and was specifically attacked by Episcopius, Courcelles, and Clarke in order to advance a subordinationist Trinitarianism (Hampton 2008: 166–83; citation on 166). Consequently, to the critics of his presbytery, Simson's refusal to use such terms as *ens necessarium* or *independens* for Christ indicated a 'deliberate affected Omission' and a dangerous latitude toward the 'bad Use' of terms by 'Adversaries... in this Age, and in *Britain*', especially Clarke (Dundas 1728: 138–46; citations on 141–2). When Simson's case was taken up by the General Assembly of 1727, he was suspended from his teaching duties without a conclusive condemnation (Skoczylas 2001: 280–87). Part of the reason for the Assembly's censure stemmed from reports that Simson taught that 'Necessary-existence' and 'Independency' were 'impertinent' and 'Philosophical Niceties' (Dundas 1728: 183; cf. Skoczylas 2001: 283). Immediately following the decision, English Nonconformist Samuel Clark (1684–1750) complained to Philip Doddridge that resistance to Simson was due to his refusal to 'oblige himself to conform to all the scholastic ways of speaking, concerning some things, about which the scripture is silent' (Doddridge 1790: 18).

The Assembly's decision, however, could not stem the tide of theological change. As the century wore on, the disposition of Scottish theology professors turned toward

English Latitudinarians. In the opinion of one historian, 'By the end of the century the professors all showed a preference for Latitudinarian divines and a distaste for the scholastic, hairsplitting, Calvinist theology of an earlier time' (Emerson 2016: 72). This preference can be seen in the lectures of George Hill, who, while occasionally recommending Calvin, Marckius, and Francis Turretin, frequently drew on modern English theologians (Hill 1796: 33; 1825: i.457; cf. Emerson 2008: 483). Hill saw his 'more enlightened' age and 'rational and philosophical form' of theology, particularly as manifested in Reformed adaptations of Leibnizian and Wolffian determinism, as an advance on the Reformed theology of former times, with its 'slender knowledge of philosophy' (Hill 1825: iii.188–9).

A similar shift of sensibilities in English Nonconformity can be seen in the career of Philip Doddridge, who was probably the most influential Nonconformist theologian of the eighteenth century. As a divinity student under Nonconformist tutor John Jennings (c.1687–1723), Doddridge noted in 1721, 'In practical divinity, Tillotson is my principal favourite, and next to him Barrow and Scott.' By contrast, Doddridge said of the works of Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, 'I am not very fond of such mysterious men' (Doddridge 1829–31: i.44). Doddridge not only acquired a strong sympathy for Tillotson's sermons but also reported in 1722 that Jennings 'encourages the utmost freedom of inquiry' in theology (Doddridge 1829–31: i.155–6; cf. Wykes 1996: 127–8). In 1723, Doddridge wrote that Jennings 'does not entirely accord with the system of any particular body of men; but is sometimes a Calvinist, sometimes a Remonstrant, sometimes a Baxterian, and sometimes a Socinian, as *truth* and *evidence* determine him' (Doddridge 1829–31: i.198; cf. Doddridge 1829–31: i.155–6). This is a mode of theological inquiry that greatly pleased Doddridge, and he chose to 'go over [Jennings's system] a second time' (Doddridge 1829–31: i.214). The following year, by contrast, Doddridge described Baxter's *Methodus Theologiae* as 'unintelligible' (Doddridge 1829–31: i.397). At this early stage as a student, Doddridge had acquired a taste for new modes of thought, including Tillotson, and a distaste at least for Baxter's scholastic theology.

When Doddridge later came to lecture on theology, he cited representative works of Arminian and Socinian theology such as Philip van Limborch's *Theologia Christiana* and Johannes Crellius's *De Deo* (Doddridge 1763: 34, 63, 128, 233, 406, 426, 441, 445, 448, 459, 479, 489, 525, 544, 562, 564 [Limborch], 63, 80, 128, 544, 551 [Crellius]), numerous Latitudinarians including Clarke and Burnet, and Reformed authorities Francis Turretin and Herman Witsius. Unlike Turretin and Witsius, Doddridge displayed little interest in medieval sources and terminology. While surveying ancient and modern opinions on the Trinity, he bypassed the medieval scholastics entirely and ignored Calvin, Turretin, and Protestant scholastics. He then concluded that, given the variety of opinion among modern English authors, their particular views 'are not fundamental in religion' and that one should be cautious about 'unscriptural niceties' (Doddridge 1763: 400–404). When Doddridge did mention 'the *Popish* school-men', he was entirely dismissive (Doddridge 1763: 397). He also spoke of the pre-incarnate *Logos* as having a 'created or derived nature'—an opinion traceable, via Jennings' citations, to the

Latitudinarian Edward Fowler and the Presbyterian Robert Fleming, and approximating the earlier view of Henry More (Doddridge 1763: 383; Strivens 2015: 59–62). Doddridge defended the inspiration of scripture against critics, but it is difficult to find any trace of an affirmation of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit amidst his extensive discussion of scripture and its evidences (Doddridge 1763: 221–378). He thought the evidence that God gives of revelation would be ‘sufficient to convince every honest and candid enquirer’ (Doddridge 1763: 246). While Doddridge maintained continuities with Reformed soteriology and regarded himself as ‘in all the most important points, a Calvinist’ (Strivens 2015: 44–5, 155–7), this is a Calvinism that had absorbed a polemical disposition toward scholastic sources and terminology, and in this respect stands in greater continuity with seventeenth-century Remonstrants and Latitudinarians than seventeenth-century Reformed scholastics.

The altered theological climate also had an impact on the reading of practical theology. George Whitefield (1714–70), whose Reformed theological inclination reflected the continued strength of the Anglican Reformed tradition at Oxford (Hampton 2008: 269–73), saw a correlation between the rise of interest in Latitudinarian authors and decline of interest in seventeenth-century Puritans at Harvard. In 1740, after visiting Harvard, Whitefield complained, ‘Bad Books are become fashionable amongst them. *Tillotson* and *Clarke* are read instead of *Shepard*, *Stoddard*, and such like Evangelical Writers’ (Whitefield 1741: 29). Although Doddridge retained an appreciation for Puritan practical divinity and passed on his love of Baxter’s practical works to many of his disciples, he appears to have also passed on an antipathy for Baxter’s scholastic sources. Benjamin Fawcett, who has been called ‘a favourite pupil of Dr. Doddridge’ (Orme 1830: i.168), produced a wildly successful abridgement of Baxter’s *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1759), on which most later editions were based (Powicke 1920: 473–4). In this abridgement, Fawcett excised sections of the work that were heavily philosophical and replaced Baxter’s extensive marginal apparatus of some 150 patristic and scholastic authorities with biblical footnotes (Baxter 1759; Sytsma 2017: 5–6). The philosophical and scholastic context of Baxter’s practical thought proved uncongenial to the enlightened sentiments of a later age.

5.4 CONCLUSION

As the Enlightenment unfolded, the Reformed tradition faced multiple pressures, foremost among them new philosophical and religious trends. An initial resistance to philosophical change in the seventeenth century gave way to widespread acceptance in the eighteenth century of Cartesian, Lockean, and Newtonian philosophies, with a minority of theologians, especially in the Netherlands, remaining hostile to Cartesianism. Even as Reformed theologians transitioned away from the older Christian Aristotelianism, they continued to resist radical philosophy associated with Spinoza and deism. This attempt at a middle ground facilitated the growth of the moderate Enlightenment.

Although much work remains to be done to identify precisely how such change altered Reformed doctrine, current research suggests that important doctrinal topics such as free choice, the Trinity, and the person of Christ were directly affected by the new philosophical climate. The modern notion that Reformed theology is philosophically deterministic is likely a product of this eighteenth-century transition.

During the eighteenth century, there was widespread decline of interest in the sources and terminology associated with older scholastic theology, not only in more philosophically oriented topics but also in discussion of the Trinity. Even though it occurred more abruptly in Geneva and more gradually in Scotland, this transition itself is an important feature of Reformed theology in the Enlightenment. While philosophical transition certainly played a role in discrediting scholastic theology, the growing influence of Latitudinarian and Remonstrant theology also contributed to this decline. Many Latitudinarians paralleled the Remonstrants in their polemic against scholastic sources and terminology, and also replicated Remonstrant polemic against Reformed insistence on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to establish the divine authority of scripture. As interest in Latitudinarian works increased among Reformed theologians, they increasingly lost interest in scholastic theology and terminology while adopting a more explicitly rational and evidentialist approach to the authority of scripture. While the precise extent to which Latitudinarianism facilitated theological transition within the Reformed tradition remains a matter for further research, this is a factor in need of greater attention.

SUGGESTED READING

Fiering (1981a); Klauber (1994); Lee (2013); Loetscher (1983); McNutt (2013); Strivens (2015); Sytsma (2017); van Ruler (2003).

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CHAPTER 6

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND THE HUMANITIES

MARILYNNE ROBINSON

HUMANISM arose out of the recovery and dissemination of the literature and philosophy of pagan antiquity. The study of ancient languages, and the translations, commentaries, and critical editions that came with this learning, directly influenced study of the scriptures, which scholars began to read in the original Hebrew and Greek and to translate into modern European languages. The effect of all this was greatly augmented by the advent of the printing press and by the spread of literacy. The passions of the humanists became the body of learning traditionally called the humanities—languages, literature, history, philosophy, natural science. The study of thought across ancient and modern cultures has been assumed to have the power to enlarge the mind, even the spirit, as it was felt to do when Western civilization was passing through this epochal transformation. The recovery of works of the many great writers of pagan antiquity diminished the hold of Christianity on European culture in some quarters, or was feared to be liable to do so. But in other quarters it was seen to give heightened meaning to the basic Christian tenet that humankind is made in the image of God. The grandeur of Homer, Plato, Virgil, Cicero, or Seneca simply redounded to the glory of old Adam, and therefore of God himself, who is reflected in the brilliance of all his creatures, dimly but unmistakably. The very literary character of the Reformed tradition predisposed it strongly to the second view.

John Calvin in particular cites the ancients frequently and with deep respect. In Book I of his central work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he gives an account of the soul that celebrates the abilities of human beings and alludes to the testimony of great pagan writers to affirm these abilities.

[T]he many pre-eminent gifts with which the human mind is endowed proclaim that something divine has been engraved upon it; all these are testimonies of an immortal essence... [T]he nimbleness of the human mind in searching out heaven and earth and the secrets of nature, and when all ages have been compassed by its

understanding and memory, in arranging each thing in its proper order, and in inferring future events from the past, clearly shows that there lies hidden in man something separate from the body. With our intelligence we conceive the invisible God and the angels, something the body can by no means do. We grasp things that are right, just and honorable, which are hidden to the bodily senses. Therefore the spirit must be the seat of this intelligence . . . I have briefly touched upon these things which secular writers grandly extol and depict in more brilliant language; but among godly readers this simple reminder will be enough. (Calvin 2006: 185)

This version of humanism at once sanctifies human capacities and their many expressions and makes the self, as experienced, the enacting of a most privileged, sacred, and continuous discovery. We are by our nature caught up in the grandest mystery, our relationship to God, and also in the mystery most immediate to any of us, our own being. The first heading marking the text of the *Institutes* states, 'Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God.' The second heading says, 'Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self' (Calvin 2006: 35–8). It is only within the context of humanism that the fearful and wonderful knowledge Calvin proposes is to be understood.

The Reformed tradition has been influential in many cultures, in Europe and also in Asia and the Americas. Over the centuries it has absorbed various influences and has engaged in criticisms of its own traditions, emphasizing some doctrines associated with it and muting or abandoning others, as religious traditions tend to do as they adapt to time and setting. This chapter will look at one place and period, the Reformation and Renaissance in England, when Reformed influence was new, its aesthetic, theological, and intellectual impact was clear, and its sources, notably the Geneva Bible and the writings of John Calvin, were available and widely read.

Even when the subject is delimited in this way, there are many historical problems to consider in attempting to address the Reformed tradition's influence. A major one is the fact that, in the English language context, where its influence is arguably greatest, those influenced predominantly by John Calvin are conventionally called Puritans. This culturally particular term has the effect of isolating an essentially European movement from its international context and from the body of its thought—specifically writings of Calvin, which were widely read, translated, and circulated in Britain and throughout Europe in the late sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries. How deeply his influence was implanted in English culture is reflected in the fact that as early as 1648 he corresponded with the Lord Protector, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who was in effect regent during the minority of Edward VI, about ways in which the Reformation in England could be made complete. He wrote to the young king himself, whom he knew to be aware of his writings and sympathetic to them. The word 'Puritan' meant that those called by the name wished to move the liturgy and theology of the Church of England closer to the model of the Reformed churches on the Continent. But the word has been falsely, opportunistically, and in time quite exclusively associated with a grim repressiveness, especially with regard to sexuality. It is not uncommon to find writers excluded from the ranks of the Puritans or Calvinists on the grounds that they wrote plays or

poetry with erotic content. Applying this test of course narrows the field of literature that can be seen as Calvinist in its origins, and greatly limits the evidence that can be used in evaluating its aesthetics and world view, though, for example, Thomas Middleton, Shakespeare's successful and prolific contemporary, wrote cynical and bawdy plays, and also a theologically Calvinist harmony of the two Testaments. And despite the fact that Calvin was only one of a number of theologians who influenced the Reformed movement at its inception and as it spread and developed, there is something called 'Calvinist orthodoxy', its particulars never specified, certainly not discoverable in Calvin, that has a similarly astringent affect on this question. It is not surprising that sermons are vastly over-represented in the literature acknowledged as Puritan or Calvinist. And they, of course, are very little read.

Another peculiarity of the historiography of the cultural and historical movement called Puritanism is that it is treated as having ended. There are still Presbyterians and Congregationalists, as there are still Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Like any religious culture active in the sixteenth century, they have passed through changes over time. In essential ways, in their understanding of the sacraments, for example, or the roles of the clergy and laity, or the order of worship, they are as consistent with their theological origins as other traditions. They still subscribe to the old, disruptive tenet of the Westminster Confession (1646) that 'God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath let it free from the doctrines and commandments of men' (WCF 20.2). The fact that nothing in the living world resembles the Puritanism of the historical imagination should raise questions about the degree to which this imagination is simply fond of a freedom to caricature that it would not feel if it took its subject seriously. If this freedom finds justification in the fact that Puritans were sometimes mocked or parodied in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is also true that priests and monks were mocked and parodied from the fourteenth century forward, and by figures like Boccaccio and Chaucer. Anglicanism was parodied, too. The Martin Marprelate tracts, rambunctious as they were, had a distinguished literary ancestry.

Calvin is often treated as a monarchist, even an absolutist, because he teaches obedience to magistrates. But 'magistrate' is a generic term for persons in positions of civic authority, such authority being instituted by God for the sake of peace and order. Since there were examples of non-monarchical social order in Europe, Geneva being one, the broader understanding of the word is clearly appropriate. John Milton, responding to a sermon that called for the restoration of kingship based on a text from Proverbs that says we are 'to fear God and the king', says the word 'king' 'is either to signifie any supreme magistrate, or else your latter object of fear is not universal, belongs not at all to many parts of Christendom' (Milton 1932: 153). Calvin's teaching on the subject in fact acknowledges the legitimacy of secular authority in all forms. The Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up by Puritan divines during the period of Parliamentary government, says,

It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other duties, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their

authority, for conscience' sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them. (WCF 23.4)

The same kind of failure to consult context allows the case to be made that the Puritans were patriarchal, despite the remarkable emergence of women writers among them and the importance of figures such as Mary Sidney and Jeanne d'Albret de Navarre, and despite the religious honour paid by Puritans to the covenant of marriage. The laws that governed Calvinist society are assumed to have been severe, but this is difficult to demonstrate. The penalty against fornication in a Calvinist region in Hungary was 'that the hands of fornicators be beaten until they cried out in pain' (Murdock 2000: 223). It would appear the transgressors had considerable influence on the duration of their suffering. An adulteress in the same region was sentenced to death, but instead was made to stand by the church door 'in sober clothing' for three Sundays and to make a public confession (Murdock 2000: 226). *The Scarlet Letter* comes to mind. In a period of branding, burning, boiling, dismembering, and evisceration, these penalties are notably mild. That they were not simply reflective of one time or place is established by comparison with the practices of the Geneva Consistory, which typically prescribed penance and reconciliation rather than corporal punishments. Even when instances of patriarchy or severity are cited as if in proof of a general tendency, no account is taken of the fact that European culture of the period was profoundly patriarchal or that law in the period was generally brutal.

The supposed end of Puritanism can come as early as 1690. Yet the line of descent from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to Melville's *Moby Dick* is exceptionally clear, the debt of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* no less so. Emily Dickinson took her poetics from the tense simplicities of the Puritan hymns of Isaac Watts and others. These writers were the products of a culture as appropriately called Puritan as any ever has been. They were Calvinist in the sense that Dante or Boccaccio were Roman Catholic, not without departures from received doctrine and not without ambivalence, a fundamental loyalty or identity being always assumed. A religious culture determines which questions seem salient as surely as it proposes the terms in which they will be addressed. The Calvinist view of the human place in the universe, as an individual consciousness that at once queries experience and is queried by it, in an encounter that is continuous, sacred, and implicitly momentous, is as central to their work as a vision of cosmic order is to *The Divine Comedy*. If Calvinism is to be found in the themes of these seminal American writers, is it present in the work of the many writers who acknowledge their influence, never thinking that their explorations of individual consciousness, for example, or of the portentousness of the world of experience, can be traced through them to a French humanist theologian? Such questions are obviated by historical treatments that simply terminate their subject, never taking account of the concepts as well as beliefs that animated it and that might, and do, live on in the world, in Robert Frost and Robinson Jeffers, for example.

Neglect of context trivializes the kind of reform the Puritans undertook. The Elizabethan Settlement and the Act of Uniformity of Charles II assert the right of the monarch to establish a state church and to make basic civil rights contingent on being in communion with it. Resistance to these policies, which did entail the loss of civil rights by both Roman Catholics and Protestants, would not seem overly scrupulous in any modern Western society. Since sumptuary laws specified the kind of clothing people of various ranks in society were allowed to wear, the ritual finery of clergy set them apart as a privileged class. The simplicity of dress with which Puritans are associated, in the pulpit, at least, was a rejection of such distinctions and their consequences, which included exemption from hanging and the right to trial by ecclesiastical courts. *The Liberties of the Massachusetts*, a code drawn up in America at the time of the Puritan Revolution in England, specifically forbade such privileges: 'Civil authority hath power and liberty to deal with any church member in a way of civil justice, notwithstanding any church relation, office, or interest', and, furthermore, 'No church censure shall degrade or depose any man from any civil dignity, office, or authority he shall have in the commonwealth.' When Sir Edward Coke wrote about English 'liberties' in his *Institutes*, he meant by the word the particular privileges or immunities persons customarily enjoyed as members of guilds or classes. When the *Liberties of the Massachusetts* was codified in Puritan New England, it applied to all men unconditionally. 'Every person within this jurisdiction, whether inhabitant or foreigner, shall enjoy the same justice and law that is general for the plantation, which we constitute and execute one toward another without partiality or delay.' This article rephrases protections of foreigners that occur in the Hebrew Bible, for example in Leviticus 19:33: 'The stranger who sojourns among you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself.' The opprobrium with which the laws of Moses tend to be viewed obscures the fact that in the early modern period they were liberalizing, as was the Puritanism that knew and emulated them. Coke's *Institutes* was published in 1642, the Massachusetts *Liberties* in 1641.

But the greatest and strangest omission in all this is the neglect of the Geneva Bible. (In this as in many things the historian Christopher Hill is a very distinguished exception.) This sixteenth-century Bible, to which the Authorized or King James Version is indebted to the point of outright appropriation, was the work of translators, compilers, and editors in Geneva, Puritans who left England to escape the persecutions of Roman Catholic Mary. They incorporated translations by William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and others, and provided illustrations, Introductions, an index, and marginal notes of explanation and interpretation by Reformation leaders, as well as musical settings for psalms. This was the Bible of the English Renaissance, the great translation broadly available throughout Shakespeare's lifetime, the Bible of Milton, Marlowe, and Herbert, of the British and American Puritans. The King James Version, conventionally given pride of place, was published in 1611, when Shakespeare's career was at an end. In general, persecutions for religious dissent encouraged discretion, but anyone who saw a Geneva Bible could have found its gloss on Acts 5:29, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' Only grant the Geneva Bible a reasonable share of the literary significance attributed to

the Authorized Version, and the case has been made for the cultural significance of English Calvinism. The King James Version itself, though largely shorn of apparatus and notes, should be seen as an important product of the Genevan Reform.

In any case, certain things are true and undisputed. Calvinists, in Geneva not least, were especially inclined to spread literacy, to write, translate, and publish books, and to found schools and universities. These facts by themselves have given a great impetus to learning and the arts. Sebastian Castellio, Calvin's contemporary and perhaps the harshest of all his critics, attacked him for failing to prohibit the printing and sale of 'pernicious' books. In Geneva, according to Castellio,

Aristotle is allowed, though he denies the foremost article of the creed, the creation of the world. The Koran is permitted and Apuleius, Martial, Plautus, Terence, Horace, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and other corrupters of morals. Ovid's *Art of Love*—that is of adultery—is allowed, as well as the words of his imitator, Clement Marot... What shall we say of the trash that is written there?

We might say that it looks like the product of a good humanist curriculum. Calvin, a humanist by exhaustive training, encouraged the reading of great ancient writers.

Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle, and others of that tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading [that is, Scripture]. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. (Calvin 2006: 82)

This is argument of a kind Calvin makes often, using high praise of one thing as a basis of comparison for another thing whose excellence far exceeds it but is tentatively imaginable in the same terms. To be enraptured in wonderful measure by a book is perhaps a privilege of Renaissance experience. It may account for the profound scholarship that was equally a feature of humanism and of the Reformed approach to the Bible. Clearly Calvin felt no anxiety about the power of scripture to outshine the great classics, even while they in effect prepared the aesthetic and emotional sensibility that would enable readers to truly revere the Bible. Certainly there is no suggestion that he considered them in any way corrupting. Training in the classics was characteristic of education in the period of the Renaissance and Reformation, Roman Catholic and Protestant. In the very great degree that humanist education advanced Western civilization, the Reformed tradition, especially as centred in Geneva, contributed generously. In the matter of translating, printing, and disseminating books elsewhere prohibited, it was uniquely important. Reformed communities everywhere strongly encouraged and provided for universal literacy, including in girls and women, and this by itself was transformative.

A final difficulty in appraising the influence of Calvinism is that historians very generally treat British society at the time of the Reformation as being divided between

Roman Catholics and Protestants, Anglicans and Puritans falling into the second category indifferently. That this is not descriptive of the reality then prevailing is proved by the fact that Anglicans and Puritans, or Royalists and Parliamentarians, or Cavaliers and Roundheads, would become opposing sides in a long and bitter civil war. Roman Catholics had no obvious stake in the victory of a king who literally personified the Anglican breach with Rome, nor with a movement whose theology and practice were regularly articulated in terms of rejection of Roman Catholic tradition. The Puritan side was strong and cohesive enough to win militarily and to hold power. It failed with the death of Oliver Cromwell, succumbing to the ancient problem of establishing legitimate succession.

Turbulence seldom has only negative effects. The period leading up to the Civil War was the singularly brilliant English Renaissance. During this period profound questions, religious, social, and political, were explored and disputed, inflamed in a sometimes very literal sense. These were issues that had been active in earlier centuries but which were brought to the forefront by movements on the Continent, Lutheranism and Calvinism among them. English Puritanism had the character of the second generation of the Reform movement, with a highly developed literature that proposed a distinctive metaphysics. And it was a movement that had been tested elsewhere as a church order and as a civic polity, and was being tested in New England, which was a laboratory for the new order to a degree that is lost to the unaccountable convention of severing the history of England from the history of the English colonies. John Winthrop's 'city on a hill' should be understood in light of New England's significance as an English Calvinist settlement. The very defence of the old order opened social tradition to articulation and examination. Putting aside outright allegiances to one faction or another, which may or may not equal the adoption of an entire system or of any specific concept or tenet, by itself the fact that fundamental questions were opened and debated in depth and at length had a profound effect on the kind of thought given to human nature and to history.

The same great disputes were raging in France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Low Countries, and elsewhere on the Continent. For centuries scholars and students had drifted from country to country, from one centre of learning to another. In the period of the Reformation, exiles both Roman Catholic and Protestant sought out safety, freedom, and leverage among the like-minded in other countries, intensifying their mutual commitments and creating networks of support that gave their movements a marked international character. Huguenot émigré printers in London were important in Shakespeare's career, a fact which should neither be over-interpreted nor simply dismissed. After the Restoration, the new royal government established a strenuous regime of censorship. It radically reduced the number of printers who would be licensed, with severe penalties even for sailors and carters who knowingly had a part in the dissemination of proscribed books, unless they informed on their associates. Historical cliché might lead one to suppose that the Puritan Cromwell would have been the one most bent on suppressing books, but the evidence is unambiguous.

Changes undertaken by the Stuart government as it returned Britain to monarchy should be seen as an important commentary on the Commonwealth regime.

The question of the nature and role of monarchy became especially pointed with Henry VIII's assumption of the position of head of the Church of England, displacing the pope with his own person while intending no other changes in doctrine or practice in his realm. Recusant Roman Catholics and Reformed Protestants found this change theologically indigestible. How precisely was a secular king to assume the place of the Vicar of Christ? The so-called Henrician Reform in fact only enhanced the power of the king, in part by redistributing wealth from the church to great families who supported the king. It severed the ties that had given the papacy effective power within England, and it loosely aligned the kingdom with Protestant regimes on the Continent. It demonstrated and enhanced the power of the British monarchy by putting the king beyond correction by any authority—soon Charles I would disband Parliament and rule without it for eleven years—and met its reproof in the trial and execution of that king by Parliament. There was nothing unprecedented in the killing of an English king. But it was an innovation to have tried him first.

Calvin puts monarchy in a much less than sacred light. Though it, like everything, is under the eye of heaven, it, like everything human, can go very wrong. He makes its claims entirely conditional. In his *Commentary* on the book of Daniel he treats kings then reigning with pure contempt. He says, 'We know the fierceness and pride of kings; nay, we see them act like madmen, because they do not reckon themselves among mortals, and become blinded with the splendor of their greatness.' And, 'Nebuchadnezzar seems to have followed the common practice of kings. For although they proudly despise God, yet they arm themselves with religion to strengthen their power, and pretend to encourage the worship of God for the single purpose of retaining the people in obedience' (Calvin 1996: 214). And,

In these days, monarchs, in their titles, always put forward themselves as kings, generals, and counts, by the grace of God; but how many falsely pretend to apply God's name to themselves, for the purpose of securing the supreme power! For what is the meaning of that title of kings and princes—'by the grace of God'? except to avoid the acknowledgement of a superior. Meanwhile, they willingly trample upon that God with whose shield they protect themselves,—so far are they from seriously thinking themselves to reign by his permission! It is mere pretence, therefore, to boast that they reign through God's favor. Since this is so, we may easily judge how proudly profane kings despise God, even though they make no fallacious use of his name, as those triflers who openly fawn upon him, and thus profane the name of his grace!

(Calvin 1996: 275)

The special importance of Reformed Geneva is clear in this context. The use of this kind of language would have been a capital offence in most of Europe.

Calvin's *Institutes*, which appeared in English translation in many editions during Shakespeare's lifetime, ends with a discussion of the obligation of 'magistrates of the people' to overthrow unjust rulers.

I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors. (Calvin 2006: 1519)

This passage provides another version of divine right. A divine obligation is vested in tribune assemblies to protect the people and their rights from abusive kings. The Parliamentary revolution that led to the trial and execution of Charles I could have found its theological rationale in these words. During Shakespeare's lifetime they would have served to articulate a vision of social order that limited the power and legitimacy of any king, measuring both against rights that inhered in the people. The Puritan insistence on the primacy of individual conscience in all circumstances makes every person at every moral juncture appropriately a critic of custom and authority, presumed to be competent to judge, hence under immediate religious obligation to exercise judgement. All authority is therefore conditional, even tenuous.

The influence of Reformed thought on writers like Milton and Bunyan whose subject is explicitly religious—how is the fallen state of humankind to be understood? how is the pilgrimage of the soul through the world to be imagined?—is manifest. They are indeed the point of the writing. Shakespeare should be looked at in terms of the broader, more fundamental questions being raised in his disputatious times. His work is so significant in world literature that his learning the scriptures from a Calvinist Bible ought to be taken into account, as well as his living in a period much influenced by Calvinist thought, and by writers like Edmund Spenser who embraced it. Phillip and Mary Sidney, themselves Calvinist writers, patronized others, as did great figures in the court. Arthur Golding, kinsman of the Earl of Oxford and translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a book of exceptional importance to Shakespeare's work, was also a major translator of Calvin's sermons and commentaries, including his great *Commentary on Psalms*. Putting aside any kind of affiliation on Shakespeare's part, he was nevertheless addressing a public among whom theological thinking influenced by Calvinism was present and active.

A writer of tragedy might find the idea that someone was fated, destined, similar enough to the idea that he or she was predestined—the word is a redundancy—to devote attention to the matter, given the interest of his audience, and John Calvin was perhaps the most widely read writer in England during Shakespeare's lifetime. The mention of Calvin in this or virtually any context triggers a reference to his views on predestination, which had been a tenet of the Christian faith since Augustine, arguably since Paul, but which has been especially associated with Calvin because he discussed it forthrightly. The difficulties that attend this doctrine have been used effectively in polemics against him, obscuring his theology with its supposed gloom. Yet he was a popular writer in a culture of great vitality. In the relative flood of translated classics and new works, he outsold writers who might be expected to have had far greater appeal. And while the emphasis on his predestinarian views gives a distorted sense of the burden of his thought, it must be said that these views are faithfully, without evasion, reflected in Puritan sermons and catechisms.

What could be the appeal of the doctrine of predestination? For one thing, it removed the rationale, or the pretext, for coercion in matters of belief, reinforcing the Puritan argument against infringement on the freedom of conscience. If God has, from the foundation of the world, adopted one person as his child and consigned another to perdition, then the use of terror to enforce conformity, which had been the policy of English governments off and on since an Act of Parliament in 1400 called for the burning of heretics, clearly could not alter the divine dispensation. Uniformity was felt to be in the interests of the state, but the individualism of Reformed piety, each believer absorbed in the unique mystery of his or her relation to God, limited the rights and claims of society and government over the faithful, in passionate principle if not in fact. John Locke knew a proof text: 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise leadership over them', said our Saviour to his disciples, 'but ye shall not be so'. If this runs counter to the black legend of Puritanism, it is highly consistent with the fact that during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell no one was executed for his or her religion. Puritanism was asserted in the fact of his stepping back from the long English tradition of using state terror to enforce conformity to Anglicanism or to Roman Catholicism. Considering that denominational lines were then literally battle lines, and considering that terrible public death for religious deviation had been suffered in England since 1400, such restraint is significant.

The little tract called the *Book of Sport*, written by James I and directed to be read in all churches, forbade restrictions on the playing of games after services on Sundays, since, among other benefits, exercise made men fitter to be soldiers. The tract is sometimes pointed to as evidence of a Puritan aversion to fun. But it forbade as well the playing of interludes after church, which suggests that the godly might have been up to other things than simply imposing Sabbath quiet. Interludes, those brief chronicles of the times, were sometimes seditious, as for example when the drama was written by the early Puritan John Bale. The London theatres could be closed down and they often were, but improvised plays and wandering players would have been much harder to control. With all their hazards, protest, parody, and satire were important in English vernacular culture and had been since the fourteenth century.

Shakespeare's plays are a striking departure from this tradition, indebted to it as he must have been. His plays are not polemical, not tendentious. They are philosophical or metaphysical in the sense that they explore the dynamic of event, the interweaving of character and fate. They are psychological in their attention to the complexity of motive. Conscience, central to Puritan thought as well as to Shakespeare's understanding of character, is for both the experiential crux of the soul's earthly drama. It is important not as a record of guilt to be purged by confession but as the quick of experience, immediately and truly sensitive to the meaning of any act, making every choice real and of great consequence because the actor honours or defies the will of God in his response to his conscience. While in the plays conscience is liable to being suppressed or defied, its judgements maintain their integrity and assert themselves finally in a kind of self-judgment that affirms conscience as unworldly, immune to corruption, as in Lady

Macbeth's haunted sleep, Richard III's visions of those he has killed, Claudius' tortured attempt at prayer. Calvin says in the *Institutes*,

[W]hen men have an awareness of divine judgment adjoined to them as a witness which does not let them hide their sins but arraigns them as guilty before the judgment seat—this awareness is called 'conscience'. It is a certain mean between God and man, for it does not allow man to suppress within himself what he knows, but pursues him to the point of making him acknowledge his guilt... A simple awareness could repose in man bottled up, as it were. Therefore, this feeling, which draws men to God's judgement, is like a keeper assigned to man, that watches and observes all his secrets so that nothing may remain buried in darkness. (Calvin 2006: 1182)

Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, says 'So full of artless jealousy is guilt/ It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.' John Milton says, '[I]f the church be not sufficient to be implicitly beleevd, as we hold it is not, what can there els be nam'd of more autoritie then the church but the conscience; then which God only is greater?' (Milton 1932: 307) The dramas of inwardness are metaphysical in scale, intimately linking the individual to God, to the exclusion of all other claimants.

The dictates of conscience free those who heed them from the obligation to obey unjust orders or laws, however costly the freedom might prove to be in worldly terms. At the same time, they are dictates, specific to circumstance and unambiguous, and evading them has the gravest consequences for the soul ultimately and for the self in present time. By this account, human freedom is no simple thing. It is a felt experience which cannot be thought of as existing in opposition to fate or destiny. While salvation has been everlastingly established in the will of God, a matter of grace rather than of merit, the course of one's life—that is, the pilgrimage of one's soul—is all the evidence that is to be had of one's ultimate destiny.

Shakespeare's plays explore the nature of power, typically by tracing its decay. Calvin taught that worldly power was ordained by God, and, when it collapsed, was overthrown by him. So history is another theatre of God's will and judgement. Many of the plays are drawn directly from British history and others reflect on it. Shakespeare's kings are all very fallible, often violent for reasons of state or simply homicidal. The saintly Henry VI brings disaster down on England by dint of sheer haplessness. The brutal business of succession that is so often Shakespeare's subject argues strongly against any royal appeal to divine right. Hereditary right, in theory a guarantor of legitimacy in the king and stability in the government, is in fact a source of chaos in these plays, as it was in the chronicle histories and as it was in the turbulent period from the death of Henry V to the accession of Elizabeth I. Geneva, the great pole of influence in the world of Reformed Protestantism, had driven out the Savoyard bishop who formerly governed them, leaving authority in the hands of councils. One of these was a Great Council, composed of Geneva's male citizens as a whole. This is to point out once more that there were in Europe functioning alternatives to monarchy of which Elizabethans were well aware, and that Shakespeare's attention to England's experience with royalty should be thought

of in this context. Much Shakespeare scholarship has been transfixed by the notion that a kind of entranced stability fell over England during the reign of Elizabeth I, from which proceeded its loftiest achievements. History tells a different tale, of plots and panics and gruesome suppressions. This is not to minimize the achievements of the period, or to suggest that fragile stability is not generally preferable to violent disorder. It is only to say that these achievements were obviously not the products of a single, harmonious 'world picture'.

Some of Shakespeare's plays, if they are not polemical, are startlingly topical. His compassion for women who stand accused of adultery—which in the case of a queen is high treason, a capital offence—must surely have led his audience to think long thoughts. In *The Winter's Tale*, the agonizing trial of Hermione before her husband/king Leontes would have brought to mind the trial and death of Anne Boleyn, mother of Elizabeth. Leontes is sick with jealousy. Henry VIII claimed, at least, to be seeking a male heir, though as a legal pretext he used charges of adultery against Anne. Neither woman can disprove accusations that have their origins in the temperament and motives of her husband rather than in her conduct. The play *Othello* also turns on the fact that grounds for suspicion of adultery are easily established and impossible to refute. Leontes is like Henry in renouncing and bastardizing his own children. Mamilius, the charming little boy who names *The Winter's Tale*, dies of grief because of his forced alienation from his mother. Elizabeth as a child might be assumed to have felt a yet more bitter grief. Henry's children were orphaned by him, literally or in effect, and were kept as virtual prisoners, as is the young Prince Arthur in *King John*, whose mother's lament for him makes palpable the brutality of the royal system which treated helpless children as pawns and competitors in dynastic struggles. Shakespeare humanizes royalty and nobility, those 'subject to their birth', and in his compassion for them he dramatizes the unnaturalness, fear, and suffering, as well as the temptations to violence and oppression, that come with their role.

King Henry the Eighth can be read as an experiment with a version of the question of freedom and determinism, the consequences of human intention within providential history. The play deals at once directly and obliquely with that epochal and violent reign. It is clearly premised on the thought that the birth of Elizabeth was indeed providential, despite the fact that it was an almost accidental consequence of her father's casting about for a successor. There is no complicating mention of her half-siblings, Edward and Mary, or of the break with Rome. From the point of view of Henry VIII, Elizabeth was simply a second daughter, a disappointment of his hopes and a pretext for ridding himself of her mother. But if the birth of the future queen and her accession were the work of Providence, then events would have brought it about inevitably. The divinity that shapes our ends could have done its work without all the terrible rough-hewing. The play imagines relatively recent English history as it might have been if it had unfolded under the influence of the conciliatory grace that characterizes the final acts of Shakespeare's other late plays, and which here is personified in Queen Katherine. Every major faction in the conflict that tormented England in the early phase of its Reformation is represented on stage, and every one of these figures is given his or her moment. Katherine,

who was Spanish and Roman Catholic and might have been exploited in an appeal to nationalistic feelings, is given scenes and speeches that establish her as a woman of great virtue, gentleness, and dignity. Those who die in the play, all under accusation, accept death graciously, are remembered for their virtues, and are forgiven. Figures who will be martyrs to subsequent events, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, and Anne Bullen, walk the stage, secure as they never were, embraced by enemies, honoured by the king. It is as if a moment of time, historic and a-historic, were 'smiling extremity out of act'—language borrowed from the late play *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* but appropriate here. Providence has given Henry the great successor he dreams of, the infant Elizabeth. If he could have recognized this, Anne need not have died. If the merits of those who were and will be killed were acknowledged and valued, the workings of Providence, history itself, would not have been obscured by terror and violence.

Shakespeare explored issues of history, social order, and human nature that were raised by the controversies in the world around him and might well have been of interest to him without his identifying himself with any tradition, sect, or faction. John Milton could hardly have been more strongly allied with the Puritan movement and with the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. He epitomized Puritanism in its deeply learned and literary character and in its resistance to the existing order of things, even when that order amounted to retrenchments on the part of the revolutionary Parliament or hardening of Reformed thought around what he called 'the discipline of Geneva'. Schism was characteristic of English Protestantism then as it has been throughout its history in America and elsewhere. Milton had a rationale for it: 'When there is much desire to learn, there will of necessity be much arguing, much writing, many opinions: for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making' (Milton 1644). This is from his pamphlet *Aereopagitica*, addressed to Parliament when it was considering an act that would reinstate the licensing of books, which meant censorship before publication. This had been a policy of the royal government, the work of the Star Chamber. Parliament was right to feel that factionalism was a threat to the revolutionary government, and Milton was right that, in principle, freedom of speech and of the press would finally be essential to a humane and flourishing society. His efforts to dissuade the Parliament from reinstating licensing did not succeed.

In Milton there is the profound, deeply humanist, rather mystical passion for books also expressed by Calvin, and the same fusion of this passion with a yet more exalted love of scripture, all moved by a high reverence for human brilliance. These things together make Milton's argument a classic articulation of Reformed thought, with its very many implications for conceptions of the individual and of the social order. Milton says, 'As good almost kill a Man as kill a good book; who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God as it were in the eye.' He had an answer both scriptural and humane to the question raised by Castellio about the great latitude given to the printing of books in Calvin's Geneva. He said, 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all other liberties.' Since Max Weber, the sacred autonomy of the self and the sovereignty of individual conscience are aspects of the Reformed

habitus that are acknowledged most often when they are seen as things to be regretted. In such contexts only they are recognized as ongoing and highly important to the civilization, though in a negative sense, as having atomized society and alienated modern people from one another. Yet for Milton there is a kind of holy joy in the good we create and the good we take from our much writing and our many opinions, and from this reverence for the self, our own and others. Humanism was from its beginnings a study and a celebration of intellectual and cultural achievement. The glory of any achievement redounded to humankind as a whole, humanity conceived as something more than ideal, like an angel in action, in apprehension like a god—that is to say, always redefining itself, always potentially transcending expectation. This exalted anthropology had cultural, moral, ethical, and political consequences. The American Puritan John Wise (1652–1725):

The proper definition of a civil state is this: a civil state is a compound moral person whose will (united by those covenants before passed) is the will of all, to the end it may use and apply the strength and riches of private persons toward maintaining the common peace, security, and well-being of all. Which may be conceived as though the whole state was now become but one man, in which the aforesaid covenants may be supposed, under God's providence, to be the divine fiat pronounced by God, 'Let us make man.'

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CHAPTER 7

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM

DON COLLETT AND MARK GIGNILLIAT

THE broad stream of the Reformed tradition places Holy Scripture at the core of its identity. Where the water ruffles in this stream, due to theological disagreement and polemic, one can rest assured the discord stems, at least in part, from the interpretation of the Bible. Because the Reformed tradition affirms on some level *semper reformanda*, the critical element involved in the church's continued self-reflection and prognosis regarding its identity and mission remains the theological exegesis of the canonical text. Despite the hermeneutical debates within the Reformed tradition, scripture remains the *principium cognoscendi theologiae* (Muller 2003: ch. 3). Reformed theology, therefore, orders its thinking and worship to the one God whose name is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This self-same God assures the church of his life giving presence by means of careful and prayerful attendance to Christianity's canonical text. Word and Spirit remain concomitant.

This 'Scripture Principle' is near the foundation of the Reformed edifice. Karl Barth defines the Reformed Scripture Principle as 'the church recognize[ing] the rule of its proclamation solely in the Word of God and find[ing] the Word of God solely in Holy Scripture' (Barth 2002: 41). For Reformed confessional writings, this Scripture Principle exists as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. The rise of modern biblical criticism has, however, brought challenges and opportunities commensurate with the Scripture Principle's basic status in Reformed thought. This chapter will make a modest venture into the hermeneutical fray resulting from modern criticism's ascendant status.

7.1 JOHN CALVIN AS MODERN CRITICISM'S FOREBEAR?

John Calvin, the second-generation reformer of the sixteenth century, makes for an interesting study because of his location in the history of biblical interpretation. Calvin is not necessarily the most influential reformer of his generation (cf. Bullinger, Vermigli, Musculus, Ursinus), but he ranks at the top when measured in terms of exegetical proliferation (Muller 2012). Calvin stands at the crossroads of the shift from pre-critical to critical modes of biblical inquiry, whose meteoric rise begins in the century to follow. In the next section, we will rehearse our misgivings about the terms 'critical' and 'pre-critical'.

Notwithstanding the terminology, a seismic shift occurs in the seventeenth century when Cartesian modes of inquiry are brought to bear on biblical hermeneutics. Also, the rise of historical consciousness in the eighteenth century, along with Romanticism's reifying of the particular versus the universal, made an indelible mark on biblical interpretation. The force of these philosophical and hermeneutical developments is felt to this day. It must be stressed, however, that Calvin precedes these developments in the history of ideas and only a Whig interpretation of history can locate him therein. Still, Calvin is at times treated as the progenitor of a Protestant penchant for historical-critical readings of scripture. A brief rehearsal of Calvin's exegetical instincts may help to frame the discussion to follow.

Hans-Joachim Kraus' 1968 study, 'Calvin's exegetische Prinzipien', identifies the key markers of Calvin's exegetical approach, drawing attention to his preference for clarity and brevity, the intention of the author as shaped by the historical circumstances and the literary context of the text, and the means by which the text can be extended via the scope of Christ. On the whole, Kraus' study continues to serve as a helpful referent point for Calvin's exegesis, particularly in his framing of Calvin's understanding of the internal testimony of the Spirit as integral and not ancillary to the exegetical task. As Hans Frei comments on Kraus' work, 'The religious bearing is rather part and parcel of what Calvin believes to be the unified web involved in a proper interpretative stance' (Frei 1974 22). Kraus' work stands as an interpretive achievement for understanding Calvin's basic exegetical instincts.

Readers of Calvin, however, who understand him as a precursor to modern critical approaches struggle to come to terms with the following two sides of Calvin: an attendance to the text's plain sense and his insistence that '[w]e must read the scripture with the purpose of finding Christ in it' (*Corpus Reformatorum* 47, 125). While Richard Muller lauds Kraus' work as coming 'very close in places to a full sense of Calvin's mode of interpretation', he nevertheless worries that '[t]he question Kraus fails to ask is how these seemingly divergent exegetical tendencies relate to one another in the interpretation of the Psalm' (Muller 1990: 76–7).

Shadows of modern criticism may be found in Calvin, including Calvin's sensitivity to historical and literary context, and his willingness to entertain critical opinions on the

authorship of Joshua and 2 Peter. Calvin was also undecided on the authorship of Psalm 95 even though apostolic testimony (Hebrews 4) attributes the Psalm to David (Hobbs 1990: 89). Despite these modern shadows, Calvin's theological hermeneutic breathes the air of the medieval *Quadrige* even when he claims he is reading one literal and grammatical sense. As Muller surmises, '[T]he exegetic interest presented in his remarks has not deviated very far from allegory and trope' (Muller 1990: 73). Calvin's appreciative deployment of humanist learning in his critical engagement with primary sources does not entail a lack of 'scholastic' interest in the unity and importance of Christian doctrine as hermeneutically instructive (Ozment 1981: 305–9, 316).

Arguments which position Calvin as a forerunner of historical reading in a modern mode often cite his negative attitude toward allegory as an index for his views on allegorical exegesis. However, Calvin's criticisms are most often directed toward its abuses, rather than allegorical exegesis per se. By the late Middle Ages, allegorical exegesis had become identified with an approach to exegesis that detached scripture's doctrinal or theological sense from its literal sense. It had also become associated with an approach to theological interpretation that pressed biblical texts for too many details, resulting in speculative conclusions that had no basis in the literal sense (Puckett 1995: 113). Calvin regarded the separation of scripture's theological sense from its literal-historical sense as chiefly responsible for the doctrinal problems inherent in late medieval exegesis.

At the same time, Calvin recognizes the usefulness of allegory, not simply for purposes of homiletic illustration, but also in exegetical contexts. In his Latin commentary on Galatians 4:22, he notes that Paul's own use of the term *allegoria* is rooted in the historical figures of Sarah and Isaac, and Hagar and Ishmael. He admits that Paul's reading of the Isaac and Ishmael narrative is allegorical, but distinguishes this form of allegory from an approach that departs from scripture's literal-historical sense, opening the door to speculation and mysticism:

as the house of Abraham was then the true Church, so it is beyond doubt that the principle and most memorable events that happened in it are types for us. Therefore, as in circumcision, in sacrifices, in the whole Levitical priesthood there was an allegory, as there is today in our sacraments, so was there likewise in the house of Abraham. But this did not involve a departure from the literal meaning [*a literali sensu*]. In a word, it is as if Paul says that there is depicted in the two wives of Abraham a figure of the two covenants, and in the two sons a figure of the two peoples.

(Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians: 84–5)

This open but critical attitude toward allegory's exegetical usefulness may also be found in the following statement from Calvin's *Institutes* (Book II, V.19): 'Allegories ought not to proceed beyond the point where they have the rule of scripture guiding them; certainly they must not be used as the basis for any dogmas per se.' In arguing the latter point, Calvin is simply reiterating a point affirmed by both Augustine and Aquinas, namely, that doctrinal argument must be based on scripture's literal sense rather than its allegorical

sense per se. Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin regarded scripture's allegorical or figural sense as a theological extension of the literal sense. It has no independent integrity of its own. Thus allegorical or figural senses may be appealed to in exegetical argument only insofar as they can be shown to be clearly built upon, and established by, the literal sense (Augustine, Letter 93 to Vincent the Donatist, 8.24; cf. also Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.1.10).

The foregoing discussion of Calvin's exegetical method suggests that his relationship to medieval exegetical tradition should be construed in terms of reform, rather than revolution. Why then did Calvin prefer to speak of the one true sense of scripture, rather than continuing to speak of the literal sense in terms of the differentiated mode of description on offer in the medieval fourfold? Brevard Childs rightly observes: 'Calvin rejected any dichotomy between the literal and spiritual senses, thus opposing Lyra's double literal sense and Faber's disparagement of the historical. Calvin spoke of the *verus scripturae sensus* which is both literal and spiritual, the single true sense of the text' (Childs 1992: 87). Thus while Calvin could speak of scripture's literal sense in terms of its twofold distinction between scripture's simple sense (*sensus simplex*) and its extended or connected sense (*sensus complex*), this distinction was to be situated within the seamless garment of scripture's one true sense (Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Galatians: 84–5). Calvin's preference for this language, however, turns upon his strategy for correcting exegetical abuses to which the medieval *Quadrigena* was subject, and not with the wholesale rejection of its theological instincts vis-à-vis the literal sense.

In sum, Calvin's account of the literal sense represents an attempt to recover its unity. His strategy is based on the recognition that once logical and reflective distance is introduced between the literal sense and its extended senses, the movement toward 'allegorical' independence is difficult to stem. By simply speaking of the one true sense of scripture, Calvin sought to avoid demoting scripture's theological sense to a secondary or epiphenomenal status, thereby preserving its character as that which is integral to scripture's literal sense from the outset.

One final matter bears mentioning. Calvin wades in the Augustinian, hermeneutical stream when he conjoins a high doctrine of scripture with the piety of the Christian reader. For Calvin, true religion is born in the school of scripture (*Institutes* I.6.2). The students in this school trek toward 'true understanding when we reverently embrace what it pleases God there to witness of himself'. Calvin continues, 'knowledge of God is born of obedience'. Augustine, like Calvin, places 'fear' and 'piety' before knowledge. Proper 'fear' exhibits a desire to know God's will, 'seeking' and 'shunning' what he demands. Fear's concomitant partner, piety, demonstrates a growth in modesty where the readers 'think and believe that what is written there is better and truer, even if its meaning is hidden, than any good ideas we can think up for ourselves' (*De Doctrina*, II.9–10). Right readers are those who stoop low in humility and obedience at the door of scripture's engagement. In other words, the pious posture of the interpreter, with piety understood as a modest and willing submission to what scripture claims, is integral to the exegetical task. Such an account strains under modernity's tendency to detach scholars

from their object of study for the sake of catholic objectivity. For Calvin, a faithful reader of scripture can never be detached from the object of study. The stakes are too high, with nothing less than true knowledge of God and self on the line.

7.2 MODERNITY'S GREAT SHIFT: THE EPISTEMIC LOCATION OF BELIEF AND THE RISE OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

As mentioned, Calvin makes for an interesting study because of his location in the history of interpretation. Calvin dies in 1564. Baruch Spinoza publishes his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1670, though the ideas presented therein predate the *Tractatus*. The century after Calvin's death witnesses an enormous shift in the relation between divine revelation, the human subject, and the quest for metaphysical and moral truth. Few, if any, subjects of this period are more central to these philosophical and hermeneutical developments than Baruch Spinoza.

The significance of Spinoza's hermeneutic does not lie in his critical views on the compositional history of biblical books or in his problematizing of Hebrew language study, resulting in a hermeneutic of suspicion. In other words, Spinoza was not the first to deny Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Astruc, Hobbes, and La Peyrère are precursors to Spinoza on this front. Spinoza's signal importance arises from his distinction between the 'true' meaning of the text and the 'truth of fact'. The former is deciphered by means of a historically conditioned hermeneutic where the author's intentions are identified by means of a close reading of the Hebrew text and reconstruction of the historical and social realities from which the text arose (Spinoza 2007: xi). For Spinoza (and Le Clerc), humanist scholarship had a deaf ear when it came to the social and historical points of differentiation between ancient texts themselves and between ancient texts and the modern interpreter (Israel 2009: 416). The late seventeenth-century practitioners of *ars critica* sought to uncover, as a matter of hermeneutical first principles, the historical context of the beliefs, ideas, and superstitions that shaped the authors and redactors of ancient texts (p. 416). The *sensus literalis*, in this account, becomes coterminous with the *sensus historicus* (Childs 1977). Admittedly, Spinoza pulls the rug out from this approach because he recognizes that close readings of the Hebrew text and historical reconstructions remain elusive, resisting settled hermeneutical conclusions. Provisional results regarding the text's literal sense are the interpreter's best hope.

The 'truth of fact', on the other hand, for Spinoza springs from an unprejudiced mind, a mind unshackled by the tyranny of hermeneutical tradition where the reader distinguishes the truth claims of the text from truth philosophically grounded in science and the governing forces of natural reason. This fundamental distinction between the intended truth of the text and the truth of facts places an iron curtain between the scriptures and metaphysical truth claims. Scripture does not render a divine word regarding

how the human subject shapes her thinking about God's being or cosmological order. 'With the philosophies of Hobbes and Spinoza, it became clear that what was being overturned, at least potentially, was all forms of authority and tradition, even scripture and Man's essentially theological view of the universe itself' (Israel 2009: 65). This account of reality is beyond the purview of the biblical text. To engage such matters within scripture's frame is to confuse categories that must be kept distinct. For Spinoza, biblical narratives are placeholders for religious instruction where the narrated events themselves become somewhat detached from their instructive value as moral lessons for charity (Frei 1972: 43; Spinoza 2007: 61). Truth, however, remains within the sealed domain of philosophical inquiry.

Spinoza and Spinozism loom large in the intellectual and religious landscape of Protestant and Catholic Europe over the next century. A textured account of this fertile period of intellectual history requires the adroit attention of one steeped in the literature and social history of the time (see Israel 2002; 2009). Still, it remains the case that a tidal change was swelling over Europe's intellectual and religious life, especially as these two spheres shape each other. While Spinoza's philosophical work ranges beyond the realm of modern biblical criticism, his views on scripture, its purpose, and its interpretation sent a rip current through the halls of religious and academic institutions, including especially the Reformed churches and universities in the Netherlands and the Calvinist regions of Germany and Switzerland (Israel 2002: 29–34).

The mid-seventeenth century provides a helpful point of reference as the decisive moment when intellectual and religious life in the West takes a decidedly modern turn. Michael Legaspi's work on modern biblical studies at the new Georgia Augusta University in Göttingen describes the shifting scene as *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Legaspi 2010). In Göttingen, Johann David Michaelis (1717–91) taught Old Testament and Semitic Languages by analogy with the disciplinary instincts derived from classical studies. The study of scripture within a university required little warrant for its existence in time past. The tidal shift modernity brought to university life, however, altered this anterior assumption. Justification for biblical studies within modern universities became requisite along lines commensurate with the epistemological turns of modernity. For Michaelis, study of Israel's history and sacred texts are necessary in a modern university for the same reasons the study of Homer and Greece or Virgil and Rome are: antique studies have their necessary place in the humanities. But the religious or metaphysical value of Israel's scriptures rests uncomfortably in this new intellectual setting.

Because of this shifting intellectual scene—a scene with a bona fide before and after—scholars often speak of pre-critical and critical approaches to scripture. Calvin, for example, is a pre-critical interpreter, along with the broad stream of Christian interpretation leading up to him. Johann Semler, Richard Simon, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, to name a few, represent critical interpreters on the far side of this intellectual divide. Hans Frei's important *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, for example, makes broad use of these categories. David Steinmetz lauds the value of 'pre-critical' interpretation in his oft-cited article, 'The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis'. These terms, therefore, have a wide range of use and acceptance.

The terms 'pre-critical' and 'critical' may serve as helpful indicators of interpretive instincts vis-à-vis the rise of Cartesian modes of inquiry. The terms themselves present a potential red herring, however, suggesting that 'critical' inquiry into the problems of scripture were in a holding cell awaiting unfettered and modern minds. As observed with Calvin's views on the authorship of Joshua or 2 Peter, such is not the case. Admittedly, critical issues in scripture's historical accuracy and genetic history became more acute in modernity's wake. Nevertheless, 'pre-critical' interpreters did not lack in their recognition of the Bible's 'problems'.

Moreover, Neil MacDonald worries about Frei's conceptual framework for providing an account of the shift between 'critical' and 'pre-critical' hermeneutics (MacDonald 2001). For Frei, the shift has to do with different notions of biblical narratives and their referentiality. In Frei's schema, pre-critical interpreters attach meaning to the narrated stories themselves, along with the narrative's potential as figural agents in the divine economy. In other words, Luther and Calvin assume the historical veracity of the biblical narratives but did not attach hermeneutical significance to the matter. Critical interpreters, on the other hand, shift the focus from the stories themselves to the ostensive, historical referent of the stories. MacDonald finds this schema lacking because historical truth claiming is important on both sides of the pre-critical/critical divide. Identifying historical referentiality as the neuralgic point of differentiation between critical and pre-critical interpreters, in MacDonald's estimation, misunderstands the larger issues.

MacDonald may misconstrue Frei's own concerns about the truth-claims of the biblical narratives. Mike Higon provides a more nuanced account of Frei's conceptual framing of biblical narratives and their relation to history (Higon 2004: chs 5 and 6). Despite MacDonald's reading of Frei and the critical questions it leaves on the table, his epistemological point remains instructive. The significant point of distinction between critical and pre-critical—or, better, modern and pre-modern—interpreters resides in the location of belief in the critical enterprise. Frei was right to note that Luther and Calvin assumed the historical veracity of the scriptures, even when he downplays the significance of this matter for their interpretation. Such an assumption about the biblical text arose from the anterior character of belief in the interpretive process. In other words, and to borrow language from Reformed epistemology, the historical veracity of scripture was properly basic to their epistemological frame of reasoning.

On the far side of modernity's divide, such theological assumptions were intentionally suspended, often in an effort to provide epistemic warrant for the truth-claims of scripture and Christian theology (e.g. John Locke). Belief, in this account, is allowed in on the wake of critical inquiry in an effort to maintain catholic objectivity and to provide epistemic warrant. According to John Barton, the suspension of theological commitments on the front end of critical inquiry into the scriptures' material form is a signal trademark of modern biblical criticism, setting it apart from the Christian hermeneutical tradition that precedes it (Barton 2007).

Reformed theology assumes scripture's centrality for the ordering of Christian faith and practice. The confessional character of the scripture as an object of study shapes the

church's interpretive methods. This assumption entails another confessional assumption: that scripture's interpretation and material form necessitate the social location of the church for its proper reading. This claim does necessitate the collapsing of the ecclesial sense with the literal sense of scripture. The ecclesial community exists as the proper sphere of scripture's clarity and interpretation, but is not its cause. The church remains the creature of the Word. Because these assumptions are properly basic to the Reformed tradition's ordering of faith and practice, the suspension of belief or confession regarding scripture's nature and role within the divine economy is not concomitant with Christian belief.

The flipside of this theological construction rings true as well. The anterior character of confession or belief regarding scripture's nature and role should release, not impede, biblical scholars of the confessional stripe into the investigation of scripture's creaturely form to its fullest. These two confessional commitments are not antithetical. At the same time, they continue to result in conflict and disputation within confessional communities of faith, especially of the Reformed kind. The debate between Charles Augustus Briggs and the Princeton Seminary faculty in the late eighteenth century is a case in point. Our attention will turn briefly to this historic and important exchange before turning to a constructive account of the relationship between Reformed theology and modern criticism.

7.3 CHARLES AUGUSTUS BRIGGS AND OLD PRINCETON: THE CONTROVERSY ILLUSTRATED

Admittedly, a focus on Princeton Theological Seminary in the eighteenth century does not do justice to Reformed thought *in toto* during this period. Our aim is not to provide such an account, although Princeton Seminary is an interesting ecosystem pertaining to the rising tensions between confessional commitments and modern criticism. Old Princeton provides an important point of entry into the subject matter because of their 'both/and' approach to the study of scripture as a book of divine origin *and* a creaturely document whose material form warrants critical inquiry. As time went on, the 'both/and' strains toward an 'either/or', and this is especially apparent in the public exchange between Charles Briggs and the faculty at Princeton Seminary.

In the early eighteenth century, Princeton Seminary's founder, Archibald Alexander, encouraged engagement with scripture's critical issues because a robust faith affirms discussion and eschews prejudice. 'That faith which is weakened by discussion is mere prejudice, not true faith' (Alexander 1851: 28). Critics may retort that such an account smacks of the common-sense realism so prevalent during the day, with its Baconian attendance to empirical evidence and reason. Still, the basic instinct remains grounded in Reformed thought: namely, the attendance to the creaturely character of scripture is not at odds with a robust commitment to its canonical authority and inspiration.

The challenges arising from German critical scholarship during this period created a strain for the 'both/and' approach espoused by Alexander's earlier work. As the results of modern criticism in German universities made their presence known on the American theological landscape, Alexander and his protégé Charles Hodge defended traditional positions with ferocity, leaving the front lines of the battle to confessional German scholars like E. Hengstenberg (Berlin) and A. Tholuck (Halle). But in principle, Hodge and Alexander were not predisposed against new learning or ideas—though Hodge did boast that novelty did not mark the seminary's curriculum for almost a full century.

Hodge himself studied in Germany, carrying with him Alexander's warnings about the threat posed by German scholarship. Hodge returned from his two-year study in Germany enriched in his study of biblical languages and entrenched in his resistance to what Marion Ann Taylor calls 'radical criticism' (Taylor 1992: 264–5). Such criticism was at odds with Christian scholarship because practitioners come to the Bible 'as to the work of men, without reverence, and without prayer, trusting in ourselves, our rules, or our learning' (Hodge 1822: 50; see Taylor 1992: 264.) The posture of the Christian scholar vis-à-vis the biblical text remains central to the task as it was for Calvin and the Augustinian hermeneutic tradition Calvin inhabited. German critical scholars like Reimarus or Strauss, in Hodge's view, operated in a very different epistemological space than this Augustinian hermeneutical stream. For Hodge, Reformed confessionalism and the results of modern criticism remain necessarily at loggerheads because of the assumed epistemic context that gave rise to modern criticism.

The binary character, however, of an 'either/or' approach to Reformed, confessional commitments and an openness to critical inquiry into scripture's creaturely character became especially acute in the case of Charles Augustus Briggs. One can safely assume the residual effects of this debate are present to the current day in Reformed theological circles and, more broadly, in the church's negotiating of confessional approaches with academic theology and biblical studies. The Briggs case set the stage for the modernist/fundamentalist controversies of the early twentieth century.

Critical scholarship made few ripples in North America until the second half of the nineteenth century. Andover's Moses Stuart, considered by many the father of biblical criticism in America, made judicious use of the critical theories he learned from J. G. Eichorn. For Stuart, Moses draws on the Yahwist and Elohist sources in the composition of the Pentateuch (Giltner 1988: 33). Such a compositional theory held to Mosaic authorship while at the same time introducing source criticism into the traditional view. Stuart's modest use of critical theories did not shake the Reformed world, however. The Briggs controversy in North America and the William Robertson Smith case in Europe did.

Charles Augustus Briggs, a veteran of the Civil War, returned to Union Theological Seminary in 1874 as a member of its faculty. He had spent three years at the University of Berlin where he studied under such notables as E. W. Hengstenberg, Isaac A. Dorner, and H. G. A. Ewald. Unlike Charles Hodge, Briggs believed that his confessional commitments and the results of modern criticism were not at odds with each other. In fact,

Briggs hoped the results of modern criticism would aid confessional Christian beliefs, distinguishing as he did between a believing 'evangelical criticism' and the 'rationalist criticism' too often on display among German critical scholars. In a letter to Professor Henry B. Smith of Union, Briggs recounts, 'They [German critical scholars] are too much influenced by rationalism as we would say in America . . . But in spite of their *coldness* in handling Scripture, it is more *satisfactory* to the student than a devotional spirit without *thought*' (Loetscher 1955: 28).

The stress lines between Briggs' version of 'evangelical criticism' and the more repellant view of the Princeton faculty became a matter of public debate in a series of articles published in the *Presbyterian Review* between April 1881 and April 1883. A.A. Hodge and C.A. Briggs were coeditors of the journal, a joint effort between Union and Princeton. These articles decrying the deleterious effects of modern criticism or affirming their positive use created a firestorm. This firestorm eventually died down without bringing a theological controversy. But in time, the embers would flare again.

From the perspective of ensuing events, Briggs stated confidence in his ability to persuade the confessional Reformed world of modern criticism's value is overwrought. When A. A. Hodge intimated to Briggs his withdrawal from coediting the review, Briggs begs his patience, stating, 'I believe that you will be greatly rewarded, you will find that the positions that I will take will *conserve* all that you will deem essential in the Inspiration of the Scripture and the Standards of the Church and that the Higher Criticism that I will advocate will be one of great value for the defense and advocacy of the Scriptures themselves' (Loetscher 1955: 34). Perhaps Briggs' optimism resembles a species of idealism where ideas are divorced from institutional dynamics. Such a divorce is rarely a happy one.

In 1891, the stress fractures of the previous decade became a full break in the dam. On January 20, Briggs delivered a public address at Union entitled, 'The Authority of Holy Scripture'. The lecture kicked up the dusts of controversy again. By April of the same year, Briggs came under investigation for heresy by his presbytery in New York. Despite his exoneration by his local presbytery, the initial investigation began a process that eventually led to his suspension from ministry by the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1893. The heresy trial resulted in a fissure between Briggs and the Presbyterian Church and between Union and the self-same church.

The contents of Briggs' lecture, 'The Authority of Holy Scripture', bear the marks of one at the end of a long struggle. The diplomatic sensibilities Briggs displayed in his private correspondence with A. A. Hodge had frayed. Briggs publicly calls into question the verbal inspiration of scripture, choosing to locate revelation and inspiration in the thought of scripture rather than in the fixity of its language. Language, for Briggs, is the dress of thought (Briggs 1891: 31). The word is the vehicle for revelation.

Briggs also rehearses his strong misgivings about the tendency of conservative theologians, like W. H. Green, to base scriptural authority on the human authors of scripture. Briggs adopts many of the literary-critical conclusions of current Pentateuchal scholarship, affirming the composite literary nature and multiple authors of this corpus. With Bernard Duhm, Briggs assumes a complex compositional history of a prophetic

book like Isaiah. Again, Briggs exemplifies in his own scholarly practice the modern penchant for inductive reasoning, eschewing traditional positions that did not arise from a robust biblical theology—i.e. exegetical theology—and affirming modern critical conclusions that did not, in Briggs' estimation, harm the substance of confessional belief in the Standards of the Presbyterian Church.

In point of fact, Briggs goes on the offensive at this point in his lecture with exceptional ardour—as demonstrated by the multiple uses of the exclamation mark! Briggs believes his confessional interlocutors have themselves introduced a *novum* into their confessional viewpoints by linking biblical authority to traditional views of biblical authorship.

But who tells us that these traditional names were the authors of the Bible? The Bible itself? The creeds of the Church? Any reliable historical testimony? None of these! Pure, conjectural tradition! Nothing more! We are not prepared to build our faith for time and eternity upon such uncertainties as these. (Briggs 1891: 33)

To the contrary, Briggs claims, 'We desire to know whether the Bible came from God, and it is not of any great importance that we should know the names of those worthies chosen by God to mediate his revelation.' The case of the disappearing redactors or tradents of the biblical material is, for Briggs, a gift of divine providence so that the authority of scripture would be properly built on its divine source rather than on human authors.

In this latter providential sense, Briggs believes Higher Criticism is a gift to the Reformed church, providing an 'inestimable service' in diminishing the conceit of theologians who build their theology on something other than scripture. Those who seek to establish the authority of scripture in apologetic efforts to dismiss Higher Criticism while affirming traditional views on authorship are themselves, in Briggs' estimation, out of accord with the Westminster Standards. According to the Standards (I.4), the authority of scripture rests on nothing other than the authority of God.

By the time Briggs addresses the thorny issue of inerrancy, whatever gloves were on in the fight now rested comfortably on the floor. Briggs called inerrancy 'a ghost of modern evangelicalism to frighten children' (Briggs 1891: 35). The errors one finds in scripture are in circumstantial matters of historical detail but not in the essentials of divine and saving revelation. Inspiration and authority are properly located in scripture's religion, faith, and morals. Otherwise, one should fully anticipate the human authors of scripture to be limited by their location in time and space. Moreover, theologians should be wary of raising unnecessary hurdles to scripture's authority by extending inerrancy's scope to matters of circumstantial detail. As thoughtful and ardent Briggs was in his defence of the compatibility of historical criticism with a Reformed confessional identity, the institution of the Presbyterian Church disagreed.

As an international phenomenon, the Briggs controversy remains instructive as an historical moment where confessional commitments and biblical criticism struggle for a clear holding. One should not doubt the sincerity of Briggs in his understanding of the

compatibility of his views with the doctrinal standards of his church. Equally, one should not dismiss the views of figures such as W. H. Green and B. B. Warfield in their insistence that Briggs' adoption of critical viewpoints went beyond the bounds of the self-same confession.

Reformed theology's affirmation of the divine and human authorship of scripture, even with the theological prioritization of the former, keeps the door open for stringent disagreements of this kind. As this brief narrative of Reformed circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals, navigating the waters between 'either/or' and 'both/and' approaches remains perilous. What this period also reveals is the necessity for subsequent generations of Reformed thinkers to give critical thought to this subject, taking into account the philosophical underpinnings informing previous generation's theological decision-making and pressing forward to clarify the twin commitments to the divine source of scripture and the providential oversight of creaturely activity in the production of its material form.

7.4 CREATION AND REDEMPTION IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: GEERHARDUS VOS, KARL BARTH, AND BREVARD CHILDS

7.4.1 Geerhardus Vos

In 1891 the faculty of Princeton Seminary requested its board of directors to create a chair in biblical theology, a decision motivated in part by the ethos beginning to develop in the Presbyterian Church in connection with the controversial views of Charles Briggs on scripture. The seminary sought to establish an alternative to Briggs' approach to biblical theology, not only because it recognized its growing importance in the field of biblical scholarship but also because of the seminary's prominence as 'a citadel for the defense of Reformed orthodoxy'. The chair was offered to Geerhardus Vos, who accepted the chair some time in late 1892 or early 1893 as the Briggs controversy was making its way to the General Assembly of 1893. Just over a year later, in May 1894, Vos offered a programmatic statement of his views on biblical theology in an inaugural address, 'The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline' (Vos 1980: 3–24). Vos' approach to biblical theology sought to capture the dynamic of biblical history in terms amenable to Princetonian orthodoxy, while at the same time offering an alternative to Briggs' deployment of historical-critical methods. His approach nevertheless reflects certain modern impulses.

Vos' inaugural address frames the context of biblical revelation in terms of historical progress and organic development, in which the terms 'organism', 'organic', and 'organically' occur over 30 times in contexts describing the nature and history of biblical

revelation (Vos 1980: 9–24). The history of biblical revelation is construed in terms reminiscent of Aristotelian teleology or entelechy, or, as Vos himself puts it, as ‘internal expansion, an organic folding from within’ (p. 11). Biblical exegesis is a field of study whose practice mimics the telic nature of revelation by exegetically ‘unfolding’ its intrinsic ends. It does not work with what might be called a ‘mechanistic’ approach to exegesis—that is, an approach that interprets or explains biblical revelation in terms of historical agencies *external* to revelation’s own history—but rather with the *intrinsic* unfolding of revelation as it moves from bud to blossom (pp. 11–13).

Vos contrasts the disciplines of dogmatics and biblical theology, suggesting that the constructive principle of dogmatics is ‘systematic and logical, whereas in [biblical theology] it is purely historical . . . Systematic Theology endeavors to construct a circle; Biblical Theology seeks to reproduce a line.’ Moreover, while the advance of biblical history is linear in character, its linear development is to be conceived of in terms of epochal advance akin to the way in which a tree’s age is marked by a series of successive growth rings, each of which grows out of the preceding one. For Vos, this particular way of construing ‘The History of Revelation’ is so closely associated with biblical theology’s meaning that he suggests it would be better to speak of ‘The History of Revelation’ rather than biblical theology (Vos 1980: 21 n. 2). Vos’ suggestion at this juncture offers an instructive point of contrast with earlier understandings of the place of biblical revelation in the saving economy of redemption. In the premodern era of the church, the theological concept of revelation was understood, not as the subject matter of scripture, but as that which testified to scripture’s true subject matter, namely, the person and work of Jesus Christ (Frei 1974: 51–3). In the modern era, revelation’s function was redefined by detaching it from its providentially appointed role and transposing it into the place formerly occupied by Jesus Christ (Webster 2001: 25 n. 41). The contextual mislocation of biblical revelation in Vos’ approach to biblical theology clarifies how something called ‘the history of revelation’ came to occupy the subject matter and place formerly occupied by the person of Jesus Christ.

Vos’ reliance upon the metaphor of organism as a model for construing biblical revelation reflects a common theme in late nineteenth-century approaches to biblical theology. As one commentator aptly notes: ‘Every era has its particular marks, its images, metaphors, and signs that capture its standpoint and express its message. The organic metaphor was one of the central images for the romantic movement which played such a significant role in nineteenth-century arts, letters, and science’ (Conser 1996: 105). In this way, organic models for understanding historical development and the history of biblical revelation came to share in a mutually explicative, symbiotic relationship (Vos 1948: 13–17).

By extension, this way of interpreting the nature of biblical revelation also came to serve as a warrant for construing the relationship of the twofold canon of scripture in terms of organic development. The net effect of Vos’ programme for biblical theology was to transpose biblical revelation from the theological context provided by the Trinity into the context of historical progress and organic development. In the transformation of revelation’s role effected by his approach, revelation now served to unify the two testaments, not because it proceeded from the same triune reality in both testaments,

but because it was closely associated with the concept of historical development and progress. On this approach, the character of biblical history is conflated with biological features found in the natural order of creation. The organic properties of this order are transferred to the history of revelation, which is then construed in terms of 'organic unfolding'. As a result, the relationship between the two testaments collapsed into a single, organically unfolding salvation history in which the Old Testament 'unfolds' into the New Testament in an unbroken, developmental movement 'from bud to blossom.'

However, there is a real sense in which the Old Testament does not 'naturally' unfold or 'lean into' the New Testament (Childs 1970: 122). Rather, the canon's own material form preserves a distinction between the testaments, a distinction registered by the fact that the Old Testament reached its end *before* the New Testament began in a new mode of accordance and fulfilment. The church's catholic confession has always been that the unifying reality or *res* of scripture is the triune God speaking in Christ by the Spirit, and not a concept of revelation construed in terms of organically unfolding historical progress—or, for that matter, revelation understood as a technical term and locus for theology in its own right. On the contrary, the church operated with an account of history construed in terms of providence, where providence is synonymous with the figural sequencing of time, rather than the linear sequencing of 'epochal advance' envisioned by Vos' account of progressive revelation. On this approach, the relation between the two testaments was understood in terms of conjunction rather than development.

7.4.2 Karl Barth

One way of reading Barth's approach to the use of history in biblical theology is to interpret it as a rejection of developmental models for construing the history of revelation. Commenting on the approach of Cocceius and other forerunners to Vos' approach to redemptive history, Barth raises the following question: 'Are we to think of a kind of special history within this history, of a historical process, so to say?' He then answers it in the negative, stating that he personally cannot adopt this approach to construing biblical history 'because the history in question is a "history" which not only happened but happens and will happen in all times as the same history. It should not be divided into different steps and phases; it is one history. We are always at one with the prophets of the Old Testament' (Barth 1962: 175). The implicit critique of the biblical theological models of Cocceius and Vos at work in Barth's approach has been aptly summarized by Douglas Harink:

For Barth there is no divine cosmic-historical narrative, no linear sequence leading from creation to Israel, from Israel to Christ, from Christ to the church, from the church to the eschaton. Rather, the gospel of Jesus Christ cancels that supposed linear salvation-historical 'plan' and renders the whole of past, present, and future immediate to the time of the gospel. Israel and the church, Paul and his readers, the letter and the commentator, exist together *in one and the same time*, the time of the gospel, the time of judgment and redemption. (Harink 2010: 302–3)

Barth's approach thus resists the 'one after the other' logic for uniting the two testaments inherent in Vos' approach, replacing it with an 'alongside one another' logic appropriate to the nature of both testaments as two unique witnesses to the one triune God speaking in Christ by the Spirit. In this way Barth avoids the conflation of redemptive history with creation that one finds in Vos' organic model for construing the nature of OT prophecy, as well as the displacement of scripture's Christo-Trinitarian subject matter by something called 'the History of Revelation'.

In retrospect it now appears that Barth did so at the price of subordinating creation to redemptive history. A useful index for assessing Barth's influence in this regard may be found in the so-called Biblical Theology Movement (BTM), a broad trend in European and North American biblical scholarship which Barth's 'confessional' theology helped inaugurate. In contrast with the theological forces at work in the BTM, late nineteenth-century approaches to biblical theology illustrate the various uses of 'history' in Reformed biblical scholarship, worked out against the backdrop of the rise of historical consciousness and developmental models of various kinds for construing that consciousness. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, the use of history in the cause of biblical theology is perhaps best explicated in terms of the relation between Israel's salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) and creation (*Schöpfung*) at work in approaches to biblical scholarship associated with the BTM. While this movement was not a monolithic alliance devoid of differences, scholars within this movement typically preferred to construe biblical revelation in terms of salvation or redemptive history, with creation occupying a more or less subservient role vis-à-vis that history. Characteristic of this approach is a 'teleological' or goal-oriented, rather than an 'original' or foundation-oriented, account of creation's meaning and function in relation to redemption. Creation, therefore, exists 'for the sake of' redemption, rather than redemption existing for the sake of creation.

In many ways, Barth's discussion of the relation of redemptive grace to creation in his *Church Dogmatics* offers an almost textbook example of this teleological paradigm. His larger treatment of the issue is given in CD III/1 under the rubric of *Covenant as the Internal Basis of Creation*. In one of a number of similar statements regarding the theological significance of creation, Barth writes: 'Creation is one long preparation, and therefore the being and existence of the creation one long readiness, for what God will intend and do with it in the history of [redemptive] covenant. *Its nature is simply its equipment for grace*' (Barth 1958: 231, emphasis added).

John Webster notes that while it is incorrect to argue that Barth denies the original goodness of creation, it is true that for Barth the goodness of creation is 'teleological', in that it exists for the sake of God's covenant of redemption. Webster contrasts Barth's teleological view of creation with traditional accounts as follows:

For Barth, on the other hand, 'creation' is not to be thought of as the necessary *ground* of the other works of God, a ground which is complete in itself and can be defined without reference to the history of redemption. Quite the contrary: creation is the necessary *implication* of God's primary work of grace in Jesus Christ. For Barth, in other words, creation is wholly ordered toward its redemptive fulfillment:

its meaning not in its original ordering *per se*, but in that ordering as the external condition for covenantal grace. (Webster 1995: 63)

Among the more problematic legacies of Barth's teleological account of creation is the impact it had upon the theological significance of creation for the history of redemption in OT biblical scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic (Brueggemann 1996). Advocates of *Heilsgeschichte* in the BTM sharply distinguished creation (or natural religion) from Israel's salvation history. Israel's religion was not to be construed in terms of the mythopoetic language of her creation traditions, but as a historical religion that arose out of the 'crisis' or breakdown of the older, mythological forms of actualization that had hitherto enabled Israel to get in touch with the founding myths of her primordial past. In the wake of this hermeneutical crisis, a concept of history emerged which aimed at reconnecting Israel with the power of those myths, at the centre of which stood the historical event of the Exodus. In Germany, this view was forcefully articulated by Gerhard von Rad. In a series of influential publications, von Rad argued that a distinctive concept of historical actualization, characterized by charismatic freedom toward the past and eschatological orientation toward the future, superseded Israel's earlier concept of mythological actualization, the effect of which was to subordinate Israel's creation traditions to the all-controlling lens provided by the redemptive-historical event of Exodus (Groves 1987).

On the one hand, creation involved concepts of archetypal order, structural *a priori*s, stability and fixity, cycle and regularity, as well as constraint. On the other hand, history was thought to be dynamic, ever-changing, involving time and development, linear rather than cyclic movement, and thus freedom from the constraints of nature. Historical existence is thus the existence of freedom, while existence defined under the rubric of creation means being constrained by its foundational orders (Hiebert 2007). In retrospect, it is perhaps not difficult to perceive why the stability and fixity of the creation order, as well as the Torah's witness to this order, presented a threat to von Rad's notion of prophecy. For von Rad and many others in the BTM, Israelite prophecy lay at the heart of her salvation history, forming its driving force. German idealism's notion of the freedom of history, coupled with tradition history's interest in the fluidity and openness of oral traditions, offered a more suitable model for conceiving of prophecy as charismatic freedom. Modeling Israelite prophecy upon *historical* existence thus offered the promise of construing prophecy's freedom in terms unconstrained by the limits inherent in the ontological structuring of Israel's historical existence vis-à-vis the orders of creation and Torah.

Fixed or stable orders, in whatever form they take—creation, Torah, written texts—inevitably stand in tension with the charismatic freedom of a prophetic vision whose sight is directed toward the openness of the future, rather than the fixity of the past. Such orders, and the ontologies they represent, are inimical to prophecy's freedom. At the end of the day they must be subordinated to prophecy and its redemptive goals. One way of accomplishing this is to historicize the meaning of Israelite prophecy in terms of models provided by tradition history. In this way OT prophecy may be sharply distinguished

from creation by associating its identity with the oral dynamics of freedom at work in tradition history, rather than the fixed order of creation—or, for that matter, the witness to that order rendered in the fixity of a canonical Torah (Seitz 2007: 61–73, 155–78).

Von Rad's antithesis between Israel's faith and the nature religion of Canaan made its presence known on American shores in Presbyterian circles through George Ernest Wright, who in like fashion argued that 'Israel was little interested in nature, except as God used it together with his historical acts to reveal himself and to accomplish his purpose' (Wright 1957: 17). Wright's 'recital theology' placed heavy emphasis upon God's acts in *history*, virtually erasing the contribution offered by the creation narratives for an understanding of Israel's salvation history. In the post-Second World War era, however, voices from both sides of the Atlantic began to register dissent against the marginalization of creation in OT theology. In Germany, Claus Westermann argued against the subordination of creation to redemptive history, noting that such an argument fails to reckon with the close relation in the book of Genesis between redemptive 'blessing' and creational realities such as 'fertility'. In North America, Frank Cross' work recovered the importance of mythopoeic conventions and language for Israel's account of her salvation history, an approach that 'frontally assaults the neat distinction between myth and history' upon which the approach of von Rad and Wright relied (Brueggemann 1996: 180–81).

7.4.3 Brevard Childs

The importance of creational ontology for the Torah's witness to redemption was fully stressed by Brevard Childs. In his discussion of the book of Genesis in 1979, Childs praised the theological acumen of von Rad's commentary on Genesis, but then went on to suggest: 'By reading the primeval history as an aetiology for Israel's election, von Rad has subordinated creation to redemption, which runs counter to the canonical shape of Genesis' (Childs 1979: 155). For Childs, the canonical role Israel assigned to its creation traditions in the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 establishes the ontological priority of the created order, both for the providential ordering of that history described in Genesis 2:4b–25 and for the redemptive history that follows. Fully aware of the fact that Israel came to a knowledge of creation through Yahweh's redemptive election, rather than vice versa, Childs argues that the historical fact that the canonical form of Israel's scriptures gives precedence to creation has ontological significance for our understanding of Israel's theology of redemption:

From a theological perspective it is significant to note that the present canonical shape has subordinated the noetic sequence of Israel's experience of God in her redemptive history to the ontic reality of God as creator. This is to say, although Israel undoubtedly first came to know Yahweh in historical acts of redemption from Egypt, the final form of the tradition gave precedence to God's initial activity in creating the heavens and the earth. (Childs 1992: 385)

For Childs, this conclusion is not merely the function of a dogmatic or theological judgment, but a canonical ‘rule for reading’ the relation of creation and redemption established by the final form of the book of Genesis itself. On Childs’ view, there are a number of ways to influence the interpretation of the tradition building process by which canonical scripture was formed. One way of proceeding involves reworking and reshaping it according to a particular theological end. Another is to place it in a new context or interpretive frame of reference. Childs suggests that this latter way of constructing the tradition-building process best describes the canonical move by which the Yahwist’s account of creation in Genesis 2 was framed in terms of the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1.

The theological effect achieved by this canon-conscious act of recontextualization was to frame both redemption and human knowing (noesis) in terms of the ontology of creation (contra the reversal of the order of being and knowing one typically finds in post-Kantian epistemology). For this reason, ‘Childs criticized his esteemed teacher Von Rad for failing to “do justice to the final effect of the Priestly writer’s editing of the Yahwist’s material”’ (MacDonald 2007: 1067; Childs 1992: 120). Childs’ disagreement with von Rad does not turn upon the question whether or not canonical scripture is the product of a tradition-building process, but on whether its canonical form functions as the decisive lens for interpreting that process. Thus while a theological judgement is clearly reflected in Childs’ reading of the creation narratives, it is important to note that it is a judgement rendered on the basis of, and not apart from, the historical shape of the traditions inherent in the final form of Genesis.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Reformed theology’s relation to scripture’s canonical status as divine in genesis, preservation, and purpose settles comfortably alongside the Bible’s creaturely and historical character. As the previous discussion intimates, the canonical formation of scripture as a two-testament canon is itself a historical phenomenon, the result of a tradition-building process under the providential governance of human activities. Reshaping scripture’s canonical form in light of a reconstructed historical or tradition-historical schema runs the real danger of attenuating this achievement of providence.

Modern criticism, therefore, brings a set of challenges and opportunities for Reformed theology and hermeneutics. Where modern criticism dismantles the canonical text, Reformed thought registers its reservations. Where modern criticism provides insight into the historical and literary machinations leading to scripture’s final form, a Reformed view of providence remains open to critical inquiry. Navigating these challenges within the institutional dynamics of Reformed thought continues as a challenge. But the twin commitments remain intact. The Christian scriptures as a twofold canon assume the operative work of the Holy Spirit in scripture’s human production and continued effectiveness.

SUGGESTED READING

Childs (1979); Frei (1974); Legaspi (2010); Muller (2003); Webster (2001).

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CHAPTER 8

REFORMED THEOLOGY IN MODERN EUROPE (NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES)

JAMES EGLINTON

8.1 INTRODUCTION

THE history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe is in every sense a story of upheaval. Wide-ranging and often dramatic social, political, and cultural transformations produced a late twentieth-century setting markedly different to its early nineteenth-century antecedent. The Industrial Revolution, the consequences of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the rise of European nationalisms, the peak (and subsequent collapse) of the age of Eurocentric world empires, the emergence of liberal democratic political ideals, the Great Depression, World Wars, the move from modernization to globalization, and the emergence of diverse species of European secularism serve as markers to a fascinating period in Western cultural history. This was the context in which Europe transitioned from classical to late expressions of cultural modernity, which in turn was superseded (in some places, at least) by postmodernity. Blanning has aptly noted that modern Europeans were characterized by the conviction that ‘the ground [was] moving beneath their feet’ (1996: 1)—a sentiment that seems equally true of Europeans as they move into the twenty-first century.

This upheaval, of course, took place across the continent that, in its early modern period, birthed the Reformation. How did nineteenth- and twentieth-century European Reformed theologians and theologies fare as the social, political, cultural, and intellectual ground upon which they stood was shifting?

In attempting to answer that question, the historical theologian faces problems substantially similar to those acknowledged by Rietbergen’s more general work, *Europe:*

A Cultural History (1998). The attempt to develop a pan-European account of anything is, in essence, to aim at a number of frenetically moving targets, and requires a careful initial identification of that which one is aiming to describe. In describing 'Reformed' theologies and theologians, this chapter employs a fairly broad descriptive methodology: little substantive theological consensus can be found between many of the figures described (e.g. Schleiermacher, Barth, and Schilder), and the same is true regarding their subscription to the historic Reformed confessions of faith. Their most common trait, however, is that they are all European Protestants whose fundamental theological trajectories, in one way or another, can be traced to the heritage of the Reformed, rather than Lutheran or Anabaptist, traditions.

This chapter plots the development of a range of localized European Reformed theologies in the early modern period along the lines (primarily of increasing regionalization) identified in Benedict's *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (2004: 426). In the build-up to the nineteenth century, two closely related developments affected the development of Reformed theology in Europe considerably: the practice of academic peregrination had largely ground to a halt in the eighteenth century (Benedict 2004: 426; Almási 2014: 17–34), and Latin fell out of favour as the Europe-wide language of university instruction (Boekholt 1999: 301). Although it would be historically inaccurate to portray Reformed theology in modern Europe as exclusively nationalized, it remains true that together, these factors accompanied the establishment of a new set of norms in theological education: that of staying in one's own country throughout one's theological education, and of no longer having an academic lingua franca with which to communicate with theologians in other European countries. Against that backdrop, Europe's move into classical modernity made plain the presence of various localised Reformed theologies. (This is not to imply that Reformed theology in early modern Europe was somehow homogeneous or univocal. The likes of Lindberg and Holder have elsewhere advanced the claim that the Reformation itself would be more accurately characterized as the 'Reformations' (Lindberg 1996; Holder 2009)).

The complexity of this picture, particularly as one moves into the late nineteenth century, is that European regionalism (as found in relation to the earlier Napoleonic Wars) then developed into globalization (Daudin, Morys, and O'Rourke 2010: 5–29). New steam technologies enabled safe, cheap, and relatively quick international transport, leading to mass nineteenth-century human migration from Europe to the New World, and to European cultures both influencing and being influenced by non-Western cultures through the colonial efforts of various European nations. The distinctive strands of Reformed theology active and developing in Europe in this context thus evinced particularized local identities, whilst reflecting their period in its increasing sense of international and global connectedness.

In following Benedict's analysis, then, this chapter will engage with European Reformed theologies as they took shape (and related to each other) in geographical settings focused on Western and Eastern Europe as distinctive geographical-cultural locations, and in the particular historical-cultural epochs of classical and late modernity.

The division of Europe along ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ lines must be handled with care. Europe’s geographical and political regions are variously and often arbitrarily defined. In this case, the choice of ‘East’ and ‘West’ is deliberate, and is not an attempt to conflate the numerous distinct nations and cultures of either ‘Eastern’ or ‘Western’ Europe (or to impose an ‘Eastern’ European identity on those who self-identify as ‘Central’ European). Rather, it is a choice based in an historic divergence in European Reformed theology rooted in the Synod of Dort, as identified by Benedict.

This Synod, called in 1618 to resolve the Arminian controversy, was attended by Reformed theologians from a number of European contexts: England, Scotland, Geneva, Basel, Bern, Schaffhausen, Zurich, as well as numerous German Reformed territories. The notable Western European omission was France, whose participants were barred from participating by the French crown. The most significant absence, albeit one often forgotten, was that of the Eastern European Reformed traditions of Hungary and Poland, whose theologians did not participate at all. ‘Lacking prestigious universities, the Reformed churches of these countries evidently stood in a semiperipheral relation to their sister churches in the West.’ (Benedict 2004: 289)

This chapter’s focus on ‘East’ and ‘West’ should be viewed against that backdrop, with these terms being used to view the divergence already evident in the early seventeenth century, and as highlighting the longstanding existence of streams of the Reformed tradition in historically distinct European cultural poles. Accordingly, this attempt to trace their nineteenth- and twentieth-century descendants will focus on Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, and Hungary. Such a focus does not deny the existence and influence of Reformed theology elsewhere in Europe (England and Wales, or Italy (Coletto 2010), or in other Eastern European countries (Payton 2010: 10–19)), and recognizes at the outset that the trajectories set by Reformed theologians in each of these countries regularly transcended national borders. Nonetheless, its exploration of Reformed theology in a Europe modernized precisely by its division into modern nations follows a Hobsbawmian view of said nations as the central ‘novelty’ birthed by modern Europe’s cultural strivings (Hobsbawm 1990: 14–45). The story of modern Europe is inherently one of nations and nationalisms. Accordingly, the nations focused on in this chapter were the most important loci in the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European Reformed theology.

8.2 REFORMED THEOLOGY IN WESTERN EUROPE

8.2.1 Scotland

The nineteenth century saw Scotland undergo distinctive social change, much of it painful. The brutality of large-scale coerced human migration in the Highland clearances, the potato famine blighting the Highlands and Outer Hebrides from 1846 to 1856, the mass urban poverty accompanying Scotland’s booming industrial urbanization, and the

Disruption of 1843 (in which the Free Church of Scotland separated from the established Church of Scotland, being joined by 450 ministers and all but one of the Church's overseas missionaries) left deep marks on Scotland's cultural heritage. The twentieth century would go on to see Scottish culture transform in a melting pot of secularization, political realignment and devolution, a revived sense of Scottish nationalism, and plummeting levels of attendance amongst Scotland's increasingly fractured Reformed denominations (Brown 2014: 278–325).

Against that backdrop, the course of Scottish Reformed theology followed two principal lines: the continuation of the earlier federal theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the development of an alternative Scottish Reformed theology centred on John McLeod Campbell in the nineteenth century and on Thomas F. Torrance in the twentieth.

The move away from the aforementioned earlier form of federalism can be seen in the emergence of Edward Irving (1792–1834) in the early nineteenth century. Licensed to preach in 1815, Irving first served as assistant to the noted eighteenth-century preacher and social reformer Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) in Glasgow. In 1822, he accepted a call to the Caledonian Chapel in London. There, Irving's theology began to contrast what he perceived to be a 'contract God' as found in Westminster's federal theology with the notion of a God who loves in freedom (Irving 1864: 4.444). Irving's life was nothing if not colourful. Following a celebrated pulpit ministry in London (which included notable controversies regarding charismatic gifts and the sinlessness of Christ, as well as the formation of the Catholic Apostolic Church), he was eventually excommunicated by the Church of Scotland on the grounds of his Christological commitments. Although Irving's life ended in sad circumstances relatively early in the nineteenth century (dying at the age of 42), his significance to subsequent developments in Scottish Reformed theology should not be underestimated. In that light, McFarlane has rightly portrayed Irving as a theologian before his time, noting that his Karl Barth would eventually give his Christological emphases widespread currency in various later theological debates (McFarlane 2010: 363). With regard to his particular importance for the development of a distinct tradition within Scottish Reformed theology, however, Irving preceded John McLeod Campbell (1800–1872), a Church of Scotland minister whose similar unease with federal theology would play a key role in the development of an alternative Scottish Reformed tradition.

In 1830, McLeod Campbell, then the Church of Scotland minister in Rhu, was tried for heresy in relation to his universalist account of the atonement. During his early ministry in Rhu, McLeod Campbell perceived his parishioners as lacking active, assured faith. His attempts to diagnose this spiritual malaise turned to the federal theology of the Westminster tradition. In short, McLeod Campbell viewed the theologies of Christ's incarnation and atonement within this covenantal system as flawed, and argued that they robbed Christians of their assurance of faith and, in the case of Rhu at least, led to a deadened nominalism. The subsequent heresy trial resulted in McLeod Campbell's excommunication from the Kirk, following which he pastored an independent congregation in Glasgow. His theological output continued unabated, with his most significant

work, *The Nature of the Atonement*, being published in 1856. He received academic recognition in the award of a Doctor of Divinity from the University of Glasgow in 1868. Although McLeod Campbell has been recognized as having few theological allies during his own lifetime, the Episcopalian Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788–1870) stands out as an important supporter of his revised Scottish Calvinism.

While the likes of Irving and McLeod Campbell were plotting a new course within the nineteenth-century Scottish Reformed tradition, federal theology continued to find noted exponents throughout the nineteenth century. Scottish federalism had gained widespread acceptance in the eighteenth century, when it was asserted amongst Church of Scotland and Secession theologians, Thomas Boston and James Fisher being prime examples (Boston 1797; Fisher, 1753). In the nineteenth century, its most significant advocates were theologians of the then new Free Church of Scotland. William Cunningham (1862: i.502; ii.261) and Hugh Martin (1882) provided the Free Church with considerable intellectual impetus rooted in a strong commitment to the tradition of Westminster federalism. The nineteenth-century Free Church also contained Reformed theologians who made outstanding contributions to preaching and social work (Thomas Chalmers and Thomas Guthrie) and the natural sciences (Hugh Miller). With regard to the latter, the geologist Hugh Miller (1802–56) served as editor of the Free Church magazine *The Witness*, in its heyday amongst the most widely read publications in Scotland (Shortland 1996: 287–300).

It should be noted, of course, that nineteenth-century Scottish Reformed theology developed as a spectrum, rather than a system of binary opposition. While the likes of McLeod Campbell and Cunningham assumed positions at either end of that spectrum, a number of theologians attempted to stand somewhere between the old adherence to federalism and the new revised Calvinism. Archibald Hamilton Charteris (1835–1908), William Muir of St. Stephens (1787–1869) and Norman Macleod (1812–1872) represent articulations of Scottish Reformed theology that occupied some kind of middle ground (Fleming 1927; 1933). The development of distinct Reformed theologies in this context was also intertwined with the changing nature of subscription to the Westminster Confession in the Scottish Reformed churches (Hamilton 2010) and the increasingly significant influence of German higher critical thought in the late nineteenth century.

The twentieth century's two most outstanding Scottish Reformed theologians also positioned themselves as constructive inheritors of, respectively, the heritages of McLeod Campbell and Westminster federalism: the Church of Scotland's Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007) and the Free Church of Scotland's Donald Macleod (b. 1940). Both men spent the greatest part of their academic careers at institutions on the Mound in Edinburgh: the Free Church College and New College. The emergence and continued separate existence of these neighbouring institutions throughout the twentieth century highlighted the ongoing divergent accounts of Scottish Reformed theology found in the previous century (Macleod 1996: 221–38).

The significance of Torrance to twentieth-century Scottish Reformed theology can perhaps be best traced along two lines. In the first place, he brought the trajectory followed by Irving and McLeod Campbell into the twentieth century, planting it at the

theological centre of the Church of Scotland. In so doing, he followed McLeod Campbell in reimagining a form of Scottish Reformed theology that played Calvin and the Church Fathers against Westminster's federalism. In addition, he leaned on the brilliance of his mentor Barth, then at the peak of his powers, in order to articulate a twentieth-century theological vision. Indeed, the role of Barth in the development of Torrance's theology ensured that it was no mere repristination of McLeod Campbell's nineteenth-century work. Torrance affected Reformed theology globally by mediating Barth to the English-speaking world (McGrath 1999: 113–46), and changed the course of Scottish theology by marrying a Barthian theology to the aforementioned developments away from federal theology in nineteenth-century Scotland.

In 1978, Donald Macleod was appointed professor of systematic theology at the Free Church College, a position he held until 2011 (Macleod 2011: 15–54). Macleod stands out as twentieth-century Scotland's foremost challenger to Torrance's continuation of McLeod Campbell's revised Calvinism (Macleod 2000: 57–72). Profoundly influenced by the Old Princeton school and the Dutch neo-Calvinism of Bavinck and Kuyper (Macleod 2006: 261–82), and an appreciative critic of Barth (Macleod 2008: 323–45), Macleod's work represents the high point of the twentieth-century Free Church's constructive appropriation of its own federal tradition (Macleod 1974: 21–8; 1975: 22–8; 1993: 214–18).

8.2.2 The Netherlands

In 1815, the Batavian Republic came to an end as William I ascended the throne of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands (*Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*). The new king was tasked with providing political unity between the Netherlands and Belgium. His ideal was to join the Kingdom's Roman Catholics and Protestants in a single, enlightened denomination that would serve the state by educating the people in civic virtues (Harinck and Winkler 2015: 445). This unification proved impossible, leaving William I to work with the pre-existing Christian division. However, as the Enlightenment did not produce widespread anti-clerical sentiment in the nineteenth-century Netherlands, the king saw himself as well positioned to work through the Dutch Reformed Church, through which he could promote a practically oriented, enlightened 'Christianity above doctrinal division' (Harinck and Winkler 2015: 450).

William I had inherited governmental departments for religious affairs established in 1808 (Vandenbosch 1959: 141), and a state that had taken upon itself the task of providing stipends for Reformed ministers in 1814. The state's influence on Protestant worship, particularly through its promotion of the moralistic hymnbook *Evangelische Gezangen* (1807), produced a context within which the evangelical *Réveil* movement spreading through France and Switzerland would also see growth amongst Dutch Protestants. Conventicles were formed, increasing numbers of Reformed preachers began to emphasise the *Réveil*'s 'sin and grace' religion, and the works of the older Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*) theologians experienced renewed popularity.

A further reaction to the state's appropriation of the Dutch Reformed Church for its own goals was seen in the Secession of 1834 (*Afscheiding*). Hendrik de Cock (1801–42), a Reformed minister who had experienced a pietistic conversion, began to protest and preach openly against the new doctrine of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1834, he and his congregation formally seceded from the Church. Within two years, approximately 2–3 per cent of the Dutch Reformed Church's membership had joined the newly formed Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland*), which had gathered some 130 congregations. The first secessionists faced considerable state persecution on account of their departure from the Dutch Reformed Church. Indeed, they were the last Europeans to experience the state-sanctioned billeting of troops in their homes (and be charged for the cost of the billeting (Fokkema and Grijzenhout 2004: 331)). As a result, many emigrated to North America, founding Dutch Reformed colonies in the United States and Canada. Those who remained eventually came to occupy a more settled place in Dutch society, and saw their denomination grow rapidly.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the formation of two distinct appropriations of Dutch Reformed theology centred on the Universities of Groningen and Leiden. In Groningen, a group of disciples of Philip Willem van Heusde (1778–1839) came to espouse a nationalistic 'pure Dutch' theology that supported the state's *Volkskerk* ideals and assumed an antagonistic posture towards Calvin on the grounds of his apparent foreignness (Eglinton 2012: 6–11). The Leiden theologians, centred on the outstanding Old Testament scholar Abraham Kuenen (1828–1921) and van Heusde's nephew, the systematic theologian Johannes Scholten (1811–85), developed an alternative account of the Dutch Reformed tradition. Theirs was a strictly mechanical form of determinism (rooted, according to Scholten, in Calvin's doctrine of predestination), a view of scripture as a purely human text, and a belief that the church's role in society could be better fulfilled by a secular state (Eglinton 2012: 13–18).

While many former students of the Leiden school would go on to abandon the Christian faith or resign their pastoral charges, two of the school's most famous former students came to prominence in the formation of another branch of Dutch Reformed theology: the neo-Calvinist school led by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921).

After his studies at Leiden, Kuyper, then a typically liberal theologian, became the pastor of a rural Dutch Reformed congregation in Beesd. While there, he underwent a pietistic conversion, eventually coming into contact with the *Réveil* inspired, anti-Revolutionary statesman Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–76). Kuyper's correspondence with him would prove crucial to the development of Kuyper's eventual understanding of Calvinism as a life-system as found in his 1898 *Lectures on Calvinism*.

Kuyper founded a Reformed newspaper (*De Standaard*) in 1872, and established the Netherlands' first modern political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, in 1879. In the following year, Kuyper began the Free University of Amsterdam (*Vrije Universiteit*), a Christian university founded on Reformed principles but not affiliated with any particular denomination. In 1885, while serving as a minister in Amsterdam, Kuyper

(along with 80 members of the consistory) was suspended by his local classis for insisting that Dutch Reformed ministers and church members subscribe to the Church's confessions. In response, Kuyper led a movement of congregations out of the Dutch Reformed Church. By 1889, this movement, which referred to itself as the *Doleantie* ('the grieving ones'), had grown to over 200 congregations, with approximately 180,000 members and 80 ministers. (It is worth noting that the Christian Reformed Church, by this point, had an estimated 187,000 members, thus signifying the widespread, grassroots change occurring in Dutch Reformed theology in the late nineteenth century (Harinck and Winkler 2015: 494).)

In the same time period, Herman Bavinck, a Seceder theologian working at the Christian Reformed Church's theological school in Kampen, was rising to prominence. As a teenager, Bavinck, the son of a Christian Reformed pastor, had chosen to pursue a scientific training in theology at Leiden, declaring the level of theological education provided by his denomination's own seminary to be unsatisfying (Eglinton 2020: 66–8). Following the completion of his doctorate and a short stint as a pastor, he returned to Kampen as professor of systematic theology, where he wrote his magnum opus *Reformed Dogmatics* (Dutch first edition, 1895–1901; and second edition, 1906–11; English edition, 2003–8). Arguably the most important volume of systematic theology produced in the Netherlands in that century, it has come to stand alongside Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* as one of the defining texts in the neo-Calvinist tradition.

The personal histories of Kuyper and Bavinck became closely intertwined in 1892 when the *Doleantie* and *Afscheiding* Churches united to form the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*), and further in 1902, when Bavinck accepted the chair of dogmatics at Kuyper's Free University.

The impact of neo-Calvinist theology on Dutch national life at the beginning of the twentieth century was considerable. Kuyper served as prime minister between 1901 and 1904. The neo-Calvinist notion of 'sphere sovereignty' (a vision of society composed of distinctive spheres, each with its own responsibilities and competences) influenced the reordering of Dutch society via the system of 'pillarization' (*verzuiling*). Reformed, Catholic and social-democratic 'pillars' were created within Dutch society, each having its own educational institutions, political parties, media (newspapers, and eventually television channels), and so on. Pillarization continued to define Dutch society into the twentieth century, until the process of depillarization began in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The twentieth century saw further movements of ecclesiastical division and unification in the Dutch Reformed churches: the Liberation of 1944 (*Vrijmaking*), a movement led by Klaas Schilder (1890–1952), saw a large section of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands separate to form the Reformed Churches (Liberated) (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*).

In terms of twentieth-century developments, both Dutch neo-Calvinism and Barthian neo-Orthodoxy were developed critically (and from a range of viewpoints) by the likes of Gerrit Berkouwer (1903–96) and Schilder. Berkouwer and Schilder serve as good examples for the varied Dutch responses to Karl Barth in the twentieth

century: in Schilder, Barth found his most vocal Dutch critic (Hennecke 2014: 102–5; van den Brom 2006: 262–4); and in Berkouwer, he found one of his most prominent Dutch advocates (Berkouwer 1956; Harinck 2003: 189–206). Other Dutch theologians to be significantly influenced by Barth include Kornelis Miskotte (1894–1976), Opeke Noordmans (1871–1956), Gerrit van Niftrik (1904–72), Alexander Bronkhorst (1914–94), and Theodorus Haitjema (1888–1972). Schilder's critique of Barth was focused primarily on Haitjema's interpretation of him.

8.2.3 Switzerland

Switzerland began the nineteenth century having been ravaged by the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, its independence only being definitely reasserted by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. It was engulfed in civil war in the early 1840s, and emerged as a federal state in 1848. The early years of the nineteenth century saw Switzerland as the centre of the *Réveil*, an evangelical awakening stemming from contact between Swiss Protestants and missionaries from Scotland, and itself then having a considerable impact across much of northern Europe. In early nineteenth-century Switzerland, Henri-Louis Empaytaz (1790–1853), César Malan (1787–1864), Louis Gaussen (1790–1863) and Merle d'Aubigné (1794–1872) stressed the inspiration of scripture and the doctrine of election, and called the Swiss Reformed Church to a stricter adherence (in doctrine and life) to its heritage (Bavinck 2003: 194).

As the century progressed, the likes of Daniel Schenkel (1813–85) and Alois Emanuel Biedermann (1819–85) came to the fore as Swiss Protestant theologians who espoused a rationalist theology inspired by Hegel's metaphysical philosophy. Both published volumes under the title *Christliche Dogmatik* (Schenkel 1858–9; Biedermann 1869), works that were more or less contemporaneous with the Dutchman Scholten's *De leer der Hervormde Kerk* (1861), which advanced a similar brand of Hegelian, liberal Protestant rationalism.

Although this variety of Reformed theology was dominant in mid- to late nineteenth-century Switzerland, it would go on to be challenged by the resurgent conservative theology of Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938), and the neo-Orthodoxy of Emil Brunner (1889–1966) and Karl Barth (1886–1968).

Schlatter, born in St Gallen as the son of a Reformed mother and pietist father, taught New Testament and systematic theology at the Universities of Bern (1881–8), Greifswald (1888–93), Berlin (1893–8), and Tübingen (1898–1922). His historical significance lies in his rejection of the liberal theology dominant in the Swiss and German universities at that time, and his reassertion of conservative theology in that context (Neuer 1996). Although his most famous students (the most important being Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer) did not go on to replicate his particular brand of conservatism, his ability to deny liberalism within the academy nonetheless served to inspire their own subsequent efforts.

The move away from classical nineteenth-century liberalism in twentieth-century Switzerland continued apace with the emergence of Emil Brunner, a Swiss Reformed

pastor who rose to prominence with the publication of *Mysticism and the Word* (1924). There, Brunner offered a strong critique of the German Friedrich Schleiermacher's thought (which he saw as typical of post-Enlightenment Protestant theology) as more indebted to 'heathen paganism' than to the Christian faith. As such, Brunner heralded the advent of a new attempt to formulate Reformed orthodoxy in the twentieth century. However, Brunner (whose thought did not experience a fundamental break from its early Kantian influence until 1937) did less than his contemporary Karl Barth in distancing himself from the old liberalism.

Widely regarded as the most important Christian theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth's theology moved away from the German liberalism of his education during the First World War. This decisive shift became clear with the publication of his *Römerbrief* (1922) in a reworked form starkly challenging the previous century's German liberal theology. His *Church Dogmatics* (1936–61), an expansive and unfinished lifework addressing the doctrines of revelation, God, creation, and redemption, is often viewed as the most important constructive work in Christian theology in the twentieth century. Barth's mature theology, a dialectical, thoroughly Christocentric reworking of the Reformed tradition, articulated a distinctive new account of the doctrine of election (whereby Christ himself is the subject of double predestination, as both elect and reprobate, and is furthermore the one in whom all humanity is elect). As is evident at various points in this chapter, Barth's thought would quickly come to exert an unsurpassed influence across twentieth-century Reformed thought.

The advent of National Socialism in Germany, particularly in its attempt to co-opt the Christian church towards its own ends through the *Deutsche Christen* movement, prompted Barth, as a member of the Confessing Church, to pen the Barmen Declaration—perhaps the twentieth century's most important Protestant confession of faith—in 1934 (Busch 2010: 1–18). A powerful declaration of the church's spiritual independence from the state, it reflects its author's own theological emphases throughout.

8.2.4 Germany

In the early nineteenth century, German Reformed theology was dominated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the son of a Reformed Church chaplain in the Prussian army. After an education amongst Moravian pietists, Schleiermacher went on to study at the University of Halle, abandoning traditional orthodox Christianity during those years. He remained highly active in theology, however, and served as a pastor and theology professor (and played an important role in the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810), preaching regularly for much of his life. His most important constructive theological work, *The Christian Faith* (1922), is an attempt to rework Christianity entirely around the notion that theology should be grounded upon a feeling of absolute dependence on God (*Gefühl schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit*), rather than assertions of dogma. Central to this was a highly original move to view theology as stemming from human self-consciousness (Roy 1997: 217–32)—a shift later described by Bavinck as the

single most significant development in nineteenth-century Christian theology ('since Schleiermacher the whole of theology has changed, mediating, confessional, and liberal... into a theology of consciousness' (Bavinck 2003: 78)).

During the nineteenth century, Germany moved away from its former feudal patch-work into distinct phases of unification: the Confederation of the Rhine (1806–7), the *Deutscher Bund* and *Zollverein* (1815–34), the Revolutions and Frankfurt Assembly (1848), the North German Federation (1867–71), the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), and the creation of the German empire (1871). In that context, German Protestantism, in both its Lutheran and Reformed branches, experienced notable revival movements (Beyreuther 1977: 30–44).

A significant development in the mid-nineteenth century, albeit one often neglected in accounts of Protestantism in Germany, was a considerable and renewed interest in the life and doctrine of Calvin. The three-volume, 2,200 page *Das Leben Johann Calvins des grossen Reformators* (1835–44) by Paul Henry, the then pastor of the French Church in Berlin (Laube 2009: 133), became the first full-length biography of Calvin to be published in Europe since Theodore Beza's sixteenth-century *Ioannis calvini vita* (1575; Rutgers 1901: 46–7). Henry's biography would be translated into English and Dutch, and marked the beginning of a period of Europe-wide Reformed interest in its tradition's own great Reformer. This development has been attributed variously to Europe falling under the sway of Thomas Carlyle's 'great man' model of history (Laube 2009: 134; Eglinton 2014: 153).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Heinrich Heppe (1820–79) published the *Reformed Dogmatics* (German 1861; English 1964), a work that soon became the standard text on Reformed systematics within the new dialectical school of thought, and also influenced Barth (Busch 2005: 153–4; van den Belt 2008: 119). Schleiermacher's influence continued to unfold into mid-nineteenth-century German Reformed theology through the likes of Johann Peter Lange (1802–84) and Karl Ullmann (1796–1865). Schleiermacher's intellectual dominance would only be countered by the monumental impact of Barth's critique of his thought. Indeed, for Barth the starting point of a renewed modern Reformed theology would become a decisive 'no' to Schleiermacher.

As has already been outlined, Barth's impact on German theology was exceptional. After teaching at the universities of Göttingen (1921–5), Münster (1925–30) and Bonn (1930–35), his stay in Germany ended when he refused to swear allegiance to Hitler. As a consequence, Barth was forced to return to Switzerland, where he received a professorship at the University of Basel (1935–62).

Despite this, the development of German Reformed theology under the shadow of Barth, rather than of Schleiermacher, continued unabated, and can be seen particularly in the work of Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926). Having come to faith while a prisoner of war (1945–8), Moltmann returned to Germany to study theology at Göttingen. There he was profoundly influenced by Barth, before adding to this an eclectic range of other influences: Otto Weber, Ernst Wolf, the Lutheran Barthian Hans Iwand, the dialectical theologian Ernst Wolf, the Lutheran Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad, the Dutch Reformed theologian Arnold van Ruler (himself a critic of Barth), and the

Jewish Marxist Ernst Bloch, among others (Bauckham 1995: 1–28). Moltmann's work is typically characterized as a theology of hope centred on the resurrection of Christ, as the crucified God (Moltmann 1973). The centrality of a more typically Lutheran willingness to speak of a 'crucified God' within Moltmann's Reformed theology serves well to highlight the often overlapping, intertwined nature of Reformed and Lutheran theologies throughout German Protestantism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

8.2.5 France

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the longstanding persecution of France's Reformed (Huguenot) community had largely come to an end. Under the increasingly aggressive persecutions of Louis XIV (1724–64), many eighteenth-century French Reformed Christians had emigrated or been forced to convert to Roman Catholicism. Although this persecution officially ended in 1787, and while the French government issued a law giving the foreign descendants of exiled French Huguenots the right of return to France in December 1790, the French Reformed community at the start of the nineteenth century was small in number (the common term used to refer to the French Protestant community at that time was '*le petit nombre*') and largely composed of peasants (Wolff 2001: 13).

France's history throughout the first half of the nineteenth century was one of ongoing political reorganization and upheaval. From the years of the First Empire (1804–14), through the period of the Restoration (1814–30), to the years of the July Monarchy (1830–48), the Second Republic (1848–52), and the Second Empire (1852–70), France's small community of Reformed Christians lived in a regularly changing society. In this setting, French Protestantism reflected its geopolitical context in being consumed by reorganization and confrontation (in this case, between evangelical and liberal forms of Protestantism). In short, each form of reworked political organization required a new articulation of French society's relationship to its Protestant community (Wolff 2001: 44–51). In the early nineteenth century, many pastors within the French Reformed Church (*l'Eglise Réformée de France*) came under the influence of the conservative, evangelical *Réveil* theology moving throughout much of Northern Europe in response to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, which had also affected the French Reformed Church.

France's move into the Third Republic (1870–1940), however, saw the shape of French Reformed theology begin to change. The 1918 annexation of the German Alsace-Lorraine to France changed the demographics of French Protestantism considerably, bringing many Reformed and Lutheran Christians into France (Latourette 1961: 375). The particular significance of this to the development of Reformed theology is that the 1901 laws concerning the separation of church and state (which made university-level theological study impossible in France) were not applied to this newly acquired territory: it had become possible to be a French Reformed theologian at a French university, despite the French Republic's otherwise thoroughgoing commitment to strict secularism (*laïcité*).

Against this backdrop, constructive Reformed theologians like Louis Auguste Sabatier (1839–1901) and Auguste Lecerf (1872–1943) emerged. Appointed to a chair in Reformed dogmatics at the University of Strasbourg in 1867, Sabatier's pro-French views during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 eventually led to his dismissal from that faculty. Together with the Lutheran theologian Eugène Ménégoz, Sabatier founded the Protestant Faculty of Theology of Paris (*Faculté de théologie protestante de Paris*), in part to provide an alternative to the evangelical Protestant seminary founded in Montauban in 1808. By combining Reformed dogmatic affirmations with theological methods and content closer to that of nineteenth-century liberal theology, Sabatier's work represents the appearance of the 'new theologies' (*les nouvelles théologies*) which arose in reaction to nineteenth-century France's continuing liberal-evangelical debates, and attempted to plot a course beyond this impasse.

Lecerf, born in London to Communard parents who fled France following the demise of the Paris Commune, became a Calvinistic Christian having read the New Testament and Calvin's *Institutes* in his teens. He studied at Sabatier's Protestant Faculty in Paris, going on to complete a dissertation on determinism and responsibility in Calvin's thought (Lecerf 1894), and eventually being appointed its professor of dogmatics in 1936. Lecerf's constructive theological vision differs dramatically from that of Sabatier. His *Introduction à la dogmatique réformée* (1949) and *Études Calvinistes* (1999) demonstrate the thoroughgoing influence on his thought of both Calvin and the more recent Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition of Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Dooyeweerd on his thought.

Lecerf's impact on French Reformed theology continued into the twentieth century through his intellectual disciple Pierre Marcel (1910–92), who was sent to the Netherlands by Lecerf to study under Dooyeweerd. Like Lecerf, Marcel was eventually appointed to a professorship at the Protestant Faculty in Paris. In 1950, he launched the francophone Reformed theological academic journal *La Revue Réformée*. As a direct consequence of Lecerf's influence upon Marcel, a new Reformed theological seminary was established in Aix-en-Provence in 1973: formerly the *Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée*, it has been known since 2011 as the *Faculté Jean Calvin*.

In the mid-twentieth century—a period encompassing the latter years of the Third Republic, the First World War, the interwar years, and the Second World War—French Reformed theology also saw considerable influence from Barth (Raymond 1985), who gave lectures at the Protestant Faculty in Paris in 1934 (Busch 2005: 243). The most prominent early French advocate of Barth's theology was the Protestant pastor Pierre Maury (1890–1956) who provided, amongst other works, a significant French translation of Barth's *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (1933). The most notable twentieth-century French constructive thinker to come under Barth's influence, however, came to the fore towards the end of the Second World War, and remained active during the Fourth and Fifth Republics: the philosopher and lay theologian Jacques Ellul (1912–94). Having converted to Christianity in his late teens and joining the French Reformed Church, Ellul's subsequent theological thought (particularly regarding the shape of his ethics) came to be profoundly marked by Barth's dialectical account of the Word of

God (Bromiley 1981: 32–51; Clendenin 1987: 10–13; Rognon 2007: 235–71; Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly 2013: 122).

As one moves beyond the beginnings of the Fifth Republic (established in 1958) into the late twentieth century, the two most important constructive Reformed theologians in France were found at the *Faculté Jean Calvin* in Aix-en-Provence and the *Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique* at Vaux-sur-Seine: respectively, the Presbyterian Paul Wells (b. 1946) and the Reformed Baptist Henri Blocher (b. 1937), both of whom are also strongly influenced by the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition (Wells 2014; Nisus 2015: 321–2).

8.3 REFORMED THEOLOGY IN EASTERN EUROPE

8.3.1 Hungary

Having begun the nineteenth century as a province of the Hapsburg Empire, Hungary would quickly become the locus of a significant, albeit initially unsuccessful, Revolution (1848). This Revolution marked the onset of years of social unrest and violence lasting until the 1867 Compromise between the Hungarians and the Hapsburgs established a Hungarian King, granted Hungary a greater degree of political self-governance, and set it on the path towards its eventual emergence as an independent, modern nation.

Although the Reformed faith had been established in Eastern Europe since the sixteenth century, its history in Hungary was not an easy one. In the seventeenth century, Reformed Hungarians struggled under the persecution of the Roman Catholic Hapsburgs and the Muslim Ottoman Turks. Although an edict of toleration was signed by Emperor Joseph II in 1781, the early nineteenth century was nonetheless a difficult period for Reformed Hungarians. Despite the formal disestablishment of Roman Catholicism in 1848, the Austrian Imperial government held Hungarian Protestants as responsible for the Revolution of that year, to which they responded by further repressing the autonomy of the Reformed church (which at that point existed as five separate districts, rather than as a single, united Church). In the second half of the nineteenth century, Hungarian Reformed theology would also come into close contact with its Scottish counterpart through the then newly established Free Church of Scotland's missionary efforts amongst Hungarian Jews (Kovács 2006).

On the 300th anniversary of Calvin's death (1864), numerous commemorative events were held across the Hungarian Reformed church districts, and a remarkable number of Calvin-themed theological publications appeared in print (Gaál 2009: 109–12). Historically noteworthy amongst these is Imre Révész' *Calvin's Life and Calvinism* (1864). Evidently, mid-nineteenth-century European interest in Calvin was not an exclusively Western phenomenon. However, Gaál has argued that Calvin's influence on Hungarian Christianity and culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries far exceeded anything found in Western Europe: commemorations of a similar scale would

be held in 1936, for example, to mark the 400th anniversary of the publication of Calvin's *Institutes* (Gaál 2009: 123–4).

In 1881, the four pre-existing Hungarian Reformed Church districts and the Transylvanian Reformed Church held a united meeting in Debrecen, at which the modern Hungarian Reformed Church (*Magyarországi Református Egyház*) was birthed.

The close of the First World War saw the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which plunged Hungary into years of political turmoil and social instability. In this period the Treaty of Trianon (1920) divided the Hungarian Reformed Church along new, arbitrary borders, with approximately half of its membership being allocated to Czechoslovakia, Romania, the Serb-Croat-Slovenian Kingdom, and Austria. As was the case throughout Western Europe, Hungarian Reformed theology also saw the influences of both nineteenth-century liberal theology and the *Réveil* (Pásztor 1995; Kovács 2014b). In this regard, developments in Hungary mirrored their Western European counterparts, as early twentieth-century Hungarian Reformed theologians tried to reinvent new kinds of orthodoxy.

Jenő Sebestyén (1884–1950), a professor of theology in Budapest who had come under the influence of Abraham Kuyper while studying in Utrecht (1907–10), was of particular importance in trying to develop and popularize Kuyper's 'Calvinism as a life-system' ideas in a Hungarian setting. He oversaw the Hungarian translation of Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* (1914), corresponded with Kuyper, and was even visited by him in Budapest in 1916 (de Bruijn 2014: 384). As a result of Sebestyén's influence, Debrecen's theological faculty became strongly influenced by Dutch neo-Calvinism: there, Kálmán Kállay (1890–1959) taught Dutch language classes to theological students, with Benjámin Csánki (1868–1943) teaching courses on the theologies of Bavinck and Kuyper (Gaál (2009: 120). In 1930, Sebestyén was awarded an honorary doctorate at the Free University of Amsterdam in recognition of this influence (Berkelaar 2007: 32).

Following the Second World War, the People's Republic of Hungary, a new communist state, emerged. Communism posed considerable challenges to the Hungarian Reformed Church: the only Reformed educational institutions to remain open were the theological faculties of Budapest and Debrecen, and the college of Debrecen. Religious instruction was nationalized, with religious teaching in schools eventually being banned altogether (Kovács 2014a: 105–32). Reformed pastors found themselves under close state supervision. Although this persecution was lessened following in the Revolution of 1956, Hungarians were only granted religious freedom in 1990.

Barth also played an important role in the development of Hungarian Reformed theology in the middle of the twentieth century. Barth visited Hungary in 1936 and 1948, and had a number of Hungarian students (István Török, Barna Nagy, Tivadar Rózsai, Sándor Kálmán, and Imre Bertalan). The lasting impression of this first visit, made in the midst of Barth's pre-Second World War vocal criticism of National Socialism in Germany, concerned the strength of nationalist feeling in the Hungarian Reformed Church (Hanebrink 2006: 188). His enduring significance for the Hungarian Reformed Church, however, concerns his contribution to the Reformed Church's relationship to the emerging communist state. In 1948, Barth was asked by János Péter (1910–99), a Reformed pastor and socialist politician, to support the candidacy of

Albert Berczky (1893–1966) for the bishopric of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Barth obliged, penning an open letter to the Reformed Church in support of Berczky (Barth 1954). In this letter, Barth distinguished Nazism and communism (thus drawing fierce criticism from Emil Brunner), which in turn supported the Hungarian Reformed Church's eventual move to collaborate with the communist party. Although Barth later became critical of Berczky's wholehearted support of socialism as theologically naïve (Pungur 1992: 122), his contributions to Hungary would nonetheless face fierce criticism from Reinhold Niebuhr (Bingham 1993: 343). Although Barth's theology was enthusiastically mediated in a Hungarian context by the likes of János Victor (1888–1954), and while his *Dogmatics in Outline* would be translated into Hungarian, his relationship to the Hungarian Reformed Church would become a difficult one. Only one Hungarian Reformed theologian, László Márton Pákozdy, attended his funeral (1968).

The post-communist context of late twentieth-century Hungary saw a renewed interest in Barth's theology, particularly at the Reformed University in Debrecen, where a Karl Barth Research Centre would be opened in 2007.

8.4 CONCLUSION

At the outset, this survey chapter set out to engage with a number of frenetically moving targets: the Reformed theologies and theologians developing across Europe during two momentous (and often chaotic) centuries. There is a sense in which the first half of the nineteenth century saw Reformed theology coming to terms with the Enlightenment—conforming to it, in the case of classical liberal theology, and challenging it, in the case of the *Réveil*. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the two most historically important attempts to reimagine the Reformed faith in a culturally modern Europe were neo-Calvinism and neo-Orthodoxy. The story of twentieth-century European Reformed theology, from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland to the eastern plains of Hungary, for the most part was the story of Reformed theologians reorienting themselves in relation to Basel and Amsterdam, as the ground moved beneath their feet.

SUGGESTED READING

Hobsbawm (1990); Laube (2009); Wolff (2001); Harinck and Winkler (2015); Brown (2014).

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CHAPTER 9

REFORMED THEOLOGY IN NORTH AMERICA

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THE development of Reformed theology in North America is inextricably linked with the story of European immigration and settlement of the New World. Just as diverse geographic and political circumstances crucially shaped a variegated network of Reformed churches in Europe, the immigration of key groups and figures from this network brought a similar diversity of Reformed Christian thought and practice to the New World. These interrelated traditions then developed in the context of colonial settlements and ultimately hand in hand with the formation and development of national identities. In America, the experience and consequences of the Civil War and its aftermath fundamentally formed the institutional entities and cultural realities in which the Reformed tradition developed in the nineteenth century, and also set the trajectory for its shaping influences in the twentieth century, and in contemporary life as well. This background provides a key hermeneutical lens through which to see the theological conflicts between Reformed Christians who identified closely with the classical Protestant past and those who desired to drive the tradition in a direction more consistent with what they took to be its inevitable modern future. Reformed theology in North America today is thus the product of the planting of various Reformed roots in colonial soil in the midst of the transition to modernity.

9.1 EARLY BACKGROUND

English and Dutch colonists planted the strongest of these roots in the early seventeenth century. However, these colonists were not the first Reformed Protestants to bring their faith to the New World. In 1562 a group of French Huguenots attempted to settle in what is today Charleston, South Carolina, and two years later, in 1564, another group established Fort Caroline in what is today Jacksonville, Florida. The former group abandoned

their efforts in less than a year, and Spanish forces killed in battle and brutally executed virtually all of the latter in similarly short order (Hart 2013: 95–6). The failure of the Huguenots and the success of the English and Dutch illustrate the degree to which colonial circumstances shaped the early development of Reformed theology in the New World. Traces of the French Reformed tradition remain to this day, particularly in the Carolinas, and yet the Dutch and British streams of the Reformed tradition proved to be the dominant sources of foundational influence.

While the earliest attempts of English Puritans to settle in Virginia and Maryland proved unfruitful, those who eventually settled in New England established a lasting legacy. In 1620 the Pilgrims famously landed in Plymouth Rock after spending a tumultuous few years in Amsterdam and Leiden. The Plymouth Colony they founded was shaped profoundly by their identity as separatists from the Church of England. While historians typically have directed most of their attention to the theological influence of the typically more moderate Puritans in Massachusetts Bay, recent scholarship has vigorously argued for the lasting significance of the sectarian tendencies of the Plymouth Pilgrims (Winship 2012: 7f.).

At any rate, not only were there ecclesiological differences between the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay and the Pilgrims in Plymouth Colony, but significant issues in Boston divided the colonists in Massachusetts. Whereas John Winthrop had famously declared in his sermon of 1630 aboard the *Arbella* that their new colony would be a ‘city upon a hill’ and thus a ‘Model of Christian Charity’, theological harmony in the New World proved difficult to attain. In 1631 the arrival of Roger Williams resulted in controversy when he declined the pulpit in Boston due to the church’s refusal to separate from the Church of England. Williams’ rejection of the authority of the English crown and his advocacy of the absolute separation between church and state together with his denial of infant baptism ultimately made him unfit not only in Boston but for the separatists in Salem and Plymouth as well. In 1636 he was forced to leave for the land he had acquired that ultimately became Rhode Island. At the same time, Williams’ desire to distinguish between spiritual and temporal authority developed significant but underemphasized streams already present within the tradition, not least in the writings and work of Calvin himself (Tuininga 2017).

The following year Ann Hutchinson also created a stir when she accused the Boston ministers of preaching a legalistic covenant of works rather than salvation according to the covenant of grace. In the highly contested cause célèbre that ensued, the ministers in return accused her of teaching that the Holy Spirit revealed truth unmediated by the Scriptures, of denying the ongoing legitimacy of the moral law of God, and of violating the peace and purity of the church. Although John Cotton initially defended his loyal congregant, even he eventually acknowledged her errors. The years that followed witnessed a slew of publications adjudicating these issues on both sides of the Atlantic. Interestingly, the soteriological aspects of these controversies frequently intersected with the ecclesiological controversies at stake in debates with Roger Williams and his sympathizers, thereby simultaneously clarifying and clouding the picture of what true Reformed theology looked like during this tumultuous period of ecclesiological and theological reconfiguration.

It was the Englishman Henry Hudson whose explorations for the Dutch East India Company led to the founding of the colony of New Netherland. The early years of the colony coincided with the predestinarian controversies in the Dutch Republic that came to a head at the Synod of Dort in 1617–18, although the young Dutch churches in the New World were as much spiritual servants of the economic and political interests of the colony as vessels for the advancement of any Reformed confessional agenda (Bratt 1984: 137). In 1664 England assumed control of the colony, although the Dutch churches continued to experience a great deal of freedom. Dutch ministers in the colony continued to be ordained on the Continent, and worship services were held exclusively in Dutch well into the eighteenth century. Consequently, while the theology and practices of the church certainly were shaped by the circumstances of the New World, they were also in constant conversation with theological voices from the Old World.

9.2 GROWING PAINS IN A COVENANTED SOCIETY

The latter half of the seventeenth century witnessed a heavy overlap between the Dutch and English Reformed traditions in the New World, as members of both churches experienced the pressure of establishing a common life in the colonies. In New England, as church leaders worried that the next generation was not embracing the faith with the enthusiasm of their parents, they established a ‘Halfway Covenant’ in 1662. According to this arrangement, full membership in the church required not only a profession of Christian belief and a pious life, but also an account of an experience of conversion. Half-members were still permitted to participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, but only full members could present their children for baptism or participate in congregational votes. Critics of this arrangement included notable figures like Charles Chauncy and John Davenport, and although he did not live to see its enactment, John Cotton earlier expressed his opposition as well. While the vote of the synod to settle the dispute in favour of the Halfway Covenant carried by an overwhelming majority, the vigorous opposition in both print and manuscript sources reveals a deep rift amongst Congregationalist church leaders in New England (Hall and Joyce 1977).

While these ecclesiological and sacramental differences themselves contributed to significant discord and confusion, their connection to varying understandings of the relationship between membership in the church and civil society only exacerbated the problem. On one end of the spectrum, Roger Williams argued, in a running published dispute with John Cotton as well as with others, for an absolute separation between the two spheres, whereas on the other end Solomon Stoddard argued in his sermon published as *The inexcusableness of neglecting the worship of God, under a pretence of being in an unconverted condition* (1708) that the sacrament did not require a previous experience of regeneration and instead represented God’s willingness to enter into a national covenant with the people. Rather than serving as a confirming ordinance of grace already received, Stoddard conceived the Lord’s Supper as a converting ordinance that

offered grace according to the condition of a willing acceptance on the part of the worshipper, which Stoddard understood to constitute worthy observance. Although in the year of the Halfway Covenant's approval Stoddard was but a fresh graduate from Harvard, his advocacy of these views over the many years of his long life made their widespread acceptance in the face of significant controversy a major aspect of his legacy. The issue of identifying the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance also has a connection with Old England, as these matters were debated with similar vim and vigor during the period that the Westminster Assembly sat (1643–8) and during the Interregnum period as well, drawing figures such as Richard Baxter, George Gillespie, John Humfrey, and Thomas Blake into an intra-Puritan-and-Reformed debate.

By the early eighteenth century, these longstanding debates at the intersection of soteriological, sacramental, ecclesiological, and national concerns contributed to the fracturing of the Reformed churches into parties that eventually became referred to as the Old and New Lights in Congregationalist circles and the Old and New Sides in Presbyterian circles. The catalyst for this fracture was the series of revivals that took place in the 1730s and 1740s, which eventually became known as the Great Awakening. The most famous of these revivals took place in Jonathan Edwards' church in Northampton, MA, and were quite controversial. Critics of the revivals like Charles Chauncy (the great grandson of the Charles Chauncy who opposed the Halfway Covenant) opposed the disorderly enthusiasm, the practice of itinerant preaching, and the revivalists' general disregard for ecclesiastical authority. Proponents of the revivals like the Congregationalist Edwards, the Anglican George Whitefield, and the Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent defended their practices with pragmatic arguments regarding their circumstantial necessity, and in return they accused their Old Light critics of 'rationalism.' Representatives of both groups claimed to represent authentic 'Calvinism,' but Old Lights questioned the Reformed credentials of New Lights who seemed to downplay the ordinary means of grace and to lack appreciation for Calvin's emphasis on church order, while New Lights found Chauncy's putative anti-Trinitarianism and anti-supernaturalism equally problematic.

The consequences of these controversies were significant and deeply influential for the development of Reformed theology in North America. The trans-denominational shape of the revivals led to the minimization of denominational allegiance and many confessional distinctives of the various Reformed churches. Institutionally speaking, these controversies led to the founding of many of America's most important colleges and universities, including the College of New Jersey (Princeton), founded by New Light Presbyterians in 1746, the College of Rhode Island (Brown), founded by New Light Baptists in 1756, and Dartmouth College, founded by New Light Congregationalists in 1769. In Dutch Reformed circles, whereas King's College (Columbia) was founded in 1756 and evidenced Old Light sympathies, New Lights succeeded in founding Queen's College (Rutgers) to counter that influence in 1766. In addition to these institutional developments, at the level of personal piety the Great Awakening emphasized the immediate and personal religious experience of the individual and also elevated the authority of effective evangelists in relation to that of the ordinary pastor. On the other hand,

sceptics of these tendencies who nevertheless affirmed traditional Trinitarian and predestinarian doctrines often found themselves strange bedfellows with rationalist ministers who shared their suspicions of revival yet not their orthodox theological convictions. Objectively speaking, church attendance soared during the years of revival, and so did the influence of Unitarianism and Arminianism in the universities and in the pulpits.

9.3 THE LEGACY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY

In addition to his role in leading the revivals in Northampton, Jonathan Edwards left a theological legacy unrivalled in American history. The nature of that legacy is a vexing subject that has challenged pastors, theologians, and historians ever since. Edwards' most famous theological works include those written to defend and interpret the revivals in his church, including *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* (1737), *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival in New England and the Way it Ought to Be Acknowledged and Promoted* (1742), and *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1754). His other most important works include a reworking of the Reformed understanding of predestination in *The Freedom of the Will* (1754), a reworking of the Reformed understanding of original sin in *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758), and a development of the tradition of Reformed ethics in his posthumously published dissertation on *The Nature of True Virtue* (1749). These works were attempts to rearticulate Reformed doctrines in light of various challenges raised by the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Edwards' followers hailed his works as powerful assertions of traditional views, but his critics lamented his departures from more classical formulations of those doctrines. Following the somewhat ambivalent reading of the Old Princetonians Charles Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, older historiographies tended to read Edwards as a faithful, if not always consistent, proponent of the Reformed theological tradition, and attributed theological departures from Reformed orthodoxy to his pupils in New England rather than to Edwards himself. More recent scholarship, however, demonstrates a great deal of continuity between Edwards and the chief architects of the New England Theology, and therefore indicates that many of the tensions with classical Reformed theological formulations were present already in Edwards' own thought (Crisp and Sweeney 2012).

Many of the figures associated with the New England theology developed reputations for their theological contributions in the areas central to the major themes of Edwards' own most important works. In his *True Religion Delineated* (1750), the distinction between natural ability and moral ability offered Joseph Bellamy resources to defend

divine sovereignty in salvation by arguing that each human being was under probation in a similar way to Adam in his prelapsarian state. Edwards' grandson and Yale president Timothy Dwight similarly defended human agency in salvation and emphasized the role of human reason in his sermons published as *Theology Explained and Defended* (1818–19). Dwight's student Nathaniel William Taylor also employed the notion of natural ability to argue for a doctrine of sin that emphasized actual rather than original sin, and he defended a moral government theory of the atonement in his *Lectures on the Moral Government of God*, posthumously published in 1859. Samuel Hopkins developed Edwards' understanding of true virtue by grounding ethical actions on the basis of a notion of 'disinterested benevolence' in his *Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773). Each of these works developed and applied key aspects of Edwards' thought. Thus, later theologians associated with the Yale school certainly were more comfortable challenging or ignoring the classical formulations of Reformed theology, although they also could make a solid case that they were developing faithfully the tradition of their intellectual forefather.

9.4 A NEW SCHOOL FOR A NEW REPUBLIC

By the early years of the nineteenth century the New England theology included a diversity of views and expressions, but the description above also indicates that it shared a unity of orienting themes and approaches to important questions related to ethics, soteriology, and theology proper. While not all of the figures went as far as Taylor or his colleagues who promoted the 'New Divinity' or 'New Haven Theology', opponents of Edwards' thought and its legacy at Yale nevertheless readily identified a 'New School' of theology and practice. In response, they developed a self-consciously 'Old School' perspective that criticized the rationalistic and pragmatic methods of the revivalists, reasserted divine sovereignty in classical terms, and staunchly defended the federal imputation of the guilt of Adam's original sin to all humanity descending from him by ordinary generation, and they developed a new vocabulary for defending the authority and inspiration of the scriptures according to the category of biblical inerrancy. The fault lines of the controversy between the Old and New Schools were similar to those that divided the Old and New Lights of the previous generations, and once again the disagreement inexorably led to realignment of ecclesial bodies.

One significant catalyst of the controversy was the Plan of Union of 1801 that joined the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America and the Congregational Churches of New England. Presbyterian opponents of the merger valued ecclesiological and doctrinal distinctives too much to sacrifice them for the ostensible gain of a united front to evangelize America's western frontier, and they feared an influx of Congregationalist adherents of the New England Theology. Ultimately the desire to expand the church's boundaries to match those of the new nation won the day, however, and the two churches were united. The union lasted until 1836, when the Old School

majority at that year's General Assembly voted to annul the union and to remove the presbyteries formed on the basis of the plan's terms.

The circumstances of the theological and cultural struggle over slavery and the rising tensions that led to the Civil War served to reunite the New and Old Schools and to shift the boundaries of schism from theological and ecclesiological lines to a latitudinal one. In 1857 the New School split over the slavery issue, and in 1861 the Old School followed suit when the southern Old School Presbyterians withdrew from fellowship with their northern counterparts over the passing of the Gardiner Springs Resolutions, which pledged denominational allegiance to the decisions of the federal government. The Old and New Schools in the south merged in 1864, and the northern factions did likewise in 1869. Theological and ecclesiological differences were easy to reconcile, relatively speaking, but the Mason–Dixon line proved to be too formidable a Rubicon to be crossed.

The controversial revivalist Charles Grandison Finney was the best-known proponent of the New School's agenda. Finney did not attend college or seminary, but undertook an apprenticeship under the Presbyterian minister George Washington Gale in 1821. He was ordained in 1824 in spite of his explicit reservations concerning the Westminster Standards. He served briefly as a minister in New York City, founding the Brooklyn Tabernacle, before moving to Ohio, where he served on the faculty at Oberlin College and ultimately became its president in 1851. Finney introduced the 'anxious seat' to his revivals, a place where those considering conversion could sit and receive prayer, and he published his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* in 1835. This work earned him strong criticism from Old School Presbyterians who objected to his assertions that 'There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the right exercise of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else', and that 'Revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much as any other effect produced by the application of means.' In addition to his views on revival, Finney also attracted criticism for his views on predestination, the nature of the will, his affirmation of a governmental view of the atonement, and his distaste for the classical understanding of the imputation of Adam's original sin. In each of these areas he exhibited strong continuities with Taylor and other proponents of the New England Theology, and his strong preaching and evangelistic efforts made him a powerful apologist for the New School Presbyterians. In this regard, there is an ironic sense of continuity between Edwards and Finney; the identification of both figures as having a good deal in common would startle those who identified with either one as their philosophical or religious progenitor.

Like many New School Presbyterians, Finney also actively pursued a number of social issues by opposing slavery, advocating the vocal participation of women in worship services, and speaking out on economic disparity in the church and society. Finney held that social renewal was primarily the result of individual spiritual renewal, and therefore that social reform should be one logical consequence of revivals of religion. If Finney led the way in advocating the social reforms of the so-called Second Great Awakening in the west, Lyman Beecher fronted the same New School ideals in the east. Like Finney, in his *Lectures on Political Atheism* (1852) Beecher also spoke of the 'heavenly origin' of the

United States and declared that its government ‘was not borrowed from Greece and Rome, but from the Bible’. In order for the United States to flourish it must be a Christian nation, and therefore Beecher argued that the various factions in the Reformed tradition should put away their differences in order to form a more perfect union. Whereas Finney championed the New School cause by explicitly confronting the Old School, Beecher took a subtler approach. He neither championed classical Reformed doctrines nor criticized members of the New School who rejected them, and he privately expressed his sympathies for the New England Theology; but he publicly denied any agenda to oppose Old School ideals and instead attempted to paint a positive picture of the shared evangelistic goals of the New School and Old School. This approach was influential and effective, but it did not satisfy Old School opponents like Samuel Miller at Princeton.

9.5 OLD PRINCETON AND THE REASSERTION OF REFORMED ORTHODOXY

Sensitive to the need for evangelism and warmly disposed to the potential benefits of revival to that end, yet wary of the theological innovations at Yale, Princeton Theological seminary opened its doors in 1812. Its first president was Archibald Alexander, who sought to connect the new institution with the legacy of New Jersey’s Log College and its revivalistic fervour, defended the importance of religious experience, and yet—together with Princeton’s second faculty member, Samuel Miller, who joined the faculty the following year in 1813—strove to defend what he saw as the true form of the Reformed theological tradition neglected and undermined by the proponents of the New School. Over the years, Princeton developed a reputation for its intellectual rigour, its commitment to the classical tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy, its defence of traditional Reformed formulations of the imputation of Adam’s original sin, substitutionary atonement, and predestination, its commitment to a distinctive Presbyterian ecclesiology, and its development of the language of biblical inerrancy. In many ways, these priorities were a response to developments which challenged traditional understandings of the inspiration and authority of the scriptures, and Princeton remained a powerful influence throughout the nineteenth century until the early years of the twentieth.

Charles Hodge built on the foundation laid by Alexander and Miller, and along with B. B. Warfield established the lasting legacy of Old Princeton. Alexander personally disciplined Hodge with the Latin edition of Francis Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1679–85), the standard theology text at Princeton for fifty years until Hodge published his own systematic theology in 1871–3. Hodge valued his theological training as well as his instruction in Latin and the biblical languages, but he also travelled to Europe from 1826 to 1828 in order to supplement what he perceived to be his inadequate education with the rigours of European biblical and theological education at Paris, Halle, and Berlin. Of all Hodge’s theological contributions, his staunch defence of the imputation

of Adam's original sin was perhaps his most significant. Whereas many proponents of the New School preferred to attribute original guilt to actual rather than original sin, Hodge went to great lengths in order to demonstrate that Adam's original sin was the source of all humanity's guilty verdict before God (Wells 1997). His strong defence of the imputation of guilt for original sin underwrote his equally strong defence of the substitutionary atonement of Christ as the source of God's forgiveness for sin, and he strongly opposed those proponents of the New School who rejected the substitutionary view in favour of governmental views of the atonement.

Hodge also willingly addressed social issues of his day, but he did so carefully under the Old School conviction that the proclamation of the Gospel was the primary mission of the church. For example, with regard to the issue of slavery, the views he expressed in the *Princeton Review* in 1836 were complex. While Hodge favoured the abolition of slavery as it was practised in the United States, he did not oppose the idea of slavery in absolute terms. He believed that the reform of slavery and the establishment of rights to education, the inviolability of marital and parental relationships, and in general treatment that respected natural human dignity would gradually lead to the end of slavery in the country. He also wrote that the South 'must choose between emancipation by the silent and holy influence of the gospel... or abide the issue of a long continued conflict with the laws of God'. His position may be criticized as inadequate from the perspective of contemporary hindsight, but it must be acknowledged that his explicit and published opposition to slavery in the United States set him apart from Old School Presbyterians who remained silent on the issue, and especially from those in the South who defended the institution. While his practice may have been inconsistent, in his theological method Hodge attempted to allow the scriptures to speak to the social issues of his day while at the same time trying to avoid wedding that voice to any particular political platform.

The second most influential teacher at Old Princeton was B. B. Warfield, who also studied abroad in Europe after completing his studies at Princeton. After beginning his teaching career at Western Theological Seminary, he received an appointment to the Charles Hodge Chair of Theology in 1887. By then he had established his reputation with a series of publications, including his famous article in the 1881 *Presbyterian Review* on biblical inspiration and authority, co-authored with Charles Hodge's son A. A. Hodge. Although some historians and theologians critical of the doctrine of verbal inspiration have described Warfield's understanding of inspiration as a wooden and literalistic notion heavily reliant upon the notion of verbal dictation, this article demonstrates that these descriptions represent a gross mischaracterization. Because this mischaracterization is so widespread, Hodge and Warfield are worth quoting at length:

It must be remembered that it is not claimed that the Scriptures any more than their authors are omniscient. The information they convey is in the forms of human thought, and limited on all sides. They were not designed to teach philosophy, science, or human history as such. They were not designed to furnish an infallible system of speculative theology. They are written in human languages, whose words, inflections, constructions, and idioms bear everywhere indelible traces of human error. The record itself furnishes evidence that the writers were in large measure

dependent for their knowledge upon sources and methods in themselves fallible; and that their personal knowledge and judgments were in many matters hesitating and defective, or even wrong. Nevertheless the historical faith of the Church has always been, that all the affirmations of Scripture of all kinds, whether of spiritual doctrine or duty, or of physical or historical fact, or of psychological or philosophical principle, are without any error, when the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense.

(Hodge 1881)

While Old Princeton, under the influence of Hodge, Warfield, and others, sought to found Christian theology upon the scriptures rather than other sources, they did not possess the skepticism of natural revelation that characterized the fundamentalist heirs of their tradition. Their embrace of the doctrines of both special and general revelation led them to value the findings of contemporary science. Neither Hodge nor Warfield believed that the scriptures taught a doctrine of a ‘young earth’, and both were open to contemporary notions of evolution, so long as these did not deny the workings of divine providence. Hodge did speak critically of the materialistic denial of the possibility of supernatural influence upon the creation of some ‘Darwinists’, but he was not critical of the idea of evolution in general. While the precise nature of Warfield’s position on evolution is a subject of some debate (cf. Noll and Livingston 2000 with Zaspel 2010), in 1915 he expressed his sympathy for what he took to be John Calvin’s view, writing in the *Princeton Theological Review* that ‘Calvin’s doctrine of creation is . . . for all except the souls of men, an evolutionary one’ and that ‘Calvin doubtless had no theory whatever of evolution; but he teaches a doctrine of evolution . . . All that is not immediately produced out of nothing is therefore not created—but evolved.’ While his views on the subject were complex, at no point in his career did Warfield reject all notions of evolution outright. As was true of his contemporaries at Old Princeton, his strong doctrine of revelation led him to affirm both general and special revelation as sources of divinely revealed truth.

Old Princeton profoundly shaped the trajectory of the Reformed tradition’s development in America, and its influence far outstripped its size. Some historians critical of its ecumenical and theological sensibilities have characterized its approach as overly influenced by Scottish common-sense realism (Noll 2005), although this assessment has arguably been overdrawn (Helseth 2010). More accurately, Princeton’s legacy was an attempt to articulate the classical tradition in contemporary language and with an openness to evangelism and the possibility of revival that at the same time remained sceptical of the theological compromises of the revivalistic New School.

9.6 THE SOUTHERN AND GERMAN ALTERNATIVES TO THE NEW SCHOOL

Old Princeton was not the only alternative to New School sensibilities during the nineteenth century. In the south, a distinctive Old School tradition developed under

the influence of Robert Lewis Dabney at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, James Henley Thornwell at Columbia Theological Seminary, and other figures. The southern tradition shared Old Princeton's devotion to scripture and desire to defend imputation and predestination, but it also developed these doctrines with different emphases, and in concert with strongly held ecclesiological sensibilities shaped in part by regional priorities and in particular by societal debates regarding slavery and the church's relationship with the civil government.

With regard to different points of emphasis, the southern tradition possessed a higher view of the rational faculties of humanity, and tended to associate doctrines developed by 'good and necessary consequence' more closely with the teachings of the scriptures themselves. For example, in the southern tradition the desire to protect the divinity of Jesus against increasingly eroding confidence in the doctrine made it relatively common to assert not only that Christ did not sin but that he could not have sinned. Dabney taught this doctrine of Christ's impeccability, and William Plumer also vigorously defended it against northern Old School theologians like Charles Hodge and William G. T. Shedd. This tendency to defend doctrinal essentials by elevating secondary or tertiary positions developed on the basis of confident inferences was arguably related closely to a positive assessment of the common sense realism of Scottish philosophers. While Thornwell distanced himself from the more extreme positions of Thomas Reid, his epistemology was close to the more moderate approach of William Hamilton. Similarly, Dabney in his *Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century* (1875) articulated a nuanced and selective appropriation of the Scottish school. John L. Girardeau explicitly expressed his intention to advance the common sense philosophy in his *Discussions of Philosophical Questions* (1900), although he too criticized some aspects of both Reid and Hamilton. The reliance upon common sense realism was stronger and more explicit in the southern Presbyterian tradition than at Old Princeton, and this tendency contributed to a high confidence in doctrinal deliverances.

The southern tradition's ecclesiological sensibilities provide another illustration of this dynamic. The arrival of Catholic immigrants during the nineteenth century raised the question of the validity of their baptisms when they converted to Protestantism. Thornwell expressed the widespread southern rejection of Catholic baptism in his famous debate with Hodge that began at the Old School General Assembly of 1845 and continued in print in the *Princeton Review*. At the same time, rising temperatures over the slavery issue led southern Presbyterians to assert a vigorous notion of the spirituality of the church, which, as Thornwell argued in an 1851 speech before the Synod of South Carolina, denied that the church possessed a commission to 'construct society afresh', to 'change the forms of its political constitutions', or to 'solve' problems that a 'fallen state' forces upon 'philanthropy'. Adherents of the notion of the spirituality of the church based the doctrine on the idea that the mission and teachings of the church ought to be restricted to those matters addressed explicitly and clearly by the scriptures.

Given their reliance upon common sense and the fact that southern Presbyterians did not hesitate to apply the scriptures to other social issues like temperance, it is not surprising that their *jure divino* ecclesiology fell into disrepute. The selective use of the

doctrine to defend the institution of slavery undermined more consistent applications like that made by Stuart Robinson, who argued that the *jure divino* principle limited not only the church's ability to speak to social issues where the scriptures were silent but also the church's authority to establish ecclesiological structures like church boards for missions. Yet while this and many of the southern church's ecclesiological positions appeared to be logical applications of classical Reformed principles drawn from the scriptures, their inconsistent application, particularly with regard to the slavery issue, undermined their credibility and influence.

In addition to the northern and southern Old School traditions, the Dutch and German churches also possessed their own critics of New School tendencies. Phillip Schaff and John Williamson Nevin of Mercersburg Seminary at Marshall College were perhaps the most notable examples within the German Reformed churches. Their emphasis on liturgy and sacraments, along with their appreciation for church history, led them to develop ecumenical sensibilities more appreciative of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran tradition than those of their New School contemporaries, whose revivalistic bent lent itself more towards cooperation with Baptists, Methodists, and other low church traditions. In his 1843 tract, *The Anxious Bench*, Nevin excoriated Finney for his revivalistic methods, which Nevin took to be so far removed from the worship and evangelism of historic Christianity that he accused Finney of propagating a different religion. In contrast to Finney's 'system of the bench', Nevin sought to recover the 'system of the catechism'. Conversion was not merely an emotional decision but the divinely wrought response of the elect to the ordinary means of grace that needed to be nurtured through regular teaching and participation in the sacraments of the church.

Nevin's Old School contemporaries appreciated his critique of Finney but were less enamoured of the sacramental theology articulated in his most famous work, *The Mystical Presence* (1846). Nevin distinguished Calvin's Reformed understanding of the Supper from both the teaching of the Catholic Church and also from what he referred to as 'the Modern Puritan theory', which denied the true spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament. In 1848, however, Charles Hodge reviewed Nevin's book in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* and accused him of synchronizing Calvin's view with that of the German theologian Fredreich Schleiermacher. Nevin accused his contemporaries of a rationalistic understanding of the sacrament that denied Christ's mystical presence, and Hodge accused Nevin of a romantic understanding that conceived Christ's presence in real rather than spiritual terms, and the benefits to recipients in ontological rather than forensic categories. In retrospect, it is difficult to find fault with either figure's accusations.

Thus, in the nineteenth century Reformed theology in America developed along the fault lines shaped by the controversies surrounding New School theology and revivals as well as the tremors these beliefs and practices produced in a rapidly changing cultural context shaped by immigration, debates regarding slavery, and post-Enlightenment Romanticism. Questions regarding ecclesiology, worship, sacraments, and the nature of conversion produced the most obvious tensions, but beneath these lay foundational differences regarding divine revelation, theological anthropology, Trinitarian theology, the

relationship between nature and grace, and soteriology. By the twentieth century, these incipient fractures proved to be catastrophically permanent.

9.7 THE FRACTURING OF THE REFORMED TRADITION IN AMERICA

In the years following the Civil War, a variety of social and cultural factors combined to put intense pressure on the theological differences within the American Reformed churches, and in particular upon the doctrine of scripture that played such a large role in shaping Old Princeton's legacy. Developments in natural science, and in particular the increasing acceptance of Darwin's understanding of evolution, put pressure on traditional readings of the book of Genesis. Additionally, differing interpretations of the Bible's teaching regarding slavery undermined its authority in the years following the Civil War. Even if the Bible was inspired and authoritative, it was subject to varying readings. As immigration, advances in technology and transportation, and economic forces combined to make the world smaller and more concentrated in cities, theological differences previously separated by distance and culture created friction. The ecumenical legacy of the New School proved a potent force in the midst of these circumstances, as many Protestants including the Reformed churches in America began to focus on essentials.

Many Reformed theologians and churches responded to these realities by embracing the winds of modernity and its variegated ideological corollaries. The essentials of the Christian faith did not depend upon the infallible foundation of the scriptures that figures like Charles Augustus Briggs increasingly called into question as they embraced the findings of higher critical methods of interpretation. Rather than a deposit of truths revealed by God, the scriptures were read as Schleiermachiian expressions of the religious experience of their various authors. The New York Presbytery of the northern Presbyterian church was ground zero for such sensibilities, as Henry van Dyke worked tirelessly to revise the Westminster Confession of Faith in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Harry Emerson Fosdick's 1922 sermon at First Presbyterian Church in New York City was perhaps the most famous expression of the early modernist spirit. In that sermon Fosdick relativized the virgin birth of Christ, denied the inspiration of the scriptures, and rejected the doctrines of Christ's substitutionary atonement and second coming. For Fosdick and other modernists, the problem with these doctrines was that they violated the Christian calling to think 'our modern life clear through in Christian terms'—a calling which was itself grounded on the ability 'to think our Christian faith clear through in modern terms'.

For other Reformed Christians, these theological views and methods represented a rejection of historic Christianity. The 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, in response to the controversy generated by van Dyke's efforts, declared that

all ministers in the denomination must affirm biblical inspiration, the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the resurrection, and the second coming of Christ. The affirmation of these 'fundamentals' earned their proponents the label 'Fundamentalists', a label that they initially embraced with pride. In 1923, Princeton's J. Gresham Machen published *Christianity and Liberalism*, in which he argued that theological liberalism was true Christianity's chief rival among the false religions. For Machen and his co-belligerents, to deny the historical and supernatural claims of Christianity was to deny Christianity in its historical totality. In addition to these core doctrinal matters, many fundamentalists began tying the essentials of the faith to a rejection of the findings of modern science, and especially to the rejection of Darwinian evolution. Whereas the majority at Old Princeton affirmed the teachings of science regarding the age of the earth and were open to aspects of evolutionary theory that did not deny the material influence of God's providence or reject the possibility of the supernatural, in the early years of the twentieth century, and especially after the infamous Scopes trial in 1925, fundamentalists increasingly tied their rejection of theological modernism to a rejection of modernity altogether (Harding 2001). Whereas the fundamentalists experienced significant success in advancing their doctrinal views in the church courts and in the broader church in the early years of these controversies, particularly when they focused on more properly theological matters, the Scopes Trial represented a major watershed in the way religion and science were beginning to be seen as mutually exclusive and inherently incommensurable. In 1929, a second defeat was even more symbolic, as Princeton Seminary was reorganized by the General Assembly after significant controversy, and Machen, together with other like-minded faculty, left to form Westminster Theological Seminary.

At the same time, even outside fundamentalist circles, a number of the faculty of America's Reformed seminaries were wary of various aspects of modern theology, and questioned what they took to be its tendencies towards radical subjectivity and cultural accommodation. Even so, their opposition did not lead them to embrace traditional theological formulations the way fundamentalists had. In many ways sympathetic with the 'Neo-orthodox' theologies of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, in America this response took a variety of forms in the works of figures like Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr. The common thread that tied them together was their attempt to ground theology in the revelation of God without resorting to a doctrine of divine inerrancy or infallibility of the scriptures. Many also believed that Christian theology also offered valuable resources for the transformation of culture and the pursuit of justice in the world—sensibilities that Reinhold Niebuhr expressed in *The Irony of American History* (1952) and H. Richard Niebuhr articulated in his magnum opus *Christ and Culture* (1951). Extremely influential during the middle third of the twentieth century, the influence of Neo-Orthodoxy in America waned under critiques from both sides. Modernists like James Barr questioned the movement's use of the scriptures to ground theology when the texts were not historically accurate or internally consistent, and on the other hand fundamentalists viewed its doctrine of scripture as virtually indistinguishable from other modernists. Interestingly, the movement has seen a resurgence of interest in more

recent years through the work of George Lindbeck and others associated with Yale University. It is still too early to tell whether this resurgence will continue to be influential in the long term.

9.8 CONTEMPORARY TRAJECTORIES OF REFORMED THEOLOGY IN NORTH AMERICA

In a similar way, at present Reformed theology in North America finds itself in a position of waning influence and yet with opportunities for resurgence. The fragmentation of the tradition has certainly contributed significantly to its present malaise, as Reformed theology is currently developed in several relatively circumscribed communities (Lim and Martin 2017). One contemporary trajectory of the tradition traces its roots through the rejection of early twentieth-century modernism, and identifies with either or both the fundamentalist movement or its evangelical rebranding in the years following the Second World War. A second contemporary trajectory is more sympathetic with modernist critiques of these movements, is consequently more willing to turn to sources outside the Christian scriptures as the basis for theological reflection, and is therefore more open to constructive approaches to Christian theology. In addition to these two trajectories there is yet a third associated with the thought of Karl Barth, which on the one hand emphasizes the scriptures as the source of divine revelation but on the other hand also emphasizes the continuing role of the Holy Spirit in revealing to the community of faith new meanings derived from those scriptures. A fourth trajectory seeks to return to the sources of classical Protestantism in the attempt to rearticulate the Reformed tradition in a manner that organically develops its roots while deploying sensitivity to new questions raised by contemporary developments in science, philosophy, anthropology, and other related fields of thought. A fifth and final trajectory reflects the upshot of immigration into North America. Just as this chapter started with immigration—in the early modern period, from Europe, predominantly—it is perhaps apropos to finish with immigration, this time from the ends of the earth. While some Reformed-leaning Christians who emphasize the sovereignty of God, and the corresponding human inability to save oneself unless empowered by the initiating redemptive work of God, are leery of an overt identification with Reformed theology *per se*—in the case of many African diaspora communities in North America—others more willingly embrace Reformed theology as their primary ecclesial identity badge, in the case of a number of Asian American Christians, Korean American Presbyterians being a specific example. With the realities of immigration and globalization impacting everything else, it is of great historical significance to see how Reformed theology in America reflects these demographic and religious reconfigurations. Of course, these trajectories represent ideal types and the boundaries between them are permeable, albeit in some cases more so than others. Whether any of the present trajectories or some combination of them will rejuvenate the tradition is an open question.

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Hart (1994); Holifield (2003); Noll (2005); Stout (1986); Wells (1997).

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CHAPTER 10

REFORMED THEOLOGY AND GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

The Cases of South Africa and Korea

D. G. HART

FROM its inception, Reformed Protestantism was an international phenomenon. The church reforms led by Ulrich Zwingli in the little provincial city of Zurich during the early 1520s were not the most auspicious for achieving a global presence, even though similar reforms were also transpiring in other cities—Bern, Basel, and Strasbourg. But by the time that John Calvin arrived in Geneva in 1536 as the pastor elected by the city's magistrates to spearhead church reform, a movement of people and texts around Europe gave Reformed Protestantism an international scope. Reformed Protestantism also made significant inroads in England at roughly the same time that Calvin started his ministry, and the English Reformation cultivated religious ideals that later spawned Puritanism. Calvin himself was a French Protestant with ties to a large group of churches in his native land. The Huguenots never gained the approval of the French monarch, and at times faced serious opposition. But French Reformed Protestants, either as immigrants or refugees, settled in other parts of Europe and functioned as the chronological bridge between the early success of Swiss cities and later Calvinist victories in northern Europe. At the same time that French Protestantism gained stature, Reformed teaching and worship also made its way into parts of the Holy Roman Empire (most notably the Palatinate) and into Eastern Europe with Protestant churches starting in Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania. Arguably the most significant expression of Reformed Protestantism came in the second wave of reforms that occurred during the 1560s in Scotland and the Netherlands, where the rise of Reformed churches coincided with national identity and political autonomy.

John Calvin was remarkably productive and efficient, but to imagine that he was the mastermind behind the spread of Reformed Protestantism across Europe is to forget

how accidental history is. Calvinism became an international phenomenon in the sixteenth century by both the herculean and ordinary actions of rulers, pastors, entrepreneurs, fathers, mothers, and schoolteachers. Aside from Calvin's omniscient deity, no one planned the expansion of Reformed Protestantism, and its success, compared to Lutheranism's relative confinement to German-speaking and Scandinavian territories, is a question that still puzzles historians. Even so, by 1600 Reformed Protestantism was not confined to a specific territory or language but showed itself capable of adapting to a host of circumstances in different parts of Europe.

Another of the accidents of history for which Calvin or Zwingli could not have planned was the beginning of the European exploration of foreign lands. Europe's encounter with non-Europeans went back several centuries, to the Crusades, and those efforts to roll back Muslim penetration of the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa—not to mention worries about Ottoman assaults on Eastern Europe—were partly responsible for Spain and Portugal's patronage of explorations in North and South America. Not only did European contests with Islam in North and West Africa equip the Spanish and Portuguese to navigate the globe, but one of Christopher Columbus' aims in the voyages that led him to the Americas was to secure riches that would allow King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to do for the Holy Land what they had accomplished by defeating Islam in Spain. Indeed, for a century or more before Reformed Protestants began to settle in North America, Roman Catholics from Spain, France, and Portugal (in South America) exported Roman Catholicism to the New World.

But by the early seventeenth century, Reformed Protestants and the rulers who patronized them were vying with Roman Catholics in Africa and the New World. The Dutch and the English were particularly forceful in establishing colonies with commerce at the heart of their efforts. Providing religious services for colonial officials and settlers meant that Reformed Protestantism expanded beyond Europe initially through colonialism. Here the chief aim of most pastors who accompanied colonial settlements, whether in Puritan New England or in Dutch Calvinist South Africa, was to minister to fellow Europeans. Only occasionally, and depending on the circumstances, did European Christians in the seventeenth century consider evangelizing indigenous peoples part of the church's task. Colonial churches were invariably extensions of the state churches in Europe.

At the same time that Europeans colonized other parts of the world, the opening of new lands also made possible the sizeable relocation of numerous Europeans from their native lands to opportunities and communities outside Europe. Most colonies sought property owners and workers without much consideration of church membership or religious convictions. Consequently, a dissenting English Baptist could migrate to a colony, like New Netherland in North America, where Reformed churches were the only option and Baptist ministers were prohibited. Or a German Calvinist could move and settle in a colony like Pennsylvania, run by Quakers but tolerating a broad sweep of Protestant expressions. In those colonies where religious uniformity was not required, Calvinists needed to be creative in finding support for their churches. Without the patronage of the civil magistrate, Reformed Protestants in certain colonial environments

experimented with voluntaryism—namely, the support and maintenance of the ministry from voluntary church membership and member contributions.

For roughly the first 200 years of Protestant experience outside Europe, Reformed churches were characteristically dominated by governors and settlers who took with them expectations and assumptions as European Christians. Not until the rise of the modern foreign missions movement in the final decades of the eighteenth century did Reformed Protestants begin to sponsor churches intentionally designed for non-European indigenous peoples. Although a concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of native people groups informed the missionary movement, foreign missions still owed their existence to colonialism and imperialism. Invariably, the places where European and American missionaries went were the very same locations where European powers operated a vast set of economic and political enterprises. Furthermore, because the missionaries themselves were the product of Christian developments in the West—whether the Protestant opposition to Roman Catholicism or intra-Protestant squabbles (Lutheran vs. Reformed, pietist vs. confessional)—missionaries faced a considerable challenge in trying to adapt a faith heavily bound up with Western civilization for people for whom Europe's history, language, and culture were alien. In other words, the challenge of foreign missions was how to decouple the simple Christian message from a set of understandings and practices thoroughly situated for over a millennium in the West.

The globalization of Reformed Protestantism, then, was a by-product of European expansion around the world chiefly for the purpose of commerce and conquest. This process happened in two stages. The first, as exemplified by the experience of Dutch Reformed Protestants in Africa, involved the creation and establishment of European-style churches for Western settlers in a foreign land. The second, as the history of Presbyterianism in Korea shows, occurred through the modern missionary movement where Protestants of European descent sought to evangelize and disciple an indigenous population. In both cases, despite the best of intentions eventually to rid Christianity of its cultural assumptions, European-based patterns of theology and church life continue to set the standard for Christians around the world who constitute what some scholars refer to as 'global Christianity'.

10.1 THE DUTCH REFORMED IN SOUTH AFRICA

The start of a Dutch colonial presence in Africa was bound up with the United Provinces' quest for political independence from Spain, an almost two-decade struggle that gained a measure of closure with the 1579 Union of Utrecht, a treaty that united six Protestant provinces. The Spanish did not recognize the United Provinces for another thirty years. That animosity fueled a parasitic relationship between the Dutch and the Roman Catholic monarchies of the Iberian Peninsula. Wherever the Spanish and Portuguese went—such as Africa and Indonesia—the Dutch were sure to follow and take advantage

of their superior ability to navigate and conduct battles at sea. The first significant Dutch colonial presence came in 1614, with the establishment of New Netherland in North America with territories that England would later claim and name New York. This colony was under the supervision of the East India Company.

The same company was responsible for creating a colony in the southernmost part of Africa, though it took almost forty years longer than North America. The Cape Colony began in 1652 first as a port for refreshment half-way between Europe and Asia. Over time as Europeans settled there, the colony became a self-sustaining agricultural community, much more than a way station for sailors and business persons. Colonial officials made some provision for religious services, initially in the form of comforters of the sick, lay people who could read scripture, and church-approved sermons in worship. Not until 1655 did the colony receive its first pastor, Johan van Arckel (?–1666). Soon van Arckel selected elders and formed the first consistory at the first congregation in Capetown. Like the congregations in North America, the Classis of Amsterdam in the old country oversaw the initial churches in South Africa. Church officers back in Europe had little to supervise since the growth of the South African churches was as small as the development of the colony was slow. The Classis of Amsterdam also had to compete with the rulers of the colony. When in 1685 church and colonial officials approved a second congregation at Stellenbosch and set up a consistory, secular authorities passed a law that limited the selection of the elders. The regulation required that half the consistory's members also hold positions in the colonial government, and that these officers be chosen by the civil authorities. That policy continued in place for the next 150 years.

State efforts to keep the churches in check was also evident with the arrival of Huguenots in South Africa soon after the new congregation at Stellenbosch. In 1688 the churches received an influx of Huguenot refugees who were part of a long series of French Protestants seeking a safe haven outside Europe. In this case the immediate crisis was the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes (which in 1598 had granted Protestants limited religious liberties). Pierre Simond (1652–?) was the minister who accompanied the Huguenot settlers, and he became South Africa's first author, recognized for producing a metrical psalter that was published in 1704. Although popular with his parishioners, Simond drew some negative attention from colonial authorities when he requested the formation of a separate French congregation. The colony's refusal to grant the request had less to do with friction between the Dutch and French than with friction between church and state. Secular authorities did not want to encourage pastors to think and act as if ministers and elders governed ecclesiastical affairs independently of the state.

One reason for maintaining a civil presence within the ecclesiastical bodies was that the Cape Colony lacked population clusters, and congregations were one way to establish a measure of social order. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the population was a little more than 4,000 (with the whites constituting a little less than half the total). Over the next 100 years, the population grew to almost 45,000 (whites numbered roughly 21,000). The territory of colonial rule also expanded over the eighteenth century. Initially, it was a circuit of approximately 80 miles around Capetown. By the end of the eighteenth century, the colony claimed a land mass almost as large as the British Isles

(about 550 miles long and 235 miles wide). With a population spread out across the landscape and navigable rivers nonexistent, establishing churches was a challenge. But it was one of the few ways that colonial rulers could attempt to instill order. In 1743, the colonial governor, Baron Van Imhoff, described the moral conditions of the settlers in discouraging terms. He was amazed 'how little interest was taken [by the people] in the public services of religion.' The whites, in fact, seemed to the governor 'more like a gathering of blinded heathens than a colony of European Christians' (McCarter 1869: 11). To try to remedy the moral and spiritual deficit, Van Imhoff established two additional Reformed congregations. By the end of the eighteenth century, the white South African colonists had seven congregations and ten pastors.

The Dutch Reformed were the established churches until the early nineteenth century, but the quality of religious life did not measure up to old-world standards. On the frontier, where attending church services was a challenge, white settlers invariably made provision to attend worship where the sacraments were administered. Pastors celebrated the Lord's Supper quarterly and baptism was a rite that applied to all children of Europeans, on the grounds that God's covenant between fathers and children lasted 1,000 generations. For religious devotion in between sacraments, white families had to rely on reading the Bible and other Christian literature. The Synod of Dort (1618) had produced a States Bible whose rate of ownership suggested higher than average use. Closer to Capetown, attending religious services was easier, but participation in the Supper was often low and resembled patterns of observance in the Netherlands. Devoting a Sunday service of preparation a week before the Supper set a high bar for church members who worried if they were fit for communion. In most cases, the Reformed churches in South Africa were all white. Native Africans or slaves of private owners could not be baptized unless they converted. Only four from the native Khoikhoi people professed faith during the seventeenth century, and none of them remained members of the church. Slaves owned by the Dutch East India Company could initially be baptized with the colonial government itself standing in as the godparents. But this practice contradicted provisions of the Synod of Dort, which implied that slaves needed to be members of Christian households to qualify for baptism. By the end of the seventeenth century, a letter from the Classis of Amsterdam prohibited the baptism of company-owned slaves. Only occasionally did Reformed ministers attempt to evangelize the native tribes. As John W. de Gruchy observes, however, these efforts 'were sporadic and eventually declined, until the birth of the nineteenth-century international missionary movement provided... concern for the evangelization of the "heathen"' (de Gruchy 1979: 2).

Even before English-speaking missionaries started efforts to cultivate indigenous churches—indeed, what made them possible—was the British conquest of the Cape Colony which first occurred in 1795 and then in 1806 became the nineteenth-century norm. The Moravians were responsible for sending the first missionary to South Africa as early as the 1730s but the work of George Schmidt 100 miles east of Cape Town was short-lived. His evangelistic efforts also drew opposition from Reformed pastors on the grounds that the Moravians departed from Reformed orthodoxy. The reasons for

England's appropriation of the Dutch colony were similar to those that originally took the Dutch East India Company there; here was a half-way point between the British Isles and the substantial British colonial enterprise in India. Thanks to France's own imperial ambitions and its conquest in 1794–5 of the old Dutch Republic and war between England and France, the Dutch colony in South Africa was easily commandeered for British purposes. Dutch rule returned briefly between 1803 and 1806, again thanks to the fortunes of England's war with France. But after 1806 the Cape Colony under British rule became the Cape of Good Hope, and that change in civil government included a very different religious landscape.

The introduction of British rule altered the dynamics of Reformed Protestantism in South Africa. What had previously been a careful delineation along Dutch, black, and coloured (mixed-race) lines now increased the awareness of differences between the Dutch settlers and the British colonial presence. During the first phase of British rule in South Africa, Dutch Reformed churches remained part of the religious establishment but also found themselves without a monopoly on church life. Differentiating Dutch from British and black Christians compelled the Dutch Reformed to rally round ethnicity as one way to preserve the settlers' European heritage. This emphasis on important parts of Dutch cultural identity had profound effects on the politics of South Africa and on the development of Reformed Protestantism in the modern era.

Under British rule, Dutch pastors continued to receive support from the government and congregations were under state regulation. The arrangement allowed the Dutch churches to expand, but it also meant that to meet in church assemblies, pastors needed to gain permission from the state. This relationship did not end until 1843, when an ordinance granted autonomy to the churches, thus ending the sporadic assembly of church officers at synod. Even before the Dutch churches in the colony gained autonomy, Dutch farmers (Boers) and some ministers migrated from the Cape Colony to settle in lands across the Vaal rivers outside the control of British authorities. This 'Great Trek' included over 15,000 South African descendants of the Dutch (Afrikaners) who objected to government policies on race relations and black labour. Three new territories emerged from this migration, the South African Republic (or Transvaal), the Orange Free State, and Natal; in the 1850s the British government eventually recognized only the South African Republic and the Free State as independent republics. The 'trekkers' were also responsible for introducing two new expressions of Reformed Protestantism within South Africa. Because the Afrikaners were suspicious of ministers in the original Reformed communion of the Cape Colony, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), for cooperating with the British, in 1855 they formed their own communion, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA). Key to this development was the arrival of Dirk van der Hoff (1814–81), a pastor trained in the Netherlands who could not find a call until the Afrikaner church sought his services. Although recognized as the state church of the South African Republic, some of the trekkers, also known as the Doppers, objected to the singing of hymns in the DRCSA. In turn these Calvinists turned to another minister from the Netherlands, Dirk Postma (1818–90), who had been part of the *Afscheding* (Secession) Church that left the state church in reaction to liberal and

rationalistic trends. In 1859 this psalm-singing communion constituted itself at the Reformed Church of South Africa (RCSA).

Three varieties of Dutch Reformed churches now existed in South Africa. Important to notice is that the newer communions, the DRCSA and the RCSA, owed some of their character to developments in the Netherlands. And because the Dutch state church experienced the rise of conservative Reformed communions, first the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and then the *Doleantie* of 1880 under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the strong ties between the Dutch nation and its colonial peoples meant that church life in Europe often had profound consequences for Reformed Protestantism in South Africa.

The institution of British rule also opened southern Africa to foreign missionaries sent by independent societies, many of which were formed during the same years that Britain gained control of the Cape of Good Hope. After the arrival of British settlers, the same denominational landscape of Great Britain and North America became part of Christian life in South Africa; Anglican, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians all established separate ecclesiastical structures. In addition, these English-speaking Protestants had embraced the goals of the modern missionary movement which took institutional form in 1795 with the founding of the non-denominational London Missionary Society (LMS). This body's first missionary to South Africa was Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp (1747–1811), son of a Reformed pastor at Rotterdam whose first career was split between service in the Dutch military and medicine. An adult conversion led van der Kemp to dedicate his life to missions, even to the point of establishing the Netherlands Missionary Society, a Dutch equivalent of the LMS. When he left for the mission field of South Africa in 1799, he immediately set up operations to evangelize the native peoples, first among the Xhosa for two years, and then among the Khoikhoi. The Afrikaners opposed these efforts, which they believed constituted a threat to white supremacy in South Africa, and van der Kemp did not improve public relations for his missionary work when as a 60-year old man he married a teenage African slave girl. But the missionary activity begun by van der Kemp continued, and by 1816 had become part of the Congregationalists' work in South Africa. The new director, John Philip (1775–1851), sought to defend the civil rights of the native population which included evangelization and establishing black congregations. Philip even testified before the British Parliament on behalf of the Xhosa people. This political recognition of native peoples was part of the basis for the Afrikaner resentment of British rule and the motivation for the migration to the Transvaal.

Reformed evangelism among blacks in South Africa was also part of the work of the Presbyterians of Scottish backgrounds who settled in the British colony. Most of the Presbyterian congregations established throughout the colony included efforts to reach and include slaves in church life. Unlike the Dutch Reformed churches, where in 1857 synod had decided, on the basis of the weaker consciences of some whites, that segregated congregations were preferable, Presbyterians originally favoured multi-race congregations. Only in the latter decades of the nineteenth century did Presbyterians start to allow for segregated congregations, for the reason that blacks might feel more comfortable. The rise of black Presbyterian congregations led to the formation in 1923 of the

Bantu Presbyterian Church, a communion comprising almost entirely blacks that did not merge with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa (white) until 1999 to form the Uniting Presbyterian Church of South Africa.

In the second phase of British rule, in 1910 South Africa went from the status of a colony to a nation within the British Commonwealth. The consolidation of the Union of South Africa was possible in part because of further rancour between the Afrikaners and British in the Boer Wars (1880–81 and 1899–1902). In each case, the Afrikaans fought for a separate existence against British imperialism (the British found Afrikaner lands attractive partly because of the discovery of precious metals). Both the British and Dutch churches contributed theological rationales for their respective side in the war, identifying their people as a chosen instrument of divine purpose. But British victories made possible the 1910 union of the four South African colonies, Cape, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange Free State. In the new nation, which became a republic in 1961, Dutch and British hostilities remained present even as South African Protestants participated in a number of ecumenical endeavours. English-speaking Protestants, for instance, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, welcomed proposals from other denominations for cooperation and in 1936 joined the Christian Council in South Africa. Only two of the Dutch Reformed Church's synods also entered the Council. By 1941 all the Dutch Reformed synods had left the Council over a suspicion that the ecumenical agency favoured British denominations and that it was promoting an unacceptable position on race relations.

Indigenous or native Africans, in contrast, had limited outlets for the practice of their faith. John de Gruchy identifies three Reformed ecclesiastical alternatives in twentieth-century South Africa for blacks or coloured. One was the Bantu Presbyterian Church, which meant belonging to a single-race church under the oversight of Europeans, whether a denomination or missions agency. This was a communion that missionaries from the Church of Scotland had initiated. A second alternative, but less available, was to belong to a coloured (mixed-race) church. The DRC had made provisions for coloured South Africans, and in 1881 established the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church. This situation invariably involved close monitoring by white church leadership. The last option was a 'native church' with blacks in their own communion and in positions of ecclesiastical leadership. Some black South Africans even looked to the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States, the first independent American black church, as a model. For Reformed Protestants a black communion did not emerge until 1963, when the DRC sponsored the formation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, a communion formed in the midst of protests over the South African government's policy of apartheid.

After the Second World War the Reformed Churches in South Africa entered arguably the most difficult phase of their history. This era was painful enough for South Africans themselves but it included the extra burden of having domestic affairs implicated in ecclesiastical and political trends around the world. The period saw the dominance of the National Party in South African politics and the eventual formation in 1961 of the South African Republic, which gave the nation compete autonomy from British

rule. This political party, also known as the Afrikaans National Party, had been founded in 1915 by Afrikaans who were dissatisfied with the centralizing trends of British rule. As the ruling party after 1948, the Nationalists, most of whom belonged to the Reformed churches, were responsible for policies and laws that further stressed the isolation and superiority of an inherited white cultural identity, which included racial segregation. Although implemented formally in 1950 and responsible for dividing South Africa demographically into four distinct peoples—whites, blacks, coloured (mixed race), and Indians—apartheid had roots much deeper than changes to postwar South African society. The Reformed churches particularly cultivated the rationale for separateness between the races. Some of the justifications for apartheid among Christians came to expression in the 1920s and 1930s, when the economy forced rural whites into the cities where they found themselves on an equal (and low) playing field with blacks. Some of the rationale for apartheid also owed to the input of Reformed theologians who stressed group identity and nationalism as part of a divinely instituted social order. God's authority, for many Afrikaans, was manifest in distinct racial and national groups. What gave this justification for apartheid even greater urgency after the ascent of the Nationalist Party was the threat of communism and the emerging battle lines of the Cold War. With its understanding of a common humanity and one-world order, communism appeared to be a direct violation of the created order.

Although apartheid assumed that Afrikaans would act as guardians for blacks and coloured in South Africa, racial segregation did not restrict Christianity to whites exclusively. In fact, partly to maintain the barriers between ethnic groups, the Reformed churches engaged in a variety of religious endeavours to convert native and mixed-race peoples and form separate churches. The DRMC as the communion for coloured South Africans was one example. Another was the DRCA, the ecclesiastical home for blacks. Owing partly to the success of Reformed missions and to demographic realities—by 1960 South Africa was 68 per cent black, 19 per cent coloured, and 9 per cent white—the native DRCA and mixed-race DRMC outgrew the size of the historic DRC. By 1978, for instance, the oldest Reformed church, the DRC, had 1.5 million members, while the DRMC and DRCA had a combined membership of 1.8 million church members.

The white Reformed churches were not unanimous in their attitude to apartheid. Criticisms of the policy came from Beyers Naudé, a pastor who lost his office thanks to participating in a multi-racial educational institution; Benjamin B. Keet, a professor of theology at Stellenbosch University; and Barend J. Marais, a professor of church history at Pretoria University. This opposition received support after the calamitous events of 1960 when police shot and killed 68 women and children who were protesting apartheid in Sharpeville. Later that year, the Cottesloe Consultation, organized by the World Council of Churches and held in Johannesburg, drew church leaders together to address the South African crisis. Cottesloe's statement did not necessarily favour integration, but it recognized the equality of all South Africans and their rights to participate in the common responsibilities of the nation. The South African government interpreted the consultation as treasonous, and called for the nation's Reformed churches to rid themselves of those officers who supported Cottesloe. The churches complied.

After 1960, the most resistance to apartheid that the white Reformed churches offered was to question whether it was required by scripture. In 1974, for instance, the DRC produced a statement on race relations, *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, that did not defend apartheid per se but did contend that the pluriformity of races was not inherently sinful. It called for greater attention to the black and coloured peoples from the South African government. The statement also did little to challenge the status quo. Meanwhile, the GKSA, arguably the most conservative of historically Dutch churches, under pressure from World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council, revised its previous rulings on race and apartheid. Although placing greater emphasis on the unity of the church in different resolutions from the 1980s, the GKSA refused to accept integration as the model for genuine fellowship.

This left the strongest protest to apartheid to come from the non-white Reformed Protestant communions. When the DRCA was formed in 1963, the black Christians in the new denomination were still tied closely to its Afrikaans mother church, the DRC. The all-white denomination continued to monitor and supervise the DRCA's activities, support it financially, and provide training for its pastors. In many respects, the DRCA was a mirror image of the white church's practice, worship, and education. Any form of a distinctly self-consciously African church would not emerge until the politics of the 1970s provoked among the DRCA's pastors and church members a desire for a separate Christian identity. The DRMC, the South African coloured communion, had a longer history of institutional identity and a different, more experimental piety than the white churches. What contributed to the emergence of critiques of apartheid was a new generation of black and coloured ministers in the 1970s, who had either studied in the Netherlands or drew inspiration from liberation theology or civil rights protests led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and were no longer willing to exist in subservient relationships with the white Reformed churches. An added factor was the transfer of white pastors and theologians critical of apartheid. Behind these ministerial transfers was the conviction that the white churches were so conservative that hope for support for reform of apartheid was pointless. Allan Boesak, a pastor in the DRMC who studied in the Netherlands and spent considerable time in Grand Rapids, Michigan, emerged as one of the most vocal Reformed opponents of apartheid. As the president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982, he persuaded the fellowship of churches to suspend the membership of South Africa's white communions and to raise apartheid to the level of *status confessionis*, a matter in which the Gospel is at stake.

The Belhar Confession, drafted in 1982 and ratified in 1986 by the DRMC, summarized Reformed opposition to apartheid in a form that has appealed to ecclesiastical bodies far removed from South Africa. The short five-article statement of faith contained three overriding themes. The first is the unity of the church over against any theology or ideology that justifies separate communions. The second theme locates the reconciliation between God and man in Christ as the basis for reconciling peoples separated by race or skin color. The third affirmation is a call for the church to recognize God's identification with the poor and oppressed and in a similar manner 'witness against and strive

against any form of injustice' (Art. 5). Belhar's theology was partly responsible for the DRMC and the DRCA merging in 1994 to form the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa. The Belhar Confession has also received favourable consideration from the Reformed Church of America, the Christian Reformed Church of North America, and the Presbyterian Church USA, where the statement is being considered for inclusion as a doctrinal standard. In South Africa, Belhar has gradually produced a measure of support from the Afrikaans Reformed churches, especially with the arrival of a new constitution for the nation in 1994 and the end of apartheid.

But Belhar has also revealed the same sort of theological dynamic that has emerged in other sectors of the Reformed world where theological lines between liberals and conservatives have generated either church controversies or splits. On the one side, theological justifications for church-based social activism have often introduced doctrinal and hermeneutical novelties to which conservatives object. The rationale for the new way of looking at scripture and applying its teaching is the obvious injustice of a particular set of social circumstances that reveal the older theology's error and irrelevance for establishing God's just rule on earth. On the other side, a desire to preserve a historic pattern of doctrinal affirmations and church procedures has generated assertions of the apolitical nature of the church and demands that ecclesiastical bodies refrain from endorsing specific legislation or policy. Such attachment to received theology and practice has also underwritten a social and political status quo that seems to do exactly the opposite of what conservatives desire—align the church with a specific social or political program. The division between liberal and conservative Reformed Protestants over race relations, consequently, echoes the dynamic that has characterized Calvinism in Europe and North America. Rather than adapting to indigenous circumstances and developing another variety of Calvinism, the churches in South Africa transplanted Reformed Protestantism from Europe to a setting where the patterns and assumptions of western churches wound up playing out with remarkable similarity to trends elsewhere in the West.

10.2 REFORMED PROTESTANTISM IN KOREA

Reformed Protestantism came later to Korea than to South Africa. In 1884, a Presbyterian medical missionary from Akron, Ohio, Horace N. Allen, arrived in Korea to begin a work of evangelizing the natives. Roman Catholics had attempted to establish churches on the Korean Peninsula for the better part of a century, beginning in 1784, when the church's missions in China made an extension into Korea look possible. But Rome's missionaries experienced a wave of persecutions, as did the Koreans who converted. The most brutal occurred in 1866, when an estimated 8,000 Christians were killed as part of a kingdom-wide opposition to the presence of Westerners. When Allen arrived, however, Korea had begun to change dramatically, and abandoned its former isolation as the 'Hermit Kingdom'. Japan's domination of the peninsula in 1875 was one

factor that opened Korea to the West. Another was the beginning in 1882 of diplomatic relations between the United States and Korea. Allen soon had a missionary co-worker in the first Presbyterian minister to work in Korea, Horace G. Underwood (1859–1916), a gifted linguist and evangelist who helped to found Yonsei University, the most prestigious Christian university in Korea. By 1887, Presbyterians had established their first congregation, with two elders and fourteen church members. Presbyterians were not the only Protestants conducting missionary works in Korea. Methodists also established their first congregation in the same year.

Presbyterians followed the blueprint of missionaries elsewhere. Translating the Bible into the native language while also establishing schools that taught Western languages and culture to natives were important strategies for nineteenth-century missionaries in Africa, Asia, and South America. One novelty in the Presbyterian missions to Korea was the use of the so-called Nevius Plan. A veteran of American Presbyterian missions to China, John L. Nevius (1829–93) in 1890 visited Korea to recommend a programme for evangelism that featured establishing self-sustaining churches. Instead of employing natives in works run by foreign missionaries which Nevius believed encouraged feigned conversions, he advocated systematic Bible study, methods of devotion, and standards for inclusion to the end that the indigenous people would produce their own pastors and leaders. Historians have often attributed this stress on an autonomous and self-sustaining native church as the key to the growth of Presbyterianism in Korea. What is more likely is that Nevius introduced his ideas coincident with social circumstances that made Christianity particularly appealing to Koreans.

The emergence of Japan as an imperial power in Korea at the beginning of the twentieth century (especially after Japan's defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War 1904–5) helped Koreans abandon a deep suspicion of the West and begin to regard the United States as an ally and potential defender against Japanese imperialism. Although American missionaries sometimes challenged and mainly cooperated with the Japanese colonial government in Korea, the native people itself regarded the Protestant churches as centres of a Korean identity at odds with Japanese rulers. In the 1910s the number of church members and new congregations rose dramatically. Nevius' encouragement of an indigenous leadership had also set the stage for the emergence of Korean pastors and elders sharing responsibility in the newly formed Presbyterian Church of Korea (1907). To the degree that Japanese rulers criticized the present of Western religions in Korea, the Protestant churches looked all the more appealing to Koreans as a source of national identity. But after the 1 March protests of 1919 calling for national independence, Japanese colonial officials retaliated by restraining the churches' appeal. This strategy involved giving greater freedom to non-ecclesial organizations so that Korean nationalism was no longer so closely bound up with Protestantism. It also included imposing Shinto worship on Christians as part of their religious practice, and eventually removing foreign missionaries at the end of the 1930s from Korea.

With the final overthrow of Japanese rule after the Second World War, Korean Protestants faced another set of social developments that were to all intents and purposes unprecedented. Korea emerged from the war with greater autonomy, though the

ideal of self-determination had great resonance with the Western political narrative of modern freedom from past oppression. At the same time, the presence of Soviets and Americans in postwar Korea, the division of the peninsula into North and South, and the subsequent war between North and South as part of the larger Cold War between the West and communism continued to give Korean Protestantism a Western inflection. In a society where Japanese restrictions on the church had ceased, Korean Presbyterianism expanded dramatically. Some of this growth was simply the product of a large migration of North Koreans to the South who either converted to Christianity or reaffirmed an already existing faith. Another factor was the material support made available by Protestant churches. Korean denominations still had strong ties to communions in the United States, and so became conduits of provisions for basic human needs during a time of great hardship for the Korean people. In addition, Presbyterian churches grew after 1950 because they supplied a common identity for people whose national and social identities were uncertain.

In South Korea, the ensuing polarization among Presbyterians after the Korean War was not far removed from the conservative/liberal divide that characterized church life among American Presbyterians at the time. In the late 1940s, conservative Korean Presbyterians became vocal in opposing liberal theological trends within their church's leadership. Some of this opposition was due to compromises that church leaders had made with Japanese rulers over Shinto worship. Some of it also stemmed from an awareness of the variety of conservative Presbyterian theology that had marked Princeton Seminary before its reorganization in 1929, and the Princeton Theology's long history of polemics against departures from historic Calvinism and defence of the authority and infallibility of scripture. For instance, Pak Hyöngnyong (1897–1978) was a leading voice among conservative Korean Presbyterians who had studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as part of his advanced training. Pak had studied at Princeton during the fundamentalist controversy, and J. Gresham Machen's opposition to theological liberalism left a lasting impression. He eventually presided separately over three Korean seminaries and wrote prolifically, especially in defense of biblical inerrancy and opposition to liberal teaching. Such conservative Presbyterianism was not without political implications. Because of communism's atheism and the apparent sympathy of the World Council of Churches for leftist groups, Pak and fellow conservatives supported the South Korean government's efforts, no matter how illiberal, to stamp out communism. Conservative Reformed theology once again (as in South Africa) lined up with a government that elevated order over freedom.

Liberal Presbyterians in South Korea, in contrast, had taken root before the Second World War when some pastors questioned traditional attitudes toward women's roles as well as received beliefs about the Bible. Thanks to the Japanese rule, liberals were in charge of South Korea's only theological seminary after the Second World War. That would change after conservatives began to create their own seminaries. But liberals were a force amongst Korean Presbyterians for introducing new biblical and theological ideas from the West and for challenging the piety that had informed Korean Presbyterianism. Kim Chaejun (1901–87) was the chief figure on the left side of the Korean church who

studied in Japan and then in the United States at Princeton and Western seminaries. In addition to introducing liberal theological materials, Kim argued that conservative Presbyterians were wrong to insist that the church should abstain from politics. Instead, he contended that distinguishing between God's and Caesar's spheres was not clear-cut, and that the church had a responsibility to call citizens to their public responsibilities. In contrast then to the otherworldly themes that dominated conservative theology, Kim stressed the incarnational quality of the Gospel and called for the church to challenge the exploitative and repressive social structures of Korea.

Although Korean Presbyterianism was one of the rare ecclesiastical products of American foreign missions to be controlled by the native population, its dynamics differed little from global trends, and it wound up reflecting the same sort of left/right divide of Western societies, both along political and theological lines. The result was a deeply divided Korean Presbyterianism: the left side regarded Christianity increasingly in social justice categories and viewed anti-communist politics as inherently authoritarian; Presbyterian conservatives understood Christianity in largely spiritual terms and refused to critique even the excesses of government officials in their efforts to subdue communist influences. Since Reformed Protestantism came to the Korean Peninsula at a time when almost no part of the world could escape the presence of Westerners, the idea that Christianity might have developed along distinctly Korean lines is as anachronistic as it is idealistic. Still, the irony of the Nevius plan and its programme of planting self-sustaining native churches could not prevent the controversies of Western politics and ecclesiastical bodies from dominating the Presbyterian churches in Korea.

10.3 GLOBAL, WESTERN, INDIGENOUS?

The phenomenon of global Christianity has received sustained attention from scholars and church leaders alike. A prominent theme in the literature on the recent flourishing of Christianity in the global South has been to contrast the decline of churches in the West with the vitality and size of Christian communions outside Europe and South America. Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (2002) gave this contrast a revisionist twist. For the last five centuries, he wrote, 'the story of Christianity has been inextricably bound up with that of Europe and European-derived civilizations overseas, above all in North America'. As much as Christians in the West used this narrative for encouragement, even critics who identified the globalization of Christianity with colonialism and imperialism acknowledged that the Christian faith was an 'ideological arm' of the West. But Jenkins used his book to announce that the 'center of gravity' among Christians was shifting from the northern hemisphere to the global South. To be even more provocative, Jenkins argued that to conceive of the 'average Christian' at the start of the twenty-first century, readers should visualize a 'woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*'

(Jenkins 2002: 1, 2). Jenkins added that this global Christianity was distinct from Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy. It was an indigenous expression of contemporary realities in Asia, Africa, and South America. For support Jenkins appealed to Andrew F. Walls, a former missionary who taught and studied Christianity in the non-Western world at the University of Edinburgh. Like Jenkins, Walls called for a different understanding of Christianity outside the West, one that recognized global Christianity's distinct and indigenous character. In fact, the study of churches in the global South required a rethinking of Christianity itself. Instead of relying on the Christendom model and the West's expansion around the world, with indigenous churches functioning merely as shadows of Western Christianity, Walls insisted that scholars and believers recognize that Christianity has always been 'cross-cultural', and that the expansion of the church has invariably 'come from the margins more than from the centre' (Walls 2000: 145).

The experience of Reformed Protestantism in nations associated with global Christianity suggests a different way of looking at the relationship between European Christianity and the rise and growth of churches outside the West. Of course, the very category of Reformed Protestantism is a product of the Christian West, and so to look for its expression outside Europe will invariably involve finding resemblances and connections with Reformed developments in the global North. Even so, as the cases of South Africa and Korea suggest, the emergence of indigenous churches still in the orbit of Calvinism has rarely allowed for experimentation with native forms of Protestantism. On the one hand, the native Reformed or Presbyterian churches were in some respects creations of the West and starting *de novo* was never an option. On the other hand, modern Reformed communions in the global South have not been free to develop apart from the enormous influence of the West in at least the political, cultural, and economic aspects of modernization. Both the Doppers in South Africa and liberal Korean Presbyterians faced a similar set of circumstances which their respective nations could not ignore by virtue of being part of a global network of financial, political, cultural, and ecclesiastical institutions. If somehow in 1559 John Calvin could have dropped down among native peoples in the Amazon River valley, perhaps an opportunity for planting an indigenous Reformed church that was less dependent on Western culture might have been possible. But unless the Holy Spirit had transported Calvin to South America without the aid of technology, seafaring knowledge, economic interests, and political patronage, the presence of the Geneva pastor in an undeveloped non-European society would not have been possible without a much larger constellation of developments that for the better part of five centuries took European influence, for good and ill, throughout every inhabitable part of planet Earth. The idea of an indigenous Reformed church has great appeal to compensate for all the hardship that has accompanied the European dominance of the world in the modern era. But the experience of blacks, coloured, and Afrikaans in South Africa and of Korean Presbyterians underscores how difficult the process of disentangling the church from western Christianity has been.

SUGGESTED READING

de Gruchy (1979); Jenkins (2002); Park (2003).

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PART II

TEXTS

CHAPTER 11

MARTIN BUCER'S *KINGDOM OF CHRIST*

SCOTT AMOS

11.1 INTRODUCTION

It was only during the last two years of his life, while in exile in England, that the Alsatian Reformer Martin Bucer (1491–1551) produced what is recognized as one of the most significant works of ‘social theology’ from the era of the Reformation, his *Kingdom of Christ* (Bucer 1955; 1969) (hereafter *De Regno Christi*). This treatise bears testimony to a reformer who thought long about the Christian life in all its implications, not only for the individual believer but also for the body of all believers, the church, and for society as a whole, and it is a work one might have expected him to have produced at an earlier stage in his life—if he could ever have found the time to work on it in a life marked by frenetic activity. Throughout much of his career he was heavily involved not only in reforming doctrine and liturgy but also in the practical outworking and application of the principles of the Reformation to the broader social sphere, both in his adopted home of Strasbourg and in cities and principalities throughout the Holy Roman Empire. However, it was not until he had been exiled from the city to whose pastoral care he had devoted so much of his energy (Strasbourg) that he was able to dedicate himself to the task of putting down in writing his thinking on the church in its broadest context. Bucer’s *De Regno Christi* was, indeed, the last major work of his career apart from his Cambridge lectures on Ephesians which, like *De Regno Christi*, were published posthumously. It set forth ideas which he had been developing since his emergence as a reformer in 1522, giving a full expression to the ethical aspects of the Christian faith, and it is one of the most substantial pieces of social theory produced by any of the early Reformers.

Yet it was more than a retrospective on his career. It was also addressed to the specific situation of England in the reign of Edward VI (ruled 1547–53), a situation which provided the immediate focus and occasion for the book and informed its shape and

content. The work clearly shows evidence of an involvement in the discussions and debates among mid-Tudor ecclesiastics and government officials concerning the reform of the English church and commonwealth. This involvement is seen in the resonance of the central themes of Bucer's treatise with those found in the literature of the Edwardian Reformation (for the latter, see Davies 2002). Read in this light, we can observe that while it is true that Bucer drew on his entire career and experience in composing this work (and he may well have incorporated previously written material), he wrote it with a particular state of affairs and set of concerns in view. Ideas do not inhabit an abstract realm of thought, and an examination of *De Regno Christi* within its immediate context roots it in the concrete reality of Bucer's work as a reformer who was involved in the struggle to secure the advance of the Reformation in England, but one who did not lose sight of the broader European struggle for Reformation.

11.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Given the fact that as this work is to no small degree a summation of Bucer's career and experience in Strasbourg, it is worth taking a few moments to consider the role of that context in shaping *De Regno Christi*. In particular, the book reflects the struggle with the city magistrates in which he was engaged since 1538 over the further advance of reform beyond the achievements of the early 1530s (Greschat 2004: 123–7, 143–51, 207–25). One of the major concerns Bucer had following the Synod of 1533 and the promulgation of the church order for Strasbourg in 1534 was the practice of Christian discipline, which had the aim of bringing about in Strasbourg a Christian commonwealth in which believers would live well and rightly. His first attempt to institute discipline as a necessary complement to preaching ended in a compromise: Bucer accepted that the civil government rather than the church would, for the most part, have charge of the individuals tasked with the exercise of discipline (Burnett 1994: 55–86). But he was never content with the arrangement, not least because many of these officials were unwilling to conduct their disciplinary duties in the fashion to which Bucer would like them to become accustomed. Over the next decade, he issued a series of tracts and memoranda addressed to the magistracy urging the establishment of a legitimate, consistently enforced Christian discipline (Burnett 1994: 87–121, 163–79).

As a way forward in the face of mounting opposition to his ideas, Bucer set aside (temporarily) his hope for a comprehensive discipline for the whole of Strasbourg in favour of voluntary discipline within *Christliche Gemeinschaften* (Christian communities), first formed in 1547 (Burnett 1994: 180–207). In response to charges that he was proceeding in a schismatic manner, he disclaimed all desire to be sectarian; his aim, he maintained, was to create a reformed core which would effect by example the desired wider renewal. Nonetheless, the result was a crisis and then failure in Strasbourg, followed by exile in 1549 (a consequence in part of this struggle, but more immediately of Bucer's opposition to the religious settlement, the *Interim*, imposed in that year on

Protestants within the empire by a victorious Holy Roman Emperor in the aftermath of the latter's crushing victory over the Protestant Schmalkaldic League at Mühlberg in 1547). All of *De Regno Christi* must be read in the light of the bitter experience of Bucer's last years in Strasbourg, and especially those portions that concern subjects which were at the heart of the struggle for *Christliche Gemeinschaften*, chief of all discipline.

However, *De Regno Christi* was also written in the midst of the raging debate that was the Edwardian Reformation, and this constitutes the immediate, primary context of the treatise. Bucer's direct involvement in English affairs came at a time when the Edwardian church was struggling to define itself, and to articulate the character of its Reformation (MacCulloch 1996: 351–553; Ryrie 2009: 147–75). In leaving Strasbourg, Bucer had accepted a long-standing invitation from Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, who had been urging the Alsatian to come to England and take part in the evangelical Reformation that been unleashed with the accession of Edward VI in early 1547. He came to England in late April 1549, and was appointed as Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge in December 1549. He took up his duties in January 1550, duties which became the focus of his principal public activity in service to Reform in England up to his death on February 28/1 March 1551 (Amos 2002a; 2014).

Though the evangelical Reformation in England had been in full flood for two years following Henry VIII's death in early 1547, by the time Bucer arrived matters had reached a crisis corresponding to the political and social crises of the summer of 1549 (Ryrie 2009: 157–61). Once settled, Bucer expected to take an active part as a consultant and participant in reform, and no doubt felt he had arrived at a critical juncture where his advice would do the most good, but instead he found himself without obvious opportunity for involvement until his appointment at Cambridge. In the meantime, he became aware of religiously zealous, socially minded reformers who were themselves increasingly frustrated by a Reformation that to them seemed to be more about self-enrichment by the elites at the expense of the church than about reform of church and religion. Bucer's correspondence reflects their discontent as well as his own sense of being shunted to the margin (Amos 1999; 2004), and this would play a role in the shape of *De Regno Christi*.

In addition to his lectures as Regius Professor on the Epistle to the Ephesians that he commenced in January 1550, and various other smaller projects (including a critique of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer), at some point in the same year Bucer began work on *De Regno Christi*. His ostensible motive in writing this work, as he explained in the prefatory address to Edward VI, was to offer (belatedly) a gift such as other royal servants proffered to their king at the New Year, and as an expression of gratitude for money the king had furnished to purchase a stove to heat his residence in Cambridge, as well as for other kindnesses (Bucer 1955: 1–2; 1969: 174–5). Bucer was moved to do this at the suggestion of English friends who, like Bucer, felt their advice on reform had been neglected—men such as Roger Ascham, Edmund Grindal, Edwin Sandys, and Thomas Lever (Pauck 1969: 161; Wendel 1955: lii–liii). These friends no doubt provided a perspective that informed Bucer's thinking about the state of reform in England, and they saw in the work he was preparing an opportunity to break through to one person whose influence might actually put their ideas into action. The treatise was completed on 21 October

1550 and sent to the king by way of the royal tutor, John Cheke—among Bucer’s closest friends in Cambridge (along with Matthew Parker, Master of Corpus Christi College, and Walter Haddon, Master of Trinity College), and the leader of this circle of reformist thinkers in Cambridge who had a mutually supportive relationship with Bucer (Pauck 1969: 158–61; Hudson 1981: 57–60).

11.3 STRUCTURE AND SOURCES

As with all of Bucer’s substantial works, *De Regno Christi* bears the marks of a treatise that was hurriedly written, and thus full of infelicities of speech, occasional lack of clarity, and above all (characteristically) an excess of words. That said, the structure of the treatise is straightforward enough, as the excellent schematic outline in the introduction to critical edition demonstrates (Wendel 1955: lxvii–lxx). It consists of two books of unequal length. In Book I (Bucer 1955: 1–97; 1969: 174–265), Bucer explains what constitutes the Kingdom of Christ, the restoration of which is the object of the treatise as a whole. He does so by defining his terms, distinguishing the Kingdom of Christ from earthly kingdoms (though noting the commonalities), and identifying passages of scripture that clarify for the reader what this kingdom is. He describes at some length what the kingdom of Christ looks like in concrete, practical terms: the ministry of the Word, the centrality of the proclamation of the Gospel, catechetical instruction, the administration of the sacraments, Christian discipline, ceremonies, care for the needy. In essence, the kingdom is, in the first instance, the church as it functions in this world, as it seeks to promote the rule of Christ over all the world. He also surveys this kingdom in the various periods of the church’s history. Woven into this description is a critique of what has been done in pursuit of Reformation in England and a call for what remains to be done, which is a strand of his argument that runs throughout the treatise. He concludes with a declaration of the fundamental need for a restoration of the Kingdom of Christ (Bucer 1955: 90–97; 1969: 259–65).

The much longer Book II (Bucer 1955: 98–309; 1969: 266–394) is a programmatic description of how to accomplish the task Bucer urges upon Edward VI. He begins with the king’s responsibility to pursue this task in the face of all challenges, citing the examples of Old Testament kings, especially important among them being David and Josiah (Bucer 1955: 98–9; 1969: 266–7), and then provides a sketch of the basic plan of action, the selection of advisers to accomplish the task, and the critical need for ministers of the Word (in the guise of evangelists in the first instance) to promote at all levels of society the restoration of the Kingdom of Christ, that is, the restoration of biblical Christianity. This is followed by a proposal of fourteen laws that are integral to the achievement of the ultimate goal:

1. on religious education (Bucer 1955: 114; 1969: 280);
2. on the sanctification of holy days (Bucer 1955: 114–16; 1969: 280–82);

3. on the sanctification of churches (Bucer 1955: 117; 1969: 283);
4. on the restoration of church ministries (Bucer 1955: 118–30; 1969: 283–95);
5. on the preservation and proper use of church properties (Bucer 1955: 130–42; 1969: 295–306);
6. on provision for the needy (Bucer 1955: 143–52; 1969: 306–15);
7. on marriage (Bucer 1955: 152–236; 1969: 315–33);
8. on the civil education of the youth and overcoming leisure (Bucer 1955: 236–60; 1969: 333–54);
9. on sumptuary laws (Bucer 1955: 260–63; 1969: 354–7);
10. on reform of civil laws (Bucer 1955: 264–8; 1969: 357–61);
11. on the appointment of magistrates (Bucer 1955: 268–82; 1969: 361–74);
12. on the appointment and correction of tribunals and judges (Bucer 1955: 282–5; 1969: 374–7);
13. on the custody of those to be judged (Bucer 1955: 285–6; 1969: 377–8);
14. on the moderation of penalties (Bucer 1955: 287–93; 1969: 378–84).

The first six laws are focused on ecclesiastical matters; the remainder concern matters of society and the economy. Marriage bridges both church and society, and though Bucer speaks of the sanctification of marriage, he also treats it as a compact of mutual consent and thus as a social institution.

In most cases, the laws are briefly described, but to a few laws Bucer devotes a substantial amount of space: the reform of the pastoral ministry (the fourth law); the protection of church property from spoliation, and its proper deployment in the service of the Kingdom of Christ (the fifth law); civil education and employment (the eighth law); the appointment of judges (the eleventh law); and, at exhaustive length, the reform of marriage laws (the seventh law). As noted, there was a measure of repetition, and Bucer could be verbose to an extreme degree. In this regard, the reason for the large amount of space he devoted to marriage (just over 27 per cent of the whole) remains something of a mystery. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that he sounds quite modern on this subject, much more so than his contemporaries, and it thus may be something of a surprise that this proved to be the longest section translated into English, by none other than John Milton in 1644, though admittedly the poet had his own particular agenda that was advanced by this part of the book.

In writing *De Regno Christi*, Bucer drew on a range of sources which included patristic authors such as Ambrose, Augustine (at the greatest length), Cyprian, Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Tertullian, and Theodoret; medieval authors such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas; and classical authors such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero (interestingly, for a former Dominican, Plato much more so than Aristotle). However, the sources on which Bucer relies most heavily are Roman civil law, canon law, and above all scripture (Amos 2002b). In respect of the former two (especially canon law), his use may strike one as surprising, given his declaration in the preface that he would advise the king on the basis of scripture (not to mention that canon law was the law of the Roman church that he and his hosts rejected); but an examination

of the text reveals that he cites these two bodies of law only in those cases where they are judged to be in agreement with scripture. A review of the index in the critical edition of *De Regno Christi* shows that there are 41 possible references to canon law and 122 to civil law; in the case of scripture, the Old Testament is referred to 324 times, the New Testament 608 times. These numbers underscore the point that the use of and reference to scripture far outweighs reference to the other two major collections of source material: 932 references versus 163. To be sure, the index to the critical edition often identifies allusions rather than direct reference for all categories of sources, so the actual number could be higher or lower depending on how one interprets Bucer's text and usage; but the point stands regarding the relative weight Bucer places on each. While on the subject of law, it is also worth noting that before one accepts the argument some make about Bucer's intent to create a theocratic kingdom patterned after ancient Israel (e.g. Hall 1994: 156), such a claim should be judged in light of Bucer's substantially greater reliance on the New Testament and the fact that, of the 324 references to the Old, only 119 are to the Mosaic law. Further, while it is true that Bucer makes frequent reference to the importance of biblical law, this must be qualified by the particular way in which he characterizes law (Torah) as instruction (Amos 2002b: 151–6; esp. Gäumann 2001: 201–2)—thus, when Jesus Christ teaches, he does so as law-giver in this sense of the term.

11.4 ARGUMENT

Viewed in the context of the state of the Reformation in Edward VI's reign as sketched above, and in particular at its moment of crisis in 1549–50, one can see that *De Regno Christi* is both Bucer's critical assessment of and his constructive response to what he found on his arrival in England in 1549. With respect to the critical assessment, Bucer makes a searching evaluation of Edwardian reform. With respect to the constructive response, he puts forth proposals that are straightforwardly practical in nature in addition to those that have a more utopian character, and taken together all these proposals constitute a plan for the reform of the church which will then promote the restoration of the Kingdom of Christ and thus bring into being the Christian commonwealth that both he and the Edwardian Protestants desired (not to mention becoming a realization of Bucer's own earlier vision for Strasbourg).

Bucer's critique of the progress of the English Reformation and his criticism of its conduct can readily be seen in the work, and this constitutes what is here identified as his critical response. What he writes is sometimes indirect, even subtle; at other times it is forthright and direct. These criticisms are integrally related to the constructive proposals described below, and the aim here is to draw out a few of the points he makes in order to indicate the tenor of his critique. For the most part, he reflects the criticism advanced by the disaffected evangelicals, adding his own voice to the chorus of discontent. On more than one occasion, he points to the failure to provide for a fully endowed and supported preaching ministry, which in his view is the single most important

instrument for the promotion of the Kingdom (Bucer 1955: 26, 29–30, 45–6, 91–2; 1969: 197, 199, 201, 217, 259–60). The establishment of a ministry of the Word requires not only a diligent search for candidates, but also a complete funding of their preparation, and on both counts the regime has fallen short (Bucer 1955: 110–13; 1969: 277–9). He laments the spoliation of the churches, demanding an end to the practice of forced exchanges of property between the church and individuals which invariably results in the impoverishment of the former (Bucer 1955: 131–3; 1969: 296–7), and he warns against the bad example set in Henry VIII's reign following the dissolution of the monasteries (Bucer 1955: 137; 1969: 301).

With the ruling elites in view, he rebukes those who, having been freed from submission to (in his words) a Roman tyrant (not to mention anti-Christ), do not fully submit themselves to the claims of the Gospel. These people only accept it (nominally) so that they might enrich themselves via government seizure and redistribution of ecclesiastical properties (Bucer 1955: 41; 1969: 213). He has strong words for those who do not reverently attend worship though they claim to be among the faithful (Bucer 1955: 79–80; 1969: 249), as well as for those who would obstruct the preaching of the Gospel as seditious (Bucer 1955: 90–93; 1969: 259–61). He criticizes the policy of proceeding in reform by royal proclamation without sufficient effort at preparing the ground by persuasion (Bucer 1955: 101–2, 104–7; 1969: 268–9, 271–3), and notes the failure to clear the bench of bishops of those opposed to reform (Bucer 1955: 119, 120–21, 126; 1969: 285, 286, 291).

However, it is Bucer's constructive response that is the most important aspect of the work. It needs to be stressed that *De Regno Christi* is more than a searching critique of reform that resonates with similar Edwardian criticism. Bucer's vision is much more sweeping, and here the work testifies to thinking on his part that developed over the span of his career in Strasbourg. It is a concise argument (concise for him, at least) for fundamental reform of the church and equally a full expression of a programme for a *respublica Christiana* rooted in that reform. Bucer thus goes beyond criticism and makes substantive proposals for a renewal that will encompass all of society, and at the centre of this is the restoration of the church to its biblical character. As we have seen in our consideration of his critique above, Bucer's concern with the reform of the Christian ministry is the most immediate aspect of *De Regno Christi*, but it is not an end in itself; it is the means to fulfilling his vision of an ethically reordered commonwealth. To achieve the latter, reform must begin with the ministry, for it is the instrument by which the Gospel is spread, and which will promote the renewal that will in the end bring everything into submission to Christ. In confronting the crisis of Edwardian Protestantism, an underlying concern of Bucer (and the Edwardian evangelicals) is at root ethical. He stresses that the Christian faith is *life in addition to* doctrine. The church must be reformed to facilitate this; faith as doctrine and praxis should inform all structures of society. Whether or not everything Bucer proposes regarding the reform of society is feasible can be (and was) debated, though he rejected the charge that what he sought was unrealistic, arguing that he built on the foundation of the immutable Word of God (Bucer 1955: 294–5; 1969: 385–6). What cannot be debated is that what he wrote is consistent with his vision of a Christian commonwealth.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the sections of *De Regno Christi* dealing either directly or indirectly with the Christian ministry are collectively the most concrete and extensive of all the sections of the treatise (apart from what Bucer writes about divorce). His discussion of the reform of the church as an instrument in the service of the Kingdom of Christ and society is found in a number of places in the treatise, ranging from the recovery of the true role of bishops (Bucer 1955: 118–30; 1969: 283–95) to the duties of ministers and elders at the parish level (Bucer 1955: 62–73; 1969: 232–42), to the duties of deacons (Bucer 1955: 87–90, 143–52; 1969: 256–9, 306–15). He deals as well with the reform of church ceremonies under several headings: places of worship (Bucer 1955: 78–80; 1969: 248–50), times of worship (Bucer 1955: 80–84; 1969: 250–53), and fasting (Bucer 1955: 84–6; 1969: 253–5). He writes about the need for evangelists (Bucer 1955: 102–4; 1969: 269–71), the need to reform education in the universities for the purpose of producing able ministers (Bucer 1955: 107–10; 1969: 273–7), and the need to provide adequate funding to support the ministry required to minister to the realm (Bucer 1955: 110–13; 1969: 277–9). He is particularly concerned with the use of ecclesiastical property and its revenue in this regard, as well as for poor relief (Bucer 1955: 130–52; 1969: 295–315).

If we exclude the lengthy section on divorce (Bucer 1955: 152–236; 1969: 315–33 (in the 1969 translation, this is mostly chapter headings), the sections where Bucer deals with the ministry of the church broadly conceived make up over 40 per cent of the remainder of the work (including six of the fourteen laws in Book II). His knowledge of the particulars of England's needs is remarkable, and points us again to his circle of friends (Pauck 1969: 158–61; Hudson 1981: 57–60). Regarding the question of the wider impact of Bucer's thinking on these matters, it is worth noting that what he had to say on these topics did not remain a matter of unpublished consultation, but found expression in a public forum. His Cambridge lectures on Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Bucer 1562), delivered to an audience of individuals who would later take up positions of responsibility in Elizabeth I's church, are an important point of comparison for any effort to determine the extent to which Bucer's thinking in *De Regno Christi* might have received a public exposure in 1550 and exercised influence afterwards (Amos 2002a; 2014). That said, direct evidence of his impact remains to be demonstrated.

Another aspect of Bucer's constructive response in *De Regno Christi* that should be highlighted is his set of proposals regarding the social order and economy. In those instances where he seeks to establish the relationship of church and commonwealth, he is on firm ground, and his discussion of these issues is (and must have been) stimulating. Here one can observe how he applies such concepts as service (*diakonia*), vocation, the common good, and the broader social implications of discipline (all concepts which informed his proposals for the reform of the ministry), all in the elaboration of his vision of a Christian commonwealth. As Bucer believed that the problems of society were at root ethical, his principal concern was to strengthen the Christian ministry to promote the needed change in society as a whole, change that was to be effected in cooperation with the civil authority. However, one has to recognize that there are passages in his proposals for education, training for vocations, and economic activity where his suggestions strike one as wishful thinking, lacking in awareness of what could in practice be

achieved, and thus utopian, following Pauck's (1928) characterization of the treatise as a whole. For instance, he calls for the reform of marketing laws to permit only acceptable people to engage in trade (Bucer 1955: 247–50; 1969: 342–5), and to allow only suitably virtuous and modest men to run public inns (Bucer 1955: 250; 1969: 345). In laws regarding honest games for the youth, he argues that dances be permitted, but only of a chaste sort which do not allow the mixing of boys and girls, and he also sets out proposals for the content of pious singing to occupy the hours of the day when children are not involved in work or study (Bucer 1955: 252–60; 1969: 346–54). The utopian character of these proposals is due in part to their resonance with those found in Plato's *Republic* and his *Laws*, and hence their sometimes totalitarian character; consider Bucer's advocacy of the institution of overseers at all levels of society, charged with keeping watch on all to ensure they do what was expected of them (Bucer 1955: 276; 1969: 368). In this connection, it is worth observing that Bucer explicitly denies that he is seeking to establish a Platonic republic (Bucer 1955: 294–5; 1969: 385). One hesitates to characterize what he envisions in this as a culture of surveillance, but the potential is certainly present. The intention behind these proposals may have been well-intentioned and laudable, but one is led to wonder how tolerable such a regime would have been in practice.

To be fair to Bucer, these were not ideas entirely of his own making, as the affinities between some of these economic and social suggestions and those of a number of English religiously minded social reformers, several of whom are counted among Bucer's friends and correspondents while he was in Cambridge, has been noted above (see also Hall 1994: 156–7). More so than in the case of his proposals for the reform of the ministries of the church, here Bucer was likely dependent upon the suggestions of these friends which he adopted as his own, and he was perhaps less able to sift the wheat from the chaff. Practicality aside, what he proposed was an attempt at a consistent application of his broader vision and, it has been suggested, a full expression of his project for a *respublica Christiana*.

11.5 THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

De Regno Christi was not written as a theological treatise in the same sense as the works discussed elsewhere in the present volume, but rather as a call to implement what Bucer believed to be a desperately needed total reform of church and society and a plan of action to achieve this end. Yet the work did develop several important and interconnected doctrinal themes, central to which is his vision of the Kingdom of Christ, which he defines thus:

The Kingdom of our Savior Jesus Christ is the administration and care of the eternal life of God's elect, by which this very Lord and King of Heaven by his doctrine and discipline, administered by suitable ministers chosen for this very purpose, gathers to himself his elect, those dispersed throughout the world who are his but whom he

nonetheless wills to be subject to the powers of the world. He incorporates them into himself and his Church and so governs them in it that purged more fully day by day from sins, they live well and happily both here and in the time to come.

(Bucer 1955: 54; here, 1969: 225)

In other words, the Kingdom of Christ is the church, which Bucer seeks to restore; restoration is a concept that he repeats frequently in this work, by which he means returning the church to its biblical and apostolic norms. In the passage quoted above, Bucer addresses himself to three major areas of theology which will serve to organize what follows. First, it is clear that the central focus in *De Regno Christi* concerns the church and its character in this world; second, he gives close attention to the mutually supportive relationship of the church and the governing powers of this world; and third, he devotes attention to what will be necessary for the subjects of the kingdom(s) to live well and rightly—the basic outline of the discipline of the Christian life.

The major theological contribution of *De Regno Christi* is ecclesiological. The vision and programme Bucer elaborates in this, his last book, points up the strong ecclesiological character of his thought found throughout his career, but especially in his final years (Hammann 1984; Van't Spijker 1996). The church is identified as the body of Christ of which the faithful become members, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. The church is not a voluntary society, it is the creation of the Holy Spirit; citizenship in it is based on God's election (Bucer 1955: 4; 1969: 177). In this respect, Bucer speaks of the fundamental necessity for its members to be born of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom (Bucer 1955: 52; 1969: 222), and he argues that the Spirit informs every aspect of the life of the believer (Bucer 1955: 23; 1969: 194–5). The place of the Spirit in Bucer's thought is, with the emphasis on the church, a major facet of his theology throughout his career (Stephens 1970).

However, Bucer's doctrine of the church embraces more than the church, strictly speaking. It is true, as we have seen above, that he devotes a substantial portion of this treatise to practical matters relating to the ministry of the church (its structures, the training and responsibilities of ministers, elders, deacons, its ceremonies, charitable work), but his discussion of these matters is with an eye to the larger purpose of the treatise—advising on how to bring about restoration—and is set within a broader social and communal (if not cosmic) context. Christ's Kingdom begins with and first becomes visible in the church, but through the church it will ultimately embrace, shape, and rule the world. Bucer has what can be termed a post-millennial eschatology, and thus an optimistic view of the spread of Christ's Kingdom through preaching and teaching; it is a kingdom that comes by persuasion, not by edicts or conquest.

In expounding upon the Kingdom of Christ, Bucer also talks about the kingdoms of this world, specifically the kingdom of England, and the interrelationship of the two categories of kingdom in the present age, which raises theological questions concerning church and state. He does talk about the state, but it is mostly in reference to its relationship to the church; he develops no theology of the state to a degree that complements his ecclesiology, nor is he concerned about forms of government (though what he implicitly

endorses could be termed a 'monarchical republic', to borrow a phrase from recent discussions of Elizabeth I's reign (Ryrie 2009: 233)). It is, however, clear from *De Regno Christi* that Bucer's view of the state has little of the darker hues one finds in Luther, on the one hand, or in those collectively designated as Anabaptists, on the other. In several respects, the state has many of the same functions with reference to its subjects/citizens as does the institutional church to its members, and it was the calling of both church *and* state to effect the reforms for which he called.

In reference to the role of the state in caring for religion, Bucer, like Calvin and unlike Luther, developed a theology of the Christian magistrate. The magistrate has a high calling in respect of his duty towards religion, and he must pursue the restoration of true religion with all he has, even if it meant exile or death (Bucer 1955: 7–8; 1969: 180). Bucer regarded the magistrate as a shepherd, and many of the exhortations directed towards Edward VI urged him to take up this role by means of actively promoting the restoration of a truly biblical form of the church. In some respects, this would have resonated with the Tudor concept of the royal supremacy, though one suspects Bucer's emphasis on the mutual submission of the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of Christ (Bucer 1955: 14; 1969: 186–7) would have cut across the grain. However, Bucer does hold up Constantine and his 'pious successors' as a model for Edward to follow (Bucer 1955: 36–7; 1969: 207–9), which would fit well with the argument advanced in the 1530s that the realm of England was an empire. Indeed, it has been argued that Bucer regarded Constantine's reign as the golden age to which Christendom should return (Dandeleit 2007).

While Bucer argues that the church and the state are distinct, he also argues that they must act in concert, with the mutual submission noted above, a joint activity that is fundamental for the full manifestation of Christ's kingdom in this world. The aim of this concerted action was to promote the rule of Christ in such a way that church and society become two ways of speaking of the same reality. The *corpus Christi*, the body of Christ as the body of believers, becomes the *corpus Christianum*, the Christian society, where the ecclesiastical and spiritual on the one hand and the secular and political on the other are combined into one under the rule of Christ. Bucer does not expect that everyone within a given realm (such as England) will be intentional Christians. He does recognize that there will continue to be a few who reject the Gospel, and he maintains they should receive a measure of toleration unless their impiety becomes manifest in open rebellion (Bucer 1955: 18, 50; 1969: 190, 221). However, he proceeds on the assumption that the Kingdom of Christ will have authority over all members of society.

In addition to promoting the spread of the Kingdom of Christ, it is the role of the ministers and the magistrates to cultivate and encourage among believers their fundamental vocation, which is to serve others. The doctrine of the Christian life, the life of the Kingdom, is thus another major area of theology that is developed in *De Regno Christi*. The Christian life is a life of mutual service in which the principle of brotherly love is to be supreme. In words taken from the title of one of Bucer's earliest works (Bucer 1523), believers do not live for themselves, but for others (Bucer 1955: 10–11; 1969: 182–3)—a principle that is repeated throughout *De Regno Christi*. Bucer advances a view of the Christian life as corporate, not individualistic (Bucer 1955: 10–11; 1969: 182–3).

Each person is to have a regard for others, and to submit to the needs of others, seeking their well-being (Bucer 1955: 21, 22, 25; 1969: 193, 194, 196). He strongly affirms the cardinal Protestant doctrine of justification by faith, but equally he argues that it should result in service to others as faith works through love (Bucer 1955: 26–7; 1969: 198). In this respect, we see again his emphasis on the role of the Spirit, for the gift of the Spirit precedes all, and the works that Bucer argues should be manifest in the lives of believers must be in and through the activity of the Spirit. Works apart from the Spirit are of no use; the Spirit is essential, and likewise works following from the gift of the Spirit are essential (Bucer 1955: 27; 1969: 199).

What was also essential to the Christian life was the practice of discipline. In *De Regno Christi*, Bucer maintained that discipline was the third function of the ministry, following the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Discipline included, first, attention to each believer's life and manners; here his emphasis on discipline was connected to the obligation of everyone (not just ministers and elders, though these individuals retained primary responsibility) to demonstrate a care for others, to watch out for others, to aid them when they stumble or fall (Bucer 1955: 70–73; 1969: 240–42). Discipline also included what Bucer terms penance, administered by ministers and elders towards those who have fallen into serious sin, and which is exercised through prayer and private confession; in serious instances, excommunication is to be used against the stubbornly rebellious, though rarely and with the aim of restoration to full communion (Bucer 1955: 73–8; 1969: 242–7). Discipline is an area of Christian teaching to which Bucer is recognized as having made a major contribution (Burnett 1994), and he makes very clear his firm conviction that it is essential to achieving all for which he calls in this book (Bucer 1955: 78; 1969: 247).

11.6 CONCLUSION

De Regno Christi is a multi-faceted and profound work, the product of an experienced and distinguished reformer at the end of his career. It was not produced as a theoretical exercise, composed in the study of an academic theologian detached from the turbulence of the world around him, but was written in the hurly-burly of an unfolding Reformation. Bucer had not come to England to take up the status of 'Reformer emeritus', and he believed himself still very much on the front line of the struggle for Reformation in Europe in his new place of service. In light of this, we can see how Bucer sought to serve the ends of his hosts in writing *De Regno Christi* and applying the experience of years in the reform of an imperial city to a social and political setting quite unlike that to which he was accustomed, but with an eye to all of Europe.

Yet the irony is that the work was not published until 1557, six years after Bucer's death, four years after Edward VI's death, and two years after Cranmer's martyrdom. It was not published in England, but in Basel (in 1557, and again in 1577); full translations were produced, but into French (1558) and German (1563, 1568). What was translated into English

were only portions on the giving of alms (1557), some parts of his discussion of bishops (1641), and John Milton's production of what Bucer had to say on divorce (1644). Hence, with respect to its immediate impact, *De Regno Christi* was of limited influence, certainly upon the initial audience. This takes nothing away from its significance, however. There was nothing else quite like it from the era of the Reformation. It was the comprehensive statement of everything for which Bucer strove in reform of church and society throughout his years of leadership in Strasbourg, and a vision of an all-embracing rule of Christ which extends into every area of life.

SUGGESTED READING

Burnett (1994); Gäumann (2001); Greschat (2004); Hammann (1984); Van't Spijker (1996).

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CHAPTER 12

JOHN CALVIN'S *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION*

PAUL HELM

IN this chapter I shall treat the formation of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as a window into his career as a Reformer and theologian. There is good reason for doing this. Although Calvin's literary output was considerable, very few of his books required (or were given) a second or subsequent edition. One exception is his *Commentary on Romans* composed while in Strasbourg, the first edition of which was published in 1539 during his exile in that city, the fruits of the teaching Calvin gave while he was exiled there 1538 to 1541. A second edition was published in 1551 and another in 1556.

By contrast, the literary history of the *Institutes* is extraordinary. It began life as a catechetical manual, published in 1536 when Calvin was 27. Although this first edition is routinely described as 'small', the English translation covers over 300 pages. Thereafter the book underwent a process of revision impelled by the warm reception it had received among Protestants, and by Calvin's concern to present the ever-accumulating material in the best order. During the period 1541–59 it more than doubled in size, being enlarged particularly in 1550. In 1559 it was augmented further, and was divided into four books. In Calvin's own estimate it became a 'new book'. In this entire process Calvin rarely retracted an earlier position, or set earlier material aside.

12.1 THE VIEW FROM 1541

The plan in what follows is to take the 1541 second edition (the first French translation of the *Institutes*) as a pivot in the development of this series of editions. We shall look at it and at its predecessor, and briefly note those editions which came between it and 1559.

The advantage of this approach to the *Institutes* is that it weakens the tendency to think of the 1559 edition as the result of a process of historical inevitability. The earlier editions were not simply the drafts of the last edition, they were productions in their own right, substantially different.

How did Calvin himself become a ‘Calvinist’? The plotting of Calvin’s own personal trajectory after that fateful stay-over in Geneva in 1536 helps us to put that question more precisely, and to frame answers to it. When B. B. Warfield wrote his masterly review of the literary history of the *Institutes* (Warfield 1930), his eye was on the 1559 edition throughout. The earlier editions, even 1541, are largely passed over. I shall refer to this edition as ‘1541’ throughout, using the English translation of the 1541 edition by Robert White (Calvin 2014). The 1541 edition was followed by one of 1543, reprinted in 1545, also translated into French. A fourth Latin edition appeared in 1550, translated into French, and reprinted several times, and finally in 1559 the work achieved its final form.

Approaching the *Institutes* in this way provides a way of estimating Calvin’s development from that of a retiring student to a theologian of the first stature and a Reformer with an international reach. It offers a less certain but still interesting lens through which to judge his own view of himself and his tasks.

In the Latin edition of 1539, The *Institutes* largely lost its catechetical character and became a set of *loci* whose character and order was largely determined by Paul’s Epistle to the Romans—a ‘Christian philosophy’, as Calvin called it in his Outline of the 1541 edition (Calvin 2009: xv). Here he reveals his plan to write biblical commentaries. The reading of the commentaries will be profitable if we first know the sum of Christian doctrine. The 1541 edition is by no means ‘Calvin lite’. In the most recent English translation, the book weighs several pounds and runs to nearly 900 pages. (But it never rains but it pours. Who would have thought that the Christian public, after waiting since Thomas Norton’s first English translation in 1561 of the 1559 edition, would have to wait until the twenty-first century for the first translation of the 1541 edition, and then be favoured with *two* English versions of that edition within five years? In 2009, as part of marking the 500th anniversary of Calvin’s birth, a translation by Elsie Ann McKee, the Professor of Reformation Studies and the History of Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary, appeared.)

Calvin views it as a ‘key and opening to Holy Scripture’ (Calvin 2009: xvi):

In the future, therefore, if the Lord gives me the means and opportunity to write commentaries, I will be as brief as possible. There will be no need for lengthy digressions [that is, in the commentaries], since I have here provided a detailed explanation of almost all the articles which concern the Christian faith.

(Calvin 2009: xvi)

By now he was beginning to see himself as an influential teacher of the Gospel, deliberately preparing for the emerging educated Protestant laity in France. He became *de facto* a leader in exile to the Huguenots, in a city that readily welcomed refugee French Protestants in numbers, though not without local frictions. Quarrels with the city authorities over the independence of the church had led to the exile of both Calvin and

Farel. It proved to be a productive time. In Strasbourg, as a teacher and pastor of a church of French exiles, and colleague of Martin Bucer, he learned much about the organizational side of the work of reformation. Back in Geneva, he was never to return to France. Yet he was a man whose distinctive voice and style would quickly reach to that country, and to the other Protestant city states of Europe, and then to England and Scotland, to the Low Countries, and to the Western world more generally.

As a theologian with growing international connections producing biblical commentaries in a new, brief style that were intended to be read outside as well as within the walls of Geneva, Calvin may have been persuaded of the virtue of brevity by Simon Grynaeus, a professor at Basel. He included a letter to Grynaeus in the Romans commentary, mentioning their agreement on the need for brevity. The style of his biblical commentaries is in sharp contrast to the elaborateness of Calvin's first commentary, that on Seneca's *De Clementia* (1532), written when he had ambitions of becoming a Renaissance scholar (Calvin 1532).

In Calvin's judgement, if these were to be accessible, then the format of contemporary commentaries, with lengthy doctrinal excursions which routinely interrupted the exposition of the text, had to be dropped. For example, in his *Commentary on 2 Kings* (1566) Calvin's contemporary and friend Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) inserted into his comments on 2 Kings 4 a *scholium* on the doctrine of the Resurrection running (in English translation) to more than 80 pages.

But where were the doctrinal excursions to be found, if not in the commentaries? Answer: the *Institutes* was hereafter to be the theological framework to his commentaries. The readers of the commentaries met with frequent references by Calvin to 'my *Institutes*'. They were directed to have open the *Institutes* on their desks. But was not the 1539/1541 edition and its successors such a key? Yes, but Calvin was not altogether satisfied with it until that of 1559.

Let us reflect briefly on the layout and content of the 1541 *Institutes*. The chapters are by and large distinct *loci*, though there is now and again a sign of the interweaving of themes that is so characteristic of the 1559 edition. Calvin had abandoned the 'Lutheran' organization of the material of 1536, of first the law, and then the grace of God in the good news of Jesus Christ, which takes the form of an exposition of the Apostles' Creed and then of the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments, providing his reader with a critique of the 'Five False Sacraments' of the Church of Rome, and with ecclesiastical and political matters in the final chapter. Nevertheless the *loci* of the 1541 edition are greater in number, distinct but not separate. The idea for such ordering may have also been influenced by Philip Melancthon's *Loci Communes*, first published in 1521.

In the 1541 *Institutes*, the overarching theme of 'true wisdom', and topics that have become familiar to readers of the 1559 edition, such as the bondage and liberation of the will, providence and predestination, justification and sanctification, the life of faith, Christian liberty—the well-known Calvinian emphases—are prominent. His style is clear, confident, and unflinchingly dogmatic, in both senses. Only rarely do we read of a false view in which there is 'some truth', or that some figure in the past was 'half right' in what he wrote. In all this Calvin's ultimate interest is more in the cultivation of true religion than in theology, but doctrine matters a great deal in the cultivation of 'true religion'.

Many of Calvin's distinct doctrinal touches, familiar to the reader of the 1559 edition, can be read here. The theme of religion consisting in the knowledge of triune God and of ourselves makes its appearance at the start and then later on, though it is not yet a continuous theme of the work, as it became later. These include the view that repentance is born of faith (Calvin 2009: 295): Christ as the bestower of two distinct yet inseparable gifts, reconciliation and sanctification (p. 351); and Christ as the mirror of election (p. 487). Many passages were incorporated verbatim into later editions. But other themes, such as the union of the children of God with Christ, lie relatively undeveloped. What became the largest part of the 1559 *Institutes*, Part IV, his ecclesiology, is represented by two chapters, 'The Power of the Church' and 'Civil Government'. A full account of the institutions of church and state, and his repeated warnings against speculation, have to await the augmentation of 1550 and finally that of 1559 (Calvin 1975).

Robert White says in one of his helpful footnotes in his translation of the 1541 *Institutes* that Calvin's relations with scholasticism were ambivalent (Calvin 2014: 47). Yet if one attends to the treatment of the patristic and medieval figures that Calvin cites, which come over prominently in this edition, the book reads as a late medieval document in which Calvin was interrogating the tradition. Augustine, Lombard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hilary of Poitiers, Chrysostom, and so on, all take their place in the witness stand. Especially Augustine, of course, though less copiously so than later on. Here, in effect, is a series of medieval *disputationes*, in matter if not in the late medieval scholastic style that Calvin was not practised in, in the way that some of his contemporary Reformed theologians were, for example the Italians Peter Martyr and Guillaume Zanchi (1516–90).

There is little or nothing yet of the polemic with living opponents that Calvin's theology led to, and which is such a feature of the last edition, as we shall see. Not quite nothing at all, if Robert White is correct when he thinks that there are places in the book some signs of Calvin's opposition to Michael Servetus (Calvin 2014: 212 n. 16). However, there is plenty of argument against the errors in doctrine and practice of the unreformed church, and the contemporary *Sorbonnistes* particularly suffer at his hands, as do the various more radical groups known as 'Anabaptists' and 'Libertines' that pestered the city-states such as Strasbourg and Geneva, citadels of the Reformation. Calvin himself held that such polemics were essential for a full *apologia* for the Reformation. Such an *apologia* needed clarity, to say what the movement of Reform was for, and what it was against. The faithful theologian must say what God is and does, and also what he is not and does not do. But in 1541 there was no combat yet with Pighius or Osiander or with the later anti-Trinitarians.

12.2 THE 1559 *INSTITUTES*

Calvin's achieving of the much-sought order in his magnum opus was signalled in its title, in which the *Institutes* were 'newly presented in four books: and divided into

chapters according to a most suitable method: also augmented by such additions that it ought properly to be regarded as a new book'. So what was Calvin still dissatisfied with about the organization of the previous editions, including that of 1550 which was already a 'massive augmentation' of those that came earlier (Muller 2000a: 132)?

In 'John Calvin to the Reader' Calvin tells us of the unexpected success of the first edition, and of the way in which in the second edition he added and rearranged material; but nevertheless, even with these changes he says: 'Although I did not regret the labor spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth. Now I trust that I have provided something that all of you will approve' (Calvin 2008). Living through serious illness, 'a bout of quartan fever', malaria, he was fearful that his life was coming to an end, but 'the more the disease pressed upon me the less I spared myself, until I could leave a book behind me that might in some measure repay the generous invitation of godly men'. (4)

The opening sentences of the *Institutes*, sentences which appeared at the head of every edition of that great work, are: 'Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists in two parts; the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern'. First, note the emphasis on *wisdom*. The Christian religion offers a method of possessing true and sound wisdom. Here Calvin taps into one medieval emphasis, that the Christian religion has to do with the imparting of wisdom, *sapientia*, and he implicitly rejects another medieval emphasis, that theology has to do with theoretical understanding and certainty, *scientia*. Theology does not provide us with more knowledge in the form of more explanations, but with wisdom. It has to do with the knowledge of God, certainly, but with that sort of knowledge that enables us to enjoy the favor and presence of God, and to bring us to our everlasting home. It is an exaggeration to say that for Calvin the knowledge of God is mere know-how, but there is nevertheless more than a germ of truth in this.

Calvin rarely uses the word 'theology', and scarcely ever of his own work. When he does use it, it is often as a term of contempt. For him, the 'theologians' are the speculative thinkers, such the *Sorbonnistes* of his own day who attempt to distract attention from and to disrupt the progress of the Reformation in France by their own 'blasphemous inventions'. Calvin's word was not *theologia* (a word which, after all, was the invention of Aristotle) but *religio* (like Huldrych Zwingli, 1494–1531 [Zwingli 1525]), which bespeaks the binding of the self to God.

And then there is the emphasis, in these sentences, of where this wisdom is to be found: in the knowledge of God and of ourselves. Where did Calvin get this emphasis on wisdom from? There was no doubt an allusion to the Delphic Oracle, 'Know Thyself'. But there is a possible source closer to home, in Zwingli's *Commentary*. The idea that true wisdom lies in the knowledge of God is, of course, in Scripture, in its references to the wisdom of God, from its warnings against the wisdom of this world, from the 'wisdom literature', especially from the Psalms. Perhaps this is the correct suggestion. But there are other possibilities, too, not incompatible with this. Suppose we ask, where does that emphasis on the twofold knowledge, of God and of ourselves, in this particular

formulation, emerge from? I suggest that it was one of the very many things that Calvin learned from St. Augustine. The supreme importance for Augustine of this twofold knowledge, of God and of ourselves, is found vividly in the *Confessions*. In his wonderful discussion of memory in Book X he says, addressing the Lord, ‘to hear you speaking about oneself is to know oneself’ (Augustine 1991: X.iii.3 [180]). The fundamental point is stated with deliberate plainness, and rather more formally, in his *Soliloquies*: ‘I desire to know God and the soul. Nothing more? Nothing at all’ (Augustine 1994: II. 1.1).

Although Calvin may get the theme from Augustine, he gives this relation between the knowledge of God and of ourselves his own distinctive twist. For him, it is a reciprocal relationship. In any case, he did not *quite* say what Augustine said. He omitted Augustine’s ‘nothing more’, and there is much evidence in the *Institutes* and elsewhere that there were other things that Calvin desired to know, and other sources of wisdom than the self in its relation to God. He’s very careful to state, in the opening sentence of the *Institutes*, that ‘*nearly* all the wisdom we possess’ consists in the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

What does Calvin mean by this new and orderly arrangement of the work? The earlier editions were certainly orderly, each topic building on and presupposing the earlier in a conventional topical order largely following Paul on Romans. The volume of topics had been enlarged even further by 1550, so that by now it had become something like twice or three times the size, a volume of fifty-five chapters collected into four books. The topics still largely follow Paul, yet the sequence of the four books retains traces of the Apostles’ Creed—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and then the Holy Catholic Church:

Book First, *Of the knowledge of God the Creator*

Book Second, *Of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, in Christ, as first manifested to the father, under the law, and thereafter to us under the gospel*

Book Third, *The mode of obtaining the grace of Christ. The benefits it confers, and the effects resulting from it*

Book Fourth, *Of the Holy Catholic Church*

What did this growth and the grouping of the chapters into these books imply? What new order did it have that the chapters of the earlier editions were lacking?

Two features are strikingly apparent. One is the prominence of the opening theme of the interlinking of the knowledge of God and of ourselves, as we have already seen. The other notable feature is the division into four Books. The title of Book I, delivers an account of one of the parties, God, both transcendent and revealed in nature and in his Trinitarian splendor in Holy Scripture. In Book II, the Christocentric book, the way in which the grace of God is acquired by fallen men and women is made plain. In Book III, the benefits and effects of grace as applied by the work of the Spirit of Christ from conversion to consummation are recounted. Book IV, the longest book, appears at first glance to be a separate treatise on the church, taking in changes made in 1545 to his 1541 material on the sacraments in chapters 10–13 of 1541, as well as parts of chapter 14, and

then the two explicitly 'churchly' chapters, 15 and 16. The church is not a mere human institution, but the church of Christ, 'the mother of all the godly'.

Clearly, one of the things that Calvin hoped to achieve was to show his readers that the opening motif of the work, the knowledge of God and of ourselves, ought not to be forgotten. It is the main theme of the work. After its opening statement it recurs, or is closely implied by, not only the titles of the first three books, but as a theme to which Calvin returns and embellishes in the text. So (for example) at the start of Book II he reminds the reader

It was not without reason that the ancient proverb so strongly recommended to man the knowledge of himself. For if it is deemed disgraceful to be ignorant of things pertaining to the business of life, much more disgraceful is self-ignorance, in consequence of which we miserably deceive ourselves in matters of the highest moment, and so walk blindfold. (Calvin 1975: II.1.1)

At the start of Book III he quotes Augustine with approval, that 'the surest way to avoid all errors is to know him who is both God and man. It is to God we tend, and it is by man we go, and both of these are found only in Christ' (Calvin 1975: III.1.1). And Book IV 'But as our ignorance and sloth (I may add, the vanity of our mind) stand in need of eternal helps, by which faith may be begotten in us, and may increase and make progress until its consummation, God, in accommodation to our infirmity, has added such helps, and secured the effectual preaching of the gospel, by depositing this treasure with the church' (Calvin 1975: IV.1.1).

This emphasis on the knowledge of God is reinforced in two further ways. Throughout the work Calvin is concerned to show the impact that the truth should have, and does this by employing the first person plural as his favored mode of exposition. By this he identifies himself with his readers, as one who experiences with all the people of God the ups and downs of the Christian life. He is not a magisterial figure hectoring his readers, but without qualification he is a mere Christian, one of his readers, alongside them. This very naturally raises the largely unanswerable question of how much such language was autobiographical. As is well-known, Calvin was extremely reticent about personal matters. The reference in the opening letter to the reader to his recent ill-health is pretty much the last avowed personal reference in the entire work. Yet the way in which the truth impacts upon 'us' is so heartfelt, that one cannot but wonder at how much is obliquely autobiographical.

There is another kind of order, less prominent than the organization into Books and Chapters, but evidently of importance to Calvin. From the 1541 edition onwards, Calvin introduces definitions of key terms, which gradually grow in number. We may take Book III as a sample. The most elaborate treatment of a definition in the *Institutes* concerns faith in III. 2 'Faith: The Definition of It. Its Peculiar Properties.' This becomes pivotal for the elaborate discussion of the topic (Calvin 1975: III.2.14-29). The treatment of repentance (III.3.5) which Calvin 'lays down', follows a similar pattern. He mentions the unpardonable sin. But what exactly is such a sin? Calvin answers by offering a definition.

'Definition' appears in the title of III.11.1, the chapter on justification. At III.19.15 he offers a definition of conscience. In his exposition of the Lord's Prayer (III.20.42) he refers to his definition of 'this Kingdom' as the place where 'God reigns when men, in denial of themselves and contempt of the world and this earthly life, devote themselves to righteousness and aspire to heaven.' By defining these realities, Calvin reminds the reader of the importance of his view that right doctrine is necessary for the life of faith.

A further way in which he protects the truly religious impact of the work is by his cautions against speculation. As the matter of the *Institutes* in its latest and last edition in places becomes more intricate, so Calvin sees the need to emphasize further his warnings against speculation made in earlier editions, throughout the work. To do this he appropriates the distinction (found in Thomas Aquinas and many another medieval writer) between God *in se* and God *quoad nos*. God as he is in himself, and God as he is toward us.

For, first of all, the pious mind does not devise for itself any kind of God, but looks alone, to the one true God; nor does it feign for him any character it please, but is contented to have him in the character in which he manifests himself, always guarding with the utmost diligence against transgressing his will, and wandering, with daring presumption, from the right path. (Calvin 1975: I.2.2)

It is tempting to speculate about God as he is in himself. Calvin judged that this was the matter with much late medieval theology, and by his contemporaries the *Sorbonnistes*. Calvin was aware of the difference between God and the concept of God. God is the living God to be worshipped and served. The concept of God can all too easily become an intellectual plaything. He was aware of the religious danger of playing such conceptual games.

Another way is to change the mood of his work from mere doctrinal exposition to that of personal responsibility for making use of what is read. An example of this is found in his mercilessly critical remarks on Andreas Osiander on justification and union with Christ. If the reader follows Calvin's argument in Book III chapter 11 he may think that he has demolished the Lutheran Andreas Osiander, (1498-1552), and is entitled to applaud himself and to be applauded as the victor. But as he moves to chapter 12 the reader is stopped short by the heading: 'The necessity of Contemplating the Judgment-Seat of God, in Order to be Seriously Convinced of the doctrine of Gratuitous Justification.'

The question must be: How shall we answer the heavenly Judge when he calls us to account? Let us contemplate the Judge, not as our own unaided intellect conceives him, but as he is portrayed to us in Scripture (see especially the book of Job), with a brightness which obscures the stars, a strength which melts the mountains, an anger which shakes the earth, a wisdom which takes the wise in their own craftiness, a purity before which all things become impure, a righteousness... which once kindled burns to the lowest hell... [I]f our life is brought to the standard of the written law we are lethargic indeed if we are not filled with dread at the many maledictions which God has employed for the purpose of arousing us.... (Calvin 1975: I.12.1)

It is one thing to win an argument about the nature of justification. It is another thing entirely to enjoy the benefits of justification when facing the judgment of God.

Calvin further augmented the doctrinal content of the 1541 edition in subsequent editions, particularly that of 1550. The 1559 edition did contain these straight augmentations. But there were various other forces at work.

For example there was in Calvin's mind a desire to correct and rebut those who had found things to dispute in the 1541 edition, theologians and thinkers such as Michael Servetus, for his anti-Trinitarian and Arian views, and the Roman Catholic Louvain theologian Albertus Pighius, who had provided an elaborate rebuttal of Calvin's views on predestination and the bondage of the will to sin, in his *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*, (Pighius 1542). Calvin had replied in his *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, (Calvin 1543) and *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, (Calvin 1961). Some of this material was used in the augmentation that became II.2 in 1559: 'Man now Deprived of Freedom of Will, and Miserably enslaved'.

There were his correspondents, too, not only Michael Servetus, with whom Calvin had exchanged letters under the *nom de plume* of Charles d'Espeville during the 1540's and who had returned Calvin's gift of a copy of the *Institutes* with margins filled with his dissenting views scribbled in them. Calvin had responded in his *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errors Michaelis Serveti Hispani* (1554).

But he had tangles with less prominent individuals. For example he had an exchange of letters beginning in 1549 with Laelius Socinus, the uncle of the now better-known Faustus Socinus, an Italian refugee who live for a while in Zurich and then moved to Poland. Questions about the resurrection, mixed marriages, and baptism. The correspondence (which ended in 1552) included a discussion of merit, and moved in a more speculative direction, Calvin told him. Out of the exchanges Calvin wrote *Responsio ad aliquot Laelii Socini senensis quaestiones* (1555), and the discussion of Christ's merit in the *Institutes* 1559 (III.17) is influenced by their exchanges (Lazzaro 1965).

The Italian congregation in Geneva was clearly a source of headaches for Calvin in connection with the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Valentine Gentile, and Georges Blandrata, for example, raised problems. Their objections to what Calvin had written tended in the direction of unitarianism, certainly to a loosening of God's triunity. Such disquieting rumblings motivated Calvin to develop his doctrine of the Trinity in the 1559 *Institutes*. For example, in I.13.2 he defended the threeness of the Trinity against the charge of tri-theism, made by Servetus explicitly in his *De Trinitatis erroribus* (1531) and subsequently. Calvin responded to Servetus in I.13.22 and III.14.7, as well as to the modified Trinitarianism of Gentile and of Blandrata. Calvin dealt with the consequences of their views for the unity of the person of Christ in II.14.5–8.

Another example of a polemical position that Calvin saw the need to quash was that of Osiander. In *Inst.* II.12.4 Calvin rejected what he regarded as Osiander's speculation that Christ would have become incarnate even if Adam had not fallen. And in III.11.5–12. As we have already noted, he tackled at length Osiander's view that in justification we are essentially in union with God. As an example of a Roman Catholic theologian, Calvin responded at length to Albertus Pighius. All these and more led him to expand the

Institutes by refining the doctrinal and polemical side of the work, devoting separate chapters to this. For example, in Book III, Chapters 4, 5, 15, 16, and 23 are heavily polemical, as are 18 and 19 of Book IV.

Further, while we have mentioned Calvin's conception of the *Institutes* as a handbook to obviate the need for elaborate doctrinal excursions in his commentaries, there were ways in which his commentaries were selectively fed into the developing 1559 *Institutes*, though this influence is somewhat difficult to trace. By the 1543 third edition he had published only a commentary on Jude (1542). But during the period between 1543 and 1550, there followed commentaries on I and II Peter (1545), I and II Corinthians (1546–7), on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (1548), on Hebrews (1549), and on I and II Timothy, Titus, and James (1550). Between 1550 and 1559 he published on Isaiah (1551 and 1559) the Canonical Epistles (1551), Acts (1552–4, John (1553), Genesis (1554) the Synoptic Gospels (1555), the Psalms (1557), Hosea (1557), and the Minor Prophets (1559), providing matter that he could use to further strengthen the exegetical foundations of his *Institutes*. Besides commentaries, his sermons should also be added (Muller 2000a).

A last element in Calvin's enlargement of and reordering of the material of the *Institutes* was the physical movement of material from one part of the 1551 *Institutes* to a new location in the 1559.

In 1541 Chapter 8, 'The Providence and Predestination of God', more or less rounded off the soteriological chapters, and also included pretty much all that Calvin offered by way of an eschatology apart from his discussion of the resurrection of the body, which was a section of the last chapter, 'The Christian Life'. In the 1559 edition he separates his treatment of providence from that of predestination. In the last half-century or so scholars have imputed varying theological reasons for this separation, some not very plausible.

To Calvin, as the 1541 *Institutes* shows, predestination was a species of divine providence, *pars providentiae*. If they belong together in this way, why did Calvin think that their separation was an improvement in their 'ordering'? The separation was effected by putting predestination into the newly created Book III, while providence was retained in its early position, in what became Book I, 'Of The Knowledge of God the Creator'.

This may give the impression that Calvin came to recognize providence as a part of 'natural theology' or of general revelation. But this would be misleading. For Calvin, providence was divinely revealed in scripture, and the examples he uses of the workings of providence are drawn from the history of redemption. Various other suggestions have been offered. For example, that Calvin is said to show that predestination is part of divine grace, and so is alleged to have a different theological method from that of Theodore Beza and the early Puritan theologian William Perkins, who (it is said) derive their entire theology by way of deduction from the divine decrees (Torrance 1985: 62 n.1). A similar suggestion is made by M. Charles Bell (Bell 1985: 26).

I suggest that Calvin separated them because of a problem that arose after 1541. As we noted earlier, Calvin spent considerable time in responding to Albertus Pighius. The suggestion is that in the course of this Calvin came to think that the confusion over 'free will' that Pighius exploited would have less warrant if a clear separation was made

between 'two issues'. One issue is the metaphysical question about the nature of human choice as such. The second is the nature of human choice as affected by the Fall and bondage to sin. Calvin minimized the possibility of such confusion by physically separating the discussions of human choice as such by keeping it a part of providence in Book I. He placed discussion of the human choice fallen (and renewed) in his Book III, where it might be thought properly to belong (Helm 2007).

Other instances of the relocation of material are as follows. The treatment of the Old and New Testaments is placed prior to those on faith, repentance, and justification at the commencement of Book III. While predestination remained where it was, the chapters on faith and the creed, the two Testaments, human traditions, predestination including the bondage of the will, and prayer were all moved into Book III (Muller 2000a: 135–6). There is an occasional new chapter, including that on the Last Resurrection, drawing material from elsewhere (III.25).

12.2.1 Book IV

The largest augmentation of the text of what would become the 1559 *Institutes* is the creation of Book IV, which came to be longest of the four books, out of several chapters of 1541, four on the sacraments, Chapter 15, 'The Power of the Church,' and Chapter 16, 'Civil Government'. The creation of this Book, changing the literary balance of the entire work, is evidence of Calvin's increasing concern to develop his account of the Reformed church as an institution against the deformed ecclesiology of Rome: its simplicity of government and ministerial character, and the doctrine of the Word and the two sacraments, reflected developments in Geneva and other cities, and the growth of the Reformed constituency in France. But these Reformed congregations were under political pressure, hence the need to continue provide for them the elements of a political theory, the topic that brings Book IV to a conclusion.

One significant remaining link between Book III and this material on the church in Book IV is Christian liberty. In 1541, a separate chapter on 'Christian Freedom' (Chapter 12) prefaces the two chapters that provide the ecclesiological backbone of Book I. In 1559 Christian liberty is discussed in two places. The first is in Chapter 19 of Book III, appropriately entitled 'Of Christian Liberty', where Calvin is dealing with soteriology, including the consequences of justification by faith alone. Besides the obligation to form his character by the law of God, and to possess the virtues the Word of God enjoins, the Christian has freedom to engage in (or to refrain from) activity which the law of God neither requires nor forbids. This is the area of *adiaphora*, matters indifferent.

The second treatment of freedom is in Chapter 10 of Book IV, 'On the Power of Making Laws', dealing principally with the church, and what Calvin viewed as the root error of Roman Catholic Church, the imposition on the Christian of laws of its own making. He also dealt with civil society, which makes law for human good by *inter alia* giving privileged support for the true religion. Even though the state is a divinely

ordained order, its laws are not divine laws, as are those which constitute the church, and which regulate its life. Nonetheless the laws which it does enact, provided that they do not flout the law of God, are to be ‘internalized’ by the Christian, who is enjoined by scripture to keep the law as a matter of conscience. This is a rather surprising result. The church is not free to make new laws which are obligatory for the Christian, but the state is. The law of God neither commands nor forbids the imposition of a 30 mph speed limit. But the limit, once imposed, must be conscientiously obeyed nonetheless.

Having the Anabaptists in mind, no doubt, and also what he regarded as the objectionable practices of the ‘Nicodemites’—Reformed Christians living under oppression in France who masked their allegiance by continuing to attend the Mass—Calvin is quite exercised by this point of obeying the powers that be, unless it were sinful to do so. The Christian should be principled in his obedience to a law that is not a divine law, when it is enacted by an institution ordained by God. He cites Paul on this (Rom. 13:5): one must respect the state law for conscience’s sake, though it is purely human, and may carry with it all sorts of inconvenience.

So concerned is Calvin to insist on this point that he reproduces almost verbatim the treatment of freedom as one of the consequences of free justification in Book III, 19.16, in his discussion of freedom in his treatment of the church and society in Book IV, 10.4. The sections were carried over from the 1550 edition. It is not likely that this repetition was a slip. Perhaps Calvin thought that some of his readers would be inclined to skip parts of Book III, moving to the more political themes of Book IV. Whatever the reason, the duplication has the effect of underlining the place of liberty in the Christian life.

It is not perhaps surprising that Calvin should enter with such gusto into the laws of the church and state. He was eminently fitted to do so. He was trained in the law and for a time destined by his father for a career in it. Besides this, he spent a good deal of his time in the 1540s, along with his French colleagues Theodore Beza and Germain Colladon, who also had legal training, in reforming the law of Geneva respecting family life (Witte and Kingdon 2005). So Calvin had plenty of opportunity to mull over laws which overlapped the concerns of both state and church. The size of Book IV of the 1559 *Institutes* should be no surprise, then. In many ways it was the climax of the entire work, and maybe the capstone of the work’s ‘order’. Perhaps John Calvin thought so too.

The nature of civic and ecclesiastical freedom is a main theme of Calvin’s thinking in Book IV, but not the only one. Another is the ministerial rather than *ex opere operato* character of the church, and a further one is the nature of a sacrament. The 1559 treatment benefited from the prolonged (and rather repetitive) debates with the Lutheran Jerome Westphal in the 1550s on the nature of Christ’s presence at the Supper (two of the three writings against Westphal are translated in Calvin 1983).

For Calvin, the question of Christ’s presence was not a matter of developing a formula, but a matter of wonder and awe.

For whenever this subject is considered, after I have done my utmost, I feel that I have spoken far beneath its dignity. And though the mind is more powerful in thought than the tongue in expression, it too is overcome and overwhelmed by the

magnitude of the subject. All then that remains is to break forth in admiration of the mystery—which it is plain that the mind is inadequate to comprehend, or the tongue to express. (Calvin 1975: IV.17.7)

The last chapter of Book IV concerns Calvin's concern with waging war and with tyranny and how it is to be met—not by inducing a popular uprising, but by the force of aristocratic leadership.

12.2.2 Gain and Loss

If, looking back from 1559, one compares the last edition of the *Institutes* with earlier editions, there is both gain and loss. In the earlier editions, the doctrine is expounded in a fairly timeless fashion. The last edition breaks with this style, in accordance with Calvin's plan, as we have seen. As a consequence the *Institutes* in its final form is, paradoxically, the most 'occasional' of the various editions, as Calvin deals with those contemporaries who seek to subvert and attack the work of Reformation. This dates the work, and makes it (or parts of it) less immediately accessible to the modern reader. But it remains a testimony to Calvin's concern not only to expound the Faith but to be watchful in defending it, a stance which left its mark on subsequent Reformed theology.

12.3 CONCLUSION

Only two years after its publication in Latin (there was a French version in 1560), an English translation by Thomas Norton appeared. By 1581 there had been four printings of it. In the Preface to the 1581 printing Norton comments.

To spend many words in commending the work itself were needless; yet thus much I think, I may both not unruly and not vainly say, that though many great learned men have written books of common-places of our religion, as Melancthon, Sarcerius, and others, whose works are very good and profitable to the church of God, yet by the consenting judgment of those that understand the same, there is none to be compared to this work of Calvin, both for his substantial sufficiency of doctrine, the sound declaration of truth in articles of our religion, the large and learned confirmation of the same, and the most deep and strong confutation of all old and new heresies; so that (the holy Scriptures excepted) this is one of the most profitable books for all students of Christian divinity. (Reproduced in Calvin 1975: xxii)

Scholars these days bemoan with some justification the fact that 'Calvinism' came to be used as a synonym for the 'Reformed faith', when in fact the articulation and defence of that faith was the work of many men, such as Bucer, Vermigli, Zwingli, and Ursinus.

Why was Calvin's name given this prominence? Part of the answer must be due to the influence of his 'package deal' of a doctrinal manual and a shelf of succinct commentaries, all written in an attractive and accessible style. The 1559 *Institutes* was the manual.¹

SUGGESTED READINGS

Calvin (1975); Muller (2000a); Muller (2000b); Helm (2007); Warfield (1930).

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¹ Thanks to John Balserak for his helpful suggestions.

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CHAPTER 13

HEINRICH BULLINGER'S *DECADES*

BRUCE GORDON

ALMOST 50 years after the classic work by Walter Hollweg on Heinrich Bullinger's *Decades*, there was a resurgence of interest in the theology and life, including a major biography, of the man who led the Zurich church from 1531 until his death in 1575 (Hollweg 1956; Büsler 2004–5). Following the 500th anniversary of Bullinger's birth in 2004, conference volumes and collected essays appeared brimming with new research agendas (Campi 2004; Campi and Opitz 2007). The work of Peter Opitz on Bullinger's theology has proved particularly influential, with his monograph on the *Decades* followed by a critical edition of the *Sermonum Decades quinque* (Opitz 2004; 2008). Other scholars such as Emidio Campi, Christian Moser, and recently Daniël Timmerman have greatly enhanced our understanding of Bullinger's exegetical methods and historical vision (Campi 2005; Moser 2005; Timmerman 2015; Campi and Opitz 2007; Bollinger 2004). An earlier focus on Bullinger's covenantal thought by Wayne Baker and others has given way to a broader exploration of the reformer's theology, exegesis and ecclesiology (Baker 1980; McCoy and Baker 1991; Baker 1998: 359–76; van 't Spijker 2007; Gordon 2004; Mock 2017; Pak 2018).

Serious impediments remain, however, for those seeking access to the reformer's work. In comparison with Calvin, only a small portion of the Zurich church leader's body of writing is available in translation. The result has been that the text under consideration in this chapter, the *Decades*, remains the best known of Bullinger's numerous works, largely on account of the Parker Society's nineteenth-century reprint of the sixteenth-century translation by H.I. (Bullinger 1849–52). Inaccessibility is a major problem in placing Heinrich Bullinger in his doctrinal and historical contexts (Gordon 2001).

Bullinger was born before John Calvin and died more than ten years after the Genevan reformer. Although in the history of Reformed thought Calvin absolutely dwarfs his friend and mentor, this was not the case in the sixteenth century. Similarly, Bullinger continues to dwell in the shadow of Huldrych Zwingli to the extent that he is

often referred to as 'the successor', even though his tenure as head of the Zurich church was far longer.

13.1 HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Heinrich Bullinger was devoted to defending and propagating what he passionately held to be the ancient apostolic faith of the church (Taplin 2004: 67–99). He saw himself as akin to the bishops of the early church struggling against heresy, and in particular he looked to his model, Augustine of Hippo. It was not that Bullinger assumed any ritual role—in fact he rigorously held to a democratic model of authority (Bollinger 2004: 175f.). Nevertheless, in the correspondence from English Reformers he was referred to as the bishop of Zurich. Whatever the title, there was no doubt that Bullinger was head of the church and exercised considerable authority over ecclesiastical affairs in Zurich. Formally he held the position of chief preacher in the Grossmünster, but his role within the state and ecclesia was pervasive.

Bullinger assembled in Zurich an impressive circle of learned men who included Konrad Pellikan, Theodor Bibliander, Rudolf Gwalther, and others who engaged in teaching, preaching, and scholarship (Hobbs 2008: 452–511). Together they formed a sodality committed to the teaching of the Reformed faith. Bullinger was the *primus inter pares*, the leading spokesman who presented the views of the Zurich church on foreign and domestic matters. The best evidence for his work in this respect is the massive body of correspondence that has survived and continues to be edited and printed (Henrich 2004: 231–41). Bullinger's reputation was such that his letters and works spread across Europe, and he was consulted by senior scholars, churchmen, and political figures, as well as by students and people of humble status (Mühling 2001).

The kinship of reform was not limited to Zurich. Bullinger was frequently in contact with the other leading figures of the Reformed churches to discuss current events and theological questions and to share news. These figures shared a well-established network that came to include John Calvin, with whom Bullinger, for the most part, enjoyed a good relationship (Gordon 2009). The two men were entirely different in temperament: Bullinger was cautious and patient, Calvin less so. Nevertheless, Calvin saw in the Zurich churchman a mentor and very much the senior figure in their relationship. There was extensive correspondence between them, often carrying significant disagreements, but they agreed to keep their differences to themselves for the sake of the wider unity of the church.

Within Zurich, Bullinger's duties were extraordinary. He oversaw the lives and work of the rural and urban clergy (over 100 parishes), and he was in constant negotiations with the city magistrates over a range of issues including poor relief, provision of schools, and limits of preaching on political themes (Bächtold 1982; Biel 1991; Gordon 1992a). Bullinger held a considerable authority in city precisely because of his effective working relationship with Zurich's rulers, who in turn trusted him. Harmony did not, however, always

prevail, and Bullinger was not shy about taking on his political masters when he disagreed with their policies, in particular their unwillingness to fund the church.

The public platform of Heinrich Bullinger without doubt was the pulpit in the Grossmünster, where he delivered sermons several times a week (Büsser 1985). Bullinger's practice was to preach *lectio continua* during various services, so that there would be several Bible series continuing at the same time. Naturally, depending on the book of the Bible, it could take a good deal of time before the series was completed. The sermons would then form the basis for Bullinger's Bible commentaries that would follow from Froschauer's press (Opitz 2009). The result was an impressive oeuvre. We have very little in the way of manuscript material for the sermons, but Bullinger recorded in his diary the books on which he preached (Egli 1904).

13.2 THE CHARACTER OF THE *DECADES*

Bullinger's most famous work, the *Decades*, consists of five books of ten sermons, as the title suggests, written between 1549 and 1552. Yet, the sermons are not quite what one might expect. They were written in Latin, and were in many cases implausibly long for even the most patient audience. They are highly didactic in character, intended to instruct students training for the ministry in the essentials of Reformed theology. That purpose, however, changed once the *Decades* was translated into English, Dutch, German, and French and distributed widely across Europe, where it became known as the *Hausbuch*. At that point the *Decades* ceased to be solely a book of instruction in doctrine and became more a devotional work on how to live the Christian life. The *Decades*, therefore, had multiples lives in Reformed culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in vernacular forms it became a bestseller, above all in the Low Countries and England (MacCulloch 2004: 891–934; Kirby 2007; Euler 2006).

At 800 folios the *Decades* is Bullinger's longest theological book. It was the work of a mature writer and preacher. Unlike Calvin and his *Institutes*, Bullinger never revised the *Decades*, which remained in the form they were printed between 1549 and 1552. 'Bullinger performed his intended task', Peter Opitz has written, 'in a multifaceted manner, realizing his many and varied roles as preacher, pastor, exegetist, teacher, advocate, polemicist, guardian of Zwingli's legacy, and evangelical irenicist' (Opitz 2004: 102). His chosen format was well known: Bullinger used the medieval tradition of sermon collections to instruct those who would preach the Word of God to the faithful (p. 103).

On the nature of the sermons themselves, the work of Opitz is most persuasive. Bullinger maintained a literary fiction that they were delivered, often remarking at the end that he had gone on for more than an hour and a half, but it is unlikely that the sermons were ever delivered in the form in which they appear in the *Decades*. Opitz points to the fact that Bullinger makes no mention of the sermons in his record of his preaching in his diary, which was an extremely accurate account of his activity in the Grossmünster (Opitz 2004: 103). However, certain aspects of the literary texts suggest that the printed

works may indeed reflect sermons that Bullinger actually did deliver. There is helpful internal evidence that links the *Decades* to Bullinger's preaching style. For example, the Latin of the *Decades* is fairly straightforward, written in the didactic manner in which Bullinger would have preached to students (Opitz 2004: 104).

Neither the relative simplicity of the language in the *Decades* nor their homiletic form conceals Bullinger's deft weaving together of multiple theological and pastoral strands. In his arrangement of his *loci* he sought both to expound scripture and explain the historical doctrine of the church in order to instruct and edify (Millet 2007; Peterson 2007; van den Belt 2011; Stephens 2008; 2009). In the latter case the topics covered include the covenant, the Ten Commandments, the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. His purpose, therefore, was not to produce a systematic work of theology, but one that focused on instructing at various levels. Far from being systematic in the manner of Calvin's *Institutes*, Bullinger frequently repeats material in his sermons and often directs the reader to arguments previously made or to follow. The *Decades* have a catechetical quality, and Opitz has suggested that an important source for Bullinger was Augustine's 'De catechizandis rudibus' (Opitz 2006: 7). In his diary entry for March 1549, Bullinger remarks that the first two decades covered the high point of faith (Opitz 2006: 8).

13.3 STRUCTURE OF THE *DECADES*

As a preface to the *Decades* Bullinger appended a short treatise on the four ecumenical councils of the ancient church (Nicaea 325, Constantinople 384, Ephesus 434, and Chalcedon 454), along with the Creeds. Although it is easy to overlook this material and proceed directly to the *Decades*, Bullinger's account of the early church was essential to what followed. In the Latin preface to the *Decades*, he wrote that he added the councils and creeds in order to demonstrate the harmony of Protestant theology with the teaching of the ancient church (Bullinger 1849–52: i.12).

In his account of the formation of the Nicene Creed, Bullinger emphasized the unity of the church in adopting a faith consistent with the Apostles' Creed, which all had professed. It was the 'wicked Arius' who 'sprang up, corrupting the pureness of the faith' who forced the fathers of the church to prepare another Creed to refute his 'novelties' (Bullinger 1849–52: i.13). Of the creeds that followed at the other three general councils 'neither was anything changed in the doctrine of the apostles', nor

was any new thing added, which the Churches of Christ had not before taken and believed out of the Holy Scripture: but the ancient truth, being wisely made manifest by confessions made of faith, was profitably and godly set against the new corruptions of heretics. (Bullinger 1849–52: i.13)

What distinguished the true Creeds of the church for Bullinger was how they followed the writings of the prophets and apostles as a 'rule', so that the fathers did not

‘suffer anything to be done there according to their own minds.’ Such fidelity to the rule of faith was, the Zurich church leader heavily implied, the measure of his *Decades*. Bullinger wrote of four general councils, not six, because he did not include the two at Constantinople (552 and 682), which although important did not, in his view, determine anything not established by the previous four.

The first *Decade* was devoted to the Word of God, and opened with two sermons on its nature and form of revelation before proceeding to its manifestation in faith (sermons 3–9) and love (sermon 10). In his treatment of the ancient councils of the church Bullinger stated that it was his intention to shape the first *Decade* around the Apostolic Creed, which he does in sermons 7–9. Bullinger’s treatment of the Apostles’ Creed (or ‘Symbol’) was essential to his demonstration of harmony with the rule of faith of the ancient church as the rule for Christian teaching (Opitz 2004: 106). Among its diverse characteristics, the *Decades* were an *apologia* for the Zurich church.

The second *Decade* was devoted to the law, and Bullinger treated the Two Tables at considerable length, extending his treatment of the Decalogue to sermon 4 of the third *Decade*. The order of his theological structure becomes clear as Bullinger demonstrated that the law follows from the Word of God. Following his careful discussion of each of the laws, Bullinger turned his attention in the third *Decade* to the ceremonial and judicial laws, the abrogation of the law, Christian liberty, and sin.

The fourth *Decade* continues the theme of Christian response by treating Gospel and repentance (sermons 31 and 32). This ends the second thematic part of the *Decades* as Bullinger turned to his account of God, knowledge of God, providence and predestination, the Trinity, Christ, and the human soul (sermons 33–40). In his discussion of God, Bullinger enumerated five ways in which the limited minds of humans are accommodated.

The fifth *Decade* treated the church, its ministry, and sacraments. In addition Bullinger provided a catechetical treatment of the Lord’s Supper.

Bullinger’s understanding of God merges into the treatment of providence and predestination and then leads to the teaching on true worship; the teaching on Christ leads into an explanation of the question of what it means to call oneself a Christian; the teaching on the Spirit concerns God’s work in humanity; finally, the teaching of the Church treats the being and acting of humanity and the community in the body of Christ. (Bullinger 1852, ed. Opitz 2007: 107)

13.3.1 Dedication of First Ten Sermons to the Zurich Clergy (1549)

A significant text that does not appear in the English translation of the *Decades* is the dedication of the first *Decade* to Bullinger’s colleagues in Zurich. Bullinger opened with account of the terrible times in which Christians and the Zurich church found themselves. Everywhere there is evidence of God’s anger for the unfaithfulness of the people. It was, therefore, worthwhile for him to address his colleagues on the nature of their

offices (Campi, Roth and Stotz 2006: 20). The clergy must be ever prepared to root out evil and sin. Sadly in many churches there is no desire to follow God's commandments. A good shepherd knows what is appropriate to his own church. God's wrath will not be appeased by any form of external ritual, for the church must turn to the true faith.

Those who truly repent come in humility before the Lord, but such remorse is insufficient unless one accepts that sins are forgiven through Christ. One cannot only acknowledge one's sins. Who truly believes, believes that through Christ sinners are reconciled with God. This should lead to prayer. Therefore, Bullinger writes to his colleagues and friends, it was their shared duty to bring the people to prayer (Campi, Roth and Stotz 2006: 27). The end is to provide the people with assurance, and to remove from them all other forms of certainty and comfort. In every case, Bullinger insisted that the pastors must examine themselves first before teaching the people.

Bullinger summarized for his colleagues: God's evident anger can only be appeased when all sin is acknowledged and confessed and the Zurich ministers must throw themselves before God seeking his mercy. Such forgiveness is possible only when it is accepted that it comes on account of no human merit. The dedication of the first ten sermons reflected not only Bullinger's closeness to his colleagues, but the pastoral nature of the *Decades* as a whole. Bullinger's sermons were to instruct, but above all they were to foster piety and amendment of life in those entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel.

13.3.2 The Argument

Bullinger's theme is clearly established in the opening words of the first sermon:

All the decrees of Christian faith, with every way how to live rightly, well and holily, and finally, all true and heavenly wisdom, have always been fetched out of the testimonies, or determinate judgments, of the Word of God by the faithful and those who are called by God to the ministry of the churches. (Bullinger 1849–52: i.36)

The Word of God is truth, Bullinger wrote, 'but God is the only well-spring of truth: therefore God is the beginning and cause of the Word of God' (i.38).

From the beginning of the world God taught the 'holy fathers', who then taught their children, ensuring that no age was without the Word. Bullinger offers a biblical history of God's address to the ancient peoples, the foundation of the 'tradition'. All that was taught by the holy fathers was put into writing by Moses, who 'declared most largely the revelation of the Word of God made unto men, and whatsoever the Word of God contains and teaches: in which, as we have the manifold oracles of God himself, so we have the most illuminating testimonies, sentences, examples, and decrees of the most excellent, ancient, holy, wise, and greatest men of the world' (Bullinger 1849–52: i.47).

Bullinger's purpose in his long opening sermon was to treat the Word of God, what it is, to whom it was revealed, and its history. In the second sermon on the topic he developed the theme of to whom it was revealed. The end of the revelation of God's Word is that it may teach humanity 'what manner God is towards men' and how

God 'would have them be saved'. To that end 'who Christ is, and by what means salvation comes' Scripture teaches a 'perfect doctrine', Bullinger wrote following Paul (Bullinger 1849–52: i.60).

In a direct address to the pastors for whom the *Decades* were prepared, Bullinger argued that it is God's will that his Word be understood. For 'in speaking to his servants he used a most common kind of speech, wherewithal even the very uneducated were acquainted. Neither do we read that the prophets and apostles, the servants of God and interpreters of his high and everlasting wisdom, did use any strange kind of speech' (i.71). There is some 'darkness' in the scriptures which arises from a variety of issues relating to ignorance of languages and literary forms, but these can be overcome by 'study, diligence, faith, and the means of skillful interpreters' (i.71).

The response of men and women to God's Word is in faith, which Bullinger called a settled and undoubted persuasion in God and his Word (i.82). It is faith alone that allows people to see what God has revealed. Bullinger set down two principles to be accepted: first, belief that all good things come from God through Christ. Secondly, 'that in the Word of God',

there is set down all truth necessary to be believed; and that true faith believes all that is declared in the scriptures. For it tells us that God is; what manner he is; what God's works are; what his judgments, his will, his commandments, his promises, and what his warnings are; finally, whatsoever is profitable or necessary to be believed; that God's Word is wholly laid down for us, which is received by true faith, believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets, in the gospel and writings of the apostles. (i.96)

This teaching on the nature of the Word, Bullinger continued, was articulated in the articles of the apostles, which formed the 'sum of faith', and were the subject of sermons seven to nine. He divided his account into four parts, the first three treating the nature of the triune God and the fourth the fruits of faith. He described the articles as a 'symbol', a badge, a marker of the true faith, 'because by the laying together of the apostles' doctrine, they were made and written to be a rule and an abridgement of the faith preached by the apostles, and received of the Catholic or universal church'. It is not known, Bullinger, continued, who first wrote the articles.

In his treatment of love of God and neighbour Bullinger was emphatic about the proper order of *loci*. It is the love of God by which he loved humanity that is the foundation of all human love of him and other people. 'The love of God works in us a will', Bullinger wrote, 'to frame ourselves wholly to the will and ordinances of him whom we do heartily love' (i.182). It is such love that makes love of neighbour possible, which in true Bullinger fashion had a special emphasis on the poor and sick. He quoted Lactantius:

It is a chief part of humanity and a great good deed, to take in hand to heal and cherish the sick, that have nobody to help them. Finally, that last and greatest duty of piety is the burial of strangers and of the poor. (Bullinger 1849–52: i.191)

It is not enough, Bullinger concluded, to understand what love of neighbor entailed, although such knowledge was necessary: 'but rather we must love him exceedingly, and above what I am able to say' (i.191).

Decade Two opens with a treatment of the law, a subject Bullinger occupied himself with through to the beginning of the fourth *Decade*. Some laws are of God, others of nature. The latter is the conscience, by which men and women know what they should and should not do. The conscience does not, however, know God, only general principles of religion impressed upon humans, as well as qualities of goodness and virtue (ii.194). Bullinger treated at length the nature of virtue among the ancients, concluding:

We may gather, that even in the gentiles' minds there was a certain knowledge of God, and some precepts whereby they knew what to desire, and what to eschew, which notwithstanding they did corrupt, and make somewhat misty with the evil affections and corrupt judgments of the flesh. For which cause God also, beside the law of nature did ordain other means to declare his will. (ii.205)

In distinction from the law of nature the law of God has been fully revealed and clearly teaches what humans are to do and not do, and how God will punish those who are not obedient. Bullinger treated the first two commandments in sermon 12. He wrote of God's law being divided into moral, ceremonial, and judicial.

The moral law is that which teaches men right conduct and sets down the nature of virtue. It declares how great righteousness, godliness, obedience, and perfectness God looks for at the hands of us mortal men. The ceremonial laws are those that are given concerning the order of holy and ecclesiastical rights and ceremonies, and also touching the ministries and things assigned to ministry and other holy uses. Last of all, the judicial laws give rules concerning matters to be judged between men for the preservation of public peace, equity, and civil honesty. (ii.210)

Unlike the ceremonial laws, the moral laws were not abrogated by Christ. The Ten Commandments, Bullinger argued, are the 'absolute and everlasting rule of true righteousness and all virtues set down for all places, men, and ages, frame themselves by' (ii.211). The sum of the Ten Commandments is for men and women to show their love for God and one another, and that is what God requires at all times, and everywhere and of all people. The distinction between the moral and the judicial and ceremonial is its particular place in the Ten Commandments. The ceremonial and judicial were revealed to Moses by the angels, and then by Moses to the people. The moral law, however, was revealed by God himself on Mount Sinai. God spoke them 'word for word' (ii.212).

Bullinger's extended treatment of the law in the second and third *Decade* is a discourse on the whole of religion. He addressed all the different forms of the law and their place in Christian revelation. An example of this approach is found in his discussion of the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath, which he interprets as belonging to the outward and inward service of the Lord. The Sabbath has various meanings, above

all that humans should rest and cease from labor that is for their own purposes. It is a particular day set aside to allow God to work in the individual.

Together with the inner spiritual growth through rest, Bullinger understood the Sabbath to be instituted by God in order that men and women might have the proper outward form of religion (Bullinger 1849–52: ii.255). Because the worshipping of God cannot be without a time, he wrote, ‘wherein we should abstain from outward or bodily works: but so yet that we should have leisure to attend to our spiritual business. For that cause is the outward rest commanded, that the spiritual work should not be hindered by the bodily business’ (ii.255). By outward form of religion, Bullinger referenced the public reading and expounding of scripture, public prayers, and petitions, the administration of the sacraments, and the ‘gathering of every man’s benevolence’.

The practical approach taken by the head of the Zurich church to the exposition of the laws is evident in his concluding words of sermon 14. Having declared that the first table of the commandments sets down the true worship of God, Bullinger concluded ‘they are not the children of God who know his mind, but they who do it’ (Bullinger 1849–52: ii.267).

Having treated the laws, Bullinger wrote that one must turn to those matters that follow on the law: Christian liberty, good works, sin, and the punishment of sin (iii.300). The abrogation of the law, which he treats in sermon 28, is the foundation of Christian liberty. What is this liberty? Bullinger argued that it is the grievous bondage from which the Lord has delivered his elect. The Son of God came into the world, overcame Satan, and brought his own into the kingdom where he is Lord and King. Further, he has ‘adopted us to be the sons of God’ and took away the bitter curse of the law’ (iii.305). With the liberty of the Christian the hatred of the law remains no more, although the weakness of the flesh does. God bestows the free gift of the Holy Spirit in order that men and women should willingly submit to the will of the Lord. Finally,

The same our Lord and king has taken from the shoulders of his elect the burden of the law, the types and figures, with the costs belonging to the same. He has forbidden us, being at once set at liberty, to entangle ourselves again with any laws and traditions of men. Of all this taken together we offer this definition: to deliver is to make free and to set at liberty from bondage. He is free, or manumitted, that being delivered from bondage enjoys his liberty: therefore manumission, or liberty, is nothing other than the state of him that is made free. (iii.305)

The treatment of Christian liberty was taken up by Bullinger to offer an extended discourse on how such freedom can be abused. The Christian is not made free in Christ to offend another. The root of such offence is the confusion of the Spirit and the flesh. Those who take human traditions and actions and grant them spiritual significance bind the consciences of others by imposing upon them unacceptable duties and obligations. Following Pauline advice, Bullinger admonished that freedom must be tempered by love.

The misuse of freedom leads to the discussion of works. Bullinger naturally denied any role for works in the salvation of persons, but he devoted attention to the place of

works in the sanctified life. The only good works are those that come from God, who through the Spirit works in the hearts of the regenerate. 'And God by his Spirit and by faith in Christ', Bullinger writes,

[r]enews all men, so that they, being once regenerate, do no longer their own, that is, the works of the flesh, but the works of the Spirit, of grace, and of God himself. For the works of them that are regenerate do grow up by the good Spirit of God that is within them; which Spirit, even as the sap gives strength to trees to bring forth fruit, doth in a like manner cause sundry virtues to bud and branch out of us men. (iii.322)

In the subsequent treatment of sin Bullinger faced the old question of the role of God in the fall of humanity. If God created Adam, the objection runs, and Adam committed sin, is God not the author of sin? Drawing on a large body of scriptural evidence Bullinger asserted that God is not the cause of evil, for it was the corruptible will and the temptations of the Devil 'that inflames our depraved nature to sin' (iii.373). Nevertheless, the questions continue and Bullinger sought to enumerate them. Why, he continued, would God create a person so frail that he would by his own judgment fall into sin? Only God, he replied, is good by necessity, not humanity. Adam was a man, and not a God. Yet he was not created for death, but for life and blessedness, for he was the image of God. In the garden he was perfect, lacking in nothing, although God knew that Adam would fall. Such foreknowledge, Bullinger is adamant, is not to be confused with necessity. That God knew did not cause the fall to happen (iii.377).

Sin, Bullinger observed, is an offence against God's law, and the law is nothing other than the divine will. That will was first expressed in the law of nature, then by the two tables of stone, and finally by the preaching of the Holy Gospel. All three forms express God's desire that humans be holy, innocent, and therefore saved. Bullinger then proceeds to a forensic analysis of the types of sins to be found among humans. In particular, through his treatment of Original Sin and the sin against the Holy Spirit he explores the character and consequences of human disobedience. Sermon 30, however, ends on a more pastoral note as Bullinger asked why God does not withdraw punishment even when a sin has been forgiven. 'God has laid bodily death', he wrote, 'as a punishment upon the body of man; and after the forgiveness of sins has not taken it away, but left it in the body to be a means to the exercise of righteousness' (Bullinger 1849–52: iii.431).

The first two sermons of the fourth *Decade*, on the Gospel and Repentance, continue the themes in Bullinger's treatment of Christian liberty and sin. The Zurich church leader, however, makes a certain transition by stating that the Gospel is the exposition of the law. Bullinger's discussion of the Gospel in sermon 30 has a strong catechetical quality. His lengthy definition of the Gospel is an arresting statement of faith that expresses much of his teaching in the *Decades*. The Gospel, he wrote, is the heavenly preaching of grace to humanity wherein it is declared to a sinful world that God is pleased with his Son, Jesus Christ. His only-begotten son was promised to the ancient fathers and now revealed to men and women. God 'in him hath given'

[a]ll things belonging to a blessed life and eternal salvation, as he that was for us men incarnate, dead and raised from the dead again, was taken up into heaven, and is made our only Lord and Savior, upon condition that we, acknowledging our sins, do soundly and surely believe in him. (Bullinger 1849–52: iv.4)

In sum, what Bullinger desired to say about the Gospel is how all humans are slaves to sin and will suffer eternal death, a fate unavoidable except through the free grace of God. This has been achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is the only-begotten Son of God. Alone those who believe in him will be partakers in the resurrection. Whoever receives the Gospel through true preaching is justified. That means that they are cleansed of sin, sanctified, and ‘made heirs to eternal life’. Those who do not receive Christ will perish in their unbelief, for ‘the wrath of God abides upon them’ (iv.54). Bullinger linked repentance closely to the preaching of the Gospel, calling it an ‘unfeigned turning unto God’ (iv.57).

13.4 DEDICATION TO EDWARD VI (1550)

Bullinger dedicated the final eight sermons of the fourth *Decade* to Edward VI in 1550. Apart from the usual praise of princes and warnings against the temptations of power, Bullinger writes mostly about the Council of Trent, denying that any recent general council of the church has achieved anything. And while there might be hope for a general council lawfully called, the only ones summoned are by the bishop of Rome (Bullinger 1849–52: iv.118).

There can be no reform of the church if it is dedicated to ensuring the authority of the papacy in all things and in asserting that those who disagree are heretics. All churches should be reformed by the Word of God, not by popes. ‘Now the Lord’, Bullinger wrote,

gave his church a charge of Reformation: he commanded unto it the sound doctrine of the gospel, together with the lawful use of his holy sacraments; he also condemned all false doctrine, that I mean is contrary to the Gospel; he damned the abuse and profanation of the sacraments and delivered to us the true worship of God, and proscribed the false. (iv.120)

Bullinger admonished Edward to follow the wisdom of the Word and not of human traditions. All wisdom is revealed in scripture.

At the beginning of the 33rd sermon, Bullinger offered a review of his topics thus far. The summary marks the transition to his treatment of knowledge of God. Having treated the divinity in diverse ways to this point, Bullinger wants to make the case for the scriptural basis of the triune Godhead, which he regards as the essential foundation of the Christian faith. Bullinger took on the subject of God himself, discussing how we know that he exists, his names, and historical relationship with the patriarchs, Moses, and the Israelites. He did not spend much time on God’s nature outside of his

relationship with humanity, but in discussing the 'I am,' there is a turn to what that statement meant. 'What else is this,' Bullinger wrote,

[t]han if he had said 'I am the uncreated essence, being of myself from before all beginning, which gives being to all things, and keeps all things in being. I am strong and almighty God. I do not abuse my might for I am gentle and merciful. I love my creatures and man especially.' (iv.146)

In an extensive treatment of the Trinity Bullinger argued that it was known to the patriarchs and revealed in full by Christ. All three persons of the Trinity are to be honoured equally. This has been the teaching of the church from its earliest times and forms part of the 'rule of faith'. It is expressed in the Apostles' Creed in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are confessed. Yet, what we can know of the Trinity is limited by 'appointed bounds about the knowledge of God, which to pass is hurtful for us; indeed, it is punished with assured death' (iv.173).

Bullinger continued his treatment of how God is known by considering God as creator and sustainer. Through God's providence men and women know of his goodness towards them, for it demonstrates the lengths to which he goes to preserve and defend his people. This discussion leads directly to predestination. Providence is the manner by which God governs the world, foreknowledge is his knowledge of what will happen, and predestination is the decree of who is to be saved (iv.185).

Scripture, Bullinger argued, is clear on predestination.

God has by his eternal and unchangeable counsel foreordained who are to be saved, and who are to be condemned. Now the end or the decree of life and death is short and manifest to all the godly. The end of predestination or forordination, is Christ, the Son of God the Father. For God has ordained and decreed to save all, how many whosoever have communion and fellowship with Christ, his only begotten Son. Now the faithful verily have fellowship with Christ and the unfaithful are strangers from Christ. (iv.186)

Those who are saved are not so because of any merit that God foresaw in them. True faith is required of the elect. Being called, they receive their calling by faith and mould themselves to Christ. Such things, Bullinger, summed up, reveal the beautiful and wonderful work of creation by the eternal God, who governs by wise providence and with a good will that is revealed in his gracious decision to elect some to salvation. Bullinger turns to the human response, which is in adoration, 'to bequeath ourselves wholly unto God and cleave inseparably to him upon him only and alone to hang in all things and to have recourse unto him in all our necessities whatsoever' (iv.199).

In the fourth *Decade* Bullinger followed the knowledge and nature of God as creator and Trinity with God's manifestation of his power in the world. The human response in adoration and worship follows, and then Bullinger's account of Christ. The long 36th sermon on the Son of God follows the account of Christ in the Apostles' Creed. Bullinger is especially concerned to defend the relationship of the two natures of

Christ and refute the idea that they were in any way mixed (*communicatio idiomatum*). Bullinger had several opponents in his gaze. Those radicals and antitrinitarians who denied the equality of the Son with the Father, and the Lutherans, with whom Zurich was locked in battle over the nature of Christ. Bullinger put his argument in a pithy confession:

Touching the Son of God, let us firmly hold and undoubtedly believe that he is consubstantial (or of the same substance) with his Father, and therefore true God. That the selfsame Son became incarnate for us and was made man. Howbeit so that these natures are neither confounded between themselves nor yet divided. For we do believe one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ to be true God and true man. (iv.242)

Bullinger treated Christ king and priest before turning to the Holy Spirit in sermon 38, where he explains in detail the manner in which the third person of the Trinity proceeds from the first two. He addressed the twofold proceeding of the Spirit, one to humans and the other from the Father and the Son. The first is a temporal proceeding that sanctifies the faithful, while the latter is eternal. It is the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify all that would be sanctified. The heavenly Father sanctifies with his grace, Bullinger writes, 'through the blood of his beloved son, and sanctification is derived to us and sealed by the Spirit. Therefore the holy Trinity, being one God, sanctifies us' (iv.312). Instead of offering a conclusion to his sermon, Bullinger cited at length Tertullian on the Holy Spirit. He was adamant that the three persons of the Trinity are fully declared in scripture, but he had an evident anxiety that the unity of God will be lost. The tension is found in the final admonition of the sermon. 'And when sins are forgiven in the Holy Spirit':

We believe that this benefit and all other benefits of our blessedness are inseparably given and bestowed upon us from one, only, true, living, and everlasting God, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Bullinger 1849–52: iv.326)

The sermons of the fifth *Decade* focus on the themes of church (two sermons), ministry (two), and sacraments (four). In addition, Bullinger had sermons on prayer and the institutions of the church.

On the church itself, Bullinger treated at length its character and the extent of its authority. His essential principle lies in the church's constant profession that it is nothing without Christ, by whose blood it is sanctified. It is in error when in any manner the church departs from the teaching of Christ, to whom it must 'cleave' as king, redeemer, and high priest. Although Bullinger approached the subject from several perspectives, his definition in sermon 41 is perhaps his best expression of that which he has argued.

For it [the Church] executes (as I have just said) that power that it has received from God most carefully and faithfully to the end that it may serve God, that it may be holy, and that it may please him. And I reckon some of her studies specially: first of all it worships, calling upon, loving, and serving the one God in Trinity. That it takes nothing in hand without having consulted with the Word of this true God. That she

orders all her doings according to that rule of God's Word; that she judges by the Word of God; and by the same frames all her buildings, and those built by maintaining them, and when they fall down they are repaired or restored. (v.47)

When Bullinger began the *Decades* in 1549 he was concluding the agreement with John Calvin known as the *Consensus Tigurinus*. Both men compromised to make the document possible, and the fifth *Decade* reflects much of Bullinger's mature thinking on the sacraments, a topic far too complex for this survey (Stephens 2006: 62–9). Part of what is found in the *Decades* (sermons 46 and 47) came from an earlier unpublished tract on the sacraments written by Bullinger in 1546. It has long been recognized that Bullinger both defended Zwingli's sacramental theology and developed a less dichotomous line of thought (Euler 2014). His willingness, for example, to speak of a closer relationship between the inner and outward character of the sacraments is evident in sermon 46: 'For they [the sacraments]'

are called external or outward signs, because they are corporeal or bodily, entering outwardly into those senses whereby they are perceived. Contrariwise, we call the things signified inward things, not that the things lie hidden included in the signs but because they are perceived by the inward faculties, or motions of the mind, wrought in men by the Spirit of God. (v.315)

Although Bullinger objected to the language of the sacraments as 'instruments' of God's grace, he held a higher view of baptism and the Lord's Supper than Zwingli, who tended to have a negative sense of the two. Bullinger repeatedly speaks of the 'dignity' of the sacraments. In the seventh sermon the Zurich minister roundly denies that the sacraments have any value in themselves, but he continues to write that the sacraments were instituted by God as testimonies of his grace, they are the seals of his promises, which are always true.

For immediately upon the beginning of the world he began to show himself as such a one unto us, and shows himself more and more through the course of life. We receive him and comprehend him spiritually and by faith. Therefore, when we are partakers of the sacraments, he proceeds to communicate himself to us in a special manner, that is to say, proper to the sacraments. (v.315)

13.5 CONCLUSION

The *Decades* are sermons organized according to a series of loci according to the themes of Word of God, faith, God, and the church (Dowey 2004: 51–2). They were written by a man at the height of his powers ready to defend the teaching and practices of the Zurich church, having made a wider agreement on the Lord's Supper with John Calvin. The *Decades* was an unusual work in the sixteenth century. As mentioned above, it was modelled on the sermon collections of the late Middle Ages, but it was more than that.

The sermons are a clear expression of Bullinger's theology, in particular his Christological reading of the Old Testament, the emphasis on good works, the Christian life, and the sacraments. The tone of the sermons is pastoral, as Bullinger concerned himself with instructing both clergy and laity how to live faithfully and obediently. The sermons frequently overlap, and Bullinger often refers to points made elsewhere. The didactic quality of the *Decades* is unmistakable. At the same time, the sermons have a strong rhetorical quality; Bullinger is not merely instructing but exhorting his listeners/readers.

For Bullinger, Christ is the *scopus* of the covenant of grace between the Old and New Testaments (Opitz 2004b: 112). This position was a hallmark of Reformation Zurich theology. Repeatedly the church leader stressed the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New, but not by a simple subordination. For example, when, discussing the Trinity, he writes that the triune God was known to the patriarchs, it is clear that the head of the Zurich church was eager to demonstrate the total integration of the two Testaments.

The creeds placed at the beginning of the *Decades* are not decorative. They demonstrate Bullinger's determination to show the harmony of the Zurich church with apostolic Christianity. We have seen that throughout the *Decades* the Apostles' Creed, which he regarded as the purest statement of the faith, is the barometer against which all teaching is measured. In addition, the text is full of quotations from Lactantius, Cyprian, Tertullian, Augustine, and a host of other luminaries of the early church upon whom Bullinger calls as witness for the antiquity of his teaching. Only rarely are any contemporaries mentioned—notably Zwingli, whom Bullinger referenced extensively in his treatment of the sacraments.

It does little justice to reduce the *Decades* to a core theological idea. Bullinger worked his way between a range of topics that are carefully interwoven in texts that are essentially exhortative. The *Decades* is a work of and for the church. It is a passionate plea for the sanctified life in which men and women become more Christ-like. It is a hymn to an all-powerful, all-loving, and merciful God who is in an intimate relationship with humanity, of whom much is expected. Bullinger covered the spectrum of Reformed theological thought in the middle decade of the sixteenth century, defining the Christian life and church, seeking harmony with his colleagues, fighting Rome, and demonstrating the apostolic faith of the Zurich church.

SUGGESTED READING

Biel (1991); Campi and Opitz (2007); Gordon and Campi (2004); Gordon (2009); Pak (2018); Timmerman (2015).

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CHAPTER 14

THE THREE FORMS OF UNITY

LYLE D. BIERMA AND DONALD SINNEMA

THE term ‘The Three Forms of Unity’ refers to the three confessional documents that have served as doctrinal standards for the Dutch Reformed family of churches since the early seventeenth century: the Belgic Confession (1561, hereafter BC), Heidelberg Catechism (1563, hereafter HC), and Canons of Dort (1619, hereafter CD). The first two documents acquired confessional status in the Reformed churches of the Low Countries in the second half of the sixteenth century, but the full triad was not solidified until 1619, when the Synod of Dort adopted both the Canons of Dort and a form requiring ministerial subscription to all three statements of faith (Sinnema 2007).

‘Forms of unity’ is a technical term for documents with confessional status. It apparently derived from the Lutheran *Formula concordiae* (1580), as the Reformed described their alternative to the Lutheran forms. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, both the BC and HC began to be called ‘forms of unity (*formulieren van eenicheyt*)’ in Dutch Reformed circles. After the Synod of Dort gave its Canons confessional status by requiring subscription to them, the designation ‘forms of unity’ also began to be applied to the Canons as early as 1620 (Sinnema 2011b). Although one of the forms, the Canons were not included in Dutch *kerkboeken* for more than two centuries. The first complete edition of the forms of unity was published in 1836, shortly after the revival of Reformed orthodoxy by the Secession of 1834. It was not until 1878 that the full phrase ‘the Three Forms of Unity’ came into official use, as part of Abraham Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist program, especially after he popularized the concept with the publication of *De Drie Formulieren van Eenigheid* (1883) (Vree 2007).

14.1 BELGIC CONFESSION (1561)

14.1.1 Historical Background

The BC was composed within the context of severe persecution of Reformed believers by Roman Catholic authorities in the southern provinces of the Netherlands (now Belgium), then under Spanish domination.

The confession was written in French in 1561 by Guido (Guy) de Brès (1522–67), pastor of the Reformed congregation in Doornik (Tournai). Born in Bergen (Mons), he converted to the Reformed faith in about 1547, then fled persecution to England. Returning in 1552, he served several congregations and wrote *Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne* (1555), which countered Roman Catholic views. In 1555 he fled to Frankfurt, then pursued theological studies at Lausanne and Geneva. In 1558 he was back, settling in Doornik. Persecution there caused him to flee to France in December 1561. He returned to his homeland in 1566, but after the iconoclasm of that year, he suffered martyrdom for his faith in 1567 (van Langeraad 1884).

The circumstances of the composition of the BC in Doornik are unknown. Before its publication, de Brès consulted several other pastors to suggest improvements, but whether changes were made is not known.

The BC is clearly patterned after the Gallican Confession (1559), not only its title page but also its general structure and a number of corresponding articles. Since the Gallican Confession was based on a preliminary draft by John Calvin (1509–64), his indirect influence is evident in the BC. Yet, de Brès made significant changes in phrasing, expressed doctrines more fully, and more prominently rejected Anabaptist teachings. Besides reflecting various topics from *Le Baston*, a number of articles of the BC also show traces of Theodore Beza's (1519–1605) confession (1559) (Gootjes 2007: 59–91).

In 1561 two editions of the confession were printed in Rouen and Lyon. The original title was: *Confession de Foy, Faicte d'un commun accord par les fideles qui conversent és Pays Bas, lesquels desirent vivre selon la pureté de l'Evangile de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ*. Two more French printings followed in 1562, and a Dutch translation in 1562, 1563, 1564, and 1566. Such demand indicates that the BC was broadly used in the early Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

The early editions contained a letter addressed to King Philip II of Spain, as well as a remonstrance to regional magistrates in the southern provinces. The address to the king appealed for the lives of Reformed believers (more than 100,000) in the Netherlands. Falsely accused of being seditious rebels, they instead prayed for those in authority, especially the king, as rulers ordained by God. The confession, ready to be signed with their blood, would show they were not schismatics, rebels, or heretics, but confessed not only the main points of the Christian faith commonly believed in the Creed but also all the biblical doctrine revealed by Christ. The remonstrance reminded local authorities that they were servants of God appointed to punish evildoers and protect the

good; on this basis it appealed for better treatment of innocents who were being brutally persecuted.

The earliest public appearances of the confession occurred in the fall of 1561. To gain a hearing with authorities, on the night of 1 November, a package containing a printed copy of the confession, with a letter protesting the persecutions, was thrown over the wall of the Doornik castle. About the same time, de Brès nailed a copy of the confession to the main doors, probably of the Roman Catholic church, to make it public (Gootjes 2007: 13–32).

The initial purpose of the confession was to instruct and comfort persecuted Reformed believers and to convince Roman Catholic authorities to tolerate the Reformed religion. It sought to show that adherents to this faith were not seditious rebels seeking to overthrow the government, like some Anabaptists (viewed as a seditious sect after the Münster rebellion of 1535), but law-abiding citizens loyal to the true Gospel of Christ.

In 1566 the synod of Antwerp made a comprehensive revision of the BC, consisting of various additions and deletions, corrections, clarifications, and stylistic improvements, but no substantive doctrinal changes. Noteworthy is that in article 36 the original edition stated that the task of government is to restrain and watch not only over the public domain, but also over ecclesiastical affairs, to remove and destroy all idolatry and false worship. The 1566 revision added a positive note: that its task was also to maintain the sacred ministry. The revision was sent to Geneva for approval; there it was printed the same year (Gootjes 2007: 117–31).

Very early, the BC functioned as a confessional witness to unity among Reformed churches of the Low Countries. The title states it was made ‘with common consent’ by believers throughout the Netherlands. At the provincial synod of Armentières (1563, probably held at Antwerp), ministers, elders, and deacons were expected to sign ‘the Confession of faith agreed on among us’, implying some form of adoption of the BC already earlier. The Synod of Antwerp (1565) required that the confession ‘of the churches of this land’ be read ‘to affirm our unity’. As the BC became established in the northern provinces of the Netherlands, first ministers, and then elders, deacons, school-teachers, and professors of theology were required by the synods of Emden (1571), recht (1574), Dordrecht (1578), and Middelburg (1581) to sign a copy of the BC to express their unity of faith. By the 1580s, the BC was functioning, not only as a witness to unity, but also as a standard of orthodoxy in doctrine, as is evident in the provincial synod of Rotterdam (1581) and national synod of The Hague (1586). With the rise of the Arminian controversy, to prevent ambiguity in what signing a copy of the BC meant, forms of subscription, which explained the meaning of subscribing, became prevalent after 1608 (Sinnema 2007).

The Arminian controversy that led to the national Synod of Dort (1618–19) partly centred on the content of the BC, especially article 16 on election. The Arminians called for revision of the confession, and at Dort they submitted observations to be considered in such a revision. These relatively minor observations were all in question form, without stating their own opinions. In response to the Dutch government’s request that the

synod, in the presence of the foreign delegates, examine whether the BC conformed to God's Word, the whole synod approved the confession regarding the substance of its doctrine, but not its formulations or articles on church polity. After the foreign theologians left, the Dutch delegates approved a revision of the text of the confession in French and Dutch, needed due to discrepancies between various printed editions. This was a general overhaul of the text, without substantive changes; the revision involved some additions, corrections, changes in response to Arminian observations, changes closer to biblical formulations, and the omission of scripture references. The approved French and Dutch revised texts were published in 1619. The synod also drafted a new form of subscription, requiring all ministers to adhere to the BC, HC, and CD (Sinnema, Moser, and Selderhuis 2015).

The decisions of Dort solidified the role of the BC as a confessional standard in Reformed churches of Dutch heritage for the following centuries.

14.1.2 Theology

Given the fact that Guido de Brès based the BC largely on the Gallican Confession, whose primary author was John Calvin, it is not surprising that the shape and some of the contents of the BC are distinctively Reformed. With respect to its structure, some scholars have detected a roughly Trinitarian division of the confession: God and revelation (Arts 1–9), Christ and redemption (10–23), and the Holy Spirit and sanctification (24–37) (e.g. Plantinga 1979: 39). This may be true in a broad sense, but the BC also mirrors the great theological systems of the Middle Ages and Reformation by surveying all major points of Christian doctrine, and in a sequence that follows the unfolding history of redemption. The BC begins with the doctrines of God and scripture (Arts 1–11) and then proceeds to the creation and fall of humanity (12–15), the person and work of Christ (16–21), the ministry of the Holy Spirit in salvation (22–6), the church and the sacraments (27–36), and the Last Judgment (37). This progression from the foundational principles of theology (God and scripture) to an ultimate goal (the Last Judgment) reflects not only the historical order of the Bible but also the synthetic method of systematizing theology (moving from causes to effects) that typified the Reformed tradition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Muller 1996: 152–4). In addition, the BC contains a number of Reformed theological accents, some with clear Calvinian origins: the universe as a 'book' of divine revelation (Art. 2); the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (5); the *extra calvinisticum* (19); the authority of the Old Testament (25); the existence of the church from the beginning of the world (27); a Presbyterian form of church government (30–31); a covenantal framework for the practice of infant baptism (34); the spiritual partaking of Christ's body and blood at the Lord's Supper (35); and a high view of the role of civil government in society (36).

The theology of the BC was also shaped by the two audiences that de Brès had in view as he composed it. In the context of Spanish and Catholic persecution of Reformed Protestants in the Low Countries, de Brès addressed his statement of faith both to those

responsible for the persecution and to those suffering at their hands. First of all, the BC can be seen as an apology, or defence, in which de Brès sought to persuade King Philip II of Spain that Reformed believers in the Low Countries were neither heretics nor seditionists. Already in Article 1, the definition of God includes a standard list of divine attributes ('eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty', etc.) (*Our Faith* 2013: 26) that can be traced back through the Middle Ages to the patristic period. The same is true of the BC's doctrine of the Trinity, which explicitly distances itself from the major heresies of the past and affirms its agreement with the three ecumenical creeds of the ancient church (Art. 9). Other articles too—for example, on the deity of Christ (Art. 10), the deity of the Holy Spirit (Art. 11), creation (Art. 12), providence (Art. 13), original sin (Art. 15), the incarnation and two natures of Christ (Arts. 18–19), and the atonement (Arts. 20–21)—are simply 'affirmations of the universal, apostolic Christian faith held in common with Roman Catholics' (Bolt 2013: 7).

Furthermore, the BC emphasizes to King Philip and his proxies that Reformed Christians should not be identified with more radical forms of Protestantism. It is noteworthy that never once does the term 'Catholic' appear in the BC, yet Anabaptists are mentioned by name three times. Reformed Protestants are against the Anabaptist 'heresy' of the heavenly origins of Christ's body (Art. 18), oppose the Anabaptist 'error' of condemning infant baptism (34), and 'reject the Anabaptists, anarchists, and in general all those who want to reject the authorities and civil officers' (36). Many Anabaptists of that day were peace-loving, of course, but in the sixteenth century their refusal to participate in civil government was viewed by other Christians as a subversion of the divine order of society. De Brès wishes to assure the king that, by contrast, he and his fellow believers pay their taxes, honour and pray for their rulers, and 'obey them in all things that are not in conflict with God's Word' (Art. 36) (*Our Faith* 2013: 65–6).

The theology of the BC was also formed by de Brès's intent to instruct the underground congregations in the Lowlands in the basics of the Reformed faith. Although the BC is less polemical in its opposition to Roman Catholicism than the Gallican Confession was, a number of its articles were designed to differentiate Protestant and Roman Catholic teaching. The apocryphal books (Art. 6), for example, are clearly set apart from the canonical books of scripture (4), although the former still have limited value. We are assured of the authority of scripture not first of all by the church but by the Holy Spirit (5), and the tradition of the church must never be put on a par with scripture itself (7). Baptism does not abolish original sin (15), nor are we justified by anyone or anything other than Christ alone through faith alone (22–3). Our good works do not lead to justification but flow out of a justifying faith (24). It is only Christ, and not also the saints, who intercedes for us before the Father (26). Finally, de Brès distinguishes the true church from the false (Roman Catholic) church by the marks of preaching, sacraments, and church discipline (29), and rejects both baptismal regeneration (34) and transubstantiation (35).

The teaching of the BC was intended not only to educate and unite these underground congregations but also to comfort them in the midst of their suffering. In his treatment

of the doctrine of providence, de Brès assures his compatriots that ‘even when the devils and the wicked act unjustly’, God is still in control and watches over his people; nothing happens by chance (Art. 13). Even though it appears at times as if the church has been ‘snuffed out’, God has always preserved her ‘against the rage of the whole world’ (27), and some day, at the great judgment, ‘their cause—at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers—will be acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God’ (37). Here, as elsewhere in the BC, pastoral words to the persecuted serve also as a warning to those who are oppressing them.

14.2 HEIDELBERG CATECHISM (1563)

14.2.1 Historical Background

The Heidelberg Catechism derives its name from the city in southwestern Germany where it was composed and first published. However, its full title, ‘Catechism or Christian Instruction as This Is Conducted in Churches and Schools of the Electoral Palatinate’, indicates that it was written not just for a single city but for the entire territory of which Heidelberg was the capital. The Palatinate was an important state in the Holy Roman Empire (Germany), in part because its ruler was one of seven electors responsible for choosing the Holy Roman Emperor. Like several other parts of the empire, the Palatinate changed its official religion from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism during the sixteenth century, but the Palatine Reformation underwent a longer incubation period than other major territories. Lutheran and south German Reformed influences had penetrated the region already during the reign of Elector Louis V (ruled 1508–44), but it was not until 1546, nearly 30 years after Luther launched the Protestant Reformation, that the Palatinate publicly joined the Lutheran cause under the leadership of Elector Frederick II (ruled 1544–56). With the Peace of Augsburg’s legalization of Lutheranism in the empire in 1555, Elector Otto Henry (ruled 1556–9) introduced broad Melanchthonian reforms into the Palatinate, and invited Protestants of a variety of stripes to Heidelberg to assist him. It was left to his successor, Elector Frederick III (ruled 1559–76), to bring these Protestant parties together as he further reformed the doctrine, worship, and organization of the church in his territory along Melanchthonian-Reformed lines. The flagship of this phase of the Palatine reformation was the Heidelberg Catechism (Gunnøe 2005).

Frederick III’s preface to the catechism suggests that he had at least three purposes in mind when he commissioned it (Bierma 2005b: 50–52). First, it was to serve as a tool for teaching Christian doctrine to young people in the churches and schools of the Palatinate. When Frederick ascended the throne in 1559, he had ordered a visitation of the churches in his realm to assess their spiritual health, and what he found was

disheartening. Especially the young people were growing up with little knowledge of God or Christian piety, and those teachers who did offer doctrinal instruction were using an assortment of catechisms. If the territory was really to be Reformed, Frederick concluded, the place to begin was with the training of children based on a single clear summary of biblical truth.

Second, the HC was to function as a preaching guide for ministers of the Word. To facilitate catechetical preaching, the HC was divided into 52 sections, or Lord's Days, so that a minister could work through the entire catechism once a year in sermons at a second worship service on Sunday afternoons.

Third, the catechism provided a form of doctrinal unity for the several Protestant factions in the Palatinate. Given the presence in Heidelberg of Gnesio-Lutherans, Philippist (Melancthonian) Lutherans, Zwinglians (or Bullingerians), and Calvinists, as well as a variety of catechisms in use at the time, one of Frederick's goals was to produce a consensus confession that would fit within the framework of the Augsburg Confession, the document to which all Lutheran territories in the empire were required to subscribe.

The details of the preparation of the HC, including the identity of its writer(s), are largely lost to history. No author or authors are named on the title page or in the preface by Frederick III, and records that might have contained these names were either lost or destroyed in the regime changes and wars that plagued the Palatinate for a century after the HC first appeared. In his preface to the catechism, however, Frederick does refer to the 'advice and cooperation of our entire theological faculty in this place, and of all superintendents and distinguished servants [or chief ministers] of the Church, [through whom] we have secured the preparation of a summary course of instruction or catechism of our Christian Religion' (quoted in Richards 1913: 193, 195). The drafting of the HC, therefore, was first and foremost a team project, supervised by the elector and involving professors, superintendents, and ministers from all the major Protestant parties in Heidelberg at the time. The two men traditionally associated with the authorship of the HC, Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83) and Caspar Olevianus (1536–87), were members of this team, the former in his capacity as a theology professor at the university and the latter as a minister and superintendent of the church. Ursinus, who had written two earlier catechisms and later became the chief commentator and apologist for the HC, probably functioned as the primary author. Olevianus seems to have had a lesser role, although likely not as insignificant as some recent scholarship has suggested (Bierma 2005b: 52–74).

The sources on which Ursinus and the drafting committee drew were as diverse as the committee itself. The most obvious source text was the so-called *Catechesis minor*, or Smaller Catechism, probably composed by Ursinus in late 1561 or early 1562 as an instructional tool for children and uneducated adults, and perhaps even as a preliminary draft of the HC itself. At least 90 of the Smaller Catechism's 108 questions and answers reappear in some form in the HC, sometimes nearly verbatim. The HC also reflects some of the language of Ursinus' other earlier catechism, the *Summa Theologiae* (sometimes called the Larger Catechism), which was likely composed in late 1562 as a theological text for advanced students. At least 28 of the Larger Catechism's 323 questions

and answers have linguistic parallels in the HC that cannot be traced to the Smaller Catechism (Bierma 2005a).

These two catechisms by Ursinus, however, were hardly the only sources employed in the composition of the HC. Among earlier works by Theodore Beza, Johannes Brenz, Martin Bucer, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, Leo Jud, Johannes à Lasco, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Marten Micronius, and Mattheus Zell, it was texts by four of these reformers in particular—two Lutheran and two Reformed—that served as likely sources for some of the language of the HC: Luther's Small Catechism (1529); Melancthon's 'Examination of Ordinands' (1552), a catechetical text used in preparing ministerial candidates for ordination; Calvin's Genevan Catechism (1542); and the north German Reformed catechisms by Johannes à Lasco and his circle (1540s–1550s) (Bierma 2013a: 193–9). Whatever sources Ursinus and the drafting committee employed, however, the HC is more than simply a splice of earlier texts. It is a work all its own, even in the way that it refashions the questions and answers taken from the Smaller Catechism. Many of its threads are borrowed, but it is an original tapestry woven by a loomsman of considerable skill.

14.2.2 Theology

The theology of the HC is shaped in part by the catechetical genre to which the document belongs. Like all Christian catechisms before and after it, the HC is essentially an exposition of the basic elements of the Christian faith: the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. What is distinctive about this catechism, however, is that it weaves its explanations of these elements into a threefold structure: human misery (Q/A 3–11), deliverance (Q/A 12–85), and gratitude (Q/A 86–129). These submotifs, in turn, elaborate on the central theme of the catechism introduced in Q/A 1: the comfort of the believer. This theme and threefold structure are striking because they set a tone for the HC that is not first of all theological but pastoral and devotional. By selecting as the very first question, 'What is your only *comfort* in life and in death?' (*Our Faith* 2013: 69), the authors seem to have sensed a profound 'dis-comfort' in the religious lives and experience of their audience, and the theological material that follows is focused on that spiritual anxiety. The HC explains not just the meaning of a doctrine, but its meaning for *us*, its relation to the life and experience of the believer and the Christian community. How does Christian doctrine help us (Q/A 28)? How does it benefit us (Q/A 36, 43, 45, 49, 51)? How does it comfort us (Q/A 52, 57, 58)? What good is it to us (Q/A 59)? How does it remind and assure us (Q/A 69, 75)? Like Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes* (1536), the HC is not just a manual of theology, but a handbook on Christian piety.

Borrowing, as we have seen, from both Lutheran and Reformed sources, the HC represents a textual and theological synthesis of the two traditions, a Lutheran vine, as it were, onto which various Reformed branches are grafted. For example, the comfort theme; the threefold structure of misery, deliverance, and gratitude; the contrast

between law and Gospel, which is wedded to the first two divisions of the HC (Q/A 3, 19); and the headings that introduce the three parts of the Apostles' Creed (Q/A 24) are all of Lutheran parentage. The HC also sought to respect the Lutheran tradition in general and the boundaries of the Augsburg Confession in particular with very muted doctrines of predestination and covenant. But throughout the text we encounter a number of Reformed theological accents as well: the threefold office of Christ (Q/A 31), the descent of Christ into hell while on the Cross (Q/A 44), the *extra calvinisticum* (Q/A 47–8), the *fractio panis* (breaking of the bread) during Holy Communion (Q/A 75, 77), the numbering of the Ten Commandments (Q/A 93ff.), the prohibition of images in churches (Q/A 97–8), and the so-called practical syllogism (Q/A 86) (Bierma 2013b).

The theology of the HC is also defined by implicit and explicit attacks on doctrinal positions with which the authors disagree (Latzel 2004: 195–8). The sharpest polemics are reserved for the Roman Catholic Church, which is mentioned by name in Q. 80 ('How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic [literally: papal] Mass?'), and whose teaching on the Mass is anathematized in the last part of the answer: 'Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable [or accursed] idolatry' (*Our Faith* 2013: 98). But the HC also has Catholicism in view when it rejects all reliance on self or saints for salvation (29–30, 94, 102), the contribution of human works to justification (62–4), baptismal regeneration (72), transubstantiation (78), good works based on human tradition (91), and the worship of images and pictures (97–8).

In addition, the Christology in the HC's doctrine of Christ's ascension (HC 46–9), and perhaps in its doctrine of Christ the mediator (HC 15–18), was formulated in direct response to the ubiquitarian view of Christ's human nature held by some of the Gnesio-Lutherans of the day. Finally, the HC rejects Anabaptist teachings on baptism (HC 74), the swearing of oaths (101), and civil government (101, 104, 105), even though no names are mentioned and the polemical tone here is not as sharp as it is against the Roman Catholics (Latzel 2004: 195–6).

Nevertheless, in the middle of a theological spectrum bounded by Roman Catholics and Gnesio-Lutherans on the one side and Anabaptists on the other, the HC represents a remarkable doctrinal consensus achieved by employing several of what today we would call 'ecumenical' strategies. In addition to drawing upon catechetical sources from all theological parties in the Palatinate, the HC focuses largely on fundamental Christian truths, emphasizes theological convergences, stakes out middle positions, presents doctrines positively without explicitly rejecting other views, avoids or only lightly touches upon disputed topics, and sometimes simply combines elements of more than one tradition into a single formulation. In these respects, the HC can be considered a model consensus confession, at least within the limits of the Melancthonian-Reformed synthesis it sought to bring about. By the standards of the twenty-first century, this was an achievement of rather modest proportions. But when placed in its own context, at a time when European Christianity was rapidly fragmenting, the HC stands as one of the best examples of an attempt at Protestant confessional unity from the entire Reformation era (Bierma 2013b: 116–29).

14.3 CANONS OF DORT (1619)

14.3.1 Historical Background

‘The Canons of Dort’ is the popular name for the statements of doctrine adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618–19), which convened in the Dutch city of Dordrecht, in order to settle a major controversy that arose in the Dutch Reformed churches with the advent of Arminianism.

A half-century earlier, John Calvin had taught double predestination, the view (already in Augustine) that from eternity God decided to elect or choose some people to salvation and reprobate others to condemnation. While this was not a central teaching for Calvin, some of his followers, especially Theodore Beza, William Perkins, and Franciscus Gomarus, gave predestination a more prominent role and developed an extreme form of this doctrine known as supralapsarianism (the view that God from eternity predestined some to eternal life and others to eternal death without considering them as fallen and deserving of condemnation).

Jacobus Arminius (1559–1609), who had studied under Beza in Geneva, challenged the teachings of Calvin and his followers on several points, and advocated a position that placed less emphasis on divine sovereignty and more on human responsibility in salvation. This brought Arminius into controversy while serving as a minister of the Reformed church in Amsterdam in the 1590s. After he became a professor of theology at Leiden University in 1603, the controversy intensified as his views collided with those of his supralapsarian colleague, Gomarus. Arminius’ views were most clearly expressed in his *Declaration of Sentiments* (1608).

After Arminius’ death, his followers summarized the Arminian position in five articles in the Remonstrance of 1610 (here abbreviated):

1. God by an eternal decree has in Christ determined to save sinners in Christ who by grace shall believe and persevere in faith, and to condemn unbelievers.
2. Christ died and merited forgiveness for all people; yet only those who believe will be saved.
3. No one has saving faith by his own free will; it is necessary to be regenerated by God in order to perform any true good.
4. All good works must be ascribed to the grace of God, but the mode of this grace is not irresistible.
5. By aid of grace, believers have abundant strength to persevere, but whether they can by negligence fall from grace must still be determined from scripture (Bakhuizen van den Brink 1976: 288–9).

Later, Arminians (or Remonstrants) more explicitly based election and reprobation on human faith and unbelief foreseen by God, and they affirmed that believers can fall completely from the state of grace.

These five articles formed the pattern for later debates, also at the Synod of Dort. At a conference between the two sides in The Hague (1611), articles 3 and 4 were combined because both sides recognized there was no real controversy on the third point. Thereafter these two articles were usually treated together.

Throughout the following decade, the controversy agitated the Dutch church, university, and public arena. Finally in 1618, the Dutch government convened the Synod of Dort in order to resolve the matter. The proceedings of the synod continued six and a half months. This was a national synod of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, but it had an international character. There were fifty-eight Dutch delegates from the various provinces and the Walloon churches, including five theologians from Dutch universities and academies. But also present were twenty-six Reformed theologians from 8 foreign territories (Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, four Swiss cantons, Nassau-Wetteravia, Geneva, Bremen and Emden). The Dutch government also sent eighteen state delegates to supervise and advise on matters of procedure. Thirteen leading Arminians, led by Simon Episcopius, were called before the synod, not to serve as delegates, but to have their views examined and adjudicated. The Arminians refused to recognize the synod as a legitimate judge of their views; they wanted a conference between the opposing parties. After six weeks of procedural wrangling, they were expelled from the synod (Sinnema, Moser, and Selderhuis 2015).

For the next three months, the synod debated the issues to prepare for making its judgement on the Arminian case. On the basis of advice presented by the Dutch and foreign delegations, synod president Johannes Bogerman presented an initial draft, but the synod opted to appoint a committee of nine to draft the Canons in Latin. In the course of three weeks, the committee prepared its own draft, received input from the various delegations, and made a revision—a process that was repeated twice before the Canons were adopted by the synod and signed by all its members (Sinnema 2011a). In light of the diverse viewpoints of the time, the Canons took a moderate Reformed stance on the disputed issues.

The Canons have a special character because of their original purpose as a judicial decision on the doctrinal points in dispute in the Arminian controversy. Thus the formal title is: ‘The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands’.

In its later sessions, the synod drew up a form of subscription by which all ministers of the Dutch Reformed churches were required to signify that all points of doctrine contained in the BC, HC, and CD fully agree with the Word of God. Thus the Canons acquired a secondary purpose: they became a doctrinal standard for the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, alongside the Confession and the Catechism (Sinnema 2011b).

The Canons, however, have a more limited character than the Confession and Catechism; they do not encompass the whole range of doctrine, but focus only on the five points in dispute—predestination and associated issues concerning the extent of the atonement, the impact of sin, the way God’s grace works, and perseverance in faith. Though narrower in range, the Canons elaborate more on these themes than do the

other two standards. As expressed by the form of subscription, the Canons are an 'explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine' presented in the Confession and Catechism (Sinnema 2007: 373).

The Canons consist of a preface, five chapters, and a conclusion. Although in form they have only four chapters, properly speaking there are five chapters, because the structure of the Canons corresponds to the five articles of the 1610 Remonstrance. Following the pattern of debates after 1611, chapters 3 and 4 are combined.

Each of the chapters consists of a positive and a negative section, the former a presentation of the Reformed teaching on the topic, the latter a rejection of corresponding errors. Since the Canons were primarily intended to provide the Synod of Dort's judgement on the points disputed with the Arminians, this required above all a rejection of their alleged errors. The negative sections typically paraphrase, rather than directly quote, Arminian errors; then respond to each with a brief rebuttal, usually drawn from scripture. In order to make clear the basis for its judgment of the errors, the synod included the positive explanation of the Reformed stance on these matters. In later years, as the controversy faded, the positive sections emerged as the dominant part (Sinnema 2011b).

14.3.2 Theology

Chapter 1 of the Canons presents a moderate treatment of God's election of some people and reprobation of others. It begins, not with God's decision in eternity, but rather within the historical horizon, with the fallen state of humanity, which deserves condemnation. The chapter then moves to God's love by sending his Son for salvation, proclaimed in the Gospel message, which receives the human response of faith or unbelief. Such faith is solely a free gift of God, whereas the cause of unbelief lies in humans themselves. In the sixth article, the chapter finally ascends to God's eternal decision or decree of election and reprobation in order to explain the historical fact that some receive the gift of faith and others do not. Election is explained first, then reprobation. Against the Arminian view of election and reprobation based on foreseen faith and unbelief, the Canons teach that God elects some sinners to salvation solely by his good pleasure, not as a response to human belief; on the other hand, God reprobates others by the decision of his will, and yet they perish by their own fault. So in reprobating, God does not eternally condemn innocent people. The Canons treat predestination in a pastorally sensitive manner, so that this teaching might be a comfort to believers rather than a threat. Assurance of their election comes from seeing in themselves the fruits of election (Sinnema 2019).

This formulation of predestination is typically *infralapsarian* (the view that in predestining to life and to death God considers those predestined as fallen and deserving of condemnation). Chapter 1 thus avoids—but does not condemn—the severity of the *supralapsarian* stance.

Chapter 2 focuses on the nature and extent of Christ's atonement for sins. God's justice requires punishment for sin, but on the cross Christ completely satisfied God's

justice in our place. In a universal tone, this chapter emphasizes that the infinite value of Christ's death is more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world, and so the Gospel message that whoever believes shall be saved ought to be proclaimed to all. Yet, contra the Arminian view that Christ died for all and obtained forgiveness for all, this chapter also teaches that the atonement is particular in that Christ's death efficaciously redeems only those God has elected to salvation.

Chapter 3/4, which deals with human corruption and the way God's grace works in conversion, first stresses that, by the Fall, humanity became pervasively corrupted, enslaved to sin, and utterly unable on its own to return to God. Yet humans remain human, with intellect and will; they are not mere puppets. Conversion (or regeneration) occurs not by free choice; it is a work of God by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, which comes with a well-meant call to salvation. In conversion, God's grace works not only outwardly in the proclamation of the Gospel; it also penetrates inwardly by the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, softening the heart and freeing the will, thus producing faith in such a way that the person receiving grace is himself enabled to believe and repent. Faith is a gift of God, but not in the sense that God offers it to be accepted or rejected by human choice. Against the Arminian opinion that grace is resistible, this chapter asserts that God's regenerating grace works powerfully and efficaciously, not coercing a reluctant will by force, but rather spiritually reforming the will to overcome its resistance.

Chapter 5 focuses on the perseverance of believers in faith until the end of life. Though set free from slavery to sin, the converted are not free from sin in this life, and they can even be led astray into very serious sins. But God does not let them fall so far that they totally forfeit grace and faith and thus perish, a scenario the Arminians considered possible. Such persons are able to persevere, not by their own inner strength, but rather because God powerfully preserves them and renews them to repentance by his Word and Spirit. Though they may yet have doubts, believers can be assured of this preservation. Such assurance does not lead to false security or carelessness, as if once saved it does not matter how one lives; rather, it is an incentive to godliness.

The main intent of the Canons' conclusion is to reject a number of false accusations by Arminians and others that exaggerated or misconstrued various aspects of Reformed teachings. Since some ground for several of these accusations could be found in careless statements by certain Reformed leaders of the time, the conclusion also urges ministers to refrain from ways of speaking that go beyond the limits of scripture (*Our Faith* 2013: 119–44).

The five topics of the Canons are often called 'the five points of Calvinism', even though Calvinism cannot be reduced to five points and not all of the points stem directly from Calvin. Just as misleading is the summary of the Canons by the acronym TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. The acronym is of recent origin, dating from the first years of the twentieth century in America. Though helpful for memory, TULIP has had the regrettable result not only of altering the proper order of the five points, but also of oversimplifying and distorting the nuanced teaching of the Canons. The first point is not just

about *unconditional election*, but also reprobation, introduced by the universal sinfulness of humanity and the Gospel message. The concept *limited atonement* focuses on Christ's death as effective only for the elect, but fails to capture the universal features of chapter 2, that his death was sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world and so should be proclaimed to all. *Total depravity* is easily misunderstood as absolute depravity, the notion that humans can do no good at all; whereas this chapter teaches pervasive depravity and the utter inability of people to save themselves, without denying that fallen humans have some sense of moral good and desire for good outward behavior. The Canons do not actually teach that grace is *irresistible*, but rather that divine grace is efficacious and overcomes human resistance. And the emphasis of the last chapter is more on God's preservation of the elect than on their own *perseverance* (Sinnema 2011c: 102–3).

The Canons of Dort have continued to function as a confessional standard in Reformed churches of Dutch heritage throughout the world. Although they respond to a seventeenth-century controversy, the Canons remain one of the most significant confessional statements in the Reformed tradition on the recurring issue of how divine sovereignty relates to human responsibility in salvation. In a balanced and theologically precise manner, the Canons affirm the central message—salvation, from beginning to end, occurs wholly by God's gracious initiative, not by human decision; and yet this does not erode human responsibility.

SUGGESTED READING

Apperloo-Boersma and Selderhuis (2013); Bierma (2005b; 2013b); Gootjes (2007); *Our Faith* (2013); Plantinga (1979); Sinnema (2011a; 2011b).

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CHAPTER 15

THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

CHAD VAN DIXHOORN

THE ‘Westminster Standards’ were penned at the end of England’s second Reformation, and symbolized the high-water mark of Protestant scholasticism. The cluster of 1640s texts both codified prior developments in Reformed doctrine and standardized theological vocabulary. Terms and phrases employed by the assembly almost immediately became the preferred parlance of English-speaking Reformed churches, and when Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists wished to create confessional or catechetical texts of their own, they often reverted to revising and reissuing works produced by the Westminster assembly (1643–53).

The idea of ‘Westminster Standards’ was rooted in the Church of Scotland’s adoption, in the mid-seventeenth century, of the Westminster assembly’s doctrinal texts, as well as its directories for worship and church governance. The collective term ‘Standards’ was coined in Scotland probably in the eighteenth century, whilst in England and then America it came to be used as shorthand for the doctrinal texts of the assembly only: the Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism authored in 1646 and 1647. It is these historic texts that this chapter considers, with only limited attention to later revisions (Van Dixhoorn 2014: xxi–xxiii).

15.1 THE CATECHISMS

The Westminster catechisms offer questions and answers covering a full range of doctrinal topics, but with a special focus on soteriology and the Christian life. The catechisms are also designed to be companion texts to the confession of faith, and parallel presentations of the 1646 Confession and the 1647 catechisms show extensive verbal dependence of the later texts on the earlier: the Shorter Catechism (WSC) leans on the Larger; the Larger Catechism (WLC) largely derives from the Confession.

Of these three texts, the Larger Catechism is the least known and most underemployed. It is not widely recognized that the Larger Catechism is actually the lengthiest text among the Westminster Standards, nor is it often considered that its statements benefit from an additional year of assembly debate. It offers the ripest fruit of the assembly's deliberations, and, while its formulations mostly mirror that of the Confession, there are places where it develops ideas in the Confession. It lives in the shadows of the Confession, and yet its description of federal theology is crisper than that of the Confession, and its statements about the role of union with Christ in the application of redemption offer a helpful supplement to the earlier statement. Studies of the Westminster Standards are best served when they focus both on the Confession of Faith and on the Larger Catechism (the Shorter being almost entirely a by-product of the Larger, save for its individual vs. corporate approach to the subjects it discusses).

The structure of the catechisms is both more straightforward and more subtle than that of the Confession. On the face of both texts is a programmatic statement: 'Q. What do the scriptures principally teach? A. The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man' (WLC 5, WSC 3). The remainder of each catechism discusses indicatives (who God is and what he has done) prior to imperatives (what we must do). Each question follows logically after that which precedes it but, unlike previous catechisms (such as Calvin's, or to some extent the Heidelberg Catechism), each question can be understood on its own terms without reference to a prior sequence of questions and answer. Additionally, each answer offers an aphorism which can be understood independently from the questions asked: 'Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.'

Nonetheless, if this is the overt structure, it is also true that both catechisms also follow a traditional pattern of expounding the Apostles' Creed (although the classic text is deliberately not mentioned), the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer (Bower 2010: 20–24). This structure is significant, as the focus on the law and on Christian piety gives these texts ethical and spiritual accents not found in the Confession. As well, the Larger Catechism offers an ecclesial perspective distinct from the more individualist emphasis of the Shorter Catechism, resulting in an accent on the practical importance of church life for the Christian community (Godfrey 1994: 135–8).

15.2 *PRINCIPIA*

The chapters of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) are clustered in a manner generically similar to that of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the second Helvetic Confession, the Irish Articles of 1615, and Protestant systems of doctrine generally: it begins with *principia*, moves to soteriology, and concludes with doctrines related to the church. Beginning with the knowledge of God and then the doctrine of God, the third chapter of the Confession treats the decree of God.

The first of these chapters, 'Of the Holy Scripture', is the longest in the Confession. It opens with a statement about what can be known from general revelation, distinguishing

between a revelation interior to human beings and that which is outside of us. It then treats those subjects known only through special revelation, which is now restricted to the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures. Paragraphs discuss the canon and the complexity and clarity of Scripture, and offer polemical statements aimed at the continuation of charismatic gifts, medieval exegesis, and the authority claims of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

The second chapter, masking the extensive debates that took place at the assembly about the best formulations of Trinitarian doctrine, offers a classic treatment of the Godhead, ordered according to a rough biblical theological development of the doctrine: the oneness and independence of God, a balanced and doxological list of his perfections from his love to his justice, and finally his triune nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The latter statement carefully echoes the classic Trinitarian creeds. The corresponding questions and answers offered in the assembly's catechisms have almost become creeds of their own: 'What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.' 'Are there more gods than one? There is but one only, the living and true God.' 'How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory' (WSC 4–6).

The third chapter, on the decree, proved significant in subsequent Reformed theology. It not only presents a sturdy statement of a Calvinistic (or better, a Reformed) treatment of the decree, but also served to solidify a vocabulary to be used in discussions about the decree. Its presentation of predestination is limited to election only, and not to reprobation (WCF 3.3–5, 8; 10.1), while 'foreordination' is used both generally, referring to the divine decree(s) (WCF 3.6; WLC 12; WSC 7), and narrowly, referring to reprobation (WCF 3.3–4; WLC 13). In this way the Confession and both catechisms introduce a 'soft' distinction of sorts in the way in which predestination and fore-ordination are used to refer to election and reprobation respectively. The emphasis of the chapter is on predestination as it relates to salvation, but it also makes important points about the knowledge of God, such as his comprehensive knowledge of hypothetical scenarios and the independence of his decision from his foreknowledge: he does not peer into the future to see how we might respond, and then plan accordingly (WCF 3.2). If one reads the paragraphs sequentially, as they are meant to be read, a strong case can be made that the movement from paragraph 6 ('the elect only') to 7 ('the rest of mankind') precludes the hypothetical universalism held by some assembly members.

15.3 CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

The internal logic of the confessional text in the following few chapters is implicit, but the catechisms' discussion of doctrine makes these movements explicit (although in the catechisms the decrees are referred to as a plurality): 'How does God execute his decrees? God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence' (WSC 8).

Here the Confession enters its discussion of human history and treats the subjects of creation (ch. 4) and providence (ch. 5), followed by that impenetrable ‘permission’ and ‘purpose’ of providence (ch. 6)—the plunge of humanity into sin. Redemptive history begins to be narrated in chapter 7 (God’s covenant) and chapter 8 (God’s mediator).

The chapter on creation is a traditional statement on the subject. It avoids the specificity of some assembly exegetes who preferred to state the length of the Creation days. It emphasizes the divine act of making all things of nothing, the historicity and theological importance of Adam as the first man, made in the image of God; it outlines the purposes of Creation, and it reminds readers that the created world that people see may be a mere shadow of the created world they do not. The chapter on providence, in addition to its adumbration of the fuller discussion of the Fall found in chapter 6, repeatedly emphasizes the wisdom of God and his special care for his people.

Chapter 6 of the Confession tells the sad story of the Fall of man and then details the grim realities of sin and of punishment. It relates what is a shocking event to us, but not to God. He knew it was coming because he ‘was pleased’, according to ‘his wise and holy counsel’, to permit Satan’s smooth propaganda and Adam and Eve’s rebellion. It is perhaps the first irony, and arguably the greatest one recorded in the Confession, that the Creator planned to use Satan’s supposed subtlety; he ‘purposed to order it to his glory’ (WCF 6.1). These first movements in the garden, however, are a grim overture to much misery to follow. Very much within the Augustinian tradition, the Confession presents sin as a cancer we cannot cure; a walking death; a plight from which we cannot help ourselves escape.

Embedded in the narrative of the Fall is an understanding of Adam as a representative. While the details are narrated differently in the Confession (with a more traditional narration of the fall) and in the Larger Catechism (with a clearer articulation of federal theology), it is evident that Adam’s actions affected the lot of his spouse and all his descendants. Whatever the nuances of the headship of our first parent(s) in chapter 6, a robust covenant theology obtains when chapters 6, 7, and 8 are read as a unit.

15.4 REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED

The treatment of covenants in the Westminster Standards presents all humanity in relationship either to the first or to the last Adam. Nonetheless, it is not uncomplicated in its details. The Standards insist that we are made in God’s image, and that our first parents understood from the beginning the true nature of ‘knowledge, righteousness, and holiness’. Adam and Eve knew this because the law of God, reflecting the character of God, was ‘written in their hearts’ (WLC 17; WCF 4.2). That said, while people bore this image and were inscribed with this law, the Confession of Faith also insists that the distance between God and humanity is so great that God voluntarily condescended to us, without which people would have no benefit from him at all. God’s act of ‘voluntary condescension’ was to establish a covenant (WCF 7.1). In other words, the law of God was

implanted in Creation, and yet humanity cannot flourish without covenant. For that reason, God brought our first parents into a covenantal relationship with himself through a ‘special act of providence’ (WSC 12), variously termed a ‘covenant of works’ (WCF 7.2) and a ‘covenant of life’ (WSC 12). The implantation of law in the human conscience is coincident with creation, and yet the creation of a covenant falls under the realm of providence. In other words, from the viewpoint of the Confession, this law on their hearts was not naked; it was clothed from (almost?) the beginning in a covenantal arrangement. It is for that reason the man and the woman were not alone together in the garden; it is in that way they were enabled to live in relationship with God.

Now ‘man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant’, the Standards explain that God made a second covenant, a ‘covenant of grace’ (WCF 7.3). The covenant of grace is discussed in historical terms, noting the contrasts in the way in which the covenant of grace was administered in Old Testament and in the New. Nonetheless, as understood by the Westminster assembly, the covenant of grace bridges both the Old Covenant and the New, and the ‘substance’ of the covenant of grace is the same in all administrations of that covenant: it is Christ himself; he is the way to receive the promise and the promise itself, and is called in the Standards the ‘surety’ of the covenant (WCF 8.3). A surety is a ‘person who undertakes some specific responsibility on behalf of’ someone else. The surety is the guarantee, the person ‘who makes himself liable for the default or miscarriage of another’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*)—no matter what the cost. The cost for the surety of God’s elect was his humiliation, encapsulated in his incarnation, obedience, suffering, death, and burial. All of this was necessary for us to share in his subsequent resurrection, ascension, session, and glory.

Although the soteriological overlay of the accomplishment of redemption is presented in terms of federal theology, it is also evident that historic soteric concerns are granted an equal interest in the Westminster Standards, as the surviving records of the assembly’s debates would lead us to expect. If the Westminster assembly was convinced that the development of covenant theology in prior decades offered the best exposition of the Gospel and a strong backbone for the soteriological sections of the Confession, it was also concerned to properly present more traditional theological concerns assumed in and heightened by discussions about federal theology. Both debates demanded a full-orbed Christology, but where the accent of debates over federal theology emphasized the humanity of Christ, the emphasis in the more traditional debates fell on the divinity of Christ.

Traditional concerns revolved, in part, around a properly construed relationship between a work and a reward. Is it the case that there is some necessary correspondence between a work and its reward? Or is the connection between the two a matter which God himself can freely determine as he pleases but, once determined, is obliged in faithfulness to his own word to maintain? In terms of classical theology and philosophy, is the relationship between works and rewards real or nominal? The Westminster Standards choose to highlight both of these aspects—the glory of God’s freedom (the nominal) and the consistency and goodness of God’s character and choices (the real). On the one hand, the Confession’s doxological description of God in chapter 2 emphasizes that

‘To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them’ (WCF 2:2). On the other, the Larger Catechism carefully explains that sin is an offence ‘against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God’ and also ‘against his righteous law’ (WLC 152). Note that this deliberate distinction between the person of God and the will of God is that which explains why ‘sin, even the least’ sin, deserves God’s wrath and curse, and why it ‘cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ’. Significantly, the explanation offered by the catechism is that the standard for sin and obedience is real, not nominal; it is determined by, or in relation to, the person and character of God.

This insistence on a real or ontological definition of work and reward, or ‘merit,’ while most succinctly noted in the Larger Catechism, is present throughout the assembly’s confessional standards. It suggests that while anything that God demands is due to him, yet God will demand and reward only that which is consonant with the holiness and justice of his character. Both in their lament of our demerits and in their praise of Christ’s merits, the Westminster Standards describe a relationship between work and rewards that can be summarized under five headings: a meritorious work must be free, perfect, personal, profitable, and proportional. Each of these descriptors captures defining elements or aspects of merit as commonly understood in the Protestant tradition leading up to (and subsequent to) the meeting of the Westminster assembly.

The first aspect of a truly meritorious work (a work deserving of reward) is that it is free. If one must perform a work as a matter of debt, he or she can hardly request a reward for that work when completed. Under this heading, as in every aspect of a discussion of merit, we encounter a contrast between sinner and the Saviour. Such is the debt of mankind to make that as reasoning ‘creatures’ people ‘owe obedience unto’ God as ‘Creator’ (WCF 7.1). Indeed, quite apart from the fact that people ‘are guilty both of original and actual sin, and thereby [have] become debtors to the justice of God’ (WLC 194), every person knows that he or she owes ‘whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require’ (WCF 2:2). But Jesus Christ, by way of contrast, is no mere creature and he owed no obedience to the creator. This was a subject about which the assembly debated at length (e.g. Van Dixhoorn 2012: i.53–8), and thus the gathering’s statement that the incarnate ‘Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake’ his work as mediator should be read as a deliberate and not an accidental comment on his meritorious work (WCF 8.4). His actions were performed freely, and not as a matter of debt. His work was meritorious because it was free.

The second aspect of proper merit, as described in the Standards, is that it be perfect. There must be nothing lacking in the performance of the work that would make it unworthy of reward. Unsurprisingly, the Standards’ discussion of sin clarifies that as fallen persons—and even as redeemed—‘our best works’ fall short of God’s standard for obedience (WCF 16.5). Echoing the pronouncements of the Word of God, readers are told that ‘in Adam, and by our own sin, we have’ also ‘forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life’—something that is apparently true in any postlapsarian and pre-eschatological placement of humanity (WLC 193). The most that people can do is offer work that is ‘sincere’—which in the Standards is markedly different from offering

work that is ‘unblamable and unreprouable in God’s sight’, and is instead ‘accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections’ (WCF 16.6). The whole of chapter 6 precludes the possibility of making a beneficial covenant of works with fallen man, and underscores God’s provision of one who is himself perfect (WCF 8:2), who is made under the law (WCF 8.4), and who can offer ‘perfect obedience’ in our place (WCF 8.5). His work was meritorious because it was perfect.

The third property of a work deserving reward is that it be personal. If one is to claim a work as his or her own, one must not be borrowing on the efforts of others. Here too, human beings fall short. Outside of Christ personal works cannot be accepted at all (for the reasons mentioned above). ‘They may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God’ (WCF 16.7). Conversely, works done in union with Christ are only accepted ‘through Christ’. The Father is ‘pleased to accept and reward’ what his children do because he looks ‘upon them in his Son’ (WCF 16.6). If there are human works that are good, ‘they are good’ as ‘they proceed from His Spirit’ (WCF 16.5). People completely depend on the triune God acting on their behalf, not least the one ‘anointed with the holy Spirit, above measure’, to whom ‘all power’ has been given on our behalf (WCF 8.3). So far are men and women from standing on our own two feet that ‘we wholly lean on Jesus’ name’. His work is meritorious because it was personal.

In the fourth place, a meritorious work is profitable. It gets its reward. It has purchasing power. This is presented in the starkest of terms in chapter 16: ‘We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God.’ Indeed, quoting Christ’s comment in Luke 17:10, we are told that ‘when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants.’ God is a just master, and what people do ‘cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment’ (WCF 16.5); indeed, people cannot even do anything to make themselves acceptable candidates ‘to receive grace from God’ (WCF 16.7). Jesus Christ, on the other hand, found all of his work profitable. He could ‘procure’ the Father’s favour and ‘purchase a peculiar people’ (WLC 38). He ‘purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of Heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him’ (WLC 8.5). Christ ‘purchased’ liberty for believers. He has bought ‘freedom from the guilt of sin; the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God’ (WCF 20:1). His work was meritorious because it was profitable.

Finally, a truly meritorious work will be proportional to its reward. A day’s pay for an hour’s work is a matter of grace, not works. It can hardly be surprising that the Confession insists on a ‘great disproportion’ that ‘is between’ the works of the redeemed ‘and the glory to come’ (WCF 16.5). The eschatological advancement offered in the scriptures is way out of proportion to even the best works, even if these were offered freely, perfectly, and personally. The chasm between what is deserved and what is inherited can only be bridged by a beneficent covenantal agreement.

Furthermore, not only is there a ‘great disproportion’ between the works of the redeemed ‘and the glory to come’, but also an ‘infinite distance that is between us and God’ (WCF 16.5). Even pre-Fall merit is thus excluded, in any proportional sense, because of the ontological difference between the Creator and the creature. Quite apart from the problem of sin (also discussed in WCF 16.5) it seems there was no possibility of Adam or his descendants accelerating an eschatological state by means of any real merit of his own; he could only do so through a covenantal arrangement, where God would reward Adam’s obedience with a gift beyond that which he had earned. This disproportion is only accentuated by blessings received in a postlapsarian condition!

Statements in the Standards about disproportionality are significant in themselves, but they also serve to highlight the role of Christ as mediator. The Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism argue that the mediator must be God (WLC 38), must be full of the Spirit (WCF 8.3) and must be perfectly obedient (WCF 8.4 and 8.5). There are different lines of tradition within the history of the doctrine of merit but a tripartite emphasis on Christ’s divinity, the influence of the Spirit, and the obedience of the Saviour is a commonplace in those discussions, including in the works of English theologians in the decades prior to the assembly. All three of these elements are non-negotiable aspects of the system of doctrine in the Standards—not merely that all of this obtained in the person and life of Christ, but that they must obtain in order for Lord Jesus to grant all of his people a reward. Chapter 8 emphasizes that the divine nature of Christ (an ontological matter) and the indwelling of the Spirit (an economic reality) are necessary for the removal of demerit (WCF 8.3) and the provision of merit (WCF 8.4, 8.5; WLC 38). In the words of WLC 38, ‘It was requisite that the mediator should be God’ to ‘give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession’ as well as ‘to satisfy God’s justice.’ Thus the Confession can speak of an ‘efficacy’ to ‘the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ’ (WCF 17.2) and insist that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged debt and made ‘proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father’s justice’ (WCF 11.3). Of course all of these statements about the mediator and his work only underscore that the Confession and catechisms, especially the Larger, teach a classic conception of Christology and a Trinitarian understanding of God.

15.5 REDEMPTION APPLIED

If the sixth chapter (the Fall) sets up the need for two chapters on the accomplishment of redemption, the ninth (free will) tees up a series of chapters on the application of redemption: the divine works in calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification (chs 10–13).

The final four paragraphs of chapter 9 need to be read in light of the first, which attempts to describe what is true of the will in any state, and offers a surprisingly robust statement of human responsibility: ‘God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to

good or evil.' One implication of this statement is that neither a fall into the fullness of sin nor salvation by sovereign grace destroys the will or obliterates its liberty. This statement is then nuanced and applied as the Confession considers four possible states of historic human existence: in innocence, in sin, in grace, and in glory. The Confession curiously (and perhaps mercifully) does not consider the state of the human will for those who are damned.

Chapter 10 describes the process of effectual calling. Harkening back to chapter 3, it explains: 'All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased... effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.' The burden of the chapter is to argue for a Holy Spirit-worked monergistic presentation of God's redeeming work, and the priority of grace even over that of faith (e.g. in elect infants or persons with mental disabilities). The catechisms embed the necessity of union with Christ within this discussion of God's effective calling.

The Confession's treatment of justification defends the doctrine against all detractors. (As is common in the Confession's treatment of the application of redemption, each chapter begins with a sentence tying the current discussion to the previous one.) Chapter 1 explains that the free gift of justification entails the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the forgiveness of sins and is received by the instrumentality of faith alone. Unlike the treatment of justification in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Confession not only provides a statement of what justification is (and is not!) for the believer, but also adds a statement of the foundation of justification in the person and work of Christ. It also offers paragraphs against Arminian, antinomian, and Tridentine construals of justification.

Adoption, arguably the neglected step-sister of Reformed doctrines, is for the first time not subsumed under a discussion of justification, but is granted its own brief chapter (in fact, one long sentence) filled with consolation for believers and penned with an eye to the eschaton and the inheritance awaiting all 'heirs of everlasting salvation'.

The Confession's treatment of sanctification is pastoral in tone, rooting this grace in 'Christ's death and resurrection' effected 'by His Word and Spirit' (WCF 13.1), and then followed by cautions that a growth in holiness will progress but remain 'imperfect in this life' (WCF 13.2, 3). The Larger Catechism offers additional theological nuance on the subject, specifying the ways in which justification and sanctification differ in nature and in effects (WLC 77).

In discussing calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification first, the Confession presents the work of God prior to the spirit-worked response of man. Nonetheless, the three chapters on faith, repentance, and good works (chs 14–16) are longer than the preceding four. The Standards labour to show how these graces are essential in the Christian life and for Christian preaching, but with an appropriate emphasis on the helplessness of man and the sovereign grace of God: faith can be weak but true; repentance is an evangelical grace; good works 'are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith'; and any 'ability' of men and women 'to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ' (WCF 14.3; 15.1; 16.2, 3). Only two of the chapters openly oppose

error: first, a confession of sinfulness that refuses to confess particular sins is not to be reckoned true repentance; second, no person is so able to perform good works as to be credited with a work of supererogation (15.5; 16.4).

Understandably, the chapter on good works, in turn, prompts a discussion of the possibility of perseverance of the saints (ch. 17) and raises questions regarding the assurance of salvation (ch. 18). In continuity with the conclusions of the Synod of Dort with its monergistic presentation of salvation and its tight tethering of justification to the graces of sanctification and good works, the Westminster assembly insists on the active perseverance (and not merely the passive preservation) of the saints. And in keeping with its recognition that true faith is not always a strong faith, the assembly spelled out reasons why Christians should be assured of their salvation, even if it is sometimes ‘shaken, diminished, and intermitted’ (WCF 18.4).

15.6 LAW AND LIBERTY

Having insisted that ‘good works are only such as God has commanded in his Word’ (WCF 16.1), the assembly found it necessary to follow the subjectively focused chapters on perseverance and assurance with objectively declarative chapters on the law and Christian liberty (chs 19 and 20). The chapter on liberty is often flagged as a favourite amongst Protestants. Its statement on the liberties purchased by Christ, both historic and existential, are among the richest lines penned by the Westminster assembly:

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin; the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. (WCF 20.1)

Likewise, its statement on the Lordship of Christ was often quoted by later puritans and enjoyed a special prominence in the 1788 constitution of the American Presbyterian church: ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship’ (WCF 20.2; *Constitution* 1789: cxxxiii–cxxxiv).

The assembly’s discussion of the law was straightforward in its main outlines. Historically, the law in the Old Testament was of three kinds—moral, civil, and ceremonial—with only the first of these, and aspects of the second, enduring into the New Testament. The moral law, in turn, had three uses: as a rule of life, as a guide to Christ, and as a restraint to sin. More complicated is the relationship of the law to the covenant, a subject to which the assembly returns in the opening line of chapter 19.

In the Standards, law and covenant have much in common, not least that they both contain the requirement of perfect and personal obedience (cf. WLC 93, 99 and WCF 7.2, 19.1). But this relationship is carefully nuanced. First, the confessional description of prelapsarian, or pre-Fall, conditions of the covenant of works presents only the ‘perfect’ and ‘personal’ elements of obedience, omitting the ‘perpetual,’ and thus suggesting a promise of entering an eschatological life designed for Adam and his descendants if he were to pass some probationary period (WCF 7.2). The law, by contrast, including the law for Adam in his prelapsarian state, entailed demands that were perfect, personal, and perpetual (WCF 19.1 and WLC 93, 99). And yet, although law and covenant are presented as similar but different, the Confession can still state that ‘God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works’—a surprisingly robust statement of identity (WCF 19.1).

Second, it appears that covenant is a larger category than law; that covenant contains law, for the moral law itself, it would seem, does not contain threats and promises for sin and success, where covenant in fact does (WCF 19.1). Nonetheless, in descriptions of the law in WLC 93, the catechism states that there are threats and promises contained within the law. Perhaps the catechetical text intends for readers to see that there are ways in which law does promise a general pattern of blessing for obedience, and harm for disobedience; or it may see threats and promises as features of every covenant administration, and not merely that of the covenant of works. And yet statements like these continue to generate discussion in the small but vibrant cottage industry of covenantal exegesis that finds its home within Reformed confessional communities.

15.7 CORPORATE CHRISTIAN LIFE

What follows the discussion of law and liberty are treatments of the corporate life of Christians: worship and the sabbath (ch. 21), then a discussion of lawful oaths and vows (ch. 22), which are at once acts of worship and acts of civic responsibility, and thus a bridge, in the third place, to a chapter on the civil magistrate (ch. 23). Marriage and divorce (ch. 24) are appropriately set between the chapter on the magistrate and that of the church (ch. 25), and another on the communion of saints with each other and with Christ (ch. 26), here roughly following the order of the Apostles’ Creed.

Of these chapters, the chapter on the civil government received the earliest and the most extensive editorial input in the development of the text of the Westminster Standards. Chapter 23 acknowledges the Christian’s duty to submit to the civil magistrate, but also announces a limitation to the powers of the magistrate: secular governments are appointed by God, and called to serve in his name, but they are ministers in the civil sphere only, and not the spiritual. Thus magistrates are not to do the work of the minister of the gospel: they are not to preach or administer the sacraments. Nor are they to do the work of an elder, for it is not their place to administer church discipline.

Presbyterians in the new world would not dispute restrictions placed on the magistrate; when the eighteenth-century American Presbyterian church, under the leadership of

the Scottish minister John Witherspoon, decided to revise a few paragraphs of the Confession, it saw no need to change this first line of WCF 23.3. However, they found two ideas, expressed in the original paragraph, particularly problematic. The first was that the civil magistrate had a duty to defend and promote Gospel truth. The second idea was that civil magistrates should exercise godly control by calling synods or councils, even to the point of guiding the work of synods to ensure that they do what is 'according to the mind of God'. Of course this is just what the House of Lords and House of Commons were attempting to do with the Westminster assembly itself. Parliament summoned theologians to advise the two houses on doctrinal matters. But American Presbyterians judged that there is a difference between a government asking for the advice of godly church leaders and a government assuming that they have a right to such advice. There is a difference, too, between seeking counsel from the church and seeking to govern the councils of the church.

After decades of permitting ministers to take exception to these statements in the Confession, American Presbyterians, meeting in Philadelphia in 1788, concluded that the civil government should not 'in the least, interfere in matters of faith'. The Philadelphia assembly did think that civil governors could function, to use the remarkable mixed metaphor of Isaiah 49:23, 'as nursing fathers' to the church. Indeed, under the umbrella of a governing authority's duty to sanction 'good conduct' and approve 'what is good' (Rom. 13:3; see 13:1–6), the revised Confession concludes that it is 'the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord', while not 'giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest'. The revised paragraph also states: 'as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his Church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof'. Finally, the revised text of the Philadelphia assembly states that 'it is the duty of civil magistrates' to permit and protect freedom of religion and freedom of assembly. In limiting the power of the state, the Philadelphia assembly may have been thinking theologically and biblically about the fact that God has established a civil government apart from and distinct from an ecclesiastical government, and each of the concerns expressed here, warnings issued, and boundaries demarked may be intended to flow from this general biblical distinction. And yet it can hardly be missed that, in arguing for protection and freedom of the church, the Philadelphia assembly was also articulating themes and phrases which would be echoed at the First United States Congress and in the American Bill of Rights.

Following the pattern of the Apostles' Creed, the sacraments are next discussed after the doctrine of the church. The assembly dedicated three chapters to sacramental symbols in general, to baptism, and to the Lord's Supper (chs 27–9) before turning to its ecclesiastical chapters on church censures (or discipline) and synods in (chs 30 and 31).

In the Westminster Standards, sacraments are both signs and seals of the Gospel, or the covenant of grace. Signing and sealing terminology had a particular meaning in the post-Reformation period. In the seventeenth century, 'seals' were understood to be confirming tokens, or authenticating symbols. When that meaning was applied to the

sacraments, a seal was understood to protect a promise, emphasizing an obligation, or solidify a covenant. Most basically, a seal *validated* something. ‘Signs’ carried a much wider range of possible meanings in the seventeenth century than did seals. Generally, a sign was a visible indicator, a tangible token of something else. A sign could have a symbolic reference to something that was not material or was in some way abstract. In any case, a sign was a visible action or material object which symbolized something else. When applied to the sacraments, signs were understood to be emblems or badges that established one’s identity. A sign in this sense could indicate that the person marked belongs to God and is part of the church. Most basically, it *pointed* to something.

The Westminster Standards (while almost ambivalent about the mode of baptism) presented, in part through the use of proof texts, a terse declaration and defence of the normativity of public household baptism, including believers and their children. The proof texts of the assembly were appended by parliamentary fiat at the conclusion of the Confession—but only after the assembly further refined a committee’s selection of texts to those they considered more pertinent to the text of the Confession. The order and selection of these texts is often significant for the interpretation of the Confession and as a manner of extending the reach of a point made in the Standards: the citation of ‘Gen. 17:7, 9 compared with Gal. 3:9, 14 and Col. 2:11–12 and Acts 2:38–39 and Rom. 4:11–12; 1 Cor. 7:14; Matt. 28:19; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15’ in support of infant baptism in WCF 28.4 is but one case in point.

The assembly’s treatment of the Lord’s Supper follows the main lines of John Calvin’s discussions of the subject, with an emphasis on the real spiritual feeding on and communion with Christ in the supper, and on Spirit-worked benefits that are derived from the supper when it is received by faith. This Supper also offers some of the most intensely polemically orientated paragraphs in the Westminster Standards. Chapters in the Westminster Confession of faith are like varieties of vehicles in a royal motorcade. Some are open-top carriages—like chapter 12, which openly displays the doctrine of adoption but makes no effort to defend it. Some are armoured cars, sturdy vehicles for conveying concepts, sacrificing elegance in favour of protecting the truths most often targeted by the enemy: here the chapters on the Lord’s Supper or on justification come to mind. Most are elegant limousines with protective glass. These are dignified statements of doctrine; not impregnable, but given some protection from unwelcomed construal and predictable errors. The Confession’s chapters on the covenant and on the law and the corresponding questions and answers in the two catechisms belong to this latter category, as I see it. There are predictable errors that they explicitly refute; other views are left unaddressed. There is no attempt to make these statements as bulletproof as they could be.

In some ways, the catechetical treatment of the sacraments counterbalances the tone of the Confession. The assembly’s treatment of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is given practical enrichment in the Larger Catechism, which reflects on the practice and impact of the sacraments in and on the Christian life (WLC 167, 169–75). Indeed, it also contains extended reflections on the effective reception of the reading and preaching of the scriptures (WLC 156–60).

15.8 TYPOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY

While the proof texts appended to the Westminster Standards, mentioned above, are significant, it is also the case that there is an exegetical caution characteristic of the Standards as a whole. Members of the assembly were capable of creative exegetical ideas to the point of allegory (some of Daniel Featley's sermons or Charles Herle's devotional literature offer cases in point). Members also explored innovative biblical theological paradigms not only in covenant theology, as is well known, but in the relationship between the accomplishment and application of redemption (e.g. Goodwin 1642). Nonetheless, the biblical theology of the Westminster Standards is characterized by restraint. There is no question that the Standards affirm, for example, that various features of the Mosaic economy have a typological purpose, including 'promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover, and other types and ordinances'. This is explicitly affirmed in WLC 34, and in virtually the same words, in WCF 7.5 as well. What is more, the Confession *does* explicitly ascribe a typological function to the ceremonial laws, and relates them to the covenant of grace (WCF 19.3). Nonetheless, although there is an eschatology imbedded in the promise of the Covenant of Works, the confessional Standards have little to say about the typological importance of offices, persons, places, events, corporate Israel, and the moral law in the Mosaic economy.

The exception to this trend, with possible implications about a typology of office and perhaps old covenant persons, is the Standard's treatment of Christ, the archetype of prophet, priest, and king (WCF 8.1; WLC 42–5; WSC 23–6). If not the typology of place, at least the *symbolic* significance of place in the old covenant is affirmed, indirectly, in WCF 21.6, where we are told that 'now under the gospel' the place where one prays has no significance. In WCF 19.3 corporate Israel is described as a 'church under age'. And in explicating the preface to the Ten Commandments, the Larger Catechism appears to ascribe a typological significance to the event of the Exodus, to the nation of Israel, and perhaps to the place that is Egypt (WLC 101). Nevertheless, one would never glean from the Westminster Standards a sense of the breadth and creativity of exegesis characteristic of their private writings and of the post-Reformation period generally.

This restraint is perhaps most pronounced in the final chapters of the Confession of Faith. The final two chapters follow the Apostles' Creed once more in discussing the state of man after death and the resurrection (ch. 32), with an additional discussion of the last judgment (ch. 33). These final chapters frame the movement, begun in chapter 4, that takes readers from creation to consummation. In neither of the concluding chapters do the Standards show much interest in popular or scholarly eschatological questions: the focus is very much individual and not cosmological. Nor do the Westminster Standards make any real effort to exclude rival theories about the end of these end times.

While the voice of the Standards is, for the most part, in the third person, declaring what God's word says, instead of the first person, sharing what Christians believe, passages are often doxological, grateful, and hortatory in tone. This is deliberately the case

at the conclusion of the two catechisms, and even in the Confession of Faith. In its closing paragraphs readers are called to praise: ‘God hath appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father’ (WCF 33.1); to give thanks: ‘the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord’ (WCF 33.2); and above all to pay attention!

As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity; so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen. (WCF 33.3)

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CHAPTER 16

JOHN OWEN'S *DISCOURSE* *ON THE HOLY SPIRIT*

SUZANNE MCDONALD

16.1 INTRODUCING JOHN OWEN AND HIS WORKS

JOHN OWEN (1616–83) led a remarkable life during an extraordinary time in British history. He was a pastor and prolific Reformed theologian, one of Oliver Cromwell's chaplains during his campaigns in Scotland and Ireland, Vice Chancellor of Oxford University during the Commonwealth and Protectorate, and finally a prominent Nonconformist leader following the restoration of the monarchy, using his influence to try to ameliorate the suffering and persecution of Dissenters more vulnerable than himself.

His theological output is vast and varied. The standard edition of his works runs to 23 volumes of English works, with a further volume for his Latin output. His first published work appeared in 1642 (the anti-Arminian treatise, *A Display of Arminianism*) and his final works were printed posthumously. They range from an account of theological prolegomena (*Theologoumena Pantodapa*, 1661) to his multi-volume exposition of Hebrews, to individual tracts and treatises on doctrinal *loci* and issues of Christian life, from major volumes on pneumatology and Christology to *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656) and *Communion with God* (1657), and two volumes of sermons.

16.2 INTRODUCING JOHN OWEN'S *PNEUMATOLOGIA*

John Owen's *Pneumatologia: Or A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* was first published in 1674. Owen considered this work, and projected further volumes on the Holy Spirit, to be the very first attempt of its kind (*Pneumatologia*, 7); and it is still one of the

most exhaustive accounts of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in English-language theology. Whereas many had treated various aspects of pneumatology, Owen views this as the first attempt to deal comprehensively with the person of the Spirit and the full range of his work. The full title of the treatise gives a sense of its ambitious scope:

Pneumatologia or A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit: wherein an account is given of his name, nature, personality, dispensation, operations, and effects; his whole work in the old and new covenant is explained the doctrine concerning it vindicated from oppositions and reproaches, the nature also and necessity of gospel holiness; the difference between grace and morality, or a spiritual life unto God in evangelical obedience and a course of moral virtues, are stated and declared.

For all that it takes up the entire of volume 3 in the standard edition of Owen's works (some 650 pages), *Pneumatologia* is in fact only the first half of his pneumatological project. Volume 4 contains the handful of treatises which Owen saw as continuing his comprehensive account of the Spirit's person and work.

In addition to its value as a study of the Holy Spirit, *Pneumatologia* also exemplifies many aspects of Owen's approach to theology. As a pastorally oriented theologian, even his most doctrinally focused writings are filled with applications for the believer's life of discipleship, and frequent exhortations to encourage his readers to live out the implications of whatever theme is under discussion. Owen writes *Pneumatologia* with the explicit intention of edifying believers and encouraging their growth in holiness (*Pneumatologia*, 9), so as to build up their 'faith, obedience, and holy worship' (64).

Pneumatologia also demonstrates Owen's priorities first as a scriptural theologian and then as someone who synthesizes his theological inheritance, in this case, the patristic, Thomist, and Reformed traditions. Owen summarizes his approach in *Pneumatologia* as follows: 'I have endeavoured...to declare and assert what the Scripture manifestly teacheth...confirming it with the testimonies of some of the ancient writers of the church' (*Pneumatologia*, 9). Owen engages directly and indirectly with patristic authors, and while he never mentions Aquinas directly, his influence is very evident, especially in Owen's discussion of sanctification. With regard to the Reformed tradition, Owen particularly stresses the themes encapsulated in the Canons of Dordt, as part of his polemic against Arminianism. He does not seek to forge new doctrinal directions. Where he is sometimes thought to be distinctive (such as his account of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Son in *Pneumatologia*), this is generally because he is more thoroughgoing than those who preceded him in working out the implications of a trajectory that has already been set.

Much of *Pneumatologia* is highly repetitive, both in the theological themes that Owen chooses to emphasize and in his polemical concerns. These two are closely intertwined, since part of Owen's intention in setting out an account of the Spirit's person and work is to combat what he considers to be the contemporary denigration or misrepresentation of the Spirit. Owen sees his task as 'the declaration and vindication of the despised work of the Spirit of God' (*Pneumatologia*, 11). For this reason, before giving an overview of the structure and content of *Pneumatologia*, it will be helpful to highlight the most important of these intertwined theological themes and polemical foci.

Owen is tireless in asserting the divinity of the Spirit and his distinct personhood in the context of the inner-Trinitarian relations. This safeguards the integrity of the Spirit's person within the Trinity, and also the principle that the works of God *ad extra* are a true reflection of God's being *ad intra*. It also reflects Owen's battle with Socinianism throughout his corpus. He is clear that the denial of God as Trinity—and in this context, the denial of the divine personhood of the Spirit—is the triumph of rationalism over scripture, and leads to the destruction of the Gospel.

With regard to the Spirit's work, the primary concern for Owen is to distinguish sanctification from mere 'moral reformation'. Once again, he has 'rationalists' and Socinians in his sights, repeatedly describing how moral improvement under our own power has nothing at all to do with the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in renewing our entire nature, restoring the image of God in us, and bringing us into conformity with Christ through union with him.

Owen also continues his lifelong dispute with Arminianism, focusing in this context on the assertion that without the personal, effectual work of the Spirit in us, we are incapable of the least inclination towards God, let alone any action pleasing to him.

As Owen frequently indicates, the desire of many of his contemporaries to downplay the significance of the Holy Spirit and his work arises in part as a reaction against 'fanatical spirits' and 'enthusiasts'—Quakers and others who claimed special revelations of the Spirit and inspirations from 'inner light' as the basis for socially disruptive and sometimes bizarre words and actions. In response, Owen continually asserts that unless a claim to revelation from the Spirit is clearly grounded in scripture and the person and work of Christ, it cannot be considered as the actual work of the Holy Spirit, and can have nothing to do with Gospel holiness.

16.3 THE STRUCTURE OF *PNEUMATOLOGIA*

Owen begins with a summary preface, 'To The Readers', and then divides the main text into five books. Book I offers an account of the person of the Holy Spirit, his work in the act of creation, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Book II investigates the Spirit's role in the Old Testament, before focusing particularly on the role of the Holy Spirit towards Jesus Christ as the head of the new creation. He closes with an overview of the Spirit's role towards the church, as the community of the new creation. In book III Owen explores the Holy Spirit's work in our regeneration, or new birth in Christ, including an exposition of the nature and extent of sin, as that from which the Spirit's work of regeneration delivers us. Sanctification is the primary focus of book IV. Owen examines the relationship between the Spirit's work and Christ's, and between the Spirit's actions and ours, including a discussion of the relationship between the Spirit's agency and human freedom. Book V repeats much of what has gone before. Owen reframes by now familiar material as an urgent plea for the absolute necessity of holiness, based on the nature of

God, the electing decree, the commands of God, the sending of Christ and his ongoing mediation, and finally our lost condition apart from Christ.

For reasons of space, because of the frequent repetition of concepts and themes, the following summary will be a synthesis of key ideas within each book rather than a straightforwardly chronological account of the content of each chapter.

16.3.1 To the Readers

In addition to sketching the trajectory of the work as a whole, Owen stresses the centrality of scripture as the primary source of our knowledge of God (particularly, in this context, the Spirit's person and work), and also of how to live before God. Moreover, he insists that reason alone is insufficient truly to understand scripture, which cannot be interpreted rightly without the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit who inspired it. One target here is the claim that reason alone can tell us all that we need to know about God and right living before him. The other is the 'enthusiasts', noted above, whose sometimes outlandish claims to the inspiration of the Spirit to some extent aided the rise of a rationalist denigration of the Spirit's work. The proper response, says Owen, is not to dismiss the Spirit's person and work as such, nor to claim that anyone who speaks of the Spirit is ipso facto irrational, but instead to test all claims to the inspiration of the Spirit by a more fully scriptural pneumatology.

16.3.2 Book I

Owen begins by examining Paul's presentation of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. He does this in the first instance to demonstrate the absolute necessity of the Spirit and his work for the existence of the church and the life of discipleship, against those who call that into question. Owen points out that without the Spirit there would be no believers and no church, since 1 Corinthians 12:3 indicates that the ability to confess that Jesus is Lord is not from ourselves but is 'a pure effect of the operation of the Holy Ghost in [us] and towards [us]' (*Pneumatologia*, 18). This becomes a springboard for Owen to give a summary of the necessity of the Spirit's saving work as the 'second great principle' of the Gospel. The first is the Father's giving of the Son for our salvation, and the second is the bestowal of the Spirit who alone makes 'the effects and fruits of the incarnation, obedience, and suffering of [the] Son effectual in us and towards us' (*Pneumatologia*, 23). From our ability to understand the scriptures, to the confession of Christ and the application of his saving work, to our sanctification, and the building up of the whole church through the bestowal of the gifts necessary for the task to which God has called it, the entire efficacy of the Gospel depends wholly upon the Spirit as the one through whom the saving work of the Triune God is accomplished in the economy.

The second reason Owen begins with an examination of 1 Corinthians 12 is that this text demonstrates how, even from earliest times, the role and gifts of the Spirit could be misunderstood and misused. It shows that the solution is not to deny or disparage the Spirit and his work, but to test claims to the inspiration of Spirit by scripture, and especially by whether such claims point to Christ, the fully divine, fully human savior. It is also worth noting that Owen is a cessationist with regard to the extraordinary gifts such as tongues and their interpretation, maintaining that these were only necessary in the earliest years of the church (e.g. *Pneumatologia*, 35).

From here, Owen explores the ways that scripture directly and indirectly indicates the divinity of the Spirit and his distinct personal subsistence within the Trinity. Chapter 2 offers a survey of the key scriptural names and titles of the Spirit, acknowledging the complexity of many of these, and recognizing that this causes some to question his divine identity and/or personhood. Throughout, Owen stresses the importance of context and careful interpretation of the original languages for determining the best sense of the terms.

With regard to the Spirit's distinct personal subsistence, Owen remarks that we can know that the Spirit is a person of the Trinity in the same way that we can know that the Father and the Son are persons—by the personal properties and actions attributed to them in scripture, and by the way that they are the objects of others' actions. Owen concludes that scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit is a divine, self-sufficient, self-subsisting person, together with the Father and the Son, giving as examples of his deity that he is equated with God, that he is given the divine name and attributes, and that he performs actions reserved only for God (89ff.). In addition, the very designation of the Spirit as the *Holy* Spirit refers not simply to his work *ad extra* in sanctifying believers, but primarily to his divine personhood. God alone is holy, and only God can sanctify, and indeed, *every* action of the Spirit *ad extra* is holy, not just his work of sanctification, because all of God's works reflect God's nature, and the Spirit is the person of the Triune God who effects the acts of God in the world (56–7).

This brings us to the way that Owen articulates the Spirit's distinct personhood and his works in the context of inner-Trinitarian relations. It is axiomatic for Owen throughout his corpus that the works of the Triune God *ad extra* reflect the being of God *ad intra* in the processions and relations—or as he puts it, 'the order of the dispensation of the divine persons towards us ariseth from the order of their own subsistence' (61). Owen is an ardent upholder of *filioque*, which means that the Spirit is the third in order of subsistence, as the one who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and as such he is the one whose particular role in the economy is the concluding, completing, and perfecting of all the acts of God (94). Owen firmly maintains both that *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* and that there is distinction, relation, and order between and among them, such that each person does the same work in a way that reflects the order of inner-Trinitarian subsistence. As Owen puts it, the beginning of all things is assigned to the Father, the establishing and upholding of all things to the Son, and the finishing and perfecting to the Spirit. This means that the work of the Father and the Son in the world is utterly dependent on the completing work of the Spirit (93–4). Also, while the Spirit is the one

sent by the Father and the Son, this is also his voluntary acting. The Spirit wills to be sent, and to do what he does, out of his own love and grace. No person of the Trinity is merely an instrument to be used by another. Each person of the Trinity is the author of every act of God, and the persons freely and willingly act in the economy in ways consistent with their eternal relations to one another (116–18; see also 93).

In this first book, Owen also begins his account of the Spirit's role in the scriptural narrative of God's dealings with us and with his world in the act of creation. The Spirit is the one who initially forms the creation and then continues to preserve, sustain, and guide it. Most important to the remainder of *Pneumatologia* is the role of the Spirit in the creation of human beings, and in particular the Spirit's gift of the 'universal rectitude of nature' which constitutes the image of God in us (101). Owen maintains that this capacity for loving obedience towards God and enjoyment of God in human beings as created was the particular and immediate (non-mediated) work of the Holy Spirit. As such he speaks of the right relationship with God that constitutes the image of God in us as a 'concreated' and superadded gift—part of what it means to have been created as human beings, but not something intrinsic to human nature as such. For Owen, the NT witness makes clear that any capacity to live rightly towards God is always and only the gift of the Spirit, and he therefore discerns this work of the Spirit towards humanity as created retrospectively on the basis of the Spirit's work in restoring the image of God in those who are united to Christ by faith: '... the Holy Spirit renews in us the image of God, the original implantation of which was his peculiar work. And thus Adam may be said to have had the Spirit of God in his innocency' (102; see 101–2). Owen will return again and again to this idea that the image of God at creation was the Spirit's gift of right relationship with God. This and the subsequent loss of our right relationship with God through sin, our inability, apart from the Spirit to orient ourselves towards God, and the restoration of the image in us through union with Christ by the Spirit, provide a framework for Owen's approach to the Spirit's work in regeneration and sanctification in the rest of *Pneumatologia*.

16.3.3 Book II

In book II Owen turns first to the role of the Spirit in the OT subsequent to the act of creation. In particular, he considers the Spirit's role towards the prophets (with an eye to contemporary attempts by the Quakers and others to imitate some of their prophetic actions), which leads into a consideration of the setting down of scripture itself; but he also considers the performance of miracles, and the work of the Spirit as the one who bestows and enhances ordinary abilities, from the artistic to the political, and orients them towards God and his purposes for his people. Owen's account of Spirit's role in relation to the prophets and the writing of scripture gives us a summary of his view of the nature of inspiration. The Holy Spirit did not simply speak to the prophets and then leave it to their natural faculties to understand and remember what he told them. Rather, he so acted upon them that they expressed what was needed in the Spirit's words, not

their own. Owen declares they were like pipes through which the water flows, ‘without the least mixture with any alloy from their frailties and infirmities’ (*Pneumatologia*, 134). Similarly, with regard to the inspiration of scripture, the Spirit suggested the words to the authors and guided their hands. For Owen, without this direct and verbal inspiration of the Spirit, ‘Scripture could not be absolutely and every way divine and infallible; for if the penmen of it were left unto themselves in anything wherein that writing was concerned, who can secure us that *nihil humani*, no human imperfection, mixed itself therewithal?’ (144; see 143–5). The Holy Spirit’s inspiration has integrity to the styles and capacities of the various writers, who exercised their own choice in the words they used, but that choice was infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit, who ‘doth not put a force upon them, nor act on them otherwise than they are in their own natures and with their present endowments and qualifications’ (144).

The remainder of book II begins Owen’s account of the Spirit’s work in the new creation. He focuses initially on the relationship between the Spirit and the incarnate Son, presenting his attempt to hold together the anhypostatic and enhypostatic divine–human personhood of Christ and an equally strong account of the divine–human personhood of Christ as dependent upon and animated by the Spirit. He raises the obvious question immediately: if the incarnate Son is fully divine, then what need is there of the work of the Spirit in him? In response, Owen asserts:

The only singular and immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself... [T]he only necessary consequent of this assumption of the human nature... is the personal union of Christ, or the inseparable subsistence of the assumed nature in the person of the Son... all other acting of God in the person of the Son towards the human nature were voluntary, and did not necessarily ensue on the union mentioned. (*Pneumatologia*, 60–61)

Instead, the Holy Spirit is ‘the immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature. Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit, as he is the Spirit of the Father’ (162).

For Owen, this safeguards against any idea of the ‘transfusion of the properties’ when it comes to the divinity and humanity of Christ, and also against any hint of adoptionism. In addition, it is the rigorous outworking of the axiom that the works of God *ad extra* reflect the being of God *ad intra*. In the economy, it is the role of the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, to be ‘the immediate, peculiar, efficient cause of all external divine operations’ (161) even including mediating the actions of the divine Son upon his human nature.

The Spirit also creates the physical body that the Son simultaneously assumes in the womb of the Virgin Mary (e.g. 165–7), and wholly sanctifies his human nature. The Spirit is the one through whom the Son lives his life of perfect holiness and sinless obedience. As we saw, the capacity to live wholly and perfectly towards God was the gift and work of the Spirit in the unfallen humanity of Adam, and it is also the gift and work of the Spirit

in the unfallen humanity of the incarnate Son. Owen's account of the strong role of the Spirit in relation to the personhood of the incarnate Son allows him to give full rein to the scriptural witness to the humanity of Christ in every facet of his life and ministry, and the Holy Spirit is also the one who brings Jesus to resurrection life. Just as he prepared the human body of the Son in the Virgin's womb, so the Spirit bestows glorified humanity upon the risen Christ, and so he will do also at the last day for believers. Everything we see the Spirit doing in and for Christ, in his birth, life, death, and rising is the pattern for what the Spirit will do for those whom he unites to Christ by faith, in their new birth, sanctification, death, and rising. Moreover, the close binding of the Spirit's work to Christ continues in the Spirit's role of enabling believers to bear witness to Christ (ch. IV).

Owen presents this work of the Spirit towards humanity in the new creation as the outworking of the Triune God's eternal decree of election. Once again reflecting the way that the works of God *ad extra* correlate to the Trinitarian relations *ad intra*, it is the Spirit's task to bring to effect the whole work of the grace of God in our salvation, applying the work of Christ to the elect 'that they may be partakers of the grace designed in the counsel of the Father and prepared in the mediation of the Son' (190). This is realized through the Spirit's gift of faith, such that the Spirit is both the mediator of God's saving grace to the elect and the one who enables the elect to respond to God: 'As the descending of God towards us in love and grace issues or ends in the work of the Spirit in us and on us, so all our ascending towards him begins therein' (200).

In addition to his work in relation to individuals, Owen turns to the Spirit as the one who brings the church into being and preserves it, and is the source of the church's efficacy as the instrument of God's saving purposes in the world. The Holy Spirit enables both the proclamation and the effectual hearing of the Gospel, since merely reading the scriptures or hearing a sermon can accomplish nothing unless the Spirit enables the readers and hearers to respond in faith. Similarly, the structure of the church as an institution and the form of worship are meaningless without the work of the Spirit in and through them (190–95).

Having set out the absolute necessity of the Spirit's work for both personal faith and the witness of the church, and so called into question any attempt to deny or downplay the centrality of the person and work of the Spirit in this regard, Owen again takes aim at those who make exaggerated and misguided claims to personal revelations from the Spirit. He summarizes the role of the Spirit in the new creation as doing the work of Jesus in and for us. There can be no revelation by the Spirit, and no work of the Spirit, unless it is consonant with Christ as he is revealed in the Word, and unless the outcome brings glory to Christ (195–7).

Owen also turns again to one of the other key contemporary challenges to the Spirit and his work—the attempt to substitute moral reformation of life for sanctification. He bluntly affirms that we cannot do anything that is acceptable to God unless it is done in union with Christ by the Spirit, as the fruit of Christ's mediation. As for the objection that if this is the Spirit's work in us, then there can be no meaningful human agency, Owen remarks that anything good in God's sight is indeed the work of the Spirit in us,

but ‘the Holy Spirit so worketh *in* us as that he worketh *by* us, and what he doth in us is done by us’ (204).

16.3.4 Book III

The focus of book III is the nature of regeneration, or new birth in the Spirit, and a major priority throughout is the continuation of the theme of distinguishing Gospel regeneration from moral reformation. Owen remarks that when Paul calls those who are in Christ a new creation, he means what he says. This does not imply the need for some moral readjustment. It requires a transformation of the whole person—what Owen speaks of as a ‘spiritual renovation of our nature’ (*Pneumatologia*, 219). To deny this is to refuse to recognize what scripture says about the depth of fallen humanity’s alienation from God and the seriousness of sin. To this end Owen strongly emphasizes that whatever intellectual gifts anyone may possess, and however morally upright their life might be, apart from Christ, all are spiritually dead and therefore incapable of any saving good. There is no ‘principle of spiritual life’ in fallen human beings—not the least spark or inclination by which, unaided, we can turn to God or the things of God (207). Chapters 3 (‘The Corruption and Depravation of the Mind by Sin’) and 4 (‘Life and Death, Natural and Spiritual, Compared’) offer an extended account of the implications of sin, which renders us utterly incapable of turning to God, savingly receiving any truth about God, or living rightly before God. A life of spiritual obedience acceptable to the Father comes from Christ alone, and this is communicated to us only by the Spirit, as we are united to Christ by the Spirit’s gift of faith.

While those who equate regeneration with moral reformation are Owen’s primary opponents here, he does not forget his other main target—the ‘enthusiasts’. He points out that just as regeneration is not moral reformation, neither does the regenerating work of the Spirit consist in ‘enthusiastical raptures’, ecstasies, voices or anything of the sort—especially when those who make these claims still live blatantly unholy lives. Instead, Owen says, the Spirit generally uses ordinary means, and works with our faculties, not ‘mindless raptures’. Even so, he points out that many who are truly regenerate are still scorned as ‘mad’ and ‘fanatics’ by the world (224–6).

Owen sees the Spirit’s work of bringing about our new birth in Christ as analogous to the Spirit’s work in the act of creation, bringing order out of chaos and life from the formless void (207). Like all the works of God, regeneration is the work of the whole Trinity, with the mighty re-creating work of the Holy Spirit in us as the ‘immediate efficient cause’ of our new birth, which communicates to us the love of the Father through the mediation of the Son (209). Everything about our restored relationship with God depends upon his work for and in us. Against the Arminians, Owen is careful to insist not only that it is our act of believing and turning to God that is enabled by the Spirit’s work of grace, but that there is no inclination to prompt us towards believing or turning to God except by the personal, effectual enabling of the Spirit. Just as he rejects the idea that regeneration can be equated to moral reformation, so he rejects the idea

that the Spirit's work in regeneration is simply a matter of offering moral persuasion to obey God, and leaving the outcome to the unaided power of our wills. This, says Owen, would mean that the whole glory in regeneration would be ascribed to ourselves and not God's grace and the fruit of the sacrifice and mediation of Christ. Moreover, it would leave the actual salvation of anyone uncertain—and is contrary to scripture's assertion that even the act of willing to obey God is the gift and enabling of God (307–16).

Owen also compares the Spirit's role in regeneration with his role in the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ. Any attempt to suggest that we can make a move towards God apart from the personal, efficacious enabling of the Spirit 'makes a man beget himself anew... It takes away the analogy that there is between the forming of the natural body of Christ in the womb and the forming of his mystical body by regeneration' (311). Likewise, Owen states:

God in our conversion, by the exceeding greatness of his power, as he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, actually worketh faith and repentance in us, gives them unto us, bestows them on us, so that they are... effects of his grace in us. And his working in us infallibly products the effect intended, because it is actual faith that he works, and not only a power to believe, which we may either put forth and make use of or suffer to be fruitless, according to the pleasure of our own wills. (*Pneumatologia*, 323–4; see also 317)

Owen acknowledges that we do in fact resist many promptings of the Spirit, but when God intends to regenerate, this is not resistible. Even so, Owen is clear that this effectual working of the Spirit is not in opposition to our freedom, but the act of setting us free for God. In book IV Owen will offer a more extended treatment of this subject. Here, he simply remarks that the Spirit's effectual power is not opposed to our free agency. The Spirit offers no compulsion to the will. Instead, the will is set free and reoriented towards God, so that it is no longer at enmity with God. The enabling of the Spirit precedes our will, yet at the same time that our will is freed, it freely moves towards God (317–20).

As to the nature of regeneration, Owen speaks of it as the implanting by the Spirit of a new, spiritual, supernatural, vital principle or habit of grace, infused in the soul, the mind, will, and affections, by the power of the Holy Spirit, disposing and enabling people to spiritual, supernatural, vital acts of faith and obedience (329). This 'quickening principle' of new spiritual life is the beginning of the restoration of the image of God in us. Recalling his understanding of the image of God as the 'concreated' capacity to live rightly towards God, he remarks that the Spirit's work of regeneration is greater even than the creational gift of the image of God, because whereas Adam could keep or lose that gift, new creation life is rooted in Christ and so is as unshakeable as our union with him. Moreover, just as creation in the image of God was not primarily about moral virtue as such, but about right relationship with God—it was the 'uprightness, rectitude, and ability of [Adam's] whole soul, his mind, will and affections... for the obedience that God required of him'—so regeneration is not about moral reformation, but is 'the begetting, infusing, creating, of a new saving principle of spiritual life', the effect of which is a

transformation of our whole nature to enable us to walk in love and obedience to God in every facet of our lives (222).

Owen considers that there are preparatory works of the Spirit in us antecedent to regeneration, to dispose us to receive it, including regular reading of scripture and attending public worship, and also personal conviction of sin, and attempts to live a more holy life. While all of these are prompted and enabled by the Spirit, they are not actual regeneration, and are no guarantee that the Spirit will enact the work of regeneration (chapter 2). While Owen is clear that this means some may be misled about their true spiritual condition, he is also careful to offer pastoral reassurance that *all* who are in Christ by the Spirit through faith *are* regenerate. They are a new creation, born again in Christ, even if they experience different degrees of assurance, regardless of whether or not they experienced a dramatic conversion to Christ, and even though there is great variety between believers when it comes to sanctification. While there are degrees of sanctification there are no degrees of regeneration: 'Every one that is born of God is equally so . . . Men may be more or less holy, more or less sanctified, but they cannot be more or less regenerate' (215; see 213–15).

16.3.5 Book IV

The fruit of the Spirit's work of regeneration is the Spirit's work of sanctification. For Owen, sanctification is 'the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ' (*Pneumatologia*, 386). The Holy Spirit is therefore as much the author of our sanctification as he is of our regeneration. Although Gospel obedience and holiness is our duty, apart from the work of the Spirit in and for us, we are incapable of it. As with regeneration, so also our sanctification is wholly bound to our union with Christ by the Spirit through faith, and therefore to the electing decree. Owen speaks of the electing love of God as the fountain spring of holiness (503–4). Sanctification is the means God has chosen to bring the elect to the fullness of their salvation, and his choosing is the cause and reason for the Spirit's sanctifying work in them; hence the fruits of sanctification are a means for believers to make their calling and election sure (503–6).

As Owen makes clear, growth in holiness is a non-negotiable requirement for believers. He recognizes that this is a lifelong struggle with no linear progress, and that believers may experience long periods of stagnation, but by the Spirit, all believers are bound to a lifelong cultivation of holy habits which begin to override the sinful habits of the unregenerate state. By the Spirit, everything about our lives can and should become an occasion to practise holiness, which might be defined most simply as an orientation towards God in faith and love (ch. 2). The primary motivation to holiness is gratitude for the atonement won for us in Christ (376–82, and ch. 5), and the primary focus of holiness is not fulfilling duties in this life, but the glorious mystery of communion with God, now and in the life to come (374–6).

It will come as no surprise that Owen once again takes up the theme of sanctification versus moral reformation, this time particularly with regard to those who deny the divinity of Christ, and so maintain that he is simply a man whose obedience provides us with an example to imitate in our quest for moral virtue. For Owen, the cultivation of moral virtue cannot of itself be considered as growth in holiness, because holiness is inseparable from the divine-human person of Christ, and from our union with him. The fruit can only be holy as the branches abide in the vine (413–16). Once again, Owen also appeals to the image of God. Just as the original image of God was the orientation of the whole self towards God in love and obedience, so sin is not simply acts of disobedience, which might possibly be rectified by attempts at greater obedience to the commands of God or greater striving towards moral reformation, but is a loss of conformity to God that affects our whole selves. So therefore, ‘Our whole persons . . . and in them our whole natures’ are the subject of sanctification (421; see 417–22). Mere moral virtue cannot be equated with the holistic nature of sanctification, and Owen in fact maintains that the best test of true sanctification is its universality—does it impact not just our outward actions, but also our whole character?

When it comes to the actual process of sanctification, Owen sets out the Spirit’s work in both vivification (chs 6 and 7) and mortification (ch. 8). He particularly emphasizes the Spirit’s work in developing holy habits in us, as that which both vivifies us in conformity to Christ and mortifies in-dwelling sin. Owen is careful to maintain that these habits of holiness are not something simply implanted within us by the Spirit that we then go on to cultivate for ourselves. Rather, the effectual work of the Spirit is required for our every act of obedience (529). This ‘habit of holiness’ is less a series of actions than the process of renewing of the whole self, which becomes the source of our acts of obedience, by disposing us to love God and to long to live in union and communion with Christ. It is in the context of describing the process of sanctification that Owen also offers his fullest treatment of the issue of the freedom of the will, in response to Arminian accusations that the Reformed approach to the relationship between divine and human agency destroys human freedom (494–6). Following the well-trodden trail of such arguments, Owen maintains that we always do what we most want to do, but that fallen and unaided humanity cannot will any spiritual good, since the will is captive to sin and so is alienated from God. There is never a neutral position—an equal poise between choosing for or against God. The will is either alienated from God, and so does not desire to love and obey him, or it is set free for God in the Spirit’s work of regeneration, and so freely chooses to love and obey him, having received the spiritual power and ability to do so.

16.3.6 Book V

This final book repeats much that has gone before, now as a sustained pastoral exhortation for Owen’s readers to recognize the life-and-death necessity of personal holiness. This is based first upon the nature of God as holy, which makes our holiness a requirement

for communion with him (ch. 1). This is not, however, simply God's holiness in himself and in the abstract—it is 'the holiness of God as manifested and revealed unto us in Christ Jesus' (*Pneumatologia*, 570). As seen in Christ, God's holiness becomes an encouragement to us, rather than demonstrating an impossible gulf between us and God. Christ also shows us what human holiness is like, and through his atonement and intercession, he gives the power that works holiness in us by the Spirit.

Owen then returns to the theme of election, and how it both demonstrates the necessity of holiness and is an encouragement to holiness (ch. 2). While election does not depend on holiness, holiness depends on, and is the indispensable and inevitable corollary of, election: 'It is the eternal and immutable purpose of God that all . . . whom he designed to bring unto blessedness in the everlasting enjoyment of himself, shall antecedent thereunto be made holy . . . He chooseth none to salvation but through the sanctification of the Spirit' (591, 593). Owen sees the free, undeserved grace of God in election as a powerful motivator to holiness, leading to awe-filled gratitude and humility for one's own undeserved election to salvation in Christ, and also to love, compassion, forbearance towards all believers, as those who are equally the objects of God's saving love in Christ.

Owen's next argument for the necessity of holiness turns to God's very specific commands that we be holy, in general and in his particular requirements of us (ch. 3). He also points out that only as we do things in response to the commands of God as given in scripture are actions holy in his sight. Whatever 'good' we do otherwise, it is not holiness. While perfect holiness is impossible for us, the new covenant provides both the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness and the empowering of the Spirit, from which come the desire to live in loving obedience towards God and the capacity to act accordingly, and the covering of our imperfection, such that the command to holiness becomes a life-giving delight.

We are also shown the necessity of holiness from the Father's sending of the Son (ch. 4). The principal intention of the incarnation, says Owen, was to restore us to a state of holiness—to renew the image of God in us, and so to restore our communion with God. He explores this theme particularly in relation to the *triplex munus*, showing how each office has the aim of our restoration to holiness. Finally, Owen reminds us that a life of holiness is necessary because we are utterly lost without it. The holiness that comes by the Spirit as the fruit of faith in and union with Christ is the only way to 'cure our distorted condition', with the life of Christ as our pattern for what the life of holiness signifies (ch. 5).

Owen closes by reminding us that as we seek by the Spirit to grow in holiness, so we give glory to Christ who is the pattern and the source of our holiness, and we become an example to others. Owen concludes the chapter and the volume with the following prayer and exhortation, which sums up so many of the themes and priorities of *Pneumatologia* as a whole:

God teach us all duly to consider that all the glory and honour of Jesus Christ in the world, with respect unto us, depends on our holiness, and not on any other thing either that we are, have or may do! If, therefore, we have any love unto him, any

spark of gratitude for his unspeakable love, grace, condescension, sufferings, with the eternal fruit of them, any care about or desire of his glory and honor in the world; if we would not be found the most hateful traitors at the last day unto his crown, honor, and dignity; if we have any expectation of grace from him or advantage by him here or hereafter—let us labour to be ‘holy in all manner of conversation’ that we may thereby adorn his doctrine, express his virtues and praises, and grow up into conformity and likeness unto him who is the first-born and image of the invisible God. (*Pneumatologia*, 651)

SUGGESTED READING

Owen's *Pneumatologia* can be found in Goold (1850–55), vol. 3. There are no monographs devoted exclusively to *Pneumatologia*, but the following are recommended as an introduction to aspects of Owen's pneumatology: Crisp (2011); Kapic (2007); Kapic and Jones (2012); McDonald (2009); Spence (2007).

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CHAPTER 17

FRANCIS TURRETIN'S INSTITUTES OF ELENCTIC THEOLOGY

J. MARK BEACH

17.1 INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS Turretin (François or Francesco Turretini or Franciscus Turretinus) was one of the most eminent Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century, and a noteworthy representative of scholastic theology which dominated the theological scene at that time. He was born 17 October 1623, in Geneva, Switzerland, and died there 28 September 1687. He completed studies at the Academy in Geneva in 1644, and then went on to study theology at Leiden, Utrecht, Paris, Saumur, Montauban, and Nîmes (1644–8). He also studied philosophy with the Roman Catholic Pierre Gassendi in Paris, 1645–6. From 1648 he served as minister to the Italian congregation in Geneva; and from 1653 until his death he laboured as pastor of the French congregation in Geneva and as professor of theology at the Academy in Geneva. In 1650 he also served for a year as interim pastor at Lyons (see Pictet 1997: 659–76; de Bude 1871; Keizer 1900; and Dennison 1997b: 639–58).

During his life Turretin produced a number of significant theological disputations, but his most principal and renowned work—indeed, his primary theological contribution—was his three-volume *Institutio theologiae elencticae*, which appeared in 1679, 1682, and 1685 (see Dennison 1992: xxvii–xxix and reference list). This work, contending for Reformed orthodoxy against all rival theologies, served as a textbook in theology during that time and has subsequently continued to receive endorsement, to varying degrees, in that role and now especially since the English translation of this work has been published. This is not to say that Turretin was the author of only one book; in fact, he published numerous theological disputations during his life (see e.g. Turretin's miscellaneous disputations in 1696, vol. iv; and in 1847–8a, vol. iv.)

Among the most prominent works in the history of Reformed theology, it merits attention and recognition as representative of Reformed orthodoxy and the scholastic method that contended for that orthodoxy. This we seek to do—first, exploring (only briefly) the theological background of Turretin's scholastic theology; second, the origin and occasion of this work; next, we treat the genre or type of theological writing that best describes his *Institutes*. We then present an analysis of Turretin's theological method and a simple illustration of it. We continue by offering an analysis of some salient features of Turretin's elenctic theology; and conclude with a succinct account of the English publication history of this work.

17.2 BACKGROUND TO TURRETIN'S SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY

Turretin's theology follows the well-travelled path of Reformed scholastic theology, building on the foundation laid by earlier scholastic writers (on Reformed orthodoxy and scholasticism, see van Asselt et al. 2011; Muller 2003a: 3–102; 2003b: i.27–84; van Asselt and Dekker 2001; Trueman and Clark 1999). This theology, in the form of Turretin's *Elenctic Institutes*, exhibits its own distinct set of traits and offers a glimpse into the world of seventeenth-century theology.

Turretin's theological labour took place within the context of the ongoing theological foment created by the Protestant Reformation, with contending parties seeking to safeguard and extend their field of influence. In working to consolidate the doctrinal achievements of the Reformation, Reformed theologians, often working in academies or universities supported by national churches or the state, employed the methodology of late medieval theology, adapting it to their specific needs and theological concerns. Early examples include the works of Bartholmeus Keckerman (1571–1609); Johann Henrich Alsted (1588–1638); Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), and Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644).

This 'school theology', i.e. scholasticism, was deliberately academic in character. On a formal level, it is best understood as a method and approach to theological topics, using *quaestiones* to form theses or propositions that defend a staked out position pertaining to those topics. Noteworthy was the polemical thrust of this method, elucidating and refuting opposing points of view in order to come to a resolution to the question under dispute or needing explanation. Because many of the opponents of the Reformed confessional consensus—the most formidable being Roman Catholic antagonists—attacked that consensus using scholastic method, this challenge was best met using the same theological weapon, i.e. the method of 'school theology' or scholasticism. Muller notes that scholasticism can be defined in a 'loose' or a 'strict' way, and the role and limitations of reason as part of the theological task also requires careful definition (Muller 2003b: i.197f.). Early examples of scholastic method among the Reformed include the works of Francis Junius and Johannes Maccovius (see Junius 2014; Maccovius 2009).

It should be noted, too, that Reformed scholastic theology is also called Reformed orthodoxy inasmuch as its goal was to adhere to the confessional consensus hammered out in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Orthodoxy therefore describes its *content* while scholasticism describes its *method*. As a Reformed scholastic theologian, Turretin pursued his work, as earlier intimated, at the high point of Reformed, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Arminian scholasticism. Given this state of affairs, Turretin's *Institutes* is deliberately elenctic in nature, seeking to ward off the many foes of the Reformed movement and to present this faith with intellectual vigour and biblical warrant. His concern was to defend evangelical truth from error in various guises. The three volumes of his *Institutes*, therefore, focus on ecclesiastical controversy with zeal to safeguard confessional orthodoxy, specifically Dortian orthodoxy—i.e. the points of doctrine settled at the National Synod of Dordrecht in 1618–19. Turretin's most immediate field of concern was the Swiss and French Reformed churches, extending from there to Reformed churches spread throughout Europe.

Although Turretin worked during a period of high orthodoxy, the climate of change was already in the air, and his work, grounded in scholastic methodology, could not finally fend off the gradual demise of orthodoxy in Geneva or throughout Europe. This devolution was most immediately forecast inasmuch as some of his theological colleagues at the Academy, such as Louis Tronchin (1629–1705) and Philippe Mestrezat (1618–90), were sympathetic to Amyraldian views, which stood opposed to certain declarations of the National Synod of Dordrecht (1618–19), specifically pertaining to the doctrine of limited atonement. Turretin was therefore compelled to take up intramural debates within the French and Swiss Reformed churches themselves. In doing so, he positioned himself as a stout opponent of Amyraldian teachings (Klauber 1994).

Turretin's work emerged in part from the particular ecclesiastical and academic setting of the Reformed church in Geneva—and Geneva's affairs were not unrelated to the matters and disputes facing the Reformed churches in France as a whole. Not only did Reformed churches throughout Europe face various opponents to the Reformed cause, but the French and Swiss Reformed churches found themselves under increasing Roman Catholic threat, including the menace of armed attack. Already in 1661, Genevan officials had sent Turretin to the Netherlands in order to secure funds for the rebuilding of Geneva's walls. Evidence of the growing hostility toward and intolerance of the Reformed cause in France was manifested when the French Academy at Sedan was closed by French authorities in 1681. Finally, in 1685, with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the Reformed churches in France were banned. This crisis came about two years before Turretin's death, and the same year that the last volume of his *Institutes* appeared. Thus, as the threat of Roman Catholicism grew, it is not surprising to find the *Epistola dedicatoria* in volume 2 of his *Institutes* (1682) addressed to the magistrates of Geneva and Zürich (1847–8c: ii.xiii–xx). Likewise, in both volumes 2 and 3 Turretin's *Præfatio ad lectorem* are potently anti-Rome and quite denunciatory of the Roman pontiff (1847–8d: ii.xxi–iv; 1847–8e: *Pio et Benevolo Lectori*, iii.v–xv).

17.3 THE OCCASION AND ORIGIN OF TURRETIN'S *INSTITUTIO*

That Turretin decided to publish his *Institutes* was due to outside pressure. He informs readers that he consented to put his theological lectures into a published form after much urging by interested parties and upon hearing rumours that others were intending to publish his work without his knowledge. His reluctance to publish this work is not a case of false modesty, especially if one remembers the relative glut of such works available at the time. Even a cursory glance at Heinrich Heppe's bibliography in his *Reformed Dogmatics* reveals that a large number of Reformed dogmatical writings were already in print, ably expositing and defending the Reformed cause against various opponents—perhaps the most important being Amandus Polanus' *Syntagma Theologiæ Christianæ* (1624), the Leiden Faculty's *Synopsis purioris theologiæ* (6th edn 1652), Samuel Maresius' *Collegium theologicum sive Systema breve universæ Theologiæ comprehensum octodecim disputationibus* (1662), and Gisbertus Voetius' *Selectarum Disputationum theologicarum* (5 vols, 1648–69) (Heppe 1950). Turretin's *Institutio* thus entered a well-populated field of dogmatic discussion. He published this work finally because he believed it might serve to defend the truth of the Gospel in an age of much learned opposition and sometimes needless division (Turretin 1992: 'Preface to the Reader', xxxix–xl).

If the above elucidates what prompted Turretin to publish his elenctic *Institutes*, he explains that the 'design in publishing this work' bears the marks of its gradual and initial formation in the process of classroom instruction. Turretin states that he sought to teach by focusing on controversies or disputed points. Making use of the 'decades' in Maresius' *Collegium theologicum* (1662: 470–87), Turretin offered supplemental materials in a written form, which explained the 'state and foundation of the controversies' under consideration, and which presented important 'distinctions and observations' along the way. The focus was on 'capital falsehoods' (πρωτωνψευδος) of opponents and their 'chief objections' (præcipuæ objectiones) to Reformed orthodox views. Turretin opted to put these materials in a written form—versus mere lectures—to promote learning and good pedagogy (Turretin 1847–8b: *Præfatio ad Lectorem*, i.xxiii–xxiv; 1992: xxxix). Turretin also explains that his *Institutes*, therefore, is not as such 'a full and accurate system of theology', but given his specific aim it treats 'principal controversies' to aid students to find their way through the labyrinth of disputation in 'this fond-of-wrangling age'. He hopes to equip his readers with an 'armour of righteousness' and 'the shield of faith' (Turretin 1847–8b: *Præfatio ad Lectorem*, i.xxiv; 1992: xl).

Like John Calvin, his most renowned predecessor at Geneva, Turretin called his work an *Institutio*. The term refers to fundamental or foundational instruction. In adding the phrase *theologia elenctica*, Turretin reveals his intention to pursue the instruction of theology in an elenctic manner—for the latter term, 'elenctic', is derived from the Greek word ἐλεγχος, 'to expose error'. An elenctic theology, then, seeks to teach truth by way of

contrast to and in refutation of error. For Turretin, and for his Reformed orthodox comrades, theology has the task of opposing heretical views or otherwise harmful theological opinion in the defence of the received catholic faith of the church, and specifically of the distinctive Reformed understanding of that faith. In the labour of theological education at Geneva, Turretin sought to expound Christian doctrine using the foil of error and heresy in order to explain and defend what he judged to be biblical truth. Specifically, Turretin argues that ‘the theology of revelation’—being grounded in divine revelation of the supernatural sort—is theology that transcends human reason and depends upon God’s grace as revealed in his Word (I.Q2.7). ‘A combination of doctrinal and polemical theology was called “elentic theology” (*theologia elenctica*)’ (van Asselt et al. 2010: 171).

Yet Turretin’s work is more than a sustained piece of polemics, and it is easy to find large portions of his work that are positive and specifically didactic in orientation; nonetheless, it would be a mistake to underplay the refutative dimension of his work. In fact, many of the lengthier polemical sections of the *Institutes* defend distinct Protestant tenets, such as the authority of scripture, or specific Dortian canons and the difficult questions pertaining to them.

17.4 THE GENRE OF TURRETIN’S *INSTITUTES*

Turretin’s *Institutes* is representative of a certain method and type of theological writing in the early modern period. Indeed, various genres of writing are manifest in early modern scholasticism, among them the *disputatio*. The disputation (or ‘discussion in the form of debate or argument’) has its origins in the medieval schools; it was re-applied and reoriented in the newly established Protestant academies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This model of writing functioned as a format of theological education, and is well illustrated in the *Leiden Synopsis* and Voetius’ *Selectorum*, not to mention Turretin’s own published *Disputationes*. This medieval model was self-consciously adopted by the Reformed scholastic writers but also subjected to critique and modification (Muller 2003b: i.196).

Turretin’s *Institutes* is not in the form of *disputationes*, nor does it qualify as a *Compendium* or *Medulla* of doctrine. Rather, his work follows more the model of the great medieval *Summas*, employing questions as the principal format to address theological topics and sub-topics, like the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and the *Summa quæstionum ordinariarum* of Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) (Aquinas 1947–8; Henry of Gent 2005).

Moreover, Turretin theology is properly characterized as polemical and scholastic versus didactic and positive—these latter traits better describe work of Benedict Pictet, Turretin’s nephew, in his *Theologiæ christiana* (1696). Yet Turretin’s *Institutes* proves to be a more expanded system of theology than what is presented in the shorter doctrinal

works, such as *compendia* and *medullæ*—‘system’ understood here as the whole body of doctrines or teachings as elicited from scripture which are expounded in relation to one another, not as a monistic whole that may be deduced from one or more *principia* or reduced to such *principia*. Nonetheless, Turretin’s work shares with these shorter writings the aim of treating and expounding the ‘commonplaces’ (*loci communes*) of theology as elicited from scripture. Among the important *compendia* worthy of note are, for example, Johannes Wollebius’ *Christianæ theologiæ compendium* (1626), William Ames’ *Medulla theologia* (1623), and the later work of Johannes Marckius, *Christianæ theologiæ medulla, didactio-elemtica* (1690) (see bibliography in Heppe 1950).

For Turretin, scripture is the *principium* of theology. His *Institutes*, therefore, deliberately builds on these sorts of works of ‘commonplaces’ but adds more thorough and rigorous definitions, divisions, and distinctions, along with arguments and rebuttals of opposing views (cf. Muller 2003b: i.203). Muller observes, ‘Other genres of scholastic writing are *Loci communes*, doctrinal digressions that arose from exegetical commentaries and that later were compiled in a more or less coherent order.’ Besides these sorts of works, ‘[t]here also were manuals based on catechetical or undergraduate instruction; these were called *Compendia*, *Medullæ*, or *Systemata*; and treatises modeled on the great medieval examples of the method of the scholastic “question” (*quæstio*)’ (Muller 2003b: 202–3; see as well the editors’ discussion of genres of scholastic writing in ‘Introduction’ to *Synopsis Purioris Theologiæ* 2015: 3–5). The genre of writing which defines Turretin’s *Institutes* is thus both comprehensive and polemical. Although his three volumes are not written as *disputationes*, Turretin’s work uses the question-structure, modelled after the elementary tool of medieval scholastic inquiry, and discernible in its application to various genres of scholastic texts, functioning as a textbook in theology for the benefit of youthful theological students (Turretin 1992: ‘Preface to the Reader’, i.xl–xli). Even when the ‘question’ structure is not followed explicitly, the techniques of definition, distinction, logical reasoning, and refutation of objections are typical of Turretin’s scholastic discourse.

17.5 TURRETIN’S METHOD ANALYSED AND ILLUSTRATED

As already noted, Turretin’s *Institutio* clearly follows the model of the medieval scholastic *quæstiones*. Although not every sub-topic or specific point under dispute is addressed via questions, the content of such sections still presuppose the ‘question’ structure and usually unfold with Turretin’s typical sections on ‘proof’ and ‘reply to objections’. Thus, in his alignment of *loci*, specific topics are discussed with a definite design, so that the careful expression of the question or questions in dispute can properly explore specific features of a given topic and exact conclusions can be reached. Therefore, in each of the

twenty *loci* Turretin subdivides the specific topic into its requisite distinct questions. In outline form, the topics are (usually) set forth as follows:

1. Turretin begins, in most instances, by naming specific opponents—who they are and what they specifically believe. For example: ‘This is the dogma of our adversaries...’ ‘The Romanists teach...’ ‘The Remonstrants also endeavour...’ ‘The Socinians reach the height of boldness in rejecting...’ If opponents are not directly mentioned, Turretin will usually succinctly define the doctrine under dispute, and note where there is disagreement. It is not unusual, in presenting the position of one or more opponents, for Turretin to engage in a lengthy analysis of their views, and then turn to circumscribe the question at issue.
2. Having accomplished the above, Turretin proceeds to delineate the question or questions at issue—this follows the *status quæstionis* wherein Turretin seeks to articulate the exact point needing exposition or that is under contest. The analysis of the exact question at hand reveals both what the question is not and what the question is. The ‘state of the question’, then, results in a clarification of where there is agreement (what is not in dispute) in order to arrive at the nub of disagreement—that is, where parties split into diverse camps. Turretin typically explains: ‘The question is not...’ ‘Rather the question is...’ A further observation here is that it is not uncommon for Turretin, under the ‘state of the question’, to enunciate the orthodox position by differentiating two extremes: those who err in excess and those who err in defect. An example of this trait is well set forth in the doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments (Topic XIX.Q8).
3. From here, Turretin expounds his own stated position, presenting positive arguments in support of his view, though this is often done in light of an opponent’s position: ‘Many arguments prove...’ This section can be brief or quite elaborate, depending on the nature of the issue under discussion. Turretin’s positive argumentation at this point, then, can be as short as a paragraph or extended for many pages.
4. Last, there is a consideration and rebuttal of counter-arguments, called ‘*fontes solutionum*’ (often translated as ‘sources of solution’ or ‘sources of explanation’). This section principally meets the counter-arguments of opponents, but may include a succinct summary of Turretin’s own views; and it can serve as a ‘handy check for the reader to see if the discussion is understood’ (van Asselt et al. 2010: 172). Oftentimes Turretin does not so much state the counter-arguments explicitly as meet these objections as suppositions, which he then refutes.

A further observation regarding Turretin’s method is that he always seeks to ground his staked-out position in scripture and to present biblical arguments for his view. Yet, besides bolstering his argument with the relevant scriptural materials, he will sometimes seek support from the church fathers and medieval scholastic writers (see Meijering 1991). Thus, while first drawing proofs from scripture, Turretin also appeals, to varying degrees, to patristic, medieval, and other Reformed authors, and sometimes even Jewish sources. Interestingly, although Turretin mentions Reformed writers by

name from time to time, he generally avoids dependence on them in order to make his case. In addition, he shuns heated polemics in treating disputed issues, especially with other Reformed authors. Given the precarious nature of the Reformed churches in France, for example, it hardly would have helped the Reformed cause to lend assistance to Roman Catholic opponents by engaging in denunciatory polemics against the Amyraldians.

It is noteworthy, too, that in dealing with those who oppose the Reformed position, Turretin is uninhibited in specifying their names or their writings. His method no doubt has advantages and disadvantages. A key advantage of this method is that he consistently demarcates and defends the Reformed position, while also exposing and refuting the positions of theological opponents. A key disadvantage is the risk that error creates the agenda of theology rather than scripture—or, in any case, it might seem less obvious that this genre of theology is derived directly from scripture. Turretin's work, however, ever sought to be faithful to scriptural teaching, even as his work rested on an exegetical tradition.

17.6 SELECT OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING TURRETIN'S *INSTITUTES*

Although it is impossible here to offer a comprehensive survey of Turretin's three-volume work or even to explore the architectonic structure of these volumes, it is not unfruitful to present a few selective observations about important traits and salient features of Turretin's *Institutes*.

First, we note that Turretin's opponents figure prominently in the shape and texture of this work. These opponents, principally Roman Catholics, Socinians, Remonstrants (or Arminians), along with various Lutherans, Anabaptists, and others, represented for Turretin the principal adversaries to the Reformed cause. Turretin's scholastic theology therefore sought to defend the hard-won gains of the earlier codification of Reformed theology achieved by Calvin and his Reformed contemporaries, particularly against what was perceived to be the 'Pelagianizing' acids that dissolved the primacy of divine grace and transgressed the right teaching of 'catholic' Augustinianism (see e.g. IV.Q10.1; X.Q1.1; XV.Q51). As such, Turretin is not interested in contending with marginal points of doctrine. His mission is to defend robustly the Reformed confession of divine grace (*sola gratia*). In this regard, he is prepared to make common cause even with particular Roman Catholics thinkers who, with him, reject Jesuit deviations from the sovereignty of God's grace; he appeals to the tradition of the church and to scholastic Roman Catholic authors in order to help make his case (van Asselt et al. 2010: 171–3). Certainly, Turretin's polemic against Pelagianizing tendencies is a constant refrain in his *Institutes*.

In spite of the above remarks, chief among the opponents to Reformed orthodoxy, and the most intellectually formidable, were the Roman Catholics. Consequently, most fundamental to Turretin's programme is his sustained polemic against numerous

Roman Catholic errors. Rome represents for Turretin, and his Protestant contemporaries, the most serious (if not the most sinister) antagonist of the Protestant cause, which is to say, to the cause of the Gospel itself (see e.g. Topic XVIII). Next in order are the Socinians. Turretin's darts of disputation are repeatedly aimed at Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) and his followers, covering a large number of theological topics. Being anti-Trinitarians and deniers of Christ's deity, the Socinians were the most prominent enemies of the broad consensus of Nicene orthodoxy (see Topic III.Qs24–6, 27–8). Turretin gives considerable attention to rebuffing their aberrant claims and theological errors. As for the Lutherans, while the Reformed shared much in common with them as their Protestant counterparts, still in some places the Reformed parted ways from them—the principal departures centring on the *communicatio idiomatum* (the communication of the divine properties in the hypostatic union of Christ's person) (XIII.Q6.9; Q8), and how that issue in turn played out relative to the manner of Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (XIX.Qs26, 28). Regarding the Anabaptists, relative to other opponents, Turretin devotes much less space to their errors. Of course, his elenctic arguments toward them focused principally in refuting their denial of the biblical warrant for infant baptism (XV.Q14; XIX.Q20), and in back of that their failure to affirm the essential unity of the covenant of grace (XII.Q5).

As a general observation, Turretin engaged in polemics in an irenic spirit and treated his theological rivals equitably. In fact, he was rather scrupulous to present the views of opponents accurately if only to refute their position more persuasively. In doing so, he was predisposed to be 'mainstream' in his Reformed convictions, and also sought at times to play the role of mediator between parties, i.e. to effect reconciliation (or at least understanding) among the Reformed where debate had become overblown or otherwise misconceived. An example is his treatment of conditionality in the covenant of grace (see e.g. Topic XII.Q3.15). To his credit, Turretin excels at stating opponents' views fairly and accurately, and he resists *ad hominem* comment (van Asselt et al. 2010: 172). This 'school theology', with its polemical thrust, was no more fanatical or reactionary or intolerant than an earlier, less scholastic codification of Reformed theology. These negative traits mark personalities, not theological method.

Second, as adumbrated above, Turretin upholds the doctrine of grace alone, and so he persistently argues against Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian doctrines, even as he promotes the findings of the Synod of Dordrecht against the Remonstrants. Turretin's work, then, constantly champions divine initiative in the face of human inability, divine mercy in the face of human guilt and demerit, and God's sovereign accomplishment of salvation, persevering to the end, in light of human instability and impotence. All the main canons of Dort are discernibly defended in Turretin's *Institutes*, as he expounds upon the doctrine of predestination, including unconditional election (Topic IV.Q11) (Turretin even lines up with the infralapsarian orientation of Dort); human free choice and its limitations (Topic X.Qs1–5); and effectual calling (Topic XV.Q4). He likewise explicitly takes up the topic of Christ's penal substitutionary atonement, the scope of that atoning work (Topic XIV.Q14), as well as the doctrine of the perseverance of faith (Topic XV.Q16).

In addition, in advocating for the doctrines of Dort against Remonstrant objectors, Turretin also opposed some in the Reformed camp (whom he considered our men), primarily the Amyraldians—the name being derived from Amyraldus, the Latinized name of Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664). Here we observe that Amyraldianism, Cocceianism, and Cartesianism form three chief aberrations that emerged among the Reformed in the seventeenth century. The philosophical programme of René Descartes (1596–1650), with its subjectivistic method, became hotly debated in the Netherlands and beyond. However, Descartes's thought did not immediately impact Turretin and his work in Geneva, so he does not address this movement. Meanwhile, only with moderation does he take on controversy with the Amyraldians and Cocceians. Turretin disputes Cocceius' views particularly regarding Christ's suretyship vis-à-vis Old Testament believers (Topic XII.Qs9–10) (see Klauber 2014: 169–96; Dennison 1997b: 643–6; Schaff 1983: i.478–89; Kiezer 1900; de Bude 1871).

The Amyraldians, however, were Turretin's foremost concern. The Scottish theologian John Cameron (c.1579–1625), who studied at the Academy of Saumur in France, was the first to give expression to this (non-standard) Reformed theology. Yet it was Amyraut who proved to be its chief proponent and most able defender. Included among the distinctive doctrines of Amyraldianism were hypothetical universal redemption and the mediate imputation of Adam's sin—the latter doctrine being defended by Josué de la Place (Placæus) (c.1596–?1665). The first of these doctrines argued that while God decreed that Christ's sacrificial death should achieve salvation for all persons (thus a hypothetical universalism), he also decreed to elect only some to be the recipients of salvation—i.e. recipients in the way of the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. Those sympathetic to Amyraldian views included some of Turretin's theological colleagues at the Academy. The Swiss Reformed churches, however, explicitly rejected these and other Salmurian doctrines in the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675) (see especially canons VI, X, XVI, XXV). With Lucas Gernler (d. 1675) of Basel, Turretin assisted J. H. Heidegger, who composed the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), which bore the title 'Form of Agreement of the Swiss Reformed Churches respecting the Doctrine of Universal Grace, the Doctrines Connected Therewith, and Some Other Points' (see Klauber 1990; 2013: 699–710; Denniso, 1997b: 643–5 for an analysis of this controversy). For his part, Turretin rebuts Amyraldian teachings, for example, in Topics IV.Q17, IX.Q9.4–6, XII.Q12, and XIV.Q14.6.

Third, Turretin, as a Reformed scholastic theologian, was at the same time a federal theologian (see Beach 2007). That appellation is warranted not because he wrote a book like Cocceius' *Summa Doctrinæ de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (1648) (see reference list), nor because he explored the history of redemption in a manner akin to Cocceius or with the thoroughness evident in Francis Roberts' *Mysterium & medulla Bibliorum* (1657, bk II, 19–190; bk III, 191–1227; bk IV, 1229–1721) or in Herman Witsius' *De Œconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus, Libri Quatuor* (1677) (see 1822, bks I, II, III.1–3, and IV). Rather, Turretin warrants that label inasmuch as he developed his theology in the way of the twofold covenant—namely the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace, the latter being grounded in the intra-Trinitarian covenant of redemption or *pactum salutis*

(see Topics VIII.Qs3–6; XII.Qs1–12). For Turretin, the covenant of grace, Christ being the substance of the promise, included all the blessings of salvation (see Topic XII.Q2.18–25). Consequently, all theological exposition detailing that redemptive work is really expounding features and dimensions of that Gospel covenant. Thus, all that follows after the Fall and the initial promise of the covenant of grace, including the promise of the coming mediator, his person and work, the soteric operations of the Holy Spirit, which in turn issue forth in the gathering and calling of the church, the meaning and function of sacraments, as well as the doctrine of the last things—all of these blessings are but expressions of God's gracious work according to the promises of the covenant of grace, which also meet the demands of the covenant of works. In other words, federal theology is woven into the whole fabric of Turretin's work, and is presupposed even when not specifically mentioned. In that connection, it must be said that the older scholarship on scholasticism, which pitted Reformed scholastic theology against Reformed federal theology, cannot be sustained and has been shown to be erroneous (see Muller 2003a: 63–102; van Asselt 2011: 11–25). In reality, scholastic theologians, including Turretin, wrote in various genres, some of which bear little or no marks of scholastic method. What is more, even the most recognized and influential federal theologian of the high orthodox era, Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), whom the older scholarship often called the father of federal theology, wrote at times using scholastic method; indeed, his own doctrinal work, *Summa theologiæ ex Scriptura repetita* (1665), shares the common features of Reformed scholastic theology (see e.g. van Asselt 2001b: 54–62; 94–105; 2001a: 227–51). Meanwhile, many Reformed orthodox writers, who clearly wrote in this mode, including Turretin, were champions of federal theology and viewed it as giving definition not only to redemptive history but also to the content of the whole of dogmatic system (see Beach 2007: 22–73, 316–39; Clark 2013: 403–28).

Fourth, although Turretin asserts that his *Institutes* cannot claim to be a full system of theology, the work bears the marks of comprehensiveness despite that claim. In fact, sometimes he takes up topics or questions where matters of controversy are only indirectly addressed or the point of controversy is peripheral to the discussion—as we see, for example, in his treatment of homonyms for the word 'church' or the church's attribute of 'unity', or in treating the senses of being 'called' to the ministry (XVIII.Q2.1–6; Q.5; Q.22.1–7). This is only to say that Turretin's polemics frequently contain a good deal of positive theological argumentation. His theology hardly qualifies as a series of well-phrased criticism of opponents. Instead, he creates an exposition of doctrine in the interplay of refuting opponents, fortified by tightly reasoned arguments, and ever appealing to scripture for primary support and to other authoritative authors for supplementary support. That being said, it remains true that Turretin does not cover every theological topic. Perhaps most conspicuous in its absence is the lack of any exposition of the Christian life or Christian liberty or prayer—as we find, for example, in Calvin's *Institutes* (III.6–10, 19–20) or in Johannes Markius' *Medulla* (1686: ch. 26, 230–41). In this last-mentioned work, the author devotes an entire chapter to prayer, fasting, almsgiving, vows, etc., which is not atypical for Reformed works of theology of that era. Although Turretin touches on some of these topics in expositing the Ten

Commandments, none of them receives a fulsome treatment. Even with some topics missing from the discussion, Turretin's work, notwithstanding his pronouncement to the contrary, remains a rather full and accurate system of theology.

Fifth, and finally, within the broad context of the scholastic theology that emerged on both the Continent and the British Isles, although Turretin's *Institutes* was certainly not marked by innovation, neither may it be dismissed as rote or simply repetitive. To be sure, he laboured, deliberately, in the role of codifier of Reformed orthodoxy and wrote as a defender of the Reformed consensus. In doing so, he aimed to bring Reformed thinkers into agreement with one another, where possible. As such, his work was not visionary or trend-setting; and therefore it comes as no surprise that his *Institutes* presents Reformed teaching in a rather standard format so that, in spite of its elenctic orientation, the sequence of topics and their content are familiar. Turretin writes with clarity and acumen on each topic; and while his theology is not distinctive as to content, his penchant of focusing on controversial issues with erudition and insight gives his theological work abiding value. Given the elenctic form of Turretin's theological exposition, his *Institutes* was and remains a pinnacle of achievement in the development of Reformed scholasticism in Geneva and throughout Europe; and it remains an outstanding specimen of Reformed dogmatical works. Following the *quaestiones* format of instruction, Turretin's *Institutes* still exhibits its well-designed function as a textbook of theology; and its readers, having mastered its scholastic vocabulary and method, realize that it is an effective pedagogical tool. Turretin was not given to extreme views, nor did he 'colour outside the lines' of Reformed orthodoxy; he set the benchmark of that orthodoxy, even as he remains its standard-bearer. His *Institutes* will endure as a work of interest to scholars of the early modern era and the history of doctrine. In its English translation, Turretin's *Institutes* will also continue to occupy a highly influential place among the dogmatical works of Reformed theology.

17.7 THE *INSTITUTIO* IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Unlike Calvin's *Institutes*, Turretin's work did not grow larger over time, nor did it see multiple editions in Latin and French. Instead, he published his work near the end of his career and, as it turned out, near the end of his life. Yet his three-volume work did enjoy multiple publications and was reprinted numerous times in various editions. The first English edition of the *Institutio* appeared as *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* in 1992, 1994, and 1996 by P&R Publishing Co., of Phillipsburg, New Jersey. James T. Dennison, Jr. ably edited this work, putting George Musgrave Giger's translation into a published form. In the English edition, Dennison also included a 'Biographical Dictionary', a valuable source for scholars, as well as various indices: Proper Names, Subjects, Scripture and Apocrypha, Significant Hebrew and Greek Words; and a very helpful index of Works Cited (by Turretin).

The origins of the translation date back to the nineteenth century when Charles Hodge, the renowned professor of Princeton Theological Seminary, asked his colleague,

Dr Giger, professor of classics at the College of New Jersey (Princeton University), to translate this work. A handwritten copy was produced and kept on hand for student use. This translation was based upon the 1847 Edinburgh/New York edition of Turretin's work (see Dennison 1997a: 677–9). Giger's translation, with Dennison's editing, remains the only complete English translation of Turretin's *Institutes*—though this translation lacks the *Epistola dedicatoria* and the *Præfatio ad lectorem* from volume 2 and the *Ad lectorem* from volume 3.

Other portions of Turretin's *Institutes* have been published in English prior to Dennison's work. In 1817, James R. Willson translated and published Questions 10–14 of Topic XIV on 'the Mediatorial Office of Christ', which was a chapter in a larger work (Willson 1817). These materials were later published under the title *The Atonement of Christ* in 1859 (Willson 1978). Also, in 1965 John W. Beardslee III translated and edited locus III on divine predestination for inclusion in his book *Reformed Dogmatics*, which contained translated materials from other seventeenth-century Reformed theologians (Beardslee 1977). Beardslee likewise later translated and edited locus II on the doctrine of scripture (Beardslee 1981).

SUGGESTED READING

Junius (2014); Clark (2013); Beach (2007); Muller (2003b).

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CHAPTER 18

JONATHAN EDWARDS' A TREATISE CONCERNING RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS

KYLE STROBEL

WRITTEN in 1746, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (hereafter, *Religious Affections*) was Jonathan Edwards' most mature reflection on the difference between true and false religion, a question that plagued New England as it wrestled with the aftermath of the revivals. Contrary to popular assumptions about the work, *Religious Affections* is not simply a biblical meditation on the life of faith; it is a polemical piece aimed to undermine the critics of the revivals and bring much-needed moderation to the revival's excesses. Furthermore, while Edwards' legacy is often directly attached to his brilliance in this work—branding him as one of the great Christian thinkers on questions concerning discernment, the internal working of the Spirit, and the nature of spiritual knowledge—this was not his sole attempt to answer such inquiries. *Religious Affections* was his final blow in a fight that had lasted a decade, where he built upon and adjusted his thinking from his earlier works: *A Faithful Narrative* (1736–7), *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), and then *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (1743) (for more on the polemical context of *Religious Affections* and preceding works, see Strobel 2012).

Revealing his intentions from the outset, Edwards begins *Religious Affections* with a clear question: 'What is the nature of true religion? (Edwards 1957: 84). To answer adequately, Edwards believes he must not only articulate the nature and practice of true religion but also explain why there is such widespread *false* religion as he understood it. This work is not all light; Edwards seeks to narrate the shadow-side of God's work of salvation so that people could recognize in themselves the temptation, and even the out-working, of false affection. Without the means necessary for discerning between true and false religion, Edwards expects that false religion will delude Christians into hypocrisy, where the church becomes 'a city without walls', open to the work of Satan (Edwards 1957: 88). Edwards does not fear atheism as the great enemy of the church, but

false religion: 'Tis by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ' (Edwards 1957: 86). To buttress the church against the schemes of the devil, Edwards expositis true religion by articulating 'the nature and signs of the gracious operations of God's Spirit, by which they are to be distinguished from all things whatsoever that the minds of men are the subjects of, which are not of a saving nature' (Edwards 1957: 89). Contrary to his critics, who believed any excesses discovered in the revivals invalidate them, Edwards seeks to be more attentive to the nuance of spiritual warfare. Where God is at work, he supposes, one should expect to find excesses and 'enthusiasm', because Satan's main interest is invalidating a true work of God. The Christian's calling, therefore, is not to reject movements where we find such errors, but to discern true religion from false.

Edwards' exposition of the topic of religious affection unfolds in three major sections. The first grounds the whole, by articulating the theoretical content of true religion. The next two sections build on the first by applying the theory to practical discernment, though he never ceases to unpack and develop the theoretical material on affection, anthropology, and grace. In the second section, the main focus is on 'signs' people use for discernment that do not actually provide it, whereas in the third section he gives an account of the *distinguishing* signs of true religion. The temptation with such a work is to move too quickly through the theoretical material, thereby reducing religious affection to emotion on the one hand, or perhaps an immediate activity of the Spirit, without the need for means of grace on the other. But Edwards' account is too nuanced for such readings. (For an important description of Edwards' notion of religious affection and ecclesiology, with particular focus on his case against the enthusiasts, see Bezzant 2014: 135–44.) Here, I focus most of my discussion on the nature of religious affection, providing the necessary conceptual framework to make sense of Edwards' discussion, and only then turn to an overview of the next two sections, concluding with some reflections on the reception history of the work.

18.1 PART I: TRUE RELIGION, AFFECTION, AND THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

Before considering how religious affection is integral to true religion, it is important to pause on the nature of spiritual knowledge as the foundation for what true religion entails. In Edwards' understanding, God's life is the archetype of the truly religious life. God is the one who is the pure actuality of knowledge and love, and religion is partaking of *this* life:

How good is God, that he has created man for this very end, to make him happy in the enjoyment of himself, the Almighty, who was happy from the days of eternity in

himself, in the beholding of his own infinite beauty:...'Twas not that he might be made more happy himself, but that [he] might make something else happy; that he might make them blessed in the beholding of his excellency, and might this way glorify himself. (Edwards 1997: 153)

God's life of knowledge and love is made available in the economic overflow of Son and Spirit. The self-knowing that defines God's eternal life is not speculative, it is not light without heat, but is affective. The processions of Son and Spirit are the knowing and loving that define God's life *in se*, and therefore define the nature of the divine blessedness. The only way to know God is to know God as God knows himself, and since God's self-knowing is affectionate self-knowing, creaturely knowledge of God must be affectionate knowledge within the Son and by the Spirit. Far more than human speculation, true religion requires the illumination of the Spirit to behold the Son in love, a finite partaking of the Father's infinite love of the Son in the divine blessedness.

Admittedly, in the sensibility of much modern theology, it may seem odd to moor true religion to God's life *in se*, rather than turning to Christ in the economy. Edwards certainly advances the life of Christ to model true religion, but this is not his primary, or even his secondary, focus. Rather, God's eternal life is the ultimate ground of true religion, and the secondary grounding is the life of the saints in heaven (see e.g. Edwards 1957: 114). In this sense, the pilgrim knowledge of faith had by the regenerate in this age is given its teleology by its perfection in the beatific vision of eternity. 'The religion of heaven consists very much in *affection*,' Edwards asserts, claiming, 'There is doubtless true religion in heaven, and true religion in its utmost purity and perfection. But according to the Scripture representation of the heavenly state, the religion of heaven consists chiefly in holy and mighty love and joy, and the expression of these in most fervent and exalted praises' (Edwards 1957: 113). In his opening meditation in *Religious Affections* on 1 Peter 1:8: 'Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory,' Edwards reflects on this joy, claiming that 'it was a prelibation of the joy of heaven, that raised their minds to a degree of heavenly blessedness: it filled their minds with the light of God's glory, and made 'em themselves to shine with some communication of that glory.' Therefore, according to Edwards' logic, 'if religious affections in men here below, are but of the same nature and kind with theirs, the higher they are, and the nearer they are to theirs in degree, the better; because therein they will be so much the more conformed to truth, as theirs are' (Edwards 1957: 130).

Pilgrim knowledge, or knowledge by faith, is oriented by its perfection in the beatific vision. But this pilgrim knowledge is 'of the same nature and kind with what the saints are subjects of in heaven, differing only in degree and circumstances: what God gives them here, is a foretaste of heavenly happiness, and an earnest of their future inheritance' (Edwards 1957: 133). This foretaste is the 'reflected light' of God that Edwards compares to the light of the sun reflected off of the moon (Edwards 1734). The knowledge by faith that the pilgrim has is not somehow a different sort of knowledge the saint will have in the beatific vision of heaven, but is 'the imperfect beginning of this heavenly sight'

(Edwards 1999: 75). By refusing a sharp bifurcation between faith and sight, Edwards keeps knowledge by faith in the same overall register as knowledge by sight, even though faith in Christ is not akin to physical sight, but is something spiritual. The regenerate know God by the '[l]ight of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6), and therefore regeneration requires an illumination of Christ to the soul by the Spirit:

One glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God, and supreme amiableness of Jesus Christ, shining into the heart, overcomes and abolishes this opposition, and inclines the soul to Christ, as it were, by an omnipotent power: so that now, not only the understanding, but the will, and the whole soul receives and embraces the Savior. This is most certainly the discovery, which is the first internal foundation of a saving faith in Christ. (Edwards 2006: 635–6).

Whereas in God's life the Father gazes upon the Son with the Spirit of love pouring forth, the Christian is the one who has come to see this same Son with the same Spirit pouring forth from her heart. What the Father sees immediately and perfectly, the Christian sees mediately and through a glass darkly; the Father's infinitely perfect vision is known in creaturely finitude even as the creature grows in its depths for eternity. This is the grand vision that grounds the importance of affection. Religious affection, as an idea, is founded upon Edwards' understanding of the life of God and the life of the saints in heaven, and it is this framework that provides his hermeneutic for scripture's language of affection. (For the backdrop to Edwards' material, see Stoeber 1996: 85–99; Walton 2002; Wainwright 2012: 224–40.)

18.1.1 The Nature of Affection

One of the major difficulties with a text like the *Religious Affections* is holding in mind what an affection actually is. But Edwards is clear: 'the affections are no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul' (Edwards 1957: 96). An affection, for Edwards, is not an emotion, but is a certain kind of willing (i.e., a vigorous and sensible willing). (For the most well-developed account of affections in relation to emotions, passions and willing, see Martin 2019.) The soul is capable of perception and speculation, which he names as the understanding, and the soul inclines or is averse to what is beheld, which he names as an act of inclination or will. While he freely uses the term 'faculties', it is a mistake to think of the understanding and the will as 'faculties' that understand and will respectively; a person does not *have* an understanding and a will as distinct entities in the soul. Rather, *persons* understand and *persons* will. One of the important implications of this focus, Edwards claims, is that there cannot 'be a clear distinction made between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately, in this matter' (Edwards 1957: 272). Furthermore, the difference between a normal act of the will and an affection is simply 'the degree and manner

of exercise' (p. 97). As an act of willing, an affection can be negative or positive, but to qualify as an 'affection', it must be a *vigorous* inclination of the will. (On the union of the body and the soul, and the bodily response to affections, see Edwards 1957: 98.) Affections are not synonymous with passions, therefore, because passions are more sudden and violent to the body (i.e. violence to the 'animal spirits' and the 'motion of fluids' according to Edwards' understanding of human physiology), whereas affections are a more abiding movement of the will. According to John E. Smith, unlike the overpowering nature of the passions, the affections 'require instead a clear understanding and sufficient control of the self to make choice possible' (Smith 1957: 15).

18.1.2 The Nature of *Religious* Affection

The preceding description narrates the nature of affection, but Edwards' work is not an exposition of affection as such, but *religious* affections—an affectionate knowledge of *God*. To get to the heart of his argument, it is important to consider his understanding of the Spirit's work in the soul, and how his religious psychology gives an account of the nature of affectionate knowledge. Edwards' view of religious affection is moored to his understanding of regeneration, spiritual knowledge, *theosis*, and anthropology, at the very least, all of which are governed by his doctrine of God. (For an account of how these all fit together in Edwards' thought, with a particular emphasis on what a Reformed doctrine of *theosis* entails, see Strobel 2016: 371–99.) The decisions he makes in each of these areas lead him to say, in a statement he considers inherently obvious, 'That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wouldings, raising us but a little above a state of indifference', as well as 'for who will deny that true religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart' (Edwards 1957: 99). At the centre of his theory of religious affection is the notion that true religion entails a 'vigorous and lively' willing. This is not just any willing, it is willing God and the things of God that makes an affection a truly *religious* affection, which is, by necessity, an act of the Spirit of God in the regenerate alone.

Because religious affections are only possible through the infusion of the Spirit in the soul, when issues of discernment arise, one cannot simply address the teleology of an affection, but must attend to the inner movement of the heart. In Edwards' words, 'True religion is evermore a powerful thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in the inward exercises of it in the heart, where is the principal and original seat of it' (Edwards 1957: 100). As a movement in the heart, and because the fount of this work is the Spirit in the soul, Edwards turns to the language of sense and perception to articulate the phenomenology of this event. The problem this creates for discernment concerns the nature of this new sense of the heart given in regeneration. He claims that there is a 'new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified', and argues that this 'new sensation' is discovered in the 'faculties' of the soul but is

available only through the work of the Spirit in the elect (p. 204). Key to Edwards' phenomenological description is his theological aesthetics, once again grounded in God's beatitude and made available to the Christian through God's self-revelation in Son and Spirit. In doing so, he distinguishes mere 'notional' understanding of God with the regenerate's spiritual knowledge of God:

There is a distinction to be made between a mere notional understanding, wherein the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, wherein the mind doesn't only speculate and behold, but relishes and feels. That sort of knowledge, by which a man has a sensible perception of amiableness and loathsomeness, or of sweetness and nauseousness, is not just the same sort of knowledge with that, by which he knows what a triangle is, and what a square is. The one is mere speculative knowledge; the other sensible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned; the heart is the proper subject of it, or the soul as a being that not only beholds, but has inclination, and is pleased or displeased.

(Edwards 1957: 272)

Edwards uses the example of someone who knows everything about honey except its taste. (For an overview of the nature of this new 'sense of the heart,' see Smith 2005: 103–14.) For Edwards, this is missing everything that truly matters about honey—missing out on its glory—and is therefore only speculative knowledge. To know God is to know him, not only speculatively, but sensibly (or, maybe better, *personally*), through a partaking in his self-giving as one receives the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit. To receive the invisible God, one must come to see Christ, the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), through the illuminating work of the infused Spirit, such that seeing *this* image is seeing the beauty of God. This act of sight in conversion, for Edwards, is read through his theological aesthetic, such that recognizing the beauty of God in Christ is the first act of a regenerate soul: 'Spiritual understanding primarily consists in this sense, or taste of the moral beauty of divine things; so that no knowledge can be called spiritual, any further than it arises from this, and has this in it' (Edwards 1957: 273).

18.1.3 The Spring of Affection

True religion, for Edwards, is not simply a creaturely *response* to God's work, however true that is, but is a participation in God's own goodness. It is not that God gives over a sight of his glory and beauty, but rather, in the Son and Spirit, God ushers the believer *into* his glory and beauty. The 'inward principle' of religious affection 'is something divine,' Edwards claims, 'a communication of God, a participation of the divine nature, Christ living in the heart, the Holy Spirit dwelling there, in union with the faculties of the soul, as an internal vital principle, exerting his own proper nature, in the exercise of those faculties' (Edwards 1957: 392). A good action, on this line of thinking, must have a good source, or to use his preferred terminology, a good *principle* of action. But the Christian is called to be holy as God is holy, therefore true religion must derive its

principle of action from God's own holiness. Therefore, God puts the Spirit of his holiness in the heart of his elect, who functions according to 'his own proper nature' (i.e. as holiness and love), not as a new faculty, but as a 'vital principle in the soul' (Edwards 1999: 208).

Fundamental to Edwards' theological impulse is that true religion requires God's *immediate* action in the soul: 'For there can be no one virtuous choice, unless God immediately gives it' (Edwards 1743: §43). This immediacy does not undermine the mediation of the means of grace, but the Spirit uses these means for his immediate activity in and upon the soul. This immediacy is necessary for the believer to have true virtue and holiness. As Cochran rightly notes, 'For Edwards, we acquire the virtues by receiving them. True virtue and its corollaries are received through the direct intervention of God's converting grace, which bestows a spiritual sense upon the regenerate' (Cochran 2011: 167). The natural person does not have the necessary holiness by which to live holy lives, although they have the capacity for natural virtue. This leads to the problem and necessity for discernment. An unregenerate person can habituate aspects of religion that mimic true religion, even to the person themselves, and fail to have the love and holiness of God as their foundation. Once again, it is the problem of discerning true from false religion that Edwards seeks to address.

So while affection is necessary, it is insufficient for discerning true religion. Questions of discernment must attend to the nature of the affections as true or false, and therefore must focus on the principle or spring of the affection in the soul. It is not enough to look at a person's action to discern true religion; one must face the difficulty of attending to the inner-movement of the heart (and the Spirit's role in that movement). Religious affections are deeply abiding realities in the Christian, and therefore a key element of false affections is that they 'don't go deep enough, to reach and govern the spring of men's actions and practice' (Edwards 1957: 393). Whereas false affections don't penetrate deeply into the soul, true gracious affections 'go to the very bottom of the heart, and take hold of the very inmost springs of life and activity' (p. 393). Because of this, there is a close relation to the inner movements of the regenerate soul and Christian practice. True grace is not an inactive thing,' Edwards avers, 'for 'tis life itself, and the most active kind of life, even spiritual and divine life' (p. 398). In his practical sections, this inclination will do a lot of work, but will also raise questions for later Reformed theologians on whether or not this kind of impulse is helpful.

18.1.4 Indwelling Corruption

Up until this point, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that Edwards has provided an overly realized account of God's presence in the soul, such that continued sin seems impossible. In a move that will unnerve later Reformed theologians, Edwards talks about God's 'omnipotent' power in the soul that 'overcomes and abolishes' the opposition of sin (Edwards 2006: 635–6). One may wonder why any opposition remains, or if omnipotence is even the right register of causality to employ when talking about God's

action in the soul. Nonetheless, Edwards presupposes that indwelling corruption will remain in the heart, and that all affection before the creature is glorified will be ‘mixed’:

For undoubtedly, there is much affection in the true saints which is not spiritual: their religious affections are often mixed; all is not from grace, but much from nature. And though the affections have not their seat in the body, yet the constitution of the body, may very much contribute to the present emotion of the mind. And the degree of religion is rather to be judged of by the fixedness and strength of the habit that is exercised in affection, whereby holy affection is habitual, than by the degree of the present exercise. (Edwards 1957: 118–19)

Edwards assumes that believers have only a ‘small degree’ of grace in the soul, and therefore much indwelling corruption. But while the ‘degree of religion’ is judged based upon the strength and habituation of affection, it is not the degree that makes true religion different from false religion; it is ‘not so much from the degree of this principle [of grace] in the hearts of the saints, as from its nature and its relation to the beloved Son of God, that it makes so vast a difference in God’s account between the godly and the ungodly’ (Edwards 2012: 164). So while there is much corruption still in the heart, what matters for the Christian is first, how they are related to Christ in grace, and second, the strength and degree of the habit.

Religious affections are had by ‘degrees’, and Edwards assumes that those who are young Christians have these habitual affections in a relatively low manner, even while asserting that they have a ‘strength and vigor’ that guarantees their sustained activity (Edwards 1957: 100). As an act of God in the soul, the ‘strength and vigor’ is based on God’s covenant faithfulness and immediacy of the Spirit in the soul, and therefore cannot fail. But this will not always be the experience of the Christian who may struggle when confronted with the remaining sin in her heart. But this is what Edwards expects. Whereas God’s Spirit creates the foundation, and becomes the principle, for a holy life, Edwards expects that this presence will illumine the remaining corruption of the heart. This means that the Christian should expect that the life of faith will entail an increasing revelation of sin within them, rather than what many may assume: that one’s recognition of sin should diminish as one grows in faith. In his brief autobiographical account of his spiritual life, Edwards states, ‘It is affecting to me to think, how ignorant I was, when I was a young Christian, of the bottomless, infinite depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit left in my heart’ (Edwards 1998: 803). Furthermore, after detailing how much he had given himself to a rigorous asceticism that he later came to see as fleshly (Edwards 1998: 795), he notes:

Though it seems to me, that in some respects I was a far better Christian, for two or three years after my first conversion, than I am now; and lived in a more constant delight and pleasure: yet of late years, I have had a more full and constant sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, and a delight in that sovereignty; and have had more of a sense of the glory of Christ, as a mediator, as revealed in the gospel.

(Edwards 1998: 803)

In his maturity, Edwards experiences less pleasure, delight, and (it would seem) zeal, and yet he is more habitually oriented to God's sovereignty and glory. Therefore, in Christian maturity, remaining corruption should lead the believer to a deeper embrace of God and a continual struggle against that sin in her heart (see Edwards 2012: 159). Remaining sin, however, and the believer's capitulation to it, awakens the problem of assurance. When confronted with this sin, and when living in sin, the believer loses their assurance, Edwards claims. It is a sign of hypocrisy, he claims, to believe one has received the habitual grace of God dwelling in the soul in the midst of a rejection of God (Edwards 1957: 173ff.). Assuming someone is a Christian but is living in an un-Christian way, Edwards argues that this person would not be able to know with certainty that she was saved based on two defects: First, the person would be 'low in grace' and therefore, 'grace being very small, cannot be clearly and certainly discerned and distinguished'; second, there would be a 'defect in the eye', thereby darkening the person's ability to see grace at work in the soul at all (pp. 194–5).

18.2 PART II: NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE SIGNS

The material we have navigated above outlines the main theoretical issues related to religious affection, and highlights the necessity, on this account, for discernment concerning the Spirit's work in the soul. This was particularly relevant for Edwards' desire to affirm the revivals as a work of God while simultaneously denouncing any excesses that occurred in the revivals themselves. But he realizes how limited the scope of his work must be, something he does not fully detail until he gets to the final section of the book. There, he gives three major qualifications of what his work can and cannot do. First, he states clearly that his account does not provide certainty 'to distinguish true affection from false in others', or to determine if others are or are not saved (Edwards 1957: 193). Second, he claims that his account will not be sufficient for those who are 'very low in grace, or are such as have much departed from God, and are fallen into a dead, carnal and unchristian frame' (p. 193). Last, he claims that his work will not be of much use to convince hypocrites of their hypocrisy, while holding out hope that his work may be of use to prevent people from becoming hypocrites (Edwards 1957: 196–7).

With these qualifications in mind, Edwards provides twelve negative and twelve positive signs for discerning God's work in the soul to distinguish between true and false religion. The first set of twelve outline strategies people utilize for discernment that are unable to provide the proper justification necessary for it. Summoning Cartesian critical suspicion, Edwards takes an axe to the root of these ways, clearing the ground for his own positive account of discernment in the final section of the book. The twelve negative signs are:

1. 'Tis no sign one way or the other, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high' (Edwards 1957: 127).

2. 'Tis no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they have great effects on the body' (p. 131).
3. 'Tis no sign that affections are truly gracious affections, or that they are not, that they cause those who have them, to be fluent, fervent and abundant, in talking of the things of religion' (p. 135).
4. 'Tis no sign that affections are gracious, or that they are otherwise, that persons did not make 'em themselves, or excite 'em of their own contrivance, and by their own strength' (p. 138).
5. 'Tis no sign that religious affections are truly holy and spiritual, or that they are not, that they come with texts of Scripture, remarkably brought to the mind' (p. 142).
6. 'Tis no evidence that religious affections are saving, or that they are otherwise, that there is an appearance of love in them' (p. 146).
7. Persons having 'religious affections of many kinds, accompanying one another, is not sufficient to determine whether they have any gracious affections or no' (p. 147).
8. 'Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections by this, that comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convictions of conscience, in a *certain order*' (p. 151, emphasis original).
9. 'Tis no certain sign that the religious affections which persons have are such as have in them the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they dispose persons to spend much time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship' (p. 163).
10. 'Nothing can be certainly known by the nature of religious affections by this, that they much dispose persons with their mouths to praise and glorify God' (p. 165).
11. 'Tis no sign that affections are right, or that they are wrong, that they make persons that have them, exceeding confident that what they experience is divine, and that they are in a good estate' (p. 167).
12. 'Nothing can be certainly concluded concerning the nature of religious affections, that any are the subjects of, from this, that the outward manifestations of them, and the relation persons give of them, are very affecting and pleasing to the truly godly, and such as greatly gain their charity, and win their hearts' (p. 181).

What makes these 'negative' signs is that they do not provide the kind of discernment necessary to get to the foundation of true religion. In many ways, this is relatively straightforward Puritan teaching, as even a superficial reading of *Pilgrim's Progress* would show. But Edwards' focus here is to make both the Old Lights and the New Lights uncomfortable with the assumptions they employ to discern their state before God and God's work in the soul. After years of seeing 'converted' congregants walk away from their faith after the initial awakenings died down, Edwards has grown suspicious about how easy it is to discern such things. Edwards confessed, after he looked back on this pastorate in Northampton, that the people he pastored had some strange tendencies in religion that hurt them. 'Particularly,' Edwards explained, 'it was too much their method

to lay almost all the stress of their hopes on the particular steps and method of their first work... Nor had they learned, and many of them never could be made to learn, to distinguish between impressions on the imagination, and truly spiritual experiences' (Edwards 1998: 383). The list of negative signs, in part, was meant to undermine such tendencies in his own congregation and beyond. Edwards highlights how these external realities may or may not accompany God's action in the soul, but either way, do not provide the necessary justification for true discernment. For that, he turns to his positive signs (p. 383).

In this final section, Edwards provides positive signs for the necessary discernment to distinguish between true and false religion. This is the heart of the work, but is also the place where one is confronted with the difficulty of what Edwards is trying to achieve. (The first two sections make up less than 100 pages in the critical edition, whereas this third section is over 250 pages.) Unlike the negative signs, which are relatively easy to discern, the positive signs are often much more difficult. The twelve positive signs are:

1. 'Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are *spiritual*, *supernatural* and *divine*' (Edwards 1957: 197).
2. 'The first objective ground of gracious affections, is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest' (p. 240).
3. 'Those affections that are truly holy, are primarily founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things. Or (to express it otherwise), a love to divine things for the beauty and sweetness of their moral excellency, is the first beginning and spring of all holy affections' (pp. 253–4).
4. 'Gracious affections do arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things' (p. 266).
5. 'Truly gracious affections are attended with a reasonable and spiritual convictions of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things' (p. 291).
6. 'Gracious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation' (p. 311).
7. 'Another thing, wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others, is, that they are attended with a change of nature' (p. 340).
8. 'Truly gracious affections differ from those affections that are false and delusive, in that they tend to, and are attended with the lamblike, dovelike spirit and temper of Jesus Christ; or in other words, they naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy, as appeared in Christ' (pp. 344–5).
9. 'Gracious affections soften the heart, and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit' (p. 357).
10. 'Another thing wherein those affections that are truly gracious and holy, differ from those that are false, is beautiful symmetry and proportion' (p. 365).
11. 'Another great and very distinguishing difference between gracious affections and others is, that gracious affections, the higher they are raised, the more is a

spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments, increased. On the contrary, false affections rest satisfied in themselves' (p. 376).

12. 'Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice. I mean, they have that influence and power upon him who is the subject of 'em, that they cause that a practice, which is universally conformed to, and directed by Christians rules, should be the practice and business of his life' (p. 383).

Unlike the negative signs, which are more external and circumstantial, these signs point to deeper realities in the heart of the Christian. The first two signs ground true religion in God's immediate activity in the soul and the saint's loving God for his own sake. These two signs advance the implications of Edwards' doctrine of regeneration, specifically how the infused Spirit in the soul functions to illumine Christ and act as the principle of holiness ('something divine') in the soul of a believer. The next three (signs 3, 4, and 5) advance these claims to focus the saint's new sense on divine things and the person's captivation by those realities. These signs are, again, direct implications of how Edwards has explicated regeneration, and, in particular, how his theological aesthetics functions in his thought. To share in God's self-knowledge is to see God as beautiful; true religious affection is driven by the beauty and excellency of divine things, and not, as with false affections, by selfish desire. If one is faithful to God to avoid hell, that person is not captivated by the beauty of God, but by self-interest. Continuing to develop his account, signs 6–11 name effects upon the soul, articulating how God's work in the soul reorders it around his presence; true religion is not moralism, but requires the transformation of the soul through a change of nature (see Edwards 1957: 340–44). The final sign focuses on the relation of affection with practice, highlighting how an affectionate life will be a life of obedience. This is essential to discern true religion, as he states in his introduction to the positive signs: 'Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination, as by action' (p. 195).

In many ways, Edwards' signs flow out from his twofold conviction, discovered in his doctrines of regeneration and *theosis*, that God has communicated something divine to the soul—the Spirit—thereby captivating the person with a beauty that is beyond nature but received by grace. This person has glimpsed something of eternity, and something divine, and therefore recognizes sin, ugliness, and depravity for what they are. Edwards' exegesis of biblical images of the heart, affections, nature, and regeneration are all caught up in that vision.

18.2.1 Receiving Religious Affections

In 1903, B. B. Warfield gave an address to the incoming students of Princeton Theological Seminary on the pastoral ministry as a spiritual office, and how that should orient the spiritual culture of the seminary (published the following year as Warfield 1904: 65–87). After much wise counsel, Warfield provides a list of twelve spiritual classics he believes all seminary students should read. *Religious Affections* does not make the cut, although

right after these twelve he lists three other books that are worthy of attention by Princetonians; it is there that he names *Religious Affections*. This could highlight something of an instinct by later Reformed thinkers concerning Edwards' work. This is not to say that the work, or Edwards himself, isn't revered—far from it!—but there seems to be a general recognition that while *Religious Affections* should be read, it should be studied with caution concerning its original purpose and aims. *Religious Affections* is recognized as a masterpiece of discernment, but, if I may read into some of the silence of later writers on it, there is a worry that Edwards' vision is overly realized (see Clark 2008: 106) or that his description of religious affections is, to some degree, misguided (see Shedd 2003: 528). In light of this, and by way of conclusion, we pause here to reflect on the reception of the *Religious Affections*, and worries Reformed thinkers have had about Edwards' development.

One common critique of Edwards, from his day unto our own, is that his philosophical work ended up undermining key Reformed doctrines, in particular the God–world relation (see Crisp 2012; Crisp and Strobel 2018). This is precisely where Charles Hodge engages Edwards, mistakenly calling his view pantheistic, while rightly recognizing that Edwards' view of continuous creation undermines God's preserving activity by reducing it into an act of creation (Hodge: 1960: 219–20; Salmond 1888: 179–80). Hodge advances this critique by addressing how the breakdown of the God-world relation influences Edwards' thought:

Many philosophical systems, however, ignore all second causes. They assume that effects are due to the immediate agency of God. This is the doctrine not only of the Pantheists, but also of many Christian philosophers. This idea is involved in the theory of occasional causes, and in the doctrine so popular at one time among theologians that preservation is a continual creation. If God creates the universe *ex nihilo* every successive moment, as even President Edwards strenuously asserts, then all effects and changes are the product of his omnipotence, and the efficiency or agency of second causes is of necessity excluded. (Hodge 1960: 659)

Louis Berkof also worries about Edwards' possible pantheism and rejection of secondary causes (Berkhof 2017: 137). Hodge's worry is well-founded. The doctrine of God's preserving is lost to a bloated doctrine of creation, such that secondary causality is rendered meaningless, in that all non-divine causality disappears. On this account, all action in the world is an immediate result of God's omnipotent agency, an issue we raised above in relation to sin when looking at God's work in the soul. So while Edwards' doctrinal work tends to be seen as broadly, though idiosyncratically, Reformed, there is some concern over how his philosophical concepts order the God–world relation and causation (see Crisp 2015: 1–15).

Alongside worries about causation are questions of where one looks for assurance—in the self and the acts of the self, or in Christ. R. Scott Clark, to cite a contemporary example, compares Edwards with his Reformed forebears: 'Attention is no longer on the objective work of Christ for his people and the secret but ordinary work of the Spirit in

his elect through the Word and sacraments. We have entered a realm of subjective judgments . . .’ (Clark 2008: 95; for how Edwards would respond, see Edwards 1957: 138–9). Edwards’ focus on the internal work of the Spirit will come to be seen as overly introspective, and, anticipating Clark’s worries, will be seen as undermining the objective foundation of salvation. ‘Many sincere believers are too introspective,’ Hodge worries. ‘They look too exclusively within, so that their hope is graduated by the degree of evidence of regeneration which they find in their own experience’ (Hodge 1960: 107). In his pastoral prodding, Hodge invokes Edwards’ *Religious Affections*: ‘We may examine our hearts with all the microscopic care prescribed by President Edwards in his work on ‘The Religious Affections,’ and never be satisfied that we have eliminated every ground of misgiving and doubt’ (Hodge 1960: 107). In his five points of assurance following this quotation, Hodge points to God in his infinite goodness, and not the soul, as the place to discover the true ground of assurance. (Donald Bloesch makes something of a similar claim, placing Edwards outside of the Reformed impulse in this regard: Bloesch 2000: 55.) There is a worry here, not only concerning assurance, but that what passes as discernment concerning the Spirit is really just a discussion of the internal dynamics of a person’s psychology. Advancing similar concerns, T. F. Torrance references errors he believes Protestants have made distinguishing the Spirit’s work from the human spirit in the soul: ‘Thus knowledge of the Spirit is dissolved in the subjectivities of the consciousness of the Church or of the individual, and the products of this consciousness, in its collective or individual genius, are put forward as operations of the Holy Spirit’ (Torrance 1996: 228). Developing this objection further, Torrance claims:

We have become accustomed to think of the coming of the Holy Spirit far too much as the interiorization in our hearts of divine salvation, with the result that the presence of the Spirit is so often identified with inward moral and religious states. Creator Spirit and our own creative spirituality tend to become confused. This way of thinking arose early in the history of the Church, gathered momentum in monastic piety and broke out again in Protestant pietism in its emphasis upon religious *inwardness* and *immediacy*, but all this has been greatly accentuated by modern habits in psychological and personalistic thinking. Certainly the Holy Spirit is sent into our hearts where he begets enlightenment and conviction, and bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, but the psychologizing and subjectivizing of this is entirely, or almost entirely, absent from the New Testament.

(Torrance 1996: 242)

Both Hodge and Torrance worry about trapping the Spirit’s action into a subjective psychological state that can be utilized to discern the difference between true and false religion. One dangerous result of this, Hodge believes, is overreach in Edwards’ understanding of the church’s call to discern true from false religion, such that the church can judge someone’s status as regenerate, and therefore determine if that person is allowed to partake in the sacraments (Edwards 1994: 166–325). Hodge claims that Edwards’ view is novel, that it has no warrant from scripture, and that the ‘attempt to make the visible

Church consist exclusively of true believers must not only inevitably fail of success, but it must also be productive of evil' (Hodge 1960: 571–2).

Hodge can be taken as representative of the broad worry of Reformed theologians concerning the implications of Edwards' views on assurance and the visible church. More recently, Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink argue that Edwards departs from Augustine's instinct regarding the visible and invisible church and, in their estimation, links himself to a view more properly understood as Donatist (van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017: 577). Because of this, oddly, *Religious Affections* is both revered and often ignored by Reformed theologians, who seek to distance themselves from the revivals, leaving the work to be picked up enthusiastically by Reformed Baptists. (A counterexample to this is when the Reformed were confronted with questions about revival and the methods of Charles Finney. See e.g. Dod 1847: 138. For an example of the use by the Reformed Baptists, see Chun 2012: 110–41, and, in regards to Fuller's response to 'Sandemanianism,' see Chun 2008: 117–34.) That said, where *Religious Affections* has been utilized by Reformed theologians is in discussions of conversion, faith, and regeneration, rather than with issues related to assurance, revival, or discernment of the Spirit. It is in their sections on regeneration that the likes of A. A. Hodge and Herman Bavinck turn to Edwards, both invoking his analysis of the 'principle of nature' as the new foundation laid in the soul for exercising its faculties (Hodge 1860: 458; Bavinck 2008: 94). So while there seems to be an agreement upon the status of Edwards as a theologian of the highest order, and even a recognition of his brilliance on the topic of regeneration, there seems to be an abiding worry at the purpose and direction of his notion of religious affection as a theological construct and as a work of discerning the Spirit. Nonetheless, it also seems to be agreed upon that the *Religious Affections* is a classic text of Reformed doctrine and practice, and is therefore worthy of careful, even if cautious, attention.

SUGGESTED READING

Martin (2019); Smith (2005); Strobel (2013); Walton (2002).

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CHAPTER 19

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER'S CHRISTIAN FAITH

SHELLI M. POE

FRIEDRICH Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* (1830/31), or *Glaubenslehre* (faith doctrine/teaching), has often been understood as a heterodox theological perspective. Some take the *Glaubenslehre* to be fundamentally at variance with a Reformed emphasis on the word of God (e.g. Brunner 1924; Barth 1982; Lindbeck 1984). A growing number of scholars, however, are finding in Schleiermacher's work the main contours of the Reformed tradition (Gerrish 1977; DeVries 1996; Gockel 2006).

In their Introduction to *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*, David Willis and Michael Welker outline some basic features of Reformed theology, and Schleiermacher's work exemplifies many of those features. First, Reformed theology 'resists the temptation to empty God's word of its content', such that it might come under the controlling influence of 'metaphysics, morality, mysticism, or the dictatorship of a "spirit of the age"' (Willis and Welker 1999: x). Second, Willis and Welker indicate that for those in the Reformed tradition, God's word is mediated by the Spirit and the 'testimony of the many-membered body of Christ' (p. xiii). Such a recognition of mediation leads those in the Reformed tradition to trust in the illuminating and liberating power of the divine word in contemporary situations, and take up truth-claims ecumenically (p. xii) with openness to self-criticism and renewal (p. xiv). Third, the Reformed theological tradition, as Willis and Welker outline it, is comfortable with engaging diverse theological perspectives in its efforts to live into its 'Reformed' namesake.

That Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* is beneficially interpreted in the context of the Reformed theological tradition can be demonstrated by attending to two aspects of his thought in that work. First, the *Glaubenslehre* is adamantly anti-speculative insofar as it does not make room for considerations about God as God would be apart from the world. As such, the text stands with the Reformed tradition in its opposition to any form of metaphysics or mysticism that might empty the word of God of its content. Second,

the theology of the *Glaubenslehre* is Trinitarian in structure. Schleiermacher's masterwork is focused on the wisdom of the loving God, the content of which is identified as the divine creative activity that comes to completion in Christ and makes progress in humanity in and through the Spirit of the church. Schleiermacher's focus on the love and wisdom of the living God, which are mediated by the Spirit in the body of Christ, speaks to the second feature of the Reformed tradition highlighted above, namely the importance of the Spirit and the church in mediating the word. It also draws out the third feature of the Reformed tradition insofar as Schleiermacher's Trinitarian work spoke to the need for a Protestant development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and ignited a renewal within the Reformed tradition in that regard. Understanding Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* in these ways may entail, for many, a re-evaluation of its place in the theological landscape. That re-evaluation will enrich both Schleiermacher scholarship and the Reformed tradition.

In this chapter, I first present the world in which the *Glaubenslehre* was written, indicating Schleiermacher's ecumenical motivations in writing the work, and considering its significance for the fields of theology and religious studies. Second, I provide an introduction to the *Glaubenslehre* itself, identifying the genre of the work and its theological method. In the third section, I offer two interlocking keys for interpreting Schleiermacher's magnum opus: first, to read the *Glaubenslehre* backward; second, to regard its conclusion as the climactic summary of the work, and therefore interpret the *Glaubenslehre* as a form of Trinitarian theology. I describe the pneumatological, Christomorphic, and creation-focused features of Schleiermacher's thought, highlighting the anti-speculative commitment evidenced within each section of the *Glaubenslehre*. Fourth, I indicate the *Glaubenslehre*'s influence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, paying special attention to its importance in the Reformed theological tradition.

19.1 THE WORLD OF THE *GLAUBENSLEHRE*

Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* was partly written in an effort to provide a doctrinal groundwork for the unification of Reformed and Lutheran churches in Prussia, including his own church in Berlin, *Dreifaltigkeitskirche* (Trinity Church), where he served as preacher from 1809 to his death in 1834. The church, which boasted 12,000 members, had been formed in 1739 for both Lutheran and Reformed parishioners by King Friedrich Wilhelm I. Already by 1804, Schleiermacher had published *Two Unanticipated Opinions in the Matter of the Protestant Church Chiefly in Connection with the Prussian State*, in which he argued that the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia ought to worship together. His ecumenical stance was helpful to Reformed King Friedrich Wilhelm III, who at that time wanted to celebrate communion with his Lutheran spouse, Queen Louise. To keep Schleiermacher from taking a position outside Prussia that was offered to him at the University of Würzburg, and therefore to increase the chances of being able to receive communion with his spouse, in 1804 Wilhelm III created the first

Reformed theology faculty position at the Lutheran University of Halle, combined with the position of University preacher, for Schleiermacher to occupy. In 1817, Lutheran pastor Philip Marheineke and Reformed pastor Schleiermacher did, indeed, celebrate communion together on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in *Nikolaikirche* (St Nicholas' Church).

While Schleiermacher's work was influenced by and sought communion with the Lutheran tradition, his own ecclesial and familial roots were undeniably Reformed. Schleiermacher was born in 1768 to Elisabeth Maria Katharina Stubenrauch and Gottlieb Schleiermacher. Elisabeth's family was Reformed; both her father and brother were Reformed pastors. Schleiermacher's paternal grandfather, Daniel Schleyermacher, was also a Reformed minister. In addition his father, Gottlieb, served as a Reformed chaplain to the Prussian army under Friedrich II, who reigned from 1740 to 1786. Schleiermacher famously received part of his early education in the Moravian community at Herrnhut, followed by training at the University of Halle from 1787 to 1789. During that time, he lived with his uncle Samuel Ernst Timotheus Stubenrauch, who served as professor of church history and holy antiquity within its Reformed gymnasium. What Schleiermacher learned from his family and Reformed communities would continue to inform his mature theology in important ways, which are taken up in the next sections of this chapter.

Schleiermacher's academic post at the University of Halle, which we have already noted had been created for him by Wilhelm III, was interrupted when Napoleon's troops occupied most of Prussia and closed the university in October 1806. After a year, Schleiermacher went to Berlin, where he was substantially influential in forming a new Prussian university, the Humboldt University of Berlin, which opened in 1810 as one of the first modern universities in Europe (see Purvis 2016). Intellectually, the structure of the university follows Schleiermacher's 1808 essay, 'Occasional Thoughts on the University in the German Sense'. Administratively, the University was formed by Schleiermacher and others after its namesake, Wilhelm von Humboldt, took a position as ambassador in Vienna less than a year and a half after it opened. At the opening of the University of Berlin in 1810, Schleiermacher was appointed the dean of the theological faculty. He also served as rector in 1815/16, following Johann Gottlieb Fichte's term.

Along with his ecclesial context, Schleiermacher's academic context is equally important for understanding the world in which he wrote the *Glaubenslehre*. The modern University, which emerged largely under Schleiermacher's leadership, housed innovative methods in biblical criticism, natural and social sciences, and philosophy. The early nineteenth century was a time of intellectual advancement, which cast the confidence of premodern Christians into doubt, and would lead those in both the ecclesial and academic worlds to consider whether faith or theology could coexist with science in the modern landscape. Schleiermacher holds that the essence of Christianity and core Christian beliefs and practices could be maintained in the modern era without detriment to free and open academic inquiry. In fact, he maintains that there is 'an eternal covenant between the living Christian faith and completely free, independent scientific inquiry, so that faith does not hinder science and science does not exclude

faith' (OG, 64; see Dole 2010; Pedersen 2017). The basis for this covenant, he states, 'was already established in the Reformation' (OG, 64). By eschewing speculation and grounding Christian theology in descriptions, analyses, and critiques of the Christian church in particular times and places, Schleiermacher not only made a place for the study of religion in the modern university but intended to set his Christian readers' minds and hearts at ease so that they could embrace modern scientific advances.

Schleiermacher's wide significance, beyond his own context, is now acknowledged among scholars in the fields of both Christian theology and religious studies. He is regarded as the founder of modern theology because he was one of the first to grapple with advances in the natural sciences and historical-critical readings of scripture that upended pre-modern assumptions about the relationship between God and the world. Rejecting divine intervention into the interconnected system of nature, Schleiermacher was on the cusp of an era wherein theologians would have to reassess what it means to call God the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of the world. As the architect of the modern University, his work is also important for religious studies as an academic discipline. Because he advanced the notion of an 'eternal covenant' between science and faith, Schleiermacher was able to situate the study of religion within the modern university's academic disciplines. It would be no exaggeration to state that one cannot understand the contemporary theological and academic landscape without understanding Schleiermacher and responses to his work.

19.2 SCHLEIERMACHER'S CHRISTIAN FAITH

Christian Faith was first published in 1821/2 and revised in 1830/31. It is a dogmatic text, where 'dogmatic' is understood as communicative description that seeks the highest degree of clarity regarding the faith of the Christian community at a particular time and place (CF §§16, 19). Schleiermacher distinguishes dogmatic propositions, which are descriptions of Christian piety, from philosophical ethics and philosophy. Those fields of study create and analyse arguments that can be discussed separately from the Christian community, since they are based on principles that are independent of the church. In contrast, as Schleiermacher himself writes, dogmatics is a 'presentation of faith-doctrine [that] wholly dissociates itself from the task of setting forth a doctrine of God—or even an anthropology and an eschatology—that is based on general principles from which use is to be made in the Christian church, despite their not having distinctively arisen within it, or in which propositions regarding Christian faith are to be demonstrated by means of reason' (CF §2, pp. 4–5). The descriptive character of dogmatics requires that its theological propositions be based on the piety of the Christian community itself.

Although the *Glaubenslehre* includes only dogmatic material and is therefore separate from Christian ethics, Schleiermacher clearly states that 'only these two disciplines, taken together, present the whole reality of Christian life' (CF §26, p. 164). Since

Christian action takes place simultaneously with doctrines of faith, the two are intrinsically related and Schleiermacher gives practical theology pride of place in his thought. The other half of Schleiermacher's presentation of Christian life is found in his *Sittenlehre*, or *Christian Ethics* (see Schleiermacher 1843; 2011b).

Because Schleiermacher conceives of dogmatics as a descriptive enterprise, those unfamiliar with his work might imagine that he intends to prevent theologians from ordering and regulating the material, and especially from critiquing current doctrine and formulating new theological perspectives. This view could be further bolstered by the fact that Schleiermacher requires that all propositions within the system of doctrine refer or be coherently related to Protestant confessions or New Testament scriptures.¹

However, Schleiermacher maintains substantial room for difference within Christian dogmatics. With regard to Protestant confessions, Schleiermacher states that only those portions where the Lutheran and Reformed confessions 'collectively agree can be really essential to Protestantism', and that both Lutheran and Reformed churches have 'the right to have differing notions in all nonessential points' (CF §27, p. 168). He also suggests that 'greater attention must be paid to the spirit of these symbols than to clinging onto their letter' (CF §27, p. 169). With regard to scripture, Schleiermacher suggests that theologians need not provide proof-texts for each doctrine, but should work with larger swaths of scripture (see Nimmo 2015). In this way, 'one would not be bent on applying individual passages torn out of context but on taking stock of larger particularly fruitful sections' to reveal the logic of scripture (CF §27, p. 170). Schleiermacher's insistence that dogmatic theology must make reference to Protestant confessions or New Testament scripture attests to the ecclesial character of his understanding of the theological task insofar as it is related to actually lived Christian life and allows for diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, Schleiermacher was also committed to the 'scientific' character of the *Glaubenslehre* (see Zachhuber 2013). It has a descriptive function in relation to a particular community at a particular time and place. In addition, 'The scientific value of a dogmatic proposition,' Schleiermacher explains, relates to 'the definiteness of the concepts present within it and their conjoining' (CF §17, p. 126), and to 'how versatile it is in alluding to kindred propositions' (CF §17, p. 127). Schleiermacher's scientific approach to dogmatics also includes his maintenance that the theologian may have an influence on both the form and method of handling the dogmatic content. This handling may even include 'one's stepping forward in particular matters by way of deliberately correcting customary statements' (CF §19, p. 136). As such, his account 'in no way excludes improvements and new developments in Christian doctrine' (CF §19, p. 136). In fact, he thinks that the theologian could find dogmatic propositions that have 'attained public currency', but that, 'when viewed from a distance and compared with earlier and later

¹ Schleiermacher gives the New Testament priority over the Old Testament for two reasons: first, because of his concern to ensure that piety is grounded in an encounter with Christ rather than knowledge of Messianic prophecy; and second, because the New Testament is the distinctive scriptural source for Christians. As Schleiermacher explains, 'if a proposition is given warranty by means of the New Testament, no one would then raise an objection on the basis that nothing whatsoever concerning that proposition is found in the Old Testament' (§27, p. 169).

ones, appear wholly arbitrary' (CF §19, p. 137). In this case, a dogmatic theologian might, with care, recommend the revision or eradication of even a widespread and accepted point of doctrine. In this way, Schleiermacher's understanding of dogmatic theology renders the field open to critique and innovation.

This brief introduction to Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* already indicates a number of ways in which his theology bears the stamp of the Reformed tradition. His understanding of the scientific character of dogmatics carries on the tradition's efforts of continual reformation within the church. His attention to Protestant confessions and New Testament scripture align with the Reformed concern to understand the truth-claims of the word of God ecclesially and ecumenically. Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* also demonstrates a commitment to keeping theology from being controlled by or reduced to philosophy, morality, or a mysticism that would render the word of God void of content. Combined with Schleiermacher's own family's theological heritage and his work as Reformed pastor of Trinity Church in Berlin, these features of his theology place him squarely within the Reformed tradition, even as he reaches ecumenically toward the Lutheran tradition.

19.3 SCHLEIERMACHER'S CHRISTIAN FAITH AS A WORK OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

Two features of the *Glaubenslehre* draw out the Reformed character of his thought in particular, namely, its anti-speculative character and its Trinitarian structure. To see these aspects of his work, I offer two keys for its interpretation. I first provide a justification for these two hermeneutical guides, and then briefly analyse the *Glaubenslehre* by using them, beginning with the conclusion and moving backward through Schleiermacher's pneumatology, Christology, and the doctrines of creation, sin and evil, and the corresponding divine attributes.

19.3.1 Reading Backward

The idea that one might read the *Glaubenslehre* backward is not original. Schleiermacher himself made the suggestion in *On the Glaubenslehre*, an open letter addressed to his friend Dr Lücke. Along with the *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, this text is advantageous as a guide for those who are first approaching Schleiermacher's work, as it offers the author's own perspective on readers' attempts at interpreting his dogmatic theology. Often, interpreters misunderstood him. Schleiermacher recounts some of the criticisms:

[They say that] my work is self-contradictory, or that faith in God is inconsistent with the position I have expounded, or that I make the Christian faith dependent on

fantasy, or, what is perhaps in essence the same, that I want to reintroduce paganism into Christianity, or even that my *Glaubenslehre* is perfectly compatible with the papal system of the Roman church. (OG, pp. 34–5)

To such criticisms, Schleiermacher responds, ‘The best that can be said of me is that I am not what they take me to be’ (OG, p. 36).

Many of the criticisms propounded against Schleiermacher’s work arise from reading the work from front to back, without afterward bringing later propositions into conversation with earlier ones. Schleiermacher himself recognized this tendency, noting the way that interpreters frequently took the introduction to be the main portion of the book rather than ‘a preliminary orientation’ (OG, p. 56). In his second letter to Lücke, Schleiermacher recounts his own internal debate about how to order the book: ‘Ever since I first conceived of the work, I have debated whether I should arrange the parts as I did or should reverse them, beginning with what is now the second part and concluding with the present first one’ (OG, p. 55). He recognizes that ‘it would have been natural and proper for a theologian who comes from the reformed tradition and who does not believe that this tradition should be put aside even in the present state of church union to have followed much more closely the outline of the Heidelberg Catechism’, which begins with human sin, followed by redemption and thankfulness (OG, p. 55). Schleiermacher’s *Glaubenslehre*, in contrast, begins with creation and preservation (CF §§32–61), followed by sin (CF §§62–85) and grace (CF §§86–169).

Schleiermacher sacrificed his fondness for the reversed order primarily because of his desire to address early in the work the doctrine of creation in light of developments within the natural sciences (OG, pp. 60–69). In order to deal adequately with the doctrine of creation and to set forth the covenant between faith and science during a time of great scientific development, Schleiermacher ordered the *Glaubenslehre* as we now find it.

19.3.2 The Conclusion as Interpretive Key: The Doctrine of the Trinity

To understand Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* more accurately in our own time, it is helpful to read it in reverse order, beginning with the doctrine of the Trinity. Until recently, the *Glaubenslehre*’s conclusion has been understood by the majority of Schleiermacher’s interpreters as an appendix that is not integral to the work as a whole (§§170–72). Schleiermacher himself, however, states that the essential features of the Christian life are ‘posited in the essential features of the doctrine of the Trinity’ (CF §170, p. 1019). Those essential features are ‘the equal status of the divine in each of these two unions [i.e. in the person of Christ and the common Spirit of the church] with the divine in the other, and then also of the two with the divine nature as such’ (CF §170, p. 1021). Schleiermacher identifies these as the essential features of the doctrine of the Trinity by

examining the motivation for developing a doctrine of the Trinity in the first place, namely, to affirm that it is the self-same God who is responsible for the creation of the world, the person and work of Christ, and the continuation of his redemptive work within the church through the Holy Spirit. On this understanding, Schleiermacher upholds the essential features of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Beyond that, however, Schleiermacher rejects many aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity as it has been historically developed. For example, he argues that Trinitarian doctrine is on shaky footing as it attempts to distinguish the three persons of the Trinity from one another, and yet also demonstrate their equality. Further, the 'presupposition of an eternal separation in the Supreme Being,' for Schleiermacher, is not implied in the union of the divine with Christ and the Spirit of the church (CF §170, p. 1022). This presupposition, which results in positing the three persons mentioned in the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, is a speculative transplanting into eternity of the threefold activity of God in relation to creation. For Schleiermacher, therefore, the doctrine of the immanent Trinity amounts to a speculative overreaching of theology's proper limits.

According to Schleiermacher, one might know about the eternal divine being considered apart from creation only if God reveals it to humanity in scripture. Scripture, however, does not set forth technical Trinitarian doctrine, as theologians and historians of the church are acquainted with it, in any straightforward way. What is more, Schleiermacher states that were scripture to include a clear doctrine of the immanent Trinity, 'our faith in Christ and our living communion with him would be the same even if we had no knowledge of this transcendent fact or if this fact were different' (CF §170, p. 1023). Here he is channelling the anti-speculative commitment of John Calvin, who likewise understands God 'not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us: so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation' (Calvin 1960: 97). Since the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity has been both speculative and prone to logical problems, Schleiermacher is content to restrict the doctrine of the Trinity to what he identifies as its essential features. With these essential features, he maintains, 'the whole conception of Christianity in our ecclesial doctrines stands or falls' (CF §170, p. 1020).

Although Schleiermacher refuses to speculate about the divine being considered apart from the world, he does not leave the divine character in question. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (Poe 2017), within his thought there are three essential features of the divine being that are clearly distinguished yet never separate from one another (i.e. 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation,' as in the Chalcedonian Definition), and are always present in the divine activity in relation to the world, no matter which stage of historical existence is under consideration. Although Schleiermacher himself explicitly draws out only love and wisdom as essential to the divine being, his *Glaubenslehre* lends itself to a triune formulation of the divine essence as love, wisdom, and causality. In Schleiermacher's theology, these three contours of the divine life serve a function similar to that of the three persons mentioned in the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, while avoiding some of the logical problems that arise within the latter.

Schleiermacher details these three features of the divine life throughout the *Glaubenslehre*, and highlights them at the end of the work (CF §§164–9). Divine causality, for Schleiermacher, is that by which God governs the world as a whole. In the *Glaubenslehre* and other portions of Schleiermacher's corpus (see especially *On the Doctrine of Election*), divine causality also goes by the name of the divine decree, divine will, or divine activity. Under any name, divine causality is never divided into various and discrete divine acts. Instead, Schleiermacher claims that 'we can view the divine government of the world only as *one* causality, directed toward but *one* aim' (CF §164, p. 1001). While the church is the key object of the divine government, it cannot be divorced from the whole of created life. Rather, Schleiermacher wants to 'express the relating of every particular part to the interconnectedness of the whole and present the divine government of the world as an internally harmonious ordering' (CF §164, p. 1002). In the *Glaubenslehre*, 'divine causality' is the term used to describe God's being as living activity in relation to the world as a whole.

Moreover, 'within the divine government of the world the divine causality presents itself as love and as wisdom' (CF §165, p. 1002). Love, as 'the orientation of wanting to unite with others and wanting to be in the other', is the divine attribute that corresponds directly with redemption since the person and work of Christ are the effects of the divine will to unite the divine essence with human nature and this union provides redemption (CF §165, p. 1004). Wisdom is intricately intertwined with love, as that which properly outlines love's designs: 'we rightly term wisdom as the art, so to speak, of bringing the divine love to its complete realization' (CF §165, p. 1004). Love and wisdom are so completely interdependent, for Schleiermacher, that 'one can also view each attribute as already contained in the other one' (CF §165, p. 1004). Arguably, the perichoretic relationship between love and wisdom that Schleiermacher details could also include divine causality as that feature of the divine being by which the oneness of the loving and wise divine government of the world is signified. Just as divine wisdom determines all things to fully realize divine love, and divine love unites the divine essence with human nature as the fulfilment of divine wisdom, so too does divine causality unite the loving and wise government of the world as one living activity (see Lamm 1996).

Affirming the essence of the divine being as love, wisdom, and arguably causality helps Schleiermacher to avoid speculation in his understanding of God insofar as these essential features of the divine life are derived from the concrete relationship of God to the world as manifested in the three stages of created life: the beginning of creation, the completion of creation (Christology), and the progressive perfection of creation (ecclesial pneumatology). To these stages we now turn in reverse order.

19.3.3 Ecclesial Pneumatology

The most recent stage of created life is the pneumatological (CF §§113–63). This epoch begins after the death of Christ and includes the emergence of the church (CF §§113–25) and the coexistence of the church with the world (CF §§126–56), and anticipates the

consummation of the church (CF §§157–63). For Schleiermacher, Christians in the pneumatological epoch encounter Christ not in the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth, but in and through his Spirit, which is embodied in the Christian community's 'shared love for Christ' (CF §121, p. 799). This common Spirit forms the whole into 'a moral person,' within which 'there exists a shared tendency to advance the whole, a tendency that in each individual is, at the same time, a distinctive love for every individual' (CF §121, p. 799). Schleiermacher identifies the church's shared love of Christ and one another as the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from God in and through Christ: 'just as in Christ himself everything proceeds from the divine in him, this is also the case with this communication of the Holy Spirit, which now becomes the power of new life in each individual' (CF §121, p. 801). The love of Christ and one another, which is here identified as the power of new life, is 'the same thing,' Schleiermacher explains, 'as willing the reign of God in its full extension' (CF §121, p. 802).

The essential features of the divine life—causality, love, and wisdom—are received in the Holy Spirit of Christ in the church. Divine causality is revealed in the power of new life found in the church. Divine love is revealed in the love of Christ that is shared in the church. And divine wisdom is revealed in the connection between the love of Christ and the church's willing of the fully expansive reign of God. In these ways, Schleiermacher derives the essence of the divine being from God's activity in relation to the community of Christ. Eschewing speculation, he expresses the Reformed commitment to a mediation of God's word through the Spirit and the body of Christ.

19.3.4 Christology

Christology undergirds all of Schleiermacher's dogmatic theology: 'John 1:14 ["And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth"] is the basic text for all dogmatics, just as it should be for the conduct of the ministry as a whole' (OG, 59). It is therefore in the theological centre of the *Glaubenslehre* that Schleiermacher explicates the person and work of Christ (CF §§91–105), and humanity's subsequent regeneration and sanctification as expressed in individuals' lives (CF §§106–12). The Gospel, for Schleiermacher, is that the divine being unites with human nature in the person of Christ, such that the creation of human nature comes to completion in Christ, and thereby establishes the reign of God on earth.

According to Schleiermacher, the completion of the creation of human nature in Christ relates to both his person and work. First, the person of Christ completes human nature insofar as 'in every element of his life, even at each of his developmental stages, he would also have had to be free from everything whereby the emergence of sin is conditioned in any individual human being' (CF §93, p. 571). Freedom from sin is intrinsic to the person of Christ since it is attributed to the 'complete indwelling of Supreme Being as his distinctive nature and his innermost self' (CF §94, p. 578). In other words, 'the being of God in the Redeemer is posited as his innermost primary strength, from which

all his activity proceeds and which links all the elements of his life together' (CF §96, p. 590). For Schleiermacher, the person of Christ is a result of the union of the divine essence with human nature, such that the divine essence is expressed in and through the person, self, or consciousness of Christ. In him, the 'Word became flesh', as in the Johannine text, since "word" is the activity of God expressed in the form of consciousness and "flesh" is the general designation for what is organic' (CF §96, p. 590). The person of Christ is the 'new Adam', the completion of human nature (Wyman 1994, Hector 2006). In this way, Schleiermacher's thought shows continuity with the Reformed emphasis on the mediation of the word of God in Christ.

Second, human nature is completed in Christ's redeeming work, which is to bring humanity into the 'community of his activity and life' (CF §100, p. 622). The result is the formation of new persons: 'Christ's activity of taking us up is an activity of creating; but what it brings forth is something altogether free' (CF §100, p. 623). Persons taken up into Christ's activity grow stronger and more consistently oriented, as Christ was, to the divine love for the world that God wisely governs. This union with Christ, Schleiermacher explains, 'is the actual possession of blessedness in consciousness that Christ is the focus of our life . . . This gift is his blessing and his peace' (CF §101, p. 631). In Christ's redeeming work, those who are taken up into community with Christ become conscious of divine forgiveness of sin. Both their own sense of their relationship to God and their form of life are therefore changed into spontaneous imitation of Christ's love for others (CF §107, p. 686).

Divine causality, love, and wisdom are all palpably present in Schleiermacher's description of the person and work of Christ. Divine love is revealed in Christ's love of others. Divine wisdom is revealed in the very existence of the person of Christ. And divine causality is revealed in the redemptive work of Christ in creating new persons. Here, Schleiermacher's anti-speculative Reformed tendency leads him to ground his understanding of the divine being in the person and work of Christ.

19.3.5 Doctrine of Creation

Moving now further backward, part 1 of the *Glaubenslehre* includes the doctrines of creation and preservation; the divine attributes that relate to the general relationship between God and the world—eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience; the original perfection of the world and humanity (CF §§32–61). The first aspect of the second part of the *Glaubenslehre* then describes sin and evil, and the corresponding divine attributes of holiness and justice (CF §§62–85).

An important idea for grasping Schleiermacher's anti-speculative system of doctrine in the beginning portions of the *Glaubenslehre* is that the creation of the world—full of sin and evil, on account of humanity's weakness and opposition to the spirit of God—is just as God designed it. Divine causality, wisdom, and love have not been foiled through human sinfulness. Rather, sinfulness arises out of the weakness that is part of the progressive creation of humanity, which is incomplete before the person and work of Christ.

Sin is a condition of humanity as an interconnected whole: 'it is best represented as the collective act and collective fault of the human race', and the recognition of sin is the 'recognition of the general human need for redemption' (CF §71, p. 425). The social condition of sinfulness, within which each individual becomes susceptible to sinful acts, is 'original sin', for Schleiermacher. Out of this susceptibility to sin, actual sin arises. Schleiermacher does not shy away from the claim that this state of affairs is a result of the divine intention. God is the originator of sin, though not in the same way that God is the originator of grace. Putting it as positively as possible, Schleiermacher explains: 'God has ordained that dominion by the Spirit that has not yet come to pass in any given instance becomes sin for us' (CF §81, p. 497).

Holiness and justice are the divine attributes that keep sinful humanity in check before the existence of Christ, so that redemption by God in Christ may occur in the future. Holiness is the divine causality that makes humanity aware of its sinfulness (CF §83, p. 517). In other words, it establishes conscience in human collective life (CF §83, p. 519). Though conscience may fluctuate in individuals, collective conscience has been demonstrated throughout human history by the emergence of moral and civil law. 'Accordingly', Schleiermacher explains, 'in the collective life of human beings, divine holiness is the law-giving divine causality' (CF §83, p. 519). Here Schleiermacher parts company with those who would describe holiness in terms of the 'inner purity of God', or 'God's perfect self-love' (CF §83, p. 521). These descriptions, Schleiermacher says, 'perhaps might belong in some speculative or so-called natural theology but find no room in a presentation of faith-doctrine' (CF §83, p. 521). The *Glaubenslehre* is concerned not with God considered apart from the world, but always with God in relation to Christomorphic creation.

Schleiermacher's anti-speculative commitment also motivates his description of divine justice. He defines divine justice as 'that divine causality by the force of which a connection of evil with actual sin is ordained' (CF §84, p. 522). Evil includes any 'hindrances to life that unfold from sin' (CF §84, p. 526), and evil too is conceived not individualistically but collectively. He conceives of evil this way because 'not every act of impropriety or falsehood [is] always punished by contempt or disease, for example' (CF §84, p. 526). In light of this and other considerations, he attaches 'the concept of collective punishment to the concept of collective fault', so that 'the totality of sin is reflected in the evil suffered and that the totality of evil suffered is to be explained as coming from sin' (CF §84, p. 527). On the opposite side, however, divine justice does not connect reward with doing good. The one-sidedness of Schleiermacher's understanding of divine justice reflects the Reformed view that any goodness the creature might receive in the course of life 'is to be traced back to divine grace' (CF §84, p. 524). The divine purpose of collective punishment, along with the human consciousness of deserving punishment, is not to satisfy the vengeful wrath of God, which has no place in Schleiermacher's system of doctrine. Rather, divine justice is meant to keep humanity from growing sinful 'to the extent of being overweening through unchecked habit' (CF §84, p. 531).

Human susceptibility to sin is also counterbalanced by 'original perfection' in Schleiermacher's thought (CF §§57–61). Original perfection refers to the divinely

created human capacity for awareness of God, the ‘Whence’ of created existence on which all of creation absolutely depends. In Schleiermacher’s words, ‘original perfection is the cohering of all these forms and functions of being by virtue of which they have the same compass as divine causality and, on account of the presence of the contrast [between the forms and functions of natural causality and divine causality], call forth consciousness of that divine causality’ (CF §57, p. 341). Without the capacity for consciousness of God, humanity could not be redeemed by God in Christ since its redemption involves the love of God in Christ and the establishment of God’s reign of love through spontaneous imitation of God in Christ. In this way, awareness of God, Christ, self, others, and the created order are intimately intertwined in Schleiermacher’s thought.

Schleiermacher describes the general relationship between God and the world in his discussion of the doctrines of creation and preservation and four corresponding attributes (CF §§32–56). To put the relationship between God and the world briefly, for Schleiermacher, ‘the totality of finite being endures only in dependence on what is infinite’ (CF §36, p. 205). This is an expression of the Reformed conviction that nothing is exempt from divine sovereignty. The universe in its totality, as an interconnected process of nature (*Naturzusammenhang*), is absolutely dependent upon God for its existence and continuation. For Schleiermacher, this means that God cannot be ‘placed under those definitions and those contrasts that have originated only in the world and through the world’ (CF §40, p. 217). Doing so would turn God into a creature.

To safeguard against such idolatry, Schleiermacher offers four divine attributes that distinguish divine causality from creaturely causality: eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. When he treats these abstract notions—which set the divine causality in total contrast to natural causality and therefore could be most available to speculation—he nonetheless presents a God who is, in these very notions, intimately related to the world. Divine causality conditions all of time and space, and conditions the entire scope of the created nexus. This divine determination both exhibits divine wisdom and identifies the motivation for divine activity solely as the divine good-pleasure or divine love of the world. These attributes of God are based, for Schleiermacher, on the creative activity of God in Christ and the Spirit:

Everything in our world—human nature above all and then all else the more surely the more closely it interconnects with human nature—would have been differently arranged, and so too the entire course of human occurrences and of natural events would have been different if the union of divine being with human nature in the person of Christ, and as a consequence of this union also the community of the faithful through the Holy Spirit, had not been decreed by God. (CF §164.2, pp. 163–4)

Schleiermacher’s threefold presentation of the divine life in the *Glaubenslehre*, wherein God is actively present in the church and to the world in the Holy Spirit, the person and work of Christ, and the creation and preservation of the world for redemption, is distinctive for its anti-speculative character. He grounds his pneumatology in the church;

his Christology in the witness of scripture, Protestant confessions, and the living witness of the church; and his doctrine of creation in the conditions for the possibility of redemption by God in Christ and the Spirit: the Christomorphic human capacity for awareness of God, protected by consciousness of collective sin and punishment, and a Christomorphic understanding of the absolutely gracious divine activity of creation and preservation. From Schleiermacher's pneumatology, Christology, and doctrine of creation, the essential features of the divine being are derived: the causality, love, and wisdom of God, which stand at the apex of his *Glaubenslehre*.

This sketch of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* demonstrates that it is authentically Reformed insofar as it demonstrates a commitment to the God who is always in relation to humanity; refuses to reduce the word of God to metaphysics, morality, or an empty form of mysticism; emphasizes the mediation of the word by the Spirit and the body of Christ; and takes up diverse perspectives so that dogmatics is ever reforming with each new situation. For Schleiermacher, that situation, as we have noted above, chiefly included the advancements seen by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in natural and historical sciences, which challenged previously held views about the relation of God to the world, how to attain knowledge of God, and the relation of theology to other disciplines. In a new theological era in which divine action, theological methodology, and the place of religious studies in the modern world were increasingly interrogated, Schleiermacher responded with an anti-speculative commitment and a call to renew and develop Trinitarian doctrine.

19.4 SCHLEIERMACHER'S INFLUENCE

Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* left no small mark on the theological landscape. Because many of its first readers interpreted the work as a deviation from orthodox doctrine, for many years it represented a challenge and a foil to be overcome. Perhaps for this reason, his masterwork was not translated into English until 1928, nearly a full 100 years after its original publication. The legacy of this early rejection and dismissal of Schleiermacher's work is still felt today in depictions of his work that paint him as a wayward 'liberal,' whose main concern was not the word of God but the subjective, inner experience of humans. Arguably, Karl Barth has been the most influential critic of Schleiermacher in this regard, and his assessment still holds sway today. Since the 1980s in Anglophone literature on Schleiermacher himself and in Barthian studies, however, there has been a reassessment of Schleiermacher's dogmatics and an emerging appreciation of his theology.

Within the Reformed tradition, Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*, read backward, holds out the possibility of a Trinitarian theology that begins with the Spirit. Even Barth himself seemed open to such an interpretation: 'I would like to reckon with the possibility of a theology of the Holy Spirit, a theology of which Schleiermacher was scarcely conscious, but which might actually have been the legitimate concern dominating even

his theological activity' (Barth 1991: p. 278). Indeed, Schleiermacher's work could be one way to pneumatologically expand the Reformed emphasis on the word of God. Fresh readings of the *Glaubenslehre* could also lead to a renewed dialogue in the Reformed tradition about the doctrine of the Trinity, and contribute to an authentically Protestant development of the doctrine. In addition, his work is important in the development of anti-speculative modes of thought that value empirical description along with critical analysis and evaluation. Although Schleiermacher's work has received mixed reviews over the last few centuries, his legacy endures within the Reformed tradition most significantly through his anti-speculative method and call for a development of Trinitarian theology (Aubert 2013; Wilcox, Tice, and Kelsey 2013).

SUGGESTED READINGS

Crouter (2005); Gerrish (2001); Niebuhr (2009); Vial (2013).

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CHAPTER 20

ABRAHAM KUYPER'S *LECTURES ON CALVINISM*

RICHARD J. MOUW

THERE was no obvious reason to think that anything of special historical significance was about to happen when Abraham Kuyper arrived at Princeton Theological Seminary in October 1898 to deliver the Stone Lectures. To be sure, Kuyper was certainly a distinguished visitor. Eight years before, he had founded Amsterdam's Free University (*Vrije Universiteit*), where he served as professor of theology. More importantly, he was at the height of his political influence in Dutch life: the leader of his party in the parliament, in three years Kuyper would begin a term as the nation's prime minister.

Princeton University, the theological school's neighbouring educational institution, was aware of Kuyper's leading role in Dutch society, and the university arranged to present him with an honorary doctorate when it learned that he would be in town. But even that was pretty much business as usual. The city of Princeton was accustomed to hosting distinguished visitors.

Nor was there any basis for expecting that the visit would have any lasting theological significance in particular. There was nothing out of the ordinary for Princeton Theological Seminary to have someone lecture about Calvinism on its campus. Benjamin Warfield, the senior theologian on the faculty at the time of Kuyper's visit, carried on the work of his predecessors—Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and A. A. Hodge—whose combined theological scholarship had established the school as a bastion of Calvinist orthodoxy. While Kuyper was respected in the Netherlands as one of the great theological minds of his century, his work was not yet well known in North America, except in the small Dutch immigrant communities.

The Stone Lectures had been initiated in 1871 by Levi Payson Stone, a Princeton trustee, to highlight some topic in theological scholarship, with the stipulation that the content of the lectures 'shall not contravene the system of doctrine taught in the Standards of the Presbyterian Church' (Dennison 2005: 196–7). Kuyper received \$600 for his efforts in 1898, and his audiences averaged about 40 people per lecture. In terms of sheer numbers, his visits to Dutch Calvinist communities in Grand Rapids, Michigan

and Pella, Iowa, along with meetings with church and government leaders in New York and Washington, were much more notable (Heslam 1998: 9–14; Bratt 2013: 261–79).

Kuyper's Princeton lectures soon appeared in book form, published in 1899 by the Fleming H. Revell Company. In 1931 the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company issued an edition, and has kept it in print until the present. For much of the book's history, its main readership has been in the Dutch Calvinist communities in the United States and Canada. But in the twenty-first century it has begun to receive broader attention in American evangelicalism and the United Kingdom—with increased interest also in Korea and other countries.

While it may not have seemed particularly noteworthy for the Princeton Seminary of 1898 to sponsor yet another set of lectures about Calvinism, Kuyper was in fact elaborating upon a version of Calvinist thought that had not been given serious attention by the faculty there during the nineteenth century. (The one exception on the Princeton faculty was Geerhardus Vos, the Dutch Calvinist biblical scholar who had been teaching biblical theology at the school for a decade or so and had done much to facilitate Kuyper's visit.) The version of Reformed theology that had dominated the theological scene at Princeton during the decades preceding Kuyper's visit was of the 'Old School' Presbyterian variety. It focused primarily on soteriological and ecclesiological matters, frequently in polemical interactions with alternative perspectives both in the Presbyterian and the larger ecclesiastical world.

While none of that was foreign to Kuyper's experience as a theologian and a churchman, he made it clear at the beginning of his lectures that his intention was to present a much broader vision of Calvinism. Calvinism had begun as a unique theological system, he observed, but it soon developed a 'special church-order'. Out of the deep 'life principle' that informed its theology and ecclesial systems, though, there emerged a comprehensive vision for understanding 'the moral world-order' (Heslam 1998: 113).

Kuyper devotes considerable attention in his first lecture, 'Calvinism a Life-System', to what he sees as the unique character of Calvinism as an overall perspective on reality, contrasting the Calvinist system with four other 'general systems of life': 'Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism'. In contrast to these perspectives, Kuyper argued, Calvinism alone provides the right kind of insight 'into the three fundamental relations of all human life: viz., (1) our relation *to God*, (2) our relation *to man*, and (3) our relation *to the world*' (Kuyper 1931: 19).

These three relations connect to the biblical perspective, in which the central theme is—Kuyper insists in good Calvinist fashion—the sovereign rule of God, the Wholly Other who is self-contained and self-sufficient within his own being over all that he has called into existence. Paganism errs, then, in locating the divine within the creation. Whether in 'the lowest Animism' or 'the highest Buddhism', the pagan world-view 'does not rise to the conception of the independent existence of a God beyond and above the creature'. The religion of Islam, by way of contrast to Paganism, does indeed keep God's being distinct from created reality, but it does so, Kuyper argues, in a way that '*isolates God from the creature*, in order to avoid all commingling with the creature' (p. 20).

Kuyper sees Catholicism as closely aligned with Islam in the manner in which it distances God from humankind, although it attempts a corrective by positing a churchly mediation between God and the rest of created reality. All of the things that Protestantism finds defective in the Catholic perspective—such as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the nature of the sacraments—are but the outcome of one fundamental thought: viz., that God enters into fellowship with the creature *by means of a mystic middle-link*, which is the Church, allowing for only a '*mediate communion* between God and the creature' (p. 21).

'Romanism' will loom large throughout Kuyper's lectures, because he views it as the primary alternative to Calvinism in the Christian world. Baptists, Anglicans, and Wesleyans are each in their own ways drawing upon—inadequately, to be sure, in his assessment—the inspiration of the life-system of Calvinism. Lutheranism, on the other hand, failed to break consistently with the Catholic world-view. By making the 'subjective-anthropological' aspect of Reformation thought (with the strong Lutheran emphasis on justification by faith alone), it failed to reach deeply, as did Calvinism, into a profound grasp of 'the general cosmological principle of the sovereignty of God'—a narrowness of focus that perpetuated a Catholic-like view of the Church as 'standing between God and the believer' (p. 22).

The fourth alternative life-system to Calvinism—Modernism—has less coherence than the other three in its understanding of the relationship of the divine to created reality. The real culprit here, for Kuyper, is the French Revolution, with its attempt to eliminate religion as a formative force in human affairs. When Modernism 'passed from French into German hands,' a world-view developed in which religion 'clothed itself in either pantheism or agnosticism.' The result, Kuyper argues, was that belief in God was seen as having no relevance for 'practical and theoretical life,' thus affirming the fundamental project of the French Revolution (pp. 23–4).

Given the erroneous manner in which each of these other world-views—Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism—depict the fundamental relationship between God and the world, they cannot help but fall far short in their understandings of the other two basic relationships: between human and human, and between humankind and the rest of created reality. Calvinism alone, then, with its conception of human life as lived directly (in an unmediated manner) in the presence of God, can preserve the all-important conviction that all of human life, including the relationships of human beings to the non-human creation, be carried out in obedience to the Creator who desires the flourishing of the whole creation.

20.1 MORE THAN A THEOLOGY OR CHURCH TRADITION

In his book-length study of Kuyper's Stone Lectures, Peter Heslam observes that Calvinism, as Kuyper saw it, 'represented a kind of centrifugal force that moved outwards

in ever-widening circles—from its initial influence in the sphere of religion—to encompass the whole of human existence' (Heslam 1998: 113). It was appropriate, then, for Kuyper to pause to reflect in his second lecture, 'Calvinism and Religion', upon four religious themes that impel the movement outwardly into the broader areas of created life.

Kuyper's first theme is the God-directed nature of human life. While a positive relationship with God has many benefits for the human person, these are 'fruits which are produced by religion', and not the primary point of the religious life. All of created reality exists to bring glory to God (Kuyper 1931: 45). Appealing to John Calvin's notions of both the *sensus divinitatis* and the *semen religionis*, Kuyper insists that the proper fulfillment of the deepest longings of the human spirit can only be satisfied in worshipping and serving God. 'This is the fundamental conception of religion as maintained by Calvinism, and hitherto, no one has ever found a higher conception' (p. 46).

The God-directed character of religion in turn requires—and this is Kuyper's second theme—the unmediated status of each individual in the presence of God. He quickly spells out the social-political significance of this status: '[O]nly in the churches which take their stand in Calvinism', Kuyper argues, 'do we find that spiritual independence which enables the believer to oppose, if need be and for God's sake, even the most powerful office-bearer in his church.' And this celebration ecclesiastically of 'the glorious wings of liberty' has meant that 'despotism has found no more invincible antagonists, and liberty of conscience no braver, no more resolute champions than the followers of Calvin' (p. 49).

In explaining his third theme on the religious context of Calvinism, Kuyper is encouraging the church to send believers forth into all spheres of cultural interaction in order to give testimony to the fact that all of life is under the sovereign rule of God. 'A religion confined to the closet, the cell, or the church' is unacceptable to the Calvinist, since 'no sphere of human life is conceivable in which religion does not maintain its demands that God shall be praised, that God's ordinances shall be observed, and that every *labora* shall be permeated with its *ora* in fervent and ceaseless prayer' (p. 53).

Having thus introduced the central emphasis of his well-known concept of 'sphere sovereignty', Kuyper goes on immediately to make explicit reference also to his doctrine of 'common grace'. The church is the sphere of saving grace, where sinful human beings are incorporated into the fellowship of a covenant community dedicated to the worship of the one true God. But, insists Kuyper, 'in the walls of this church are wide open windows, and through these spacious windows the light and life of the Eternal has to radiate over the whole world' (p. 53).

Kuyper was paying special attention at this time to developing his views on common grace. The first of his major three volume work on the subject, *De Gemeene Gratie*, would be published in Amsterdam in three years, but the contents of those volumes were already appearing as articles in *De Standaard*, the daily news that Kuyper had founded. In doing so, he was building on insights of John Calvin, who had been deeply influenced by Seneca and other Greco-Roman writers during his legal studies, and who continued to admire these writers after his evangelical conversion. In his *Institutes* Calvin had observed that there is an 'admirable light of truth shining' in the thoughts

of pagan thinkers, which means, he said, that 'the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness', can still be 'clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts'. Indeed, Calvin went on to warn, to refuse to accept the truth produced by such minds is 'to dishonor the Spirit of God' (1960: II.3.6, 273).

The problem was that Calvin never developed these views consistently, so he could on occasion also speak harshly about the contributions of non-Christian thinkers, as when he says, also in the *Institutes*, that the fallen 'mind, because of its dullness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as if it were groping in the darkness... Thus it betrays how incapable it is of seeking and finding truth' (1960: II.2.12, 270–71).

Kuyper recognized the need for a more systematic formulation regarding the positive achievements of the unredeemed human consciousness. Common grace was for him a non-salvific attitude of divine favour toward those who were not destined for eternal fellowship with God. This gracious disposition on God's part was often manifested in ways that were categorized by Kuyper as 'external' divine operations: all human beings experience the blessings of good crops and technological advances, as well as the restraining of sinful impulses that often lead, even in amidst the fallenness of social and political life, to relative signs of justice. But there are also, for Kuyper, 'internal' workings of common grace. We can discern the workings of the Spirit, he argued, 'wherever civic virtue, a sense of domesticity, natural love, the practice of human virtue, the improvement of the public conscience, integrity, mutual loyalty among people, and a feeling for piety leaven life' (Kuyper 1998: 181).

Kuyper's views of common grace, along with his concept of sphere sovereignty, had to be coordinated, in his mind, with yet a third key element that he featured in his thought, the idea of a radical *antithesis* between the fallen and unredeemed human consciousness and that which characterizes the patterns of thought and action to which the redeemed are called. And this is the concern at work in his fourth religious theme, namely that under present post-Fall realities the religious condition must be viewed in soteriological terms. The widespread assumption 'that religion has to start from man as being *normal*' is, says Kuyper, profoundly mistaken (Kuyper 1931: 54). The present state is one of deeply rooted abnormality. Human beings, originally created to worship and serve the Creator, have rebelled against the Living God. The remedy for this state of affairs is nonetheless than a redemption that can only be provided by sovereign grace, which empowers human beings to conform to God's intentions for human kind by obedience to the revealed Word. Thus, says Kuyper, 'the two-fold dogma of the necessity of Regeneration and of the *necessitas S[ola] Scriptura*' (p. 59).

The community of the regenerated, then, stands in its own life and thought over against the patterns of unredeemed humanity. As he puts it in his fourth ('Calvinism and Science') lecture, in 'the *present* condition of things we... have to acknowledge *two kinds of human consciousness*: that of the regenerate and the unregenerate; and these two cannot be identical' (p. 137). In focusing primarily on the sphere of religion in this earlier chapter, however, Kuyper concentrates on what the church needs to be in order to nurture the kind of consciousness that equips Christians to go into the world as effective agents of the Kingdom. His account of a robust ecclesiology makes much of the dangers

of an ecclesiastical hierarchalism, a pattern of ecclesial life that tempts the laity to think of the church as the primary, or even exclusive, arena for experiencing God's kingly rule.

In the worshipping and teaching life of the church, believers are pointed directly to the message of the scriptures, and within that message in a special way to the Law of God as revealed in the Sinai commandments. But this Law, brought to the believing community by special revelation, is a republishing of the 'moral world-order' established by God's original creating activity. Special revelation does not point human beings to a different plan for the ordering of human affairs than what has been there all along. Christ came into the world not to establish something new for the flourishing of human life. Rather, 'he has swept away the dust with which man's sinful limitations had covered up this world-order, and has made it glitter again in its original brilliancy' (p. 71). The Law revealed to Moses on Sinai, then, is 'the divinely authentic summary of that original moral law which God wrote in the heart of man, at his creation, and which God is re-writing in the tables of every heart at its conversion' (p. 72).

20.2 POLITICS: GROUNDED IN CREATION

Kuyper's lecture on politics, while only slightly longer than some of the others, is in key respects the most important for understanding his overall perspective. He is using the case of politics here to explain in explicit terms how the spheres of cultural interaction that eventually become visible in human life are built into the Creator's original design, how they are then distorted by human sinfulness, and how the work of redemption begins a work of cultural renewal that will be initiated with the Return of Christ.

The notion that the political order was an important element in God's original design for the creation has not been obvious to many theologians, including many in the Reformed tradition. A common understanding of the exclusively post-lapsarian role that God intended for political life was set forth bluntly by the Calvinist philosopher Gordon Clark, who argued that since politics is essentially a matter of coercion, it enters into human life only where there is 'a large number of evil people working at cross purposes' (Clark 1952: 138). For Kuyper, that way of viewing things fails to consider that God intended from the beginning that the human presence in the creation would develop into 'a large number of people'—albeit not people who would be 'working at cross purposes'. A political ordering of human life, Kuyper insisted, would have become necessary even if the Fall had not occurred. The original mandate to the first human pair was to 'be fruitful and multiply'. In an unfallen world, then, large populations of sinless human beings would have come into existence, which in turn would have required some kind of formal ordering of human life. For a significant population of unfallen human beings, argued Kuyper, '[p]olitical life in its entirety, would have evolved itself'. This development would have emerged 'after a patriarchal fashion, from the family', with the rules for living together in harmony being established by the collaboration of the male heads of families (Kuyper 1931: 80).

Kuyper does not offer specific examples of what would need to be regulative by such a political order, but it is not difficult to imagine the kinds of cases he might have in mind. A human community wherein no sinful impulses were at work would still embody a diversity of inclinations and desires. Since, for example, one person might want to play loud music while a neighbour might want to be taking a nap, agreed-upon schedules for noise and quiet times would be necessary. Or, as people developed means of transportation and thoroughfares, the regulation of traffic patterns would be required.

The overall picture that Kuyper offers here of a large unfallen human community is of 'one organic world-empire, with God as its King,' with human beings organizing their communal patterns in perfect obedience to God's designs for creaturely life. And it is precisely this harmonious unified collective life that 'sin has now eliminated from our human life' (p. 92). The fall has necessitated, Kuyper argues, the introduction of diverse 'peoples and nations' into the equation—a necessity that he explicitly connects to the divisions required to counter the sinful impulses that were at work in 'the building of Babel's tower.' And these divisions in turn required the formation of 'States,' over which 'God appointed governments' (p. 92).

Kuyper is distinguishing, then, between the kind of 'external' political ordering of human life in unfallen communities and the formation of 'States' and 'governments' that are required for the curbing and controlling of sinful human life. Citing 'the apostolic testimony [that] the magistrate bears the sword' (a reference to Romans 13), Kuyper argues that a sinful human society requires government, as a 'remedy' for fallenness. There has to be '[a] stick placed beside the plant to hold it up, since without it, by reason of its inherent weakness, it would fall to the ground' (p. 93). In exercising the God-given power of the sword in our sinful world, governments have a 'right to life and death' that is to be exercised in three ways: 'It is the sword of *justice*, to mete out corporeal punishment to the criminal. It is the sword of *war* to defend the honor and the rights and the interests of the State against its enemies. And it is the sword of *order*, to thwart at home all forcible rebellion' (p. 93).

Kuyper also makes it clear, however, that governments in our fallen world not only have an important role in curbing sinful impulses, but they are also themselves tempted by those impulses. For this reason Calvinism must, in its political engagements, insist upon the preservation of the 'rights and liberties of social life' as ordained by the God whose sovereignty transcends all human authority.

20.3 FUNCTIONS OF A HEALTHY STATE

Kuyper's politics lecture is also significant for the way it sets forth the basics of his doctrine of 'sphere sovereignty.' This doctrine has contemporary relevance for the way it provides a theological framework for addressing a topic that has been much discussed in social thought in recent years—the question of what constitutes a healthy 'civil society.' The sociologist Peter Berger put the case clearly when he argued that the

'megastructures' of societal life cannot promote human flourishing without assistance from other collective entities (Berger 1977: 140). States and corporations need to look 'below' themselves for 'moral sustenance', providing room for the significant influence of those 'living subcultures from which people derive meaning and identity' (p. 140). Such entities protect us from the all-encompassing tendencies of the state on the one hand and an isolated individualism on the other.

Those twin but opposing threats—statism on the one hand and individualism on the other—loomed large for Kuyper in his practical efforts at societal leadership. But he also gave the topic much theological attention, arguing that the Creator built into the original creation the potential to actualize diverse culture spheres. The state is the expression of one of these spheres, but each of the other spheres has its own integrity as a God-ordained arena for human engagement.

In this politics lecture, Kuyper's examples of spheres include art, commerce, industry, the family, and 'human relationship' (by which he probably had in mind marriage and friendship). One sphere differs from another in his view by virtue of the purposes they serve in human affairs. As Gordon Spykman summarized the Kuyperian conception: 'Each sphere has its own identity, its own unique task, its own God-given prerogatives. On each God has conferred its own peculiar right of existence and reason for existence' (Spykman 1976: 167). The point of doing art is to display aesthetic excellence, while the point of science—a term which Kuyper often uses broadly to cover all orderly intellectual investigation—is to advance the cause of knowledge. Economic activity aims at stewardship. Politics aims at justice.

The spheres also embody a diversity of authority patterns. The way in which a parent exercises authority over a child should be different from the way a legislator exercises authority over constituents, or a professor over students, or a coach over team players. This means too that the skills associated with a specific mode of authority do not automatically transfer to other spheres. Someone might be a good parent but a poor politician or pastor. It was more important for Kuyper that this diversity be recognized and respected than that particular organizational structures serve the more practical function of curbing tendencies toward statism. Families may in fact serve well to cultivate virtues that reinforce resistance to totalitarian governments. More importantly, however, families are essential to God's designs for human flourishing, even when the threat of statism is not present.

In issuing his warnings against an undue state control over the other spheres, Kuyper employs two metaphors to highlight the danger: the government should not be a tree whose roots spread to inhibit the growth of roots of other trees that God has planted in the creation, nor should it function as an octopus who reaches out with its tentacles to strangle other living things.

Having issued his warnings, however, Kuyper quickly goes on to ask: 'Does this mean that the government has no right *whatever* of interference in these autonomous spheres of life?' And his answer is: 'Not at all.' He then outlines a 'threefold right and duty' that the state has in its relationship to the others spheres: first, it must adjudicate disputes between spheres, 'compel[ling] mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each'; second, it

has a duty defend the weak against the strong within each sphere; third, it must exercise the coercive power necessary to guarantee that citizens 'bear *personal* and *financial* burdens for the maintenance of the natural unity of the State' (Kuyper 1931: 97).

Again, these are not only functions that the state *may* exercise. For Kuyper, they point to positive governmental *duties*. Government has a special role to play among the spheres, seeing to it that the relationships among and within the spheres are properly ordered. And this ordering function is an active one. Indeed, there is considerable room—given the way Kuyper actually states his three qualifications—for a fairly energetic interventionist pattern for governments. One can surely raise questions within Kuyper's framework about how often and how far a government may reach in pursuing its obligations with reference to the other spheres. The fact of a significant 'reach' as such, however, is grounded in God's sovereign purposes for created life.

20.4 CHURCHES AND GOVERNMENTS

While Kuyper discussed the relationship between the state and the other spheres in some details, he found it necessary, before leaving his discussion of the political order, to give some attention to the specific topic of the state's relationship to the institutional church—or as he puts it, '*the Sovereignty of the Church in the State*' (p. 98). And at this point, there is a shift of tone in his references to the Calvinist tradition. After almost 100 pages of celebrating the unique virtues of Reformed life and thought, he offers some harsh words about that tradition. 'A free Church in a free State,' he observes, has been his motto since his earliest days of public service. But in his advocacy for 'the liberty of religion,' Kuyper confesses, he has not been able to 'pick up the gauntlet for Calvinism'. On the contrary, he has found it necessary to 'directly oppose it' (p. 99).

In explaining the defect of past Calvinism practice in this area, Kuyper offers a litany of historical examples. The Calvinist tradition's 'difficulty' in this area can be seen, he says,

in the pile and fagots of Servetus [whom John Calvin had executed for heretical teachings in Geneva]. It lies in the attitude of the Presbyterians toward the Independents. It lies in the restrictions of liberty of worship and in the 'civil disabilities,' under which for centuries even in the Netherlands the Roman Catholics have suffered. The difficulty lies in the fact that an article of our old Calvinistic Confession of Faith entrusts to the government the task 'of defending against and of extirpating every form of idolatry and false religion and to protect the sacred service of the Church'. The difficulty lies in the unanimous and uniform advice of Calvin and his epigones, who demanded intervention of the government in the matter of religion.

(Kuyper 1931: 99)

Kuyper may be quite harsh here in his citing of Calvinism's historical record, but he quickly goes on to insist that the proper correctives to this regrettable pattern can be

found in a unique and compelling way within Calvinism's own theological resources. In tension with the practices and events that Kuyper deplores, he holds up an underlying Calvinist celebration of the liberty of the individual conscience—a theme clearly on display, he observes, in the way 'our Calvinistic Theologians and jurists have defended the liberty of conscience against the Inquisition' (p. 102). Indeed, Kuyper argues, it was the genius of Calvinism to oppose the French Revolution's corrupt notion of individual liberty as the freedom 'for every Christian *to agree with the unbelieving majority*' in favour of the kind of liberty, as Calvinism eventually came to endorse explicitly, 'which enables every man to serve God *according to his own conviction and the dictates of his own heart*' (p. 109). This understanding of liberty was put on display in a special way, says Kuyper, under Calvinism's influence in the Netherlands. 'There,' Kuyper observes, 'the Jews were hospitably received; there the Lutherans were in honor; there the Mennonites flourished; and even the Arminians and Roman Catholics were permitted the free exercise of their religion at home and in secluded churches.' And then, with a special nod to his American audience, he adds: 'The Independents, driven from England, have found a resting place in the Calvinistic Netherlands; and from this same country the Mayflower sailed forth to transport the Pilgrim Fathers to their new fatherland' (pp. 101–2).

In making his case for the liberty of the individual conscience Kuyper refers—with a clear tone of approval that likely gave pause to his Presbyterian listeners (as it did for many in his own Dutch Reformed tradition)—to the benefits resulting from the way the Protestant movement had succeeded in breaking 'the one Church into fragments' (p. 101). As long as both religious and governmental leaders could proceed on the 'conviction that the Church of Christ on earth could express itself only in *one* form and as *one* institution,' it was feasible to expect 'the Magistrate to protect that Church from schisms, heresies and sects' (p. 101). The development of many religious bodies, then, had the effect that 'everything which was deduced from this unity of the visible church drops out of sight' (p. 101).

Nor did Kuyper see this ecclesial fragmentation as a mere unintended consequence of what was otherwise a bad ecclesiological development. He briefly argues the point—one which he will develop in a few years in a published portion of his common grace studies (Kuyper 2011: 84–9)—that the fragmentation of what had been a unified ecclesiastical body served to demonstrate 'that the Church of Christ can reveal itself in many forms, in different countries; nay, even in the same country, in a multiplicity of institutions' (Kuyper 1931: 101). Calvinism's gift, then, to both church and society, is the recognition that a plurality of church bodies must be viewed positively, not only in political thought but in ecclesiology as well.

20.5 SCIENCE IN ITS OWN PLACE

Kuyper begins his lecture on 'Calvinism and Science' by announcing the four points he will cover: Calvinism's loving appreciation for the scientific task; the way Calvinism

‘restored to science its domain; the Calvinist insistence on rescuing the scientific enterprise ‘from unnatural bonds’; and how Calvinism proposes to deal with the inevitable conflicts that emerge in considering the relationship between science and faith (Kuyper 1931: 110).

The first three points would have gone down well with the Princeton theologians attending Kuyper’s lecture. The ‘Old Princeton’ theology was generally known to be supportive—albeit cautiously so on the topic of evolution—of nineteenth-century developments in scientific thought (Noll 2001). Kuyper’s insistence on Calvinism’s strong support for scientific investigation would have been an affirmation of the long-standing convictions of his Princeton colleagues. And the Princeton scholars would also have sympathized with his insistence that Calvinism, with its ‘cultural mandate’ focus on the integrity of the created order, had done much to remedy the way in which Rome’s dualistic denigration of the physical had inhibited the unencumbered investigation of nature.

Kuyper’s fourth point, however, took him into a discussion of the noetic effects of sin, where his pronouncements differed from the standard formulations of his Princeton hosts. The major philosophical influence on the Princeton theology that had developed in the nineteenth century was the Scottish Common Sense school. While there has been some disagreement about the degree to which the Old Princeton theologians consistently endorsed the details of Common Sense thought (McConnel 2000), there is no question about their positing the reality of irreducibly foundational ‘first principles’ to which all human minds have access, as well as a universal awareness of the basics of general revelation.

Kuyper’s thought, on the other hand, drew upon Continental philosophy, especially German thinkers. His insistence in his first lecture, for example, that Calvinism is a ‘life system’ (Kuyper 1931: 11) was shaped by the *Weltanschauung* concept developed by Kant and others (Heslam 1998: 88–9). He did not explicitly raise the philosophical points of contention here, but that he was setting forth an alternative perspective to Common Sense thought would have been obvious to a discerning listener.

There is no genuine conflict between faith and science as such, Kuyper argues. There is, however, a fundamental conflict between ‘two scientific systems or if you choose, two scientific elaborations... each having its own faith’ (p. 135). This conflict makes itself known in the radical opposition between a ‘Normalist’ view of the natural order and an ‘Abnormalist’ one. Normalism posits a naturalistic evolutionary scheme, while the Abnormalists affirm the uniqueness of the human person as a bearer of the divine image (p. 132). What makes the world as we presently know it abnormal is the fact of ‘sin as the destruction of our original nature, and consequentially as rebellion against God’ (pp. 132–3).

For Kuyper, the reality of human rebellion pervades the fallen human consciousness, and it can only be restored to normalcy by the regenerating grace made possible through Christ’s atoning work (p. 133). Scientific endeavour—like every other area of human interaction—is guided by the dispositions that reside in the deep places of the human spirit.

The consciousness of the regenerate life differs radically from that of the unregenerated. The unstated implication here is that an appeal to a shared 'Common Sense' does not go deep enough. Indeed, Kuyper would insist on two conflicting 'common senses'. What strikes the Normalist as intuitively obvious stands in start contrast to what the Abnormalist understands about the fundamental nature of reality.

To be sure, Kuyper himself found ways of qualifying the seemingly absolute character of what he described as the 'antithesis of principles' between regenerate and unregenerate thought (p. 139). He had already set forth his views about the restraining power of 'common grace' in the human community, and in this chapter he once again makes positive reference to John Calvin's endorsement of the notions of the *semen religionis* and the *sensus divinitatis*. But such qualifying factors have to be seen, according to Kuyper, against the background of a deep division within humanity, a division that requires the Calvinist to insist upon the cultivation of a robust 'world- and life-view' that addresses in a biblically faithful manner all aspects of created life (p. 134).

20.6 THE LIBERATION OF THE ARTS

Kuyper's discussion of art proceeds from the frank admission on his part that Calvinism has not developed its own artistic style. This is not, however, due to any defect in Calvinism. While there are practical reasons for a lack of artistic production on the part of Calvinists, there is a deeper factor at work, having to do with the ways in which spheres have come to be historically differentiated from each other.

Art took longer than other spheres to realize this differentiation. Until the Renaissance and Reformation eras art was pretty much embedded in the religious sphere. The architecture of ancient Greece and Rome was largely connected to cultic worship, a pattern that continues under Christian influence in the Middle Ages. For centuries the Catholic Church was the primary patron of the arts, with religious themes dominating aesthetic content.

If the 'alliance of religion and art' is to be thought of as 'the highest end to be obtained', than Calvinism, Kuyper admits, 'cannot but plead guilty' to a serious aesthetic deficit (Kuyper 1931: 148). But the fact is that Calvinism actually points to a higher way. The two spheres needed to be differentiated, each for their own good. When religion is tied too closely to the arts, it runs the risk of being 'intoxicated' by 'aesthetic pseudo-emotion' (p. 148). And when art has to be allowed to manifest specific 'ordinances of creation which neither science, nor politics, nor religious life, nor even revelation can bring to light' (p. 163).

Calvinism can be thanked, then, for its clarity about the need to liberate art from captivity to ecclesiastical control, to liberate art from the grips of religion, so that aesthetic gifts can now flourish not only by the efforts of Christian artists but 'even in larger measure outside the holy circle' (p. 160).

20.7 THE CALVINIST 'HARP'

Early on in his second lecture, Kuyper had announced that in defending Calvinism as a God-honoring religious perspective he had no interest in trying to 'restore its worn-out form'. Rather, his task was to address the basic principles of Calvinism in a way that meets 'the requirements of our own century' (Kuyper 1931: 41). As he moves into his final lecture he repeats the point. His project in what he had been discussing was not to defend an 'imitative repristination' of the Calvinist past, but to explore the ways in which the robust '*life- and world-view*' of Calvinism 'was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every state of human development, in every department of life' (p. 171). We look to the past, then, in order to 'go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in modern times, and with the demands of the times to come' (p. 171).

The challenges that Kuyper calls attention to are familiar ones for his twenty-first-century readers. There is, for example, '[t]he modern philosophy, which gains the day' by presenting itself 'in ever-increasing measure as having *outgrown* Christianity' (p. 175)—Kuyper even makes explicit reference to Friedrich Nietzsche in this regard as 'the author whose works are being most eagerly devoured by the young *modern* Germany of our day' (p. 178). And he complains much also about how this 'naturalistic, rationalistic system of thought' had come to infect much of the theology of the day.

At this point, however, Kuyper's tone changes in a surprising manner, given the way he has depicted other theological traditions throughout his Princeton lectures. In referring to the denial of Christ's divinity by many theologians of his day, he observes that they are often motivated nonetheless by a desire to have Christ 'continue to glitter from the throne of humanity, as the highest ideal of the modernized human heart.' Because of this, Kuyper warns, the orthodox Christian 'who would look down upon such men, would only dishonor himself' (p. 181).

An even more positive change of tone comes with Kuyper's concluding assessment of Catholicism, the Christian perspective that has been a chief object of his critical remarks throughout these lectures. There has been during the past half of the nineteenth century, Kuyper reports, a 'marvelous energy' in Catholicism that Calvinists should 'not too hastily dismiss' (183). For all of his continuing disagreements with Catholic thought, says Kuyper, 'it would nevertheless be narrow-minded and short-sighted to underestimate the real power which even now is manifest in Rome's warfare against Atheism and Pantheism' (p. 183).

Kuyper quickly reassures his audience that he is not abandoning his opposition to serious aspects of Catholic thought and practice, offering as cases in point the examples 'of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, of man's nature before and after the Fall, of justification, of the mass, of the invocation of saints and angels, of the worship of images, of purgatory, and many others.' On these matters, he says, 'we are as unflinchingly opposed to Rome as our fathers were.' But, he says, 'these are not now the points on which the struggle of the age is concentrated'. On many significant issues 'Rome is not an antagonist, but stands

on our side' (p. 183). And then Kuyper adds a comment that can only have been a candid plea for better understanding on the part of his Princeton colleagues: 'And I for my part am not ashamed to confess that on many points my views have been clarified through my study of the Romish theologians' (p. 184).

In the final analysis, says Kuyper, 'the fundamental contrast has always been, is still, and will be until the end: *Christianity and Paganism*, the idols or the living God' (p. 198). This means that only a trust in the Sovereign Lord of the creation can provide Christians with hope for the future. He leaves his listeners with a reference to the ancient image of 'the Aeolian Harp, which men were wont to place outside their casement, that the breeze might wake its music into life.' The call to Calvinism in a time of widespread unbelief is to 'be nothing but such an Aeolian Harp—absolutely powerless, as it is, without the quickening Spirit of God.' The present task for Calvinists, then, is to 'feel it our God-given duty to keep our harp, its strings tuned aright, ready in the window of God's Holy Zion, awaiting the breath of the Spirit' (p. 199).

SUGGESTED READING

Bratt (2013); Heslam (1998); Kuyper (1931); Spykman (1976).

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CHAPTER 21

KARL BARTH'S *CHURCH DOGMATICS*

EBERHARD BUSCH

IN Barth's *Church Dogmatics* it is clearer than before that the subject of the theology which he calls the 'Word' or the 'revelation' of God is identical with Jesus Christ—He not without the people who confess him, but this person in their midst. The Triune God discloses himself in the incarnation of God's Word and in the work of his Holy Spirit. God reveals by this disclosure who he *is* by what he *does* there: the God who takes up the cause of humans. God the Father chooses his Son to be that which happens to him there: the human accepted by God.

the word [of] John 1:14 is the centre and topic of all theology...I do not own a Christologic principle or method. I try in every theological question...to orientate me anew...—not on a Christology-dogma, but on Jesus Christ himself (*vivit! regnat! triumphat!*). Then I have to go again and again for the answer to every special question always a special way—rather to let lead me...in an always special kind. Thereby the method must always renew, change, modify. I like quite the sentence of Hilarius from Poitiers: *Non sermoni res, sed rei sermo subjectus est*. In it we find a whole theological revolution. If people had followed it, infinitely many errors, unfruitfulness, tediousness in theology would have become impossible. The question of the christologic theology is first a vital issue—the question of the confrontation of the theology with the matter, this means with Whom, *qui est imago Dei invisibilis, primogenitus omnis creaturae, caput corporis ecclesiae*. (Busch 1976: 380)

Christ is no mere principle, from whom we could deduce tenets, but the living one, whom our awareness can only follow. He is also not a postulate made by us under whose banner we then remain. Rather, he is God's good, prevenient decision for our benefit, with whom we can begin always anew. Therefore 'attention for the existence of the living person Jesus Christ...within the theological thinking' has to have 'the unconditional priority'; in this light we may consider all other theological doctrines. (Barth: IV/3, 167).

Barth's *Dogmatics* repeats the same ideas over and again, always in different ways. It deals always with the one and whole of the Christian creed, seen from a different perspective at every point; its subject matter is familiar, yet it drives the reader to ever new considerations. Its special style of speech, which often utilizes long sentences, forms a microcosm of repeated patterns. Barth moves forward in ever-new circulations around his subject, which is not static, but dynamic. Therefore, it is relatively immaterial at which point you begin to read this opus. It is better to read a little with understanding than to read much without any. However, to follow the little we need to take a long breath as we chart its circulating course. We understand his *oeuvre* right when we understand its motivation.

Such great work would have come soon to an idling cycle if the author had engaged here in an endless monologue, rather than in a versatile dialogue. If the reader can decipher Barth's many interlocutors, the impression of a monologue vanishes. *Dogmatics* is a dialogue in which the author is first the listener, and then speaks, answers, reflects, and asks in return. Because praying and working belong together, according to Barth, this dialogue is primarily with God and with the Old and New Testaments, and then furthermore with other Christian contemporaries, and even with students studying with him. It is also dialogue with many figures of the history of theology and thought. For all who have preceded us 'are not dead, but alive. They are still speaking'; thus, we have to join in a conversation with them, not only with our favourite voices, but also with those which are 'initially quite unwelcome', also of 'decidedly heathens' (Barth 1960: 3).

Barth's *Dogmatics* is not only a list of dogmatic principles. It includes long exegetical passages (e.g. the doctrine of creation is largely an exegesis of Genesis 1–2; the doctrine of the church and Israel is in large part an interpretation of Romans 9–11). It also contains discussions of problems in the history of theology and philosophy, together with a discussion of ethics. And it shows homiletic intentions when in the index we find meditations for sermons. The fullness of this volume is also the fact that it exposes the connection of all theological disciplines. It makes clear that theology becomes 'more harmful than useful', where its disciplines break apart 'in a relation of a mutual indifference or of a latent or open contradiction.' 'Sane and beneficial is it, when it looks in all its [disciplines] fixed at its problem and topic' (IV/3, 769).

This dogmatics does not intend to present 'a system'—indeed, it offers 'no total views, no completeness, final conclusions, and results' (I/2, 776). It seeks to inaugurate a conversation and not to have the last word. It is also neither an accumulation of stray thoughts, nor a cupboard with many drawers. But it takes consistent steps through a comprehensible train of thought. To pick single sentences out of their context leads quickly to difficulty. The statements occur in an inner coherence, which is structured by a characteristic rhythm. This accounts also for the beauty of its presentation: the formation of the content by well-arranged order. Therefore, an adequate understanding has to take into account, along with the varied contents and order, the macro- and microstructures, in which the contents have their form. Indeed, this opus may appear

first as conservative. Its composition is intentionally unspectacular: Prolegomena (CD I/1.2), doctrine about God (II/1.2), about creation (III/1–4), about reconciliation (IV/1–4), and, leftunwritten, about redemption (V). The greatness of the opus reveals itself only on closer inspection—in the ways in which the material is moved back and forth, and in the typical sequence of steps, which again and again prompt cogitation about the prevailing questions. Christofer Frey notes, in a comparison of Barth with Paul Tillich, that Tillich ‘builds with new beams the old framework-structure . . . whereas Barth takes the old beams and establishes with them a new structure’ (Frey 1988: 239f.).

21.1 WHAT MUST BE SAID FIRST

The dogmatics of the nineteenth century understood the ‘Prolegomena’ to be a preface concerning general human-religious presuppositions, which might *enable* a doctrine of faith. Barth starts in his work with an opposite understanding of ‘Prolegomena’. It acts ‘with a matter, which is not to say *before*, but *first*’ (I/1, 42). The theology never comes to its topic, when it is not from its first word already in its topic. It can never speak about God, except what *God* has *begun* to speak from Himself to humans. It can speak about God only as it has ‘to begin continually with the beginning’, at *this* beginning (I/2, 868). It follows that the first thing we should say is in respect of that which *God* speaks first. Therefore Barth’s Prolegomena is a complete dogmatics on the doctrine of the Word of God.

For Barth the ‘Word’ of God is the event in which God speaks, so that he is heard (Barth: I/1, 132). ‘Word of God’ means: the speaking God’ (136), so that it is not something different, but he himself, who defines himself in it. God is none other than the one who discloses himself in the Word. ‘Word of God’ means neither that the Word finds those who are able and ready to hear, nor that it is unsure whether it finds a hearer. It means, rather, the creation of a vis-à-vis for whom it reaches. ‘Revelation means incarnation of the Word of God’ (168), not transformation into a human, but *acceptance* of humanity in one man. Finally, ‘Word of God’ means ‘to act’, which means neither that God’s work is wordless, nor that his supposedly mere word is complemented by a doing, but that ‘God’s word is itself God’s act’ (147). Therefore, his addressees also ought not separate ‘to hear’, ‘to act’, and ‘to be’.

Barth stresses three points here.

1. The Word of God is the *reality* of his gift to make himself known to us in the concrete history of Jesus Christ—which summarizes the history of Israel and which the Holy Spirit mediates to us as the Holy Scripture testifies to us, and as it is proclaimed to the church according to Scripture. This is Barth’s doctrine of the threefold character of God’s Word (111). The Word of God is not merely an idea which is only partly realized in that which is testified and proclaimed; it is identical with the reality that God himself *speaks* in the testified and proclaimed act. Therefore, we know God not

because *we* can do so, rather we know him only because God *gives* himself to be known in his speaking.

2. The Word of God contests the idea that humanity has the possibility of knowing God. It is not self-evident to the human person that the true God is concealed from her. This has to be said to her by the Word of God. Indeed, it is true that 'God conceals Himself in revealing Himself' (I/1, 323; cf. 168). His concealment and revelation are not two phases that can be detached from one another. God is hidden *in* his revelation. Otherwise his revelation would not be the revelation of God. God's concealment does not rest on an inadequacy of human knowledge. It rests on the fact that it is and remains a possibility of God alone, when the human actually has to rely on God in the encounter with Him. Without the divine concealment, humanity cannot have dealings with God in His revelation.

3. The fact that, in God's real speaking, humanity begins to deal with God and that God deals with the human person, is made possible by God alone. God can be known only through God alone, but through God he truly *can* be known (I/1; 296, cf. II/1, 179). For Barth, this defines the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. Therefore, it 'must be said first' in dogmatics. He understands this doctrine as 'a necessary and relevant analysis of revelation' (I/1, 310). He can then translate the Trinitarian terms 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' with the triad: Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness (295). God is to be understood then as 'Triune' in the sense that he is the subject, the act, and the goal of revelation. As the Triune God he can do what humanity cannot do; in his revelation he turns to the human person, causing a turning in response, in order to show himself as knowable to humans. These three points from Barth reveal the free, loving, and effective grace of God: that God gives himself to be known, so that he may be known by the human person.

Balthasar's criticism that, for Barth, the Trinity does 'not play a central role for dogmatics' is correct to a certain extent (Balthasar 1992: 160). For Barth refused to derive the structure and development of dogmatics from the doctrine of the Trinity. Its object would then be a 'controllable principle... for the construction of a "system"', whereas its real object is the 'being of God in His work and activity... the actuality of the Word of God, freely preceding and underlying all views and dogmas' (I/2, 879). This implies, of course, the event of the Word of the Triune God.

When Barth addresses each theme as an aspect from which to reflect on the being of God in His Word and work, he structures his train of thought with a three-step sequence in both small and large contexts. This threefold sequence is a consequence of the way he understands the doctrine of the Trinity. As a rule, he speaks first of the subject of the divine Word and work, then of the act, and finally of the goal. Again and again, his train of thought seeks to correspond to God's movement to humanity, in order to disclose himself to the human and the human to him. He begins 'above' with God. We cannot do this on our own. Yet we must do it because of the reality that God has already trodden this path and addressed us in his Word. Therefore, before taking that threefold step, Barth usually first has a 'hermeneutical' discussion in which he explains how far, on the

basis of the preceding reality of revelation, the knowledge to be explored in the subsequent steps has been given and shaped.

The train of thought with its threefold structure reflects upon the way of God towards humanity. It thus reflects upon the work of the Triune God. God is, however, always the One in Three, so that in all which he is and speaks and does, the Triune God must always be thought of as the One God. Barth's form of knowledge seeks to do justice to this in that the steps in his thinking are set up in a threefold pattern in sequence, but also in parallel. An example of this shows Barth's doctrine of God (II/1–2).

<i>The doctrine of God</i>	CD II/1: <i>God's reality</i>	II/2: <i>God's gracious election</i>	II/2: <i>God's Command</i>
<i>God's reality</i>	God's being in action	God's self-destination for the covenant of God and human	God's claim enclosed in God's encouragement to us
<i>God's affection</i>	Perfections of God's love	Temporal execution of election	The goodness of God's decision
<i>God's claim</i>	Perfections of God's freedom	Recipients of the gracious election	God's judgement whereby he accepts sinners

To see how the characteristic vertical and horizontal three-step sequence shapes the content of Barth's thought in detail, we provide a further example, the subdivision of the middle item in the pattern above:

<i>Doctrine of gracious election</i>	<i>God's election</i>	<i>Revelation of and testimony to gracious election</i>	<i>Recipients of the election</i>
<i>God's election</i>	God's eternal covenant decree	The witness to God's free grace: the one community Israel/church	Solidarity of the elect with the reprobate
<i>Revelation of and testimony to election</i>	Temporal execution of the covenant	Witness to election: heard and believed	The elect as witness to the gracious election
<i>Recipients</i>	The human as covenant partner	The goal of witness: the human who no longer contradicts God	The reprobate as recipient of the testimony of the election

Once we see clearly the structure of Barth's doctrine of God, we can understand the task that he has set for himself. If in volumes III–V, he planned to speak of the threefold work of the Trinity in creation, reconciliation, and redemption, it is characteristic of his dogmatics that all of them are preceded by the doctrine of God first in volume II. This emphasizes the fact that we can do justice to the work of God toward us and for us and with us only if we first know God as the subject of his work. If we do not know that, then we will not recognize this threefold work of the Triune God as the work of God.

By putting the doctrine of God before that of his work, is Barth thinking of an abstract God 'behind' his work? Can we make any statements about God at all, since we humans can never know God except in relationship to ourselves? Certainly Barth speaks of God in his relation to us. Yet he contests the idea that this relation rests on a weakness or limitation of human knowledge. His emphasis is that the relation about which Christian theology has to speak rests on the fact that God graciously sets himself in relation to us (cf. II/1, 182, 193). Otherwise, we would make the centre of theology the human person who relates everything to himself. We will then do what Barth is criticized for doing: God, insofar as we cannot relate him to us, would have to be thought of as an abstract being. For Barth, the relationship between God and human is graciously created by God alone. This is made clear by putting the doctrine of God before that of his work.

This means not that we should talk of an abstract being of God behind his work, but that in free grace God is the subject of his work. He 'is' not outside of his doing. If we do not attend to this subject, then it would be doubtful whether the relationship with God involves a real counterpart, and it would be debatable whether this relationship came about solely through God's sheer grace. It is clear, then, that God as the subject of his work is not dependent upon the human in order to enter into this relationship. How otherwise would this relationship be sheer grace? No, God is in himself rich in relationship. In the freedom of his grace, he can thus set himself in relation to us. Now we can understand the Trinitarian permeation of Barth's doctrine of God.

Barth's three chapters on the doctrine of God deal (1) with the reality of God. The first point is that God 'is'. His being is not a special case within a general concept of being. For we say not that God *is*, but that *God* is. Nor is his being static, so that his activity would be something external, which he could do without. Because God is grounded in himself and moved by himself (II/1, 270), he is 'being in act', yes, as he is the one who 'alone in His act... is who He is' (272). As the subject of his act, God 'is' not outside of it. If he were, the act would not be *his* act. (2) God's 'attributes' are to be viewed as the fullness of his perfections, which are not attached to him externally but in which 'the eternally rich God' is his own essence. They are the perfections of his love insofar as he exists in his works, in which he founds and perfects relationship and fellowship. (3) The perfections of his freedom are not contrary to His love. His is not an arbitrary freedom, not a freedom in which he sets aside his love, but in which he is in his love totally himself. In this freedom, his love is always totally his love, in which he is free to determine what his love is and what use he should make of it. His being is that of 'the one who loves in freedom' (II/1, 257).

The next chapter (2) deals with the election of grace ('predestination'). This is a high point in Barth's dogmatics. He sees election not as the 'terror of Christian thinking in every age' but as pervasively gracious, the 'sum of the gospel' (II/2, 12). First, it is the self-determination of God, at the beginning of all his movement beyond himself, that brings about fellowship with the human race, which carries with it the determination of that race for fellowship with God. Second, it reaches its fulfilment in time with the consummation of the covenant with Israel in Jesus Christ. It is the divine election of fellowship with sinners in which he consigns the judgement of sin to himself and life to the sinner.

It is witnessed to the rejected for their salvation by the 'one community', which has the double form of Israel and the church of Jews and Gentiles. Third, the recipients of election are the rejected sinners, whom God has chosen as his covenant partners in Christ, as the 'one elect community' bears witness.

(3) That dogmatics includes ethics is for Barth based on the fact that the God of grace is also the God who commands. If the election of grace corresponds to the love of God, the command of God corresponds to His freedom, which is identical to His lordship (II/1, 301). His command is first His claim upon humanity, which is a just claim because the Gospel implies the law, and the total grace implies the total right of God to humanity. Yet, second, his command is God's gracious decision for humans, which is then not a disposition over him to be blindly accepted, because God's command is his announcement of what is good for us. It is, third, God's judgement upon those who are addressed by God's command. Barth has a new understanding of God's judgment. It is gracious, for in it God separates sinners from their sins, but does not separate Himself from sinners, instead claiming them as His.

21.2 FAITH IN THE CREATOR

Volume III (in four books) deals with the doctrine of creation. Though it is not as carefully structured as the other volumes (Barth: III/3), the formative principles are recognizable which correspond to Barth's understanding of God's revelation of grace. The material approach to the doctrine makes this evident. We cannot know the world as creation if we do not know God as its Creator, and know the creation in faith in him. If God has revealed himself, then knowledge comes with this relation. First, we must take seriously the idea that no other god holds sway here, only the God who has disclosed himself in his revelation. The Creator is neither an anti-God set against the Reconciling God and the Redeeming God, nor a partial God, who finally distinguishes himself in his revelation in Christ as a supplement to the first revelation in creation. No, the Triune God is the subject at the creation of heaven and earth (III/1, 28).

Second, we need to make it clear how this God, who is the same in all his works, does different things in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Barth's explanation is this: We must see creation in terms of revelation, and therefore in relation to the covenant between God and humanity viewed in the context of the biblically attested history of Israel and Jesus Christ. 'It is precisely in view of creation that we cannot possibly ignore Jesus Christ' (III/1, 46). That is the meaning of the biblical discourse about creation 'through the Word' which the New Testament equates with Jesus Christ. We must understand creation in terms of the covenant, because the covenant materially precedes creation. God's 'yes' to his creature precedes its existence. The fallen creature's 'no' cannot negate this 'yes'. God's 'yes' to his fallen creature in the covenant of reconciliation reveals that God affirms that creature's existence.

This is expressed both in Barth's structuring of the doctrine as a whole and in its details. We again have a three-step sequence both horizontally and vertically (III/1, 22).

(1) God is the Creator by giving existence to, by favouring, and by guaranteeing a reality different from Himself: a true counterpart who is both other and distinctive. (2) The existence of the created world—and particularly humanity—since it is from this God, is allowed existence, proving the benevolence of God. (3) The two-sided but single reality is the truth that is made known to us by the history in which God announces himself to us in his Word according to the witness of Holy Scripture. This three-step sequence determines the arrangement of the doctrine of creation as a whole.

Volume III/1 speaks of the subject of creation—the Creator—regarding his creative action. First, faith in the Creator is the precondition allowing us to speak of the 'world' as his creative work. Second, the act of God's creating is presented in a differentiated treatment of the relation between creation and covenant, by means of a detailed exposition of Genesis 1 and 2. Third, God's work is joined to his Word, by which he discloses his 'yes' to his creatures.

Volume III/2 deals with the product of God's action, the *creature*. This section focuses particularly upon humanity, not because of preference for the human over all other creatures, but because the human is recognizable in the Word of God as its first responsible recipient. Therefore, the structures of human existence cannot be recognized in themselves, but concretely in the one, who is 'true God' and 'true man'. In this second step, the benevolence of the divine work of creation is to be considered, for the human does not exist alone but essentially in relationships: to God, to our fellow creatures, to ourselves, living in body and soul, and to the limitations of time in which the creature always exists.

Volume III/3 deals with the history of Creator and creature, in which the reality and goodness of the creation are proved. Barth speaks about it in three ways. First, God in his love as Father, and in his freedom as Lord, preserves, accompanies, and reigns over his creature, as he does first in the covenant with the elect. This is the 'doctrine of providence'. Second, Barth deals with the question of evil. He defines it as 'nothingness'. It is that which God negated at the outset. Evil did not come from God nor is it his creature, thus, it has no legitimate place in God's creation. Third, where we would expect Barth to discuss the historical disclosure of the twofold reality of good and evil, instead he treats the kingdom of heaven and the angels as God's messengers. This has to do with the statement (III/3, 369) that God claims the upper world for himself. It was also created, but it is beyond the reach of earthly creatures; from there, God sends messengers as authentic witnesses to his will on earth.

Volume III/4 deals with creation ethics. The thematic term 'freedom' here replaces the customary language of 'orders of creation'. The reference is to the free affirmation of the human person as the good creature of God which is, in basic functions, human. That this affirmation is a benefit is stressed by the fact that ethical priority is given not to duties and norms but to the Sabbath commandment. Its meaning is the release from the necessity of earning one's right to life, so that the activity we are commanded to do is to be understood as a free, liberated activity. As creatures we are commanded to live in correspondence to the basic relationships of humanity, and to practise our freedom as freedom in fellowship: with God, in relation to others, to ourselves, and to our limited time.

The books in Volume IV are devoted to the doctrine of reconciliation, which is the inner core of the work. Barth first saw the very artfully structured plan in a dream. On awakening in the night, he committed it to paper at once. In the arrangement, three vertical lines correspond twice to three horizontal lines. Before we present this content schematically, some remarks relating to our understanding are appropriate.

1. Originally Barth had thought of calling these books the doctrine of the covenant. This is indeed the inner theme, summarized as 'Immanuel, God with us' (IV/1, 4). Barth understands the classic designation of Jesus Christ as 'true God and true man' as the designation of the covenant made in him. This is not a 'new' covenant as compared to the 'old' covenant with Israel, but the fulfilment of that covenant made by God with Israel—now in its fulfilment completed for all people.
2. The covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ is not a reaction to sin but the execution of God's original goodwill with his creatures. If this covenant had been only a reaction to sin, then it would have been defined by the condition of sin and would have become invalid when sin was vanquished. If it did not also react to sin, it would never have been fulfilled because of the failure of the human covenant partner. If it is also a reaction to sin, then this reaction is to be characterized as a factual 'incident' (IV/1, 68), which does not impede God's original covenant will but can only signify that he fulfills it all the more decisively in spite of sin. The fulfillment of the covenant is thus an action of God that, because of sin, has the form of a reaction: the form of the reconciliation of sinners with God.
3. In this event we must not separate the person and work of Jesus Christ. Barth has reservations about the so-called 'doctrine of Christ's two natures' (God and man). It is his nature to be in action. We cannot know his person apart from the execution of his work. At the same time we would not know his work properly if we were to fail to discern his person as the irreversible and irreplaceable subject of that work. Hence, we have to distinguish between the person and the work so as to make it clear that in that work we have an authentic, divine human counterpart who acts for us, and that that work rests on his gracious initiative.
4. In his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, Barth interweaves three doctrines that were formulated alongside one another in classical teaching. (a) The first is that of the two natures of Christ: true God and true man in one person. (b) The second is that of his two states: humiliation and exaltation. (c) The third is that of his three offices: priest, king, and prophet. This is achieved as follows: (a) Christ is true God in that he humbles himself and is priestly in his action toward us. (b) He is true man in that he is exalted to fellowship with God and thus is the kingly man. (c) He is one person in that, in the Holy Spirit, he imparts himself to us as the pledge and witness to what he is and does, and thus acts prophetically.
5. Since Barth understands God's work in Christ as the reaction to sin, the consequence is his doctrine of sin. Sin is not in its essence 'wrong conduct' against divine or human laws, but rather consists in opposition to the God who in grace and love encounters sinners to reconcile them. Sin, then, has no grounding at all, and is in its presumptuous reality so incredibly empty that divine reconciliation

alone is a match for it. It can be truly known only where God in his kindness sets himself in opposition to it. It must, therefore, be discussed after Christology.

6. Because what God achieves through Jesus Christ has the form of a reaction to sin, it is also a means to heal the damage done by sin. Soteriology deals with this: the doctrine of salvation. Traditionally, one speaks here of the divine justification and sanctification of sinners by God. Barth adds to these themes a third perspective: the vocation of humanity to be witness to God's reconciliation.
7. In classical dogmatics, the doctrine of the provision of salvation would be followed by the doctrine of the personal appropriation of salvation, which is by faith. Barth has several corrections at this point. He sees this entire theme decisively as the work of the Holy Spirit. He stresses that salvation through the Spirit is made known first to the Christian community, so that individuals can be Christians only within that community. This means that the 'church', that is, the clergy, does not mediate salvation between Christ and individuals. Thus, the church cannot be divided into two different groups of the clergy and the laity. All those in the church carry the full responsibility of members. There is only a provisional difference between Christians and all other people, which consists in the fact that Christians know salvation in Christ. But they know that this fact is not valid for them alone; their task is to witness to it to others. Therefore, faith alone is not the responsible 'appropriation of salvation'; faith is accompanied by love and hope.

In the formal structure of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation we see again how his thinking is shaped by the Triune God and his path to humanity, and in Christ the path from humans to God.

<i>The person of Jesus Christ</i>	<i>IV/1: God's turning to humanity</i>	<i>IV/2: Human turning to God</i>	<i>IV/3: Revelation and Witness</i>
<i>Two natures (Subject)</i>	Jesus Christ as true God,	Jesus Christ as true human,	Jesus Christ in unity of his person,
<i>Two states (Act)</i>	Humbling himself to the human,	Exalted by God,	Pledge of reconciliation,
<i>Three offices (Goal)</i>	Thus reconciling the humans as priest	Thus in fellowship with God as king	As prophetic witness enlisting us in his work
<i>Work of Jesus Christ</i>	<i>(God's humiliation to the Human)</i>	<i>(Human's exaltation by God)</i>	<i>(Revelation of reconciliation)</i>
<i>God's judgement on our opposition</i>	Sin of pride	Sin of sloth	Sin of falsehood
<i>God's changing of our opposition</i>	Justification	Sanctification	Vocation
<i>The work of this change by the Holy Spirit</i>	(a) The gathering of the community (b) Faith	(a) The building up of the community (b) Love	(a) The sending of the community (b) Hope

This dogmatics was interrupted as Barth moved into the doctrine of ethics (IV/4) as the last part of the doctrine of reconciliation. The purpose of this part was to address the interaction between God and humans, and the action that is graciously commanded of us therein. Three chapters were planned.

1. Barth names baptism as the founding of the Christian life. As the contradiction of sin, baptism involves a person's renunciation of the old life, made possible by God's turning to that person. Baptism is the appropriate response to God's action in a person's life, so that it is that person's mature 'yes,' her answer to the new life which God has promised her. It, thus, entails as well that individual's incorporation into the Christian community.
2. The main part on ethics was intended to understand the Christian life as action by means of reflection on the invocation of God. For Barth, this is the essence of all action of the reconciled person, because in the human response to God's gracious covenant fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the interaction with God from the human side is fulfilled. This ethic was to involve the closest interweaving of the admonition to 'pray and work,' the presentation of which was to follow the Lord's Prayer, that prayer of Jesus that inaugurates human response. For Barth, prayer does not replace action, but through prayer action is characterized as activity that responds to reconciliation and is dependent on it. The dogmatics breaks off after two sections which expound the first two intercessions of the Lord's Prayer in discussion of 'Zeal for the honour of God,' and 'The struggle for human righteousness'.
3. The closing chapter would have dealt with the Lord's Supper seen in analogy to the departure for the Promised Land in the Passover, as the departure of the community which is nourished in the presence of the risen Lord for its journey. Its journey is moving simultaneously to the coming kingdom of God and into the world around it.

Barth left no indication of how he would have handled volume V and its theme of eschatological redemption. He would certainly have developed this doctrine in Trinitarian fashion and added an ethics. He would have understood the Eschaton brought about by the Holy Spirit as an 'apocalypse,' a definitive, total, and universal 'revelation' of the eternally decreed and beneficent counsel of God fulfilled temporally in Jesus Christ—that is, of his covenant with His creature as its eternal validation. This sets aside forever all human opposition against God. His work is thus consummated as all creation gives Him thankful praise.

SUGGESTED READING

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CHAPTER 22

THE BELHAR CONFESSION

ROBERT VOSLOO

22.1 INTRODUCTION

THE Belhar Confession is a Reformed confessional document that developed in the 1980s out of the church and theological struggles in apartheid South Africa. It was accepted in draft form in October 1982 at the Synod meeting of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in Belhar, a township near Cape Town designated by the apartheid government for the so-called coloured people. This draft confession was supported by an accompanying letter that serves as an important source for understanding the confession's historical origin and theological content. After the prescribed period of consultation, the Belhar Confession was officially adopted in September 1986 at the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church as the fourth confession of this church (the other confessions being the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort). The Dutch Reformed Mission Church was at the time one of the churches that formed part of the racially segregated 'Dutch Reformed family of churches', which consisted of the white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (predominantly with 'coloured' members), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (predominantly with black members), and the Reformed Church in Africa (predominantly with Indian members). In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the largest part of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), and the Belhar Confession became part of this church's confessional base.

22.2 THE HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION

The genesis of the Belhar Confession should be understood in the light of the injustices and divisions associated with South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. The class and racial prejudice that marked the South African sociopolitical landscape also had an effect on ecclesial life. In the nineteenth century, for instance, the Dutch Reformed Church had to deal with disputes related to the question of whether white members and the black converts should worship and celebrate Holy Communion together. At the synod of 1829 the official position was still 'that Holy Communion be served simultaneously to all members notwithstanding race or descent' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Church 1829: 70). This position was affirmed at subsequent synods, but in 1857 the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa made a decision that would later prove to have great historical and symbolic significance:

Synod regards it as desirable and scriptural that our members from heathendom should be accepted and incorporated into our existing congregations, wherever this can happen; but where this measure could, as a result of the weakness of some, obstruct the advance of the cause of Christ amongst the heathen, then congregations formed by those from heathendom, or which may still be formed, shall enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.

(Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Church 1857: 168;
on the Synod of 1857, see Loff 1983: 10–23; Pauw 2007: 71–7.)

Although this decision affirms that, ideally and biblically viewed, the coloured and black converts to Christianity should be incorporated into the existing Dutch Reformed congregations, it did open the door for exceptions by making allowance for the 'weakness of some' (that is, the prejudices of some white members). Over time, however, this exception became the rule. Within a few decades after the 1857 decision the Dutch Reformed Mission Church was established in 1881 as a separate church, and over time a certain missionary pattern became entrenched, with mission churches established in the Free State (1910), Transvaal (1932), and Natal (1952). A separate church for African blacks was founded in 1958 and a church for Indians in 1968, with several other mission churches being established according to a similar pattern. Regarding these ecclesial and missiological developments following the 1857 Synod, Richard Elphick notes: 'What had begun as a pragmatic accommodation to white settler prejudices had become a vaunted hallmark of DRC missions everywhere' (Elphick 2012: 45). Thus although these churches had the same confessional base, they in fact became racially segregated churches.

Within Dutch Reformed Church circles the separation and segregation of races was given a moral, theological, and even biblical justification. The Mission Policy of the

Dutch Reformed Church of 1935, for instance, declared itself in favour of the idea of 'geen gelykstelling' (no equalization of races), and promoted social differentiation and cultural segregation (Elphick 2012: 222–37). This mission policy endorsed autonomous, racially divided churches, and reflected the paternalism associated with the idea that the 'mother church' should act as guardian of the so-called 'daughter churches' that developed out of the church's missionary work. In the 1940s some Reformed theologians justified the idea of apartheid on biblical grounds, and in 1947 this idea made its way into an official report of one of the Synods of the Dutch Reformed Church (Vosloo 2015: 195–215). After the National Party won the general election in 1948, many new apartheid laws were adopted that changed the face of legislation in the country and had an oppressive and painful effect on the lives of many black South Africans, including the members of the black Reformed churches.

How did the Dutch Reformed Mission Church respond to apartheid rule and the white Dutch Reformed Church's theological and biblical justification of apartheid? Although there was some official resistance to apartheid policies in the late 1940s (Loff 1998: 233–48; cf. Adonis 2006: 235), it was only in the mid-1970s that the resistance against the theology of segregation and apartheid really gathered momentum, with the voices within the black Reformed churches protesting on theological grounds against the injustice of apartheid becoming more vocal and articulate. Mention should be made at this point of the role of the BK or *Broederkring* (Circle of Brothers), later called the *Belydende Kring* (Confessing Circle). This movement was founded in 1974 as a ministers' fraternal and consisted over the years mainly of members of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, and the Reformed Church in Africa. The BK, which was influenced by the work of the Christian Institute (an ecumenical anti-apartheid organization under the leadership of Beyers Naudé), increasingly played an important albeit contested role in formulating a vision for church unity and the church's prophetic witness in society (Van Rooi 2008: 173–91; Kritzing 2010: 209–31).

The BK also played a role in arranging for scholarships for DRCA and DRMC ministers to study abroad. Several ministers went to study in Kampen in the Netherlands, among them Allan Boesak. Boesak, who started his ministry as student chaplain at the University of Western Cape shortly after his return to South Africa in 1976, soon became an influential public voice in the struggle against apartheid. Boesak drew on insights from black theology, liberation theology, and his own Reformed tradition to articulate a theology of prophetic resistance.

Any discussion of the origin of the Belhar Confession should mention what happened in the classes of the systematic theologian Prof. J. J. F. (Jaap) Durand at the theological faculty of the University of the Western Cape. Durand challenged the students to reflect on the question of what is *theologically* wrong with apartheid, and they came to the conclusion that the theological problem with apartheid is that it is based on the premise of the fundamental irreconcilability of people. One of these students, Russel Botman (who later became a prominent and influential pastor, theologian, and educational pioneer), puts it this way:

As a student of Professor Jaap Durand in the year 1978, I was challenged, together with the rest of the class, to come to a theological evaluation of the problem of apartheid. He refused to accept the usual legal ('apartheid is a crime against humanity'), political ('apartheid is undemocratic'), and economic ('apartheid is an exploitation of human and nature resources') condemnation of apartheid. Together we revisited Karl Barth's theology. Eventually our class arrived at the idea that apartheid takes its point of departure in the irreconcilability of people. That represented the theological centre of the problem of apartheid. (Botman 2006: 240)

These students then played an important role in this theological emphasis on apartheid as contradictory to the Gospel message of reconciliation, becoming part of a motion that led to the Synod meeting of the DRMC in 1978 passing a resolution stating: 'The Church wishes to express it as its conviction *that apartheid policy as maintained by the government is in contradiction with the gospel*' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1978: 399, emphasis original).

After 1978 a theological vision critical of apartheid and its theological underpinnings became more amplified. The Theological Declaration of the BK in 1979, for instance, stated in words that later found an echo in the Belhar Confession: 'As God's property the church must be busy standing where God stands, viz. against injustice and with those who are denied justice' ('Broederkring: Theological Declaration, 1979', in Hofmeyr, Millard, and Froneman 1991: 302). And in 1981 the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians (ABRECSA), consisting of Reformed theologians and pastors from various denominations, was formed, with Allan Boesak playing a key role. At the first conference of ABRECSA in October 1982, at Hammanskraal (north of Pretoria), Boesak gave an important address entitled 'Black and Reformed: Contradiction or Challenge'? At the heart of Boesak's address is the question of the relation between the Reformed tradition and social justice. Of further importance is the ABRECSA charter adopted in 1981, especially the section on the theological basis of the charter. It contains the unequivocal declaration 'that apartheid is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the Gospel, a betrayal of the Reformed tradition, and a heresy' (de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983: 162). The charter also indicated the need for black Reformed Christians to contribute to the ecumenical conversation; in this regard, a special opportunity arose with the meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to be held in Ottawa, Canada in the following year.

At this meeting of the World Alliance in August 1982 in Ottawa—where Boesak was voted in as President of the Alliance—the following statement was adopted: 'We declare with black Reformed Christians in South Africa that apartheid ("separate development") is sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the gospel, and, in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy' (de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983: 170). At this meeting a decision was also taken to suspend the membership of the white Dutch Reformed Church and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) until these churches distanced themselves from the ideology and policy of apartheid. The meeting in Ottawa caused quite a stir in Reformed circles in

South Africa, and had a direct bearing on the DRMC Synod meeting that was held shortly afterwards, where a draft confession was accepted.

22.3 THE DRMC SYNOD MEETINGS OF 1982 AND 1986

But how did matters proceed at the Synod meeting of the DRMC in 1982, and how did it come about that a confession was drafted? The commission for ecumenical matters brought the decision of the WARC to the Synod of 1982 and it was discussed at length on Friday 1 October 1982, with Synod accepting a proposal that declared a *status confessionis* (a state of confession) for the church of Jesus Christ, 'because the secular gospel of Apartheid profoundly endangered the confession of reconciliation of Jesus Christ and the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in its very essence' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1978: 706; see also, with broader reference to the notion of *status confessionis*, Smit 1984: 7–32). After some discussion, this was followed by the acceptance of the recommendation of the commission, stating: 'We declare that apartheid ("separate development") is a sin, that its moral and theological justification makes a travesty of the gospel and that its continued disobedience to the Word of God is a theological heresy' (Acts of Synod 1978: 706).

After this important decision, Prof. Gustav Bam, professor in practical theology at the University of the Western Cape, made a speech that pointed out to Synod that the declaration of a *status confessionis* implies that the words that one then speaks at such a time and place will have the character of a confession: 'It is not a mere decision that I take, or a policy declaration that I proclaim, or an administrative arrangement that I make, or a procedure ruling in my deliberations with others. It is a confession on the level of the other confessions of the church' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1978: 605). Bam also pointed to Karl Barth's discussion of the requirements for a confession in his *Church Dogmatics*, namely that a confession should serve to honour God and not be the result of any ulterior motive; that it is a deep-cutting protest that results when our faith is confronted with life; that it is a deed of confrontation and conflict, and not a lyrical effusion or an emotional catharsis; and that it is a free deed, performed only under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit and the Word (Acts of Synod Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1978: 605; cf. Naudé 2010: 79–81). After Bam's speech a proposal was accepted that a confession be presented to the same synod. An ad hoc commission consisting of Rev. Isak Mentor (the moderator), Dr Allan Boesak (the vice-moderator), and three lecturers from the University of the Western Cape, Dr Dirkie Smit, Professor Jaap Durand and Professor Gustav Bam, was appointed for this task. Durand played an important role in the reflection on the main points of the confession, and Smit drafted the confession and an accompanying letter. At the same synod, the draft confession was accepted on 6 October (Acts of Synod Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1978: 637; cf. Plaatjies-Van Huffel in Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Vosloo 2013: 328–40).

According to the Church Order, this draft confession and the accompanying letter were then sent to the presbyteries and congregations of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church for study and commentary during the recess. By the time the next Synod meeting took place in 1986, only 10 out of 267 congregations indicated that they were not ready to accept the confession. At the Synod meeting in September 1986 in Belhar—where Dr Allan Boesak was elected as moderator—the report on the draft confession was discussed amidst great public interest. After speeches by Professor Bam and Dr Smit (on behalf of the commission) that argued for the acceptance of the confession, and a speech by Dr Loff that attested to the integrity of the preceding speakers, the matter was put to vote. With 400 delegates voting in favour of accepting the confession and 71 delegates voting against it, the Belhar Confession was thus officially adopted. A proposal was also accepted that allowed for the signing of the confession, with several of the delegates who voted against the confession in the end signing it. The next day the Synod affirmed, in line with the Belhar Confession, the church's commitment to the ideal of church reunification. The need for a pastoral process directed towards engaging the pastors and church members who did not sign the confession, or were uncomfortable with certain formulations in it, was also emphasised (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1986: 763; cf. Loff 1998: 267).

22.4 THE THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION

What about the theological content of the Belhar Confession? The confession resists easy summary but, in short, one can say that it offers a strong theological articulation affirming the Lordship of Christ, focusing in the process on the notions of unity, reconciliation, and justice.

Before attending in more detail to the theological content of the confession, one should emphasize that the letter accompanying the Belhar Confession is important for understanding the context and underlying theological assumptions and commitments of the confession. The letter (which is part of the long tradition of accompanying letters associated with Reformed confessions) opens as follows:

We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of a church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation... In our judgment the present church and political situation in our country, and particularly within the Dutch Reformed Church family, calls for such a decision. Accordingly we make this confession, not as a contribution to a theological debate or a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something that we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. (cf. Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1986: 725–6).

The letter also makes it clear that the confession is not aimed at a specific group or church but against a false doctrine that distorts and threatens the Gospel itself. The letter further expresses the desire that the confession should not foster false divisions. At the same time the letter also expresses the conviction that the church has no other option but to confess, even amidst the possible pain and suffering that might result from this act of confession: 'Accordingly our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation . . . We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.'

With regard to the theological content of the Belhar Confession itself, two remarks are called for at the outset. The first relates to the fact that the Belhar Confession is a *Reformed* confession. Although the Belhar Confession developed in a specific historical and political context, it is of the utmost importance to understand the confession against the background of the Reformed confessional tradition. Therefore one finds, with regard to the form and content of the confession, that there are important implicit and explicit echoes of Reformed confessions such as the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618–19). One also finds resonances of the early Christian creeds (or ecumenical symbols) such as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed in the confession. The Belhar confession should thus be placed firmly within the Reformed and broader ecumenical confessional tradition.

Secondly, one should note that it was not the aim of the confession to propose new theological arguments and ideas for the church to believe in. The aim was rather to articulate the content of the faith convictions that were already present in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, with the purpose of confessing this faith in the midst of what was perceived as threats to the integrity of the Gospel (Smit 2013: 135).

With regard to the structure of the Belhar Confession, it is helpful to divide the confession into five subsections: (1) a preamble expressing belief in the Triune God; (2) an article confessing belief in the unity of the church; (3) an article confessing belief in the reconciliation in Christ; (4) an article confessing belief in the justice of God; and (5) a concluding word calling for obedience to Christ as Lord. The three central articles all include explicit rejections of false teachings.

The preamble states: 'We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the Church by his Word and his Spirit, as he has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end' (cf. Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1986: 722–4). The ecclesiology that follows in the confession is thus grounded in faith in the Triune God. It is this God that gathers, protects, and cares for the church. As already mentioned, the Belhar Confession is deeply embedded in the Reformed confessional tradition, including especially the ecclesiology put forward in the *Confessio Belgica* (articles 28 and 29) and the Heidelberg Catechism (Sunday 21, question and answer 54 and 55). As Piet Naudé has rightly noted in his book *Neither Calendar nor Clock*,

the words 'who gathers, protects and cares for his Church by his Word and his Spirit, as He has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end', is an almost

direct quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 54, which reads: 'What do you believe of the holy catholic church? That the Son of God . . . from the beginning to the end of the world gathers, defends, and preserves for himself . . . by his Spirit and Word . . . a church chosen to everlasting life.' (Naudé 2010: 206)

One should further take into account that behind these formulations in the preamble lie important theological choices with regard to the understanding of the church. In essence one finds the choice for a confessing church over against a *volkskerk* (an ethnic or national church). The preamble thus offers an implicit critique of the idea that the church is a gathering of like-minded people who share the same culture, language, and racial identification. The affirmation that the church belongs to the Triune God is, therefore, a rejection of the idea that the church belongs to a particular ethnic grouping or culture, and that people can be excluded on this basis (Smit 2015: 50).

The second article of the Belhar Confession focuses on the unity of the church. This article is introduced with words that resonate with the formulations from the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed, as well as from the sixteenth-century Reformed Confessions such as the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism: 'We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.' The article continues by making it clear that the unity of the church results from Christ's reconciliation. Already in this article on the unity of the church we see that we cannot separate the various articles of the Belhar Confession from each other. The unity of the church is inextricably linked to reconciliation in Christ, and reconciliation in Christ calls for visible unity and compassionate justice. And unity, reconciliation, and justice are to be understood within the framework of the confession of faith in the Triune God (the preamble) and the emphasis on obedience to Christ as Lord (article 5).

This unity resulting from Christ's reconciliatory work, the confession continues, is both a gift and an obligation. Unity is not in the first place something chosen by us or dependent on us; it is a gift from the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 4:4–6). Yet this gift of unity is also a task for the church as part of its mission. This emphasis implies that this unity that already exists must become visible 'so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin'. The unity of the church is therefore not an abstract unity that makes us comfortable with the concrete reality of our separateness and division. Drawing on several biblical passages, mainly from the New Testament, the confession emphasizes that the unity of the people of God must be embodied in a variety of ways as part of the love for one another. This unity, the confession continues, 'can be established only in freedom and not under constraint'. As Piet Naudé comments: 'Unity cannot be forced upon people by impressing it as a political or cultural ideal. It comes from the "constraint" of the gospel, which frees us from our selfishness to reach out to one another in freedom' (2010: 10).

In the theological debates on apartheid within the South African context, the emphasis on unity often immediately raised the counter-remark about the importance of diversity or plurality. This emphasis on plurality or pluriformity was often used as a way to affirm the apartheid logic of separation and separatedness. It is against this background that the

words in the article on unity should be understood; they state 'that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God'. Given the way in which the language of 'diversity' was used to justify apartheid logic, it is important to note the inclusion of these words. One of the discussions at the synod was exactly on this point, with some delegates in favour of not using the language of 'diversity'. Yet the Synod kept the original formulation, which affirmed diversity (rightly understood) as a gift. It is clear, however, that the confession rejects any doctrine 'which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the Church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation'. One hears the painful history of division within the church in these words, and the critique of the mindset and policy of apartheid. Faith in Jesus Christ, the confession states, is the only condition for church membership. Neither descent nor any other human or social factor should be considered in determining church membership.

Whereas article 2 focuses on the unity of the church and calls the refusal to earnestly pursue the visible unity as a priceless gift a sin, article 3 confesses that the reconciled community is called to embodied reconciliation as part of its ministry. This witness of the church is grounded in the fact that 'God by his lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity'. This is what makes a new obedience possible. The confession proceeds with a reference to the South African situation, and states that the credibility of the message of reconciliation is seriously obstructed in a country that proclaims to be Christian but in which one finds enforced separation on a racial basis. Any teaching that legitimizes such enforced separation in the name of the Gospel, and thus denies the reconciling power of the Gospel, 'must be considered ideology and false doctrine'. Hence the rejection of any doctrine that 'sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on grounds of race and colour'. Such a doctrine obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation.

The fourth article, with its focus on justice, confesses faith in the God who wishes for the manifestation of justice and true peace in a world of injustice and enmity. Dirkie Smit helpfully points to the underlying importance of these words:

There must be no doubt or misunderstanding about the importance of the confession of 'the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among humanity... and calls God's church to follow in this.' The opinion has steadily grown that the ideology of apartheid did not merely legitimate and stabilise irreconcilability and racial prejudice, but it also approved of and stabilised relations and structures in society which was unjust, humiliating, degrading of humanity, and often repressive. Even more, it helped to design and implement such structures.

(Smit in Cloete and Smit 1991: 53)

This God that wishes for the manifestation of justice and peace, the confession continues, is ‘in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged, and calls the church to follow Him in this’. In the reception history of the Belhar Confession, this formulation turned out to be one of the most controversial aspects of the confession, with many interpreters critical of the confession linking this part of the confession to ‘liberation theology’ (a term that was often used to discredit the confession) or arguing that these words imply that God is a partisan God and not the God of all people (including the rich). Over against this charge Piet Naudé has argued that this critique ignores the evidence in the Bible itself that God accepts responsibility for justice and makes special legal provisions for those without rights, and that it does not take into account that the confession here bears testimony to God’s ‘distinctiveness’ as a God of justice: ‘God does not stand by the poor because they are poor or because—as in a class struggle—he is in particular the God of the working class. God stands with the people who suffer in situations of injustice, because of this injustice. God can do no other. This is how God is’ (Naudé 2010: 17). It is important to note, on the other hand, that there was also a question from an opposite perspective at the 1982 Synod as to whether this reference should not state more explicitly that God sides with the poor. Smit writes in this regard:

The commission responsible for the formulation explained that those expressions were avoided precisely in order not to create the impression of a class struggle in which God would, as it were, choose sides for a certain group against another group. That which is expressed in the draft confession is simply the basic, historical, biblical and Christian conviction that God is the help of the helpless.

(Smit in Cloete and Smit 1991: 58)

This God (that is ‘in a special way the help of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged’), the Belhar confession further affirms, drawing on a string of biblical references, ‘brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry . . . frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind . . . supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly’. What are the implications for the church in the light of its confession that God is the God of justice? The confession is clear: ‘the Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need.’ This implies, among other things, that the church must witness and strive against any form of injustice. The church must stand where God stands, i.e. ‘against injustice and with the wronged’, and ‘must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interest’. In this light, the confession states, the church rejects any ideology that legitimizes any form of injustice or is unwilling to resist it in the name of the Gospel.

The concluding section affirms that the church is called to confess and do all these things in obedience to Christ, its only head, even if this might lead to the experience of resistance and suffering. The fact that the church is called to obedience to Christ as its only head affirms that the highest obedience is to Christ. Therefore the confession:

‘Jesus is Lord.’ This statement is, of course, in line with the core Christian confession, also reflected in other confession documents, such as the Barmen declaration. In early Christianity, this confession was not apolitical but a powerful statement in an environment of emperor worship, declaring loyalty to Christ and often resulting in persecution. Within the Belhar Confession the statement ‘Christ is Lord’ also affirms, amidst possible costly consequences, obedience to Christ, as is further underscored by the reference to scriptural passages such as Acts 5:29–33, 1 Peter 2:18–25, and 1 Peter 3:15–18. For those suffering in apartheid South Africa, this confession of the Lordship of Christ had a strong meaning. As the South African theologian Nico Koopman puts it: ‘In the apartheid context that proclaimed that the powers of the apartheid regime reign supreme, and that we should pay allegiance to them, the faith expressed in Belhar protested: Jesus is Lord. To Him we show loyalty and obedience’ (Koopman 2008a: 29).

The confession concludes on a doxological note, giving honour and glory to the Triune God: ‘To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever.’ It would be reductive, though, only to see these concluding words as doxological, since it is more apt to say that the whole confession is doxological, giving praise to the Triune God for the gift of living unity, real reconciliation and compassionate justice (Smit 2013: 141).

22.5 THE RECEPTION OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION

For many Christians in South Africa the Belhar Confession is seen as a liberating, dignifying and hope-giving confession. On the other hand, there is also still strong negativity in certain circles towards the document, notably within some white Afrikaans-speaking Reformed churches (see e.g. Theron 2012).

With regard to the complex reception history of the Belhar Confession, a first question concerns its reception within the Dutch Reformed Mission Church itself. The acceptance of the confession brought a new sense of identity to the church and served as a motivational force to live out its calling within apartheid society. In the build-up to the 1982 Synod the DRMC was divided on how to respond to the decisions taken at the WARC meeting in Ottawa, and about the implications of this decision for the relationship with the Dutch Reformed Church (many of the white pastors in the DRMC, but also others, had strong ties with the DRC and were worried about the consequences of the declaration of a *status confessionis* and the concomitant accusation of heresy). However, the acceptance of the draft confession in 1982 led to the strengthening of a spirit of acceptance and reconciliation at the Synod (Smit 2013: 142). Or, as Russel Botman puts in the Foreword to the book *Good News to Confess: The Belhar Confession and the Road to Acceptance*: ‘The Belhar Confession was like the balm that healed our hardened opposition to one another. It pulled down the walls of separation among the

differing groups of the DRMC at the time' (Botha and Naudé 2011: 12). After the acceptance of the Belhar Confession there was an eagerness to integrate the confession into church life. Liturgies and Bible studies were developed and a book of sermons on the Belhar Confession was published (N.G. Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika 1988a). In an attempt to make sure that the Belhar Confession was understood and embodied, a booklet with commentary on the confession in simple language, and with a short summary of the confession, was also published and distributed (N.G. Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika 1988b).

An important aspect of the reception of the Belhar Confession relates to the way the confession was received within the (then still) so-called 'daughter churches' (the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa and the Reformed Church in Africa). The dialogue commission of the DRMC, which was tasked at the 1986 Synod with having a conversation with other churches about the confession, took as its point of departure the idea that no church will be expected to accept the Belhar Confession as its own confession. It was important, though, that there be accord about the content of the faith convictions that lie as the heart of the Belhar Confession. At the first meetings between the DRMC and the DRCA the delegates from the DRCA indicated their desire to accept the Belhar Confession as part of their confessional base. This started a long unification process that eventually led to the establishment of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) on 14 April 1994. The Belhar Confession played a decisive role in the formulation of the new Church Order, and the article on the confession of the church (article 2) mentions that the church 'accepts the Belhar Confession as is presently required of this church in the South African situation' (URCSA Church Order 1994). A number of congregations (mostly from the Free State Province) of the old Dutch Reformed Church in Africa felt that the right church order procedures were not followed in the process of reunification. This led to painful and costly court cases. Part of the old Dutch Reformed Church of Africa thus still functions under this name.

The story of the reception of the Belhar Confession in the Dutch Reformed Church is complex and ongoing (see Botha and Naudé 2011: 99–174; Naudé 2010: 138–48; Vosloo 2017: 277–87). The first official response of the DRC after the declaration of a *status confessionis* and the acceptance of the draft confession had a strong critical tone. At the DRC General Synod in Pretoria in October 1982 it was stated: 'Synod has with great sorrow taken note that, as a result of the *status confessionis*, a confession has come into being that stands in conflict with the DR Church and on the same footing as our other confessions' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Church 1982: 1403). In the stormy years that followed, relations between the DRC and the DRMC became more strained. In March 1984 the leadership of the DRC formulated a response to several important documents regarding church unity, including the draft confession, and this response was sent to the DRMC, stating that the confession does not do justice to the legitimate pluriformity of the church. In addition to some other points of critique, the report further suggested that the idea 'that the church as property of God must stand... by the oppressed' is too one-sided: 'Your point of departure is, however, different from ours, since you seemingly reach this conclusion based on an unacceptable horizontalistic exegesis

typical of liberation theology' (Agenda of Synod, Dutch Reformed Church 1986: 27). Over the more than three decades that followed this early response by the Dutch Reformed Church, there also have been strong voices within the church pleading for the official acceptance of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession. At the synod meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church of 1990, for instance, a proposal was accepted stating that the Belhar Confession, taken by itself, is not in contradiction to the Three Formulae of Unity, and that it need not bring separation between the divided churches. Since then the Belhar Confession has continued to play an important role in the discussion regarding church reunification. In October 2011 the General Synod of the DRC, following a motion put forward as a result of a decision by the Western Cape regional Synod, accepted the following proposal with an overwhelming majority (of around 90 per cent): 'The General Synod decides to make the Belhar Confession in a church-orderly manner part of the church's confessional base and commissions the Moderamen to start the necessary church order(ly) processes that are required in this regard' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Church 2011). The church orderly way to do this requires that two-thirds of all church councils and all the regional synods accept with a two-thirds majority the proposed change to the confessional base. Given the divisions within the church, a compromise decision was made at the General Synod meeting of the DRC held in Port Elizabeth in October 2013 proposing that the vote be taken by regional synods and church councils to change article 1 of the Church Order to read, in part, 'The Belhar confession is part of the confessional base of the church, in such a manner that there is space for congregation members, office bearers, and church assemblies that confess the Belhar confession as in accordance with the Word of God, as well as for congregation members, office bearers, and church assemblies that do not want to underwrite the Belhar Confession as a confession' (Acts of Synod, Dutch Reformed Church 2013). However, even this compromise proposal did not receive the required support from the regional synods. Thus, notwithstanding the strong decision of the 2011 General Synod on the Belhar Confession, the DRC has not as yet accepted the Belhar Confession as part of its confessional base.

The Belhar Confession was adopted, however, by several other churches (see Plaatjies-Van Huffel in Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Modise 2017: 24–44). In 1997, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa in Namibia (ERCA) adopted the confession, followed in 1998 by the United Protestant Church in Belgium. In May 1998 in Germany, the *Reformierten Bund* and *Lippische Landeskirche*, together with the *Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche*, started an ongoing process of engagement with the Belhar Confession (see e.g. Niemöller 1998). The Reformed Church in America adopted the Belhar Confession as fourth confession at its General Synod meeting in 2010. The Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) adopted it in a less binding way as an ecumenical faith declaration, although at its Synod meeting in 2016 a proposal was tabled to recategorize the Belhar confession to the same status as the church's contemporary testimony 'Our World Belongs to God.' The ecumenical reception of the Belhar confession also extends to the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) that voted at its General Assembly meeting

in June 2016 to include the Belhar Confession in its *Book of Confessions*, after receiving a two-thirds approval from the presbyteries.

22.6 CONCLUSION

One can say that the Belhar confession arose in a very specific historical context. Yet the Belhar confession is about more than apartheid, and as such it is not merely part of some Reformed churches' historical past, but is in many ways still part of the future agenda of Reformed churches in the struggle to embody unity, reconciliation, and justice in our world today, in obedience to the confession of Christ as Lord.

Since it was officially accepted as confession in 1986, the Belhar Confession has found, in Piet Naudé's words, 'important echoes within the ecumenical church', notably in the decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to adopt at its General Council meeting in Ghana in 2004 the Accra Declaration, a declaration speaking to economic and ecological injustice (Naudé 2010: 149–5). Naudé also mentions in his discussion of the contemporary significance of the Belhar Confession that the confession holds much potential for a restoration of humanity for marginalized people (also in the African context), which he spells out in terms of unity in freedom, reconciliation with respect to gender relations and HIV/AIDS, as well as in terms of restorative and economic justice (Naudé 2010: 169–218). The Belhar Confession has also been brought to bear on challenges related to racism, violence, and human dignity (Koopman 2008b: 159–66). The appropriation of the Belhar Confession has not been uncontested, even within URCSA itself. In this regard one can think of the controversy around references to the Belhar Confession in the discussion of the report on 'homosexuality' at the 2008 URCSA Synod (cf. Boesak 2015: 93–117). Yet the Belhar Confession continues to hold much promise as a rich resource to deal in a theological way with some of the most important challenges facing us in our global world today. In this sense, the Belhar Confession is not to be seen as a mere historical document to be archived, but should be viewed as a confession that seeks to be lived and embodied, also with the future in mind. Or, to conclude with words from Russel Botman:

To give birth together, within the church, to the new reality that Belhar speaks of—to the reality of embodied unity, true reconciliation and compassionate justice, the reality for which the community around us and creation stretch out their necks in anticipation (Romans 8)—this is indeed the calling and responsibility of every one of us today. And the birth of this new reality—so the gospel promises—will break free by grace alone, independent of the strengths and despite the weaknesses of ourselves and our generation. Precisely for this reason the Belhar Confession will perhaps one day be remembered as the gospel word that came too early for my generation, but that was joyfully lived by the faithful of the next generation.

(Botha and Naudé 2011: 12–13)

SUGGESTED READING

Boesak (1984); de Gruchy with de Gruchy (2004); Vosloo (2017); Belhar Confession.

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PART III

TOPICS AND
THEMES

CHAPTER 23

PROLEGOMENA

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23.1 INTRODUCTION

WHEN we open an academic book, one of the first things we usually find is an introduction. Even shorter texts such as essays (like this very piece) often start with a preliminary section in which the theme, method, and/or intention of the paper is introduced. In many cases such introductions are completely innocent; it cannot be disputed that they are helpful, and sometimes even essential, in that they offer us a first orientation of the field we are entering when we start to read the book or paper in question. Not so, however, in systematic theology. The question whether a systematic theologian (or someone else, for that matter) should add an introduction when he sets about to write a coherent account of the contents of the Christian faith is one of the most disputed in contemporary theology. Especially in the Reformed tradition, important reservations and even criticisms can be observed with regard to the propriety of adding an introductory section to a survey of Christian doctrine.

Why is this such a sensitive issue? Is it another example of the dreaded *rabies theologorum*—the fury of theologians against one another on issues that everyone else takes for granted? It does not seem so; rather, a serious problem is involved that touches the nerve of what the Christian faith is all about. Of course, nobody thinks that anything is wrong with introducing a survey of the Christian faith by telling one's readers what they may expect and by making some other prefatory comments. Literally, however, the verb 'to introduce' (which is taken from the Latin) means 'to lead into'. The image conjured up is that of a space or spatial object—such as a building or territory—with which we are unfamiliar. In order to help us become familiar with it, the author adopts the role of a guide who shows us how we can enter the field or the building in question. In doing so, she starts from a place with which we, as outsiders, supposedly *are* familiar, in order to show us the route from that spot to the field or building she would like us to enter. Without such an introductory road map (the idea is), it might be impossible for us to understand what sort of phenomenon the Christian faith is, to what class or category it

belongs, how it can be comprehended from generally accepted premises—let alone to consciously *enter* the building of the Christian faith.

It is precisely here, however, that the controversy starts: is it really the case that we can only understand the Christian faith by approaching it as a special instance of some other, more generally known phenomenon (e.g. religion)? Would we not end up with a highly distorted picture in this way? According to some, when we try to explain the nature and content of the Christian faith, we should rather take our starting point directly in God's revelation, since this is the one and only ground on which the Christian faith rests. Indeed, if we examine the New Testament, faith in Jesus Christ as Lord does not introduce itself as a peculiar instance of some more generally accessible phenomenon, but as a special gift of the Holy Spirit and a fruit of divine election (Berkhof 1986: 1). It originates in the experience of being caught up by the Son in the Father through the Spirit. As Paul says, speaking of the knowledge of Christ (and not, as is often thought, of the eschaton): 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived [...] God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Corinthians 2:9). Isn't this experience so unique that it cannot be reduced to some more mundane, generally known human phenomenon? If so, it becomes unclear how it can be—let alone why it *should* be—introduced from some external point of view. Such an external starting point, one might surmise, easily, if not unavoidably, slants one's take on the issue, in that it does not let the Christian faith stand on its own feet. It threatens to transform it into some construct that is more palatable to our pre-established intuitions, wishes, and in the worst case even ideologies.

In the tradition of Reformed theology no one voiced this concern more seriously and consistently than Karl Barth ('the most consistent Protestant', as Hans Urs von Balthasar called him). In Barth's view, an introduction to the Christian faith can only be conceived of as part of the exposition of the faith. Only in that way can the danger of misrepresenting and, in fact, domesticating the Christian message by using it for one's own purposes be avoided. Barth discusses the problem in the very first sections of his *Church Dogmatics* under the heading of the term 'prolegomena'. This Greek word, retrieved from '*die Alten*' (i.e. sources from Post-Reformation Orthodoxy), literally means: 'things that have to be said in advance'. Barth does not oppose the possibility and appropriateness of prolegomena altogether; his own *Church Dogmatics* also opens with an introductory chapter (*Einleitung*) in which the presuppositions of his project are made explicit. He insists, however, that in Protestant dogmatics prolegomena should themselves have a dogmatic rather than a pre-dogmatic character. That is, like the entire body of theology, they can only draw their materials from the Word of God. Thus:

Prolegomena to dogmatics are only possible as a part of dogmatics itself. The syllable pro- in the word prolegomena is to be understood figuratively. What is in question is not the things that must be said previously, but the things that must be said first. (Barth 1955: 45)

From this perspective, Barth opens his magnum opus with 'the doctrine of the Word of God', since what must be said first is that the Christian church derives all her faith in God and talk about God from the Word of God that has been spoken to her. 'In the

prolegomena of dogmatics, then, we inquire into the Word of God as into the criterion of dogmatics' (Barth 1955: 46).

Although the doctrine of scripture took pride of place in most Reformed accounts of Christian doctrine (and Barth insists that his prolegomenon is obviously no other than what the older Protestant theologians had discussed under the heading *De scriptura sacra*), not every representative of Reformed theology had taken this course. In what follows, we will chart some of the ways in which the prolegomena have traditionally been drafted and discussed in Reformed theology. First, we will examine the two Reformers who arguably most deeply influenced most of the later trajectories of Reformed theology: Philip Melancthon and John Calvin. Next, we will turn to the movement of post-Reformation Reformed Orthodoxy, mapping some of its complex and intricate intellectual trajectories. We will then turn to Schleiermacher as the great nineteenth-century Reformed theologian who reinvented the prolegomena after Kant had given short shrift to their classical form. Subsequently, we will show how the tradition of Reformed prolegomena from Calvin to Schleiermacher received a surprising update in philosophical quarters by the end of the twentieth century, in circles of what has come to be called 'Reformed epistemology'. Finally, in a brief prospect we will suggest some of the tasks and functions which any future (Reformed) prolegomena may fulfil after the demise of classical foundationalism.

23.2 THE REFORMED REFORMERS

In the course of the history of theology accounts of Christian doctrine have often started with sections in which preliminary questions were discussed. Such prolegomena included (but were not limited to) issues such as the following:

- What exactly is theology? What are its basic principles and presuppositions?
- What is religion, and how is theology related to it?
- How does theology relate to other academic disciplines, especially to philosophy?
- How should an overall survey of Christian doctrine be structured and divided?
- Where does our human knowledge of God come from? How do natural sources (such as creation) relate to supernatural ones (such as God's special revelation in the Bible)?
- What is a dogmatic statement and how can it be justified?
- What method(s) does theology use, and what is the proper role of human reason in constructing a theological system?

Over the course of time, there has been little development in the type of questions discussed in theological prolegomena; though the emphasis may change depending on cultural conditions, issues such as those listed above belong to the 'perennial questions' which everyone who attempts to provide a systematic account of the Christian faith should be aware of and take into account. Indeed, even when they were not explicitly

discussed, as in the patristic era and during the first stage of Protestant thought, they often received implicit answers that could be deduced from the body of the expounded theological views. It was only under the pressure of external pressures and educational demands in emerging theological schools—the cathedral schools and monasteries in the medieval period and the budding Protestant universities in early modern Europe—that they were made explicit and discussed in a detailed way.

Even those who emphasize the essential continuity between the theological thought of the Reformers and their post-Reformation successors admit that there is a clear difference between the two when it comes to the issue of prolegomena. With some exceptions (e.g. Heinrich Bullinger's *Ratio studiorum*, 1527), the Reformers did not write any prolegomena, whereas their successors reintroduced them (Muller 2003: iv.397). Their strong orientation towards the bible as the sole source of Christian theology, and oftentimes their joy about the grace of God they had experienced personally, led them to plunge *in medias res* when giving an overview of Christian doctrine. Moreover, especially Reformed Reformers such as John Calvin were wary of what they called 'idle speculation': asking questions and building up thought systems about God that have no clear basis in the divine self-revelation. Therefore, when they had to unfold in a more or less consistent way the contents of the Christian faith for academic purposes, they tended to prefer the 'local' method of theological presentation to the classical 'questional' method. The latter consisted in long series of all sorts of (sometimes speculative) *quaestiones* that were answered with a clear judgement or sentence after protracted discussions of the various pros and cons.

It was especially Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) who, drawing on a methodological renewal in the art of rhetoric by the early humanist Rudolf Agricola, introduced the use of topics (from Greek *topoi*; Latin equivalent: *loci*) as an organizational principle in theology. Though a Lutheran, Melanchthon had strong Reformed leanings (e.g. in his understanding of the Lord's Supper), and hugely influenced later Reformed theology—which justifies his inclusion in this survey. According to Melanchthon, it was the task of theology to bring together and discuss in a coherent manner the various 'general topics' or *loci communes* that can be found in scripture, such as sin, law, and grace. Melanchthon especially had in mind Paul's letter to the Romans as the primary template for presenting these topics in the right order. Thus, Melanchthon's *Loci communes theologici* (1521) 'prepared the way, from a methodological perspective, for the fundamentally biblical and exegetical model, centered on the message of Romans, that became one of the most significant for both Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (Muller 2003: i.101). This new principle of structuring systematic theology could also, following Melanchthon's terminology, be referred to as 'historical' or, later, 'covenantal', since God's dealings with humankind according to the biblical narrative, from creation through fall to redemption, became the basic pattern within which theological doctrines were placed and discussed (Muller 2003, vol.1, 206; cf. 100, 110). Given such an overall scheme, clearly there is no place for external prolegomena.

Still, Melanchthon offers quite a lot of considerations that pertain to the presuppositions of his theological thinking. He starts doing so in the preface to the first edition of

his *Loci Communes*, where (in line with Luther) he is very critical of the role of philosophy and speculation in traditional dogmatics. In later rewritings for further editions, however, Melanchthon's tone becomes more moderate, his style increasingly comes to resemble the scholastic method, and traditional dogmas reappear in his system. Also in his doctrine of God as expounded in these subsequent editions of the *Loci*, Melanchthon makes comments of a type that would later be placed in the prolegomena of systematic theologies (Muller 2003: i.100; cf. Reeling Brouwer 2009: 178–207, who identifies Melanchthon's *Loci* as 'the most widely read dogmatic work of the Reformation period', 179). Eventually, both in his *Commentary on Romans* (ed. 1540) and in later editions of his *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon even comes up with series of arguments for the existence of God.

Like Melanchthon (and possibly drawing on him), John Calvin adopted the *loci* method when rearranging and expanding the catechetical materials of his 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in preparation for its enlarged second edition in 1539. Although the older scheme of the traditional catechetical manuals—with expositions on the Law, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments—remained transparent in the structure of the *Institutes*, it was blended with a more historical division, moving from our knowledge of God the Creator to that of God the Redeemer. More than some of his more scholastically inclined colleagues and successors, Calvin elaborated this division in a discursive and narrative way. Perhaps as a result of this, he did not feel a need for including theological expositions that *preceded* the treatment of the general contents of scripture; discussing scripture's detailed contents in his exegetical works, he intentionally relegated his more general observations to the *Institutes* so as not to overload his commentaries, as Calvin himself indicated in the 'Letter to the reader' that he added to the 1539 and later editions of the *Institutes*.

Still, it is interesting to see how in the successive editions of the *Institutes* we find a growing preoccupation with preliminary issues, such as the right method of teaching theology and the sources of our knowledge of God. Calvin was especially puzzled by the question of where to start the exposition of sacred doctrine. In the first sections of the second edition of the *Institutes* (1539), Calvin carefully weighs the Lutheran option to start with human self-knowledge against the pros and cons of starting with the human knowledge of God. He concludes that, although both are inextricably linked, the right order of discussion requires beginning with our knowledge of God—and he would remain faithful to this decision throughout his life, as can be seen in the final revision of the *Institutes* in 1559, where he still follows the same order.

But where does this human knowledge of God come from? Is God's special revelation in the Bible its only source, or is there also a more generally available 'natural' knowledge of God, dispersed among all properly functioning human beings? Although we must be careful not to narrow down the theme of prolegomena to this single issue, it cannot be denied that Calvin had a special interest in it. Meanwhile, the question brings us into a territory of heated debate and controversy ever since Karl Barth had rebuked Emil Brunner for his endorsement of a limited natural knowledge of God and for his appeal to Calvin in this connection (Brunner and Barth 2002). Calvin indeed made a

distinction between two types of human knowledge of God. In the beginning of the *Institutes* he wrote:

Here I do not yet touch upon the sort of knowledge with which men, in themselves lost and accursed, apprehend God the Redeemer in Christ the Mediator; but I speak only of the primal and simple knowledge to which the very order of nature would have led us *if Adam had remained upright*. In this ruin of mankind no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation, or as favorable in any way, until Christ the Mediator comes forward to reconcile him to us.

(Calvin 1960: i.2, 1; emphasis added)

Calvin continued this train of thought in subsequent sections by discerning within the human mind ‘by natural instinct’ an awareness of divinity (*sensus divinitatis*), implanted by God himself in all human beings, along with a certain understanding of the divine majesty (Calvin 1960: i.3, 1). Next to that, drawing on Romans 1:19–20 Calvin argued that God had revealed himself and continued to disclose himself on a daily basis ‘in the whole workmanship of the universe’. As a result, ‘men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him’ (i.5, 1). We do not even need ‘toilsome proof’ to demonstrate the existence and majesty of God, but like Paul we may use ‘natural arguments’: simple inferences from empirically observable factors in the natural world (cf. Sudduth 2009: 17).

Thus, Calvin seems to have acknowledged a twofold natural knowledge of God, situated in the human mind on the one hand and triggered by creation on the other (cf. van der Kooi 2005: 63–86). Quite a number of twentieth-century Reformed theologians, however, including Karl Barth and G. C. Berkouwer, have concluded from the italicized words in the first quotation (*si integer stetisset Adam*—‘if Adam had remained upright’) that, in Calvin’s view, *for us*, humans living after Adam’s Fall, this natural knowledge of God has become only a theoretical possibility. As a matter of fact, in their reading of Calvin, it has vanished and come to nothing by our sinful perversion (Brunner and Barth 2002: 106; Berkouwer 1955: 30–31, 46–7, 152–3; cf. Sudduth 2009: 113–18). Therefore, the only means through which we can still come to know God is God’s special self-disclosure in the Bible, and most especially in the Bible’s centre: the person of Jesus Christ.

Neither here nor, as far as I know, anywhere else, however, does Calvin write that we no longer have any natural knowledge of God because of the blindness and perversion that resulted from sin. Nor does he say that, although God continues to reveal himself to us in nature, these signals are no longer received by us (*pace* Steinmetz 2010: 23–39, 32). What he does say is that our natural knowledge of God *no longer leads us to salvation*, since we do not use it in the appropriate way, namely to seek and honour the only true God. The fact that our natural knowledge of God is soteriologically deficient does not imply that it is absent. In fact, it is implausible that Calvin thought it had totally vanished as a result of sin, since in that case it could not fulfil the main function Paul had ascribed to it: leaving us, post-Adamites, without an excuse when we do not seek and worship the only true God (Muller 2003: i.274, with reference to Calvin’s following the order of nature and scripture as the two means of divine revelation in his commentary on Psalm 19). It seems that Calvin’s pupil Guy de Brès captured the thought of his master

well when he drafted the second article of what came to be called the Belgian Confession (1561), the first authoritative Reformed confession in the Low Countries:

We [not: Adam only] know [not: knew] God by two means. First [not: Second], by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God's eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20: 'All these things are enough to convince humans and to leave them without excuse'. Second [not: First], God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God's glory and for our salvation.

(Billings et al. 2013: 26–7; cf. van den Brink 2011)

As Michael Sudduth has pointed out, in Calvin's view as well sin distorts our knowledge of who and how God is, but does not annihilate our intuitive knowledge *that* God is, leaving us with an awareness that there is some Creator who ought to be worshipped (Sudduth 2009: 117). This awareness is so vague and limited, however, that in order to come to know God in the full sense of the word we need God's special revelation in Jesus Christ.

In brief, whereas Brunner may have made too much of the natural knowledge of God in Calvin's thinking (treating it as a kind of substructure on which Calvin's proper theology was supposedly built), Barth and his sympathizers were definitely wrong when denying any actual functioning of it.

23.3 REFORMED ORTHODOXY

Moving to the period of Reformed Orthodoxy now, we should keep in mind that the chronological order is not as tight as is often suggested. Early Orthodox Reformed theologians such as Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563), Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and Andreas Hyperius (1511–64) were contemporaries of John Calvin (1509–64), but all three of them wrote extensively on prolegomenal issues. Hyperius, a Flemish theologian from Yper, inherited from his spiritual father, Melancthon, a strong interest in the right method of doing theology. He wrote a separate treatise on how to study theology (1556), which was in fact the first Protestant encyclopedia of theology and by far the most extensive prolegomenal work at the time. It was to be followed by a 'revealed theology', published posthumously as *Methodi Theologiae* (1568). Musculus devoted extended sections to the natural knowledge of God in his *Loci Communes* (1573). Though he admitted that its primary function was to make humans inexcusable for their unbelief and impiety, he also argued that especially its philosophical elaboration yielded important truths for theology. In Peter Vermigli's highly influential *Loci Communes* (published posthumously in 1576), essays on the natural knowledge of God and on theology's relationship to philosophy were also included. Though in basic agreement with Calvin on its non-saving character, he came to a more positive appreciation of natural revelation, especially valuing the use of philosophical argumentation in theology as exemplified in classical arguments for the existence of God.

Although all these publications saw the light of day only shortly after Calvin had passed away (and many parts of them had their origin in his lifetime), it is clear that we enter a new stage in the development of Reformed prolegomena here. In his landmark monograph on the theme, Richard Muller discusses the post-Reformation Reformed prolegomena under seven headings:

1. The Meaning of the Terms Theology and Religion
2. Theology as a Discipline
3. The Parts or Divisions of Theology
4. Natural and Supernatural Theology
5. The Object and Genus of Theology
6. The Use of Philosophy in Theology
7. Fundamental Articles and Basic Principles in Theology

We can easily recognize in this list most of the themes enumerated in the first section above. In the limited space available, however, we cannot deal with each of these topics separately; therefore we will restrict ourselves to drawing some main lines, focusing most of all on issue 4. In relation to issue 5, however, it is important to note that the majority of the Reformed Orthodox writers considered theology to be a form of wisdom (*sapientia*) rather than a science (*scientia*). Though its theoretical aspects were not denied, theology was primarily seen as an eminently practical discipline, directed to the honour of God and the salvation of human beings (Muller 2003: i.324–59). Further, in relation to issue 7 there was a widespread consensus that theology has two *principia* or foundations that determine its material content: Holy Scripture as its *principium cognoscendi* or noetic principle and God as its *principium essendi* (principle of being) or objective foundation. These principles correspond with the two *loci* that were usually treated immediately after the prolegomena, the doctrine of scripture and the one on God. For example, in Herman Bavinck's dogmatics (1895–1901), we still find the same basic pattern (Bavinck 2003).

As noted, however, by far the most attention in post-Reformation prolegomena went to issue 4 (often in combination with the closely related topic 3). One of the main focal points of the Reformation had been the retrieval of a 'dark' Augustinian view of human nature and will as the counterpart of its *sola gratia* principle. Along with this emphasis came a radical doctrine of the Fall and sin, which in turn, as we saw already in Calvin, raised questions concerning the remaining human capacity to know God. Indeed, the 'early Reformed statements concerning theological presuppositions focus, virtually without exception, on the problem of knowledge of God', and it is here that their 'single most important contribution' is made, since their radical view of human sin forced them to reconsider and modify the medieval patterns of theological prolegomena (Muller 2003: i.108).

Just like Calvin, the early Orthodox theologians held that despite the noetic effects of sin a limited natural knowledge of God is retained, consisting of an inborn propensity of the human mind to sense God (*cognitio insita*) and a vague knowledge which is acquired from experiencing the wonders of creation (*cognitio acquisita*). In the course of time, the Orthodox theologians gradually came to make more of this natural knowledge, developing it into a full-blown 'natural theology' which was often discussed in the first locus

of their theological system. When we examine the influential 19th century compendium of Reformed Orthodox voices assembled by Heinrich Heppe (1820–79), it is telling that Heppe opens this work with a *locus* (preceding the locus on Holy Scripture) entitled ‘Natural and Revealed Theology’ (*De theologia naturalis et revelata*; Heppe 1978: 1–11). It has been argued that Heppe is misleading here, since he ignored the fact that both revealed and natural theology were discussed by the Reformed Orthodox within the broader epistemological framework of *theologia archetypa* and *ectypa*—‘archetypal theology’ referring to God’s perfect knowledge of himself and his works, and ‘ectypal theology’ comprising the various forms of finite human knowledge of God. All ectypal theology was supposed to be dependent on ‘the communication of grace from Creator to creature’ (Muller 2003: 235, paraphrasing Franciscus Junius here). Thus, being part of ectypal theology, natural theology could never be seen (as Barth, reading the Reformed Orthodox authors through Heppe, thought) as an external prolegomenon—or more bluntly, a pagan foundation—which was assigned a preparatory function to theology proper (cf. van Asselt 2002).

Indeed, the days are gone when the development of Reformed Orthodoxy after Calvin could be seen as a process of gradual theological decline leading step by step towards Enlightenment rationalism. During the past decades it has been convincingly demonstrated (e.g. by the indefatigable efforts of Richard Muller and Willem van Asselt) that the historical trajectories were far more nuanced and variegated, displaying both continuities and discontinuities between the Reformed Reformers and later Reformed scholasticism. Still, the discontinuities cannot be denied and should not be downplayed. It is interesting (to say the least) that, whereas Calvin never used the term ‘natural theology’, it was not uncommon for Reformed (as well as Lutheran) Orthodox theologians to open their disputation cycles—and subsequent publications of these—with a disputation on the difference between natural and revealed theology; in doing so, they apparently considered natural theology to be unrevealed (cf. van den Belt 2015). Therefore, Heppe did not do something completely alien to post-Reformation Reformed theology when he started his compendium with a *locus* on this division of theology in a natural and a revealed part.

If we examine the material contents of post-Reformation Reformed expositions on natural theology, the balance once again is mixed rather than uniform. On the one hand we find theologians like Lambert Daneau (c.1535–90), who in a new, scholastic key reaffirm Calvin’s emphasis on the disastrous consequences of human sin, thus limiting its actual significance over against more optimistic Thomistic views:

First of all, this knowledge, derived only from God’s visible works or from this world, is true enough; but it is insufficient for salvation, because a peculiar knowledge of redemption is required for salvation. Secondly, this general knowledge does teach that God exists and that He is to be worshipped [...]. But it does not recognize either who this God is or how He is to be worshipped. (Daneau, quoted in Heppe 1978: 3)

On the other hand, authors like Trelcatius and Altsted were less reticent. Lucas Trelcatius (1542–1602), for one, equalled the natural knowledge of God with ‘natural theology’. Thus, he suggest that it is not just a limited variety of the human knowledge of God but an entire

branch of theology! Further, Trelcatius argues that natural theology proceeds ‘from principles that are known by the light of [...] human reason’. Elaborating on this, he rehearses several arguments for the existence and providence of God that he may have found in later editions (from 1543 onwards) of Melancthon’s *Loci Communes* (cf. Sudduth 2009: 20–21).

Only some years later did Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) publish a separate volume, *Theologia naturalis* (1615), exhibiting in more than 800 pages ‘the most august school of nature, in which is utilized the common language of God’s creatures for teaching all equally; against the atheists, Epicureans, and sophists of our age’ (subtitle; see https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10008101_00007.html). In this work, Alsted introduced arguments for the existence of God, expanded on God’s essential attributes and providence, and discussed the various classes of creatures. Alsted identified the foundations or *principia* of natural theology as human reason, universal experience (e.g. of nature), and Holy Scripture. This triple nature can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, we might highlight that Holy Scripture belonged to the sources and criteria of natural theology, thus controlling its contents and preventing it from becoming an alien, non-theological substructure of sacred doctrine. Arguably, in Alsted’s view, reason was offered only an ancillary role, not a principal one (Muller 2003: i.303). On the other hand, since a glass that is half-full is also half-empty, we might conclude with equal warrant that Alsted’s biblical references were only ‘confirmatory of arguments that are independently developed on rational grounds’, thus suggesting that as a matter of fact unaided human reason took the lead in his thinking (Sudduth 2009: 22; contrary to what is suggested by the title of his book, Sudduth shows from the relevant sources that there was *no* ‘Reformed objection’ to natural theology).

In any case, we discern a rationalizing tendency in post-Reformation dogmatics, as a result of which the prolegomena of theology gradually became both more extended and more important. Basically, they had to fulfil two functions. First, as is clear from Alsted’s subtitle, they had an apologetic role, articulating and defending the faith over against newly emerging movements such as Anabaptism, Socinianism (according to which the natural knowledge of God might be sufficient for salvation), and Arminianism (according to which natural theology forms a solid basis for the truths of revealed theology). In order to do so effectively, authors like Alsted used the conceptual categories of their contemporaries, and they were stimulated in doing so by the institutionalization of a Protestant academic culture which required a proper curriculum including disciplines like logic and metaphysics. Second, the prolegomena served to strengthen and deepen the Christian’s faith, and even to lead those who seek God to the higher truths of revealed theology, thus fulfilling a pedagogical role. Even so, however, natural theology always served as an adjunct, not as a precondition for revealed theology—let alone as theology’s most important part (Muller 2003: i.303).

It is precisely here that a crucial transition occurred in the eighteenth century, during the period of what is sometimes called Late Orthodoxy. Influenced by new approaches such as Descartes’ philosophy, Reformed academic theologians started to incorporate rationalist philosophy into their Protestant theological systems, using reason as its primary criterion and fundamental norm of truth. As a result, the entire weight of

Christian theology came to rest on the rational foundations laid out in the prolegomena, which as a result tended to become more and more long-winded. The balance between reason and revelation we found in a writer like Alsted has now been ousted at the expense of the obedience to Scripture. It is here that the real watershed in the theology of the Reformers is to be found. The difference can be seen in a stunning way when one compares the theology of Francis Turretin (1623–87) during the era of so-called ‘High Orthodoxy’ (c.1640–1725) with that of his son Jean-Alphonse (1671–1731) in the waning phase of Reformed Orthodoxy. To the younger Turretin, it is axiomatic that revelation cannot teach us anything that goes against the grain of reason. In this way, natural theology, as informed by the deliverances of reason, soon came to be seen as the most important—if not the only relevant—part of Christian theology, which could be shared by all rational people (see Muller 2003: i.3057 for a brief overview).

This type of theology, however, closely resembling contemporary forms of deism and natural religion as instantiated for example in the work of Herbert of Cherbury, could hardly be recognized any longer as Reformed—let alone as Orthodox Reformed. As to Reformed theology, meaning here the theology of the Reformers and of their post-Reformation successors, we can conclude that the legitimacy of theological prolegomena was not denied. Even the classical arguments for the existence of God were deemed to have a certain relevance. But the house of the Christian faith was never built on foundations laid by human reason. In that sense, Reformed prolegomena were always internal rather than external to the Christian faith, or dogmatic rather than pre-dogmatic. In the end, it was scripture that was—either on its own or next to reason—regarded to determine their proper meaning and content.

23.4 THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES: FROM SCHLEIERMACHER TO REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY

Immanuel Kant is usually credited as the one who in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) struck a deadly blow to all Enlightenment attempts at developing a natural theology from the generally available data of nature and human reason. Kant argued that human reason cannot transcend the limits of sense experience and therefore cannot lead to any knowledge of God. Thus, he invalidated theology’s *principium essendi*: God as an object of knowledge, leaving only a place for God as a postulate of practical reason or morality. Next to that, the rising tide of historical-critical Bible scholarship undercut the second foundation of theology as distinguished in post-Reformation orthodoxy: its *principium cognoscendi*, Holy Scripture. These developments put a sudden end to the Protestant prolegomena traditions. And given the way in which supernatural or revealed theology had become totally dependent on the substructure of natural theology, the entire building of Christian theology as a sound academic enterprise collapsed along with the prolegomena.

It required the genius of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) to find a new avenue out of this gridlock into which Christian theology had manoeuvred itself. Although, as the ‘father of theological liberalism,’ Schleiermacher perhaps stood ‘outside the Reformed movement doctrinally’ (Allen 2010: 92), his thinking displays many continuities with classical Reformed theology and would deeply affect later Reformed giants like Bavinck and Barth—so there is reason to consider his Reformed affiliation as more than just a formality and to include him in our discussion (for a delineation of Reformed theology, see van den Brink and Smits 2015). Schleiermacher accepted Kant’s barring of the way from human reason to God, but he did not agree with Kant’s de facto reduction of religion to morality. Instead, he argued that religion ‘has its own province in the mind in which it reigns sovereignly’—a province which he first called intuition (*Anschauung*) and later (in 1806) ‘feeling,’ meaning by this a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness (Schleiermacher 1996: 17). As such, religion—or piety, as Schleiermacher more often says (reflecting his upbringing in the pietist climate of the Moravian Brothers)—need not be grounded in either speculative metaphysics or morality, but is a category *sui generis*. Thus, Schleiermacher embedded religion deeply in human subjectivity, making the human being rather than God the starting-point of theology.

In his culminating dogmatics *The Christian Faith* (1821–2), Schleiermacher further specified this feeling as one of ‘absolute dependence’ (*schlechthinnige Abhängigkeit*). Before any conceptual reflection comes in, we are conscious of ourselves as absolutely dependent, that is, Schleiermacher explains, as in relation with *God*—God being the name for the ‘whence’ of our feeling of absolute dependence. This consciousness is common to all normally functioning human beings, though it is expressed and reflected upon in highly different conceptual frameworks depending on one’s cultural tradition, according to Schleiermacher. Clearly, we are not far here from Calvin’s view of a universal *sensus divinitatis*! In his prolegomena (simply called ‘Introduction’) Schleiermacher further argues that Christianity—obviously, for him and his age—should be considered the highest level of development of this feeling of absolute dependence. Thus, he gave Christian theology a new, anthropological basis in the phenomenon of religion as based on human experience. This way of reconceptualizing theology’s prolegomena was adopted and adapted by many subsequent theologians, both within and outside the Reformed community. In this way Schleiermacher shaped the tradition of what came to be called ‘modern’ or ‘liberal’ theology, i.e. all forms of theology that find their starting point in human experience rather than in divine revelation.

Interestingly, however, Schleiermacher himself was not satisfied with the way in which he had restructured the foundations of Christian theology in his *The Christian Faith*. In particular, he realized that there was, in fact, no coercive connection between his prolegomena and his material dogmatics. Therefore, in a letter to his friend Friedrich Lücke (1829) he contended that nobody should think that he had wanted to derive Christian piety from a general human pious consciousness (Schleiermacher 1981). Rather, there is a gap between the two; although we can, for example, deduce the concept of redemption from general religiosity, the identity of the Redeemer (Jesus Christ) is irreducible and unique. Thus, what Schleiermacher had said in his prolegomena allegedly

was not intended to substantiate the Christian faith from an external perspective, but rather, as he further explained in the second edition of *The Christian Faith* (1830), presupposed the internal perspective of the Christian believer. Christianity is not the highest step of religion in an objective way, but it is so from the perspective of the Christian faith. In this connection, Schleiermacher conceded: '*Für die christliche Glaubenslehre ist die Darstellung zugleich die Begründung*' ('The presentation of Christian doctrine is at the same time its foundation'; cf. Berkhof 1986: 2).

It was exactly this insight that Karl Barth was to turn from a concession into a confession in the next century: prolegomena to dogmatics are only possible as part of dogmatics itself, thus from the perspective of faith. Barth stuck to this maxim so consistently that later observers admired the fabulous house he had built in his *Church Dogmatics*, but wondered where they could find its door. Barth's approach, however, led many subsequent Reformed theologians (and not only so-called 'Barthians') to renounce the search for sound prolegomena altogether. Fortunately, there were important exceptions to this rule, as is clear from the theology of T. F. Torrance (1913–2007)—who was a Barthian in many respects but not when it came to Barth's rigorous attitude towards prolegomena. Other theologians, such as the Dutch Reformed H. M. Kuitert (b. 1924), stubbornly continued Late Orthodoxy's search for adequate external prolegomena, but not being able to find any foundations that were strong enough to bear the weight of the entire house, in the end abandoned the faith. All in all, as a result of theology's difficulties in dealing adequately with the topic of prolegomena many believers found it hard to connect their faith to the conceptual categories of their culture and the world at large.

It seems to me that the bottom line of Reformed theology, which we can trace from Calvin through Reformed Orthodoxy to Schleiermacher and beyond, is to appreciate prolegomena but not to ask too much of them. We should not expect them to lay the foundations of Christian dogmatics in a rationalist way, as if we were only entitled to enter the house of the faith when we have enough arguments. As we saw above, the Christian faith does not emerge from sound arguments, but originates in the experience of being brought to the Father by the Son in the Spirit. On the other hand, we should not discredit the role of prolegomena either. We need them to see why it is not idiosyncratic or even stupid to believe in God, and to connect the Christian faith with the thought categories of our culture. Also, they can rebut all-too-easy arguments or sentiments that are brought forward against the Christian faith.

Remarkably, from the final quarter of the twentieth century onwards a couple of Reformed philosophers did what many of their theological fellows had failed to do ever since Barth, namely to elaborate theological prolegomena along these lines. What came to be called 'Reformed epistemology', and as such became a much discussed and influential perspective in contemporary philosophy of religion, is in fact a new and full-fledged conceptual elaboration of the Reformed take on prolegomena. Reformed epistemologists such as Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932) and Nicholas Wolterstorff (b. 1932) have forcefully argued that Christian belief does not need a foundation in natural theology in order to be warranted (Plantinga 1997: 383–9; Wolterstorff 1997: 165–70). Rather, belief in God can justifiably be one of our 'properly basic' beliefs, that is: beliefs we do not

reason to but *reason from* (there is a remarkable concurrence with Barth here; cf. Diller 2014). In this connection, Plantinga explicitly refers to Calvin's notion of a pre-reflective *sensus divinitatis*, explaining this as 'a kind of faculty (like sight or hearing) or a cognitive mechanism [...] which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs in God' (Plantinga 2015: 33). Just as we are entitled to trust the deliverances of other cognitive faculties, provided that they are functioning properly, there is no a priori reason why we should distrust the outcomes of our religious sense. By extension, Plantinga argues, something similar holds for more specifically Christian beliefs, such as belief in the Trinity, the incarnation, Christ's resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins (Plantinga 2015: 45–56, esp. 52; for a broader account, see Plantinga 2000).

At the same time, however, this does not mean that the use of theistic arguments is entirely worthless. For it is not the case that anything goes when it comes to religious (and other) beliefs. If we are aware of important *defeaters* for our basic beliefs, it is irrational to ignore these; rather, we should do the best we can to appropriately evaluate such counter-arguments. It is here that arguments for the existence of God just as counter-arguments to proposed defeaters, have an important role to play. As in Melancthon, Calvin, and later Reformed theologians, this role is additional and ancillary rather than foundational. Here again, we find a thoughtful way in between rationalism (or 'evidentialism' or 'scientism') on the one hand, according to which we need universally acceptable arguments in order to be entitled to believe, and fideism (according to which arguments are of no use at all) on the other.

23.5 PROSPECT

By way of conclusion, it seems to me that a Reformed theology that remains faithful to its roots will also need prolegomena in the future. These prolegomena cannot be fixed to a particular set of arguments, however. For what kind of defeaters come up against the Christian faith largely depends on the context in which one lives. Thus, the contents of theology's prolegomena cannot be determined in a decontextualized, one-size-fits-all pattern. Arguably, in the science-imbued Western world systematic theologians will use prolegomena to account for the relationship between the Christian faith (and Christian theology as the structured reflection on it) and the sciences. Indeed, a lot of work has been and is being done in this territory, both inside and outside the Reformed tradition (see e.g. Pannenberg 1976; Murphy 1990; Van den Brink 2009). In other contexts, however, it is much more pertinent to show the ways in which Christian faith and theology are relevant from the perspective of a specific society's social needs and challenges (cf. e.g. Venter and Tolmie 2012). Thus, prolegomena can and should be elaborated in a variety of ways. They should not focus exclusively on the epistemological question ('How do you know?') as in modernity, but should also include thoughtful reflections on the task of Christian theology in the changing cultural and intellectual climate of our age (cf. Ford 2011; 2013: 169–76). Prolegomena can be quite extensive and rigorous, requiring detailed monographs rather than just a chapter in a survey of Christian doctrine. In cultural conditions in which it is far

from self-evident to be a Christian, such as in the contemporary Western world, they may even take the form of what is called ‘fundamental theology’. Until recently, this label was mainly used in Roman Catholic theology, but today it is becoming more and more recognized in Protestant circles as well (see Maddox 1984; Becker 2015).

This designation should not seduce us, however, into thinking that prolegomena are foundational to Christian faith and theology, since from a Reformed perspective only God and scripture are its foundations. Instead, their function is to relate the contents of the Christian faith—either constructively or critically, but usually in both ways—to the conceptual categories and thought forms of the world (for a contemporary attempt, see van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017: 33–74). Thus, they may prevent Christianity from becoming sectarian, help believers to connect their faith to the intellectual and cultural world in which they live and move and have their being and—yes—properly *introduce* ‘seekers’ and those who have not the slightest idea of what it is all about to the riches of the Christian faith.

SUGGESTED READING

Barth (1955); Calvin (1960); Plantinga (1976); van der Kooi (2005); van den Brink (2011).

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CHAPTER 24

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

KATHERINE SONDEREGGER

‘WHAT is the chief end of man?’ the Shorter Westminster Catechism asks. ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever,’ the catechumen answers. In this exchange is caught up in brief compass the whole of the Reformed doctrine of God. Now, it may seem incredible that a broad and rich tradition of the Western church—the entire family of doctors, pastors, and confessions springing up from the Swiss Reform—could be contained within a single catechetical question—and one as conventional as this. Yet it is a revealing truth about this famous question that it contains in brief form both what is distinctive about Reformed theology, and what makes its entirely traditional and unremarkable. We might begin with the conventional.

The Westminster Divines stand in a long Augustinian tradition when they begin the catechism in this way. Augustine’s *cor inquietum* seeks to join in permanent rest and fullness the longing love of the creature with the chief end, who is God. In this, Augustine hardly turns over fresh ground. The Platonists of late antiquity, and Plotinus in particular, sought the final flourishing of the creature in its ascent to the One, the fountainhead of the good. Gregory Nyssa in his late commentary, *The Life of Moses*, follows this well-worn pathway of ascent, from the desert plains of the Exodus up into the cloud of God’s own dark majesty, where knowing and unknowing and creaturely desire are one. In later idiom we might speak of this joining of creature to Creator as ‘friendship with God’, a relationship or marriage that can never be excelled. Just so, this ascetic and paraenetic wedding together of creaturely fulfilment and the creature’s chief end can be seen as itself a compressed rendering of the great scriptural themes of covenant, of the marriage of Israel and the Lord, and the indwelling of God with His creature: Blessed are they who are called to the marriage feast of the Lamb! The Song of Songs, never far from this Latin tradition of creaturely intimacy with God, spills over with the rich, embodied language of fulfilment, of desire, and utter self-giving. This is the enjoyment of God, and it is a poor theology that cannot bear the unbridled language of the creature’s longing for God, and its surpassing joy in the ardor fulfilled and stilled. In all these ways, the Westminster Catechism rings changes on the broad tradition of God’s covenant, fulfilled.

And there is more. It is the rare reader of the Reformed confessions, the 39 Articles of the Church of England, or the manifold teaching essays pouring out from the seventeenth-century Reformed consistories and schools, who does not notice how conventional—how predictable, really—is the entire treatment of the divine nature and the triune life. There are, to be sure, fresh methods of arranging the whole—schemas, say, of communicable and incommunicable attributes—or distinctive notes that reflect inner quarrels, or disputes with near-neighbours such as the Lutherans: consider, say, the discussion of the communication of idioms in Christ. But the list of attributes themselves, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence; the affirmation of divine simplicity or immateriality; the moral excellences of the divine being, his perfect goodness or justice; all these are entirely as one would expect from Christians emerging out of the medieval, scholastic West (Barth 1965; Leith 1963; Turretin 1992). And although the sixteenth century saw some unsteadiness in the treatment of the dogma of Trinity (Ganoczy 1987), the Reformed churches by the seventeenth century could affirm only what long centuries had already taught: three distinct persons in one substantial nature, equal in glory, in power, and in being.

We cannot overlook these distinctive notes or the unsteadiness and quarrels, either; indeed they will compose the substance of this chapter. But the wholly conventional must be allowed its say. For the churches that arose from the Swiss Reformation are catholic in just this sense. It would be a complete misunderstanding of these sixteenth-century divines to imagine they desired anything less than a wholly orthodox, wholly traditional, scriptural, and dogmatic Christian doctrine as the foundation of their church. Now this is not to say that the Reformation is nothing but continuity, scattered across emerging nation-states. The Reformation, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican, is *revolution*: the break-up of the medieval church in the Latin West remakes the world. But it is a remaking that aims to join *ressourcement* with *aggiornamento*, the recovery of sound patristic doctrine into a church renewed and purified by the *Verbum Dei*. The Reformed divines understood themselves to teach pure doctrine, not novel ones; the bitter debate over the anti-Christ, and its presence, they warned, in the office and universal jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff, shows them in deadly earnest over the recovery of true, unmarred, ancient teaching. The conventional in the doctrine of God, then, reveals much more than we ordinarily expect from a domesticated and fully anticipated schema. These entirely predictable questions lay claim to the unbroken faith of the Latin church. They say: We conserve and purify the past. For this reason the dogmatic theology of the seventeenth-century Reformed divines is studded with references to the fathers of the church as well as a liberal dash of medieval schoolmen.

Such marked stress on continuity should give us insight, too, into the complex and controverted debate over ‘tradition’ in Reformed theology. To glorify God in Christian life and thought is, in part, an epistemic act: to know Almighty God as glorious in His revelation to Israel and the church. Now such knowledge appears to draw both on Holy Scripture and on the tradition, dogma, and practice of the church. Can those who claim to ‘reform the church according to the Word of God’ rely upon ecclesial teachings in this way—or have they turned to the wayward ‘traditions of human beings?’ Questions like

these draw a firm line between Holy Scripture and human invention, one a bedrock and lantern in the darkness, the other a blind guide and deceiver. But such a clean demarcation proved difficult to sustain in the polemics of the sixteenth century. For one, the reforming Council of Trent codified a defence of church tradition through a remarkable historical thesis: far from ‘human inventions,’ Trent said, ecclesial traditions expressed in written form an oral teaching conveyed by Christ to the college of apostles, and transmitted as it were ‘hand to hand’ from these first disciples to their heirs in church councils and the magisterium. Such a defence rested on long-standing rabbinic distinctions between written and oral Torah, and drew upon the evident testimony in the Gospels themselves that Jesus aimed to teach his disciples, in private and by themselves alone, mysteries that could not be broadcast yet to the people. The famous Johannine logion that committed full teaching of and about Jesus Christ to the agency of the Holy Spirit – ‘I have things to tell you but you cannot bear them now’ – brought the unfolding history of the church into the domain of the Lord and his dominical teaching.

From such tender shoots sprang the wonderfully inventive and influential account of the ‘development of doctrine’ set forth by former Calvinist John Henry Newman and warmly welcomed in the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church. The now ardent Roman Catholic Newman could write, ‘And this one thing at least is certain; whatever history teaches, whatever it omits, whatever it exaggerates or extenuates, whatever it says and unsays, at least the Christianity of history is not Protestantism. If ever there were a safe truth, it is this . . . To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant’ (Newman 1968). The tradition of the historic episcopate, and the teachings handed down from these Apostolic sees, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: *this*, Newman said, just was history, providential history, and only the churches under Roman obedience, he claimed, could receive, defend, and develop the faith of the apostles. In just this way, Holy Scripture itself became a tradition, the tradition, and the community the disciples founded both shepherded and constituted its witness. Now, the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not abide such teaching—such ‘presumption,’ they would say.

Holy Scripture must be the one authority for Christian doctrine, the sole ‘principle’ of theological knowledge. *Sola Scriptura* was the foundation of Reformed doctrines of God. But how was this foundation to be united to the edifice raised so much later, by bishops gathered in Nicaea and Chalcedon? How were the dogmas of Trinity and two-nature Christology to be viewed in light of the ‘scripture principle’? How were the Reformed claims to the pure teaching of the Latin church to be defended, should scripture alone be prized as true guide, teacher, and touchstone? These questions were to haunt the Reformed churches that emerged from the Peace of Westphalia, and give contour to the distinctive shape of Reformed doctrines of God in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But we can begin this story further back.

Famously, several Reformed theologians in their younger days voiced nervous hesitation before the ‘unscriptural’ language of Nicaea. The ‘homoousion’ of the Nicene Creed can be found nowhere in scripture, most especially not in the more discursive passages on the being and nature of God—should such there be in this ‘non-metaphysical’ book,

as this point is commonly expressed in our day. From Socinus and Servetus, tragic figures of the divided early modern church, sprang full-blown the Unitarian and Deistic doctrines of the one God and his prophet, Jesus Christ. That Protestantism (or 'Lutheranism,' to give it its historical name) could be, in truth, the fountainhead of heresy: that was the nightmare of every magisterial reformer. It is the work of another day to describe the higher critical and exegetical development that would allow the Reformed to read Holy Scripture in a churchly fashion; and for its latitudinarian and radical wings to deny just such readings. But we may say here that Calvin in his later editions of the *Institutes* throws every lever of his theological imagination against suspicion over the doctrine of Trinity, and to attack the 'innovations' of Servetus. Calvin gave voice to a fresh concordat between scripture and the traditional teachings of the church: language that was not itself scriptural but in very truth gave the 'meaning' or 'intention' of the Bible should be accepted, even defended. In this, Calvin had Augustine at his side. In the famous conclusion of the *Confessions*, Augustine confidently affirms that whatever is in accord with truth must be the proper meaning of scripture, even should that counter the intention of the biblical authors themselves—chief among them Moses (book 12). Tradition could enter into the lifeblood of Reformed dogmatics in just the historical and providential form its opponents demanded. The church, in faithful witness to the Holy Scriptures, the Reformed now said, offered concepts, idioms, and arguments drawn from the storerooms of the gentiles, to adorn, investigate, and glorify the true and living God of the Bible.

The Reformed were not recovering or amplifying a 'spiritual sense' of Holy Scripture; they shared with the Tridentine reformers the early modern conviction that Holy Scripture refers to historical events and actors. But they opened up a semantic field between the idiom and vocabulary of scripture and the subject matter of the Bible. Crucial to the development of early modern Reformed orthodoxy was the new-found liberty of distinguishing topic from language use. Now it could be affirmed that the ecumenical councils said 'in other words' what the Bible depicted in its own characteristic and inspired manner. That this would not prove to be a stable solution the history of Reformed theology in the nineteenth century bears eloquent witness. From the lap of the Swiss Reformed issued the rationalistic and impersonal doctrines of God of the eighteenth century. But that lay far in the future. For now, the place of Reformed divines within the church catholic—defenders, teachers, purifiers—could now be set beside the honoured seat of theology grounded upon scripture alone. The conventional and traditional could be given their day.

But it is the distinctive note of the Reformed doctrine of God that commands our attention now. The opening question of the Westminster Catechism must speak of more than the conventional and traditional; it must capture too the innovation of Reformed theology. Consider for example the joining together of God and humanity, not now as the conventional wedding of Creator to creature, but as the rich invention of the Swiss as they set forth the proper doctrine of God. Calvin, in the remarkable opening chapter of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, links together the knowledge of God and the knowledge of creature in these famous words: 'Nearly all the wisdom we

possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.' And perhaps with even more influential daring, he adds: 'But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern' (Calvin 1960: 35). The outlines of the modern Reformed doctrine of God are now firmly set in place.

Calvin, for his part, had in view a doctrine of God that could not be separated from the creaturely love, dependence, and reverence for the object of faithful knowledge. This linkage Calvin called, 'piety'. Here is his definition of that pregnant term: 'Here indeed is pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.' Or in a dense summary: 'I call "piety" that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces' (Calvin 1960: 41). Calvin in these passages announces that he has broken with the medieval scholastic tradition of formed and unformed faith—a distinction he later calls 'frigid' and 'sophistry'—and declares himself opposed to a 'pagan' notion of 'bare speculation' about the reality of God. So trenchant and far-reaching is this latter opposition that it may be well to cite Calvin directly. 'We ought to observe', Calvin writes in an encomium on the divine majesty, 'that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but what which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart' (Calvin 1960: 61–2). The distinction here between head and heart will rise again renewed in the age of Pietism and the New England New Light. But in the original reformers, proper piety, 'rooted in the heart', is meant to set out just what it means to know and worship God.

The knowledge of God, for these reformers, did not begin in contemplation of or ascent to being itself. Strikingly, Calvin omits from his sweeping book I, the Knowledge of God the Creator, a dedicated section to the divine nature or *deitas*. Not for him the elaborate questions taken up once again by the seventeenth-century divines about deity and its attributes. Rather, Calvin places Reformed theology on another footing, one that will outshine the seventeenth-century scholastics in influence and permanence. For the Swiss reformers, the proper knowledge of God by the creature is 'piety', a life anchored and transformed by the divine will. In another idiom we might say that knowledge of God is 'self-involving'; better: that God is the sort of reality that cannot be known without conversion. To speak in Luther's tongue: There can be no 'naked God'. The Lord God cannot be simply 'thought about'; God is not 'objective' in that sense. Calvin taught the Puritans and Westminster divines a pattern for the doctrine of God that militated against the broad, conceptual cosmology that joined analysis of the world to a prime mover or cause. The medieval schoolmen unfurled the doctrine of God against the backdrop of a created order—a rich, fallible, busy, and mortal place—where the deity of utter uniqueness, simplicity, and actuality could only blazon out like a heavenly flame. Calvin's use of the creation, its preservation and governance, takes on another hue altogether. Of course, Calvin, with his sixteenth-century allies, affirmed that God and his glory could be seen in creation. They too used Psalm 19 without hesitation. But the distinctive Reformed note here is always sounded. God is known in his works as majestic,

as protector of his creatures, as judge and Lord. To know this is to show 'reverence'; to be thankful for it, is to give evidence that his benefits have not been poured down upon the creature without gratitude returned.

Notice that God is not, in this Reformed pattern, a being commonly available to the human intellect. From this element of Reformed teaching about God descends a complex legacy. On one hand, Calvin does not hesitate to say that human beings are 'naturally religious'; they are created with an ineradicable *sensus Divinitatis* that can only be stilled in the human heart by crude idolatry, perversity, and material greed. In moments of danger, seasons of trial and loss, the seed planted deep in the heart will spring up: 'No atheists in fox-holes,' we say, in unwitting tribute to Calvin. In this way, an 'existentialist' or phenomenological account of human transcendence into God of the sort we find in Tillich or Rahner is not a foreign country to Calvinists. But on the other hand, Calvin does not hold, nor does the Reformed tradition as a whole, that God is a speculative concept available to the rational intellect, common to the human race itself. The nerve is cut to the kind of fundamental theology prevalent in Vatican I theology, and its famous and controverted 'natural knowledge of God.' God must be known, rather, through an awakening of one's conscience, a conviction of sin—to use nineteenth-century parlance—or a stirring of wonder at the order and majesty of the cosmos, or the 'inner testimony' of the Holy Spirit as the mere words of the Bible or the preacher becomes the Word of Life itself. This is the joining of reverence and gratitude, the knowledge of divine benefit extolled by Calvin in the *Institutes*.

Now we might be prompted to ask: has this focus upon piety 'disenchanted the world'? Common to the study of nineteenth-century intellectual history is the observation of the social theorist Max Weber that the Reformed, Protestant world drew the magic from the world, and broke plain nature open for observation and study and control; the world of the everyday, the *secular*, in our modern sense, opened up in the natural realm for Puritan discipline, energy, labour. It is no secret to the modern student of religion that the nation-states most moved and entranced by the Swiss Reform are most worldly, secular, and humanistic of the old Christendom. Is this a legacy of the Reformed doctrine of God? Of course, a bald assertion of a cause and effect relation could never capture the contingency, complexity and overdetermined nature of full, historical human life. But the Reformed willingness—eagerness, really—to join the knowledge of God wholeheartedly to piety and Christian practice makes the question nearly irresistible. It appears that one legacy of the marriage of knowledge of self and knowledge of God is a form of 'sectarianism', a desire to draw belief in God away from the common, public, and rationalized social life to the intimate, Church-suffused, and self-gathered life of believers in community. The cost of 'self-involvement' in the doctrine of God, we might say, is the narrow hall in which the faithful now sit.

Now, any student of nineteenth-century theology will say: surely Friedrich Schleiermacher waits in the wings. And of course there would be no proper account of the doctrine of God in Reformed theology without a discussion of this 'Prince of the Church'. But one counter-stroke to the secularization thesis must be drawn before the Christian faith can take center stage. And that is the rich countervailing tradition of natural theology in the English-speaking world of the Reformed.

Emerging from the bitter confessional wars of the seventeenth century, English divines and naturalists undertook a full-throated defence of Almighty God as Creator of an ordered universe. The full teachings and world-views of Newton and Locke, of Priestly and Harvey and Paley, are unimaginable without their natural theologies of the being and creative will of God. 'Let Newton be! and all was light', exclaimed Alexander Pope, and it is easy to see the cheery assimilation of God to the philosopher; the philosopher to God. But, wait! Has not Enlightenment deism carried within itself the seed of its own destruction? Many generations of scholars have been taught that David Hume, in his famous *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, destroyed the 'argument from design'. Such confident, indeed Whiggish, history fits admirably well into the 'secularization thesis'; but we might well pause before joining in this chorus. There is counter-evidence to the 'irresistible march of secularization', from some of the Reformed's harshest critics. Hume, for one, expressed admiration for Bishop Butler, and Butler's *Analogy* (Butler 1856) was taken as an impressive, well-turned tribute to the creative hand of God well into Darwin's days. Indeed the notion of design lingered in Darwin's thought-world long after his explicit admiration for Butler and Paley vanished (Darwin 1993; McGrath 2011). So too William Paley's more didactic, more sweeping account of natural design, the *Evidences* (Paley 1809), served as mainstays of Protestant seminaries and colleges well into the nineteenth century. Or consider the merciless light trained by George Eliot on the Reformed Anglicanism of the nineteenth century. Is this in truth the unanswerable satire of and elegy for early modern Anglican divinity? The portrait of Casaubon in *Middlemarch* could hardly be bettered, we might say, and the key to all mythologies, his life-work, seems bent head-long for disaster—no reader could miss George Eliot's *tendenz* here. But a masterpiece such as *Middlemarch* creates and demands its own plausibility; this is part of what we mean by a 'realistic novel'. But it need not conform to history even as it shapes it. For Casaubon's fictional task, to catalogue and explain the world's religious myths, did not fade away like the character; comparative study of religion and the history of religion school commanded authority through the twentieth century in academic theology. The worship of God, and awe and reverence for his handiwork in creation, did not die in the modern era; indeed, through the astonishing vigour of the world-wide missionary movement, they became the lingua franca of the nations of the earth.

Just how can we understand the stubborn persistence of natural knowledge of God, and of the earth as a *creature*, with the rising tide of pietism, inwardness, and separation that are ingredients of modern secularization? It may be that for a Reformed Christian, the answer can and should properly only rest in the divine good pleasure: that it pleases Almighty God to not be 'without his witnesses'. But the doctrines of general and special providence need not do all the work here. We may also search for an analytic answer drawn from the resources of Reformed theology. We could investigate the doctrine of election, and the divine decrees, that is, for a conceptual clue to the seemingly odd melange of rationalism, secularism, and vibrant theological power that is Reformed doctrine in the modern era. Not too much can be promised here, as the rich hiddenness and complexity of human history, and most especially of religious history, cannot be dissolved into a neat row of orderly ideas. But the comparison of Schleiermacher's

Glaubenslehre with his seventeenth-century Reformed sources may give us some purchase on the remarkable and unexpected life of the doctrine of God in modern times.

First, the seventeenth-century divines. Distinctive to this Reformed doctrine of God is the *opera interna ad extra*, the decrees of the electing God. Of course this *locus* does not spring up as *novum* in the Reformed divines: Augustine may be said to be the father of the doctrine of election in the Latin church. Predestination and divine foreknowledge preoccupied all medieval schoolmen, and Thomas Aquinas devotes a special treatise to these topics in his *Summa*. But the Reformed divines innovated all the same. Not for them the simple and awe-inspiring affirmation that God elected some as ‘vessels of His mercy’ out of the *massa perditionis*, the mass of damnation, and passed over the rest. No, the Swiss Reformed imported the doctrine of predestination directly up into the doctrine of God: God’s very being was an act of *ordered* will. This is not exactly a voluntarism in the doctrine of God, though the place of the *via moderna* in the theological imagination of the reformers, and its voluntarism in the doctrine of God, is surely salient. Rather, the Reformed are carrying forward an axiom of their sixteenth-century teachers: God should be sought through his works, as Calvin affirmed; these works were displayed in the history of Israel and the acts of the apostles. (Karl Barth will build an entire doctrine of God from this narrow platform.) Holy Scripture, then, was a compendium of the works of God, and in it we were to see that the very life of God was his sovereign lordship over his creatures. Once again we see the reluctance of sixteenth-century reformers to ‘speculate’ about the divine being: knowledge must be joined to reverence. But in the established and settled Reformed cultures of the seventeenth century, the university divines allowed a certain form of speculation full reign. They sought to make fully coherent, persuasive, and simple the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God.

Here is Wollebius on this point: ‘Immanent or internal works of God are those which take place within the divine essence, and of this sort are the decrees of God . . . Immanent or internal works of God are realities not different from the essence of God . . . A decree of God is an internal act of the divine will, by which he determines, from eternity, freely, with absolute certainty, those matters which shall happen in time’ (Barth 1965: 46, 47). The doctrine of decrees, then, is not to be reduced or identified with the doctrine of predestination, *tout court*. We are not being invited by the Reformed divines to consider directly the manner by which some lives are destined for eternal communion with God and others to reprobated, rejected, and punished eternally for sin. This is the content of the doctrine of predestination as set out, for example, in the *Institutes* and in several Reformed confessions of faith. The divine decrees step back further from this reflection upon human destiny to the God who is himself the source and cause of all human life and election. A decree is itself an *internal* divine state or act of will. It has as its ultimate *terminus* a work *ad extra* but in its very nature it is *interna*: the decree just is God himself. Now, some distinctive notes in the doctrine of God stem from this structure.

The proper object of the decree will be God himself: he knows and wills and delights in his own being as the true and living good. Or to express this in other idiom: God just is his self-knowledge. The proper *scopus*, the object or purpose, of the decrees must be the divine glory, his own mercy and justice. Though no seventeenth-century divine

would scruple at Calvin's celebrated definition of predestination—that 'by which God adopts some to hope of life, and sentences other to eternal death' (Calvin 1960: 926)—they would nevertheless aim higher than did Calvin. God in his unique and simple majesty is justice and good pleasure itself; to will and affirm that is God's chief end. So strong is this affirmation of divine self-sufficiency that the mission of the Son, the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, must be viewed as an instrumental cause only of creaturely salvation. (Once again, we can spot the roots of Barth's remarkable doctrine of election in the Reformed doctrine of God: Jesus Christ, in direct rebuke to all seventeenth-century scholasticism, must be both full subject and object of election.) In our limited and temporal cognition, we human creatures can only puzzle out this grandeur by logically ordering these decrees as they express themselves us-ward. Polanus will translate this into a far-reaching and subtle methodological axiom: Creatures must affirm 'two' in order to say, 'One' (Polanus 1595). Note that in this province of Reformed theology we still cleave to the Westminster pattern: the creature is joined, however indirectly, to the creator as its chief end. The decrees, though assimilated to the divine essence, remain tied to the divine works: they are revealed there, in the economy of salvation.

From this delicate balance of internal and external aims stems the scholastic debate over the proper ordering of the decrees. Should the decree to exercise the divine glory be ordered to the decree to create and permit the human fall into sin, or should it precede such a glorious work? To follow the supralapsarian party was to hold that the decree to elect and reprobate came logically prior to the decree that permitted the fall: God had in view human creatures as 'possible and fallible' (*creabilis et labilis*), not actual creatures, fallen and guilty. That this was lofty terrain was recognized by all Reformed divines; always the supralapsarian party was treated with great respect for its wintry austerity. But the infralapsarians in truth were the dominant and persuasive architects of the Reformed doctrine of decrees. The proper doctrine of the divine decrees should order actual created human beings, in their fallen misery, *before* the decree to elect and determine creaturely destiny: the decree to elect fell *within* the doctrine of the fall. But no orthodox divine in this era could countenance a 'postlapsarian' position in the order of divine decrees. God could not be thought to remedy or repair what presented itself as a creaturely disaster; no Arminian or Remonstrant, however opposed to Reformed Orthodoxy, could entertain the notion that God would be ordered to the creature, depend upon it or wait to discover the creature's act, however free, responsible and guilty the creature may be. At the Synod of Dort only the matter of divine and perfect foreknowledge could bear to be debated: could God order the decrees of election and reprobation to foreseen faith; or no? The Arminian view, however strenuously hedged about by affirmations of divine grace, could be only regarded as a kind of Pelagianism by the Orthodox, a 'conditional election' that elevated the creature and its dispositions into the divine will—an offence to the divine glory; intolerable.

The whole, undivided Trinity must be the subject and agent of election in the mystery of the divine life. No creaturely work, not even that of the Incarnate Son, can interrupt the sovereign exercise of the Lord over his creature. That is the common affirmation of the whole Reformed tradition. But one variant of the Reformed scholastic doctrine of

the decrees will leave a lasting impression on Trinitarian doctrine into the modern era, long after the other forms have entered into the silence of the historical past. Federal theology, so-called from its focus upon the *foedus* or covenant of God with creature, proposed that the saving works of God *ad extra* were themselves predicated upon a covenant within the divine life itself (Coccejus 1689). The outworking of this triune covenant in a series of earthly covenants—a covenant of works, for example, followed by a covenant of grace—belongs properly to a Reformed doctrine of providence and the *ordo salutis*. (A full history of this development in Reformed theology would include the significance of the covenant in the Puritan history of the early American colonies, and the Reformed legacy in South Africa.) But even within the Reformed doctrine of God, the impact of federal theology can be felt.

Now, covenant or *pactum* clearly concerns the creaturely realm: the history of Israel would be unintelligible without it. But in this dogmatic universe, such focus *ad extra* can only be grounded in the *opera interna*: Covenant must be a language, too, of the divine being. Even in so determined an advocate of the divine simplicity as Turretin we find the depiction of a pact between the Father and Son, the immanent ground of the saving and instrumental work of the Son among the lost. This divine covenant must be folded into the doctrine of decrees, so that the essence of God has as constituent the personal drama—we can go this far—of the Son's acceptance of the Father's will. Here is Turretin on the triune *pactum*: 'The pact between the Father and the Son contains the will of the Father giving his Son as a lytroten and the will of the Son offering himself as a sponsor for his members to work out that redemption' (Turretin 1992: vol. 2, 177). That this is a Trinitarian mystery Turretin affirms in his prologue to the entire covenant of grace:

As this work is eternal [NB], it is common and undivided to the whole Trinity with this distinction, however—that each person has his own proper and peculiar mode of operation here, agreeable to this saving economy. God the Father instituted this method of communicating himself and gave his Son; ... God, the Son, both as the cause and foundation of the covenant through his own blood; ... God, the Spirit, as the cause together with the Father and the Son, and the matter and the witness and the earnest of the heavenly inheritance. (Turretin 1992: 175)

Then, in a fateful turn toward the economy, Turretin will write:

For thus the Scriptures represent to us the Father in the economy of salvation as stipulating the obedience of his Son even unto death, and for it promising in return a name above every name that he might be the head of the elect in glory; the Son as offering himself to do the Father's will, promising a faithful and constant performance of the duty required of him and restipulating the kingdom and glory promised to him.'

'All these things,' Turretin firmly concludes, 'are plainly gathered from the Scriptures' (p. 175).

Now it is from such roots that Karl Barth, the greatest Reformed theologian since Calvin, will forge a doctrine of God that embraces in full cry the doctrine of a divine *pactum* between Father and Son. We have seen over the course of this survey places

where Barth's massive doctrine of God can be anchored and recognized in its patrimony. But this conviction, that covenant belongs to the inner life of God, has remained the daring outpost of Barth's work on the being of God. 'As we look at Jesus Christ we cannot avoid the astounding conclusion of a divine obedience,' Barth dares to write in *Church Dogmatics* IV.1. There is in God Himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination'; we can affirm, he continues, '... that it belongs to the inner life of God that there should take place within it obedience... In His mode of being as the Son He fulfils the divine subordination, just as the Father in His mode of being as the Father fulfils the divine superiority' (Barth 1956: 201–2, 209). Here the delicate relation between the acts internal to the being of God and those external to him are heightened to a remarkable degree.

We have seen that Barth is willing to affirm that Jesus Christ in his own aseity is subject as well as object of election; he is the one 'elected for rejection'. From this stems Barth's radical affirmation of the *Logos sarkos*, the eternal, enfleshed Son: *Jesus Christ* is the Word who is with God and is God. These remain controversial within Barth studies, and will demand a careful assessment in light of the broad Reformed teaching on the decrees. But here Barth advances another step. Faithful to the Federalist insight, Barth takes the dual-sided covenant into the essence of God, an *opus interna*. But Barth does not rest content with Turretin's language of 'giving and offering', itself daring enough. Barth takes the work of redemption, the *ordo salutis*, up into the inner life of the Trinity: the obedience of the Son 'during the days of his flesh' now finds its eternal ground in the obedience of the Divine Son to the Divine Father. The persons of the triune Godhead have particular and proper roles in the divine will to save, and this *propria* includes command and obedience. Barth will speak of the humility of God, and of the free self-offering that does not contradict but rather affirms God's glory as the lowly one. There is a certain 'perfect temporality' in God, a 'before and after', a history that contains all times without loss, or conflict, or division: eternity cannot be defined as over against time. Just so, there can be a certain act, a command, that begins with the First Person, and is continued and received and ratified by the Second, so that the event who is God unfolds in glorious giving and offering, commanding and obeying, an above and below that is all perfect deity, perfect equality, perfect work.

Now, how such a vision of divine commerce as Barth conjures it here can serve as an account of the divine unity—the one who loves in freedom—is a bill yet to be paid in Barth studies (Hunsinger 2015; McCormack 2008). Future research will seek out just how we are to read being and act in Barth, unity and trinity, eternity and temporality—all as masterful extensions and wonderful reworkings of the Reformed doctrine of God.

Just in this way is the legacy of the doctrine of election made vivid in the modern day. But there is a second form of this legacy that we tentatively sounded out some time back that must become our final chapter in the Reformed doctrine of God. We asked, in this preliminary sounding, how a doctrine of God that wedded knowledge of God to piety could long survive in a world hurtling toward secularism. A counter-stroke of natural theology seemed to register itself in the midst of the world that seemed to revel in its long emancipation from the sea of faith. The great Reformed theologian of the early modern period, Friedrich Schleiermacher, seemed poised to accompany that surprising

vigour of Reformed theology in a secular age. So now, in conclusion, we return to those soundings, the Reformed doctrine of decrees still fresh in our ears. How, we ask again, can this distinctive note of the Reformed, the *opera interna ad extra*, prepare us for a world both of pietism and secularism, of rational defence of God and the strong desire to leave him behind? One conjecture will guide us: the notion of efficient cause will accompany and structure the whole.

This could only be a conjecture, for the phenomenon of the modern, its complexity and contingency, will outstrip any conceptual effort to fully explain—even less, fully explain it away. But we may ask, after our survey of Reformed doctrines of God: have the divine decrees and the reduction of cause to efficient causality made in its own way, a *pactum* with a ‘world come of age’?

We begin with a scientific hypothesis. Efficient causality will be taken now, on all sides, as the only ‘real cause’ at work in the world the Enlightenment made (Pasnau 2011; Chadwick 1990; Schorske 1980; Taylor 2007). It was not just Kant, it seems, who was awakened from dogmatic slumbers by worries over causality; the whole settled place of Christian faith in the western world-view seemed disturbed by them. Historians of the modern, secular age have been struck by the dominance of efficient causality in the thought-world of early naturalists and philosophers; the world was ‘flattened out’ in a materialist and mechanistic universe. But Christian theology too partook of this flattened and foreshortened world. It too sought to account for a rich, vibrant naturalistic and social realm through another form of efficient cause; the omnipotent and omnicausal God. Almighty God caused the world—this is a teaching of Jews and Christians since the days of Philo. But the form of this causal work took a sharp edge in the early modern era: God was efficient cause of the world, the one who made it and made it go in this, its appointed path.

Now, revolutions in theology are slow to take root. We would look in vain in our seventeenth-century scholastics for a doctrine of God that ruled out a notion of final or formal cause. But the doctrine of decrees does its work here too. For the aim in the recondite ordering of decrees is to prepare in the divine firmament the ground for the *opera ad extra*, those destinies of human creatures brought about by the divine and sovereign will. Indeed, it seemed almost as though God were the most perfect of efficient causes, relying upon nothing outside or beyond him for the full effect to be realized, but rather working in glorious power to an exact and perfect and untrammelled end. Such omnipotent vitality could be readily translated into a Newtonian world. God seemed something like an eerie double to the perfect inertial force, operating without friction, in a pure vacuum that can offer no resistance. What we call a rationalistic or Deist conception of God, the creator, seems something like an electing God, indeed a supralapsarian one, with the decrees shorn off and his causal powers anchored in their place. Natural theology in the English-speaking world is modern in just this sense. Though echoing some of the medieval forms of argument codified in Thomas’ Five Ways, the eighteenth-century natural theologies in fact belonged very much to their scientific age. God was supremely self-sufficient and enclosed; supremely powerful and effective; utterly and serenely eternal. The world was his effect. We might say, should this conjecture hold, that

secularism and natural theology go hand in hand into the modern world. The single, all-pervasive power that drives the natural realm—efficient cause—can speak not only of the natural realm but of nature's God as well.

This is Schleiermacher's legacy in the Reformed doctrine of God. Students of *The Christian Faith* (Schleiermacher 1928) will recognize two characteristics of this work that speak plainly of Schleiermacher's Reformed heritage. The celebrated Introduction, long the province of graduate study in theological method, heralds a dogmatic starting-point in 'God and the world given in human consciousness'. Such formal structure clearly echoes the Westminster Catechism and Calvin's *Institutes*: God and self belong together. Schleiermacher's famous restriction of proper dogmatics to 'piety', the 'sheer awareness of utter dependence', brought the Reformed reliance upon reverent knowledge of God into the epistemic world Kant had forged in his critical idealism. But Schleiermacher is Reformed in a stronger sense. He develops a doctrine of God in which absolute and sovereign cause is the fundamental attribute of the divine being. When the Christian takes on a 'little introspection', she discovers the still resting-point at the centre of a world that acts upon her, and that receives in turn her own causal effect: she intuits her own absolute receptivity of life itself, a dependency over which she exercises no autonomy or influence, but rather only receives in quiet wonder and gratitude. What the religious person discovers in the inner life, the descent into the self, is an unshakeable sense of *effect*: to be pious is to be aware that we are not self-caused. God, in Schleiermacher's celebrated formula, is the whence of this feeling of absolute dependence.

What Calvin considered difficult to determine—the proper order of knowledge of God or of self—has been firmly settled by Schleiermacher. We begin with self; we end with God. And this is the God who is irresistible cause; no counter-stroke can be registered against this power. Indeed, so effective is this divine power that the world exhausts just what God wills, for the creative power of God cannot go unrealized. To borrow Barth's language for a moment: God's omnipotence has been identified and reduced to His omnicausality. This horrified the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (Hodge 2008); he considered it a form of Spinozism or worse, atheism. (But, like Schleiermacher, Hodge saw God's omnipotence in his causal power.) Now, it may seem that such a God with such a world could only be wholly, utterly, simply determined—an efficient cause relentlessly efficient. But Schleiermacher was what we might term a 'heroic compatibilist': divine being and cause are both compatible with freedom; indeed they are its true ground. This is the source of the true innovation and controversy in Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*. Of course, it is true that Schleiermacher held that human beings had no direct experience of Trinity, and he showed much greater enthusiasm for divine simplicity than many of his Reformed allies, but these are not the true rub against the grain. After all, Schleiermacher could say about his doctrine of Trinity that it belonged as the 'coping-stone' of the whole, and was fittingly summed up at the book's end. And divine simplicity merely spelled out in doctrinal form the legacy to be drawn from a human heart utterly dependent upon its maker. The innovation, rather, is this: Schleiermacher, like the natural theologians of an earlier generation, took the Reformed

doctrine of God, its *opera interna ad extra* and the essential ordering of decrees, and turned them over into an utterly simply causal relation, the sole power that makes the world.

The Reformed doctrine of God has bequeathed to the church catholic a God who is truly Lord, a majestic sovereign who rides in the ancient heavens. He exercises his own good pleasure eternally, affirming and attesting and delighting in his own perfect goodness; and he turns toward his creatures in that perfect goodness to enact his justice and his mercy. Utterly self-sufficient, gloriously free, this God seals the covenant with creatures through the blood of his son, and is content to dwell with them. He does not leave himself without witnesses, for the whole cosmos speaks his name. For this reason, the God whom the Reformed worship and adore is, in fullness and in truth, humanity's chief end, its glory and its delight forever.

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Barth (1956); Calvin (1960); Hodge (2008); Schleiermacher (1928); Taylor (2007).

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CHAPTER 25

THE DIVINE DECREE

PAUL T. NIMMO

25.1 INTRODUCTION

IN a manner broadly unparalleled in other confessional traditions, the doctrine of the divine decree has exercised a striking influence in the field of Reformed theology past and present: the *locus* has seldom been far removed from the concerns of Reformed teaching, and has been prominent within its dogmatic works. Given the way in which the scope of the divine decree brings together many of the central claims of Reformed theology—the absolute sovereignty of God, the abject sinfulness of humanity, the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ, and the existential importance of Christian assurance—its significance should come as no surprise. Yet this doctrinal locus has also given rise to intense and protracted disagreements, not only within Reformed theology but also between the Reformed and other Christian traditions, and it continues to generate both interest and conflict in contemporary study.

This chapter offers in a first section a brief orientation to the issue of the divine decree and its background. It then moves in a second section to explore the way in which the divine decree was presented in the texts of the early confessions and theologians in the Reformed tradition, and in the context of Reformed Orthodoxy—the classical Reformed tradition. In a third section, the chapter considers two later Reformed theologians who presented new directions of thought in respect of the divine decree. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the doctrine in contemporary theology and on its future challenges and possibilities.

25.2 THE DIVINE DECREE

To speak of the divine decree in the first place is to speak of the counsel of the will of God in accordance with which God accomplishes all things (Eph. 1:11). The decree of God is

simply the expression of this divine counsel. However, the will of God which underlies the divine decree is conceived in Reformed theology according to its portrayal in scripture, and hence in a way radically dissimilar to any human parallel (see e.g. Heppe (n.d.): 134–7). The divine will is thus eternal and immutable, without change or movement over time; free from external conditioning, unaffected by any cause or source that is not God; and absolute and effective, without possibility of obstruction or frustration. Moreover, just as there is no real (but only a conceptual) distinction between the essence of God and the will of God, so too there is no real distinction between the essence of God and the decree of God which expresses that will. The decree of God is thus not accidental to the divine essence, but identical with it. Hence, Heinrich Heppe observes, ‘Since then the divine decree is the being and will of God Himself, it is unconditioned by anything else and is absolute, eternal and unchangeable’ (Heppe n.d.: 138).

In its widest meaning, the divine decree is taken to govern the entire compass of the external works of God including the activities of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. On occasion, each of these latter activities is referenced as if there were a distinct decree particular to it; however, for God they are all one and the same decree and there is no real distinction between them.

In theological discourse in general, however, and in this chapter in particular, the divine decree refers more narrowly to that aspect of the wider divine decree which pertains to God’s will in respect of the salvation of human beings. In this usage, the divine decree specifically references God’s decision in eternity to elect from among the sinful ranks of humanity certain individuals to be saved in time.

Such an idea of single election or predestination unto salvation is prominent in the scriptural witness, central to the theological tradition as a whole, and largely uncontroversial as a teaching of the church—although questions do arise concerning whether one can recognize the elect or whether the number of the elect is fixed.

However, if God elects only *certain* individuals for salvation, then the question naturally arises as to the content of the divine decree in respect of those *other* individuals who are not elect. As unsaved sinners, such individuals would seem justly to be doomed to everlasting punishment. Yet the role of God and the divine decree in this process is contested in the tradition. On the one hand, God might be thought not only to predestine some to salvation but also to ordain others to damnation (so-called ‘double predestination’). Here, however, the worry might arise that God was both arbitrary and the author of human sin, with human freedom and responsibility correspondingly eroded or vitiated. On the other hand, if the outcome of damnation is not wholly subject to the sovereign will of God, then the concern might arise that human action or merit was receiving a significant role in determining salvation. On both accounts, challenging passages of scripture would call for attention.

When the Reformed tradition considered such theological complexities in its approach to the divine decree, it joined a long history of debate and controversy. The issues had already been thematized in the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius, and in the complex questions surrounding the relationship between grace and freedom to which that conflict gave rise. For Augustine, as Matthew Levering notes, ‘predestination

has to do with God's utterly gracious work of healing sinful creatures who were otherwise justly doomed to everlasting punishment' (Levering 2011: 45). But for Augustine, those who are not predestined to grace are, according to Jaroslav Pelikan, 'predestined . . . to undergo eternal suffering with the devil' (Pelikan 1971: 297). To the question of why a good God does not work to heal *all* sinful creatures, instead dooming some to everlasting punishment, Augustine invokes the 'unsearchable judgements and inscrutable ways' of God referenced in Romans 11:33 (Levering 2011: 51). Yet this insistence upon the absolute sovereignty of grace was not uncontested within the church.

In response to the teaching of the priest Lucidus, for example, the Synod of Arles in 473 condemned the views 'that the foreknowledge of God violently impels man to death, or that they who perish, perish by the will of God' and that 'some have been condemned to death, others have been predestined to life' (Denzinger 2010: 119). Meanwhile, the Second Synod of Orange in 529 similarly anathematized the view 'that some are predestined to evil by the divine power' (Denzinger 2010: 140). Both councils effectively preserved Augustine's emphasis on the centrality and sovereignty of grace in salvation. Yet both also rejected any idea of a double predestination, and risked softening Augustine's insistence upon the incapacity of individual persons in respect of salvation. Though later centuries saw interventions from more strictly Augustinian voices, such as Gottschalk of Orbais in the ninth century (Pelikan 1978: 80–95), medieval teaching on predestination was broadly constrained to follow the letter of these synods. The full recovery of a more strictly Augustinian teaching of election—certain readings of Aquinas notwithstanding—had to await the time of the Reformation.

25.3 THE DIVINE DECREE IN THE CLASSICAL REFORMED TRADITION

The general approach of the classical Reformed tradition—by which is meant the tradition of the early Reformed and Reformed Orthodoxy—to the divine decree concerning election is marked by both profound determination and extreme caution. Francis Turretin describes in exemplary fashion the two rocks on which the teaching of predestination might founder. On the one side, there is the rock of "affected ignorance" which wishes to see nothing and blinds itself purposely in things revealed' (Turretin 1992: i.329). There is a real sense pervading the Reformed attitude that there is no possibility of silence concerning the divine predestination, however difficult or unpalatable Reformed views might prove and however fiercely Reformed views may be opposed. On the other side, there is the rock of "unwarranted curiosity" which busies itself to see and understand everything even in mysteries' (Turretin 1992: i.329). There is a profound awareness, in accordance with the teaching of scripture, that the decree treats of profound eternal mysteries, and that idle speculation is an irreverent and futile activity. Consequently, to find safe passage, Turretin counsels that the doctrine 'should be taught soberly and prudently from the word of God' (Turretin 1992: i.329). Thus, and in paradigmatic

fashion, the Reformed sought here to abide firmly by the principle of *sola Scriptura* in their investigation of the decree.

25.3.1 The Decision to Elect unto Salvation

In terms of the substance of the decree, early Reformed writings are united in respect of its positive aspect—election unto salvation. The First Confession of Basel (1534) states that ‘before He created the world God elected all those upon whom He willed to bestow the inheritance of eternal salvation’ (art. I; Cochrane 1966: 91), while the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) posits in slightly more expansive terms that ‘[f]rom eternity God has freely, and of his mere grace, without any respect to men, predestinated or elected the saints whom he wills to save in Christ’ (ch. X; Cochrane 1966: 240). A fuller statement yet is provided by the French Confession (1559), which states:

from th[e] corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calleth those whom he hath chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy.

(art. XII; Cochrane 1966: 148)

There are a number of features in this particular statement—as well as in many others that could have been cited—worthy of enumeration, as they form the substance and contours of any Reformed account of the divine decree.

First, salvation is *eternally* predestined. There is no sense, then, in which God decides upon the salvation of individuals within time in response to human actions, or has a change of mind in respect of the salvation of individuals in the course of history. In his summary of the doctrine, John Calvin stresses this point repeatedly: ‘As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God *once* established by his *eternal* and unchangeable plan those whom he *long before* determined *once and for all* to receive into salvation’ (Calvin 1960: II.931; III.xxi.7, emphasis added).

Second, election unto salvation is entirely *unmerited*. As Heinrich Bullinger insists, ‘God’s predestination is not stayed or stirred with any worthiness or unworthiness of ours’ (Bullinger 2009: 188). This point is significant both theologically and pastorally: Christians are not to seek within themselves the grounds of their election, as if their election depended on their actions or their faith. As Huldrych Zwingli insists, then ‘election...is so absolutely free that no account is taken in it of our works or merits’ (Zwingli 1999: 199–200). The corollary of this is that election unto salvation is a matter of the mercy of God, effected solely by grace. Thus Calvin remarks, ‘with respect to the elect, [the plan of God] was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth’ (Calvin 1960: II.931; III.xxi.7).

This lack of regard to human worth extends also to human faith: election does not proceed as a result of human faith (not even faith as foreseen by God); rather, election is the primary cause of the human faith that proceeds from God. The former was the

teaching of the Arminians or Remonstrants, and was condemned in the Canons of Dort (1619): 'election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or of any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith, and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc.' (art. I.9; Schaff 1983: 583). Jan Rohls notes that the Reformed reject the idea that God elects certain people on the basis of a faith foreseen as 'Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian' (Rohls 1998: 155). The result is that the Reformed reject any idea that the decree of God can be dependent on human states or acts as conditions.

Third, and more specifically, election unto salvation is a matter of the grace of God *in Jesus Christ*. As Bullinger continues, then, 'of the mere grace and mercy of God the Father, [God's predestination] respecteth Christ alone' (Bullinger 2009: 188). And, at greater length, the Second Helvetic Confession states: 'God has elected us, not directly, but in Christ, and on account of Christ, in order that those who are now ingrafted into Christ by faith might also be elected' (ch. X; Cochrane 1966: 240). If there is merit involved in the divine decree to elect, it is the merit of Jesus Christ, sole Mediator between God and humanity. In a memorable phrase, Calvin writes that 'Christ makes himself the Author of election' (Calvin 1960: II.941; III.xxii.7).

A Christocentric note is also found here in the Scots Confession (1560), albeit in a slightly different way. Rather than begin with the election of individuals in Christ, the Scots Confession speaks first of the decree governing the incarnation of Jesus Christ: 'this wonderful union between the Godhead and the humanity in Christ Jesus did arise from the eternal and immutable decree of God from which all our salvation springs and depends' (ch. VII; Cochrane 1966: 168). And Zacharius Ursinus writes in his Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism directly of the election of Christ, observing of the elect that '[God] chose us in Christ, viz., as in the Head. Hence he first chose the head, and ordained him to the office of mediator' (Ursinus n.d.: 299). Bullinger meanwhile posits: 'The end of predestination, or fore-appointment, is Christ, the Son of God the Father' (Bullinger 2009: 186). The desire to locate the election of Jesus Christ at the centre of the decree of election would re-emerge in a more thoroughgoing way in later Reformed thought.

And fourth, and finally, election unto salvation is for a specific purpose. To articulate this telos, the Second Helvetic Confession simply quotes Ephesians 1:4–6: '[God] chose us in [Christ] for adoption that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption to be his sons through Jesus Christ that they should be to the praise of the glory of his grace' (ch. X; Cochrane 1966: 240). The implication is that the doctrine of election should lead directly to consideration of ethics, of how to live a life of Christian discipleship in the world.

The explicit intention of such a doctrine was thus explicitly one of comfort and reassurance for Christians doubting their salvation. This was particularly important given the situations of oppression and persecution in which many early Reformed Christians found themselves. The central pastoral insight at stake is that people should not look to themselves for evidence of their salvation, whether in the quality of their faith, the effect of their works, the success of their situation, or some other measure:

assurance of salvation is not to be found there. By contrast, given that salvation is simply by the grace of God, people should look for reassurance only to Jesus Christ. Calvin therefore writes that ‘we shall not find assurance of our election in ourselves . . . Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election’ (Calvin 1960: II.970; III.xxiv.5). And again, the Second Helvetic Confession exhorts: ‘Let Christ, therefore, be the looking glass, in whom we may contemplate our predestination’ (ch. X; Cochrane 1966: 242). To look anywhere other than the Word for comfort was to risk misery and insecurity. As for others, it is impossible to know who will ultimately belong to the number of the elect. And so the Second Helvetic Confession proceeds to recommend that ‘we hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate’ (ch. X; Cochrane 1966: 242–3).

This pastorally helpful Christocentric focus was from the beginning supplemented by an awareness—perhaps at times less pastorally helpful—that the life of the elect should also demonstrate certain characteristics. This is the issue of the *sylogismus practicus*, the practical syllogism, of whether it can be deduced from one’s works that one is elect. In this way, the Second Helvetic Confession remarks that ‘it is to be held as beyond doubt that if you believe and are in Christ, you are elected’ (ch. X; Cochrane 1966: 241). And the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) insists that ‘it is impossible for those who are ingrafted into Christ by true faith not to bring forth the fruit of gratitude’ (A. 64; Cochrane 1966: 316). There is here both a clear rejection of antinomianism and a clear emphasis upon sanctification; but there is also here the danger of evading the centrality of Jesus Christ and the grace of justification *sola fide*—by faith alone. However, an appropriate contemplation of the Christian life does not take place from a neutral perspective that is devoid of attention to Christ as the foundation of that life. If that were true, all human works would stand under the condemnation of God as incomplete and imperfect. By contrast, as G. C. Berkouwer notes, this syllogism and faith are not mutually exclusive; rather, they must be appropriately ordered such that the act of God in election finds a response in Christian sanctification (Berkouwer 1960: 293, 302).

25.3.2 The Decision to Ordain unto Damnation

In turning to an eternal divine decision not to elect certain individuals but to ordain them on account of their sins unto damnation, more contested theological terrain is entered. It is here that the language of ‘double predestination’ is generally encountered: the idea that some are predestined to salvation, and others to damnation. Yet seldom—in the Reformed tradition or beyond—has language of ‘predestination’ been used in respect of the negative aspect of the divine decree; thus to speak of ‘double predestination’ may invoke a term that the Reformed themselves seldom used.

It is noteworthy that some of the early Reformed confessions have very little to say concerning the non-elect beyond acknowledging simply that they exist. Thus the First Confession of Basel posits—in a context separate from its treatment of election—that on the Day of Judgment, someone will receive from Christ ‘everlasting fire if he has done

either good or evil without faith or with a feigned faith without love' (art. X; Cochrane 1966: 95). In similarly reticent vein, the Scots Confession distinguishes the destinies of the 'chosen departed' and of 'the reprobate and unfaithful departed' (ch. XVII; Cochrane 1966: 176). The Heidelberg Catechism scarcely acknowledges the theme of election, let alone the non-elect, stating in its treatment of the church only that 'the Son of God...gathers, protects, and preserves for himself...a congregation chosen for eternal life' (A. 54; Cochrane 1966: 314). In texts such as these, the existence of the non-elect is acknowledged, but their non-election and its cause is never thematized or explained.

By contrast, many Reformed writings—most (in)famously those of Calvin—affirm explicitly the doctrine that God predestines some to election and ordains others to reprobation. To complete the quotation cited earlier, Calvin writes: 'As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once and for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction' (Calvin 1960: II.931; III.xxi.7). The decision to reprobate, like its counterpart, the decision to elect, is eternal, and it is without reference to the *particular* merits (or demerits) of the individuals concerned. The Belgic Confession (1561) apportions the different decisions instead to the divine attributes: in view of the fallenness of humanity, God is merciful in delivering and preserving the elect, and 'JUST, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves' (art. XVI; Cochrane 1966: 199–200). The reason for the condemnation of the 'others' is, Calvin states, that 'God wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children' (Calvin 1960: II.947; III.xxiii.1). And as to the purpose of this decree, Turretin states that it is 'in order to demonstrate [God's] glorious justice, liberty and power' (Turretin 1992: i.380).

25.3.3 The Objections to Reformed Doctrine

As previously in the history of the church, so this latter form of the doctrine has proven controversial, with the consistent Reformed emphasis upon the absolute sovereignty of divine grace in the eternal decree provoking sustained criticism. In the final edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin considers in turn five possible objections to such teaching, and given their enduring relevance, these—and his responses—are worth attending in detail.

The first objection is that the doctrine renders God tyrannical or capricious. To this, Calvin responds in twofold fashion. First, he contends that the divine will is 'the highest rule of righteousness', and that if it is asked 'why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found' (Calvin 1960: II.949; III.xxiii.2). Yet for Calvin there is no trace of theological voluntarism or arbitrariness here, because God's will—beyond which nothing can be found—is essentially identical with God's justice and goodness. And, second, Calvin argues that there is no injustice in this will in condemning the reprobate to death, for all human beings are vitiated by sin, and thus deserve condemnation (II.950; III.xxiii.3). Yet this answer leads naturally to a further, more pressing concern.

The second objection is that the doctrine suggests that those things which God considers sinful are things which he has predestined to occur, which thereby removes human responsibility for sin. If this were the case, Calvin observes, it would seem that 'man ... should not be blamed for what he cannot avoid and undertakes by God's will' (II.954; III.xxiii.6). The spectre of coercion may loom large at this point.

At this point Calvin explicitly and deliberately avoids the solution that much of the wider theological tradition endorses—the view that 'God's foreknowledge does not hinder man from being accounted a sinner; inasmuch as the evils God foresees are man's, not his own' (Calvin 1960: II.953; III.xxiii.6). This view insists that it is God's foreknowledge of the sins of the individual which renders them liable to judgment and reprobation. And it is here that established Lutheran (and Arminian/Remonstrant) doctrine parts company with the Reformed tradition. The Formula of Concord (1577), to offer one example, thus rejects the view 'that without regard to their sins—only because of God's naked decision, intention, and will—some are designated for damnation, so that there is no way that they could be saved' (Epitome, art. XI.19; in Kolb and Wengert 2000: 519). There is here instead a single predestination of the elect to salvation, but only a foreknowledge of the sinfulness of others that leads to their damnation (Solid Declaration, art. 11.4–7; in Kolb and Wengert 2000: 642).

By contrast, Calvin and the Reformed at large broadly reject any distinction of consequence between foreknowledge and foreordination. Thus Calvin posits simply that 'God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree' (Calvin 1960: II.955; III.xxiii.7), with the consequence that 'man falls according as God's providence ordains' (II.957; III.xxiii.8). In this way, reprobation is an eternal decision of God, made without reference to the (future) merit or demerit of those so left in their sins. The danger that arises here is that God could be construed as the author of sin, a position that the tradition in general had hitherto resisted. This is a danger especially for Calvin, given his view that God wills and causes everything that occurs, including sin, and his corresponding rejection of any distinction between the effective and the permissive modes of the divine will (II.956; III.xxiii.8)—a distinction carefully upheld by others in the Reformed tradition (Turretin 1992: i.388). However, not only the tradition in general, but also—and perhaps counter-intuitively—Calvin in particular reject this conclusion. And so, for example, the French Confession states: God 'governs and directs [all things], disposing and ordaining by his sovereign will all that happens in the world; not that he is the author of evil, or that the guilt of it can be imputed to him' (art. VIII; Cochrane 1966: 147). In a similar fashion, the Canons of Dort observe that the teaching that 'in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety' is one 'which the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul' (Conclusion; Schaff 1983: iii.596).

Yet there is more to be said at this point. For the Reformed tradition also clearly insists that human beings fall by their own fault. For this reason, Calvin posits, 'we should contemplate the evident cause of condemnation in the corrupt nature of humanity ... rather than seek a hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause in God's predestination' (II.955; III.xxiii.8). The Westminster Confession (1647) correspondingly insists that by virtue of

the divine decree, 'the liberty or contingency of second causes [is not] taken away, but rather established' (ch. III.1; Schaff 1983: 608). The proximate occasion for condemnation and thus reprobation is the faithlessness of God's creatures and their depravity and perversity: to seek to posit the blame for sin in God's decree rather than in the creature itself is to evade the call to human responsibility that is the dominant testimony of scripture.

The third objection which Calvin treats at this juncture is the charge that the doctrine implies that God shows partiality towards certain persons in election. Yet, given that predestination to salvation proceeds without regard to the merits of the human person, Calvin notes simply: 'God does not consider the man but seeks from his own goodness the reason to do him good' (Calvin 1960: II.958; III.xxiii.10). Election proceeds by way of unmerited grace, reprobation by way of just penalty: neither, then, proceeds by way of individual partiality.

The fourth and fifth objections may be taken together: that the doctrine leads to a lack of zeal for holiness and a futility of all admonition. Calvin offers two responses. First, he suggests, 'If election has as its goal holiness of life, it ought rather to arouse and goad us eagerly to set our mind upon it than to serve as a pretext for doing nothing' (Calvin 1960: II.960; III.xxiii.12). Second, he recalls the example of the apostle Paul, who preached both election and holiness: 'those moderately versed in Paul will, without long proof, understand how aptly he harmonizes those things which they pretend disagree' (II.961; III.xxiii.13).

25.3.4 The Diversity of Reformed Doctrine

On the basis that certain Reformed confessions and thinkers seem to be hesitant in affirming an eternal decree of reprobation in the same manner as (for example) Calvin, it has been suggested that there exist diverse early Reformed views of the divine decree of election (see Venema 1986). It is certainly true that the texts of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession are significant and influential works which on the surface teach a doctrine of single predestination. Yet further reading behind these texts renders the thesis of two radically separable early Reformed views of election a little more difficult to sustain.

In respect of Bullinger, the author of the Second Helvetic Confession, his *Decades* reference predestination as 'the eternal decree of God, whereby he hath ordained either to save or destroy men', and state that 'God by his eternal and unchangeable counsel hath fore-appointed who are to be saved, and who are to be condemned' (Bullinger 2009: 186). Yet Bullinger in the same work writes 'we must not imagine that in heaven there are laid two books, in the one whereof the names of them are written that are to be saved . . . ; and that in the other are contained the names of them which . . . yet cannot avoid everlasting damnation' (p. 32). The practical consequence of this view of election is that Bullinger in the *Decades* both preaches pastorally in order to address struggling faith and exhorts strongly to ongoing prayer and obedience (Opitz 2004: 181–4).

In respect of Ursinus, co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism, his *Commentary* on the Catechism declares that reprobation is 'the eternal, and unchangeable purpose of God,

whereby he has decreed in his most just judgment to leave some in their sins, to punish them with blindness, and to condemn them eternally, not being made partakers of Christ, and his benefits' (Ursinus n.d.: 297). Ursinus distinguishes between the efficient cause of reprobation ('the good Pleasure of God'), and the cause of damnation ('the free will of devils and men' who 'separated themselves from God') (p. 298). At the same time, he rejects at length the charge that God is the Author of sin (pp. 49–54). There is thus support for the teaching of an eternal decree to condemnation and damnation, in contrast with the more circumspect teaching of the Catechism itself.

These examples suggest that both Bullinger and Ursinus were ultimately not far removed in their teaching on election from Calvin. And if that is correct, then it may be possible to speak of a broad Reformed consensus on the material content of the doctrine of the divine decree. This holds true not only for the early Reformed, but also for Reformed theology through the period of Reformed Orthodoxy, for all its heightened systematization and its more logical and more speculative course (Muller 1986: 178–82). At stake for the classically Reformed in the divine decree is the eternal and sovereign counsel of God, electing some unto salvation in Jesus Christ, without reference to their merits or demerits, and foreordaining to pass by others unto their damnation.

At the same time, it would be unwise to suggest that Reformed teaching was uniform on the divine decree, and to overlook important differences in presentation and detail between different figures in the Reformed tradition. A certain hesitation to speak of the negative aspect of the divine decree and a pronounced desire to address the pastoral implications of the doctrine of election have already been noted. But two further differences might briefly be considered.

First, it should be noted that the doctrine of the divine decree is located in a variety of positions across the different works of Reformed theology from this era (Barth 1957: 77–87). In some cases, the doctrine is in close proximity to the doctrine of reconciliation, following the decrees of creation and sin; in other cases, the doctrine is in close proximity to the doctrine of God, preceding the decrees of creation and providence. This could lead to the idea that the former, soteriological position (followed by Calvin and many of the earlier Reformed) is somehow truer to the tradition than the latter, cosmological position (followed by many of the Reformed orthodox), or that in the latter case the doctrine of the divine decree has become an organizing principle or central dogma for dogmatics in a way alien to the former. Yet this claim is not convincingly sustained by the evidence, which suggests instead that neither in terms of material content nor in terms of practical interest is there a significant difference between Reformed accounts that is dependent on different doctrinal topography (cf. Muller 1986: 175–82).

Second, it should be recognized that as the early Reformed tradition developed, questions emerged as to the eternal ordering of the aspects of the one divine decree. The key question was: is the eternal decree to elect prior to or posterior to the eternal decree to create humanity and to permit the Fall? If prior—the position of supralapsarianism—then the object of the decree of election is all elect human beings considered in eternity as uncreated and unfallen; if posterior—the position of infralapsarianism—then the object of the decree of election is all elect human beings considered in eternity as created, fallen, and in need of redemption (Weir 1990: 19). While supralapsarianism certainly

protects the sovereignty of God and offers a particular logical consistency, it runs the risk of portraying God as the author of sin by virtue of rendering the Fall a necessary means to the divine end of salvation; and while infralapsarianism lacks the systematic coherence of supralapsarian (and depends upon a historical Fall), it recognises more clearly the moral difficulties of the decree (Barth 1957: 131). Ultimately, the two viewpoints were both widely held among the Reformed, and neither was condemned by any Reformed confession or synod.

The classical Reformed teaching on the divine decree—whether infralapsarian or supralapsarian—survives to the present as a vibrant and dynamic voice with the tradition. Yet distinct alternative positions emerged later in Reformed history.

25.4 TWO LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN REFORMED VIEWS OF THE DIVINE DECREE

In the subsequent history of the Reformed tradition, the writings of two particular theologians, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth, stand out as setting forth developments of the consensus teaching of the classical Reformed tradition.

25.4.1 Friedrich Schleiermacher

Though the divine decree is never thematized in Schleiermacher's major dogmatic work, *The Christian Faith*, nevertheless his description of its formal features are in complete harmony with the classical Reformed position. He speaks readily of 'one undivided eternal divine decree' (§94.3; Schleiermacher 1999: 389). And since the divine thought, the divine will, and the divine action are not to be separated, he observes more expansively that the 'one eternal and universal decree justifying men for Christ's sake... is the same as that which sent Christ on His mission... [and is] one with the decree creating the human race, for in Christ first human nature is brought to perfection' (§109.3; Schleiermacher 1999: 501). The divine works of creation, incarnation, and salvation are, for all their historical manifoldness, ineradicably bound up in the one divine decree.

When he turns to the content of the divine decree, and to election in particular, however, Schleiermacher breaks radically new ground for the Reformed tradition. In nineteenth-century Prussia, the unity of the Reformed and Lutheran confessions was a prime concern for Schleiermacher; but far from seeking always to mediate between these confessions, he on occasion explicitly rejects both as he seeks a new understanding of election. In *The Christian Faith*, he thus denies against the Lutheran view that there is a difference between divine fore-ordination and divine foreknowledge, and that there is a meaningful difference between divine fore-ordination (to salvation) and divine

passing over (unto damnation) (§119.3; Schleiermacher 1999: 550). However, he agrees with both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions that election proceeds ‘without any ground for it in the persons themselves’ (§116.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 534), for ‘none has any advantage in reference to the new life communicated in Christ’ (§116.1; Schleiermacher 1999: 534). And for Schleiermacher, as for the classical Reformed tradition, election proceeds only with reference to Jesus Christ, for God regards all men only in Christ (§120, postscript; Schleiermacher 1999: 560).

Constructively, Schleiermacher observes on the one hand that, in respect of salvation, ‘since the whole government of the world is, like the world itself, eternal in God, nothing happens in the kingdom of grace without divine fore-ordination’, while, on the other hand, that ‘we can never arrive at the idea that ... there is a fore-ordination of an opposite kind’ (§§119.1, 119.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 547, 548).

There is thus a single divine fore-ordination, and this is to blessedness (§119.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 548–9). Moreover, Schleiermacher posits, this fore-ordination includes every human being: ‘all belonging to the human race are eventually taken up into living fellowship with Christ’ (§119.3; Schleiermacher 1999: 549). The universalist aspect of election is perhaps the most radical element of Schleiermacher’s proposal, and two of its supporting arguments might briefly be mentioned (see further Pedersen 2017: 146 and 2011: 344–5 respectively). First, were universalism not the case, then there would be a ‘contradiction between the end in view in the divine plan of salvation and the result accomplished in the divine government of the world’ (§119.3; Schleiermacher 1999: 549). And second, the blessedness of the elect would surely falter if part of the human race were excluded from salvation and were to exist only in unblessedness and humiliation (§118.1; Schleiermacher 1999: 540).

Schleiermacher certainly recognizes that at any given moment some people will be part of the fellowship of Jesus Christ and others will be sunk in the sinful common life. Yet this is simply part of the divinely ordained historical outworking of election. And so, he writes, ‘we can never cease to regard [the reprobate] as objects of the same divine activity that gathered the church together, and as embraced along with us all under the same divine fore-ordination’ (§119.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 548). Even if someone dies outside the circle of the church, Schleiermacher maintains, ‘the state in which he dies is only an intermediate state’ (§119.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 549). Ultimately, everyone is fore-ordained to blessedness in Jesus Christ, by virtue of the single divine decree ‘by which the whole ... is what it is in virtue of the divine good-pleasure’ (§120.4; Schleiermacher 1999: 558).

This understanding that all people are fore-ordained to be saved in Jesus Christ puts into context Schleiermacher’s earlier decision to describe God as the author of sin. He does this only with significant qualification: ‘God is the author of sin—of sin, however, only as related to redemption’ (§80.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 328). In this way, Schleiermacher once again echoes the classical Reformed tradition, for God is not the author of sin in the same sense that God is the author of redemption.

Though the explicit universalism of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election does not harmonize well with the classical Reformed tradition, its desire to see the future of all

people as being determined in Jesus Christ and its corollary refusal to divide the human race eternally into reprobate and elect would re-emerge in a later period.

25.4.2 Karl Barth

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth sets out a second, equally radical revision of the traditional Reformed doctrine of election. His correctives touch on two areas of teaching in particular: the identity of the electing God and the respective identities of the elect and the reprobate. Each will be explored in turn.

First, though Barth respects the classical teaching, he is concerned that it fails to ground the doctrine in a sufficiently Christocentric manner: if the divine decree to elect or reprobate takes place prior to the decree to provide a Mediator, then it invokes Jesus Christ as an instrument or means and is not essentially governed by Jesus Christ. This means that it is an inscrutable and absolute decree—a *decretum absolutum*—with ‘the will and decision of God...hidden somewhere in the heights or depths behind Jesus Christ and behind God’s revelation’ (Barth 1957: 64).

For Barth, by contrast, Jesus Christ himself takes the place of this absolute decree: Jesus Christ is not only the object of election, as the Reformed tradition insists, but also the subject of election. Or again, Jesus Christ is not only ‘the elect human’, but also ‘the electing God’ (Barth 1957: 105, 116). For Barth, the doctrine of election is thus in all circumstances the sum of the Gospel: if its substance is Jesus Christ and its form is the covenant of grace, then from first to last it declares the ‘Yes’ of God and not the ‘No’ (p. 13).

The interpretation of the claim that Jesus Christ is the subject of election is much contested. Barth writes, for example, that ‘election is obviously the first and basic and decisive thing which we have always to say...concerning the eternal decree and the eternal self-determination of God’ (Barth 1957: 54). On the one hand, to speak of ‘self-determination’ might mean that there is no mode of existence in God above and beyond and before the gracious divine act of election, and that in this very act God freely determines the essence of God in eternity to be for humanity in Jesus Christ (McCormack 2010). On the other hand, if the existence of God as Trinity is ontologically prior to and presupposed by the eternal decree of election in which God determines to be for humanity in Jesus Christ, to speak of ‘self-determination’ might be true only in a qualified manner (Hunsinger 2008). Both interpretations (and their implications) continue to generate critical conversation.

Second, Barth posits that when God determines Godself to be for humanity in Jesus Christ, God determines to be for all humanity without exception. Thus while, for Barth, ‘the eternal divine decision as such has as its object and content the existence of this one created being, the man Jesus of Nazareth, and the work of this man’, it is equally true that ‘in and with the existence of this man the eternal divine decision has as its object and content the execution of the divine covenant with man, the salvation of all

men' (Barth 1957: 116). Barth is aware that a doctrine of universal reconciliation—*apokatastasis*—may seem a logically necessary consequence of this position. But unlike Schleiermacher, he refuses to endorse it.

On the one hand, Barth declares the need to 'respect the freedom of the divine grace' and to avoid giving rise to any (universalist) 'historical metaphysics' (Barth 1957: 417). On the other hand, he denies that boundaries can be set to the grace of Christ by means of 'an opposing historical metaphysics' which would 'try to attribute any limits... to the loving-kindness of God' (p. 418). If this is 'universalism', Greggs notes, then it 'is something new: as grounded in the election of humanity in Christ, belief in the final victory of Jesus does not remove human particularity, freedom, temporality and will; it grounds them' (Greggs 2009: 53).

This teaching of universal election is not a teaching of single predestination, however: in truth, Barth advances a clear doctrine of double predestination. But the identity of the reprobate is here recast in Christological fashion. Thus Barth writes that while 'God has ascribed to man... election, salvation and life;... to Himself He has ascribed... reprobation, perdition and death' (Barth 1957: 163). From all eternity, then, God determines Godself to be the one who in Jesus Christ suffers for the sake of humanity and who is cast out and rejected. Hence Barth writes of the divine predestination, then, that 'we shall never find there the decreed rejection of ourselves or of any other men... because God did not will it, because God willed the rejection of His Son in our stead' (p. 168).

Barth's recasting of the doctrine of election has generated significant interest, not only within but also outwith the Reformed tradition. It has found a warm reception in some quarters for moving beyond some of the existing aporias in the doctrine, but it has also generated strong criticism for some of its more innovative moves.

25.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the way in which Reformed theology understands the doctrine of the divine decree with particular reference to the divine works of election and reprobation. It has sought to identify a broad and classical Reformed position, informed by the early Reformers and the Reformed confessions, and consistently held in the period of Reformed Orthodoxy. And it has identified two later reconstructions of the locus in the works of Schleiermacher and Barth that have emerged from within the tradition and challenged that classical consensus.

As work continues in investigating and expositing the doctrine in the Reformed tradition, a number of desiderata might be mentioned as worthy of consideration.

First, the Reformed have not always held together the divine attributes in their treatment of the doctrine of the divine decree, and have consequently run the risk of separating the divine grace and the divine holiness. In this connection, it seems important

to attend to the recommendation of Schleiermacher: ‘Justice and mercy must not exclude one another’ (§118.2; Schleiermacher 1999: 544).

Second, although the Reformed have always acknowledged the importance of the purpose of the divine decree, their presentations have not always articulated a happy balance of dogmatic and ethical interest. Barth’s observation here is helpful, when he proposes that the purpose and meaning of election are ‘that the one who is elected from all eternity can and does elect God in return’ (Barth 1957: 178).

Third, though the Reformed have always insisted that election takes place in Jesus Christ alone, the danger of abstraction from this Christocentric focus at this point in dogmatic enquiry is real, as examples in Reformed history occasionally attest. As Berkouwer remarks, however, ‘how impossible it is to abstract the election of God from Jesus Christ, the Word that became flesh’ (Berkouwer 1960: 171). Jesus Christ is not simply the instrument of election, such that the ultimate focus of the doctrine would be on a hidden God standing inscrutably behind the incarnate Word, but also the mirror of election, its object and—in complex ways—its subject.

Finally, the Reformed at their wisest have always insisted that in dealing with the doctrine of the divine decree, they have been dealing with a truly holy mystery, certainly revealed yet not fully explained in Scripture. For this reason, Bullinger writes: ‘The religious searchers or interpreters of the scriptures . . . acknowledge that, as in all things, so in these matters especially, moderation is to be kept’ (Bullinger 2009: 185). Such a call for moderation gestures towards an exercise of modesty and humility on the part of the Christian theologian that is appropriate for their doctrinal enquiry in general, and for this difficult doctrine in particular.

SUGGESTED READING

Barth (1957); Berkouwer (1960); Cochrane (1966); Muller (1986); Schleiermacher (1999).

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CHAPTER 26

CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

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CREATION is a word of faith. The opening sentence of the Apostles' Creed is one of the most best-known statements: 'I believe in God, the almighty Father, Creator of heaven and earth.' Speech about the world we inhabit and participate in as human beings in terms of creation is therefore a theologically loaded statement. It says that our world and universe is willed by the Creator, who in the church is confessed as the triune God. Creation is therefore not a neutral given, but a word of faith. It involves a duality, a relation to God, who is not identical with his creation. This means that the concept of creation stands in a much wider and more differentiated context than only the question about the beginning of the world. It implies also questions of the existence, persistence, goal, and meaning of this existence. This wider context becomes clear by linking the word 'creation' to providence. The questions of origin, meaning, and the goal of our existence are answered in Reformed theology by relating them to God, who has revealed himself in history as creator, sustainer, and fulfiller. Consequently it is clear that creation is not a word of modern science, but supposes a religious relation. In Reformed theology, this relationality is made concrete in the concept of covenant. Creation and providence are closely connected with the covenant by which God realizes his ends.

At the same time it has become clear that the elaboration of this article of faith is always intertwined with the time and culture of its formulation. There is a close inter-relatedness between questions, challenges, and answers in every period. Therefore, the view on creation and world in the time of the Reformation cannot be abstracted from some variant of traditional Aristotelian cosmology. And looking at the nineteenth century, we see that the Copernican revolution and the surge of modern science form the background of many thoughts and discussions. More than earlier generations, we have become aware that we live in a universe with gigantic measures in time and space. The anthropocentrism which seemed sometimes undisputed in earlier times has lost its self-evidential character, and throws a sharp light on the question of the meaning and

goal of the universe. The question of the weight and importance of the other-than-human creation, the billions of years of development of universe and galaxies, insight into the precise equilibrium of conditions that make life on our planet possible: these all put the questions of the future and of ecology on the agenda of a theology of creation. The Reformed tradition already knew about the responsibility of humans, but the fact that contemporary generations are learning their responsibility to preserve the earth as an inhabitable house for the future requires renewed reflection on themes like God's providence, his concurrence (*concursus*) and reign (*gubernatio*).

26.1 THE TRINITARIAN CONTEXT OF THE THEME OF CREATION

The Trinitarian context of creation theology is already testified in early Christian theology. Although the creation of the world traditionally is appropriated to God the Father, Irenaeus stated that God the Father creates by his two hands, through the Son and through the Spirit (*Adversus Haereses*, V.6.1). In Calvin's thought this christological and pneumatological aspect is even further elaborated. Not only is the Son the mediator in salvation, but as eternal Son he is already involved as the mediator in the work of creation. Calvin makes clear that Christ's mediatorship is not restricted to the incarnation, but is also at work *extra carnem* in creating and sustaining the world. Due to his mediatorship in creation, Christ is the head of the church from the very beginning, standing above the angels, and is properly named the firstborn of the whole creation. The cosmological role of the mediator, triggered by biblical passages like Ephesians 1:9 and Colossians 1:17, has its counterpart in the role of the Holy Spirit in creation. Calvin is very clear that right from the beginning the Spirit inhabits the world and that God, by the secret power of the Holy Spirit, sustains and vivifies all life on earth (*Institutes* 1.13.14.). In his thought, the superiority of the Father above everything, the nearness of Spirit to every particle of his creation and the mediatory, ordering work of the Son are combined.

From the beginning to the end, God is actively involved as '*Créateur et souverain Gouverneur*' in this world. The conception of God as creator and sovereign governor has an immediate and critical effect on Aristotelian natural philosophy, which dominated traditional cosmology. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, God is near, and the creator and sustainer is the Father of Jesus Christ. These covenantal notions and emphasis on the unity of God have functioned as critical and sometimes paradoxical notions within the Reformed theology of creation. On the one hand, Calvin's thought on creation and providence is obviously deeply characterized by the Stoic impulse, according to which the universe is ordered and structured by the *logos*. The *logos* determines the coherence and regularity of the world, but within this framework it was not possible to think of

historical or societal change as something positive. On the other hand, the confession that the Creator is the Father of Jesus Christ produced a critical impulse that ran counter to classic intuitions about God and world, particularly as to God's providential care. According to Aristotelian concepts, the earth had its place at the centre of the universe. Around the earth were to be found the spheres, nine or ten in total. As the *primum mobile*, the outermost sphere imparts its movement to the spheres within it. The influence of God as first cause (*causa prima*) is thus mediated by intermediate causes (*causae secundae*). At this point, Calvin argues that God is not bound to intermediate causes but can intervene directly. Over against the Epicurean idea of a remote deity, he avows that it can be seen from all manner of things that there is a direct influence that runs counter to the regular course of nature or which bypasses it.

Reformed thought on creation has throughout its history been deeply influenced by the knowledge that this world comes from the triune God, whom we know as Father, Son, and Spirit. The world is approached with the expectation that it somehow bears the traces of the Father, Christ and the Spirit. Examples of theologies where creation is particularly oriented to one of the persons of the Trinity can easily be given. Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of common grace can be regarded as an elaboration of the awareness that the glory of God the Father is reflected in the development of modern culture. Karl Barth's doctrine of creation as the outer ground for the covenant that is realized in Jesus Christ reflects the faith that this world is built upon and centres around the covenant in Christ. Jürgen Moltmann argues for a pneumatological oriented doctrine of creation. God inhabits this world by his Spirit. This world and its history is the house, the *oikos*, where God by his Spirit is among us.

26.2 CREATION AS AN ACT OF GOD'S WILL AND GOODNESS

Existence lacks self-evidence. From where and how does it come? Why is there something rather than nothing? These old questions are answered by Jews and Christians in an astonishingly simple way: God wanted 'something' to be. That this world exists along with an unmeasurable cosmos is because God willed it. In Reformed doctrine this is explained by pointing to God's decree. There is no other ground than his good will. He spoke, and it was there.

Reformed spirituality has been coloured by wonder of the greatness of God's creation. Hymns like Psalms 8, 24, 90, 104, 148, and 150 praise the vastness of God's creation. From the Old Testament on, we speak of heaven and earth, and this comprises all we can imagine. Following Colossians 1:16, the Nicene Creed speaks of God the Creator of 'all things visible and invisible'. That means not only that creation consists of the things human beings are able to perceive, but that God's creation has also a part that is invisible for the human senses and beyond our grasp. Therefore the Belgic Confession (article 12)

speaks explicitly of the creation of the angels. Although, by comparison with medieval theology like the textbooks of Peter Lombard, Reformation theology has been modest as to an exposition of the world of spiritual beings like angels (and devils as fallen angels), it is nevertheless clear that the awareness of a part of creation beyond human grasp has never been forgotten.

The main motif in the Bible is that angels are in God's service. They are sent out to fulfil a mission of God and to function as his representatives (the figure of the *malach JHWH* in the OT), and belong in that way as messengers and protectors to the saving and protecting activity of the eternal God. Although there are good reasons to be modest and consciously sober in an extensive inquiry in and exposition of the angelic and a non-visible world, there is also good reason even for modern Reformed theology to give full attention to the many and rich ways God is working and acting upon his world and human beings. The paradigm of a naturalistic explanation of the world should not silently dominate the way Reformed theology deals with what the Pauline letters call the rulers, powers and authorities (Eph. 1: 21; Col. 2:15) and what in an unredeemed world should be recognized as spiritual warfare. A good example in this respect is the extensive comment by Karl Barth on angelology, which he stringently developed in the context of God's acts in Christ (*Church Dogmatics* III.3). Although in our day and age, many ideas about angels in the Western world are also influenced by new age thought, it should be regarded as positive that there is nowadays, partly due to the testimonies from Christianity from the southern hemisphere and the charismatic renewal, greater openness towards angels and messages of God than was the case within the modern empirical climate.

A number of insights follow from the fundamental Jewish-Christian conviction that God created all things through an act of will, and are accepted in Reformed theology:

1. Creation is *contingent*. It might not have been. Creation is not necessary and therefore not eternal. It is there by virtue of his will. Therefore the ideas that this universe is the effect of emanation, and the idea of pantheism, are rejected in Reformed theology. The idea of emanation is part of some Eastern religions, and is also accepted doctrine within classical Greek philosophical schools like Neoplatonism. In this school of thought, there was never a time when the world was not. The Aristotelian doctrine of eternal creation has long been one of the great challenges to Christian faith in God as creator. The idea of an eternal world was strongly connected with the idea of the great chain of being and a perfect and sacred cosmos, in which all earthly reality participated somehow in God as the primary source of being. This idea of a hierarchy of being and heavenly participation, however, has been of great influence in Reformed theology, and is nowadays taken up again under the influence of so-called Radical Orthodoxy.

2. The *ontological* difference between Creator and creature. The Creator and creature have modes of existence that differ structurally. The Creator has no other source of life than himself, he exists '*a se*', or possesses '*aseitas*'. It must be emphasized that aseity does not explain; it aims only to set a border to our thinking and speculation.

God himself is the ground; and he created *ex nihilo*. That immediately sets a limit. Ontologically, we are not in the same boat. The human being is not God. God is not subject to the structural order of our created reality, as creator he is Lord of all reality. Thus it can be said that God's reality is transcendent. God is not restricted to this world and cannot be identified with it. In this respect there is a deep difference from the idea of pantheism, which teaches that God and our world and universe coincide.

Awareness of this ontological difference has been of great influence in Reformed theology and spiritual life. God is honoured in his majesty and sovereignty over all that exists and in every path of life. This might be one of the reasons that the psalms and the acknowledgment of God as sovereign have had such a great influence on spirituality in many Reformed communities.

3. All creatures are *dependent* on God as giver and creator of life. We live from minute to minute, year to year, on the breath of God. This ongoing dependency makes it clear that creation and the sustaining of that creation cannot be separated. God gives care to his creation, and this is articulated in the doctrine of providence.

4. The dependency means among other things that this world is temporal, whereas God is said to be eternal. Eternity does not mean that God does not know time, but that he as creator is not subjected to its flow, and is therefore not perishable and transient as we are. He is the Lord of time and space.

5. The foregoing characteristics of created reality may be summarized and collected in the notion that created reality is *interesting in itself*. Creation is a gift from God. It is not part of God. He intentionally made it to his glory. He did not need it, nor was it a kind of unconscious reflex, but it is created for his love. God wanted us to exist and to share with him the joy of existing. This suggests that our world without being God can still be an object of inquiry and our curiosity. This world is not necessary, and therefore must be determined by way of a speculative process—as was the idea in Greek metaphysics, where for instance the circle was supposed to be the most perfect form of the cosmos and the orbits of the planets. The fact that the world is profane and not a sacred deity makes it possible to develop research on the created order. Without claiming that the development of science is Christian, it can be said that the Christian concept of creation and deeper insight into the non-necessity of the created order have fostered the conditions for the development of modern science.

6. Awareness that creation comes from God the Father points to the fact that creation is not something neutral, and certainly not something intrinsically evil (*malum*), as is believed in dualistic theories like those of Marcion and Gnosticism, but a good (*bonum*). Christians believe that creation is no quirk, no whim, but a gift that reflects the goodness, the power and glory of the triune God, in that he gives us existence. The good gift of creation corresponds with God's being, although it must be said that this correspondence will never have the form of a logical conclusion or deduction, since there is an act of God's will in between. Nevertheless, this world is said to be one of the means of God's revelation, as the Belgic Confession states in the first part of article

2: 'We know him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely his eternal power and Godhead.' The second part of this article leaves no reason to misunderstand the relative value of this knowledge: 'Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word; that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation.' The Barmen Declaration of 1934 speaks, under the influence of Karl Barth, purposively of 'Jesus Christ as the one Word of God that we have to hear, in life and death have to trust and to obey.' There are not two sources of knowledge of God, but one. It clearly shows that in the twentieth century creation has become an ambivalent topic in relation to the means of God's revelation.

7. Creation is trustworthy. It is not an arbitrary product or a trick from an inimical power, but a given order with structures that reflects the goodness and blessing of God. That does not mean that creation does not have restrictions and even shadows. It is not perfect in the Platonic sense. This creation as a gift is fragile, susceptible to abuse, and even transient in its nature, but nevertheless it has God's blessing and is in principle trustworthy. We live in a world with regularities, with laws of nature, and we rely on them. The world is not a phantom house, where reality suddenly becomes distorted and unreliable. It is therefore strange and incomprehensible that in the modern Reformed world there is hardly any protest concerning the horror genre in literature and film.

8. From what we have said, it can already be concluded that creation and the maintaining of creation is intentional. God has a goal with this world, and this goal is not immediately realized. Over creation the Spirit of God hovers; creation is the overture of the story of the covenant, and this all points to a goal. Immediately we find a tension, a 'not yet': will Adam, will the human being be obedient or will he not (Gen. 2:17)? This goal of creation is foreshadowed in the creation of the Sabbath. The doctrine of creation includes the eschatological dimension that has become vibrant in several forms of Reformed theology, particularly in the use of the idea of a covenant. It can even be said that due to these eschatological, Trinitarian, and sacramental dimensions the doctrine of creation increasingly has been acknowledged as a central theme in Reformed and ecumenical theology (Colin Gunton, Jürgen Moltmann, Martien E. Brinkman).

26.3 CREATION, COVENANT, AND SALVATION

As already stated, the doctrine of creation cannot be separated from the full Christian message. New exegetical insights have been of great importance for a retrieval of the relation between creation, covenant, and salvation. There are good biblical reasons not to put a high barrier between creation and salvation, but instead to develop a sharp eye for the interconnections. The articulation of God as creator of this world is in the

scriptures deeply connected with the faith in God's saving and life-giving acts. The hope in God's creative power on the one hand and his liberating interventions on the other are linked together in e.g. Psalms 89 and 74:12–17, and in Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40: 25–9; Isa. 51:9). The struggle against the powers that bring chaos and danger never leaves us in fear. The outcome is never in doubt. On the contrary, everywhere (in cases where Rahab, the Leviathan, or the sea threatens), the story of Israel is sung and written from the perspective of a victory that JHWH gained a long time ago. God the Liberator is the same as the Creator. For that reason, we do not find in the Old Testament a metaphysical dualism. But neither do we find a denial of the fact that in his work of creation God had to put up a fight against the powers of chaos. As late as Revelation 21, we hear its echo where we are assured that the sea will no longer exist in the new world.

Due to these strong ties between God's saving power and his creative power, it is sometimes argued that the belief that God created heaven and earth was only a derivative, a by-product of faith in God's redemptive acts. And since in the New Testament belief in creation is not a central issue, but is always linked to salvation in Christ, it must also be seen as a secondary matter from a dogmatic viewpoint. But this position, that under the influence of Gerhard von Rad and Karl Barth was for some time popular, no longer finds much support. In and behind the Old Testament one clearly discovers more or less independent traditions. In the canon these traditions have been closely linked and thus appropriated in the narrative of God's acts with Israel and the world.

A good example of this tie between creation and new creation is Isaiah 51, where creation is pictured as the first salvific act that God performed, an act of deliverance so special that it is on a par with the crossing of the Red Sea. When one subsequently reads Genesis 1, one can catch the astonishing struggle of God against the sea powers of chaos, particularly when in verse 2 reference is made to darkness that was above the primeval waters. God's creative act is to separate light from darkness. These notions of separation as a way of deliverance help us to understand why the Dutch theologian Oepke Noordmans (1871–1956) summarized his doctrine of creation: 'Creating is separating.' Creation is so radically viewed in the light of God's saving intervention through Jesus Christ that Noordmans could even describe creation as a spot of light around the cross. In recent theology, Abraham van de Beek (2014) has followed Noordmans in elaborating a creation theology which features creation through the perspective of suffering and passion.

These radical positions might go too far in interpreting the 'is' as 'equal to'. But, indeed, in comparison with older Reformed voices which viewed creation as perfect and part of a state of integrity, contemporary Reformed theology tends to state that creating is also a work of separating, a disentanglement of light and darkness, day and night, land and sea in order that man should have place and space to live and breathe. Although creation and redemption do not totally overlap, they are linked according to the biblical witnesses. Already in his creative act, God conquered the dark powers that threaten our lives.

The close relation between creation and covenant is magnificently captured by Karl Barth in the statements that (1) creation is the external ground of the covenant and

(2) the covenant is the internal ground of the creation. Although the first statement may suggest that Barth supports a rather static view of creation as only setting the stage, he succeeds in this way in describing creation as facilitating God's goal, the covenant with man. The center and culmination of creation is Jesus Christ. In his life we can discover who Adam was supposed to be, what it is to be human, and how to live with God as responding creature. At the same time we see the anthropocentricity of this version of Reformed theology.

26.4 CREATION AS BEGINNING

The doctrine of creation is not confined to the beginning of the universe, but is much richer. It also implies God's ongoing relation and interaction with this world. But this does not mean that questions regarding the beginning of the universe can be skipped. Christian theology has always to enter into discussion with contemporary ideas about cosmology. Barth's decision not to relate at all to contemporary science is understandable in his pursuit of a theological and Christological perspective on creation, but should not constitute a reason for later generations to isolate theology from the other sciences. In the first place, one has to agree with the American theologian Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921) that creation and evolution are different things. Creation is about the origin of world and universe, evolution concerns its subsequent development. Creation happens from nothing, evolution has to do with processes of modification of things that already exist (Warfield 2000: 201–4). Only when evolutionary concepts become ideological and attempt to provide an ultimate explanation of everything do they go beyond the limits of their science; only then should we speak of evolutionism, as one of the 'isms' that Christian doctrine of creation has to deal with. Together with other sorts of 'isms', like pantheism, monism, and dualism, Christian theology always had to enter into debates with contemporary world-views. The Old Testament itself offers an example when, in Genesis, the sun and the moon are not described as divine powers, but as created lights in service of the Creator.

It also has to be acknowledged that the insights of modern cosmology also provide contemporary Christian theology with some huge and unanswered questions. What does it mean for the notion of a fall into sin, if at some point in the evolutionary development of the hominids a moral awareness emerged? And what does it mean for our concept of covenant and the goodness of God, when it is accepted that our cosmos has already gone through millions of years and a struggle for life, including moments of massive extinction, suffering, and death among animals? What does it mean for the clear anthropocentricity of the Reformed doctrine of covenant? From John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Benjamin Warfield, to Herman Bavinck, Karl Barth, and Hendrikus Berkhof, Reformed theology has stated that the apex of God's creating work is the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man. But what if we see that God's universe and the history of that universe is so much greater and vaster then

was imaginable for the first generations of Reformed theologians, who still lived with the cosmological heritage of a spatially delineated and vaulted heaven, where our globe was the centre of the universe? Awareness of the substance and vastness of non-human creation urges us perhaps to rethink the way the Reformed tradition has appropriated the anthropocentricity of modernity. The doctrine of creation should have an eye not only for human life but also for non-human life and nature, with which we are surrounded and on which we depend. In this context, the elaboration of a contemporary ecotheology is of great importance.

Three aspects that have come to the fore in recent theology should be mentioned here. First is the fact that diverse forms of life cannot be reduced to other forms of life. Here the Christian doctrine of creation, and particularly the neo-Calvinistic theology of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, offers insights that are often overlooked or denied in many naturalistic models of understanding reality. We will have to do justice in our reflection on nature to its great pluriformity, without reducing one reality to the other. This often happens in a so-called 'nothing but' approach: human beings are nothing but further developed mammals or a magnificent accident; a thought is nothing but a combination of neurophysiological processes; the starry sky is nothing but a revolving nebula. Kuyper developed in his theology of creation a strong awareness for the differentiation of life and life spheres, which are related to each other, but cannot be reduced to each other. Following Kuyper, H. Dooyeweerd and D. Th. Vollenhoven developed a philosophy in which the theory of the modal spheres formed the core of theory that aimed to do justice to the great variety and multiplicity of our world.

Secondly, we can point to the independent relationship between flora, fauna, and even lifeless matter to God, and the relationship between them and God. This especially can be found in the psalms, where we read that trees and mountains praise him and erupt in jubilation for their creator. At the very least, such verses tell us that the earth is not only about humans, that there are also other works of God that are important.

Thirdly, there is a strong intertwining and mutual bond between all organisms. Increasingly we are aware that in ecosystems everything depends on everything. As human beings we do not stand over and against nature, but constitute an integral part of it. This awareness is particularly articulated and elaborated in ecological theology (e.g. by Jürgen Moltmann and Ernst M. Conradie). Conradie (2011) makes particular use of Kuyper's theory of common grace, which helps to affirm the goodness that is still present, despite the impact of sin. The concept of common grace might even offer an idea of God's goal with his creation, and overcome a narrow form of anthropocentricity. Common grace affirms in the end the theocentric character of Reformed theology. God will be glorified in his works, and the whole project of the creation of this universe is aimed to achieve a win-win situation, in which the glory of God is manifested and the human being may partake in this glorification.

As the foregoing paragraphs have shown, the discussion of creation is closely related to the doctrine of providence. God remains actively involved in the continuation of his creation. Already in Calvin's work this aspect is very clear, in his rejection of the Epicurean idea of a distant divinity who does not interact with the world. The continued

reality of God's rule as sovereign over all that exists is one of the basic elements of the Reformed theological tradition. At the same time it has been and still is one of the most contested doctrines. Is it really true that God is actively involved in all that happens? And if so, in what way is God involved? In modern times, the faith in God's care and maintenance has increasingly come under pressure from so-called theodicy. Is it possible to believe in God's love, righteousness, and power when in this world all kinds of evil haunt life on earth and make humans and animals suffer? Listening to the prophets and apostles, we discover that God's providence has never been a self-evident aspect of faith. Already in the scriptures God's involvement and care is something that is not evident, as shown by some Psalms and the book of Job (e.g. Ps. 73:21–3).

It must be stated that the word 'providence' is not a happy choice for what can be defended as a biblically responsive idea of God's ongoing involvement and care. The word 'providence' entered the Christian idiom through the Vulgate rendering of Genesis 22:8: '*Deus providebit*', 'God will provide'. But in the theological tradition the word is mostly interpreted as designating God's exhaustive foreknowledge, whereas in the story of the binding of Isaac it clearly points to the evidence of God's care. Providence in this way does not so much concern itself with seeing things as with making things available, with making provisions in the darkness of life. As G. C. Berkouwer has aptly elaborated, faith in God's providence is not so much a cerebral theory that can be developed from a distant, neutral position, but is instead a word that only can be discovered as meaningful in the way of living faith, in active obedience to God (Berkouwer 1952). The importance of the relational context of the doctrine of creation and providence becomes visible again. What providence is, can only be discovered and theologically and meaningfully elaborated when one starts with what is called the *providentia specialissima*, the loving care that God makes available to all who orient their lives to him. Paul offers a fine example of this in Romans 8:31–2: 'What then shall we say this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?'

For a long time the doctrine of providence was conflated with the stoic doctrine of providence. It remained, so to say, unbaptized. Sometimes it was not clear what the difference was between blind fate and God. It has triggered a long and still ongoing debate on human freedom in relation to God's omni-activity. A great part of the theological energy of the Reformation has been devoted to articulating the idea that God's grace is decisive in the salvation of the human being. Every form of cooperation was seen to spoil the reality of God's salvation. Not only Luther, but also Calvin and Zwingli have paid their tribute to the impact of Stoic philosophy. Throughout the history of Reformed doctrine this influence remains visible, when for example Schleiermacher and Herman Bavinck alike state that all that happens is already fixed in the one counsel of God.

For all these reasons, Reformed theology should more emphatically retrieve the doctrine of providence in Trinitarian terms from beginning to end. For all God's acts *ad extra* derive from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Providence is not an *articulus mixtus* that can be understood by non-Christians; it has its setting of trust in the God we

have learned to know in Jesus Christ and who, by his Spirit, directs us to be transformed in his image. Providence is therefore not a theoretical explanation of human history, but a confession of trust in God, who has shown in Jesus Christ that he remains faithful to his works.

The categorization which became a standard concept in Lutheran and Reformed post-Reformation theology is that of preservation (*conservatio*), concurrence (*concursus*), and government (*gubernatio*).

Preservation or conservation, the first aspect of God's providential care, may be interpreted quite literally as God holding his hands beneath our lives. It is the conviction that God does not forsake the works of his hands (Ps. 138:8), and is deeply rooted in the Old Testament (e.g. Pss. 8, 19, 29, 104, 108, 147, 148 and passages in Deutero-Isaiah). The New Testament confirms and clarifies that God conserves and supports the world finally through and in the coming of Jesus Christ. His ministry shows, however, that this work of preserving creation is not easy. His ministry shows the battle against the powers that threaten life, by healing people and restoring their wounded lives. It is important to see that conservation does not mean passivity and acquiescence, but God's activity and struggle for life.

Special attention has to be given to the Spirit as the giver and restorer of life. In the Reformed tradition, this aspect of the work of the Spirit is termed 'general grace' (*gratia generalis*). This refers to the form of divine grace that makes it possible for the earth to stay inhabitable, since people, in spite of their limitations and sinfulness, nonetheless often want the best for each other. Biblical warrant for this doctrine is often found in texts such as Ps. 145:9, Matt. 5:45, Luke 6:35–6, Acts 14:16–17.

Calvin's notion of a general or common grace (*Institutes* II.2.17, II.3.3) offsets his austere view of sin. Calvin did not fully develop the idea into a separate doctrine, as happened later in the Dutch context in Kuyper's broad three-volume elaboration (1902–4). Apart from saving grace, God imbues our world and history with a sort of grace that withholds the destructive power of sin. The work of the Spirit is therefore not restricted to regeneration and to indwell in the saints, but is also to be a creative power 'to stir up natural gifts of artists, scientists, rulers and parents to contribute to the common good' (Horton 2010: 365). In other words, the work of God's Spirit has also a broader outreach, as a humanizing power in our world. Kuyper's theory of common grace was, in turn, attacked by Klaas Schilder, who believed that the Bible is less positive about human society outside the church.

Serious objections might be raised against the 'teaching' of general grace. It can lead to uncritical optimism regarding our culture, minimizing the consequences of evil in social structures—a fault Abraham Kuyper did not fully avoid. It may also easily suggest a dichotomy in God's acts, as if God is inconsistent and operates with more and less pure forms of grace. But as long as we manage to avoid these misunderstandings, the prospect that God extends his goodness to people outside the Christian church can be very encouraging. It turns believers away from isolationism and dualistic apprehensions about society, and leads them instead to cherish relationships and opportunities for cooperation with non-believers without always having to justify these with missionary

intentions (Horton 2010: 267). The experience of God's generous goodness and gifts may protect us from a misplaced sense of superiority.

2. The second aspect of God's providence is God's concurrence, or 'going with'. This literal translation of *concursum* is less one-sided than the more frequently used word 'cooperation', for this *concursum* does not only affect our *operationes* but also our *passiones*—not only our actions but also what affects us. The Bible not only speaks of God's *cooperation* but also of his *compassion*. God is with us also when we suffer, not in the sense of being a victim of events just as we are, but in the sense of being present and journeying with us through the land of pain. We catch a glimpse of this in the Old Testament (Isa. 63:90), but it becomes especially clear when it is said that Jesus Christ is a high priest who can sympathize with us (Heb. 4:15), and when it is said of the Spirit that he 'groans' together with the suffering creation and, in particular, with the community of believers (Rom. 8:23, 26). This is another feature of God's care that has not received adequate attention in the dogmatic tradition (for a useful correction, see Migliore 2004: 133–4).

This 'going with' has traditionally been mostly linked to God's acts. This is correct, for if it is true that in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), then God also has a part in all that we do. At the very least, it means that God creates the conditions that enable us to act; without God's involvement, we would not be able to do anything. This idea so naturally follows from the idea of preserving providence that not all sources mention the *concursum* separately. But those authors who do mention it want thereby to express something more: God may be active through human beings beyond simply enabling them to act. With Paul, Christians believe that, where salvation is concerned, God 'is at work in you, both to will and to work' (Phil. 2:13), without implying that we ourselves do not, and do not need to, work.

One of the classic problems with the *concursum* is the so-called problem of double agency; can one and the same act have two different actors? However we answer this question, there is no doubt that God's activity plays out on a structurally different plane from ours. God is ontologically different from human beings. Borrowing from Thomas Aquinas, the Reformed tradition has tried to define this difference by using the concepts of *causa prima* (God is the 'first cause') and *causae secundae* (human actors are the 'second causes'). These terms remain useful if we realize that the one is not just an extension of the other. The two levels of God and human remain distinct. We have to avoid the idea of a zero-sum game, in which one party's gain is the other party's loss. Such a concept of the power of God makes him too small, as if God's power is a 'normal' human power, only infinitely greater. Two basic rules emerge from the biblical witness:

1. God as Lord equips people and gives them space to act independently and effectively.
2. People are and remain absolutely dependent on God's all-encompassing and decisive action.

God's *concursus* should therefore not be thought in terms of competition but in terms of equipping and stimulating. The divine–human relation is not about tyranny but about empowerment.

The second problem with concurrence is how to explain God's involvement when people use their freedom of action to do evil. Does God have a part in our sins? However far theologians in the Reformed tradition have gone in ascribing all events to God, this question has always been answered in the negative. Yet the answer can be quite paradoxical, for it is unclear how God's non-complicity can be reconciled with his active involvement. The Reformed tradition distinguished different modes of God's will. It may be suggested that a Trinitarian approach leads toward a sound solution. In Jesus we discover how and where God is actively at work (cf. John 5:17–19), and after his departure the Spirit continues this work on earth. In other words, we can only speak about *cooperatio* in a multi-layered, differentiated way: God is minimally present in human sin, only in the sense that he creates the conditions that enable us to sin. God wanted people who would be able to sin but did not want the sin itself. But God is maximally present in the covenantal history with us human beings, as initiated by the Father, fulfilled by the Son, and completed by the Spirit.

The doctrine of providence, therefore, does not teach us simply that everything that happens is 'God's will'. Rather, it sharpens our eye so that we can more perceptively discern what happens in the world. Where is God at work? How can we understand theologically—that is, from God's perspective—what is going on? For an answer to this question, we can only rely on the 'two hands of God', Christ and the Spirit. We can confess the active involvement of God when what happens in the world conforms to the way of Jesus, where the fruits of the Spirit are really visible. There God works with heightened intensity, pervading human will and action.

3. The third aspect of divine providence is God's governance (*gubernatio*) or leadership (*directio*). Traditionally, this part of God's providence was conceptualized in rather static terms. The Bible, however, speaks in much more dynamic—more precisely, in eschatological—terms about God's rule. The fact that God rules the world means, first and foremost, that he guides it in a particular direction, toward the final realization of his plans and promises. Therefore, history is geared towards the kingdom, for also in his rule the Father works through—and thus in the mode of—the Son and the Spirit. That sets all what happens under tension. For the time being God rules 'from the wood of the cross' (Venantius Fortunatus, sixth century), i.e. in spite of all kinds of misery, setbacks, and experiences of loss. History becomes ever more similar to Jesus' road to the Cross, just as the apocalyptic portions of the New Testament teach. In addition, it should be noted that God works through his Spirit and not by power and might (Zach. 4:6). Recent Reformed theology has emphasized this eschatological aspect of God's governance (Barth, Berkhof, Moltmann, Gunton, Migliore, van de Beek). Often we should pay more attention to small things than to powerful revolutions or major changes in society. Where people are touched by the Spirit of the Gospel and on that basis experience a decisive renewal in their lives, there God is at work, guiding the world to its future destination. So, God's direction often proceeds via small things and detours—another

reason that God's providential rule is first and foremost a matter of faith and not something that can be gleaned from a newspaper. But this faith takes a lifelong exercise, a hope for God. In faith we learn that we are not dealing with a blind power, but with the Father of Jesus Christ, who draws his creation to its final destination.

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Berkouwer (1952); Brinkman (1999); Conradie (2011); van de Beek (2014).

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CHAPTER 27

COVENANT

MICHAEL S. HORTON

ACCORDING to I. John Hesselink, ‘Reformed theology is covenant theology’ (Hesselink 1983: 57). Many Reformed biblical scholars and theologians have contributed to various theologies of covenant. However, the scope of this chapter is limited to the specific form of covenant theology (or ‘federalism,’ from the Latin word for covenant, *foedus*) that became dominant in the confessions and systems of Reformed orthodoxy.

With important precedents in Luther, Bucer, Calvin, Melancthon, Oecolampadius, and Bullinger, this tradition reached its zenith in the late sixteenth century, especially through Zacharius Ursinus (1534–83), Caspar Olevianus (1536–87), Robert Rollock (1555–99), and William Perkins (1558–1602). During this period, federal theology formed the structure of Reformed orthodoxy, as is evident in the Canons of the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith (esp. chapters 7, 8, 19). This system is also explored thoroughly by John Owen (1616–83), Francis Turretin (1623–87), and Herman Witsius (1636–1708) among many others.

By the late sixteenth century, Reformed theologians were distinguishing between two covenants: a *covenant of works* (also called the covenant of law, nature, or life) made with Adam as the federal head of the human race and a *covenant of grace* made with believers and their children—Christ being the federal head and mediator.

One of the most succinct statements of this scheme of the two historical covenants is found in the seventh chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him, as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man, by his Fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them

faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.

By the dawn of the seventeenth century, this distinction emerged as a widespread consensus, along with a third covenant as the presupposition of the others: the *covenant of redemption* (*pactum salutis*). This was a covenant between the persons of the Trinity in which the Father elected a people and gave them to the Son as his bride, thus providing the absolute and unconditional basis of the covenant of grace.

Even during the turbulent debates within the Church of England from the Reformation to the Civil War, partisans could unite on this covenantal framework. Federal theology also became a fertile framework in the early modern development of political federalism.

27.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'COVENANT' IN SCRIPTURE

Contemporary interest in comparisons of biblical covenants with political treaties of the ancient Near East has been sparked and enlarged by non-Reformed scholars. However, many of these discoveries were already anticipated or even made by these Reformed theologians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many of whom were also pioneering biblical scholars, orientalists, and philologists.

Given the diversity of biblical covenants, the broadest definition should suffice: 'oaths and bonds.' Walther Eichrodt demonstrated that 'the covenant-union between Yahweh and Israel is an original element in all sources, despite their being in fragmentary form' (Eichrodt 1951: 36). Thus, 'God's disclosure of himself is not grasped speculatively, not expounded in the form of a lesson; it is as he breaks in on the life of his people in his dealings with them and molds them according to his will that he grants them knowledge of his being' (p. 37). The promissory character of this covenant 'provides life with a goal and history with a meaning' (pp. 38-42).

Far from engendering a legalistic form of religion, Israel's covenant with Yahweh meant that they were no longer at the whim of petty warlords and heavy-handed suzerains. In secular treaties, the gods were called upon as *witnesses*. Yet only in Israel is the deity also the *suzerain* (great king). Delbert Hillers observes, 'When the statement is made that religion is based on covenant, it implies that a form of action which originated in legal custom has been transferred to the field of religion' (Hillers 1969: 24). To be in covenant (that is, to literally 'cut' a covenant, *karat berit*) with Yahweh was to acknowledge him alone as deliverer and therefore as sovereign over every aspect of national life. Cult and culture formed a unified reality, with a geopolitical nation identified as the kingdom of God.

Even where the term ‘covenant’ (*berit*) is absent, the wide variety of terms employed in scripture are taken from this field of international politics. The rituals of circumcision and Passover, which involved a cutting ceremony, are signs and seals of the covenant, just as Jesus institutes baptism and the Supper as signs and seals of the new covenant. The prophets are covenant attorneys, prosecuting the suzerain’s claims, and the apostles are ambassadors authorized to communicate the suzerain’s terms of peace. Though neglected perhaps in much modern New Testament scholarship, Reformed theology has a long history of interpreting the Pauline corpus in such terms. Indeed, as N. T. Wright notes in his *Climax of the Covenant*, ‘The overall title reflects my growing conviction that covenant theology is one of the main clues, usually neglected, for understanding Paul’ (Wright 1991: xi).

27.2 THE RISE OF COVENANT (FEDERAL) THEOLOGY

After a survey of the main lines of historical development I will engage alternative interpretations, both historical and theological in nature.

27.2.1 Zwingli’s Anti-Anabaptist Polemics

During his ‘second disputation’ against Anabaptists in 1523, Zwingli offered a vigorous defence of infant baptism by highlighting the unity of the covenant of grace. ‘Christian people are also in the gracious covenant with God, in which Abraham stood,’ he argued. Therefore, ‘it is clearly proved that our children are no less God’s than Abraham’s’ (Quoted by Stephens 1988: 209). While this argument would remain essential to covenant theology, Zwingli also stressed the human side of the covenant, especially in his view of the sacraments as the believer’s pledge rather than God’s promise and means of grace. How then could infants make promises? Zwingli answered that ‘the parents’ pledging of the child and the child’s being ‘pledged to the law’ sufficed (Stephens 1988: 215). While the first argument (unity of the covenant across the testaments) supported paedobaptism, the second (sacraments as the believer’s pledge) undermined it. The irony was not lost on Anabaptist leaders, especially Zwingli’s former students Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz.

27.2.2 Luther’s Law/Gospel Distinction

Another major impetus in the development of federal theology was the distinction between the law and the Gospel. In the law, Luther emphasized, God commands and

carries out his just sentence against us; in the Gospel, God reveals his saving mercy in Jesus Christ. This distinction became important in Lutheran teaching (especially in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, article 4, and the Formula of Concord, epitome V).

Zwingli differed somewhat with Luther's understanding of the law and the Gospel (Stephens 1988: 164–7). This may be due in part to Luther's tendency to treat the relation between the Old Testament (and Moses) and the New Testament (and Christ) as antithesis rather than promise-and-fulfilment, thus undermining the unity of the covenant crucial to Zwingli's anti-Anabaptist polemic. Can one affirm the unity of the covenant while distinguishing law from Gospel?

Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), did just that. He became a 'Martinist' after reading Luther but especially Melancthon's *Loci communes*. Thus it is not surprising to see Bullinger include the law/Gospel distinction in the Second Helvetic Confession (ch. 13): 'The Gospel is indeed opposed to the Law. For the Law works wrath and pronounces a curse, whereas the Gospel preaches grace and blessing.' As Otto Weber points out, in Heidelberg, Herborn, Marburg, and Bremen, all places where the Reformed movement was strongly influenced by Melancthon, the concept of the covenant came to dominate dogmatics (Weber 1981: 125). At the same time, there is no basis for the thesis (Miller 1956: 48–98; Trinterud 1951: 37–57; McCoy and Baker 1991) that 'covenant' arose as a counterbalance (mainly in the Rhineland) to Calvin's or Beza's 'double predestination'. Although Bullinger held only to single predestination (election to salvation), double predestination enjoyed a wide consensus and Calvin was if anything more influenced by Melancthon, with whom he had a close friendship, than by Bullinger. This suggests (among other reasons) that a desire to play off double predestination via covenant has little historical traction (Bierma 1983: 1990; Venema 2002; Muller 1999).

'The promises of the Law depend on the conditions of works,' Calvin explains, 'while the Gospel promises are free and dependent solely on God's mercy' (Calvin 1960: 3.11.17; cf. 2.7.4). 'For the words of Paul always hold true, that the difference between the Law and the Gospel lies in this: that the latter does not like the former promise life under the condition of works, but from faith. *What can be clearer than the antithesis?*' (Calvin 1983: 156, 250).

Like Melancthon, Calvin continued to speak of law and Gospel in two senses: (1) as referring to the Old Testament and New Testament, where the unity of the covenant of grace is stressed especially over against Anabaptists; and (2) as referring to the way of justification, where law and Gospel are antithetical (emphasized especially over against Roman Catholic teaching). Paul refers to both of these senses in Romans 3:21: 'But now the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart from the law*, although *the Law and the Prophets* bear witness to it' (emphasis added). Calvin explains, 'Paul harmonizes law and faith, and yet sets the righteousness of one in opposition to that of the other.' Why? 'The law has a twofold meaning; it sometimes includes the whole of what has been taught by Moses, and sometimes that part only which was peculiar to his ministration, which consisted of precepts, rewards, and punishments.' The goal of his ministry was to lead the people of God 'to despair as to their own righteousness, that they might flee to

the haven of divine goodness, and so to Christ himself. This was the end or design of the Mosaic dispensation... And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ: and then we must consider what the law contains, as separate from the gospel' (Calvin 1996: 386–7). Calvin also anticipates the emerging Reformed distinction between law and Gospel in terms of 'two covenants': 'the legal covenant... and the evangelical covenant' (Calvin 1997: 137–8).

As early as the first page of his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Zacharius Ursinus (primary author of the Heidelberg Catechism) stated, 'The doctrine of the church is the entire and uncorrupted doctrine of the law and gospel concerning the true God, together with his will, works, and worship' (Ursinus 1852: 1). He then elucidates what was to be a typical Reformed statement of the distinction that was held in common with the Lutheran confession:

The doctrine of the church consists of two parts: the Law, and the Gospel; in which we have comprehended the sum and substance of the sacred Scriptures... for the law is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, constraining us to fly to him, and showing us what that righteousness is, which he has wrought out, and now offers unto us. But the gospel, professedly, treats of the person, office, and benefits of Christ. Therefore we have, in the law and gospel, the whole of the Scriptures comprehending the doctrine revealed from heaven for our salvation... The law prescribes and enjoins what is to be done, and forbids what ought to be avoided: whilst the gospel announces the free remission of sin, through and for the sake of Christ.

(Ursinus 1852: 2–3)

Furthermore, because it is grounded in the covenant of creation, 'The law is known from nature; the gospel is divinely revealed' (Ursinus 1852: 2–3).

Theodore Beza included in his *Confessio* a section on 'Law and Gospel' as 'the two parts of the Word of God', warning that 'ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the principle sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupt Christianity' (Beza 1992: 41–3). Wilhelm Niesel observes, 'Reformed theology recognises the contrast between Law and Gospel in a way similar to Lutheranism' (Niesel 1962: 217).

27.2.3 Distinction between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace

Princeton biblical theologian Geerhardus Vos observed that we should 'have no difficulty in recognizing the covenant of works as an old Reformed doctrine', with Ursinus' *Larger Catechism* as an example. 'The doctrine of the covenant of works is found in the ninth question.' In fact, Vos adds, 'The contrast of law and gospel is brought to bear on the contrast between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace' (Vos 2001: 237). Casper Olevianus, co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism, sees in the original covenant's prohibition the essence of the whole law—love of God and neighbour (cited in Heppe

1950: 294; cf. Clark 2008). And in this state Adam could expect—for himself and his covenant heirs—royal entrance into the consummation, the Sabbath rest of God himself, and everlasting confirmation in righteousness.

It was argued that the elements of a covenant are present in Genesis 1–3 even if the term is not used. Later in history, Israel's covenant with God frequently drew on allusions to Eden. In fact, God declares in Hosea 6:7, 'But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.' Federal theologians also point to Romans 5:12–21, with its explicit contrast between the covenantal headships of Adam and Christ. They also recalled similar arguments in patristic sources—for example, in earlier theology. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus saw the whole economy of salvation in terms of the outworking of covenants. He speaks of one covenant of grace running from Genesis to Revelation, while also recognizing a 'legal covenant' and a 'gospel covenant' (bk 4, ch. 25). The promise–fulfilment pattern lays the groundwork for a covenantal hermeneutic, here but also in book 5, ch. 17. Augustine's *De spiritu et littera* played a key role in Luther's 'law-and-Gospel' thinking. Citations of Augustine are replete on this point among the Reformed scholastics, such as the following remark from *The City of God*: 'The first covenant was this, unto Adam: "Whosoever thou eatest thereof thou shalt die the death", and this is why all his children "are breakers of God's covenant made with Adam in paradise"' (bk 16, ch. 28).

Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706) warns against those (he has Rome chiefly in view) who would turn the Gospel into a 'new law', neglecting both the real demands of the law and the real freedom of the Gospel. The 'works of the law' demand 'most punctilious obedience ("cursed is the man who does not do all the works therein")'. Only in this context, says Mastricht, can we possibly understand the role of Jesus Christ as the 'fulfiller of all righteousness'.

Heb. 2.14–15 (since the children are sharers in blood and flesh, he also in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil) ... If you say the apostle is speaking of a covenant not in Paradise, but the covenant at Sinai, the answer is easy, that the Apostle is speaking of the covenant in Paradise so far as it is re-enacted and renewed with Israel at Sinai in the Decalogue, which contained the proof of the covenant of works.

(Cited in Heppe 1950: 290)

In addition to the exegetical arguments, Mastricht adduces the intrasystematic importance of the covenant of works. 'We can scarcely give suitable satisfaction' for key doctrines such as original sin and 'the satisfaction of Christ' in both his active and passive obedience 'if the covenant of works be denied' (cited in Heppe 1950: 290).

Even those who found themselves on opposite sides in many debates, like Cocceius and Voetius, jointly emphasized the absolute and unconditional foundation of the covenant and saw the law/Gospel distinction as integral for its preservation. In fact, the covenant of works was regarded as essential to Reformed orthodoxy during this period (Berkhof 1996: 212). Prior to the fall, humanity in Adam was neither sinful nor confirmed

in righteousness. Created for obedience, he was entirely capable of maintaining himself in a state of integrity. In an important 1677 work entitled *The Economy of the Covenants*, Herman Witsius also argues that to deny the covenant of works or to confuse it with the covenant of grace entails a fatal confusion of law and Gospel.

Furthermore, federal theologians argued for a pre-temporal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the persons of the Trinity as the absolute and unconditional basis of the covenant of grace. They pointed out that Jesus speaks of having been given a people by the Father before all ages (John 6:39–44; 10; 17:1–5, 9–11). In addition, Paul speaks of God's 'eternal purpose in election' (Rom 8:28–31; 9:11; Eph 1:4–5, 11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9), the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the 'unchangeable oath' that rests on God's promise rather than on human activity (Heb. 6:17, 20), and represents Jesus as announcing in his ascension, 'Here I am, with the people you have given me' (Heb. 2:13).

According to these theologians, it is this covenant of redemption that lies behind both the *historia salutis* (the history of God's redeeming acts) and the *ordo salutis* (the application of redemption), as in Romans 8:29–30. This eternal purpose of the Triune God is realized in history through the promise of salvation in Christ (Gen. 3:15) and in the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15) and David (2 Sam. 7). Also similar in form is the Noahic covenant, with God swearing a self-maledictory oath (with the rainbow as the sign), although in content this was a common grace rather than saving grace covenant (VanDrunen 2014: 95–132). Because of the covenant of grace, and the Messiah's having fulfilled the covenant of works, 'There still remains the promise of a Sabbath rest' (Heb. 4:1, 9).

'Leave your country and family' was the divine call to Abraham (Gen. 12:1), like the sovereign command to the disciples, 'Leave your nets and follow me' (Matt. 4:19–20). Whatever stipulations—requirements and demands—that God will put upon his people, they will never—can never—be the basis for his judgment of their status before him. Herman Bavinck notes that even circumcision was commanded not as a prerequisite for covenant membership but as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace to believers and their children (Bavinck 2003: 203–4). 'The covenant is neither a hypothetical relationship, nor a conditional position; rather it is the fresh, living fellowship in which the power of grace is operative,' Vos observes (Vos 2001: 256).

Within this wide consensus, there were debates especially over the relationship of the Sinai covenant to the covenant of grace. At Sinai, for example, Moses is the mediator, Israel swears the oath, and blood is splattered on the people 'in accordance with the words you have spoken, "All this we will do"' (Exod. 24:8). In contrast, Yahweh is the promise-maker with Abraham in Genesis 15, and he passes alone through the pieces in a vision. The Abrahamic covenant rather than the Mosaic covenant establishes the terms according to which people from every nation now share in the God of Israel.

It is in this context that we better understand the prophets. Through Jeremiah, God prosecutes the terms of the Sinai covenant: 'And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts' (Jer. 34:18). Once again, this curse-formula fits the terms of Sinai: the people swearing the oath, assuming its sanctions, in sharp contrast with the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 15. Yet the 'new

covenant' promised in Jeremiah 31:32 'will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers in the wilderness'. The promises are everlasting and global, not temporary and limited to one nation. Paul's distinction between the covenants of law and promise in Galatians 3:17–18 and elsewhere merely elaborate this difference. God as the oath-maker and mediator, with the families of all the earth being blessed by the singular 'seed' of Abraham ('meaning Christ', Gal. 3:16).

At the same time, God's election of Israel (unlike the covenant with Adam) presupposes a condition of sin, where his act of deliverance and gift of the land are the fulfillment of his merciful promise (see Deut. 9:4). Even when Israel sinned, God was patient, and even after executing his sentence (exile from the temporal land), he promised a greater future. Therefore, the Sinai covenant must be in some sense an administration of the covenant of grace.

These two points were expressed in the consensus of the Westminster Confession (ch. 7): these 'two covenants were differently administered in the time of the law . . . and the time of the gospel'. And yet, the Sinai covenant is a *different administration* of the *one covenant of grace*. Fleshing out this difference has provoked—and will continue to provoke—different arguments. Yet this distinction-with-unity represents a remarkable breadth of consensus.

Geerhardus Vos notes that although the Sinaitic covenant is based on law, it is only such in the interests of holding out the promise of the covenant of grace:

When the work of the Spirit by means of the law and gospel leads to true conversion, in this conversion the longing for this lost ideal of the covenant appears as an essential part. From the above we can also explain why the older theologians did not always clearly distinguish between the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant. At Sinai it was not the 'bare' law that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.

(Vos 2001: 255)

There are not two different ways of salvation, but two promises: the one being temporal, pertaining to national security in the land, and the other pertaining to everlasting salvation for Israel and the nations.

In summary, then: because of the eternal covenant of redemption, God's promise takes priority over all human disobedience—without setting aside God's law. 'There is no gift that has not been earned by Him', as Vos observes (Vos 2001: 248). Early on, Robert Rollock (first principal of the University of Edinburgh) points out that it is only by Christ's fulfilling the covenant of works that justification is not a legal fiction. Christ's active obedience in fulfilling the covenant of works therefore became an essential basis for articulating and defending the doctrine of justification, Vos concludes (p. 249).

27.2.4 Contemporary Reformed Interpretations

With the triumph of the Enlightenment in theological academies, federal theology survived and indeed flourished in churches and confessional seminaries. Karl Barth found

his theological voice in part by acquainting himself with Calvin and the tradition of Reformed orthodoxy while teaching at Göttingen (Barth 1950: v). Nevertheless, his view of the older theology was especially critical precisely in its federal scheme. He regarded the notion of a covenant between the persons of the Trinity as leading dangerously toward tritheism (Barth 1961: 65). He also regarded the distinction between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace as the first 'fatal historical moment' in Reformed theology, presupposing a distinction between law and Gospel instead of a single covenant of grace. The second 'fateful moment' in Reformed orthodoxy was 'the introduction of an understanding of revelation as a sequence of stages' (cited by Migliore 1991: xxxviii).

Some conservative Reformed theologians have also criticized the federal scheme. Unlike Barth, John Murray was eager to maintain the distinction between law and Gospel (Murray 1957: 181). Yet for Murray, there is no covenant between God and humans that is not gracious. Thus, although he still affirmed key components, he ultimately rejected the covenant of works (Murray 1976: 47–59).

Over the last quarter of the twentieth century a spate of sharp critiques of federal theology emerged, especially among students of Barth. The most notable is what has come to be called the 'Calvin vs. the Calvinists' thesis (Armstrong 1969; Kendall 1979; Clifford 1990; Torrance 1970; 1994; Hall 1966; Bell 1985). According to these theologians, federalism represents a departure from the emphasis of Calvin on a one-sided and unconditional covenant of grace. As such, it is a legalistic system in which the nature/grace dichotomy of Roman Catholic and Protestant scholasticism is said to have corrupted Reformed theology early in its infancy. Through federalism, Calvinism devolved into an introspective scrupulosity and a voluntaristic emphasis that contrasts sharply with Calvin's interest in a gracious promise.

The 'Calvin vs. the Calvinists' thesis presupposes a deep discontinuity that has been challenged by a formidable body of recent scholarship (Muller 1994; 1986; 1994; 2003; Helm 1982; Beeke 1991; Bierma 1987; Beach 2007; Venema 1993; Weir 1990; Trueman and Clark 2005).

First, in its critical, even polemical, approach to Calvin's contemporaries and heirs, it fails to see the latter especially as contributing to a refinement of ideas that are already present in Calvin (Muller 2012: 13–24).

Second, there is no justification in the sources for viewing federal theology as 'legalistic', any more than the law/Gospel distinction. Calvin asserts the main features of the covenant of works (Calvin 1960: 1.15.8). In a number of places, Calvin refers to Christ's having 'merited' salvation for his people by his obedience, once more emphasizing the satisfaction of law as a necessary prerequisite for everlasting life. The Belgic Confession says that Adam 'transgressed the commandment of life' (art. 14), terminology that was used in the emerging covenant theology (especially by Bullinger and Martyr) as interchangeable with 'covenant of works'. In articles 22 and 23, Christ is said to have 'merited' our salvation. 'In fact, if we had to appear before God relying—no matter how little—on ourselves or some other creature, then, alas, we would be swallowed up' (art. 23). All of this anticipates the fuller development of the federal scheme. The merits of Christ rather than those of the believer that were a central emphasis of the magisterial Reformation.

The charge of legalism is fraught with theological assumptions that run counter to the historical fact that those most committed to the federal scheme were also the most ardent opponents of Neonomianism (i.e., seeing the Gospel as a ‘new law’). Vos observes that a denial of the covenant of works characteristically went hand in hand with a denial of Christ’s active obedience and therefore his imputed righteousness as the ground of justification (Vos 2001: 245).

What all of these critiques of federalism have in common is a theological aversion to a law/Gospel distinction and a suspicion that one must choose between a unilateral gift of grace and conditions of enjoying its blessings. Herman Bavinck stated well the view that most federal theologians would affirm when he said that the covenant of grace is ‘unilateral in its basis and destined to become bi-lateral in its administration’ (Bavinck 2003: 225). Clearly, there are conditions: justification through faith, for example. Those who persevere to the end in faith and repentance will be glorified. And yet, even these conditions are gifts that God graciously grants unilaterally. There are commands to be obeyed, responsibilities to be assumed, in this fellowship with the Triune God. And yet the believer’s obedience is always the fruit, never the root, of God’s gracious purpose and promise in Christ.

As the Reformed tradition faced different contexts—both in time and place—there could be a spectrum of emphases. At its best, the Reformed tradition has been able to emphasize mutual obligation without surrendering to neonomianism as well as the absolute, unconditional, and unilateral basis of the covenant without succumbing to antinomianism (von Rohr 1986). And if that is possible, then the tension that exists in federal theology may be a sign that we are dealing with a relationship in history between God and human beings that is as complex and real as it is presented in the Bible.

SUGGESTED READING

Beach (2007); Bierma (1990); Muller (2003); Vos (2001); Witsius (2010).

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CHAPTER 28

CHRIST

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AT first glance, Reformed theology's contributions to the doctrine of Christ may appear a little slender. Issues to do with the person and work of Christ were of great importance in the emergence of the Reformed churches in the sixteenth century, but the major themes had old roots, and Reformed theologians were concerned to anchor their arguments in the authority of scripture as heard by an ecumenical tradition. The degree to which their ideas as a whole represented continuity or break with theological teaching before them is open to discussion. But in its doctrine of Christ, early Reformed theology affirmed a classical inheritance, and reflected a swathe of late medieval influences; the orthodoxy of Reformed thinkers in this territory was basic to their claim to catholicity. The legacy continued in the major Reformed confessions and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in the traditions affected by those instruments well into the modern era. In general, the Christological instincts seem conservative more than speculative—a reiteration of conventional claims as much as the venturing of anything especially distinctive.

Sixteenth-century challengers of ecclesial status quo would, of course, have professed to care more for obedience than for originality: the entailments of Reformation may have been variously perceived; it was elementary for almost any Reforming agenda that there was concern for no new Gospel, only the one that had been cherished in better times. As a rule, 'speculation' was a dangerous matter, as likely to generate falsehood and idolatry as insight; theology had proved that all too well. God was to be contemplated according to his self-revelation, not by human projection. God's outer works had particular form, set forth with definitive potency in Holy Scripture; in these, God had made himself known as he truly is. God's ultimate self-exposition, the incarnation of his eternal Word or Son, lay at the heart of the evangel. The plea for ecclesial renewal was an appeal to the living authority of this Word in accordance with his declared sufficiency, as heard by the faithful in ages past. In their efforts to mark out the essential features of his self-disclosure over against such forms of their occlusion as they discerned in their time, Reformed theologians developed their own particular emphases. The conceptual issues

with which they worked had had a lengthy history already; the specific ways in which those issues were pursued were distinctive of a movement that would offer its own refractions of a catholic doctrinal inheritance.

28.1 CONTEXTS AND DEVELOPMENT

Reformed Christology ought not to be characterized as ‘mature’ until the 1560s, and it evinced countless modulations thereafter. It never would be a fixed thing: continuing ‘reformability’ in accordance with the Spirit’s instruction in the Word remained (variously understood) an enduring principle. A thorough account of the process of maturation and expansion in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods would need to attend to a very complex history: from the correlative ideas of an inchoate movement to the systematic arguments of its confessional forms, and to the highly generative legacies of that teaching in turn. Major voices and their particular influences were by no means the only ones. Even among the more famous, Zwingli, Bucer, Capito, Oecolampadius, Farel represent (diversely) one stage; Calvin, Bullinger, Musculus, Vermigli, and Hyperius another; within what we think of as Reformed orthodoxy, scholars identify at least three phases of development, stretching from the 1560s (or later 1550s) until well into the eighteenth century.

Through all of the major stages of formation, Reformed theologians preached and wrote endlessly about Christ. In the elaboration of their orthodoxy, they had immense amounts to say on questions of Christological method and content: on the relationship of scripture, creed, and system; on the place of Christological teaching within an overall account of theological *loci*; on the sorts of connections to be made between the doctrine of God, God’s decrees concerning creatures, and the redemptive history that had reached its climax in incarnation and atoning action. The results have not been studied as they deserve; far too many Reformed witnesses—Olevian, Zanchi, Polanus; Puritan giants such as Perkins, Goodwin or Owen; Scottish theologians like Rollock or Rutherford—have somewhat belatedly been recognized by modern scholarship as the substantial contributors they were on Christological themes. The density of the terrain is one reason: on the relationship of Christ and covenant in particular, the later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates were vast; interpreters must pick their way through a forest of related but differential arguments about Christ and the divine decree/s in German Reformed lands, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland, and must consider the ways in which ideas, exegesis, and pedagogical emphases travelled, influenced, and mutated. To explore the origins and development of federal traditions, and their relationships to the theologies of covenant advanced earlier by Calvin or Bullinger, is necessarily to study the investments of all of these in Christology. And those theologies were not, of course, the only ones; Reformed teaching was highly eclectic in its methods, and in its forms.

No individual—far less (lest it still need to be said) Calvin all on his own—gave rise to all this. In the development of an international movement across two centuries and more, the contextual factors were legion: political conflict and structural change within Reformed territories; interactions with Roman Catholic scholarship, and the effects of counter-Reformation; engagement with radical and Anabaptist teaching; the evolution of educational systems as channels of Reformed instruction, and the movements of teachers and students; diverse philosophical, logical and rhetorical influences on Reformed pedagogy; the impact of enduring disputes that began in-house ('Arminianism' above all, no doubt, but also much of the teaching shaped by the Academy of Saumur); affinities for both Thomas and Scotus. There would be clashes with rationalism, deism, and Socinianism; interactions with Cartesianism; empiricist and idealist influences; the effects of new ideas on toleration, law, church and temporal power—the emergence of 'the modern' on all sorts of levels.

Modernity meant a coalescence of issues all its own: new questions about the relationship of the Christ of scripture, tradition, and experience to the Jesus of history; sharp challenges to the nature—the very possibility—of classical doctrinal claims. Critique of dogma evoked wide-ranging reactions: spirited defences of tradition, but also determined efforts in the eighteenth century to set aside confessional differences within Protestantism. The coexistence of moderate or self-consciously progressive impulses alongside a principled conservatism would not abate thereafter. In modern Christology's story, theologians with shared allegiance to a Reformed identity would push in many directions.

In the history as a whole, development and diversity are a given. Reformed Christology has found expression in an enormous range of situations, and in a vast array of genres—sermons, doctrinal treatises and tracts, biblical commentaries, works of polemic, spiritual texts, personal writings, confessional statements and catechisms, systems and compendia. Some accounts have been tightly arranged in logical or causal terms; others have been dominantly exegetical, or heavily invested in spiritual and pastoral themes. If scholasticism was one environment, Puritanism was another; and concerns for both the connectedness and the practical vitality of doctrinal themes in reality permeated both. Personal religion of an intensely introspective kind; visions of revolutionary politics; apocalyptic expectations; detailed prescriptions for moral and social order; conceptions of ecclesial authority, purity, ministry and mission—all these have shaped and been shaped by Reformed Christological images.

Yet we must be wary of excessive fragmentation of the picture, or of preferring snapshots only—the impression that 'Reformed Christology' is an abstraction, or that all we can do is consider individual contributors and local situations. Reformed Christological teaching has, in its pluriformity, also been highly dispersed in its general reach. The ecclesial symbols which codified and disseminated Reformed doctrine were genuinely unifying forces, first in the mid-sixteenth century then again in their successor forms in the seventeenth. Reformed theologies historically must be viewed in their particular settings, and their accounts of Christ, covenant, and atonement took disparate forms; but all of these occurred within a broadly confessional tradition, the significance of

which remained a conscious reference point for Reformed believers across a large spread of geographical contexts.

It remains entirely appropriate to identify commonalities of approach, to shun construals of territorial diversity or intellectual periodizations which exaggerate differences in style. Variety in synthesis or catechesis did not necessarily bespeak radical discontinuity at a conceptual level—only the attempt to go on acknowledging an inheritance in seriousness, and to set out its claims with clarity. For all the immense effects of cultural change, ‘deconfessionalizing’, and doctrinal criticism over the modern period, a good number of the underlying instincts would not disappear. Where Reformed theology has been at all conscious of its roots, it has continued to wrestle with Christological themes in ways that had already begun to assume a certain shape within the first generation of its history.

28.2 ORIGINS AND METHODS

The earliest developments occurred in contexts of controversy and polemic. The genesis of Reformed Christology was not merely a by-product of some other contest, but Reformed theology’s most obvious emphases on the person and work of Christ emerged in disputes over practical matters of faith and piety, and in debates about the nature of the church’s worship and sacraments especially. As a general point, we might say that the magisterial Reformation’s doctrines of Christ assumed the several forms they did because it was held to matter so much that believers should celebrate and proclaim their Saviour aright, and that their acts of confession should entail much more than formal assent. The issues were intellectually serious; the debates tended to be conducted under the shadow of the altar or the table, not as a detached exercise.

From its beginnings, Reformed theology invested heavily in the centrality of Christ in Holy Scripture. The aim or ‘scope’ of scripture in all its parts, Old Testament as well as New, was to testify to him. The material content of Christological teaching was accordingly to be governed first and foremost by exegesis rather than by the elaboration of principles or concepts. Some Reformed theologians—Calvin remains the most obvious example—were particularly cautious regarding extra-biblical language, concerned to avoid modes of thought and speech that might be ‘speculative’. To their critics, they sometimes appeared as dangerous as the radicals, even heretical in their instincts, as witness Pierre Caroli’s (reactionary) accusation in Lausanne in the mid-1530s that his erstwhile French exile associates in Geneva, Viret, Calvin, and Farel, were Arians; the trio’s attempt to rebut the charge by strictly scriptural reasoning rather than conciliar idiom only worsened the situation.

But it was not at all the case that tradition did not matter. Zwingli, humanistically trained exegete, was insistent that patristic arguments remained of real importance; Oecolampadius maintained a scholarly investment in the Greek fathers; Alsatian and Erasmian humanism left obvious marks upon Bucer’s interest in patristic testimony in

the exposition of scripture and upon his quests to demonstrate the possibilities of a reinvigorated ecclesial order. Bucer made more, not less, appeal to the fathers in the 1530s and 1540s than he had in the 1520s. Bullinger traded extensively in classical authorities; Musculus was a renowned expert on the fathers; Peter Martyr Vermigli was probably the most highly trained of all sixteenth-century Reformed thinkers, whose extensive patristic learning supported a carefully qualified case for the role of tradition as subordinate witness to the Gospel's truth. Calvin himself would beef up his endorsements of conciliar authority over the various editions of the *Institutes*, and spend increasing energy in repudiating the heresies identified in the first five centuries.

Yet Calvin was not alone in supposing that the conceptual language deriving from that history was something to be deployed with care, and with respect for its limitations; extra-biblical categories possessed no ultimacy of their own, nor could their content be filled up *a priori*. If they were serviceable, they were of use inasmuch as they pointed up vital features of scripture's testimony, assisting in its orderly exposition, confounding obvious instances of its misconstrual. Classical authorities functioned in a wide range of ways in the reading of scripture, and their influences upon Reformed exegesis, thought, and rhetoric must be gauged in differential terms. The 'majesty' of the great councils was to be recognized, Calvin would stress, but their doctrine 'we willingly embrace and reverence as holy' insofar as it contains 'the pure and genuine exposition of Scripture' (*Inst.* IV.9.8). The ancient church's confession remained of real importance—it was not to be repudiated, as more radical voices argued, as product only of a debased tradition. Final authority, however, lay in scripture—generated by divine purpose, received aright by the Spirit's enabling (Zwingli in particular made much of that): the ultimate arbiter of all things.

In the hearing of scripture's teaching, Reformed theologians were not afraid to venture controversial elaborations of their own upon classical ways of presenting it. A striking example can be seen in Calvin's concern to say—*contra* his inheritance and indeed much of the Reformed tradition after him—that God the Son according to his divine essence deserves, no less than God the Father, the designation *autotheos*, 'God of himself'. In respect to his divine *person*, the Son is indeed eternally begotten 'of the Father'; in respect to his divine *essence*, the Son no less than the Father is God in and of himself; the Father does not communicate essence as such to the Son (*Inst.* I.13.23–5). Arguably a particular way of pressing the logic of a Nicene construal of eternal generation rather than any abandonment of it (Ellis 2012), Calvin's reasoning illustrates the ways in which he saw theology as obligated to the tenor of scriptural testimony taken as a whole: while divine persons cannot be separated off from the divine essence, the differentiation that eternally obtains in the Son's personal relation to the Father does not admit, even implicitly, of subordination within the essence.

While the *consensus patrum* as deployed by catholic interlocutors might be problematic, its legacies in respect of scripture's revelation of the Trinity and Christology were to be treated with full seriousness. Reformed orthodoxy would yield detailed depiction of Christological metaphysics as essential topic in an architectonic system, and a yet more conscious exploration of technical *theologoumena* over which patristic and medieval

teachers had spilt much ink. In this there was no abandonment of the assumption that scripture was the essential cognitive foundation of theological thought and speech. Reformed theology had evolved, but—*pace* both the pietist critics of its own time and the caricatures of a certain modern mythology—doctrinal formalization and justification did not involve the crude replacement of exegetical reasoning by rationalism, or a regression to the sorts of arid scholasticism against which there had been so much protest in the first place. Simple disjunctions between the methods of seventeenth-century dogmatics and the assumptions of sixteenth-century Reformed leaders are now heavily discredited; not the least of the reasons is that there was in both contexts a clear and operative commitment to the authority of scripture. The appraisal of canonical inspiration and its functional location within a theological system were certainly given new kinds of analytic consideration, but the practical clarity and sufficiency of the Word for all that God intended, and the vital task of hearing its message faithfully, remained essential Reformed convictions.

Reformed theology's reading of the canon evangelically had given early rise to accounts of Christ in which his person and his work were tightly integrated: the one could not be collapsed into the other, but neither could they be segregated. Other reforming theologies were also insistent on the benefits of Christ (Anabaptist traditions were particularly keen on the present moral and spiritual significance of his redemptive action), but might pit these against an analytic account of his person, presenting the latter as abstract or remote from experience. The Reformed tended to resist such bifurcation, on exegetical grounds. The significance of the incarnate One's saving achievement, as scripture presented it, was inseparable from his unique identity as its agent. At the fullness of time, in fulfilment of a specific appointed office, the Word had taken flesh and dwelt among us, the Father's sent Son, come for us and for our salvation. The human history of the Son was real, material, personal, spontaneous; it was also commissioned, an execution of antecedent purpose, the definitive outworking of God's merciful resolve to reconcile creatures and bring them to intimacy of fellowship with himself.

The living human image of the invisible God, the Saviour's temporal background lay in the divine eternity, the exclusive source of every creaturely good. Enfleshed, his humanity was also of indispensable consequence for the meaning and ends of his presence in our midst. The incarnate Son was the messianic servant whose fleshly life, death, resurrection and ascension enacted in temporal, bodily form God's promise of an ultimate prophet, priest and king; through his actions, God's covenant people Israel, and in turn all the nations of the earth, had been and would yet be blessed. In Christ had been effected *par excellence* God's gracious pledge to live his Godness in fellowship with us, to address the alienation and judgement our sin has incurred. Divine and human at once, Christ was as such—in accordance with both of these realities—the one mediator between God and estranged humanity. His person and work completed and summed up once and for all the divine saving economy.

This way of reading scripture's story had deep roots in patristic theology. As Bullinger (for one) argued with impressive verve, the Reformed churches were to see themselves as heirs of the orthodoxy hammered out by their forebears in the faith in their engagements

with scripture's text; sixteenth-century believers were to be vigilant against the same heresies, the same corruptions of the Gospel, that had plagued the true church in all the phases of its history. For the Reformed, Christ was indeed, as the Council of Nicaea (325) had declared, 'of one substance' (*homoousios*) with God the Father in respect to his divinity; he was also, as the Council of Chalcedon (451) had added, 'of one substance' with us in respect to his humanity.

There could be no 'Arian' subordination of the divinity of the Son, nor any adoptionist construal of the Son as an independently existing creaturely subject assumed into special relationship with God. The deity and pre-existence of Christ were matters of ongoing contest. The most obvious instance was the teaching of the redoubtable Spanish physician and scholar Miguel Serveto (Michael Servetus), whose anti-Trinitarian theology and understanding of the incarnation posed a major challenge from the 1530s and led ultimately to his execution for heresy in Calvin's Geneva in 1553. But there were other issues: the emergence in the 1540s and 1550s from Italian Protestant roots in particular of a disparate movement that would go on to have huge impact in Poland and Transylvania, then later in Holland, England, and North America—known from the seventeenth century generically (and of course pejoratively) as Socinianism (in view especially of the influence of Fausto Paolo Sozzini, Sienese exile in Poland from 1579, nephew and developer of the ideas of the energetic mid-century controversialist Lelio Francesco Maria Sozini). The doctrinal packaging of the movement varied, particularly prior to the formulation of its chief teaching instrument, the *Racovian Catechism* of 1605. Socinian Christology typically denied the pre-existence of Christ altogether, though it proposed a notably higher view of the Jesus of the Gospels than was often to be found in early modern rationalism. The 'Arian' label was a slur; but Socinian arguments for an exemplary Christ whose 'divine' status was earned rather than essential, and for a God who was one not Three, had obvious points of commonality with much older ideas, and were seen as just as dangerous by their opponents. Anti-'Arianism' in one form or another was real-time business.

Reformed theologians were also insistent that there could be no docetism as regards the humanity which the divine Son assumed in becoming incarnate. His humanity was real and complete, not truncated, as the arguments of Apollinaris and others had long ago implied. Whatever was essential to being human was Christ's, and he was *properly* human, and as such 'without sin'. So, contemporary accounts which suggested, for example, that the flesh of the Saviour was 'celestial', that it had come into the world without taking anything from Mary—the teaching of the Anabaptist Melchior Hoffman to such effect would have major influence in Holland and on wider Mennonite belief—were also to be extensively repudiated. Such ideas were by no means universal among Anabaptists. But Reformed theologians perceived many other kinds of diminutions of the humanity of the Saviour, and saw it as vital to emphasize its authenticity.

For the Reformed, to confess the incarnate Son set forth in scripture involved affirming, as Chalcedon's formula had put it, one Christ 'acknowledged in two natures', these natures concurring in his person 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'. The authenticity, completeness, and difference of both natures

subsequent to their union was to be upheld against 'Eutychianism', which collapsed them into a single, composite divine-human nature, a *tertium quid* dominated by divinity. The unity of the enfleshed Son, his one person and hypostasis, was equally vital, contrary to any notion—generally if unjustly called 'Nestorian'—that there were somehow two distinct 'Sons' in view, one divine, one human.

This formal inheritance was general in Western confession. What came to set the Reformed apart was their particular way of parsing it. Chalcedon's 'one person, two natures' was widely assumed to offer an appropriate gloss on scripture's testimony, but Reformed theologians came to posit an understanding of the relationship of natures to person, and of natures to each other, quite different from the approach espoused by the followers of Luther in particular.

28.3 LUTHERAN AND REFORMED

The arguments of Reformed and Lutherans took place among those who held a great deal in common, and the Reformed owed substantial debts to their Lutheran colleagues as they worked out their ideas. There was ready agreement that two natures concurred in one person and hypostasis, but while the Lutherans came to place particular weight on Chalcedon's second pair of negative indications—the two natures were united in the one person 'without division, without separation'—the Reformed would firmly emphasize its first: the natures came together 'without confusion, without change'. If the differences of the natures were in no wise taken away by reason of their union, as Chalcedon declared, the integrity and completeness of the human nature of the incarnate Son was to be given full scope; there could, for the Reformed, be no account of the incarnate person in which the relationship of natures threatened the distinctiveness of the Saviour's humanity from his divinity, and the significance of that humanity for his role as mediator.

The starting point was debate over the Eucharist, which quickly became an intense dispute concerning Christological matters. By 1522–3, Zwingli was pointing towards a symbolic view of the Eucharist, emphasizing that the elements of bread and wine were given for faith's commemoration of Christ, not for the literal eating of his body and drinking of his blood. By 1524, Zwingli expressly understood 'This is my body' to mean 'This signifies my body'. Unpacking his reasoning more fully the following year in *On True and False Religion*, Zwingli argued that a clear distinction was needed between Christ's two natures. According to his divine nature, Christ, raised from the dead, was both at the right hand of the Father and omnipresent in the world. According to his human nature, however, he could not be on earth, in the eucharistic elements, for his risen and ascended body was now located in a particular place, in heaven; he could not be physically present in more than one place at a time.

This view brought Zwingli into sharp conflict with Luther and his disciples, and a fierce pamphlet war ensued. For Luther, it was crucial to say that there was a real

presence of Christ in the Eucharist, for the exalted humanity of Christ participated fully in the attributes of his divinity and as such could be present everywhere: the sacrament was a particular localization only, albeit a unique one in that it was God's concrete presentation of the Gospel. For Zwingli, such reasoning collapsed the distinction between divinity and humanity, and risked denying the significance of Christ's exalted humanity by failing to see the importance of his bodily resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session in a specific place; there could be no real presence in or with or under the eucharistic elements. The Colloquy of Marburg in 1529 failed to achieve consensus between the two positions. For all their agreement on other points, Luther declared his Swiss colleagues heretical for their refusal to accept the true presence of Christ's body in the bread and wine; hostility towards the Lutheran churches in Germany became a deep and enduring sore in Zurich.

One possible influence upon Zwingli's own thinking in the early 1520s was that of the young Bullinger, later his successor as leader of the Zurich church. Much of Bullinger's prolific work as teacher of scripture and theologian would reflect Zwingli's impression upon him, but it is conceivable that the influences at one stage at least ran in both directions, with Bullinger also mediating to Zwingli ideas deriving from fourteenth-century spiritual and humanist sources. For Bullinger, the Eucharist was not merely a commemoration of Christ, but Christ's own act in which his followers were granted communion with him spiritually by faith. The later Zwingli would himself qualify the strong memorialism of his earlier teaching, recognizing that the ascended body of Christ also has a spiritual presence in the Eucharist, the material elements of bread and wine serving as aids to his contemplation by the faithful. But there was an enduring insistence that the humanity of Christ was and remained properly human, and as such distinct in its properties from the properties of his divinity.

28.3.1 *Communicatio idiomatum*

The eucharistic controversy made clear that Lutheran and Reformed were coming to quite different understandings of a particular Christological concept. If Chalcedon was their common inheritance, so too was some version of the patristic doctrine of the 'communication of attributes' (perhaps better: 'proper qualities'), traditionally known by its Latin designation *communicatio idiomatum*. In identifying the qualities and actions of Jesus of Nazareth with the qualities and actions of the God of Israel, New Testament authors had deployed some startling language: the blood of God was shed (Acts 20:28); the Lord of glory was crucified (1 Cor. 2:8). Idiom of similar force had been widely deployed in early Christian rhetoric, and the attempt to explore something of its logic was widespread in mature patristic exposition of the incarnation. In Cyril of Alexandria's reasoning against Nestorius, an *antidosis* of attributes was a linchpin of the confession that the Word did not change in the assumption of flesh, nor did he suffer metaphysical augmentation or reduction, nor were there two different persons in view: the attributes of true divinity and true humanity were to be predicated alike of the one

person of the Word enfleshed. On that basis, Mary the mother of the human Jesus could justly be called *Theotokos*, ‘bearer of God’. In Leo’s *Tome* (449), a Latin version of the tradition was affirmed; its account was not quite Cyril’s, but the fundamental point was clear: there were not two discretely existing entities or subjects—one divine, one human—but one enfleshed Lord in whom two different sets of features were made manifest.

As the *communicatio* was coming to be understood by the Lutherans, the hypostatic union effected a ‘true’ communion of natures: Christ’s human nature shared in the attributes of his divine nature. For the Reformed, by contrast, the idea of a literal flow of attributes between natures as such conflated the distinction between them, and fatally compromised the humanity of the Saviour in particular. To claim that a human nature had the property of omnipresence was to deny its genuine humanity, which could be in one place only. Attributes were not ontologically exchanged or shared between *natures*, but properly ascribed in their totality to the one *person* of the incarnate Word. According to his divine nature, the person of Christ was omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, impassible; according to his human nature, he was finite, vulnerable, and subject to death. As the Reformed reasoned this out, they came for the most part to insist that all of the attributes collectively belonged to the ‘whole Christ’, to the person of the mediator according to both of his natures. The distinction of natures did not compromise the oneness of his person, nor the oneness of his work of mediation, to which his divinity and his humanity were both indeed crucial: it maintained the necessary differentiation between what was true of his natures as such and what was true of his person *in concreto*.

To Lutheran ears, the Reformed were frankly Nestorian in their tendencies, although it could well be argued that the Reformed position had strong foundations in the schoolmen as well as in the fathers; to the Reformed, the Lutherans, who were perhaps in line with a minority patristic tradition on the matter, sounded altogether Eutychian. The ideas evolved a good deal on both sides and only gradually did the distinctions become altogether clear. The connections with eucharistic theology as such loosened in the process, and the *communicatio idiomatum* itself would not by any means be of equal or even central significance for sixteenth-century Reformed theologians as they articulated their accounts of the Saviour’s person. What did matter to them, however, was a general insistence that divinity and humanity were not to be conflated but given their full integrity as enacted by the mediator. Over time, this principle came to be set out by Reformed teachers in increasingly specific terms; in the process Reformed Christology came to demonstrate its affinities with—and expansions upon—Christologies of the sixth and seventh centuries.

28.3.2 Divine *and* Human: Some Representative Emphases

We can merely glimpse fragments of the picture here. For Zwingli, as we have noted, there was a strong distinction between Christ’s two natures, and although the humanity of the Saviour was vital to his saving work the emphasis tended to fall firmly on the

divinity (Stephens 1986: 108–28). Zwingli was concerned that Luther's approach risked collapsing divinity into humanity, and turning the human nature as such into an object of adoration. When it came to understanding the relation of natures and their properties, as Zwingli saw it idioms that properly apply to only one nature are indeed at times in scripture predicated of the other, or ascribed to the whole Christ, but in either event this is fundamentally a figure of speech, of *alloiosis*, the 'transference' or 'exchange' of terms (Cross 1996).

Serious assessment of Calvin's Christology requires extensive study of his scriptural commentaries, sermons, and other writings at least as much as of the *Institutes* (Edmondson 2004; cf. also DeVries 1996). For Calvin, the Lutheran claim of a literal communication of properties between natures was profoundly objectionable, suggesting an ontological conflation of divinity and humanity. The biblical references to the blood of God, or to God being touched by human hands (cf. 1 John 1:1), were again figurative, or examples of synecdoche: what is technically true of only one 'part' of the whole Christ is attributed rhetorically to his totality. Such expression is legitimate and necessary insofar as there is one person in view: 'the things he carried out in his human nature are transferred improperly, although not without reason, to his divinity' (*Inst.* II.14.2). Nevertheless, a clear distinction remained between the properties of each nature. In Calvin's exegesis of scripture, the *communicatio* was primarily a hermeneutical tool, a mode of speech which helped to convey that the features of divinity and humanity both applied to the one incarnate subject; it was not a description of an actual transference of these features between each other, or indeed of their transference to the person of the union specifically (the last point is rendered only partly clear in Tylenda 1975).

In seeking to set out the biblical and credal picture over against its enemies as he discerned them, Calvin's emphasis repeatedly is on the distinction of natures. The humanity, including the bodiliness of the Saviour, was not altered or penetrated by divinity, but remained utterly real in itself, and of indispensable salvific importance. For Calvin, the fundamental wonder of the incarnation lies here: in taking to himself this genuinely human nature, the eternal Son did not lose anything proper to his divinity, yet humbled himself, allowing his divinity to be 'veiled', indeed increasingly so, so that at the last, in his final suffering and death, his divine glory was in at least some respects (in his power, though not his love and grace) removed altogether from human sight. The humiliation of the Son climaxed in passion and death, in a 'descent into hell' which involved his vicarious endurance of the judgement of God upon human sin.

The person of the incarnate Son was the person in whom two natures existed together, each retaining its distinctiveness 'unimpaired' (*Inst.* II.14.1); in 'mutual connection' his divinity and our human nature were conjoined and grew together (*Inst.* II.12.1). The humanity grew and developed, not only in body but also in spirit; it involved a path of obedience, each stage of which was redemptive. The incarnate one did not become more divine over time, as some suggested, but in living humanly the divine Son walked a human road, the Last Adam who recapitulated our condition from the inside, learning obedience through suffering, growing in wisdom, setting right by his faithfulness the

consequences of our disobedience, removing the curse from us at last by taking it to himself and bearing it away.

For many interpreters, Calvin's concern to maintain the distinction between natures remains fundamentally 'Antiochene' in cast, indeed Nestorian in tendency. Accusations to the latter effect were extensively made in his own time, and Calvin faced them squarely. It was of the essence of his teaching, he insisted, that there should be no 'double Christ' (*Inst.* II.14.4). In truth, Calvin's ability to hold to a clear distinction of natures with an emphatic insistence also on the oneness of the enfleshed mediator only illustrates the dangers of simplistic scholarly differentiations of 'Antiochene' and 'Alexandrian' impulses and their entailments; his Christology actually evinces substantial Cyrilline instincts alongside its concerns to give proper weight to the humanity of Christ.

For Bullinger, it was also vital to say that both natures retained their properties unimpaired after the union, and there could be no transference of properties as proposed in the Lutheran account of ubiquity. Bullinger's most famous text, the 50 sermons which make up his *Decades* (1549–51), was not of course intended as a systematic treatment of Christian doctrine, and Christology does not appear as an extended focus until more than half-way through (Opitz 2004), but Bullinger had already offered Zurich pastors in 1534 an orthodox statement on the two natures of Christ, and he developed extensive Christological arguments in his writings on the covenant and on divine revelation, in his biblical commentaries and in his practical and pastoral exhortations (Stephens 2015).

Perhaps more boldly than Calvin, Bullinger recognized that the divine assumption of a human nature meant that God *qua* God had taken human features to himself. Finitude, vulnerability, suffering, and death were not to be attributed merely to the human nature, as though that nature were somehow an experiencing subject in its own right: they were genuinely experienced by the divine Son. Certainly they were experienced by the divine Son only insofar as he voluntarily assumed a human nature naturally capable of them, and so reference to God as suffering needed to be immediately qualified: God suffered according to the human nature taken. Yet for Bullinger it does seem that the properties of both natures were to be genuinely, not just verbally, transferred to the one person of the union: the attributes of both divinity and humanity applied ontologically to the whole person; as such, it was indeed the case that God had taken human experience to himself. The point would be spelt out yet more fully in Ursinus, Zanchi and other early orthodox writers. If 'person' was the necessary instantiation of nature, and the human nature of Christ came to be only in the Word's personal assumption of it by the Spirit's power in the womb of Mary, then it was to the person of the Word enfleshed that the attributes, activities, and functions of the flesh—including its intellect, will, and energy—must be genuinely ascribed. Each nature had and retained its own properties, but there was a genuine coincidence of both natures in the person of the union and a genuine transference of the properties of both to *him*.

The Reformed proved faster than the Lutherans at agreeing on the substance of their doctrine, the latter engaging in lengthier internecine debate. Confessional codification of Reformed teaching formalized the differences, and consolidated bonds between

Reformed partners. Reformed Christology was summed up in varying detail in statements such as the Gallican Confession (1559), arts 14–15; the Belgic Confession (1561), arts 18–19 (cf. also art. 10); the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), qq. 29–52 (cf. also qq. 15–19), especially q. 48; and the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), ch. 11. Such texts reflected particular influences—in the immediate examples, Calvin (and his pupil Chandieu and others), de Brès, Ursinus, and Bullinger, respectively—but also assisted the diffusion of shared perspectives. The rapidity with which the Reformed gave international expression to their teaching assisted in the containment of their diversity in the seventeenth century (most obviously at the Synod of Dort in 1618–19, though scarcely only there), whereas Lutheranism continued to know quite substantial differences, not least on the metaphysics of the incarnation; the tensions scarcely all disappeared with the publication of the *Book of Concord* in 1580. Polemical exchanges between theological traditions remained significant, and Reformed theologians went on owing a fair bit to Lutherans as they thought through their ideas.

Lutheran denials of Eutychianism were plentiful: the human nature did not lose any of its natural or essential properties; the properties of one nature never became identical to the properties of the other; the properties of divinity were added to the natural or essential properties of humanity as gift; the human received them in an essentially mysterious or ineffable manner.

In the work of the great Martin Chemnitz, chief architect of the Formula of Concord in 1577, the *will* of Christ was key (Haga 2012). Christ's human nature did not automatically share in the essential properties of the divine majesty during his earthly life, for in that 'state of humiliation' he voluntarily abstained from the full use of his divine powers, including his will to be everywhere present; in the 'state of exaltation', the place of the risen and ascended Christ at the Father's right hand, he chose to be bodily present in the world as well as in heaven when and where he willed (and thus present eucharistically) in accordance with the freedom essential to his divinity. The communication of attributes might be conceived according to three forms: a *genus idiomaticum*, according to which the features peculiar to each nature were also ascribed to the whole person concretely; a *genus apotelesmaticum*, according to which in the redemptive action of Christ both natures cooperated perfectly, participating together in his mediatorial work in accordance with their respective properties; and a *genus maiestaticum*, in which his divine nature shared with his human nature its divine characteristics, but in such a manner that the human nature, while 'possessed' of the power and glory of divinity, experienced no detriment to its human integrity inasmuch as the expression of those divine attributes remained ever a matter of freedom.

Reformed teachers were happy to speak of two states, humiliation and exaltation, as scriptural testimony, but for them the exaltation of Christ involved the ascent of his humanity to a new state of human glory, not the revelation of a divine glory which his humanity in principle already possessed (Hoogland 1966). More pointedly, the Lutheran need to invoke the distinction between the two states in order to explain why the attributes of divine majesty were only actively shared by the human nature in a particular phase of its existence seemed to the Reformed to underscore the illogicality of a claim

that there was ever a direct transference of properties from one nature to another. As Reformed theologians saw things, the first two so-called *genera* of communication were not in question: they were simply a common confession of classical faith, albeit the second *genus* might admittedly be put in differing ways. The invocation of the *genus maiestaticum* in artful delimitation of the implications of a far bolder claim concerning the flow of idioms between natures was a different matter. Either the hypostatic union itself was the basis of a general transference of properties between natures or it was not; the Lutheran approach wished to suggest that it was, then was forced to qualify the claim quite drastically in order to avoid a miaphysite position in which the human nature was effectively eclipsed by the divine all along the line.

Whether the sensibilities of Lutheran reasoning were fairly represented in all of this is a question too large to explore here. Later Lutheranism would find reasons to invoke a further category, the *genus tapeinoticum* (evocative of Phil. 2:8), to speak of the manner in which the *kenosis* of divine incarnation entailed a process in which the properties of divinity were in the state of humiliation not just voluntarily restrained or overlaid by features of human lowliness but – in part at least – ontologically given up. That too would generate much debate, not least as to which aspects of divinity might conceivably be said to be thus laid aside and which might not. But what was in any case already clear by the later sixteenth century was this: As Reformed Christology had refined its teaching, it had come to demonstrate a significant degree of continuity with those interpretations of Chalcedon which sought to safeguard the integrity of the two natures while also affirming that the specific features of both natures belonged ontologically to the one incarnate person.

According to that orthodoxy, advanced at the Councils of Constantinople in 553 and 680/81 and transmitted with great impact by figures such as John of Damascus in the eighth century, the humanity of the Saviour had its concrete subsistence only in or as the humanity of the enfleshed Word, yet *as* the humanity of this Word it possessed a full set of human features, including a human will, and the achievement of the Saviour involved his willing of salvation humanly as well as divinely. While his human nature had no subsistence (and thus of course no properties) of its own, its concrete actualization in the person of the enfleshed Word meant that the properties of his humanity were, no less than the properties of his divinity, fully attributable to his whole incarnate person. Just this kind of (effectively, if not always expressly, ‘an-’ and ‘en-hypostatic’) reasoning became ever clearer in Reformed argumentation; the Reformed saw their Christology as faithful not only to Chalcedon, but to its later conciliar expansion. Every act was the act of the one person, not of one of the natures, for only the person can act; the person acts in accordance with both of his natures, with all that each of them in its integrity represents.

In Reformed orthodoxy, it would regularly be proposed that the communion of natures in the one person was such that the person of the union himself ‘mediated’ them: while the features of divinity and humanity did not have direct communion, as the Lutherans argued, they were always operative together, coinciding in the one person, so the person of whom they are both predicated might as such be said to mediate their

reality. Reformed theologians were aware that it was easier to say what this did not mean than what it did: clearly there could not be a person who existed ‘in between’ the two natures. Yet in all that the incarnate Christ is and does, the two natures work together—distinct in their particular features and ‘energies’, one in their consequence or effect. Communion of natures, glossed the Reformed way, meant a *communicatio operationum* or *apotelesmatum*; there were not two different sets of works achieved by divinity and humanity, but one personal action, wrought humanly as well as divinely, the natures cooperating in perfect harmony according to their respective kinds to effect a single result.

One way of speaking of this more clearly, scripture suggested, was to speak of the Holy Spirit. It was by the power of the Spirit who bound the eternal Son to his Father that the Son in time took flesh and dwelt among us. Rather than thinking of properties communicated, better to speak of gifts given—not by one nature to the other in abstract terms, but by the Holy Spirit, the agent of those natures’ concrete union. The gifts of knowledge, power, and fidelity possessed by the incarnate Son were not attributable to his humanity’s participation in divine attributes, but to the Spirit’s enabling of his humanity’s existence at its every stage. It was by the Spirit that the humanity of the Son was conceived in Mary’s womb; it was by the Spirit that the humanity of the Son was upheld all along its genuinely human journey, not gifted necessarily with steady beatific vision (though on that precise point the Reformed varied) and certainly not untroubled by trials and temptations, but developed and sustained, enabled by the Spirit’s grace to walk in perfect obedience to the Father’s will; it was through the same eternal Spirit that the Son offered himself, at last, unblemished to God.

Spirit Christology of this kind—as complement, not alternative, to the Christology of the Word—would find intriguing expression in a number of Reformed theologians, in deliberate repudiation of Nestorianism; nowhere, perhaps, would it be developed more powerfully than by the English Puritan John Owen in his 1679 work *Pneumatologia* (Daniels 2004, and esp. Spence 2007). Behind the Spirit Christology, for Owen, lay another theme that had by his time taken shape within significant parts of Reformed covenantal dogmatics, particularly from the mid-1640s onwards. It had developed there in part under the impress of debates with Arminian and Socinian opponents regarding the nature of saving grace, but it substantially predated these, being explicitly developed by Caspar Olevian in the 1580s and with roots of various kinds further back still (Fesko 2016). In addition to the so-called covenant of nature/works and the covenant of grace there was an eternal, pretemporal commitment within God himself, a covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the Father and the Son, which grounded the Son’s incarnate salvific action as enabled by the Spirit. The significance of the Spirit in the temporal outworking of the Son’s commitment to his Father was emphasized by Johannes Cocceius, one of the great architects of federalism (van Asselt 2001), and in Owen’s thinking likewise the work of the Spirit in concretizing and sustaining the humanity of the Word was vital to the execution of this primordial divine resolve.

The *pactum* itself would certainly not be endorsed by all in the seventeenth century or afterwards; within federal theology, its relationship (distinct or subordinate) to the covenant of grace would be variously assessed. In modern Reformed thought it has proved a decidedly controversial theme, dismissed by Karl Barth and others as essentially mythological and restrictive—a positing of intra-divine deliberation in which the divine determination to have incarnate saving fellowship with creatures is heavily marked by voluntarism and contractualism, and thus, by implication at least, a good deal less secure than the Gospel declares. Yet, as instanced by authors such as the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, it was of immense significance for an account of the incarnation and its eschatological ends in the glory of the Son (Jones 2010).

The *pactum* proved an enduring attraction for Jonathan Edwards, Reformed Christology's greatest thinker in the eighteenth century, whose vision of God's economy in creation and redemption is deeply determined by an account of the inner order of the divine relations. Edwards' Christology, which made much of the Spirit's role as agent of the hypostatic union and of the fellowship of the church with the triune life of God, might be said to evince various features all its own, not least in exposition of the Son's person and redemptive work as manifestation of divine glory. But it exists in a trajectory of Reformed endeavour to present the enfleshed existence of the Son as outworking of intra-triune commitment, and in that as radically dependent on the Spirit's enabling of his incarnate fellowship with his Father (for a very brief overview, see McClymond and McDermott 2012: 244–61; for a reading of Edwards on redemption, see Strobel 2013; on the Spirit, see Hastings 2015: 201–63; on the *pactum*, Yazawa 2019). In the Reformed expression of the integration of the person and work of the Son, an account of how it could be that the Son was mediator according to both of his natures would find its ultimate anchorage in the doctrine of God.

28.3.3 The *extra Calvinisticum*

The Reformed emphasis on the distinction of natures in the one incarnate person was closely connected to another major feature of the tradition. Just as the human nature of the incarnate Son was completely and properly human, so too the divine Son lost nothing proper to his divinity in becoming human. He retained his divine properties, including his immensity and omnipresence, in such a way that he was not confined or restricted to the form of the flesh that he took. Divinity was genuinely in union with humanity, and genuinely present in human physical form, but also transcendent of that form's finitude—present 'beyond' or 'outside' (*extra*) it as well.

For Calvin, the point was bound up with objection to the Lutheran *communicatio*: if the human nature necessarily retained its finitude and localization, so the divine nature necessarily retained its omnipresence. Reformed instincts about the distinction of God and creatures were clearly operative here, but the main focus was not on divinity's 'otherness' as a matter of general principle: it was rather that the humanity of the Saviour

was not ontologically altered, as would effectively have been the case if his humanity had, *qua* nature as such, ontologically received the property of divine omnipresence. The emphasis lay on the mystery of divine condescension or accommodation: God the Son was not diminished in the taking of flesh; God the Son was also genuinely present as human: 'The Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the Virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning' (*Inst.* II.13.4; cf. also IV.17.30).

By the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Lutherans were jibing at 'that Calvinistic *extra*' (*illud extra Calvinisticum*), for the Reformed position was held to be a refusal to take divine enfleshment seriously. It seemed to propose the dangerous notion that there was somehow another divine Son beyond the one who took flesh, or that the Son who took flesh was not truly the subject of his experiences as enfleshed. The *extra*, it was argued, posited a 'divided' or a 'second' Christ. Versions of these concerns have been widely reiterated in modern theology, and not only under Lutheran influences. Yet the so-called *extra* was no 'Calvinist' aberration, nor a contrivance developed only in response to eucharistic controversy (it in fact played only a minor part in the early stages of that debate). As represented in Reformed arguments, it was consonant with a considerable weight of patristic and medieval testimony (Willis 1966). If the Reformed placed expansive emphasis upon it, they certainly did not invent it.

Contrary to some readings, the language was intended not to downplay Christ's humanity and its finitude, but precisely to take it seriously. The Word was not entirely enclosed within bodily existence, but this did not mean that the Word was less than physically present, or that there was some 'non-incarnate' Word floating above and beyond Jesus of Nazareth. The principle *finitum non capax infiniti*, 'the finite cannot comprehend/contain the infinite', did not erode the finitude and particularity of the mediator's humanity, nor did it suggest that God *could not* assume finite or local form: only that such finite, local form as actually instantiated in the person of the mediator did not restrict or jeopardize the immensity of God (*infinitum capax finiti*), nor did it violate the reality of the humanness enacted. For the Reformed, once again the burden was that divinity and humanity were not to be differentiated in abstraction, but only as they were in fact found, in the concrete person of the union: there, each nature retained that which was essential to it.

As developed, for example, by Ursinus, the doctrine of the Son's existence, even as incarnate, *extra humanum* was a way of underscoring the benefits of Christ for believers. Risen and ascended, the enfleshed Son is absent from us in bodily terms, yet also present in and to us, joining us to himself in his human nature by his Holy Spirit, and in the supper we do indeed have communion with him in his humanity. In the influential Heidelberg Catechism (1563), to which Ursinus was primary contributor and of which he wrote a potent defence against Lutheran critiques, these pastoral and spiritual blessings receive some emphasis: the burden of the *extra* is, not least, that the ascended Christ is never really absent from us, and that we may genuinely feed upon him by faith

in the supper, for he is able majestically to be present with us as the one whose divinity is not restricted by the humanity he has taken (HC 46–9, 75–82).

The significance of the ascended humanity of the Saviour as our forerunner and advocate in the presence of God would be extensively developed in Reformed preaching and catechesis. But the *extra* itself, even in non-technical form, often played little or no operative part in that, and for all its importance in the post-Reformation era the theme suffered significant decline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Enthusiastic defence (or attack) waned amidst quests for rapprochement between Reformed and Lutherans, and in the utilization of consciously modern methods as alternatives to conventional exegetical and dogmatic arguments. There was a minority tradition of support, and the *extra* served to reinforce modern Lutheranism's emergent forms of bolder kenotic Christology, which posited various versions of an ontological giving up—or at least functional suspension—of divine attributes in the divine assumption of flesh. The *extra* could work alongside a model of *krypsis* rather than *kenosis* as so conceived: the Word enfleshed chose to 'veil' rather than renounce or set aside his divine properties, continuing to possess and exercise them beyond the flesh (for modern analytic treatments of *krypsis* as such, cf. e.g. Crisp 2007: 118–53; Loke 2014). Rather than condescending to us *from* his freedom, majesty and glory, God condescends to us *in* these; he is found in humility and nowhere else—but present there in his complete transcendence.

Nevertheless, concerns persisted that the *extra* suggested a God (and a Word) who could somehow be known or spoken of other than as revealed in Jesus Christ. Within the modern Reformed tradition, this criticism would be advanced with particular force by Karl Barth. Yet in spite of his concerns about the dangers of the *extra*, in the end Barth would rehabilitate a revised version of his inheritance here as elsewhere: because the Word who becomes incarnate in time is eternally determined to become incarnate, he may be said to be both wholly in the flesh and wholly outside it as well. There is an identity between the eternal Word and the eternal Word made flesh. The Word cannot be accessed other than in Jesus Christ, but the incarnation does not restrict the divine fullness: it declares it (Sumner 2013). Constructive reappropriations of the *extra* have been made along various lines in modern times (McGinnis 2014; Gordon 2016), some more ambitious than others in terms of the utility of the theme for theology as a whole; as a Christological concept at least, it remains of greater significance than its hastier critics have tended to discern.

28.3.4 The *munus triplex*

It was entirely consistent with Reformed assumptions to emphasize that the whole of Christ's fleshly path was mediatorial; his death, resurrection, and ascension completed his saving work, but atoning action certainly did not occur only at the finale of his earthly life. In Calvin's words: 'from the time when he took the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us' (*Inst.* II.26.5). The anointed

servant of God in our midst, Christ's life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session at God's right hand involved the full reality of his humanity at every stage.

Calvin's mature account of the mediator's execution of his role presents Christ's work under the rubric of the threefold office (*munus triplex*): the incarnate mediator acts as prophet, priest and king (*Inst.* II.15). The exposition looks back to Israel's history, and to the office of God's 'anointed' in one or more of these capacities in the Old Testament scriptures. The immediate context in Calvin is his concern to present his account of the mediator as fulfilment of covenant history (Edmondson 2004). Contrary to the views of an itinerant Italian theologian, Francesco Stancaro, whose ideas had gained controversial influence in Poland in the late 1550s, Calvin argues that Christ did not mediate between humanity and God only in respect of his human nature but in his whole divine-human person (Tylanda 1973a; 1973b). Stancaro's concern was primarily to safeguard the unity and coequality of the Son with the Father and the Spirit in his divinity, and so to propose that mediation between God and humanity took place at the level of the incarnate Son's human, not his divine, nature. For Calvin, as for other Reformed thinkers, it was by contrast essential to say that mediation occurred according to both natures; the execution of his office was the outworking of that by one divine-human subject, prophet, priest, and king in the totality of his person.

Calvin did not invent the rubric of the *munus triplex*. Besides its exegetical warrants, it had some patristic roots and a definite presence in medieval theology; Calvin's understanding of it may have been developed under Bucer's influence in particular. It would be deployed by Lutheran theologians also, though until the mid-seventeenth century the kingly and priestly offices were there the dominant foci. Calvin himself in fact originally adopted a twofold (priest, king) rather than threefold rubric, in his 1536 *Institutes* and in his *Catechism* of 1537/8, and that pattern persisted substantially in his biblical commentaries and preaching. Even in the threefold form, Calvin did not make nearly as much of the device as later Reformed theology would; it is notable that having invoked it in his 1559 *Institutes* he quickly returns to his earlier preference for a credal pattern as a way of arranging his themes. Late on in Calvin's literary career, the *munus triplex* was evidently not sufficient in itself to integrate all of the aspects of the mediator's action; it was only one part of such an account, and its capacities as an organizing device for an overall theology of atonement were not to be overstated.

Nevertheless, the threefold office had valuable heuristic force. The mediatorial work of the prophet was to be seen especially in the history of Christ's work of revelation, the priestly office in his sacrificial life and death, the kingly office in his enactment of the final reign of God. In practice, the priestly function would tend to assume centrality: it was of decisive significance that the Son was the perfect oblation for sins, his blood shed once and for all to make atonement and bring sinners near to God. The whole life of the Saviour was indeed atoning; special importance attached to his death, the climax of his active and passive obedience. The Cross was, unavoidably, a judicial business, but it did not condition God into being gracious towards sinners, or turn an only wrathful or vengeful deity into a loving one. In as much as it was the enactment of a

commission, behind the cross already lay God's love; it was the holiness of that love which grounded the justice of the judgement that was executed in the condemnation of Christ as our substitute.

From the later sixteenth century, it became standard for the Reformed to integrate the *munus triplex* with the two states of humiliation and exaltation: all three offices were said to be exercised by the mediator in each state. In some Reformed accounts, the threefold office was effectively subordinated to the two states (Wollebius is one example), but in general the office would emerge as dominant. The incarnate one was not prophet and priest prior to the resurrection, king thereafter: his earthly work involved royal arrival from its inception; his prophetic instruction of his disciples assumed an advanced stage between his resurrection and ascension, and continued in his heavenly authority over his church; his priestly representation of his people before occurred not only at the Cross but also in heaven, in his ongoing intercession for us, bearer of our humanity in the presence of his Father. The offices overlapped in both states, and assumed different forms in each case: prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministry takes one shape on earth, another in heaven. There was no *merely* sequential way of reading the threefold office.

At the same time, Reformed theologians faced the obvious reality of a scriptural narrative which spoke of earthly humility *followed* by heavenly glory, and they continued to engage Lutheran arguments on the transference of properties between natures, according to which exaltation of the Saviour's humanity was only the revelation of its already-possessed divine glory. Historical sequence of some kind seemed unavoidable: exaltation involved a movement from divine splendour veiled to divine splendour confirmed, but glorification was also a vindication and a reward for work actually accomplished in a state of lowliness. Yet insofar as the person of the mediator was central, the one whose divinity was not compromised in the voluntary assumption of servant form but enacted precisely in this chosen mode of being, it was crucial, as Calvin himself had recognized, to avoid 'compartmentalizing' of the two states, or a strictly linear pattern. In the mediator's personal history, humiliation and exaltation overlapped all along the line; the servant was also king upon the Cross (for a modern attempt to set out a version of such soterio-logic, see Treat 2014).

As major trajectories within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology expanded their formal concern with the divine covenant as unifying category in soteriology, they would make much more of the threefold office as the elect mediator's fulfilment of the purposes of God in his successive dealings with Adam, the patriarchs, and Israel. The threefold office was eternal, and revealed in the mediatorial work of the Word throughout history. The prophetic office was linked especially to the history of revelation, the priestly to the sacrificial life and death of Christ, the kingly to the final reign of God. In covenantal reflection, the content attributed to each of the three offices tended to be affected by categories of conditionality. If there was a covenant of grace, there was also originally a covenant of works with Adam, and the mediator's threefold office also involved his execution of a federal role in which his satisfaction of divine conditions was core to his righteousness. Once again, person and work were closely integrated.

Modern charges that such accounts disastrously overlaid biblical concepts of covenant with contractual or forensic logic, or that they posited a fundamental relationship of God and creatures in which grace came second to nature and its obligations, have been severely overstated. The allegations are generally motivated by other theological agendas, and scarcely reflect attentive engagement with the sources. The Reformed concern for the relationship of Christology to soteriology undoubtedly found particular kinds of expression in covenantal traditions and their legacies (meaning, for speakers of English, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) above all, or perhaps its modified form for Congregationalists, the Savoy Declaration (1658)), but the results were by no means only baleful or legalistic, nor were they necessarily at odds with earlier Reformed impulses. It is entirely feasible to track a good deal of the reasoning back into the applications of covenant in Calvin and Bullinger. Orthodox thinkers adopted different positions on the role of Christ in election—on his significance as an active subject of the divine decree, and on the relationship of his mediatorial work to his identity as prototype of all the elect, not simply executor of a transcendent divine will that mediation involve the accomplishment of conditions. Yet for all the variety Reformed teaching about Christ and the decree had changed a good deal less in the early seventeenth century than has often been supposed, and it is certainly not feasible to characterize the theologies of federal orthodoxy as contorted attempts to qualify a one-sided predestinarianism in quest for a much-needed account of creaturely agency (see Muller 2008). Whatever new intellectual and moral emphases federalism brought, and whatever distinctions are to be drawn within covenantal theologies, a fundamental impulse had not disappeared: consideration of the person of Christ as mediator belonged within an overarching narrative of the eternal appointment of estranged creatures to *blessing*—the wondrous story of their temporal reconciliation and redemption for a filial relationship with God, purposed for them in mercy before the foundation of the world.

The threefold office continues to inform contemporary expositions of a Reformed covenantal Christology (e.g. Horton 2005). However strong its heritage, it may be inadequate in itself to serve as a summary concept in soteriology, and attempts to deploy it in such fashion have their challenges (Sherman 2004; cf. Johnson 2012). Its applications may also be problematic: some ways of attempting to map the theme onto ecclesial and ministerial forms of mediation, for example, or of using it to underwrite political authority, have justly incurred questions.

Nevertheless, the *munus triplex* has remained a significant Reformed theme in modernity; it is worth glancing at two quite different examples. In Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* (2nd edn 1830/31), the supreme expression of a modern liberal version of a Reformed theology, there is sharp criticism of Chalcedonian Christology as incoherent and fundamentally detached from the Christian community's experience of God (Mariña 2005). In extrapolation from that experience, Jesus Christ is not to be confessed as one person in two natures, but as the human being in whom there is a perfect potency of God-consciousness. The 'unclouded' blessedness of his human consciousness of God draws believers into fellowship with him in his perfect receptivity:

that is his redemptive work, on the basis of which they may properly speak of 'the veritable existence of God in him'. To experience the transformative significance of Jesus' unique human ideality is to confess that he is the perfect reiteration in human form of the pure activity of love that God is (Hector 2006). As part of Schleiermacher's presentation of what a Christology thus constructed out of redemptive experience might entail, he makes use of a revised form of the threefold office. The prophetic is Christ's self-proclamation; the priestly involves his obedience and intercession, but that is at its core the outworking of his perfect expression of the being of God within him, the effects of which are determinative only as they are evocative; the kingly resides in his pervasive capacity to be as sufficient as the church finds him to be in his influence upon it (*The Christian Faith* §§102–5). In all this, substantial shifts are made to classical assumptions, and the formula of the two states is set aside entirely. Yet it is clear that Schleiermacher considers his approach remains within a Reformed matrix. In the continuing sense of need to engage the categories, to adapt them according to a very different kind of procedural logic, there remains a strong investment in the primacy of divine grace, and on the irreplaceable significance of the humanity of Christ in salvation.

A quite distinct approach is found in Karl Barth, who makes extensive use of both the threefold office and the two states as organizing principles in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1–3. Though Barth for his part could be distinctly critical of post-Reformation dogmatics, not least its accounts of Christ and election, his exposition of Christology received early stimulus from his engagements with Reformed orthodoxy (both in Heinrich Heppé's classic textbook, *Reformed Dogmatics*, and more widely: cf. Heppé 1950, especially chs 17–19), and he went on conversing extensively with the legacy of traditional Reformed confession throughout the development of his *Church Dogmatics*. The centrally determinative place of Jesus Christ as the one Word of God is evident from the start, governing Barth's treatment of revelation, and taking particular shape in his revision of a Reformed theology of election, according to which God and humanity must both be thought of as they are found to be in Jesus Christ. Election is God's self-election and his election of humanity all at once, made actual in Jesus Christ, who is both the electing God and the elect human being. In Christ, God determines himself to be gracious; in him, humanity as such is elect to know the blessing of fellowship with God. The logic is basic to Barth's exposition of creation and covenant, and to his theological anthropology. When he turns to the doctrine of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics* IV, Barth's emphasis on the concreteness of the person of Christ as 'God with us' attains its profoundest intensity and range.

If Schleiermacher's Christology essentially treats Christ's work as his person, Barth labours to consider the person of Christ in light of his work, and to do so in highly creative fashion in terms of the mediator's fleshly particularity. Barth's 'actualism' and its implications are read in diverse ways by his interpreters, and it may well be that the case for the later Barth as ingenious signpost to a post-metaphysical Christology has been overblown. It is far from clear that Barth's mature account of the incarnation ever lets go of the fundamental claim that the divine Son is eternally complete in his being irrespective

of any movement in creaturely history, but it is certainly the case that for Barth the person of Christ can in the end receive no substantive treatment in abstraction—only as the reality of the God who takes flesh. The Christology is massively ‘high’, but also places immense emphasis on the humanity that is freely assumed and enacted (Jones 2008). Chalcedon’s two natures are a *history*, the great act of God’s self-identification as the one who determines to be God with and for us.

Barth’s exposition looks back to classical questions as to what this means (Sumner 2014), and does so with interests that continue to be governed in no small measure by Reformed sensibilities, but the tradition is assessed in distinctive form. In the mediator’s history, there is divine humiliation and human exaltation all at once. For Barth, there is a strong simultaneity about the two states: the Son enacts at once the high humility of God, and the exalted significance of humanity for God. The divine descent, the way of the Son of God into the far country of the fallen creature’s alienation from God, is also the ascent of the human to its intended dignity: the homecoming of the Son of Man. The Lord is Servant; the Servant is Lord. Reconciliation is accomplished in the personal history of the mediator. We cannot set the divine nature, the state of exaltation and the kingly office on one side; the human nature, the state of humiliation and the priestly office on the other. The prophetic office is for Barth to be thought of as the mediator’s work of making himself known as the one he is: his declaration, now in risen, ascended power, that he is victor, the light of life in whom the world’s darkness has been banished.

Whether Barth’s treatment of Christ as prophet leaves sufficient role for the Holy Spirit, and whether it diminishes the being and ministry of the church itself as communicator of the Gospel to the world, have remained lively questions, too large to consider here. Whether Barth is also successful in reconfiguring the *status duplex* in non-sequential terms, or whether the quest to do so by the route he adopts is well-aimed, is also open to discussion. What is undeniable is that Reformed instincts remain powerful at point after point. For Barth, as for the tradition, whatever the Spirit’s role is, the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ specifically, not some amorphous or immanent power; whatever the church’s role is in attesting, it is as human that the church carries it out—enabled by grace to be itself in so doing, and charged with serious responsibilities in that regard, but not burdened with the task of mediating the divine, or of making reconciliation effective by what it does; that work is God’s.

28.4 SOME OTHER MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

Barth’s exposition of reconciliation connects with major claims regarding the being of God, including the radical contention that the obedience of the Son in the economy of salvation is not a matter only of his temporal self-humbling but the outworking of his essential way of being within the Godhead. The relationship of such claims to the fundamental question of divine freedom in particular is a matter of enduring—and often heated—debate. Much hangs upon whether we say that the Son’s enfleshed way of being is grounded in his eternal way of being, reiterative of it in freedom, or whether we say

that it is simply identical to it, such that the divine determination of the Son's economic mission is effectively constitutive of God's being as triune. Some arguments to the latter effect venture (consciously) beyond Barth's own qualifications on the relationship of Trinity and election.

Still, the possibilities afforded by a Reformed Christology remain an important part of the conversation. There are continuing endeavours to construct a Reformed version of a kenotic Christology in which the incarnation obliges us to take with full seriousness the 'humanization' of God (for an early programmatic sketch in respect of one ongoing project which has since been developed further in lecture series, see McCormack 2006). According to this reasoning, if it is an axiom of the Reformed tradition that the subject of Christology is the composite person of the mediator, not the second person of the Godhead *simpliciter*, the eternal divine being of the Son is already an eternal being-toward his incarnation in time, and so—contrary to a fair bit of the classical tradition—theology in fact has little or no interest in a *Logos asarkos*, a 'non-enfleshed' Word, for the Word always exists in God's self-electing anticipation as the *Logos ensarkos*, the Word enfleshed. The Word who takes flesh (*Logos incarnatus*) in time is antecedently the Word who is to be incarnate (*Logos incarnandus*). The mediator's deity eternally is the necessary ontological precondition of his historical humanity. If humility is not acquired by God the Son in the assumption of flesh, but is the essential mode of God the Son's being God the Son in eternity, the Son divests himself of nothing proper to deity in willing to act humanly by means of the acts of the man Jesus; he eternally and freely wills so to act.

Whether such an ambitious attempt to reconceive Reformed Christology—and the doctrine of God—in radically historicist terms will prove persuasive is too early to say; the full form of the case has yet to be set out. Still, it indicates the capacity of an avowedly Reformed theology, working after Barth, to wrestle with questions regarding the relationship of God to humility and passibility in light of the incarnation.

While modern Reformed theologians have ventured significant revisions of their tradition, and have often drawn decidedly problematic pictures of its historical course as a story of 'Calvinisms' old and new, they have remained conscious of its range. Reformed Christologists have often devoted considerable energy to demonstrating the fidelity of Reformed arguments to scripture and tradition, and have sought to find resources within their confessional history for responding to modernity's arguments. The strategies have of course been heavily shaped by their own intellectual contexts, but they have also evidenced the flexibility of the tradition, its ability regularly to depart from standard renditions of its shape (Crisp 2011). Modern Reformed Christology has found expression in accounts both proudly conservative and avowedly liberal; it has infused political theologies of right and left, West and East, old world and new, the persistently imperialist and the proudly postcolonial or contextual. International as well as local influences persist, and the contributions of major European and North American voices continue to be assessed in territories far from their own.

The authority of confessional standards, the criteria and boundaries of authentic Reformed identity, have ever been lively debates within the tradition, and there is little reason to suppose that will change. The questions already evidenced by the beginning of

the eighteenth century about the status of confessional forms have not gone away, nor have modernity's adjustments in subscription or content eroded concerns for a stricter fidelity as evangelically vital. Christology may have been less obviously affected by such arguments than have doctrines such as election, atonement or the authority of scripture itself, but it has naturally been implicated in the debates, especially in light of modern questions about faith and history, ontology, and symbol.

Intellectual and idiomatic range have certainly continued: while Reformed Christology as a formal affair continues to be heavily concentrated in systematic, historical and biblical modes, Reformed thinkers also continue to evince interests in philosophical Christology, making notable contributions in particular to Anglo-American endeavours to analyse the coherence and force of classical doctrinal claims. Such work is often presented as an exercise in theological retrieval, a way of pondering the sophistication of Reformed thought as a contribution to the catholic tradition. The operative role of exegesis in the endeavour tends to be limited; the method is presented primarily as a constructive deployment of tools furnished by analytic philosophy.

Alongside these self-consciously intellectual interests, the riches of Reformed Christology as a *pastoral* tradition—its profound capacity to offer powerful accounts of union with the enfleshed, risen and ascended Christ by the Spirit, and to open up the significance of such images for church, ministry, and Christian existence in the world—continue to be explored. They have immense amounts to offer. We do well to remember that the tradition at almost every point reflects deep investment in preaching, and in the exposition of scripture as a formational task, directed towards the outworking of a comprehensive moral vision of the Christian life. Reformed Christology's implications for missional theology and ecumenism in an increasingly globalized and post-Christendom world also continue to merit close consideration.

The results of all of it may be startling for those whose images of a tradition and its legacies register only atavism or misanthropy. Reformed Christology has hardly always got things right; it has doubtless far too often been divisive, dull or abstract, managing to package the best news of all as bad. Yet Reformed theology has also made immense contributions to catholic Christianity, developing dogmatic and ethical emphases that command enduring attention as powerful representations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. According to its practitioners' confession, Reformed Christology's future lies with the one it attests. As such, its possibilities are reliant upon the transcendent wonder—and the judgement—of his communicative presence; so too, its tasks remain enduringly reformable in accordance with his Word, heard as ever only in his Spirit's power. Still, in the promise of that presence and all that it means there may be something else: any contemporary fears of Reformed Christology's demise may just—like assumptions as to its supposed modesty within the church's story—be greatly exaggerated.

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Edmondson (2004); Horton (2005); McCormack (1993); Willis (1966).

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CHAPTER 29

REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED

Atonement

KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

29.1 INTRODUCTION: ‘FOR HE HIMSELF IS OUR PEACE’ (EPH. 2:14)

29.1.1 War and Peace

‘MISSION accomplished.’ These words mark the attaining of an important objective, the execution of a plan, or the successful end of a military campaign. Surely the most impressive rescue operation in recent history was the Allied invasion of occupied France, a mission that eventually led to the end of the Second World War. D-Day was ‘Deliverance-Day’. Newspapers marked the end of the Second World War, and thus victory in Europe, with record-setting sized headlines (‘VE-Day—It’s All Over’). On 2 May 1945, the *Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper of the U.S. Armed Forces, used almost half the front page to announce ‘HITLER DEAD’. A few days later the headline was simply one word: ‘VICTORY’. Church bells rang out and crowds filled Times and Trafalgar Squares in New York and London respectively to celebrate.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is similarly good news, unsurpassable good news inasmuch as it announces not the end of a seven-year world war but the end of a millennia-long war for the world itself. The redemption that Jesus Christ accomplished was a rescue mission (from Lat. *missio* = ‘I send’) on a global scale, a freeing from prison of captives from every tribe and nation (Isa. 42:7). The Spirit of the Lord anointed him ‘to release the oppressed’ (Luke 4:18). God sent his only Son into the world to save it. The Gospel announces Jesus’ Mission Accomplished—news that Jesus’ work accomplished

redemption ('It is finished'—John 19:30; 'I am the resurrection and the life'—John 11:25). The Gospel is the breaking news that the kingdom of God has broken into the world to break the gates of hell and all the powers that enslaved it.

If the Gospel is the proclamation of the headline news that Jesus has saved the world, the doctrine of the atonement is its intelligent description and explication. To explain how Jesus accomplished redemption involves investigative journalism, for the Gospel is not an idea but an event. Think of the doctrine of the atonement as a series of answers to the several questions that typically characterize competent journalism: who? what? where? when? how? and why? The doctrine of atonement—indeed, all of theology—responds to the Psalmist's exhortation to 'make known his deeds among the peoples . . . tell of all his wondrous works!' (Ps. 105:1–2). A dogmatic account of the saving work of Christ is essentially a joyful indication of what the triune God has done 'for us and our salvation' (from the Nicene Creed).

29.1.2 From Day to Doctrine of Atonement

Biblical references to war in heaven are infrequent (see esp. Rev. 12:7–13), yet the biblical authors often depict Christ's saving work as a victory over demonic occupying forces (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Christian hymnody too celebrates Christ's defeat over the powers and principalities that oppressed the world: 'The powers of death have done their worst / but Christ their legions hath dispersed' is the second line of the great Easter hymn, 'The strife is over, the battle done / The victory of life is won'.

The Son's mission was peacemaking: the reconciliation of estranged parties (God/world; Jew/Gentile). His victory did indeed result in peace, but not in any ordinary way—not by political power or military might but 'by the blood of his cross' (Col. 1:20). It is an odd sort of victory that results in the death of the victor. Theology's task is to reflect on the biblical testimony to this saving event, particularly in its relation to God. How did God in Christ reconcile the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19)?

The apostle Paul testifies that it God's plan to make peace by the blood of Jesus' Cross (Col. 1:20). The Son of God is the Prince of Peace, and his dying is his way of procuring peace. John the Baptist introduces Jesus as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), and the book of Hebrews draws out the connections between Jesus as both offering and priest in a unique and once-for-all Day of Atonement (Heb. 4:14–5:10; 7:22–8:7; 9:1–10:25), the most important ritual sacrifice in Israel's calendar. Jesus himself says his shed blood constitutes a new covenant (Luke 22:20; cf. Heb. 12:24).

Jesus accomplished redemption by offering a definitive blood sacrifice that serves as the basis of peace everywhere, always, and for everyone (Heb. 10:12), but first and foremost of peace with God. The Gospel is the proclamation of this good news: not V-E but V-ESD Day (Victory over Evil, Sin, Death). Jesus atoned for the sins of the world (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2). The atonement is thus the *axis mundi* of world history, the critical turning point that completed the mission begun in Incarnation: the incarnation of the Son of God created a beachhead, but it was the Son's death that established the

kingdom of God. The Prince of Peace who came proclaiming his kingdom also served as the priest whose sacrifice brought it to earth. Jesus is the saviour of the world because he has incorporated sons and daughters from every tribe into his royal family, which is the inheritance of saints.

How exactly does the blood shed on Jesus' Cross make peace? Isaiah says that 'upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace' (Isa. 53:5). Peacemaking appears here to be a function not of conquering enemies but of undergoing punishment: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed' (1 Pet. 2:24). The prince of peace became a human pauper so that human paupers could become princes and princesses in the kingdom of God. Reformed theology locates the atonement at the heart of this 'wondrous exchange'. What is the nature of this exchange, and with what categories should we describe it: ontological, federal, forensic, relational? The doctrine of the atonement is the attempt to set out the logic of this exchange, explaining why it was necessary, who was involved, what happened, and how it works.

29.1.3 Towards a Distinctly Reformed Understanding

All Christian traditions affirm the saving significance of Christ's death. The Nicene Creed states, 'For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.' All theological traditions work with the same set of biblical texts. In what way, then, is Reformed theology distinct? What categories do Reformed theologians use to describe and explain the Son's successful mission to release the captives, establish a kingdom of peace and justice, and restore right relationships between sinners and God? What counts as a Reformed understanding of redemption accomplished depends in part on where (e.g. which country) and when (e.g. which century) one looks. For example, if one looks to seventeenth-century Holland and the Canons of Dort, often summarized with the acronym TULIP, one there discovers what is indeed distinctive, namely, the idea that the scope of Jesus' atonement is limited (the L) to the elect. Limited atonement is often mentioned as a distinctly Reformed inflection but, as we shall see, as a concept it is indeed limited—in its usefulness to capture what is distinctly Reformed.

While there are diverse streams in Reformed theology, there are also family resemblances: (1) a commitment to the supreme authority of scripture and to doing justice to the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27); (2) a tendency to follow scripture's lead to think about the history of redemption in covenantal terms, where covenant is 'a binding relationship based on obligations and sealed with an oath that makes two parties as close as family' (Treat 2015: 103); (3) an emphasis on God's covenant lordship and hence divine sovereignty, especially the free, sovereign, and holy love of God; (4) a disposition to think about human beings and especially Jesus Christ in terms of covenant servanthood, in particular the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. All of these, especially the latter, figure prominently in the way Reformed theologians seek to make sense of redemption accomplished.

The primary concern of the present chapter is the *historia salutis*, not the *ordo salutis*. Our focus is what Calvin treats in book II of the *Institutes* ('The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ') rather than book III ('The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ'), with the way Christ accomplished redemption rather than the way in which the Spirit applies it. A secondary concern will be to explore the unity and diversity of the Reformed understanding of the atonement. Thanks to recent historiography, it is now widely acknowledged that Calvin's thought is not the exclusive or even the primary criterion for determining whether or not a doctrine is 'truly Reformed'. *Sola Calvinus* was never a Reformation slogan (Muller 2012: 67–9).

This chapter begins with a survey of the traditional position as reflected in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century post-Reformation dogmatics and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reactions it provoked, particularly among Scottish and Swiss Reformed theologians who contend that 'federal Calvinism' requires correction (reform?) by 'evangelical Calvinism'. The four journalistic questions that structure the rest of the chapter help to bring out the distinctive notes that characterize a Reformed understanding of Jesus' redeeming work: (1) Why did Jesus have to die to save us and to whom is his atoning death directed? Who needed to be reconciled to whom? (2) What does the shedding of Jesus' blood actually accomplish? Put bluntly: how does atonement work? (3) Exactly when and where did Jesus make atonement? (4) For whom did Jesus accomplish redemption? Did Jesus really die for the sins of the whole world?

The following thesis, to be worked out over the rest of this chapter, attempts to read scripture theologically, represent the distinct Reformed theological emphases mentioned above, and reconcile divergent Reformed interpretations of the atonement: Jesus Christ, the sovereign Prince of Peace and eternal Son of God made man, accomplished redemption by exchanging his status as covenant Lord for that of covenant servant (Messiah; mediator) to fulfill the covenant stipulations (commands of the law) through his active obedience and to suffer the covenant sanction (curse of the law) through his passive obedience (death) in order to procure the covenant blessing (peace; life with God; filial adoption into the family of God) for God's covenant people (his elect; the church) through his resurrection.

29.2 ALWAYS REFORMING? FEDERAL THEOLOGY AND ITS CHRISTOLOGICAL 'CORRECTION'

One way to discover what is distinctly Reformed is to consult the various post-Reformation confessions and catechisms that consolidated the insights of the first-generation Reformers. Another is to examine the intra-Reformed debate that, like a subterranean fault-line, cuts across the tradition, particularly in the way some of its Swiss and Scottish proponents insist on the centrality of Christology and the inseparability of Christ's person and work.

29.2.1 From Calvin to Murray: The Development of Reformed (Federal) Orthodoxy

Reformed theologians are not the only ones to affirm an ‘objective’ type of atonement according to which sin is a concrete liability or debt that must be paid or satisfied. In light of the concern that scripture’s own categories inform theology, Reformed theologians have viewed the drama of redemption that scripture recounts—the history of God’s dealings with humanity—in covenantal terms. While Reformed theologians differ somewhat as to the nature and number of these covenants, almost everyone follows Calvin’s lead in discussing the atoning work of Christ as the unique mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5) in terms of the three offices (prophet, priest, and king) that structure the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai.

29.2.1.1 *The Three Covenants*

The covenant of grace. Fundamental to Reformed theology is an emphasis on the covenant of grace that, despite its different forms, spans the entire length of the Bible and ultimately accounts for its telling a unified story about the one people of God in its two forms (Israel and the church). The Gospel is the good news that God proves faithful to his promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2–3)—to form from his seed a holy nation that would bless all nations, a people that would enjoy and glorify God forever—by sending Jesus to do what Israel and the law could not: bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. The *person* of Jesus is as it were the covenant of grace made flesh (Emmanuel = ‘God with us,’ the covenant-maker and the supreme covenant blessing). The *work* of Jesus is the covenant of grace made good (Luke 24:44–9; Rom. 4:13), his shed blood the basis of the new (because more glorious) covenant (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 12:24). In Jesus Christ, God proves a covenant-keeper (faithful) even when the children of Abraham were covenant-breakers.

The covenant of works. Grace is necessary for two reasons: first, because human beings have fallen short of the law’s requirements and deserve death (Rom. 3:23); second, because fallen human beings cannot do what the law requires. All human beings are children of Adam, complicit in his God-defying disobedience and sentenced to death (cf. Hos. 6:7). Reformed theologians in the sixteenth century knew the term ‘covenant’ is missing in Genesis 3, yet it became commonplace to treat God’s command to Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the stipulations of life for obedience and death for disobedience, in covenantal or ‘federal’ (Lat. *foedus* = ‘covenant’) terms. On the basis of Romans 5:1–12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–2, Reformed theologians came to understand Adam and Christ as representative ‘heads’ of old and new humanity, the covenant of works and grace respectively, as is clear from the Westminster Shorter Catechism: ‘The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity’ (Q. 16).

The covenant of redemption. The broader framework that connects the two previous covenants is the plan of salvation devised ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8). The covenant of grace is the execution on the plane of history of a triune decision (the decree to elect) agreed in eternity. While some Reformed worry that

the notion of a covenant of redemption is merely speculative, others have made the exegetical case that it is a good and necessary implication of what scripture says about the *commissioned* nature of Jesus' historical mission (Fesko 2016; Swain 2016; Webster 2011: 28–31). The covenant of redemption involves the Father's determination to save sinful humanity by sending his Son, as a human, to do for humanity what humanity cannot do for itself, and the Son's willing consent to this plan. Jesus displays both messianic consciousness and filial awareness of the mission given him by his Father, as is clear from his words just prior to his arrest and crucifixion: 'And what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" But for this purpose I have come to this hour' (John 12:27; cf. 17:4).

Together, these three covenants provide the framework with which most post-Reformation federal theologians understand the saving work of Christ. God accomplishes redemption by graciously appointing the Son to put things right by undertaking the covenant of works himself. This is the surprising good news: God himself takes on and fulfils the covenant obligations that Adam and his posterity failed to keep. The covenant of grace is the Son's fulfilling the covenant of works through the historical outworking of the covenant of redemption.

Reformed theologians differ over which of the covenants has logical priority. In particular, do works come before grace or does grace come before works? Is grace the opposite of works or does grace perfect works? The underlying issue is the nature of God. Is God more like a lawgiver who eventually relents or a lover who makes the ultimate sacrifice in spite of unrequited love? The apostle Paul says 'Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due' (Rom. 4:4). If the Father simply pays Jesus the wages owed him, whence the covenant of grace?

Calvin and the Reformed tradition found the covenantal framework a helpful aid for dealing with such questions. Calvin devotes a whole chapter to his own answer: 'Christ rightly and properly said to have merited God's grace and salvation for us' (*Inst.* II.xvii). It is precisely God's grace that establishes the covenant of works to begin with, and it is only by grace that sinners obtain what properly belongs to Jesus Christ: righteousness. By grace God gives us the work (Calvin actually says 'merit') of Christ, which is precisely what the Father and Son determined to do in eternity for us and our redemption. In Calvin's words: 'we obtain through Christ's grace what God promised in the law for our works' (*Inst.* II.xvii.5).

Is the covenant of grace therefore conditional or unconditional? This is a subtle query, requiring careful analysis, and there is a difference of Reformed opinion on the matter (see 'A Scottish "Nae"'). At the very least, it is important to acknowledge that while the covenant of grace may have conditions (e.g. faith), 'this is not to be opposed to the gracious foundation of the covenant, or the gracious fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant on man's behalf' (Ballor 2012: 218). While the work of Christ accomplishes redemption, this work begins and ends in grace: salvation results from God's sovereign love, his unmerited and unmotivated goodwill towards men and women.

29.2.1.2 *The Three Covenantal Offices*

God's eternal purpose is to create a covenant partner, a people to which he pledges his troth ('I will be your God, and you shall be my people'—Jer. 7:23). A covenant is an oath-bound

commitment to extend familial relationships (Gentry and Wellum 2012: 132–3): God graciously condescends to incorporate, through something like adoption or marriage, those who are not his people and to make them his family, and to extend the privileges and responsibilities commensurate with that new identity (it is significant that adoption is a legal and a filial relation). The three covenant offices loosely correspond to different aspects of the covenant (Bavinck 2006: 203), offices conducive to ordering a holy nation and, as such, provide a helpful, and distinctly Reformed, framework for appreciating the multifaceted nature of Christ's saving work.

King. Israel's kings were federal heads, responsible above all for embodying the fear of the Lord by keeping his commandments and judging justly, thereby demonstrating God's right rule. If Israel was God's son, the king was the personification of loyal and obedient sonship, the realization of God's intent for humanity. Reformed theologians emphasize the importance of Christ's active obedience, not simply refraining from sin but rather positively doing God's will, which includes defeating the powers ranged against the holy nation. The lamb of God is also the lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5), a warrior-king, for in depriving the law of its power over sinners by cancelling 'the record of debt that stood against us' (Col. 2:14), Jesus the Lord's anointed 'disarmed the rules and authorities and put them to open shame' (Col. 2:15). By fulfilling the old covenant and establishing the new covenant, Jesus triumphs over the kingdom of darkness and transfers all who are his into his kingdom of light (Col. 1:13).

Prophet. Israel's prophets reminded Israel's kings and the nation itself of the importance of obedience and loyalty to the covenant and, in particular, of the blessings and curses that would accompany obedience and disobedience respectively. Jesus was not simply one more prophet speaking God's word but the definitive prophet, the Word of God come in the flesh. Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God, its surprising scope, and the shocking scandal of its establishment: not by military might or political ploys but by Christ crucified (Treat 2014: 149–54).

Priest. The third aspect of the Mosaic covenant, in addition to the obligations and stipulations, was the cultic ceremony that symbolized and served as a type representing the covenant curse: death by sacrifice or, in Jesus' case, crucifixion. It is here that we arrive at the atonement proper, and Christ's role as both high priest and sacrificial lamb—the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Reformed theologians and confessions typically devote more space to explaining this aspect of redemptive work than the two others, and we shall do the same.

The priest represents God to the people and the people before God. Reformed theology distinguishes two aspects of Christ's priestly office: he offers an atoning sacrifice that brings about reconciliation, after which he makes continual intercession for the elect (Heb. 7:25). While the Belgic Confession devotes an entire article to Christ's intercession (1561: art. 26), it is the nature of Jesus' sacrifice that has received the lion's share of Reformed attention.

How does a man's bloody death effect reconciliation between God and the world? The Westminster Shorter Catechism is indeed succinct: Christ executes his priestly office by his once-for-all 'offering up of himself a sacrifice, to satisfy Divine justice, and reconcile us to God' (Q. 25). *Satisfaction* is the operative concept. The Latin etymology is instructive:

satis ('enough') + *facere* ('to do'). Simply stated: because of human sin, something had to be done to make things right with a righteous God. The doing in this case was a being-done-to (suffering and dying): a 'passive' obedience. Jesus is passively obedient in presenting himself as a sin offering. In Calvin's words: 'an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God's favor for us and appease his wrath' (*Inst.* II.xv.6).

Christ is the lamb without blemish offered up 'for us.' Though Christ redeems us through his whole life of obedience, active and passive, scripture and Reformed tradition lay special emphasis on the role of his death as making satisfaction for sin (Heb. 9:22). Christ 'makes right' first, by living a righteous life, actively representing humanity, and, second, by suffering the curse of the law as a substitute for sinners. Most federal theologians understood satisfaction in forensic (i.e. judicial) terms: Christ 'pays' the debt we owe to divine justice, hence the 'penal substitution' theory of the atonement. Calvin insists that the type of death Jesus suffered is significant. Dying from measles, an accident, or old age would not be enough—it would not *do enough*; it would not satisfy—because these forms of death are not sin offerings. In order to redeem sinners Jesus rather had to die the kind of death that would transfer our condemnation onto him (Lev. 16:10; Isa. 53:5); that Christ was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate (who ironically found him innocent) is for Calvin of the utmost theological significance (*Inst.* II.xvi.5).

The sacrifices mandated by the Mosaic covenant were indeed gracious provisions for sin, but only temporarily: the reason 'it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Heb. 10:4) is that animal blood ultimately fails to make things between God and sinners right. To co-opt a phrase from the Rolling Stones: God can't get no satisfaction from human sacrifices (Isa. 1:11). The apostle Paul explains that Israel's sacrificial system was not intended to deal with sin but to teach Israel about God's righteousness, to serve as a framework for understanding the only death that really does atone and do enough (Rom. 3:25–6). Jesus' death is our sin offering: 'Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). According to the Puritan theologian William Ames, 'An efficiency is set forth in that phrase' (Ames 1968: 135). Jesus' atoning death was the divinely appointed (gracious) means of satisfying divine honor, justice, and holiness, of making things right by offering what was required in order to fulfill all righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

29.2.2 From Barth to 'Evangelical Calvinism': The Triumph of Grace?

The federal scheme implicit in Reformed confessions and explicit in later theology has not been met with universal approval. We first examine some external criticisms before turning to consider alternative proposals that have emerged from within the broader Reformed tradition itself.

29.2.2.1 *An Italian Dissent*

Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) was an Italian Unitarian whose attempt to interpret the Bible in a way that would satisfy (his) reason anticipated the more 'Enlightened' critiques of

later modern thinkers. Socinus found the idea of Jesus' death placating God's wrath to be offensive for, according to Socinus, requiring satisfaction is incompatible with showing mercy. God is able to forgive sins freely, without requiring 'payment'. Indeed, if sin is punished, it is not forgiven; if it is forgiven, it is not punished. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are the objects of God's loving mercy. God does not *need* 'satisfaction', nor can the death of one man satisfy infinite justice. According to Socinus, Jesus was a man who revealed God's will through his teaching and moral example.

Francis Turretin devotes two chapters of his 1682 *Institutes* to refuting Socinus' efforts to deconstruct the logic of penal substitution. Turretin defends the *truth* of satisfaction (countering Socinus' claim that the death of one man cannot compensate on the scales of justice for the sins of the many) first, by recalling clear biblical teachings ('for you were bought with a price'—1 Cor. 6:20) and, second, by emphasizing the infinite worth of the person suffering (the Son of God): 'One sun . . . is still sufficient for the illumination of all' (Turretin 1994: 437).

Next, Turretin defends the *necessity* of Christ's satisfaction against Socinus' contention that a loving God could have simply willed to forgive sins without requiring the payment of a penalty. God is no mere creditor who can exact or remit payment: the Cross is not a business transaction. On the contrary, God is holy and just, and nothing he does goes against his essential nature. 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' (Heb. 9:22) is no arbitrary principle, but an expression of God's very being. The doctrine of divine simplicity reminds us that God is not an assemblage of discrete perfections that can be turned on or off. On the contrary: God is one, and always everything he is. Socinus is wrong to force apart divine perfections and oppose, say, divine love or mercy to God's holiness or justice. Rather, we must say that God is always and everywhere—and especially at the Cross of Christ—all that he is. Satisfaction was necessary because God cannot deny himself: God 'can will nothing contrary to his own justice and holiness' (Turretin 1994: 424) or to any of his other attributes either.

29.2.2.2 A Swiss 'Correction'

Chief among the Reformed detractors of the federal scheme stands Karl Barth, who would agree with Turretin at least this far: that one's doctrine of atonement is intimately tied up with one's view of God. Yet Barth faults federal theology for holding a concept of God determined by something other than God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth intended his own account of redemption accomplished to be more consistently Christological, unlike federal theology which, in giving pride of place to Adam and the covenant of works, takes its eye off the Christological ball.

Barth believes the one covenant of grace revealed in Jesus Christ, a 'single event', rules out a covenant of works and renders superfluous the covenant of redemption (Barth 1956: 56). Barth complains that federal theology uses these two other covenants as a framework for understanding the covenant of grace (and atonement) instead of acknowledging that everything in Christian theology is a description of, and determined by, the history of Jesus. The truth of human being is not a function of the first Adam but the last. To acknowledge a covenant of works is to admit that there is a way of

getting right with God that bypasses Jesus and, what is worse, a God ‘behind the back of Jesus’ whose character remains a mystery. Barth was critical of federal theology for making the covenant of works (and hence God’s justice) ‘the framework and standard of reference for the covenant of grace’, such that grace is always a fulfilling of the law, which comes first (Barth 1956: 62–3). On this federal scheme, grace is a secondary arrangement concocted only because of the failure of the covenant of works. Barth insists rather that God’s word is always, already, and only grace: Jesus Christ *is* the decree of election, a decree that determines who God is (for us) and who we are (in Christ).

The incarnation reveals that God has determined not to be God without his human covenant partner. In Jesus Christ the triune God reveals the divine being to be a being-with and being-for us. Because Jesus Christ *is*, in his person, the union of divinity and humanity, Barth insists on treating the incarnation and atonement as integrally united. To say ‘and he [the Son of God] became flesh’ is already good news, and reveals that God is never more divine than when pouring himself out for undeserving human others.

What, then, does Jesus accomplish on the Cross? In Barth’s view, the Cross satisfies, not so much in the sense of propitiating God’s wrath, but in proving God’s love. God takes on the human experience of death and makes it his own (McCormack 2016: 76). The covenant history that brings about reconciliation is more a matter of ontological transformation than legal transaction. The Cross does not satisfy a mere penalty for sin but rather destroys sin (the old humanity) itself: ‘This creating... of a human subject which is new in relation to God... [is] the event of the atonement made in Jesus Christ’ (Barth 1956: 89). It is not simply what Jesus does (satisfy divine wrath) but who he is, the God-man, that has atoning significance: ‘Jesus Christ is the atonement’ (Barth 1956: 34). Jesus’ death does not placate an angry God but enables the triune God to ‘absorb’ sin into the divine being, thus overcoming it by replacing disobedient humanity (Adam) with new, obedient humanity (Christ) (McCormack 1993: 26–34).

29.2.2.3 *A Scottish ‘Nae’*

T. F. and J. B. Torrance develop Barth’s critique further, arguing that federal theology is a sub-evangelical aberration of genuine Reformed—Calvin’s, not Calvinist—theology. The Torrances retrieve an older Scottish tradition whose focus is incarnational, inclusivist, and of great pastoral benefit. In particular, they worry that federal theology, with its emphasis on the Cross as a propitiation of God’s wrath, combined with the notion that salvation is for the elect only, sets up many in the congregation to become anxious about their salvation: *unassured*. How can preachers preach the Gospel, and assure their listeners ‘Christ died for you’, if the benefits of his death are for the elect only?

Such questions led J. McLeod Campbell to write his 1856 work *The Nature of Atonement*. Campbell argued that the Gospel is not a demand for humans to do something in order to be right with God but an announcement of what Christ has done to make us right with God. So far, so Reformed. However, Campbell radicalizes Jesus’ vicarious humanity by insisting that Jesus not only dies but *repents* for sinners too: ‘the Son’s dealing with the Father in relation to our sins [took] the form of a perfect confession of our sins’ (Campbell 1996: 118). Christ’s ‘perfect Amen’ to God’s judgment on sin

satisfies divine justice, not primarily by undergoing punishment, but by offering perfect repentance: ‘*in that response* sin is conquered, God is satisfied, and we are called to be partakers through Christ in eternal life’ (Van Dyk 1999: 229).

Campbell is one of a number of Scottish theologians who stress what, for lack of a better term, could be called the *unconditional* Gospel—that is, the good news of Jesus Christ ‘for us’ that offers saving grace without prior conditions, faith and repentance included. Jesus is ‘for us’ because he has assumed fallen humanity and done what fallen humanity could not. In an important sense, the person of Jesus, the God-man, *is* the work of reconciliation. Hence the incarnation is an atonement, or at least the beginning of atonement. If this Christologically enhanced revision of federal theology were a syllogism, it might go like this:

- The Gospel is the good news of atonement in Christ (reconciliation).
- Jesus Christ *is* the Gospel, for in his person divinity assumes, and thus heals, human nature.
- Therefore, the Gospel is for all because all humanity is included in and represented in Christ’s person and so receive the benefits of his atoning work.

Such is more or less the position of self-styled ‘Evangelical Calvinists’ intent on reforming the Reformed doctrine of the atonement along Swiss (Barthian) and Scottish (Torrancian) lines that ensure grace and love precede law and justice.

Richard Muller (2012: 34–5) and Oliver Crisp (2014) have each argued against reducing Reformed theology to what derives from John Calvin only. Such a constraint misses the breadth and diversity that characterizes the tradition. In describing their position as ‘evangelical Calvinism’, however, its proponents claim to retrieve a purer Reformed source, one that quenches the anxious soul’s thirst with the water of Christology. In particular, it claims to do better justice to the signature Reformed theme of the covenant of sovereign grace. Its federal critics (Letham 2013: 444–59; McGowan 2008: 131–4) remain unconvinced. The way forward must surely involve charitable listening and critical discernment—on both sides.

Perhaps the most basic correction Evangelical Calvinists make is to replace the federal notion of penal substitution (vicarious sacrifice) with ontological representation (vicarious humanity): ‘By becoming a human being, Christ bound up our being inextricably with his’ (McSwain 2010: 6). A technical term for the way in which the person and work of Christ are bound up with one another might be ‘hypostatic atonement’. This emphasis on the saving significance of Christ’s vicarious humanity generates three important distinctions that define the disagreement between the two Reformed camps over the nature of Christ’s work.

First, filial over federal (Radcliff 2016: 20–21). J. B. Torrance charges federal theology with describing God’s relationship to humanity in contractual terms (‘do this and live’) (Torrance 1970). This contract demands payment before forgiveness, implying that divine justice is a necessary and perhaps defining attribute of God, while divine love is arbitrary and contingent. The Torrances strenuously object to every appearance of subordinating

grace to such an overarching forensic framework. God rather sends the Son to assume and adopt humanity (hence ‘filial’). God elects all of humanity, unconditionally, in Christ, who also makes the right covenant response for us: repentance, faith, and obedience.

Second, ontological over external: ‘The Torrances believe that an overarching eternal and judicial scheme of penal substitution and imputation does not reflect God’s primarily filial purposes for humanity nor does it truly transform humanity’ (Radcliff 2016: 49). T. F. Torrance makes patristic Christology the centre of soteriological gravity. In particular, he appeals to Athanasius’ emphasis on *homoousios* to argue that atonement takes place not on the Cross, *outside* of Christ, but within his being inasmuch as it is there that the divine nature transforms fallen human nature: ‘his nature heals our nature’ (Torrance 1996: 156). This is true of Christ’s whole life, as well as his death on the Cross: we—everyone—have been crucified with Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20), and his victory over death and corruption is therefore ours also. The exegetical question, of course, is whether scripture speaks of Christ’s bearing the sins of human nature rather than the sins of particular human persons.

Third, objective over subjective. The atoning work of Christ is finished. Sinners can therefore contribute nothing to it, not even the existential decision to trust Christ as their savior. He *is* their saviour, whether they believe it or not. For Evangelical Calvinists, faith and repentance are not conditions for receiving grace but its fruit. Christ’s work includes his having faith for us. The human response of faith by the Holy Spirit is but a subjective participation in what is already an objective reality.

The rest of this chapter responds to these corrections and objections to federal theology, and charts the Reformed way forward, by answering the four journalistic questions and unpacking the initial thesis with which we began.

29.3 THE INTENT OF ATONEMENT: TO WHOM IS JESUS’ DEATH DIRECTED (AND WHY IS IT NEEDED)?

‘The most fundamental of all questions with regard to the atonement is the question of direction. To whom is the great atoning act, the Cross, directed?’ (Macleod 2016: 243). To state the issue bluntly: is atonement necessary because God is essentially a just judge and only secondarily a loving Father, as its critics charge federal theology of assuming? Or, is the penal substitution view guilty of condoning violence (retribution) under the rubric justice and promoting a doctrine of God that features divine bloodlust? Jesus himself said that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; cf. Luke 24:26; Acts 17:3, 26:23), and every atonement theory worth its salt has to account for this necessity.

The way forward is to return to the beginning: why is reconciliation necessary at all? We begin by unpacking the relevant phrase from our initial thesis on the intent of the

atonement: to procure the covenant blessing (peace; eternal life in God's presence and fellowship in the family of God). The federal tradition could, and perhaps should, do more to emphasize its distinctly biblical covenantal roots, not least to avoid giving the false impression that justice is the essential attribute of God, with love contingent and conditional on the satisfaction of justice. Calvin quotes Augustine to establish his key point, that the work of atonement is not the condition of God's love but derives from God's love: 'Thus in a marvellous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us' (*Inst.* II.xvi.4). God reconciles us to himself only 'because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19).

The reason God needs to be reconciled to us and not simply us to him, however, is because sinners are not fit to stand in his presence: 'For God, who is the highest righteousness, cannot love the unrighteousness that he sees in us all' (*Inst.* II.xvi.3). Sin is the refusal of the creator order and the rejection of the Creator. God nevertheless loves us (Rom. 5:8), and thus provides a way for ungodly rebels to stand in right relation with him. Paul says that 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them' (2 Cor. 5:19)—but also not merely looking the other way. Scripture depicts Jesus' death as a sacrifice, and sacrifices, the God-given means for unholy sinners to be protected from the intense white light of God's holy righteousness, are directed to God. It is impossible to read Hebrews 4–10 and think that Christ's high-priestly work is directed primarily toward humanity (Macleod 2016: 247).

The atonement was necessary for God's love to realize its purpose of forming a royal priesthood that would glorify God and enjoy him forever. As a number of recent studies have shown, the Bible depicts the garden of Eden—and indeed, the whole created cosmos—in terms of a temple, that is, the place where God dwells: 'As the innermost aim of the covenant, dwelling with God in the house of God, for fullness of life in abundant joy and fellowship, is the great promise held out before God's people' (Morales 2015: 18).

The presence of God is not a thing with which to trifle. The prophet's wail is heartfelt and entirely apt: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips' (Isa. 6:1). The Lord God is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29), hence the pressing question: 'Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire?' (Isa. 33:14). When Adam sinned, he was banished from the place of God's special presence, and cherubim with flaming swords guarded the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). It is not coincidental that cherubim similarly 'guard' the mercy seat, that holiest of places on the ark of the covenant that sat in the Holy of Holies and was the site of the annual Day of Atonement (Ex. 25:18–22; 1 Kgs 8:6). God is neither a tame lion nor a dull light: those who either touch or even look upon the ark of the covenant in a state of unholiness are struck down (1 Sam. 6:19) or killed (2 Sam. 6:6–7).

The people of God must strive 'for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14). This holiness is not something that humans can manufacture but rather the 'single offering' by which Jesus Christ 'has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified' (Heb. 10:14), an offering that is the centrepiece of the new covenant in Jesus' blood, and of the ritual ceremony that commemorates it (the Lord's Supper). The atonement is the gracious provision that, in providing a way for the unholy to abide in God's presence, realizes the most wonderful of covenant blessings, and it does so in a

way that does not de-god God. It de-gods God when fallen human creatures—what Pascal describes as ‘the scum of the earth’—enter God’s house. Never mind the soles: the real problem is how to wipe clean a soiled soul and corrupt heart in order to render it fit for life in God’s presence. Arguably the dominant concern of Leviticus, of the whole Bible, and of Christians down through the centuries, is how to resolve this problem, namely, how to render the ungodly fit to enter and stand in God’s holy presence and, ultimately, to be adopted as his children.

The necessity of the atonement follows from the mandate that the holy Creator must somehow render the unholy creature fit to dwell in his presence—to cohabit in his house. The Cross of Christ is the means by which God justifies the ungodly, turns ‘flesh’ to spirit (Leithart 2016: 282–6), and makes strangers family members, all while remaining fully God. ‘Fully’ God is the operative concept: we must not think that the Cross allows God’s mercy to overcome his justice, or his love his holiness. On the contrary: God is always and everywhere *everything* that he is. Hence it is not the case that God is always just and sometimes loving, or always love and sometimes just. The Cross may be directed to God, but not for the purpose of elevating one divine attribute higher up the ladder of divine being than another. The doctrine of divine simplicity affirms that God is not composed of different parts, and it follows that the atonement is directed toward, and satisfies, not only divine justice but the sum total of God’s indivisible perfections (Johnson 2015: 97–101).

29.4 THE CONTENT OF ATONEMENT: WHAT DOES JESUS’ DEATH ACTUALLY ACCOMPLISH (AND HOW)?

What did Jesus do to establish right relations between God and humanity? Why the God-man? The Son of God assumed humanity to fulfil the covenant stipulation (commands of the law) through his active obedience, to suffer the covenant sanction (curse of the law) through his passive obedience (death). The active/passive distinction takes its cue from an important insight of Calvin’s: ‘Christ redeemed us through his obedience, which he practised throughout his life’ (*Inst.* II.xvi.5). Everything depends, however, on understanding this obedience, in particular Jesus’ shed blood, in its proper framework: federal satisfaction by filial obedience.

Contra critics of penal substitution, Jesus was not the victim of divine child abuse. Jesus insists that no one takes his life, for he lays it down of his own accord (John 10:17–18). The eternal Son of God’s obedience is both loving and free, and is first seen in his emptying himself, taking the (human) form of a (covenant) servant, in which form he completed the course of obedience by dying on a Cross (Phil. 2:6–8). The Cross is not the fulfilment of a commercial contract but the historical outworking of God’s eternal self-determination to re-establish right relations with fallen human creatures and thus to reopen their access to his life-giving presence.

Jesus' self-sacrifice is a striking example of filial obedience, more so than Isaac's. Although some Jewish interpreters view Isaac as the hero of the odd incident at Moriah, the author of Genesis does not explicitly depict Isaac as a covenant servant (Gen. 22:1–18). However, the New Testament authors clearly say that Jesus learned and displayed perfect obedience by completing *his* mission (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Heb. 2:10–18, 5:8–10). By demonstrating obedience, the Son of God made it possible for many to become sons and daughters of God (2 Cor. 6:18). It is by means of Jesus' human obedience that the Lord of the covenant becomes its servant: 'God himself, as the covenant maker and keeper, must unilaterally act to keep his own promise through the provision of a faithful, obedient Son' (Gentry and Wellum 2012: 668).

It is just here, at the climax of the Son's obedience, that we confront the scandal of the Cross in all its gory glory. Many people cannot stand the sight of blood, and many contemporary theologians cannot stand to mention it—and the violence it represents—in connection with God (e.g. Belousek 2012). Blood seems too messy, and primitive, to have anything to do with the love of God. Nevertheless, we must deal with the Gospel we have been given, not the Gospel we might have preferred. The New Testament presents the Gospel as an announcement that a new covenant has been instituted by Jesus' blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 12:24).

Blood looms large in both Testaments as the gracious means God provides for his ongoing relationship with his people, in particular by 'covering' their sins from God's righteous sight (Leithart 2016: 112–13). Israel's tabernacle was a God-given mechanism that enabled sinful humanity to dwell in God's presence. A good case can be made for viewing Leviticus 16 as the centre of the Pentateuch and the Day of Atonement it recounts as the high point of the story of God's relationship to Israel (Morales 2016: 23–9). The blood sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement represents the life owed God as the giver of all good gifts, particularly life itself. Hebrews represents the work of Christ as both High Priest and blood sacrifice (Heb. 9:11–14) and suggests that Israel's earthly tabernacle was but a shadow of the real heavenly thing (Heb. 9:23). Indeed, the whole sacrificial system of Israel, together with the law itself, were simply provisional pointers (Heb. 10:1, 14)—previews to the main event: the self-sacrificial once-for-all sin offering that was the death of Jesus Christ that purifies the cosmos (Morales 2016: 171). The liturgical drama of temple atonement staged a parable of the eschatological drama of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of Israel's law was to establish and enforce right relations. The law is not an arbitrary violent imposition upon human beings but, on the contrary, an expression of the law of their created nature: we were made in God's image for fellowship with God. Hence the summation of the law is to love the Lord God with all one's heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5): 'The goal for Israel is fellowship and communion with God. Because YHWH God is holy, the source of life, however, the requirement for communion with God is utter and complete consecration' (Morales 2016: 124). Justice concerns what is due a person. Sin, the failure to give God his due (love), is injustice: the failure to live rightly in relation to God and human beings. Sin disorders our relations with God, one another, and the world itself.

Sinners owe the author of life nothing less than life itself. Jesus' shed blood, a sign of life given—consecration to the uttermost; whole-hearted submission—indicates that covenant relationships have been put right. A righteousness has been revealed from heaven in Christ, for the Son makes things right—makes the Creator–creature relationship right—by taking onto himself the consequences of sin, in particular, the sanctions for covenant disobedience: not only physical death but separation from God. It is by thus 'covering' our sins—hiding unrighteousness from God's sight by taking it away—that Jesus' death satisfies God's holy justice and just holiness. The Cross propitiates God by expiating sin (Rom 3:25; Heb. 2:17). Jesus' sacrificial death 'corresponds to satisfaction for us' (*Inst.* II.xvii.5) because it satisfies not only God's justice but the sum total of God's perfections. What meet on the Cross are not justice and mercy only, but love, wisdom, patience, goodness, freedom, and all the other divine attributes as well. The Cross is where God acts lovingly to make things right in a way that draws on the fullness of the divine perfections.

The obedience of Christ accomplishes redemption by removing the ground of our separation from God—covenant disobedience and death—and by re-establishing right relatedness, which is to say, right covenant servanthood. In addition to reconciling us to God, Christ's work also frees us from the dominion of sin and death. In particular, Christ frees us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13) and from the necessity of having to establish right relatedness with God on the basis of our own works (Rom. 5:19). Ultimately, the sacrifice given on the altar of Jesus' Cross opens up the way for a renewal not only of our relationship with God, but of our hearts and minds. Because of Christ's sacrifice of obedience, we can now offer up our obedience in thanks and praise.

29.5 THE EVENT OF ATONEMENT: WHEN WAS REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED (AND WHERE)?

As we have seen, Torrance and others find atoning significance primarily in Jesus' incarnation, and even Calvin says 'Christ has redeemed us through his obedience, which he practised throughout his life' (*Inst.* II.xvi.5). Yet Jesus' last words on the Cross were: 'It is finished' (John 19:30). Is there a specific moment where Jesus accomplishes atonement? We can here review the relevant portion of our thesis: Jesus Christ... accomplished redemption by exchanging his status as covenant Lord for that of covenant servant. Jesus is the covenant faithfulness of God worked out in the form of a covenant servant, but at what point does Jesus fulfil his mediatorial work?

Murray's chapter on 'The Perfection of the Atonement' (Murray 1955: 51–8) unpacks the significance of the finished work of Christ understood as his making satisfaction for sin. Atonement is a past fact: Jesus' death in our place was a real event with historical

objectivity and for that reason does not need to be repeated. There is both a uniqueness and a finality to Jesus' death (Heb. 9:12, 25–8). The Cross marks the moment and the place where God 'condemned sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3), which is why Paul can confidently assert 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1).

If the death of Jesus marks the moment of atonement, however, why does Calvin go on to affirm the creedal article 'he descended into hell'? Calvin disagrees with Thomas Aquinas that Jesus needed to suffer even more to accomplish our redemption, and he would probably disagree with Barth's view that Jesus suffered being dead ('non-being') in our place. Nevertheless, Calvin insists that the descent is 'a matter of no small moment in bringing about redemption' (*Inst.* II.xvi.8). The descent is a way of referring not simply to Jesus' physical death but to his experience of absolute God-forsakenness, to Jesus' paying 'a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul' (*Inst.* II.xvi.10). Calvin's view accords with that of the Heidelberg Catechism, which explains the addition of the 'descended into hell' as a way of assuring us '[t]hat in my greatest temptations I may be assured that Christ, my Lord, by his inexpressible anguish, pains, and terrors which he suffered in his soul on the cross and before, has redeemed me from the anguish and torment of hell' (Q. 44).

The story of Jesus does not end with his burial, of course, and neither does his redeeming work. After 'descent into hell' comes resurrection, and 'ascent into heaven'. Socinus held that Jesus' real sacrificial offering happened not on the Cross, which was only an example, but rather in a post-mortem event in the heavenly tabernacle—a suggestion that has recently received exegetical support in a study of the book of Hebrews: '[Jesus]' death sets the sequence in motion. His appearance before God in heaven effects atonement. The bridge between the two is his resurrection' (Moffitt 2011: 294).

The Reformed tradition has always acknowledged Jesus' past historical *satisfactio* on the Cross and his ongoing heavenly *intercessio* (Heppe 1978: 458). Yet scripture presents Jesus' historical death both as the *locus* of his victory over death (Heb. 2:14) and as having 'once-for-all' significance (Rom. 6:10; 1 Pet. 3:18). This is not to say that events associated with Jesus' exaltation—that is, resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, and heavenly session—have no redemptive significance. If the accomplishment of redemption turns on the wondrous exchange whereby the eternal Son of God, the second Adam, takes the sinner's place and recapitulates the history of Adam so that the children of Adam can enjoy by grace what the Son has by nature, then everything that happens to the Son, including the resurrection and Ascension, has redemptive significance.

The resurrection is the Father's vindication of the Son's work (Rom. 4:25), and the Ascension highlights 'what he has saved us *for*: namely, communion with the triune God in immortal glory' (Horton 2015: 226). While the Cross indicates that which we are saved *from*, the resurrection shows what we have been saved *for*, namely, 'to be born again to a living hope' (1 Pet. 1:3). Jesus' resurrection marks the efficacy of his crucifixion (1 Cor. 15:20–28). As Calvin notes: 'How could he have acquired victory for us if he had failed in the struggle [with death]?' (*Inst.* II.xvi.13).

29.6 THE EXTENT OF ATONEMENT: FOR WHOM WAS REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED (AND ON WHAT CONDITION)?

Jesus' death is the most important event in history. No other event has anything close to its universal significance, for it is the fulcrum by which the powers and principalities that rule the world were defeated and the means by which creation is renewed: 'the work of redemption... the spiritual re-creation of the souls of men, was a greater work than the original creation of the universe' (Boettner 1941: 30). Yet no point is more contentious among Reformed theologians than the extent of the atonement: did Jesus die for the whole world or for the elect only? Never mind the scarlet A: for critics of federal theology, the truly scandalous letter is the black L, 'Limited' Atonement, a blunt conceptual instrument that takes the bloom off TULIP. Why, then, does our thesis indicating the Reformed way forward insist that Jesus accomplished redemption for God's covenant people (his elect; the church)?

The recent Evangelical Calvinist Manifesto sees the extent of the atonement as part and parcel of the Gospel message 'that all are included in Christ's salvific work' (Habets and Grow 2012: 11)—a claim that contradicts the Canons of Dort and Westminster Confession, both of which specify the elect (those predestined by God) as the finite set of those for whom Christ made atonement: 'it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross... should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father' (Second Head of Doctrine, Article 8). As it so happens, there has been a difference of Reformed opinion on this question since it was first explicitly raised in the sixteenth century (Thomas 2006: 248–9).

John Owen sets out the logical possibilities: 'Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men' (Owen 1742: 36). Owen rejected the first option as unbiblical and the last as unworthy of the Saviour. 'Limited' does not do justice to the thrust of 'all the sins' and 'some' could be better described not in terms of limitation but definiteness. The majority Reformed tradition followed Augustine in affirming 'particular redemption', namely, that salvation is for those whom God predestines. However, in light of passages that offer the Gospel to the whole world, Reformed theologians searched for a formula with which to affirm both universality and particularity. For example, some Reformed theologians say that Christ died 'sufficiently for all, efficiently for the elect' (Heppe 1978: 475–6). All Reformed theologians affirm the infinite value and therefore intrinsic sufficiency of Jesus' death; the controversial point is whether Christ *intended* to atone for the sins of each and every individual.

While the Arminian position that Christ died for all (unlimited atonement) may appear to be a better Gospel (because better news), Reformed theologians would disagree. Unless one holds to universal salvation, the proclamation of a universal atonement

means that something other than God's purpose (e.g. foreseen human faith) determines whether or not a given individual is part of the elect. According to Boettner, the Arminian universalizing of the extent of the atonement is accompanied by a limitation of its saving power: 'Calvinists limit the atonement quantitatively, but not qualitatively. Arminians limit it qualitatively, but not quantitatively' (Boettner 1941: 94). Blocher makes a similar point in seeing definite atonement as '*unlimited* in its import and efficacy' (Blocher 2013: 576). Still, some trace the basic tension between redemptive inclusivity and exclusivity back to Calvin himself inasmuch as he wanted to affirm both the universality of the divine promise of the Gospel and the sovereignty of God's electing grace in predestining some to saving faith (Thomas 2006: 34; Muller 2012: 90).

Subsequent Reformed theologians have answered the question 'For whom did Christ die?' in several ways, and even by the time of the Westminster Assembly there was support for two distinct positions, each of which was compatible with the sovereignty of God's saving decree (predestination): strict particularism and English hypothetical universalism (Fesko 2014: 192). The latter position, represented by such theologians as John Davenant, James Ussher, and John Preston insisted that, in principle, Christ died for all humanity, though his death is not effective apart from faith. The basic idea is that Christ's redeeming work is for everyone, even if the actual enjoyment of its benefits is restricted (Muller 2012: 126–60). The end result may be the same (salvation is for the elect only), but the rhetoric hews closer to scripture and preserves the integrity of the universal offer of the Gospel. Recent scholarship has shown that English hypothetical universalism is neither a *novum* in nor a softening of the tradition (Muller 2011: 25), and some Reformed thinkers have recently come to its defense, advocating for its Reformed *bona fides* (Crisp 2014: 201–11).

The case is different with Barth and Torrance, who espouse what we could term 'actualist universalism'. As we have seen, for Evangelical Calvinists, Jesus' incarnation represents the atonement for all of humanity insofar as, having assumed fallen humanity, he also heals it. 'Actualist' refers to Barth's view that being—divine and human—is the result of God's act in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God determines himself for humanity and humanity for himself: '[God] gives himself to all whether they will or not' (Torrance 2009: 189). However, while atonement is universal, redemption is not (Habets and Grow 2012: 446). God's universal grace (God's 'Yes') is the hidden cause behind the believer's faith—and of the reprobate's unfaith. Evangelical Calvinists cannot explain either why or how those for whom Christ died deny their own reality (i.e. their determination by the event of Jesus Christ), appealing instead to mystery. The conclusion is nonetheless inescapable (Crisp 2010: 116–30; Williams 2008: 262–70): if atonement is universal and redemption is not, it can only be that God's 'Yes' in Christ (the decree of electing grace for all), is not irresistible—and so another TULIP petal falls.

Did Jesus' work accomplish redemption for those who ultimately fail to benefit from it? As king, his defeat of the devil benefits the whole cosmos. The question, however, is whether as high priest he makes atonement and intercedes for the sins of each and every individual: 'On the matter of limited intercession, Calvin's commentary on John 17:9, "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me," is definitive' (Muller 2012: 101). It does not

make much sense to say that Jesus accomplished redemption even for those who, at the Last Day, are not among the redeemed. The atonement does not simply make salvation possible but actually (efficaciously) saves: ‘To suppose that His plans fail and that He strives to no effect, is to reduce Him to the level of His creatures’ (Boettner 1941: 87). What may be at issue is not the distinction between hypothetical and actual universalism but between two kinds of benefits: ‘goods of present life *for all* (common grace rooted in the cross), and life of the coming age *for believers only*’ (Blocher 2013: 566). This rings true with the Gospel message: Jesus’ death redeems ‘whoever believes in him’ (John 3:16).

29.7 CONCLUSION: ‘IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD’ (EPH. 1:7)

Belief ‘in him’—faith—is the missing link between redemption accomplished and redemption applied. Everything depends not simply on Jesus’ sharing our general humanity but on a person’s particular relation to him. In Calvin’s words: ‘as long as Christ remains outside us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us’ (*Inst.* III.1.1). More positively: ‘everything that happened to Jesus will happen to those who are united to him’ (Horton 2015: 235). Union with Christ makes atonement efficacious (Ferguson 2016: 44–50). ‘Union with Christ also defines the “some” for whom his death is effective’ (Gibson and Gibson 2013: 48): ‘For he himself is our peace’ (Eph. 2:14). The Son redeems not simply by assuming human nature, but by transferring particular persons from every tribe and nation from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:13).

For whom did Jesus die? For all who put their trust in him as God’s gracious provision made flesh, the divine mercy made man. Is ‘putting one’s trust’ a condition that humans have to fulfill before God loves them (the Evangelical Calvinist worry about Federal Calvinism), or does Jesus’ vicarious work include believing on our behalf (the Federal Calvinist worry about Evangelical Calvinism)? Reformed theologians agree at least on this: faith is not a work that merits grace but a means by which the Spirit incorporates believers into the new covenant in Christ’s blood. Redemption is in him: to be in Christ is to enjoy all the benefits of his work. The Spirit, by occasioning faith, gives believers a share in Christ’s personal history of filial obedience: ‘I have been crucified with Christ’ (Gal. 2:20).

Regardless of how Reformed theologians express the extent of the atonement, they agree that Christ himself is the environment of the atonement. Redemption is accomplished, and found, in him (Eph. 1:7). The covenant blessing—communion with God; indeed, every spiritual blessing with which we have been blessed (Eph. 1:3)—is located in Christ. In Christ there is the forgiveness of sins and victory over sin. In Christ there is royal priesthood: sonship.

Redemption in Christ is the joint work of the triune God. The Father initiates, the Son executes, and the Spirit perfects and completes the work of redemption by uniting the elect to Christ through the gift of faith. Those on whom Christ pours out his Spirit are the sheep who hear his voice (John 10:11, 15–16); it is for this particular set—the elect; the new covenant people—that Christ died and for whom Christ intercedes (John 17:9, 24; Heb. 7:25). These are the redeemed, the ones the Father has given the Son (John 10:27–9), the ones who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world for adoption (Eph. 1:4–5). The Reformed way forward is to acknowledge that the federal *is* the filial (and vice versa). Perhaps the following can serve as a peace-making Reformed formulation: federal satisfaction through filial obedience and adoption. In establishing a new covenant in his blood, Jesus Christ the covenant mediator makes satisfaction for sin, conquers death and the devil, and restores right (familial) relations between God and his image-bearers. The company of the redeemed—the new covenant community; children of God (1 John 3:1–2)—enjoy that most intimate of personal unions: the marriage communion of at-one-ment that befits his bride, the church. Christ accomplished redemption. ‘So they are no longer two, but one’ (Mark 10:8).

SUGGESTED READING

Bavinck (2006); Boettner (1941); Gibson and Gibson (2013); Macleod (2014); Murray (1955).

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CHAPTER 30

REDEMPTION APPLIED

Union with Christ

J. TODD BILLINGS

‘UNION with Christ’, in the Reformed tradition, is shorthand for a complex nexus of themes within the scriptural witness and central to the church’s proclamation of the message of the Gospel. In contemporary discussions, ‘union with Christ’ refers to the broad soteriological and pneumatological framework in which doctrines of regeneration, faith, sanctification, and glorification take place. It also provides the basic context for framing the theological significance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Since union with Christ is a widespread scriptural teaching, non-Reformed traditions such as Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anabaptist, and other Christian traditions each afford the doctrine a significant place in their respective theologies. Despite several areas of broad catholic overlap among various Christians on the teaching, however, it is also the location for lively doctrinal debates, reflecting differences in soteriology, sacramental theology, ecclesiology, polity, and the Christian life. Historically, the closest kin to Reformed teaching on union with Christ has been the Lutheran tradition. But despite significant commonalities, the Reformed and Lutheran traditions have had and continue to have some significant confessional differences on issues related to union with Christ, especially surrounding how the doctrine informs the theology of the Lord’s Supper. The primary focus of this chapter will be upon union with Christ as it relates to soteriology.

30.1 WHAT KIND OF DOCTRINE IS UNION WITH CHRIST?

The theme of union with Christ has an astonishing doctrinal scope. In light of this, some theologians have proposed it as a hermeneutical key to Reformed theology as a whole.

For example, Charles Partee suggests that, in interpreting Calvin, union with Christ can function as a central dogma from which other teachings are derived. He then uses this as a strategy to argue that later 'Calvinists' betray Calvin's central insights. 'Calvin is not a Calvinist because union with Christ is at the heart of his theology—and not theirs' (Partee 2008: 167). This declaration is dubitable in what it says both about Calvin and about the so-called 'Calvinists'. Calvin's theology of union with Christ is not the 'heart' of his overall theology. Rather, Calvin's method in the *Institutes* was not a series of deductions from a grand principle, but a collection of *loci communes*, common topics of theology that were derived from his biblical exegesis and discussed in the Christian tradition. Topics such as incarnation, Trinity, and sacraments did not function primarily as dogmas that generate other dogmas, but as the topical gathering of biblical exegesis. Moreover, much like his contemporary Peter Martyr Vermigli, Calvin does give union with Christ a distinct place as a *locus* of doctrine, but it occurs in sections on faith, justification, the sacraments, and other related sections. Indeed, for Calvin, Vermigli, and later seventeenth-century 'Calvinists' in Partee's view, union with Christ is significant, but it was not the engine driving their teaching. Instead, Reformed theologians derived their thoughts on union with Christ from their biblical exegesis, and expounded and developed their thoughts on the topic whenever it arose in Scripture. They developed it in further detail when it impinged upon particular doctrinal controversies (e.g. related to justification), or when it had potential to bear pastoral fruit, as in sanctification.

In light of the exegetical basis for an early Reformed doctrine of union with Christ, what passages and themes in scripture have been particularly significant in Reformed theology?

Reformed exegetes have discovered a particular emphasis upon the theme of union with Christ in Pauline and Johannine writings. According to New Testament scholar Adolf Deissman, the phrase 'in Christ' and 'in the Lord' occurs 164 times in Paul's writings. 'It is really the characteristic expression of his Christianity' (Deissmann 1912: 128). Thus, as Reformed theologians sought to rediscover Paul's account of the Gospel, his expressions of union with Christ played a central role. In Romans, Paul's account of justification and new life occurs together with his account of baptism in union with Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 5–6). Romans 8 makes the Trinitarian context for union with Christ particularly clear, as believers are adopted as children of God, joining Christ as co-heirs in the role of sons and daughters to the Father, and receiving the Spirit who prays through them and testifies to their adoption. Believers are both 'justified' and 'glorified' in Christ (8:1, 8:30). In Ephesians 1–2, being 'in Christ' is connected to creation, election, the dead being made alive in Christ, and union with the ascended Lord 'in the heavenly realms'. Other epistles of Paul further develop these themes of adoption, dying with Christ, rising with Christ, and being glorified together with him. Indeed, for Paul this union with Christ relates not only to fellowship with Christ in baptism and at the table, but also to fellowship with other believers who have been engrafted into the people of God, uniting believers into one interdependent body because of this union with Christ (Eph. 2; 1 Cor. 12).

John's Gospel and 1 John were the other central sources for biblical exegesis on the topic. The Gospel of John uses a variety of images to speak about a dynamic, abiding

union with Christ, which involves both obedience to God and dwelling in the fellowship that the Son shares with the Father. Jesus is the living water for the thirsty, the bread of life for the hungry, the one who abides in believers as believers abide in him (John 4, 6, 7, 15). Apart from this abiding union with Christ, believers can do nothing (John 15:1–5). This union entails a rebirth by the Spirit (John 3; 1 John 5). The union and rebirth is enabled by faith and bears the fruit of obedience, especially the love of God and neighbor (John 15:8; 1 John 5:1–2).

While this brief sketch highlights some of the key New Testament materials exegeted, debated, and developed, the classical Reformed tradition made a number of related theological and confessional proposals for how to formulate Christian teaching on this nexus of themes. To that tradition we now turn.

30.2 CLASSICAL REFORMED FORMULATIONS OF UNION WITH CHRIST

The soteriology of union with Christ is ultimately grounded in the union of God himself with human flesh in the incarnation. As John's prologue testifies, 'the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (John 1:14). This incarnational union is sometimes spoken about as being 'in Christ' in relation to God: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). But most significantly, the union of God and humanity in Christ (the hypostatic union) is the indispensable theological doorway for making sense of the more common 'in Christ' language in the New Testament. Because Jesus Christ is the one in whom God and humanity commune perfectly, those who are adopted 'in Christ' can partake in this divine-human communion of God's household. As Vermigli noted in a letter to Calvin, in order to understand the 'mode of our union with Christ', we first need to recognize the fundamental union of God with the human race in the incarnation, such that Jesus is our brother. Indeed, 'the whole human race already has communion with Christ in this manner'. Yet, this 'natural fellowship' is not redemptive in itself, but enters us into a new communion generated by the Holy Spirit, who enables faith among the elect and brings the gifts of justification and new life in Christ (translation Garcia 2008: 274–6).

The vast majority, then, of 'in Christ' language in the New Testament refers to the Spirit-generated adoption of persons into union with Christ and into the covenant community of the church. There is both a vertical (God-directed) and a horizontal (other-directed) dimension, so to speak. For early Reformed exegetes, these two dimensions were closely interrelated and affirmed, yet most of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century controversies revolved around the content of the vertical dimension. In late modern biblical scholarship, the exegesis has often focused more upon disputes regarding the content of the horizontal dimension. We will turn to each in due turn.

For classical Reformed theology, a key overall framework for speaking about the benefits of union with Christ in relation to God is succinctly expressed by John Calvin:

'By partaking of him [Christ], we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life' (Calvin 1960: 3:11:1). While received simultaneously, the first gift of this 'double grace' is justification—the forgiveness of sins, the free pardon of God based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The second gift of the double grace is regeneration and sanctification—the new life generated by the Spirit resulting in works of love toward God and neighbor. Calvin insists that the two gifts must be distinguished—like the natures of Christ at Chalcedon, they are 'without confusion' and 'without mixture'. A mixture between the two would both violate his biblical exegesis of the apostle Paul on justification and it would turn sanctification into a sham of self-righteousness: rather than obeying God in gratitude for the gratuitous gift of justification—as children serve a 'gracious Father'—Christians would serve God and neighbour ultimately for *their own* sake, seeking merit through their good works. Instead, for Calvin, the Christian life is one of gratitude precisely because it is a response to God's astonishing grace in justification.

Yet, while Calvin insisted that justification and sanctification remain distinct, avoiding the turning of the Christian life into moral calculus, he just as vigorously emphasized that sanctification is not an optional 'extra' for Christians. Indeed, it is not the case that justification is God's work in Christ and sanctification is primarily human work. Both are gifts received in union with Christ—thus the gifts are 'without division, without separation' as Chalcedon declares about Christ's two natures. This means that regenerate Christians always bear the fruit of good works, even though it is not through good works that salvation is either accomplished or received:

Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.

(Calvin 1960: 3:16:1)

In light of this formulation, it is not surprising that Calvin claims that the 'sum of the Gospel' is justification and sanctification received in union with Christ (Calvin 1960: 3:3:1). Calvin does not downplay the significance of justification by faith alone—indeed, Calvin insists that it is 'the main hinge on which religion turns'. And yet, the Gospel always entails more than forgiveness alone or justification by faith alone. It involves no less than adoption as children of God, receiving a new status and new life through Christ by the Spirit.

As a second-generation codifier of the Reformed tradition, Calvin was not seeking to be unique; in his theology of union with Christ, he is characteristic of the broader

Reformed tradition, particularly as expressed in the Reformed confessions. Although he is distinctive in the phrasing of the ‘double grace’, the notion that justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable gifts received in union with Christ by the Spirit is expressed in a wide range of Reformed confessions.

For example, consider the Belgic Confession of 1561, which reflects the influence of Calvin in quite clear ways and received the approval of Calvin by letter. It has three articles on union with Christ and salvation: the first (article 22) introduces the role of faith and union with Christ, and then articles on justification (article 23) and sanctification follow (article 24). The Holy Spirit ‘kindles in our hearts a true faith that embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and makes him its own, and no longer looks for anything apart from him’. Thus, this Spirit-enabled faith is ‘the instrument that keeps us in communion with him [Christ] and with all his benefits’. In article 23, justification is ‘the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ’ based not on ‘ourselves or our merits’ but ‘on the sole obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him’. Justification has a particular consequence, which points to its role in preceding sanctification, and thus purifying it from obeying God out of servile fear. Justification ‘free[s] the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror of God’s approach’. As the Belgic expounds sanctification, it insists that sanctification is distinct yet inseparable from justification, for ‘it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being’ (*Our Faith* 2013: 46–9).

Other early Reformed confessions follow a roughly similar pattern, even if they do not as clearly mirror Calvin specifically. Confessions such as the Heidelberg Catechism emerge from diverse theological sources—with a variety of influences such as Philippist Lutherans and Zurich theologians (especially Bullinger). Yet its doctrine of union with Christ is central to its soteriology. From its initial question and answer, it draws upon the substance of a shared confessional theology of union, justification, and sanctification. In its characteristic way, it gives the doctrine a pastoral emphasis: that ‘your only comfort in life and in death’ is that ‘I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ’. This hope is grounded in the work of Christ who ‘fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil’. Christ’s work on the Cross is received by the Spirit in union with Christ, who empowers the believer for grateful service. ‘Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him’ (*Our Faith* 2013: 69).

Confessions, by their nature, do not tend to be sites of innovation. But on union with Christ, perhaps the most creative development in the early Reformed confessions comes in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q and A 31 and 32. As Ursinus makes clear in his commentary, he describes Christ’s person and work in the three offices and then moves to a direct parallel of a derivative, subordinate participation of Christians in the three offices through Christ. After explaining how Christ is called ‘anointed’ because he is our prophet, priest, and king, Q and A 32 describes the Spirit’s anointing of the Christian in terms of union with Christ, reflecting these three offices:

Q. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity. (*Our Faith* 2013: 80)

This strong account of union ('I am a member of Christ') by the Spirit (sharing in Christ's 'anointing') leads to a threefold aspect of Christian identity: through faith, Christians are 'engrafted into Christ as members to the head, that we may be continuously sustained, governed and quickened by him; and because he makes us prophets, priests and kings unto God and his Father, by making us partakers of his anointing'. This new identity conferred upon Christians is an 'unspeakable dignity' and it calls forth a response in action. For in this new, anointed identity is 'a participation in all of the gifts of Christ' including the three offices. This participation is subordinate and derivative. As prophets, Christians declare someone other than themselves—they 'confess his name', and, in Ursinus' commentary, teach 'the true doctrine of God necessary for salvation'. As priests, Christians depend upon the full priesthood of Christ as they pray and intercede for others, offer alms to those in need, and gratitude to God. 'Christ offered up a sacrifice of thanksgiving and propitiation, at the same time, we offer only sacrifices of thanksgiving.' As kings, believers participate in Christ's kingship in striving 'against sin and the devil in this life', looking forward to a kingdom when we 'reign with Christ over all creation for eternity'. And yet the logic of union is once again combined with that of subordination and derivation: 'Christ conquers his enemies by his own power, but we overcome our foes in and through him' (Ursinus 1954: 179–80).

30.3 FEDERAL THEOLOGY AND UNION WITH CHRIST

As noted, scholars such as Partee and others have argued for a strong discontinuity between Calvin and later 'Calvinist' theologies of union with Christ, particularly as federal theology developed in fullness in the seventeenth century. Indeed, there is development. But arguably, these developments emerge largely from a fidelity to the confessional claims and the key claims of early Reformers already noted.

For example, consider the work of Caspar Olevian, whose 1585 work *On the Substance of the Covenant of Grace Between God and the Elect* was extremely significant for the development of Reformed covenant theology. Olevian utilized the biblical category of covenant to organize soteriology around two federal, covenantal heads and representatives: Adam and Jesus Christ (thus 'federal theology'). God's covenant with Adam was a covenant of works established in the Garden, and God's covenant of grace, the Gospel, was enacted through Jesus Christ, the second representative head. In contrasting the different covenants in scripture, Olevian insists that the covenant of grace in Christ

always entails the ‘double benefit’ of justification and sanctification, which constitutes the ‘substance of the covenant’. In a way similar to Calvin’s ‘double grace’ and the confessional teaching about justification and sanctification, Olevian teaches that justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable; then he goes on to develop the way in which the mystical union of believers with Christ is central to the Christian life. Indeed, the doctrine of the mystical union of believers with Christ is a key way to hold together different dimensions of living in covenant with God. In union with Christ by the Spirit, the covenant promises are put into effect, and this union with Christ holds together the different dimensions of the covenant. The reception of the gifts of justification and sanctification are not conditional upon works, but nevertheless become evident through works, as citizens of Christ’s kingdom offer him service. Though God alone is the source of the double benefit of the covenant, the covenant has not only unilateral but bilateral dimensions as well, as the elect reflect their gratitude through works of obedience to Christ the king.

Olevian’s covenant theology, with its central place for union with Christ, came to be part of the shared inheritance of seventeenth century Reformed theology and helped to generate further developments in federal theology. Not surprisingly, when the Westminster Assembly convened in the mid-seventeenth century, it provided an account of union with Christ that evidenced more detailed reflection on the nature of biblical covenants than one detects in earlier confessions.

On the one hand, the Westminster Standards display continuity with earlier Reformed accounts of union with Christ, and the gifts of justification and sanctification. These notions continued to play a crucial role in soteriology. As the catechism states, ‘the union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God’s grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling’ (*Book of Confessions* 1999: 258). Even more emphatic than most earlier confessional statements, this union by the Spirit is both ‘real’ and ‘inseparable’, and is the key avenue for receiving the benefits of Christ’s work. Its definition of justification has not changed significantly from the time of second-generation codifiers such as Calvin. The Shorter Catechism defines justification as ‘an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone’ (Q & A 33). Moreover, like the earlier Reformed tradition, faith is an instrument of union with Christ, and sanctification is a life of love of God and neighbor that necessarily accompanies the gift of justification. ‘Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love’ (Confession 11:2). Yet justification and sanctification remain fundamentally distinct, while they are ‘inseparable’. ‘Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification His Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth the exercise thereof’ (Larger Catechism Q & A 77). With more detail and precision, the Westminster

Standards both affirms and develops the earlier Reformed confessions on union with Christ and salvation.

On the other hand, the Westminster Standards set this in a broader context of Federal theology. This has a number of implications for union with Christ: it closely ties salvific union to election, and it highlights the significance of union with Christ in covenantal fellowship with God and others in the church. It also leads to an increasing development in what has come to be known as the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). Although the technical term probably derives from Lutheran scholastic theologians in the 1720s, Reformed theologians who developed the doctrine drew upon a significant Reformed inheritance as well. For earlier Reformed thinkers this was known as the ‘golden chain,’ and had its exegetical roots in Romans 8:28–30:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Second-generation reformers such as Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, and Peter Martyr Vermigli gave significant attention to the sequence of the benefits of salvation in Romans 8, and the unfolding ‘stages’ of salvation therein. Calvin referred to it as a ‘necessary chain.’ As this reflection continued in the tradition, it focused more specifically upon the causes for each element of salvation, and added other biblical elements not specifically included in Romans 8:28–30. All of this was seen as reflection upon the broad work of the Spirit’s activity in union with Christ, unfolding the various dimensions of this union, prioritizing God’s election (with Paul, ‘And those he predestined’), and unfolding the various elements of God’s electing, empowering, and enabling work. By 1587, Ursinus expanded upon the Romans 8:28–30 chain in this way:

- 1) The creation and gathering of the church.
- 2) The sending and gift of Christ the Mediator, and of his sacrifice.
- 3) Effectual calling and the knowledge of it, namely, the conversion of the Elect by the Holy Spirit and the word.
- 4) Faith, justification, regeneration.
- 5) Good works.
- 6) Final perseverance.
- 7) Resurrection to glory.
- 8) Glorification and eternal life. (Translation Muller 2012: 189–90)

Thus, in Ursinus as well as other late sixteenth-century theologians such as William Perkins, Romans 8:28–30 was seen as an exegetical starting point for a broader reflection upon the internal causation of the application of Christ’s work. This did not marginalize union with Christ; rather, it was a development and expansion of the theme. As Perkins

made particularly clear, all of the ‘links’ of the chain were aspects of union with Christ in salvation.

The Westminster Standards reflect this development of early Reformed theology of the ‘golden chain’ and the *ordo salutis*, an ordering of the benefits of redemption in Christ. Interestingly, this teaching appears differently in the doctrinal ordering in the Westminster Confession of Faith than in the pedagogical ordering of the Shorter and Larger Catechisms. The Catechisms begin with union with Christ by the Spirit (Shorter, Q 29–30; Larger, Q 58–9) and then move to election, effectual calling, and the golden chain. The Confession begins with election and effectual calling, exploring union with Christ in various parts of the chain, particularly in its doctrine of faith and adoption. This difference does not reflect a disagreement in substance. Indeed, with the catechisms, the point is that union with Christ is not a link of the chain, but that the whole golden chain unfolds the benefits of the larger category of union with Christ. The Larger Catechism is particularly clear on this point in Q and A 69:

Q. What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

A. The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him.

(*Book of Confessions* 1999)

Thus, as the catechism continues on with its account of justification, adoption, sanctification, and other parts of the *ordo* (perseverance, glorification), it all ‘manifests their union with him’ (Christ). Thus, contrary to Thomas Torrance, who interprets Westminster’s *ordo* as steps culminating in union with Christ, Westminster’s theology of the golden chain and *ordo* insists that the whole chain manifests the believer’s union with Christ. One receives these benefits from the Spirit, not in temporal steps, but simultaneously. Nevertheless, as one can see from the profound importance that Melancthon, Calvin, and other early Reformers put on the distinction between justification and sanctification, the task of distinguishing and ordering these gifts of union with Christ is extremely significant for confessional and catechetical purposes.

30.4 UNION WITH CHRIST, UNION WITH GOD, AND JUSTIFICATION

If believers are united to Christ through faith, why does justification need to be framed as a legal declaration as Lutheran and Reformed confessions testify? Indeed, if union with Christ by the Spirit is the way that sinners come to possess Christ and his righteousness, why would a legal declaration be necessary? Rather than using the legal imagery of

the courtroom for justification, some theologians suggest that we should use relational imagery as an alternative: Christians are made one with Christ, who is their righteousness. They need not be 'declared' righteous forensically, because Jesus Christ, the righteous One, indwells the believer. No courtroom is necessary.

In various forms, this has been an objection to a Reformed account of union with Christ from the second generation of the Reformation to the early twenty-first century. For Lutheran and Reformed theologians, the earliest and most influential dispute on this subject was about Andreas Osiander's theology of union with Christ. After giving a brief account of this and the response of Calvin, we will return to the dogmatic questions it raises.

Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest before converting to Lutheranism and later serving as a professor of theology at the University of Königsberg. In 1550, he presented and defended 81 theses on justification, which contrasted sharply with both the Council of Trent and the exegesis of Philip Melancthon on Romans, specifically. In contrast to Trent's emphasis upon the indwelling habits of works of love in justification, he emphasized that God himself indwells the believer. This emphasis upon divine indwelling also cut to the core of early Lutheran accounts of justification: justification as a forensic declaration of forgiveness from God was unnecessary because Christ's divinity (which is righteousness itself) indwells believers. Drawing upon biblical passages about union with Christ and 2 Peter 1:4 where believers 'participate in the divine nature', Osiander argued that Christ's righteousness is *infused* in believers because of their union with Christ. He presented this as an alternative to justification as the *imputation* of Christ's righteousness to believers, thus giving them a new status on the basis of God's forensic declaration.

While Osiander died only two years after delivering these theses, his revisionist account of justification was vigorously attacked by Philip Melancthon as well as other Lutherans such as Johannes Bretschneider and Matthias Flacius. In the wake of these debates, some accused Calvin of promoting views akin to Osiander's. Indeed, aspects of Calvin's theology exhibit ostensible commonality with Osiander's emphases. In the *Institutes* and *Commentaries*, Calvin has an extensive account of divine indwelling, union with Christ, and communion—even union—with God. Yet, in a way that drew upon Melancthon on the meaning of justification and probably upon Flacius on faith, Calvin shows in the 1559 *Institutes* that his contrasts with Osiander are very real (Wengert 2013: 78–82). Calvin thus presents an account of union with Christ that the mainstream of the Reformed tradition sought to uphold as well: an account that holds together the forensic nature of justification with the regenerating, indwelling work of the Spirit. The two are held together, without being confused. In a significant way, this 'both/and' approach to imputation and infusion continues to be a distinctive insistence of Reformed theologians in theological disputes today (see e.g. Horton 2007).

With Osiander, Calvin used emphatic language about the oneness of believers with Christ and the indwelling of Christ by the Spirit. 'He [Osiander] says that we are one with Christ. We agree' (Calvin 1960: 3:11:5). This oneness means that salvation was not just a transaction procuring abstract 'benefits' such as forgiveness and new life, but a

relational communion and oneness with Jesus Christ. Indeed, Christ dwells in human hearts in a 'mystical union':

Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him. (Calvin 1960: 3:11:10)

This profound 'mystical union' is of 'highest importance'. It means that the gifts of justification and sanctification are not received from a distance, but through oneness with Christ and engraftment into his body. However, Calvin goes on to insist that an intimate union with Christ should not lead one to downplay the forensic character of justification as the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Indeed, Calvin claims that Osiander makes serious exegetical and doctrinal errors by rejecting the forensic character of justification. In Osiander's conception of union by the infusion of Christ's divine nature, 'he [Osiander] does not observe the bond of this unity', namely, 'to be united with Christ by the secret power of his Spirit' (Calvin 1960: 3:11:5). For Calvin, union with Christ is always by the work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, Osiander's understanding of the infusion of Christ's nature results in a 'confusion of the two kinds of grace' in union with Christ, namely, justification and sanctification (Calvin 1960: 3:11:6)—a distinction Calvin goes on to defend against Osiander on scriptural grounds (Calvin 1960: 3:11:12).

Moreover, Calvin argued that Osiander's account distorts the person and work of Christ himself. Calvin notes that Osiander grounds the justifying work in Christ's divine nature to the exclusion of his human nature. This narrowing moves deeply against the logic of Jesus Christ as the Mediator in his divine-human state (Calvin 1960: 3:11:8). But even more significant for Calvin is that this diminishes a crucial scriptural and doctrinal connection: the Cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Here, Calvin argues that 'we are justified in Christ, in so far as he was made an atoning sacrifice for us' (3:11:9). Yet, this act of atonement is not performed simply in the divine nature. 'For even though Christ if he had not been true God could not cleanse our souls by his blood, nor appease his Father by his sacrifice, nor absolve us from guilt... yet it is certain that he carried out all these acts according to the human nature' (3:11:9). This final point is significant for Calvin because it shows how Calvin's theology of union with Christ maintains a strong link between the cross of Christ and justification. By the instrument of faith, believers are justified in union with Christ. But they are not simply united to a 'divine nature' that is righteous because it is divine, or even a second Adam who lived a righteous life and hypothetically could have died a natural death. Rather, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is the righteousness of the cross—the mystery of the cross connected to the 'wondrous

exchange' language that is so closely related to imputation—in which the sin of sinners is imputed to Christ and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to sinners. As Calvin writes elsewhere, 'that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he [Christ] has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness' (Calvin 1960: 4:17:2). In this way, Calvin was characteristic of the Reformed tendency to approach forensic and transformational images as 'both/and' rather than 'either/or'. In this approach, the distinction between justification and sanctification is fundamental, even as the two are inseparable in a profound union with Christ by the Spirit.

And yet, for Calvin, this double grace in union with Christ fits within a broader soteriological context as well: one in which the original, and the final new creation are united to God. 'It was the spiritual life of Adam to remain united and bound to his Maker' (Calvin 1960: 2:1:5). Indeed, the image of God in human beings is a 'participation in God' (2:2:1). Yet, after the fall, human nature has been corrupted through the disease of sin. This corruption—as real as it is for Calvin—is *accidental* to human nature. Although the accidental characteristic of sinning will remain with believers through the present life, sanctification involves the gradual *diminishing* of this accidental characteristic as the original human nature is restored and perfected.

In this restoration and perfection of God's oneness with humanity in Christ, the second Adam, the Triune God incorporates believers into a covenantal oneness with himself through union with Christ. 'Just as he [Christ] is one with the Father, let us become one with him' (Calvin CO 29:353; my own translation of '*et quemadmodum unus est in patre, ita nos unum in ipso fiamus*'). This union with Christ occurs through the Spirit—indeed through the Spirit 'we come [to] a participation in God (*in Dei participationem venimus*)' (Calvin 1960: 1:13:14; my translation). Moreover, because the 'perfection of human happiness is to be united to God', this union takes place in redemption (1:15:6). For 'men are so united to Christ by faith that Christ unites them to God' (Calvin 1999a). Yet being united with God does not make believers 'consubstantial with God', as if they were a fourth member of the Godhead, but rather takes place in Christ, by 'the grace and power of the Spirit' (1:15:5). Calvin also speaks of a coming beatific vision, a 'direct vision' of the Godhead, 'when as partakers in heavenly glory we shall see God as he is' (2:14:3). This final, temporal end is in fact 'the end of the Gospel' which is 'to render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may so speak, to deify us'. For 'we shall be partakers of divine and blessed immortality and glory, so as to be as it were one with God as far as our capacities will allow' (Calvin 1999b). While Calvin does not indulge in detailed speculation about this final, eschatological end, his language concerning a Trinitarian incorporation of humanity into union with God is clear and emphatic.

In light of this strong emphasis upon union with God, do Reformed authors such as Calvin teach 'deification' as part of a doctrine of union with Christ? It depends upon how one defines 'deification'. Some use the term to refer to a soteriology in which humans are assimilated into the divine, or a soteriology in which Christ's divine attributes overwhelm his human attributes in the glorified state. Others assume that it

refers to a theology reflecting the work of Gregory Palamas, who used the essence/energy distinction to defend the Hesychast practice of the monks on Mt Athos in the late Byzantine church. If one defines ‘deification’ in any of these senses, then Calvin and the broader Reformed tradition do not teach it.

However, Calvin and the Reformed tradition do affirm deification as part of their broader biblical and catholic identity when less idiosyncratic definitions are given. Deification is a key soteriological motif developed in both Latin and Greek patristic writings, receiving a Western development in the Augustinian tradition in late patristic and medieval thought. In this broadly Augustinian tradition, it is common to speak about salvation in terms of union with God—though the assumption is that the final end would involve a *differentiated* union of creature and Creator at the beatific vision. This union is made possible by the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, which then leads to a state in which Christians share in the privileges of Christ’s Sonship as adopted children, sharing in his communion with God. Participation in Christ enables communion with God, even as the communication of idioms are in Christ’s concrete person (*communicatio idiomatus in concreto*). For the classical Reformed tradition, the affirmation of these themes did not entail a downplaying of the forensic character of justification as a gift received in union with Christ. Rather, it provided the larger soteriological context, showing the way in which union with Christ has implications for the doctrine of both creation and new creation in Christ, culminating in a participation in Christ’s glorification as children of the Father, through the Spirit.

30.5 UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COVENANT ENTRY

Although Reformed theologians do not seek to approach scriptural interpretation as a blank slate, the task of biblical exegesis remains central for the ongoing work and development of Reformed theology. Recent decades have seen a lively renewed interest in studies on union with Christ in the New Testament, with important recent monographs from Constantine Campbell, Grant Macaskill, and John Barclay. In addition, various debates about the significance of justification and union with Christ have been noteworthy in the development of the ‘new perspective on Paul’, a reassessment of Paul’s theology of grace in light of Second Temple Jewish sources and the influential work of E. P. Sanders. While a full chronicling of the contemporary debates is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is significant to note a trend in scholarship—and in the Reformed church (through the Belhar Confession)—concerning the horizontal and covenantal dimension of union with Christ.

On the one hand, classical Reformed theology strongly emphasizes the horizontal dimensions of union with Christ. In the words of Calvin, ‘we cannot love Christ without loving him in the brethren’ (Calvin 1960: 4:17:38). And yet this theme has been developed

and unfolded in new ways. In Ephesians 2, union with Christ involves covenantal incorporation into 'one, new humanity' in which Christ has made peace, breaking down the 'dividing wall of hostility'. This horizontal dimension of union with Christ has been powerfully retrieved by the Belhar Confession, written in 1984 after the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa had been excluded from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches when apartheid was declared a 'heresy' in 1982. Repeatedly the confession returns to the covenantal obligations of union with Christ in countering the heresy of apartheid:

[W]e share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world. (*Our Faith* 1999: 146)

In late modern New Testament scholarship, the horizontal dimension of union with Christ has been heavily emphasized as well. Specifically, 'justification' involves covenant-
entry, with scholars arguing that justification by faith is never less than (and is perhaps primarily) the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God. As such, particularly for the New Perspective on Paul, faith becomes a badge of covenant membership. In this way, it is postulated that covenantal thinking underlies New Testament passages about union with Christ, such that Gentiles are either 'in Adam' or 'in Christ' through adoption into God's elect people. In the words of James Dunn:

Paul had no concept of the unconscious or unintentional Christian. He did not think of all men and women as willy-nilly 'in Christ' whether they want to be or not, whether they know or not. The given of humanity's condition is membership in Adam, sharing in Adam's humanity, under the power of sin, on the way to death. But membership of the last Adam, sharing in Christ's resurrected humanity, beyond the power of sin and death, was not a given in the same way. It had to come about.
(Dunn 2006: 323–4)

As a part of this account, these scholars frequently emphasize the coterminous nature of being 'in Christ' with being 'in the Spirit' and 'in the covenant'. A transition from being 'in Adam' to 'in the covenant' occurs through faith.

Along with this emphasis upon particularity, however, scholars such as Richard Bauckham and N. T. Wright expound the claim that in Paul, God's election of a particular people (in Israel and in Christ) is for the sake of blessing the whole world. Through election in Christ, God creates a kingdom of priests to be a sign and foretaste of God's final renewal of heaven and earth in the New Creation. Election of a particular covenant people is part of God's mission of love to the whole world.

On a doctrinal level, Karl Barth has a peculiar relation to these later developments in biblical theology. On the one hand, he adds a third major gift to justification and sanctification in union with Christ: vocation. As hearers and doers of the Word, the church is called to be *a witness in the world* to the reconciliation accomplished in Christ. In these ways, he anticipates the later ‘missional’ emphases of later biblical theologians.

Yet the recent scholarly emphasis (exemplified by Dunn) upon humans as either ‘in Adam’ or ‘in Christ’ strongly contrasts with Barth’s reformulation of the doctrine of election. Beginning in II/1 in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth revised his doctrine of election such that all humanity is elect in Jesus Christ. Specifically, all humanity is legally (*de jure*) in Christ, even though some have not embraced this true (*de facto*) identity through faith. Indeed, those who are elect in Christ only *de jure*, and who do not have faith, also ‘lack the gift of the Holy Spirit’; thus they live as ones rejected, even though they are elect in Christ (Barth 1957: 345). As Adam Neder summarizes Barth’s position, ‘there is no such thing as a human *being* apart from its being “in Jesus Christ”’ (Neder 2009: 17–18). In contrast to this later biblical scholarship, for Barth all human beings (whether they know it are not) are ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the covenant’—and yet since faith is a sign of the Spirit’s work, not all are in the Spirit. For all of its insight, Barth’s theology of election, when applied to union with Christ, moves a very different direction from recent biblical scholarship which emphasizes that for Paul it is a very real possibility for a person to be ‘in Adam’ rather than ‘in Christ’ (cf. McDonald 2010). For ‘anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him’ (Rom. 8:9).

Exegetical proposals and debates concerning union with Christ will continue, along with exegetical evaluations of Barth’s revision of the classical Reformed doctrine of election. Each of these discussions will help inform a contemporary Reformed theology of union with Christ. All too often, New Testament scholars have given a contextualized account of Paul’s theology while simultaneously employing as their foil a decontextualized caricature of Reformation exegesis. (At times this disciplinary divide is reflected the other direction as well—presuming that Calvin or Westminster have the final exegetical word on Paul, thereby disengaging from ongoing New Testament scholarship.) Yet, particularly in Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift*, as well as a volume on *Reformation Readings of Paul* to which he contributed (Allen and Linebaugh 2015), there are promising signs of a rapprochement between historical and dogmatic theology on the one hand and biblical studies on the other.

30.6 CONCLUSION

Union with Christ is a crucial theme for Reformed soteriology, with far-reaching implications in numerous areas, including the theology of the covenant, the sacraments, eschatology, and the outworking of the doctrine of grace as justification and sanctification in Christ. Through engagement with scriptural exegesis and the refining of various catholic and characteristically Reformed elements, a Reformed doctrine of union with

Christ has much to offer to the broader theological and ecclesial discussion. Rather than reducing salvation to simply a forensic act or a gradual transformation, the Reformed tradition holds together God's forensic declaration with the Spirit's indwelling, transformative work. Rather than approaching the various acts of God in salvation as temporal stages for human ascent to God, God's electing action unfolding in justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification are 'manifestations' of union with Christ. Rather than reducing salvation to a purely vertical or purely horizontal affair, the Reformed hold together communion with God in Christ with covenantal, reconciled communion with others who are adopted into his household. This cluster of topics continues to generate considerable debate and development in contemporary biblical and theological circles, and promises to be an area for lively discussion for years to come.

SUGGESTED READING

Barclay (2015); Billings (2008); Calvin (1960), book 3; Campbell (2012); Horton (2007); Macaskill (2014); Muller (2012); Neder (2009); Venema (2007)

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CHAPTER 31

CHURCH

AMY PLANTINGA PAUW

31.1 REFORMED AND ECUMENICAL STARTING POINTS

UNTIL the late modern period, ecclesiology was a distinctly secondary doctrine in theology, derivative of more central topics such as providence, Christ, and redemption. Ecclesiology's increasing prominence can be seen as part of a broader turn to culture in contemporary Western theology. Loss of confidence in the Enlightenment focus on the individual knower, and in the modern projection of a universal rationality, has encouraged greater attention to the shaping power of communal traditions in human knowing. Christian communities of faith are incubators of theological knowledge, and nowhere is this more evident than in reflection on the church. Ecclesiology is perhaps the part of Christian dogmatics where oral tradition and bodily habituation most directly shape theological instincts and conclusions, whether this is acknowledged or not. Ecclesiology is theology at its most inductive.

Life in the church is the context for constructing a theology of church, so there is an inevitable circularity to ecclesiological reflection. A Reformed theology of the church universal starts by acknowledging its concrete location in particular patterns of worship and practice. Reformed communities of faith consider themselves to be expressions of the universal church, but not coincident with it. As members of the larger body of Christ, Reformed communities see their distinctives as contributions to the richness of the whole. No part of Christ's body may say to another part, 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor. 12:21). No single strand of Christian tradition can claim historical or theological completeness. Reformed ecclesiology is rightly marked by a receptive ecumenism that seeks to respect and learn from other communities of Christian faith, even as it offers the witness of its own life.

Despite the communal embeddedness of Christian perceptions of God and God's work, there are sound theological reasons to keep ecclesiology from occupying the

centre of Christian dogmatics. The 'turn to the ecclesial subject' has had problematic consequences for contemporary Christian theology. The story of God with the world is not reducible to the story of God with the church. God's presence in the world is not derivative of God's presence in the church. Ecclesiology needs to remain a secondary Christian doctrine with a self-critical edge, and the unsentimental realism of Reformed understandings of church may be of some assistance in this regard.

'Church' is the English translation of the Greek word *ecclesia*, literally, 'those who are called out'. During New Testament times, *ecclesia* was a generic term for an assembly of people. In the Septuagint, *ecclesia* is a common translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*, the assembly of the people of Israel. In the New Testament, *ecclesia* refers to the people of God assembled in the name of Jesus Christ for worship. Theologically, Christians understand themselves to be gathered by God into communities of response to the good news of Jesus Christ, their communal lives guided by scripture, nourished by sacraments, and fuelled by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is the aggregate of all these communities across time and space, its boundaries porous and often undetectable by human eyes. Ecclesial existence is and has always been plural, not singular, which means talk of 'the church' can quickly become an abstraction, often a theologically dangerous one.

The church is instantiated first of all in visible local assemblies, the sites of preaching, fellowship, and sacramental celebration. Theological emphasis must remain there, not on clerical structures or on a phantasmal 'church universal'. Christian life is a material life, a way of conducting public, bodily life in community. To be a Christian is to be joined by God to a social body, grafted into a larger whole. God's work of reconciliation and consummation creates a people, and the socially established practices and structures of the visible church are central to the communal formation and nurture of this people. In the biblical word proclaimed and heard, Christians receive and rehearse a witness to the apostolic faith. In baptism, Christians are joined with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–5). In the Eucharist they are fed and united to Christ by participation in his body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16–17). In their fellowship and service Christians exercise their spiritual gifts and perform the Gospel for the sake of the whole world. The church is indispensable for Christian existence, the lifelong school in which disciples of Jesus Christ are guided, nurtured, and sent.

Yet Christian trust rests finally in God, not in the church. Commenting on the Apostles' Creed, John Calvin insisted that Christians do not properly believe *in* the church: 'We testify that we believe *in* God because our mind reposes in him as truthful, and our trust rests in him' (Calvin 1960: 1013). Jesus Christ is the source of Christian confidence that God's creation of the world is an original grace, and that God's aims for creaturely reality are an expression of irrevocable, self-giving love. In Christ, the God who is beyond kinds takes on ordinary human nature, and through this intimate union to a world of suffering, death, and conflict, brings salvation. The human capacities of Jesus are not supplanted by God's own: God saves in and through Jesus' very human life and death. The church exists to proclaim this good news, and, by the power of the Spirit, to enact it in its common life, so that the saving benefits of Christ might be extended and celebrated. But the church does not supplant Christ as Lord and Saviour: it remains in

need of the same mercy it proclaims. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted, the church is ‘that community of human beings that has been led by the grace of Christ to acknowledge its guilt toward Christ’ (Bonhoeffer 2005: 135). Just as the risen Christ returns to his betrayers, so God is at work in, and sometimes in spite of, the life and practices of the gathered community of Christ’s followers. In the church, as in the created world at large, God works out his loving purposes for the world in and through creaturely agency that remains fully finite and fully fallible.

31.2 EARTHEN VESSEL ECCLESIOLOGY

Upholding the theological centrality of the outward, bodily, visible church as a finite, fallible gift of God has proven to be a daunting challenge, one which theologians are perennially tempted to avoid. One way of succumbing to dogmatic temptation is to set the earthly church apart from the ordinary compromises and failures of human society in general, so that its visible structures and practices can be identified unambiguously with Christ’s saving presence. The theological assumption beyond this approach is that the faithfulness of the visible church, or of some dimension of it, renders it central to life in Christ. This approach risks triumphalist views of the church and what may be called ‘trickle-down’ ecclesiology, the assumption that all God’s relating to consummate and reconcile human creatures flows through the church. An equal and opposite dogmatic temptation is to flee the visible church, relocating authentic Christian existence in individual inwardness or in the perfections of an invisible spiritual communion. The theological assumption behind this approach is that, because of its compromised character, the visible church cannot be central to life in Christ. This approach invites sacramental minimalism and posits a profound disconnect between the empirical church and Christ’s gracious presence. In either case, authentic Christian existence is raised above or over against the ordinary limitations and negotiations of creaturehood. Reformed ecclesiology, alert to the dangers of claiming perfection for particular church structures and practices, has tended to fall prey to variations of the second temptation, with disastrous results. The church becomes visible *as church* only when it is being faithful to its calling, or else true faith is lodged in the cognitive, emotive, or ethical transformation of the individual believer.

Yet Reformed theology also has resources for constructing an ‘earthen vessel’ ecclesiology (2 Cor. 4:7). According to this theological alternative, the church is not a heavenly space, walled off from the rest of creaturely reality, but rather an earthly space, where God’s grace is played out amidst ordinary human dynamics and limitations. As Karl Barth noted, Calvin’s ‘energetic attempt to make Protestantism historically functional’ required that he give ‘to this fellowship in Christ . . . an earthly form that takes into account as much as possible human infirmity and weakness’ (Barth 2002: 95). The good news of reconciliation accomplished in Christ and God’s promise of eschatological consummation do not diminish the joys or make easy the ambiguities of the church’s

earthly existence. The visible church trusts that God's grace is sufficient and that God's strength is made perfect in the church's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). The church is a treasure precisely in its earthen character, not in spite of it.

The church is finite: it is and remains a dependent creature of God. As the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 54, insists, the church does not gather, protect or sustain itself; rather, it is Christ who does all this. Christ is the church's true office-bearer. Christ's gifts to the earthly church are particularly suited to its creatureliness. Human words are spoken and heard. Bread, wine, and water are chewed, swallowed, and splashed, and by the power of the Spirit these ordinary, ephemeral things are made 'the instruments of Christ's presence and consequently of renewed repentance, forgiveness, and walking in newness of life' (Willis 2002: 93). Christians understand themselves to be called by God to live out the Gospel in the world in ways visibly shaped by faith, hope, and love. However the church is constituted by God's gratuitous action, not by its holy life or mission. It is not granted earthly existence because God needs it. Ecclesiological doctrine assumes a fundamental asymmetry: the church depends for its existence on God, but God does not depend on the church. To be a finite creature is to have a particular temporal, geographic, and cultural location, and this givenness is always part of the church's identity. Christian communities forge their identity within the constraints of their particular context. The church is not set apart from its cultural neighbors by a stable and clearly delineated set of practices. Instead, Christians use the cultural materials at hand in their attempts to construct a way of life that is transparent to their convictions about God, even when they live in opposition to their host society in particular ways. 'Christian practices are always the practices of others made odd' (Tanner 1997: 113). As David Kelsey has noted, Christian communities of faith 'understand themselves to be gathered by God precisely in their historical contingency and social and cultural relativism, neither despite such contingency and relativity nor to the end of escaping such contingency and relativity' (Kelsey 2010: 13). Gratuity and historical contingency are at the heart of ecclesial existence.

The earthen vessel church is not merely finite. It is also peccable. As I have noted elsewhere (Pauw 2006: 189), the Reformed narrative of the church has no Eden. The church on earth has always existed 'after the fall,' often in the midst of great religious and political turmoil. The perception of scandalous failings in the established church significantly shaped Reformed ecclesiology from the beginning. According to Calvin, God has entrusted the church with the power of the keys (Matt. 16:19), but Christian communities can so abuse this trust that in them 'Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out' (Calvin 1960: 1053). The church's confession of faith is inseparable from its confession of sin. No dimension of the church's existence is immune from moral compromise. Yet even where it has failed most egregiously to live in a way worthy of its calling, the church trusts God's promise of grace and transformation. This insistence on the peccability of the church has been perhaps the most distinctive Reformed gift to ecumenical reflection on the church, though it is not a gift that has been eagerly received.

Reformed ecclesiology has often taken refuge from the ambiguities and failings of the visible church in Augustine's notion of an invisible church, composed of the elect saints

from every time and place, its membership known to God alone. According to Augustine, the visible church will always be a mixed body of sinful saints and saintly sinners, and it should resist the violence and hypocrisy of premature human attempts to purify itself by expelling those who are deemed unworthy. Ecclesiological problems arise when the invisible church is deemed the 'true church', and this notion is allied with a strong version of double predestination that posits a great antithesis between the saved and unsaved. Within this theological construction, human sin occasions the eternal estrangement of most of humanity, striking a blow from which God's gracious purposes towards human creatures never recover. The members of the 'true church' constitute a reconciled remnant, a very partial remedy for the devastation caused by human sin. The cosmic scope of God's redemptive work shrinks to a consideration of the ultimate blessedness of a small number of human individuals. The church's witness to the universality of God's gracious intentions for the world is repudiated, and the comfort and spiritual nourishment provided by the *visible* church is evacuated, since being a member of the visible church is no sure indicator of being reconciled with God through Christ.

Theological reliance on the invisible church has also provided cover for a hypocritical indifference to a lack of reconciliation and visible unity among Christians. The Confession of Belhar rejects specious Christian appeals to a 'spiritual unity' that leaves Christians of different races 'alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation'. The harsh realities of human divisions of nation, class, and race are a scandal for the church of Jesus Christ and are not solved by recourse to an abstract unity, as if issues of injustice, bigotry, and exclusion were peripheral to the church's 'real' identity. The wider ecclesial unity towards which the notion of the invisible church gestures is upheld by determined efforts on the ground to overcome visible human divisions.

Despite these ecclesiological pitfalls, it is possible for the notion of the invisible church to reinforce, rather than undermine, a primary theological emphasis on the finite, peccable, visible church. As Augustine intended, the invisible church can function as a vital safeguard against Christian perfectionism and sectarianism, reminding Christians that they are not salvation's gatekeepers, and that the community of Christ is always bigger and broader than they can see or imagine. In this way the notion of the invisible church can serve both as a corrective to parochial and exclusionary church practices that attempt to limit the scope of divine grace and as a comfort to those who have been victims of this exclusion. Appeals to the invisible church can expose the pretence of any ecclesial claims to finality, by insisting that God's gracious intentions for the church always exceed what its life instantiates. Yet because God's ultimate aim is not the absorption of the world into the church, even the broadest notion of the invisible church cannot claim to encompass the full flow of God's grace towards creation.

Over the centuries Christians have amassed a rather large collection of images that point to God's gracious intentions for the church. They are aspirational images, both reflecting true dimensions of the church's life and nudging it forward in its efforts to follow Jesus. The church is the body of Christ, whose interdependent members incarnate the love of Jesus in the world. The church is the temple of the Spirit, a community gifted and directed by God's Spirit. The church is the mother who births and lovingly nurtures

believers in the faith. The church is the bride of Christ, living in joyful union with her Lord. The church is a reflection of the eternal communion of the Trinity, and the first fruits of the perfect communion God intends with creation. The church is the servant people of God, following in Christ's footsteps by serving those in need. The church is a sacrament, a foretaste and instrument of unity with God and all creation. The church is the beloved community, an embodiment of solidarity and social transformation across lines of gender, race, and class. These images are a reminder that the whole people of God, not just the clergy, is called to embody God's purposes. As models of perfection, they also exert leverage on the church's manifold shortcomings and demonstrate its continuing need for God's transforming grace.

The life of the church is multi-faceted, and so ecclesial images are complementary and best deployed in theological concert, rather than letting one serve as a 'master image'. In modern Reformed ecclesiology, for example, there has been a salutary theological tension between emphasis on fellowship and sacramental communion, seen in the ecclesiologies of Friedrich Schleiermacher and John Williamson Nevin, for example, and the emphasis on mission evident in the writings of Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann. By the Spirit, the church is both nourished and sent, called to both worship and service.

The Nicene Creed professes 'one holy catholic and apostolic church'. It is evident that these four marks are not an empirical description of the earthly church, which has often mirrored the divisions, confusions, and injustices of the larger society. The church's calling to be one has been frustrated by conflict and schism. The church's holiness has been persistently marred by sin. The church's catholicity has been fragmented by partisanship and parochialism. The church's apostolicity has been compromised by a refusal to repent and learn from the wisdom of others. Yet, as followers of the risen Christ living at the dawn of God's new day, the church is called to participate now in the eschatological promise of the four marks, confessing all of them as both gift and task. The unity of the church is the unity of those who have been reconciled in Christ, who now have 'access in one Spirit to the Father' (Eph. 2:18). Its members are to live as those no longer estranged from each other, because the dividing walls of hostility and suspicion have been broken down in Christ. The church's unity is not primarily found in church structures or doctrinal precision. The church is one as it centres its life around witnessing to the Gospel, forging a unity that embraces theological, liturgical, and cultural difference. The church is holy as it lives by confession of sin and the assurance of God's forgiveness. Its holiness rests in the perfect holiness of Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection sets the church on a path of sanctification. The church rejoices wherever the gifts of the Spirit bring visible signs of renewal and transformation. The church is catholic as it claims the adaptive capacity of the Gospel of Christ to thrive and transform human life in diverse cultural contexts, joining people together in interdependence and shared joy and sorrow. The church is also catholic as it moves beyond its own fellowship through open-handed service to the whole created world, especially its suffering and vulnerable members. The church is apostolic as its teaching and practice model faithfulness to the Gospel across time. Apostolicity is not restricted to the ordained leadership of the church, or to the official ministries of word and sacrament. The whole church is apostolic in its daily life

in the world, as it testifies to and enacts the apostolic teaching of Christ's love for the whole world. The church claims these marks in hope as it leans forward into the reality promised by God's transforming grace. Here too the church's trust rests in God, not in its own achievements or perfections.

31.3 THE CHURCH AS HISTORICAL CREATURE

The earthly church is an appropriate subject of historical and cultural analysis, amenable to approaches that are used in examining other forms of human community, and the historical ups and downs of the church need to be taken into account in ecclesiological reflection. It is not enough to theorize about ideal models of church office or to present exemplary case studies of eucharistic transformation. The church must also theologize about its scandals and failures, the tragedies and victims of its communal life. A forthright account of its history calls the church to repentance. The tradition of the historical episcopate has been used to bless papal schism. The eucharistic sacrament has been used to reinforce racial apartheid. It seems that God has worked against, as well as through, the church's deployment of its most sacred symbols and traditions. Dogmatic approaches to the church need to be intertwined with honest social and pastoral analysis, so that they do not become merely a theological abstraction, or an exercise in justifying and defending the church's specific structures and characteristic actions.

The rhizomatic development of the church from many centres and in multiple directions must be taken into account in theological understandings of the church's unity. From the beginning, the church has been a community of communities, understanding its faith and ordering its life in a wide variety of ways. Along the way, Christians have evidenced tremendous adaptive power in diverse political and cultural contexts. Christian communities always encompass competing ideals and practices within themselves. In any given ecclesial context, some traditions and voices are given official expression while others are neglected or submerged, ready to be drawn on and developed as new circumstances demand. Theologies or forms of life that are rejected by official consensus often retain significant influence in popular belief and practice. Longstanding traditions are challenged towards renewal and revision by dissenting voices and practices on the margins of the community. There is no golden age of theological and structural unity, no simple narrative of the steady unfolding of a divinely ordained institution.

The followers of Jesus Christ started out as a Jewish sect. In continuity with Israel, the earliest Christians saw themselves as a people irrevocably claimed by God, even when they were unfaithful or politically subjugated. As the followers of the crucified and resurrected Messiah of Israel, they understood themselves to be the people of God living at the dawning of the messianic age. The New Testament writings reflect Christian struggles to forge an interim ethic until the expected return of Christ, especially concerning issues of economic status, gentile customs, and gender roles. The evolving pattern of communal life centered around worship on the first day of the week, in commemoration

of Christ's resurrection; the ritual washing and incorporation into the community marking an initiation into a new life in the Spirit; and the common meal of remembrance and hospitality linking believers to Christ's suffering and his promised return in glory. These three elements would each undergo much theological and liturgical development and remain at the heart of Christian practice.

The inclusion of gentiles in the church was a subject of 'no small dissension and debate' (Acts 15:2) among the earliest Christians. The apostle Paul portrays the inclusion of gentiles as an enlargement of God's people Israel: they are wild branches grafted in to 'share the rich root of the olive tree' (Rom. 11:17). At the same time, the New Testament witnesses to a hardening opposition between the synagogue and the church. John's Gospel, for example, reflects a historical context in which 'the Jews agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue' (John 9:22). This hostility would become more severe in the post-biblical period, as the church became almost wholly gentile and as parts of it later came to wield great political power. Supersessionist and triumphalist understandings of the church's relationship to Jews became dominant; only since the end of the Second World War have Christians made a widespread effort to abandon the 'teaching of contempt' toward Jews. To properly embrace its gentile identity, the church must claim its derivative and interim status as God's people. The church comes into existence by being joined to the covenant and promises of God's people Israel (Rom. 9:4). It lives on earth as a pilgrim people, sharing its life with other peoples and pointing ahead of itself to the fullness of God's eschatological reign.

Within the first century of the Christian era, the church's centre of gravity moved from Jewish Palestine to the Hellenistic world of the eastern Mediterranean. The earliest leaders of the church were the apostles and those like Paul who claimed apostolic authority. By the early second century, bishops or overseers generally became the leaders of local communities. Structures of leadership emerged gradually as a routinization of the various practices of Christian communities, with the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon becoming the common pattern, though subject to local variation and continuing development. Monasteries formed as places of religious devotion, learning, and charity for both women and men. Early Christian communities experienced sporadic but at times intense persecution as their political fortunes shifted, forging their identity as a church of martyrs. However by the third century the Christian faith had spread across the whole Mediterranean world, and beyond it to places like Edessa, Persia, India, Ethiopia, and the Maghrib. Many of these places would not retain a robust Christian presence in the centuries to come. The expansion of Christian communities of faith has been serial rather than progressive, as geographical centres of strength gradually weaken and areas on the margins become the new Christian heartlands (Walls 1995). This chronic institutional fragility and flux deserves attention in theological reflection on the church.

Christianity was established as the official religion of the Roman empire in the early fourth century, with Constantinople as a new centre of both empire and church. Christians who had mostly worshipped in house churches now had the political and economic support needed for building large public worship spaces. Elaborate new liturgical forms and

clothing evolved for worship in these larger spaces. The gradual weakening of the empire in the Latin West starting in the fifth century provided an opportunity for the increased religious authority and political power of the papacy. The spread of Christianity, by both evangelism and military conquest, into the shifting people groups north and west of the Mediterranean eventuated in what became known as European Christendom, a social-religious complex joining many tribes and cultures into one more or less unified civilization, with Rome as its spiritual and institutional head. The joining of throne and altar in different ways across the centuries has had serious and enduring implications for the church. Like other social entities, the church is a political body because it possesses and uses social power. According to Wallace Alston, 'Politics is the means by which the mission of the Church is discerned and done in the formal and informal processes of its institutional life' (Alston 2002: 97). Theologians who relegate politics to the sphere of fallen worldly concerns are usually dodging some hard political questions about ecclesial power structures and channels of religious authority. In relation to civil power, the church has existed in a range of sociological incarnations: state-sanctioned religion, culturally established institution, voluntary association, and persecuted sect. Some form of political expression is an inescapable dimension of the life of the church, as well as a perennial temptation to misuse.

In the Eastern empire, monasticism provided a context in which theology, liturgy, and iconography flourished. The rise of Islam in the early seventh century significantly weakened Christian presence in Asia Minor, and almost eliminated it in northern Africa. However missionary endeavours in Russia and among the Slavic peoples beginning in the tenth century led to rich and distinctive forms of Orthodox expression in those cultures. Relations between the Eastern and Western church suffered for centuries because of language barriers, power struggles, and liturgical divides; mutual excommunications in 1054 were not revoked, and East–West relations reached a nadir in 1204 when Western forces authorized by the pope sacked Constantinople, the leading city of the Eastern church. The waning power of the Eastern Christian empire under Muslim ascendancy encouraged the emergence of self-governing (autocephalous) national Christian churches, which despite political struggles remained in spiritual communion with Constantinople. The autocephalous structure has proved durable, if divisive, but has been challenged by patterns of human migration across national boundaries and shifting political conditions. Ecumenical progress in healing the split between East and West continues slowly.

The growing power and wealth of the Western church throughout the Middle Ages made possible ambitious missionary endeavours and tremendous artistic and literary achievements. But ecclesial power and wealth were also a temptation to corruption, which in turn gave impetus to numerous reform movements within the church. The institutional unity of Western Christianity was fractured in the sixteenth century by the rise of reform movements that broke away from the established church to form numerous alternative Christian communities. Some of these communities, notably Anabaptist groups, rejected alliance with ruling powers, while others, such as the Anglicans, Lutherans, and Reformed, perpetuated the alliance in new forms.

Since the sixteenth century, Protestant churches have continued to divide and spawn new Christian movements.

The hope among sixteenth-century European reformers that a biblical theology purged of speculative and devotional accretions would unite the church was dashed early on by divisions over the practice of baptism, and Protestants have gone on to fulfil the gloomiest Roman Catholic predictions about the tendency of their movement to divide the church. In the contemporary period, the almost inexhaustible accommodations of religious preference within Protestant Christianity mirror the consumerist patterns of the larger capitalist culture. Faced with conflicts about theology, polity, and cultural engagement, Protestants have repeatedly opted to form small, homogeneous groups of the like-minded, preferring to settle the truth about a controverted issue in the church by breaking fellowship with all who disagree. Protestant schism has often been enacted under the banner of reforming and purifying the church, but the overall result has been a weakening of internal and public Christian witness in the West.

The rise of the modern period in Europe has generally been described as a time of theological and cultural challenge for the Western church, as philosophical and scientific revolutions called into question the validity of communal Christian traditions and beliefs. However, it is a mistake to overlook the Western church's complicity in the larger modernist enterprise. The turn to the centred European subject included confidence in its power to classify and subjugate the lands and peoples which European powers were colonizing. The Western church too becomes infected by this imperialist self-understanding, and the missionary impulse, which has all along been a sustaining force in the survival of the church, becomes in some cases a means by which white European Christianity claims to be the universal exemplar of civilization and virtue. Disentangling Western Christian mission from Western imperialism remains a challenge as long as the West possesses disproportional economic and political power.

In the contemporary period, it is clear that the numerical dominance of modern Western Christianity was a temporary phenomenon. As the cultural power of Christianity shifts away from the Western colonizing centres to the postcolonial peripheries, Christian allegiance in Europe is showing significant decline, and many North American communions are losing members. The Christian centre of gravity is again moving south. Whereas in 1800 well over 90 per cent of the world's Christians lived in Europe or North America, at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is estimated that two-thirds of the world's Christians live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Pacific. Some of these non-Western churches have emerged as a result of large-scale Western missionary efforts. Many others represent the renewal of older indigenous Christian traditions or the emergence of new ones. The global church in the contemporary period is predominantly a church of the poor, and its future is increasingly a renewalist, charismatic future.

Attention to the enormous diachronic and synchronic breadth of the church's life and witness serves as a hedge against perennial dogmatic tendencies to absolutize features of the church's existence in particular historical and geographical contexts, especially those of the West. There is no uniquely Christian geography, language, or culture. Patterns of worship and cultural adhesion and renunciation, especially long-established ones,

can be appreciated and respected as the distillation of Christian wisdom regarding the ordering of the community's common life. But they should not be seen as binding on all Christians everywhere.

The church has always lived alongside religious and non-religious others, sometimes in humility and hospitality, sometimes in arrogance and militancy. The life of the earthly church has a centrifugal force. It should not be complacent and self-satisfied, concerned only with providing excellent goods and services to its members. Nor should it seek to expand its presence by means of cultural erasure and the absorption of other forms of life into itself, as if its own life were already constitutive of human perfection. The church is called by God to give a public witness of its life and faith, trusting that God is always at work outside the church as well as inside it. According to chapter 17 of the Second Helvetic Confession, God has always had friends in the world outside the commonwealth of Israel. Christian communities are called to band together with other religious communities to address problems too big for any single faith tradition to handle, such as ecological degradation, poverty, and violence. In their witness Christians are called to listen as well as speak, receive as well as give, learn as well as teach. The salutary missional insistence that the church exists for the sake of the world should not obscure the dependence that Christians have on others. An earthen vessel church acknowledges its need for mutuality and collaboration with other human communities and indeed with all living things. The church longs for a richer fulfilment of its creaturely vocation to join its life with others, in a way that challenges all parochial loyalties of nation, race, and culture. It hopes to be drawn by the Spirit into deeper connection with other people and other ways of life, so that the church may explore and learn new forms of earthly faithfulness.

The contemporary period has also been marked by ecumenical collaborations and dialogues among different Christian communions at local, national, and global levels, as Christians seek ways to recognize in each other the fullness of life in Christ and overcome the prejudices and divisions that have hampered their common witness. Differences in polity have proved more divisive than differences in doctrine, particularly regarding structures of ordained ministry and the exercise of authority in the church.

The church comes with no complete set of operating instructions. The leadership of the church has tended to mirror the traditional hierarchies and exclusions of its host societies. Communal Christian negotiations around polity are never carried out in isolation from other forms of political life, and therefore are always to some degree contingent and provisional. Over the centuries, Christians have appropriated and adapted various models of human organization that were available in the larger society: the household, the empire, the nation-state, and the corporation, to name a few. Each of these models has implications for how Christian communities relate to the larger social order. The struggle over appropriate ways of ordering Christian community is apparent from New Testament times onward. It is an ongoing struggle, even in traditions whose basic polity has remained unchanged for centuries, since changes in the social order, both large and small, often prompt renewed attention to church polity.

Protestants have usually operated with a pragmatic, functionalist approach to church structure, with fear of the abuse of clerical authority as an animating principle. This fear

of clerical tyranny has fuelled various mechanisms of clerical accountability, from thoroughly congregationalist impulses to careful systems of checks and balances in more connectional polities, both episcopal and presbyterian. The biblical passage that has most resonance for Protestant Christians around the issue of church office is not the promise in Matthew 16:18 that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build the church, but the account in Acts 15 of the Council of Jerusalem, in which apostles and elders met, and after 'much debate' (Acts 15:7) found a common way forward. Internal ecclesial argument is not only a consequence of Christian sinfulness, as if there were some earthly place beyond conflict and contention that sufficiently sanctified Christian communities eventually reach. The need for argument is also a consequence of creaturely limitations, the narrowness of the church's grasp of God's gifting presence. As the church constructs and reconstructs its identity throughout its history, it needs room in its life for argument. The principle of the priesthood of all believers is a reminder that the primary expression of apostolic continuity is found in the apostolic tradition of the church as a whole. Living into this principle remains a work in progress for the church, but this process is supported by ecclesiastical polities that encourage ordained leadership to be representative of the membership of the church as whole.

Among Protestants, at least, the quest for a unified church structure has been largely set aside as a prerequisite for common worship and mission. Yet a more centralized ecclesial polity has been beneficial or even necessary for the church's survival and flourishing at various points in its history. The distressingly fissiparous character of Protestantism suggests that it has wisdom to receive from the larger church on this issue. There are pragmatic grounds for supporting the episcopate as a common means to Christian unity, at least in a form that allows for a central role for conciliar forms of Christian discernment. With *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Protestant Christians can regard 'the episcopal succession as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church' (BEM 1982: para. 38). The most pressing ecumenical question is how there is to be global communion, that is, a common possession of material and spiritual riches among the world's Christians. Protestants in particular cannot ignore how particular structures of leadership can aid the realization and expression of this communion.

Historical and cultural change is a perennial feature of the church God gathers. Just as the perseverance of the saints is really about the perseverance of God, so the indefectibility of the church is really about the indefectibility of God. What is indefectible is God's promise not to be without a witness to Christ on earth. When the Gospel of Matthew says that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18), it does not mean that there is some transcultural ecclesial essence that will never be compromised. Nor does it mean that the church in particular places never wavers, never errs, never weakens and dies. It means that God's promise of life for the visible church will have the last word, and that Christians trust God to renew the church when it stumbles and falters. As Calvin insisted, 'truth does not die in the church,' even though particular church councils may err (Calvin 1960: 1177). Likewise, worship and mission do not die in the church, even though particular Christian communities of faith may wither and

disappear. Old ways of being church may stop working, and new ways will have to be born. But God will not abandon Christ's body on earth.

31.4 THE PILGRIM CHURCH

The church is a pilgrim in search of a better country (Heb. 11:6). In its life it points ahead of itself to the fulfilment of the reign of God already inaugurated in Christ's resurrection. It lives in hope of the realization of perfect communion—between humanity and God, among human beings, and between humanity and the rest of creation. The church does not pretend to have realized this eschatological hope in its own life, nor to have the capacity to bring this hope to fruition by its own actions. It understands itself instead as a provisional entity, entrusted with the vision of God's universal generosity towards the whole created order.

The church demonstrates its eschatological hope by staying firmly rooted in the earth, by living fully in the time between the times that God has given it. Its aim is not to live as an island of heaven in the sea of earthly reality but to embrace a fuller earthly faithfulness. Rather than turning in on itself, it lives as a witness to God's gracious dealings with the whole creation. The church on earth lives in the tension between the already and the not yet: it recapitulates in its own life the Christic pattern of mortification and regeneration. Its communal practices are still being put to death and raised with Christ. Its central task is not the maintenance or theological justification of its historic traditions but the prayerful, communal discernment of *present* forms of ecclesial faithfulness. The God to whom Christians belong is disturbingly free to confound human expectations and dismantle human constructs in the ongoing divine work to consummate and redeem creation. The church of Jesus Christ is called to share in God's freedom by sitting lightly to the current configurations of this world, including the current configurations of the church. It grows by giving itself away; it lives by dying to itself.

The church is not the end of the ways of God, and therefore cannot be the fulcrum of Christian theology. The story of God is larger than the story of the church. The church witnesses to and participates in something much bigger than itself, a giftedness and hope that far exceed its own vision and understanding. It looks forward to the day when there will be no temple in the city, no need for the lamps of Word and sacrament or the gates of ordered ministries (Rev. 21:22–6). The faithful church is the humble, self-relativizing church, praying for the day when its pilgrimage will be over, and God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

SUGGESTED READING

Alston (2002); Calvin (1960); Moltmann (1991); Webster (2005).

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CHAPTER 32

SACRAMENTS

MARTHA MOORE-KEISH

32.1 BIBLICAL AND EARLY CHURCH ROOTS

ANY discussion of Reformed sacramental theology rightly begins with scripture, the first source for terms and practices. In the Vulgate text of the New Testament, *sacramentum* (Latin translation of the Greek *μυστήριον*) refers first to God's hidden plan for salvation (1 Cor. 2:1; cf. 1 Cor. 4:1; Rom 16:25). Later Pauline tradition (Eph. 1:9, 3:3–9; Col. 1:26–7, 2:2) connected this salvific mystery with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whose sufferings we share. Early North African translations of the New Testament into Latin rendered *μυστήριον* as *sacramentum*, a word that also referred to the vow Roman soldiers took when enlisting in military service.

In the second century, with Tertullian, the church began to apply the word *sacramentum* to certain church practices, especially baptism and the Lord's Supper. These two rites, already central to initiation into and continuing participation in the Christian community, were interpreted as representations of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and a means by which God communicates grace.

Augustine defined 'sacrament' as 'a visible sign of an invisible grace,' terms that ever afterward shaped Western Christian sacramental theology. Augustine used the term 'sacrament' to describe not only baptism and the Lord's Supper, but also creeds, the Lord's Prayer, and marriage, as well as signs like the rainbow in the story of Noah. For centuries, the word 'sacrament' was used to refer to a range of actions and signs, only gradually becoming restricted to a specific number. In the twelfth century, scholastic theologian Peter Lombard established the official seven sacraments as baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and matrimony.

By the high Middle Ages, the Western Catholic understanding of sacraments affirmed that the mysterious power of Christ's life was given to the Church as the Body of Christ on earth, and the Church nourishes the faithful with Christ's life through the seven sacraments. The Church is the 'steward' offering God's grace to the world, and the sacraments are the primary means by which the church extends such grace.

32.2 SIXTEENTH-CENTURY EMERGENCE OF A 'REFORMED' TRADITION

In the early sixteenth century, church reformers continued to affirm the true church as the body of Christ, and the sacraments instituted by Christ as visible signs of God's invisible grace. At the same time, they looked to biblical and early church materials to critique more recent developments in sacramental theology and practice. On the basis of scripture, Lutheran and Reformed alike judged that most of the Western church's sacraments were not biblically warranted. Only baptism and the Lord's Supper were truly instituted by Christ: baptism by Matt. 28:19, and the Lord's Supper by the several institution narratives that conclude 'Do this in remembrance of me' (esp. 1 Cor. 11:23–6). Because of the abuses of power and corruptions of the sacramental system that they observed in the medieval church, Protestant reformers denied that sacraments themselves—rather than God—dispense grace. Calvin, for instance, defined a sacrament as 'an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men' (Calvin 1960: IV.14.1). With these words, Calvin affirmed Augustine's definition of sacrament as visible sign ('outward sign') of invisible grace ('God's good will toward us'). Yet two further things are significant in Calvin's definition: first, the agent of this grace-giving is clearly 'the Lord', not the human institution of the church; and second, in response to God's grace, there is a clear emphasis on the human response: 'piety'.

This relates to the reformers' distinction between *validity* and *efficacy* in the sacraments. A sacrament rightly administered is valid because by the sign, God truly offers that which is signified (God's grace in Jesus Christ). Yet valid sacraments are only efficacious when received by faith. As the Second Helvetic Confession says,

we know that the value of the sacraments depends upon faith and upon the truthfulness and pure goodness of God...the sacraments, which by the Word consist of signs and the things signified, remain true and inviolate sacraments, signifying not only sacred things, but, by God offering, the things signified, even if unbelievers do not receive the things offered. (Cochrane 2003: 281)

Reformed Protestant worship has often been criticized as overwhelmingly verbal, focusing on the Word read and proclaimed, with minimal attention to sacraments. Even so, in their theological writings and confessions of faith, reformers frequently sought to hold Word and sacrament together as the two basic 'notes of the church' (e.g. Calvin 1960: IV.1.9), fundamental to the church's identity since apostolic days and vital to its life today.

32.2.1 Baptism

In continuity with prior tradition, the reformers taught that baptism was to be done with water (usually by aspersion) using the Trinitarian formula. They commonly affirmed that baptism is the sign of forgiveness of sins, new life, and union with Christ. Some made strong claims about the power of this sacrament; so Calvin proclaims,

Through baptism Christ makes us sharers in his death, that we may be engrafted in it... and, just as the twig draws substance and nourishment from the root to which it is grafted, so those who receive baptism with right faith truly feel the effective working of Christ's death in the mortification of their flesh, together with the working of the resurrection in the vivification of the Spirit. (Calvin 1960: IV.15.5)

Water itself was to be the singular sign at baptism, without what the reformers regarded as medieval ritual accretions to the rite (e.g. salt, spittle, and exorcisms). Some reformers focused attention on the biblical narratives in which God saved the people through water as foreshadowing baptism. So Zwingli, like Luther, introduced a version of the 'Flood Prayer' as the blessing over water (Bürki 2005: 440).

At the same time, the reformers insisted that the power of baptism is not in the water itself, but is solely by the grace of God. Therefore the sign must always be attached to the Word proclaimed. The rite of baptism itself, therefore, is not necessary for salvation. Rather, baptism is a seal of God's prior election, marking those whom God has already chosen as part of the covenant community.

The presence of the covenant community was vitally important to the Reformers. They forbade private baptisms, declaring that baptism must be done in the church, with the community gathered. In this way they emphasized that baptism is the sign of entrance into the community, not of individual salvation. Furthermore, the community played a necessary role in the nurture of the baptized. Bucer, Calvin, Knox, and the Dutch Reformed Church in the sixteenth century all included in their baptismal services a charge to godparents as well as families to raise the child in the faith. Baptism was connected to ongoing formation so that the child would eventually come to mature profession of faith.

Sixteenth-century Reformed Protestants made a significant contribution to baptismal theology in their covenant defence of infant baptism (against the Anabaptists). Zwingli and then Calvin argued that the promises God made to the people of Israel, sealed by the practice of circumcision, are the same promises given to Christians in baptism. Those born into the covenant receive the sign of the covenant, marking them as members of the people of God. This argument for infant baptism shaped Reformed Protestant baptismal theology and practice well into the twentieth century.

32.2.2 Lord's Supper

Far more than baptism, the Lord's Supper was the focal point for sixteenth-century reformers' critiques and reinterpretations. Their concerns about medieval eucharistic

practice included infrequency of communion, withholding of the cup to the laity, the teaching regarding transubstantiation with its accompanying devotional practices, the ‘mechanization of the sacraments which undermined the fully personal relation of faith in God’, and the portrayal of the Supper as sacrifice rather than meal (Nichols 1968: 23–4).

In response, the Reformers were united in their efforts to return to the New Testament for right understanding and practice of the Lord’s Supper. They all called for fuller (and more frequent) participation in the meal. They rejected any suggestion that humans can manipulate God’s presence, emphasizing God’s free and benevolent promise to come to us in Word and sacrament—a promise that can be trusted but not commanded. They all insisted that the meal celebrates the ‘once for all’ sacrifice of Christ, rather than again offering Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, Reformed Protestants frequently emphasized (usually against Lutherans as well as Roman Catholics) that Christ’s human body is ascended and therefore is not locally present in the elements. For Bucer, Calvin, and some Dutch Reformed, this led to an emphasis on the work of the Spirit, who unites the faithful with the glorified humanity of Christ, giving new force to the ancient liturgical line *sursum corda* (‘lift up your hearts’).

Together with their shared convictions, the reformers also displayed significant variety in interpretation and practice of the Eucharist:

- In Zurich, Zwingli’s quarterly communion services focused on joyful fellowship and remembrance of Christ, now ascended and seated at the right hand of God. There was ‘no consecration and transformation of the eucharistic elements. In place of all that, the assembled believers themselves became the body of Christ’ (Bürki 2005: 440). Zwingli preferred to describe the Supper as a ‘memorial meal’. This did not mean, however, that Christ was absent in the Supper; most important to Zwingli was the faith of believers by which they received Christ through the signs of bread and wine.
- In Basel, under the leadership of Oecolampadius, the emphasis was much more somber, with a focus on Christ’s Passion and death in order to lead the community into greater holiness of life.
- Bucer, Calvin, Beza, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and John Knox focused in their writings on the Supper as celebration of the mystical union of the faithful with the risen Christ. In the sacrament, by the mysterious power of the Spirit, Christ is joined to us and becomes our nourishment, or our spouse. This theme of union, however, did not come through clearly in Calvin’s liturgical practice, which was more penitential in tone.
- At Strasbourg, communion was celebrated weekly in the cathedral, monthly or bimonthly in parishes. Calvin agreed with Bucer that communion should be celebrated weekly, after the pattern of the earliest church, but this met with resistance from the leaders in Geneva, whose prior custom had been to commune at most once a year. They compromised on four times a year, a pattern which became normative for many Reformed communities until the late twentieth century.

- In the Dutch Protestant Church in London in 1550, the French-speaking section celebrated every other week; the Dutch-speaking section once a month. The community sat at tables 'like Christ and his disciples' (a practice also followed in the Church of Scotland). The national Dutch Protestant church Synod in 1578 at Dordrecht decided that the Supper should be celebrated every other month; this was reaffirmed in the synod in 1618–19 that established the Reformed church as the national church (Klaassens 2005).

One final recurring theme among sixteenth-century Reformed Protestants was their effort to connect the holiness of the table with the holiness of all of life. The sombre warnings about 'worthy participation', the exhortations and excommunications, closed communion and communion tokens, practices of self-examination as well as examinations of parishioners' moral behavior by consistories—all of these practices were established to underscore that those united with Christ at the table should display behaviour consistent with that union in the rest of their lives. The 'government and order of the Church of Scotland' of 1641 explains the practice of 'closed communion' that emerged from this conviction, and that shaped Reformed communion practices into the twentieth century: 'None are admitted, to the Lords [*sic*] Supper, but such as upon examination are found to have a competent measure of knowledge in the grounds of Christian religion, and the doctrine of the Sacraments...Neither are strangers received, but upon sufficient testimony, or otherwise be very well known' (Forrester 2005: 477).

32.3 SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES: PURITANISM AND PIETISM, RATIONALISM, REFORM, AND RENEWAL

New England Puritans during the seventeenth century continued to emphasize holiness of life as a prerequisite to participation in the sacraments. Only people who were obviously 'regenerate' were true members of the covenant, and could therefore be admitted to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Many church leaders required an account of personal experience of saving grace in order to be considered regenerate.

The 'halfway covenant' of 1662 partly relaxed these expectations, requiring an account of an experience of grace in order to join a church and receive communion, but allowing children and grandchildren of members to be baptized even if they had not made such profession. Anyone up to the third generation could be admitted to baptism, but only those who examined themselves and were godly persons could come to the table. Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729), pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts, tried to ease these restrictions, arguing that those who were admitted to baptism also ought to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Only moral sincerity was necessary; the sacrament of communion itself was a means of grace that could bring those of sincere heart to full

conversion. In this way, he hoped to encourage those who were refraining from the Lord's Supper to come back to this 'converting ordinance'.

Solomon Stoddard's grandson Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) initially agreed with his grandfather's approach to the sacraments. However, by 1749 he became frustrated with the congregation in Northampton, where he had succeeded his grandfather as pastor, convinced that allowing those who simply had 'moral sincerity' to participate in communion and have their children baptized was contributing to spiritual complacency and moral hypocrisy in the church. He therefore declared that he would admit to full communion only those who are 'in profession, and in the eye of the church's Christian judgment, godly or gracious persons' (Edwards 1994: 17, 174). In order to come to the table, receive adult baptism, or have one's children baptized, it was necessary to make a credible public profession of saving faith. As a result, Edwards was dismissed from his pastoral duties in Northampton.

In the early years of this debate, while Puritans in seventeenth-century New England were requiring an account of regenerating grace for admission to the sacraments, Puritans in old England participated in a major effort to reform the Church of England and its practices: the Westminster Assembly (1643–9). This assembly included Puritans (both Presbyterian and Independent) together with more royalist Anglicans, and it produced a Confession of Faith, two versions of the catechism, a Form of Government, and a Directory for the Worship of God. These 'Westminster Standards' were adopted in England and Scotland in 1645. Though they had little lasting effect in the Church of England, these documents were a major force in shaping sacramental theology and practice in Scotland and, through migration of independent Puritans to New England and Scots-Irish Presbyterians to the mid-Atlantic, also had a profound effect on the formation of American Presbyterianism.

The Westminster Confession described sacraments as 'signs and seals of the covenant of grace', and emphasized that the power of the sacrament depends upon the work of the Spirit and the words of institution. Baptism was presumed to be baptism of infants into the covenant, and was to be done in public, ordinarily in Sunday worship. The Confession also affirmed, significantly, that the efficacy of baptism is not 'tied to the moment of time wherein it is administered,' but yet really is conferred by the Spirit at the appropriate time—to those to whom that grace belongs. (Westminster 2003: 642).

With regard to the Lord's Supper, the Westminster Confession reiterated many themes central to the sixteenth-century Reformers: remembrance of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, critique of the sacrifice of the Mass, emphasis on the real spiritual presence of Christ, and the importance of worthy participation. The Directory had a less polemical tone, and included an outline for a fuller eucharistic prayer than most sixteenth-century reformers, including thanksgiving, anamnesis, and epiclesis. The last part of this prayer asked God to

vouchsafe his gracious presence, and the effectual working of the Spirit in us, and so to sanctifie these Elements both of Bread and Wine, and to blesse his own Ordinance, that we may receive by Faith the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ crucified for us, and so to feed upon him, that he may be one with us and we with him, that he may live in us and we in him, and to him, who hath loved us, and given himself for us'

(Thompson 1961: 370).

The Directory also recommended 'frequent' communion, but without further specification.

In 1788, the American Presbyterian church radically revised the Westminster Directory, removing the sample texts for baptismal and eucharistic prayers from the 1645 version. In addition, the American Directory added a chapter regarding previously unbaptized persons, showing awareness of adults presenting themselves for baptism. Its description of the Lord's Supper emphasized the Words of Institution, implying that they are the most important element in setting aside the elements. Such heightened attention to the Words of Institution contributed to the perception that the Last Supper of Christ was the main focus of the meal—which has been common in Reformed eucharistic theology and practice ever since.

A simultaneous movement, related to Puritanism, was the Pietism that arose in the Netherlands and Germany in the seventeenth century. Pietism emphasized individual experience of conversion rather than the church and sacraments as means of grace. Like the New England Puritans, Pietists voiced grave concerns about unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper. This sometimes led to extremes, as when Jodocus van Lodensteyn (1620–77) in the Netherlands vowed not to celebrate the Lord's Supper again, or when thousands of Pietists refused to attend Communion in the parish churches, because of concern about inappropriate behavior and weak piety (Nichols 1968: 115–16).

While Puritans and Pietists sought reform of the church and spiritual renewal, other Reformed Protestants in Europe and America were increasingly influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, which rendered the sacraments questionable. For people shaped by the rise of modern science and the desire for a religion 'within the limits of reason alone', baptism in the name of the Trinity, and talk about being joined to Christ by the power of the Spirit at the Lord's Supper, ceased to have much meaning. Thus the sacraments were often neglected, and when they were celebrated, they were interpreted as signs of remembrance or moral lessons.

One interesting figure from this time, Jean-Frederic Ostervald (1663–1747), united interest in liturgical reform with a modern rationalist outlook. Pastor of the Reformed church in Neuchâtel, Osterwald undertook liturgical reforms inspired by the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, for example introducing a full eucharistic prayer. He showed deep appreciation for the role of sacraments in renewing and uniting the church. His view of the Eucharist, however, was 'merely memorialist.' For Osterwald, the Sacraments were "sacred ceremonies" performed out of obedience. Confirmation was more important than Baptism' (Nichols 1968: 142–4).

Finally, significant to any consideration of Reformed sacramental theology in this era is the Scottish practice of 'sacramental seasons.' These were nearly week-long events in which hundreds or even thousands of people gathered for a series of preparatory services, climaxing with communion on Sunday and a service of thanksgiving on Monday. This tradition of sacramental renewal and conversion came to America in the eighteenth century and set the stage for nineteenth-century camp meeting revivals such as Cane Ridge. Sermons from the sacramental seasons, by preachers like Gilbert Tennent

(1703–64) and James McGready (1763–1817), offered vivid depictions of the mystical union with Christ at the Lord's Supper, often drawing on language from the Song of Songs to compare the eucharistic table to a marriage bed. Such preaching was inspired by the writings of John Willison (1680–1750), Scottish Presbyterian devotional writer, who freely used metaphors of lover and spouse to describe the mystical union with Christ in communion (Long 2011; cf. Schmidt 2001; Forrester 2005: 480).

32.4 NINETEENTH CENTURY: REVIVAL, SACRAMENTAL RENEWAL, AND RESPONSE

On the American frontier, as sacramental seasons culminating in the Lord's Supper evolved into evangelistic camp meetings culminating in decisions to follow Jesus, baptism was increasingly associated with adult conversion. American Reformed churches reacted to this movement in various ways. Some (like New England Congregationalist Horace Bushnell in his treatise *Christian Nurture*) strengthened their defence of infant baptism, arguing that faith is best nurtured in the context of families rather than expecting sudden conversion. However, with more adults coming for baptism who had not been baptized as infants, Reformed churches also began to provide for the first time liturgies appropriate for adult baptism ('These Living Waters' 2007: 28).

Another significant sacramental development on the American frontier was the Restorationist, or Stone–Campbell movement, which brought together rationalist argumentation and revivalist fervour. Former Presbyterians Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell promoted 'biblical restorationism', seeking to overcome the divisions of denominationalism and embody a simpler vision of the church rooted in the Bible alone. Thomas Campbell insisted, 'Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the Church, or to be made a term of communion among Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.' One of the most dramatic examples of this was the reintroduction of weekly communion, presided over not by clergy, but by deacons and elders of the congregation, with Words of Institution and free prayers of thanksgiving. The focus of these communion services was remembrance, fellowship, and joy. Baptism was by immersion, on the New Testament model, and was necessary for participation in communion. Both sacraments were viewed as ordinances, performed in obedience to Christ's institution. In 1804 in Kentucky, Stone founded the 'Christian Church', which eventually became the Disciples of Christ.

In contrast to the simple biblical appeals of the Restorationists, some Reformed leaders of the nineteenth century pursued sacramental renewal informed by early church and sixteenth-century sources. One American example of this is the Mercersburg movement in the German Reformed church, led by theologian John Williamson Nevin and historian Philip Schaff at the Reformed seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. Schaff headed that denomination's liturgical commission, which drew from the New Testament, third-and

fourth-century liturgies and 'the best portions' of the available sixteenth-century liturgies to propose a new communion service in 1857. This included a lengthy formal eucharistic prayer, and closely joined the congregation's self-offering with the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Though opposed by many, and never formally adopted, this service was widely distributed and had influence far beyond German Reformed circles.

In his work *The Mystical Presence* (1847), Nevin examined current eucharistic theologies and practices of American Protestantism, and judged them all to be focused on the inward state of the worshiper rather than the objective gift of Christ. He named the prevailing theology 'the modern Puritan view', devoid of appreciation for the true presence of Christ as mediated by the church and its sacraments. In contrast, Nevin offered a fresh reading of Calvin's eucharistic theology centred on union with Christ, reinterpreted in historical and 'organic' categories of his time. A proper understanding of the Lord's Supper, he contended, rested on the 'inward living union between believers and Christ, in virtue of which they are incorporated into his very nature, and made to subsist with him by the power of a common life' (Nevin 2000: 50f.). It is not clear whether or not Nevin read the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, but his vision of the church as the historical movement that organically communicates the life of Christ to believers echoes some of Schleiermacher's views.

Nevin's opponents, especially Charles Hodge of Princeton, accused him of 'Romanizing' tendencies. Hodge argued that Nevin's focus on the sacraments ascribed too much power to the church, and that 'eating Christ's body and blood' simply meant having faith in Christ. There was no 'special benefit or communion' to be had in the Eucharist. Nevin, however, persevered in his efforts to present a sacramental theology that was both fully catholic and fully Reformed. In the last half of the twentieth century, the Mercersburg movement re-emerged as a significant influence on many Reformed Protestants seeking a deeper appreciation of historic liturgical forms and the centrality of the sacraments.

A similar impulse toward deepened sacramental piety can be seen in the work of Parisian pastor Eugene Bersier (1831–89), who longed for ecumenical unity and drew from liturgical forms of other ecclesial bodies, especially the little-known Catholic Apostolic Church (a nineteenth-century Protestant group also called the 'Irvingites', after their Scottish founder, A. E. Irving). Underlying his reforms was a commitment to the 'communion of the saints', the community of Christ's redeemed who met at the Lord's Supper and would gather together to worship for eternity. Because of his communion ecclesiology, 'sacraments were important to Bersier, particularly Holy Communion, in which he understood, following in Calvin's footsteps, that Christ "is present and shares himself with those who receive him in faith"' (Byars 2005: 47; cf. Bürki 2005: 451f.)

Scotland too saw a sacramental renewal movement in the nineteenth century, particularly with the founding of the Church Service Society in 1865, dedicated to recovery of the liturgical heritage of the Church of Scotland. Starting in 1867, this group published several different editions of *Euchologion*, a liturgical resource which drew from many sources, including Knox, continental Reformed liturgies, the Book of Common Prayer, Eastern liturgies, the American German Reformed church, and the Catholic Apostolic Church. The eucharistic prayer was very similar to the Mercersburg proposal, and the editor, George Washington Sprott, particularly emphasized the work of the Word as well

as the Spirit in the epiclesis. This service book had important influence on several generations of Scottish pastors (Byars 2005: 48–50).

32.5 TWENTIETH CENTURY: ECUMENISM, SACRAMENTAL RENEWAL, AND BAPTISMAL DEBATES

One profound shift in Christianity in the twentieth century was a new spirit of ecumenical respect and shared learning, especially focused on biblical and early church scholarship. This led, by the second half of the century, to significant liturgical and sacramental reforms among Reformed Protestants, often using patterns common to Catholics as well as other Protestants. Convergence in sacramental practice was accompanied by a common conviction that sacramental theology of more recent centuries had failed to take seriously actual sacramental practice. Thus, much twentieth- and early twenty-first-century sacramental theology has attended closely to liturgical texts and embodied sacramental practices as the ‘primary theology’ of sacraments.

With regard to baptism, ecumenical scholarship has enriched both practice and reflection with a broad range of New Testament images: baptism as rebirth (John 3); as cleansing and forgiveness of sins (Matt. 3:6; Acts 2:38); as participation in death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6); as constituting the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5); as inauguration of a new way of life in which old divisions are washed away (Gal. 3:28); and as connected with the sending of the Spirit (Titus 3:5–6). Biblical and early church scholarship together have shifted attention away from Matt. 28 (or Mark 16), and toward Jesus’ baptism as the foundation for our baptism. This has led to significant revision of baptismal rites, with less emphasis on the sixteenth-century interpretation of baptism as covenant (Kay 1999: 203).

With regard to Eucharist, Reformed Protestants have recognized that the Supper is not simply focused on the ‘Last Supper’, but also on Jesus’ meals with his disciples both during his life and after his resurrection, and the eschatological banquet. This has also led to fuller appreciation of classic Eucharistic prayer forms, rather than just focusing on the Words of Institution. Bürki observes that in recent Reformed Eucharistic liturgies, ‘the Eucharist is placed in a Trinitarian perspective. This approach is remarkable in the Reformed tradition, which has hitherto been set in a Christological pattern. The celebration of the death of Jesus Christ and the expectation of his coming are put in the context of the entire history of salvation’ (Bürki 1999: 237; cf. Byars 2005).

32.5.1 Increased Appreciation for Sacraments

Greater ecumenical openness, significant new biblical and historical research into liturgy and sacraments, and growing appreciation for the formative value of embodied

practices all contributed to a surge of interest in sacraments among Reformed (and other) Protestants over the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Donald Baillie noted and encouraged a revival of interest in sacraments among Protestants in a series of lectures on 'The Theology of the Sacraments' in 1952 (Baillie 1957). Reformed theologian Hans Boersma recently issued a comprehensive call, particularly for evangelical Protestants, to recover a premodern world-view in which created things have value only as they participate in heavenly realities—what he calls 'a sacramental tapestry' (Boersma 2011). Both of these theologians illustrate the marked increase in appreciation for God's grace at work through the sacraments among Reformed Protestants since the early twentieth century, balancing the emphasis on the Word read and proclaimed that has characterized Reformed Protestantism since its emergence.

More particularly, many Reformed theologians have reclaimed Calvin's conviction that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every week, after the pattern of the early church. Jean-Jacques von Allmen is but one example of a Reformed liturgical scholar who argued for recovery of the Lord's Supper as normal part of Sunday worship. He argued that the Eucharist is essential to worship (a) because Christ instituted it and commanded it; (b) because it helps us hold together the cross with the teaching ministry of Christ; and (c) because it enables us to 'mark the difference between the Church and the world in a way which is not subjective, self-centered and moralizing, but objective. . . . All in all, the absence of the Eucharist shows contempt for grace' (von Allmen 1965: 154–6).

32.5.2 Christ, Sacraments, and the Church

Karl Barth by the end of the *Church Dogmatics* rejected the term 'sacrament' for baptism and the Lord's Supper. He called the incarnation of Christ (to whom the church attests) the 'first sacrament' (Barth 1957: 54) and later, the 'one and only sacrament' to which baptism and the Lord's Supper are 'witnesses' or 'signs' (Barth 1967: 55). Jürgen Moltmann proposed that the Spirit could be called the 'primal sacrament,' reflecting the New Testament usage of *μυστήριον* to name the divine eschatological secret (Moltmann 1977: 202–6). Both wished to ground Reformed sacramental theology in the witness of the New Testament, particularly its use of the term *μυστήριον*.

Though he did not challenge the traditional term 'sacrament,' British Congregationalist P. T. Forsyth was one of the first twentieth-century Reformed theologians to offer a strong view of Christ's agency in the sacraments. Central to Forsyth's understanding was the conviction that Christ is the actor in baptism and the Lord's Supper: 'They are acts of Christ really present by his Holy Spirit in the Church. It is Christ doing something through the Church as His body' (Forsyth 1917: 177). Sacraments, according to Forsyth, are not mere 'keepsakes' reminding us of someone now departed, but are real means by which the risen Christ is present, conveying love to believers here and now.

T. F. Torrance shared Barth's conviction that Christ is the primary sacrament, but went beyond Barth to argue that the Spirit incorporates us into Christ through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He emphasized the sacraments as Christians'

participation or *koinonia* ‘in the mystery of Christ and his Church through the *koinonia* or communion of the Holy Spirit’ (Torrance 1975: 82). This emphasis on the interconnection of sacraments, Christ, and church constituted an explicit critique of the individualistic focus and interpretation of sacraments as ‘mere’ symbols which had haunted many forms of Reformed sacramental theology between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

The integral connection of Christ, the sacraments, and the church led many theologians in this era to a renewed view that baptism constitutes entrance into the church, the body of Christ. Focus on the ecclesiological implications of baptism has sometimes been expressed in more personal and practical terms, as with Donald Baillie, who said ‘baptism brings the child into a new environment, the environment of the Church of Christ’ (Baillie 1957: 85). Other theologians have emphasized the objective dimension of baptism as participation in the mystery of Christ and his church through the communion of the Holy Spirit (Torrance 1975: 82f.).

With regard to the Lord’s Supper, increasing numbers of Reformed scholars in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have sought to reclaim the strand of eucharistic theology represented by Calvin, Bucer, and Vermigli: the conviction that at the Supper, the Holy Spirit unites believers to the living Christ (e.g. Gerrish 1993; Hunsinger 2008; Moore-Keish 2008). George Hunsinger has explicitly related this reinterpretation of eucharistic theology to a desire for ecumenical unity, seeking to ‘open up new avenues for healing the notorious divisions that have beset the sacrament of unity’ (Hunsinger 2008: 313).

32.5.3 Anamnesis

Within the wider twentieth-century discussion of the relationship of Christ, the church, and sacraments, the particular rediscovery of the meaning of *anamnesis*, or remembrance, has been significant for Reformed theologians, especially in relation to the Lord’s Supper. Drawing on Hebraic understandings of what it means to remember, many scholars point out that the ‘memorial’ character of the Supper is quite different from mere memory of a distant past. As von Allmen said, ‘It is a restoration of the past so that it becomes present and a promise . . . the Christian cult does not merely recapitulate the life, death, and resurrection of Christ by making them operative in the present. The history of salvation, in fact, is not only something past: it is also what is to come’ (von Allmen 1965: 34f.). To ‘remember’ is closely related to the presence of Christ crucified, risen, ascended, and returning. When the community gathers ‘in remembrance of me’, it enters into the saving mystery that is Christ’s life. In this way, twentieth- and early twenty-first-century theologians have opened up a fresh avenue for rereading Zwingli’s sixteenth-century emphasis on the Supper as ‘memorial meal’.

Although he does not use language of anamnesis, David Ford sounds a similar note in his own discussion of Eucharist, when he interprets the meal in terms of ‘non-identical repetition’. At the supper, Christ incorporated his disciples into a community ‘without

their trust or understanding,' and then commands them to repeat the meal, binding them together in a way that ever anew brings the past into the present. 'In gratitude the past is repeated in such a way that it is fruitful in a new way for the present and the future' (Ford 1995: 375).

32.5.4 Baptism: Infant and/or Believer?

Though Reformed Protestantism has affirmed infant baptism since its origins, this practice has been openly debated by theologians since the mid-twentieth century. In 1948, Barth issued a strong critique of infant baptism, challenging Reformed and other infant-baptizing Protestants to rethink their understanding and practice of baptism. Based on his interpretation of the New Testament, Barth argued that baptism is in essence 'the representation of a [person's] renewal through . . . participation by means of the power of the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (Barth 1948: 9). The practice of baptism needs to communicate this clearly. This led him to conclude that while infant baptism may be technically 'valid', it fails to communicate the truth of baptism. What is needed, instead, is a recipient who freely and responsibly receives the promise of grace, and can 'be party to the pledge of allegiance concerning the grateful service demanded of him' (Barth 1948: 40). Barth is concerned above all that baptism not be construed as a passive act, but as the act of a free partner of Jesus Christ.

Several Reformed (as well as other Protestant) theologians since 1948 have responded to Barth's challenge. One example is Geoffrey Bromiley, who appealed to the covenant understanding of infant baptism, arguing that in both Old and New Testaments, children of the people of God are considered part of the covenant community, and so they should not be denied the sign. He also argued that infant baptism bears witness to the first and final work of God on our behalf, which does not require anything of us. By the Spirit, God is at work already in infants, so that the response we see in adults, who are further along in the path of sanctification, is the evidence of the Spirit's work, not our own. Finally, he concludes that children are part of the divine plan of salvation, and so should not be denied the sign (Bromiley 1979: 107–9; cf. Torrance 1975: 82–138; Baillie 1957: 80–90; Migliore 1998).

Others, however, have heartily agreed with Barth's critique of infant baptism. Notably, Jürgen Moltmann embraced Barth's political critique of infant baptism as the basis of a national church, which obscures baptism's basic character as a call to free and responsible discipleship. Moltmann highlighted the eschatological nature of baptism, as the sign of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the mark of the messianic community of the Spirit that lives already in light of the new creation. As such, baptism is to be a 'public, confessional sign of resistance and hope' (Moltmann 1977: 232; cf. 226–42).

32.5.5 Baptism by Water and the Spirit

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century Reformed (and other Protestant) theologians have also focused attention on the relationship between baptism by water and baptism of the

Spirit. This was prompted by several developments, including an outpouring of interest in eschatology (prompted partly by Schweitzer's work at the turn of the twentieth century); the emergence of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement; and reconsideration of confirmation's relationship to baptism.

Some Reformed theologians have stressed the distinction between water and Spirit baptism. Barth in his later work saw a significant difference between the two; water baptism was the public ethical response of the believer to the prior reception of the Spirit, which awakened faith and thus marked the actual movement of a person into the Christian life (Barth 1969). In similar fashion, James D. G. Dunn argued that in the New Testament, Spirit baptism was a definite and dramatic experience, distinct from water baptism, which constituted the central event of the process of 'conversion-initiation'. While he disagreed with the Pentecostal interpretation that Spirit baptism was an entirely separate stage of salvation, he affirmed the significance of this event as the true beginning of the Christian life. In this way, he sharply disagreed with T. F. Torrance's view that *baptisma* in the New Testament refers to the whole complex of salvation events that must always be held together, with the Spirit working in and through the water rite (Dunn 1970: 4–6). Torrance criticized Barth for his separation of water and Spirit baptism, and offered his own fully Trinitarian understanding of baptism as an act of God the Father through the Son and in the Spirit—a unified act that cannot be separated into discrete events (Torrance 1975: 82–105).

32.6 CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

32.6.1 Reformed Distinctives?

In the face of the ecumenical developments in the twentieth century, one question that faces Reformed theologians today is this: what are the distinctive insights of Reformed sacramental theology, and how do these relate to the wider ecumenical world? We no longer sharply define ourselves over against Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Anabaptists, and others. What do we offer to the church catholic that is distinctive—and is distinctiveness the goal?

Some scholars have focused on the role of the Spirit in the sacraments as a particular gift of Reformed Protestantism. Ron Byars, for instance, suggests, 'Insofar as the Reformed tradition has anything to say to the whole church about Eucharist, it would seem that we need to say Amen to Calvin's affirmation of a theology informed by sources Eastern as well as Western, that is, to his Eucharistic theology rooted in the action of the Holy Spirit' (Byars 2005: 72). In a previous generation, von Allmen similarly lifted up the 'epikletic' character of Reformed sacramental worship—that is, the emphasis on the Spirit as the agent in the 'cult' (i.e. worship): 'if the cult is epikletic, it means that those who celebrate it recognize that the Lord whom they serve is not at their disposal, that they are indeed His ministers, not technicians' (von Allmen 1965: 28–9).

Other scholars raise concerns that the embrace of liturgical and sacramental renewal in concert with wider ecumenical trends has compromised distinctive insights of Reformed faith. For instance, James Kay, in surveying baptismal liturgies of the 1994 Common Order of the Church of Scotland and the 1993 Book of Common Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA), concluded: 'the Americans gather the harvest of the post-Vatican II ecumenical liturgical renewal movement'. As a result, 'the American rite appears... less confident in the power of the Reformation to speak today' (Kay 1999: 212; cf. Riggs 2002).

32.6.2 God's Grace and Human Response

One recurring issue in Reformed sacramental theology, as in Reformed theology generally, is how to maintain a historic focus on the radical priority of God's action while also attending to the shape of human living in response to that grace. This underlies many of the practical questions that arise in sacramental debates: for instance, when is it permissible to refuse to baptize someone, or welcome someone to the table? Is any such refusal a denial of the generosity of God's grace? How much should we ask of those preparing for baptism? How do we celebrate the Supper in a way that speaks grace and shapes a life of gratitude?

Several Reformed theologians are increasingly turning to a participatory ontology to negotiate a path through this question. George Hunsinger, David Ford, Hans Boersma, and Jürgen Moltmann, for instance—in very different ways—all seek to describe sacramental activity in terms of human participation in Christ, or in the triune God. Such a focus on participation defines the nature of genuine human agency as being in Christ, by the Spirit, without suggesting a false divide between humanity and God.

Leanne van Dyk offers helpful insights related to this question of divine and human agency in the sacraments. Drawing especially on Calvin in conversation with contemporary feminist and womanist scholarship, she emphasizes first that sacraments are divine gift. Recognizing the gift-character of sacramental elements such as bread and wine means that we should give thanks to God and also give thanks for the hard work of the human labour that brought these elements to the table. Second, like Torrance and Hunsinger, van Dyk affirms that sacraments point us to Christ. But they do this in ambiguous ways, and we have to ask of every particular sacramental celebration how this act points to or obscures Christ. Finally, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are truly united to Christ in the sacraments. Van Dyk cautions, however, that language of 'union' with Christ needs to be handled carefully, lest it imply that we lose ourselves in the process. Better to understand our unity with Christ in terms of 'solidarity' (van Dyk 2006).

32.6.3 Relation of Baptism and Eucharist

Since the sixteenth century, Reformed Protestants have concurred with the historic Christian view that baptism (at any age) signifies entrance into the Christian community, and the Lord's Supper signifies ongoing nourishment.

This basic logic, however, is increasingly being questioned today among Protestants, especially in Europe and North America. As Eucharist is celebrated more frequently, and as more people come into churches without having been baptized in infancy, the practical situation is prompting serious theological reflection.

Moltmann offered one of the first theological arguments for welcoming all people to the table, regardless of baptism. Following Barth's critique of infant baptism, he portrayed baptism of believers as a sign of messianic hope for the world. The church is the community of those who understand themselves to be a sign of God's inbreaking future, and who live accordingly. The Lord's Supper, then, is the sign of God's welcome to all people, which may lead to baptism but does not need to precede it (Moltmann 1977: 281ff.). Many have followed Moltmann in such a summons to make the table open to all.

Others have raised concerns about how such a move obscures the grace offered in baptism, implying that the table signifies welcome while the font signifies commitment. This undoes the important balance of gift and call that has characterized both sacraments. Reversing the normative ordering of the sacraments also works against the rich symbolism that has shaped baptismal and Eucharistic theology since the first century: baptism as the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as new birth, as death and resurrection; Eucharist as meal shared with disciples, as manna, as basic food for the journey.

32.6.4 Sacraments and Ethics

A final concern shared by several contemporary sacramental theologians, including Reformed ones, is how to strengthen the connection between sacraments and current ethical issues such as environmental care, food distribution, clean water, and the economic injustices caused by globalization. Brazilian-American Claudio Carvalhaes asks, 'How can the borders of the Eucharist be negotiated so that unexpected guests might participate in it?' (Carvalhaes 2013: 8). In response, he proposes a concept of 'borderless borders' as a way of constantly redrawing the boundaries of the table to welcome the outsider and the immigrant. Paul Galbreath has explored in multiple ways how sacramental practice can move us from 'ego to eco-centered lives', through closer attention to the natural elements of bread and wine, water and oil, bodies and soil, and trees and light—and even the built environment (Galbreath 2008; 2011; 2014). These are but two examples of a growing conversation that seeks to form Christians at table and font in order to face honestly and faithfully the particular challenges of the contemporary world.

SUGGESTED READING

Gerrish (1993); Hunsinger (2008); Nichols (1968); Riggs (2002).

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CHAPTER 33

HOLY SCRIPTURE

DANIEL J. TREIER

REFORM and innovation are distinct. In the case of Holy Scripture, the Protestant Reformers did not seek to innovate. Rather, they maintained the traditional identification of the biblical texts as the Word of God while seeking to reform the church's hearing through 'a corrected interpretation of what the Bible means by grace' (Dowey 1992: 29; see also Treier 2016). This Reformed hearing provoked enduring conflict over how scripture relates to tradition and its interpretation to contemporary ecclesiastical authority. Facing that conflict, subsequent Reformers expounded the internal framework of scriptural teaching with new fullness—even concerning the attributes of scripture itself. Thus, the Reformed tradition eventually contained a measure of innovation regarding the doctrine of Holy Scripture, but fundamentally this innovation served a traditional purpose—in the words of a widespread saying, the church 'always being reformed' according to the Word of God.

As a matter of definition, speaking of 'Holy' Scripture already risks redundancy; in wider religious discourse and in biblical texts like 2 Tim. 3:16–17, 'scripture' designates sacred writings. Christian references to Holy Scripture celebrate a particular account of holiness, tied to the Holy Spirit of God. Christian scripture is holy because the Spirit set apart prophets and apostles to bear enduring verbal witness regarding the identity and mighty action of the Triune God (for a recent, insightful account of scripture's holiness (somewhat idiosyncratic regarding inspiration), see Webster 2003). This unfolding of divine self-revelation culminated in the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ, the Logos who is God's final Word. Prophets have anticipated the advent of this Word; apostles have communicated its arrival. So, while Reformed doctrines of Holy Scripture formalize implications of scripture's identity as the Word of God, they also emphasize the Word's integration with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit 'inspired' the prophetic and apostolic witnesses; superintended the collection, recognition, and preservation of the resulting scriptures; and illuminates their understanding as the church's 'canon,' the final authority over her faith and practice.

To expound a Reformed account of Holy Scripture, this chapter will both narrate the development of key concepts and relate them to John's Gospel for biblical support.

Accordingly, the exposition begins with an account of the Word (John 1:1–18) in relation to God’s Spirit, the living water for which we are thirsty (John 4:10–13, 19–26; 7:37–9). Then the exposition turns to the font of the Reformed tradition on scripture, notably John Calvin; the early flow of the Reformed tradition on scripture, namely the boundaries set in historic confessions and scholastic interpretations; and the major tributaries that flowed from there. These tributaries emerged as modern contexts led Reformed Christians to extend key concepts into new territory: from Westminster, scripture’s communication of revealed truth; from Amsterdam, scripture’s comprehensive harmony with created reality; from Basel, scripture’s personal revelation of God in Jesus Christ; and from the margins, scripture’s liberating truth. Finally, this exposition explores a possible new tributary, placing scripture within a drama of saving wisdom.

33.1 LIVING WATER: THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

John echoes Genesis, ‘In the beginning . . .’ Even before ‘God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1), ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1). The ensuing context identifies this Word as the Incarnate One: ‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14). The Word is God’s Son, incarnate in Jesus Christ (John 1:17–18). The conceptual background of *Logos*, Word, remains disputed regarding relative Hellenistic and Hebrew elements. Yet some element of coherent cosmic order is surely involved, along with an Old Testament theology of powerful divine speech.

In Jesus Christ, people hear the Creator speak in person, communicating grace and truth. The Incarnate Son makes the Father visible to human beings. John’s Gospel dramatizes the world’s encounter with God’s testimony regarding Jesus and the Son’s testimony regarding the Father. Often this testimony applies Old Testament imagery to Jesus, evoking the unique identity of Israel’s covenant-keeping God in relation to the Son. ‘I am’ sayings evoke God’s mysterious covenant name YHWH, with the succeeding images—the bread of life, the light of the world, and so on—evoking the loyal love of Israel’s God. That love came down to earth in a newly personal way; thus, Hebrews identifies the Incarnate One as God’s final Word (Heb. 1:1–4). The early chapters of John’s Gospel portray this Word having unique insight into people, commanding miraculous signs and healings, confronting false religion, anticipating his own redemptive death and resurrection, correcting Israel’s teachers, reaping a spiritual harvest among the despised Samaritans, and claiming that Moses anticipated him in the Torah. Yet this Word speaks mysteriously, in images that conceal as well as explain, challenging even his own disciples and family members.

So the Word must be accompanied by the Spirit if people are going to welcome God’s light into the world. The world’s darkness is a major theme leading into John 7:37–9,

where the Spirit becomes prominent. Sometimes the world's darkened understanding reflects incomprehension—as in 1:9–13 or 1:19–28, perhaps—and such incomprehension even affected those closest to Jesus, as in 2:3–4, 19–22. Furthermore, the world's people love darkness rather than God's light, because of their evil deeds (3:19–21). Several narratives contain ironic incomprehension and/or willful rejection in response to John the Baptizer's and God the Father's testimony. Despite his words being full of the Spirit's life, even Jesus' apparent disciples may be offended by the salvation he actually offers (6:60–70). As Jesus prepares to attend the Festival of Tabernacles, he flatly concludes that the world hates him (7:7), and the surrounding narrative contains people trying to kill him—the exact opposite of life.

Yet Jesus offers living water welling up to eternal life (4:13–14), the gift of eternal life to the dead who hear his voice (5:24–6) and welcome the scriptural testimony about him (5:39–40); he is the bread of life in person (6:32–58). His invitation in 7:37–9 is climactic: 'on the last and greatest day of the festival'. The invitation again involves coming to Jesus—anyone who is thirsty—as scripture supports. On this occasion, the living water is identified as the Spirit, to be given once Jesus had been glorified by the crucifixion and the resurrection. Some hearers recognized the divine origin of this climactic invitation, identifying Jesus as the Prophet long anticipated by Moses (7:40) or as the Messiah (7:41). But, lacking the Spirit, they still could not agree on how to identify Jesus in light of the scriptures. Hence the drama of Israel's responses to Jesus would continue, as John 8 epitomized in its conflict with the Pharisees.

Although John continues the theme, for now the point is clear enough: the Word personally embodies the light and offers the life of divine truth. For people to recognize this Word in light of the Old Testament, to welcome its light and embrace its life, though, requires hearing in a particular way. As Jesus' subsequent promises in John 14 and 16 suggest, the Holy Spirit is the agent of such hearing. The Spirit not only helped the Apostles to recall and to interpret Jesus' teaching for later generations (14:25–7)—thus the New Testament as a form of the Spirit's confirming testimony (15:26); the Spirit is also the One who convicts the world (16:8–11), indwells the apostolic community (14:17), and guides its members into all the truth that glorifies Jesus (16:12–15).

The prominence of 'love' in John's Gospel is related. The revelatory unity of Word and Spirit reflects the Trinitarian coinherence of the Son and the Spirit; the Spirit who binds the Father and the Son together in love enables Jesus' disciples to participate in that love (Swain 2011). The Spirit enables people to hear the Word aright by enticing them to love the God who speaks. John 15:7–17 associates fruitful living, abiding in Jesus' love, with having his words abide in us; as we obey his instruction, his love leads us to love others. For the sake of such love, the Protestant Reformers distinctively celebrated Jesus Christ as the one Mediator between God and humanity; their account of scripture and tradition flowed from that celebration, helping the divine Word of grace in Jesus to be heard clearly rather than obscured by merely human words or actions. That the living water of the Spirit of Christ might flow freely, with the love of the Triune God welling up within hearts that hear the Word—that is what animates the Reformed account of scripture.

33.2 THE FONT OF THE TRADITION: JOHN CALVIN

At the font of this tradition stands John Calvin (1509–64). Calvin’s practice as a pastoral exegete and theologian already reflects a distinctive approach to scripture, deploying his humanist learning. Favouring brevity and clarity, he distinguished between biblical commentary and catechetical theology. His commentaries focused on explaining and applying the texts’ message, while *Institutes of the Christian Religion* set forth the broader doctrine surrounding particular texts. The *Institutes* grew across various editions from a small catechetical manual to a larger-scale theology, but its teaching was meant to support rather than supplant understanding of the scriptures. Keeping commentary and catechesis distinct would help theology to emerge from and to enhance biblical interpretation.

Calvin’s primary account of scripture appears in book 1 of the *Institutes*, concerning ‘The Knowledge of God the Creator’. The expository framework involves the twofold knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, interwoven with true knowledge of ourselves. Knowledge of God is implanted within human hearts and shines forth in principle by virtue of creation and providence, but fallen humans suppress it, becoming incapable of seeing God, ourselves, or the world aright in practice. Thus, scripture is a necessary teacher for knowing God as Redeemer and thereby as Creator. Books Two through Four draw materially upon scripture, particularly its framework of law and Gospel, to expound how we receive this knowledge of God as Redeemer. While acknowledging that the true church is the mother of the godly, that she has an office of ministering the Word, and that maintaining her unity is essential, Calvin objects at length to papal primacy and he subordinates church councils to scripture—only treating the (two, not seven) sacraments and civil government after lengthy rejection of Roman claims.

The exposition of scripture’s authority in book 1 contains four basic chapters, although subsequent chapters underscore biblical authorization of their doctrines—particularly, Trinitarian orthodoxy. The first chapter, 6, establishes scripture’s necessity as a saving guide for coming to the Creator in faith. Calvin’s treatment immediately refers to ‘the light of [God’s] Word’ and quickly uses the image of old men with weak vision needing spectacles to read, even if the book is most beautiful: ‘so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God’ (Calvin 1960: 1.6.1 [70]). God speaks personally to the covenant people rather than using mute teachers. Knowledge of God as Redeemer involves the Person of the Mediator granting an internal knowledge that ‘alone quickens dead souls’, helping them to go beyond merely knowing God as the sole Creator. Revelation has a redemptive history, which Calvin primarily narrates in terms of the Old Testament’s preparation for the Mediator through Israel. While it is fitting to contemplate the Creator’s works, we must listen most carefully to the Word. The Word vividly describes God in light of God’s works; Calvin takes the association between creation’s declaration of divine glory (Ps. 19:1–2) and the redemptive splendour of the divine law (Ps. 19:7–8) to be prophetic. Calvin simply assumes that scripture is the Word of God.

While insisting on scripture's self-authenticating authority, the next chapter, 7, makes its identity as God's Word explicit: When scripture 'is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent—unless devoid also both of common sense and of humanity itself—as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks'. God does not send daily oracles from heaven because the scriptures alone 'hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance' (Calvin 1960: 1.7.1 [74]). Calvin refers to 'the greatness of this matter' but immediately turns to criticizing the Catholic assertion that scripture's authority depends upon the church's consent (Calvin 1960: 1.7.1 [75]). He takes 'the foundation of the prophets and apostles' (Eph. 2:20) to imply that their teaching authoritatively precedes the church's existence. Therefore, the church does not determine the authenticity of the scriptures but only recognizes the clear evidence of their truth that they themselves present. Some opponents appeal to a statement from Augustine—tradition!—to counteract this claim, but Calvin provides an alternative and agreeable interpretation, namely that reverence for the church can make people teachable so that they may receive the Spirit's illumination (Calvin 1960: 1.7.3 [77]). Because the Spirit is God, the Spirit's witness is God's own, and the prophets and apostles 'bring forward God's holy name', scripture is 'self-authenticated' (Calvin 1960: 1.7.4–5 [78–80]).

Hence the rational proofs of scripture's credibility in chapter 8, although numerous—thirteen subsections!—are merely supportive, not foundational. The strength of Calvin's appeal to the Holy Spirit elicits a caution in chapter 9; he has no intention of supporting fanatical appeals to the Spirit over against scripture. Neither is the Spirit subordinated to scripture; instead, the Spirit's image is stamped upon scripture so that Word and Spirit are joined 'by a kind of mutual bond': The Spirit efficaciously confirms the Word (Calvin 1960: 1.9.2–3 [94–5]). In Calvin's subsequent exposition of faith, the Word is its essential support, and the Spirit seals it to our hearts (Calvin 1960: 3.2.6 [548–51]).

33.3 THE FLOW OF THE TRADITION: THE CONFESSIONS AND SCHOLASTICISM

Near the time of Calvin's death, Reformed confessions began to appear; these reflect both fundamental unity and focal diversity regarding scripture. On one hand, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) scarcely mentions the authority of scripture, reflecting Calvin's assumption of its identity as God's Word and his focus on Gospel faith. The Scottish Confession (1560) introduces the subject relatively late, reflecting the salvation-historical order of Christian creeds and arriving at scripture's authority when ordering the church's life. On the other hand, the Belgic Confession (1561) treats divine revelation, and Holy Scripture therein, prominently, after one initial article on God. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) launches straight into the authority of scripture, its foundational principle, and does so at length. Accordingly, the confessional starting points are basically two: at or near the beginning, as the epistemic rule over everything else; or

along the redemptive way, as a necessary clarification of how Christ and his Spirit guide the church in Gospel faith.

Despite different starting points and amounts of detail, the confessions' basic commitments are quite consistent—as epitomized by the Westminster Confession's detailed exposition. Scripture is necessary because general revelation via creation is only sufficient to condemn, not to save, fallen humanity. The Old and New Testaments are the canonical Word of God; the Apocrypha is not. We hear the scriptures as God's Word by faith, based ultimately on the Holy Spirit's internal testimony even if supporting arguments can be offered. Scripture's content is sufficient, and sufficiently clear, to present God's glory and our path to salvation. Indeed, scripture's authority over both the church and civil government entails such clarity. Scripture works alongside other means of grace by which the Spirit nurtures Gospel faith, including the sacraments. Accordingly, the preaching of God's gracious Word, focused on the Gospel, is the pre-eminent sign of a true, properly reformed, church.

Given its slightly more rational emphasis, Westminster's first chapter includes what 'by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture' (1.6) within the scope of scripture's sufficient revelation. While acknowledging the necessity of the Spirit's 'inward illumination' and some legitimate circumstances for 'the light of nature and Christian prudence', Westminster forbids adding 'new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men' as revelatory authorities (1.6). Admittedly, not all things in scripture are plain, but the necessary truths of salvation are clearly enough presented somewhere that 'the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them' (1.7). Accordingly, Westminster affirms the immediate inspiration of the original Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek autographs, the providential preservation of their textual traditions, and the propriety of vernacular translations (1.8). The bedrock hermeneutical principle is that 'Scripture interprets Scripture' (1.9). On that basis, 'the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture' is the supreme judge of Christian theological claims (1.10) (see Pelikan and Hotchkiss 2003: ii.601–50).

There is debate about how much Westminster explicates latent prior commitments versus adulterating the Reformed tradition with rationalistic precision. A broader debate concerns the legacy of what is called Protestant scholasticism or Reformed orthodoxy. Jack Rogers epitomizes one side when he asserts that scholasticism was 'almost the exact opposite of Calvin's own approach', and that scholasticism 'rejected the Augustinian approach of faith, especially in regard to the Bible, and reverted to the Thomistic rationalism of the Reformers' medieval opponents'. Rogers traces the influence of Francis Turretin's (1623–87) scholastic theology upon the Princeton theologians in the Westminster tributary described below. He suggests that, instigated by Scottish Realism, Charles Hodge (1797–1878) applied Baconian science's 'naïve inductive method' to theology. In due course, the Princeton theologians were insisting on the Bible's verbal plenary inspiration and inerrancy, but Rogers finds that confessional requirement to be out of step with the earlier tradition's focus on scripture's Gospel proclamation (Rogers 1992: 51–65 (quotations specifically at 51, 57, 61)).

On the other side, however, historians such as Richard Muller have critiqued attempts to drive a fundamental wedge between Calvin and scholastic orthodoxy. In Muller's words,

The great divide in the understanding of Scripture and, therefore, in the way in which the formulation of doctrine and, indeed, the construction of theological system was conceived cannot be placed between the Reformation and the era of orthodoxy—and it has nothing to do with the adaptation of the scholastic method by the Protestant orthodox. Rather...the great divide arose as a result of the historical dimension that the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century added to the critical dimension of Reformation and post-Reformation exegesis. (Muller 2003: 524)

Muller traces fundamental continuity from late medieval scholastic accounts of scripture through early Reformers like Luther and second-generation Reformers like Calvin into the period of scholastic orthodoxy. The resulting doctrine of scripture follows the confessional contours sketched above. The approach to interpretation pursued a fundamental, unified literal sense, particularly for formulating doctrine, although such literal interpretation was not historically oriented in the modern sense; instead, it remained spiritually oriented in a more traditional sense.

33.4 FOUR MAJOR TRIBUTARIES

Debate over the respective fidelity of confessional and scholastic orthodoxy versus the necessary innovation of modern historical criticism has decisively affected the flow of the Reformed tradition and has overrun its banks, leaving others awash in Reformed categories as they have tried to keep their own hermeneutical heads above water (on evangelical accounts, see Treier 2007; on modern trends, see Treier 2012; on American accounts, see Treier and Hefner 2017). Four major tributaries have flowed from the Reformed font into the modern era, the first of which has generated much of the debate over biblical truth and confessional boundaries.

33.4.1 Westminster: Communication of Revealed Truth

The Westminster tributary has championed scripture's communication of revealed truth, maintaining the trajectory of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the face of modern historical pressures. This name also brings to mind Westminster Theological Seminary, begun in 1929 when members of the Princeton Theological Seminary faculty sought to preserve the traditional 'Princeton theology' in opposition to higher criticism of the Bible and concomitant theological liberalism.

The classic article on 'Inspiration' by Archibald Hodge (1823–86) and B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) represents the crucial Princeton/Westminster claims concerning scripture.

Hodge and Warfield begin by distinguishing the word ‘inspiration’ in 2 Tim. 3:16 from its theological uses, this theological concept from ‘revelation’, and the human process(es) of scripture’s origin from the quality of its divine inspiration. At stake is not divine dictation but divine superintendence:

This superintendence attended the entire process of the genesis of Scripture, and particularly the process of the final composition of the record. It interfered with no spontaneous natural agencies, which were, in themselves, producing results conformable to the mind of the Holy Spirit. On occasion it summoned all needed divine influences and suggestions, and it sealed the entire record, and all its elements, however generated with the imprimatur of God, sending it to us as His Word.

(Hodge and Warfield 1979: 6–7)

After this introductory definition, key presuppositions indicate the dependence of biblical inspiration upon basic truths of the Christian faith: ‘it is the last and crowning attribute of those sacred books from which we derive our religious knowledge’ (Hodge and Warfield 1979: 7–8). In particular, biblical inspiration depends upon providential concursus between God’s sovereign action and creaturely causality, especially the writers’ free, active composition of the overwhelming majority of the scriptural texts, apart from ‘a small element of prophecy’ (p. 16).

Hodge and Warfield affirm but do not focus on inspiration’s ‘plenary’ character, because this term—involving fullness—is ‘indefinite’ (p. 18). Instead they focus on inspiration’s ‘verbal’ character, arguing that providential concursus makes it possible to reject ‘dictation’ theories (into which, admittedly, earlier traditionalists sometimes fell): God did not control the wording of inspired scripture in a way that nullified human thought. At the same time, though, it is impossible to sustain a distinction between the thoughts and the words of scripture, as if the former could be revelatory while the latter were merely human: The words communicate the thoughts. Hodge and Warfield embrace legitimate historical study of the Bible, with theological openness to various results regarding authors, dates, and so forth—as long as those claims do not contradict the sacred texts. Ultimately at stake in verbal inspiration, they insist, is the Bible’s genuinely infallible authority over faith and practice: The scriptures *are*, not just *contain*, the Word of God.

Hodge and Warfield address apparent challenges to scripture’s verbal inspiration and concomitant inerrancy. They articulate nuances regarding the Bible’s lack of omniscience, philosophical sophistication, and the like, as well as human phenomena such as inexact (as opposed to inaccurate) statements. In answering objections, they choose their opponents’ strongest examples. Even many sympathetic defenders of biblical inerrancy, though, fault the Princeton theology for some moments of rationalism. Charles Hodge famously characterized scripture as a ‘store-house of facts’ from which theologians could scientifically develop a system via induction (Hodge 1993: 1.1–17 (quotation at 10)).¹ Despite debated elements of its legacy, though, the Westminster

¹ Defenses of Hodge by Paul Helm, along with Kevin Vanhoozer’s mild version of widespread critiques (which Helm attacks), can readily be found online.

tributary preserves a consistent Reformed theme: scripture's communication of divinely revealed truth. Identified with the Word of God, the Bible conveys the crucial basis for theological reflection and teaching.

33.4.2 Amsterdam: Comprehensive Harmony with Creation

Without minimizing scripture's communication of revealed truth, the Amsterdam tributary has championed its comprehensive harmony with creation. As 'the theatre of God's glory' (in Calvin's famous words), the created order pours forth speech (Ps. 19), offering the treasures of wisdom that hold together in Christ (Col. 1:16–17, 2:3). The Dutch Reformed tributary celebrates God's common grace that undergirds this epistemological harmony. Its pre-eminent exponent was Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), whose *Lectures on Calvinism* were delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898, shortly before he served as prime minister of The Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. Kuyper treated Calvinism as a comprehensive 'life-system' in his opening lecture, with five subsequent lectures addressing its significance for religion, politics, science, art, and the future.

Explicit citation of the scriptures and treatment of their authority are relatively modest; the latter is assumed more than argued. In the lecture on religion, though, Kuyper briefly treats divine revelation. There he rejects any limitation of scripture to a merely formal principle of the Reformed confession, referring to Calvin's insistence on the necessity of scriptural revelation. This necessity concerns redemption: 'In Paradise, before the Fall, there was no Bible, and there will be no Bible in the future Paradise of glory. When the transparent light kindled by Nature, addresses us directly, and the inner word of God sounds in our heart in its original clearness, and all human words are sincere, and the function of our inner ear is perfectly performed, why should we need a Bible?' (Kuyper 1931: 56–7). Against the modern claim that scripture unnecessarily puts a book in between us and God, Kuyper responds that currently humans are groping about in the dark, having obscured the light of heaven. Accordingly, the true Calvinist willingly rather than grudgingly follows God's ordinances, knowing the necessity of a guide through the desert. General moral ordinances and special Christian commandments are not fundamentally distinct, because the divine will has not changed; all that changes is Christ's redemptive removal of the dust obscuring the brilliance of world's moral order (Kuyper 1931: 71).

In a later lecture on science, Kuyper lauds a Calvinist preacher for whom the 'investigation of the lines of longitude and latitude of the terrestrial globe formed in his estimation one whole with the investigation of the length and breadth of the love of Christ. He saw himself placed before two works of God, the one in creation, the other in Christ, and in both he adored that majesty of Almighty God, which transported his soul into ecstasy' (Kuyper 1931: 120). The analogy of two divinely revealed books—scripture and nature—appears in the Belgic Confession and is a favourite of the Amsterdam tributary. In Kuyper's eyes, Calvin's metaphor of the scriptures as spectacles emphasizes Christians' renewed ability to decipher divine truth in nature, reflecting an alliance between

Calvinism and humanism (pp. 120–21). Reformed Christians vary in the extent of their emphasis on cultural engagement in light of common grace and general revelation in the created order. Yet the Amsterdam tributary prioritizes a consistent Reformed theme, at least relative to other Protestants: scripture's comprehensive harmony with creation.

33.4.3 Basel: Personal Revelation in Jesus Christ

Beginning with a deluge of words from Karl Barth (1886–1968), the Basel tributary has championed personal divine self-revelation of Jesus Christ as the Word of God, indirectly identifying scripture and its proclamation with this Word as human forms of its self-witness. In the face of modernity, Barth celebrated the supposedly irrational doctrine of the Trinity as the necessary interpretation of the biblical reality of revelation: 'God speaks'. Barth's initial account of this reality in *Church Dogmatics* proclaims the Triune God as Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness. Revelation cannot be an 'other' from God, lest modern scepticism triumph concerning a hidden God. Revelation is the repetition of God, with its theme 'primarily the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, the deity of Christ' (Barth 1975: I/1.314–15). Human knowledge of God materially concerns all three persons equally, but formally centres on the Son: God's self-unveiling takes form in Jesus Christ. Thus, an account of scripture involves the threefold form of God's Word: incarnate in the Logos, Jesus Christ, as the personal form of revelation; written in the scriptures, as the prophetic and apostolic witness to revelation; and verbal in the church's proclamation, as ongoing witness that really participates in God's self-unveiling by the Spirit. Barth fundamentally defined revelation in personal terms, though he did not deny verbal and rational aspects (Barth 1975: I/1.137–8).

Barth's so-called 'neo-orthodox' theology walked a tightrope. On one hand, Barth accepted the general legitimacy and many particular claims of historical criticism. He criticized the traditional account of scripture's verbal inspiration and did not confess its infallibility (Barth 1975: I/1.123–4, 137–8; see also McCormack 2004). There certainly are more liberal Reformed theologies of scripture, but they quickly become indistinguishable from modernist approaches in other traditions. So the Basel tributary can epitomize a robustly Reformed account of scripture that embraces modern biblical criticism; for this reason, a Barthian account has substantially influenced certain denominations and seminaries.² On the other hand, Barth maintained scripture's theological primacy both in principle and in practice. He recovered the tendency of Luther, and arguably Calvin plus other early Protestants, to prioritize Gospel proclamation when construing scripture's revelatory authority and attributes. Thus, the Basel tributary creatively retrieves some recognizably Reformed commitments, albeit possibly at the expense of others:

² For a denominational example, see the Presbyterian Church (USA) account of 'VI. The Authority of the Scriptures' in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (1992: 35–50). Those who follow Rogers' aforementioned critique of scholastic orthodoxy often share Barthian sympathies.

retrieving the Reformation's emphasis upon the scriptures cradling Christ to the world, yet in a newly modern fashion.

33.4.4 The Margins: Liberating Truth

The political aspects of Barth's project notwithstanding, by the 1960s even a 'neo-orthodox' vision seemed unsatisfying to people at the margins. Reformed tributaries branching off from there, for all their variety, share Jesus' claim that the truth will set people free (John 8:32). Their question concerns the extent to which the Christian tradition and its scriptures reflect such truth—rather than the parochial power of the privileged. An illustrative essay from Dawn DeVries asks, "Ever to Be Reformed According to the Word of God": Can the Scripture Principle Be Redeemed for Feminist Theology? Numerous other liberation theologies raise the same question.

DeVries suggests that the locus of God's Word is not a simple matter in the Reformed tradition (DeVries 2006). Feminist opposition to corruptible tradition could align with the Reformed tradition, but feminist opposition to conceptual hierarchies would oppose the Reformed priority of scripture over tradition. Thus, a Reformed contribution to feminist theology would require distinguishing the Word of God from the Bible, not just human interpretations. Whereas Barth virtually treats the 'scripture principle' as the formal article on which the Protestant church stands or falls, DeVries claims some Reformed precedent for the distinction she wishes to make—namely, how for Calvin and others Christ defines the scope or target of the scriptures. She therefore proposes that the slogan *verbum divinum* (Word of God) would more accurately epitomize the Reformation's final authority than the renowned *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) (DeVries 2006: 41–7). Or, as Brian Gerrish puts it, "evangelical" in its good Reformation sense, as distinct from its misappropriation by the fundamentalists', involved making only one thing central: 'the gospel of the Word made flesh' (Gerrish 1999: 19).

The steps of DeVries' ensuing account can be widely representative. First, the Word of God is divine, not human, metaphorically pointing 'to the way in which God's activity comes into human consciousness' (DeVries 2006: 49). Second, the Word of God comes in multiple forms; here Barth provides a handy conceptual framework but his own practice—appealing to scripture as a norm, and not the entire created order—fails to be sufficiently liberating. Third, the Bible itself should not be understood as the Word of God or even really as a form of God's Word, but rather as 'the primary *means of grace* through which the Christian community expects to receive the Word of God' (p. 53); this distinction will liberate theology from arguments that directly depend on citing scriptural texts. Fourth, God's self-revelation in Christ is the Word's primary form, and scripture's authoritative relation to this Word is sacramental; hence, fifth, 'Christian theology must treat the canon as open with regard to its normative significance for doctrine' (p. 54). The canon's openness does not involve the potential addition of new books, despite the pertinent variance among Christian traditions' canonical lists; rather, this canonical openness involves the mode of theological appeal to the texts: 'Feminist and Reformed

theologians share a conviction that tradition is not a fixed and unchangeable body of truths received from our predecessors to be handed on intact, but rather a human cultural product that is always being reshaped through its transmission in new circumstances,' transmission that varies how we encounter the Word of God in the scriptural texts (pp. 56–7).

Such an account from the margins remains relatively conservative or, put differently, attempts to promote a liberationist vision on distinctively Reformed rather than simply external or generic terms. An altogether different canon or lack of a canon is not proposed. The material theme of the Word of God, distinctively proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shapes the construal of liberation: truth will set people free, and scripture can be a means of this grace. In Jürgen Moltmann's words, 'Taking seriously the Word of God attested in Scripture . . . means asking for the binding and liberating Word in one's own contemporary situation,' distinguishing between its historical origin and its eschatological goal (Moltmann 1999: 124–5; see also de Gruchy 1999).

33.5 A NEW TRIBUTARY? THE DRAMA OF SAVING WISDOM

Given the biblical prominence of covenant and kingdom themes, the Reformed tradition has long thought in narrative terms, celebrating the unity and internal progress of redemptive history. In recent decades, postmodern interest in narrative joined Reformed world-view thinking plus inaugurated eschatology in biblical studies to galvanize fresh preoccupation with the movement from Creation and Fall to redemption and consummation. Directing this narrative interest toward drama have been the multi-volume theological aesthetics of Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) and (among others) an appeal to improvisation from Anglican biblical scholar N. T. Wright (1948–). Reformed theologians Michael Horton (1964–) and Kevin Vanhoozer (1957–) appropriated their work, with Vanhoozer incorporating a 'theodramatic' hermeneutical model into his 'canonical-linguistic' approach to theology (Horton 2002; Vanhoozer 2005).

For our purposes, the crucial aspects of Vanhoozer's dramatic model are three. First, drama is distinct from narrative generally, with its action moving forward by means of speech. Using language from speech-act theory as well, Vanhoozer champions God's 'communicative action' in scripture: God's speech is a crucial form of saving action, while God's action communicates what God is like and is always accompanied by authoritative interpretation. Second, drama assumes performative hermeneutics, incorporating improvisation as an aspect of theological wisdom. Without overextending the analogy, interpreting scripture can be like performing a script, with the roles of pastors, parishioners, and theologians explicated using dramatic categories. Third, whereas performative models easily overemphasize human freedom or the church's shaping of its members, Vanhoozer focuses on the linguistic patterns of the biblical

canon rather than churchly culture(s). Those canonical-linguistic patterns convey both what God has accomplished in Christ and how we may attain Christian wisdom by the Holy Spirit.

The narrowest versions of the previous four tributaries can become mutually exclusive. This new tributary, though, reflects a possible convergence of more modest versions: scripture communicates revealed truth, indeed, yet despite its comprehensive harmony with creation such biblical truth focuses on the personal revelation of Jesus Christ; genuine biblical truth must be liberating, a challenge that heightens the contextual discernment of the canonical Word of God when interpreting particular texts. If this new tributary is to extend its prominence, though, then two additional contours are worth exploring.

First, John's First Epistle concludes enigmatically, 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5:21), and the Reformed tradition is well known for including or even insisting upon iconoclasm (Allen 2010: 12–18; see also Webster 2012). Likewise the dramatic model emphasizes learning and embodying God's wisdom in Christ via the scriptures—thus truly bearing the divine image rather than offering our own, idolatrous representations of God (Vanhoozer and Treier 2015). Hearing scripture as the Word of God, thus addressing us from outside our immanent churchly or cultural frames, incorporates interpretation within the drama of saving wisdom itself—submissive to the Word's authority and dependent upon the Spirit's assistance. The danger of oppressive interpretation is real, but even our pursuit of liberation can fall into idolatry.

Second, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), a collaborator with Kuyper, championed an 'organic' view of biblical inspiration that may be helpful:

even the lowliest part has its place and meaning and at the same time is much farther removed from the center than other parts. In the human organism nothing is accidental, neither its length, nor its breadth, nor its color or its tint. This is not, however, to say that everything is equally closely connected with its life center... In Scripture as well, not everything is equally close to the center. (Bavinck 2003: i.438–9).

Scripture is not a living person, so we speak of its organic character only by analogy. Yet the analogy is apt, if ultimately the biblical canon presents the prophets' and apostles' patterns of theological judgment in order to make us 'wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:15). In the most famous biblical text concerning verbal inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16–17, 'all Scripture is God-breathed,' yet its central, life-giving purpose is clear: 'useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.' Given that organic centre, interpreters need not narrow biblical inspiration to thoughts rather than words, select portions rather than the whole, or certain aspects rather than all of the texts' teaching, in order to find life and liberation. Instead, the drama of saving wisdom means hearing the Word of God in human words, expecting that the Spirit will ultimately help us to hear of God's transforming grace in Jesus Christ.

33.6 CONCLUSION

A Reformed account of scripture begins with the living water of the Holy Spirit as the accompaniment and attestation of the gracious Word that God speaks in Jesus Christ. A Reformed account seeks not innovation but reformation, preventing any human ‘tradition’ from obscuring the clarity of God’s gracious Word. Scripture is identified with the Word of God as the verbal witness of the prophets and apostles to Jesus Christ, the One Mediator between God and humanity. The font of this tradition, John Calvin, could simply accept the traditional identification of scripture with the Word of God, focusing upon the Spirit’s confirming testimony. The new tradition flowed into confessional statements and scholastic expositions that variously expanded its reforming reach. Its course changed more fundamentally when the dam of modernity broke, altering how Western people understood history.

Four major Reformed tributaries have flowed through the modern age. Westminster has extended an emphasis on scripture’s communication of revealed truth: ‘Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth’ (John 17:17). Amsterdam has extended an emphasis on scripture’s comprehensive harmony with creation: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . Through him all things were made. . .’ (John 1:1, 3). Basel has extended an emphasis on scripture’s personal revelation of Jesus Christ: ‘The Word became flesh . . . the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known’ (John 1:14, 18). The margins have extended an emphasis on scripture’s liberating truth: ‘Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32).

A possible new tributary extends an emphasis on scripture’s drama of saving wisdom. Indeed, John’s Gospel presents a dramatic confrontation: whereas the leaders of Jesus’ own people would put him on trial, ultimately all of us are on trial. Rather than seeking our own glory, will we study the scriptures to hear our Saviour’s voice, believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and thereby find fullness of life (John 5:31–47; 10:10; 20:30–31)? The outcome of this trial depends upon receiving the living water of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37–9), the same Spirit who was sent to remind the apostles of Jesus’ teaching and to guide his followers into all truth (John 14:26–7; 16:12–15). A Reformed account of Holy Scripture resists or reforms human tradition that obscures or supplants the Word, but gratefully receives the ministry of human teachers through whom the Spirit helps us to hear of God’s liberating grace.

SUGGESTED READING

Barth (1975); Bavinck (2003); Calvin (1960); DeVries (2006); Hodge and Warfield (1979); Kuyper (1931); McKim (1992); Muller (2003); Swain (2011); Vanhoozer and Treier (2015); Webster (2003); Willis and Welker (1999).

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CHAPTER 34

LITURGY

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It is a gift to any who study the Reformed confessional tradition that several careful discussions of the history of Reformed liturgy have appeared in recent years (Vischer 2003; Wainwright and Tucker 2006). As thick descriptions of Reformed worship—from its emergence and development in Europe in the sixteenth century to its eventual global spread—these discussions bear witness to the fact that, just as the Reformed tradition is a ‘tradition of traditions’ with respect to, for example, biblical interpretation, theological emphases, and ecclesial structure, so also the Reformed tradition is a ‘tradition of traditions’ with respect to liturgical practice. Furthermore, these historical presentations offer strong, sound gestures to the theology of Reformed liturgy.

To complement these discussions, the approach of this one is rather opposite. That is to say, the interest here shall be to flesh out Reformed liturgy from a theological perspective, all the while offering strong, sound gestures to the history of Reformed liturgy. Though the Reformed tradition is arguably ‘a tradition of traditions’ liturgically, many common liturgical-theological threads are drawn quite consistently through the warp and woof of the tradition’s liturgical diversity.

34.1 PRELUDE: WHAT IS LITURGY?

A definition of the word ‘liturgy’ in a standard dictionary might read ‘a form for public religious worship’, with ‘form’ referring to a document, such that the term ‘liturgy’ might be well taken as synonymous with ‘order of worship’ or ‘order of service’. Such a definition of liturgy, while true, is theologically and experientially prosaic. It is, quite literally, a two-dimensional abstraction of a multi-dimensional, dynamic reality. If one were asked, ‘What is music?’ and one pointed to only ink on paper—that is, notation on five-lined staves—one would not be wrong, but one would have set forth only a two-dimensional, inaudible abstraction of something that, though without substance, inhabits space and assumes time, stimulating auditory nerves and titillating imaginations. Liturgy is similar. It is certainly correct to refer to a formulary for public worship in a religious community

as ‘liturgy’, though this referent, for Christians, does not capture the dynamic reality of ‘liturgy’, a dynamic reality that involves both human and divine participants, a dynamic reality that inhabits space (though not just a local space, but cosmic space) and assumes time (though not just an hour’s time, but eschatological time).

In his commentary on Psalm 24, John Calvin gestures toward the transcendent significance of Christian worship, affirming it with a confessional claim and rhetorical wonder: ‘It is an instance of the inestimable grace of God, that so far as the infirmity of our flesh will permit, we are lifted up even to God by the exercises of religion. What is the design of the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, the holy assemblies, and the whole external government of the church, but that we may be united to God?’ (Witvliet 2003: 147). For Christians, of Reformed and other confessional traditions alike, a liturgy, or liturgical formulary, is not an end in itself: it is not prepared as such and it is not exercised as such. Rather, as formulary, a liturgy accommodates and facilitates *the* liturgy, which is nothing less than a profound communion of God and God’s people.

Apprehending liturgy this way is not uniquely Reformed, but it is Reformed. The word-pair ‘Reformed liturgy’ is not an oxymoron; it does not set forth a dilemma, as if one should ask, of worship in a confessionally Reformed setting, ‘Reformed or liturgical?’ As a ‘tradition of traditions’, it is true that, with respect to worship, some denominational strains within the Reformed tradition have been historically and have remained, as it were, ‘free’. Others have attended all along to forms. Some denominations—or even congregations within denominations—have proceeded historically ‘from freedom to formula’, while others ‘from formula to freedom’ (alluding to Bouyer 1981). Still, the observation of Richard Paquier, a mid-twentieth century Reformed pastor-theologian in Switzerland, applies whatever the case: ‘Liturgy is not a luxury item; rather it is the breath of this living body: the church of Christ. One is not free either to foster or neglect it since liturgy, no less than preaching of God’s word, constitutes the encounter of the community and its Lord’ (Paquier [1954] 1967: xii).

34.2 SURVEY OF THE LITURGY OF THE LORD’S DAY

A Dutch Reformed theologian who fostered worship renewal in the Netherlands in the early twentieth century, Gerardus von der Leeuw, once quipped that ‘whoever takes the little finger of liturgy soon discovers that he has grabbed the whole fist of theology’ (Hageman 1962: 15; Daniels 2003: 35), his point being that ‘the religious exercise of liturgy’, as Calvin might put it, both informs and is informed by the breadth of Christian doctrine, the church’s apprehension of God, creation, and their interrelation. Or, as it is often put in the liturgical-theological trade, *lex orandi lex credendi*: roughly, ‘the word of prayer [is] the word of belief’. In the main, the Reformed liturgy—that is, as ‘order of worship’—that facilitates *the* liturgy of the communion of God and God’s people comprises these main movements: Gathering, Renewal, Word, Response, Sign, and Sending.

34.2.1 Gathering

A fundamental affirmation of Reformed liturgy is that God is the one who gathers God's people for worship: God, in Christ and by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, gathers. The twentieth-century Swiss theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen brooks no appeal on this point when he offers prophetically and pastorally: Were it not for the presence, the action and the *welcome* of God, Christian worship would be a criminal farce, an atrocious lie, a seductive power. But the Church, through faith, 'knows that its worship is neither criminal, nor mendacious, nor seductive, because it is *God who calls the Church to worship that He may give Himself to the Church and take the Church into His embrace*' (von Allmen 1965: 185, emphasis added).

That God is the one who gathers God's people is manifested in a variety of ways in churches of Reformed confession. Classically, the opening words of worship have acknowledged God's role of gathering, though not necessarily explicitly. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed congregations in England and Scotland retained the opening words of the Mass: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Reformed congregations in parts of Switzerland, Germany, and eventually the Netherlands and France, opened worship with a devotional *votum* from Psalm 124, also carried over from the Mass: 'Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.' Both practices stand as acknowledgments that the Triune God's volition precedes human volition in the economy of worship, even as in the economy of salvation. More recently, in many Reformed worshiping communities, liturgical catechesis is knit into the opening of worship, a minister or worship leader explicitly voicing at the outset of worship a phrase such as this: 'God in grace has gathered us, God's people.' Scriptural words, voiced as God's Word, may be employed to render God's summons and welcome: 'Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come!' (Isa. 55)

Perhaps less common, though no less fitting, for churches of Reformed confession is worship that opens with a prayer of invocation. Such a practice might well provoke a furrowed brow over an apparent conundrum: If God is the one who summons God's people into God's presence, presumably God *is* and indeed *always was* present; why then would God's people prayerfully summon God to be present? This very question is an acute diagnosis of the practical 'problem of the *epiclesis*', as some have called it. With the Christian tradition, Reformed theologians are keen to resolve this 'problem' not with respect to God, but with respect to God's people: Lest we *presume* that God is present or acts at *our* behest, let us readily confess, in humility in the posture of prayer, that God is God's own free agent. God is present to us in Christ by the Spirit sheerly out of divine grace, and in that same grace, Christ by his Spirit makes us present to God.

Having experienced the grace of being drawn into God's embrace, the people respond with acclamations of praise. This is worship, understood in the narrow sense of the verb's etymology: namely, 'to ascribe worth to'. Employing the psalms, or following their direction, the people address their acclamations to God, recognizing, however, that the act of acclaiming God's glory belongs not to them alone. Like the psalmists, worshipers enjoin the nations and all creation to give God the glory due God's name. Well within the

bounds of Reformed thought is an understanding that Christian worship ‘lends a voice to the entire world, [carrying] to the throne of God, through Christ, the supreme liturgist, the praise and supplication of all humanity and of the whole creation’ (Paquier [1954] 1967: 56–7).

Whether before these acclamations of praise or after, in Reformed worship, God greets God’s people with a blessing. In the salutation—as in the absolution, the proclamation, and the benediction—*God* speaks to God’s people, and the minister’s accompanying gesture of upraised hands is evocative of God’s gracious gesture in this moment: a laying on of hands with which God places upon God’s people, gathered as one, peace.

34.2.2 Renewal

A call to confession; a prayer of confession; words of assurance, forgiveness, and hope—‘comfortable words,’ they once were called; a fresh invitation to new life in Christ. Though specific sixteenth-century liturgies are variously ascribed to such pastor-reformers as Johannes Oecolampadius, Martin Bucer, Guillaume Farel, John Calvin, Caspar Olevianus, John a Lasco, or John Knox, not one of these reformers is the author of a liturgy. Admittedly, with varying degrees of appreciation for their inheritance, the Reformers were not creators of liturgy, but recipients and purveyors of liturgy, the catholic liturgy of the West, the Mass. Ultimately their interest was not novelty, but faithful reform. This principle is evident in various liturgical moments, but poignantly so in this movement of confession, comfort, and calling, a corporate movement that arguably subsumes both the priest’s *Confiteor* at the altar and the sacrament of penance.

In 1524, in Strasbourg, Diabold Schwarz transposed the Latin Mass into a reified German Mass. Among other changes, Schwarz reformed the priest’s opening, private confession of sin at the altar into the ‘Common Confession’ of the congregation. Reform of worship was unsteady and ongoing for years in Strasbourg, yet this feature of Schwarz’s reform remained normative. The 1539 edition of the Strasbourg liturgy, attributed to Martin Bucer, provides not one but three prayers of confession, the third of which is a series of ten short confessions, one for each of the Ten Commandments, an employment of the Law according to its so-called ‘first use,’ namely, to ‘convict of sin.’ Calvin arrived in Strasbourg about the time Bucer’s liturgy went to print. Compelled by Bucer to serve a congregation of French refugees there, Calvin followed Strasbourg’s liturgy, though not quite to the letter. Like Bucer, Calvin invites each member of the congregation ‘to confess his faults and sins, following my words in his heart.’ Calvin then employed the Law not according to its so-called ‘first use’ but its ‘third,’ namely, as a guide for living gratefully and faithfully before God’s face, as an invitation to life abundant. Using Bucer’s Strasbourg liturgy, a minister, after the prayer of confession, forthrightly declares, ‘[in the name of Christ], I proclaim unto you the forgiveness of all your sins. . . . Amen’ (Thompson 1961: 170). Using Calvin’s liturgy, the minister addresses God’s people and even more forthrightly confers forgiveness: to all who repent, who ‘believe that the heavenly Father wills to be gracious,’ and ‘who look to Jesus Christ for their salvation,

I declare that *the absolution of sins is effected*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen' (Thompson 1961: 198, emphasis added).

About the same time that Calvin prepared this liturgy for use in Strasbourg, he was also preparing a fresh edition of his *Institutes*. New material in this edition includes his liturgical assertion that 'the absolution has reference to baptism.' Calvin follows this with a claim of profound, pastoral passion: 'Therefore, there is no doubt that all pious folk throughout life, whenever they are troubled by a consciousness of their faults, may venture to remind themselves of their baptism, that from it they may be confirmed in assurance of that sole and perpetual cleansing which we have in Christ's blood' (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.15.4). Already in his 1536 edition of his *Institutes*, and unchanged in every edition after, Calvin proclaimed: 'As often as we fall away, we ought to recall the memory of our baptism and fortify our mind with it, that we may always be sure and confident of the forgiveness of sins' (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.15.3).

Liturgically, the minister evokes this memory of baptism when, following the congregation's prayer of confession, ordained as God's mouthpiece, she proclaims the forgiveness of sins in Christ. At the eve and dawn of the twenty-first century, liturgical renewal in some churches of Reformed confession has given rise to evoking the memory of baptism not only with words, but also with gesture. So, for example, a pastoral study of the sacraments published in North America, *Invitation to Christ—Extended*, commends to congregations: '[L]eading the Prayer of Confession and Declaration of Pardon from the font grounds our confidence in God's forgiveness in our baptismal identity. Lifting water with a hand or both hands as the words of forgiveness are spoken makes the abundance and freedom of divine grace visible' (*Invitation* 2012: 4)—not to mention audible, as the water splashes and drips. In baptism, God in Christ by the Spirit seals to God's people their eschatological identity as children of God, citizens of the kingdom of heaven. With this identity comes a promise to be received in faith: no matter how deep a swirling vortex of sin may sink us, it cannot ever sink us deeper than the deep, deep love of God in Christ.

This movement of renewal affords a time not only to confess sin, for which we are culpable, whether individually or corporately, but also to lament the effects of evil, for which we may not be culpable, either directly or indirectly. With the psalmists, Christians turn to God with anguished questions: Do you *see*, God? Do you see human trafficking and hate crimes? Do you see the terror of war and refugees running? Do you see cancer, epilepsy, schizophrenia? Do you see the spilled oil that slicks the ocean? The deforestation that unfetters mud? Do you *care*? When will the chaos that upends creation be utterly overcome?

In Romans 8, the apostle Paul provocatively attests to the very creation's weariness of the fall: All creation groans for the eschatological revelation of the sons and daughters of God. All creation *groans*, as if enduring the pain of labour. Christian worship 'lends a voice to the whole creation's praise *and supplication*' (Paquier [1954] 1967: 56–7); Christian worship, 'because it is based on the reconciliation of all things in Christ, is the vanguard of that cosmic quest' of the reconciliation of all things, claims Paquier's contemporary von Allmen (1965: 185). Standing at the frontline of the cosmic longing for *shalom*,

Christians at worship are, as Calvin puts it in his commentary on Psalm 148, ‘*heralds of creation’s praise*’ (Calvin [1563] 1949: 303). Until creation’s praise is sonorous rather than raspy, the baptized, in worship, participate in the cosmic breadth of worship as priests, yes, of creation’s praise, but also of its pain.

Following lamentation is consolation: words that assure God’s people of the unremitting redeeming work of God in Christ by the Spirit: ‘And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). Making new. In Reformed conception, this is the end for which the Word is proclaimed, in absolution and in proclamation.

34.2.3 Word

Consonant with centuries of Reformed witness, Michael Horton declares, ‘Preaching is not merely the minister’s talk *about* God but *God’s* talk . . . the kind of talk that produces a new people’ (Horton 2002: 38). Horton’s claim sets forth two key liturgical theological themes, each worth their due: God speaks, and in speaking, God acts. True to its form as a ‘tradition of traditions’, the Reformed tradition bears these correlative themes of God’s speaking and God’s acting in more than one way: primarily, one is duly associated with John Calvin, another with Karl Barth, and a third, with awareness or not, is an appreciative mingling of the approaches of Calvin and Barth (e.g. Van Dyk 2005; also Kuyper [1911] 2009: 162–3).

For Calvin, though a minister’s voice is heard, God speaks when scripture is read and preached—God, who ‘deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that [God’s own] voice may resound in them’ (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.1.5). God calls, ordains, and deploys preachers as God’s ‘ambassadors’, as Calvin calls them. Accordingly, God ‘uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths [God] may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work’ (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.3.1). Nicholas Wolterstorff aptly summarizes Calvin’s conception: ‘[T]he minister is a deputy of God. He or she speaks on behalf of God, in the name of God, so that his or her speaking *counts as* God here and now saying something to these particular people’ (Wolterstorff 2015: 128, emphasis added). For Calvin, and for the strains of the Reformed liturgical theological tradition that follow him closely on this point, the ‘office’ of the Word of God is ‘*to offer and set forth* Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace’ (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.14.17, emphasis added).

Barth, however, departs from this conception. Rather than offering and setting forth Christ in a radical sense, for Barth, scripture’s proclamation in worship points to Christ. Barth’s threefold typology of the Word of God suggests conceptually—theologically and liturgically—a centre with two concentric circles of witness-bearing: The center is (1) the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ, meaning, Jesus Christ in his very person. The inner circle is (2) the Word of God written in Holy Scripture, which is a witness to the very Word of God, Jesus Christ. The outer circle is (3) the word of God as liturgical proclamation, which is a witness to scripture’s witness, by way of scripture’s witness, to the

Word, Jesus Christ. For Barth, only Christ, especially in the miracle of his incarnation, is revelation. So scripture itself is not revelation, much less its preaching, which 'has the task of bearing witness to revelation' (Barth [1966] 1991: 87). So the word of the preacher is prospectively the Word of God, but only if at God's initiative it 'becomes the Word of God'. 'Whether or not a sermon is service to the Word,' says Barth, 'depends on whether God himself wills to make use of it' (p. 86). The 'event of preaching' features 'human speech' that is fundamentally 'exposition of scripture' (pp. 74, 75) which, co-opted by God, becomes 'God's own speaking (*Deus loquitur*)' in the assembly (p. 47). To what end? The 'event of preaching' places listeners—preachers and pew-sitters alike—in a totally *new* situation. Anything that we might say here about the power of God's Word to create anew is much too weak in view of the rest and unrest that are present when in faith a human being may grasp the calling of Jesus Christ' (p. 57).

In this place [the church] we have a commitment that differs from any other commitment on earth, whether it be family, station, people, or race. This commitment is one that we see to be absolutely different from all created ties, for it means *en Christō einai* (being in Christ). Here in the church, where the word of reconciliation is pronounced, all those other ties are exposed and judged by the Word as unclean, poisoned, immersed in the sphere of the fall. But by the same word we also hear that every hurt is healed and that the whole burden of sinful ties is taken from us. Those who hear the Word of the God who is gracious to us then see that they are also his creatures, for the message of reconciliation, which the church is primarily to proclaim, also contains the message of creation. Where the Word of reconciliation creates human hearers for itself, there is the church, the *kyriakē ekklēsia*, the congregation of those whom the Lord has called. (Barth [1966] 1991: 57)

Given Calvin's conception of God's speaking in worship, it has been said that 'the preacher of the Word is thus God's instrument in a terrifyingly direct way' (Nichols 1968: 31). (It is important to note that Nichols buttresses this observation quoting Martin Luther, affording demonstration that while this understanding is Reformed, it is not solely Reformed. Other Christian traditions share this perspective. Luther declares: 'I am certain that when I enter the pulpit to preach or stand at the lectern to read, it is not my word, but my tongue is the pen of a ready writer' (Parker 1947: 47; from Luther 1914: iii.673).) Given Barth's conception, it might be said that 'the preacher of the Word is God's instrument in a still terrifyingly, though indirect, way': Either way, the liturgical act of proclamation inclines a preacher to regard this role not with foolish pride or fear, but with reverent humility: Like Mary, a preacher confesses, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord' (Luke 1:38). 'There is no deeper pattern for the spirituality of the preacher,' says von Allmen, 'than that of the Virgin Mary, who receives, clothes with her substance and gives forth to the world, God's eternal Word, true God and true man' (von Allmen 1965: 143–4). Perhaps Barth had this biblical narrative in mind too when he reflected that, for ministers, 'preaching has to take place in humility and soberness and as the prayer of those that realize God himself must confess their human word if it is to be God's Word' (Barth 1991: 89). In sum, the Reformed tradition has variously and strongly affirmed that

the liturgical act of proclamation effects something new: a new people, says Horton; a new situation, says Barth; a new creation.

As a confessional expression that nothing good transpires anywhere, ever, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, a consistent liturgical practice in the Reformed tradition is a prayer for the work of the Holy Spirit offered immediately prior to the reading and preaching of scripture. This epiclesis is commonly called the 'Prayer for Illumination'. With this prayer, the Reformed tradition affirms with the Christian tradition that the same Spirit active in the ancient inspiration of scripture is just as active in scripture's current proclamation, reception, and application. Given the varied traditions within the Reformed tradition, the Word of the Lord for the day in any worshiping context might be prompted *lectio continua*, or from a lectionary, or thematically for a season of the year or Church Year. However it is prompted, the Spirit of God must be at work, not only in the mouth of the preacher in the pulpit (and in her mind in the study well before) but also in the ear of the listener (and in his soul) for the Word to have effect.

Putting effect and epiclesis together with scripture, many Reformed liturgical theologians identify scripture and its proclamation a 'means of grace', giving the Word a sacramental cast. Mindful of Calvin's claim that both Word and Sacrament 'offer' and 'set forth Christ to us', Leanne Van Dyk asserts that 'when Scripture is read in gathered worship, *Christ is presented* to the community of believers' (Van Dyk 2005: 67, emphasis original). Accordingly, 'the Spirit uses the words of the text in much the same way that the Spirit uses the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper to form the community of faith and to unite believers to Jesus Christ' (p. 66). Following scripture's reading, 'the preached word has enormous power to reach people, seize them with the truth of the gospel, and cause their hearts to respond with joy and gratitude. The sermon is the word of God that *presents* Jesus Christ in the worship service by the power of the Holy Spirit' (p. 71).

34.2.4 Response

The response of joy and gratitude of which Van Dyk speaks is captured liturgically in the Reformed tradition in the intercessory Prayers of the People and the Offering. Like the corporate prayer of confession, the corporate prayer of intercession is an expression of the Protestant principle of 'the priesthood of all believers'. This is not first a priesthood of each, but first a priesthood of all, as one, exercising royal priesthood on behalf of the world (*kosmos*) that God so loves (John 3:16). A unique manifestation of distinct voices offering but one prayer to God in Christ is the practice of worshipers praying aloud simultaneously, often with great fervour. Such practice is common in Reformed churches in Asia (in Korea, it is called *tongsong kido*) and in parts of Latin America. Whether an intercessory prayer is voiced by one while congregants follow along in their hearts, or by a holy cacophony of all congregants' voices, such 'common' prayer in worship is 'not simply the sum of our individual prayers, but rather our praying together with one voice as the body of Christ. Therefore, they are not simply the prayers of each visible community

gathered in a particular place. Wherever a gathered community lifts up its prayers in worship, it does so in fellowship with the church of all ages and places, and is joined to Christ the Intercessor' (Vischer 2003: 293). The church's first response to the Gospel, offered and set forth in the proclamation of the Word, is an expression of thanksgiving and hope. To paraphrase von Allmen, when a congregation prays with pastoral ardour on behalf of the world, the Church around the world, and its own, that congregation expresses the deepest identity of its members in union with Christ and manifests 'its own truest identity' as a royal priesthood participant in Christ's priesthood. In praying, the church 'obeys a command of its Lord, and in obeying that command it contributes to the coming of the Kingdom' (von Allmen 1974: 128).

When the church prays, yes, it contributes to the coming of the Kingdom, but it also *commits* itself, with all its members, to the coming of the Kingdom. It commits itself to what it has prayed for, and in so committing itself, embraces its confession that the Church—as a body, with its members at work in the world—is itself God's answer to the Church's prayer: being in Christ by the Spirit, the Church and its members participate in the renewing work God Triune is accomplishing in the world today, the renewing work for which that very Church prays.

The liturgical action expressing this commitment is the Offering. Tethered to the intercessions, the offering invites the church and its members 'to put their money where their mouth is', as it were, though not just money, but money as synecdoche for time, and labour, and loves. We pray with the psalmist, 'Send forth your spirit! Renew the face of the ground!' (Ps. 104), but are we mindful when our industriousness augments the earth's degradation rather than its restoration? We pray for justice in the city, but do we truly seek it, with our own sore muscles, wearied hearts, and spent minds?

Some worshipping communities in churches of Reformed confession embody the liturgical act of offering by inviting congregants to walk forward to place their contribution in a bowl or basket near the Table. Kasonga wa Kasonga describes how this transpires in Congolese Presbyterian churches, explaining that, for the Congolese, the practice manifests both devotional conviction and cultural nuance:

In the early 1960s people began singing a chorus during the offering—*Kuenzela Azambi mudimu kudi kuimpe, nkulengela bushua* (To serve God is good, it is so wonderful). While singing, worshipers danced as they moved toward the altar to place money in a trunk or bowl. This style, which is still practiced today, was the beginning of an ongoing reaction to missionary worship. Africans do not wish to worship the living God as if they are sitting in a classroom; bodily movement accompanies spiritual sentiments. (Kasonga wa Kasonga 2003: 229)

As a first act of gratitude in response to God's grace, Prayer and Offering is variously located within the order of worship in Reformed communities of faith. In many it follows the proclamation of the Word and anticipates celebration of the Sacrament. This is a fitting and ecumenically familiar progression. Rooting their practice in the early Christian church, many congregations include in the offering procession the bringing forward of the bread and wine for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, lest the

offering be construed as a purchase of God's grace, or an exchange of sacrifice for sacrament, some worshiping communities locate Prayer and Offering either earlier or later in the occasion of worship: if earlier, then following the assurance of forgiveness, as an expression of renewed dedication to holy living; if later, then following the Lord's Supper, as part of the 'thanksgiving after communion', or—as was common in the sixteenth century—following the benediction, at the door, as people disperse from the gathering. Whenever it transpires in Reformed worship, Prayer and Offering is the response of God's people to God's lavish grace, a response that links liturgy and life, life and liturgy.

34.2.5 Sign

Churches of Reformed confession celebrate two sacraments, baptism and Eucharist, the latter more commonly called Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Calvin and Paquier together sum the significance of the sacraments: In baptism,

God has received us, once for all, into his family. . . . Thereafter, to fulfill the duties of a most excellent Father concerned for his offspring, he undertakes also to nourish us throughout the course of our life. . . . [I]n baptism, God, regenerating us, engrafts us into the society of his church and makes us his own by adoption. . . . [In the supper] he discharges the function of a provident householder in continually supplying to us the food to sustain and preserve us in that life into which he has begotten us by his Word [that] we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality. (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.17.1)

Baptism celebrated in the worshiping congregation . . . makes the baptized a member of the body of Christ, and the Holy Communion renews and nourishes this relationship. (Paquier [1954] 1967: 32)

While pastoral provision is made for exceptions, Reformed churches ordinarily celebrate the sacraments in the congregation gathered. Baptism is administered as occasioned—by birth, adoption, or conversion—though, as indicated above, some 'traditions within the tradition' encourage congregations to exhibit the waters of baptism lavishly week by week, to enhance liturgical and homiletical themes of identity and calling, forgiveness and new life in Christ. With respect to the Lord's Supper, Calvin is often noted to be an advocate of weekly communion, when in fact he argued for more, saying that the Table should be set and the sacrament administered 'at least once a week' in order that believers might 'frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, [and] by such remembrance . . . sustain and strengthen their faith,' and that they might 'urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness' (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.17.43, 44). In celebrating the sacraments, some traditions within the tradition employ liturgical forms that have survived since the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Some employ forms modified in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, whether apart from or in embrace of the liturgical renewal movement. If in embrace of this movement, often

communion prayers—and even baptism prayers—assume the form of the ecumenically familiar Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. Among the traditions of the Reformed tradition, there is ‘form’ and there is ‘freedom,’ ever invoking the questions: What form? And what nature of freedom?

Following Augustine and the Western church after him, the Reformed tradition regards sacraments ‘visible words.’ They are ‘signs and seals’ of the one covenant of grace, manifested to God’s people before the coming of Christ in circumcision, Passover, and temple ceremonies; and now to God’s people after the coming of Christ in baptism and Lord’s Supper. With regard to *all* these sacraments—both old and new—the ‘thing signified’ by the sign remains the same: *Christ*. At this point, sacramental traditions within the Reformed tradition vary: For some, the signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are regarded true signs signifying something already accomplished and granted. They point to a past grace or a past event of grace, and are therefore preeminently a memorial of that grace. For others, the signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are regarded true signs not simply *pointing to* a reality beyond them, but in fact *participating in* the reality to which they point beyond them. So, following especially Calvin, some Reformed confessions forthrightly aver that the sacraments are not ‘empty and hollow signs.’ Rather, they are ‘means of grace’ in the strong sense, ‘instruments’ by which God deigns ‘to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace’ (Calvin [1559] 1960: 4.14.17, emphasis added). *How* this transpires is ultimately a mystery. In the end, faith assents to the secret and utterly incomprehensible work of the Holy Spirit, says Calvin and the tradition after him.

Liturgically significant then, especially in the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, is the *sursum corda* and the epiclesis. God’s people are enjoined, ‘Lift up your heart!’ lest the mystery of profound communion with Christ—who is incarnate in heaven and who himself proffers to us his body and blood as our spiritual food—be missed. How can this profound communion be? Again, only by the secret and incomprehensible work of the Holy Spirit. So gathered around the font or at the Table, we pray, summoning God to send the Holy Spirit to effect here and now, sacramentally, the reality that always obtains for us: namely, our union with Christ, and by this union, communal communion with God Triune. Such communion transcends time and overreaches space, conjoining the church on earth with all the saints in heaven.

Baptism is a bath, attending to our spiritual hygiene. The Lord’s Supper is a meal, attending to our soul’s hunger and thirst for the only sustenance that will satisfy: Christ’s body and blood as spiritual food for the spiritual pilgrimage. Cleansed and renewed, well-fed and strengthened, God’s people are sent to participate in Christ’s redeeming work in the world.

34.2.6 Sending

In Calvin’s Geneva, and in churches that imitated Genevan practice, the close of worship followed this short pattern: Following communion, the congregation sang the Song of Simeon: ‘Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your

salvation' (Luke 2). In worship, God's people have not only seen, but have heard and even tasted the Lord's salvation. Now at worship's end, they pray for the peace only God can give. God blesses the church just as God blessed Israel. The priests were God's mouthpieces then; the minister is God's mouthpiece now: 'The Lord bless you and keep you . . . and give you *shalom*' (Num. 6:24–6). That was in Geneva. While a closing blessing was conferred in Reformed churches of Strasbourg and Zurich, Heidelberg and Frankfurt, Edinburgh and London, the canticle was not prominent and the specific benediction varied. The same diversity is true of Reformed churches today.

At their liturgical best, however, churches of Reformed confession give *God* the last word in worship, a word of blessing, comfort, and promise. God is sending—not simply dismissing, but sending—God's people to the world. As in worship, so also in the world: God in Christ by the Spirit is present to God's people.

In some Reformed communities, God is granted not only the final word of blessing, but also an immediately prior word of commissioning, often called a charge. By Word and Sacrament, God reorients God's people to their identity that matters most: 'I have called you by name, you are mine' (Isa. 43). By Word and Sacrament, and now more pointedly with a word of commissioning, God reappoints them to their high and holy calling of participating with Christ by his Spirit to announce and manifest the kingdom of God. Baptismal identity does not slough off our shoulders when we pass from worship to the world. Our union with Christ and our common union—our communion—in Christ obtain for us whether we are gathered or dispersed. They obtain for us always, as gift and calling.

In reflecting on prayer, von Allmen suggests that all daily prayers are 'the echo of or the prelude to' the pre-eminent 'common prayer' of God's people gathered. Put another way, von Allmen's suggestion is that all daily prayers, whether private or communal, find their beginning, their meaning and their end in the church's Prayers of the People. In reflecting on Christian *ordo*, Martha Moore-Keish aptly claims this of all our liturgical practices:

What is the *ordo*? The lifegiving water, Word, and meal given to us as the basis of our lives in Jesus Christ. Why affirm it? Because these things shape us in the way of Christ, the One who came among us to give his life for the world. How do we affirm it? By returning to these central things so regularly that in our daily living, every bath becomes a remembrance of baptism, every conversation a proclamation of the Word, and every meal an encounter with the stranger on the road to Emmaus.
(Moore-Keish 2010: 255)

Liturgy and life, life and liturgy, inextricably interlinked. Thus engaged, in the Reformed tradition, 'liturgy' is affirmed to be a dynamic reality that involves both human and divine participants, a dynamic reality that inhabits space (though not just a local space, but cosmic space) and assumes time (though not just an hour's time, but eschatological time). The church on earth at worship participates in profound communion with God, cosmic in its scope. By the work of the Holy Spirit, the praise and prayer of the church and all creation is conjoined with the prayer and praise of Christ the Son, the one true high priest and liturgist who offers all worship to the Father holy and one (Heb. 9). God

invites God's people in this worship, not simply that they may offer such prayer and praise to God, but that God may *first* offer to them 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13:13). With Word and with Sacrament, God remembers to God's people and seals to God's people the redeeming work of Christ, thereby renewing the covenant of grace among God's people for their sake—though not just for their sake: for their sake for the world's sake. In response, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, God's people renew in faith their dedication to be the new people of God. Intrinsic to this divine-human dialogue, then, is not only remembrance (anamnesis) but prayer (epiclesis)—prayer for the effectual presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Once dispersed, God's people sustain the church's prayer with the work of their hands: *Mara natha!* Come, Lord Jesus!

All of this transpires, of course, not in the abstract but in the here and now: just off a concrete sidewalk or a dirt footpath; in a *Torajan* house-church or a neo-Gothic edifice; with a pedalboard played by an organist or by a bass guitarist; with the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in Polish, Punjabi, or Portuguese; with tap water, river water, or rainwater; with a feast spread on a table ornately inlaid with *pau brasil* or on the desert-sand hood of a Humvee. Ester Pudjo Widiasih, speaking of Reformed churches in Indonesia today, captures well the challenging invitation to and reality of Reformed churches whatever their context: inhabiting faithfully, in worship as in witness, the church's priestly and prophetic calling in the world:

The Indonesian context is highly pluralistic culturally, socially, economically, and religiously. It is almost impossible to speak about one kind of contextualized Reformed worship. Therefore, every church is challenged to seek its own path of contextualization while honoring the Reformed tradition and the ecumenical convergence in worship. The primary question is not merely how to worship God using traditional cultural elements, but how to worship God in the midst of a particular context so that people can live in harmony with their society and be empowered to show God's love for the world. (Widiasih 2003: 192)

Put theologically, in the words of a Scottish Presbyterian pastor-theologian, 'there is only one way to come to the Father, namely through Christ in the communion of the Spirit, in the communion of saints, whatever outward form our worship might take' (Torrance 1996: 22).

34.3 POSTLUDE

Despite the variations, even vagaries, of liturgical practice within the Reformed tradition, a considered reflection on worship, articulated with a Reformed accent, both speaks from and sets forth a common theology of worship. Likewise, the Reformed tradition is a Christian tradition, and in this sense is a catholic tradition, belonging to that one community of which the apostle Paul—employing not just theological argument,

but liturgical theological argument—says: ‘there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all.’ So the way the Reformed tradition speaks theologically—even specifically theologically about liturgy, about worship—voices, not a new language, but a commonly Christian language, articulated with a Reformed accent.

SUGGESTED READING

Hageman (1962); Horton (2002); Kuyper (2009); Vischer (2003); Witvliet (2003).

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CHAPTER 35

REFORMED ETHICS

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35.1 INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIAN ethics concerns the specific dynamics, norms, and aims of the conduct of believers in the Christian congregation. As such, it is inseparable from the doctrines and practices of piety which constitute that particular community. A theological account of ethics thus involves sustained doctrinal description of Christian persons as moral agents and, crucially, also of the moral field within which they act. Moral reality is liable to several overlapping theological descriptions reflecting the density and complexity of the substance of Christian faith. Taken together and rightly ordered, these overlapping descriptions constitute our understanding of the origins, form, and horizon of ethical activity and guide its exercise. Where are we and where are things going? What are we and what is being made of us? Whose are we? To whom and for whom are we responsible? To what ends do we act? Answers to these sorts of questions are ingredient in any and every Christian moral act. Making them explicit and reflecting upon them critically is the work of theological ethics.

Ethics in the specifically Reformed tradition shares these general characteristics. Its distinctive character is a function of how the particular elements of Reformed faith and doctrine—for example, emphasis upon the transcendent sovereignty of God and efficacious divine grace, human depravity under sin, the unity of the one covenant of grace, the reality of regeneration in the power of the Spirit, the construal of the world as a theatre for the accomplishment of salvation and the manifestation of divine glory—dispose the moral field so as to locate and orient human agency within it. This chapter offers some historical and theological observations on the ways in which theological ethics has been approached by Reformed theology.

The Reformed tradition of asking and answering the question of what it means ‘to do the good’ is marked by certain recurrent perspectives, patterns, and emphases. Its commitment to *sola scriptura* has dictated that to do the good involves acknowledging in the

very grammar of human actions the unsurpassable answers already given to these questions in and by divine revelation. Its commitment to *sola gratia* has stressed that to do the good is miraculously to discern and to undertake actions whose motive, shape, and *telos* testifies to the truth of the Gospel of salvation, thereby honouring God and profiting the neighbour. Its commitment to *sola fide* has entailed that to do the good involves obeying the divine law already fulfilled by Christ, in which the indicative realities of the gift of divine salvation stake their liberating claim as evangelical imperatives. Finally, its commitment to *solus Christus* has led it to understand that to do the good is finally always to accede and to enact the will of the one God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as the One to whom, by grace, Christians belong, and so to glorify Him—*solī Deo gloria*. Reformed ethics thus conceives of Christian moral action as simultaneously indexed to scripture, grace, faith, and Christ, and set inexorably within the decisive horizon of the sovereign outworking of the economy of divine salvation from which the church lives and in which it hopes.

It is precisely by layering several non-exclusive, self-consciously overlapping, dogmatic descriptions of the moral field of just this kind that the formative tradition of Reformed theology has developed its ethics. Reformed Christians pursue the moral life as a function of their faith and the very form of their piety: for this reason, a Reformed ethic is broadly equivalent to a doctrine of the Christian life. There are, to be sure, many different ways one might try to present the distinctive characteristics and contributions of Reformed ethics. The discussion that follows is organized under the four themes of belonging, gratitude, law, and holiness. I suggest that these concepts are recurrent emphases which can well be taken to be the fundamentals of the Christian life understood in a Reformed key and thus also of a Reformed ethic.

Before taking up these four themes directly, we first pause briefly to consider the widely influential modern interpretations of Reformed ethics advanced by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. While their treatments helpfully focus on the co-inherence of distinctive Reformed doctrines and the shape of the Christian life, their overly constricted account of the former gives rise to a much-reduced view of the latter.

35.2 WEBER AND TROELTSCH ON THE ETHICS OF CALVINISM

At the outset of the twentieth century two distinguished German social historians, Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, gave extended, congruent, and hugely influential accounts of the ethos of Reformed Christianity (Weber 2001; Troeltsch 1992). Basic to Weber's view is the transformative effect of the Protestant doctrine of vocation. In rejecting the inherited Roman Catholic distinction between common Christian obedience to the 'precepts' of the law and the separate monastic pursuit of the higher 'evangelical counsels', the Reformers fundamentally recast the concept of vocation. With it they invested everyday secular activities with full religious significance, contending that faith was

practised 'in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume' (Weber 2001: 40). As Troeltsch would later remark, having laid aside the duality of lay and religious life, Protestantism 'laid upon all alike the duty of permeating the life of the world with the spirit of world-renunciation and victory over the world' (Troeltsch 1992: 605).

The revolutionary consequences of this shift are fully realized in Calvinism, Weber suggests: social and ethical activity undertaken in all spheres of life is the very practice of piety undertaken solely *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. He argues that this impulse is radicalized by a pressing need to secure *certitudo salutis* under the shadow of the doctrine of predestination: it is in the business of one's worldly vocation that 'faith ha[s] to be proved by its objective results' in order 'to attain certainty of one's own election and justification in the daily struggle of life'. Weber considers this—the identification of worldly activity as the fundamental site and the primary means of 'counteracting feelings of religious anxiety' and working out that 'tremendous tension to which the Calvinist was doomed by an inexorable fate'—to be the unique genius of Reformed Christianity in the moral sphere. The result was what he famously called 'worldly asceticism': if it is true that 'only activity serves to increase the glory of God according to the definite manifestations of His will', then the lives of Reformed Christians will of necessity be given over to the disciplined and sustained pursuit of 'good works combined into a unified system' (Weber 2001: 67–71, 104; cf. 121–3). For Weber, the rigorous and anxious moral striving of Calvinists constitutes their practical answer to the immediate and individual question: 'How do I bear the burden of an uncertain election?'

Troeltsch works with Weber's analysis, modifying it on the basis of a fuller treatment of the theological substance of Reformed faith. Passing over the first-generation Reformed founders, Troeltsch depicts Calvin and Calvinism as 'the daughter of Lutheranism' which, for all its family resemblances, has a markedly different doctrine of God, account of piety, and concomitant ethic (Troeltsch 1992: 579, 581). God is an absolute, inscrutable, indeed 'irrational' will, whose prime attribute is majesty, to which all else (including divine benevolence) is ordered. Both the created world and the predestining decrees rest on this sovereign will. While the nature of God is set forth by scriptural doctrine, this will of God is expressed through the imperative idiom of law which manifests God's 'active and creative nature as an energy of will' (p. 585). To this corresponds a Christian piety whose proper *telos* is a public life enacted under the discipline of divine law. Faith and doctrine are but presupposition and preparation for obedient Christian conduct. Ethics is not the result, but the point of justification by faith (p. 603).

Here, as in Weber, it is the doctrine of election that immediately connects God to the life of believers: the electing will of God finds its term in Christian moral life, and in turn the conduct of the saints is driven by 'the ethical duty of the preservation and making effective election' (Troeltsch 1992: 591). But in contrast to Weber, Troeltsch contends that it is not churning anxiety but certain confidence in election which animates the moral life. The Reformed Christian knows herself to be part of a 'spiritual aristocracy' in virtue of a 'divine appointment': confident of final perseverance, she enters a 'uniform permanent state of moral achievement and assurance' and is filled with 'the high sense of a

Divine mission to the world, of being mercifully privileged among thousands, and in possession of an immeasurable responsibility' (pp. 593, 604, 617). The energy, intensity, discipline, thoroughness, ambition, and assertiveness of Reformed ethics all variously derive from and reflect this confident subjectivity. The resultant ethos is again one of 'intramundane asceticism' which uniquely combines 'practical sense and cool utilitarianism with an other-worldly aim, of systematic conscious effort united with an utter absence of interest in the results of effort'—and all this within a legally articulated deontological scheme whose sole purpose is the glorification of God (p. 607).

These influential characterisations of the essential 'logic' of the Reformed ethos from its formative origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries highlight some of its key features, and rightly concentrate upon the intra-systematic coherence of this ethos with fundamental doctrinal convictions. Weber and Troeltsch rightly discern that from the first, Reformed Christians have taken up active moral endeavour in the world not as 'an addition to their religion' but as a fundamental responsibility which is 'there among the very motions of Christian spirituality' itself (Wolterstorff 1983: 3). Yet their account of precisely these convictions is reductive and overly schematic, concentrating far too tightly upon the doctrine of election. The line they trace from a bare voluntaristic doctrine of God as sovereign electing Will to a Christian life impersonally oriented—whether in confidence or in fear—to the inscrutable divine decree is abstract and too immediate. It suggests that ethics amounts to submitting to the 'arbitrary fiats of a cosmic despot', as Alisdair MacIntyre characterized the matter (MacIntyre 1967: 123). At best it is unbalanced to suggest, as Weber and Troeltsch do, that the doctrine of divine predestination and the related idea of a radically heteronomous 'irrational' divine law provide the sole determinative description of the moral field in Reformed ethics. To prosecute such an interpretation, they bypass almost all of the extensive soteriological, Christological, and pneumatological discourses in which the concrete mediation of the relationship between the God of the Gospel and the Christian life is actually set forth in Reformed theology. And even if Troeltsch is less guilty of this charge than Weber, many of the most notable features of the actual form and content of Reformed moral theology—features which forge and display decisive connections between Christian moral imperatives and the identity and purposes of God—are left unaddressed.

35.3 A HOLY LIFE OF LAWFUL ACTION IN JOYFUL GRATITUDE TO THE GOD TO WHOM WE BELONG BY GRACE

An account of Reformed ethics which attends more closely to the richer dogmatic descriptions of the moral field which the tradition of Reformed doctrine actually provides might be usefully organized around the four fundamental leitmotifs of belonging, gratitude, law, and holiness.

35.3.1 Belonging

At the very head of his treatment of the ‘sum of the Christian life’ in the *Institutes* Calvin sets the theme of belonging. Election is certainly a doctrine that tells of the Christian’s inalienable belonging to God, precisely in virtue of his gracious and effective choice. But it is not election but the saving work of Christ to which Reformed theologians directly repair in explicating this theme. The watchword here is Paul’s claim in 1 Cor. 6:19–20 that Christians ‘are not their own’ because they have been redeemed by the Lord ‘at a price’. Of this Calvin provides an archetypal exposition.

Christians belong to God in virtue of Christ’s saving purchase, and as such are ‘consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate and do nothing except to his glory’ (*Institutes* III.7.1). This belonging amounts to the effective extension of Christ’s lordship over them. It has a twofold entailment. On the one hand, it annuls any rightful claim to dispose over oneself: the ‘dominion’ of both reason and will are unseated such that we no longer act ‘of ourselves’, i.e. no longer pursue ‘natural’ ends of our choosing for reasons of our own devising. Rather, the Christian ‘refers all he has to God’s decision and judgment’ (III.7.2). Self-denial and self-forgetfulness are thus basic and permanent features of the life that belongs to God in faith.

On the other hand, Calvin argues that to belong to God is actively ‘to submit and be subjected to the Holy Spirit’ as one who knows and ‘hears Christ living and reigning within him’; to belong is to receive from God’s Word and Spirit new directions, new goals, and new motives for living and so for acting. In other words, belonging to God turns human life into ‘worship’, into ‘living sacrifice’, into Christian ‘service’ *tout court* (III.7.1, citing Rom. 12:1–2). Significantly, this belonging is conceived not so much as a settled status as a lively subjection, a continuous yielding to the reality of a present divine possession and leading. The mainsprings of moral life are not located in remote divine sovereignty and the inscrutable decree, but rather in the more proximate work of Christ made present and pressing by the Spirit. The Christian life is understood to be one entrusted entirely to the care and direction of the God to whom it actively belongs. Indeed, Calvin argues that faithful acknowledgment that we belong to God in this way—itsself a kind of compressed summary of the ‘first table’ of the Decalogue—is what enjoins and empowers Christian concern and action for the neighbour—which is the substance, we will see, of Reformed expositions of the ‘second table’ of the Decalogue.

These emphases are by no means idiosyncratic to Calvin. Zwingli’s treatment of Christian righteousness begins with the claim that since ‘everything we have and are’ belongs to God, the logic of the moral life is stripped from the outset of the logic of *quid pro quo*: we can give him nothing, yet Christians are compelled to ‘be like him if we desire to dwell with him’ because Christ is the Head into whom we are knit as ‘members’ (Zwingli 1984: ii.5–6; i.188). Likewise, reflecting upon 1 Cor. 6:19–20, Jonathan Edwards asserts that the selflessness that marks a life genuinely seeking ‘the glory of God and the good of your fellow creatures’ is but the apposite disposition of those who Christ redeems and claims as his own ‘by a most just title’ (Edwards 1989: 268). Famously, the authors of the *Heidelberg Catechism* hang their entire instruction in Christian faith and life from the

claim that ultimate and sole comfort derives from the fact that 'I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ'. Olevianus and Ursinus go on immediately to identify this belonging as the very engine of the moral life: by belonging to Christ by the power of the Spirit one is made 'wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him' (Q1, *Book of Catechisms* 2001: 114). This material structuring of the account of the faith is explicitly and consciously repeated in Questions 1 and 2 of the most recent catechism of the Presbyterian Church, USA, which takes as its title, 'Belonging to God' (*Book of Catechisms* 2001: 1, 64). Notable once again is the prominence of appeals to Christ and Spirit rather than to predestination as such.

Schleiermacher's ethics also emphasize 'belonging' as the essential precondition to moral duty. The Christian belongs to God in virtue of union with Christ in the effective power of the Spirit which ensures that 'the will of God arises within us through communion with Christ' rather than heteronomously 'from without'. The entire question of the moral life is thus preceded and surrounded by the reality of redemption; we ask and answer it only on the basis of being incorporated into that 'union in which Christ stands with God' (Schleiermacher 1989: 65). Communion with Christ—our utterly profound *belonging* to him—stands here at the root of all Christian action; and the discourse of ethics is but 'description of those ways of acting which arise from the dominion of Christianly determined religious self-consciousness' (Schleiermacher 2010: 36).

Karl Barth's theological ethics rest upon a Christological substantiation and transformation of the doctrine of election that brings the theme of belonging to the fore once more. While evident at many points, its role as a controlling motif becomes most clear in his unfinished 'ethics of reconciliation' which unfolds the thesis that '[t]he obedience of Christians follows from the fact that in Jesus Christ they may recognize God as his Father and theirs, and themselves as his children ... by his Holy Spirit they may take God at his word as their Father and take themselves seriously as his children' (Barth 1981: 49). Barth explicitly characterizes the 'ethos' of those thus adopted by the Father in terms redolent of the pattern of self-denial and expectation of active divine direction characteristic of Calvin's earlier account: in the Christian life everything is done in 'sheer need', 'sheer helplessness', and thus absolute readiness to be instructed anew by the God to whom we belong (Barth 1981: 79–80). It is as those graciously adopted are blessed with this '*particular goodness* of the work of God', that women and men may participate with their 'own good works' (Barth IV/2: 594).

In short, the Christian life arises from the reality of having been overtaken, claimed, and entrusted to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. This makes clear that the frequently remarked upon heteronomous character of Reformed ethics reflects its vigorously monergistic account of salvation more than it does an abstract legalism: radical, self-effacing faith comports with the fact that Christian lives belong to the living Lord who possesses his congregation by Word and Spirit. This objective positioning of the believer is fundamental in shaping the moral life: the living fellowship between Christ and his disciples is a 'fellowship issuing in conformity' (Berkouwer 1952: 156). The moral agent is understood first and foremost by reference to what has been made of it by the God who has redeemed it and taken it for his own. We might say that Reformed ethics

knows the Christian moral subject to be constituted by its belonging to God, who gathers and actively governs it by Spirit and Word. An ethics oriented to this must therefore be unfolded as an exercise in '*fiducia* or *fidelitas quaerens intellectum*' (Niebuhr 1999: §4). In all this, of course, we have before us the determinative environment of the divine covenant of grace.

35.3.2 Gratitude

We may conceive of the second leitmotif, that of gratitude, as the primary subjective correlate to the objective reality of Christian belonging to God. As such it represents the fundamental and comprehensive form of that truly human life to which salvation gives rise. It is both its fitting motivation and its expressive end. In a Reformed ethic, gratitude displaces both reward and abstract obligation as the inexhaustible subjective impulse of the disciplined moral life: 'gratitude is the springboard for Christian ethics' (de Gruchy 1991: 170).

In one of the most formative texts of the early Reformed tradition, Question 86 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* asks: 'Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?' and goes on to reply:

Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through his Holy Spirit according to his own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us; and further, so that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and by our reverent behaviour may win our neighbours to Christ. (*Book of Confessions* 1996: 73)

The ultimate origin of the Christian moral life lies then in the objective power of God's goodness *pro nobis* in Christ made effective in us by the Spirit: it is only 'because through faith I share in Christ' that Christians can offer themselves 'a living sacrifice of gratitude to him and fight against sin and the devil with a free and good conscience' (Q 32, *Book of Confessions* 1996: 64). Accordingly, the subjective source of ethical life is gratitude, thankfulness. Its triple ambition is to honour God, to confirm the reality of faith, and to testify persuasively before the world. This gives the moral life irreducible theological, anthropological, and missional dimensions. As Ursinus explained, this life of gratitude is indexed both to truth—as a public recognition and witness to the truth of redemption—and to justice—as the enactment of worshipful obedience that is justly due to the Lord (Ursinus 1888: 464).

Ethical action arises out of gratitude and is its active expression. As such, the moral life is referred primarily to God: the faithful are 'much obliged' to the God of their salvation and so impelled to pursue a manner of life that offers to God the sustained 'praise of works' (Barth IV/2: 584). As Jonathan Edwards explained, Christian moral life is driven by its '*obligations to gratitude*', made ambitious to render to God 'according to the

benefits received', and so 'tends to his declarative glory' in its enactment of what he styled a '*virtuous gratitude*' (Edwards 1989: 458, 395–6, 617). Under the rubric of gratitude, the moral imperatives of Christian life are cast in terms of their fittingness as a response to those specific movements of divine grace that give rise to the life of faith. To the distinctive relationship between God and redeemed humanity—not only of Creator to creature, but more decisively also of gracious God to pardoned sinner—there corresponds a formative posture of 'absolute reverence, love and gratitude' (Barth II/2: 535). Moral acts are subsequent to, propelled by, and conformed with the gift of salvation in Christ. They develop according to the logic of the 'evangelical "as"': just *as* we have already been treated by God—graciously, mercifully, lovingly, justly—so we should act towards others (Hunsinger 2009: 122f.).

The ineluctable disproportion between the magnanimity of God's saving work in Christ and human gratitude generates key features of a Reformed ethic. First, while the divine life is not exhausted in the saving works of grace, human life is entirely exhausted in its expression of gratitude: the full scope of human existence, entire and abiding, thus becomes the field of active thanksgiving and so of ethics. The scope for gratitude is coextensive with the scope of divine sovereignty and the reach of divine salvation. An ethic arising from this gratitude must therefore encompass human life *in toto*—its internal dispositions and reason as well as its external acts, its personal as well as social and political dimensions.

Second, the asymmetry of divine grace and our human response leads Reformed ethics to affirm that the significance of Christian moral action lies in it being expressive, symbolic, or parabolic of Christ's gracious reign (Lehmann 1963: 122). Since both moral reflection and action arrive, as it were, only 'after the good has already addressed itself to us and has placed us', the work of ethics can only be that of witness, i.e. 'to attest and explain' this divine goodness and the situation it creates (McKenny 2010: 146). This is a particularly prominent theme in Schleiermacher's ethics, which consistently stress the self-expressive character of Christian conduct. Moral acts manifest and communicate that inner 'joy in Christ' that constitutes Christian consciousness and is its sole 'principle of action'; they 'portray the life which is restored by Christ' and make 'manifest the union of the life of the believer with Christ'. Whatever the 'efficacious' character of Christian moral activity might be, on this view, it is subsidiary to the 'essentially timeless' work of displaying the joyful consciousness of one's divine salvation. (Schleiermacher 1989: 75, 67, 91, 77).

Finally, an ethics of gratitude admits the propriety of fragile, imperfect, and insufficient human actions as nonetheless apt and welcome gestures of thanksgiving and witness. No moral act can adequately express the gratitude properly owed to God for divine deliverance; and there can certainly be no thought of 'supererogation'. Reformed ethics insists upon the moral life as something open, unending and incalculable, a life whose very shape bespeaks its limitation, insufficiency, and utter reliance upon divine grace. The Christian life will in this way gratefully 'express Christ' who binds it graciously to God (Calvin, *Institutes* III.6.3). For 'the true imitation of Christ is a revelation of gratitude' which self-evidently partakes 'in the mercy of God' (Berkouwer 1952: 160).

35.3.3 Law

The law of God as summarized in the two tables of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1–17; Deut 5:4–21) and their condensed restatement in the double love command (Mark 12:30f. and parallels) has long been recognized to be at the heart of Reformed ethics. For the law promises to shape and direct the outworking of Christian belonging and gratitude. This historic sensibility continues to be manifest in contemporary Reformed theology as well (see Bockmühl 1999 and also Frame 2008, which centres on an exposition of the Decalogue running to more than 400 pages). Schleiermacher represents a notable deviation from this practice, arguing that the Mosaic law cannot provide any direct ‘evidence’ for Christian ethics for fear that ‘the whole legalistic spirit can too easily enter’ (Schleiermacher 1989: 67).

Since its formative centuries, Reformed confessions, catechisms, and theologians have practiced expansive exposition of the Decalogue as the fundamental mode of ethical reflection and instruction. The first edition of John Calvin’s *Institutes* (1536) opened with ‘*de lege, quod decalogi explicationem continet*’ (*Corpus Reformatorum* 29: col. 27), and no fewer than half of the first 30 sermons in Heinrich Bullinger’s *Decades* are given over to extensive discussion of the law as ‘nothing but the declaration of God’s will’ (Bullinger 1849: 193). Since nothing less than ‘the Will of God’ is ‘explained for us in the Law of God’, the Second Helvetic Confession asserts representatively, Christians trust that ‘the written law when explained by the Gospel is useful to the Church’ as it ‘prescribes for us the pattern of good works’ (chs 12 and 16, *Book of Confessions* 1996: 113–14, 122). The law is understood to be intrinsic to the very definition of good works, those works being good ‘which are done out of true faith in accordance with the Law of God’ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q 92, *Book of Catechisms* 2001: 127).

Zwingli vigorously asserts the eternal validity of the Law (a reflection of God’s own eternity) and argues that it provides permanent direction to the human spirit concerning ‘how a person should be if he wants to live according to the will of God, become godly and come to God’ (Zwingli 1984: ii.53). Calvin echoes these views when he recommends the law as the ‘one everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by, applicable to every age, even to the end of the world’ (*Institutes* II.7.13). Appeals to ‘natural law’ as substantively equivalent to the eternal revealed divine law have been widespread in Reformed thinking. Some of the earliest work in Protestant ethics dealt solely with the ‘righteousness of reason’ as epitomized in the work of Aristotle, who, as Melancthon influentially held, ‘wrote so eruditely about social ethics that nothing further needs to be added’ (Kolb and Wengert 2000: 122, 124). In this it approached ethics as an entirely humane, philosophical undertaking, rather than as a theological discipline, working directly with Aristotelian texts and concepts in its formulation (see Sinnema 1993). Yet although natural law ‘in a sense [*quodammodo*] asserts the very same things’ taught in the Decalogue, Reformed theologies have generally considered that human sin so obscures and distorts it as to require its explicit divine revelation and written publication (Calvin *Institutes* II.8.1; on wider analysis of natural law in the reformed tradition, see VanDrunen 2010 and Grabill 2006). So, when Lambert Daneau writes the first

extended and distinctively Reformed theological treatise in ethics—his *Ethices Christianae* of 1577—he, like the catechisms and confessions, devotes its central volume to exposition of the Decalogue as the best and only finally secure *locus* of Christian moral instruction (Strohm 2005: 265; Sinnema 1993: 21–5).

The revealed Law of God represents the objective reality of living divine direction within the one covenant of grace. It provides decisive orientation and shape to the Christian life of gratitude, articulating the imperatives ingredient in the indicative reality of the believer's belonging to God. The law channels thanksgiving into concrete moral forms. It is thus of 'great use' to believers: by providing them with 'rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly'. Such use of the law does not contradict, but rather 'sweetly complies' with the Gospel of grace (Westminster Confession 19: 6–7; *Book of Confessions* 1996: 194). All of this is evident in the manner in which the Decalogue is explicated by Reformed theologians, as well as in the formulation of the doctrine of the proper or 'third use' of the Law, the *tertius usus legis*.

Calvin's expansive approach to exegesis of the Decalogue is exemplary and formative for Reformed ethics. Christians receive the law through Christ, who is its fulfiller and 'its best interpreter'. Christ's own work and teaching superintend and 'purify' faith's understanding of Ten Commandments (*Institutes* II.8.7). As the manner of Christ's own testimony shows, the commandments 'contain more than is expressed in words': each of the 'ten words' represents a 'synecdoche of what God wills' and so demands reflection upon its proper 'reason', 'purpose', and 'substance' in order that the positive virtues, duties, and obligations mirrored in the terse literal prohibitions may be genuinely discerned and set forth (*Institutes* II.8.8–10). So, for example, the eighth commandment against theft rules against all those ways in which we might deprive others of what is rightfully theirs, whether by violence, deceit, flattery, or manipulation. But more than this, it also *positively* commands believers to be content with 'only honest and lawful gain', as well as to concern themselves directly with meeting the needs of others, not only by ceding disputed property to them but even more fundamentally by 'assisting them in their need with our abundance'. For, he concludes, 'this rule was established for our hearts as well as for our hands, in order that men may strive to protect and promote the well-being and interests of others' (*Institutes* II.8.45–6). Calvin's exposition of this commandment—typical in form of the best of Reformed treatments of all the various commandments—presses inward to the matter of motivation, disposition, and will, as well as outward into all spheres of economic, social, political, ecclesiastical, and family life, attempting to elicit the depth of its meaning and the full range of its implications for guiding Christian life.

The doctrine of the *tertius usus legis* names and schematizes this Reformed practice of receiving and interpreting the Decalogue as a living source of authoritative divine direction for the lives of the redeemed. Practically, this use of the law is a *usus didacticus sive normativus*: an authoritative pedagogical preaching of the word of the law which exhorts, directs, and disciplines Christian living under the sway of the Spirit in the way that it should go. In this sense it substantiates and expounds the meaning of the double

love command, indicating and specifying the form of love's freedom for God and the neighbour. Theologically, it is also its primary and most proper use of the law—the *usus praecipuus et proprius*, as Calvin put it (*Institutes* II.7.12)—its chief and true office within the covenant of grace. Of course, such a 'use' of the law has as its *sine qua non* both the prior fulfilment *pro nobis* of the law by Christ and the believer's regeneration by the Spirit. Only under these conditions may the law motivate and concretely shape faith's manifold enactment of its boundless gratitude to God.

The precepts of the moral law are thus never bare but always as it were 'clothed' by the reality of the gift of God's gracious salvation and the vitality of the Spirit. Efforts variously to develop a 'divine command ethics' in Reformed moral theology in the twentieth century—for example by Barth, Brunner, and Mouw—can be read as creative restatements of the *tertius usus legis* particularly alert to the crucial role played by Christology and pneumatology—and secondarily by creation and ecclesiology—in its elaboration and deployment (Mouw 1990; Brunner 1937). Karl Barth openly demurred from this tradition of building theological ethics upon expansive interpretation and application of the Decalogue, in favour of an approach which concentrates upon the discernment of the 'concrete divine command' spoken and heard in the midst of the life of faith, rather than 'derived' in any way from the general law (Barth II/2: 683–700). This is patent in the thesis under which Barth elaborates his mature ethics: 'As God is gracious to us in Jesus Christ, His command is the claim which, when it is made, has power over us, demanding that in all we do we admit that what God does is right, and requiring that we give our free obedience to this demand' (Barth II/2: 532). The Second Article of the Barmen Theological Declaration states this same claim under the particular pressures of the time of its composition (*Book of Confessions* 1996: 311).

Reformed ethics ultimately wagers that an evangelical use of the law is decisive for Christian moral life. Zwingli went so far as to suggest that the law ought simply to be called 'Gospel' because any disclosure of the will of God itself is a salutary mercy to those lost in 'human darkness and ignorance' and because, even more, the good that God 'prescribes for us, he is in himself' and enacts for us (Zwingli 1984: i.185, 64l; ii.8). This idea of the law of God as a merciful blessing—as a salutary 'commanding' of those who do not and cannot know what to do—anticipates Barth's contested description of the law as 'the form of gospel' which provides 'the norm of the sanctification which comes to man through the God who chooses us' (Barth II/2: 509). The prominence and positive use of the law within Reformed Christian ethics reflects a distinctive acknowledgment that it is integral to the one saving movement of the grace of God upon the one people of God.

35.3.4 Holiness

If gratitude subjectively corresponds to the objectivity of belonging to God, then we might similarly conceive of holiness as the subjective correlate and outworking of the objectivity of Christ's gracious use of the law to shape Christian life in the power of the Spirit. The end of the proper use of the law is a creaturely holiness befitting God's

elected covenant partners. The theme is ubiquitous in Reformed theology, and finds exemplary expression in the very definition of ethics offered by Daneau, when he says that Christian ethics 'as included in the word of God, is the full and perfect instruction and doctrine of both our internal and external holiness, that is, of the reformation of our whole life, such as it ought to be' (cited in Baschera 2013: 531). The doctrine of sanctification and matter of Christian holiness are indisputably basic to moral theology in a genuinely Reformed key (de Quervain 1942).

Reformed theology teaches the necessity of a life of holy works to the reality of salvation, never as its cause but always as its consequence. The moral life is a sanctified life inasmuch as it demonstrates and displays the formative effect of justification by grace (Fuchs 1986: 111). The biblical watchword here is often Titus 2:11–14, in which Christ's work of redemption aims 'to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'. Set apart and sanctified by saving grace as those who now belong to Christ, believers have not been 'created and regenerated through faith in order to be idle' (Second Helvetic Confession, XVI, *Book of Confessions* 1996: 122). Rather, they are 'quickened and strengthened in all saving graces to the practice of true holiness' (Westminster Confession XV, *Book of Confessions* 196: 188). The enactment of such holiness across the whole of life is that true praise and glorification of God which is the comprehensive aim of the life of redeemed humanity. 'The only lawful worship' of God, Calvin avers, 'is the observance of righteousness, holiness and purity' (*Institutes* II.8.2).

From the time of its emergence, Reformed theology has identified the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as the indispensable 'starting point of ethics' (Strohm 2005: 264). Women and men cannot 'assent to the will of God when it is revealed', the Scots Confession puts it graphically, 'unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will' (XII, *Book of Confessions* 1996: 38). The Spirit is ever identified as the power and cause of all those holy acts in which love of God and neighbour is faithfully and obediently exercised. The possibility of enacting the good lies nowhere in us, but solely in virtue of the 'dwelling' and 'dominion' of the 'Spirit of Christ' (Westminster Confession XV.1, XVI.3, *Book of Confessions* 1996: 190).

This regenerating work of the Spirit is variously accounted for in the Reformed tradition. Some stress the extrinsic power of the Spirit to animate obedience to the law. Some conceive of it in close relation to the effectual imputation of Christ's own holiness. Others identify it with the effects of participation in divine holiness through union with and 'being in' Christ. It is chiefly among these latter theologians that the discourse of moral *virtue* finds a prominent place in Reformed ethics. Jonathan Edwards, for instance, influentially expounds upon the Christian life as one of 'true virtue' arising from the communication of divine holiness in which 'the creature partakes of God's own moral excellency' (Edwards 1989: 442).

However this might be, the tradition admits that Christian holiness is to be assigned to the unmerited gift and working of the Spirit, and thus be confessed to be naught but 'grace upon grace' (John 1:16). Holiness is not indexed to intrinsic moral merit, but to the fullness and fittingness with which Christian gratitude is expressed under the concrete

direction and empowerment of Word and Spirit. The Christian life is a life lived without reference to merit (Luke 17:10), because its fruits are finally and properly attributable solely to God's own work. The holiness of human work comprises its accord with divine law, its effective and objective ground in the working of Spirit, its subjective motive origin in the gift of the Spirit, and its final *telos* in God's glory.

Finally, we note that affirmation of the absolute holiness of God himself is a critical component of a Reformed ethic. On the one hand, it summons believers to struggle to preserve and honour the gift of holiness integral to the community's election, adoption, regeneration, and calling. The distinctive place of church discipline in Reformed ecclesiology reflects this sensibility. On the other hand, recognition of the utterly transcendent and incomparable sovereign holiness of God radically chastens all human aspirations and claims to holiness. Taken together with the continued weight of human sin, it underwrites strong opposition to perfectionist accounts of the moral life. Christians are holy because they 'lean to the pursuit of righteousness' without ever being able to 'fulfil righteousness itself'. Since 'not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified', the holiness of a Christian life must always 'yield to the justification of faith whence it has what it is' (Calvin *Institutes* III.17.10). The pursuit of holiness is thus an unending vocation that finds its hope and consummation in gracious redemption, or not at all.

The chastening effect of the transcendent holiness of God has continued to be a marked feature of the sensibility of more recent Reformed ethics. James Gustafson, for example, stresses how confessing that 'the Almighty has his own purposes' relativizes all human willing and doing, and engenders a 'more circumspect' hope. Indeed, the subtitle of a late work—*The Grace of Self-Doubt*—expresses his sense of the positive gain of our moral uncertainty before the utter transcendence of God (Gustafson 2004: 97). H. Richard Niebuhr similarly argues that faithful recognition of the absolute holiness of God—intrinsic to the logic of radical monotheism—requires believers to be structurally open to the always objectively relative value of human moral projects and systems, including their own (Niebuhr 1960: 112–13). The dynamism of a Reformed ethics including its inalienable self-critical posture and its structural resistance to both idolatry and tyranny (Culp 2010), as well as its capacity to negotiate moral pluralism, are in no small part attributable to this eschatological tension between the necessity and impossibility of attaining a human holiness genuinely adequate to God.

35.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I have suggested that Reformed ethics is a thoroughly theological enterprise tasked with understanding and orienting human action by formative reference to the fundamental description of moral reality provided by Reformed doctrine. I have further suggested that many of the essential features of this moral reality can helpfully be displayed and coordinated with reference to the four themes of belonging, gratitude, law, and holiness. Other ways of disciplining the material are undoubtedly available. What is clear is the

essential Reformed commitment to thinking and acting morally in a world remade by 'the rigorous Gospel and the gracious Law' (Busch 2010: 35). The practice of Reformed ethics is a testament to the fundamental and abiding conviction on the part of Reformed believers and theologians that *reformatio doctrinae* is intrinsically bound with and finds its term in serious, joyful, and constant *reformatio vitae*. And this because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is itself 'a doctrine not of the tongue but of life' (Calvin, *Institutes* III.6.4).

SUGGESTED READING

Barth 1960; de Quervain 1942; Edwards 1989; Troeltsch 1992; Schleiermacher 1989.

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CHAPTER 36

POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND LAW

DAVID FERGUSSON

36.1 INTRODUCTION

THE Reformation was first established in Saxony, where Luther enjoyed the support of Frederick the Elector. A hereditary ruler, Frederick protected Luther from his Catholic opponents and so enabled the Reformation programme. Luther's political writings tend to adapt the two cities framework of Augustine by developing a two-kingdoms doctrine (*Zweireichelehre*). These refer to different regimes. Within the realm of civil society, the state maintains law and order through the power of the sword. Here, the state is ordained by God to deal with the unruly impulses of sinful people. It is a necessary form of control and restraint in a fallen world. By contrast, within the church, the Gospel is preached freely and forgiveness of sins proclaimed. While the state rules by force, the church is governed by peaceful means. The offices of the magistrate and pastor are thus clearly defined by these two separate regimes. Although the support of the ruler was required for the maintenance of the true church—there could be no state neutrality or total disjunction of the civil and the religious—the provinces of the secular and the ecclesiastical were largely separate. Luther, moreover, was largely accepting of monarchical power; he tended to view this as a norm authorised by scripture and providential in its outcomes, at least in sixteenth-century Saxony, most of which was rural.

The Swiss cantons provided a contrast to this sociopolitical context. Power was more distributed. City councils were elected, generally by the aristocracy. These ruled the urban centres that were dominated by the guilds and an emerging mercantile class which was often in tension with the wider rural population in Zurich and elsewhere. A close partnership of civil and church authorities thus became possible, even necessary, in this political setting. With an influx of refugees from other parts of Europe, the creation

of a regulated social order in Geneva was a political as well as a religious necessity. From the outset the Reformed movement was engaged with sociopolitical issues.

Zwingli's *Sixty-Seven Theses* (1523) offer an initial indication of the rather different political theology that emerged in the Reformed tradition. Although the temporal and the spiritual authorities are to be distinguished, their partnership under the rule of Christ is affirmed. The state is to serve the cause of God, not only in terms of maintaining law and order through force, but in preserving and supporting the church in its divine vocation. When it does this, Christians owe the magistrate their obedience. But the implication is that this may be withheld in the case of a tyrannical or unjust state. While there are similarities with Luther's two-kingdoms doctrine, the tendency here is towards a unity in differentiation rather than a strict separation of powers and functions. This is illustrated by the statue of Zwingli outside the Wasserkirche in Zürich, clasping a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other. Although Reformed theology never eschewed the language of two kingdoms, its inherent tendency was towards integration and a more positive construction of the role of the secular authorities. As such, the Reformed tradition belonged to the magisterial Reformation in affirming the civil ruler as a defender of the faith. To that extent, it maintains a medieval tradition of coordinating the secular and the religious, and of baptizing every infant into a state-recognized church.

These tendencies are further apparent in the teaching of Calvin in the *Institutes* IV.20.2. Earthly rulers are ordained by God, and not merely for maintaining order. Here he is at pains to argue against the more negative estimate of civil rule amongst the Anabaptists. The purpose of the secular authorities is 'to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine or piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behaviour to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity' (Calvin 1960: 1487). This partnership of church and state was reflected in the work of the Genevan consistory, which included representatives of both realms. Their task was to create and maintain a 'godly commonwealth' in which the entire social order was sanctified according to the Word of God. To this end, the rule of both civil magistrate and the church was required. But these worked together within one community in which all citizens belonged to the visible church. This commitment to social transformation was generally more characteristic of the Reformed tradition than the Lutheran, where the primary function of the state as a restraining ordinance was more apparent. In Scotland, the *First Book of Discipline* (1560) outlined a programme both for ecclesiastical and social reform. This included a commitment to systematic poor relief, comprehensive education, and moral discipline. As in Geneva, it was envisaged that the church and civil authorities would work together to implement this vision of a sanctified society. The honouring of God in the first and second tables of the law was expressed in a commitment to justice, good government, and the ordering of social and economic life.

36.2 STANDARD ELEMENTS OF REFORMED POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THEORY

36.2.1 Participation

In both Lutheran and Reformed theology, political office is ordained by God and necessary for the wellbeing of the church. For that reason, it was entirely proper for Christians to regard the holding of such office as a calling of God. Much of this thinking can already be discerned in medieval accounts of the Christian prince, but it is emphasized in different ways at the time of the Reformation and often against the more exclusionist trends of the radicals. In Lutheranism, the concept of vocation becomes secularized. The service of God is fulfilled in the home, in commerce, and in political life. Vocation is no longer confined to the cloister. Christ is to be served in the world, freely and gladly without the burden of having to perform extraordinary meritorious works. This lent a dignity and seriousness to the responsibilities of the everyday. Exercised within the secular domain, the calling of the Christian was not out of the world but within it, informed by faith and animated by love.

The (Lutheran) Augsburg Confession (article XVI) of 1530 explicitly affirms that Christians can without sin exercise political authority and execute justice. Their service is not unsullied by virtue of its secularity, nor are they at a spiritual disadvantage. The only restriction is that a separation of powers and functions in church and state is required. These are to be neither mingled nor confused. In the *Institutes* IV.11.8, Calvin likewise stresses that political and ecclesiastical office should be clearly distinguished, arguing further that the two roles should never be combined in one person. Believing this to be the explicit teaching of Christ, he underscores the difference between the offices of pastor and prince (Calvin 1960: 1220). Nevertheless, they serve a common end under the divine rule. Together, church and state are committed to a sanctified society according to the Word of God, even if pastors and politicians should neither confuse nor combine their functions.

36.2.2 Democracy

The Reformation is sometimes interpreted as a democratic movement. This is true only in a restricted and qualified sense. Luther appears to have accepted the right of hereditary monarchs to rule. As a humanist scholar and lawyer, a French refugee and citizen of Geneva, Calvin was more alert to constitutional issues. He examines these rather tentatively in the closing chapter of the *Institutes*, where he appears to express a mild preference for an admixture of aristocracy and democracy. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, this is the least bad option. A monarchy concentrates too much power in the hands of one individual. A democracy has anarchic tendencies when it too readily succumbs to

the *vox populi*. Aristocracy can decline into a 'faction of the few'. Yet in Israel, prior to the establishment of monarchy—an unhappy experiment on the whole—Calvin discerns an aristocracy bordering on popular government. This seems to be where his sympathies lie, though he does not press the point; instead, he merely notes that divine providence works through very different polities across the world.

In other settings, however, Reformed theology was keenly alert to the distribution of authority and popular consent. This is apparent, for example, in church government and the public calling of ministers. Each minister is called by God, yet the ecclesiastical rite of ordination must take place always with the consent of the people. Ministerial appointment requires popular legitimation, and cannot be imposed top-down by church authority. The government of the church, moreover, involves the rule of elders who function with ministers as a senate-like ruling body. These elders are described by Calvin as senior figures elected by the people. We are of course a long way from later democratic ideals of universal adult suffrage, but these features of Reformed polity indicate some popular impulses with respect to church government and the empowering of the laity. Inevitably this would have a wider political effect, as we can see in approaches to civil resistance.

The inherent egalitarian and democratic impulses of Reformed theology were argued by Abraham Kuyper in his celebrated Stone Lectures on Calvinism.

If Calvinism places our entire human life immediately before God, then it follows that all men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented, as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently as equal as man to man . . . So Calvinism was bound to find its utterance in the democratic interpretation of life.
(Kuyper 1898: 26–7)

The dual stress on divine sovereignty and human equality is one that generates a principled commitment to some form of democracy—Kuyper himself did not advocate universal adult suffrage—on a Reformed theological base. Although it may have taken the Reformed churches some time to reach this position, it can plausibly be regarded as latent within some of the core convictions of the tradition.

36.2.3 Civil Resistance

Luther and Calvin tended towards a political quietism with respect to acceptance of civil authority. No doubt there are contextual reasons to explain this, not least the fear of anarchic forces on the left wing of the Reformation. Both argued for a duty of obedience even to tyrannical rulers who behaved unjustly. Armed rebellion was deserving of the death penalty. Yet within their political thinking, there are seeds of a different approach. The civil authorities have a responsibility under God to execute justice and to protect the church. After all, the Reformation could not have taken place without political support. But what happens when the civil authorities abandon their responsibilities and threaten

the existence of the church and the godly commonwealth? The possibility of defending the cause of God against attack is embedded within the political dispositions of the magisterial Reformers. This was articulated in the influential Lutheran Magdeburg Confession (1550), which exercised an important influence on Reformed thinking (Skinner 1978: 189–238).

A succession of Reformed writers, including John Knox, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Theodore Beza, developed arguments for civil resistance, some of which had been inspired by the success of Magdeburg. These converged upon several convictions. The power of the monarch is neither absolute nor unfettered. Kings and queens are ordained by God to serve the people, and they do so in accordance with natural laws that are not of their own making. Appeal was made here to the *Corpus Juris Civilis*—a set of early texts in jurisprudence—as a guide to the principles underlying positive legal systems in different territories. Where monarchs contravened these principles of natural law either through coercive action or by the enactment of unjust laws, they could lawfully be resisted. A second line of argument developed the notion of a local magistracy which had its own responsibility to act lawfully and to promote the common good. Where local rulers find themselves in opposition to national or imperial forces, they have a right, even a duty, of resistance. In doing so, they act not as private citizens but as holders of an office which carries its own responsibilities and rights. Knox, for example, employed this argument in his appeal to the nobility of Scotland to oppose the Catholic monarch. Vermigli offered the example of the Roman senate as a body that could resist unlawful princely power. Finally, Protestant theories of resistance could appeal to classical and medieval traditions of popular consent. In George Buchanan's *De jure regni apud Scotos* (1579), a king rules legitimately only by tacit popular consent and in accordance with law. This adumbrates later social contract theories and provided humanist—as opposed to purely theological—arguments for resistance. These philosophical and theological considerations were conjoined in the seventeenth century by theologians such as Samuel Rutherford in *Lex, Rex* (Kingdon 2008).

36.2.4 Law

Within Lutheran theology, two fundamental uses of law were distinguished. The first was the law as a restraining mechanism to curb the excesses of human sinfulness. Implemented by the state and backed by its coercive powers, the law was given by God to maintain order within civil society. This *usus civilis* or *politicus* was divinely ordained to prevent chaos in society. Its first use therefore realised a measure of justice and peace in civic affairs, although this was characterised largely in negative terms through notions of restraint and enforcement. By contrast, a second use of the law was more theological and Christological. Following Galatians 3:24, it was described as the taskmaster who brings us to Christ. In awakening a sense of sin and unworthiness, the law directs us towards God's forgiveness and grace. Condemned by the law, we are brought to a place where we can no longer rely upon our good works. Like a mirror that reveals our flaws to us, the law exposes our degradation and brings us to the point of despair. Only the alien

righteousness of Christ can rescue us from our plight. This *usus theologicus* or *enlenchticus* is central in Luther's reading of Pauline theology.

In addition to these two uses of the law, we find a third articulated by Reformed theologians. This is also apparent in Melancthon's *Loci Communes* where he speaks about a tertiary use of the law in the lives of those who are reborn. This is given for the Christian life so that we can be constantly reminded of our continued sinfulness and the need to do God's works. For Lutheran theologians, however, this third use of the law has tended to be viewed as a reiteration of the first, a reading which is suggested by its handling in Article VI of the *Formula of Concord* (1577). The *tertius usus legis* reminds us that, even as Christians, our inner self needs to be constrained by the law of God. Since we continue to display the marks of sin, we do not cease to require the law in its primary and secondary functions. Reformed theologians, however, went beyond this by stressing the law as exercising a further positive function in relation to individual and social sanctification.

For Calvin, this use represents a restoration of the law to its intended function in the Old Testament. Inverting the Lutheran ordering of first and second uses in the *Institutes* II.7, he then discerns a third function which is its 'principal use' and 'proper purpose' (Calvin 1960: 360). The law is a divine gift to enable people to live together in unity with one another and in true worship and obedience of God. For Reformed theologians, this had to be held together with a commitment to *sola gratia*. We are forgiven and reconciled to God by divine grace. This is the basis on which the Christian life is lived each day. Yet as a new creation, we are to walk according to the Spirit. And for this calling, we are given the law to assist us in our renewal as individuals and as a society. This is neither burdensome nor oppressive, but acts for our wellbeing. Hence there is no dialectical opposition of law and Gospel in Reformed theology, but an integration of the two under the rubric of the third use.

In much seventeenth-century Reformed theology, the third use of the law is normative. It was widely preached and expounded in pamphlets, catechisms, and textbooks. The *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XX (1646) affirms all three uses in its treatment of the subject. With its fear of antinomian trends, it affirms unequivocally the significance of the law in the Christian life. 'Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires to be done.' (Rohls 1998: 200–206) The content of this law tends to be identified with the natural law enshrined in the covenant of works, written on the heart of each person, and in the Decalogue which outlines our duties towards God and our neighbour. At the same time, this also introduces a greater minimalism which promotes Christian liberty. The human laws of the church which are not grounded in God's Word do not bind the conscience. From these requirements, the Christian is released. Since there can be no enslavement to excessive regulation of conduct, people of faith can reasonably disagree on many matters of relative indifference.

This theological orientation and its outworking in systems of church discipline also had important consequences for the development of civil law. For example, theories of punishment were developed which distinguished retributive, deterrent, and remedial functions in the enforcement of laws by fines and imprisonment. Much of this thinking

drew upon theological reflections on the negative and positive functions of divine law (Witte 2006: 263–292). Other developments in jurisprudence were shaped by the social and political upheavals that followed the Reformation, not least with respect to the rise of nation states and the development of international law by Grotius and other jurists. In the case of marriage, the shift from a sacramental status to more secular constructions of its significance produced new laws including elements such as parental consent, civic registration, church solemnization, and public witnesses.

With respect to its application, however, the third use gives rise to some tensions. How rigorously are Old Testament injunctions to be applied to the Christian life, the church and civil society? Are there ways in which these can be modified, mediated and interpreted in light of changing social and political circumstances? In Scotland, for example, the *First Book of Discipline* sought not only to promote education and poor relief but also to introduce the death penalty for adultery. This overly rigorous application of Scriptural precedents could result in some counter-productive measures, while also proving inadequate to growing ideals of toleration, democracy and equality as these emerged in early modern and Enlightenment Europe. And yet the fundamental impulse of Reformed theology seems right. The laws that govern civil society cannot be construed only in a negative modality as ordinances of restraint. They exist to promote social justice, to advance the common good and achieve in some measure the *shalom* proclaimed by Scripture (Aus de Au 2015: 132–141).

36.2.5 Economics

The prevalence of the Weber thesis has generated a widespread perception that Reformed theology was instrumental in the rise of capitalism in early modern Europe. Though largely based on seventeenth-century Puritan texts, Max Weber's argument, first published in 1905, was that the religious sensibilities animated by Protestantism provided some of the cultural conditions under which capitalism could flourish (Weber 2013). The search for the signs of election in one's life promoted thrift, a strong work ethic, and the quest for long-term personal material gain. To this extent, the Reformed tradition created the right psychological and intellectual ingredients for the flourishing of a market economy. Fearful of the prospect of damnation, Puritans sought to confirm their election in the fruits of their lives. This typically manifested itself in hard work, savings, investment, the accumulation of wealth, and eschewal of extravagance. By contrast, Weber detected a more immediate and carefree approach to daily life in Catholic populations.

The best and worst expressions of a tradition always merit careful consideration. The Weber thesis has been subject to over a century of intense scholarly interrogation, much of which casts doubt on any strong causal link between Puritan theology and the spirit of capitalism. This is not to deny that these could not live together in harmony; yet a substantial body of research suggests that many of the economic developments described by Weber were no less evident in predominantly Catholic societies. Nor is there much sign of salient differences amongst Protestants and Catholics living alongside each other

in mixed communities, at least as far as their economic success is concerned (Hoffmann 2006: 72–86).

Recent scholarship has also pointed to features of Calvin's writings which display a strong ethical concern for the poor and a commitment to economic justice. First published in 1959, André Biéler's landmark monograph on Calvin's economic thought drew attention to his extensive deliberations on economic issues, especially in his commentaries and sermons (Biéler 2005). Though neglected by later Reformed thinkers, this material interprets biblical concerns for the underprivileged and destitute. Calvin's theology of the *imago Dei* plays an important role here. While his soteriological instincts inclined him to speak of the image as being destroyed at the Fall, he later recovers the ethical use of the concept by referring to the ways in which its remnant persists in each person. This has an equalizing function in that everyone is to be regarded as a bearer of the divine image, and therefore of value to God and so to us. As Wolterstorff has argued, this creates a sense of divine suffering on account of poverty. Starvation and homelessness are an affront to God, as is the exploitation engendered by lending money at punitive rates of interest (Wolterstorff 2011: 114–32).

On the subject of charging interest on loans, the Reformed tradition adopted a position that was both innovative and mediating. It recognizes that the practice of moneylending is necessary to economic activity. In doing so, it also accepts that some return requires to be made in the case of commercial ventures, given the risks that are undertaken and the benefits that can accrue. To this extent, Calvin departs from the position of Aristotle and those theologians who maintained that money was sterile. While his position is revisionist in not comprehensively excluding the lending of money at interest, the cap placed on interest rates tended against the unregulated charges that were already being set by money lenders in late medieval Europe. With respect to moneylending and other commercial activity, Calvin requires that these contribute to the common good of society, especially the poor, over and above the immediate interests of individual economic agents (Biéler 2005: 400–422; Grafland 2010: 233–48; Grafland 2014: 177–98). The lending of money at interest merely to enable subsistence was the kind of usurious practice condemned in scripture; here, only interest-free loans were appropriate. Lending money to a poor person should not be undertaken for profit. For this reason, loans for commercial projects were clearly distinguished by Calvin from loans required merely to relieve poverty. In such latter cases, no profit should be anticipated on the part of the borrower.

36.3 EARLY MODERN AND ENLIGHTENMENT DEVELOPMENTS

36.3.1 Tolerance

The theology of the magisterial Reformers committed the civil magistrate to upholding the worship and polity of the church. This created a unitary religious state, like its late

medieval predecessor, in which civil and religious authorities worked in close partnership. Until about the middle of the seventeenth century, this system was upheld by the teaching of the Reformed confessions. Around that time, however, developments took place which required a reconfiguration of the relationship between church and state. This arose in large measure because of the fragmentation of Protestant groups in England and elsewhere (Coffey 2000). Demands for toleration grew, these being accompanied by arguments for relative state neutrality with respect to those dogmatic issues on which confessional groups divided. Civil disagreement, constructive argument and peaceful co-existence were ideals preferred to violent conflict or religious coercion. Appeal was made to the New Testament, according to which faith spread freely by the work of the Holy Spirit, not by compulsory religious measures. The baptism of the first Christians was voluntary and never coerced. In addition, exponents of religious toleration could argue that agreement was possible on some theological and moral essentials without requiring unanimity amongst all groups on every head of doctrine. Much of the eschatological preoccupation of the period after the Reformation diminished as the belief in hell declined from the late seventeenth century onwards. This also had the effect of reducing the significance of doctrinal disagreements (Mendus 1999).

In this changing climate, Reformed theologians repositioned themselves. While some, such as Samuel Rutherford in Scotland through an appeal to Old Testament ideals, sought to resist the growing ideal of toleration, others argued for a clearer separation of church and state. For the most part, they succeeded. John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey and one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence, wrote a new chapter on the civil magistrate for the version of the Westminster Confession that was adopted in 1788 by American Presbyterians. For Witherspoon, there was to be a plurality of churches in the republic, all of which should be protected and none privileged. '[A]s nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest' (Presbyterian Church of the USA 2014: 175) The indifference of the state to a range of Christian churches was also entailed by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights which created the much-discussed 'high wall of separation' (Jefferson) between church and state. Although this accommodation of difference appeared to extend only to rival Protestant groups, it has steadily been enlarged to comprehend those of all faiths and none.

The case for religious toleration was largely accepted as European and American Christians learned to live alongside those with different confessional allegiances. This was confirmed by the later emergence of Reformed churches in other parts of the world. These newer churches had no aspiration to be the single, dominant religious body in their societies, though this was not to the detriment of their social engagement, particularly in education, health care and democratic movements. Today in Western societies the struggle is largely with forms of secularism which seek to banish religious expression from the public sphere altogether, a challenge that the Reformers could scarcely have comprehended.

36.3.2 Nationalism

The Reformation is sometimes associated with the rise of nationalism, yet the relationship is a complex one. Luther's reform movement was consolidated when the elector of Saxony resisted the emperor and established a Reformation church within his territory. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular by Luther also contributed to the growth of German national consciousness. In other parts of Europe, the fracturing of Christendom created distinctive churches that were protected by national rulers, for example in England and Scandinavia. With the Peace of Westphalia in 1638, Europe settled for religious difference on the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*—the religion of the ruler determined the faith of the territorial state. Within the Reformed tradition, the different confessions played a role in forming national churches, as in the Belgic and Scots Confessions. Reformed churches were committed to the shaping of societies often modelled on the example of Biblical Israel as a covenanted nation. By the seventeenth century, we see the emergence in Europe of powerful and autonomous states that are now related to each other by international law rather than by imperial power, even though these states were inclined to engage in empire-building in other parts of the world. Religious forces played a part in this process.

Yet the relationship between Christian theology and nationalism has sometimes been an uneasy one. Some scholars have argued that the romantic nationalism which emerged through the Enlightenment, with its stress on land, language, and ethnicity, was a replacement for more traditional forms of religion. Others, echoing criticisms from the political left, see it as lurching towards an idolatry of kinship and place that divides peoples and threatens a more virtuous commitment to cosmopolitanism. The loyalty commanded by the nation can threaten the allegiance of the baptized to the body of Christ, a polity that transcends language and tribe. And at other times a theory of national exceptionalism, again modelled on the Israel of the Old Testament, has generated attitudes of hostility and superiority to those who belong elsewhere.

Nevertheless, nationalism can also provide a way of promoting the common good of a people, as well as articulating legitimate protest against tyranny, colonialism and globalizing tendencies. There are positive examples of its functioning as a force for liberation and attracting a commitment to goals wider than those of individual and family. In relation to boundaries of language, society, and territory, it is difficult to see how a political philosophy can avoid some acknowledgement of nationhood in comprehending how a polis is to be delineated. In a recent study, Doug Gay has argued on theological grounds for a 'tamed nationalism' allied to the processes of constitutional democracy. The affective force of national traditions requires deployment for the promotion of the commonweal; there is much positive potential to be realized in doing so. And with its historical commitment to pastoral and social discipline, the Reformed tradition has a contribution to make to this process (Gay 2013: 30–32). Nationalism is inevitable, and so must be harnessed to promote the welfare of a people and their contribution to that of others beyond their borders.

Karl Barth insists that the divine command meets us as people who are bound to one another by links of history, culture, and language (Barth 1961: 286–323; Biggar 2014). These are inescapable and must be acknowledged and valued. We have near neighbours whom we should love as our own. We can take a justifiable pride in our local identities. Our homeland is where we start from, and we must remain loyal to it. Yet we are also called to move outwards to meet those more distant, and to recognize our solidarity with them. This is a Christian vocation, dramatically manifested on the day of Pentecost and in the eschatological vision of a community transcending tribal and linguistic divisions.

Our own language must not be allowed to become a prison for ourselves and a stronghold against others... the concept of one's own people is not a fixed but a fluid concept. As we affirm and love our own people in our own tongue, we shall not be too hasty, for all our presumed knowledge, to say definitively who belong to this people and who do not. (Barth 1961: 291)

Barth was deeply critical in this context of the theological nationalism that suddenly emerged in Germany in the 1930s and which he regards as one of the most tragic episodes in Protestant history. Here, national identity became a divine given and norm to which other principles and movements were to be subordinated. This led to an apotheosis of the nation with an absolute requirement for its purity and integrity. For Barth, by contrast, it is a mutable good to be set in its proper place and made to serve a higher purpose. Today as the churches of Europe function less as national bodies articulating the shared identity of a majority of citizens, they may be better placed to stand alongside other minority groups within their societies. In doing so, they can counter some of the potentially harmful effects of nationalism (Baum 2001).

36.3.3 Human Rights

A standard criticism of modern human rights discourse is that it is a largely secular product of the Enlightenment which replaced an older theological world-view in which each person had a divinely appointed place. In this ordered whole, people had duties and responsibilities which they owed to one other in accordance with divine law. By contrast, more recent theories see rights as belonging inalienably to individual persons as a brute moral fact irrespective of world-view, philosophy, or creed. This turn towards subjectivity and autonomy, it is further argued, began in the early modern period and was codified in elaborate theories of human rights. On this reading, 'rights' discourse is a secular replacement for religiously grounded accounts of the moral universe. Recent scholarship, however, has challenged this assumption of a chasm between an older theological world-view and the contemporary burgeoning of rights talk. An alternative narrative has been presented which sees recent developments as a further phase in a long historical process of articulating the rights of individual people and groups. In this

respect, a greater continuity is detected between the natural rights that accompany a theological vision of the world and the human rights of more recent secular philosophy. Within this process, Reformed theology played an important role.

Rights and liberties were already correlated in Roman law and in developments of canon law in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. Medieval charters of rights became prototypes for early Reformed communities to justify their opposition to tyrants. These were combined with appeals to the Christian freedom proclaimed in the New Testament and the Decalogue as supporting the right to worship God according to one's conscience and to associate freely with others. John Witte argues that the 1791 Bill of Rights in the USA was adumbrated in the work of Reformed thinkers such as Beza, Knox, and Althusius during the previous two centuries (Witte 2007: 20–37).

This body of thought understands society in terms of a set of institutions—especially, family, church, and state—as ordered in ways that establish the liberties and duties of each in relation to one another. In the writings of Althusius, the language of contract and covenant is employed for this purpose. The household, the church, and the state are ordered under God as individuals are brought into a set of covenantal relationships with each other. These institutions complement one another by respecting the integrity and boundaries of each.

Witte claims, moreover, that theology can make a contribution to human rights discourse by providing it with a broader setting that points to its wider corporate significance and divinely intended goals for life together. To this extent, some correction of human rights discourse may be possible through reconnection with earlier theological traditions. Historically, it has close ties with theological notions of justice, equality before God, and the claims of those who are 'done unto'. As Wolterstorff also argues, the language of rights does not belong exclusively to the DNA of possessive individualism (Wolterstorff 2013: 60). With its Christian ancestry, rights language can be appropriated and repositioned by contemporary theology.

36.4 TWENTIETH-CENTURY CONTRIBUTIONS: KUYPER AND BARTH

The most significant Reformed contributions to political theology in the twentieth century were initiated by Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands and by Karl Barth in Germany. Kuyper (1837–1920) had a chequered career as pastor, theologian, university leader, public intellectual, and politician. The founder and leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in 1879, he served as prime minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. His public theology was shaped by opposition to several religious and political trends. Rejecting the pietist tendency to construe faith as a matter of private devotion only, he argued for a Calvinist world-view that embraced every sphere of life. This also set him against forms of political liberalism that sought to exclude the influence of religion from the public

domain. For Kuyper, an essential Calvinist insight was that every sphere of creation was intended to glorify God in its distinctive way. Created life is shaped by a covenant relationship with its Maker. In their diverse forms, moreover, the different spheres of creation reflect the divine wisdom whether in family, trade, science and art. These interact with each other to form an organic whole in human societies. The state also serves God, but in a somewhat different way. As a restraining and disciplining ordinance, it exists to limit the effects and excesses of human sinfulness. As such, the state should not encroach unduly upon those other spheres of created life which in their own ways serve God. To this extent, Kuyper's theology seeks to limit the powers of the state from overdetermining the social life of its citizens; the scope of civil society is to be acknowledged as free from state domination.

Kuyper's political theology is often associated with the concepts of sphere sovereignty and common grace. Within the proper terms of its own sphere, the institutions of society function in distinctive ways. These are indebted to inherited traditions, established practices and the influence of seminal figures. The church is one such sphere which occupies a vital place, but its institutional task is not to control or to be controlled by other spheres of divine sovereignty. There is to be a plurality of churches, and each citizen has the right of conscience to belong to any or none. For Kuyper, religious adherence must remain voluntary. And yet God intends more than a church which rescues souls from a perishing world. The divine mandate governs the entire created realm which is appointed to glorify God. Despite the limits set upon the activity of the institutional church, Kuyper reckons that its influence will be spread by individuals into all the other sectors of society, including political parties, the press, and educational institutions. What emerges is a distinctively Calvinist inflection of a Christian society, which charts a path between individualism on the one side and state collectivism on the other. In the different spheres of life, the sovereignty of God is manifested not only through the special grace of baptism and spiritual regeneration but through the wisdom of a common grace that permeates all created life. This grace should never be viewed apart from Christ, for he is the one in whom and for whom all things are created, and therefore the source of both common and special grace. The vision that animates the Calvinist worldview is one that is cosmic, political, and Christ-centred.

[C]ommon grace must have a formative impact on special grace and vice versa. All separation of the two must be vigorously opposed. Temporal and eternal life, our life in the world and our life in the church, religion and civil life, church and state, and so much more must go hand in hand. They may not be separated. (Bratt 1998: 185–6)

In some respects, Kuyper's social vision now looks dated. It assumes a set of social institutions that are implicitly Christian, even Reformed, in their ethos, by virtue of the influence of those who are members of the church. This makes some sense in a majority Calvinist society which values freedom of conscience and religious diversity. To that extent, Kuyper's appeal may be restricted to a particular set of social conditions that no longer obtain in an increasingly secular Europe. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Free

University of Amsterdam has a much less clearly defined confessional identity than it did for Kuyper at the time of its foundation in 1880. And the Christian Democratic Appeal (a merger of three former parties in 1977, including the Anti-Revolutionary Party) is not informed by distinctively Reformed principles, though it retains a commitment to sphere sovereignty. Under more secular conditions, furthermore, critics have asked whether Kuyper is unduly restrictive in the limitations he places upon the direct social action of the church. His assumption is that the institutional church should respect the public sphere of other bodies by encouraging the influence of its members in the social domain. But in a more pluralist context, one might ask whether the church as an institution at times requires to bear witness to issues of poverty, nuclear disarmament, and environmental degradation.

Yet, in other respects, Kuyper's vision continues to attract the attention of public theologians, particularly in the USA (Mouw 2011). His commitment to the sovereignty of God in every sphere of life represents an enduring insight of the classical Reformed tradition, while his stress upon the role of institutions in civil society offers a more relational and organic account of human life. The development of devolved levels of sovereignty is adjacent in key respects to the Catholic notion of subsidiarity. To this extent, his work provides a corrective resource to the more individualist approaches that characterize political liberalism with its characteristic stress on autonomy and the rights of each citizen (Wolterstorff 2007: 29–69).

The theology of Karl Barth (1886–1968) was already closely aligned to democratic socialism during his time as a pastor in the Swiss village of Safenwil. Subsequently, this became an important resource for Protestant opposition to the Hitler regime in Germany. In particular, the Barmen Declaration (1934) provided a point of theological focus for the Confessing Church's resistance to government policy. Drafted by Barth and two of his Lutheran colleagues, it reflected Barth's opposition to natural theology as an independent source of knowledge of God. Our loyalty is primarily to Christ, as he is known through scripture. Since there is no area of life that lies outside the scope of his lordship, the Christian is subject to his command in all respects. This prevents any absolute separation of faith and politics into two discrete provinces of life, as if faith could be confined to a private lifestyle choice apart from its public manifestations (Busch 2011). Barth's strongly Christocentric theology inveighs against any tendency to establish political loyalties on alternative grounds. This resulted in a suspicion of the concept of 'orders of creation' as static, semi-autonomous, and impervious to radical theological criticism. His opposition to natural theology requires to be set within a political context—for Barth, natural theology leans towards a quietist, bourgeois complacency that avoids the disturbing prophetic insights of the Gospel. At the same time, the possibility of theologically driven resistance to the state recalls those earlier Lutheran and Reformed traditions which advocated rebellion against tyrants.

Barth's theology has generally proved more flexible than standard criticisms indicate. In this context, he seeks to avoid the charges typically levelled against theocracy and sectarianism. The tasks of the church and the state may be complementary and related, but they are not identical. Each has its own distinctive sphere of province and its

appointed tasks, although there can be no complete separation—here he employed the model of concentric circles with the church as the inner and the state as the outer. But the acknowledgement of this difference is part of the church's political task—it has no place usurping the state or dictating to it. Nor does Barth claim that the church has an exclusive monopoly on true judgement and correct practice. There are insights beyond the walls of the church which are compelling and instructive for Christians—Barth speaks of secular parables of the Word of God. Hence common cause can be made with other movements. The church may even be led into a deeper appreciation of its own distinctive message through encounter with secular groups and individuals. The children of this world, he reminded his students, are often wiser than the children of light.

Critics have suggested that, unlike Kuyperian politics, Barth's influence has been largely confined to academic theology and church life. Yet one obvious counterexample is the way in which Barth's confessional theology provided a catalyst for Christian political opposition to apartheid in South Africa. The Belhar Confession (1982) adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church has strong Reformed overtones. With an indicative and imperative structure, it recalls Barth's theological commitments and the structure of the Barmen Declaration. In particular, his insistence upon divine justice as preceding and enabling human acts of justice, not as its equivalent or repetition but as our limited creaturely response, is a dominant theme in Belhar. This has now been taken up by other Reformed churches across the world (Smit 2007: 359–78; Naudé 2010).

36.5 CONCLUSION

This overview of some key themes and approaches to politics, society, and law within the Reformed tradition suggests a constant adaptation of historical insights to changing circumstances. From its sixteenth-century beginnings, the Reformed tradition displayed a deep commitment to social wellbeing. The anti-speculative character of its theology was oriented towards the everyday world in which God was to be glorified. This generated a bias against any fundamental separation of the religious and the civic. Furthermore, the capacity of Calvin and other key historical figures to shape contemporary thinking in different parts of the world on social and economic justice, human rights, and forms of government confirms the ways in which the tradition was both local in its concerns and global in its significance. The relevance of their reflections to contemporary public theology is one way in which the Reformed tradition can continue as a living and dynamic force within the ecumenical church today.

SUGGESTED READING

Barth (1954); Biéler (2005); Kuyper (1898); Witte and Alexander (2007); Witte (2006); Wolterstorff (2011).

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CHAPTER 37

LAST THINGS

CHRISTOPHER R. J. HOLMES

37.1 INTRODUCTION

ESCHATOLOGY is an important Christian theme. ‘Last things’ are important because they concern us with God and all things in relation to God, the God who will one day ‘be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28). What makes Reformed theology distinctive is its preoccupation with God and God’s sovereignty with respect to all that God does for us and for our salvation. Karl Barth, the most important Reformed theologian of the modern era, says of the Reformation’s theology in general and Calvin’s theology in particular:

theology has to do with *God*. It [the Reformation] made the great and shattering discovery of the real theme of all theology. The secret was simply this, that it took this theme seriously in all its distinctiveness, that it names God God, that it lets God be God, the one object that by no bold human grasping or inquiry or approach can be simply one object among many others. *God is. He lives. He judges and blesses. He slays and makes alive* [cf. 1 Sam. 2:6]. *He* is the Creator and Redeemer and Lord.

(Barth 1995: 39)

Concentration on God makes Reformed theology ‘reformed’, and this concentration will form the basis for the treatment of eschatology in the present chapter.

I pursue three things in this chapter. First, I provide a brief account of a few of the main themes of eschatology in Reformed perspective in conversation with the leading English-speaking Reformed theologian of the twentieth century, Thomas F. Torrance. Second, I provide a distinctive and substantial interpretation of the last things from a Reformed vantage point, arguing for the importance of God for any biblically faithful eschatology. I do so in dialogue with Calvin’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 and, secondarily, with Barth’s commentary on the same. Third and last, I present some avenues for future research.

37.2 A FEW MAIN THEMES

Torrance asks, ‘why was it that after the Reformation the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican churches largely lost their eschatological note in spite of the fact that their hymns and liturgies are resonant with it?’ (Torrance 2009: 402). The eschatological stress of the New Testament is easy to forsake. But why? The church is (often) embarrassed by talk of Christ’s imminent return. The church is continually tempted to accommodate itself to foreign gods or to bow before idols of its own making. That propensity so characteristic of post-Adamic humanity is one reason why the eschatological note of the Bible is so easily dismissed. We like to think that we are masters of our own destiny, but the Bible reminds us otherwise. It teaches us that it is ultimately God, and not ourselves, that will one day ‘be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28). God, as we shall see, is not only the one who brings about the end of time but in his very being is our goal, our salvation, and blessedness. This is a difficult teaching, to be sure, but one that resonates with good news and joy.

When one loses the eschatological note of the Gospel, one loses ‘the very heart of the gospel and...every doctrine of the faith’ (Torrance 2009: 402). Torrance’s point is that the Gospel has to do with the coming together of creation and the kingdom. The kingdom Jesus proclaimed and in his very person established will, when he comes again in glory, be visibly manifest in all its fullness. The creation will be its very theatre, world without end. Even in the here and now, however, the kingdom is present in what Torrance calls an intensive sense ‘in temporal and historical encounter, *in Christ and his encounter with people*’. But the kingdom will be realized one day, in an extensive sense, ‘in a new heaven and a new earth’ (p. 404).

The intensive and extensive character of the kingdom has its motor on the immanent level, that is, with reference to God. Reformed theology recognizes this. Not only is God the subject of the kingdom but also the agent, the one who makes the kingdom happen. The ascended Jesus, present now according to the Spirit, having killed off sin and death in a once-and-for-all kind of way, will, in the fullness of time, reveal that victory to all. All things shall thus be ‘subjected to him, then the Son himself also will be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28). One of Paul’s points, which Reformed theology is keen to emphasize, is that it is *God* who accomplishes this. The intensive and extensive realization of the kingdom is God’s work all the way down.

When the Lord Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, and visibly manifest his rule, ‘we cannot think in terms of an extension of the incarnation, but only of an eschatological “reiteration” of the incarnation (including the death and resurrection)’ (Torrance 2009: 407). Reformed theology happily emphasizes the utter particularity and unsubstitutability of the incarnation, its once-and-for-all character. Accordingly, the church neither prolongs nor extends the incarnation but rather witnesses to it, longing for its ‘eschatological “reiteration”’. In this we see another key feature of Reformed

theology in eschatological perspective, namely the sovereignty and lordship of the head with respect to his body. It is Jesus in the Spirit who, when his Father determines it appropriate, reiterates his victory among the nations in such a way that 'every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:11). The church is not the agent of the kingdom—it is Jesus Christ; he through his Spirit makes its eschatological reiteration happen.

The Reformed tradition is keen to remind us of Jesus' supremacy over his body. His body, the church, does not prolong him. Rather, in and through the powerful working of the Spirit, it witnesses to him. When the Lord Jesus comes again, it is he who will reiterate himself, and the church catholic, indeed the whole cosmos, will bear witness to and be made new by him.

St Paul reminds us that our lives are 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3). 'The new creation', Torrance writes, 'is as yet a hidden creation, hidden with Christ in God, but always on the point of becoming manifest. Until then the church lives in the eschatological tension between the first coming of the kingdom and the final coming' (Torrance 2009: 409). The new creation is not hidden in us. It is outside of us, 'with Christ in God', but present, soon to be fully manifest. Reformed thinking, Torrance argues, embraces the 'tension' in which the church finds itself. While it prays for the kingdom to come in all its fullness and density, it does not forget that it has already come, and is coming—'I am coming to you' (John 14:28). The Reformed tradition is alert to the temptation on the part of the church to take over as it were from Christ, to assume that it can sustain and perfect itself apart from the favour and grace of the Spirit. In other words, the church in the Reformed tradition is according to Torrance an agent of the eschatological realization of the kingdom but only a witness. The character of the church as witness does not denigrate the church. Again, it is a forthright reminder that the principle of intelligibility of the church, just like that of the creation and the kingdom, lies outside itself—'with Christ in God'.

The last thing to say in this brief discussion of eschatology relating to the thought of the leading English-speaking Reformed theologian of the twentieth century is something about the apocalypse. Torrance writes, 'Apocalypse in its deepest sense is the unveiling of Jesus Christ' (Torrance 2009: 411). The Reformed tradition's theocentric character is not unique to it per se. In Protestant modernity, however, it has, *contra* many other Protestant traditions, remained focused on God, not of course to the exclusion of the works of God, but on the inexhaustible plenitude, perfection, and goodness of God as the source of all God does. Torrance reminds us that the final revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ—which is the apocalypse—is Jesus' own achievement. It is not something that we can hasten or orchestrate but rather, in a time known only to the Father, is something for which we pray and should long in the Spirit 'with sighs too deeps for words' (Rom. 8:26). Torrance continues: '[the] Apocalypse therefore is the unveiling to faith of history already invaded and conquered by the lamb of God' (p. 412). The Lamb has triumphed, is triumphing, and will triumph. Reformed theology in eschatological perspective honours the prevenience of the invading and conquering Lamb who is the

same ‘yesterday, today, and forever’ (Heb. 13:8). It knows that our ‘history already invaded’ has its source in the utterly complete and sovereign life of God, who wills the creation to be a theatre wherein his glory will one day be unveiled in its fullness for all to see.

37.3 THE LAST THINGS IN REFORMED PERSPECTIVE, IN DIALOGUE WITH CALVIN AND BARTH ON 1 CORINTHIANS 15

A fitting way to provide a distinct interpretation of the last things in Reformed perspective is to work with scripture, notably 1 Corinthians 15 and Calvin’s and Barth’s treatments of it. In staying close to scripture, particularly 1 Corinthians 15, we shall see that the Reformed tradition’s appreciation of God and God’s sovereignty over sin and death provides an ideal platform for interpreting the last things.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, Calvin writes, is ‘as one of the principal and fundamental elements in the Gospel’ (Calvin 1996: 313). What makes the Resurrection ‘principal and fundamental’ is that it procures ‘righteousness’ (p. 314). The Resurrection procures righteousness because it is a work of God. One of the salient themes in Calvin’s exposition of 1 Corinthians 15 is—not surprisingly—God. This is not only true of Calvin’s reading of Paul but of the whole Bible. As Herman Selderhuis notes, ‘neither Christology nor Pneumatology is central to Calvin’s thought but rather it is the *doctrina de Deo* which fundamentally informs his biblical interpretation’ (Selderhuis 2008: 16). Paul, Calvin comments, ‘declares that the grace of God is the efficient cause of everything’ (Calvin 1996: 317). And what is of God is also of Christ. Christ’s ‘resurrection is the basis of ours, so that if His is taken away there will be none for us’ (p. 319). God in Christ is the cause of our resurrection and our new birth into his mercy. And God causes these things because he raised Jesus, because Jesus raised himself. So Calvin: ‘He has by His own death destroyed the power of death, and the devil himself, yet there would be none of these things if He had not emerged the victor by rising again’ (p. 320).

Any serious treatment of eschatology, and not simply eschatology in the Reformed tradition, must emphasize what Calvin emphasizes, following 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection is the fundamental event of Christian faith. In Anthony Thiselton’s words, ‘the canonical writings, especially the New Testament, place all their emphasis on resurrection, in spite of very occasional references to immortality in the Apocrypha, in the light of Hellenistic, not purely Jewish, influence’ (Thiselton 2012: 5). The resurrection destroys death—or better, the one who is raised destroys death by suffering it in his very person. And yet we await the universal manifestation of death’s destruction in him. ‘For our life must still be hid with Him, because He has not yet appeared’ (Calvin 1996: 323). But when he does appear, he shall, following 1 Corinthians 15:24, hand ‘over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.’

Calvin affirms that Christ's subjection to the Father as described by Paul is not 'unusual', as his subjection concerns 'His human nature' (Calvin 1996: 324). Without getting into a discussion of how profitable such a formulation is, we can say that Calvin honours the theocentric drift of Paul's argument. Christ does not administer his own kingdom but the Father's kingdom. The last enemy to be destroyed in his Father's kingdom is death, and Jesus destroys death by suffering it. Once he has done so, he hands over the Kingdom to his Father.

In 1 Cor. 15:28 Paul writes, 'then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him'. Once again, Calvin does not read such a text in a subordinationist sense, but rather as acknowledging that the Father's 'rule is actualized in the man Christ (*sed in facie hominis Christi*)' (Calvin 1996: 327). Commenting on Calvin's reading of this text, Richard A. Muller argues, *contra* Moltmann, that for Calvin the Father's rule, as asserted in 1 Corinthians 15:24–8, does not conflict with the 'eternity of Christ's kingship'. Instead, Calvin offers us 'a series of loose ends, of systematic suggestions or tendencies', inferring, on the one hand, that God's rule will, following the final judgment, be immediate and, on the other hand, that Christ's spiritual kingdom will stand forever (Muller 1981: 33). Accordingly, the Lord Jesus Christ does not actualize his own rule but his Father's. This is not to suggest for a moment an opposition in terms of will, for they share the same will. But it is to make sense of Paul's great words 'so that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28). Calvin comments, 'But the only meaning that the words of Paul bear is that all things must be restored to God as their one and only beginning and end, so that they may be bound closely to Him' (Calvin 1996: 328). Calvin does not think that Paul's argument eclipses Christ, but he does think that Paul assumes an order within the triune life, and that that order is on display here. The day will come when God will not govern in Christ, when the other-directed (i.e. Father-directed) character of Christ's ministry will cease because his Father 'will be governing heaven and earth by Himself, without any intermediary, and then in that way He will be all; and in consequence He will finally be in all, and not in all persons only, but in all created things as well' (p. 328).

Reformed eschatology has to pause here and honour, following Calvin, the monarchy and supremacy of the Father. Reformed theology has not been tempted to embrace a kind of flat egalitarianism regarding the relations of the persons one to another in the Godhead as have some other traditions of theological thought. The three are of course equal, consubstantial. But scripture speaks of an order, and that order goes all the way down into the depths of their life. The Father is and always shall be first, not in any kind of ontological sense, but in terms of order. Son and Spirit come from him; the Father does not come from them. The eternal ordering of the three one to another—Son and Spirit come from the Father, the Father does not come from them—is manifest in their works. Their works reveal their source. The Father does not hand the kingdom over to the Son, and it is not the Son who shall be all in all but the Father. The reason for this has to do with their relations of origin and the properties specific to each: begetting to the Father, begottenness to the Son, the breathing of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, and the

Spirit's proceeding from them. The acts of the three persons among us express their eternal relations one to another; the economy of salvation attests this order.

Where Calvin gets into a bit of trouble is when he says that Christ 'will transfer it [the Kingdom] from His humanity to His glorious divinity, because then there will open up for us a way of approach, from which we are now kept back by our weakness'. To be frank, I am not entirely sure what Calvin means. The ambiguity continues insofar as Calvin writes, 'we will see God plainly, reigning in His majesty, and the humanity of Christ will no longer be in between us to hold us back from a nearer vision of God' (Calvin 1996: 327). What Calvin might be arguing of Paul in 1 Cor. 15:27, is that the mediating function of the humanity of Jesus will be no more, as the Father will be 'all in all'. Even Jesus' humanity, Calvin seems to be suggesting, shall be transparent 'to His glorious divinity' in order 'that God may be all in all'. Jesus in his humanity will cease mediating at the end of time when he hands the kingdom to his Father.

J. Todd Billings helpfully writes of this provocative passage,

Calvin leaves an important aspect of his doctrine of divine mystery ambiguous: the sense in which this final 'direct vision' of God is still accommodated, whether it is still the 'prattling' of God that human receives at the beatific vision—and ultimately whether all human knowledge of God requires the divine condescension in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. (Billings 2011: 84)

Billings does 'not consider this point of ambiguity in Calvin's theology to be a virtue in his thought', and cites Herman Bavinck as a credible Reformed alternative (Billings 2011: 84). Bavinck 'avoids Calvin's ambiguity on this point about accommodation', thus offering, Billings suggests, 'a greater preservation of divine mystery and a more consistent christocentrism' (pp. 85, 84). That is to say, Bavinck emphasizes God's covenantal condescension in a way that is always mediated by the Son, in this life and in the life to come.

Whatever one does with what is at times a puzzling and challenging reading, one point is clear, namely the 'vision of God'. Eschatology in the Reformed tradition is about that one point, a point in deep agreement with this stunning passage of scripture. The vision of God is what makes it possible for Paul to say, 'I die every day!' (1 Cor. 15:31). Indeed, without the vision of God, without 'knowledge of God', one cannot say such (15:34). Instead, one must say 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die' (15:32). But with knowledge of God there is 'the kingdom of God' that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit' (15:50). Ignorance of God destroys us. Ignorance of God causes 'our whole cast of mind' to reject 'as incredible, even as absurd in the extreme', the resurrection of the dead (Calvin 1996: 335). Our rejection, however, reveals just how little we appreciate God's power. Again Calvin: 'our appraisal of the power of God is far too spiteful and ungrateful, if we do not ascribe to Him, what is already plain before our eyes' (p. 336). What is plain is that God will be our vision, seen as it were face to face. The content of the life to come is God, the seeing of whom is our joy and bliss.

What is plain is the great 'difference between our present state and that which will follow the resurrection' (Calvin 1996: 337). Subsequent to the resurrection, the body will

be qualitatively different. It will be a spiritual body, subject in all things to the life-giving Spirit of Christ. Calvin says, Christ 'has brought us the life-giving Spirit from heaven, in order that He might regenerate us into a life that is better and higher than that on earth. In short, our life in this world we owe to Adam, as branches to the root: Christ, on the other hand, is the originator and source of the life of heaven' (p. 340). In this passage we see some of the themes that a substantial account of the last things in Reformed perspective must champion. We see the agency of Christ emphasized: it is he who bears us for higher life in the Spirit. We also notice the inseparability of Christ and the Spirit. Christ brings with him the Spirit from heaven. Reformed theology ought never to untether the two. Moreover, we sense something of the concrete character of heaven. Heaven is not simply a state of being but rather a place whose life comes from Jesus Christ, whose life is indeed God's.

Heavenly life will be marked by incorruptibility. According to Calvin, our corruptible nature will be destroyed in 'a sudden transition from our corruptible nature to blessed immortality' (Calvin 1996: 343). The corruptible is, in other words, 'to be clothed in glory', which will be 'that fullness of salvation which God promises to His people' (pp. 344, 345). The fullness of salvation also means 'that the Lord will destroy death and put an end to the underworld' (p. 346). The upshot, Calvin avers, is that 'we have every right then, to taunt death as a conquered power, because Christ's victory is our victory' (p. 347). 'A better life...an unshakeable foundation' is 'waiting for them, in heaven' (p. 348). If such shall be the case, as Christian faith confesses, Reformed theology in eschatological perspective promotes a deep confidence in the Gospel. Death and the underworld have been destroyed; they are no more. Promotion of this great truth is one of theology's original tasks. More than that, promotion of the victory's source in God is Reformed theology's task. Reformed theology (should) honor the prevenient power of God at every point, that God is neither dependent on what he has made nor mutable. It is God who destroys the principalities and the powers in order that nothing should hinder us from seeing God as all in all, indeed our seeing God.

Karl Barth, in his riveting commentary on the same text of scripture, emphasizes similar themes. In characteristic fashion, Barth says, 'God always remains the *subject* in the relationship created by this testimony.' God is the author of the Gospel and its fruit, fruit such as the resurrection of the dead. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:18, Barth writes, similarly, 'It is the word of the Cross (i.18), of salvation, that is only of God, that can only come to us from God, and ever and always comes from God alone' (Barth 2003: 16). Salvation comes from God and is God's work all the way down. This is what Reformed theology has at its best emphasized and must always emphasize. As Barth says, 'Christian knowledge' must 'understand the three words *apo tou theou* (from God)' (Barth 2003: 26). When we begin to understand those delightful words, we grasp something of the theme of the letter and especially of ch. 15, namely 'the glory of God and really only the glory of God' (Barth 2003: 37). If there were ever a characteristically Reformed emphasis, it would be this: the glory of God, the worship and promotion of the same. Barth, with Calvin, thinks that the Gospel has to do with the exaltation of God, and one of its principal effects, a love for and a longing to see his glory.

God's glory cannot be contained or circumscribed. It bespeaks a crisis, 'the execution of the diastasis' between God and man, the discovery of the unheard-of change of subject and object into what is called Revelation. The crisis facing all theology is Jesus Christ, the crisis that is his Resurrection and the subsequent resurrection of the dead. The implications of this crisis for the last things are quite evident insofar as they 'can only be described *via negativa*' (Barth 2003: 85). Barth continues, 'the establishment of the full *sovereignty* of God' is such that it shows forth the poverty of all of our attempts to describe it (p. 88). This is once again because of God who was and is theology's crisis. So Barth (at length):

The sole, or at any rate vital, assumption which I make, is that when Paul spoke of God (from the side of God, from God, to God's glory), he really meant *God*, and that it is permissible, even imperative, and from this standpoint, to interpret all his ideas, however they may otherwise be historically and psychologically determined, to take him at his word, calculating that all his utterances, however ambiguous they may be regarded within the realm of history, relate, beyond the realm of history, unequivocally to God, and that this relationship gives to everything its peculiar concrete meaning. (Barth 2003: 97)

What is at stake not only in 1 Corinthians but also indeed in the whole Bible is not only God but also all things in relation to God, 'the rule of God and nothing else' (Barth 2003: 98). This emphasis, which is of course a biblical one, is what Reformed theology in either the tradition of Calvin or Barth must champion. It is God's 'absolute *transcendence* as Creator, Redeemer, and King of things' that Reformed theology must promote, honor, and cherish (p. 105). Barth thinks that what Paul teaches about the resurrection of the dead has its motor on the immanent level, which is with God. The immanent is the ground and condition of the economic. Theology must be taken up with God.

The transcendence of the God of the Gospel, however, does not simply land upon us with a thud. Reformed theology must, I would argue, acknowledge that the reality that the Gospel announces is brought into being through the Gospel itself. God in Christ does not leave it up to us to put the good news into effect. He through the power of the Spirit is its subject and agent. Jesus brings about the resurrection of the dead by virtue of his own resurrection. In his own person corruptibility perishes, death dies. So Barth: Jesus Christ is 'the crisis from life to death to life' (Barth 2003: 161). Expressed in terms of Paul's Adam Christology, Barth puts it this way: 'Adam, with whom death, Christ, with whom life, begins.' Life, however, does not end with Christ. Following the logic of Paul's argument, 'beyond the militant and triumphing Christ is always God Himself' (p. 170). God is indeed the ground of the Gospel. 'God is the Lord! God is *Spirit* and to that extent the Lord' (pp. 192, 193). Again, we see the theocentric thrust of Reformed thinking, something that Scripture commends. 'The truth of God requires and establishes the Resurrection of the Dead, the Resurrection of the Body... the reality of the *resurrection*, the truth of Christianity is exclusively *God's* absoluteness' (pp. 197, 211).

To sum up this section regarding the last things in Reformed perspective, Barth and Calvin really do think that the last things, as with all tracts of Christian teaching, have to do with God. As Selderhuis says of Calvin, ‘Calvin’s theology is concerned with the divinity of God’ (Selderhuis 2008: 41). God is the centre of any account of Jesus’ resurrection and the resurrection of the dead as its first fruits. Last things also have to do with us, but that is only because they have to do with God. A substantial interpretation of the last things in Reformed theology emphasizes just this. God in Christ is the subject and agent of our renewal, of the resurrection of the dead and God’s being ‘all in all’ as the resurrection’s end. Reformed theology’s greatest strength is and will continue to be its singular devotion to this very point, its unwillingness (as exemplified by Calvin and Barth) to talk about the works of God apart from their source and actuality in God. Moreover, Reformed theology’s championing of God’s absoluteness, far from devaluing the human, is that which evokes the genuine exaltation of the human. The resurrection of the dead is what Christ’s resurrection creates. Attention to this central point of Pauline teaching reminds us that God’s absoluteness is generative of our bliss. The interpretation of Reformed theology that I have championed embraces the basic asymmetry between God and the creature, not because it elevates God at the expense of the creature, but because it understands that the Creator–creature relation is irreversible. This God shall be ‘all in all’, not us; we will not be God’s all in all but God, in mercy inestimable, will be our ‘all in all’. I think that Reformed theology’s contribution to theological and ecclesiastical renewal in our time lies in reminding us of just this. All those who are interested in promoting its legacy should by the grace of God do so as well.

37.4 AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Herman Bavinck, one of the most important Dutch-speaking theologians of the modern era, says that ‘fellowship with God is the first and most important benefit of the covenant; without it there really can be no talk about life’ (Bavinck 2002: 548). Fellowship with God is ‘the restoration and confirmation of that rich fellowship in which man was originally created’ (p. 550). That rich fellowship includes ‘a treasure of spiritual and material blessings’ (p. 551). It is Christ who will, when he returns, bring this about, says Bavinck. ‘For when He returns He fulfills all His promises and grants to His confessors the perfect salvation and the eternal life’ (p. 555). When Christ returns, he will complete the kingdom. Such completion, Bavinck reminds us, will mean for the world ‘so great a change that it can be called a new heaven and new earth’ (p. 566). This is the hope of our beatitude, that day when ‘all the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem will behold God’s face, and will bear His name upon their foreheads’ (p. 567). That is the content of Christian hope, and Bavinck does a wonderful job of highlighting its main points.

Where I think more work can be done in Reformed theology in terms of expounding this hope is with respect to what John Webster calls the ‘backward reference’ (Webster 2012: 143). Take Barth for example: Barth is a theologian who is highly attuned

to the economy of God. He, as we have seen, is happy to talk, as he should, about the absoluteness of God. What Barth does not say so much about is the divinity of God, indeed of God's nature. Knowledge follows the order of being, the way in which the one essence of God exists in a Trinity of persons. Future research in Reformed theology should encourage reflection on the life of the one God, specifically the divine processions, not only as grounding but also as expressed in the divine being in mission to us. Such thinking deepens and extends what is only salutary in Reformed theology, namely the unapologetic preoccupation with and promotion of *God*.

Barth (at times) collapses treatment of the perfect divinity of the one God into that of the Trinity of persons. I do not think that this is a helpful move. Barth's own preoccupation with God's absoluteness demands a generous unfolding of the contours of that absoluteness. Indeed, if we are happy with Bavinck's talk about Christian hope as beholding God's face, then reflection on the nature and divinity of that face is salutary and good. This is not to detract attention from revelation by which knowledge of God's goodness and greatness come to us, 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6). Indeed, it is to remind us that God's act of achieving the new heaven and earth is a function of God's actuality, the actuality that we will no longer trust but will instead by grace behold in the life to come.

Let me put it another way. To say God means that we appreciate the nature of God, the great works of that nature in creation and providence. In short, in order to say God well, we need to back up and to reflect upon how God's acts derive from God's nature, the 'sort' that God is. However, there is in Calvin's thought, and in the classical tradition of Christian thought, a right and a wrong way of proceeding. The right way recognizes that we can know *that* God is. On the basis of the knowledge that revelation supplies us with, we confess that God is for example one, and that intrinsic to God's unity of essence is a Trinity of persons. But we cannot say *what* God is. God does not belong to a class of being(s) about which we can describe the what. The sort God is, is made clear to us in God's communication with us by his nature and acts of grace. Revelation compels us to say with confidence that God is, that his essence is his existing, and also what sort God is, that is one who is perfect and therefore good. Nonetheless, we should not search 'into his secret essence' to ask what God is (Selderhuis 2008: 19). Indeed, such an emphasis is in keeping with the concerns of other teachers of the church, for example, St John Chrysostom, who in his homilies *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* argues, on the one hand, that God is everywhere, that God is great, etc. On the other hand, he argues that this does not imply that we 'know how or what his greatness is.' To inquire after the 'how' of God's essence 'is meddlesome and inquisitive' and, ultimately, insulting to God. In short, no created power can 'know God in his essence' (Chrysostom 1984: 65, 85).

The great last acts of God, namely, the return of Christ in glory, the resurrection of the dead, and the Last Judgment are acts 'according to the way of its [God's] substance' (Aquinas 2009: 59). Instead of being allergic to concerns usually labelled 'scholastic'—pejoratively speaking—Reformed theology would benefit, I think, from a generous appropriation of Thomas. Why? Because Thomas too stressed the aseity of God, reminding us that 'each thing acts in the way in which it has existing.' God acts as one who is

ontologically self-sufficient. Future thinking in Reformed theology would benefit from further thinking on the basis of the Bible about ‘the way in which God has existing’ (Aquinas 2009: 63). This is in part a matter of describing God as one who exists in relation to himself. Of course, exemplars of the Reformed tradition—Torrance, Barth, Bavinck, to say nothing of Calvin—would never deny this. What I think would be helpful is for more extended reflection and contemplation of God as one who exists in relation to himself, and how this basic truth makes its presence felt in and informs treatment of all the doctrine of the faith.

Where Reformed theology could also do more thinking is in the area of the beatific vision. Suzanne McDonald has made a wonderful start insofar as she has shown John Owen’s appreciation for Thomistic thinking on the vision, even as Owen applies a Christological concentration to the vision not present in Aquinas. Unfortunately, ‘the beatific vision is hardly an issue of burning significance’ for other Reformed theologians. So McDonald: ‘For Aquinas, the knowledge of God that is attained by faith now and will be consummated at the beatific vision is indeed mediated by Christ the Word, but Christ himself is not presented as the specific content of and mediator of the beatific vision itself. For Owen, to behold the glory of God is to behold the face of the incarnate Son’ (McDonald 2012: 141, n. 1; 150).

Reformed thinking would benefit from teaching on the vision of God that moves with Barth and Calvin but also beyond them so as to see corners of the biblical witness to which Reformed thinkers—however unconsciously—fail to draw attention, mainly because of possible Roman Catholic resonances. Anthony Thiselton, a notable contemporary biblical scholar and theologian in the Anglican branch of the Reformed tradition, reminds us that in the end ‘faith is transformed into sight’ (Thiselton 2012: 176). The promise by which we now live shall yield to sight. What shall be seen will not be ‘an extrapolation from the present’ but shall surpass ‘all expectations’ (p. 32). For example, there shall be no more sacraments understood as ‘tangible and visible pledges of assurance concerning God’s promissory acts’ (p. 45). God’s sovereignty shall at the *Parousia* be vindicated ‘publicly and absolutely’ (p. 108). Indeed, the rule of God will not be seen; no, even greater, God shall be ‘all in all’. All things shall be in him, and all shall be related to him. There will not be so much a rule of God but *God*, our true and perfect blessedness. In Thomas’ words, ‘since the more one sees God, who is the essence of goodness, the more necessary it is to love him, and so also the more one will desire to enjoy him’ (Aquinas 2009: 231). It is just this insight that Reformed theology needs to think about, so as to see how its own salutary emphasis on God’s absoluteness lends itself to further reflection on the vision of God.

37.5 CONCLUSION

I have argued, first, that eschatology in the Reformed tradition has to do with God. Torrance helped us see that. Second, the Bible as interpreted with the help of Calvin and

Barth, specifically 1 Corinthians 15, encourages us to think of God not only as one whose acts—think the resurrection of the dead—determine the end but also of God as the one who is the *end*, the ‘all in all.’ Third and last, I argued that the Reformed tradition would benefit from more thinking on God—not simply God’s economy, but God as the source and the actuality of all that he achieves for us and our salvation and how such relates to the vision of God. The knowledge of God’s greatness and the good that comes to us by God’s revelation assimilates us to God as our final good and our eternal happiness. Reformed theology ought to think more deeply about this as an extension of its own best instincts. This is not a matter of theology seeking to exceed limits of the knowledge of God. Instead, it is a matter of knowledge yielding to love of the God whose face we come to treasure in Jesus Christ.

SUGGESTED READING

Barth (2003); Thiselton (2012).

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PART IV

CONCLUSION

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR REFORMED THEOLOGY

MICHAEL ALLEN

C.1 ON REFORMED IDENTITY

REFORMED theology continues unabated. This Handbook has not only introduced key conversations and notable topics but has shown how those vital connections have prompted the development of classic texts and the ongoing development of their newer counterparts. Such literary-theological works have taken different forms, ranging from the confessional and catechetical resource to the biblical commentary or even dogmatic treatise or system. Even a seemingly defined genre, the dogmatic text, undergoes a variety of twists and turns throughout the centuries, so that various iterations play out in notably different forms. A comparison of Turretin and Barth on just this point proves instructive. Turretin titles his work *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, raising the flag of polemical engagement. Here we have not simply theological exposition or doctrinal unfolding along positive lines, but also and specifically a dialogical give-and-take with other approaches. Other texts, whether those of Calvin or Schleiermacher, offer less a polemical survey than a positive affirmation (albeit differently). Barth provides another massive example of this other approach, wherein the debates of denominational or theological traditions do not define the structure or shape but are themselves placed by material doctrinal decisions. Both texts have been used as doctrinal textbooks: Turretin famously at the old Princeton Theological Seminary for decades, Barth in numerous places more recently. Similar variety could be found in the realm of biblical commentary, of spiritual meditations, and of confessional or catechetical texts. The Reformed tradition does not suffer blasé homogeneity. And, of course, the Reformed tradition includes many directories for worship, though there is no centralized liturgy as in the Roman Missal or the tradition of Common Prayer worship.

Even so, 'Reformed' means something and does not morph and meander into nebulous shape or interminable variety. Some have tallied the purported breadth of the tradition and found it completely nondescript (Vischer 1993). But the word 'Reformed' is not a wax nose, though it is admittedly complex to classify. A host of facets of Reformed identity might be highlighted regarding distinguishing principles and practices. Some would point to particular 'habits of mind' that mark out the Reformed pathway to knowledge and faithfulness (Gerrish 1999). Much can be affirmed here, even if one might wish to offer some modifications here and there. Others could hone in on particular doctrines that mark out key concerns of the Reformed tradition (Allen 2010). In addition, ethical, cultural, and liturgical practices or principles also help define Reformed identity in a post-Christian and ecumenically divided situation.

George Stroup has addressed the ways in which Reformed engagement in ecumenical conversation demands, first, a sense of what it means to be Reformed in doing so (Stroup 2003: 257). Five major approaches are defined by Stroup: polity, essential tenets, theological themes or emphases, habits, and practices (Stroup 2003: 258–65). Each approach has strengths as well as weaknesses, signalling the fact that there really is something that can be termed 'Reformed' even if its definition eludes or surpasses singular analysis and demands a multi-pronged or multi-focal study. Stroup argues that the final three approaches must be clustered together and viewed in a trifocal lens (Stroup 2003: 258, 265–8). I would argue, though it goes beyond our immediate concern here, that even his own suggestions push toward a full embrace of the value of all five iterations of Reformed identity (not merely the final three which he suggests).

Stroup rightly notes that Reformed identity involves more than theology or doctrine, but he does not present an argument that it thereby involves more than the theological. He does rightly observe that habits and practices, moral and liturgical, mark out the Reformed tradition from other Christian streams (much less from wider religious traditions). And, embracing the first approach to Reformed identity which he does not take up into his own constructive proposal, we might add polity and government to the mix as an additional distinguishing facet of Reformed experience. The organizational, liturgical, and devotional development of the tradition is no less formative and definitional of its constituents and culture than are its intellectual and academic resources. And yet it is worth observing that the Reformed tradition—with a unique verve, though not alone, amongst Christian traditions—has emphasized that each of these other facets of its reality derives from theological judgements. Its varied exponents from the Puritans to Karl Barth have called for a distinctly theological approach to liturgy, life, and church government, as well as to the cultivation of habits of mind and tenets of doctrine. Disagreements ensue at both the formal and material levels, of course, regarding precisely how and what that panoply of theological implications might be in those myriad fields, but the conversation continues.

C.2 ALWAYS BEING REFORMED BY THE WORD OF GOD

As we think about Reformed identity and even the idea of future prospects for Reformed theology, we do well to linger over this idea of being resolutely theological, and to specify something of the way it has marked this Christian tradition. One signal element of Reformed identity remains its commitment that we are being reformed by the Word of God. Note that the affirmation is not simply that the Reformed church is always reforming, but rather that she is always being reformed (*semper reformanda*). We dare not lose sight of that passivity, and we should make explicit what can easily be lost in the implicit fundament, namely, that it is a divine passive and refers to the reforming work of God himself. Surely this is the weak point of approaches to reform that lead with or are most fundamentally shaped by a fixation upon the contextual; while appreciating the role of contextual differences, such lenses most commonly work in a rather thin context themselves that is only as wide as demographic distinctions (Blount 2007). Far from shrinking contextual concerns, thinking always theologically helps thicken our contextual awareness.

We need to do our theology contextually self-aware, but doing so must involve attending to a more fundamental contextualization, namely, a relocation of the whole enterprise not merely and surely not primarily in the guise of identity politics or social (mal) formation but in the economy of sin and grace. Too often demographic context crowds out or de-emphasizes the context of the drama of creation, fall, and redemption. In the Anglican world, Sarah Coakley has examined how a focus solely upon gender ideology and the dynamics of power invariably sells short the ability for genuinely theological challenge and provocation of the status quo by means of addressing a fundamentally theological construal of the situation, much less its repair by the Spirit; she has not shirked contextual analysis but has attended to it in its layered, prioritized manner, theologically construed (Coakley 2002). Genuine reform cannot simply sift the annals of power apparent to us in a slightly different social distribution, realigning the power potential of ideological approaches. The status quo surely is not Edenic, much less heavenly (Plantinga Pauw 2006: 190), and yet our genuine need is for fundamental transfiguration, not mere demographic or disciplinary mediation. We require death and life, mortification and vivification. We do not simply reform or even revolt; we confess that God reforms us by his Word (Willis and Welker 1999: x–xi).

While the church has integrity and her ministers and confessional instruments bear genuine authority, therefore, all these are construed in a particular way. The business of theology must be understood by locating it in the proper economy, apart from which it will invariably trade in the wrong sort of job description and work as if with only ill-suited tools to hand (Davidson 2015). In the economy of sin and grace, we find that theology occurs for human creatures in a realm of dependence and of sufficiency from the

outside. The reformers would no doubt alert us to the posture of *sola fide* as not only a soteriological note but also a theological-methodological axiom. Or we might listen to what the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian James Bannerman affirmed of the church: 'The source of its life and authority is from without, not from within; the Church of Christ confers upon its members, but does not receive from them' (Bannerman 2015: 206). Here the doctrine of the church is related to the doctrine of God: Christian community exists, and that existence must always be understood as gift from above. Reformed ecclesiology takes a decidedly instrumental and ministerial form, wherein our understanding of the body of Christ never overextends beyond the direction and precedence of the head (*kephale*) of that body. Theology too must be construed as an auxiliary and instrument in the hands of God's sanctifying, life-giving work.

We do well to reflect upon the way in which prospective reforms or developments may be deemed good or bad in this specific economy. Perhaps most significantly we must relate those terms—'good' and 'bad'—to a deeper distinction more closely tethered to these given realities: faithful or unfaithful. Reforms are not unrelated to the past as a standard, and they have a responsibility to be related to that which has already been given. But reforms are also responsible to the present, not crassly as if in the form of matching that which is influential or plausible in other fields but rather as that which fits snugly with the present agency of the triune God's action. Faithfulness as criterion signals our covenantal context as its explanatory horizon, as Reformed theologians and confessions frequently attest. We do our confessing, meditating, and analysing all in the presence of the God of Israel and the one who raised Jesus of Nazareth from the grave. Theology does not engage an inert object, nor does it occur apart from that God's mortifying presence and quickening resolve (Webster 2003: 28).

Reformed ecclesiology has sought through the centuries to attest this context by affirming first and foremost the principle that Jesus Christ is Lord of the church. This statement can be taken as an affirmation of our founder and his initiating work. Jesus instituted the church. But that is not its primary meaning, for it speaks of a present tense reality: Jesus Christ *is* Lord of this assembly. Here we have a full-throated confession of the *Christus praesens*, the doctrine of the exalted Son's heavenly session and spiritual presence to his blood-bought people. Notice that the affirmation specifies the God who makes himself present: Jesus Christ, and not some other god of our own devising or object of our experiencing. This Jesus who walked and talked and sacrificed and ascended; this one treads his way through our study and ventures into our contemplation. We need not ferret our way into the divine, for we find that in the divine mercy God has already descended to meet us, to assume our form, even to transfigure our being. We do see the glory of God revealed in Christ (2 Cor. 4:5–6), and this same Christ continues to make himself known (Allen 2014: 13–26).

Christological and Trinitarian reality shapes the contours of our theological existence, for in him 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:25) and he is 'preeminent' in all things (Col. 1:18). Too often we reduce our theological account to one of origination and destination with, perhaps, the occasional intrusion and providential episode. That is, our metaphysics of intellectual study takes the form of a story wherein God

makes us (beginning) and intends us for himself (end) and only intervenes as needs be (incarnation) or in rather cataclysmic reorientations (conversion). Too often the thick portrait of God's concurrent and yet transcendent and lordly presence to all of human existence eludes our attention. We turn to neurophysiology, on the one hand, and to critical theory in its manifold iterations, on the other, to depict the intellectual act of contemplation or of theologizing. While not without benefit, such scripts invariably fail to address the most fundamental plotlines of our pilgrimage or to prescribe the deepest need for our intellectual ills.

Whatever reform might mean and what could possibly be intended by the moniker 'Reformed', then, must be thought amidst a distinctly Christian and overtly theological portrayal of the theological act, indeed, of the theologian as a person. While we might construe reform in many terms—ranging from the register of the market to the evolutionary adjustments of the biological world and many other *idioma* beside them—a claim about 'Reformed theology' offers not first and foremost a sociological or historical attestation but one of a distinctly theological calibre. Amidst any other significant elements of Reformed identity, this notion that Reformed theology is that being reformed by the Word of God remains a central thread. And understanding its meaning demands sketching a metaphysics within which the theologian might be plotted vis-à-vis that God who issues forth his own Word.

C.3 TESTING THE REFORMS: FAITHFUL AND PRODUCTIVE, UNFAITHFUL AND PARASITIC

What sort of reforms then mark out a future with strong prospects? We return to that earliest confessional affirmation in the tradition. In 1528 The first of the Ten Theses of Berne stated: '[T]he holy, Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger' (Cochrane 2003: 49). Much else can and should be said about proposed reforms, but not until this question has been engaged: does this prospective reform signal a listening to the right voice, not that of a stranger but of our Head and mother as he speaks to us through the Word of God?

Far too often, prospective reform takes the shape of listening to the voice of strangers. Indeed, we might say that the history of modern theology has involved the timidity of theology in its wider intellectual culture and the reactive posture of cowering by means of co-opting the categories, terms, and judgements of (at best) ancillary disciplines. We can see the prevalence of such a stance in the reactions provoked in recent years. In the early 1990s, John Milbank provocatively challenged the stranglehold of social theory upon academic theology, seeking to challenge its metaphysical grounds and its ongoing ethical direction (Milbank 1991). Just a few years later, John Webster offered a now famous lecture calling for a return to 'theological theology', alerting us to the context

and content unique to the theological task as outlined in the direction of the gospel (Webster 1998). While both the tact of Radical Orthodoxy under Milbank's suggestion and a revitalized dogmatics as epitomized by Webster have inspired many, it remains nonetheless obvious that much of academic theology—including that in Reformed settings—continues to march on the conversational pathway. Nothing so obviously illustrates this reality as the very makeup of the *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, edited by John Webster himself, which includes a final section that addresses a number of 'conversations' intrinsic to the systematic theological task today (Webster, Tanner, and Torrance 2007). Even the strongest critic of co-opting other discourses, when editing a handbook on the discipline, had to structurally design it to address these varied disciplinary conversations because they were (and are!) seemingly so dominant in the field.

Reformed witnesses of years past would alert us to the reality that such co-opting by other voices—strange ones—is nothing new, and not an occurrence which can be reduced to recent trends in the academy or culture at large. John Calvin famously identified the human heart as a 'perpetual factory of idols' (Calvin 1960: 108). Living east of Eden invariably involves the temptation to modify, minimize, and mangle theological vision such that a squint, side glance, or stare attains only a partial or even a fully irrelevant glance at its true object. Reformed convictions about sin and grace remind us that, as those who not only live on borrowed breath but exist due to God's long-suffering patience, we do not naturally contemplate the one true God. Our proclivities lead us to identify God with that which is not divine and to fixate upon that which is not heavenly. As Walter Brueggemann has told us, 'The issue for God's people is characteristically wrong god and not no god' (Brueggemann 2003: 1). Neither theism nor religiosity is an uncomplicated achievement, for the one true God is jealous (Exod. 20:5; 34:14). This God is light, but we do well to remember that he is a fiery one (Sonderer 2015: 209–10).

Admittedly, we walk a fine line here, tensed still further because Reformed theology alerts us that theology is in fact about everything. God is not only Lord but universally so. Jürgen Moltmann has heralded this completely unimpeded sovereignty in his description of the 'reformatory' character of our enterprise (Moltmann 1999: 120–21; see also Busch 2003: 29–30). In his essay on '*Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda*' Moltmann reminds us that the theological posture here is not only 'theocentric' but also 'universal' so that 'what is reformed "according to God's Word" cannot be limited to certain areas of life' (Moltmann 1999: 122). Moltmann also signals some of the central facets of that reformatory work on varying aspects of human life, whether covenant or subjectivity or anything else. And yet Moltmann's work on the Word of God is wholly deconstructive, at least here; he offers a rebuttal to purportedly fundamentalist approaches to *tota scriptura* and the notion of plenary verbal inspiration (by implication), yet he does not offer anything more specific or particular regarding divine presence and address than that the Word's textuality 'creates the context, and the context is the *kairos* of the text' (Moltmann 1999: 125). Surely more should be said here regarding the centre or end of scripture itself and how this central principle forms a new context of meaning.

Still further, we should note that next to nothing is conveyed here about divine action; ecclesial lordship in this essay is identified with origination or initiation in terms of giving a Word now in scriptural form. The notion of *Christus praesens* receives no concrete elucidation.

Moltmann turns prophetic, of course, throughout his corpus in an attempt to trace that reformatory work across the varied terrain of human existence. As much as anyone, he has sought to remain alert to ways in which divine lordship reorients our every endeavour. And yet we do well to reflect upon the notion of the prophetic calling and the world in which it functions. We may begin by turning to the paradigmatic calling of Jeremiah (1:4–19). The account begins when ‘the word of the LORD came to me’ (1:4), and this communication even took visual form: ‘the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth’ (1:9). God grants a word, his own Word. In so doing, the LORD comes and extends his reach and even touches the prophet. The gift is not granted apart from a stated purpose, however, which is also revealed by God: ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant’ (1:9–10).

The prophetic task of reform involves tearing down and building back up. Reforming and Reformed—these two terms suggest twinned, entangled facets of this tradition of faith and practice. The prophet ministers a deconstructive Word which tears down and unearths that which is withering to dead. But this proclamatory assault comes not *ex nihilo* but on the basis of a given Word already administered by God’s ambassadors. A Jeremiah does not call one back to the ether of the beginning; the herald of God summons the people according to the good designs of God’s own law (*torah*) of his words which are placed in the ambassador’s mouth (1:9). The future prospects of Reformed theology will hang on the extent to which the reformatory work of the Word of God shapes the ongoing development of thought forms, of conversational frameworks, of abiding questions. To the extent that we co-opt the promising words of our host culture(s), we will fail to plumb to the depths wherein we need to find an ever-deeper Word. But we are not left only with a warning or an exhortation, not simply with a calling or a goading. Theological work and the reform of our contemplation ultimately flow from a promise and a gift.

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Allen (2014); Blount (2007); Gerrish (1999); Moltmann (1999); Webster (2003).

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