Editor's Notes

The month of October is significant in reformation studies. Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Twelve years later, on October 1-4, the Marburg Colloquy (a conference between the Lutheran and German-Swiss reformers) met. The reformation in Geneva dates to October 1532, when William Farel arrived in that city. And October marks the month in which Ulrich Zwingli died in battle; in which William Tyndale, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer died of persecution; and in which Theodore Beza died of old age. All this, not to mention the death of Jacob Arminius in 1609, and the birth of several reformers in this month.

Partly for this reason, the article by Prof. Herman Hanko on the relation between the Lutheran and Calvin seemed appropriate. In addition to being appropriate, it is timely, though published originally in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* in November 1969.

Another article in this issue is a reprint, this time of a recent publication. As part of his work in obtaining a ThM degree, Prof. Cory Griess wrote the article that is here published. It was originally published in the May 2023 issue of the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, the editors of which graciously permitted us to reprint the issue. It faces a significant question: Did Johannes Polyander's doctrine of the gracious call of God defend the orthodox view of sovereign grace, or concede something to the Arminians? The question is significant, not only because Polyander himself was one of the five theological professors delegated to the Synod of Dordt, but because the answer says something about whether the orthodox men defended the doctrines of sovereign grace after Dordt, or ignored them. Polyander defended them, Prof. Griess contends.

Excepting Prof. Hanko's article, the main articles in this issue touch on some aspect of Arminian, or Remonstrant, teaching. Prof. Griess' regards the doctrine of calling. Rev. Joshua Engelsma examines the development of the Remonstrant doctrine of justification, and the orthodox response to it. And Prof. Douglas Kuiper examines and critiques the Remonstrant doctrine of Scripture and the interpretation of

Scripture, asking whether the Remonstrants' wrong view of Scripture explains their wrong doctrines of human nature and divine grace, or whether the wrong doctrines of nature and grace explain their wrong doctrine of Scripture. Read the article to find out the answer.

Prof. Kuiper has not forgotten the serial treatment of the history of the Protestant Reformed Theological School, or of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches; rather, this article on the Remonstrant view of Scripture fit the theme of this issue.

Four men read and submitted reviews of twelve books. Dr. Marco Barone's interest and background in philosophical studies is evident in his reviews. That Prof. David Engelsma taught and loves dogmatics is evident from the choice of books that he reviewed. Prof. Kuiper teaches hermeneutics; both books that he reviewed regard how to interpret Scripture. And Mr. Julian Kennedy submitted a review of a book regarding taking evil seriously.

Several petitions are brought to God's gracious throne, as this issue is written and published. One is that God continue to give the PRCA and its seminary the grace to remain faithful to Him in doctrine and in every aspect of life. Another is that what is set forth in this issue glorify God and help the reader.

DJK

Johannes Polyander and the Inefficacious Internal Call: An Arminian Compromise?

Cory Griess

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Abstract

In the thirtieth disputation of the *Leiden Synopsis* (1622), Johannes Polyander elucidates what he considers to be the reformed doctrine of *vocatio*. In his explanation of this doctrine, Polyander makes surprising statements concerning the internal call. He teaches that not only the external call, but also the internal call can come to the reprobate. It does not do so all the time, but it does so sometimes, especially in the sphere of the covenant. Yet, when it does, that internal call is ineffectual. This doctrine of an ineffectual internal call is not found in the Canons of Dordt (1618–19), nor in disputations held before the cycle of disputations that became the *Leiden Synopsis*. Was Polyander's view a compromise with Arminianism? Or was Polyander actually defending Dordt's doctrine? This article builds on Henk van Den Belt's cursory conclusion to this question by providing proof that Polyander was in fact defending Dordt.

The *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (Synopsis of a Purer Theology, or, the Leiden Synopsis)* is a collection of disputations held by the Leiden University faculty between 1620 and 1624. The disputations cover all the topics of the traditional *loci* of dogmatics, together representing a key reformed system of theology published shortly after the Synod of Dordt.[1] The word 'purer' is in the title due to the fact

1 The Synod of Dordt is dated 1618–19. The *Synopsis* was published in 1625.

that, before the Synod of Dordt, the Leiden faculty had included Arminian theologians. Arminius himself had succeeded Junius in Leiden in 1603, and later Episcopius was hired to teach theology. After the Synod of Dordt, however, Arminian sympathisers were removed from the school and the country. The Leiden curators and faculty, aware that the reputation of the school could be called into question, wanted to make known their orthodoxy by publishing a 'pure' theology in harmony with the decisions of the great Synod.

In the thirtieth disputation of the Leiden Synopsis (held in 1622), Johannes Polyander, professor of theology at the university, elucidated what he considers to be the reformed doctrine of *vocatio*.[2] In his explanation of this important doctrine, Polyander makes surprising statements concerning the internal call. He teaches that not only the external call, but also the internal call can come to the reprobate. It does not do so *all the time*, but it does so *sometimes,* especially in the sphere of the covenant. Yet, when it does, that internal call is ineffectual: "Nor does God always link the two ways of calling [external and internal] equally or in the same way, but the concurrence of both of them is effective in some people and ineffective in others."[3] Polyander goes on to explain, "The ineffective concurrence of the two ways is observed in three kinds of people."[4] These three kinds of people are the three kinds of hearers who ultimately reject the word in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. These "three-soil" hearers "hear" the word, and to some extent "receive" it, though they are never regenerated. This is evidence, says Polyander, of an internal, ineffective calling.[5]

Polyander views this internal yet ineffective call as the work of the Holy Spirit: "The way of calling when we examine it from opposing perspectives, is divided into external and internal. The former

2 Henk van den Belt, "The *Vocatio* in the Leiden Disputations (1597–1631): The Influence of the Arminian Controversy on the Concept of the Divine Call to Salvation," *Church History and Religious Culture* 92/4 (2012), 546.

3 Henk van den Belt et al., *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae/Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 2:223.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

is achieved outwardly through the administration of Word and sacraments, the latter inwardly through the working of the Holy Spirit."[6] The Holy Spirit is not involved only in the efficacious call to the elect, but He is involved in *any* internal call, efficacious or inefficacious.

In making this claim, Polyander has Hebrews 6:4–6 in view: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made *partakers of the Holy Ghost,* And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (AV).[7] As Polyander sees it, the three-soil hearers who are not regenerated receive something of an internal call of the Holy Spirit in them, though this calling is ineffective.

This doctrine of an ineffective internal call is not found in disputations on *vocatio* held by the Leiden faculty previous to the one held by Polyander in 1622 and recorded in the *Leiden Synopsis.* Beginning in the year 1596, and ending with the cycle that became the *Synopsis,* the Leiden faculty held eleven cycles of disputations. Prior to Polyander's disputation on *vocatio* in 1622, "the internal call—or rather the combination of the external and internal calls—is synonymous with the efficacious call. This is the case in all the disputations prior to the Synod of Dort."[8] Two examples will suffice. Franciscus Junius held a disputation on the *vocatio* in Leiden in 1597. In this disputation he identified the internal call with the efficacious call: "Junius says that the call is either merely by external revelation, which is inefficacious, or by both internal and external revelation, which is efficacious to salvation."[9] Franciscus Gomarus, in a disputation held in 1600, "dis-

6 Ibid., 221. See also thesis 37 (2:223): "To other people the Holy Spirit offers a little taste of his grace so that their hearts are touched by a momentary feeling of happiness. These receive the gospel like seed on rocky soil." This "taste of His grace" does not imply saving intentions, as will be shown below.

7 Polyander refers specifically to Hebrews 6:6 in thesis 40 when speaking of the gifts that flow to hypocrites when the internal ineffective call comes to them along with the external call.

8 Van den Belt, "The *Vocatio,*" 548.

9 Ibid.

tinguishes the call to salvation in an external call (of all people) and an internal call (of the pious or elect)."[10]

These facts raise the question, why the change in the doctrine of *vocatio* found in Polyander and the *Leiden Synopsis?* More specifically, why does this change occur *only after* the watershed decisions of the Synod of Dordt? The fact that the change *does* occur only *after* the Synod of Dordt indicates that the answer to the question must take into account the rise and rejection of Arminianism (Remonstrantism). This leaves two most likely possibilities: (1) either Polyander is compromising with Arminianism by teaching an ineffectual internal call given to the reprobate, or (2) he is combating Arminianism by the same teaching.

Henk van den Belt is the only scholar I have discovered who is cognisant of this change in the doctrine of *vocatio* after the Synod of Dordt and who addresses the issue of the inefficacious internal call in Polyander. Van den Belt is one of the editors of the English publication of the *Leiden Synopsis*. In an article titled "The *Vocatio* in the Leiden Disputations (1597–1631): The Influence of the Arminian Controversy on the Concept of the Divine Call to Salvation,"[11] he argues that Polyander is combating Arminianism by this new development:

> The background or stimulus of this more nuanced view most probably is the claim by Arminius that the concurrence of the outward and inward call is efficacious, be it that in his case the effect ultimately depended on the consent of the faith of the believer. After the Synod of Dort, Reformed theologians felt a need to specify when and how the internal call had effect and did not assume that the combination of outward and inward calls was always salvific.[12]

I do not disagree with Henk van den Belt's conclusion, namely, that by his teaching of an ineffectual internal call, Polyander was not attempting to compromise with Arminianism but was attempting to defend the faith from Arminian doctrine. My intention with this article is rather to bolster this point. Van den Belt grounds his conclusion in the fact that Arminius believed the concurrence of the external and

10 Ibid., 549.

11 See n. 2 above.

12 van den Belt, "The *Vocatio*" 552.

internal call was always efficacious (at least to start). Polyander, he concludes, wanted to distinguish the reformed view from this position. But *all* of the Leiden faculty before the Synod of Dordt taught that the combination of the internal and external call was efficacious, including Gomarus.[13] This was standard reformed teaching. That Arminius taught the combination of the internal and external call was efficacious (in its beginning) is not sufficient explanation for the change after Dordt. Van den Belt's own conclusion here is a small part of an article with more expansive intentions. His conclusion demands more research. In this article I will show that Polyander's doctrine of an inefficacious internal call is an attempted defence of Dordt's theology against Arminian doctrine. I will proceed by first investigating the Arminian doctrine of *vocatio*. Then I will consider the possibility that Polyander is compromising with Arminian doctrine, which possibility I will reject. My three grounds for rejecting this possibility will be drawn from the *Synopsis* itself, Polyander's disputation on *vocatio* and a comparison of Polyander's teaching on *vocatio* with that of Wollebius and Francis Turretin. We will then be able to see Polyander's polemical purpose in teaching an internal inefficacious call.

Arminius' theology of *vocatio*

Jacob Arminius held a disputation on *vocatio* in Leiden, 25 July 1609.[14] This disputation was the last theological treatise Arminius wrote before he died three months later.[15] In thesis XI, Arminius states what was standard Leiden theology regarding the call at the time: "The efficacy consists in the concurrence of both the internal and external call."[16] Nonetheless, in thesis X, Arminius had already set forth his conditional theology: "The remote end is the salvation of the elect and the glory of God, in regard to which the very vocation to grace is a means ordained by God . . . But the answer by which obedience is yielded to this call, is the condition which, through the

13 As noted above.

14 To situate the timing of this disputation, 1609 is nine years after Gomarus held the same disputation in Leiden, nine years before the Synod of Dordt, sixteen years before the *Leiden Synopsis* was published.

15 Jacob Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols, ed. James Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), 1:15.

16 Ibid., 573.

appointment of God, is also requisite and necessary for obtaining this end."[17] The foreseen answer to the call is the condition to the end of actual salvation by the call.

If Arminius' view was that the concurrence of the internal and external call was efficacious, and yet salvation was not guaranteed unless man fulfilled the condition of obedience to the call (many of whom did not), what precisely was the efficacy of the concurrence of the internal and external call? For Arminius, the concurrence of the internal and external call did not irresistibly save him. Instead, it irresistibly brought a man into a state in which his will was liberated, and from there, saved him only if the now liberated will consented. The initial state to which the grace of calling brought a man was "an intermediate stage between being unregenerate and regenerate."[18] A man still needed more grace from calling to help him believe in Christ for salvation. But the will, now freed, could choose to resist or not resist the further grace of calling.

Thus, the grace of calling began irresistibly when the external and internal call were concurrent, but continued resistibly: "For all his affirmations of the necessity of grace from beginning to end in the process of salvation, he [Arminius] still affirmed that the person under the influence of grace can resist it and, in order to be saved, must freely accept it of his or her own volition by not resisting it."[19]

Because saving grace came to all who heard the preaching of the Word, and that saving grace was not effectual but ultimately resistible, we would expect to hear from Arminius an explicit confirmation that the internal call goes to more than those who are saved. This is indeed the case. In his work, "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," Arminius states concerning the doctrine of *vocatio,* "Internal vocation is granted even to those who do not comply with the call."[20] He then adds that the intention of God with this expansive

17 Ibid.

18 Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 164.

19 Ibid., 163.

20 James Arminius and Carl Bangs, *The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition*, 3 vols, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1986), 2:721. The "Certain Articles to be Diligently Ex-

internal call is to save all who are called internally: "Whomever God calls, He calls . . . with a will desirous of their repentance and salvation."[21] And, Arminius continues, there is no other will of God, as in the will of God's decree, that is contrary to this intention.[22]

This was directly opposed to the irresistible power of the concurrence of the external and internal call on the elect taught by the reformed. Arminius himself recognised that the issue at dispute in his theology was ultimately whether or not the intention to save and the grace of God demonstrating that intention to save were irresistible all the way to salvation:

> For the whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, "is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?" That is, the controversy does not relate to those actions or operations which may be ascribed to grace, (for I acknowledge and inculcate as many of these actions or operations as any man ever did,) but it relates solely to the mode of operation, *whether it be irresistible or not.*[23]

Arminius taught (1) that the saving grace of calling came internally to all who hear the word with the intention to save, and (2) that saving grace began irresistibly, but in the end was resistible.

Episcopius and the Remonstrants

In 1621, Simon Episcopius, former student of Arminius, erstwhile professor at Leiden, and leading representative of the Remonstrant party after the death of Arminius, authored the "Confession or Declaration of the Remonstrant Pastors."[24] Regarding the call to faith, Episcopius says in this work, "Faith, conversion, and all good works, and all godly and saving actions which are able to be thought, are to be ascribed solidly [*sic*] to the grace of God in Christ as their principal

amined and Weighed" were published posthumously. No one knows exactly when they were written. See Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 332.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Arminius, *Writings of Arminius*, 1:253–54.

24 Simon Episcopius, *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, ed. and trans. Mark Ellis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2005), 105–10.

and primary cause."[25] This saving grace for faith, conversion and good works is not limited to the elect, but is given to all who come under the proclamation of the Word: "According to the most free dispensation of the divine will, still the Holy Spirit confers such grace to all, both in general and in particular, to whom the Word of faith is ordinarily preached . . . ."[26] The effect of this saving grace is to free a man from his bondage and give him what he needs for salvation.

Freed from bondage, he must now make a choice. This grace will save him if only he will not resist its power: "Still the Holy Spirit confers such grace to all . . . as is sufficient for begetting faith in them, and for gradually carrying on their saving conversion. And therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion not only comes to those who actually believe and are converted, but also to those who do not believe and are not really converted."[27] This is an internally worked saving grace given to all with the intention of saving all. "This calling, however, is effected and executed . . . with a gracious and serious intention to save and so to bring to faith all those who are called, whether they really believe and are saved or not."[28]

What makes the difference between the believing and the unbelieving then? It is not the grace of calling, for all who hear the preaching of the word receive sufficient grace, yet not all believe. Neither is it the intention of God to save that makes the difference, for God intends to save all who hear the preached word. The difference is what a man does with the continuing grace of calling, having had his will freed by grace under the preaching of that Word: "Yet, a man may despise and reject the grace of God and resist its operation, so that when he is divinely called to faith and obedience, he is able to render himself unfit to believe . . . ."[29]

Just as with Arminius, the later Remonstrants taught concerning *vocatio* (1) that the saving grace of calling went to all who hear the

25 Episcopius, *Arminian Confession*, 108. N.b., not "only cause" but "primary cause."

26 Ibid., 109.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 106.

29 Ibid., 108.

word, internally with the intention to save, and (2) that saving grace began irresistibly, but in the end was resistible.

Did Polyander intend to compromise?

The possibility exists that Polyander intended to compromise with the Remonstrants by his formulation of an inefficacious internal call. Four considerations can be raised in support of this claim.

First, both the Arminians and Polyander taught an ultimately ineffective internal call that went beyond the elect. Second, both appealed to the parable of the sower to support their doctrine. We observed above that Polyander appealed to the three-soil hearers in Matthew 13. When Episcopius confessed that the grace of calling is ultimately resistible, he also turned immediately to the parable of the sower for proof.[30] Episcopius published his *Arminian Confession* in 1621. Polyander held his disputation on *vocatio* in 1622.

Third, it is notable that there is no mention of an inefficacious internal call to the reprobate in the Canons of Dordt. This is true in spite of the fact that the Canons speak of the parable of the sower in relation to *vocatio*. Instead of explaining the sowing to some as an ineffective internal call of the Spirit, the Canons of Dordt say that the three-soil hearers are only rejecting the *external* call, the ministry of the Word:

> It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the *ministry of the word*, refuse to come, and be converted: the fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the word by perplexing cares, and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. – This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower. Matthew 13. [31]

30 Ibid.

31 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper, 1919), 589.

Though the Canons speak of a temporary faith, they do not speak of an inefficacious internal call. In addition, they do not mention the work of the Holy Spirit in calling the three-soil hearers.

When the Canons of Dordt do bring up the work of the internal call of the Holy Spirit, they speak of it as effectual:

> But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illumines their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly under stand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.[32]

Here the Spirit is said effectually to draw the elect by an internal irresistible working. Polyander clearly is adding something that differs from the teaching of the Canons of Dordt.

Fourth, it would not be impossible to think Polyander capable of compromising with Arminian theology. Polyander was a mollifying figure with respect to the Remonstrants.[33] He has been called "the orthodox but conciliatory Calvinist."[34] In fact, as a condition to receiving the chair of theology at Leiden, Polyander "promised the Curators to tolerate Arminian colleagues."[35] Although some would argue that his conciliation with Episcopius that allowed the two of them to teach to-

32 Ibid., 590.

33 "Johannes Polyander," *Prabook World Biographical Encyclopedia*; https://prabook.com/web/johannes. polyander/2218573, accessed 29 November 2021.

34 C. C. Barfoot and Richard Todd, *The Great Emporium: The Low Countries as a Cultural Crossroads in the Renaissance and the Eighteenth Century* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1992), 90.

35 Ibid.

gether before the Synod of Dordt was more feigned than real, Polander certainly was a man who sought peace.[36]

Polyander did not intend a compromise of Dordt but a defence of Dordt

Despite these possibilities, I do not believe such compromise is Polyander's purpose in teaching an internal inefficacious call to some reprobate. For all his conciliatory attitude toward the Remonstrants, Polyander was still an orthodox reformed theologian. He was a delegate to the Synod of Dordt, functioning as secretary of the drafting committee of the Canons themselves, and therefore also editor of the Canons.[37] In addition, he was charged by the Synod with helping to "translate the Synod-ordered *Staten-Bijbel.*"[38] Add to this that, though he was a man who sought peace and was able to labour beside Episcopius at Leiden for a number of years, he did publish an anonymous attack on Episcopius' theology even *before* the Synod of Dordt met to deal with the Remonstrant question.[39]

Regarding the publication of Polyander's disputation on *vocatio* in the *Leiden Synopsis*, it is important to remember that, though each disputation was the work of its own author, the publication of the *Synopsis* was the combined effort of the whole faculty. The son of Antonius Walaeus (one of the other faculty members involved in forming the *Synopsis*) later reported that "the professors were concerned to avoid division within the Leiden faculty. They even decided not to pass their judgment separately, but only together as colleagues; no theses were to be disputed publicly unless all colleagues had seen and approved them."[40] It is highly unlikely that the faculty together would brook any compromise with the Arminian position. The *Leiden Synopsis* was written in order to exhibit the orthodoxy of the Leiden faculty regarding Dordt's rejection of Arminian theology.[41]

36 Jeremy Bangs, "Johannes Polyander: Een Dienaar van Kerk En Universiteit: EBSCOhost," *Church History* 52/3 (Sept. 1983), 375.

37 Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (eds), *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 299.

38 Bangs, "Johannes Polyander," 375.

39 Ibid. The attack was published in 1616.

40 Van den Belt et al., Synopsis, 1:2.

41 Ibid., n. 3.

But the question centers on the theology of the call itself. Did Polyander teach (1) that the internal inefficacious call was a saving grace of God intending to save those who ultimately did not believe? And did he teach (2) that this internal inefficacious call was an irresistible saving grace of God? If so, then all other evidence falls away; he has compromised with Arminianism. In the disputation itself, however, one finds proof that Polyander did not intend either of these things with his doctrine of an internal inefficacious call.

In the disputation Polyander states that one goal with any inefficacious calling (internal or external) is to harden and leave without excuse: "The accidental goal (*finis*) of the ineffective calling is the conviction of stubborn disobedience and complete inexcusableness in the hearts of the those who impudently withstand and interrupt the Holy Spirit as He speaks through the mouths of the preachers."[42] Both Arminius and Episcopius were unwilling to make this a goal (*finis*) of the call with regard to those who do not believe, because it implies that God has no saving intention with regard to the non-elect. In Arminius' "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," Arminius says of the *vocatio*: "'That man should be rendered inexcusable' is neither the proximate end, nor that which was intended by God, to the Divine Vocation when it is first made and has not been repulsed."[43] Arminius here rejects the notion that God has any intention to harden before man rejects the call. For Arminius the only intention of God in *vocatio* is to save, and therefore, only when the gospel is rejected finally and fully does hardening occur as an *effect.* But God did not intend this effect in any way. Importantly, in his 1609 disputation, Arminius says, "The accidental *result* of vocation, and that which is *not of itself intended by God*, is the rejection of the word of grace."[44] Polyander uses similar language in his disputation in 1622, with key differences.[45] First, whereas for Polyander, the accidental *goal* (*finis*) is the conviction of stubborn hearts, for Arminius this is the accidental

42 Ibid., 227. "Conviction of stubborn disobedience" is hardening. Though this is termed an "accidental goal" by Polyander, that is, a goal not essential as the main goal of the calling, it is nonetheless a *goal*. The importance of that word is seen below.

43 Arminius, *Works of Arminius*: London Edition, 2:721.

44 Arminius, *Writings of Arminius*, 574 (emphasis added).

45 As quoted above.

result. And whereas Arminius emphasises that God has no intention with regard to this hardness, Polyander gives no such qualification. It appears that for Polyander God does have an intent to harden, which intention is opposed to an intention in God to save.

Episcopius also repudiates any notion of an intention in God to harden, understanding this would limit God's intention to save to only some: "For whoever God calls to faith and salvation he calls . . . also with a sincere and unfeigned intention of saving them. Thus, he never willed any prior decree of absolute reprobation of undeserved blinding or hardening concerning them."[46] Polyander, however, has hardening and leaving without excuse the accidental goal. This is directly opposed to Arminianism's intention of God to save all by calling, internal and external.

Enough evidence exists also to say that Polyander teaches that when God graciously intends to save, His saving grace is directed to the elect and is irresistible. In his 1609 disputation Arminius said the love of God (philanthropy) is the inward moving cause in God of every call of the gospel (both external and internal): "The inly-moving cause [i.e. the cause within God himself that leads him to save creatures] is the grace, mercy and (philanthropy) 'love of God our Savior toward man;' (Titus iii, 4,5;) by which He is inclined to relieve the misery of sinful man, and to impart unto him eternal felicity."[47] Van den Belt points out that "after the Synod of Dordt the philanthropy of God is no longer mentioned as cause of the external call."[48] In fact, Polyander explicitly denies it is a cause:

> Therefore they are idle dreamers who extend God's gracious calling to each and every human being. For they mix up God's love towards humanity (whereby God embraces all people as his own creatures) with the love whereby He has ordained to take into his grace a select number of people from the common crowd of sinners who are perishing for their own wickedness, and to guide them in Jesus Christ, the Son in whom He delights.[49]

46 Episcopius, *Arminian Confession*, 110.
47 Arminius, *Writings of Arminius*, 1:571.
48 Van den Belt, "The *Vocatio,*" 555.
49 Van den Belt et al., *Synopsis,* 2:219.

Here Polyander is unwilling to say that the call that goes to the reprobate is evidence of God's gracious saving work toward them. To say so would be for Polyander to confuse what he terms the general love of God for His creatures with His love that "takes into his grace," which is limited to the elect.

That Polyander's view restricts God's gracious saving intention to the elect, regardless of whether or not the Holy Spirit internally calls the reprobate, is further confirmed at the end of the disputation. There he makes a distinction between the *mercy* of God *manifest* in the call when it goes beyond the elect, and the "saving *imparting* of God's *grace*" found in the "effective calling" of God's own. "The highest goal of both callings [ineffective and the effective] is the manifestation of God's mercy towards those whom He calls. The subordinate goal of the effective calling, and the goal proper to it, is the saving imparting of God's grace."[50] All men see that God is a God of mercy by the general call. But the effective call imparts God's grace. For this reason, Polyander says, "although some gifts flow forth from the concurrence of the callings and are shared by hypocrites along with the elect (i.e. the gift of knowing and tasting God's good Word, and the virtues of the coming age), they are not sufficient for the salvation of the hypocrites." It appears therefore that the reason why Polyander considers the internal call to be ineffectual with the three-soil hearers is because there is no gracious intention to save in it.

It was thus not merely the *mode* of the call (external or internal) that was at issue in the debate between the reformed and the Arminians/Remonstrants, it was also God's intentionality or lack thereof, and the resistibility or irresistibility of that intention in his saving grace. The *Opinions* of the Remonstrants that were presented to the Synod of Dordt make this very clear: "Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhypoctricial *intention and will* to save."[51] For the Remonstrants, God's intention

50 Ibid., 225.

51 P. Y. De Jong (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dordt, 1618–1619* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 226–7; emphasis added. The Remonstrants defined the serious call as "intention and will to save." Contrast this with the Canons, which define the seriousness and genuineness of the call as instead,

and will to save was coordinate with the internal call which comes to all. In contrast, Polyander does not coordinate the internal call and the intention to save in every case.

Our understanding of Polyander is consistent with the theology of others of his day who were seeking to present the orthodox faith of Dordt. Johannes Wollebius provides a key point of comparison. Wollebius was a preacher and professor in Basel. He published his *Compendium of Theologiae Christianae* in 1626. Beardslee says of this work:

> It cannot be denied that its extensive use during the seventeenth century, its brevity, clarity, and faithful, positive expression of what Reformed theologians were saying in the decade of the Synod of Dordt and would keep on saying, entitle it to consideration as an avenue to an over-all picture of the accepted "orthodox" understanding of the Reformed faith—the "teaching commonly accepted in our churches" on which Voetius, Turretin, and others set such store.[52]

Wollebius' intention aligns with that of the *Leiden Synopsis.*

Though he does not make as much of a point of it as Polyander, Wollebius does speak of some possible internal aspects of calling with respect to some of the reprobate: "It is called internal because the calling of the reprobate is only external, by the word; or if they are to some extent enlightened and internally moved, the change is only temporary."[53] Again, "From the above, the differences between common and special calling are evident. The first is often merely external. The second is internal."[54] If the common calling is *often* merely

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"For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him" (i.e. the will of His command). See also Raymond Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation," *Calvin Theological Journal 35/1* (Apr. 2000), 41–2. The *Opinions* of the Remonstrants were likely written at least in their final form by Jan Uytenbogaert.

52 John W. Beardslee et al., *Reformed Dogmatics: J. Wollebius, G. Voetius, F. Turretin* (Oxford: OUP, 1965), 11.

53 Ibid., 158.

54 Ibid., 160.

external, then there are times when it is also internal. And since this is the *common* calling being described, this internal calling too is ineffectual. Interestingly, Wollebius immediately turns to the parable of the sower in this connection, explaining that the three-soil hearers who ultimately are not converted are those who receive some kind of internal ineffective call.[55] The difference between Polyander and Wollebius is that Wollebius never mentions this possible internal call as the work of the Holy Spirit or references Hebrews 6:4–6, even if it may be implied. Nonetheless, the teaching of an ineffectual internal call to some reprobate is not Polyander's alone.

According to Wollebius, the goal of God with calling is not that all are saved: "Its purpose is the glory of God and the salvation of the elect. This is served both by the glory of his mercy toward the elect who are responsive to the calling, and by the glory of his justice toward the reprobate who are disobedient."[56] God's *mercy* in the *vocatio* is for the elect, His *justice* is for the reprobate. And again: "We grant that common calling is enough to take away any excuse from the reprobate, although it is not enough for salvation."[57] And most explicitly: "As to the reprobate, although they are not called "according to his purpose," *or to salvation*, nevertheless they are called in earnest . . . ."[58] Wollebius states that the reprobate, even if called internally, are not "called to salvation."[59]

Conversely, Wollebius speaks of the saving grace of calling as irresistible and limits that saving grace to the elect:

55 Ibid., 161.

56 Ibid., 116.

57 Ibid., 160.

58 Ibid., 116; emphasis added.

59 Making reference to the reprobate not being called "according to His purpose" is significant in this regard as well. This speaks to God's lack of intention to save. Turretin explains, "They who are called with the intention of salvation are "called according to purpose" because that intention is the act of election and the effecting of the purpose. Now it is certain that no reprobates are called according to purpose because thus they would both love God and be necessarily justified, etc (v. 30), which cannot be said of them." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 2:506.

> The "matter" or object of [special] calling is elect man . . . It is absurd to suppose that this grace of calling is extended to all, since not even that calling which we have considered above reaches all men. . . . The grace of calling is absolutely irresistible, not with respect to our corrupt nature, which is harder than stone, but with respect to the Holy Spirit, by whom his elect are so drawn that they inevitably follow.[60]

If the grace of calling is irresistible, and if an internal call can be resisted, then God has no gracious intention to save in the internal ineffectual call.

Francis Turretin's doctrine of *vocatio* with respect to an inefficacious internal call upon some of the reprobate is also worth examining. Turretin was also intent on explaining the orthodox faith of Dordt. Turretin was "a great synthesizer and defender of reformed orthodoxy. He frequently defends and exposits the declarations of the Synod of Dort in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology.*"[61] Turretin treats the doctrine of *vocatio* in particular with explicit reference to the canons of Dordt.[62] He begins by explaining the external and internal call: "The former takes place only by the ministry of the Word and sacraments (which are the external means of application). The latter however, takes place with the additional internal and omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit."[63] Turretin maintains this strict distinction between the two aspects of calling for nine pages. But when he takes up polemic against the Arminian doctrine of *vocatio*,[64] he admits that at times there is an internal aspect to the general call: "Still we do not deny that in a certain sense the division can be admitted if a sufficiency . . . is meant . . . both with regard to external means and internal illumination for a knowledge of the truth and temporary faith (Heb 10:26; Lk 8:13) and for conviction and inexcusability (*anapologian*, Jn 15:22)."[65] Turretin adds that "the reprobate mingled with the elect

60 Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 159.

61 Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed," 59.

62 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:507.

63 Ibid., 502.

64 "Third Question: Sufficient Grace. Is sufficient, subjective, and internal grace give to each and every one? We deny against the Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians." Ibid., 510.

65 Ibid., 511.

are favored with the external preaching of the word and sometimes an internal illumination of mind by which they mourn over their sins and congratulate themselves at least for a time concerning the word admitted."[66] Again, the scripture to which Turretin appeals in speaking of this internal inefficacious call is the parable of the sower (this time from the version in Luke 8:13).[67]

Turretin did not believe that God's intent with the internal ineffective call is to impart saving grace to the reprobate, but rather to draw out their hardness and hold them without excuse. This is consistent throughout Turretin's doctrine of *vocatio*. The "Second Question" Turretin treats is, "Are the reprobate, who partake of external calling, called with the design and intention on God's part that they should become partakers of salvation? And, this being denied, does it follow that God does not deal seriously with them, but hypocritically and falsely; or that he can be accused of any injustice? We deny."[68] He explains:

> we do deny both that they are called with the intention that they should be made actual partakers of salvation (which God knew would never be the case because in his decree he had ordained otherwise concerning them) . . . . God cannot in calling intend the salvation of those whom he reprobated from eternity and from whom he decreed to withhold faith and other means leading to salvation. Otherwise he would intend what he knows is contrary to his own will and what he knew in eternity would never take place (and that it would not take place because he, who alone can, does not wish it to do it).[69]

Turretin sees a kind of grace going to all in the *benefits* the reprobate have being under the word (restraint from many wickednesses and enormous crimes),[70] but grace with saving intention is limited to the elect alone and is irresistible:

> However, the orthodox deny that God is bound to bestow such grace upon all and that he wills in fact to confer it and actually to impart

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 504.
69 Ibid., 504–5.
70 Ibid., 511.

> it to each one. Rather he bestows it only on those who are the called according to his purpose (viz., to the elect). XII. The reasons are: (1) saving grace is not extended beyond the decree, since it is its effect.[71]

Apparently after Dordt it had quickly become common to nuance the doctrine of *vocatio* by not so strictly coordinating the external call with the common ineffectual call, and the internal call with the effective saving call. At times the common call could have an internal ineffective component as well. Yet, this was not a compromise with Arminian theology, for those who taught it maintained that God's saving grace in this internal calling was not resistible, and that God had no frustrated intent to save by it.

Why did this teaching develop after the Synod of Dordt?

After the Synod of Dordt Polyander and others taught a possible internal call to the reprobate that was inefficacious. If they did so *not* to compromise with Arminianism, then the conclusion must be that they did so in order to defend the teaching of Dordt. From what has been said, the truth of this latter position should now be clear. The promoters of Arminianism were using the parable of the sower to teach that God issued an irresistible and efficacious call that freed the will of all to whom it came. This call was the combination of an external and internal call. In light of the parable of the sower and Hebrews 6:4–6, orthodox reformed theologians did not believe they could respond to this by claiming there is no possible internal aspect to the call to the reprobate. Instead, they responded by nuancing the ed doctrine of *vocatio* by saying that the general call has an internal aspect at times, but that no saving intention in God is frustrated by that call, nor is resistible saving grace turned away. Rather, the intention for the reprobate is the same in the end as that of the ineffectual *external* call: to convict (harden) and to leave without excuse. For Polyander and others it was important to point out that God had more than one purpose with the internal call. He was not freeing the will by this internal call as the Arminians taught, leaving salvation to the autonomous will of man.

71 Ibid., 512–3.

For Polyander in particular, this teaching regarding the internal ineffective call was no different from what he saw as the internal ineffective call that comes through nature. Polyander first addresses this general call through nature in his disputation in the *Synopsis*. This call through nature is not a call to salvation, because Christ is not found in general revelation. Rather it is a call to "know and worship God the Creator (Acts 17:27; Rom 1:20). For this reason it may be called 'the natural calling.'"[72] This "natural calling," Polyander explains, has both an internal and an external aspect, though it saves no one:

> As for the generally occurring patterns of nature, they are partly internal – recorded on the hearts of all people – and partly external, engraved by God in the created things. The former kind is known by the name "Law" (Romans 2:14), the latter by "words that declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:4).[73]

Since this ineffectual call of God through nature is partly internal and does not indicate an intention of God to save, for Polyander there is no theological problem in saying that the special call is partly internal as well, though it too is ineffectual. It too is not a frustrated grace of God intending to save.

Conclusion

A change occurred in the presentation of the doctrine of *vocatio* among the reformed after the Synod of Dordt. Previous to the Synod, the external call was presented as synonymous with the general ineffectual call, and the internal call was synonymous with the effectual saving call. The Canons of Dordt reflect this teaching. After the Synod some of the central defenders of Dordt began to nuance the doctrine by teaching an ineffectual internal call. Some might believe this was a compromise with Arminian theology, which also taught an internal call ultimately ineffectual to the non-elect. However, the evidence is decidedly in favour of the conclusion that this nuancing of the doctrine served the opposite purpose.

72 Van den Belt et al., *Synopsis*, 2:209.

73 Ibid.

Arminius and his followers taught that the internal call *always* accompanied the external call and *always* carried sufficient grace to save, evidence of God's intention to save all who hear. Ultimately, God's intention was ineffective and in many instances was resisted. The reformed responded by arguing that at times (following Heb 6:4–6 and Matt 13:18–23) the Spirit worked internally while the external call came upon a person. He gave the reprobate to "taste of the heavenly gift" and yet ultimately in order to draw forth their innate rebellion and leave without excuse. The unbeliever did not resist and frustrate a saving grace intended to save the reprobate.

More work could be done to trace the doctrine of *vocatio* after this early period of orthodoxy to see if the doctrine of an inefficacious internal call continues through the period, and if so, how it is explained. For now, it is clear that Henk van den Belt's initial conclusion is correct. Polyander's doctrine of an inefficacious internal call is an attempted defence of Dordt's doctrine against Arminian theology.

The Issue of Justification by Faith in the Remonstrant Controversy

Joshua Engelsma

The Synod of Dordt met from 1618-1619 to pass judgment on the teachings of the Remonstrants, as the followers of Jacob Arminius were known. Most are aware that the Synod addressed five main doctrines: unconditional election, limited or definite atonement, the total depravity of natural man, irresistible grace, and the preservation of God's saints.

Although those five doctrines were the main points at issue in the controversy, they were not the only ones. One of the other doctrines that was a significant issue in the controversy was the truth of justification by faith alone.

To summarize briefly the controversy surrounding justification, the Remonstrants taught that, while the work of Jesus Christ is necessary to make it possible that God justify the sinner, when God actually justifies the sinner, He does not impute to him the righteousness of Christ. Instead, what it is imputed to the sinner for righteousness is his faith or act of believing. God counts the believer's faith itself as righteousness. The focus for the Remonstrants was on faith itself. In contrast, the reformed taught that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer for righteousness, and that faith is merely an instrument by which the believer lays hold of Christ and His righteousness. The focus for the reformed was on Christ.

While the controversy over justification between the Remonstrants and the reformed was a significant part of the broader controversy, the subject has been given relatively little consideration and is not widely known. One author is correct in his assessment, "The error of the Arminians concerning justification is often overlooked because of the emphasis on the struggle over five other cardinal truths of the Christian faith."[1]

1 David Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 6.

The purpose of this article is first, to demonstrate from the history that the doctrine of justification played a significant part in the Remonstrant controversy, and second, to conclude by summarizing the error of the Remonstrant view of justification.

The Controversy over Justification during the Life of Jacob Arminius

Jacob Arminius (1559-1609) was minister of the reformed church in Amsterdam from 1588 to 1603.[2] During that time there were already concerns being raised about his theology, although there is no record that his view of justification was yet publicly called into question.

Hints of Arminius' understanding of justification by faith during this period of his life appeared in a private letter written in 1599 to his close friend Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557-1644), then a minister in The Hague.[3] Arminius wrote,

> I wish therefore, that any man would reconcile for me, with this interpretation, that very common phrase in the Scriptures, when they are treating on Justification through Faith, which is, *Faith imputed for righteousness*. If I understand at all, I think this is the meaning of the phrase, *God accounts faith for righteousness*: And thus justification is ascribed to faith, not because it accepts, but because it is accepted.[4]

2 The standard English biography of Arminius is the highly sympathetic work of Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998). For a recent analysis and critique of Bangs' positive presentation of Arminius, see the appendix entitled "Arminius: A New Look" in W. Robert Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019), 185-227.

3 For basic biographical information on Uytenbogaert in English, cf. Peter Y. De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2008), 66-68.

4 James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, transl. and ed. by James Nichols (London: Longman, 1825/1828/1875), 2:50n. Quoted in J. V. Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition: Grace and the Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), 92.

Arminius indicated that he understood the position of other reformed theologians, even though he rejected that position:

> But some one will reply, 'Justification is attributed to faith, on account of the object which faith receives, and which is Christ, who is our righteousness.' This is not repugnant to my meaning, but it renders a reason why God imputes our faith to us for justification. But I deny that this expression is figurative, *We are justified by faith*, that is, by the thing which faith apprehends.[5]

In 1603, Arminius was appointed professor of theology at Leiden, to serve alongside Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641)[6] and Lucas Trelcatius Jr. (1573-1607). Arminius was appointed to this position despite the reservations of some in the churches, and suspicion continued to surround his teachings in the years that followed the appointment.

As controversy surrounding his teachings began to build (about 1607), Arminius wrote a work entitled *Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed*.[7] In this work he raised a question regarding justification: "In this enunciation, 'Faith is imputed to the believer for righteousness,' is the word 'faith' to be *properly* received as the instrumental act by which Christ has been apprehended for righteousness? Or is it to be *improperly* received, that is, by a metonymy, for the very object which faith apprehends?"[8] While Arminius only raised the question and did not answer it, it would become evident that he maintained the former proposition that faith was the basis for justification, and rejected the latter proposition that faith's object (Jesus Christ) was the basis for justification.

Gomarus, one of Arminius' chief opponents, seems first to have mentioned his concerns about Arminius' view of justification in a letter

5 James Arminius, *Works*, 2:50n. Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 92-93.

6 The standard biography of Gomarus is G. P. van Itterzon, *Franciscus Gomarus* (1930; repr., Groningen-Castricum: Bouma's Boekhuis/B. Hagen, 1979).

7 For the background to this document, see Bangs, *Arminius*, 332.

8 Arminius, *Works*, 2:728. Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 93.

he wrote to Sibrandus Lubbertus (1556-1625)[9], professor of theology in Franeker, on October 23, 1607. Gomarus believed Arminius was teaching that what is imputed to the believer for righteousness is his own act of believing. He believed that Arminius taught that "Christ's righteousness is *not* imputed to us for righteousness." He also said that Arminius' view was that "nowhere in Holy Scripture is it said that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us."[10]

Lubbertus shared the same concerns as Gomarus about Arminius' position. A few months before receiving Gomarus' letter, in July of 1607, Lubbertus sent a circular letter to the cities of Heidelberg, Geneva, Bern, and Paris warning against Arminius and Uytenbogaert and their attempt to "place doubt and controversy on the principal and fundamental articles of the faith, like: original sin, freedom of the will, predestination, faith, justification, sanctification, regeneration, etc."[11] It is noteworthy that Lubbertus includes in that list the doctrine of justification, which he believed to be threatened by the teachings of Arminius and Uytenbogaert.

In a letter dated April 5, 1608, to Hippolytus à Collibus, ambassador from the Elector Palatine to the States General, Arminius explained his views on justification.[12] He said that "to impute" means "that faith is not righteousness itself, but is graciously accounted for righteousness." He continued:

> I affirm, therefore, that faith is imputed to us for righteousness, on account of Christ and his righteousness. In this enunciation, faith is the object of imputation; but Christ and his obedience are the impetratory [procuring] or meritorious cause of justification. Christ and his obedience are the object of our faith; but not the object of justification

9 The standard biography of Lubbertus is C. van der Woude, *Sibrandus Lubbertus: Leven en werken, in het bijzonder naar zijn correspondentie* (Kampen: Kok, 1963).

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

11 Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 100.

12 For the background to this document see Bangs, *Arminius*, 295.

> or divine imputation, as if God imputes Christ and his righteousness to us for righteousness.[13]

In 1608, some of the opponents of Arminius anonymously circulated a document called *Thirty-One Defamatory Articles* in which they alleged false teaching on the part of Arminius.[14] In the document they charged him with teaching: "The righteousness of Christ is not imputed to us for righteousness, but to believe or the act of believing justifies us."[15] Arminius wrote a response to this document, but it was not published until after his death.[16]

Arminius and his supporters understood that if the doctrinal controversy was resolved in the church assemblies, they would be outnumbered. Therefore, they appealed to the civil authorities of the States of Holland. This proved effective for a time because the premier politician of the States of Holland, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), not only saw this as an opportunity to gain more involvement in church matters but also was sympathetic to the cause of Arminius.[17]

For this reason, the doctrinal controversy was addressed before a meeting of the High Court of the States of Holland held in The Hague on May 30, 1608. At that meeting, Gomarus charged Arminius with teaching that "in the justification of man before God, the righteousness of Christ is not imputed for righteousness, but faith itself [is imputed, etc.]." When given an opportunity, Arminius did not deny that statement. He did offer another statement of his position: "I profess that I hold as true, pious, and sacred, that doctrine of justification before God effected through faith to faith, or of the imputation of faith for righteousness, which is contained in the Harmony of the Confessions by all the Churches."[18]

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13 Arminius, *Works*, 2:702. Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 92.

14 For the background to this document see Bangs, *Arminius*, 300.

15 Quoted in Bangs, *Arminius*, 344.

16 Arminius' response is found in *Works*, 1:669-706. It is possible that a manuscript draft of Arminius' response was circulated in 1609.

17 W. Robert Godfrey, "Tensions within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1974), 41-42.

18 Quoted in Bangs, *Arminius*, 298.

At the conclusion of that meeting, the High Court ordered both Gomarus and Arminius to state their opinions in writing. Arminius asked that he be allowed to do so in writing and in person. On October 30, 1608, Arminius appeared again before the States of Holland and read a document stating his views on the points in controversy. This document became known as the *Declaration of Sentiments*.[19] Regarding justification, Arminius said, "To a man who believes, faith is imputed for righteousness through grace, because God hath set forth his Son, Jesus Christ, to be a propitiation, a throne of grace, through faith in his blood."[20]

In December 1608, Gomarus addressed the States of Holland and said that Arminius taught "that we are justified not by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, but by faith itself, which is not an instrument of justification, but our righteousness before the judgment of God."[21]

In August 1609, both Gomarus and Arminius appeared once again before the States of Holland. Present with Arminius were four of his friends and supporters: Uytenbogaert, Adriaan van der Borre (minister in Leiden), Nicolaus Grevinchovius (minister in Rotterdam), and Adolphus Venator (minister in Alkmaar). Gomarus had with him Ruardus Acronius (minister in Schiedam), Jacob Rolandus (minister in Amsterdam), Johannes Bogardus (minister in Haarlem), and Festus Hommius (minister in Leiden).[22] Again, justification was mentioned as one of the points of disagreement. Both Arminius and Gomarus agreed to write papers on the issues, with the first being on justification. However, Arminius died shortly thereafter (on October 19), and was unable to do so.

Gomarus still published his paper later in the year. He said Arminius taught "that, by the gracious estimation of God, faith is our righteousness by which we are justified" and that "the righteousness of Christ cannot be imputed to us for righteousness" but is the cause that made justification possible. He further said that Arminius taught, "What is attributed for righteousness is not righteousness itself, taken

19 For the background to this document, cf. Bangs, *Arminius*, 307.

20 Arminius, *Works*, 1:636. Quoted in Bangs, *Arminius*, 345.

21 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 160.

22 Bangs, *Arminius*, 326.

in a narrow and strict way. But Christ's righteousness . . . is righteousness itself, taken in the most narrow and strict way. Therefore, then, it is not imputed for righteousness."[23]

Gomarus claimed that Arminius at times taught contradictory things on justification. Gomarus argued that, in answer to the question of the "matter, or righteousness by which believers are justified," at times Arminius said "that it is the righteousness of Christ" and at other times "that it is faith." Gomarus argued that, in answer to the question of the "form or manner in which our righteousness actually consists," at times Arminius said "that it is the forgiveness of sins and imputation of the righteousness of Christ" and at other times said "that it is the imputation of faith (that is the act of faith) for righteousness." Gomarus showed that at times Arminius said "that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us for righteousness," but at other times said "that Christ's righteousness cannot be imputed to us for righteousness."[24]

While Gomarus was concerned about many of the teachings of Arminius, he viewed Arminius' doctrine of justification, not his doctrine of predestination, to be his chief error. Van Itterzon, in his biography of Gomarus, wrote that according to Gomarus "not the doctrine of predestination, but that of justification [was the] cardinal point on which Arminius deviated from reformed doctrine."[25]

The Controversy over Justification from Arminius' Death to the Synod of Dordt

The conflict over justification did not end with Arminius' death. A number of his friends and followers continued to promote identical (or at least very similar) views of justification. One of those friends was Petrus Bertius (1565-1629). Bertius exchanged a number of letters with Sibrandus Lubbertus on the subject of justification beginning in 1608; those letters were published in 1612.

23 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 160-161.

24 Quoted in Goudriaan, 162.

25 Quoted in Goudriaan, 155. Cf. Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 89. Godfrey wrote: "Gomarus' prime concern was not Arminius' doctrine of predestination, but the way in which his thoughts on predestination by extension had undermined the reformed doctrine of justification" (Godfrey, "Tensions within International Calvinism," 40).

Bertius believed that faith is justifying for two reasons, both "because it is considered by the gracious acceptation of God in Christ as the whole righteousness of the law that we were held to accomplish. And because only this [faith] apprehends the righteousness of Christ that is ours by imputation."[26] Lubbertus had no issue with the second reason given by Bertius, but he objected strongly to the first. He also maintained that these two reasons were contradictory and could not be harmonized. Bertius admitted that he could not see how the two statements could be harmonized, but believed them both to be biblical. He said that one possible way of harmonizing them was to consider faith both as the instrument "apprehending the righteousness of Christ" and as "obedience . . . to the Gospel."[27] However, Bertius preferred to harmonize the two statements by saying that to those "whose faith God has accepted as the whole fulfillment of the law, He subsequently imputes the righteousness of His Son."[28] In this harmonization, Bertius considered faith as a "condition" to be fulfilled by man, to be followed by the imputing of Christ's righteousness.[29] Lubbertus denied that faith is a "condition that is met by us," as that would lead to justification "because of a work."[30]

In explaining his view, Bertius equated faith with works. He said that the New Testament rejects "the work of the law" from having any part in justification, but it does not forbid the work "of the gospel." This work of the gospel by which a person is justified he believed to be "the obedience of faith."[31] In close connection to this idea, Bertius believed that faith justifies as an "inherent quality" of the believer.[32]

In response, Lubbertus denied "that a human being is justified by the work of the gospel," because "Scripture denies that Abraham is justified by works, Rom. 4:2," which means that his "faith is not considered as a work." He stated, "the specific difference between justification of faith and of works is this, as I said before, that in the

26 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 164.

27 Quoted in Goudriaan, 165.

28 Quoted in Goudriaan, 165.

29 Quoted in Goudriaan, 165.

30 Quoted in Goudriaan, 165

31 Quoted in Goudriaan, 166.

32 Quoted in Goudriaan, 167.

justification of works we do something for God, but in the justification of faith we receive something from God."[33] Lubbertus believed the instrumental nature of faith, but denied that faith belongs to the category of a "work." To make that point, he said that in justification man is "merely passive."[34] In response to Bertius' view of faith as an "inherent quality," Lubbertus defended justification "by faith insofar as it relates to the promises," and denied justification "by faith as an inherent quality."[35]

With respect to Genesis 15:6 ("And [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness") and similar biblical passages that speak of God imputing faith for righteousness, Bertius took them literally to mean that faith itself is one's righteousness before God. Lubbertus, however, understood those passages to be employing a metonymy, that is, a figure of speech whereby *faith* is mentioned where faith's *object* (Christ) is to be understood. He argued that in these passages what justifies a man is "not faith itself, but its correlate, namely the righteousness of Christ."[36]

For Lubbertus, the Remonstrant view of justification was no insignificant matter. In his judgment, that view "take[s] away . . . the fundamental article of our justification."[37]

Bertius was not alone in his promotion of Arminius' view of justification. Only a few months after Arminius' death, more than forty followers of Arminius met together under the leadership of Uytenbogaert in the city of Gouda on January 14, 1610. There they composed the "Remonstrance," a petition to be brought to the government stating their case. The Remonstrants, as they would soon be called, called for a revision of the creeds and also asserted their Erastian view of church government. They also summarized their doctrinal position in five articles, in which they defended conditional election, universal atonement, limited depravity, resistible grace, and the falling away of the saints.[38]

33 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 166.

34 Quoted in Goudriaan, 167.

35 Quoted in Goudriaan, 167.

36 Quoted in Goudriaan, 168.

37 Quoted in Goudriaan, 170.

38 De Jong, *Crisis*, 243-45.

When these were finally published, the Counter-Remonstrants informed the government that they were ready at any time to refute the Remonstrants. A conference was held in The Hague (the *Collatio Hagiensis*) from March 10 to May 20, 1611, to which six Arminians and six reformed men were called. The Remonstrants chose for themselves Uytenbogaert, Van der Borre, Grevinchovius, Johannes Arnoldi Corvinus of Leiden, Eduard Poppius of Gouda, and Simon Episcopius of Bleiswijk. The reformed chose Hommius, Acronius, Bogardus, Petrus Plancius of Amsterdam, Johannes Becius of Dordrecht, and Libertus Fraxinus of den Briel. At this meeting the reformed answered the five articles of the Remonstrants point by point.[39]

It is worth noting that at this point the Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants did not specifically mention justification by faith as a point of difference between them.

But the issue of justification did arise at a later conference between the two parties. The Remonstrants had been pushing to have their views on the five articles tolerated in the churches. The Counter-Remonstrants were pushing for a national synod to be held so that a judgment could be made on those five articles. Since the government was not ready to convene a synod, another conference was planned. This conference came about through conversations that Willem Lodewijk, Stadholder of Friesland, had with both Hommius[40] and Uytenbogaert. He inquired whether anything could be done to resolve the divisions between the two parties in the church. Hommius' judgment was that, if the Remonstrants did not differ from the reformed in any other articles than the five related to predestination, then perhaps a way would be found in which some peace could be made between the parties until the national synod could pass judgment on the five articles. But, he continued, there were good reasons for the reformed to believe that the greater part of the Remonstrants deviated from the accepted teaching of the reformed churches on a number of other, weighty doctrines. His concern was that, under the cover of the five articles, the Remonstrants may be introducing into the churches more serious errors. He therefore thought that there was no hope of any concord with the Remonstrants,

39 De Jong, *Crisis*, 52-56; 247-50.

40 The standard biography of Hommius is P. J. Wijminga, *Festus Hommius* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1899).

unless they would sincerely declare that in all other articles, except the well-known five, they were one with the reformed.[41]

So a conference was held to determine if the Remonstrants would agree to all the other important points of reformed doctrine or if there were other doctrinal differences between the two parties besides the five disputed points. This conference was held in Delft on February 26, 1613. Those present for the Remonstrant party were Uytenbogaert, Grevinchovius, and Van der Borre. Those present for the reformed party were Hommius, Becius, and Bogardus. The reformed came to the conference with a set of theses on six other key doctrines: Christ's satisfaction for sin, justification, saving faith, original sin, assurance of salvation, and the possibility of man's perfection in this life. These six doctrines had originally been identified by the States of Holland on December 3, 1611, as key doctrines that must be taught in the churches and schools only as had been previously taught by the churches. The reformed wanted to discuss these six issues, suspecting that there were differences between the two parties on these issues.[42] What follows is the second set of six sets of theses presented by the reformed party at that conference; this second set addresses the issue of justification.[43]

B. Of the gracious justification of man before God.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*

41 J. D. de Lind van Wijngaarden, *De Dordtsche Leerregels of De vijf artikelen tegen de Remonstranten* (Utrecht: G. J. A. Ruys, 1905), 50-51.

42 Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 139; L. H. Wagenaar, *Van strijd en overwinning: De groote Synode van 1618 op '19, en Wat aan haar Voorafging* (Utrecht: G. J. A. Ruys, 1909), 161-62; Wijminga, *Hommius*, 155ff; Van Wijngaarden, *De Dordtsche Leerregels*, 50ff.

43 My translation of all six sets of theses can be found in the appendix at the end of this paper.

1. That the justification with which we shall stand in God's judgment must be wholly complete, and commensurate to the law of God in all parts, and that that righteousness before God is the satisfaction and righteousness of Jesus Christ, which being outside of us in Christ, our righteousness is rendered unto us by God bestowing and imputing it to us, as if we ourselves had accomplished it, when we by faith receive it and appropriate it to ourselves.	1. That the righteousness by which we are justified, is a righteousness which, according to the strictness of the law, does not deserve the name of righteousness, and cannot stand in God's severe judgment, but which, according to the gracious estimation of God, by grace is accounted for righteousness, and that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is not imputed to us as our righteousness, but that the righteousness of Christ in the justification of man is counted only as a cause by which it is earned and acquired, that our faith and the works of faith are approved of God in the place of a perfect righteousness, and that the righteousness with which we shall stand before God is a righteousness that is in us.
2. That our faith in the justification before God is regarded only as an instrument by which we receive Christ, who is our righteousness, and that faith, to speak properly, is not the righteousness itself with which we shall stand before God.	2. That our faith in the justification before God is not regarded as merely an instrument by which we receive Christ, our righteousness, but that our faith, properly speaking, is the righteousness itself by which we stand before God, and, through a gracious estimation in place of the complete observance of the law, is accounted of God for our righteousness.

3. That our works, even those that proceed from the good root of faith, cannot be our righteousness before God, or any part thereof, nor can they come into account to justify us.	3. That we are justified by the works of faith, by our repentance, and by our own obedience, or keeping of the commandments of the holy gospel.

At the conference the Remonstrant party refused to engage and to express their views on the issue of justification or any of the other five points raised by the reformed party. This led the reformed strongly to suspect that the Remonstrant did indeed maintain error on these points.

Van Wijngaarden explains the significant result of this conference: "That is precisely why it [the conference] is so important, because here it appeared that the Remonstrants also deviated strongly on points other than that of predestination. The reformed doctrine, founded on God's Word, is such a continuous whole that with the disruption of the one, the other also is ruined."[44] Gootjes writes similarly, "It allowed the reformed to make the point that the doctrinal divide between them and the Remonstrant party was wider than the five disputed issues. Several other confessional issues were at stake as well."[45] One of those confessional issues at stake was the doctrine of justification.

A few years later, in 1616, Johannes Polyander (1568-1646), a professor of theology at Leiden and soon to be a delegate to the Synod of Dordt, indicated that justification was a point of issue with the Remonstrants. He wrote,

> The third question is whether we are justified before God by faith as by a hand or an instrument embracing the righteousness of Christ, or [justified] as by a work and a conditional act by which the human being is justified before God. Jacob Arminius gave occasion for this question and after him someone who is currently a professor of ethics, called Petrus Bertius, who in a certain writing asserts against Sibrandus Lubbertus, doctor in theology at Franeker, that we are justified by the work of faith in so far as it is a work and in this he follows the error of Servet and Socinus.[46]

44 Van Wijngaarden, *De Dordtsche Leerregels*, 50.

45 Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 139.

46 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian

In 1617, Caspar Barlaeus, a Remonstrant sympathizer, defended the teachings of Arminius and Bertius on justification. He defended the view that "God, who in the legal covenant required exact obedience to His commandments, now in the gospel covenant requires faith, and takes it by gracious estimation because of the merit . . . of Christ in place of legal obedience."[47]

In October 1618, shortly before the Synod of Dordt was to convene to judge the five articles of the Remonstrants, Festus Hommius published a work in which he described the important points at issue in the controversy. He reported that the disagreement over justification was an issue in the controversy.[48]

The Synod of Dordt met from November 13, 1618, to May 29, 1619. Representatives of the Remonstrants were cited to appear before the assembly so as to give them an opportunity to express verbally their positions. But so disruptive were they that finally on January 14 the President, Johannes Bogerman, dismissed them. From that point on, the Synod judged the teachings of the Remonstrants based on their writings. The Canons of Dordt were adopted by the Synod on April 23. The Canons followed the five articles of the Remonstrants and addressed unconditional election, limited or definite atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the preservation of the saints. Since the Remonstrants had not devoted a separate article to justification, the Canons did not devote a separate head of doctrine to the subject either.

However, the delegates to the Synod were aware that justification was a point at issue in the controversy. They believed that the errors of the Remonstrants in the five articles were related to and affected their unorthodox view of justification. In two key places, therefore, the Canons mention justification.

In Canons Head 1, Rejection of Errors 3, the Synod identified and rejected as error the teaching of the Remonstrants regarding faith as it relates to justification:

Controversy," 156.

47 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 171.

48 Goudriaan, 156; Wijminga, *Hommius*, 264-71. Hommius' response, in its abbreviated title, is *Specimen Controversarium Belgicarum.*

> Who teach that the good pleasure and purpose of God, of which Scripture makes mention in the doctrine of election, does not consist in this, that God chose certain persons rather than others, but in this, that He chose out of all possible conditions (among which are also the works of the law), or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation, and that He would graciously consider this in itself as a complete obedience and count it worthy of the reward of eternal life.[49]

In their rejection of this error, the Canons state, "For by this injurious error the pleasure of God and the merits of Christ are made of none effect, and men are drawn away by useless questions from the truth of gracious justification."[50]

In Canons Head 2, Rejection of Errors 4, the Synod explicitly mentioned the Remonstrant error with respect to justification and rejected it as error:

> Who teach that the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.[51]

In their rejection of this error, the Canons state, "For these contradict the Scriptures: 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,' (Rom. 3:24, 25). And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church."[52]

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49 Canons of Dordrecht 1.RE3, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 160.

50 Canons of Dordrecht 1.RE3, 160.

51 Canons of Dordrecht 2.RE4, 165.

52 Canons of Dordrecht 2.RE4, 165.

The Controversy over Justification after the Synod of Dordt

As confirmation that the Synod did not misrepresent the teachings of the Remonstrants on justification, the writings of Remonstrants after the Synod indicate their error regarding justification. The Arminian Confession of Faith was written by a leading Remonstrant theologian, Simon Episcopius (1583-1643) in 1621, just two years after the Synod concluded. The Confession was written to correct what the Remonstrants thought were misrepresentations of their positions by the Synod of Dordt. But the Confession indicates that the Synod had not misrepresented the Remonstrants on the matter of justification. The Confession states as the Remonstrant position: "Justification is a merciful, gracious and indeed full remission of all guilt before God to truly repenting and believing sinners, through and because of Jesus Christ, apprehended by true faith, indeed even more, the liberal and bountiful imputation of faith for righteousness."[53]

Philip von Limborch (1633-1712) was a notable Remonstrant theologian who lived many years after the Synod of Dordt. Although he differed from the teachings of Arminius on certain points, he continued to propagate the same view of justification as Arminius. He taught that faith justifies "not by any virtue or merit of its own, but by the gracious promise of God, by which he is willing of to impute faith to us as righteousness for the sake of Christ."[54] According to Limborch, the act of believing is imputed to the believer as righteousness, rather than the righteousness of Christ being imputed to the believer.

Not only do the writings of the Remonstrants after the Synod confirm their view of justification, but also the writings of the reformed shortly after the Synod do as well. Two examples will suffice.

Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), a delegate to the Synod of Dordt and later a professor of theology at Utrecht, wrote in 1641 that the Remonstrant view was "that Christ's righteousness is not and cannot be accounted to us," and also the idea "that faith justifies us insofar as it is an act, virtue or good work accomplished by us, and not insofar as it apprehends as an instrument the righteousness of Christ."[55]

53 *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, trans. and ed. Mark A. Ellis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2005), 111.

54 Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 102.

55 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian

Jacob Trigland (1583-1654), another delegate to the Synod of Dordt and later a professor of theology at Leiden, wrote in 1651:

> The doctrine was, and still is in his [Arminius'] followers, that not the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to believers for righteousness in order to stand before God in and by the same [righteousness], but faith itself [is imputed], the act of faith, *tò credere*, believing, or this act of believing, according to the commandment of God proposed in the Gospel, [the doctrine is] that this is imputed to the believing human being for righteousness, although by Christ and for Christ's sake.[56]

Analysis of the Remonstrant View of Justification

There have been recent attempts to defend Arminius' theology as belonging to the broad stream of reformed theology. Those attempts have included a defense of Arminius' view of justification as being within the bounds of the reformed confessions.[57]

The argument is made that Arminius held to many of the key elements of the reformed doctrine of justification, for example, that justification is a forensic declaration of God, that justification involves the imputation of righteousness rather than the infusion of righteousness, and that the basis of justification is the passive and active obedience of Christ.[58]

As apparent additional proof of Arminius' orthodoxy on justification, appeal is often made to two statements he made indicating agreement with the reformed position. First, he said in his *Declaration of Sentiments* (1608), "I am not conscious to myself, of having taught or entertained any other sentiments concerning *the justification of man before God*, than those which are held unanimously by the reformed and Protestant Churches, and which are in complete agreement with their expressed opinions."[59] Later in that same work he confessed

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Controversy," 175.

56 Quoted in Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 175-176.

57 For one example, cf. Bangs, *Arminius*, 344-45. For other examples, see the citations by Fesko in *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 90 (n10).

58 These arguments are summarized in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 78-79.

59 Arminius, *Works*, 1:631. Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed*

agreement with Calvin's view of justification. After explaining his own view, Arminius wrote, "Whatever interpretation may be put upon these expressions, none of our divines blames Calvin, or considers him to be heterodox on this point." He then said, "Yet my opinion is not so widely different from his as to prevent me from employing the signature of my own hand in subscribing to those things which he has delivered on this subject, in the Third Book of his *Institutes*; this I am prepared to do at any time, and to give them my full approval."[60] It is important to note that, though some make much of this statement of Arminius, a careful reading indicates Arminius does in fact admit that his view is different than Calvin. His view is "not so widely different" from Calvin's, but it is "different."

While Arminius may have stated his agreement with the reformed tradition, when he actually explained his view it became evident that he was not in harmony with the reformed tradition.

J. V. Fesko presents several elements of Arminius' view of justification that appear to be out of line with reformed orthodoxy, although the deviancy is difficult to prove definitively.

First, Fesko says that Arminius appeared to teach that justification is not a definitive declaration of God to the believer but instead is something ongoing throughout the believer's life. Arminius wrote, "But the end and completion of justification will be near the close of life, when God will grant, to those who end their days in the faith of Christ, to find his mercy absolving them from all the sins which had been perpetrated through the whole of their lives. The declaration and manifestation of justification will be in the future general judgment."[61] As Fesko explains, Arminius seems to teach that justification did not secure eternal life for the believer, but only the possibility of eternal life. If this is true, then justification hinges on sanctification.[62]

Second, Fesko believes that Arminius taught that justification awaits the final outcome of the believer's life and therefore contains the possibility of falling away and losing one's state of justification.

Tradition, 89.

60 Arminius, *Works*, 1:636. Quoted in Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 89, 105.

61 Arminius, *Works*, 2:407. Quoted in Fesko, 79.

62 Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 79-80, 84.

This error is related to Arminius' error on predestination, in that Arminius taught a predestination that is based on God's foreknowledge of a person's faith and perseverance. It is also related to Arminius' denial of the perseverance of saints and his belief in the falling away of saints.[63]

Third, Fesko points out that Arminius did not mention the priority of justification over sanctification, and believes this to be a key omission that indicates an erroneous view of justification.[64]

In summarizing the above points, Fesko says that Arminius' understanding of justification was

> that a redeemed sinner had to remain faithful to be justified at the final judgment rather than rest entirely on the imputed active obedience of Christ. Only those who persevered in Christ would be finally justified. This justification was not grounded solely upon the imputed righteousness of Christ but also upon the believer's sanctification-driven perseverance.[65]

While Fesko's arguments are convincing and seem to fit with the overarching theology of Arminius, there is too little evidence from the available writings of Arminius to prove these points definitively.

What can be proved with more certainty is Arminius' (and the Remonstrants') erroneous view of faith in relation to justification. Three key elements of this wrong view can be highlighted.

First, Arminius and the Remonstrants taught that it is not the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is imputed by God to the believer in justification, but that God imputes faith itself and the act of believing for righteousness. This view was based on their wrong understanding of Genesis 15 and the idea of God counting Abraham's faith for righteousness. As has been shown, reformed theologians understood Genesis 15 to mean not that Abraham's faith itself was his righteousness, but that Abraham's faith had as its object Jesus Christ and His righteousness, and that righteousness of Christ was imputed to Abraham.

63 Fesko, *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition*, 81.
64 Fesko, 82.
65 Fesko, 85-86.

Second, Arminius and the Remonstrants taught an erroneous view of faith in relation to justification. They spoke of faith as a "condition" that man must fulfill, as a "work" that God is willing to accept in the place of perfect obedience to the law. This is very different from the biblical and reformed language of faith as a "means" or "instrument" whereby the believer simply rests in and receives Christ and His righteousness.

Third, the erroneous view that Arminius and the Remonstrants had of justification was related to their errors on predestination and the other doctrines of grace. Aza Goudriaan insightfully argued,

> But what the debate on justification suggests is that the Arminian concentration on human activity not only meant that the focus was not on the sovereign God who predestines, but also that it was not on the righteousness of Christ. It could be argued, in other words, that the Arminian views on predestination and on justification by the act of faith have a common drive or share the same motivation: an insistence on human activity. The insistence on human acts leads to teaching a predestination of persons who will believe and a justification of those who have the act of faith. Hence, the sovereign predestination of God and the work of Christ are both re-defined or put into the background. In this way, Arminian theology gravitates toward anthropocentrism (in the human act of faith) rather than to Theo-centrism (as articulated, for instance in a sovereign divine predestination of individuals) or Christo-centrism (as expressed, for example, in a justification of believers by imputation of the work of Christ).[66]

Arminius' view was contrary to the teaching of the confessional standards of the Dutch reformed churches to which he belonged.[67] The Belgic Confession (1561) says in Article 22,

> Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not

66 Goudriaan, "Justification by Faith and the Early Arminian Controversy," 177-78.

67 Godfrey argues that Arminius very likely subscribed to the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism when he was ordained as a minister in the Reformed church in Amsterdam in 1588. Cf. Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 200.

> mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits.[68]

The Belgic Confession clearly repudiates the notion the faith itself and the act of believing justify us or are our righteousness before God. But, Jesus Christ who is object of our faith is our righteousness, and faith is merely an instrument whereby we rely and rest upon Him.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), having explained the truth of justification by faith in Answer 60, follows up by clarifying the role of faith in relation to justification in Question and Answer 61:

> Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?
> Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.[69]

Like the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism denies that faith itself is the reason for our being justified but affirms that Christ is our righteousness and that faith is merely an instrument whereby we receive and apply to ourselves the righteousness of Christ.

This is no minor matter, no mere quibbling over words without substance. As both Gomarus and Lubbertus saw, the view of Arminius and the Remonstrants was an attempted overthrow of the reformation gospel of free justification by teaching the believer to rely upon his own faith and believing, rather than on Christ, for his right standing with God. The reformed fathers at Dordt were right to anathematize the Remonstrant view of justification in their defense of salvation by grace alone.

This article has shown that one of the key issues in the Remonstrant controversy was over the doctrine of justification by faith. Those who

68 Belgic Confession 22, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 50.

69 Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 61, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 107.

trace their spiritual heritage to the Synod of Dordt can be thankful to God not only for the Synod's defense of the gospel as it relates to predestination, the atonement of Christ, the irresistible grace of God in the salvation of totally depraved sinners, and the preservation of the saints, but also the Synod's defense of the gospel as it relates to justification by faith alone.

Appendix: Translation of the Six Doctrinal Theses Presented by the Reformed Party at the Delft Conference in February 1613.[70]

A. Of the complete satisfaction of our Redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ for our sins.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*
1. That the justice of God requires that sin be punished with the highest punishments in body and soul, whether by ourselves or by another, and that there be no other means but this by which we may escape the temporal and eternal punishments.	1. That the justice of God does not require that sin be punished with the highest punishment of body and soul, and that God, without wounding his justice, may forgive sin without any satisfaction for it, which be made by us or by any other.
2. That God will not forgive us our sins without such complete satisfaction which our Lord Jesus Christ has made in our stead.	2. That the forgiveness of sins, and the satisfaction for them, cannot in any way coexist.
3. That our Lord Jesus Christ, in order fully to satisfy the righteousness of God for our sins, all the time of His life on earth, and especially at the end of His life, bore the wrath of God against our sins, and felt in His soul as well as in His body those abominable punishments which we with our sins had deserved, even the unspeakable anguish, sorrow, terrors, and hellish evils.	3. That Christ has not had the same punishment which we with our sins deserved, but that He suffered and paid according to a certain gracious agreement which the Father made with Him, and that His satisfaction by a gracious estimation according to that agreement is accepted of God instead of a complete satisfaction.

70 Translated from the Dutch text found in Van Wijngaarden, *De Dordtsche Leerregels*, 52-59. The translation is mine.

B. Of the gracious justification of man before God.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*
1. That the justification with which we shall stand in God's judgment must be wholly complete, and commensurate to the law of God in all parts, and that that righteousness before God is the satisfaction and righteousness of Jesus Christ, which being outside of us in Christ, our righteousness is rendered unto us by God bestowing and imputing it to us, as if we ourselves had accomplished it, when we by faith receive it and appropriate it to ourselves.	1. That the righteousness by which we are justified is a righteousness which, according to the strictness of the law, does not deserve the name of righteousness, and cannot stand in God's severe judgment, but which, according to the gracious estimation of God, by grace is accounted for righteousness, and that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is not imputed to us as our righteousness, but that the righteousness of Christ in the justification of man is counted only as a cause by which it is earned and acquired, that our faith and the works of faith are approved of God in the place of a perfect righteousness, and that the righteousness with which we shall stand before God is a righteousness that is in us.

2. That our faith in the justification before God is regarded only as an instrument by which we receive Christ, who is our righteousness, and that faith, to speak properly, is not the righteousness itself with which we shall stand before God.	2. That our faith in the justification before God is not regarded as merely an instrument by which we receive Christ, our righteousness, but that our faith, properly speaking, is the righteousness itself by which we stand before God, and, through a gracious estimation in place of the complete observance of the law, is accounted of God for our righteousness.
3. That our works, even those that proceed from the good root of faith, cannot be our righteousness before God, or any part thereof, nor can they come into account to justify us.	3. That we are justified by the works of faith, by our repentance, and by our own obedience, or keeping of the commandments of the holy gospel.

C. Of saving faith.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*
1. That saving faith cannot be without a knowledge of the person and merits of Jesus Christ, and that none can be saved but those who receive the benefits of Christ with a sincere faith.	1. That men may be saved by a faith which is without a knowledge of the person and merits of Jesus Christ.

2. That to a true faith belongs a firm confidence of heart whereby every believing man is himself assured that not only to others, but also to him is forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and salvation from God, only for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ.	2. That to a true faith does not belong a firm confidence whereby the believer is assured that his sins are forgiven him for the sake of the satisfaction of Christ.

D. Of original sin.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*
1. That through the sin and disobedience of the first man Adam, the whole human race fell into sin and destruction, and that through this willful disobedience the first man has robbed himself and all his descendants of the gift of being able to love God and his neighbor received in creation, so that man is inclined by nature to hate God and his neighbor.	1. That Adam's descendants are not guilty, as if they themselves had been in Paradise and had sinned with Adam, but Adam's sin is a strange sin. That God would not present Adam and Eve as a stem of the whole human race. That man therefore is not born with an inability, and without powers to be saved, because Adam once ate of the forbidden fruit five or six thousand years ago; and that man is not naturally inclined to hate God and his neighbor.

2. That through Adam's disobedience original sin has been spread throughout the whole human race, and our natures so corrupted that we are all conceived and born in sin; and that this original sin is a corruption of the whole nature and our hereditary defect with which even the young babes are infected in their mother's womb.	2. That man is not born with an inability to be saved, nor with a mind wholly blinded, and with a will necessarily inclined to evil. That the fruits of Adam's sin are not an incapacity for the good and inevitable working of the evil. That the inborn inclination for evil is not an indwelling sin, but only strife and affliction, or only a cause and punishment of sin.
3. That original sin is so ugly and abominable to God that it is sufficient to damn the human race, and that God is so wroth with inborn sin that He will punish it temporarily and eternally.	3. That original sin is not a sufficient cause why God should justly damn man. That God is not wroth with inborn sin. That if God punished man with eternal death, He would deal more cruelly with men than with devils, and that He would punish man for some strange sin.
4. That it is an abominable error of the Pelagians to say that original sin is nothing but an imitation of sin.	4. That Adam only is a mirror, example, model, and forerunner of the fall of man, and that if we are said to be all conceived and born in sin, it is not to say that we are born with original sin, but that our parents in all their works are not without sin, and because we always see many sinful examples in their works.

E. Of the assurance of salvation.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*
1. That in this life we may be assured that we have received the Holy Ghost unto the adoption of children, and through a sincere faith have become partakers of Christ in all his mercies; that God also through His Holy Spirit assures the true believers of eternal life, so that they may firmly trust that the Holy Spirit will abide with them forever, and that they are living members of the church of God, and will remain such in eternity, and after this life be taken up into heavenly joy and glory.	1. That it is uncertain that a true believing man as he is in this life shall forever retain the Holy Ghost, remain a living member of the church of Christ, and surely be saved; and when a true believer is assured of this, that such assurance is nothing but a deceitful audacity and a pillow to carnal carelessness.
2. That the Lord's Supper has been instituted and is being held, not only to commemorate Christ's death and suffering, but chiefly to assure all true believers, when they lawfully partake of the supper, by those visible pledges and signs that the complete forgiveness of all their sins and eternal life, for the sake of the one sacrifice Jesus Christ, are so surely given them, as they receive and enjoy the bread and cup of the Lord out of the minister's hand.	2. That the Lord's Supper is not chiefly, nor is it actually instituted, nor is it used to assure the true believers, when they lawfully use it, of the remission of their sins and eternal life, but that the chief and proper end of the institution as well as of the observance of the sacrament is only the proclamation of Christ's death and suffering.

F. Of the perfection of man in this life.

We confess in our Confession and Catechism that we are taught in Scripture:	*This we reject as unscriptural and contrary to our Confession and Catechism:*
1. That also the best works of the regenerate are all imperfect and tainted with sin, and that the regenerate can do no works, but they which are tainted by the flesh and also are worthy of punishment.	1. That man in this life can do such works which are wholly perfect and not worthy of punishment.
2. That also no one can keep the law of God perfectly in this life, and those who are converted to God cannot fulfill the commandments of God, and that God does not wrong a man if He require of him that which he cannot do.	2. That the regenerate man can perfectly keep the commandments of God in this life, and that God would wrong man if He required of him that which he cannot do.

The Remonstrants' Doctrine of Scripture in Relation to Their Opposition to Sovereign Grace

Douglas Kuiper

The doctrine of the seventeenth-century Dutch Remonstrants was unorthodox in many respects. Well known is their opposition to sovereign, irresistible grace, which opposition was the occasion for the convening of the Synod of Dordt and the writing of the Canons of Dordt.[1]

Less well known, perhaps, is their deviation from other points of reformed orthodoxy. This deviation is evident when one compares the doctrines embodied in the Belgic Confession (1561) with those of the Arminian Confession of 1621.[2] At the Synod of Dordt, the Arminians were evasive and defensive regarding the charge that they were unorthodox about doctrines other than human nature and divine grace. The writing of the Arminian Confession confirmed that the charge was true. The previous article in this issue is a case in point: the Remonstrant doctrine of justification was unorthodox.

The appearance of the Arminian Confession also demonstrated the allegations of Festus Hommius (1576-1642), one of the clerks of the Synod of Dordt, to be correct. Before that great synod convened,

1 That the Remonstrants were unorthodox with respect to these doctrines is clear from their own documents as well as the Reformed responses to them. See their "Remonstrance" (1610) and the rebuttal of the orthodox Reformed, "Counter-Remonstrance" (1611), in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 4:41-48. Also, see their "Opinions of the Remonstrants" (1618), as found in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), 221-29, and the response of the orthodox Reformed in the Canons of Dordt.

2 See Simon Episcopius, "The Arminian Confession of 1621," transl. and ed. Mark A. Ellis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), 2005.

Hommius had written *Specimen Controversarium Belgicarum*, in which he quoted the Belgic Confession one article at a time, and after each article quoted or referred to statements of Remonstrant writers that contradicted some teaching of that article.[3] The concern of the reformed reader mounts immediately: the first eight pages are a collection of quotes that oppose Article 1 of the Belgic Confession, regarding God's attributes! The next six pages are devoted to articles three through seven, treating the doctrine of Scripture; these are most relevant to our purpose at the moment.

Our purpose is to examine the Remonstrant view of Scripture and Scripture interpretation. Was that view orthodox, or suspect? If orthodox, how could the Remonstrants go wrong on the doctrines of human nature and divine grace, and even develop an entire doctrinal system that differed from the orthodox reformed? And if suspect, what specifically were the errors, and did these errors contribute in any way to the Remonstrant heresy regarding human nature and divine grace?

The first two parts of this article set forth and evaluate the Remonstrant view of Scripture and Scripture interpretation. The last part of the article investigates whether the Remonstrants' wrong view of Scripture was either a cause or an effect of their wrong views of human nature and divine grace. The article will argue that in fact the Remonstrants' erroneous view of Scripture was neither cause nor effect of their wrong doctrines of human nature and divine grace, but that their erroneous doctrine of Scripture and of human nature/divine grace is rooted in a wrong view of the relationship between God and humans. An organic connection, not a cause or effect connection, exists between the Remonstrant doctrine of Scripture on the one hand, and its doctrine of nature and grace on the other.

Two things this article does not do. It does not investigate at length the significant debt that the Remonstrants owe to the Socinians in their entire theological system, including their doctrine of Scripture. Simply put, the Remonstrants were not the first to teach their errors regarding

3 The book is in Latin, and was published in 1618. An approximate English translation of the title is *Instances (or Examples) of the Belgic Controversy*. I am using a digitized version of the book from https://books.google.com.

the doctrine and the interpretation of Scripture. Kęstutis Daugirdas has developed this point at length.[4]

Nor does the article emphasize another fact: modern liberal hermeneutics today is largely a development of the Remonstrant view of Scripture. Remonstrant scholar and advocate Keith Stanglin admits this.[5] That modern liberal approaches to Scripture are fundamentally Remonstrant gives urgency to the practical purpose of this article. Orthodox reformed pastors, scholars, and believers must know the Remonstrant view of Scripture and Scripture interpretation in order better to guard against it and its developments.

The Remonstrant View of Scripture

The first chapter of the Arminian Confession contains eighteen articles under the heading "On the Sacred Scripture, its authority, perfection, and perspicuity." The chapter identifies the sixty-six books of the Bible as canonical, in distinction from the apocryphal books, and posits that they are "the entire declaration of the divine will pertaining to religion."[6] The confession is explicit that these "were truly written or approved by inspired men of infallible authority and whose credibility was undoubted by all believers."[7] The seventh article teaches that the doctrine of the New Testament books "is completely

4 Kęstutis Daugirdas, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants in the Seventeenth Century," transl. Dorothy Miller, in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, ed. Th. Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin, and Marijke Tolsam (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 89-113; also, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Philip van Limborch (1633-1712) and its Intellectual Challenges," transl. Christian Wehmeier, in *Scriptural Authority and Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Golden Age: God's Word Questioned*, ed. Dirk van Miert, Henk Nellen, Piet Steenbakkers, and Jetze Touber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 219-39.

5 Keith D. Stanglin, "The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity: Remonstrants and the Transition toward Modern Exegesis," in *Church History* 83, no. 1 (March 2014): 38-59; also, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 156-60.

6 Arminian Confession, 1.3, 35.

7 Arminian Confession, 1.5, 36.

true and divine."[8] That the Bible writers were inspired is repeatedly stated; why the church considers them to be inspired is the topic of the eighth article. Articles nine through twelve treat the authority of Scripture, article thirteen its sufficiency, fourteen and fifteen its clarity, and sixteen through eighteen its interpretation.

Although the chapter is considerably more expansive than the Belgic Confession's six articles devoted to the doctrine of Scripture, it may seem to the reformed reader that the Arminian Confession was written with the words of the Belgic in mind: The same topics are treated, sometimes in a similar manner. But James Arminius (1559-1609), not the Belgic Confession, provided the real foundation for the view of Scripture as expressed in the Arminian Confession.[9] It comes as no surprise, then, that the Remonstrant view of Scripture differed from that of the orthodox reformed in at least three respects.

Scripture's inspiration

First was the Remonstrant view of inspiration. As noted above, the Remonstrants asserted that the Bible writers were inspired, and the Bible itself was inspired. But what did they mean by this? And did all Remonstrant writers agree with it?

The closest the Arminian Confession comes to explaining "inspiration" is when it says that the Scriptures "were written and endorsed by those men who were inspired, *instructed and directed by the Spirit of God*"[10] The essential question is not whether the men who wrote Scripture were instructed and directed by the Spirit; they were. The question is whether this is a sufficient description of the concept of inspiration. To be instructed and directed by the Spirit does not rule out a liberal view of Scripture as the word of humans about our religious feelings, written on the basis of Spirit's instruction and by the Spirit's

8 Arminian Confession, 1.7, 37.

9 James Arminius taught his view of Scripture in both his public and private disputations. See his first three disputations in his "Twenty-Five Public Disputations," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, transl. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 1:396-434, and disputations five through ten of his "Seventy-Nine Private Disputations," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 2:14-25.

10 The Arminian Confession 1.3, 35. Emphasis added.

direction. The Remonstrant explanation falls short of the view of inspiration as set forth in the Belgic Confession, which quotes 2 Peter 1:21: "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."[11]

Various Remonstrant writers, working out the doctrine practically in their writings, indicated that not everything the writers of Scripture wrote was inspired. Hommius' comments after Article 3 of the Belgic Confession indicate this: He alleges that Arminius appealed to 1 Corinthians 7:12 to affirm that the apostles did not always write under the inspiration ("instinct") of the Holy Spirit.[12] He also alleged that Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622), a known Remonstrant, wrote that the Bible writers did their best to convey the ideas of the Spirit, but that the Bible contains some mistakes, and the writers themselves do not always agree with each other.[13]

Other Remonstrant theologians played even more loosely with the doctrine of inspiration. Philip van Limborch (1633-1712; the fourth to succeed Simon Episcopius as professor of theology in the Remonstrant seminary in Amsterdam) did not deny inspiration explicitly. However, he argued that Moses did not write all of the Pentateuch, and that the disciples were wrong to speak of an imminent return of Christ.[14] Presently this article will note that his interpretive method also undermined the inspiration of Scripture. If van Limborch represents a later generation of Remonstrants, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) represents an earlier; he much more openly denied the inspiration of Scripture.[15]

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11 Belgic Confession 3, in *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 24. Homer C. Hoeksema provides a robust defense and development of the reformed view of inspiration, particularly organic inspiration, in *The Doctrine of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association), 1990. Particularly chapters five through seven are to the point.

12 Hommius, *Specimen Controversarium Belgicarum*, 12. The original reads: "I. Arminius affirmavit, in publicâ disputatione, Apostolos quaedam scripsisse non ex instinctu Spiritus sancti, quod probare conabatur ex 1. Corinth. 7.12."

13 Hommius, 11-12. He refers to Vorstius' 1611 work, *The Authority of Sacred Scripture*.

14 Kęstutis Daugirdas, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Philip van Limborch," 219, 224-26.

15 In 1644, Grotius wrote his *Notes on the Old and New Testaments*, in

The Remonstrant view of inspiration as expressed in its confessional statement was weak; the use to which Remonstrant men put it was even worse. And, tellingly, the Remonstrants did not appeal to the doctrine of inspiration to explain why the Scriptures had authority.

Scripture's authority

The Remonstrant view of the authority of Scripture also differed from that of the orthodox reformed. The reformed base the authority of Scripture on the inspiration of Scripture:

> We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.[16]

Here the reformed follow the lead of Scripture, in its two classic passages regarding the inspiration of the Scripture. The inspired apostle Paul used the doctrine of inspiration as the foundation for asserting the sufficiency and authority of Scripture: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter also used the doctrine of inspiration (2 Pet. 1:21) to ground his statement that Scripture is a "more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. 1:19).

On what, then, does the authority of Scripture rest, if not on the fact that it is God's inspired Word? The Remonstrants said that humans are able to recognize Scripture's authority by noting the character of Scripture's commands and promises, as well as the character of the men who wrote it. The Arminian Confession treats how one can know that the doctrine of the New Testament is true and divine. Part of its answer is that inspired men wrote or approved the New Testament,

which he made his views clear. See Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 237. Daugirdas notes that Grotius also borrowed arguments from Fausto Sozzini (Faustus Socinus); see "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants," 91.

16 Belgic Confession 5, in *The Confessions and Church Order*, 25.

and that Christ's miracles and resurrection confirm it. But the character of the writers is only supportive evidence; the content of the New Testament is primary evidence:

> But primarily because it contains commandments more perfect, just and holy than anyone could have contrived, and such excellent promises that neither a human or angelic mind could conceive of anything more worthy of God. It adds no small weight to the admirability and efficacy of its doctrine that such an unaccommodating enemy of the flesh was written by so few apostles, simple, weak men, free not only from the crime of forgery, but also unworthy of suspicion, with no protection of worldly eloquence, no renown from writs of human authority; without force, without arms, only by the persuasion of reasons and arguments and the demonstration of the Spirit, likewise men armed merely with innocence, holiness of life and patience.[17]

To this one might respond, of course! Blind, unregenerate humans who deny God (Rom. 1:19-20) also deny the excellency of Scripture's commands and promises. Grace enables regenerated humans to see these things, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

But the Arminian Confession does not address the question whether it is the regenerate who make this evaluation of Scripture by grace, or whether it is the unbeliever, apart from grace. Arminian theologians, however, were explicit: these conclusions are the product of the rational intellect of humans. Because we are intelligent, rational creatures, humans can come to these conclusion on our own.

Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), the first theology professor in the Remonstrant seminary, took this position. For Episcopius, the reliability of Scripture, specifically of the New Testament, rested on the fact that the New Testament was "a historically impeccable testimony." This, for Episcopius,

> is the proof beyond all doubt that the Christian religion is true and divine, and hence superior to all others. It is the history reported in the New Testament and substantiated with many miracles which compels people to recognize that only God can be the originator of the religion

17 Arminian Confession 1.7, 37.

> it portrays . . . It is on this criterion that the claim that the Christian faith is true stands or falls.[18]

And how does one conclude that the history is reliable? Reason, Episcopius would say. Ironically, many modern interpreters who use higher critical methods to interpret Scripture will use the same standard, the human power of reason, to *discredit* the historicity of Scripture.

In his article on van Limborch, Daugirdas demonstrates that this later professor did not depart from Episcopius on this matter. The New Testament's authority was based on "its historical reliability," which rested on knowing that the biblical writers were either eyewitnesses of the events about which they wrote, or heard of them first hand from eyewitnesses; that these men did indeed write the books ascribed to them; that these men loved truth; and that the entire story and message of the New Testament hangs together as a whole. Note what is next: Only because the Remonstrant professors judged the New Testament to be reliable, applying certain criteria, could they then believe the miracles and resurrection of Jesus! Daugirdas says, "Only on this basis [the historical reliability of the New Testament, DJK] did the assertion of the divinity of the doctrines and events recorded in the New Testament, such as the miracles and the resurrection of Jesus, appear plausible and imperative."[19]

The Remonstrant line of reasoning regarding the authority of Scripture is both rationalistic and directly opposed to the reformed line of reasoning. For the Remonstrants, the New Testament can be considered authoritative because the events recorded in it are demonstrated to be reliable. For the reformed, the events are considered reliable because the Scriptures are inspired. The Westminster Confession is succinct and

18 Daugirdas, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants," 105-106. Daugirdas is summarizing the section *De revelatione per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum facta* (*The Revelation Made by Our Lord Jesus Christ*) in Episcopius' *Institutiones theologicae* (*Theological Institutes*); today we would commonly call such a work a systematic theology.

19 Daugirdas, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Philip van Limborch," 224. Daugirdas is summarizing van Limborch's work *Theologica christiana ad praxin pietas ac promotionem pacis Christianae unice directa* (*Christian theology directed solely to the practice of piety and the promotion of Christian peace*).

pointed: "The authority of the holy scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself,) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God."[20]

Scripture's perspicuity

The third area of difference regards the perspicuity, or clarity, of Scripture. Here the Remonstrant view of the powers of the reasoning of humans becomes explicit.

While the Belgic Confession does not speak explicitly to the clarity of Scripture, the Westminster Confession does:

> All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some places of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.[21]

The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture does not deny that some things in Scripture are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16), but rather teaches that the child of God can understand Scripture's main theme (the gospel) and even can understand most of what is contained in the Scriptures without education. That which makes the Scriptures clear is the gracious power of the Holy Spirit enlightening and illuminating God's children. Peter noted that some twist to their own destruction those things in Scripture that are hard to understand, but this can be true only of those who are and remain unregenerated unbelievers, not of God's children.

At first glance, the Arminian Confession seems to say the same thing: It indicates that the clarity of Scripture regards what must be understood for salvation, and that even the unlearned can understand it. Article fourteen reads:

20 Westminster Confession of Faith 1.5, in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990), 21.

21 Westminster Confession of Faith 1.7, 22.

> Furthermore, the clarity and understandability of these books, although they are obscure enough in some places (especially to the unlearned and less exercised) is so great, especially in meanings necessary to be understood for salvation, that all readers, not only the learned, but also the ignorant (who are gifted with common sense and judgment), as much as is sufficient, may be able to follow their meaning, if they do not permit themselves to be blinded by prejudice, vain confidence, or other corrupt affections, but piously and carefully search the Scripture (which we believe is not only permitted for all, though untaught, ignorant or lay people, but also commanded and enjoined by God), and study to become familiar with the very phrases of Scripture, and which were most clear and meaningful in the time and language in which these books were written. We say that such [people] as these, truly honest, teachable and fearing God from the heart, are able to perceive everything which pertains to true faith and godliness, not only those things which are necessary, but also the very reason of their necessity, namely, they really do easily perceive that they are necessary and for what purpose.[22]

Are saving faith and the regenerating work of God necessary to understand the Scriptures? The Confession refers to those who are "fearing God from the heart," but the Remonstrants considered everyone capable of doing this. The emphasis falls on our rational faculties: "common sense and judgment," an absence of "prejudice, vain confidence, or other corrupt affections," and being "truly honest, teachable and fearing God from the heart."

Daugirdas notes the essential distinction between the reformed and Remonstrant view. Both taught the clarity of Scripture, and that the Bible contained all that was necessary for salvation, but "in Episcopius' eyes it only made sense to postulate such clarity if one assumed at the same time that people also had the ability to find all that was necessary in Scripture themselves, and that they were given this ability in the natural gift of right reason."[23]

Keith Stanglin also freely acknowledges that the Remonstrants explained the clarity of Scripture as being the fruit, not of the Holy Spirit's regenerating and illuminating work, but of the human ability

22 Arminian Confession 1.14, 41-42.

23 Daugirdas, "Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants," 107. Daugirdas is summarizing Episcopius' *Institutiones theologicae*.

to reason. Both Simon Episcopius and Étienne de Courcelles (1586-1659; Episcopius' immediate successor to the chair of theology at the Remonstrant seminary) emphasized "the role of reason and that anyone, regenerate or unregenerate, can grasp the doctrines necessary for salvation" and that human reason was sufficient for understanding the Scripture; to believe and obey requires the Spirit's inworking, but to understand Scripture does not.[24]

In his article "The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity," Stanglin examines and sets forth at greater length the view of Episcopius and de Courcelles regarding Scripture's clarity. In it Stanglin makes several noteworthy points. First, Episcopius published his view in at least four different works. This indicates that he was intentional and consistent in his view. Second, his view was known already as early as 1616, when his orthodox colleague Johannes Polyander (1568-1646) noticed it and responded to it. Third, when opposition to his view increased, Episcopius held fast to it.[25]

Preliminary conclusions

So far this article has noted that, in addition to having a wrong view of the power of fallen humans and the character of God's grace, the Remonstrants had a wrong view of Scripture's inspiration, Scripture's authority, and Scripture's clarity. Their doctrine of Scripture was not orthodox. From this, several noteworthy points follow.

First, the Remonstrants' wrong view of natural humanity and God's grace and their wrong view of Scripture intersected at one point: their view of what humans are capable of doing apart from grace. Apart from grace, humans can understand what Scripture teaches, what we are to believe, and what God requires of us. Likewise, apart from grace, people could choose to believe and obey.

24 Keith D. Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 157. Stanglin's book is a history of Bible interpretation, and his section on the Remonstrants covers five pages. He has a fuller treatment of the subject in his article "The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity."

25 Stanglin, "The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity," 42-49; in footnote 14 Stanglin identifies Episcopius' four works that serve as the foundation for Stanglin's conclusions.

Second, the Remonstrant position regarding the human ability to understand Scripture accords with their view of free will: humans have both the ability to understand Scripture by our innate faculties, and the ability to choose to believe and obey by our own innate power.

Third, the Remonstrant understanding of the power of human reason is too positive: they suppose that unregenerate humans acknowledge and can use positively that which reason, or nature, teaches them. By contrast, Scripture and the reformed confessions teach that humans deny these teachings.[26]

Fourth, the Remonstrant view of grace was very different from that of the orthodox reformed. This is necessary to observe, for some might respond that the Remonstrants did indeed teach that humans need grace to understand Scripture's teachings, and Scripture itself. The Remonstrants viewed grace not as a divine, sovereign, irresistible, dead-sinner-transforming power, but as God providing everyone with sufficient ability to do what God requires of us. They viewed the grace by which we are converted as "only a gentle advising" in which God works alongside of and in harmony with human nature. Humans possess a common grace, that is, God makes known by the light of nature all that He requires of us, and all that we need to do, with regard to our salvation.[27] So the Remonstrants and reformed differed even on the matter of what grace was, why it was needed, and how it operated.[28]

The Remonstrant view of Scripture and grace affected their view of how to interpret Scripture.

The Remonstrant View of Scripture Interpretation

Explained

The Arminian Confession embodies Remonstrant principles for interpreting Scripture. Also, de Courcelles' and van Limborch's published principles accord with the Arminian Confession. One finds that the Remonstrants were consistent in their principles for interpreting Scripture.

26 See Romans 1:18-20; Canons of Dordt 3-4.4, 16.

27 See Canons of Dordt 3-4.RE 5 and 7, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 171-72.

28 See Arminius' brief explanation of his view of God's grace, in his "Declaration of Sentiments 4. On the Grace of God," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 1:253-54.

Article fifteen of the Arminian Confession explained the need to interpret Scripture and to explain it in the churches. Why must Scripture be interpreted, especially if it is clear to those gifted with common sense and judgment? The Confession's answer is curious. On the one hand, it appeals to the fact that the books of the Bible were written long ago, in other languages, and by those whose customs and manner of speaking differ from ours: the readers "not rarely . . . meet with some antique matter or phrase from the time period of the Scriptures, and likewise tropes [figures of speech, DJK] and figurative speech, which in the present time produce for us some obscurity and difficulty." With this we have no difficulty. On the other hand, the Confession appeals to the rational and spiritual shortcomings of the reader:

> because there are very many even among Christians who either do not read these books at all or not with sufficient attention, nor consider what they read with care and judgment, or do not frequently and piously ask for divine aid, as is proper, or else being drenched with prejudice, confidence, hatred, envy, ambition, or other depraved feelings, are busy in the reading of these books.[29]

This raises several questions. First, if every reader has the natural ability to understand the Scriptures, but some readers do not properly use these rational abilities, how will one human's explanation of Scripture help another human? Could not the improper use of rational abilities impede the explaining of Scripture, as well as the hearing and reading of Scripture? Second, the Confession introduces matters of morality and grace: we need "divine aid," and others who read Scripture are "drenched with prejudice, confidence, hatred, envy, ambition, and other depraved feelings." So the Remonstrants do, after all, acknowledge that there is a moral and spiritual component to the understanding of Scripture, and that one who is deficient in these respects needs another to interpret the Scripture for him! Implied here is the Remonstrant view of the preaching: it appeals to human reason.

The Arminian Confession sets forth the principles for interpreting Scripture in article sixteen:

29 Arminian Confession 1.15, 42.

> But the best interpretation of Scripture is that which most faithfully expresses the native and literal sense thereof, or at least comes nearest to it . . . We call, however, the native and literal sense not so much that which the words properly taken bear (as indeed most often occurs), but that which, even if not favorable to a rigid understanding of the words, yet is most agreeable to right reason, and the very mind and intention of the one who uttered the words, whether it was enunciated properly or figuratively.

The article continues to say that this native and literal sense is found by determining a passage's "scope and occasion," its "subject matter," its context ("the things which precede and follow"), and by comparing it to other Scripture passages.[30] Reading Arminius' "Private Disputations," the reader recognizes that the Arminian Confession relied heavily on Arminius on this point also.[31]

De Courcelles and van Limborch continued and developed this approach to Bible interpretation. De Courcelles "adopted Episcopius' hermeneutical views and refined them," says Daugirdas, as he examines Courcelles' *Institutio Religionis Christianae*.[32] What did Courcelles add? "He considered in more depth and detail how, and according to what principles, reason was to be applied in [Scripture's] interpretation."[33] That role of reason, as Daugirdas summarizes, was threefold: "first, to check whether the teaching in question was actually contained in the Bible; second, to reflect on the logical connection between this teaching and the other teachings of the Bible; finally . . . to deduce the genuine meaning of controversial passages."[34]

In his *Christian Theology* (*Theologica Christiana*), Philip van Limborch developed a list of rules to be observed when in-

30 Arminian Confession 1.16, 43.

31 Arminius, "Seventy-Nine Private Disputations," 2:22-24.

32 Daugirdas, "Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants," 109.

33 Daugirdas, 109.

34 Daugirdas, 111.

terpreting Scripture, which list included five qualifications for the reader and five principles regarding the process of interpretation. Because Daugirdas provides these in English translation from the Latin, I quote him at length:

> The provisions for the reader, which were supposed to lead to an accurate understanding, aimed at creating an attitude as objective as possible in the interpreter; they were as follows: (1) knowledge of the original languages and history; (2) freedom from dogmatic prejudice; (3) avoiding overestimating the power of the interpreter's personal judgement and asking the Holy Spirit for support; (4) willingness to abandon an opinion that might be mistaken; (5) a righteous and pious spirit . . .
>
> The rules to be observed when reading the Bible concentrated completely on the methodological procedure, which was supposed to enable an interpretation of scriptural meaning that could be verifiable for everyone. These provisions were as follows. (1) The scopus of the author must be contextually ascertained. (2) Obscure passages must be explained by means of the clear ones. (3) Real speech ('orationes propriae') must be differentiated from figurative speech with the aid of reason. (4) In explaining figurative speech, the interpreter must not refer it to the material that exceeds the scopus of the author. (5) No meaning is permitted that contravenes the *regula fidei* present in the Bible or the principle of contradiction.[35]

As indicated earlier, the Remonstrants had developed a consistent approach to Scripture interpretation.

Evaluation: Overview

The orthodox reformed agree with many statements that the Remonstrants make regarding Scripture interpretation. Areas of agreement include that the passage must be understood in its literal sense; that this literal sense does not ignore, but includes, the use of figures of speech, which figures must be properly explained; that one must know the historical and literary context; and that one must compare Scripture with Scripture. In the main, the five principles that van Limborch sets forth regarding the process of interpretation are good.

Yet in significant ways the Remonstrant approach to Bible inter-

35 Daugirdas, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Philip van Limborch," 227.

pretation differs from the reformed. To see these differences, one must not merely observe what the Remonstrants *said*; rather, one must ask and answer three questions: First, is anything that is *not stated* a cause for concern? Second, what do they mean by their words, and are the words misleading? Finally, is the presupposition that forms the basis for their principles correct or incorrect?

Evaluation: absence of the spiritual sense?

Many observations of the Remonstrants regarding examining a passage's grammar, figures of speech, and historical context are to the point. Whether a passage has a spiritual meaning, and if so, how to arrive at that spiritual meaning, is a question the Remonstrants do not face.

The question itself needs a brief explanation, because "spiritual meaning" is a term used loosely. Early Christian interpreters were fond of allegorizing a passage, that is, finding a spiritual meaning (some gospel truth, or some practical application) by taking a concept (truth, for instance), or concrete object (scarlet rope, or the 316 trained servants of Abraham) and finding some spiritual meaning in that concept or object that no other reader could have found. In the medieval era, this developed into the quadriga method of interpretation, whereby an interpreter asked four questions of every passage: What does it mean? What must we believe? What must we do? For what must we hope?

For our purposes the term spiritual meaning does *not* refer to this kind of approach to the passage. This is necessary to underscore, for some current Remonstrant scholars advocate for a return to the allegorical method.[36]

36 Keith Stanglin's book *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice* includes a good, concise overview of the history of Bible interpretation (chapters one through six). In it he recognizes that early Christian interpreters often sought to find the spiritual meaning of a passage, while many modern interpreters are content only to find the literal meaning, in asking the question: what did Moses/David/John/Paul mean? In chapters seven and eight he opposes the modern approach (which we can appreciate), but pushes for a spiritual approach (which we could appreciate, depending on what he means by "spiritual"). In the end, in the judgment of this author, Stanglin desires a return to an allegorical approach, so long as it is "allegory within limits" (205). In other words,

Rather, the "spiritual meaning" is the word that the Holy Spirit is conveying to believers in a passage. This word could regard the revelation of the gospel in a text, or a fundamental doctrine or practice as it comes out of a text. But this spiritual meaning is not unrelated to the grammar of the text, as it was for the the early allegorists; rather, it rises out of the text's grammar. The literal and spiritual meanings are not two distinct meanings that one text possesses; together, they are the real meaning of the text.

Such a conception is lacking in the principles of Bible interpretation that the Arminian Confession, de Courcelles, and van Limborch set forth. Their principles of Bible interpretation do not require them to find a spiritual meaning that applies to God's people today as well as it applied to God's people to whom the Bible was originally written. This omission, this lack of attending to a matter, is a cause for concern. Today, modern approaches to Bible interpretation enable the exegete to explain what Paul meant and why he meant it, without demonstrating that what Paul said is relevant for believers today.

Evaluation: the role of confessions

Evaluating the Remonstrant hermeneutical method also requires asking what exactly the words mean, and whether they are misleading. In this connection we examine the role of confessions in Remonstrant exegesis.

What did van Limborch mean when he said that an interpreter ought to be free from "dogmatic prejudice?" If he meant that an interpreter should not impose a doctrine onto a text (*eisegesis*), but should study the text to see what doctrine it contains and draw that doctrine out of the text (*exegesis*), fair enough. But if he meant that the interpreter should not approach the Scriptures through the lens of time-tested and organically-formulated creeds and confessions, that is a problem. In fact, the latter appears to be the case. The Remonstrants considered the reformed to be too rigid in their use of confessions, and to be using them too heavily in the interpretation of Scripture. Against this the Remonstrant were reacting.

Stanglin recognizes a problem, proposes a solution that begins to point in the right direction, and then overshoots by proposing a modified version of a wrong interpretive method.

Several points substantiate this interpretation of the matter. The first is the simple historical fact that the Remonstrants had desired a looser interpretation of various teachings of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, and that the Synod of Dordt both denied their desire and formulated a third confession.[37] It stands to reason that the Remonstrant theologians were reacting specifically to the orthodox reformed.

Second, the Remonstrants spoke differently than did the reformed about the role of confessions in relation to Scripture. The Belgic Confession relates confessions to the *sufficiency* of Scripture. Because Scripture is sufficient in its revelation of God's will both regarding doctrine and worship, we do not consider "councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God."[38] The Westminster Confession does the same, when it says that Scripture alone is to be the judge of controversies of religion, and that synods (and by extension, the writings that they produce or ratify) "are not to be made the rule of faith or practice," (Scripture only is that), "but to be used as an help in both."[39]

The Arminian Confession also specifies that Scripture alone is authoritative, in distinction from a particular church (Rome) or synods, or any single person (the Pope).[40] However, its only mention of the role of confessions in relation to Scripture is when it says that confessions have no place in the *interpretation* of Scripture:

> But to desire to beg an exposition from any other source, namely, from any creed of human fabrication or analogy of faith received in this or that place, or any public confession of churches . . . or from the degrees

37 Arminius already had desired such a revision; see Arminius, "Declaration of Sentiments. X. The Revision of the Dutch Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Writings of Arminius*, 1:264-273. When the Synod of Dordt convened, it understood that the Remonstrants had objections to these doctrines, and desired a revision of the creeds. See "The Sessions of the Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619," in *For God's Glory and the Church's Consolation: 400 Years of the Synod of Dordt*, ed. Ronald L. Cammenga (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019), 234, 237-41.

38 Belgic Confession 7, 27-28.

39 Westminster Confession 1.10, 24; 31.4, 122-23.

40 Arminian Confession 1.11-12, 40-41.

> of councils, or of this or that father, though even the most or greatest part of them, is very uncertain and often dangerous.[41]

A world of difference exists between considering the church's confessions to be of *equal authority* to Scripture (they are not), and using them to help *interpret* Scripture (they do express the church's historic understanding of the main points of doctrine contained in Scripture).

The third piece of evidence are written statements of Episcopius, still in Latin. I rely on Daugirdas' summary: "In the dispute with the adherents of the Roman-Catholic church, and with the supporters of the Calvinist orthodoxy laid down at Dort, he rejects all efforts by the church to standardise biblical interpretation and insists that it is the duty of every individual to seek the true meaning of the Bible himself and to form his own judgment on controversial issues."[42] This was a logical implication, Daugirdas continues to say, of the Remonstrant view of the clarity of Scripture and the ability of humans to use our reason to understand it.

For the Remonstrants, to interpret Scripture without "dogmatic prejudice" meant that one came to Scripture with no presuppositions, no previously formed convictions, about the meaning of a passage. It is true, as van Limborch said, that the Bible itself provides a framework ("No meaning is permitted that contravenes the *regula fidei* present in the Bible or the principle of contradiction;" see footnote 35), but the confessions do not provide that framework.

The reformed saw it differently: the confessions are the church's understanding of what that *regula fidei* (rule of faith) is. It is not merely for the individual believer to decide if his interpretation conforms to the rule of faith; the church will set the standard.

Evaluation: erroneous underlying presupposition

Finally, the Remonstrant hermeneutical system can be evaluated as resting on an erroneous underlying presupposition.

41 Arminian Confession 1.17, 43.

42 Daugirdas, "Biblical Hermeneutics of the Socinians and Remonstrants," 106-7. Daugirdas bases this assessment on an examination of Episcopius' *Institutiones theologicae*, and of his *Apologia pro confessione*.

The fundamental presupposition of reformed interpreters when they come to Scripture regards the depravity of humans and the irresistible grace of God. Humans are, apart from God's grace, dead in sin and totally depraved, unable to save ourselves or to contribute to our salvation in any way. Even our ability to reason correctly, and to understand Scripture, is destroyed by sin. We need God's sovereign and irresistible grace, not only for every aspect of salvation, but also for the ability to understand and discern God's revelation.

With this presupposition, the reformers spoke repeatedly of the need for prayer and the illumination of the Holy Spirit in order to understand Scripture. The Canons of Dordt indicate that the gracious illumination of the Holy Spirit is necessary for a right understanding of the gospel as preached; by implication then, it is necessary for the understanding of Scripture.[43] The Westminster Confession is explicit: "We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word."[44]

The presupposition of the Remonstrants, as van Limborch noted, was that the Holy Spirit's role in illuminating was not absolutely essential but was supportive. His role in interpreting Scripture is not to enable humans to see what we could not see apart from grace, but to keep us from using our reason wrongly.[45] So the Arminian Confession said that an interpretation ought be "most agreeable to right reason," and van Limborch said that figurative language must be discerned "with the aid of reason." The role of reason follows, because humans have the innate ability to understand the Scripture; we have natural reason.

Additionally, one must admit that the Remonstrants spoke of the necessity of God's grace, and therefore the necessity of prayer to seek that grace. However, van Limborch spoke of that grace in terms of "asking the Holy Spirit for support" (see footnote 35). One needs support, or help, who has the potential to do something by himself, but cannot fully accomplish it. That is different from illuminating power

43 See Canons of Dordt 3-4.11, 168.

44 Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6, 22.

45 See again both the main thrust of both of Daugirdas' articles, as well as specific statements already quoted above, and found in "Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants," 106-112, and in "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Philip van Limborch," 227.

and enlightened understanding, given to men whose reason is flawed and whose understanding is darkened by sin.

Conclusions

The Remonstrant view of Scripture interpretation, like the Remonstrant view of Scripture, is deficient. Its fundamental and fatal weakness is its assumption that unregenerated humans have the ability to discern what Scripture means. It assumes that humans have this ability, inasmuch as we have "the natural gift of right reason."[46] The Holy Spirit is needed—to restate, *divine grace* is needed—not to enable humans to understand the Scriptures, but to prevent them from misunderstanding or misusing Scripture. Here too, grace is a divine assistance, something God gives humans to help us; it is not an irresistible and absolute power. Because we are by nature blessed with this natural gift of reason, according to the Remonstrants, we do not need the consensus of the church, as found in creeds or confessions, to guide us; we can understand the Scripture on our own. Humans need to pray, not because we cannot understand Scripture in our own power, but because we need the Holy Spirit to heighten our natural powers and prevent us from making mistakes. The Holy Spirit answers that prayer by giving humans power to use our reason rightly.

The Remonstrants made the same mistake regarding their view of Scripture interpretation that they made with the doctrines regarding human depravity and divine grace: they exalted humanity and human powers, thus minimizing the need for God's grace.

The Relationship Between the Remonstrants' View of Scripture of Human Nature and Divine Grace

So what is the relationship between these two erroneous views of the Remonstrants, that of Scripture and its interpretation on the one hand, and that of natural man and irresistible grace on the other? I propose that the relationship between the two views is not one of cause and effect, but that the relationship is *organic.*

46 Daugirdas, "Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstants," 107; this, as noted before, is a summary of Episcopius' own words.

Did a wrong view of human nature and divine grace necessitate a wrong view of Scripture?

If the relationship is one of cause and effect, one must determine which is the cause and which is the effect. Did the Remonstrants desire to hold to a wrong view of human nature and divine grace, and see the need to redefine what Scripture is and how it is to be interpreted in order to present their view of nature and grace as according with Scripture? If this is the case, we are warned against *eisegesis*, that is, against reading into Scripture what is not there.

That the Remonstrants first held to a wrong view of humanity and grace, and then adjusted their doctrine of Scripture accordingly, is unlikely in light of the fact that they borrowed their view of Scripture from the Socinians. Already in the 1560s, Fausto Socinus expressed this view of Scripture in his *De Auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae (The Authority of Sacred Scripture)*. Daugirdas demonstrates that the Remonstrants relied on the Socinian view, and shows the parallels between the Socinian and Remonstrant views, particularly the rationalistic method of determining whether an author is credible, and therefore why the Bible is authoritative.[47] The obvious influence of the Socinian view of Scripture and Bible interpretation on the Remonstrants suggests that the Remonstrants did not contrive a view of Scripture in order to fit their doctrine of human nature and divine grace.

One point that Daugirdas raises could be taken as a caution against pushing this argument too far. Daugirdas states that we have no clear evidence that the Remonstrants appealed to the Socinian view of Scripture until 1624,[48] five years after the Synod of Dordt concluded, and several more years after the Remonstrants developed their view regarding human nature and divine grace (their "Remonstrance" was published already in 1610).

However, if clear evidence of such is lacking, indirect evidence still points to the fact that the Remonstrants were well aware of the Socinian view. Daugirdas himself provides us with one piece of indirect evidence: Conrad Vorstius was well aware of Socinus' book on the authority of Scripture already in the 1590s, and published a new

47 Daugirdas, "Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants," 92-106.

48 Daugirdas, 112-13.

edition of it in 1611.[49] A second piece of evidence is the suspicion that swirled regarding Vorstius' view of Scripture and other doctrines. When James Arminius died in 1609, Vorstius was appointed to succeed him as professor at Leiden, but orthodox theologians (not to mention King James I of England!) opposed his appointment because of these suspicions. Another piece of evidence is Hommius' work to which reference was made earlier, in which he collated statements of Remonstrant theologians that contradicted various articles of the Belgic Confession; for our purposes, the statements contradicting Articles 3-7 are pertinent.

The picture that emerges is that of the Remonstrants consciously holding to, promoting, and developing the Socinian view of Holy Scripture, rather than developing a new view to fit their purposes.

So what to make of the fact that Episcopius did not openly acknowledge this reliance on the Socinians before 1624? Simply this: He knew that to acknowledge his dependence on Socinianism would be to add fuel to the fire, and considered it in his best interests not to do so.

Did a wrong view of Scripture lead to a wrong view of human nature and divine grace?

So is the cause and effect relationship the exact opposite? Did the Remonstrants' wrong view of Scripture precede, and even contribute to, their wrong view of the nature of fallen humanity, the effects of sin, and divine grace? If this is true, the Remonstrants become an object lesson to us: When we begin with wrong foundational principles and doctrines, the whole system will be faulty.

In two ways, one might argue that the Arminian view of Scripture resulted in their view of nature and grace. Logically, one's view of Scripture and its inspiration, authority, and clarity will inevitably affect one's view of every subject taught in Scripture. Historically, it is worthy of note that Arminius himself, and the later Arminians, always appealed to Scripture as the basis of their teachings about humanity and grace.[50]

49 Daugirdas, 93-94.

50 See Arminus' "Declaration of Sentiments," in *Writings* 1:193-275. In the document he makes some references to Scripture. One ought note how *few* times he refers to Scripture in an eighty-page document that sets forth his

But that this explains the Remonstrant view of human nature and divine grace is also unlikely, in light of the pedigree of the Remonstrant teaching about predestination, sin, and grace. The Canons of Dordt repeatedly alleges that the Remonstrant teaching about predestination, sin, and grace is both Socinian and Pelagian.[51] And in setting forth his view, Arminius appealed to the teachings and passages of Scripture itself, rather than to his doctrine of Scripture.

While this cause/effect explanation of the relationship between the Remonstrant doctrine of Scripture and that of nature and grace could be explored further, it seems to be a less satisfactory and certain explanation than does what follows.

The Organic Relationship

The explanation of the relationship between the Remonstrant views of Scripture and those of human nature and divine grace that is here proposed is that neither preceded the other, but that the two doctrines have an organic connection and unity. By "organic" here is meant that the two doctrines have a fundamental similarity; that they arise out of the same root, as it were.

That same root out of which the Remonstrant view of Scripture and view of nature and grace arises is an exalting of the powers of human reason. Fallen, unregenerated humans can both understand Scripture and can understand the gospel and choose to believe and obey, or refuse to believe and obey, according to Remonstrant thinking. Our ability to reason explains this.

Underlying this root of exalting the powers of human reason, serving perhaps as the soil in which this root grows, is a minimizing of both the nature of God's grace, and our absolute need for that grace. Arminian theology views God's grace, when given in both the understanding of Scripture and of the gospel and heeding its call, as

views; but he does make some references. But in his conclusion he makes clear that only two considerations will change his mind: a clear demonstration from Scripture that it teaches differently from how he understands it, and a demonstration that for all Christians to agree on that particular doctrine is necessary to salvation; see "Declaration," 1:274. As one would expect of a confession, the Arminian Confession of 1621 more explicitly and frequently refers to Scripture in setting forth the Remonstrant views.

51 Canons of Dordt 1.RE4, 2.RE3, 2.RE6, 3/4.RE7, 3/4.RE9, 5.RE2.

an advising, a nudging, that man may either choose to receive or not receive. In neither instance is this divine grace a sovereign, irresistible, infused, radical, complete transformation of man's power to understand Scripture, or to believe and obey the call of the gospel.

This explanation of the relationship between the Remonstrant view of Scripture and view of nature and grace leads to several conclusions. First, not only will one go wrong in areas of theology if one has a wrong view of Scripture, but even more, one will go wrong in both Scripture and other doctrines if his desire is to defend the innate powers of humanity. The way to guard against all error, in the end, is to be God-centered from the start. This is a *theological* warning.

Second, as has been pointed out, the Remonstrant presupposition that man's reason can determine how to interpret Scripture has long been put to the opposite use of what the Remonstrants intended: rather than defending Scripture as the Word of God, and understanding it better, modern interpreters apply principles of higher criticism, that is, human reasoning, to the Scriptures, and find many faults in Scripture. This exposes the error of the Remonstrant starting point. Here is a *historical* warning.

Finally, the Remonstrant approach opens the way for with man to take credit for what he did and does. Ephesians 2:8-9, the classic passage regarding *sola gratia* applies here too: If salvation is all of grace and not of works, and if this is true even of the faith that is a component of salvation, then it is also true of the powers of reason in the regenerated child of God: it is all of grace.

So that God might receive all the glory.

The Relation Between the Lutheran and Calvin Reformation[1]

Herman Hanko

When the Protestant churches celebrate the reformation of the sixteenth century on October 31, they commemorate especially the anniversary of that one event which launched the reformation: Luther's act of nailing on the door of the church at Wittenberg, the university's bulletin board, the Ninety-Five Theses which he drew up against the sale of indulgences in the territory of Frederick the Wise. While this event indeed launched the reformation, it was, in itself, not intended to be an act of reformation. There were countless abuses in the Romish Church of the sixteenth and preceding centuries; one among many was the evil of indulgences. Luther was not alone in protesting the sale of indulgences, as he was not alone in protesting the many evils which were present in the Romish Church. But in the purpose of God the time for reformation had come. The time had come for the restoration of the truth long obscured by Rome's apostasy. The time had come for a return to the true institute of the church. Events rushed on swiftly, seemingly beyond the control of the monk of Wittenberg—though he remained the central figure. Events begun with the thudding of the hammer on the chapel door could no longer be stopped. The reformation was begun, and it remains with us today.

But as important as this event is which we commemorate on reformation Day, a large segment of the Protestant churches trace their spiritual ancestry back, not to Wittenberg and Luther, but to Geneva and Calvin. The Lutheran churches remain a branch of the reformation

1 Editor's note: This article is reprinted from the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 3, no. 1 (November 1969). It has been reformatted to modern formatting standards, subject headings were added, and some punctuation has been edited, but the content has not been changed. The article is republished not only because its subject is still timely, but also as an example of the kind of article that appeared in early volumes of the *PRTJ*.

distinct from the Calvinistic and reformed churches. Nor have the two yet come together. The differences are too great. The chasm is too deep.

Does all this mean that the Lutheran reformation was a failure as far as the Calvinistic churches of the world are concerned? Is it a hypocrisy to commemorate the Lutheran reformation when key doctrines of Luther and of the Lutheran churches are specifically repudiated by a large branch of reformation churches? Should the churches who go under the name of Calvinistic celebrate some other event more closely connected with the work of Calvin? Such an event as the publication of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* for example? Or the arrival of Calvin in Geneva? Is it necessary, if we are to be honest, to repudiate the Lutheran reformation and speak of it as some kind of pre-reformation spasm which was perhaps relatively worthwhile, but which did not contribute essentially to the essence of the reformation as wrought by the reformer of Geneva?

These questions assume a position quite different from the position of much of modern ecumenism. The thought of ecumenism which controls much of the church life today would not admit the validity of the questions and would refuse to answer them on the grounds that they are based on false assumptions. The position which today leads many churches into one ecclesiastical structure, and which is intent on bringing Protestant churches back into the bosom of mother Rome, is a position which relativizes doctrine. Perhaps ecumenical leaders would admit that Rome was in need of reform and that the sixteenth-century reformation was necessary to force Rome to reform. But they would hasten to add that the purpose of the reformation has now been nearly accomplished. Rome has reformed or is in the process of reforming. The reformation has attained its purpose. The schism of the reformation ought to be healed. And, with respect to the questions of the divisions between various branches of Protestantism in general and between the Lutheran branch and the Calvinistic branch in particular, the answer of today's ecumenical leaders is that these differences are really unessential. At least, they are not of such import that they offer sufficient ground to indulge in the luxury of splitting the body of Christ. The differences ought to be forgotten. After all, Lutheranism and Calvinism are but two of many ways of looking at Scripture. We

should, in the interests of unity, be able to see the value of each other's viewpoints and live together in peace and harmony.

The assumption behind the questions appearing above is that the differences are important. The breach between Rome and Protestantism which the reformation defined remains. The differences between the various branches of the reformation are differences with respect to essentials of Scripture. They cannot be ignored. Even in the interests of unity they cannot be glossed over.

An essential answer to the questions asked above is an assertion of the truth that God is the author of the reformation. The reformation is not a work of man. It is not the work of Luther. It is not the work of Calvin. To read the history of the reformation and to study the works of those men who took a prominent part in it is to be forced again and again to the conclusion that events were out of the hands of these men whose names have lived on in history. They were instruments. They were used by God to accomplish the work of reform. But God moved them. God controlled events. God worked what no man could possibly work. God brought about reformation—a reformation needed to preserve the church from the apostasy of Rome.

But to assert that God is the author of the whole reformation is to assert also that there was a proper place for Luther in the reformation and a proper place for Calvin. Both, although they themselves could not attain unity in their own lifetimes, and although the two branches of the reformation which followed from them have not been able to join hands up until the present, were needed for the work that had to be done. Both had a place. Luther could not have done what Calvin did. Calvin could not have done what Luther did. The reformation would not have happened without both of them.

The Necessity of and Background to the Reformation

To understand this, it is necessary to go back briefly to the history of the church beginning with Augustine who lived from 354 to 430. At the time of Augustine, a man arose in the church by the name of Pelagius who taught in Rome doctrines contrary to Scripture. Without going into detail as to his views, it is sufficient for our purposes to note that he taught that a man was free at birth from original guilt and original pollution; that, in other words, man came into the world

sinless. If a man sinned in the course of his life, he did so because he learned from others the bad habit of sin. Sin was a habit. Sin is not rooted in a depraved nature; sin is only in the deed. Sin is not first of all a corruption inherited which infects the whole nature. Only an act can be sinful. The view which Pelagius held of salvation was adjusted to fit this view of sin. Salvation was the work of man himself. It might be, on occasion, that a man needed the assistance of divine grace to help him overcome deeply rooted habits even as a man may need the help of a doctor to overcome the habit of alcoholism. But for the most part, since to do the will of God required only the breaking of a habit, man was capable of doing this himself if only he had the will to do it. Through strenuous and daily effort, man could do God's will and thus be saved.

It is interesting to note that, under the influence of Augustine, this view was condemned by the church of that time. Augustine strongly opposed it on the basis of Scripture, and, in so doing, developed the doctrines of original sin, predestination, and sovereign grace. The Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned Pelagianism.

Yet, during the lifetime of Augustine the error of what became known as Semi-Pelagianism raised its ugly head. Especially such men as Cassianus and Faustus developed these views. These men attempted to take a position, so to speak, half-way between outright Pelagianism and strict Augustinianism. In brief, the view of Semi-Pelagianism was that salvation was a cooperative work of God and man with man generally taking the initiative. Man, through the fall, was not dead in sin, only seriously sick. Grace, though infused, can be resisted and only supplements man's own power. Predestination is based on foreseen faith and the cross of Christ is of universal value.

This position was approved by two regional synods: Arles in 472 and Lyons in 475. On a church-wide level, however, the issue was not resolved until the Synod of Orange in 529. While also the Synod of Orange was a local Synod, the decisions of it were approved by Pope Boniface II and were generally accepted throughout the Western branch of Christendom.

The Synod of Orange was in reality a victory for Semi-Pelagianism. Although Semi-Pelagianism was condemned and Augustinianism approved, the Synod made compromise decisions. And as is

always the case with questions of the truth, a compromise is a victory for the lie. Specifically, Orange spoke of sin as injuring man in both body and soul and bringing death to all men. It spoke further of grace as being the origin of all good, even of prayers. It described grace as being the effectual power of the *disposition* towards faith, of all good as being a gift of God, of the need which all saints have for God's help. It insisted that God loves only His own gift in us and spoke of the will as being restored only through baptism. It accepted the position that unmerited grace precedes meritorious works and that even unfallen man needed such grace.

But the weakness of this position is obvious. For one thing, the Synod condemned (although such a view had never been a part of the Augustinian system) predestination to sin. The Synod condemned a caricature of Augustine's views created by his enemies. The Synod never mentioned the doctrines of irresistible grace and of sovereign predestination. In fact, the impression was left that the Synod carefully and deliberately avoided mentioning these key points in the theology of Augustine. The Synod left room for the idea of sin as being only a sickness, spoke of grace as being the source of a disposition to faith, left room for the meritorious value of good works, and failed to condemn the Pelagian conception of free will.

Semi-Pelagianism, therefore, became official Romish doctrine. While we cannot trace this in any kind of detail here, it is not difficult to show that the entire erroneous structure of Roman Catholic sacerdotalism, especially as it emphasized the meritorious character of good works as necessary to justification, was a direct outgrowth of Semi-Pelagianism. Many evils in the church arose specifically from this erroneous position. The whole system of penance, of masses for the dead, of works of supererogation, of indulgences—all these and others were developed within the framework of fundamental doctrinal apostasy which began with Orange.

What is of importance to us is to notice that the evils in the church against which so many raised their voices were evils which had a doctrinal origin. This is, in part, why many efforts towards reform which preceded the reformation were doomed from the outset to failure. The doctrine of the church (with the exception of some of the pre-reform-

ers) was never called into question.[2] But the evils which sapped the spiritual life of the church could not be rooted out without doctrinal renewal. Reform movements which tried reformation without a return to the truth of Scripture failed.

But not only were the evils in the church the direct result of doctrinal error in a general way; but specifically, the evils in the church were rooted in errors of soteriology. At bottom the errors of Rome were errors which dealt with the truth concerning the work of salvation. While the Romish Church in the centuries preceding the reformation stood firmly in the tradition of Nicea and Chalcedon, this same Church strayed grievously from the doctrines of sovereign grace and the unmerited character of works.

Justification by Faith Alone: The Fundamental Principle of the Lutheran Reformation

It was into this church with these corruptions that Martin Luther was born. Born to God-fearing parents who were pious and faithful sons of the church, Luther was brought up in the tradition of the Romish faith as it had developed up until his day. Yet Luther was brought to face all these important questions of soteriology. He was brought to face them not first of all in the arena of theological debate, but he was forced to face them in the depths of his own soul. The church historian Philip Schaff writes: "In order to understand the genius and history of the German reformation we must trace its origin in the personal experience of the monk who shook the world from his lonely study in Wittenberg and made pope and emperor tremble at the power of his word."[3]

God began the work of reformation in Luther's soul. This very matter of salvation, not as an abstract theological truth, but as a question of the personal assurance of salvation, was for many years the main problem which Luther faced. He could arrive at no peace in his heart, no assurance of the love and favor of God. His days were as the

2 Cf. for example, the Council of Constance which met specifically to initiate reform in the Church, but which burnt Hus at the stake for doctrinal deviation.

3 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 7:105.

darkness of night and his thoughts were filled with fear and turmoil as he contemplated the just severity of God against sin and strove to bring his storm-tossed soul into the quiet haven of God's peace.

Yet as true as all this was, we must not suppose that the whole work of the reformation was the result of a spiritual crisis in Luther. It was not, as some have asserted, a movement launched because some monk from the Augustinian Order thought he had received a divine insight into a problem which particularly bothered him. It was not the imposition of a highly gifted man of a subjective experience upon a band of followers. This is the gist of the position taken by the Roman Catholic historian Philip Hughes. He writes in his book, *A Popular History of the Reformation:*

> He was now on the verge of his thirtieth year, and next year, taking up his work as professor in the faculty of theology in the university, he would, all unconsciously, begin the movement we have learned to call the Reformation.
>
> What that movement will chiefly be, in Luther's intention, is not a crusade to reform the moral lives of Catholics, clerics as well as layfolk, but rather a crusade against Catholicism itself, observant, conscientious, dutiful Catholicism, now considered to be a corruption of the Gospel of Christ. And on his own showing, according to his own account, the origins of his stupendous conviction lie in his own personal experience of the ineffectiveness and the mischievousness of Catholicism as a solution offered him for his spiritual troubles, and in his own divinely guided discovery of the true meaning of the religion of Christ. It is Luther, and not his opponents, who brings into court, as an important consideration, the experiences, the spiritual crises which he experienced in his life as a monk.[4]

This is a misinterpretation of the life of Luther and of his writings. It was not a mere subjective experience which launched the reformation. It must be remembered, on the one hand, that God wrought the reformation in Luther's soul by creating this intense struggle which consumed so much of his time in his earlier years. But, on the other hand, God led him through this deep and profound struggle in order

4 Philip Hughes, *Popular History of the Reformation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), 91.

to lead Luther away from the errors of the church of which he was a part and to bring him at last to the truth of Scripture.

Quite naturally, and upon the advice of others, Luther sought the cure for his spiritual maladies in the prescriptions of the church. He tried them all. He entered the Augustinian convent in Erfurt and sought peace in a life of monkish self-denial. He committed himself body and soul to the church and placed his salvation entirely in the hands of those who had promised to bring him to heaven. He walked the way of self-denial and imposed on himself all the rigorous exercises which his order required. He was faithful in penance and confession in the hopes that this would solve his problems. He himself tells us:

> I was indeed a pious monk and kept the rules of my order so strictly that I can say: If ever a monk gained heaven through monkery, it should have been I. All my monastic brethren who knew me will testify to this. I would have martyred myself to death with fasting, praying, reading, and other good works had I remained a monk much longer.[5]

> As a monk I led an irreproachable life. Nevertheless I felt that I was a sinner before God. My conscience was restless, and I could not depend on God being propitiated by my satisfactions. Not only did I not love, but I actually hated the righteous God who punishes sinners . . . . Thus a furious battle raged within my perplexed conscience, but meanwhile I was knocking at the door of this particular Pauline passage, earnestly seeking to know the mind of the great Apostle.[6]

But it was all to no avail. Every good work which the church prescribed he undertook to do. Every method laid down by the clergy as the sure way to God was tried again and again. But the ways in which the church led him went deeper into darkness and farther from the light of God's love and mercy. He found no peace.

It was from the Scriptures that he finally learned the truth. This knowledge did not come in a flash of insight, but only by way of long and arduous study. In 1508 Luther was appointed professor in the

5 Quoted from Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Reformation* (Harper and Row, 1964), 24.

6 Quoted from Hillerbrand, *The Reformation*, 27.

University of Wittenberg established but a few years before by Frederick the Wise. In 1512 he began to lecture in theology and studied especially the Psalms and the epistles of Paul. It was the phrase "the righteousness of God" which constantly attracted his attention. He had always thought that this phrase (found especially in Rom. 1:17 and 3:22) referred to God's essential righteousness and His consequent hatred of sin.

> Meanwhile, that same year I had again turned to the exposition of the Psalter, confident that after academic treatment of the Epistles of St. Paul to the Romans and Galatians and the Epistle of the Hebrews I was better trained. Certainly I had been possessed by an unusually ardent desire to understand Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. Nevertheless, in spite of the ardour of my heart I was hindered by the unique word in the first chapter: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it." I hated that word "righteousness of God," because in accordance with the usage and custom of the doctors I had been taught to understand it philosophically as meaning, as they put it, the formal or active righteousness according to which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unjust.[7]

But gradually Luther came to see that the phrase "The righteousness of God" referred to imputed righteousness which God gives to His people on the basis of the cross. He describes this insight as follows:

> At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "in it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, He who through faith is righteous shall live." There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which a merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God,

7 Quoted from Hillerbrand, *The Reformation*, 27.

> with which He makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which He makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.
>
> And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine's *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when He justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught. Armed more fully with these thoughts, I began a second time to interpret the Psalter.[8]

Luther later said, quoted in his *Table Talk*:

> The words "righteous" and "righteousness" of God struck my conscience like lightning. When I heard them I was exceedingly terrified. If God is righteous (I thought), He must punish. But when by God's grace I pondered in the tower and heated room of this building, over the words, "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (Rom. 1:17) and "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:21), I soon came to the conclusion that if we, as righteous men, ought to live from faith and if the righteousness of God should contribute to the salvation of all who believe, then salvation will not be our merit but God's mercy. My spirit was thereby cheered. For it is by the righteousness of God that we are justified and saved through Christ. These words (which had before terrified me) now became more pleasing to me. The Holy Spirit unveiled the Scriptures for me in this tower.[9]

And so, after a long and difficult struggle, Luther saw the glorious truth of Scripture that by the works of the law is no man justified before God, for the just shall live by faith. God led the troubled monk away from himself, away from his monk's cell, away from penance and indulgences, away from all works, away from the church itself, to

8 Quoted from A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 52.

9 Quoted from Wood, *Captive to the Word*, 53.

the foot of the cross of Calvary. The cross is the rock of justification. And it is by faith alone that the righteousness of God manifested in the cross becomes the portion of God's people.

Thus, the fundamental principle of Luther's life and of the whole Lutheran reformation was the truth of justification by faith. There is no student of the reformation who denies this. Schaff writes: "Henceforth the doctrine of justification by faith alone was for him to the end of life the sum and substance of the gospel, the heart of theology, the central truth of Christianity, the article of the standing or falling Church."[10] Luther himself said: "One article, the only solid rock, rules in my heart, namely, faith in Christ: out of which, through which, and to which, all my theological opinions ebb and flow, day and night."[11]

This principle of justification by faith was the tool in Luther's hand to attack the entire towering structure of Roman Catholicism. It was the weapon with which the stronghold of the pope was challenged. It was the banner that led the forces of the reformation into victorious battle with the strongest powers which Rome could summon to her aid. The whole corrupt institution of Roman Catholicism was shaken to its foundations by this fundamental principle of the truth. So it had to be. The doctrinal apostasy of Rome was particularly in the field of soteriology. The attack had to come at this point. All the evils in the church to a greater or lesser degree resulted from this cardinal doctrinal error; the reformation had to begin with a reaffirmation of the truth at this point.

Soli Deo Gloria: The Fundamental Principle of Calvin's Reformation

Yet it soon became evident that the reformation could not stop with Luther. That is, the reformation could not stop with the establishment of the truth of justification by faith. The structure of Biblical and reformed truth cannot be erected on the foundation of this principle of soteriology. This is not to say that the principle itself is not entirely Scriptural; there is no doubt that it is. Nor is this to say that Luther

10 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:124.

11 Quoted from James Atkinson, *The Great Light* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 109.

was wrong in emphasizing this principle. It was necessary to destroy the error of Rome. But the truth of justification by faith is a stone in the structure of the truth and not the foundation. It is a block in the wall but not the cornerstone. It is an integral part of the system of the truth, but it is not the heart which gives life to all.

That this was true also historically soon became evident even in the history of the reformation. While Lutheranism made rapid progress in Germany and other countries, it never produced the reformed faith. That is, it never became a system of beliefs which was in full harmony with the Word of God. There was good reason for this. Lutheranism, in spite of Luther, became essentially synergistic. Although Luther himself was not in any sense of the word a synergist, Philip Melanchthon, his close friend and co-worker, was. Under the influence of Melanchthon synergism was officially incorporated into the confessional standards of the Lutheran churches and continues to the present as an integral part of Lutheran theology. But synergism is not essentially different from Semi-Pelagianism. There is difference of emphasis, but not of principle. Synergism too speaks of salvation as a cooperative venture in which God and man both participate in the work of salvation. These synergistic ideas appeared early in the Lutheran reformation. No doubt Luther himself was free of them but his colleague was not.

There is something inevitable about this. If the truth of justification is taken as the foundation of the whole structure of the truth it is all but inevitable that synergism should appear in some form. This does not mean that the seeds of synergism are present in the truth of justification. But it does mean that it is impossible to maintain the principle of justification by faith alone in all its implications unless one sees it as a part only of the whole structure of the truth dependent itself upon other principles. The truth of soteriology, as important as it is, is not the most basic principle of the truth. It is not fundamental; it is not the cornerstone. It cannot stand if it is made such a principle.

As Schaff notes:

> The Lutheran system is a compromise between Augustinianism and Semi-Pelagianism. Luther himself was fully agreed with Augustine on total depravity and predestination, and stated the doctrine of the slavery of the human will even more forcibly and paradoxically than

> Augustine or Calvin. But the Lutheran Church followed him only halfway. The Formula of Concord (1577) adopted his doctrine of total depravity in the strongest possible terms, but disclaimed the doctrine of reprobation; it represents the natural man as spiritually dead like "a stone" or "a block," and teaches a particular and unconditional election, but also an universal vocation.[12]

For this reason, the reformation, if it was to be successful, could not stop here. It had to move on. It had to develop, and in another direction. Justification by faith had been necessary to overthrow the false and evil structure of Romanism. But the reformation had to take a different tack if it was to face the future. It was the weapon to destroy the enemy, the only weapon which could successfully do this. But it could not be the principle of further development.

It was because of this that God prepared a man in France, Calvin, to continue the cause of the reformation. He occupied his own place in the struggle and an important place it was. Schaff takes note of this:

> Revolution is followed by reconstruction and consolidation. For this task Calvin was providentially foreordained and equipped by genius, education, and circumstances.
>
> . . . Calvin, the Frenchman, would have been as much out of place in Zurich or Wittenberg, as the Swiss Zwingli and the German Luther would have been out of place and without a popular constituency in French-speaking Geneva. Each stands first and unrivalled in his particular mission and field of labor.
>
> . . . Calvin was twenty-five years younger than Luther and Zwingli, and had the great advantage of building on their foundation. He had less genius, but more talent. He was inferior to them as a man of action, but superior as a thinker and organizer. They cut the stones in the quarries, he polished them in the workshop. They produced the new ideas, he constructed them into a system. His was the work of Apollos rather than of Paul: to water rather than to plant, God giving the increase
>
> Calvin's character is less attractive, and his life less dramatic than Luther's or Zwingli's, but he left his Church in a much better condition. He lacked the genial element of humor and pleasantry;

12 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:541.

> he was a Christian stoic: stern, severe, unbending, yet with fires of passion and affection glowing beneath the marble surface. His name will never arouse popular enthusiasm . . . But he surpassed them in consistency of self-discipline, and by his exegetical, doctrinal, and polemical writings, he has exerted and still exerts more influence than any other Reformer upon the Protestant Churches of Latin and Anglo-Saxon races History furnishes no more striking example of a man of so little personal popularity, and yet such great influence upon the people; of such natural timidity and bashfulness combined with such strength of intellect and character, and such control over his and future generations. He was by nature and taste a retiring scholar, but Providence made him an organizer and ruler of churches . . . .
>
> Widely as these Reformers differed in talent, temperament, and sundry points of doctrine and discipline, they were great and good men, equally honest and earnest, unselfish and unworldly, brave and fearless, ready at any moment to go to the stake for their conviction. They labored for the same end: the renovation of the Catholic Church by leading it back to the pure and perennial fountain of the perfect teaching and example of Christ.[13]

Calvin never met Luther but knew of Luther and of Luther's teachings. While he was still a student in Paris, the shock waves of the reformation were rolling over France. He had studied the principles of the Lutheran reformation and had done this in the light of his own intimate knowledge of Roman Catholicism. He did this while still a member of the Romish Church and only committed himself to the cause of the reformation after careful consideration. He repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Luther and, in one of his most striking phrases, after the controversies with Lutheran theologians concerning the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, he wrote to Bullinger: "Often have I been wont to declare, that even though he were to call me a devil, I should still not the less esteem and acknowledge him as an illustrious servant of God."[14]

But the point is here that Calvin saw immediately that the reformation, while it had to begin with questions in the field of soteriology, specifically with the truth of justification by faith, could not possibly end there. If the gains of the reformation and the cause of the truth were

13 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:257-60.

14 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:661.

to be consolidated and moved forward, this had to be on a different principle than the principle of justification by faith. For, as important as that principle was, it could not serve as the real foundation for the reformed faith which was to be true to the Word of God.

Calvin was, above all, a biblical theologian. And with his intimate knowledge of Scripture, Calvin saw immediately that the most fundamental principle of all Scripture is the principle of theology. God stands on the foreground. The Scriptures are, above all else, the revelation of God. And God reveals Himself for His own glory. Hence, it is the knowledge of God which is basic. On this principle only could the reformation be secured. Rome's imposing structure was dashed to pieces by Luther's thunderings from Wittenberg; but upon these crumbled ruins could a new edifice, faithful to Scripture be reared, which was built upon the fundamental truth of God's glory.

Not soteriology but theology lies at the heart of all Scripture. In Volume I of the Courtenay Studies of Reformation Theology (The volume of John Calvin) J. I. Packer writes on "Calvin the Theologian." In his lecture he makes these comments:

> The layout of the 1559 *Institutio* shows us at once its scope and range. As the opening chapter, dating from 1539, explains, it is a treatise on the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves which is bound up with it. As in Scripture, so in Calvin, "knowledge of God" is a concept which unifies belief, experience, and conduct. It embraces both the knowing of God, which is religion, and what is known of, or about God, which is theology. It denotes an apprehension of God, not merely as existing but as being "for us" in grace, and of ourselves as being "for Him" in worship and service . . . .
>
> In making the knowledge of God his central theme, and presenting the reformed faith as a recovery of this knowledge—a truly religious theology, and a truly theological religion—Calvin was picking up Luther's early polemic against the scholastics, mystics, and merit-mongers, who thought to know God without knowing Jesus Christ. [15]

James Atkinson, in his book *The Great Light,* essentially agrees:

15 *Courtenay Studies in Reformed Theology 1: John Calvin*, edited by G.E. Duffield, translated by G. S. R. Cox and P. G. Rix (Appleford, UK: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), 155.

> From the structure of the book (*The Institutes*) as well as from Calvin's other writings, it is crystal-clear that Calvin's theology began from the conviction of the absolute transcendence of God and therefore of His total otherness in relation to the creature man. If Luther found his liberation in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Calvin found that same liberation in a passionate theocentrism, in a terrifying certainty of being mastered by God. Calvin, if not God-intoxicated, was certainly God-possessed. This doctrine of the unqualified sovereignty of God related to the consequent equally unqualified creatureliness of man, lies at the heart of Calvin's experience and theology. It further dominates all of Calvin's exposition and is the stumbling block his critics never negotiated.[16]

Anyone who has read Calvin knows that this is true. Calvin saw that Scripture is theocentric in the highest sense of the word. God reveals Himself. Hence the knowledge of God is all-important. But the knowledge of God through His revelation is for the purpose of the glory of His own name. *Soli Deo Gloria* was the theme of Calvin's life and his deepest theological principle. And from this it follows that God is sovereign in all that He does, for He does all things for Himself that "of him, and to him, and through him may be all things." God is above all, glorious and majestic. He reigns supreme in the heavens to accomplish His own purpose and realize His own glory. Hence, God's sovereign determination in the counsel of His will is of primary consideration. God determined to glorify Himself through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ Whom He would raise to power and glory in heaven through the way of the cross and the resurrection. On this principle rests the truth of predestination. And from this follows the sovereign character of the work of salvation as God performs it in Christ on behalf of His people. It is here that the truth of justification by faith must find its proper place and contribute its own part to the whole of the truth. Even this truth must, in the broad and sweeping scope of the revelation of God, be subservient to God's own glory. All things are for God's sake. God's glory stands at the heart of all Scripture. To it must all be subjected. For its sake all things are done in heaven and on earth. Not man and his salvation, not even man

16 Atkinson, *The Great Light*, 173.

justified by faith, is the most important thing that happens in history. God is glorified in His own works. What is not for the glory of God will never take place. What God determines to do in all His works is actually wrought that God may receive all glory forever and ever.

This is the genius of the reformer of Geneva. This is the work to which he was called and appointed. This is the divinely ordained role he played in the reformation.

To fail to put the truths of soteriology in this perspective is to run the grave risk of repeating the error of Rome and of falling into the heresies of some kind of Semi-Pelagianism. Only when the deepest principle of God's glory is firmly maintained can its corollary be preserved: God's absolute sovereignty in the work of salvation.

The Loss of Calvin's Fundamental Principle

The importance of this has been largely forgotten today. It is not our purpose in this essay to point this out in detail. It is sufficient to note the fact that, even in churches which parade their Calvinism with pride, this important emphasis which Calvin insisted upon was the key to the Scriptures is lost.

The emphasis today in many different forms falls upon man and his salvation. Hence even revelation is spoken of in terms of the kerygma. Those who maintain this (and they occupy a broad scope in the theological spectrum from liberals to conservatives within the reformed churches) maintain that the Scriptures cannot and do not give to us any knowledge of God as He is in Himself. This, these men insist, is not the purpose of Scripture. The purpose is rather to bring man to some confrontation, through the kerygma, with God.

This is, quite understandably, characteristic of those who deny the infallibility of the sacred Scriptures, who speak of the fact that the Word of God is in the Scriptures while denying that the Scriptures are the Word of God.

But it all leads to a certain relativizing of doctrine. Even such a theological conservative as Dr. Hendrik Hart, assistant professor of philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada, who himself professes to believe in the infallibility of Scripture can write at length of this. In a footnote to a discussion of this point he says,

> Theories of truth that speak of absolute objectivity make truth to be a conceptual matter of doubtful origin. Intellectualistic doctrines of truth cannot possibly account for the bibilical notion of truth as something to be done and lived. Truth primarily concerns man's relation to the Word of God and not his first of all having correct ideas or beliefs.[17]

This is not in the tradition of the reformation. Especially is it not in the tradition of the Calvin reformation. Nor is it the emphasis of Scripture. Scripture is the objective and infallibly inspired record of the revelation of God. It is through the Scriptures that God is known. He reveals Himself in order that through the knowledge of Himself He may have all the glory. This knowledge of God is itself eternal life: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom that hast sent" (John 17:3). And this knowledge of God as the principle of eternal life results in God's glory because God is the sovereign author of it in all the work of salvation.

Failure to maintain this truth has once again brought about a shift from a proper and scriptural emphasis on theology to an improper and dangerous emphasis on soteriology. This shift is so dangerous just because it cannot serve as an adequate guard against a repetition of the errors of Semi-Pelagianism. It is not strange then that the truth of sovereign grace as emphasized by Augustine and Calvin has been lost in these troubled times and that even the reformed churches have become mired in the heresies of Arminianism. Just as the strictly soteriological emphasis of the Lutheran reformation led to the synergism of Melanchthon and subsequent Lutheranism, so does the soteriological emphasis of our day lead to Arminianism. And Arminianism is incipient modernism—a fact that is becoming increasingly evident today.

Only a scriptural return to the theology of Calvin will rescue the church from disaster. Only a return to Calvin's wholly biblical system of truth will give even the reformed churches the right honestly before God to continue to commemorate the reformation.

17 Hendrik Hart, *The Challenge of Our Age*, Christian Perspective Series, 1967/1968, 62, footnote 19.

Book Reviews

God, Creation, and Human Rebellion: Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander from the Hand of Charles Hodge, by Archibald Alexander, ed. Travis Fentiman. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019. Pp. 192. $22.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781601787194. Reviewed by Marco Barone.

This book consists of the notes that Charles Hodge (1797–1878) took during the rather interactive theological lectures of his professor and friend Archibald Alexander (1772–1851). Hodge, who took his notes on white paper with relatively clear handwriting, wrote them in the form of questions and answers, for a total of five hundred.[1] The editor and his helpers transcribed Hodge's notes. *God, Creation, and Human Rebellion: Lectures Notes of Archibald Alexander from the Hand of Charles Hodge* is the final product of their work.

After the editor's preface and a foreword, the book contains an introduction by James M. Garretson that helpfully expounds the life, theology, and times of both Hodge and Alexander. This is how Garretson describes the "personal and intensely spiritual atmosphere" (xxix) of Hodge's academic experience with Alexander:

> The pervasive spiritual atmosphere present during weekly meetings in the "Old Oratory," was equally present in the formal classroom instruction. Study of theology always took place within this devotional context. Even the most metaphysical considerations were examined within this atmosphere; while speculation was eschewed, students were taught that theology, properly conceived, is doxological in nature and must be approached with a spiritual disposition in order to live all of life *coram Deo*. (xxix)

The above is undoubtedly true to those who generally know the tenor of Alexander's and Hodge's respective ministries and works. However, the volume under review exhibits, not Alexander's practical

1 The original manuscript can be found online at http://library logcollegepress.com/Hodge%2C+Charles+-+Lecture+Notes+of+Archibald+Alexander+in+Theology.pdf

theology, nor even his combination of theology and practice, but his theology in a very succinct form and in relatively simple words.

Hodges' notes are divided into seventeen chapters covering the following topics: philosophy of the mind, theology, revealed theology and prophecy, the inspiration of Scripture, the attributes of God, the Trinity, God's decrees, predestination, election, reprobation, creation, providence, angels, the covenant of nature or of works, the seals of the covenant, sin, and the human will.

From a dogmatical and exegetical point of view, this book is limited. These limitations are mostly explained by the nature of the questions and answers which, though many, are often telegraphically short. There are occasional exegetical and theological arguments, but they are overall rare. Finally, not all the main theological topics are discussed. To be fair, comprehensiveness was not the intention here, neither of the original notes nor of the modern transcription. Furthermore, brief and direct outlines of theology were and still are common. The point is, the reader who would like to have a more complete picture of Alexander's theology and piety will have to consult other works, such as, for example, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (1836), *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (1844), and *A Brief Compend of Bible Truth* (1846).

Historically, the book is certainly interesting. It is an incomplete though informative summary of Alexander's theology. Moreover, considering Alexander's influence on American Presbyterianism, the book can be considered a representative of classical Presbyterian theology in pre-Civil War America, with most of the theological tenets, and, therefore, the consequent disagreements that one might have with those tenets.

A fascinating element that transpires from this work is Alexander's philosophical mind. The chapters on the philosophy of the mind and on the will are two of the longest chapters in the book. That is not surprising, considering that since (and even before) the times of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and his *Freedom of the Will* (1754), the freedom of the will had been a significant topic of debate in America. Alexander shows himself to be very knowledgeable of some of the main philosophical issues of his times, especially those that had an impact on Christian theology and the church, for theological and

apologetic purposes. His inclination to metaphysical reasoning is also visible elsewhere, such as, for example, in *An Enquiry Into the Nature of Conscience* (1805). Simply looking at the table of contents of Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (1872–73) is sufficient to see that Alexander passed on to his pupil Hodges the conviction of the importance of philosophy for theology, at least in the realm of apologetics. The chapter on free will, however, is sometimes unclear, also on whether or not Alexander's references to secondary sources to Edwards and to the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid are necessarily pertinent. On one occasion, page 143, Alexander surprisingly misunderstands Edwards, fallaciously contesting an argument by Edwards against the Arminian view of the self-determination and indifference of the faculty of the will. Sadly, throughout the book the author and editors fail to provide references to the quotations from other authors.

This book will probably not be an easy read for the reader at a beginner's stage, especially if the book is not approached with an eye to historical theology and church history in America. That said, the book will make a good and succinct reference work for ministers and professors, as well as a good addition to the library of theology (and philosophy) enthusiasts.

Short of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Exploration of the Fall, by Mitchell L. Chase. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. Pp. xii + 213. $17.99. Softcover. ISBN: 9781433585098. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

The subtitle accurately describes the content and appeal of the book: "A Biblical and Theological Exploration of the Fall." In language readily understood by the layman, the book calls attention to and explains every aspect of the account of the fall in Genesis 3. This "exploration" consists of thirteen relatively short chapters from chapter 1 on "Sacred Space," to chapter 13 on "East of Eden." In between are chapters on "Two Trees," "That Ancient Serpent," "A Broken Covenant," "The Mother of All Living," and more.

The message is orthodox, viewing Genesis 3 as history. Such is the author's treatment of his subject that it is clear that if Genesis 3 is not history all of the rest of history as recorded in the Bible, culminating

in the coming of Jesus Christ, is meaningless at best and a wicked deception at worst. Apart from the historical fall, there was no sense in a coming of Jesus in His incarnation and suffering.

With regard to the specific aspects of the fall, Chase is generally sound. As created by God Adam's relationship to God was a covenant, and this covenant was not a contract, but a relationship of friendship. "Adam and Eve knew God as Yahweh. They were in fellowship with the Creator of all things. He had formed them and befriended them. He dwelt with them in a covenant relationship" (81). This conception of the covenant causes the author to be less than enthusiastic about the traditional doctrine of a "covenant of works."

The explanation of the main features of the account of the fall is rich. It is the purpose of the book to relate the fall of Genesis 3 to all the rest of the theology of the Christian faith, culminating in the coming of Jesus Christ and the glorification in Him of the saints. This is the profound reality of the fall as announced in the promise of the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. And this is the reality of the fall because of the sovereignty of God: "God's plan incorporated the fall" (192). God's purpose was to display a glory that exceeds the glory of God in Adam the first.

Explanation of certain aspects of the Genesis account of the fall is unusual, but always compelling. For instance, the judgment upon the woman includes barrenness and miscarriages, as well as the bearing and rearing of children who show themselves foolish. The sorrows of marriage for the female are not exclusively the physical pains of pregnancy and childbirth.

Chase cuts the knot of the difficulty of the second part of Genesis 3:16, the judgment on marital relations, by offering a different and defensible translation of the text: "your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (132-135). Marriage is naturally conflict between a male who rules for his own sake and a female who resists his rule.

The description of the garden of Eden as "sacred space" and the pursuit of this theme throughout Scripture are instructive.

The book's explanation/exploration of the naming of Eve, which means "life," or "living," by Adam is moving. The naming was not a "leap in the dark." Rather, it expressed hope springing from Adam's

faith in the promise of God in Genesis 3:15, that Eve would bring forth, millennia later, the seed who would crush the head of the serpent.

Adam and Eve came short of the glory of God. This was their sin. Their sin affected all of the human race, Jesus only excepted, and all of human history. But in the grace of the providence of God, it did so according to the purpose of God that believers exceed the enjoyment of Adamic glory in the sharing in the surpassing glory of God in Jesus Christ.

This is an edifying, and thoroughly enjoyable, book on a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. It is written for the Christian layman, although no minister will read it without profit. It is a good book to place in the hands of the student at a Christian college where, contrary to its claim to be Christian, denial of the historicity of Genesis 3 holds sway, with the justification, when pressed, that the matter is not that important anyhow.

Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith., by J. V. Fesko, Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. 272. $25.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9780801098901. Reviewed by Marco Barone.

J. V. Fesko is a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS). In the preface of *Reforming Apologetics*, he says: "I do not claim to be an expert in apologetics . . . . Nevertheless, I address theological and historical issues that pertain to the very foundations of the art and science of apologetics, and thus seek to reform aspects of the church's present-day apologetic enterprise" (xii). Additionally, he says that his book "is about retrieving the classical Reformed approach to defending the faith" (xii).

Reformation of apologetics in general and retrieval of the classical approach to apologetics in particular: these are the goals of this volume. One of the lengthiest parts of Fesko's attempt is his case against presuppositionalism in general and against Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) in particular. The result is this book, which has both merits and faults in that Fesko succeeds in *retrieving* but not necessarily in *reforming*.

Contents

Chapter one is about "The Light of Nature" (see Belgic Confession 2; Canons of Dordt 3-4.4; Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.1, 6; 10.4; 21.1). Fesko makes a strong historical case to prove that, according to the majority view of the Westminster divines, "the light of nature denotes three things: "(1) natural law, (2) human reason, and (3) God's natural revelation in creation" (13). For Fesko, this is important because "the light of nature denotes the book or order of nature written and designed by God—an important tool in defending the Christian faith . . . forgotten by many in contemporary reformed theology but regularly used by early modern reformed theologians" (13). Classical reformed apologists believe that there is a noetic effect on man due to the fall (15). However, the fall has not taken away the non-saving light or law of nature (Fesko seems to use them as synonyms), which include belief (either admitted or suppressed) in the existence of God and "a general knowledge of the difference between good and evil" (15). The use of reason ought to be limited but not discredited, because, though radically affected by the fall into sin, that is not the end of the story.

> Fallen human beings are incapable of embracing Christ in a saving manner by the power of unaided reason. There is no governing role for reason in accepting the person and work of Christ. On the other hand, when someone presents the truth of the gospel, the recipient must have a rational comprehension of the facts and what those facts mean. In this sense, reason has a role in salvation." (22-23)

One problem is Fesko's unqualified claim about Van Til's rejection of common notions (24): Van Til openly supports a qualified view of common notions,[1] as noted by James N. Anderson.[2] Another problem with Fesko's account (implicit in this chapter, but explicit later, see 120, 130, 181) is the lack of distinction between "common notions" and the idea of "common grace." The fact is that *notion* is an epistemological concept, while *grace*, though it has epistemological *effects*, is a soteriological concept. Equating the two is a category

1 Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th edition, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 190-91.

2 https://www.proginosko.com/2019/06/reforming-apologetics-the-light-of-nature/, accessed September, 2023.

equivocation in Fesko's account (a mistake which Fesko, ironically, shares with Van Til), especially considering his own distinction between the "*principia* (foundations) for general knowledge and for saving knowledge" (205-206).

In chapter two, "Common Notions," Fesko expounds and comments on Anthony Burgess' exegesis of Romans 2:14-15 to present more evidence to support his previous claims about natural law, reason, common notions, and the book of nature. The chapter starts dispelling the myth that Thomas Aquinas did not believe in the noetic effect of sin on human reason (32-34, and later in chapter 4). Both in this chapter and in the previous one, it is difficult to see anything that should put a presuppositionalist and a classicist in radical opposition.

Chapter three, "Calvin," aims to prove that Calvin held to a concept of natural law and was not opposed to using classical theistic arguments to prove the existence of God. Fesko claims that both Thomas and Calvin "employ scholastic methodology and terminology" and that Calvin "employed identical methodology and terminology [to scholasticism] in his own theology" (56). To say that Calvin at times used scholastic terminology and methodology is uncontroversial, but to claim unqualifiedly that Calvin used scholastic methodology and terminology is an unwarranted jump. In fact, Fesko only offers anecdotal evidence, that is, a few passages from Calvin where he sounds scholastic (54-56). Fesko's characterization of Van Til is not blameless (for example, the myth that in Van Til's epistemology the unregenerate can have no true knowledge of anything), and some of the claims about Calvin's apologetical methodology are controversial, and Anderson has already signaled several problems.[3] That said, Fesko is right in condemning the belief that "scholasticism" has a specific theological position: scholasticism is rather "a method of doing theology and does not predetermine specific doctrinal outcome and does not dictate pre-established roles for reason and revelation" (54, see 53-56 in general).

In the fourth chapter, "Thomas Aquinas," Fesko disproves the myth that Thomas' proofs for the existence of God "serve as the primary ground for Thomas' system, a rational stepladder that begins with

3 https://www.proginosko.com/2019/07/reforming-apologetics-calvin/, accessed September 2023.

reason and then rises to revelation" (74, see also 73). Although "from a reformed standpoint there are a number of problematic elements in Aquinas' soteriology and ecclesiology," in his general methodology "Aquinas argued from a foundation of Holy Scripture" (96). Because of his too-optimistic anthropology, Thomas does not argue from a view of autonomous reason unaided by grace and Scripture (Fesko quotes Thomas extensively on these issues). Fesko shows that Thomas' epistemology and apologetics (and consequently, a classicist approach to apologetics) are within the boundaries of orthodoxy, including a reformed one. Despite some minor disagreements, this is a refreshing chapter about Thomas.

In chapter 5, "Worldview," Fesko criticizes the worldview philosophy which he ascribes to Van Til and to presuppositionalism. Fesko is not criticizing any given use of the word and of the concept. He acknowledges "uses of the term and concept [that] are benign" since "all people have ways of looking at the world, and the same holds true of various philosophies and religions" (98) What Fesko is aiming at is historic worldview theory (HWT):

> [HWT] is a very distinct idea that began with nineteenth-century German idealism and includes the following characteristics: (1) the rejection of a common doctrine of humanity, (2) a single principle from which one deduces a worldview, (3) an exhaustive systematic explanation of reality, and (4) the incommensurability of competing worldviews. (98)

Fesko says that "the Bible does not portray fallen humanity as existing in complete epistemological antithesis with believers at every point" (120). Rather, "Christian and non-Christians possess a shared knowledge of the world and even God's existence; they share God-given common notions" (99). Regenerate and unregenerate "have commonly shared knowledge, which makes communication and dialogue possible," and the "non-Christian's problem is not primarily epistemological but ethical" (122). True, "all ideas ontologically originate from God, but this does not mean they all first come through Israel. We should not conflate ontology and epistemology" (122), or,

as he later says, the "*ordo docendi* (order of teaching) is not the same as the *ordo essendi* (order of being)" (179):

> Christians undoubtedly stand in antithesis to non-Christians, but not at every point of their existence. There is a place for common notions, not because we capitulate to sinful human autonomy, but because we rightly recognize that God has created all human beings in his image. This means that we can engage unbelievers in dialogue and have genuine communication with them because we share a common divinely given image and because, even in spite of sin and its noetic effects on human reason, we share common notions about God, the world, and even God's law. These common notions do not sideline the absolute necessity of the Spirit's sovereign work of grace in regeneration, the only means by which fallen human beings will ever accept the special revelation of the gospel of Christ. But these common notions mean that we do not stand in antithesis at every point of interaction with the unbeliever. (100)

Fesko makes many good points concerning the possible and actual dangers of HWT. That said, the chapter is problematic. The main problem of this chapter is that it seems at best a superficial exposition of Van Til's position. Fesko argues that the four mistaken principles of HWT are the same errors we find in Van Til. However, as explained above, it is not true that Van Til rejects a common doctrine of humanity (the *imago dei* in the broader sense, which includes common notions, for Fesko). Fesko's treatment of other theologians is also questionable.[4] It would take too long to go through all the misinterpretations of Van Til's and others' positions, therefore I refer the reader to Anderson's commentary of Fesko's chapter.[5]

4 For example, Emanuel Vogel Gerhart (1817–1904), James Orr (1844–1913), and K. Scott Oliphint. Relatedly, Fesko quotes Herman Bavinck to support many of his claims (see index, 239). But Bavinck himself used the term and concept of worldview numerous times, see, for instance, his *Philosophy of Revelation*, *Christian Worldview*, and the upcoming *Biblical and Religious Psychology* (November 2023, Reformed Free Publishing Association).

5 https://www.proginosko.com/2019/09/reforming-apologetics-worldview/, accessed September 2023.

In chapter five, "Transcendental Arguments" (TAG), Fesko sees the problem with presuppositionalism's transcendental arguments: "(1) Van Til engages in synthetic thinking; (2) some overemphasize the coherence theory of truth at the expense of the correspondence theory, (3) the TAG is wedded to outdated philosophical trends" (137-138).

The first criticism is fair. Van Til makes too much out of Thomas' use of Aristotelian categories. Words and concepts such as essence, person, nature, and many other concepts used by the church at large do not originate from Scripture, but they are good tools to explain its teachings. Similarly, Van Til uses concepts such as "concrete universal," "limiting concept," and God as "the Absolute" (144, these terms originate in German idealism). However, using this or the other sets of categories or methodology to explain the Bible does not necessarily constitute by itself an illicit mixture of God's teachings with human opinions. In fact, "broadly considered, Van Til and Aquinas employed a similar apologetic methodology. Both spoke to the philosophical trends of their day from the platform of the authority of Scripture: Aquinas spoke in an Aristotelian dialect and Van Til in an idealist one" (148).

The second criticism is empty. Besides mischaracterizing Van Til's epistemology, the fact is that TAG can both work within and are compatible with both theories of truth; it does not require any necessary commitment to only one of them.[6]

The third criticism also goes nowhere. True, "the TAG is a useful tool within the apologist's toolbox but is neither a silver-bullet argument nor the most biblically pure form of reformed apologetics" (137); the "TAG can be a useful argument but not at the expenses of the book of nature" (137); and "Christians need to be flexible, able to meet a host of beliefs rather than inflexibly locked into one philosophical form of argumentation" and to "employ arguments that fit the occasion" (156).

But Fesko claims that, considering the unprecedented level of skepticism and relativism in our postmodern society, "idealism [the philosophical framework of TAG] is no longer a dominant conversation partner" (155), and he asks: "What if the [unbelieving] person has not a coherent worldview but only an eclectic, postmodern assortment of beliefs? The TAG is likely not as useful in such a case" (156). But

6 https://www.proginosko.com/2020/01/reforming-apologetics-transcendental-arguments/, accessed September 2023.

postmodernists not only dismiss *coherence in truth* (defended by the TAG) but they also dismiss *correspondence of truth* (defended by classical theistic proofs). Therefore, the same precise criticism that Fesko raises against TAG can be made against the classical apologetic approach that Fesko defends. In fact, his criticism says nothing about either of them, and Fesko nowhere explains why his Aristotelian framework would be considered less "outdated" than an idealist one in the eyes of a contemporary.

That said, Fesko is generally right in saying that Van Til "borrowed elements of idealistic philosophy (which he considered formally true) and made necessary corrections to align them with Scripture . . . . His methodology bears a strong resemblance to Aquinas' use of Aristotelian categories to build a bridge to Muslim philosophers," and therefore Van Til "stand in a long line of theologians who have employed philosophy in this manner" (157).

Chapter seven, "Dualisms," is a lengthy critique of the complex thought of reformational philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977). The purpose of this chapter is to address the criticism of one of the most formidable opponents of classical reformed apologetics.

Chapter eight, "The Book of Nature and Apologetics," is essentially a brief presentation of classical apologetics. Knowledge and epistemology are not an end for themselves, but they were and are aimed at holy covenant fellowship with God through love for God and neighbor (195-201). Fesko points out that some confuse axiology with epistemology: the regenerate can and do know many true things about themselves and the world (epistemology) just like believers can, but "only the believer will rightly evaluate the *ultimate significance* of the existence of one of God's creatures and the truth of a mathematical formulation" (213, emphasis added). The Christian's appeal to theistic proofs, history, and nature in apologetics "is not in any way a capitulation to a so-called autonomous neutral zone; to appeal to these things is to appeal to *God's* revelation" because "Christians have two books . . . the book of nature and the book of Scripture" (214).

Fesko concludes the book by offering a few general guidelines about the key role of humility in apologetics, and how to make sure always to submit knowledge of the book of nature to the knowledge of the book of Scripture. However, the chapter contains the same

problems mentioned earlier regarding the previous chapters. Finally, again as in the previous chapters, nothing that Fesko says regarding the book of nature and its recovery and use in apologetics is necessarily in opposition to a presuppositionalist approach.

Conclusion

Positively, Fesko has *retrieved* reformed classical apologetics. He has clearly expounded and defended the apologetics and methodology of Thomas, Calvin, and the Westminster divines (chapters one to three). He has also defended Thomas from many inaccurate charges moved against him by many in the reformed camp, including Van Til (chapter four). He has successfully retrieved classical reformed apologetics in that he has shown that it is helpful and within the boundaries of reformed theology.

It is true that some have in fact treated the book of nature in an unnecessarily derogatory way, and much of what Fesko says is a welcome call to appreciate God's creation both for apologetics and piety. Indirectly, Fesko's book is also helpful to further realize how wrong is the unbiblical and Anabaptist understanding of *sola Scriptura* and of the sufficiency of Scripture that make the Scripture sufficient for *anything*. The proverbial example (113) is counseling and mental illness: since the Scripture is "sufficient," then doctors and professionals should not be consulted in such cases, never mind that the Scripture is sufficient specifically "unto salvation" (Belgic Confession 7).

Negatively, it is unclear how this book has *reformed* apologetics. Fesko is unsuccessful in showing the superiority of the classical over the presuppositional approach. Fesko's claims that presuppositionalism is at odds with Calvin and with Westminster are just as unconvincing as the claims of presuppositionalists who ascribe all sorts of errors to classical apologists and Thomas. Fesko's intention to be both straightforward and fair cannot be doubted, and he has written an impressively scholarly book into which he has poured a lot of time and love. But, as a scholar who emphasizes the importance of studying and understanding the sources, he should be as concerned when Van Til (or the likes) is misrepresented as he is when Thomas (or the likes) is misrepresented. Though Fesko might be right in lamenting that "the present climate has become one of outright hostility to classical Reformed theology"

(191), his mischaracterizations of some of his opponents will contribute (and have contributed) to feeding the unhealthy argumentative climate that he dislikes. Clearly this was not Fesko's intention, and, hopefully, his book will produce constructive discussions.

Fesko's cause is also damaged by his generalized claims about presuppositionalism's alleged insufficiency to use the book of nature for apologetics. It seems obvious that associations such as *Answers in Genesis*, *Creation Ministries International*, and *The Institute for Creation Research* as well as some of their authors and collaborators, though not necessarily espousing classical apologetics, offer better and clearer ways and methods to "recover the book of nature" for apologetics than Fesko's approach. Conversely, as Fesko himself acknowledges, there is nothing intrinsic to classical apologetics that prevents anyone from using TGA. Finally, the intended reformation of apologetics towards a classical approach remains a question mark because Fesko's book does not present a defined method to move in that direction.

I disagree with both Van Til and Thomas on several different but essential theological points. However, their apologetic approaches *formally* considered are within the boundaries of reformed orthodoxy and do not bind anyone to subscribe to a specific set of distinctives, either Thomas' or Van Til's. Since orthodoxy is not necessarily at stake here, the constant misunderstandings contained in Fesko's book are instances of unnecessary "I am of Paul/Apollos/Cephas" controversies, just like the misunderstandings of classical apologetics that Fesko rightly opposes in this very book. Therefore, I think a more comprehensive and integrative approach is to be preferred.

For those who are interested in reading an academic overview of the state of the debate about apologetics within reformed circles from a classicalist point of view, this book is a good source. To others who do not share such interest, and to believers in the pews who want an accessible presentation of classic apologetics, I suggest looking elsewhere.

Biblical Reprobation: A primer on the most hated and neglected doctrine, by Sonny L. Hernandez. Lexington, KY: independently published, 2022. Pp. 109. $8.99. Softcover.; $2.99. Kindle. ISBN 9798362930769. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

If the readers of this journal labor under the misapprehension that the belief of the decree of sovereign reprobation and, much more, the vigorous defense of the doctrine against even a weakening of the truth of reprobation, are to be found only among a few theologians of Dutch reformed extraction in Western Michigan and similar redoubts of creedal reformed theology in the United States, *Biblical Reprobation* will correct the misapprehension. God has the confession of His sovereignty in salvation and damnation in more places and among more churches than are dreamt of in the philosophy of reformed, and other Calvinistic, Horatio's.

Dr. Sonny L. Hernandez is obviously not of Dutch descent. Just as obviously, the location of his pastorate—Kentucky—is not a midwestern USA center of the reformed faith, carrying on the Dutch, Dordtian tradition.

But Dr. Hernandez's book is a solid, uncompromising confession and defense of the doctrine of the eternal, sovereign decree of reprobation confessed in the Canons 1.15. The author begins with a definition:

> In accordance with His free and immutable will and glory, God actively and unconditionally reprobated the wicked for hell (everlasting conscious torment), and thus has an unremitting hatred towards them, which can never be eradicated. (18)

After examination of a number of passages of Scripture that teach reprobation, Hernandez adds,

> Therefore, God actively and unconditionally predestined the elect for heaven, and He actively and unconditionally predestined the wicked for hell. God loves the former (elect) and hates the latter (reprobates). (36)

The implications of the scriptural doctrine of reprobation are that "God does not desire to save reprobates, God does not love reprobates,

God does not give grace to reprobates, and God never offers salvation to reprobates" (43).

Hernandez demands that reprobation be preached. He judges silence about the decree as virtual denial of the doctrine. Rightly, he notes that silence prevails among the "moderate Calvinists," who predominate in professing Calvinist churches. Rightly also, he observes that these "moderate Calvinists will not teach on reprobation because it stands in opposition to the well-meant offer" (79).

As the subtitle indicates, the short book is a "primer." As a primer, the book's treatment of the subject is simple and, therefore, within the mental grasp of even the Christian who is little developed in Christian theology. Reformed young people will grasp and benefit from the book's explanation of reprobation. In addition, every chapter is followed by a series of questions pertinent to the subject of the chapter. For example, chapter four on the "equal ultimacy" of election and reprobation is followed by twenty-five questions, including the question, "Does Romans 9 teach single predestination?"

The small book—only slightly longer than 100 pages—carefully explains reprobation with abundant reference to, and explanation of, pertinent passages of Scripture. The outstanding feature of the book is its compelling demonstration and defense of the doctrine of reprobation by exegesis of especially the Greek New Testament. The book also engages in vigorous polemics with "moderate Calvinists," by which terminology Hernandez understands confessing Calvinists who nevertheless promote the theory of common grace and the doctrine of a "well-meant offer of the gospel." Hernandez judges this doctrine of a saving love of God for all humans in a desire to save them all by this offer to be incipient, if not developed, Arminianism.

Adding to the power and worth of the book is an appendix consisting of a profound lecture by Herman Hoeksema, "The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel" (83-99). This essay may well be the most insightful, comprehensive, and brilliant brief, article-length treatment of reprobation, positive and negative, ever written. To it, Hernandez is obviously indebted, as his inclusion of the piece is the acknowledgement.

The reformed orthodoxy, and worth, of the book are not challenged by the following questions. First, when affirming the sovereignty of

God with regard to sin, is "cause" the right word and idea to express this sovereignty? "God is the one who caused Adam to sin in 2 Samuel 24:1" (64, where "Adam" should be "David"). True, Hernandez immediately quotes the text, which has "moved," a word and idea similar to "caused." The Hebrew has "instigate," "incite," or "induce," all which possible meanings are very much similar to "cause." Nevertheless, does not "cause" in our day carry the notion of forcing one to sin apart from his own will? This is a question, not only for Hernandez, but also for many who confess the doctrine of reprobation in truth. Is "cause" the best way to express the truth of God's sovereignty regarding sin, and regarding the sin of Adam in particular?

Second, Hernandez's treatment of the "equal ultimacy" of reprobation with election argues, rightly, that reprobation is equally eternal and sovereign with election, as the second, inseparable aspect of the one decree of predestination. Should he not point out that election is the main aspect of the decree, whereas reprobation is secondary in importance, serving election? The two aspects of the one decree are not equally ultimate with regard to their significance whether in the mind of the church or in the mind of God.

And, third, is it necessary so radically to condemn the use of "permission" and "passing by" as the explanation of the decree of reprobation as does Hernandez: "Moderate Calvinists [explain reprobation as referring] to those whom the Father had passed by or left to themselves. This compromising approach . . . " (59). Again: "Passive language (God permitted . . .) is a doctrinal term that comes from Arminians . . . " (66). However, the Canons of Dordt describe reprobation this way: "some only are elected, while others are passed by . . . [whom] God . . . hath decreed to leave . . . leaving them in His just judgment to follow their own ways . . . " (Canons 1.15). Article 16 of the Belgic Confession likewise speaks of reprobation in terms of God's "leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves." Hernandez is an ardent supralapsarian. But is there not room in his theological tent for the sound infralapsarian of Dordt? Should there not be room? Did not Dordt authoritatively make room?

The observations implicit in these questions in no wise challenge the orthodoxy or lessen the worth of this solid, sound, simple explanation and defense of God's awesome decree of reprobation—Calvin's

"*decretum horribile.*" The questions rather respond to Hernandez's volume as to an invitation to reconsider the creedal doctrine of reprobation, as well as being a call to respond to the contemporary corruption of the doctrine.

Our day is a time of the ascendency of the swallowing up of genuine Calvinism by what Hernandez calls "moderate" Calvinism (of which R. C. Sproul is a prominent example), which detests reprobation and as much as possible reprobates the doctrine (thus also rejecting biblical election). In fact, substantiating Hernandez's contention that the present is a time of the deliberate silencing of the confession of reprobation is the little-known reality that reformed churches are taking decisions permitting their prominent theologians to dissent from the doctrine of their creeds concerning predestination. Hatred of the doctrine of reprobation is close to the heart of this dissent, and of the permission to dissent. Remarkably, there is very little, if any, explicit, blunt, thorough response, defending the decree, such as *Biblical Reprobation* is. All of these factors powerfully called this book into being. They likewise make the reading of Hernandez's book urgent for those who confess the reformed faith.

The Beginning and End of All Things: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation, by Edward W. Klink III. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 183. $17.99. Softcover. ISBN 9780830855223. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

The book offers much that is sound and attractive to the reformed, covenantal thinker. As a "big picture" man, the author sets forth the main theme of the entire Bible. This theme is the covenant, even if the covenant is, according to the author, that of Meredith Kline. Klink demonstrates how the covenant binds together creation, redemption, and the last things (eschatology). The message of the Bible, under the overarching theme, is "God's creation project." This means that the creation of the world, as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2, had as its goal the fulfillment of the covenant of creation in the covenant of the end, by way of the redemption of the creation by Jesus Christ. "The

central detail in God's creation project is the coming of Jesus to his creation" (95).

Repeatedly, the author states that Jesus was not "Plan B," but "Plan A," in God's counsel when He created the world and the first Adam. "Redemption was part of the plan of creation from the beginning" (88). "Jesus was always Plan A" (106). The fall of Adam, and in him of the human race, was "the process by which God had always intended to complete his creation project" (117).

In the development of this profound theme, the author engages in fascinating, often instructive exegesis of Scripture. The book is biblical theology. Compelling is the explanation of the Old Testament that argues that Israel was prophet, priest, and king of God (84-86). On occasion, the exegesis stretches the imagination, for example, in the comparison of the garden of Eden with its purported realization in the gardens of Jesus' capture and resurrection (102, 103).

The terminology is sometimes crude, if literally correct and catching: "[In the incarnation] God has skin in the game" (96).

Klink's major concern is the minimizing by contemporary Christians of God's redemption and perfection of the earthly creation. They betray this weakness, Klink thinks, by speaking of death as a being taken out of this world and by failing to anticipate the coming perfection of the work of salvation as Christ's renewal of the earthly creation, describing it rather as the destruction of the world.

It is this major, and often repeated, critique of the thinking of contemporary Christians that occasions uneasiness in this reviewer. A concern for the renewal of the earth overshadows the emphasis of the Bible on the salvation of the elect believer, whether the perfection of his salvation is described as being taken out of this world or as Christ's coming down into this world for him. And the beginning of this salvation is definitely "spiritual." Nor does the description of it as "spiritual" betray an incipient Gnosticism.

This uneasiness is heightened by the application Klink makes of his theme to the thinking and behavior of the reader. Vague as the application is, it is exclusively the care that the Christian must have for the welfare of the earth: for the creation of Genesis 1 and 2, for the earthly creation also redeemed by Christ, and for the earth that will share in the renewal of the children of God at the end (165-174).

If the application is not to the earth exclusively, it is to the earth primarily. The application of the book's main theme, namely, God's creation project, is "care for creation" (170). To the author himself, this application of the message of the book immediately raises the subject of the world's "gospel" of opposition to "fracking and fossil fuels" (170). This application sounds suspiciously like the "holy life" of the secular advocates of the care of the "green earth" of our day. The earth with its bounties is not the home of man, created for the service of man, but an end in itself. Pastors must "regularly teach Christians that the created world is not a means to an end but included in the end itself, the renewal of all creation which includes the earth" (170, 171).

This application of the reality of the covenant of God with His elect is radically different from the Bible's application to the life of the believer of the covenant of God in Jesus Christ: fear God and keep His commandments. The commandments are "Love God!" and "Love the neighbor!" "Love the earth!" is noticeably missing from Jesus' summation of the law.

A matter of surprise, and disappointment, is the book's falling back on a common grace of God for the carrying out of what it presents as the chief calling of the Christian in God's creation project. In the concluding section of the book, concerning "New-Creation Thinking about the Christian Life," Klink proposes the doctrine of common grace for the right ordering of the Christian life on behalf of God's creation project (169). For this all-important aspect of the Christian life, "[pastors must] teach the doctrine of common grace regularly" (169). The astounding impression is left that the (special) grace of God in Jesus Christ does not create, empower, and control the "physical life (the real and lived-in world)" of Christians (169).

Why does not the (special) grace of God in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ empower this main feature of the Christian life? Why, if Christ is indeed central in God's creation project, does He not function as central by His (special) grace?

What an anomaly: new creation thinking about God's single creation project, having as its goal the new creation in Christ Jesus, powered by a grace devoid of Christ!

An Infinite Fountain of Light: Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century, by George Marsden. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023. Pp. xii + 163. $26.00. Hardcover. ISBN 9781514006627. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

This slim book on the life and doctrine of the renowned Puritan, Jonathan Edwards, by the acclaimed church historian, George Marsden, will introduce Edwards, particularly his theology of God as beauty, to one little acquainted with Edwards, but who desires to learn his theology. It will also, no doubt, deepen the knowledge that even the disciple of Edwards possesses, as well as increase his love of the New England Puritan and confirm his commitment to Edwards' theology of experience.

As the title itself indicates, it is the purpose of the book to explain what Edwards meant by his doctrine of the outstanding virtue of God that Edwards described as God's being an infinite fountain of light, to which the chief response of the believer is delight in God with an accompanying joy. Edwards charged, or feared, or both, that Reformed church members do not do justice to the required and precious joy in God, and suffer the consequences in their spiritual life. The consequences include the lack of assurance of salvation.

Although Marsden does not emphasize this, it is of special interest to the Reformed reader whether Edwards confessed the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. The author simply identifies Edwards as "explicitly Reformed" and even as "strongly Reformed." What comes out in Marsden's description of Edwards' theology of salvation is that God irresistibly draws certain sinners, in distinction from others, by their sheer delight in Him as an "infinite fountain of light." The sinner joys in God as revealed in Christ Jesus and, therefore, comes to God in faith. The coming to God is more joy in Him than it is knowledge and trust. But knowledge and trust constitute faith. And the Bible proclaims that the elect is saved by faith.

Marsden also places Edwards in his time and culture. Of special interest is the relationship of Edwards with Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield. The relationship with the ungodly, freely fornicating Franklin, at whose sexual sinfulness, another source tells us, even the French marveled, is dubious. The relationship with Whitefield

brings to the fore the spiritual "awakenings," or revivals, of Edwards' time. Edwards was very much committed to these awakenings both in theology and in practice. In his account of these awakenings, Marsden is cautious. He recognizes their deviation from church order in that the instituted church was not involved, much less in charge. He quotes the churchman Charles Chauncy to this effect. Marsden acknowledges the dangers that plagued the movement of the awakenings. Nevertheless, he approves them as genuine workings of the Holy Spirit.

Especially Whitefield was powerful and apparently effective in the awakenings in the United States. Gifted with an enormous voice and with an appealing persona, he spoke to crowds of some 30,000 in the open field and reached a huge percentage of all the inhabitants of the east coast of the United States. His gospel message, purportedly, like Edwards', was Calvinism.

A sermon of Edwards on Matthew 16:17, illustrating both his solid manner of preaching and his theology of "a divine and supernatural light," is added as a welcome, even edifying, appendix.

This reviewer, although profiting from the book, comes away from the reading of it with three questions. First, how did Edward's falling upon the notion of God as light and a delight solve for him the struggle he had with God's sovereignty in salvation and damnation? This is the impression left by Marsden. That God is light and a delight, to whom believers respond with joy, does not do away with the doctrine of double predestination, which doctrine deeply troubled Edwards at the beginning of his ministry. Did Edwards, in fact, for all practical purposes, abandon the doctrine of predestination?

> In addition to his doubts about himself were his [Edwards'] questions regarding Calvinist teachings. "From my childhood up," he wrote in his later narrative of his spiritual journey, "my mind had been wont to be full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased, leaving them eternally to perish and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me." (43)

The resolution of his struggle with predestination, according to Edwards himself, was not faith's submissive knowledge of this doctrine, but "somehow coming to see God's sovereignty in a much broader

light." This "broader light" was not the bright light of Romans 9, but "quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty, than I had [earlier]." It was "his [Edwards'] experiences of an 'inward, sweet delight in God and divine things'" (44). Evidently, sweet delight in God, as conceived by Edwards, overcame the sour, ill-smelling doctrine of predestination as conceived by the Holy Ghost.

Second, how do the evidences, or signs, of salvation proposed and explained by Edwards in his *Religious Affections* and that were put forward to provide assurance of salvation on the part of multitudes of doubting (possible) Christians harmonize with the Reformed confession that faith *is* assurance (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 21)? Is it possible that Edward's and the Puritan's listing of all these proofs and evidences did more to create and deepen doubt than to bring about assurance? The book lists these evidences of salvation and explains them in a chapter titled, in part, "How Do We Tell?" The implication is that the member of the church is (constantly?) conducting nervous self-examination: "Am I saved, or lost?"

And, third, exactly what does the author have in mind with his assertion—subtitle of the book—that Edwards has application to the twenty-first century? Is it cultural or theological? If the reference is to Edwards' message of delight in God as the fountain of light, should it not be spelled out how the church today lacks this message?

Five Views on the New Testament Canon, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Benjamin P. Laird. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022. 287 pages. $24.99. Softcover. ISBN 978-0-8254-4727-3. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

The canon of the New Testament is an area of renewed interested in New Testament scholarship. Scholars face questions such as: How was the canon formed? Is it authentic, divinely inspired, and authoritative? If so, in what sense?

This book gives a bird's-eye view of various ways of answering the questions. In the introduction, the editors give a brief history of the recent scholarship. They also isolate four controverted issues relating to the formation of the New Testament and its authority for the church today, which issues this book's contributors address: Did the human

writers understand their writings to be inspired and authoritative? Which factors prompted the forming of the canon? By what process was the canon formed? And were the New Testament books really written by first-century apostles?

The second and third points regard historical matters. Weightier matters are imbedded in the first and fourth questions: are the twenty-seven books of the New Testament truly God's inspired, authoritative, and sufficient revelation to His people in every age? For if the apostles did not, after all, write the New Testament books, and if these books are not what the church has long understood them to be, how should we interpret them? And why should we even bother?

The first section of the book contains presentations of five different viewpoints on these matters. Darian Lockett (Talbot School of Theology) presents the conservative evangelical position; David Nienhuis (Seattle Pacific University and Seminary) gives the progressive evangelical view; Jason BeDuhn (Northern Arizona University) provides the liberal protestant view; Ian Boxall (The Catholic University of America) presents a Romish Catholic perspective; and George Parsenios (Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology) contributes the Eastern Orthodox perspective.

Each of these five respond to each other in the second section of the book. The book concludes with the editors' observations and analysis of what the five contributors have said.

The Canon's Historical Formation

The history of the formation of the New Testament is itself a subject of interest. The conservative evangelical contributor focuses on the scholarship regarding that topic, rather than the actual history. The other four contributors summarize the history itself. The five contributions are distinct in three areas.

The first regards why the early church recognized these books to be canonical: Was it because they were inspired and authoritative at the time of their writing? Or was it because the church later saw fit to use them as such? Nienhuis and BeDuhn promote the latter view. Nienhuis concludes that the New Testament books "were not written as Scripture *per se* but *became* Scripture as they were gathered together into fruitful relationship with other texts" (91). BeDuhn indicates that

the main function of a canonical passage or book was the church's use of it in worship (103); its authority was not rooted in its origin by divine inspiration, but by the church's decision to use the book in an official way.

The second difference regards the timing of the fixing of the canon. Most contributors recognize the matter was settled by the end of the fourth century, but Parsenios extends the matter well into the 1600s (172).

The third regards the fundamental principle that the church used to determine what books were canonical. BeDuhn considers the criterion to be practical: the church thought these books useful for worship. Parsenios judges it to be "tradition," which in eastern orthodox circles means the practice of the church (169, 174), itself guided by the Holy Spirit (175). Boxall finds the answer in the human writers (they were apostles) and audience (the catholic church).

Authority and Inspiration

Lockett defines inspiration as "the confession of divine-human action in the production of the Scriptures" (58). He does not explain how "divine-human action" results in what is exclusively the *divine* word. His view of Scripture's authority and inspiration is sound, and he refers to Calvin and Bavinck. Though he is brief and insufficient, those with a high regard for Scripture can appreciate what he says in this section.

Nienhuis is briefer yet. Scripture consists of writings of men; God uses these writings for sanctifying purposes; the goal of reading Scripture is the reader's encounter with God (82). This certainly reflects the *progressive* view of Scripture, deficient in its understanding of organic, verbal, plenary, and graphic inspiration, with the authority to do what 2 Timothy 3:14-17 say it does.

The liberal perspective is that Scripture is the collection of "humanly composed records of the spiritual experiences and insights" of early Christians (112). Scripture's authority is based on the recognition that these humans had encounters with God (113). Consequently, some of the New Testament is time-bound, not authoritative for us today (115), and contains apparent contradictions that are difficult to resolve (116).

Boxall defends the *authority* of the New Testament books in a way that Christians should appreciate, but gives the characteristic Romish *reason* for their authority: the official recognition of the church that they are authoritative (144).

The Canon's Hermeneutical Significance

Lockett posits that the collection and arrangement of the canon influences interpretation. He assumes that interpretation proceeds according to one of two higher-critical methods: historical-critical reconstruction, or canonical interpretation. The interpreter first determines the original intent of the text, then "recontextualizes" it, that is, decides how to apply it to today's context. Lockett relies on the work of Brevard Childs, an advocate of a higher-critical method of interpretation.

Nienhuis reminds us that we must interpret according to the confessions, the rule of faith (97). The immediate purpose of interpretation is personal to the reader: the canon "*works on the reader* who abides long before its mirror—it calls and cajoles, it inspires and frustrates, it smooths and makes rough—in order that the Word might cleave an open space within the reader for the Spirit to do her sanctifying work" (96).

Has the Holy Spirit now become a *her*? And how can one have any foundational guidelines for interpretation if all that really matters is how the passage promotes my sanctification?

BeDuhn suggests that observing a passage's grammar and historical context is not enough; we must know what assumptions the human writer brought to the text. The text does not mean today what it meant to its original audience; our cultures are very different. Interpretation requires us first to recognize our own needs, then interpret the text to meet that need. BeDuhn leaves the reader with the impression that this is difficult, and the reader comes away wondering: just *how do we do that*? And, *does that not increase the risk of twisting the text to mean what it really cannot*?

Boxall presents four issues to face when interpreting: understand the distinction between the canonical and extracanonical books, read Scripture through the rule of faith, relate a passage to other canonical passages, and observe the canon's shape and order. Illustrating these issues, he uses Revelation as a case study.

Parsenios emphasizes that Scripture is unified in its message, and both teaches and illustrates that God condescends to humans. But in the end, how a person lives affects what Scripture means for him: "to the extent that the interpreter lives a life that gradually elevates him from earthly to heavenly concerns, the deeper unity of Scripture will become clearer, and the exercise of reading Scripture will result in an ascent toward God" (187).

Conclusion

Porter and Baird provide a survey of different approaches to the nature of the New Testament canon and interpretation. The survey is helpful; many approaches exist, and here is a brief introduction to five of them.

Yet the various contributors help us understand why so many preachers have a difficult time really *preaching* the Scriptures: they have bought into higher-critical views of Scripture and Scripture interpretation. Those who reject a sound doctrine of inspiration are not able to interpret Scripture rightly.

Nowhere does the book claim to include *every* view regarding the nature of Scripture and its interpretation. Yet the absence of one particular view is glaring, on account of how many still hold to it: there is no chapter devoted to the historic, confessional view of Scripture and Scripture interpretation as these were espoused by the Protestant reformers and still are espoused by "conservative" Presbyterian and Reformed churches ever since. This view recognizes the errors inherent in every higher-critical method of interpreting Scripture. It is, in many respects, different from the view promoted by Lockett.

The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God, by Vern Poythress. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2020. Pp. 728. $49.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781629956510. Reviewed by Marco Barone.

Vern Poythress is professor at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, PA). This lengthy book is divided into forty-eight chapters, distributed among eight parts, plus an introduction, two

closing chapters before the appendixes, and five appendixes. The overarching goal is to present what the author thinks is the best way to approach the mystery of the Trinity and all the challenges that this doctrine may pose. Poythress suggests approaching the study of God, not by starting with God's attributes and then moving to the doctrine of the Trinity, but vice-versa, by deducing God's attributes from His trinitarian revelation of Himself.

Contents

In the Introduction, "God's Attributes and the Trinity," the author briefly lists and addresses some of the difficulties that he will address later. Here we learn some of his guiding principles, among which we read: God's works *ad extra* reflects His works *ad intra* (xxvi), a doctrine of analogy (xxvii), and the view that man is the ectype (a derivative instance reflecting an original) of the archetype God (xxvii).

Part 1, "Beginning to Consider God" (chapters 1-2), sets forth the general context of the doctrine of the Trinity, both biblically and theologically. It also contains a brief defense of the knowability of God.

Part 2, "Classical Christian Theism" (chapters 3-9), deals with some of the divine attributes: absoluteness, infinity, omnipresence, eternity, immutability, the knowledge of God, and simplicity. Particularly interesting and edifying are Poythress' discussions of divine infinity (chapter 4) and his practical applications of the doctrine of simplicity (75-76).

Part 3, "The Trinity—Mysteries in Diversity" (chapters 10-12) is an exposition of the biblical teaching of the unity *and* plurality of God. Together with a doctrine of the coinherence of the three persons (92), the idea that *ad intra* is reflected in *ad extra* reappears (85-86).

Part 4, "The Trinity and Language" (chapters 13-18), is a fascinating exposition of Poythress' conviction that language has its origin and best explanation in the unity and diversity of the God of the Bible. This applies to both common words and technical words for the theological science. Formally, that a word (a unity) has meanings (diversity) is ultimately a reflection of the archetypal unity and diversity of the Trinity (158). Concretely, this applies not only to all and any word (including those that have abstract or non-living referents), but also

and especially to realities such as *love* and *language* that ultimately reflect the God who loves Himself and speaks to Himself (131).

Part 5, "Philosophical Conundrums" (chapter 19-24), appears rather abruptly. It is mostly criticism of Aristotle and his categories. The chapters are a rollercoaster of fair points mostly aiming at encouraging carefulness in language when it comes to theological terminology (chapter 19), understandable concerns (205-206), and inconsequential worries. At points, Poythress is plain careless, if not absurd, with the language he uses.[1] Then, Poythress wrongly equates the Aristotelian ontological concept of potentiality with the teleological concept of purpose (254-255), equivocates Aristotelian's ontological accidents with the epistemological concept of accidental (267), and equivocates the ontological concept of essence with the teleological and eschatological concept of essence of history as it is in the incarnation and work of Christ (272). Even though some things in Aristotle do not harmonize with the Christian faith, one could still ask why Aristotle deserved six chapters with criticisms of variable degrees of questionability and relevancy. The next part of the book answers that question.

Part 6, "Challenges in Classical Christian Theism" (chapters 25-34), is mostly aimed at Thomas Aquinas', Francis Turretin's, and Stephen Charnock's respective discussions on the attributes of God. Though there are good points appearing here and there in this section, they are buried under lengthy and mostly unsuccessful criticism of those three theologians.

Poythress claims that Thomas' view of human reason "could be understood" (294) as autonomous reason involving "a fixed structure innate in the nature of reason, rather than a divine activity" (294); even

1 "One of the most basic issues for life is whether the world is ultimately personal or impersonal…We still have the difficulty that Aristotle's philosophy as a whole thinks of the ultimate nature of the world as impersonal… If *substance* becomes an ultimate category, it suggests that the world is ultimately impersonal. And then that impersonalistic atmosphere continues with everything else that is to be built up on top of the idea of substance. The danger of impersonalism is real and pressing" (209-210). Poythress seems to be complaining against not making the ultimate *ground* of the world personal (that is, God), but complaining that Aristotelianism makes the world impersonal in nature is simply nonsensical, because in fact the cosmos is not personal, it is not a person.

though the passage from Thomas that Poythress himself quotes does *not* say that. Poythress quotes Thomas,

> All things are said to be seen in God and all things are judged in Him, because by the participation of His light, we know and judge all things; for the light of natural reason itself is a participation of the divine light; as likewise we are said to see and judge of sensible things in the sun, i.e., by the sun's light. Hence Augustine says (*Soliloq*. i, 8), *The lessons of instruction can only be seen as it were by their own sun, namely God*. As therefore in order to see a sensible object, it is not necessary to see the substance of the sun, so in like manner to see any intelligible object, it is not necessary to see the essence of God.[2]

Poythress simply says that Thomas "could be understood" (294) like that. Even though Thomas is saying the exact opposite of what Poythress accuses him of, the latter provides no evidence for his claim. Then Poythress attempts to paint Thomas' view of God's attributes against that of the reformers (chapter 29), though not one single quotation from any reformer is given.

Chapter 30 is against Turretin. The latter "is self-consciously Reformed. The use of Aristotelian terms is piecemeal. It is in service of theological questions, not primarily to build up a self-standing philosophy of ontologically basic things. Moreover, Turretin is Trinitarian in his theology" (345). The same thing is true about Thomas, with the proper historical contextualization and distance from Thomas' errors. But Poythress prefers not granting to the Italian the same courtesy that he grants to the Italo-Swiss. The point of this chapter is hard to detect. It seems that Poythress believes that Turretin excessively relies upon Aristotelianism, which can in turn risk dissolving the mysterious nature of trinitarian doctrine and incomprehensibility of the triune God (358-363). From what Poythress has said so far, it is unclear that Turretin leads, even only potentially, to that danger.

In chapter 31, Poythress seeks to account for the unity and diversity in creation on the basis of the unity and diversity of God's being (367-

2 *Summa Theologica*, ST. I Q12 A11 Rep 3. As Thomas himself points out, this is also the view of Augustine (with some differences), and it is a view that, with differences in contents and emphases, goes from Augustine to Gordon H. Clark.

370). He sees these attempts, positively, also in Augustine and Thomas (370-376). Similarly, in chapter 32 Poythress seeks to account for the reality of predication (that is, the ability of rational, moral creatures to say something about something else) by tracing that back to the triune God. Also here, however, there are reappearing unwarranted criticisms of Turretin and Aristotle (read Thomas), for instance, when Poythress confuses Aristotelianism's inability to *account* for the reality of predication with Aristotle's inability to *explain* the act of predication, thus confusing the level of being with the level of knowing (384): a pagan can accurately explain a process in the created order, even though he neither knows nor acknowledges the Triune God as the ultimate source and end of that process.

Chapters 33 and 34 contain criticism directed at Charnock. Also here, Thomas is not spared:

> The supreme good does not add to good any absolute thing, but only a relation. Now *a relation of God to creatures, is not a reality in God, but in the creature*; for it is in God in our idea only: as, what is knowable is so called with relation to knowledge, not that it depends on knowledge, but because knowledge depends on it. Thus it is not necessary that there should be composition in the supreme good, but only that other things are deficient in comparison with it.[3]

Poythress cannot understand "how is the relation 'in God in our idea only,' when a relation is between two things? . . . We can also ask whether, if the relation is 'in our idea only,' it is in the end an illusion" (421-422). One may or may not agree with Thomas, but Poythress mistakenly concludes that Thomas is potentially denying the reality of the relation between God and creatures. In fact, Thomas is only denying that that relation is something real *in* God or *added to* God's being, which is impossible, because God is already perfect and complete in His triune blessedness. That explains why Thomas says that God's relation to creatures is not intrinsically in Himself but "it is in God in our idea only," that is, when we speak about God's

3 *Summa Theologiae*, I Q6 A2 Rep, emphasis added. This misunderstanding already appeared earlier in the book (xxiii), where Poythress quotes *Summa Theologiae*, I Q13 A7 C5, which Poythress partly quotes on page 421.

dealing with us and creation, to facilitate our understanding. Poythress asserts that the relation between God and the world "arises because God himself has both brought into being and established the relation" (424). Thomas would support this statement for the simple reason that it is not an explanation, but an obvious statement that, although true, explains nothing about *what exactly that relation is* both *in itself* and *in respect to God*. Poythress rhetorically asks: "Might it be the case that the relation itself is not actually 'in' either one of the two things, but rather *between* them?" (422). But what exactly *is* that "between," how exactly God relates to the world without impinging His absolute self-sufficiency, we are not told. Thomas attempts to answer those questions. Poythress' alternative? We are simply told that Thomas (and, consequently, Charnock, 427-428) is, at least potentially, partially wrong.

Poythress concludes the section with fair questions and remarks about the relationship between the classical doctrine of divine immutability and the reality of the incarnation of the eternal Son in time: the two have to harmonize with each other properly, on the basis of Scripture (429-433). However, it is unclear how superficial criticism of other theologians helps towards that goal.

Part 7, "Dealing with Challenges" (chapters 35-43) aims at considering "how to respond to the influence of Aristotle's system on classical Christian theism" (435). Like the two previous parts, this part also is a knot of good contributions (443, 487-489, 491-500, 507-517, 545-554) lost within the forest of many polemics. Though Poythress' tone is courteous and his approach gentle, he still seems to show some chronological snobbery (441-442, 452-453, 456), since he is by no means immune to the dangers and risks that he sees have affected the church of the past. The discussion reaches the point of catastrophist rhetoric when Poythress claims that "Charnock does not intend it [the danger of an impersonal deity he sees in Charnock], but his textual wording could be understood in a way that introduces a spiritual poison that is capable of taking apart the whole faith" (453). Poythress thinks that Thomas, Turretin, Charnock, and the like, risk dissolving the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity in a sort of comprehensive, rationalist explanation of the same. However, textual evidence from those authors' respective works suggests Poythress' assessment

is inaccurate.[4] Poythress stresses the importance of "acknowledging mystery *at appropriate points*" because "an inappropriate dissolution of mystery is secretly destructive" (462, emphasis added). Then, what are these "appropriate points" when we must acknowledge the mystery? The answer is given some pages later: "Lest there be any doubt, *every point made in this book is filled with and surrounded by mystery*, ultimately deriving from the mystery of the Trinity" (476, emphasis added). *Appropriate times* has become *all the time*. *Everything* about God is a mysterious mystery.

Part 8, "Some Attributes in the Light of the Trinity" (chapters 44-48) considers more attributes of God, namely, love, mercy, will, and knowledge. Chapters 44-47 are a helpful, and even edifying, further explanation of what the author means with approaching God's attributes by starting with God's triunity. The "Conclusion" is a good invitation to learn from each other in humility. The last chapter, "What It May Take: A Personal Reflection," summarizes some of the questionable points that Poythress sees in some theologians, plus some fair advice.

The five appendixes, just like the previous parts, are a mixture of helpful material and controversial claims pertaining to theology and historical theology. Carelessness in language is not uncommon, such as, for example, the equivocation between *understanding* and *comprehension* when it comes to knowing God (492-493, 499, 510, 646), the "identity of items [?!] in God" (544, presumably Poythress meant "attributes"), and, unsurprisingly, a claim about some unnamed Thomas-shaped figures,[5] even though Thomas claims the opposite.[6]

4 *Summa Theologiae*, I Q12 A7; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, G1 C3; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume One: First Through Tenth Topics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 1.8 to 1.11, 23-37; Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996 [1853]), 1:200, 302.

5 "We can hope that many of the theologians who used this formulation over the centuries really meant to say that human beings know God, but that we do not know him completely (comprehensively). But that is not what the theologians actually said" (627).

6 See footnote 3 and 4.

Conclusion

Positively, when Poythress offers his own positive contributions to the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, his expositions are captivating and even upbuilding, and his writing style engaging and easy to understand. In fact, Poythress has written a previous book on the doctrine of the Trinity[7] that I read and much appreciated for its continual carefulness to ground all its claims in a reformed exegesis of the Scriptures. Though I do not agree with everything in it, I recommend that book as being both spiritually edifying and philosophically enlightening in a sound Christian sense.

Negatively, Poythress engages in lengthy and frustrating criticism of other theologians. Poythress argues in a gentlemanly way, a virtue that is sadly not always seen in reformed debates. However, instead of reading those authors contextually (both textually speaking and historically speaking) for what they were trying to get at, with the help of trustworthy secondary sources (very minimally present throughout the entire book), Poythress reads isolated bits and pieces of their works through his Vantilian lenses and according to the claims that Cornelius Van Til made about Thomas and the like (these assumptions clearly come up near the end of the book, see 585-586, 592-596). On the basis of (often decontextualized) quotations, Poythress makes mere possibilities to turn into probabilities, and then into facts.[8]

Poythress is critical of the theologians he criticizes because, to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, they supposedly use terms and concepts that are not suitable to explain Scripture. However, Poythress himself uses terms and concepts that he simply assumes are adequate to explain Scripture (archetype, ectype, contrast, distribution, variation, and more, see the Glossary at 649-655). For Poythress, Thomas' and others' eclectic use of Aristotelianism is plastered with problems and potentially catastrophic risks, but Poythress supposes that the reader will accept as safe his own reliance on Van Til and on linguist Kenneth Lee Pike (145, 150, 247). Linguistic and conceptual tools can be either

7 Vern Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity: How Perspectives in Human Knowledge Imitate the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2018.

8 To borrow a phrase from a friend (Carl Mosser) made in a different context.

useful or less useful, and must be appropriated with discernment. One can always revaluate, and Thomas, Turretin, and Charnock do not have the last word on trinitarian doctrine. However, contrary to Poythress' worries, Thomas, Turretin, Charnock, and the like do in fact acknowledge the incomprehensibility of the triune God. The author uses the phrases "This is mysterious" or "This is a mystery" innumerable times throughout the book, together with a frustratingly high number of rhetorical questions. However, why Poythress' approach is as superior as he claims it to be over the respective approaches of his counterparts is, ultimately, a mystery (pun unintended).

To conclude, though *The Mystery of the Trinity* contains much helpful material, the enjoyment of that is ruined by the author's long-winded criticisms. Hardly any of the good material in *The Mystery of the Trinity* significantly advances what Poythress achieved in *Knowing and the Trinity*. For those who are interested in knowing Poythress' own position within the contemporary reformed debate about God's attributes, this book is of course a helpful book. To all the others who prefer a clearer and more productive read, *Knowing and the Trinity* is a significantly better option.

Justification: An Introduction, by Thomas R. Schreiner. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. Pp. xii + 163. $19.99. Softcover. ISBN 9781433575730. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

Justification is part of an ongoing series of succinct and generally sound works on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The series advertises itself as evangelical Protestantism with the definite influence of Calvinism.

Although claiming to present and defend "the classic Reformed" doctrine of justification and, as the many quotations would indicate, heavily influenced by Calvin, the work examines, in addition, the doctrine of justification of the early, post-apostolic church and even of the theologians of the Middle Ages. Aquinas receives as favorable a judgment as is possible from an evangelical theologian.

The claim to defend the reformed doctrine of justification is compromised by a certain carelessness and, more seriously, by two un-reformed corruptions of the doctrine, about which more later.

The strengths of the book include the right definition of the grace of justification as the forensic declaration of God that the guilty but believing sinner is "right with God" on the basis solely of the full obedience and atoning sacrifice of Christ. Justification is imputation, not infusion, of the righteousness of Christ. Schreiner demonstrates that this doctrine is biblical, not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old, especially Genesis 15 and Habakkuk 2.

Especially does the author locate the source of the doctrine in the New Testament, but not only in Paul. The source is in Jesus. In respect to this contention, there is compelling, even moving, exegesis of the pertinent passages of Scripture. Paul got the doctrine from Jesus.

There are polemics. Not only does the book, if ever so briefly and somewhat mildly, carry on the reformation's controversy with Rome, but it also takes on the contemporary heresies regarding justification of the New Perspective on Paul; of the federal vision; and of the theory that the biblical phrase, the "faith of Christ," refers to Christ's own faith—an error not so far removed from a recent controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches. There is also a recent development regarding justification that is known as the "apocalyptic" reading of the New Testament passages on justification.

In spite of all this commendable handling of his subject, Schreiner is careless in regard to an important aspect of justification. Occasionally, he speaks of faith as the "cause" of justification. That this expression is merely carelessness becomes evident when, again and again, he states that the sole "cause" of justification is the unmerited grace of God in the full obedience and the cross of Jesus Christ. And even faith is the gift of God, according to Schreiner.

More serious, therefore, are two, deliberate errors. The first is the author's correlation of the teachings of Paul and James on justification. All of genuine and of nominal Christianity recognize that this correlation, with the right explanation of "justification by works" in James, is the "without which not," and the "*crux interpretum,*" that spells the difference between orthodoxy and (grievous) heresy. By this time, evangelical Christianity, to say nothing of the reformed faith, harmonizes Paul and James by the explanation that the two passages differ in the meaning of justification. By justification, Paul intends the gracious word itself that declares the believing sinner righteous

in the judgment of God. James, in sharp and fundamental contrast, has in mind the evidence of justification, or justification in its fruit, in a life of good works.

Deliberately, Schreiner takes issue with the reformed harmonizing of Paul and James—itself a risky decision. He proposes that Paul and James have the same realities in mind with regard to "justify" and with regard to "works." "The difference is not in the meaning of the terms 'works' or 'justify' since these words most likely have the same meaning in both Paul and James" (101). This is to concede the Roman heresy: justification, now *in the Pauline sense of the doctrine*, is at least in part by works. According to Schreiner, faith justifies, in the sense of rendering a sinner righteous before God, only as a faith that decisively includes the good works that it performs.

Schreiner's error is evident in this, that, although the reformers recognized that true faith is a working faith, they insisted that faith's works are excluded in the matter of justification. Faith justifies apart from its works. The only work that has any place whatever in justification, save all the works of the sinner that necessitate justification by faith alone, is the perfect and complete work of Jesus Christ. The eye of the believer, like the eye of God, sees only the work of Christ.

Schreiner confirms his heretical doctrine of justification by his second egregious, and deliberate, error. He explains Romans 2:13 as teaching what is actually the case: "the doers of the law shall be justified": "Some take this statement to be hypothetical, but that is doubtful…The obedience isn't hypothetical but actual" (136).

This explanation of the text has always been Rome's argument on behalf of justification by works. The reformers held that the text speaks hypothetically—if one is to be justified by works, he would have to be a doer of the law, which no one is, since the law demands perfect doing. Hence, if there is to be justification, it must be by faith in the perfect work of Christ.

That Schreiner goes on to emphasize that the works that contribute to a human's justification are performed by grace and that the judgment that is mainly in view is that of the final judgment does not rescue Schreiner's doctrine from the heresy of Rome and of the false teachers in Galatia. It remains the heresy of justification by works, the false doctrine condemned by Romans 3-5 and by Galatians.

The heresy reflects on the publisher and editors of the volume. As confessing evangelicals, they are called to renounce the (deliberate) false teaching, which is also condemned by the Protestant creeds.

Deliver Us From Evil: A Call for Christians to Take Evil Seriously, by John Swinton. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022. Pp 140. $21.00. Softcover. ISBN 9781666734003. Reviewed by Julian Kennedy.

The fact that this booklet is based on a series of lectures given at a Nazarene Theology College in the United Kingdom should ring alarm bells. The subtitle is rather strange: one would think every true believer must take evil seriously, as he or she has a lifelong battle against it! Not having the vital basis of reformed theology, Swinton does not have the confessional framework on which to hang his hypothesis. His opening scene with the murder of George Floyd in the United States emphasizes the crime of standing by as evil is committed. Ignoring evil or covering it up is being implicit in it. He then projects this carelessness on the vast majority of Christians who care little for their persecuted brethren, and further to a world where countless thousands of young children die needlessly. He has a point!

"Evil occurs when humans mistake good for bad" (3) or rather bad for good. Swinton ought to have said that evil happens when we believe a lie rather than truth, as happened in Eden at the very beginning of earthly sin and evil. He rightly defines evil as something we do, and sin as a power to rule (Romans 7). His statement that "evil is not only something people do but also a power that acts upon them" (19) fits with Ephesians 6:12. But sin and evil are really interchangeable, and both must refer to thoughts as well as actions, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 5. God's standard governs not only actions but also motives of the heart. Swinton says something else that shows his superficial knowledge of Scripture: "The world (and ultimately God) will judge us by our actions, not by our intentions" (11). But God looks on the heart, which is the seat of all our intentions and subsequent actions, because sin starts in the heart. Jesus teaches that "from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an

evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). Solomon said, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl.12:14). Paul wrote, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). Again, Jesus said, "For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mark 4:22).

Hence Swinton is mistaken when he states that Paul "doesn't locate evil or sin in bad motives: he maintains a surprisingly positive view of human beings" (29). In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul exposes universal human depravity and wicked motives. Swinton, like so many who believe in common grace and the continued image of God in man even after the fall, somehow believes this lessens man's evil proclivities and responsibility.

Does Swinton differentiate between God's preceptive will that abhors sin and His decretive will that uses it? He argues that the origin of evil is an unanswerable mystery! "An enemy has done this" (Matt.13:28) is correct. But we do know why God permits (or rather decrees) sin. Genesis 50:20 shows that God uses it for the preservation of the human race and salvation of His covenant people. Jesus also demonstrates this clearly in the parable of the wheat and tares: "let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt.13:28). God will separate the wheat from tares (or the sheep from the goats, which may look similar) on the last day. reformed believers see the wicked and their deeds as the scaffolding that must be erected in order that God's church be built.

"Evil and sin distort our perceptions and prevent us from discerning what is good from what is bad. They will put you out of the synagogue; In fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God" (13). Such is human deception. The heart is deceitful.

When analyzing evil, Swinton names a type called "radical evil" (16, 57) that would include the Nazi holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and other genocides. His chapter on radical evil, using as his example the Rwandan genocide, is almost unreadable, for it catalogues

atrocities of the most bloody and wicked kind done in a professing Christian nation, exposing the utter hypocrisy of most of its people. The genocide that issued in 800,000 deaths was preventable and the rest of the world was complicit by being onlookers.

Swinton outlines the massive following that pornography has worldwide: billions of video images watched by tens of millions, many of whom are professing Christians. Simulating dopamine, pornography is addictive and desensitizes. People are abused as sex objects, much of it stemming from trafficking and slavery. The sin is corrupting and bestial.

Swinton also says that spiritual transformation of our minds helps us recognize God and ourselves in such a way that we perceive and avoid evil and resist the power of sin (Rom. 12:2, Heb.5:14). He does not explain how God and His people can and ought to hate His enemies.

In his final chapter, entitled "Countering Evil," Swinton expresses a classic contradiction in terms speaking of "the peaceable war of the Lamb against all principalities and powers" (91). How can Christ's warfare against Satan and his demons and their human lackeys be peaceable? This battle was won on the cross where Christ fought with them to death and overcame! Swinton is correct in saying that God's people fight the battle inwardly by fighting against pride, lust, greed, hate, and envy, and that the battle is won ultimately only when we enter glory, and when Christ comes to reign visibly and destroy all injustice. Listing the weapons of our warfare, he omits the one offensive vital one, namely the *Word* as sword of the Spirit (though he does mention truth) alongside faith, prayer, and love.

Swinton correctly identifies the Lord's Supper as a spiritual practice that helps deliver us from evil, just as the reality that it symbolizes (Christ's death and resurrection) does that for us and in us. However, he lumps holy communion with the Romish mass, making no distinction between the two, thus totally neglecting reformation truth that identifies the Roman Catholic mass as idolatry (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 80)!

Swinton leaves us with two key points: 1) We cry to God for vengeance in the face of evil done to us, and 2) We are called to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

Perhaps Swinton's most useful section is his comments on Psalm

13:1-6. Swinton says that the psalm begins with a deep-rooted expression of pain, loss, and disappointment at God's absence and lack of action. Evil seems to be winning. But there is a change in the psalmist's response when he contemplates God's unfailing love. The evil remains, but the psalmist praises, loves, and hopes for redemption. God will deliver us fully in the long term. This and other psalms of lament help us overcome hopelessness with faith-filled language that not only articulates our pain, disappointment, loss, and fear but move to praise and worship in contemplating our Lord.

In conclusion, this book is often contradictory or erroneous. It betrays lack of deep Scripture knowledge. But it is still thought-provoking and worth the read.

Common Grace and the Gospel, by Cornelius Van Til. ed. K. Scott Oliphint. 2nd edition. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015. Pp. xlix + 273. $19.00. Softcover. ISBN 9781596385832. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

The major fault of the book is indicated by the fact that the title is misleading. The content of the book demands that the title be *Common Grace and* Philosophy. In the book the author is very much the philosopher rather than a theologian. And then an exceedingly obscure philosopher! He critiques common grace in terms of "limiting concepts" rather than creedal concepts. Kant and Hegel speak rather than Calvin. The solution of the problem of common grace is not Scripture but the idea of the "earlier and the later." From the outset, the speech that is decisive is not that of Paul to the Romans, but that of Socrates to Euthyphro. The trouble with Abraham Kuyper is not that he strayed from the thought of the fathers of Dordt but that he is too Platonic and Kantian.

The issue in the common grace controversy, Van Til assures us, is not that of universal (saving) grace and particular grace, but that of "pure contingency" and "pure determinism" (255).

When Van Til briefly emerges from the maze of philosophy to acknowledge Calvin and Romans 9, his explanation of the reformer

and the fundamental chapter of Scripture affirming particular grace consists of "brute facts," a "full bucket," and "rationalism" (80-86).

God Himself does not escape Van Til's philosophical categories in the common grace controversy: "God is our concrete universal" (13). One imagines Van Til's rendition of the model prayer: "Our concrete universal who art in heaven."

That Herman Hoeksema allegedly ran afoul of some or all of these philosophical categories means, or should mean, nothing to the Reformed Christian. The question is, "Is common grace in harmony with the Reformed creeds?" And: "What has become of Bavinck's and Kuyper's Free University under the influence of their theory of cultural common grace?"

Recognizing the obscurity of Van Til's thinking and writing, the editor has inserted footnotes, often long and usually more than one, at the bottom of nearly every page.

For the average Reformed believer and for most pastors, the book sheds no light whatever on the vitally important issue of common grace in Reformed and Presbyterian circles.

As concerns this reviewer, henceforth he banishes Van Til from the discussion and debate over the subject. He judges that Van Til has put himself outside the sphere of the increasingly lively controversy by making this theological issue a matter of philosophy.

When on the rare occasions flashes of theological light penetrate the philosophical darkness, it becomes apparent that Van Til is in agreement, not only with the cultural common grace of Kuyper and the "Three Points of Common Grace" adopted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1924, but also with the Arminian common grace of the first point of common grace of the "Three Points" adopted by the CRC. That is, Van Til approves the "well-meant offer of grace" to all the humans who hear the gospel.

> The general favorable attitude toward mankind at the beginning of history becomes the sincere offer of the gospel and common grace to those who have sinned . . . To man as a class God comes with the sincere offer of *the way of life* (Rom. 2) (217; see also 99 and 144).

Demonstrating the Arminian nature of the theory of common grace, Van Til describes it as the "point of contact" in all humans for

the gospel: "a 'point of contact' for the gospel among men in general" (xlvii). On the contrary, creedal Reformed orthodoxy confesses that there is no more a point of contact in the totally depraved sinner than there was a point of contact in Lazarus for the Savior's word, "Lazarus, come forth." The gospel creates its own point of contact. Better: it makes its way into hearts in which not only is there no point of contact but which hearts are adamantly shut up to the gospel.

Van Til's theory of common grace is fatal to the confession of total depravity by the Reformed faith in Heads 3 and 4 of the Canons of Dordt. "Man's mind is not fully and exclusively bent upon evil . . . There is a genuine commonness between believer and unbeliever . . . Because of common grace they [unbelievers—DJE] can discover much truth and do much good" (189, 190).

Virtually the only biblical proof Van Til puts forward in support of his theory of common grace is Romans 1:18-32, which speaks of God's manifesting Himself and His power to all humans. But Van Til overlooks that there is nothing gracious about and that there is no blessing in this general revelation to the reprobate unbeliever whatever. At once the unbeliever holds the truth of God under in unrighteousness. General revelation only hardens the ungodly. God's purpose with it is to leave the ungodly without excuse. In the revelation of God in creation to the ungodly is absolutely no grace whatsoever. On the contrary, there is only the revelation of wrath.

All of chapter 8 is devoted to Herman Hoeksema, mostly as his anti-common grace theology is found in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. Although Van Til has good things to say about Hoeksema as a preacher, he rejects his theology of the particularity of grace, for the elect alone, out of hand. Much of the criticism is leveled against Hoeksema's doctrine of the proofs for the existence of God and, more generally, his apologetics, neither of which was of much importance to Hoeksema in any case.

One good aspect of Van Til's main work on common grace is that it will not much advance the error. Only a few academics will understand it. Lacking as it does almost all creedal and biblical argument, it lacks also the power of the Word of God to move even the few philosophically learned academics who do grasp its apologetics.

Philosophy cannot withstand or overcome theology.

Even the Devil Quotes Scripture: Reading the Bible on Its Own Terms, by Robyn J. Whitaker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. Pp xi + 177. $22.99. Softcover. ISBN 9780802882035. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

As the subtitle indicates, this book is about "reading the Bible." More specifically, it is about hermeneutics, or interpreting the Bible. This book makes a unique contribution to the field: it proposes a hermeneutic of love (5, 139-144, 154-158). Robyn Whitaker (an associate professor of New Testament studies at the University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia) notes that love is the central command in Scripture. She then concludes that love is the key to a right interpretation of Scripture. After summarizing the book and noting its strengths, this reviewer will critique, and disagree with, the author's conclusion.

Summary

Whitaker begins by presenting her view of Scripture and its inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and authority (chapter one). In chapter two she explains why Bible interpretation is necessary, and examines what Nehemiah and 2 Peter indicate about the process of Bible interpretation.

She then argues (chapter 3) that because the Bible is a collection of human stories, the reader must know how to understand them. Some stories (such as the creation account) are told repeatedly, but each retelling has a different purpose. Some stories are retold to emphasize different theological themes. Others are rewritten to amplify the story (chapter 4), as illustrated by rewritten history (1 and 2 Chronicles), rewritten laws (Deuteronomy), rewritten gospels (the synoptics), and rewritten letters (2 Peter and Jude).

Whitaker develops her thesis in earnest in the last three chapters. Chapter five notes that Jesus interpreted God's law with love, compassion, and mercy. Chapter six sets forth her "Hermeneutic of Love." Whitaker contends that Jesus and the New Testament writers applied this hermeneutic of love in their own interpretation of Scripture. What chapter six sets forth in theory, chapter seven sets forth in practice. The interpreter must ask how the explanation of a passage

leads one to love God more, and one's neighbor more. Specifically, the interpreter should 1) read with compassion, 2) not use the Bible to justify oppression of others, 3) find how the passage leads us to love our neighbor today, 4) prioritize compassion to people over rituals, rules, institutions, and commands, and 5) discern how the passage leads us to more love for God. Whitaker concludes by applying these five considerations to the story of David and Bathsheba.

Whitaker openly acknowledges that two practical considerations influenced her desire to present her hermeneutic of love. First, she had been taught that women may not lead in the church. Her sense of call to the ministry led her to reexamine her approach to Scripture. The hermeneutic of love helped her understand Scripture in a way that permits women's ordination. Second, she observed much oppression of minority groups, including members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and believes that her hermeneutic of love provides a basis to reject this oppression.

Strengths

Whitaker is to be commended for being clear. Not all proponents of new or refined ideas are clear. Some authors present their work as making a significant contribution, but the reader, having finished the book, is as confused as ever. This book is not like those.

Also appreciable is Whitaker's conviction that Scripture passages that appear to be contradictory are not, in fact, contradictory. Many approach the Bible today as being so disjointed by different authors writing at different times that it cannot possibly have a unified theme. These undermine Scripture's authority by finding many "flaws" in Scripture. Whitaker does not do this. Every different version of a story (creation, or events in the life of Jesus, for instance) are told for a different purpose, and can be reconciled with all other versions.

Critique

The book's weaknesses outweigh its strengths. One of the book's strengths (its clarity) make the weaknesses more apparent.

To begin, Whitaker's view of Scripture is severely deficient, to the point of being unorthodox. One can appreciate her rejection of the mechanical dictation theory of inspiration (21), but she views the Bible as

"inspiring" rather than "inspired." She claims that "inspiration occurs in the dynamic interaction between the Bible and the reader, between tradition and a new situation" (23). She also explicitly denies that the Bible is inerrant and infallible (29). The Bible's authority is not that it is God's revelation to His people, but that it testifies to Jesus (32). This authority is rooted in the church community's decision, rather than the recognition by God's people that Scripture is God's inspired word. Whitaker's view of Scripture is not that set forth in the Belgic Confession, Westminster Confession, Savoy Declaration, or London Baptist Confession. It is not even that set forth in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, from which she quotes (7).

Whitaker's view of the Bible is that of Peter Enns (29). The Bible is a story, not because God revealed Himself propositionally to His people through historical narratives, but because individual humans wrote a story from their perspective, which story continues in the lives of all Christians today. Consequently, the Bible should be taken seriously, but not literally (3). The meaning of any given passage "is made in the interaction" (63), which is to say, however it hits you. A passage can mean one thing for you, and another for me. Genesis 1 and 2 are not history, but stories and myths. They teach foundational truths, but are not a sound basis to say when and how the world came into being (68-73).

It is not possible that a sound approach to Bible interpretation should follow from an unsound view of Scripture. The main thesis of the book (that the hermeneutic of love is the right approach to Scripture), therefore, is the second basic weakness of the book.

Here I must be clear. That love is the greatest command of all is indisputable. That our understanding of God's revelation should lead to greater displays of love, and that a proper understanding of any passage should lead to increased charity, is a non-negotiable. My rejection of love as a hermeneutic does not take issue with the centrality of love as a command, and a Christian ethic. But is love a *hermeneutical* tool? Is it a key to understanding what the Bible really *means*?

It *can* be, *if* the Bible is indeed one part of a story, in which we also are a part. In other words, Whitaker's interpretive method follows logically from her view of Scripture. But those who have a different view of Scripture will have a different hermeneutical method.

"Biblical hermeneutics" refers to the principles and methods by which we understand a text's meaning; Whitaker herself calls it "the theory and method of interpretation" (128). This theory and method includes observing the grammar, noting figures of speech, seeing the relationship of the text to the broader literary context, understanding the historical context, and such like. The interpreter does all of these things *to* the text. Love, by contrast, is not something we do *to* a *text*; it is something we manifest toward other people. The effect of a right understanding of a text—its application—is the promotion of Christian love and other virtues; but my love for other people does not help me discern the particular meaning of a text.

Underlying the point just stated is another issue: what role does authorial intent play in understanding the meaning of the Bible? Must my interpretation of John 1 and Romans 9-11 be the same as what John and Paul would have said those passages meant, when they wrote them? Or may I find meaning that the Bible writers did not themselves intend? A sound approach to Scripture interpretation is that the meaning of a passage today cannot be essentially different from what it was then, even if we understand John 1 and Romans 9-11 more deeply than John or Paul did. Whitaker's answer is that meanings change. She underscores this by asking a question: "why privilege their interpretation [that of first writers and readers] over all others?" (128). Another, lengthier, quote is in order:

> I, however, interpret the Bible . . . as a text with a living, dynamic history of being constantly (re)interpreted in conversation with the communities reading it. I read with one eye toward the historical context, understanding how it reflects ancient attitudes towards women, bodies, and sexuality, and one eye toward our own cultural values and the insights gained from science and medicine. Where there is a difference, and there often is, these differences have to be carefully and prayerfully navigated to interpret faithfully. What guides that navigation is a core theological assumption that God embodies loving-kindness . . . and wants us to do the same. I don't think that laws written for a different culture over 2,500 years ago should be considered normative for all time. I think the Bible itself gives us a mandate to keep interpreting for new times and places and that what constitutes the most living and faithful action today is affirming LGBTIQ+ people. If I'm erring in

> that interpretation (and some of you will think I am), I am erring on the side of love. (144)

So, for Whitaker, the meaning of any passage can change from generation to generation. In fact, the Bible does not mean today what it meant when it was written to people of different cultures and times.

If Whitaker is right, the Bible is not the unchanging revelation of God to His church in every age. On the other hand, if the Bible is God's unchanging revelation to His church in every age, Whitaker's method must be wrong.

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Books Reviewed

96 Alexander, Archibald. *God, Creation, and Human Rebellion: Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander from the Hand of Charles Hodge.* Travis Fentiman, ed.
98 Chase, Mitchell L. *Short of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Exploration of the Fall.*
100 Fesko, J. V. *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith.*
109 Hernandez, Sonny L. *Biblical Reprobation: A primer on the most hated and neglected doctrine.*
112 Klink, Edward W., III. *The Beginning and End of All Things: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation.*
115 Marsden, George. *An Infinite Fountain of Light: Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century.*
117 Porter, Stanley E. and Laird, Benjamin P. ed. *Five Views on the New Testament Canon*.
121 Poythress, Vern. *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God.*
129 Schreiner, Thomas R. *Justification: An Introduction.*
132 Swinton, John. *Deliver Us From Evil: A Call for Christians to Take Evil Seriously.*
135 Van Til, Cornelius. *Common Grace and the Gospel.* K. Scott Oliphint, ed.
138 Whitaker, Robyn J. *Even the Devil Quotes Scripture: Reading the Bible on Its Own Terms.*