Journal *of* Classical Theology

Editor's Introduction

The modern theological scene continues to promote a doctrine of God more in line with an ontology of becoming, reflective of the socially oriented philosophy of our time. Many observing this drift from the classical doctrines of God and Christ, launched a retrieval mission, recovering the rich theology of the Great Tradition. This ressourcement project has continued to grow, as various traditions of the catholic faith look back to the conciliar theology of our forebears to address the theological issues of our day.

Journal of Classical Theology joins this mission, offering a platform to facilitate rigorous theological discussion pertaining to the retrieval of and advancements in classical theology. The church needs a *classical* dogmatic theology, grounded in the roots of the Great Tradition; it must look back if it is to move forward.

. . . To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Journal of Classical Theology

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The Scholastic Award 2024

The Center for Classical Theology

The Center for Classical Theology[1] exists to contemplate God and all things in relation to God by listening with humility to his Word with the wisdom of the Great Tradition. The purpose of CCT is to create a renewed vision for systematic theology today in the spirit of faith seeking understanding. CCT hosts an annual lectureship by a theologian, each of which is published in the New Studies in Classical Theology series (Crossway).

CCT summons the next generation of theologians to exemplify a biblical reasoning, rational contemplation, and reformed catholicity that directs systematic theology to its spiritual end and most blessed hope: beholding the beauty of the Lord. To that end, CCT offers The Scholastic Award. In the spirit of the Protestant Scholastics, candidates for the Scholastic Award retrieve the format of the *Summa Theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas and submit a disputed theological question. That question is followed by a reply designed "to lead listeners into the truth they strive to understand" (Aquinas). An excellent reply will exhibit precision to advance theological clarity, fidelity, and beauty. The winner's scholastic article is peer reviewed by other theologians.

This year's recipient of the Scholastic Award is Dr. Ty Kieser (PhD, Wheaton College), Assistant Professor of Theology at Criswell College.

– Matthew Barrett, Director of the Center for Classical Theology
– Timothy Gatewood, Associate Director of the Center for Classical Theology

THE CENTER FOR
CLASSICAL THEOLOGY

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[1] https://credomag.com/center-for-classical-theology/

ARTICLE: WHETHER REFORMED CHRISTOLOGY OUGHT TO BE DISTINGUISHED AND DIFFERENTIATED FROM CATHOLIC CHRISTOLOGY?

By Ty Kieser [1]

Objection 1: Since it is improper to differentiate a position from a more fundamental source of that position, it is improper to differentiate Reformed Christology from Catholic Christology, which is the fundamental source for Reformed Christology. Consider, for example, the explicit dependence upon theologians central to the Catholic tradition (such as John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus) within the christologies of Peter Martyr Vermigli, John Owen, and Francis Turretin. Therefore, at most, one can only distinguish Reformed Christology from Catholic Christology as a species from a genus—the way we can distinguish Calvin's view of predestination from Augustine's. However, this mode of distinguishing is more properly called a particularization and, therefore, should not differentiate the two positions any more than "big cat" (*Panthera*) ought to be differentiated from "lion" (*Panthera leo*).

Objection 2: It would seem that if Reformed Christology is to be distinguished from another tradition it would be by virtue of the *extra Calvinisticum*—the doctrine that the Son of God, according to his divinity, exists beyond his human flesh. However, as David Willis rightly argues, the *extra* is better understood as the *extra Catholicum* since it is affirmed throughout history (*Calvin's Catholic Christology*, 153). Therefore, the *extra* doesn't differentiate Reformed Christology from Catholic Christology, rather it reinforces their commonality.

Objection 3: One potential distinguishing feature of Reformed Christology is the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. However, this affirmation is present in the medieval tradition (including Thomas Aquinas; ST, III, Q. 31, A. 2) and is followed in contemporary Roman Catholicism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1546). Further, this threefold distinction occurs infrequently even in Calvin's theology (Parker, "Calvin's Commentary on Hebrews," 140), missing in his 1536 edition of the *Institutes*. Therefore, this feature does not distinguish Reformed Christology from Catholic Christology, nor does it present Reformed Christology as a unified whole.

Sed Contra: As Herman Bavinck says (addressing Lutheran, Anabaptist, and Catholic christologies), "Reformed theology was able, better than any other [tradition], to maintain in addition to Christ's deity also his true and genuine humanity" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, III:310).

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[1] Ty Kieser (PhD, Wheaton College) is Assistant Professor of Theology at Criswell College.

Answer: While Reformed Christology is (in my view) more proximate to Catholic Christology than any other Protestant tradition, Reformed Christology is rightly distinguished from Catholic Christology, especially insofar as it seeks to affirm and emphasize the integrity of Christ's human nature and human capacities in the single mediator. We might enumerate the distinctive commitments and emphases of Reformed Christology accordingly: (1) the distinct and genuine human nature of Christ (i.e., the *extra Calvinisticum*). (2) The distinct and genuine human capacities of Christ (i.e., Christ is a pilgrim or wayfarer [*viator*] prior to the resurrection). (3) The singularity of Christ the covenantal mediator in two distinct natures (i.e., the one person Christ mediates according to both natures).

The first distinguishing point is fundamentally used to distinguish Reformed Christology from Lutheranism.

The second point, Christ's distinct and genuine human capacities, distinguishes Reformed Christology from Catholic Christology insofar as Reformed Christology claims (with broad consensus) that Christ is a pilgrim or wayfarer [*viator*] prior to the resurrection (see Owen, *Christologia*, 1:93; Turretin, *Institutes*, II:13.xiii.12; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III:312; Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, 221). This frequently implies that Jesus does not possess maximal (or infinite) knowledge according to his human nature and it implies a denial of Christ's beatific vision while on Earth. This Reformed position is contrary to many medieval, Reformation-era, and contemporary Catholic christologies (Aquinas, *ST* III, Q.15, A.10; Eck, "Refutation of the Articles of Zwingli," 71; White, *Incarnate Lord*, 255), which claim that Christ experienced the beatific vision throughout his entire life (including on the cross) and, consequently, it is commonly said that his humanity possesses maximal human knowledge (e.g., Aquinas even calls this conclusion "universally held" [*QDV*, q.8 a.4 resp]). Reformed Christology emphasizes that Christ exercised genuine human faith (Hb 12:2), finite knowledge (Lk 2:52; Mt 24:36), and sympathizing experiences of grief and fear (Jn 11:35; Hb 2:17–18; 4:14–16).

The third point expounds the significance of Christ's distinct natures and capacities by affirming Jesus' covenantal mediation in both natures. Both historic and contemporary Catholics suggest that Christ only mediates in his human nature (e.g., Daley "A Humble Mediator;" Augustine, *City of God*, 9.15, 378; Aquinas, *ST* III, Q.26, A.1–2). Yet, in contrast, Calvin, Vermigli, and a Reformed synod at Pińczów claim that Christ mediates in both natures (see Tylenda, "Christ the Mediator: Calvin Versus Stancaro;" Vermigli, PML, 5:142–54; Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 410–87). This allows Reformed Christology to better connect the ontology of Christ with his covenantal work as testified to in the narrative of Scripture (Oberman, "The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin," 60).

Summarily, Reformed Christology is non-trivially distinct from Catholic Christology on multiple points and, therefore, ought to be differentiated from it.

Response to Objection 1: Reformed Christology is not to be understood as distinct from "catholic" (i.e., historic orthodox and conciliar) Christology since it indeed depends upon patristic and medieval accounts but remains distinct from both historic and contemporary Roman Catholic Christology. Because there is generic similarity and proximity, Reformed Christology and Catholic Christology should be viewed as related yet different species within the same genus—analogous to lions (*Panthera leo*) and tigers (*Panthera tigris*). So, for example, Reformed Christology can be Thomistic in multiple relevant senses, but not in each of the ways that contemporary Catholic Christology could be.

Response to Objection 2: The *extra Calvinisticum* differentiates Reformed Christology fundamentally from Lutheranism rather than Catholic Christology. Even so, the Reformed insistence upon the finite humanity of Christ even after the ascension contributes to Reformed distinctives on the intercession of Christ (contra the intercession of Saints) and Lord's Supper (contra transubstantiation) (see Owen, *WJO*, 21:425).

Response Objection 3: The mediatorial distinction between Catholic and Reformed christologies is not the offices of Christ's mediation, but the nature of Christ's mediation (i.e., that he executes his mediatorial works in both natures, rather than in his human nature alone). However, this qualification in Calvin is a helpful reminder that while Reformed Christology does comprise a distinct group with distinct commitments and emphases, it is not monochromatic and possesses distinct "breeds" within the species—as there is diversity within Catholic Christology (e.g., Thomas and Scotus) and Lutheran christologies (e.g., Brenz and Chemnitz).

Stephen Charnock's Doctrine of the Beatific Vision

By Caleb Eissler[1]

Abstract: *This study outlines the basic tenets of Stephen Charnock's doctrine of the Beatific Vision. Then, it analyzes the relationship of Charnock's view to those of other prominent theologians who have been studied in contemporary debates on the beatific vision. The other prominent theologians studied are Thomas Aquinas, John Owen, and Jonathan Edwards. In particular, Charnock's view is compared to Aquinas, Owen, and Edwards' views on two key points: 1.) the role of Christ in the beatific vision, and 2.) whether or not the saints will see God's divine essence in the vision. By looking at the relationship of Charnock's view to those of these theologians, Charnock's doctrine of the beatific vision is further articulated and clarified.*

Key Words: Beatific Vision, Charnock, Aquinas, Owen, Edwards

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a revival in studies on the doctrine of the beatific vision. Amid this revival, there has been renewed attention given to historic theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa,[2] Thomas Aquinas,[3] John Owen,[4] and Jonathan Edwards[5] and their articulations of this doctrine. One prominent theologian whose views on the vision have not been extensively studied is Stephen Charnock. Steeped in classical theology along with the Puritan and Reformed traditions, Charnock provides an erudite exposition

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[2] Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018), 76–94.

[3] A number of articles have been written about Aquinas' views on the beatific vision. For example, see Simon Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas and John Owen on the Beatific Vision: A Reply to Suzanne McDonald," *New Blackfriars*, no. 97/1070 (2016): 432–46; Simon Gaine, "The Beatific Vision and the Heavenly Mediation of Christ," *TheoLogica*, no. 2/2 (2018): 116–28; Hans Boersma, "Thomas Aquinas on the Beatific Vision: A Christological Deficit," *TheoLogica*, 2/2 (2018): 129–47; Simon Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas, the Beatific Vision and the Role of Christ: A Reply to Hans Boersma," *TheoLogica*, no. 2/2 (2018): 148–67. For a summary of the debates surrounding Aquinas' view as well as a general defense of the position, see Gavin Ortlund, "Will We See God's Essence? A Defence of a Thomistic Account of the Beatific Vision.," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74 (2021): 323–332.

[4] Suzanne McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the 'Reforming' of the Beatific Vision," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen*, ed. Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones (New York: Routledge, 2012), 141–58.

[5] Kyle Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," in *Jonathan Edwards and Scotland*, ed. Ken Minkema, Adriaan Neele, and Kelly van Andel (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2011), 171–88.

of the beatific vision that is biblically rich, historically informed, and pastorally sensitive. This paper will sketch Charnock's insufficiently studied doctrine of the beatific vision and explain the relationship of Charnock's view with the most prominent theologians written about in contemporary discussions of the doctrine. This explanation of relation will further articulate Charnock's view and help readers see how it compares to the most prominently debated theologians.

Outlining Stephen Charnock's Theology of the Beatific Vision

Puritan minister and theologian Stephen Charnock (1628–80) never wrote a formal systematic theology, but throughout his posthumously published collected works, he presents a great deal of theological reflection, primarily focusing on theology proper,[6] Christology, and soteriology. The context of Charnock's published works is key as it shapes where the beatific vision is placed within Charnock's own body of divinity. Rather than focusing on the beatific vision primarily during discussions on eschatology, Charnock touches on the *visio Dei* most when he is talking about the knowledge of God.[7] The most concentrated set of references to the beatific vision in Charnock's works come in his "Discourse on the Knowledge of God"[8] and "Discourse on the Knowledge of God in Christ" in volume 4.[9]

Charnock holds that the Scripture expresses the knowledge of God most commonly through the senses, especially sight. For Charnock, knowledge and spiritual sight are inseparable. He says:

> We find the knowledge of God set out by the acts of sense . . . often by seeing, which, being the quickest and most piercing sense, represents things to the understanding more clearly than bare report. And this kind of knowledge is necessary to happiness, for without it we can have no clear nor worthy notions of God . . . .[10]

For Charnock, seeing and knowing God are intimately entwined because the

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[6] Joel Beeke has said that Charnock's volumes on the existence and attributes of God are "*the* work on the character and attributes of God. It should be read by every serious Christian." Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 145. Emphasis original.

[7] Kyle Strobel has noted that within older systematic theologies, particularly those of Puritan and classical theologians, the beatific vision is typically referenced in 3 places: our knowledge of God, God's knowledge of God (often spoken of as vision), and eschatology. See Tony Reinke and Kyle Strobel, "Enjoying God's Beatific Beauty: An Interview With Kyle Strobel," Authors on the Line, accessed December 22, 2023, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/authors-on-the-line/id571410020?i=1000413103507. For more on this, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 259–67.

[8] Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; W. Robertson; G. Herbert, 1864–1866), 3–109

[9] Charnock, *Works* 4:110–163. Charnock also says a lesser, but fair amount about the beatific vision in his writings on the nature of regeneration in *Works* 3:5–165.

[10] Charnock, *Works* 4:19.

central way we come to the fullest knowledge of God is through the beatific vision.

> The happiness of heaven, which is the ultimate and complete happiness of the soul, consists in a knowledge of God. The sight of God is made by our Saviour the reward of purity of heart: Mat. 5:8, 'The pure in heart shall see God;' and to see him as he is, in the glory of the other world, 1 John 3:2, 3, when all the rational faculties shall be satisfied with light, and the desires replenished with love…[F]elicity, in the highest region, consists in a sight and knowledge of God . . .[11]

Along with other luminaries of the Christian tradition and classical theology, Charnock believes that the beatific vision is the highest happiness of the soul and the end of the great Christian pilgrimage. For Charnock, the beatific vision is so significant that he explicitly stresses to his readers that the chief punishment for sin is a loss of the beatific vision, which also means a loss of communion with God.[12]

The God-centeredness of Charnock's Theology of the Beatific Vision

One striking feature of Charnock's theology of the beatific vision is how God-centered it is. Of course, it may seem evident that theology focusing on a vision of God would be God-centered. However, Charnock articulates the God-centeredness of the beatific vision not only by explaining the object of the vision but also by explaining from where the vision derives and the grace that makes it possible.

For Charnock, the God-centeredness of the beatific vision begins with the fact that the beatific vision of the saints begins with God's beatific vision of Himself. Charnock argues that God knows himself exhaustively through a perpetual vision of himself. God knows his nature fully because he sees his nature perfectly. This knowledge through vision relates not only to God's knowledge of his decrees but also to God's knowledge of his nature.[13] God perfectly knows himself, and this knowledge of himself brings him perfect

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[11] Charnock, *Works* 4:24–25.

[12] "Besides, no creature can inflict a due punishment for sin; that which is due to sin, is a loss of the vision and sight of God; but none can deprive any of that but God himself; nor can a creature reward another with eternal life, which consists in communion with God, which none but God can bestow." Charnock, *Works* 2:410.

[13] Charnock says, "This we must conclude, that God being not a body, doth not see one thing with eyes and another thing with mind, as we do; but being a Spirit, he sees and knows only with mind, and his mind is himself, and is as unchangeable as himself; and therefore, as he is not now another thing than what he was, so he knows not anything now in another manner than as he knew it from eternity. He sees all things in the glass of his own essence; as therefore the glass doth not vary, so neither doth his vision…Again, as God knows all things by one simple vision of his understanding, so he wills all things by one act of volition; therefore the purpose of God in the Scripture is not expressed by counsels, in the plural number, but counsel, shewing that all the purposes of God are not various, but as one will, branching itself out into many acts towards the creature, but all knit in one root, all links of one chain." Charnock, *Works* 1:387–388.

joy. God has enjoyed this joy for all eternity in the fellowship of the Trinity. Just as the Father has a perfect view of his nature manifested in the eternally generated Son, the Son also has a perfect knowledge of the Father through a vision of the Father's essence.[14] From this flow of vision and love between the Father and the Son comes the spiration of the Holy Spirit. Out of sheer grace, God creates humanity so that people may enjoy him for their good and his glory unto eternity. After all, the only thing that can perfectly satisfy mankind forever is the same thing that satisfied God before time began: God himself. The beatific vision is the catalyst.[15] For Charnock, the beatific vision is a gracious gift of God, beginning in God's own vision of God, showcasing the goodness of God, made possible by faith in the Son of God, all for the glory of God.[16]

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[14] "But Christ knows the Father, he lay 'in the bosom of the Father,' was in the greatest intimacy with him, John 1:18, and, from this intimacy with him, he saw him and knew him; so he knows God as much as he is knowable, and therefore knows him perfectly, as the Father knows himself by a comprehensive vision. This is the knowledge of God wherein properly the infiniteness of his understanding appears. And our Saviour uses such expressions which manifest his knowledge to be above all created knowledge, and such a manner of knowledge of the Father as the Father hath of him." Charnock, *Works* 1:509.

[15] "The happiness of God consists in the knowledge of himself, his own perfections, and delight in them. God is the object of his own happiness. The knowledge of God himself is the felicity of God. No being is really happy without reflection upon, and knowledge of, that happiness. If God should be happy by the knowledge of anything else but himself, that which he did contemplate and know would be greater and better than God, because his happiness would depend upon it. Felicity can never be in anything inferior. God hath nothing higher and better than himself to contemplate. This gave him a satisfaction before the world was, and this would still be his blessedness, if all things should be reduced to the depths of nothing. Since, therefore, he created the world, to communicate himself and his own happiness to the rational creature, felicity cannot be attained by anything less than the knowledge of the supreme good according to the creature's measures. The angels themselves are only blessed in the contemplation of him, and affection to him. In being encompassed with his bright rays, and having their affections inflamed by him, Mat. 18:10, 'they behold the face of God.' As God's knowledge and fruition of himself makes up his felicity, so the knowledge and fruition of God composeth our happiness." Charnock, *Works* 4:24.

[16] "Now this eternal life was not due to his nature, but it was a pure beam and gift of divine goodness; for there was no proportion between man's service in his innocent estate, and a reward so great both for nature and duration. It was a higher reward than can be imagined either due to the nature of man, or upon any natural right claimable by his obedience. All that could be expected by him was but a natural happiness, not a supernatural. As there was no necessity upon the account of natural righteousness, so there was no necessity upon the account of the goodness of God to elevate the nature of man to a supernatural happiness, merely because he created him; for though it be necessary for God, when he would create, in regard of his wisdom, to create for some end, yet it was not necessary that end should be a supernatural end and happiness, since a natural blessedness had been sufficient for man. And though God, in creating angels and men intellectual and rational creatures, did make them necessary for himself and his own glory, yet it was not necessary for him to order either angels or men to such a felicity as consists in a clear vision, and so high a fruition of himself; for all other things are made by him for himself, and yet not for the vision of himself. God might have created man only for a natural happiness, according to the perfection of his natural faculties, and dealt bountifully with him, if he had never intended him a supernatural blessedness and an eternal recompense; but what a largeness of goodness is here, to design man in his creation for so rich a blessedness as an eternal life, with the fruition of himself! He hath not only given to man all things which are necessary, but designed for man that which the poor creature could

The Effects of the Beatific Vision

In Charnock's view, the beatific vision has two primary effects: 1.) it fills believers with immense and perfect joy, and 2.) it conforms believers to the image of God. First, the beatific vision fills the believer with immense and perfect joy. Charnock argues this at many different points throughout his works. In his "Discourse on the Knowledge of God" he says,

> Knowledge of God and Christ is the life and happiness of the soul...In the clear sight of God as the supreme good, the understanding is satisfied, the will filled with love, and all the desires of the soul find the centre of their rest. The vision of God in heaven is the satisfaction of the soul . . .[17]

Second, Charnock contends that the beatific vision conforms believers to the image of God. He makes this point often from 1 John 3:2. Referencing that passage, Charnock says,

> The change of the soul to a perfect glory in heaven depends upon the perfect knowledge of God and Christ; and therefore the change here depends upon this knowledge. This knowledge therefore cannot be a right knowledge without this, which is the proper effect of it. The vision of Christ in his glorious state shall then cause likeness to him: 1 John 3:2, 'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' We shall see him in his glory; we shall, by that view, be transformed into the image of his glory, as by contemplating his virtues we are here changed into the image of his grace . . .[18]

While one may assume beatific conformity would undermine the Creator-creature distinction, Charnock is careful to protect this. He says, "As the vision of God will be perfect, so will your likeness to him, 1 John 3:2; as it will be a vision without any clouds, so it will be a likeness without any dissimilitude, according to the creature's capacity."[19]

Charnock also guards the Creator-creature distinction by clarifying that the believers' sight of God will be finite. This vision will be perfect, "but perfect according to the creature's capacity."[20] Charnock clearly states that finite creatures cannot fully comprehend the infinite God. He says, "In heaven, God shall not be comprehensively known. It is true there will be a fuller perception of God, and a clearer notion of him in heaven; the infinite treasures of wisdom and goodness, which lie hid in God to be admired, will be then more clearly seen; yet God can never descend from his own infiniteness to be grasped by a

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not imagine. He garnished the earth for him, and garnished him for an eternal felicity, had he not, by slighting the goodness of God, stripped himself of the present, and forfeited his future blessedness." Charnock, *Works* 2:317.

[17] Charnock, *Works* 4:14.

[18] Charnock, *Works* 4:44. See also Charnock, *Works*, 3:54, 4:18.

[19] Charnock, *Works* 3:139. Emphasis mine.

[20] Charnock, *Works* 3:139.

created understanding."²¹

Yet, with pastoral sensitivity, Charnock quickly points his parishioners to the reality that their lack of capacity to fully comprehend God should not lead them to doubt but rather to worship. He says, "[B]ecause we cannot comprehend [God], the more we ought, and the more we shall, admire him. Our admirations of the brightness of the sun are greater, by how much the less we can look upon the body of it without winking and shielding our eyes from the onset of his beams: so should they be of God."²²

These two primary effects of the beatific vision, namely, joy and conformity to God's image, lead to greater obedience to God and delight in his commands. Charnock uses the angels as an example. The angels are before God's face, and this fills them with joy, beckoning them to obey God joyfully. On this point, Charnock says, "The more clearly [God] is understood, the more he is beloved; and the more he is beloved, the more readily he is obeyed. The angels that behold his face run most cheerfully to perform his errands, Ps. 103:20; and no doubt but the perfect illumination of the glorified souls is a partial cause of the steadiness of their wills."²³

In Charnock's view, the sight of God alone does not fill believers with happiness and conform them to God's image unless it is tied to faith in and love for Christ. "The knowledge of Christ is as necessary to happiness as the knowledge of God. If a man had the knowledge of God in as clear a manner as the angels have, yet without a knowledge of Christ he were as remote from happiness as the devil."²⁴ Without faith in Christ, the sight of a holy God would be dread rather than delight.

Similarly, Charnock contends that if a person does not exhibit love, holiness, and obedience to God in this life, he will not experience the joy of God in the beatific vision in the next. Referencing Hebrews 12:14, Charnock says, "None but those that are sanctified shall be glorified; that there must be grace here, if we expect glory hereafter; that we must not presume to expect an admittance to the vision of God's face, unless our souls be clothed with a robe of holiness."²⁵

A Foretaste of Glory

In like manner to other Reformed theologians of his time,²⁶ Charnock argues

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²¹ Charnock, *Works*, 4:40.

²² Charnock, *Works* 4:41.

²³ Charnock, *Works* 4:30.

²⁴ Charnock, *Works* 4:14.

²⁵ Charnock, *Works* 2:66. Elsewhere Charnock says, "[God] will not have men brought only into a relative state of happiness by justification, without a real state of grace by sanctification. And so resolved he is in it, that there is no admittance into heaven of a starting, but a persevering, holiness." Charnock, *Works* 2:214.

²⁶ Some examples of other Reformed theologians who argue along similar lines are John Owen, Francis Turretin, William Bates, and Herman Witsius. In his *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, John Owen says, "For if our future blessedness shall consist in being where he is, and beholding of his glory, what better preparation can there be for it than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory in the revelation that is made in the Gospel, unto this very

that believers can have a foretaste of glory on this side of glory. He says, "By an unchangeable disposition to good we should begin the happiness of heaven upon earth."[27] Elsewhere, he argues, "the covenant will want its full accomplishment till the dim knowledge of God be drowned in a perfect and clear vision. And since the shadowy light we have is so delightful, how ravishing must that be which shall discover God in his full glory!"[28]

This foretaste of glory aims to spur believers to fight sin, endure hardship, pursue God, grow in holiness, and know God more deeply. With the beatific vision as the telos of humanity, believers are encouraged to prepare for glory by gazing upon God's glory in this life. This is precisely how Charnock uses the beatific vision to inspire Christians in their walks with God.

Conclusions of the Outline

Charnock sees the beatific vision as the telos of humanity enjoyed fully in glory but with foretastes in this life. He holds that the beatific vision is a gracious gift of God that will give believers immense joy and conform them to God's image. The whole vision is God-centered from beginning to end.

Charnock's theology of the beatific vision follows the broader Christian tradition with several important theological emphases that lead to great pastoral payoff. There are two central elements of Charnock's view that must be explored in relation to other prominent theologians, as they are significant for contemporary theological debates and future theological formation.

Charnock's Views in Conversation With Aquinas, Owen, and Edwards

To articulate important nuances of Charnock's views, we will compare Charnock's views on Christology within the beatific vision and his beliefs

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end, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory?" John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1850–5.), 275. Later in the same discourse, Owen says, "No man ought to look for anything in heaven, but what one way or other he hath some experience of in this life." Owen, *Works* 1:290. Turretin famously said, "For the life of grace does not differ except in degree from the life of glory, for grace is nothing else than glory begun, as glory is grace consummated." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 3 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997), 608. William Bates says, "The beginning and introduction of our felicity, is by a lively faith here, the consummation of it is by present sight in heaven." William Bates, *The Whole Works of the Rev. William Bates*, ed. W. Farmer, vol. 3 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1990), 384. Witsius is perhaps the clearest of all on this point when he says, "[T]hrough the grace of God and of Christ, the beginnings of these felicities are imparted to true believers even in the present life, and are more richly conferred on the souls of the godly at death, that, released from the body of sin, they may rejoice in the embraces of God and the Redeemer, till, at last, being re-united to their bodies, which shall be raised up to glory, they experience God, without the intervention of any medium, to be to them 'all in all.'" Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations, on What Is Commonly Called the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Donald Fraser, vol. 2 (London: Khull, Blackie & Co., 1823), 474.

[27] Charnock, *Works* 1:418.

[28] Charnock, *Works* 4:84. Charnock also says, "Knowledge of God here is the dawn of heaven; knowledge hereafter, the meridian of it." Charnock, *Works* 4:25.

concerning whether or not we will see the essence of God in the beatific vision to the views of Thomas Aquinas, John Owen, and Jonathan Edwards.

The Christological Focus of Charnock's Theology of the Beatific Vision, Especially in Christ's Glorified Human Nature

One of the consistent charges hailed against Thomas Aquinas[29] is that his view of the beatific vision is christologically deficient.[30] Simon Gaine and Gavin Ortlund have argued that this accusation is unfair to Aquinas.[31] Regardless of which view one takes, it is clear that for Aquinas, the glorified human nature of Christ is of secondary significance in the beatific vision. Aquinas holds that believers will see the glorified humanity of Jesus, but this is not central to the beatific vision.[32] For Aquinas, the primary object of the beatific vision is God's divine essence.

On this point, John Owen has famously been compared to Aquinas. For Owen, Christ's glorified human nature plays a far more central role in the beatific vision. In his book *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, Owen says, "It is the Lord Christ and his glory which are the immediate object both of this faith and sight for we here 'behold him darkly in a glass' (that is, by faith); 'but we shall see him face to face" (by immediate vision)."[33] Soon after, in the same discourse, Owen says, "Wherefore the blessed and

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[29] For Aquinas's writings on the beatific vision see *Summa Theologiae* 1.12.1–11, 3.92.1–3, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.49–63, *Commentary on the Sentences* I,1,2 and III,1,3, ad 6, and *Compendium of Theology* 1.216, 2.9. For a reliable edition of the *Compendium of Theology* see Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, trans. Richard J. Regan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[30] For example, see Hans Boersma, "Thomas Aquinas on the Beatific Vision: A Christological Deficit," *TheoLogica*, 2/2 (2018): 129–47; See also Suzanne McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the 'Reforming' of the Beatific Vision," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen*, ed. Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones (New York: Routledge, 2012), 141–58.

[31] For responses to these accusations, Simon Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas and John Owen on the Beatific Vision: A Reply to Suzanne McDonald," *New Blackfriars*, no. 97/1070 (2016): 432–46; Simon Gaine, "The Beatific Vision and the Heavenly Mediation of Christ," *TheoLogica*, no. 2/2 (2018): 116–28; Simon Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas, the Beatific Vision and the Role of Christ: A Reply to Hans Boersma," *TheoLogica*, no. 2/2 (2018): 148–67; and Gavin Ortlund, "Will We See God's Essence? A Defence of a Thomistic Account of the Beatific Vision.," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74 (2021): 232–332.

[32] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] 3.92.2, ed. The Aquinas Institute, trans. Laurence Shapcote, vol. 22 (Green Bay, WI; Steubenville, OH: Aquinas Institute; Emmaus Academic, 2018), 272. McDonald agrees with this point in McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ," 154. To be clear, Aquinas does have an important place for Christology in his view of the beatific vision, even if it is less straightforward, as Simon Gaine and Gavin Ortlund have shown. On this, see Ortlund, "Will we see God's essence?" 329–330 and Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas, the Beatific Vision, and the Role of Christ," 148–67. The key difference between Aquinas and other figures like Owen and Edwards, is the level of priority they place on the role that Christ's glorified human nature plays in the beatific vision. Gaine helpfully points this out when he says, "Where Owen does differ from Aquinas in terms of the content of vision is in its order: for Aquinas, divinity is thus the primary object and Christ's humanity secondary, such that the humanity is seen in the divinity, while for Owen the humanity is first in order, such that the divinity is seen in the humanity." Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas and John Owen," 436.

[33] Owen, *Works* 1:288.

blessing sight which we shall have of God will be always 'in the face of Jesus Christ.' Therein will that manifestation of the glory of God, in his infinite perfections, and all their blessed operations, so shine into our souls, as shall immediately fill us with peace, rest, and glory."[34] Suzanne McDonald summarizes Owen's meaning by saying, "For Owen, the content of the beatific vision is primarily Jesus Christ, fully God, fully man, acknowledged by faith now, apprehended in its fullness in eternity."[35]

Like Owen, Jonathan Edwards has a similarly central role for the glorified human nature of Christ in the beatific vision. Edwards says the saints in heaven "shall see him as appearing in his glorified human nature with their bodily eyes, which will be a most glorious sight."[36]

To be clear, Owen and Edwards do not give primacy of place to the physical sight of glorified believers over the spiritual sight of their souls. Edwards says, "The soul has in itself those powers whereby 'tis sufficiently capable of apprehending spiritual objects, without looking through the windows of the outward senses. The soul is capable of seeing God more immediately and more certainly, and more fully and gloriously, than the eye of the body is."[37] Instead, by seeing the glorified human nature of Christ with their physical eyes, a human nature subsisting with a divine nature, the saints receive a deeper and fuller sight of the invisible God with the eyes of their souls.[38] Edwards explains that "[S]eeing God or the glorified body of Christ is the most perfect way of seeing God with the bodily eyes that can be: for in seeing a real body that one of the persons of the Trinity has assumed to be his body, and that he dwells in forever as his own, in which the divine majesty and excellency appears as much as 'tis possible for it to appear in outward form or shape, the saints do actually see a divine person with bodily eyes, and in the same manner as we see one another."[39] Christ is ever the mediator for the saints in glory, in part because he makes the invisible God visible. For Owen and Edwards, by seeing Christ, we really *do* see God. This seeing is most profoundly done with the eyes of the soul but not to the neglect of the eyes of the body. For Owen and Edwards, without the glorified

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[34] Owen, *Works* 1:292–93.

[35] McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ," 146–47.

[36] Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, ed. Kyle Strobel, Adriaan Neale, and Ken Minkema, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), 163. Edwards is also quick to point out that believers will see Christ not just the eyes of their bodies but that also "they shall see him with the eye of the soul." Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 164.

[37] Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 170.

[38] Strobel ("Jonathan Edwards Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 186n39) further explains Edwards' view by saying, "We could say that the bodily sight of Christ's glorified body perfects the body while the spiritual sight of God and Christ perfects the soul, but Edwards does not make that specific distinction himself. One of Edwards' reasons for not allowing the highest sight of God to be an embodied sight is that the angels, who do not have bodily faculties, share in the vision as well. This is an interesting employment of angelology."

[39] Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 169.

human nature of Christ, the beatific vision would not be complete.[40]

Charnock laid out this same glorified christological focus. He says:

> By knowing Christ, who is man, we know God because the human nature of Christ is personally assumed by the Son of God. As he that sees the body of a man, sees the man consisting of soul and body, because the soul and body are united together and make one composition, though the soul in itself be invisible; so he that sees the human nature of Christ is rightly said to see God, because the human and divine nature are personally united in Christ, though the divinity itself be invisible; and indeed, we cannot conceive any other sight and knowledge of God in heaven, but in Christ. The vision of Christ in his glorified human nature, is a seeing of God face to face; so that whosoever sees Christ with his bodily eyes, or with the eyes of his mind, sees God; he sees and knows God, not immediately and directly, but mediately and consequently.[41]

For Charnock, like Owen and Edwards, the glorified human nature of Christ is vital for the beatific vision.

Adding to the depth of his Christological focus for the *visio Dei*, Charnock argues that Christ is necessary for the beatific vision because Christ most fully reveals God's beauty and perfections to believers, not just in the vision but in all things. Charnock says:

> All the attributes of God are glorified in Christ...Christ added no glory to God's nature by his death and resurrection, but opened the curtains, and manifested that which had lain hid from eternity in the infinite depths of his own essence. In this regard he is called by the name of the 'glory of God' rising upon the world, Isa. 60:1. For Christ is a certificate wherein the world may read how excellent, wise, bountiful, just, faithful, holy, God is.[42]

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[40] Interestingly, this emphasis on the glorified human nature of Christ for Owen and Edwards differs significantly from John Calvin's treatment of the beatific vision. Calvin argues that in glory, Christ's mediatorial role will be complete and unnecessary "because the veil being then removed, we shall openly behold God reigning in his majesty, and Christ's humanity will then no longer be interposed to keep us back from a closer view of God." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 32–33. Calvin seems to hold to a very direct view of the Godhead in the beatific vision. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin says, the beatific vision will be a "direct vision of the Godhead". He goes on to say, "But when as partakers in heavenly glory we shall see God as he is, Christ, having then discharged the office of Mediator, will cease to be the ambassador of his Father, and will be satisfied with that glory which he enjoyed before the creation of the world." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 485. For a more detailed explanation of Calvin's view of Christ's mediatorial role and the beatific vision, see Richard A. Muller, "Christ in the Eschaton: Calvin and Moltmann on the Duration of the *Munus Regium*," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1981): 31–59.

[41] Charnock, *Works* 4:112

[42] Charnock, *Works* 4:138–39.

Additionally, for Charnock, Christ's mediation is necessary for the beatific vision not only because of the importance of Christ's glorified human nature or that he most fully reveals God's glory to mankind but also because it is only through the atonement of Christ that mankind is reconciled to God and able to enjoy the beatific vision in the first place. Charnock explains, "In uniting God and man in eternal fellowship…[God] brings stubble to dwell with flames, and weakness to behold and enjoy glory without being overwhelmed by the weight and splendour of it, to draw near to the supreme majesty through the veil of the flesh of Christ. He causeth pardon and punishment to meet, that God appeased, and man acquitted, may come together."[43] In the words of Simon Gaine, "One cannot see God without being 'in Christ.'"[44] At this point, Aquinas, Owen, Edwards, and Charnock speak in harmony.

In summary, while the glorified human nature of Christ is of secondary importance for Aquinas's view of the beatific vision, it is central in the beatific theology of Owen, Edwards, and Charnock. These latter three thinkers are far more explicitly Christological in their explanations of the beatific vision.[45] Charnock follows in Owen's footsteps in this regard. Thus, all four theologians recognize the significance of Christ as the foundation for the saints' participation in the beatific vision.

Will the Saints See the Essence of God in the Beatific Vision?

The final point of Charnock's theology of the beatific vision that we will explore in conversation with other theologians is whether or not the saints will see the essence of God in the vision. Aquinas posits that the saints will

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[43] Charnock, *Works* 4:147.

[44] Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas and John Owen," 439. Gaine makes this point while arguing that Aquinas' view of the beatific vision is sufficiently christological because Christ is the only means by which we can have union and relationship with God and that believers are therefore always dependent on Christ for their experiencing the beatific vision. Ortlund furthers this point by saying, "Furthermore, Thomas believes that the vision of God in heaven is christologically mediated in the sense that it is the result of the light of glory imparted to the saints, which is imparted to the saints through Christ – indeed, it is received by an act of participation in Christ as their head. For Thomas, the ascended Christ possesses the beatific vision par excellence, and our beholding of it is a participation in his." Ortlund, "Will we see God's essence?" 330.

[45] Gaine and Ortlund have helpfully shown that Aquinas has a greater role for christology in his theology of the beatific vision than others have previously argued. That being said, it is a demonstrable fact that Owen, Edwards, and Charnock expend vastly more ink on elucidating Christ's explicit role in the beatific vision, particularly as it relates to his glorified human nature. Ortlund and Gaine argue that when the whole of Aquinas's theology is taken into account, the implication is that Christ must necessarily be vital to the beatific vision. While this may be true, it seems clear that Aquinas, in his many words about the beatific vision, makes far less explicit statements about Christ's role in the vision compared to Owen, Edwards, and Charnock. This cannot be easily explained away, and arguments resting simply on logical inference seem weak when the primary sources are engaged. Aquinas, Owen, Edwards, and Charnock may all view christology as important for the beatific vision in different ways, but Owen, Edwards, and Charnock seem to hold a more explicit and weightier place for christology in the vision and are all at pains to show it in their respective writings.

have a finite but unmediated view of God's essence.[46] This view comes from God impressing himself upon the intellects of the saints, creating a union and participation between the two.[47] This seeing is exclusively spiritual. Aquinas does have a place forth bodily eyes in the vision, but it is in a secondary sense, namely that by seeing other created things, we will see clear evidence of God's existence and work in the world.[48]

Owen takes a different perspective by arguing that we cannot see God's essence without Christ's glorified human nature. He claims God's infinite essence would be invisible and incomprehensible without Christ's mediation, even in glory.[49] Whereas Aquinas believes that God will impress himself upon our intellect so that we can see his essence, making God the source and form of our vision, Owen has a different understanding of our source of sight and knowledge of God. McDonald explains Owen's view by saying:

> All knowledge of and union and communion with God now, and everything about our salvation, come to us through the Son incarnate. So it will be eternally. God will not change the way in which he reveals himself at the consummation of all things, as if making himself

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[46] "Therefore, God will be seen in his essence by the saints in heaven." Aquinas, *ST* 3.92.1. Aquinas also says, "[The] intellect [will] be able to see the divine essence by the divine essence itself." Aquinas, *ST* 3.92.1. Additionally, Aquinas says, "Now in the order of knowledge the object known follows the form by which we know, since by the form of a stone we see a stone, whereas the efficacy of knowledge follows the power of the knower: thus he who has stronger sight sees more clearly. Consequently, in that vision we shall see the same thing that God sees, namely, his essence, but not so effectively." Aquinas, *ST* 3.92.1 See also where Aquinas argues that, "I say then that God can in no way be seen with the eyes of the body, or perceived by any of the senses, as that which is seen directly, neither here, nor in heaven...Since, then, sight and sense will be specifically the same in the glorified body, as in a non-glorified body, it will be impossible for it to see the divine essence as an object of direct vision." Aquinas, *ST* 3.92.2. For further summary of Aquinas's view, see Ortlund, "Will we see God's essence?" 325–27. Francis Turretin also seems to hold that the saints will see the unmediated essence of God, although he is quite measured in his statements and only cautiously comes forward to say so. See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 20.8.1–22, pp. 608–17.

[47] Edward Leigh, one of the Westminster divines, follows Aquinas exactly on this point. "God presents himself immediately to the understanding, 1 Cor. 13:9. 1 John 3:2....[T]hey shall enjoy God, possesse him, he shall be all in all. They shall not see him with bodily eyes (so the Deity cannot be seen) but with the soul so far as the understanding can be enlarged." Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity*. (London: Printed by A.M. for William Lee), 1654, 871.

[48] "Yet it will see it as an object of indirect vision, because on the one hand the bodily sight will see so great a glory of God in bodies, especially in the glorified bodies and most of all in the body of Christ, and, on the other hand, the intellect will see God so clearly that God will be perceived in things seen with the eye of the body, even as life is perceived in speech. For although our intellect will not then see God from seeing his creatures, yet it will see God in his creatures seen corporeally." Aquinas, *ST* 3.92.2.This argument is similar to Augustine's in *City of God* 22.29. Aquinas even explicitly cites Augustine at this point.

[49] Owen, *Works* 1:292–93. McDonald further explains Owen's view by saying, "Were it not for the incarnation, Owen maintains that God would remain essentially invisible, now and for all eternity...[F]or Owen, it is not even an unmediated apprehension of the essence of God as Trinity as such. Here Owen moves very deliberately beyond the Thomist tradition. He informs us that even in the beatific vision, God, in the unmediated fullness of his essence, will be incomprehensible to our created, even though glorified, minds." McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ," 146.

known in the person of the incarnate Son were merely a temporary emergency measure to be discarded . . . . This means that Owen is absolutely insistent that the vision of God in heaven will be mediated to us through Christ . . . [50]

For Owen, since God reveals himself most clearly through Christ to the saints in this life, he will not cease to do so in the next. According to Owen's understanding, our view of God in the beatific vision is primarily spiritual. However, this view is impossible without our physical eyes gazing upon the glory of the glorified human nature of Christ. Christ mediates our vision of God's essence.

Edwards holds a similar view to Owen, but with some key nuances. Edwards says that the saints will see "the glory of Christ in his divine nature..."[51] Strobel explains this by saying, "As Christological as Edwards' focus is, he is clear that the embodied Christ is not the object of the vision as such, that is, as *embodied*. The vision of God by the glorified saints is primarily spiritual. It is not beholding forms or representations, shapes or colours that make the soul 'happified'; rather, "tis in seeing God, who is a spirit, spiritually with the eye of the soul.'"[52] For Edwards, Christ is necessary for the beatific vision. While his glorified human nature is important to the whole event, the spiritual seeing of Christ's divine nature through Christ gives the saints ultimate joy.

On a related note, Edwards emphasizes the importance of mutual beholding in the beatific vision. The Father has beheld the Son for all eternity past, just as the Son has beheld the Father. For Edwards, the saints behold God through Christ's vision of God according to their creaturely capacities. Through the Son, bonded in union by the Spirit, the saints will partake in the life of the Trinity, which is grounded in mutual beholding and enjoyment.[53] Edwards says, "The saints shall enjoy God as partaking with Christ of his enjoyment of God, for they are united to him and are glorified and made happy in the enjoyment of God as his members."[54] Edwards adds a Trinitarian emphasis to the beatific vision and has a different emphasis overall from Aquinas (and arguably Owen). Strobel explains, "[T]he issue for Edwards is a participation in the *relational* life of the Trinity through sight, and not, as with Aquinas, a sight of the divine essence."[55]

Like Edwards, Charnock stresses the importance of mutual beholding. Charnock posits that God has enjoyed beholding his glory for all eternity

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[50] McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ," 149–50.

[51] Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 165.

[52] Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 178.

[53] For more on Edwards' Trinitarian formulation, see Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards' Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 178–81.

[54] Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 173. Edwards also says, "By the Holy Ghost a spiritual sight of God is given in this world, so 'tis the same Holy Spirit by which a beatifical vision is given of God in heaven." Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 173.

[55] Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards' Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 187n48. Emphasis his.

past and made the saints behold and enjoy that same glory.[56] Charnock's beatific theology is less explicitly Trinitarian than Edwards in that Charnock does not often relate the Spirit explicitly to the beatific vision. However, Charnock seems to point to the reality that our enjoyment in glory is of the Trinitarian Godhead, such that even glorifying and worshiping God in glory will involve praising the whole Godhead.[57] While Charnock's view is less fully relationally-focused than Edwards', Charnock does argue for a true participation in the divine nature founded upon and saturated in the love of God. Charnock says, "It is a real participation. It is not a picture, but a nature: it is divine. God doth not busy himself about apparitions. It is a likeness, not only in actions, but in nature. God communicates to the creature a singular participation of the divine vision and divine love; why may he not also give some excellent participation of his nature?"[58] Charnock believes that God causes us to participate in his nature by his grace, which is how we can "be holy as God is holy." We are adopted as children of God and are brought into union with God. If we are children, then we are heirs (according to Paul in Rom. 8:17), and if we are heirs of God, we experience all of the benefits of God earned by Christ that our creaturely capacities will allow. For Charnock, we really do participate in God's nature in the relational context of God's love for us and our love for him.

In discussing the essence of God, it is important to note that Aquinas, Owen, Edwards, and Charnock use the term *immediate* in diverse ways regarding the beatific vision. For Aquinas, the beatific vision is immediate (unmediated) because God directly gives the vision of himself by impressing himself directly on the intellect of the saints. Edwards also explicitly calls the vision immediate. However, Edwards means something different by the term. For Edwards, the beatific vision is an immediate view of God because it does not involve things like the Scriptures or sacraments, which help us "see" God in true but less clear ways than Christ Himself in the beatific vision.[59] Strobel explains that, for Edwards, "immediacy highlights the

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[56] Charnock, *Works* 4:24, 1:509.

[57] Charnock's explanation of this Trinitarian worship can be seen in a discussion of his that almost sounds like a reverse form of inseparable operations related to our praising the Father through the Son. He says, "As the glory of both is linked in itself, it must be linked in our services; we must honour both, one as the object of worship, the other as the medium; the Father as the rector, Christ as the ambassador. As the Father is not glorified by Christ, but by first glorifying Christ, so neither is the Father glorified by us without our glorifying Christ first by believing. When we glorify Christ as the Son of God, we glorify God as the Father of Christ; we cannot glorify the paternity without acknowledging a filiation, nor acknowledge a filiation without honouring the paternity." Charnock, *Works* 4:7. Relating this to the beatific vision, we could posit that Charnock would say that in seeing God through the glorified Son, bonded to Christ by the Spirit, we praise Christ and therefore necessarily praise the Father through the Spirit.

[58] Charnock, *Works* 3:127.

[59] "This shall be an immediate sight. It will be no apprehension of God's excellency, by arguing of it from his works; neither will it be such a spiritual sight of God as the saints have in this world, seeing of him in his word, or making use of ordinances, which is called a seeing "through a glass, darkly: but then" they shall see him "face to face," 1 Corinthians 13:12. [They] shall not only

nature of *receiving* the sight, and does not delineate how direct the access is to God (namely, an immediacy to God's soul, which Edwards was concerned to protect against)."[60] Charnock's view is closer to Edwards' than Aquinas's, but he uses the terms *immediate* and *mediate* differently. He says, "The vision of Christ in his glorified human nature, is a seeing of God face to face; so that whosoever sees Christ with his bodily eyes, or with the eyes of his mind, sees God; he sees and knows God, not immediately and directly, but mediately and consequently."[61]

In Charnock's view, similar to Owen and Edwards, the saints will not have an unmediated view of God's essence. There are multiple reasons for this. First, finite human beings cannot comprehend the infinite God.[62] Second, Christ's mediation is necessary for the saints to see God. Charnock says, "[I]ndeed all the light of the knowledge of God that ever was did spring from Christ. None ever knew God by his own strength and natural abilities, but as they were kept up and animated by the mediator."[63] In seeing Christ, the saints really will see God and have a profound spiritual sight of God initiated by the physical sight of the glorified Christ. This sight will be different than the sight Aquinas envisions, which involves God impressing

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see the glory of God as being reflected from other things, but they shall see him as we see the sun by his own light in a clear hemisphere; it will be an intuitive view of God that they will have." Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, 170.

[60] Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards' Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 178–79. Emphasis his.

[61] Charnock, *Works* 4:112. Interestingly, Strobel notes ("Jonathan Edwards' Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 186–87n41) a similarity between Edwards' view and Bavinck's when Bavinck says, "The redeemed see God, not—to be sure—with physical eyes, but still in a way that far outstrips all revelation in this dispensation via nature and Scripture. And thus they will all know him, each in the measure of his mental capacity, with a knowledge that has its image and likeness in God's knowledge—directly, immediately, unambiguously, and purely. Then they will receive and possess everything they expected here only in hope." Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 722. Bavinck is commenting on how vision with the eyes is mediated while vision with the soul is considered immediate. In this sense, it seems that Charnock would agree. Charnock holds that the saints see the glorified human nature of Christ with their eyes and this gives them also a spiritual sight of God. The saints can only know God through Christ. Using Bavinck's framework, Charnock would agree with him insofar as Charnock would say that the saints have an immediate view of God by seeing him with the eyes of their souls through Christ, but they have a mediated view of God in seeing the the human nature of Christ with their physical eyes. To be clear, Charnock would be quick to clarify that however one uses the terms immediate and mediate, the saints only have true knowledge of God through Christ, even in the beatific vision.

[62] "And though it be said, 1 John 3:2, that 'we shall see him as he is,' it is most convenient to understand it of the sight of Christ in his visible human nature at the day of judgment, and not of the essence of God; for he speaks of the appearance of God, understanding Christ's appearance, which the Scripture frequently speaks of. There will, indeed, in heaven be a wider enlarging the faculty, and a fuller discovery of the object, greater sparklings of light and glory, enough to satisfy; yet still the perfections of God will be above our comprehensions; the understanding will be dilated and strengthened, a clear light put into it, which is not any species of God, but a spiritual principle created by God to perfect the understanding for the contemplation of him." Charnock, *Works* 4:40.

[63] Charnock, *Works* 4:114.

himself upon the human intellect.

Charnock's theology of the beatific vision also bears similarities to that of Edwards and Owen insofar as it is primarily focused "on the God who *gives*, rather than the vision *received*," according to Strobel.[64] Charnock's view can be indeed labeled as a "vision *pro nobis (for us)*."[65] Charnock consistently emphasizes that the beatific vision is a gracious gift of God for believers, made possible by the sacrificial death of Christ for believers, Christ's mediation for believers, through believers' faith in Christ dying for them, ultimately for the glory of God and the joy of believers. The whole of Charnock's theology of the beatific vision showcases God's love for his people through his Son by his Spirit.[66]

In summary, Charnock believes that the saints will not have an unmediated view of God's essence, differing from Aquinas' position. Instead, the saints see the glorified human nature of Christ with their bodily eyes and, through Christ, have a perfect spiritual view of God. Charnock falls closer to Owen here but also has elements of Edwards' mutual beholding nuances in his view of the beatific vision. Charnock's view is less explicitly Trinitarian than Edwards', but there is evidence of Trinitarian worship in Charnock's view of the beatific vision. Charnock's emphasis on the beatific vision is less relational than Edwards', but Charnock's view still lands closer to Edwards overall than Aquinas. One could almost say that Charnock's theology of the beatific vision rests somewhere between Owen and Edwards.

Conclusion

Steeped in classical theology and the Puritan and Reformed tradition, Stephen Charnock's view of the beatific vision is robust, christologically-focused, and deeply pastoral. While agreeing with the God-centeredness of Aquinas's view[67] (as could be said of Owen and Edwards), Charnock's theology uniquely and more closely relates to that of John Owen and Jonathan Edwards. Rather than being too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good, Charnock's theology of the beatific vision can preach and is meant to encourage believers on this side of glory. By inspiring believers to strive for as much sight of and joy in God's glory as can be found during their earthly pilgrimages, Charnock inspires believers to seek out a foretaste of the joy of the beatific vision now. While their view of God may be imperfect in this life, one day, Charnock says, believers will see God perfectly through Christ in the beatific vision such that they will be filled with immense joy and will be conformed to the image of Christ, all while giving glory to the Godhead.

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[64] Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards' Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 183.

[65] This language comes from Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards' Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," 183.

[66] For examples of this, see Charnock, *Works* 2:317, 3:125, 4:137–39, etc.

[67] Ortlund, "Will we see God's essence?," 326–27.

John Webster and the Possibility of a Reformed Thomism

By Craig A. Carter[1]

Abstract: *Why are North American Evangelicals suddenly interested in the thought of Thomas Aquinas? And what does the theology of John Webster have to do with it? The purpose of this essay is to try to answer these two questions. The growing interest in Thomas is evident today among conservative Evangelical theologians and conservative confessional ones.*

Key Words: John Webster, Reformed Thomism, Scholasticism

Introduction

The division of North American Protestantism into liberal and evangelical streams during the first half of the twentieth century has shaped Protestantism to this day. However, two current trends are complicating matters further. First, liberal Protestant denominations are dying. Not only are they in serious numerical decline, but they also have increasingly lost touch with traditional, orthodox doctrine. As they become increasingly post-Christian, they show signs of having been infected with gnostic heresy and neo-paganism. Second, Evangelicalism itself is going through a sorting process, as it divides into one stream that follows the liberal Protestant church's descent into cultural accommodation and a second stream consisting of conservative Protestants who are making the uncomfortable discovery that they do not possess the historical and philosophical resources needed to nurture historic, catholic orthodoxy. Those who view liberal Protestantism as a disaster are highly motivated to seek a deeper understanding of the tradition and to re-consider the issue of whether classical metaphysics might need to be reclaimed if we are going to succeed in maintaining Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy.

John Webster is significant to the latter group because he was a first-rate theological mind and a leading Barthian who moved away from Barth in the final phase of his career to embrace a classical theist and, specifically, Thomistic understanding of the doctrine of God. Many conservative Protestants have done doctorates on Barth in the last 40 years, many of which were supervised by Webster. Barth has been viewed as the closest modern theologian to Evangelical theology. But in the final decade of his life, Webster utilized various Thomistic metaphysical doctrines to elucidate a reformed

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version of the classic doctrine of God. He did this in the context of delving deeper into the classical roots of historic Protestantism. Thus, he raises the question of whether Barth should be regarded as a source for Evangelical theology or whether it is necessary to go back behind Barth to scholastic orthodoxy. Since Webster's death in 2016, a growing number of Evangelical theologians have concluded that we need to reach back behind Barth and the Enlightenment to recover Thomas Aquinas and reformed scholasticism.

Evangelicals have learned from Webster that the way to guard catholic orthodoxy is to recover our sixteenth and seventeenth-century roots in Reformed and Lutheran scholasticism. This premodern theological tradition produced the great Protestant confessions of faith, which build upon the ecumenical creeds of the first five centuries that symbolize trinitarian and christological orthodoxy. Webster's reading of John Owen was followed by his recovery of Thomas, which is an example of becoming more catholic by becoming more Protestant. Many younger conservative Evangelicals are following the path blazed by Webster and are beginning to recover Thomistic metaphysics in a more systematic way than he did.

Evangelicals Re-discover Their Need for Roots

The twentieth century witnessed a near-eclipse of classical metaphysics throughout Protestantism. Since Hume and Kant, most liberal Protestant theologians have started from the assumption that classical metaphysics is outdated and, therefore, we must re-state doctrine within a post-Kantian or even post-metaphysical situation. This has led to a plethora of approaches. Many Evangelical theologians have followed Barth in attempting to base theology on Christology alone, thus trying to make do without metaphysics. Cornelius Van Til has convinced many conservative Baptists and Presbyterians to reject natural theology and classical metaphysics and adopt what he termed "presuppositionalism." Neo-Calvinists in the Dutch tradition have tended to avoid talking about metaphysics by adopting the post-Kantian language of worldview (*Weltanschauung*) instead. Many Evangelicals take a Biblicist approach, which denies that we need to use any extra-biblical language to do theology and thus tends to reduce systematic theology to biblical theology. All these movements tend to place less emphasis on the ecumenical creeds and the Protestant confessions and more on *individual* biblical exegesis.

At first, the anti-metaphysical, Biblicist emphasis appeared to be successful in preserving orthodoxy. But more recently, serious concerns have surfaced. For example, in the mid-1990s and early 2000, the Evangelical Theological Society was embroiled in the open theism controversy. Open theism is a Biblicist doctrine that sees the future as truly open or undetermined, even for God. God is love, and evil is a result of his decision not to be fully in control of creation.[2] There was a failed attempt to expel

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[2] See Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001) and Clark H. Pinnock, et. al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

Clark Pinnock and John Sanders from the Society for their views. Still, many Evangelicals became aware that all Evangelical theologians did not hold classical theism.

In 2016, a controversy arose within Evangelicalism over some alarming revisions to the doctrine of the Trinity proposed by Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware, among others, which seemed to introduce an act of voluntary submission of the Son to the Father into the eternal Trinity.[3] At the same time, various Evangelical theologians were questioning the biblical basis of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son,[4] and others were dabbling in a kind of theistic mutualism, which advocated for seeing change in God in response to the creation as well as change in creation in response to God.[5] The realization that temporality and change were being introduced into the being of the Triune God set off alarm bells, and questions began to arise as to whether late twentieth-century North American theology had lost touch with the ecumenical creeds and the patristic trinitarian and christological consensus, which had grounded the church for 1500 years.

In the wake of these controversies, many Evangelical theologians, including many younger ones, have become highly concerned about the shallow historical roots of recent Protestant theology. Sessions on the retrieval of patristic and medieval thought have proliferated and been well-attended at the Evangelical Theological Society in recent years. The revisionist project of attempting to re-state orthodox theology within the philosophical constraints of post-Kantian modernity has been deemed to have fallen short of the goal of preserving historic Nicene orthodoxy. As a result, many Evangelical theologians have become interested in retrieval, of which three branches are significant.

One branch seeks to retrieve the patristic consensus on the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology, focusing on the pro-Nicene theology of the fourth century and the Trinitarian thought of Augustine.[6] A second branch sees the thought of Thomas Aquinas as a classic re-statement of the patristic consensus on the doctrine of God and as a model for the judicious use of metaphysics in theology.[7] A third branch is interested in retrieving the roots

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[3] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020). See my review, "How Then Shall We Theologize? A review of Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and his doctrine of the Trinity" Credo Magazine (Vol. 11. Issue 1, April 2021) https://credomag.com/article/how-then-shall-we-theologize/.

[4] For a good overview of this issue, see Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (eds.), *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: (Zondervan, 2017).

[5] Dolezal, James E. *All That is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Heritage Books, 2017), chapter 2.

[6] The literature is extensive but see especially Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and M. R. Barnes, *Augustine and Nicene Theology: Essays on Augustine and the Latin Argument for Nicaea* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023). Matthew Barrett has distilled much of this retrieval project for a more popular audience in his: *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021).

[7] For examples see: Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics and the Task of Christian Theology. Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2019),

of Protestant theology in post-Reformation orthodoxy, that is, the theology of writers like Vermigli, Zanchi, Junius, Gerhardt, Cranmer, Owen, and Turretin, which shaped the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican confessions like the Augsburg Confession, the Westminster standards, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.[8]

The recognition that contemporary systematic theology needs to be nourished by continual engagement with the tradition of historic orthodoxy is a hopeful sign of the maturing of an ecclesial movement often known more for emotional revivalism and activism than for serious scholarship outside the areas of biblical languages and exegesis. It is important to emphasize that what I am describing here is not just an academic activity that is disconnected from the spiritual life of the local church. Rather, it is being carried out mainly in church-oriented seminaries by theologians immersed in the life of local congregations and who frequently speak directly to pastors and students. It is thus more ecclesial than most systematic theology has been during the twentieth century.

In support of this retrieval project, there has also been a growing resistance to certain caricatures of the Reformation that have been popular within certain Roman Catholic and Radical Orthodox circles. The Reformation has been portrayed as a key catalyst of modernity, a transmitter of the virus of nominalism, and a harbinger of the Enlightenment. However, the research of the last two generations of scholars of the Reformation has called this set of characterizations into serious question. The work of intellectual historians such as Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, and Richard Muller has stressed that the stated goals of the reformers were not to disdain tradition or to abandon catholicity as a key mark of the church. Rather, it was to strive to be *more* catholic than Rome in the sense of using earlier tradition to overturn later tradition. The reformers were highly critical of late medieval scholasticism but appreciative of earlier Augustinian-Thomist scholasticism. The goal of the Reformation was to reform the existing church, not to start a new one. The main issues in dispute between the reformers and Rome were soteriology and ecclesiology, but the doctrines of God and Christ remained unchallenged. The reformers advocated *sola Scriptura* to make the point that Scripture is the final court of appeal when strands of traditions clash, but they were not interested in rejecting tradition *per se* and embracing a *solo Scriptura* that uses Scripture alone while ignoring tradition as if it were unimportant.

The first and second-generation of Protestant theologians distinguished between the Augustinian-Thomist strand of medieval scholasticism, which they often referred to as the work of the "sounder scholastics," and the late medieval scholasticism of Occam and Biel, characterized by nominalism,

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Jordan Cooper, *Prolegomena: A Defense of Scholastic Method* (Weidner Institute, 2020), Christopher R. J. Holmes *The Holy Spirit*, New Studies in Dogmatics, eds. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016) and Fred Sanders *The Triune God. New Studies in Dogmatics*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

[8] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 volumes, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

voluntarism, univocity, and semi-Pelagianism. The well-known invective of Luther against Thomas is now understood to be based on Luther's emphatic rejection of the teachings of Gabriel Biel, whose writings served as his textbooks during his formation and whose misrepresentations of the thought of Thomas led Luther to criticize ideas he mistakenly attributed to Thomas. This is why Lutheran scholasticism was able to appropriate so much from Thomas without necessarily conflicting with Luther. Calvin was not trained in scholastic theology and appears to have known Thomas's writings only second-hand. When he refers negatively to "the scholastics," he has in mind the work of the scholastic theologians of his day, especially those at the University of Paris who were nominalists and far from faithful disciples of Thomas. Other important reformers like Peter Martyr Vermigli and Martin Bucer had first-hand knowledge of Thomas and appreciated many of his ideas. By the second generation of the Reformation, Protestant scholasticism was utilizing many ideas from Thomas in the universities in Lutheran and Reformed territories where philosophy and doctrine were taught.

Much research on the intellectual origins of the Reformation has been synthesized and documented in an important book published in May 2024 by Matthew Barrett, titled: *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*.[9] This thousand-page tome offers a new reading of the Reformation that attempts to get as close as possible to the self-understanding of its leaders. Significantly, Part I of this book devotes 350 pages to medieval theology and is titled "The Reformation's Catholic Context." Chapter five's title conveys a centrally important theme of the book: "The *Via Moderna*, Nominalism, and the Late Medieval Departure from the Realism of Thomistic Augustinianism and Its Soteriology." Bruce Gordon of Yale Divinity School says of this book that it is "a crucial corrective to a historical tradition that has lost its sense of self."[10] Evangelicalism, or at least a segment of it, seems now to be recovering its sense of being catholic precisely by recovering the true meaning of what it means to be historically Protestant.

All three of these branches of the retrieval project, pro-Nicene theology, Thomistic theology and philosophy, and Protestant scholasticism, are inter-connected. One significant focus of attention has been the question of what we today can learn from the use of Thomistic metaphysics by the post-Reformation Protestant scholastics in their articulation of the doctrine of God. How did the reformers and post-reformation Protestant theologians utilize metaphysics in writing their doctrinal systems? To what extent did the classical metaphysical commitments of writers like Vermigli, Gerhardt, Owen, and Turretin shape the doctrine found in the major Protestant confessions such as the *Westminster Standards*, the *Augsburg Confession*, the

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[9] Matthew Barrett. *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023).

[10] Ibid. back cover.

Thirty-Nine Articles, and the *London Baptist Confession*? Is it possible that the classical realist metaphysics they held were indispensable to the coherent statement of Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy they taught? To what extent did Protestant scholastics utilize the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas? These questions are now the subject of intense investigation.

I suggest that it is possible to employ the term "Reformed Thomism" to designate a growing and vigorous strand of Evangelical dogmatics that can be seen in the works of scholars such as James Dolezal, Steven Duby, Christopher Holmes, Carl Trueman, Scott Swain, Michael Allen, J. V. Fesko, and Matthew Barrett. Some of these figures might be happy to be known as part of a school of Reformed Thomism, while others might be more comfortable being known as friends of such a movement. And, of course, it is early enough in the development of this movement that a different term might yet come to the fore as more appropriate.

Nevertheless, the term "Reformed Thomism" has been used in a recent dissertation written under Matthew Barrett's supervision at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I believe it captures two aspects of this retrieval movement quite well. First, it is a movement of mostly reformed theologians in the Presbyterian, Anglican, and Baptist traditions. So, it is embedded in historic, reformed theology. Second, it is Thomistic in the sense that it draws on both the philosophy and the theology proper of Thomas extensively. It uses metaphysics in a ministerial role as a handmaiden to theology rather than seeking to express doctrine through the grid of one pre-existing philosophical system. In so doing, it follows the example of Thomas himself. Major Thomistic themes treated favorably in most of these authors include natural theology, metaphysical realism, the importance of Divine ideas, the use of analogical language for God, a participatory ontology, premodern christological exegesis, and the harmony of faith and reason. Theologians who share these emphases have their own internal disagreements, but they are moving on a trajectory that is quite different from those of other theological movements within Evangelicalism, such as analytic theology, Van Tilian presuppositionalism, Barthianism, and left-wing, social justice-oriented movements.

John Webster's Influence on the Growth of Reformed Thomism

A significant influence on many of those mentioned above is the late Anglican theologian, John Webster. How has Webster's work influenced Reformed Thomism? As one of the greatest theologians of his generation, his example is an inspiration to many.

In the final decade of his life, Webster had moved well beyond Barthianism and was engaging classical Protestant theologians such as Herman Bavinck and John Owen. In his reading of Owen, Webster was directed back to the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In a recent book, *John Webster: The Shape and Development of His Theology*, Jordan Senner has argued that we can discern

three periods in Webster's writings rather than two.[11] Throughout his career, he focused on how to articulate theologically the God-man relationship. In his earliest work, which could be termed Barthian, his starting point was Christology. But in his second phase, he began to stress the economic Trinity, that is, the historical self-revelation of God in history, as his starting point. In his third phase, from about 2007 up to his death in 2016, he began to think through the implications of starting the exposition of the doctrine of God from God in himself, that is, from the immanent Trinity. One of the most important influences on his thinking during this third period was the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

He began to differentiate between the order of discovery, in which the Spirit empowers us to know the Son, who directs us up to the Father, and the order of exposition, in which a properly ordered dogmatics begins from the being of God and then explicates the processions and missions of the one God. He was starting to espouse a provocatively non-modern, even anti-modern, approach. Clearly, in this final decade of his life, Webster had adopted a premodern starting point for dogmatics that took a different approach to dealing with the Kantian strictures on doing classical metaphysics from that of his mentor Barth. Whereas Barth attempted to do an end run around Kant by grounding all dogmatics in a narrative Christology, Webster simply refused to accept the metaphysical constraints of Kant and grounded his dogmatics in the Divine being itself, in full awareness that doing so requires one to adopt many aspects of premodern, classical metaphysics, including the *analogia entis*.[12] However, he did not have time to work out the implications of this move and write the prolegomena to his projected *Systematic Theology*. One gets the impression, however, that he is committed to doing this not because he has chosen to adopt a specific metaphysical system as the foundation for his dogmatic system; rather, it seems that he was becoming convinced that doing so is necessary to do justice to the historic, Christian, orthodox, interpretation of the Bible. In the third stage of his career, he was prepared to let the chips fall where they may as far as metaphysics is concerned, and they were beginning to fall in a decidedly Thomistic direction.

Between 2012 and 2016, Webster published three collections of essays: *The Domain of the Word* and the two volumes of *God Without Measure*. He wrote these 35 essays between 2007 and 2015 (the final phase of his career) as "working papers" in preparation for writing a projected five-volume systematic theology he had contracted with Baker. In the remainder of this paper, I want to examine some themes in these essays that illustrate the Thomistic influence on his

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[11] Jordan Senner, *John Webster: The Shape and Development of His Thought* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2022), 9.

[12] As early as 2011, Webster could write: "Is the analogy of being the invention of the Antichrist? Hardly: it is a theologoumenon, no less and no more; surely the Antichrist would unleash something a bit more destructive than a somewhat recherche bit of Christian teaching?" in John B. Webster, "Perfection and Participation" in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* Edited by Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

thought. First, I will examine how he employed the well-known Thomistic doctrine of mixed relations between the Creator and creatures to set in place a foundation for the erection of a participatory ontology. He appears to be clarifying his earlier attempts to highlight the ontological differences between God and humanity while emphasizing their relatedness in terms of covenant and moral in nature. One could argue that his thought was moving toward a full embrace of Thomas's doctrine of participation as the means between pantheism (identification of God and creation), on the one hand, and creaturely autonomy (no relation between the Creator and creation), on the other. This move necessarily involves seeing an analogical relation between God and man as the basis for the moral relation. Second, I will point out his use of dual causality to show how the human agent can be free *and* moved by God's grace to embrace Christ. What is interesting about this move is that it is an example of Webster using Thomistic metaphysics in the service of a typically Protestant theme, namely, *sola gratia*. In conclusion, I will offer a few brief reflections on the implications of the movement inspired by Webster for ecumenical dialogue in the future.

Participation and the Thomistic Theory of Mixed Relations

In his Preface to *The Domain of the Word*, which serves as a preface both to the entire collection of essays in *The Domain of the Word* and *God Without Measure*, Webster says:

> Readers of earlier volumes of essays . . . may notice some changes of emphasis and idiom in the present collection: more consideration is paid to patristic and medieval authors and to their heirs in post-Reformation scholastic theology, and more is expected of the theology of creation and of the Spirit. Perhaps most of all, I have found my attention arrested by the preponderance of God's infinitely deep, fully realized life in giving an account of the substance of Christian faith, particularly as it touches upon the relations of God and creatures.[13]

"More is expected of the theology of creation," he says. Is this a very polite way of saying that he is leaving behind the thin Barthian account of creation to embrace the more robust doctrine found in Thomas? To answer this question, we must examine how he develops his account of the God-creature relationship in these essays.

One of the perennial problems in Christian dogmatics is how to express the truth that human beings are utterly dependent on God, yet not in the same genus as God or in any way existing on the same plane of reality as God. Webster articulates the utter transcendence of God in his essay, "'Love is Also a Lover of Life': *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness."[14] In this

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[13] John Webster "Preface" in, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason*, (London: T & T Clark, 2012), ix–x.

[14] John Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life: *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Creaturely Goodness" in *God Without Measure, Vol. I*, (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 99–114.

essay he says his goal is to address misperceptions about the implications of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* for the goodness of the creature. In particular, he says he wishes to address the "anxiety that the pure non-reciprocal gratuity of God's creation of all things out of nothing debases the creature, for a being so radically constituted by another as to be nothing apart from that other is a being evacuated of intrinsic worth."[15] He acknowledges that he is addressing a typically modern worry but points out that this doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* has "proved a permanently contrary article of Christian teaching."[16]

The essay stresses that God himself is the primary subject of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. It is a statement about the being of God that has implications for the nature of creatures. He writes: "To be the cause of being of all things is proper to God alone."[17] He also says that God does not simply have the power to create; God is that power "which is his substance and not some accidental property."[18] In addition, Webster stresses that God is the cause of all things, not by natural necessity but by his will. He wills in accord with his goodness. Furthermore, the act of creation involves no movement or change in God and is incomprehensible to the human creature.

When he turns to what this doctrine of creation implies for the nature of created things, he first stresses that created things are "not eternal, necessary, or underived."[19] But, he says, the negatives prepare the way for a positive statement that created things have being in God: "They are not nothing but participate in the good of being." Quoting Thomas, he writes, "But the being of created things is had by the divine gift, or *per participationem*."[20] Webster appears to have embraced what could be termed Augustinian Christian Platonism at this point, as we find it in Thomas. Webster elaborates:

> The movement by which we understand how creatures participate in being is this: 'we trace everything that possesses something by sharing, as to its source and cause, to what possesses that thing eternally . . . . But . . . God is his very existing. And so existing belongs to him by his essence, and existing belongs to other things by participation. For the essence of everything else is not its existing, since there can be only one existing that is absolutely and intrinsically existing . . . Therefore, God necessarily causes existing in everything that exists.[21]

Protestant (or, more accurately, Barthian) worries about maintaining

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[15] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 100.

[16] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 100.

[17] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 103.

[18] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 103.

[19] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 106.

[20] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologicae*, Ia.44,1, ad. 1 as cited by Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 106.

[21] Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, I.68 as cited by Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 107.

enough distance between God the Creator and the human creature seem to have evaporated as the metaphysics of participation grounded in a classical theistic conception of God indeed funds a thicker and more robust doctrine of creation.

In another essay in the same volume, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures," Webster spells out the Thomistic doctrine of mixed relations that flows from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* we have watched him expound. The essay begins with a quotation from Thomas's *De Potentia* in which Thomas says that the relation of the creature to the Creator must be a real relation, but in God, it is only a logical relation. Webster notes the provenance of this teaching in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, and he notes that it was widely held in medieval theology. In contrast to the medieval period, however, the theory of mixed relations attracts much criticism in the modern period.[22]

One common objection to the theory of mixed relations is that in it "God's commerce with creatures is accorded no constitutive role." In response, Webster notes that the point of the doctrine is not to deny God's relation to creatures "but to invest that relation with a specific character."[23] What is that specific character? What is denied here is that God is one term in a dyad, that God and creation exist on the same plane. Note that the doctrine of creation here primarily teaches about the nature of God, not simply about the nature of creatures. Webster goes on to flesh out the asymmetrical relationship between God and creation by considering the place of the doctrine of creation in dogmatics.

He points out that modern dogmatics exhibit a "certain disorder or misalignment generated by excessive attention to the divine economy."[24] Defining Christian divinity as the study of God and all things in relation to God, he says that dogmatics begins by considering God's being in himself by focusing on his inner works as Father, Son, and Spirit. As dogmatics turns its attention from the processions to the missions, it divides the material into the works of nature (creation and providence) and the works of grace (election, reconciliation, and consummation). The bridge between God *in se* and God *ad extra* is the doctrine of creation, which thus has a double theme: God and all things. So, what is said about God *in se* has to be different from what is said about God *ad extra*. The theory of mixed relations expresses the difference.

It should be noted that Webster quotes Robert Sokolowski's comment that teaching about creation "opens the logical and theological space for other Christian beliefs and mysteries."[25] The contemplation of creation allows us to discern "essential properties of the relation between God and created things" that will affect our understanding of other doctrines. Webster is here

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[22] John Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*: God's Relation to Creatures" in *God Without Measure, Vol. I* (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 115–26.

[23] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 116.

[24] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 116.

[25] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 99.

not only calling for a restoration of the focus on God's being as the object of our contemplation, but he is also laying the foundation for a doctrine of grace that rests on the doctrine of creation. Modern dogmatics suffers from an over-emphasis on the outer works of God, and, as a result, the works of grace can be presented as the final cause of creation rather than the works of nature, which are the inner ground. Although Webster does not quote Barth here, the Barthian doctrine of creation is clearly in the crosshairs. Creation is not merely the platform for the works of grace; it points to the being of God the Creator and his work *in se*. As a mystery, creation reflects the glory of God. The problem, as Webster explains, is that what may be said about the nature of God and creatures and their relation ends up being "determined almost exhaustively by attending to the economy of salvation."[26] Perhaps the anthropocentricity of modern theology is exacerbated by this kind of doctrine of creation.

It should be apparent from what has been said so far that Webster is focussed on the point that the theory of mixed relations is necessary because it allows us to ground theology in the being of God rather than in the God-creature relation without bringing God down to our level and making him one member of a dyad that operates on the same plane of reality. Because God has his being *per se*, Webster concisely says that God creates *ex nihilo*.[27] The danger, he says, is that:

> Theology may be so absorbed by Scripture's dramatic-historical presentation of God's relation to creatures that the distinction between God and the world comes to be pictured in comparative or relatively contrastive terms as a distinction within the world, one between commensurable historical agents.[28]

Created being, says Webster, is "entirely gratuitous," which is to say something that might have been different or not at all.[29]

Webster's close reading and faithful reproduction of Thomas's teaching on God and creation, illustrated here by his treatment of the theory of mixed relations, can be read as having specifically Protestant theological implications. It would be rash to ignore Webster's explicit references to the grace of creation as the ground for the grace of God's electing, reconciling, and redemptive work. Whatever evaluation may be given of his use of the doctrine of mixed relations or *creatio ex nihilo*, one thing is clear: the thrust of his thought here is not toward conversion to Rome but toward a deeper, more catholic Protestantism. This aspect of Webster's theology is also seen in the other example I wish to point out: his use of the Thomistic concept of dual causality.

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[26] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 118–9.
[27] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 120.
[28] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 122.
[29] Webster, "*Non Ex Aequo*," 122.

The Thomistic Concept of Dual Causality

For much of his career, Webster followed Barth in utilizing metaphysical concepts in an "*ad hoc*" manner without any large-scale metaphysical commitments. That may work if you want to do what Barth did in CD IV and what Webster was trying to do up to the late 1990s: ground all doctrines in the narrative of Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture. But if you want to make the move Webster made in the mid-2000s and ground all doctrines in God's eternal being, then you need to engage in metaphysics in a more intentional and systematic manner. One well-trodden path is to become a kind of Thomist. I do not think there is any doubt that he did become a kind of Thomist; the only question left to answer is what kind of Thomist he became. Perhaps a consideration of his treatment of causality can help us with that question.

Webster had already learned from Barth to distinguish between divine omnicausality and divine sole causality. Barth held that omnicausality did not imply sole causality and argued that divine action is the basis of human freedom. However, Webster eventually came to regard Barth's anthropology as deficient. One problem is that Barth's definition of human freedom still requires God to withdraw from the creature to provide the creature with the space to be self-initiating. In his final period, Webster adopted a Thomistic account of causality, allowing him to see God as "the cause of creatures who are themselves causes."[30] Webster explains:

> . . . to attribute all created effects to God as omni-causal is not to rob creatures of their proper action, because what God in his perfect wisdom, power and goodness causes is creatures who are themselves causes. The idea whose spell must be broken is that God is a supremely forceful agent in the same order of being as creatures, acting upon them and so depriving them of movement. . . . God bestows being and activity: this is part of the special sense of creation out of nothing in the Christian confession.[31]

Notice that Barth's doctrine of the covenant is replaced here by the doctrine of creation out of nothing. God gives being to humans and then gives them redemptive grace that redeems them. Here, we see the Thomistic principle at work: grace perfects nature.

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* also expresses what Robert Sokolowski calls "the Christian distinction."[32] Senner summarizes this distinction in two principles. First, it means that "two agents can be the cause of a single act if those two agents are not of the same order of being."[33] God is not part of or

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[30] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 112.

[31] Webster, "Love is Also a Lover of Life," 112.

[32] Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 32–33. Senner discusses Sokolowski's influence on Webster in *John Webster: the Shape and Development of His Thought*, 174.

[33] Senner, *John Webster: The Shape and Development of His Thought*, 39.

in a relationship of correspondence to the created order of space and time, but rather utterly transcendent of creation. As such, God is the Creator of the nature of the human creature, which is the cause of human actions. God is not only the first efficient cause of creation but also the formal and final cause of human beings. As formal cause, God gives human beings their powers by giving them a human nature, a nature designed and implanted in them by God.

The second principle that Thomas provides to Webster is the distinction between interior and exterior principles of action. The exterior cause of an action can be God; God causes the human action by causing the interior cause of that action. The concept of freedom operative here differs from modern concepts of freedom, such as self-movement, self-origination, or the will's power to choose, contrary to the agent's own nature. What Thomas means by freedom is the agent's ability to choose without external compulsion. When someone or something else forces me, I am not free, but when my own nature compels me to act, I am free. God does not compel us to do what we do not desire to do; God causes our actions by creating us as creatures with certain inclinations and powers, and we obey ourselves in choosing. God and our own natures simultaneously cause our actions, so we are both caused and free.

My point is that Thomas provides Webster with a set of metaphysical doctrines that permit him to safeguard the reality of grace, which is a prime concern of reformed theology. In the context of a Thomistic concept of dual causality, the human agent can simultaneously be free and enabled by divine grace. *Sola gratia* is thus consistent with freedom and rightly defined. When our fallen natures are healed by infused divine grace (sanctification), we are enabled to freely choose the good for human nature. Thus, we are free in a weaker sense as sinners but in a much stronger sense as redeemed saints. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8:36).

Conclusion

In the final decade of his life, John Webster moved from his previous Barthian stance to embrace a kind of Thomism. What do I mean by that? Did he just dabble in certain Thomistic metaphysical concepts in an *ad hoc* manner, or did he embrace Thomistic metaphysics as a system? And if he had not quite reached the point of doing so by the time of his death, would he have embraced Thomistic metaphysics in the process of writing his planned systematic theology? Is Webster's project in *God Without Measure* more like Barth's *ad hoc* use of particular metaphysical concepts, which would not commit him to any specific metaphysical system and which need not involve challenging Kantian metaphysics in an attempt to evade the restrictions of Kantian epistemology, or is it more like a fundamental break with Barth to return to Thomistic metaphysics as a replacement for Kantian metaphysics?

I think it is the latter. However, we need to be careful when using the

word "system" with regard to both Webster and Thomas. There is a powerful logic at work in Thomas's writings, and he is a thinker who can hold together in his mind simultaneously both extremely abstract principles and extremely detailed applications or conclusions drawn from those principles. So, he operates within a system in the sense that he thinks about truth from both ends at once, so to speak. But this is not the same as saying that he creates a system of deductive truths that flow from axioms with logical rigor and rationalistic completeness. Thomas has no such system and Webster sought no such system.

Thomas expounded Christian doctrine in such a way as to put into words the true meaning of Holy Scripture as interpreted by a believer who seeks the unified wisdom of God as God has revealed it through nature and as God has revealed it through the special revelation given in Scripture. My understanding of what John Webster was up to in the final decade of his life was that he sought to do the same thing as Thomas did, but as a Protestant theologian in the tradition of reformed scholasticism. In this way, he serves as an example for Protestant theologians who find Augustine and Thomas far more helpful in doing theology than Descartes and Kant in the current, decadent phase of late modernity. Perhaps someday, historians will look back on Webster as the inspiration for a school of "Reformed Thomism."

The Evangelical recovery of Thomistic thought is significant for ecumenical dialogue going forward. This recovery is helping rootless, late modern Evangelicals recover their Protestant roots and thus becoming more catholic. The recovery of Thomas is the recovery of the early Protestant use of Thomas in the formulation of the theology that undergirds the Protestant confessions. How should we evaluate this phenomenon?

There is good news and bad news. First, the good news. For those Roman Catholics who hold firmly to the ecumenical creeds and those Protestants who hold to these creeds, which are presupposed by the seventeenth-century Protestant confessions (Augsburg, Westminster, Thirty-Nine Articles, London), there exists a firm and extensive foundation of agreement as a basis for dialogue. It is already occurring, and I expect it will only gather steam in the years ahead.

But the bad news is that many disagreements that caused disruption in the sixteenth century still exist. These issues are ones of soteriology, sacramentology, and ecclesiology. They relate to such matters as justification by faith alone, the nature of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Marian dogmas, and the role of the Bishop of Rome.

However, it should be noted that doctrines like how we receive the benefits of Christ's death in salvation and how the church should be governed are secondary in the sense that they depend on faith in the existence of the Triune God and the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The incarnation involves the preexistence, virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, bodily resurrection, glorious ascension, heavenly session, and future bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. The nature of God and Christ's

historical achievement of salvation are matters on which we basically agree. It would be going much too far to say that all the rest are details, but it is true that everything else depends on agreement on the doctrines of God and Christ.

With liberal Protestants and liberal Roman Catholics, the foundational doctrines of God and Christ and the permanent truth of the ecumenical creeds of the first five centuries are not matters on which agreement can be presumed. This means that ecumenical dialogue between them proves difficult to get off the ground. It sometimes appears that there is a foundation of agreement, but often, this is only because both sides agree to take the irreversible finality of modernity as the basis for all else. Such dialogue can never result in unity in the faith, even if it attains a *simulacrum of unity* by agreeing in principle to revise the content of the sacred deposit of doctrine in the light of modern naturalism.

Dialogue between conservative, confessional Protestants and theologians of Rome who take seriously the creedal heritage of the faith, on the other hand, may prove to be more complex and is undoubtedly fraught with pitfalls and difficult problems. But it is the only ecumenical dialogue that really matters because it is the only dialogue that can lead to unity in the true faith of the apostles. One of the most significant, long-term results of the renewed interest in the thought of Thomas Aquinas by Evangelicals may turn out to be a new era of ecumenical dialogue, *Deo volente mox*.

Bavinckian Rhapsody: Theological Method in Bavinck's Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

By Gregory Parker Jr.[1]

Abstract: *This article argues that Herman Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity reflects a principled yet eclectic engagement with theological and philosophical sources. First, I examine Bavinck's articulation of simplicity within the divine names and incommunicable attributes, emphasizing how his nuanced use of sources—including Reformed orthodoxy, Romantic idealism, and ancient Christian thought—positions him as both orthodox and modern. Following this, certain points of continuity and discontinuity are highlighted between Bavinck and Thomas Aquinas, resulting in the acknowledgment of the uniqueness of Bavinck's construction. The conclusion of the work is twofold. First, the article concludes that Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity exemplifies his synthetic "Reformed catholicity," offering a constructive model for integrating tradition and modernity. Second, the analysis reveals that Bavinck employs simplicity to provide harmony among God's attributes, facilitating a unity-in-diversity framework that connects his with his Trinitarian theology. Therefore, his treatment of divine simplicity has significance for Bavinck's organic motif and, by extension, Bavinck studies.*

Keywords: Herman Bavinck, Divine Simplicity, Organic Motif, Reformed eclecticism

Introduction

In his 2012 book *Trinity and Organism*, James Eglinton argued Herman Bavinck was not split between orthodoxy and modernity.[2] He identified the "organic motif" as the conceptual tool that Bavinck used to navigate ideological tensions and deploy various thinkers in an eclectic and principled manner.[3] In this way, Bavinck's disposition towards diverse thinkers and his organic Reformed catholicity became more evident in

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[1] Gregory Parker Jr. (PhD University of Edinburgh) is an independent scholar and co-translator with Cameron Clausing of several Herman Bavinck volumes: *The Sacrifice of Praise* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2019), *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2022), and *Magnalia Dei* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025).

[2] James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: T&T Clark, 2012). Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 54.

[3] James Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif: Questions Seeking Answers." *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 51–71, 67; Bruce Pass, "Trinity or German idealism? Reconsidering the origins of Herman Bavinck's organic motif." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 76, no. 1 (2023): 56–70, 65. Pass has challenged Eglinton and Mattson's hypothesis regarding the origin of the organic motif, arguing that "Bavinck incorporates an ostensibly idealist idea into the Reformed tradition and modifies it in ways that make it serviceable to Christian theology."

Anglophone scholarship. This organic hermeneutic was identified as paradigmatic for his Reformed catholicity. Cory Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, in their 2017 article "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism: On catholicity, consciousness, and theological epistemology," contended, in line with Eglinton, for Bavinck as one who eclectically appropriates diverse thinkers as suits his Reformed theological needs.[4] They described Bavinck's "Reformed catholicity" as follows:

> [F]or Bavinck, to be Reformed and catholic, principled and eclectic, is not merely to acknowledge the diversity within the confessional boundaries of seventeenth-century Protestant scholastics or traditional Reformed orthodoxy. Rather, to be Reformed and catholic is to develop a stance in which the fruits of thinking from Aristotle to Kant, from Augustine to Schleiermacher, and from Thomas to Hegel are together considered valuable. To be sure, Bavinck disagrees with some of these thinkers, but he navigates them in a reciprocal fashion where the thought of one may inform another's.[5]

Brock and Sutanto perceive Bavinck as performing his organic theological task enroute to his goal of reformed catholicity. The task of theology is not one of repristinating but principled re-appropriation enroute to constructive theology for today.[6] Bavinck does this first by engaging Scripture and history. In this way, Bavinck does not universally receive any thinker but proceeds from Scripture to the Reformed tradition. He makes distinctions through polemic engagement in which unity in diversity is sought.

The final task for Bavinck is to seek to affirm truth no matter where it is found. In his essay, "*Confessie en Dogmatiek*" Bavinck writes, "That Knowledge [of God], revealed by God himself in nature and Scripture, was the center and organic principle of all dogma. Therefore, in this science, everything is related directly or indirectly, in this case *recto vel oblique*, with the knowledge of God."[7] Therefore, Bavinck engages moderns and ancients alike, looking to

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[4] Cory Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness, and Theological Epistemology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70, no. 3 (2017): 310–32. See also Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Retrieving Reformed Philosophy of Mind: Herman Bavinck's Eclectic Harmonism as Gateway to Neo-Aristotelianism." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (2023): 26–50.

[5] Brock and Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism," 313, 317:

> The term "reformed" is, for Bavinck, a catholic nuance. Its scope is limited in relation to the weight of the word "catholic." The concept "reformed" is a reference to the manner in which catholicity performs, a recognition that one works from a tradition outwards. He believes the Reformed tradition to contain the most relatively pure reflections on theology ever produced.

[6] For an incisive reading of Baivnck's methodology see Cameron Clausing, *Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck: Revelation, Confession, and Christian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[7] Bavinck, "Confessie en Dogmatiek." *Theologische Studiën* 9 (1891): 258–75, 274. For further discussion on the centrality of knowledge of God to dogmatics, see Gregory Parker Jr., "Theological Thinking and Loving: Dogmatics and Ethics in the Theology of Herman Bavinck"

appropriate them through Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Most importantly, he continues to develop his theology through the questions and insights of modern thought both inside and outside of theology.[8] This Reformed catholicity, in other words, considers the organic interconnectedness of all knowledge and seeks to appropriate truth wherever it is found while submitting oneself to the material norm of Scripture and the ecclesial nature of theology. In identifying Bavinck's eclecticism, one should not overlook that it may not always generate a satisfying resolution but is more likely to create a tension that must be acknowledged and explored using the theological and philosophical resources of our own time.

Bavinck's organic hermeneutic should be considered akin to a rhapsody, in which the creaturely composer can pull together contrasting styles, tones, and moods into a free-flowing, integrated piece that distinctly bears the mark of the composer. Bavinck's organic hermeneutic—his Reformed rhapsody—pervades all aspects of his theology, including his doctrine of God. This hermeneutic commends reading his divine simplicity as eclectic, resourceful, modern, and unique to the composer while also being confessional and orthodox. Current readings of Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity do not fully highlight these eclectic aspects.[9]

In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck wrote this: "The foundation of both diversity and unity is *in God* ... here is a units that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches."[10] This statement by Bavinck regarding the superlative unity-in-diversity of God rooted in his divine essence beckons the theologian to scrutinize his doctrine of divine simplicity. With this quote and eclectic hermeneutic in mind, the article proceeds in three parts. The paper will first explore Bavinck's discussion of simplicity in the divine names, then examine how he re-introduces divine simplicity through the incommunicable attributes. In this section, Bavinck is more constructive and situates his divine simplicity among his contemporaries. I will then highlight some continuities and discontinuities between Bavinck and Thomas Aquinas. Finally, the article concludes, reflecting on the implications of Bavinck's articulation of divine simplicity for Bavinck studies.

(PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2022), 180–86.

[8] Clausing, *Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck*, 191–92. Clausing is correct to note that the interpretation of Bavinck as modern partially depends on one's definition of "modern."

[9] Positively, Jordan Barrett and N. Gray Sutanto give the most attention to Bavinck's own articulation of the doctrine (see Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 109–14. See also N. Gray Sutanto, "Organic Knowing: The Theological Epistemology of Herman Bavinck" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2018), 41–47).

[10] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, vol. II. trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 437 (Hereafter *RD*, II).

Divine Simplicity and the Divine Names

The doctrine of divine simplicity primarily appears in two sections of Bavinck's doctrine of God. The first is his discussion on the divine names. His utilization of the names of God is in line with much of reformed scholasticism, following the pattern of discussing the "name" of something before discussing the "thing" itself.[11] The divine names play an essential role in Bavinck's doctrine of God. He states, "All we can learn about God from his revelation is designated his name in scripture."[12] True identity then is disclosed in the giving of a name.

The doctrine of God begins with God's self-disclosure of himself to his people. Bavinck initiates his fundamental theme of unity-in-diversity; in particular, he highlights the unity-in-diversity of the divine names.[13] "The *one* name of God, which is inclusive of his entire revelation both in nature and in grace, is divisible for us in a great *many* names. Only in that way do we obtain a full view of the riches of his revelation and the profound meaning of his name."[14] Bavinck then introduces his doctrine of divine simplicity to the reader and unfolds his eclectic theological method.

Bavinck begins critiquing several theologians who strayed from the consensus ecclesial position of simplicity, including Eunomius, Gilbert Porretan, William Occam, Duns Scotus, Gregory of Palamas, Baruch Spinoza, and Friederich Schleiermacher. He then turns to the norm of Scripture and the received tradition of the church. He argues that revelation gives believers the duty to confront the opinions of the thinkers mentioned above. They must affirm that every attribute is identical to the divine being and that these attributes can be distinguished from one another. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa are then put forth as examples of those who argued against Eunomius and presented a God who is "simple, and transcends all composition, yet on the other hand, [the attributes] do not differ only in name."[15] Basil and Gregory accomplish this by maintaining that speaking about God as simple while conceptualizing distinctions in the divine nature is possible.[16]

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[11] Dolf te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School: A Study in Method and Content* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 111, 114–15. See also *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, vol. 1: Disputations 1–31, eds. William den Boer and Reimer Faber (Landrum, SC: Davenant Press, 2023).

[12] *RD*, II, 97; see also Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 105.

[13] See also Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 106.

[14] *RD*, II, 99.

[15] Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 2nd ed., 4. vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1911) II, 111.

> [Dutch/Latin original: *Het is er Augustinus bij deze simplicitas Dei niet om te doen, om God iets te ontnemen, maar integendeel om Hem altijd op te vatten in de volheid van zijn zijn. Daarom spreekt hij ook van de simplex multiplicitas of multiplex simplicitas in God, en noemt hij Gods wijsheid simpliciter multiplex et uniformiter multiformis.*]

The text presents my own translation. Hereafter references to *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* will be cited *GD*, II. Compare *RD*, II.125. See also Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 17.

[16] *RD*, II, 126, 212.

Following his engagement with Basil and Gregory, Bavinck transitions to another early church father, Augustine, to emphasize the manifold abundance of God's essence:

> In speaking of the "simplicity of God" it is not Augustine's intent to take anything away from God, but on the contrary, to conceive of God in the fullness of his being. With this in view he speaks of the "simple multiplicity" or the "manifold simplicity" present in God, and calls God's wisdom "simply manifold and uniformly multiform."[17]

Following in the footsteps of Augustine, Bavinck strives for precisely this sort of simplicity, one where simplicity facilitates multiplicity, and God's abundance of attributes harmonizes with the unity of his essence.

Bavinck then lurches his chronology forward to the protestant scholastic distinction of *ratio ratiocinans* (mere reasoning) and *ratio ratiocinata* (rational analysis of a thing). Protestant scholastics used this terminology to attempt to answer the dilemma of the diversity of attributes. Bavinck offers the following solution:

> Diversity is rooted in God's revelation itself. For it is not we who call God by these names. We do not invent them. . . . But it is God himself who reveals all his perfections and puts his name on our lips. It is he who gives himself these names and who, despite our opposition maintains them. It is of little use to deny his righteousness: every day he demonstrates this quality in history, and so it is with all his attributes. He brings them out despite us. The final goal of all his ways is that his name will shine out in all his works and be written on everyone's forehead (Rev. 22:4). For that reason we have no choice but to name him with the many names his revelation furnishes us.[18]

Therefore, the diversity of the attributes is not merely subjective but corresponds in some way to God himself, who reveals himself in the divine names. However, the concept of divine simplicity is subsumed under the divine names, in which God's essence is identical to his attributes. For Bavinck, then, divine simplicity does not contest the diversity of attributes but rather facilitates it. Simplicity "speaks of him as the absolute fullness of life."[19] It is the doctrine that magnifies before us the profundity of God's infinite essence, "so rich that no creature can grasp it all at once."[20]

At the end of this section on simplicity, Bavinck makes two brief assertions. First, he argues that God's relation to creatures does not change; rather, the creature's relation to God varies. God remains the same, but the creaturely experiences the diversity of God's attributes in the changing relationship. Bavinck references Augustine, Moses Maimonides, Vermigli,

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[17] *RD*, II, 127.
[18] *RD*, II, 127.
[19] *RD*, II, 127.
[20] *RD*, II, 127.

Bernardinus de Moor, and Basil in his support. It is interesting to highlight the heterogeneous nature of this group. Take Maimonides, for example; he is a Jewish theologian and philosopher. It is self-evident that Bavinck does not endorse or adopt his system, yet he wields him here to support his argument. Augustine, Vermigli, and de Moor are theologians who we would naturally expect Bavinck to cite in support of his articulation. Vermigli is often perceived as one of the earliest Reformed scholastics, and de Moor among the very last. This suggests that Bavinck perceived his articulation as uncontested among the Reformed scholastics. Lastly, Bavinck's use of Basil, the early church father, adds another distinct figure to this diverse group of theologians.[21] In many ways, this group is a prime example of Bavinck's theological rhapsody. Bavinck uses an eclectic group of theologians to support his articulation of the doctrine.

Second, he asserts that the analogical tenor of theological language allows creatures to speak of the diversity of the attributes. He writes, "In this connection, we must remember that God can act in so many different qualities and be called by so many different names, because there is kinship between him and his creatures. If this kinship did not exist, all the names would be untrue."[22] This connection between the Creator and the creature allows us to perceive the diversity of the attributes subjectively, in a manner that genuinely corresponds to the object of that revealed confession.[23] As Bavinck states:

> So, referring to God by all these names, we indeed speak imperfectly, in finite terms, in limited human ways, yet not falsely . . . it is always the same being that confronts us in these names, each name by itself gives us a succinct statement of what that being truly is in its infinite fullness. . . . There is no name capable of expressing God's being with full adequacy. Given that reality, many names serve to give us the impression of his all-transcending grandeur.[24]

In this manner, we may speak of different attributes, though God is not composed of many attributes. We speak as creatures that must "mind the ontological gap" and recognize that through revelation, God gives us a diversity of names, each of which merely scratches the surface of the manifoldly simple God.[25]

Within the argumentation of *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck introduces simplicity in this section on divine names to facilitate the diversity of the

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[21] *RD*, II, 127.

[22] *RD*, II, 127.

[23] See also Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Gregory Parker Jr. and Cameron Clausing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2022), 52 (Hereafter, *GICR*). "And yet, that same high and exalted God stands in an intimate relation to all his creatures, even the smallest and least."

[24] *RD*, II, 127.

[25] I am indebted to my friend and former professor Adonis Vidu for the turn of phrase "mind the ontological gap."

attributes. He primarily argued for two aspects of simplicity: (1) God's essence is identical to his attributes, and (2) God's manifold simplicity permits us to talk of distinct attributes. He indirectly upheld these two principles by arguing that the divine names facilitate the unity in diversity of the attributes. It is also clear that Bavinck engaged negatively and positively with a heterogeneous group of theologians, including modern theological articulations.

Divine Simplicity in the Incommunicable Attributes

The second appearance of divine simplicity in *Reformed Dogmatics* is in his section on the incommunicable attributes. Divine simplicity is the last incommunicable attribute that is treated and follows divine unity.[26] Bavinck puts forth three arguments in this section: (1) he returns to his previous argument concerning simplicity, asserting that it is a doctrine that facilitates divine abundance; (2) that simplicity is not a metaphysical abstraction; and (3) that it is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.

1. The Abundance of Divine Simplicity

Returning to his main argument from the previous section, he argues that simplicity facilitates divine abundance.[27] He then catalogs a few biblical references in support of simplicity.[28] Subsequently, he asserts, "On account of God's absolute perfection, every attribute is identical with his essence."[29] He follows this by examining how the confessing church has viewed this doctrine, focusing on Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Athanasius.[30] These four church fathers share similar conceptions of simplicity and support Bavinck's classical articulation of the doctrine, though he is most interested in engaging with Augustine.

Bavinck links the norm of the doctrine of divine simplicity to Augustine. He cites Augustine's *The Trinity*[31] and *The Confessions*,[32] arguing that ". . . there

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[26] *RD*, II, 170.

[27] *RD*, II, 173.

[28] The Scripture listed is not explicitly defending simplicity; they defend the predication of a substantive with God in defense of the identification of God with his attributes (Jeremiah 10:10; 23:6; John 1:4–5, 9; 14:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 John 1:5; 4:8).

[29] *GD*, II, 166, cf. *RD*, II, 173.

[30] Bavinck's citation of Irenaeus *Against Heresies* is interesting since only recently have scholars suggested that the main thrust of Against Heresies may be divine simplicity (see Richard A. Norris, "The Transcendence and Freedom of God: Irenaeus, the Greek Tradition and Gnosticism," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant*, eds. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, *Theologie Historique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 88. See also Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, 39–40.

[31] Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen Mckenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), Book V, 4; VII, 5. Augustine contrasts being and nonbeing and argues that God is a single simple substance not composed of accidents. God is not composed of parts.

[32] Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. E.B Pusey (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), VII, 11; XI, 4. In these two sections Augustine exalts the immutability of God, and another that waxes of the mutability of the created world.

are differences between existing, living, knowing, and willing" among creatures, "but in God everything is one; God is all, that he is. He is his own wisdom, his own life; being and living coincide with him."[33] Bavinck views his summation as the confession of *the church* since Augustine, noting in his favor John of Damascus, the scholastics, and the various traditions of Christianity. Bavinck clearly does not perceive his construction to be out of alignment with the church catholic.

Following this, Bavinck engages a myriad of thinkers who have rejected or been critical of divine simplicity. It is worth listing the wide-ranging group of thinkers that Bavinck engages: Eunomius, Anthropomorphites, Arabian philosophers, Duns Scotus, Socinians, Remonstrants, pantheists, and various modern theologians.

The two groups he spends the most space addressing are the Socinians and Pantheists. In this article, I will limit my engagement to the pantheists. When Bavinck turns to pantheism, he focuses on the pantheism of Friedrich Schleiermacher.[34] I am primarily concerned with Bavinck's critique of Schleiermacher's understanding of divine simplicity. However, it is worth mentioning that others have suggested that Schleiermacher does present a fully orbed conception of divine simplicity.[35] Schleiermacher defines divine simplicity as "the non-separated and inseparable being intertwined of all divine attributes and of all divine activities."[36] Bavinck evaluates Schleiermacher's simplicity as occupying a lower place among the attributes. "Schleiermacher refused to put simplicity on par with the other attributes."[37] This is likely because of §56, in which Schleiermacher claims:

> Among the divine attributes customarily adduced, the oneness, infinity, and simplicity of God would be particularly pertinent here, though they bear no relation to the aforementioned contrast that takes place in the stirrings of religious consciousness. They cannot,

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[33] *GD*, II, 166–167. This too he supports with citations from Augustine this time from the *City of God*, trans. William Babcock (New York, NY: New York City Press, 2012), VIII, 6; X, 10. See also, Augustine, *The Trinity*, XV, 5.

[34] For an in depth consideration of Schleiermacher and Bavinck see Cory Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Use of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. See also Gregory Parker Jr., "Encyclopedia Bavinck: The Case of the History of the Theological Encyclopedia," *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 293–310, 301–04.

[35] See Gerhard Ebling, "Schleiermacher's Doctrine of the Divine Attributes." In *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, ed. Robert Funk (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1970), 125–75; Daniel J. Pedersen, "Schleiermacher and Reformed Scholastics on the Divine Attributes." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 4 (2015): 413–31. It appears to me, that Schleiermacher allows both a diversity of attributes (reflecting the effects of divine causality on our consciousness), but also divine simplicity (reflecting the singular causality of God).

[36] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, vol. 1 trans. Terrence Tice, Catherine Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), §56. I went with the updated translation because of its clarity, rather than the one present in *RD*, II, 175.

[37] *RD*, II, 175.

however, be regarded as divine attributes in the same sense as those treated so far.[38]

Schleiermacher then does not straightforwardly treat simplicity in *The Christian Faith* because he believes that simplicity does not produce dogmatic content that arises from the religious consciousness. For Bavinck, this is unsatisfactory, and it will become clearer why when he addresses the following critique.

Bavinck mentions several other modern theologians who opposed the doctrine of divine simplicity for two reasons: "[I]t is a metaphysical abstraction and inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity."[39] He transitions to addressing the first critique—namely, that divine simplicity is a metaphysical abstraction—within his modern context.

2. *The Critique of Metaphysical Abstraction*

He asserts that simplicity is taught in Scripture not only wherever God is called "light," "life," and "love" but also because it is a necessary implication of the other attributes.[40] He then provides an introduction to simplicity. He states:

> Simplicity here is the antonym of "compounded." If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of *genus* (class) and *differentiae* (attributes of differing species belonging to the same *genus*), *substantia* (substance) and *accidentia* (accidents), *materia* (matter) and *forma* (form), *potentia* (potentiality) and *actus* (actuality), *essentia* (essence) and *existentia* (existence), then his perfection, oneness, independence, and immutability cannot be maintained. On that basis he is not the highest love, for then there is in him a subject who loves—which is one thing—as well as a love by which he loves—which is another. The same dualism would apply to all the other attributes. In that case God is not the One than "*quo melius nihil cogitari potest*" (whom nothing better can be imagined). Instead, God is uniquely his own, having nothing above him. Accordingly, he is completely identical with the attributes of wisdom, grace, and love, and so on. He is absolutely perfect, the One whom nothing higher can be thought.[41]

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[38] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §56. See also §167, "'[I]n God there can be no distinction between essence and attributes."

[39] *RD*, II, 174–75.

[40] The set of Scripture that Bavinck is alluding to is the group cited at the beginning of his discussion on simplicity.

[41] *GD*, II, 169. Bavinck may have Aquinas in mind here with basic metaphysical terms that he references each being referenced in Question 3 of Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), I, Q3 [Hereafter *ST*]). However, it may also be suggested that Bavinck has simply inherited this terminology from Reformed orthodoxy. See Sebastian Rehnman, "The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 353–401, 377–78; Anselm, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, trans. M.J. Charlesworth (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 14, 134–35. Moreover, Bavinck's reference of Anslem's description of

After asserting the validity of the doctrine of divine simplicity from Scripture, Bavinck suggests that simplicity makes sense of the whole of what we know to be true of God. Namely, if God were composed of parts, it would undermine what Christians hold to be self-evident: that God is immutable, perfect, independent, and so on. He argues that failing to uphold divine simplicity would lead to dualism, in which God's attributes are external to him.

He then models his eclectic method by drawing on Augustine and Richard St. Victor for his own purposes. In book V, section 10 of *The Trinity,* Augustine argues that God does not participate in his greatness, as if greatness were something external to God, but that God is his greatness. He states, "God is not great by participating in greatness, but he is great with his great self because he is his own greatness."[42] Augustine further explains that this principle can be applied to all of God's attributes. Bavinck cites Richard St. Victor for a similar purpose. Richard St. Victor, in his *On The Trinity*, reasons that God himself must be the source of everything that he is. [43] Bavinck uses these two theologians to showcase that rejecting simplicity would imply dualism in God and to support his assertion that God must be simple.

To emphasize the truth that God is distinct and different from his creation, Bavinck introduces the Creator-creature distinction. God is being, whereas creatures participate in being. God is his own existence, while creatures participate in existence. God is infinite, and all that is in him is infinite; creatures, however, are finite, and all that is in them is finite.[44] In this short section, Bavinck cites French Jesuit theologian Dionysius Petavius, whose work *De Theologicis Dogmatibus* chronologically traces the development of doctrines.[45] In *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, Petavius argues that simplicity may be deduced from God's excellence, eternality, aseity, and boundless infinitude.[46] Petavius argument stretches nine pages as he catalogs the historical development of the doctrine. Most notably, for Bavinck's purposes, Petavius asserts, in line with tradition, that all that is created is compounded and divisible, but there is no composition in God, for God is supremely simple and indivisible.[47] Bavinck concludes that what he has argued so far is sufficient to answer the critique of the doctrine of divine simplicity as a metaphysical abstraction.

God as "*quo melius nihil cogitari potest*" is a clear indication that Bavinck is not limiting himself to a particular source but is broadly resourcing the historic church.

[42] Augustine, *The Trinity*, V, 2.

[43] Bavinck mistakenly cites Hugo St. Victor rather than Richard St. Victor. Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity,* trans. Ruben Angelici (Cambridge, UK: James Clark & Co., 2011), Book I, XII.

[44] *RD*, II, 176; "All his attributes are divine, hence infinite and one with his being." All creatures are compound; God is simple. God is infinite, "all-sufficient, fully-blessed and glorious within himself."

[45] Dionysius Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, vol. I–II (Paris: Vives, 1865–1867) II, ch. 2, *en toto*.

[46] Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, II, 185.

[47] Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, II, 193.

By "metaphysical abstractions," Bavinck understood the opponents of divine simplicity to mean the process of "eliminating all the contrasts and distinctions that characterize creatures and describing him [God] as the being who transcends all such contrasts."[48] This, Bavinck tells us, is what modern philosophers have called the "Absolute" and what philosophers of old called "substance."[49] Alternatively, simplicity, for Bavinck, is not abstract. Rather, the doctrine of divine simplicity is "the end result of ascribing to God all the perfections of creatures to the ultimate divine degree."[50] The difference here is subtle but important. Bavinck asserts that simplicity is indeed a cataphatic doctrine. In other words, rather than divine simplicity being considered strictly as another doctrine of what God is not (apophatic), it is also a positive description of the fullness of God's being—an "unbounded ocean of being."[51]

Bavinck contrasts his viewpoint of the Absolute against Ferdinand C. Baur, a disciple of the romantic idealist, G.W.F. Hegel. Baur asserts that divine simplicity leads to pantheism, while Bavinck counters that divine simplicity is fundamentally opposed to pantheism.[52] In pantheism, God has no existence apart from the world. In other words, simplicity, rather than leading to pantheism, defends the doctrine of God from that very critique. Bavinck makes this point by critiquing Hegel. He states, "In the thought of Hegel . . . the Absolute, pure Being, Thought, Idea, does not exist before the creation of the world, but is only logically and potentially prior to the world. All the qualifications of the Absolute are devoid of content—nothing but abstract logical categories."[53] Here, the critique of abstraction is turned on its head.

Bavinck also draws on the work of the German theologian Arthur Drews, citing *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant* in support of his interpretation of

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[48] *RD*, II, 176.

[49] Here I make a modest contribution to the ongoing conversation regarding the Absolute in Bavinck. See Gayle Doornbos, "Bavinck's Doctrine of God: Absolute, Divine Personality," *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 6, no.2 (2021): 311–48. Cf. Clausing, *Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck*, 191–209.

[50] *RD*, II, 176.

[51] *RD*, II, 176.

[52] F.C. Baur, *Die christliche lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und menschwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen entwicklung*, vol. II (Tubingen: C.F. Oslander, 1842), 634–35n58. Baur asserts that the pantheistic element in Thomas system is his divine simplicity.

[53] Bavinck critiques Hegel's Absolute as pantheistic throughout his *RD*, II, 49, 115, 155–56, 166, 176–77, 185–87, 193–96, 411, 413, 516, 613; *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 275, 568–69 (Hereafter, *RD*, III); Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1985), 97. Hegel would deny being a pantheist in his first volume of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*: "It has never occurred to any man to say, all is God, that is things in their individuality or contingency much less has it been maintained in Philosophy." Bavinck seems aware that it was not exactly pantheism. "Hegel, too, openly acknowledged his adherence to pantheism, not in the pantheism that regards finite things themselves as God but in the pantheism that in the finite and accidental sees the appearance of the absolute, the fossilized idea, frozen intelligence" (see *RD*, II, 411).

Hegel.[54] In the chapter "Radical Atheism," Drew engages Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of Hegel's Absolute. "God," Hegel said, "is only in thought and thought." However, Feuerbach views thinking as something only humans do, and thus quickly concludes that the Absolute must be nothing more than a product of human thought. As a result, Feuerbach perceives the highest essence of the theology of his time—the Absolute—as nonsense, reducing it to nothing more than an abstraction.[55] It is this same critique that Bavinck adopts and utilizes to critique Hegel's Absolute as an abstraction.

In Hegel's Absolute, nothing remains but "pure being," yet this "being" is merely an abstraction. The Absolute becomes a concept "for which there is no corresponding reality and which may not be further defined. Every further qualification would finitize it, make it into something particular, and hence destroy its generality."[56] Thus emerges Hegel's phrase, "All determination is negation," which Bavinck references.[57] The principle is part of Hegel's dialectical movement from pure being, to nothing, to becoming, to determinate being. The process of negation is central to this progression from pure being to determinate being.

Rather than asserting that God is the being who transcends all description, Bavinck contends that God is a unique being who remains determined, though not in the manner that Hegel suggests. Bavinck rejects Hegel's abstraction and argues that simplicity not only entails a variety of names for God but demands it. In this way, the attributes ascribed to God do not denote different realities within God; rather, each attribute designates the manifold being of God under a particular aspect:

> God is so abundantly rich that we can gain some idea of his richness
> only by the availability of many names. Every name refers to the

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[54] Arthur Drews, *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das Wesen des Absoluten und die Persönlichkeit Gottes* (Berlin: Paul Maeter, 1893), I, 249.

[55] Drews, *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant*, 238–55. In this section, Drew demonstrates Feuerbach's shift away from Hegel's Absolute into his critique of it. Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 356–57. Wartofsky agrees with this reading of Feuerbach stating:

> But if the Absolute or the *Idea* in itself which speculative philosophy posits as an essence beyond actual or concrete thinking, is not simply the objectification of thought, what is it? Feuerbach sees in this conception of hypostatization of a particular capacity of thought, namely, the capacity for *abstraction*. The Absolute is therefore the projected or mystified form in which *abstraction* is posited as an object for thought. The Absolute, as infinite, unconditioned, necessary Being is therefore nothing but the objectification of the infinity, the unconditionedness, the necessity, the absoluteness of abstract thought, posited as thought's own object, and as an object that is beyond thought itself.

[56] *RD*, II, 177.

[57] "*Omnis determinatio est negatio*." This phrase of Hegel's he claims to have picked up from Spinoza (see Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 536. "Determinateness is negation – is the absolute principle of Spinoza's philosophy." There has been some discussion on whether or not Hegel understood Spinoza's use of it well. See: Robert Stern, "'Determination is Negation': The Adventures of a Doctrine from Spinoza to Hegel to the British Idealists," *Hegel Bulletin* 37 (2016): 29–52.

same full divine being, but each time from a particular angle, the angle from which it reveals itself to us in his works. God is therefore *simple in his multiplicity and manifold in his simplicity* (Augustine).[58]

The Absolute of Hegel is countered as Bavinck makes Augustine's divine simplicity mantra his own. This becomes clearer in the following sentence, where Bavinck states, "Hence every qualification, every name, used with reference to God, so far from being a negation, is an enrichment of our knowledge of his being."[59] In other words, while Hegel's Absolute is an abstraction free from all qualification, Bavinck's God has named himself and is, therefore, a self-determined being. Thus, to talk of God and his multiplicity of attributes or variety of names does not reduce God or impose external determination upon him. Instead, it allows us to glimpse the inexhaustible fullness of God's being. Writing on this elsewhere, Bavinck puts it like so:

> Similarly, our knowledge does not limit God because (1) it is grounded in him, (2) can only exist through him, and (3) especially has as its object and content God as the infinite One. Furthermore, if absoluteness precludes all limitation, and all determination is negation, it is not only not permissible to speak of God as personality, but it is equally wrong still to call him the Absolute, unity, the good, essential being, substance (etc.). Pantheism suffers from the illusion that it has completed its God-concept if only the ideas of personality and self-consciousness are removed from it as contradictory elements.[60]

Bavinck also footnotes Aquinas' defense of God as a self-determined being. In this section of Aquinas' commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, he argues that God is a self-determined being because no "additions can be made to" him. Therefore, neither "the diversity of relations of God himself to creatures" nor the "personal names" establish any composition in God.[61] For Bavinck, in line with Aquinas, God remains a determined being, avoiding the addition of any parts as an independent, perfect, and eternal being.

In the same footnote, Bavinck cites German Catholic thinker Joseph Kleutgen's work *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*.[62] This section of Kleutgen's work engages pantheism in relation to divine simplicity. Most interestingly, Kleutgen quotes the same section of Aquinas that Bavinck references while also going beyond it, referring to the thoughts of Francisco Suarez. Suarez suggests there are two ways to view "pure being." The first is to remove all characteristics, leaving only something akin to Hegel's Absolute, which

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[58] *RD* II, 177. Italics mine.

[59] *RD* II, 177.

[60] *RD*, II, 49.

[61] *RD*, II, 177n119; Aquinas, "Concerning God's Simplicity." In *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, trans. John Laumakis. Accessed March 3, 2018. http://hosted.desales.edu/w4/philtheo/loughlin/ATP/Sententiae/ISentd8q4a1.html.

[62] Joseph Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, 2nd ed, (Münster: Theissing, 1867), I, 204.

Suarez also concludes is pure abstraction and not truly God. Alternatively, the second way one may view pure being is to think of God as a peculiar and unique being—not characterized by the absence of qualifications but by the fullness of His being.[63]

In this manner, we have an Absolute being that is opposed to that of pantheism—an Absolute that "is the fullness of being, not an abstraction, but concrete, not universal, but peculiar, not mingled with others, but independent from everything, existing in itself."[64] It is reasonable to posit that Kleutgen's definition, borrowed from Suarez, serves as the positive definition of Absolute that Bavinck is operating within his *Reformed Dogmatics*.[65] It is also clear that, in Bavinck's purview, pantheism—whether Hegel's or Schleiermacher's—would result in the loss of divine simplicity. In composing his defense of simplicity from the modern charge of abstraction, Bavinck theologically resources Augustine, Arthur Drew (and by proxy Ludwig Feuerbach), Thomas Aquinas, and Joseph Kleutgen (and by proxy Francisco Suarez).

3. The Critique of Simplicity as Inconsistent with the Doctrine of the Trinity

In the final sentences of this section of *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck defends simplicity against the second critique—that it is inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. Bavinck states, first, that simplicity is not inconsistent with "twofold" or "threefold" but rather is the antonym of "composite."[66] In other words, simplicity does not conflict with the diversity of persons. The divine essence is not composed of three persons, nor, as Bavinck argues, is each person of the Trinity composed of the personal properties of the essence. Rather, the same simple being exists in three persons. Bavinck writes:

> Now the Divine being is not composed of three persons, nor is every person composed of the being and the *personalis proprietas* (personal property); but the same simple being exists in the three persons, every person or personal property is not a distinction *re* (in the matter of) the essence but according to *ratione* (reason); every personal property is certainly a *relatio realis* (real relation) but does not add *aliquid reale* (anything real) to the *essentia* (essence). The personal properties *non componunt sed solum distinguunt* (do not compose but only distinguish) [the essence].[67]

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[63] Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, 207–08. For a fine reading of Kleutgen and Bavinck, see Brock, "Herman Bavinck the Neo-Thomist? A Reevaluation of Influence," in *Neo-Calvinism and Roman Catholicism*, eds. James Eglinton and George Harinck (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 114–33.

[64] Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, 208.

[65] See for example, *RD* II, 121.

[66] *RD*, II, 177.

[67] Bavinck, *GD*, II, 171. (translation mine)

The use of *personalis proprietas* refers to the personal relations between the persons of the Trinity—the Father (*paternity*), the Son (*filiation*), and the Spirit (*procession*). In other words, the property of filiation belongs properly to the Son but not to the Father. These personal properties identify real relations in God but do not add anything to the essence. In this way, the personal properties individuate or distinguish the persons without creating a compound in God. By distinguishing between essence and personal properties and between properties themselves, Bavinck defends the doctrine of divine simplicity from the charge that it is inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity.

In this short quote, peppered with scholastic terminology, Bavinck pulls from two additional thinkers: Petavius and Jerome Zanchius. In this section of Petavius' work, he defends distinguishing the persons through their relations or personal properties. Similarly, Zanchius argues that simplicity is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity. First, he asserts that the incarnation does not conflict with divine simplicity because it introduces nothing new to the essence. Second, he argues that the personal relations of the Trinity are compatible with simplicity, as they do not create a composition of essence but rather a distinction of persons: "God is the essence and the real relations." Zanchius supports this with the scholastic distinction, which Bavinck deployed above, that the relations of the persons are real but do not add anything substantive to the essence.[68]

This brings Bavinck's articulation of simplicity, under the section incommunicable attributes, to a close. This section highlighted the eclectic nature of Bavinck's Reformed catholicity. It also clarified that his doctrine of divine simplicity should not be strictly identified with one source. Rather, he pulls from various sources, both ancient and modern alike. While levying a host of heterogeneous voices to support his articulation, Bavinck is also keen to align himself with Augustine. Through his engagement with contemporary philosophers and theologians, Bavinck seeks to construct the doctrine in such a way as to meet the traditional and modern critiques of the doctrine. It is important to note that Bavinck's doctrine of God includes, rather than precludes, modern elements like personality and self-consciousness. In the next section, I will articulate a few discontinuities and continuities between

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[68] Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, II, chs.3–4. Jerome Zanchius, *De operum theologicorum*, vol. II (Geneva: Samuelis Crispini, 1649), 67–69. Zanchius, *De operum theologicorum*, 69: "At Deo est essentia, & relationes reales." See also Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. I. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 199 (*PRRD*, hereafter):

> Zanchi would carefully define an attribute as "something that we attribute to God on our part" rather than as an incidental or separable property of the divine nature. Zanchi's discussion set the stage for subsequent Reformed scholastic analysis of the problem of the attributes with its clear declaration that there are no accidents or natural passions in God, and that there is no diversity or division in the divine essence. God has simply chosen to accommodate his revelation in the Scriptures to our way of knowing, revealing there a series of attributes that are applied to him by created order.

Bavinck and Thomas Aquinas to demonstrate further that Bavinck should not be strictly identified with any one source.

Continuities and Discontinuities between Bavinck and His Sources

This section of the article will identify points of similarity and dissimilarity between Bavinck and Thomas Aquinas in his doctrine of divine simplicity. Evaluating these points of continuity and discontinuity will demonstrate for us that Bavinck cannot be strictly identified with his sources (beyond differing contexts) but must be envisioned as engaging in his own unique theological project, even if the content of *Reformed Dogmatics* remains within the bounds of confessional thinking.

The structure and order of the divine attributes in Bavinck's theology reflect a discontinuity with Aquinas. In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas begins with *simplicitas* (simplicity) in question 3. He then proceeds to *perfectum* (perfection) in Question 4, *bonitas* (goodness) in Questions 5–6, *infinitum* (infinity) in Questions 7–8, and continues with the other attributes.[69] Rather than beginning with simplicity, as Aquinas does, Bavinck concludes his discussion of the incommunicable attributes with simplicity and ends his overall discussion of the attributes with perfection, where Aquinas began. These differing starting places suggest that Bavinck may not have Aquinas directly in view.[70]

A further discontinuity is the categorization of the different attributes. It is evident that Bavinck and Aquinas grouped attributes differently. For example, Aquinas understood simplicity, perfection, and goodness to be fundamental attributes. Alternatively, Bavinck situates his attributes under three headings: intellectual, ethical, and sovereign attributes, with perfection as the attribute that summarizes all the attributes. Furthermore, rather than introducing the discussion of the attributes through simplicity, Bavinck commences, in a Reformed manner, with the divine names and, therefore, begins with God's independence or absoluteness.[71]

In terms of the actual construction of the doctrine of divine simplicity, Bavinck and Aquinas have much in common, yet there remains a point of discontinuity. Both utilize the same metaphysical categories and articulate that God has no "real" distinctions. Rather, distinctions between the attributes are understood through rational analysis (*ratio ratiocinata*). These distinctions we perceive as finite creatures grasping at the infinite and necessarily categorically splitting God into many parts.[72] Nonetheless, "they

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[69] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q3–10.

[70] Muller, *PRRD*, 58; *RD*, II, 254. Two other points are of significance here: First, Bavinck specifically places himself in opposition to Aquinas in other places in his discussion of the attributes, namely the attribute of glory. Second, Bavinck never moves away from the Reformed distinction of incommunicable and communicable attributes (see *GICR*, 55).

[71] See *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, I, 56–59.

[72] For more on Aquinas' distinctiveness see Glenn Butner, *Trinitarian Dogmatics: Exploring the Grammar of the Christian Doctrine of God* (Baker Academic, 2022), 76, 78–79.

signify him under diverse and multiple concepts, which are not synonyms."[73] Bavinck critiques Ockham and Scotus but not Thomas and, therefore, is (perhaps) implicitly linking himself to Thomas. However, despite this, Bavinck was no epigone of Thomas but a distinctly Reformed theologian. To point out a discontinuity in construction is to identify Bavinck's use of the phrase "absolute simplicity," which is absent from Aquinas but present in constructions of Reformed orthodoxy.[74] Moreover, the fact that Bavinck goes beyond Aquinas and limits his retrieval of him suggests that Bavinck should not be strictly identified with Aquinas. Instead, Aquinas served as one reliable guide among others.[75] This is in line with Brock's evaluation regarding Bavinck and the influence of neo-Thomism:

> [T]he label "neo-thomist," posited by a number of Bavinck's commentators as a critical underlying influence must be shed. This does not mean that neo-Thomism did not have any influence upon Bavinck. Rather, equating one tradition wholesale as a ground-motif or conceptual framework for the entirety of one's thought lacks the nuance needed as regards specific aspects of both tradition and the thinker.[76]

Finally, it ought to be noted, per the above argumentation, that Bavinck gravitates more readily toward Augustine and the early church fathers than Aquinas in his citations.

Conclusion: Bavinck's Eclectic Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

If the above analysis of Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity is correct, the following conclusions may be drawn.

First, perhaps more should be made of Bavinck's uniqueness with regard to divine simplicity. To suggest Bavinck's uniqueness beyond his synthetic eclecticism is to highlight his appropriation of a modified Absolute. Bavinck's adaptation of the Absolute and his engagement with modern thinkers support the hypothesis of Bavinck as one who is both orthodox and modern. Sutanto has previously argued for Bavinck's "Absolute Personality" as a modest contribution to Reformed confessional thinking.[77] Cameron Clausing's work on Bavinck and the "Absolute" and "Absolute Personality" raises the question of

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[73] *Aquinas, Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q.28, art. 3.

[74] Richard Muller, *PRRD*, 54, 279. Muller indicates Aquinas "does not use the phrase 'absolute simplicity'– indeed *simplicitas absoluta* is not a term that one often encounters in traditional presentations of the doctrine of simplicity."

[75] See also, Gregory Parker Jr., "Reformation or Revolution: Herman Bavinck and Henri de Lubac," *Perichoresis* 15, no. 3 (2017): 81–95.

[76] Brock, "Herman Bavinck the Neo-Thomist? A Reevaluation of Influence," 130–31.

[77] Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 45; see also Clausing, *Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck*, 210. "One wonders if relying on older formulae may not have served Bavinck better here. Nevertheless, the desire to see the doctrine of Trinity answer the questions of the day was noble. However, it seems Bavinck's response had the potential of causing more problems than it solved."

whether the modern features of Bavinck's simplicity served Bavinck well here. [78] To this, I would answer yes and no.

Insofar as Bavinck's "Absolute" is infused with Augustine's "fullness of his being," "simple multiplicity," "manifold simplicity," and "unbounded ocean of being" and is read alongside the background of Reformed orthodoxy's use of absolute simplicity, it is undoubtedly beneficial.[79] However, one must ask whether embracing the terminology of Absolute is ripe for confusion. Moreover, it raises further questions about the role of philosophy in Bavinck's theological program,[80] which has increasing significance in Bavinck studies.

Second, it should be recognized that the function of simplicity among the attributes is to provide *harmony*. In Bavinck's divine attributes, he employs divine simplicity to facilitate the unity-in-diversity of the attributes. Christian theology has often attempted to balance the incommunicable and communicable attributes or, in the language of Bavinck, the absoluteness and personality of God.[81] For Bavinck, perfect harmony exists among the attributes because of divine simplicity.[82]

Elsewhere in Bavinck's corpus, the concept of harmony is utilized in connection with the organic motif. This suggests that the doctrine of divine simplicity plays a foundational conceptual role in how the organic motif ought to be understood. For Bavinck, God is Triune, yet his unity does not limit God's diversity but facilitates it. As Bavinck states, "The glory of the confession of the Trinity consists above all in the fact that that unity, however absolute, does not exclude but includes diversity... whose diversity, so far from diminishing the unity, unfolds it to its fullest existence."[83] Eglinton identifies this connection in his work *Trinity and Organism*, arguing, "Trinity *ad intra* leads to organism *ad extra*."[84] In this manner:

> [O]ne finds that [Bavinck] evokes the organic motif to explain the sense in which the archetypal (Trinitarian) unity of the godhead acts as the foundation for all consequent (triniform) unity in the creation. The motif is thus viewed as an agent of conceptual unity, one grounded in Trinitarian foundations and moving towards a triniform goal.[85]

With Eglinton's point in mind, it is necessary to take it one step further by highlighting how unity-in-diversity's foundational (archetypal) reality lies at the conceptual heart of Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity. Bavinck infers this in *Reformed Dogmatics* when he speaks about the

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[78] See also Clausing, *Theology and History in the Methodology of Herman Bavinck*, 210.

[79] *GD*, II, 111 and *RD*, II, 176.

[80] George Puchinger, *Is de Gereformeerde wereld veranderd?* (Delft:Meinema, 1966), 209.

[81] *RD*, II, 118–19.

[82] *RD*, II, 110.

[83] *RD*, II, 300.

[84] Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif," 64; Pass, "Trinity or German Idealism?," 63. Pass contends for incarnation as a constitutive principle of Bavinck's organicism.

[85] Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif," 81.

polytheistic worldview in relation to divine simplicity.[86] For Bavinck, certain metaphysical realities pave the way for the world's diversity. Notably, in this context, Bavinck does not appeal here to God as Triune to provide this reality (as he does elsewhere) but instead grounds this discussion in God's attributes. Put differently, not only does Trinity *ad intra* lead to organism *ad extra*, but *divine simplicity ad intra* leads to organism *ad extra*.[87] This metaphysical understanding facilitates a further richness to Bavinck's deployment of the unity-in-diversity motifs, building not only on the unity-in-diversity of God's divine relations but also on the unity-in-diversity of his attributes.

Bavinck's unity-in-diversity motif raises an interesting question concerning the ongoing debate about the source of Bavinck's organicism.[88] Does the above discussion shed any light on the source? It does not, nor does it need to. Pass has sufficiently addressed this. However, it does suggest that Bavinck's engagement with philosophy has clear "Reformed catholic" ends. Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity should be considered an example of his eclectic "Reformed catholicity," in which he sources modern, Reformed, and ancient thinkers to construct theological doctrine in a principled manner. As Bruce Pass has stated, "Bavinck is a synthetic and eclectic thinker who strove for a reconciliation of historic Christianity and modern culture."[89] Bavinck's structure and articulation of simplicity resonate primarily with Reformed orthodoxy while reflecting dialogue with Romantic idealism and the broader church catholic in his construction.

Finally, Bavinck's description of divine simplicity is polemical, as he defends it from the charge of metaphysical abstraction while positively asserting its consistency with the doctrine of the Trinity. He affirms that the attributes may be distinguished through rational analysis (*ratio ratiocinata*), as God reveals himself in his word. While Bavinck's articulation is apologetic for his time, it may not offer anything substantially new for more modern (21st-century) opponents of the doctrine. However, it provides a synthetic model for moving forward for those who desire to uphold traditional articulations of divine simplicity with a modern tune.

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[86] *RD*, III, 588.

[87] Pass, "Trinity or German Idealism?," 63. It is relevant to note that Pass has also persuasively argued for a Christological element to be added to this phrase.

[88] For my own part, I have recently hinted at the more Romantic idealist features in Bavinck's organicism, but this is put forth much more convincingly by Pass. See Parker, "Theological *Thinking* and *Loving*," 64 (58n), 147–154. See also Pass, "Trinity or German Idealism?," 56–70, 69–70.

[89] Pass, "Trinity or German Idealism?," 66.

Book Reviews

Jared Ortiz and Daniel A. Keating, *The Nicene Creed: A Scriptural, Historical, and Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024. 225pp. Paperback. $24.99

The Nicene Creed is the most uniting doctrinal summary in the history of Christianity. Though debating aspects of meaning along the way, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox all confess faith in the Triune God through this Creed as the baseline of biblical Christianity. This easy-to-follow and well-presented introduction to the Creed expounds the Triune God and his work of salvation in the church in light of Scripture, history, and theology, aiming at devotion. Saturated with Scripture and steeped in the church fathers, this volume usefully and charitably guides readers through core beliefs without which Christianity ceases to be. Unambiguously Roman Catholic in approach, Ortiz and Keating will leave Protestant (and Eastern Orthodox) readers behind at points while still presenting what every professing Christian must hold dear. After showing the plan and value of the book, this review will illustrate some tensions that a Protestant doctrine of salvation can help resolve.

The six chapters in the book are predictable but in a good and helpful way, following the order of the Creed. Throughout, the authors are sensitive to showing readers the original language of the 325 Creed and what changed in its final form in 381. They even include two appendices, enabling readers to track these changes in English, Greek, and Latin (211–15). Chapter one focuses on the phrase "I believe" (Latin) or "We believe" (Greek), indicating that the Creed is both a personal and corporate profession of faith. As faith is "a kind of light" through which we see invisible realities (18), so faith learns from another, while knowledge is learning for oneself (26). This distinction reflects the difference between walking by faith in God through his word now and walking by sight in glory (2Co 5:7). In chapter two, the authors treat God the Father and creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*), which is the essential fact about creation, resulting in a fundamental Creator/creature distinction. Evolution, in their view, remains an open question in Roman Catholic theology (62–63) so long as we retain the special creation of mankind in God's image. Chapters three and four examine the divinity and humanity of the Son, asserting that the incarnation is "the great central truth of the Christian faith" (110). Because the Trinity precedes incarnation, this well-taken point could be an overstatement to a degree, though all Christians should admit that without God becoming man, mankind could never return to God.

In this section, and especially in the following chapter on the Holy Spirit, the authors show the nature of salvation in Christ along with Christology and Pneumatology. While maintaining that salvation comes through "Christ alone," they explain that "the Catholic church teaches" that some who never

hear Christ's name can still be saved through him (139). They walk a fine line here, affirming no salvation outside of the Roman Catholic church but holding out hope for Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians, the latter of whom "have a real though imperfect communion with the church" (181) because they have the word and baptism. By contrast, building on texts like Romans 10:14–17, in which Christ's word is necessary for faith in Christ, Westminster Confession of Faith 10.4 asserts (strongly) that people can be saved in Christ without being called to him by word and Spirit is "very pernicious and to be detested." While readers might admire the charity Ortiz and Keating display here, removing the necessity of sound doctrine through the word in calling people to Christ ends up undercutting the urgent need for evangelism and compassion to the nations. If it is true that people are lost without Christ, and they only get Christ through the word, then implying that they can have him any other way becomes detestable because it endangers souls. Chapter six ("Life in the Trinity") is the most overtly Roman Catholic part of the book, defending Roman Catholic views of the church as "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" in ways that exclude both Eastern and Orthodox and Protestant Christians from the church (though not necessarily from salvation!), inviting them to join in communion with the Triune God in the Roman Catholic church. That said, their emphasis on salvation as life in and with God, frequently citing 2 Peter 1:4 about partaking of the divine nature (e.g., 107, 140, 198, 210), reminds readers well that knowing God is eternal life (Jn 17:3). This is the point of the Creed since the "Amen" at the end reaffirms the "I believe" at the beginning (208).

Hopefully, without undercutting the authors' warm and generous tone, engaging some of their statements about the nature of salvation illustrates why differences persist, at least between Protestants and Roman Catholics. The order of salvation implicit in the book appears inconsistent and undoubtedly short of Scriptural teaching at key junctures. Baptism and regeneration help narrow down what I have in mind. For instance, "Faith saves us by engrafting us onto Christ through baptism" (20). This statement gets hard to piece together in light of what follows because baptism brings new birth and new life, yet it looks like faith here precedes baptism, uniting us to Christ, but somehow still through baptism. The question is whether faith unites to Christ, baptism, or both. Later, they add that faith comes through the Spirit through the Eucharist (90), seeming to make baptism the source of new birth, leading later to faith via another sacrament. Though the authors do not appeal overtly to Aquinas's distinction between unformed and formed faith (through love), this could offer a way out of this seeming dilemma by planting the seed of faith in baptism that needs to take shape and grow under the Eucharist. Though noting that the church is always a "mixed body," including true believers and hypocrites, they add, "Baptism sanctifies and justifies us" (192). However, "a baptism may be valid, but not fruitful" (195), meaning that some people are regenerate via baptism but do not bear fruit through faith, love, and hope. But baptism brings the

forgiveness of sins and "the new divine life" (199), and "eternal life begins now, in baptism" (206). In the end, baptism brings new birth, justification (forgiveness of sins here, 196) and sanctification, yet not all born-again people have faith and holiness; thus, they do not have salvation in Christ.

Acknowledging that most Christians have taught a form of baptismal regeneration in history, we must ask whether this presentation is coherent and Scriptural. One issue is what regeneration or new birth means and entails. Jesus says that only those born of "water and Spirit" can enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). Yet 1 Peter 1:23 describes believers as being "born again, not of imperishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (ESV). Ordinarily, new birth happens through "the word of truth," making believers "a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (Ja 1:18). The new birth has permanent consequences, according to Scripture: "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep sinning because he has been born of God" (1Jn 3:9). An unbreakable chain exists between new birth and new life, and this new life is always fruitful. New birth brings forgiveness of sins, as the authors agree, but also "a new heart" (Ez 36:26), which looks like God putting his "Spirit within you" (v. 27), leading to walking in his "statutes" and obeying his "rules." Things get harder for the idea of regeneration through a baptism that is "not fruitful" when we see that Simon the Sorcerer was baptized in Acts 8:13, though his works showed that he was perishing (v. 20). Peter's assessment was, "you have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God" (v. 21). If baptism brings regeneration, a new heart, justification, sanctification, and a changed life, then how can Simon be baptized, but not regenerated because he had no new heart, no fruit, and no life? Baptismal regeneration may be historical, but Ortiz and Keating illustrate why it quickly becomes incoherent in biblical terms.

Undoubtedly, baptism and regeneration are connected conceptually in Scripture, which space does not permit us to explore. However, Titus 3:4–7 gives a tighter order of salvation than the Roman Catholic one:

> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Salvation is not by our own works of righteousness but by faith in Christ without our works (Ro 3:28). We saw above that the Spirit calls us to new birth and union with Christ through the word. Baptism is a sign and seal of "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." It is an excellent vehicle to drive us to Christ without replacing either Christ's work for us or

the Spirit's work in our hearts. Everyone who is regenerated and sanctified is justified and adopted, which is why all such people can never go on sinning as they did before. Roman Catholic theology results in a skewed order of salvation that is out of joint with Scripture. Simon had baptism, but Scripture says that he had none of the benefits listed by Peter and Paul. Though baptism can be valid without being fruitful, regeneration cannot be. Somewhat ironically, given that this is a book on the Nicene Creed, Trinitarian appropriations offer a corrective that looks much more like a Protestant gospel. From beginning to end, God saves us by sending his Spirit "through" Jesus Christ to regenerate, renew, justify, and adopt sinners in Christ. While baptized people can be hypocrites, regenerate people cannot be. Scripture and Roman Catholicism have very different views of what regeneration is and what it does.

If the authors of this book are openly Roman Catholic, seeking to win readers to their viewpoint, then this reviewer is also openly Protestant, seeking to win readers to his perspective. Readers should remember that soteriological differences between us build on the Trinity and Incarnation, without which salvation would be impossible. This book is a historically rich and biblically informed introduction to the Trinity and Incarnation. Debates over the nature of salvation are non-starters without starting here. Yet if Scripture is the word of God, on which point Protestants and Roman Catholics agree, then our views of the Spirit's application of Christ's work in salvation must harmonize with what the Triune God said and says through the Bible.

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Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2019. 283 pp. Paperback. $16.99.

Writing a book on the doctrine of God proves daunting enough, but writing a book on the doctrine of God that proves accessible to the broadest possible audience may have seemed impossible until this welcome volume by Matthew Barrett. Clear, concise, and engaging, this book presents the classical attributes of God in a refreshingly approachable and eminently presentable form. I chose this book as the primary text for my course on the Doctrine of God at Leavell College, and students found the book informative, exciting, and even enriching to their devotional life.

Barrett begins each of his twelve chapters with a question that people tend to ask regarding God's character, including, "Does God Depend on You? *Aseity*," "Does God Have Emotions? *Impassibility*," and "Is God Bound by Space?" *Omnipresence*. Such questions immediately engage readers with relevant implications of God's being for everyday life, significantly stressing

that who God is affects who we are as his creatures. I found Chapter 2, titled "Can We Think God's Thoughts after Him? *How the Creature Should (and Should Not) Talk about the Creator*," very beneficial, as it addresses the significance of the Creator-creature distinction. This chapter showcases Barrett's ability to explain heady theological distinctions—like *res significata* vs. *modus significandi*, communicable vs. incommunicable attributes, and cataphatic vs. apophatic theology—with careful yet penetrable precision, offering readers the ability to become readily conversant with otherwise abstruse theological terms.

As the title suggests, Barrett portrays a God much larger than humans can create or control. For contemporary readers, chapters 5 and 7 on God's simplicity and impassibility are the most challenging. As a firm proponent of God's not having parts, Barrett weaves the attributes of God together to try to demonstrate how each of God's attributes carries implications for all the other attributes. For instance, Barrett states that God's infinity must relate to all of his other attributes since "the *infinite* nature of God cannot be stressed enough. Without it, the other perfections would make little sense" (46).

Another strength of Barrett's book is reflected in its firm connectedness to Scripture. Not content simply to spout off theological or philosophical formulations, much of Barrett's chapters delve into exegesis of biblical passages and can often read like a deft sermon. For instance, Chapter 3 illuminates Ephesians 1:19–20, revealing the vastness of God's infinity. Similarly, Chapter 10 delves into Daniel 4, showcasing God's unparalleled omnipotence, omniscience, and omnisapience, compelling us to recognize His supreme power and wisdom. Barrett's consistent reference to Scripture allows the book to remain firmly rooted in biblical revelation rather than human speculation. As Barrett affirms, "If *we know* anything about God, it is because he has chosen to make it known; revelation is a gift. In that light, our task cannot be speculation" (27).

Given its conversance with Scripture, one finds it odd that chapter 5 on simplicity includes so few biblical references. While Barrett mentions Deuteronomy 6:4 and James 1:17, it would seem unlikely that the original audiences of either of these verses would grasp that God has no parts from statements like "the Lord is one" or that God does not change like shifting shadows. Perhaps this chapter could benefit from a more robust biblical discussion.

Another puzzling choice that may not prove as helpful as intended is Barrett's fireman analogy to explain God's impassibility. Barrett likens God to a fireman who is so "acutely aware . . . of the danger, as well as the suffering and turmoil by those within, that he refuses to be moved by emotional outbursts or be overcome by panic. Instead, he runs into the house in order to rescue your brother or sister, while other onlookers uncontrollably weep" (120–21). Barrett argues that "in that moment we do *not* want someone who changes emotionally or suffers emotional change. We

desperately need someone who is impassible; only he or she is able to save others from that burning house" (120). While the fireman proves a powerful image to advance Barrett's point, he overstates his case here by creating a false dichotomy; he seems to assume as if emotions only cripple while emotionlessness only strengthens. This assumption, however, may overlook the empowering effect emotions can have on those who perform acts of bravery, emotions that previous generations may have termed righteous "affections" as opposed to sinful "passions."

Despite the two concerns voiced above, Barrett's book succeeds as one of the most (if not the most) accessible and clear treatments of God's attributes in writing today. I heartily recommend this book to anyone from high school and older who wants to learn about and engage with the undomesticated God of the Bible.

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Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022. xvi + 715pp. Paperback. $34.95

Who God is as Father, Son, and Spirit, and what God does to save sinners has always been the core of Christian theology. Though suffering partial eclipse in some theological circles for some time, the Trinity is again becoming the center of theological reflection (and debate). Some options presented to contemporary readers are good, while others are misdirected, even harmful. The best engagements with Trinitarian doctrine are solidly biblical and draw heavily on historical conversations over the doctrine of God and Christology. Thomas Joseph White's massive treatment of Trinitarian theology reflects the best of both worlds, reappropriating and adapting Thomas Aquinas' profound Trinitarian thought to current theological issues. His work is a penetrating and profound retrieval of Trinitarian ideas in Thomistic dress, drawing extensively from psychological analogies of the Trinity to bring Thomism into conversation with alternative options.

A true master of his topic is marked by depth, clarity, and simplicity. Despite the book's length, White's material is concise, clear, and quickly gets to the point. He grasps his material well enough to creatively summarize and restate precise ideas, making them intelligible without losing their meaning. Building a logically progressive case one step at a time, the four parts of the book move from the natural knowledge of God and early church Trinitarian doctrine through Aquinas on the unity of the divine nature and essence to his treatment of the three persons proper, launching ultimately into current debates over various forms of social Trinitarianism and theories of divine suffering. While retaining Thomas' assertion that we know

the Trinity through revelation rather than through reason (e.g., 352), part I nevertheless illustrates well how philosophy not only relates to a general natural knowledge of God but prepares the way for *sacra doctrina* via special revelation by giving us coherent categories in which to express and apply God's Triunity (3–4). Treating the Old and New Testaments and early church reflections on the Trinity mark the capstone of this section.

Part II explores the nature of the one God, masterfully showing the logic of Aquinas' ordering of the divine attributes, starting with simplicity and moving progressively up to the knowledge of God. Serving as a bridge between Parts II and III, chapter twenty on the knowledge of God enables White to address personhood as "subsistent relations" in God marked by "relations of origin" (e.g., 385). Though, peculiarly, he does not use *suppositum* (unless in a citation, such as page 484, fn. 5), one of Thomas' favorite terms to describe the divine persons, he explains an otherwise comprehensive range of Trinitarian terminology. Though doctrines like perichoresis, or the interpenetration of the divine persons, are often favorite avenues for social Trinitarians to posit three wills in God with three persons collaborating in a quasi-Tritheistic communion, White incorporates such ideas into divine processions as subsistent relations (515). This move enables him simultaneously to promote an inherently relational view of God and to offer an alternative to less-than-orthodox redefinitions of personhood. His distinct chapter on appropriations (chapter 29), reflecting the processions in God, is much-needed since appropriations have often received little notice in modern Trinitarian thought.

By the time White addresses contemporary thought in Part IV, he has already stacked the deck, illustrating why psychological analogies to intellect and will in the human soul give us some creaturely analogical knowledge of immaterial processions (see pg. 668 for a strong statement of the importance of such analogies), and illustrating why studying the divine names and attributes is essential for maintaining co-essentiality and procession as relation of origin in God. Though winsome and sympathetic, his critique of authors like Hegel, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, Seguius Bolgakov, and others is as devastating and decisive as it is fair and friendly. He leaves no room for subordination (e.g., 120, 157, 169, 501, 629 or multiple wills in the Godhead (e.g., 235, 629), let alone God suffering through a historical process alongside humanity. Far from distancing God from human suffering, his application of orthodox Christology, including Christ's divine and human willing (606–08), to divine compassion and the revelation of the Trinity in his penultimate chapter is nothing short of breathtaking.

It is impossible to illustrate the strengths of this work without reading it in full. White is readable and gripping, making it hard to put the book down. White integrates Aquinas' adaptation of Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity consistently throughout the book 9 (e.g., 13, 121, 133, 155, 167–169, 385, 388, 392, 397, 400, 407, 668, 678–80). More or less, the idea is that rational creatures have "processions" of intellect and will, or wisdom and love,

without division. While any reflection of the Trinity in creation must be analogical and limited at best, he argues that psychological analogy paves the way for conceiving immaterial processions on some level. Regardless of what readers think of the value of such psychological analogies, White illustrates their chastened and measured use in their best form. At the least, this point will challenge many Protestants to see reflections of God wherever they can while keeping Trinitarian theology in its proper place as revealed rather than natural theology.

Adding an example from Part IV, Chapter 32 offers a penetrating, if not devastating, critique of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner's proposals for collapsing the economy (work) of the Trinity into the theology of the Trinity. Incorporating ideas such as Moltmann's importation of suffering into the Godhead to redeem human suffering, White astutely observes that making this move removes God's ability to triumph over suffering because suffering becomes part of God's being (582). If union with God through Christ in the Spirit is eternal life (e.g., 5, 289, 535), then treating suffering as integral to God's being would entail some measure of eternal suffering for his people, making God unable to overcome human misery (e.g., 5, 289, 535). Moreover, despite the fact that "Rahner's Rule," that the economic Trinity is the ontological Trinity, has become mainstream, he argues that we should abandon the economic Trinity altogether. He asserts, "One can believe either in the classical Nicene affirmation of the *homoousios* (the ineffable singular divine essence of the three persons) or in an "economic Trinity' but arguably not both" (585). The real distinction is between theology and economy or between God and his works. The Triune God reveals himself in the economy, but the Trinity is independent both of creation and the economy of redemption. His extended caution is worth taking to heart: "Rahner's novel approach should not be taken for granted as an advance of theological thinking simply because it has recently and often been cited in theological literature. The classical distinction between the eternal processions and the divine missions provides a better framework, in fact, for addressing even the most contemporary of concerns regarding the way God can make himself known to us, as he is in himself, precisely in and through a shared history with us in the economy" (587). Though many today are so accustomed to referring to the ontological and economic Trinity that they take the terms for granted, White reminds us that such terms reflect seismic philosophical and theological shifts in Trinitarian doctrine. We must distinguish between God in himself, and God revealed in his works; otherwise, we will lose Nicene and classical Trinitarianism.

One minor weakness is that the author quickly moves from Pseudo-Dionysius to the Fourth Lateran Council (ch. 10), bypassing John of Damascus and Richard St. Victor. Since Aquinas drew heavily from both authors in his Trinitarian theology, they provide an important bridge towards grasping the development of his thought. Particularly, Richard St. Victor reflected elements of both Dionysius' stress on God as "supra-

essential" being and Lateran IV's emphasis on greater unlikeness than likeness in analogical language about God. Including such material would strengthen White's assessments of what was distinctive and common in Aquinas' articulation of the mystery of the Trinity. Likewise, Richard St. Victor stressed the processions of the divine persons as incommunicable existences of the divine essence, anticipating Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence and their coincidence in the divine nature (249). Though White argues rightly that Aquinas' distinction between essence and existence was a unique contribution to "human thought" (249), Richard illustrates how he developed such ideas from earlier precedents. White includes Richard on pages 356–58 (and elsewhere) but restricts his treatment to whether or not it is possible to demonstrate the Trinity through natural reason, bypassing positive influences on Aquinas. As a result, he largely pits Aquinas against Richard (and others like Bonaventure and Scotus) regarding definitions of personhood and whether natural knowledge of the Trinity is possible, omitting constructive points of continuity. Though he notes that we should "distinguish ecclesial dogma from schools of theology," such as Thomism (673), making room for alternative explanations, the tone of his interaction with other medieval models seems to be too adversative at times.

Another feature of this work that will catch readers' attention is the scattered references, ordinarily in footnotes, to "the universality of the grace of Christ" (543; e.g., 628). While this could merely reflect a theory of the extent of the atonement, he seems to mean something more. Including what he calls the "holy pagan," who did not have supernatural divine revelation, he states, "They too, then, were to be saved by the Cross, in collective unity with the whole human race, with all those who are offered and who cooperate with it effectively. They are part of the Church, broadly speaking" (650–51). In the same place, he clearly affirms the reality of the doctrine of hell in line with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. However, his statements appear to imply a modern and creative move among some post-Vatican II Roman Catholics to widen the definition of the "church" to include "pre-Christian gentiles" (650) and potentially those of other religions. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics profess their own understandings of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church," Roman Catholics have traditionally restricted their understanding of catholicity to visible communion with their visible body in communion with bishops descending from the apostles by ordination. At the same time, Protestants broadened catholicity to include all visible churches standing in an apostolic succession of truth. Ironically, White's view outstrips Protestants on this point by extending the church's catholicity beyond its visible outward expressions by including people entirely outside of its identifiable boundaries. This issue is certainly not a significant feature of this work and does not detract from its outstanding features. However, this tangential point raises its own set of theological questions and challenges.

Regardless of one's confessional convictions, White drives home one thing clearly: the gospel is about the mystery of the Triune God. Put differently, the gospel is not a list of things we receive from God or that Christ does for us. What God gives believers is himself, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is about the way back to God (e.g., the *exitus reditus* theme; 470). In a time when the Trinity has fallen to the periphery of how the average church-goer views the gospel, we must pull front and center the goal of knowing the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. Eternal life is not enduring forever, but knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (Jn 17:3; p. 542). Life is a quality of being rather than a quantity of time. Readers familiar with Aquinas himself, especially parts one and three of the *Summa Theologia*, will doubtless get the most from this book. For those in search of a compelling and well-reasoned alternative to the inadequate models of the Trinity that are prevalent in the church today, White's work provides an invaluable resource.

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Daniel J. Treier, *Lord Jesus Christ*. Edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023. 384 pp. Paperback $41.99

Daniel J. Treier is Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Theology and Director of Ph.D. Program at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. His current scholarship focuses on evangelical theology and theological interpretation of Scripture, particularly Christology. He has authored and co-authored several books such as *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, *Introducing Evangelical Theology*, and *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*.

Lord Jesus Christ forms part of the New Studies in Dogmatics series. This series seeks to "offer . . . focused treatments on major topics in dogmatic theology that fill the gap between introductory theology textbooks and advanced theological monographs" (19). The series aims to offer works in constructive theology via renewal through retrieval (19). According to the editors, modern theology has not provided a more profound understanding but has drifted sideways. However, by resourcing the Scriptures in connection with the ancient, medieval, and contemporary voices, this series seeks to "contribute to a flourishing theological culture in the church today" (20).

Treier suggests that "dogmatic theology focuses on exposition of the church's authoritative teaching" (27). Given the focus of New Studies in Dogmatics in general and of dogmatic theology in particular, this book approaches the person and work of Jesus Christ as faith seeking understanding and affirms with the earliest Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord" (Ro 10:9; 1Co 12:3; Ph 2:11). Treier draws from "ecumenical dogma and Protestant confessions" to accomplish

his objective (27). He will outline his "faith seeking Christological understanding" with four aims: evangelical and ecumenical faith, biblical and historical seeking, ontological and analogical understanding, and conceptual and contextual Christology (35–45).

His first aim is to be evangelical and ecumenical. By ecumenical, Treier seeks to uphold the "rule of faith" by speaking about the seven ecumenical councils. Additionally, the Reformed confessions also form part of our understanding of Christology. His second aim will be to employ a theological interpretation of Scripture and theological realism of historical Jesus research. In doing so, one can examine Christ from his earthly and heavenly dimensions. As Treier notes, Jesus was a man, but he was not a mere man, he was more, he was the God-man. Treier's third aim is to examine Jesus' identity, namely his eternal sonship and earthly existence as the God-man. Fourth, conceptually, Treier attempts to speak of "Scripture's theodramatic ontology," promoting Christology and engaging with various historical contexts to gain more understanding of Christ's incarnational presence and to further catechesis (42–43).

Treier, having laid out his four objectives, begins every chapter with a particular text of Scripture, which functions as his springboard for theological exegesis and interpretation. Treier then outlines his chapters in a progressive Christological manner or, as he says, "Christ's theodramatic ontology" (46). Simply stated, the book starts with the Eternal Son of God, his condescension or incarnation, his life as the Messiah, His life, death, resurrection and exaltation, ascension, and finally, consummation of redemption and creation.

The text used in chapter one is Ephesians 1:3–14. This text points to the three persons of the Trinity. Treier focuses on the Son's life, *ad intra*, that is, as the eternal Son in relation and communion with the Father and Holy Spirit; the eternal generation of the Son and his ontological identity are in full view in this chapter. Next, he employs Colossians 1:15–29 to speak about the incarnation of the Son as the express *imago Dei*. Here, the eternal Son entered His creation and took upon flesh, thus taking part in the creation as the preeminent one who is the prototype for humanity in general and the *imago Dei* in particular. In chapter three, Treier highlights Luke 24:13–35 and focuses on Jesus' Messianic office as Priest, Prophet, and King who alone fulfills God's covenant. In chapter four, Isaiah 7:14 points to the more-than-human aspect of Jesus. Jesus, as Immanuel, is God with us, thus pointing to the glorious mystery of God incarnate. In chapter five, Treier points to John 1:1–18 and demonstrates how the Logos, the Word who was with the Father, took upon flesh in the incarnation, is God's supreme and final self-revelation.

Then, in chapter six, Philippians 2:5–11 is used to demonstrate that not only was the incarnation an act of God's love, but Jesus' Servant-like attitude and obedience is evidence of God's superlative love toward sinners. Chapter seven begins with Luke 4:14–30 and situates Jesus as the Savior whose coming was synonymous with the coming of God's kingdom. Following, chapter eight

treats Mark 10:32–45 and focuses on Jesus as the Son of Man who was the once and for all substitutionary atoning sacrifice who purchased our redemption. Chapter nine properly treats Hebrews 7:22–8:6 to demonstrate that Jesus is the theandric Mediator, the God-man, who stands as the only Mediator between God and humanity. His exaltation and mediatory office were accomplished by his resurrection and ascension. Finally, chapter ten culminates in Jesus being the Bridegroom whose return ushers in the consummation of creation and redemption. It is here where He and his redeemed covenant people will dwell together on the earth in utter bliss forever.

Lord Jesus Christ reminds one of Robert A. Peterson's 2012 book, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ*. Part one of Peterson's book has similar life events to those of Jesus in Treier's *Lord Jesus Christ*. However, a distinction aligns well with the stated purpose of the New Studies in Dogmatics and Treier that is not found in Peterson's work, which is the notion of renewal via retrieval. The former book reads well and is suited for beginner to intermediate students of the Word. Treier's book likewise uses readable but more academic prose and theological grammar that theologically trained students would understand.

Treier stated in his introduction that his aim was fourfold: Did he accomplish his task? Treier accomplished his objective. Each chapter evidenced theological exegesis and interpretation of the chosen Scriptural reference. Treier engages with the various aspects of dogmatic Christology by resourcing ancient, medieval, and contemporary voices. He deals with conceptual and contextual issues as they relate to dogmatic Christology.

There are two observations that this writer would like to highlight. In chapter one, "Communion as the Son of God," Treier situates the Son in the life of the Trinity, and rightly so. One aspect that often goes unaddressed, with some exceptions, such as with Fred Sanders in his book *The Deep Things of God,* is the connection between Jesus' ontological sonship and the elect's sonship by grace via adoption. Treier devotes some pages to addressing the doctrine of adoption, which makes sense given that he is engaged in the task of theological interpretation of Scripture. Ephesians 1:3–18 is a classic text that deals with the Triune God's life and the redemption and adoption that takes place as a result of the inseparable operations within the Godhead, namely, the Father's election, the Son's substitutionary atoning work, and the union with Christ produced by the Holy Spirit. It is refreshing to see that the doctrine of adoption necessarily flows out of the ontological identity of the Son. Since the Son is eternally Son, then it follows that those who the Father elects will become sons of God by grace. As John Calvin once said, God became man, that man may become sons of God.

The second observation is identified in chapter seven. This chapter deals with the notion of reconciliation as liberation. Treier observes that Jesus came to liberate from sin, not just conceptually or spiritually but also against "social structures and systemic evil" (237). So far, so good. Then Treier makes a suggestion that needs some clarification. Treier said, "How different might have been the story of the last two thousand years on this planet

grown old from suffering if the link between Jesus and Israel had never been severed!" (238). He goes on to say, "Severing this link left the church with a sociopolitical legacy that includes imperial collaborations, colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and slavery" (238). What does he mean that Jesus and Israel were severed? Does he mean that Jesus is not treated as a Jew? Is he referring to the de-Judaization of Christianity? Moreover, this last statement seems to imply that because Jesus was severed from Israel, slavery, racism, patriarchy, and colonialism are its result. It would seem that sin lies at the root of those issues noted above.

Additionally, there is nothing inherently wrong with patriarchy, Father-rule, so long as it is biblical patriarchy. The Bible teaches biblical patriarchy. The Father is eternally Father, and the Father is over all, from whom the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed. For a treatment on biblical patriarchy see Zachary Garris's book *Masculine Christianity*. It would also seem that slavery would eventually be undone, given Paul's preaching of the Gospel, union with Christ, and his letter to Philemon, in which Christians are to treat one another as brothers.

Nevertheless, besides this above-noted section, *Lord Jesus Christ* comes with many endorsements from respected theologians. Pastors, seminary students, and anyone thirsty for dogmatic theology and Christology would benefit from this work. As the series editors noted, it seeks to be an intermediary work attempting to fill the gap between an introductory survey textbook and an advanced monograph. Thus, it will be a smooth read if pastors and theological seminary students are well acquainted with theological grammar. Should they need to improve their theological grammar, it will be essential to have a theological dictionary to help them in their reading endeavors.

Lord Jesus Christ is a well-done work. It is a great resource and exercise in resourcement of the tradition in its pursuit of renewal via retrieval. Treier effectively demonstrates how to engage in theological interpretation of the text while engaging with ancient and Reformed confessional material to help readers engage with their modern contexts. Readers will benefit from and be challenged by *Lord Jesus Christ*.

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