



*for the Church*

**MIDWESTERN**  
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# The Reformation and Later Controversies

# MIDWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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*Fall 2017*

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Fall issue of the *Midwestern Journal of Theology*. I am indebted once again, to several people who give so sacrificially to ensure the Journal appears each Semester. My sincere thanks go to Dr. Jason Duesing, Provost and Academic Editor for all his invaluable assistance. Thanks are also due to our Book Review Editor, Dr. Blake Hearson, for all the hours spent in procuring and editing the reviews he always manages to secure. Thanks also go to Mrs. Kaylee Freeman, for all her invaluable support as Journal secretary.

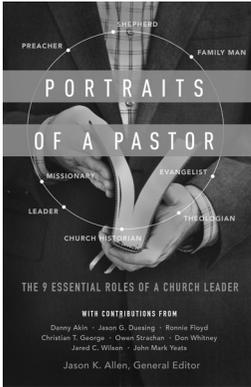
This issue is dedicated maybe not surprisingly, to thinking about aspects of the Reformation and later controversies. The articles begin with a brief Theological Commentary by Midwestern's own Dr. Matthew Barrett, on the question of what exactly are thinking of when we speak of *sola Scriptura*? This is followed by the first of our three guest articles we are very happy to publish in this issue, with Dr. Octavio's Esqueda's, 'The Reformation in light of a Christian Formation Perspective.' Midwestern's Dr. Tom Johnston then shares the fruit of his scholarly research into the issue of the marriage of clergy at the time of the Reformation. We then have the second piece from Dr. Barrett, his expert and pertinent analysis, 'Balancing *Sola Scriptura* and Catholic Trinitarianism'.

We then have the second guest contribution, and that from a great friend of Midwestern Dr. Michael Haykin, wherein he introduces us to the life and theological contribution of Anne Dutton, an 18<sup>th</sup> century English Baptist poet and writer. We conclude our guest articles with Dr. Alan Thompson's insightful piece in which he examines C. H. Spurgeon's use and endorsement of Lament Psalms in worship. Our final article comes from our Provost Dr. Jason Duesing, in which he reminds us of, and expertly comments on, the very significant debate that occurred thirty years ago between SBC theologians Paige Patterson and Fisher Humphreys. The debate, though often overlooked reveals some of the depth of what was in play in SBC theological life.

We again conclude this issue of the *MJT* with several relevant and thought provoking book reviews secured and edited by Dr. Blake Hearson.

# BOOKS IN BRIEF

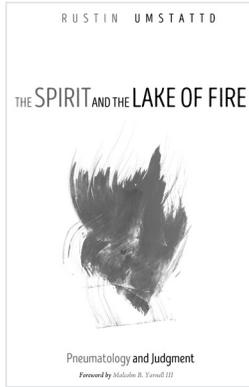
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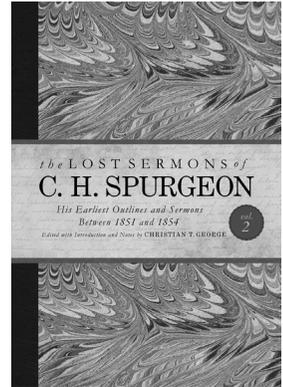
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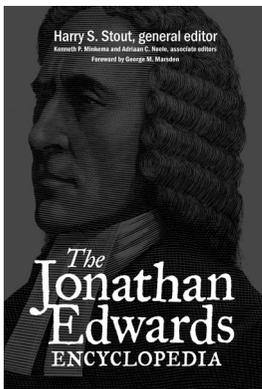
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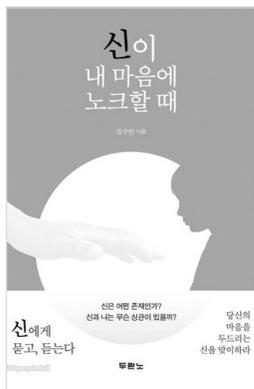


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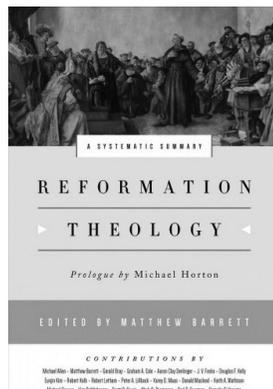
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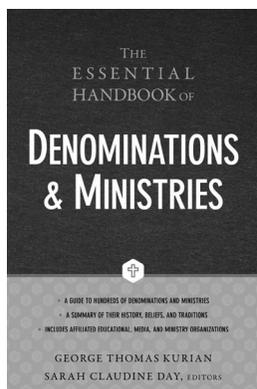
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What is Sola Scriptura?<sup>1</sup>  
A Theological Commentary

MATTHEW BARRETT

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“So what if everything in the Bible isn’t true and reliable or from God? That doesn’t really matter, does it? The Bible still remains an authority in my life.” Though it has been years now, I remember hearing these words as if it were yesterday. I had no idea what to say in response.

I was shocked because I was hearing these words from a churchgoing, Bible-carrying, evangelical Christian. This person saw no relation between the truthfulness of Scripture and the authority of Scripture, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

In that moment I realized that the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is just as important today as it was in the sixteenth century. Sadly, many Christians in the church today have no idea what *sola Scriptura* is or entails.

**Legitimate cause for alarm**

In the sixteenth century the Reformers faced off against Rome because the Roman church had elevated tradition and its magisterium to the level of Scripture. Nevertheless, Rome still believed Scripture itself was inspired by God and therefore inerrant, that is, trustworthy, true, and without error.

Since the sixteenth century, Protestantism (and its view of the Bible) has undergone an evolution in its identity. Movements such as the Enlightenment, Liberalism, and, more recently, postmodernism have elevated other voices to the level of Scripture or even above Scripture, and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture have been abandoned,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is taken with permission from Zondervan as an adapted excerpt from *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture*, by Matthew Barrett.

something Rome never would have done in the sixteenth century. Today, many people reject that the Bible is God-breathed and truthful in all it asserts.

As Carl Henry pointed out in his magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, the church throughout history has faced repeated attacks on the Bible from skeptics, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's Word been questioned, criticized, and abandoned by those within the body of Christ. To the Reformers, this would have been unthinkable, yet this is the day we live in. Not only do Bible critics pervade the culture but now they have mounted the pulpit and sit comfortably in the pews.

If Carl Henry is right, then there is legitimate cause for alarm. Repeated attacks on Scripture's own character reveal the enmity and hostility toward the God of the Bible within our own souls. One of the most significant needs in the twenty-first century is a call back to the Bible to a posture that encourages reverence, acceptance, and adherence to its authority and message.

Along with the realization that *sola Scriptura* is just as applicable today as it was in the sixteenth century, I also saw that many Christians in the church have no idea what *sola Scriptura* is or what it entails. What is the relationship of the authority of the Bible to attributes such as inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency? Even if we accept that the Bible alone is our final authority, we may have no idea *why* this is true. Is it because the Bible is the best guidebook we can find?

These questions led me to carefully study the massive shifts in authority that have taken place since the Reformation in my recent book *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture*. I wanted to better understand the relationship between biblical authority and the nature of Scripture, namely, its own inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency.

### **What is *Sola Scriptura*?**

What is *sola Scriptura* exactly? *Sola Scriptura* means that *only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.*

First, *sola Scriptura* means that Scripture alone is our *final* authority. *Authority* is a bad word in our day of rugged individualism. But the Bible is all about authority. In fact, *sola Scriptura* means that the Bible is our

chief, supreme, and ultimate authority. Notice, however, that I didn't say the Bible is our *only* authority. *Sola Scriptura* is too easily confused today with *nuda Scriptura*, the view that we should have "no creed but the Bible!" Those who sing this mantra believe that creeds, confessions, the voices of tradition, and those who hold ecclesiastical offices carry no authority in the church. But this was not the Reformers' position, nor should it be equated with *sola Scriptura*.

*Sola Scriptura* acknowledges that there are other important authorities for the Christian, authorities who should be listened to and followed, but Scripture alone is our *final* authority. It is the authority that rules over and governs all other authorities. It is the authority that has the final say. We could say that while church tradition and church officials play a *ministerial* role, Scripture alone plays a *magisterial* role. This means that all other authorities are to be followed only inasmuch as they align with Scripture, submit to Scripture, and are seen as subservient to Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority.

Second, *sola Scriptura* also means that Scripture alone is our *sufficient* authority. Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, but it is the authority that provides believers with all the truth they need for salvation and for following after Christ. The Bible, therefore, is sufficient for faith and practice. This notion of the Bible's sufficiency has been powerfully articulated by Reformation and Reformed confessions. The Belgic Confession (1561) states: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein." And the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men [Gal 1:8–9; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15–17]." In short, the Bible is enough for us.

Third, *sola Scriptura* means that only Scripture, because it is God's *inspired* Word, is our *inerrant* authority. Notice that the basis of biblical authority—the very reason why Scripture is authoritative—is that God is its divine author. The ground for biblical authority is divine inspiration. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "The *authority* of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed,

dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) *the author thereof*; and therefore it is to be received, *because it is the Word of God* [1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19, 21; 1 John 5:9].” Scripture and Scripture alone (not Scripture *and* Tradition) is God-breathed and, on this basis, stands unshakable as the church’s final, flawless authority. What Scripture says, God says.

To get a full picture of *sola Scriptura*, we need to go beyond saying that the Bible is inspired or God-breathed. Inspiration should lead to an understanding that the Bible is perfect, flawless, and inerrant. In other words, inerrancy is the necessary corollary of inspiration. They are two sides of the same coin, and it is impossible to divorce one from the other. Because it is God speaking—and he is a God of truth, not error—his Word must be true and trustworthy in all that it addresses.

It is precisely because inerrancy is a biblical corollary and consequence of divine inspiration—inseparably connected and intertwined—that it is a necessary component to *sola Scriptura*. The God of truth has breathed out his Word of truth, and the result is nothing less than a *flawless* authority for the church. Were we to divorce the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture from its authority, disconnecting the two as if one was unrelated to the other, then we would be left with no doctrine of *sola Scriptura* at all. Should Scripture contain errors, it is unclear why we should trust Scripture as our supreme and final authority. And should we limit, modify, or abandon the total inerrancy of Scripture, we set in motion tremendous doubt and uncertainty regarding the Bible’s competence as our final authority. The ground for the believer’s confidence that all of Scripture is the Word of God is shaken.

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy makes this point as well: “The *authority* of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine *inerrancy* is in any way limited or disregarded.” In other words, to reject inerrancy is to undermine confidence in the Bible’s authority, and what could have more relevance to *sola Scriptura* than biblical authority? As Roger Nicole once exclaimed, “What is supremely at stake in this whole discussion [of *inerrancy*] is the recognition of the *authority* of God in the sacred oracles.” It should not surprise us to find that in the recent history of evangelicalism, leaders have rallied around statements such as the Cambridge Declaration (1996), affirming inerrancy’s inseparability from *sola Scriptura* in stating, “Scripture alone is the *inerrant* rule of the

church's life," and they "reaffirm the *inerrant* Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can *bind* the conscience."

### **Luther's dividing line**

What is often missed in retellings of Luther's progress to the Diet of Worms is the question of *why* Luther's stance on Scripture was so detested by Rome. After all, Rome *also* affirmed Scripture's authority and inspiration. So what made Luther's stance on biblical authority so different and so offensive to the Roman church? The answer is that Luther had the audacity to say that *only* Scripture is the *inerrant* authority. While popes and councils err, Scripture alone does not! For Rome, Scripture *and* Tradition were *inerrant* authorities. For Luther, Scripture *alone* is our *inerrant* authority.

What distinguished Luther and the rest of the Reformers from church leaders in Rome was their claim that as important as tradition is (and they thought it was extremely important), tradition is not without error. That honor goes to Scripture *alone*. In fact, it is because Scripture alone is inspired by God and consequently inerrant that the Reformers believed Scripture alone is the church's *final* authority, sufficient for faith and practice.

## The Reformation in Light of a Christian Formation Perspective

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The commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of the Reformation is a worldwide celebration. In Spain, for example, we find reformers that in their studies of the Bible, discovered the message of salvation through divine grace alone and through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Constantino Ponce de la Fuente, Antonio del Corro, Cipriano de Valera y Casiodoro de Reina, among other Spanish theologians were also pillars of the Reformation, which eventually changed the Christian panorama of the entire world.

Spiritual growth is an integral and natural element of our relationship with Christ, and the Reformation has also changed the way of conceiving and practicing Christian formation. The Reformation, among its many positive aspects, has helped to understand that this spiritual growth requires a mutual edification among believers and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Also, the access to the Scriptures to all people in their own language, and the doctrine concerning the priesthood of all believers, have contributed to a more holistic, personal, and egalitarian spiritual formation.

It is also necessary, however, to acknowledge that the Reformation bestowed negative legacies in our Christian formation, perspective and practice. Many of its valuable strengths, such as the importance of the priesthood of all believers, have become through the passing of time, one of its weaknesses that have directly impacted the practice of Christianity and Christian education. The loss of the value of tradition and the history of the Church, especially during the past century, together with the growth of independent churches, are also some of those unfortunate practical consequences of the Reformation. This article addresses with broad strokes, six positive legacies and six negative legacies from the

Reformation, legacies that have impacted the perspective and practice of Christian formation.

### ***Positive Legacies From the Reformation***

The Reformation made many positive contributions to Christian formation. Its influence on Christianity has made its way around the world, and has nurtured millions of people with the fruits of a personal and communitarian relationship with the Lord Creator of the universe. As a Christian educator, I find six positive legacies from the Reformation that have strengthened the practice of spiritual formation.

1. On account of the Reformation, the meaning of the gospel and Christian faith have acquired greater clarity.

The key themes of the Reformation may be summarized under the follow Latin phrases *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) and *solus Christus* (Christ alone). These phrases summarize the simplicity of the gospel of Christ, and serve also for the believers to easier understand it and make it their own. The God of the gospel is not far away or hidden in a religious labyrinth, but rather is present for all those searching and wanting to make the gospel their very own gift.

*Sola gratia* emphasizes that our salvation becomes possible only by God's grace without human works (Eph. 2:8-9). The grace of God is an unmerited favor that comes to us from God's initiative and is a central mark of Christianity. *Sola fide* stresses that this salvation comes only through our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though we all are sinners, we are justified because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, and we are saved by faith (Rom. 5:1). *Sola Scriptura* emphasizes that the Word of God is the only source of authority in matters of faith and conduct for all believers (2. Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible, and not any church's magisterium, dictates our Christian life. *Solus Christus* emphasizes that Christ is the foundation of our lives and faith, and the only one who deserves our worship and complete surrender (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Christian formation, therefore, focuses on the simplicity of the gospel. From the Reformation, we all know that the salvation that God offers is a gift that God himself provides by means of his own grace, and

is received through faith in Jesus Christ. The fountainhead of authority for the faith and conduct of Christians is the Bible, and Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity. Christianity is not based on a series of complicated religious presuppositions but rather on the sacrifice on Christ on the cross for us sinners. The message and practice of the gospel of Christ is simple and easily transmitted from generation to generation.

2. The Reformation made it possible for the Scriptures to be easily accessible to all.

God reveals himself through many means, but specially through Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and through the Bible, God's written Word. The Bible has been called "the love letter from the Father," for it is through the Scriptures that God speaks to every person, to every culture, and to every social context.

Christian formation employs the Scriptures as the source of authority and guide for all believers. The Reformation has enabled God's message to be accessible to all and that it be not regarded as the sole possession of a few religious leaders. Consequently, it is crucial for healthy Christian formation that everyone may be able to read and study the Bible for themselves. For Christians, it has become customary to carry the Bible under the arm, for it is a faithful friend in Christian gatherings. Today is almost unimaginable to practice the Christian faith without the Bible being our means of support and guidance.

3. The Reformation emphasized that the message of Christ be accessible to all.

Through Jesus Christ, Christians enjoy a relationship with God without the need of priests or other intermediaries. Therefore, the royal priesthood of all believers signals that all believers are precious to God and that there are no second-rate Christians.

Minorities around the world have regularly seen real oppression and discrimination. The normal tendency for all dominant groups is to control and oppress all minorities and marginal groups. Human beings tend to make distinction among themselves along the lines of ethnicity, economic status and nationality. Nevertheless, Christ is near to all. The

gospel of Christ is for everybody regardless of any human distinction. In fact, Christ's light particularly shines on the poor and oppressed. Christian formation recognizes that we are all poor in spirit, and need Christ's light in our lives.

The family is the context where one may perceive more clearly the way that the gospel of Christ reaches all people. The Reformation fomented the practice of educating the children in the faith under parental tutelage, and the support of the extended family. Christian education finds the home the ideal place to proclaim the faith and foster spiritual growth. Latinos have understood well, that the family is the essential base for Christian formation, and that the Christian faith is not limited to Sundays. This is why the Latino church is a role model to other believers, that the gospel of Christ is to be understood and lived out organically, and that it is more than the methods and programs preferred in this endeavor among other cultures.

4. The Reformation's emphasis on the grace of God has taught us that spiritual disciplines are not a means to receive God's favor.

Grace declares that God's favor is unmerited and cannot be reached through human virtues. Grace also emphasizes that God is good and fills us with his love out of his own will, without depending on our works. Spiritual disciplines enable us to grow in our relationship with God—who has already made us his own through Christ.

Consequently, Christians are free to respond in love to God, and are not obligated to find ways on how to find his love. Christian formation is grounded in the realization that it is God who acts among us through the Holy Spirit, and not because of our own merits. The legacy entrusted to all believers, is that God's grace and divine favor are not a mere practice of traditional religions—for they are influenced in effect by works and religious practices.

5. The Reformation emphasized that the church is a caring community and above all, a true family.

The family is essential for all human beings. The church is not a place limited to individual devotion, for it also represents a family gathering where Christ is at the center.

For many Christians who, like my father, became outcasts because of their faith in Christ, the church became their true family. Brothers and sisters in Christ offer strong and profound family bonds. For believers, there is no greater joy than to have family members, blood brothers and sisters, share together their common faith as brothers and sisters in Christ. However, even if this ideal condition does not materialize, the church is always an extended family for all Christians.

The Reformation reminded believers, that the church is truly a family, and that it is through interpersonal relationships that we are able to grow in the faith and strengthen our Christian experiences. Christian formation is always communitarian and it is shaped always as such within the context of the church. Because of the Reformation, believers can understand that participating in church worship is more than listening to a sermon. It is also encouraging one another as Scripture clearly compels us to do ( Hebrews 10:24-25).

6. The Reformation emphasized the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

The Holy Spirit is essential for Christianity and Christian formation. Only the Holy Spirit changes peoples' lives that they be pleasing to God. Consequently, Christian formation loses its meaning and purpose without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

It is through the Holy Spirit, who treats us all alike, that the God of the universe is present among all of us as followers of Christ. The Spirit sustains and guides us, in order that we may have a strong bond with the Triune God. The Reformation reminds us that God does not remain far removed or inaccessible, but rather very near to us, as he makes his dwelling in our very heart and community.

The experience of the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit is a characteristic of the Latino church. The free expression of emotions and the expectation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the church, belong to the very core of the Latino context. This may be one of the reasons why today Latinos and others, are attracted to the Pentecostal movement. Nevertheless, this legacy from the Reformation concerning the active presence of the Spirit with believers, is becoming evident also among other churches.

During the past five hundred years, the Reformation has provided a spirit of renewal to Christianity. Its legacy has been positive concerning Christian formation and the life of the church. As Christians, we celebrate that Christ is with us, and bestows his mercy to all. All who search earnestly will find him.

### ***Negative Legacies From the Reformation***

We have though, also inherited negative legacies from the Reformation in reference to Christian formation. Christianity has grown numerically in many places, but at the same time the quality and commitment have decreased. Many have taken the lesser road and cheapened the Christian faith in the pursuit of Christian formation. There are many discrepancies and short-cuts taken concerning what are the essential foundations for spiritual growth. The following are six barriers to Christian formation, that may be attributed directly or indirectly to the Reformation.

1. In emphasizing personal experience, some Reformation legacies have contributed to the downplay of tradition and to the history of the church.

God has been edifying his church in the world for more than two thousand years. Christian tradition is important. It reminds us that Christianity is formed and shaped in community, and that the Holy Spirit has been guiding the faithful throughout the history of the church. The historic denominations born as a direct result of the Reformation, tend to value the history and tradition of the church. Unfortunately, the evangelical movement has neglected these essential elements. This attitude has been duplicated in many independent and emerging congregations.

The Christian faith is not limited to the present, or to a specific determined social context. Our faith and God's acts are ever present throughout history, and are relevant among all societies. Salvation is a gift that needs to be appropriated personally, but it needs to be also a community experience with historical roots. When we disregard God's work among other believers in the present and the past, we are also

vulnerable to a myopic faith that cannot perceive the fullness of the divine work in the church.

2. The abuse and lack of understanding concerning the priesthood of all believers, brought to the forefront by the Reformation, has given an opportunity for many Christians to regard their faith as a merely private affair.

Christianity, especially in the West, emphasizes a very personal and individualistic faith, which disregards the need of the community in Christian formation. The individualistic Anglo-Saxon protestant culture has influenced the practice of Christian formation.

The reading of Scripture is one example of the way we practice Christianity from a very private perspective. Since the onset of the Christian church, believers came together to listen and meditate on the Scriptures. The community of faith shared with one another, what they had heard, and how the reading of the Scriptures impacted their Christian faith. Today it is a very common practice, for Christians to just read the Scriptures in the privacy of their homes, whereas the practice to go to church to read, mediate, and share the Scriptures with one another, has taken a back seat in seeking spiritual growth.

The priesthood of all believers is essential for our Christian formation, but the abuse of this doctrinal teaching among several Christian groups, has tragically impacted the essential nature of faith, and the church as community. The church is the people of God, and as the people of God we are to care and support one another. Christian formation affords a great opportunity to understand correctly Christian community as essential to Christian life.

3. Through the democratization of the Christian faith, the Reformation legacy has indirectly, given way to a Christian faith without responsibility for each other among believers.

This state of affairs did not arise as a direct consequence of the actions of the Reformation movement, but it has very much become a part of the evangelical movement and other Protestant groups. Sadly, it is very common to find an abuse of power among pastors and lay leaders who believe that they do not have to give any accountability for their

actions within in the community of faith. The growth of independent churches without any ecclesiastical structure for accountability, creates the kind of culture where every believer, leader, pastor, or independent congregation, believes that they can do what they wish within the kingdom of God without any kind of responsibility or direction.

Christian formation within this atmosphere of total disregard for mutual responsibility, departs from the sense of order and structure practiced by the church in general. The church then becomes fertile ground, for everyone to promote only their self-interests. God acts in various ways and bestows different spiritual gifts to each believer, and our spirituality is experienced personally in unique ways, but this reality should not result in anarchy in our Christian lives and in Christian formation.

4. Even though the Reformation enabled the teaching of the gospel with clarity and simplicity, it also contributed to great divisions in reference to secondary beliefs.

The Reformation made possible a clear understanding of the essential elements of the gospel. At the same time, however, it became more complicated to distinguish between essential and secondary matters of faith, because the Reformation enabled different interpretations concerning these matters. This resulted in the formation of new denominations—some founded solely because of discrepancies concerning secondary theological matters.

Antonio del Corro, a Spanish reformer, once pointed out that sometimes secondary doctrines and practices had been elevated to the level of essential doctrines, as if they were a fifth gospel. This theological practice had to be opposed. This rejection was necessary, not because these doctrines were not good or salutary, but because they could be attributed as infallible teachings and with the same authority and importance as Scripture. Sadly, some Christians emphasize those secondary Christian teachings much more than that which is of the very essence of Christianity. An authentic Christian formation values the diversity present within the body of Christ, and the different ways in which the Holy Spirit works in the faithful.

5. The emphasis of evangelism apart from discipleship formation, has been one of the practices developed after the Reformation that has resulted in a weak practice of the Christian faith.

For many, evangelism has become the one and only purpose for the church. This situation has given way to the erroneous teaching, that the only purpose of the gospel is for the Christian to receive admission to heaven, but that it has nothing to do with our daily lives. Consequently, many believe that to be a Christian is simply dependent on a salvation-prayer, without an holistic understanding of the Christian life, and that it simply optional to submit our lives to Christ's lordship. This overly simplistic way of understanding Christianity, has resulted in seeing Christian formation and discipleship, as secondary tasks for the church, instead of being a central focus for all believers.

Consequently, an unconscious division has been established between the Lord of salvation and the Lord of creation, without recognizing that the same Lord reigns over all. This division keeps apart the "secular" from the "sacred," in spite of the truth that Christ, as Creator and Sovereign of all, compels us to recognize everything under his reign and rule, as "sacred." A Christian faith not committed to all aspects of life, and not wishing to engage in all areas of life, becomes a faith based in "cheap grace," as defined by the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

6. The expansion of Christianity after the Reformation among free market economies, has given way to a crass commercialization of the faith.

On the one hand, many Christian materials and resources have been made easily available around the world. There are a number of diverse Christian publishing houses that serve the various and distinct communities of faith. On the other hand, however, in many instances, economic profit has become one of the main reasons if not the only reason, for the production of those resources. The Christian faith has been commercialized at the same time that it has spread around the world. The Church, especially in the United States, has fallen prey to an over-commercializing of the faith.

For the purpose of Christian formation, this commercialization has resulted in the merchandising of countless resources that intend to provide the proper means for spiritual growth. These resources however, often describe a simplistic understanding of the Christian faith. This, together with the vast proliferation of resources, has made it difficult for pastors and leaders to find among such diversity of offerings, adequate materials for their churches. Christian formation is more than completing ten lessons from courses, though they be beautifully illustrated and printed. Christian education requires in-depth studies, that are published for those very needed reasons, rather than because market analysis indicates that certain products offer a better chance of increased sales and profits.

Finally, the “prosperity gospel” presents the same distorted message that originated in the Reformation. Luther protested the flawed perspective, that believers can earn God’s favor through our monetary offerings. For in Luther’s day, the Roman Catholic Church was promoting the distribution of Indulgences, as a way to limit the time a person had to spend in Purgatory. In our day, many so called “Christian leaders” proclaim that God’s blessings come to believers, only if they “have faith” in him as manifested in their economic offerings. The basic principle behind Indulgence sales, and the present economic blessings message, is that money can buy God’s favor upon believers. Sadly, this distorted teaching distorts and drifts from the important contribution the Reformation made to Christianity.

We have inherited, therefore, various problems from our Reformation heritage that have created barriers to Christian formation. An exaggerated individualism and a simplistic understanding of the Christian faith, have created constant division in the body of Christ, rather than promoting the unity that should characterize and identify our common discipleship as followers of Christ. As such, we should always reflect on how God’s voice is not something exclusive for our very own enjoyment, but that God is present within the body of believers as a whole, for us to listen to and follow.

### **12 Theses for Christian Formation**

With a clear understanding that the Lord is the one who works in all believers to will and to work for his good pleasure, and that the Church’s

desire is grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, I propose the following theses as foundational principles for Christian formation:

1. Salvation in Christ is for everybody regardless of age, culture or any other circumstance.
2. God speaks and understands all languages, and therefore, the Bible needs to be available for all as the Word of God that leads and sustains us.
3. The God of the universe is close to the poor and marginalized, and his light shines in all who recognize their desperate need of him.
4. God's love and favor is for all, and his grace frees us from secondary religious bindings imposed by our society and culture.
5. The Church is a family and a community that provides the essential support for Christian formation.
6. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit makes possible spiritual growth in all believers, and allows us to worship the Lord freely.
7. The history and tradition of the Church are important, and remind us that the Christian faith is communal, and that we need to learn from each other as followers of Christ.
8. An extreme individualism fails to represent Christ's desire for his Church, and distorts our communal Christian formation.
9. All believers are responsible for mutual accountability, and are to acknowledge that no church or Christian group is superior to others.
10. Differences on secondary doctrinal beliefs do not provide a justification for breaking communion with other believers, because we affirm the unity of the body of Christ.
11. Christian formation and evangelism should always be united, and together they represent a faith in which Christ is Lord of all.
12. Christian formation resources should be available for all believers, regardless of their economic situation, and we acknowledge that God's favor comes freely to all believers only because of God's grace.

## The Protestant Reformation and the Marriage of Clergy

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There were many moving parts in the Protestant Reformation. And within the Holy Roman Empire with its many city-states and multiple language groups, harnessing these moving parts proves difficult. However, one of the indelible markers of a complete break from Rome was when priests and monks were married—thereby irreparably breaking from their vows of celibacy.

Over time, the Church of Rome had included the Sacrament of Holy Orders (Ordination) in its system of salvation through the Seven Sacraments. Holy Orders included necessary celibacy beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. So, marriage of clergy was a very practical change enacted by the Protestant Reformers. It was not a doctrinal change as much as it was a practical change. And yet the change in practice was based in justification by faith and freedom of conscience. In making this final break with Rome and its traditions, the ordained Reformers cut ties with the vow of celibacy, the vow of obedience (to their superior), the monastic vows as-a-whole, thereby severing themselves from Rome's Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and Sacrament of Holy Orders. Martin Luther's revolutionary recommendations in his 1520 "An Appeal to the Ruling Class" paved the way for major changes regarding clerical celibacy:

The proposals with regard to monasticism and clerical marriage went beyond anything Luther had said previously. The mendicants should be relieved of hearing confession and preaching. The number of orders should be reduced, and there should be no irrevocable vows. The clergy should be permitted to marry because they need housekeepers, and to place man and woman together under such

circumstances is like setting straw beside fire and expecting it not to burn.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will consider the development of the vow of celibacy and consider the Protestant break from that tradition. It is this author's view that marriage of clergy served as a practical outworking and symbol of justification by faith, as opposed to justification by works. Further, marriage was not to be held as dishonorable or impure, but as an honorable estate.

### **A Brief Survey of the Development of a Celibate Clergy**

The development of the obligation for clergy to take a vow of celibacy was not a universal phenomenon. Even today, among the Orthodox Church fellowships, celibacy of Orthodox priests is not mandatory. However, over time the obligatory celibacy of clergy became an organizational benefit to the purposes and goals of the Church of Rome, and thereby it became one of its leadership distinctives. It was not an instantaneous development, but rather a slow and gradual one. The requirement for celibacy came simultaneously to Rome's prohibitions against Bible reading, its use of capital punishment on heretics, and its instigation and marketing of Holy Wars (crusades). Interestingly, all these innovations were a part of developments at the beginning of the Second Millennium—almost as if they marked an ecclesiological shift due to millennial expectations, a type of Second Millennium arrived-millennialism, a *Secundo Millennio Adveniente*.<sup>2</sup>

Millennial interpretations aside, the following timeline highlights major events that contributed to the development of clerical celibacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), 119-120. Bainton alluded to Luther's 1520 "An Appeal to the Ruling Class," Section 14; in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections . . .* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 447-51.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II discussed the Second Millennium in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Rome: 14 Nov 1994); available at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_10111994\\_tertio-millennio-adveniente\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_10111994_tertio-millennio-adveniente_en.html) (Online); accessed 8 Jan 2006; Internet), §37.

The reader will note the concentration of these events in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Timeline of Events and Enactments Related to the Requirement of Clerical Celibacy<sup>3</sup>**

A.D. 480-543, Benedict of Nursia, a Western monk, was heralded as the pioneer of Western Monasticism. The Benedictine Vows bear his name, his memory, and his method. The three common Benedictine Vows are (their order varies): the vow of poverty (no secular work), the vow of abstinence (celibacy), and the vow of obedience (to a superior). These vows are described as voluntary when they are first pronounced.

A.D. 1049-1054, Leo IX appears to prohibit sexual relations for Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.

A.D. 1074, "Priests were forbidden to marry" (Boettner).<sup>4</sup>

A.D. 1075, *Dictatus Papae* placed in the Papal Register, gave the Pope absolute supremacy over Princes, Kings, and Emperors, including in their formulation, interpretation, and application of laws.

A.D. 1079, "Celibacy of the priesthood, decreed by pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand)" (Boettner).

A.D. 1274, "Putting an end to an old debate by the present declaration, we declare that bigamists are deprived of any clerical privilege and are to be handed over to the control of the secular law, any contrary custom notwithstanding" (2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Lyons).<sup>5</sup>

Under the last date, the term "bigamist" needs some interpretation, since it appears to have a dual meaning. By the Vow of Ordination, clerics are

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise listed, citations are from Thomas P. Johnston, *Timelines for Western Christianity*, Volumes 1 and 2 (Liberty, MO: Evangelism Unlimited, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Lorraine Boettner, "Chronological Listing of Roman Catholic Heresies and Inventions," in *Roman Catholicism*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 7-9. Hereafter designated by "Boettner."

<sup>5</sup> "16 {22}. On Bigamists," in *Second Council of Lyons – 1274*; available at: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum14.htm> (Online); accessed 26 Sept 2017.

considered “married to the church.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, if a priest is both married to the church and married to a woman, he becomes dually-married. Therefore, “bigamist” appears to be code language for a married priest.<sup>7</sup>

These above promulgations and decrees against married clergy resulted in forced separations and significant cultural upheaval. Luther captured the spiritual result of forced celibacy, as it developed a two-tier spirituality within society:

The schoolmen, the monks, and such other, never felt any spiritual temptations, and therefore they fought only for the repressing and overcoming of fleshly lust and lechery, and being proud of the victory which they never yet obtained, they thought themselves far better and more godly than married men.<sup>8</sup>

Required celibacy, along with its Sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders sealed Rome’s two-tier approach to spirituality. The clergy were of a higher spiritual grade than the laity—and celibacy marked that differentiation. And with obligatory celibacy came spiritual pride.

On the other hand, to avoid problems related to monks taking their vows in their adolescent years and then falling prey to promiscuity, Luther commended in his *To the Christian Nobility* (1520) that monastic vows only be taken at the age of 30 or later.

But, on account of avoiding the many sins which gnaw their way within us so disgustingly, I will give the faithful advice that neither youths nor maidens should take the vows of continence or the “spiritual”

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<sup>6</sup>“This was the custom then: if a man could bind himself eternally to a woman in the bonds of matrimony, why could he not contract a mystical marriage with Christ at the same age?” (Émile V. Telle, “François Lambert d’Avignon et son Abbaye de Thélème”; in *Rabelaesiana*, 11:1 (1949): 48. “Called to consecrate themselves with undivided heart to the Lord and to the ‘affairs of the Lord’, they give themselves entirely to God and to men” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994] §1579); “In the Latin Church the Sacrament of Holy Orders for the presbyterate is normally conferred only on candidates who are ready to embrace celibacy freely and who publicly manifest their intention of staying celibate for the love of God’s kingdom and the service of men” (*Catechism*, §1599).

<sup>7</sup>This code-like language is quite common in Rome’s decrees and formulas, often being worded with room for equivocation and plausible deniability.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, “A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 1531 (Selections),” in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1961), 146-47.

life before they are thirty. It requires a special gift, as St. Paul says [I Cor 7:7].<sup>9</sup>

By the time Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the doors of the Wittenberg Cathedral in A.D. 1517, there was already over a thousand year history of celibate monks in the Church of Rome. Further, all Western clergy were required to live under that yoke by no later than the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. The mandate of celibacy was not developed in a vacuum, nor was it without its apologists and theoreticians in every century. The policy fit well within a state church structure, in which a clear distinction between laity and clergy gave greater authority to the latter. Vestments, tonsures, exemption from taxes, and celibacy grew the divide between laity and clergy in the Western Church. Required celibacy forced Rome's clergy to "work out their salvation" by works. It provided Rome a motivated group of leaders, who in many cases were struggling with the repression of their sin nature—even though their "original sin" was deemed purged at the baptismal font.<sup>10</sup>

With the advent of Bible literacy and freedom of interpretation, the walls of separation between the laity and clergy began to fall. Clergy members for themselves began to scour the pages of the Bible for a divinely authoritative voice on issues of celibacy and marriage. It was then that the imposition of celibacy began to crumble.

### **The Conversion of a French Monk**

François Lambert d'Avignon, a Strict Franciscan monk from Avignon, France, made his first movements toward the gospel from reading the writings of Luther. Luther's writings were being translated and published in French almost simultaneously to their being published in German or Latin.

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, "An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to the Amelioration of the State of Christendom, 1520," in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections*, 484. For example, Francois Lambert apparently took the Franciscan Vows at the age of 16 and several months. He later wrote that at that age he had no idea of the negative ramifications of his vows (J. Platon, "Francois Lambert"; Master's Thesis [Strasbourg: Faculté de Théologie Protestante, 1968], 3).

<sup>10</sup> "1263 By Baptism *all sins* are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin" (*Catechism*, §1263).

The question of the reception of Luther's writings benefitted greatly from the new method [the printing presses]. Today every account of this period seems incomplete, if it did not signal the feverish and universal penetration of France by the writings of Luther after 1520. . . . The ideas of Luther were being colported [carried and sold] in France, so interesting and fertile as they were, [that] they ought be studied uniquely in themselves and for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

As Luther's writings crossed Germany, they were translated and printed in Strasbourg, Geneva, and Anvers. From those places they spread across France. These books were marketed by evangelists, or Bible colporteurs. These men were young booksellers who traveled from city to city and from market to market selling Bibles and other Christian books. Many of these colporteurs ended as martyrs. Their fates were recorded in the Martyrology of Jean Crespin, famous printer of 53 of Calvin's works. Crespin kept press #8 open for printing volumes of his Martyrology. Four young traveling book salesmen were listed among the many martyred from 1533-1560: Pierre Chapot, Jean Joéry, Nicolas Ballon, and Barthélémy Hector.<sup>12</sup>

Avignon, France, was the seat of the Avignon Papacy from 1309-1417. Therefore, just over 100 years later, between 1520-1522, when François Lambert began to read Luther, Catholicism was still a very important part of that city's ethos. In fact, Crespin provided a glimpse into the spiritual climate of Avignon when he wrote about the

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<sup>11</sup> W. G. Moore, "La Réforme Allemande et la Littérature Française: Recherches sur la Notoriété de Luther en France" [The German Reformation and French Literature: Research on the Notoriety of Luther in France]; doctoral thesis, University of Strasbourg (Strasbourg: Faculté des Lettres de l'Université, 1930), 7, 10. Translation mine.

<sup>12</sup> For a listing of the 67 Geneva men martyred from 1533-1560 before and during the ministry of John Calvin in Geneva, please see Thomas P. Johnston, "The Evangelistic Zeal of Reformation Geneva (1533-1560) as Exemplified in Crespin's Martyrology"; available at:

<http://www.evangelismunlimited.com/documents/Crespin.pdf>; accessed 26 Sept 2017. Crespin listed 843 Protestant martyrs in his 1570 Martyrology, which covered 1410-1570. Of those 843 martyrs, 316 (37.5%) died on French soil. It must be noted that Crespin used a doctrinal test before he included martyrs in his Martyrology. Thus most Anabaptists were excluded from his book.

circumstances leading to the martyrdom of an Avignon marketplace bookseller (Fr. *Libraire*) in 1545:

Hence there was in this place of commerce, a foreign bookseller, who was displaying for sale Bibles in Latin and in French; he had no other books. And the Prelates looking at him, wondered and said to him, “Who has made you so bold, that you would display such a merchandise in this town? Do you not know that such books are prohibited?” The librarian responded, “Is not the Holy Bible at least as good as the beautiful pictures and paintings that you have purchased for these ladies?” As soon as these words were spoken, the Bishop of Aix said, “I renounce my place in paradise, if this man is not a Lutheran.” At that time the man was grasped and rudely brought to prison. To please the Prelates, a band of ruffians and thieves that was accompanying them, began to cry out, “To the Lutheran, to the Lutheran; to the fire, to the fire.” And one of them struck him with his fist, and another one pulled out his beard, so much so, that the man was covered in blood before he arrived at the prison. ... [the next day] he was condemned to be burned, and the sentence was executed the same day.<sup>13</sup>

The fate of this unnamed Bible bookseller in Avignon was repeated over and over in France in those years. And yet, it was through the boldness of similar booksellers, that the writings of Luther became available all across Western Europe. For this reason also, early Evangelical believers in France were called “Lutheran” long before they were called “Reformed”—or actually “Religion Pretending to Be Reformed” [Fr. *Religion Prétendue Réformée*].<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Crespin, *Histoire des vrais tesmoins de la verite de l'evangile, qui de leur sang l'ont signée, depuis Jean Hus iusques autemps present* [History of the True Witnesses to the Truthfulness of the Gospel, Who with Their Blood Signed, from John Hus to the Present Time] (Geneva, 1570; Liège, 1964), 118 and verso. Translation mine.

<sup>14</sup> *Religion Prétendue Réformée* [Religion Pretending to Be Reformed]: “Official term for the Calvinistic obedience in France. It appears in the text drawn up for the Peace of Longjumeau in 1568 and appears in the various edicts of pacification until the Edict of Nantes. An official term of this nature is an insult and Protestants are strongly opposed to it. The semantic struggle continues throughout the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries.” Available at: <https://www.museeprotestant.org/en/glossary/religion-pretendue-reformee/> (Online); accessed 26 Sept 2017.

And so it was, Luther's books made their way into Lambert's cell at the Franciscan monastery in Avignon, France. And Lambert came under influenced of Luther's writings. While Lambert's cache of Luther's books were confiscated and burned as heretical, the Holy Spirit had used them to make a deep impression on his soul. These writings began Lambert's journey of Evangelical conversion. Not long after the burning of Luther's books, during an official trip on behalf of his monastery in A.D. 1522, Lambert deviated from his journey and headed through Switzerland. It was an evangelistic encounter with Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, which resulted in Lambert removing his monastic cowl and discarding his Rosary beads. Zwingli led Lambert to place his faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.<sup>15</sup>

### **A Tsunami of Clerical Marriages**

Interestingly enough, François Lambert was to become the first French ecclesiastic to be married.<sup>16</sup> He was also the first Protestant Reformer to write a commentary on Song of Solomon, allowing for its literal interpretation. Much like Luther, Lambert was very clear in his rejection of the monastic vows that he had taken, as we shall see below. The following timeline considers major events related to clerical marriage among the Protestant Reformers.

### **Timeline on Marriage, Select Dates, People, and Events**<sup>17</sup>

1520 Luther published the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, discussing the Seven Sacraments of the Church of Rome, with sections condemning Rome's views of the Sacraments of Marriage and Ordination.

1521 Three priests arrested for marriage in Saxony.

1521 November, Luther wrote "On Monastic Vows."

1522 January, Wittenberg doctor of theology Andreas Karlstadt (36 years old) married Anna von Mochau.

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<sup>15</sup> Roy Lutz Winters, *Francis Lambert of Avignon (1487-1530): A Study in Reformation Origins* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran, 1938), 28-31.

<sup>16</sup> "François Lambert was the first [French] ecclesiastic to abandon celibacy" (Platon, 23).

<sup>17</sup> Dates may vary.

1522 July, Zwingli gathered a meeting in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, in which they discussed, among other things, the abolition of celibacy.

1522 July, Zwingli and Lambert discussed prayer to Mary and the saints, leading to Lambert's conversion.<sup>18</sup>

1523 January, Zwingli published his 67 Theses, three of which deal with celibacy and the marriage of clergy:

“28. Everything which God permits or which he has not forbidden, is lawful. From this we learn that it is proper for everyone to marry.

“29. That all those whom we call ‘spiritual’ sin when, having discovered that God did not grant them the ability to remain chaste, they, nonetheless, do not protect themselves through marriage.

“30. Those who take a vow of chastity childishly or foolishly undertake too much. We learn from this that anyone who accepts such vows, does injustice to good people.”<sup>19</sup>

1523 February, Lambert wrote a treatise “Reasons on account of which he rejected the way of life of the Minorites [Franciscans].”

1523 July, Lambert (35 years old) married Christina.

1524 April, Ulrich Zwingli (40 years old) married Anna Reinhart.

1524 Lambert published a work on Song of Solomon (Strasbourg, 1524; Nürnberg, 1525), as well as a book sharply contrasting marriage and celibacy (Strasbourg, 1524; Nürnberg, 1525).

1525 May, Balthasar Hubmaier (45 years old) married Elsbeth Hügline.

1525 June, Martin Luther (42 years old) was married to Katie von Bora.

1537 John Rogers (32 years old) was married to Adriana de Weyden.

1537 Menno Simons (41 years old) married Gertrude.

1540 John Calvin (31 years old) married Idelette de Bure.

Clearly, between 1523 and 1525, a seismic cultural-spiritual upheaval took place related to the marriage of clergymen. This first wave of clergy marriages necessitated a complete reversal of over four centuries of Roman Catholic precedent. Of the many Protestant voices in Wittenberg in those days, François Lambert's voice unequivocally stated that the monastic vows that he had taken were “contrary to the Christian

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<sup>18</sup> Winters, 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> “The Sixty-Seven Articles of Huldrych Zwingli (1523)” in James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523-1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008), 5.

profession of faith.” His shocking bluntness made the case against the monastic vows. And his voice added an Occitan accent (of Southern France) to the Germanic and Helvetic rumblings already taking place.

### **Monastic Vows as Against the Gospel of Christ**

After his encounter with Zwingli in Zurich, Switzerland, Lambert continued on his way to Wittenberg, Saxony, Germany. By 1523, Lambert began teaching and studying in Wittenberg. His Gallican voice remained unequivocal. He forcefully stated that the monastic vows that he had taken were not just neutral as related the gospel of Christ—they were contrary to the gospel. Herein was the strength of his argument. He did not seek to be non-negative or couch his propositions in equivocal language. His A.D. 1523 words were very pointed:

I tell you only, dear reader, a few of the reasons that constrained me to leave the *Minorites* (Franciscan order) . . . but it must suffice that I tell you only summarily. In a few days, you will receive a commentary concerning the rule of their order, that will help you understand the totality. In the meantime, in order that all the world may know what to wait for as far as my resolutions and convictions, I will say these three things:

1<sup>st</sup> Heretofore seduced and ignorant of what I was doing, I pronounced vows contrary to the Christian profession of faith. Oh well! I renounce all these inventions of the *Minorites* and recognize that the holy Gospel is my rule and should be that of all Christians; 2<sup>nd</sup> I retract what I have preached that does not conform to Christian truth. I pray all those who have heard me preach or who read my writings to reject all that is contrary to the Holy Books. I have confidence in Him who removed me from a captivity more difficult than that of Egypt, that I will repair with His divine help by my words and by my books my numerous errors;

3<sup>rd</sup> As no one can come to the knowledge of the truth without being in disagreement with the Pope, I renounce him and all his decrees, and I no longer want to be a part of his reign of apostasy. I desire

rather to be excommunicated by him, knowing that his reign is excommunicated and accursed of God . . .<sup>20</sup>

The words of Lambert were very penetrating, “I pronounced vows contrary to the Christian profession of faith.” Five months after penning those words, Lambert married Christina, becoming the first monk to physically and publicly renounce his monastic vows through marriage. It must be acknowledged that Lambert has been accused of self-service in the forcefulness of his words.<sup>21</sup> He was also accused of seeking to appeal to Martin Luther by his writings.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the remainder of his life and ministry in Marburg under Philip of Hess bears witness to the honesty of his original confession. Marriage became an unequivocal marker of Protestant Reform in a number of ways:

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<sup>20</sup> François Lambert d’Avignon, “Histoire du moine racontée par lui-même, traduite du latin” [story of a monk told by he himself, translated from Latin], in Franck Puaux, *Histoire de la Réformation Française* (1523; Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1859), 1:412-17; taken from Gerdesius, *Historia christianismi renovati*, vol IV; translation mine.

<sup>21</sup> “Public confession differs notably from regular confession at this point: it is that the person who confides in the public, by the very act, is merely making excuses; he is looking to accuse neighbors or a system, to displace the inner sense of personal responsibility to scape goats” (Telle, 48; translation mine). It is notable to consider that in the mind of Émile Telle, Lambert “became a scandal for all French” (*ibid.*). Telle accused Lambert of neo-Pauline simplistic thinking, exaggeration of facts, flattering the German public, embodying the Medieval Waldensian ideas found in 12<sup>th</sup> Century Avignon, misapplying the Franciscan simplicity of life that he had learned in the order, and confusing piety with theology.

<sup>22</sup> “Lambert probably overemphasized this episode in order to establish himself as a reliable disciple of Luther and, unfortunately, he neither said precisely what these books were, nor where he obtained them. Did they circulate in the convents? Did Lambert buy them during his preaching journeys? In any case, he depicted this as the episode that induced him to leave the convent definitively, which he did using letters that had to be delivered to the general of the order as a pretext for his departure” (Pietro Delcorno, “Between Pulpit and Reformation: The “Confessions” of François Lambert” [paper given at Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen; available at: [https://www.academia.edu/6156006/Between\\_Pulpit\\_and\\_Reformation\\_The\\_Confessions\\_of\\_François\\_Lambert](https://www.academia.edu/6156006/Between_Pulpit_and_Reformation_The_Confessions_of_François_Lambert) (Online); accessed: 26 Sept 2017; Internet].

Marriage marked the breaking of the vow of celibacy.

Marriage displayed breaking the vow of obedience.

The financial obligation of marriage necessitated the need to work, and therefore the breaking of the vow of poverty.

Marriage marked a clear break from the Seven Sacraments in Rome's system of salvation.

Marriage displayed a public disregard for the teachings of Rome and of the ineffectiveness of its condemnations.

Marriage marked the point of no return for the Protestant clergy.

It was a "Protest" by behavior before the word "Protest" was officially penned at the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529. In less than two years from 1523 to 1525, François Lambert was married, Ulrich Zwingli was married, Balthasar Hubmaier was married, and Martin Luther was married. Evangelicalism was established, "Until death do us part."

Therefore Lambert, Zwingli, and Luther must needs first establish funding, housing, and a social network for Protestant parsonages. They were entering new territory for them. However, this was territory for which purpose the New Testament served as a well-suited advisor.

Perhaps it is not an overstatement to say that the clearest antithetical distinctive between the life and work of a Protestant minister and that of Roman Catholic clergy is family. The wife of the Catholic priest is the Church. The wife of most Protestant ministers is a woman.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Catholic priest lives a life in the relational solicitude of celibacy, the Protestant minister has both the demands and blessings of a wife, children, and even sometimes grandchildren.

### **Reasons Required Celibacy Is Against the Gospel**

Perhaps Lambert's most penetrating words in his abdication of his monastic vows are noted in the statement, "I pronounced vows contrary to the Christian profession of faith." Likewise, Luther's thoughts were summarized by Bainton, "The monk's vow is unfounded in Scripture and

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<sup>23</sup> There are exceptions today, such as the celibate Protestant pastors, female Protestant pastors in certain church bodies, and even married homosexual ministers in some Protestant denominations.

in conflict with charity and liberty.”<sup>24</sup> Were these words overstatement, or do they ring true in Scriptures as read today? In seeking to evaluate these statements, this next section will enumerate several points where obligatory celibacy runs counter to the gospel profession, or the written word of God.

### **The Bible Prohibits Forbidding Marriage**

First and foremost, as to the pronouncing of vows contrary to the Christian profession of faith, Paul in his first epistle to Timothy explained that forbidding marriage was a sign of departure from the faith. Paul noted that the root source for forbidding marriage was deceptive and demonic teaching. Paul prophesied that in the future some would follow in this path.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Timothy 4:1-3 (ESV).<sup>25</sup>

### **The Bible Nowhere Positions Celibacy as Spiritually Superior to Marriage**

There is no place in the Bible that celibacy is considered to allow for higher spiritual attainment. In fact, the most prominent men in the Bible, excepting Jesus and Paul, were all married: Abraham, Moses, David, all the other apostles, and Philip the evangelist.

On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. While we were staying for many days . . . Acts 21:8-10.

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<sup>24</sup> Bainton, 156.

<sup>25</sup> All Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise stated.

If anyone may be considered a New Testament priest, would it not be the married Zacharias, father of John the Baptist. Further, the Bible does not teach that John was conceived of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Or consider that Simon Peter had a mother-in-law (Luke 4:38).

Whereas Paul expressed a preference for the single state in 1 Corinthians 7, he also made a shocking admission. The husband's interests are rightly divided between the Lord and his wife. In a sense, one's relationship with one's wife parallels one's relationship with God! Rather than lowering marriage, it raises the relationship in marriage to the highest human relationship on earth, even running parallel to one's relationship with God—which is why the Christian ought to “marry in the Lord”:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. 1 Corinthians 7:32-34.

### **To Raise Celibacy as Spiritually Superior Is to Lower Marriage as Spiritually Inferior**

The greatest danger in raising celibacy is its lowering of marriage.<sup>27</sup> In contradistinction, the Book of Proverbs asserted without disclaimer, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.” Proverbs 18:22. Advocates for celibacy must equivocate that verse in the case of clergy. More importantly, if Christ's relationship to the church is

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<sup>26</sup> There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. . . . And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived . . . (Luke 1:5-6, 23-24).

<sup>27</sup> “Saint Paul does he not rather recognize to spouses the right of temporarily abstaining from the use of marriage in order to attend to prayer [see 1 Co 7,5], precisely because this abstinence increasingly frees up the soul of the person who wants to abandon themselves to the things of God and to prayer?” (Heinrich Denzinger's *Symboles et Définitions de la Foi Catholique: Enchiridion Symbolorum*, edited by Peter Hünermann and Joseph Hoffman [Paris: Cerf, 2005], §3911).

like a groom to his bride, then it only makes sense that a pastor needs to learn how to properly treat a church by first learning to properly treat his wife.<sup>28</sup> Further, the writer of Hebrews taught that marriage was to be held in honor, and therefore by antithesis, not as dishonorable nor less honorable.<sup>29</sup>

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Hebrews 13:4.

**Salvation Is Not Achieved through Self-Denial—Salvation Was Achieved by Christ on the Cross, and through the Substitutionary Imputation by Faith Alone of the Character Resulting from His Obedience, His Righteousness**

Perhaps most importantly to the issue of the clerical celibacy pertains to the system of salvation. In the Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) the yoke of works was lowered onto the shoulders of the Infant Baptized person, which burden was only increased in the case of celibate clergy.

According to the Catholic faith we also believe that after grace has been received through baptism, all baptized persons have the ability and responsibility, if they desire to labor faithfully, to perform with the aid

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<sup>28</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:25.

<sup>29</sup> “In order to have the proper attitude of mind in the Church Militant we should observe the following rules: 1. Putting aside all private judgment, we should keep our minds prepared and ready to obey promptly and in all things the true spouse of Christ our Lord, our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church. . . . 4. To praise highly the religious life, virginity, and continence; and also matrimony, but not as highly as the foregoing. 5. To praise the vows of religion, obedience, poverty, chastity, and the other works of perfection and supererogation. . . . 9. Finally, to praise all the precepts of the Church, holding ourselves ready at all times to find reasons for their defense, and never offending against them.” (Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottala S.J. [New York: Doubleday, 1964], 139-140).

and cooperation of Christ what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul.<sup>30</sup>

This sentence proves unhelpful to the efforts of the New Testament evangelist. First, Orange affirmed that grace was received through [Infant] Baptism<sup>31</sup>—in what appears to be the rhetorical climax of the entire Council. Second, it removed assurance of salvation through the completed work of Christ alone on the cross. Rather, it placed the need for faithful labor squarely on the shoulders of people who were [infant] baptized. With the haunting conditional conjunction “if”, assurance of salvation so clearly taught in Scripture was swept away.<sup>32</sup> Third, it openly stated that they will need “to perform . . . what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul.” Hence, according to this 6<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Council, the Christian’s salvation was not purchased full and free by the blood of Jesus. Building on this very shaky view of salvation within Catholicism, it is understandable to read that Luther was concerned about “the many sins which gnaw their way within us so disgustingly.”<sup>33</sup> The rock of Christ and His perfect work had been replaced with the shifting sand of personal human effort—a recipe for sure failure!

It appears that the vow of celibacy plays into man’s pride in self-made righteousness, while simultaneously embodying Satan’s greatest deception whereby he leveraged the destruction of those souls seeking to achieve this impossible standard of excellence.

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<sup>30</sup> Canon 27 of The [Second] Council of Orange, (529): available online at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/orange.txt>; accessed: 5 June 2009; Internet. The official chronological theology of the Roman Catholic Church, Heinrich Denzinger’s *Symboles et Définitions de la Foi Catholique: Enchiridion Symbolorum*, §396-397, ascribed the concluding text of this council to Cesar of Arles (A.D. 470-542), Bishop of Arles from A.D. 502-542.

<sup>31</sup> The baptized have “put on Christ.” Through the Holy Spirit, Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies and sanctifies. 1228 Hence Baptism is a bath of water in which the “imperishable seed” of the Word of God produces its life-giving effect. St Augustine says of Baptism: “The word is brought to the material element, and it becomes a sacrament.” (*Catechism*, §1227-1228).

<sup>32</sup> For example, consider John 5:24 and 1 John 5:11-13.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, “An Appeal to the Ruling Class,” *Selections*, in Dillenberger, 484.

## **Potential Unintended Consequences of Forbidding Clergy to Marry**

In seeking to meet the impossible standard of absolute perfection, “with the aid and cooperation of Christ,” it appears that Catholic clergy were made to fall prey to the trap of self-made righteousness of which Paul spoke in Romans 10:

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Romans 10:1-4.

There may be unintended consequences to seeking that which is impossible to achieve. Seeking sinless perfection in one’s own strength, no matter what supposed “aid and cooperation” are promised is bound to end in failure. Four unintended consequences seem to flow from Orange’s description of salvation: failure, fear, relativism, and pride.

### **Failure**

Solomon wisely wrote, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” Ecclesiastes 7:20. John added:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:7, 9.

Sin is inevitable. Seeking to meet an impossible standard of behavior will surely lead to failure. Failure to achieve sinless perfection is inevitable!

### **Fear**

Just as Felix and Drusilla in Acts 24 were frightened when they heard Paul speaking of “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment,” (Acts 24:25), so the one attempting a perfect standard, when

he falls, will cower in fear before the judgment of the righteous God. This kind of fear is not a healthy fear leading to repentance and release. Rather, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, it is an unhealthy fear leading to the attempt to hide from God. Likewise, Luther confessed his hatred of God's unrealistic demands before his conversion.<sup>34</sup>

### **Relativism**

Once a person has lived with sin and failure over time, then human nature begins to relativize a behavior being sinful, especially in a context where one hears about "saints" who live lives of sinless perfection. Complex philosophical arguments soon rationalize sin. Man can congratulate himself at his abilities to rationalize. Soon good is evil and evil is good.<sup>35</sup>

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! Isaiah 5:20-21.

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<sup>34</sup> "I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the justice of God,' because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore, I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant" (Bainton, 49).

<sup>35</sup> "13. If we wish to be sure that we are right in all things, we should always be ready to accept this principle: I will believe that the white that I see is black, if the hierarchical Church so defines it. For I believe that between the Bridegroom, Christ our Lord, and the Bride, His Church, there is but one spirit, which governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls, for the same Spirit and Lord, who gave us the Ten Commandments, guides and governs our Holy Mother Church" (Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 140-141).

## **Pride**

Once relativism has led to rationalization and sin is entrenched, then comes pride. The sinner thinks himself righteous. He becomes righteous in his own eyes. As John wrote in 1 John, “He deceives himself and the truth is not in him.”

And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. Isaiah 2:17.

It is a dangerous thing to fall into the trap of spiritual pride! Could it be that Rome’s clerical celibacy leads to a systemic culture of vainglory from which they look down on married clergy as spiritually inferior?

Therefore, although expedient for the running and operating of a human organization, required clerical celibacy appears to have driven Rome away from the gospel and further into spiritual relativism. For one thing, ordination ought not be a vow to a human or earthly centered organization. Being set aside in ordination is to be set aside to the ministry of the gospel. Second, raising ordination to the level of the “reception of grace” places it in the succession of saving ordinances; or, in other words, the Sacrament of Holy Orders saves. When coupled with mandatory celibacy, the psychological pressure of the Monastic Vows were immense. This virtually impossible juggernaut was instantaneously removed from the necks of the Protestant Reformers at the marriage altar.

## **Doctrinal and Practical Implications of Freedom to Marry**

In sharp contradistinction to the results of required clergy celibacy, clear doctrinal and pragmatic concepts underpin the Protestant concept of clergy being free to marry or not to marry.<sup>36</sup> These implications flow from who can read the Bible to individual interpretation, soul competency to freedom of conscience, as well as justification and sanctification by faith. It is important to remember that most or all

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<sup>36</sup> Luther wrote, “Marriage is good, virginity is better, but liberty is best” (Bainton, 156).

practices have some type of doctrinal underpinning. The same is true for voluntary marriage of clergy.

### **Freedom to Read the Bible for One's Self**

Reading Scripture where God has direct access to the human soul without any human intermediary is central to an understanding of evangelicalism.<sup>37</sup> Consider in this regard the direct agency of the words of God to man, as described by Solomon in the Book of Proverbs:

That your trust may be in the LORD, I have made them known to you today, even to you. Have I not written for you thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge, to make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you? Proverbs 22:19-21.

One of the most basic spiritual truths in discipleship is the necessity of learning directly from the voice of God through reading and hearing the Bible for oneself.<sup>38</sup> The right and obligation to personal interpretation of

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<sup>37</sup> "Over and against this view, evangelicalism, seeking to conserve what it conceives to be the only consistent supernaturalism, sweeps away every intermediary between the soul and its God, and leaves the soul dependent for its salvation on God alone, operating on it by his immediate grace. . . . Evangelicalism does not cease to be fundamentally antinaturalistic, however, in being antisacerdotal: its primary protest continues to be against naturalism, and in opposing sacerdotalism also it only is the more consistently supernaturalistic, refusing to admit any intermediaries between the soul and God, as the sole source of salvation. That only is true evangelicalism, therefore, in which sounds clearly the double confession that all the power exerted in saving the soul is from God, and that God in his saving operations acts directly upon the soul" (Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1918], 19-20).

<sup>38</sup> "As we have said, God never has dealt, and never does deal, with mankind at any time otherwise than by the word of promise. Neither can we, on our part, ever have to do with God otherwise than through faith in His word and promise" (Martin Luther, "The Pagan Servitude of the Church," *Selections*, Dillenberger, 277). "The Holy Spirit works with, by, and in the Word of God to bring men to illumination, conversion, and the new birth" (Philipp Jakob Spener, *Theologische Bedencken* (Halle, Germany: Erster Theil. Mit Chur-Furstl., 1700), 159;

Scripture ought never be deeded over to anyone else for any reason. How can the disciple, who is to be taught to observe all that Christ has commanded,<sup>39</sup> obey the command to “take heed,” is he is not given a standard by which to judge what he hears?

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.” Matthew 24:4-5.

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Matthew 24:11.

Then if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or “There he is!” do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, “Look, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out. If they say, “Look, he is in the inner rooms,” do not believe it. Matthew 24:23-26.

Christ personally commended great vigilance from His people to guard themselves against false teaching and false teachers. They must be allowed to exercise that same vigilance in the area of marriage and required celibacy. Let each person decide for himself what the Bible truly says!

### **Freedom to Decide on the State of Marriage or the State of Celibacy**

But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.” Matthew 19:11-12.

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translation and citation by Arthur P. Johnston, *World Evangelism and the Word of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), 30).

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 28:20.

Both at the beginning, as well as at the end, of this important teaching on celibacy, “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus repeated a condition. He made it doubly clear that “not everyone can receive this saying.” In the Protestant approach to marriage, the freedom to marry or not to marry is left in the hands of the person getting married, not in the hands of a dictate of the church. If read literally, in fact, Paul seemed to require marriage of pastors when he wrote Timothy:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach. 1 Timothy 3:1-2.

Through marriage, the wife of a young pastor can surely assist him to become more sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, and hospitable.

### **Freedom to Obey Christ**

Central in biblical revelation are the concepts of soul accountability and therefore soul competency. From the warnings and blessings expressed in Scripture flow the concept of freedom of conscience. In Romans 14 Paul made a strong argument, using the example of eating or not eating meat, that each person is free to decide for themselves the course of action that they will take on actions that do not constitute moral infractions, such as against the Ten Commandments:

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Romans 14:2-4.

From these freedoms follow the freedom to marry or not to marry. These comments of Paul confirm the teachings of Jesus on celibacy in Matthew above. “But he said to them, ‘Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. . . . Let the one who is able to receive this

receive it.” Matthew 19:11-12. Christ gave His followers freedom to obey Him as they felt led by circumstances and the Holy Spirit.

### **Removing the Yoke of Self-Denial (Works) for Salvation**

Peter was clear in the gathering of disciples in Jerusalem in Acts 15, it would not be helpful to new believers if a yoke of obeying the Old Testament Law was placed on them:

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? Acts 15:10.

As to works playing no role in salvation, Lambert himself focused on Luke 17:10:

So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’.” Luke 17:10.

Rather than relish in a salvation earned through fulfilling all the commands of Christ, the follower of Jesus remains unworthy of the salvation that Jesus purchased full and free.

### **Consequences of Married Clergy**

Just like obligatory celibacy does not remain in isolation without consequences, so the marriage of clergy carries with it resulting consequences.

### **A Distraction from Spiritual Duties**

This distraction, of which Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 contains both negative and positive angles. On the negative side, an unsaved, ungodly, or selfish wife can lead to marital stress as regards a pastor’s involvement in the ministry. These matters cannot be ignored. However, on the positive side, a godly wife provides a haven to the pastor from the stresses and pressures of life and ministry—hence she

embodies a positive distraction! French Reformed pastor Franck Puaux explained the benefits of a godly wife as he discussed Lambert's marriage:

The monk Lambert dated his letter from Wittenberg, where he arrived in 1523. That same year he was married. He was the first French monk who broke the vow of celibacy, and found in a virtuous and pious woman the help that God in his kindness has given to man.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Need to Support a Family**

In the case of Francois Lambert, the need to support himself and his family became overwhelming to him. On January 20, 1523 he wrote to the Elector of Saxony, "I am poor, I have nothing to eat." And on that same day he wrote Spalatin to supply him only what he needed to live.<sup>41</sup> Once married he desired to move from Wittenberg to Zurich to support his family. With no opportunities for him in Zurich, he brought his German wife to Metz in March 1524, eight months after his marriage. There for a short time, he then turned to Strasbourg, from which he published several books on marriage. Ten months after leaving Metz, in January of 1525, Jean Castellan, another former Franciscan, was burned alive for heresy. Meanwhile, the city of Strasbourg provided Lambert a stipend. It was in Strasbourg that he met other French and Swiss Reformers. In 1526 at the Diet of Speyer, the mayor of Strasbourg commended Lambert to Philip of Hesse.<sup>42</sup> So, Lambert moved to Marburg, and assisted Philip of Hesse with his Reformation efforts. He died there in 1530. Needless-to-say, once Lambert left the Franciscan order, he found himself busy travelling and working to support both himself and his wife.

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<sup>40</sup> Franck Puaux, *Histoire de la Réformation Française* (1523; Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1859), 1:417. [Translation mine].

<sup>41</sup> Platon, 12.

<sup>42</sup> "The meeting of Philip [of Hesse] and Sturm [of Strasbourg] in Speyer was a turning point in the life of Francis Lambert, for the Strasbourg mayor spoke in a commendatory manner about him" (Winters, 60).

### **A Partner in Times of Trouble**

Marriage provides the potential for a bond of partnership that is unequalled on earth. In Genesis 2 we read, “and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:24. Jesus rendered this point more emphatic by using the first two ordinal numbers, “So they are no longer two but one flesh.” Matthew 19:6.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon reminded his readers, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.” Ecclesiastes 4:9. Therefore, marriage provides a doubly multiplied benefit of partnership, not only is the labor of the couple doubly blessed, but their relationship is greater than merely two people working together, because they are “one flesh.”

### **A Natural Minister to Woman**

In Titus 2, Paul prescribed that older and experienced married women should minister to younger married women. The entire discipleship and mentoring structure laid out by the Apostle presumes a context in which married women minister to married women. Within this relational context in the church, the pastor’s wife can speak to the issues of marriage, because she is also married. She can also speak about the complexities, difficulties and stresses of rearing children, because she is rearing or has reared children.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Titus 2:3-5.

Further, not only is it good for a woman to minister to a woman in her spiritual needs, but it is better and best. It is not helpful for a pastor to minister to a woman. Not only can he not sympathize with a woman’s issues, but it can put him in a compromising situation.

Lastly, many women labor under the stress of a marriage where they are not properly loved. The pastor’s love for his wife gives these ladies an example and the hope that at least there is one woman on earth who is loved by her husband. Therefore, the pastor’s wife plays an important

exemplary and teaching role, multiplying the pastor's ministry to all the women in the church.

### **An Example of Fathering and Child-Rearing**

Married clergy with children provides every church with a role model for child-rearing and child discipline. Paul taught of the pastor: "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive." 1 Tim 3:4. Therefore he was to exemplify the characteristics of a good father, as taught by Paul:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4.

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Colossians 3:21.

### **Learning to Shepherd the Church of God**

Building from the admonition to the church to be sure that their pastor was a good husband and father, Paul added a pointed rhetorical question to this admonition:

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 1 Timothy 3:4-5.

This rhetorical question has rung throughout the history of the church as a warning to pastors to practice in the home what they preach in the church. Its message reminds the attentive church leader to remain humble before the Lord and humble before his wife and children.

Further, and most obviously, a pastor needs to be married, have children, and keep them in dignity for this test to be applied to their pastor by his congregation. Pastors may not like this level of scrutiny, but it comes from the Lord. On the other hand, under a system of obligatory celibacy this test cannot be applied to the church leader. By clerical celibacy is removed a God-ordained accountability of the pastor to his local church.

But beyond the test for leadership comes another principle. The home is the crucible by which God trains His servants to care for the church. As men grow and learn to care for their wives and children, in like manner, they will grow and learn to care for the church of God. The home life of the pastor is not an end in itself but it includes an array of positive ramifications for his ministry in the local church.

### **Learning to Love the Church**

The love relationship of Christ for His bride, the church universal, was called upon as an example for the husband to love his own wife. Further, this love provides an example for the love and care that is to bond the pastor to the local church.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:25-32.

While there are a number of lessons in this passage. For the purposes of this essay, one lesson will be considered. Paul taught that the relationship of Christ to the church was an example for husbands loving their wives. This same admonition can be applied to a pastor and his flock. As he learns to love his own wife at home, he will grow and learn how to better love the church to whom he is ministering.

The symbiotic interrelationship between the lessons of marriage and how a pastor treats his church portrays the importance of the home as a training ground for pastoral ministry. In light of these teachings of Scripture, it proves difficult to understand how obligatory celibacy ever entered the Western church. In the final analysis, the vow of celibacy

dealt quite a blow to the Church. Required celibacy served as a disservice to the clergy themselves, to their view of salvation, and to their view of themselves as superior to lay people. It distanced clergy from the scrutiny of church members. Further, it eliminated effective ministry to married women and mothers by pastor's wives. Even more, it removed an important God-given milieu by which and through which pastoral behavior was to be groomed.

The avalanche of Protestant marriages encouraged by Martin Luther, François Lambert d'Avignon, and other Protestant Reformers released Evangelical believers from the yoke of obligatory clerical celibacy. This Protest-by-Marriage of the Protestant Reformers greatly enriched Evangelical churches, providing an incalculable positive impact. The opportunity for clergy to be married leaves this married minister filled with gratitude to those who forged the path for clerical marriage.

Balancing *Sola Scriptura* and Catholic Trinitarianism:  
John Calvin, Nicene Complexity,  
and the Necessary Tension of Dogmatics

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The formal principle of the Reformation was never relegated to geographical isolation. Transcending French, Swiss, Italian, British, and German borders, *sola Scriptura* became an epistemological dividing line that would be uniquely articulated by countless reformers, even if it was most officially heard first in Wittenberg in the years leading up to 1521. In part, the unification of the reformers around biblical authority proved to be a foundational pillar supporting the evangelical fortress Rome repeatedly attempted to demolish.

Such demolition, Rome would learn, was sometimes just as effective from the inside as from the outside. Implosion hovered over the Reformation as reformers often struggled to cooperate with one another, not only internationally but all too often within their own national ranks. It became painfully conspicuous that though each reformation trumpeted *sola Scriptura*, its application could be frustratingly variegated. For instance, consider the iconoclast controversy. The early Luther took a relatively mild approach to images in and outside churches, but in Zurich every image was a remnant of idolatry; the walls of the church had to be whitewashed.<sup>1</sup> *Sola Scriptura* may have been the epistemic nucleus of the Reformation, but it was simultaneously the dynamite that threatened implosion as few Reformers could agree on the specifics of its ecclesiastical entailments.

Such a nagging incongruity is not merely apparent from reformer to reformer, but the dialectic we speak of is equally present within any given

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<sup>1</sup> On the way *sola Scriptura* took effect in Zurich, see Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002).

reformer's own theology. Cranmer, for example, labors (struggles?) to determine the relationship between *sola Scriptura* and allegiance to king or queen; certainly, the nature of his martyrdom demonstrates the triumph of the former.<sup>2</sup>

If Cranmer's application of the formal principle is forged in the fires at the stake, Calvin's matures in the study and at synods as he is thrust into controversy over the orthodoxy of his Trinitarianism. The absence of an extensive Trinitarian statement in the *Geneva Confession*, his mixed reception of orthodox vocabulary and creeds, his unique interpretation of eternal generation, and his immovable defense of the Son's aseity would result in a firestorm of accusations that lasted from the first edition to the last edition of his *Institutes*. So intense was the firestorm that Calvin would be accused on several occasions of heresy, both in the direction of Arianism and Sabellianism.

Such a controversy may be the most surprising of the sixteenth-century. If any name is associated with theological rigor, lucid precision, and uncompromising adherence to *sola Scriptura* over against the lure of speculation, it is John Calvin's. Nevertheless, Calvin would be entangled within a Trinitarian debate that not only brought into question the fidelity of his Nicene orthodoxy, but shook the foundation of his Biblicism, a Biblicism so often revered for its preservation of divine mystery and methodological determination to resist trespassing beyond revelation itself. Unexpectedly, Calvin was caught between the proverbial rock of biblical authority and the "hard place" of the Trinitarian tradition.

For that reason, poking at the tension between Calvin's affirmation of *sola Scriptura* and his contested Trinitarianism is, ironically enough, a way of answering a much larger question: How do we balance *sola Scriptura* with catholicity? The Trinity is the perfect lens through which to look for an answer to such a question. Nowhere is dogmatics so difficult than when the theologian dares to journey within the mystery of the Trinity and seek to define the infinite essence of a God who is triune.

Upon first instinct, such an approach may seem odd. Is not an appeal to Scripture inherent in biblical Trinitarianism? Does not orthodoxy, by

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent study of this tension in Cranmer, see Leslie Williams, *Emblem of Faith Untouched: A Short Life of Thomas Cranmer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

definition, assume consistency with the biblical witness? Yet debates pre- and post-Nicaea have long revealed that the question is a complex one. Unlike other doctrines, orthodox Trinitarianism rests not on a proof text, or two, but on the synthesizing of biblical assertions, as well as deciding what conclusions logical follow from such assertions. The line between heresy and orthodoxy is a thin one precisely because citing biblical texts makes little headway; heretic and orthodox alike appeal to the same network of proof texts. Essential, even necessary, then, is the science and art of dogmatics, the ability to locate not merely that which is “expressly set down in Scripture,” but the “good and necessary consequence” to be “deduced from Scripture,” to cite the Westminster Confession of Faith’s statement on Scriptural sufficiency.<sup>3</sup>

While it will be necessary to briefly review Calvin’s debates with certain opponents, others have offered extensive summaries and evaluations, most recently Brannon Ellis, assessing not merely the debates but Calvin’s own Trinitarianism and its modern reception.<sup>4</sup> Our task, rather, is far more hermeneutical. Few have attempted to determine how Calvin’s Trinitarianism sheds light on his theological method, a method that holds *sola Scriptura* in the right hand and subscription to traditional, orthodox vocabulary in the left hand, without forfeiting either one.<sup>5</sup> While we will begin by pulling back the layers of controversy, layers that will aid us in understanding the motives of Calvin’s decision

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<sup>3</sup> “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” in *Reformed Confessions, Volume 4*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 235 (I.VI).

<sup>4</sup> Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Though he focusses strictly on the theological aspect, not the historical background, Douglas F. Kelly should be consulted as well: “The True and Triune God: Calvin’s Doctrine of the Holy Trinity (1.11-13),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 65-89. The classic treatment is B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1952), 22-59.

<sup>5</sup> There have been some who look at Calvin’s Trinitarianism with a view to theological method, but they are rare and usually very brief. E.g., W. Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 73-96; R. C. Gamble, “Calvin’s Theological Method: The Case of Caroli,” in *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag*, ed. Herausgegeben von Willem van’t Spijker (Kampen, Netherlands : J H Kok, 1991), 130-37.

making, our definitive objective is to observe Calvin's Trinitarian inclinations, even motivations, in order to determine how Calvin approached the dialectic between biblical authority and Nicene orthodoxy. Ultimately, Calvin will be but a foil, permitting us to draw out the repercussions for contemporary dogmatics.

### **I. Heresy accusations, creedal resistance, and autotheos**

The Reformers had many nemeses, but it is often forgotten that such nemeses were not limited to Rome; many were friends and/or colleagues who broke rank. Pierre Caroli generally fits this description, though it is questionable whether he was truly reformed in the first place.

Having been removed from the faculty at Sorbonne (1525) for his contentious beliefs, Caroli would eventually find a home in Lausanne, serving as a minister there in the 1530s.<sup>6</sup> His role gave him access to colleagues such as Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret, and at times even Calvin in nearby Geneva. In time, Caroli would prove not so much a colleague as a thorn in the side of the reformers. Over a short span of time, Caroli would convert to the Reformation and then back to Rome twice:

1535 (Switzerland): aligns himself with reformers (though begins to incite controversy)

1537 (France): converts to Rome

c.1539 (Switzerland): re-aligns with reformers

1541 (Sorbonne in Paris): makes final conversion to Rome

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<sup>6</sup> There are many fine accounts of Caroli's career and his controversy with the reformers. For Calvin's own account, see his *Letters*, Part 1: 1528-1545, ed. Jules Bonnet and Henry Beveridge, trans. David Constable (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 47-58, 71-75, 150-168. Secondary works include Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 38-45; James K. Farge, *Biographical Register of Paris Doctors of Theology, 1500-1536* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), 65-71; F. P. van Stam, "Le Livre de Pierre Caroli de 1545 et son conflict avec Calvin," in Olivier Millet, ed., *Calvin et ses contemporains* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998); Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 73-96; Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," 22-59. In my account that follows, I am most indebted to Nijenhuis and Ellis for their insights.

These “conversions,” as we might label them, are somewhat deceiving. Though Caroli seemingly converted to the Reformation cause, his sympathies with Rome, as tamed as they may have been, still leaked out, leading some to question Caroli’s authenticity and sincerity. “Caroli, in his heart of hearts,” Nijenhuis speculates, “never opted radically for the Reformation.”<sup>7</sup> Nijenhuis’s indictment may be more than speculation. Controversy erupted in 1537 in Lausanne when Caroli instructed churchgoers to pray for the dead and intercede on their behalf.<sup>8</sup> Caroli did not hold his Roman sympathies privately either; he broadcasted them by means of his preaching.

Personal animosity lurked behind the scenes to be sure. Caroli resented Viret for criticizing his stance on prayers for the dead. In return Caroli went on the offensive; most shocking of all was his very public accusation in Lausanne that Viret, Farel, and Calvin were Arians.<sup>9</sup> Calvin defended himself and the others by appealing to the Geneva Confession (1536/1537). Caroli dismissed this new and therefore novel confession, insisting instead that Calvin put his name to the early Trinitarian creeds (e.g., Athanasian Creed), stating that one could not truly be a Christian unless one had done so. Calvin would not.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of Calvin’s intentions, his refusal sent shock waves everywhere and Calvin would toil to clear his name, as well as the other Genevans, from this association with heresy.

What motivated Caroli’s charge of Arianism? There may have been multiple factors, but one major factor was Caroli’s criticism of the Geneva Confession’s lack of extensive Trinitarian theology. Regardless, the charge was public and Calvin petitioned two Lausanne synods to meet to resolve the issue.<sup>11</sup>

At the first synod, the pattern of the previous debates repeated itself (Caroli snubbed the Geneva Confession and demanded Calvin submit to the creeds; Calvin refused). Despite his refusal to bow to Caroli’s

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<sup>7</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 78.

<sup>8</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 79, says Caroli did add the qualifier: “non ut peccatis solvantur sed ut quam celerrime suscitentur.”

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Letters*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Letters*, 49. Cf. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 40.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Letters*, 47. Cf. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 40.

demands to creedal subscription, Calvin gave a speech where affirmation of the Son's full deity was clearly manifested.<sup>12</sup> Notably, Calvin did not merely assert the Son's full equality with the Father, but he utilized the vocabulary of early orthodoxy. In continuity with "the ecclesiastical writers," Calvin confesses "three hypostases or subsistences in the most simple unity of God."<sup>13</sup> Calvin carefully specifies at length that although the three constitute "one essence" they must never be "conflated with one another."<sup>14</sup> Calvin names Arianism, Macedonianism, and Sabellianism, rejecting each, siding unequivocally with the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the fathers. Yet one will notice that Calvin does not use the

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<sup>12</sup> "We believe and worship the one God whom the Scriptures proclaim, and indeed we conceive of him as he is there described to us: as truly an eternal essence, infinite and spiritual, who alone possesses the power of subsisting in himself and of himself, and who bountifully gives subsistence] to all creatures. We reject the Anthropomorphites with their corporeal god, and also the Manicheans with their two Principles. In this one essence of God we acknowledge the Father with his eternal Word and Spirit. While we employ this distinction of names, we do not imagine three gods, as if the Father was something else than the Word. Neither on the other hand do we understand these to be empty epithets by which God is variously designated from his works. But at one with the ecclesiastical writers we hold these to be three hypostases or subsistences in the most simple unity of God, who, though constituting one essence, are nevertheless not conflated with one another; therefore, though there is one God, the Father with his Word and Spirit, nevertheless the Father is not the Word, nor the Word himself the Spirit . . . This is the sum of the matter: in what has been confessed above we have recognized the eternal, spiritual, infinite essence of God, the Father with his Word and Spirit, in such a way that the Father is neither conflated with the Word, nor the Word with the Spirit. The insane Arians who stripped the Son of his eternal divinity, and likewise the Macedonians, who understood the Spirit as merely the gift of grace poured into human beings, we reject and detest. No more do we approve the errors of the Sabellians who admitted no distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit." John Calvin, *Confessio de Trinitate propter calumnias P. Caroli* [A Confession of the Trinity against the Calumnies of P. Caroli] (1545), in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, 59 vols. (vols. 29-87 in *Corpus Reformatorum*) (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863-1900), ix. 704. (As quoted in Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 41.) Going forward the abbreviation CO will be used.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Confessio de Trinitate propter calumnias P. Caroli*, in CO ix. 704.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

words *trinitas* and *persona*. Such an omission is intentional on Calvin's part, unwilling to give ground to Caroli.<sup>15</sup>

However, Caroli felt Calvin undermined Christ's divinity. The reason had everything to do with Calvin's appeal to Christ as autotheos. "Before he clothed himself in our flesh, this eternal Word was begotten from the Father before the ages. He is true God, one with the Father in essence, power, majesty—even Jehovah, who has always *possessed it of himself that he is*, and has inspired the power of subsisting in other beings."<sup>16</sup> That the Son is "of himself" in reference to the divine essence was, for Calvin, the greatest assurance that the Son's deity is not less than the Father's. The Son may be eternally generated from the Father *as Son* but if the essence is generated, derived from the Father, then the Son's divine equality is compromised, a point Calvin would elaborate upon in his later writings.

Arianism, however, was not the only heresy Caroli accused Calvin of embracing; Sabellianism was to follow. Karl Barth says Caroli merely contradicted himself, but Ellis more accurately deciphers the reason: "The Arian charge seems an appeal to guilt by association, to be sure, but the Sabellian accusation was not so much political or cultural as doctrinal."<sup>17</sup> Ellis proves his point by turning to Calvin's own summary of his reaction to Caroli: "Certainly, if the distinction between the Father and the Word be attentively considered, we shall say that the one is from the other. If, however, the essential quality of the Word be considered, in so far as he is one God with the Father, whatever can be said concerning God may also be applied to him, the second person in the glorious Trinity."<sup>18</sup>

If, according to Caroli, Calvin's Arianism was due to a refusal to subscribe to the early creeds, his Sabellianism was the fruit of statements

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<sup>15</sup> Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis added. Calvin, *Confessio dei Trinitate*, in CO ix. 706. Cf. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 43. Contra Karl Barth, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey D. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 328.

<sup>18</sup> Notice Calvin's exegetical support: "Now, what is the meaning of the name Jehovah? What did that answer imply which was spoken to Moses? I AM THAT I AM. Paul makes Christ the author of this statement." Calvin, *Letters*, 55-56.

where Calvin claims the Son to be *a se* in reference to the divine essence.<sup>19</sup> It is hard to determine whether Caroli accurately or fully understood what Calvin was and was not claiming. Either way, Calvin's statement reveals he is not denying eternal generation, but redirecting its object from the essence to the person, conserving the Son's divine aseity. "As true God together with the Father and the Spirit, *the Son does not receive the one divine essence that he simply is; he is God self-existently.*"<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Caroli remained unconvinced that eternal generation had not been forfeited by Calvin, and apart from eternal generation the three persons lose distinction.

Disparate personalities played a role in the affair as well. If Calvin struggled with a hot temper and impatience, Caroli could be intentionally antagonistic, seemingly looking for opportunities to stir up controversy among the Reformers. Examining the accounts of others in the sixteenth-century, particularly during the Caroli controversy, Nijenhuis has reason to believe Caroli was characterized by an "anxiety to assert himself" and attributes such anxiety to a "deeply rooted inferiority complex which found expression in a peculiar readiness to take offence." Nijenhuis spells out the collision between the two men: "The expressions of a conscious feeling of superiority on the part of the reformer must inevitably have provoked an aggressive reaction from someone so touchy, and contrariwise, nothing would shortly give so much satisfaction to a man like Caroli than to see the Swiss reformers in the

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<sup>19</sup> "It is evident from the 'calumnies' enumerated in Calvin's later exchange with Caroli that he restricted insinuations of Arianism largely to suspicions regarding the employment of technical vocabulary and creedal subscription. The doctrinal accusations, however, were nearly all variations on the modalistic implications of how he understood Calvin's views: that Calvin 'denies the distinction between the Father and the Son', that he 'posits a single person in the Deity', and so on. [See Calvin, *Pro G. Farello*, in CO vii. 317-22.] Especially in light of Calvin's explanation of his views at synod, it is most likely that Caroli had charged Calvin with Arianism because of his less than deferential approach to specific traditional forms, but came to suspect Calvin of Sabellianism because of his claim of the aseity for the Son." Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 45. Cf. Arie Baars, *Om Gods verhevenheid en Zijn nabijheid: De drie-eenheid bij Calvijn* (Campen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2005), 111-112, 115-119.

dock accused of heresy.”<sup>21</sup> What made the situation worse was the way Caroli’s aggressiveness and creedal condescension smelled like Rome. “This passion for self-assertion was speedily associated by the reformers with hierarchical aspirations of Roman origin.”<sup>22</sup>

After both synods in Lausanne, the verdict was in: Calvin was no heretic. As for Caroli, he was deemed unfit to continue as a minister.<sup>23</sup> Still, the damage was done to Calvin’s wider reputation, not only in France but Germany as well, which must have frustrated those pushing for unity between Swiss and German reformations.<sup>24</sup>

Calvin may have thought controversy had ended, but his adherence to autotheos—in conjunction with his definition of eternal generation as a generation of personhood, not essence—would prove to be controversial in the decades ahead. This much is plain in his 1543 to 1545 conflict with Jean Courtois and Jean Chaponneau in Neuchâtel, as well as yet another debate with Caroli in 1545 (this time Caroli accusing Calvin of “blasphemy” for saying “Christ exists from himself”).<sup>25</sup>

The 1550s and 1560s would introduce anti-Trinitarians like Michael Servetus and certain Italians like Valentine Gentile to Calvin (though Servetus and Gentile operated out of different anti-Trinitarian hermeneutics). In each controversy, the aseity of the Son would be in focus once more, yet now with an apologetic agenda to defend the Son’s full deity against skeptics.<sup>26</sup> According to Gentile, the Father, not the Son, is autotheos, and therefore the Father alone is God. The Son merely has

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<sup>21</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 77. Nijenhuis cites CO, vii, c. 302.

<sup>22</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 77.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Letters*, 55-56; idem, *Confessio de Trinitate*, in CO ix. 710.

<sup>24</sup> The timing was unfortunate. The Swiss reformers had labored to bring about peace and potentially unity with their German counterparts. Rumors of heresy would not land softly on the ears of those in Germany. See Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> These conflicts oscillated not so much around creedal subscription but Calvin’s understanding of the Son’s aseity, an issue we will return to in the 1559 *Institutes*. For a summary of the conflicts, see Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 45-50.

<sup>26</sup> See John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani . . .* (1554), in CO viii. 453-872; idem, *Impietas Valentini Gentilis detecta et palam traducta qui Christum non sine sacrilege blasphemia Deum essentiatum esse fingit* (1561), in CO ix. 361-430. Again, for an overview, see Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Asity of the Son*, 50-61.

the Father's deity infused into him, resulting in the impossibility of Gentile affirming a Trinity in the orthodox sense.<sup>27</sup> This time the accusation of heresy would be lobbed by Calvin upon his opponents and the Son's aseity would be the instrument to defend Nicene orthodoxy. While these later conflicts oscillated not so much around creedal subscription but Calvin's doctrine of Christological aseity, it is imperative for our purposes to return to the creedal dilemma as it sheds lights on Calvin's methodology.

## II. Interpreting Calvin's resistance to creedal subscription

Calvin's resistance has been interpreted in countless ways, most of which pay little attention to Calvin's motives and context.<sup>28</sup> Yet Calvin's own explanation deserves first consideration: "[I] did not wish to see such an example of tyranny introduced into the church, consisting in this, that he who had not spoken according to the directions of another, would be regarded as a heretic."<sup>29</sup>

In his stance against "tyranny" Calvin is not enacting an Enlightenment revolution of the individual's rights, as one who is ahead of his time. Such a reading is not only anachronistic, but inconsistent with Calvin's strict emphasis upon the assembly, the church, over against the individual (as Calvin's frustrations with certain radical reformers demonstrates).<sup>30</sup> It is the Scriptures, not the individual, Calvin is most concerned not to bind.

It is not unreasonable to assume that Caroli, given his demands, was still operating out of a Roman position on creedal authority, or at least something close to it. As Heiko Oberman has demonstrated, a T2 methodology had evolved in the late medieval era and become prevalent in Roman theologians by Calvin's day. Tradition had been elevated to the

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<sup>27</sup> E.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.23.

<sup>28</sup> For a survey of the literature, see Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 88-89.

<sup>29</sup> CO, VII, c. 315. Cf. Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Countering J. Th. McNeill who believes Calvin is trumpeting the "liberty of conscience," Nijenhuis demonstrates that the reformers "were not primarily concerned with the freedom of the human conscience—this trend was most characteristic of Renaissance and Humanism—but with the freedom of the Word of God. They thought more in terms of the church than the individual." Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 88.

same level (in some cases, an even higher level) as Scripture, as if it too was revelatory, God-breathed, and consequently without error.<sup>31</sup> An appeal to pope or council no longer was ministerial, but now functioned as the magisterial voice to which all else, including Scripture, must bend.

Caroli's demand to submit to creeds felt too much like T2 for Calvin. As much as Calvin revered the creeds and would, in later controversies with anti-Trinitarians defend and employ their Trinitarian vocabulary, Calvin was not about to give in to Caroli. To do so would communicate not only defeat on his part but a disloyalty to Scripture as his formal principle. Calvin would be criticized for this decision, even looked at suspiciously by other reformers on the Continent. Yet Caroli's approach, and his tone for that matter, was interpreted by Calvin not as a concern to harmonize the creeds with Scripture, but as a pitch to mother church to decide the matter. Caroli rejected Geneva's confession, demanding subscription to the early creeds in a way that felt ritualistic and traditionalistic.

While Calvin was for tradition, he was against traditionalism. The creeds, as Calvin's *Institutes* and *Defensio* reveal, were authoritative if, and only if, they reflected Scripture consistently and faithfully.<sup>32</sup> Calvin was not merely guarded against Biblicism but traditionalism, and Caroli's demands were the latter in Calvin's eyes.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps no one summarizes the hinge of the confrontation as well as Nijenhuis:

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<sup>31</sup> See Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 46-47. On T2 see Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 361-93; Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 276; Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 54-55.

<sup>32</sup> "For him [Calvin], however, their real authority resided not in their formal ecclesiastical sanction but in their material agreement with the Holy Scriptures. In defense of this point of view he cited testimonies from the early church itself. What else did Athanasius, Hilary, Ambrose, Augustine and Cyril desire but 'to speak from the Scriptures?'" Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 93. Nijenhuis is citing CO, VII, c. 318.

<sup>33</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 96, labels Calvin's aversion to each a rejection of "superstitio."

For what Caroli asked of the French-Swiss reformers was not in fact agreement with the religion of the early church symbols, but a rational agreement with all the expressions employed in the symbols and in particular with the words trinitas and persona. The prosecutor displayed a respect for these expressions which appeared to Calvin “superstitious”. The reformers did not refuse to subscribe to the early church symbols because they did not feel themselves bound by them and associated with them, but because they wished to dissociate themselves from Caroli’s conjuring with words. They could only understand the signing of a confession as a profession of the true religion as contrasted with error. For this reason the action demanded by Caroli would have given an entirely incorrect impression of the situation. For the religion of the early church symbols was not at issue at all, and thus the Swiss did not wish to give anyone cause to suspect that it ever had been.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 91, 95. There are additional reasons to believe Calvin was not inherently opposed to creedal subscription, either in his debate with Caroli or in later debates:

1. In his 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, there are already indicators, even if they be in seed form, that the Apostles Creed has influenced its content. Such influence will become increasingly conspicuous in later editions, most noticeable in his 1559 edition, which is framed by the Creed in significant ways. (On the influence of the Apostles Creed, see Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 73.) Additionally, Calvin is not shy to invoke the creed’s authority throughout, at times even defending it against opponents.

2. Calvin’s Geneva not only had a confession of its own, but citizens were required to subscribe to Calvin’s confession. Neither Calvin or Geneva’s citizen’s thought such a subscription was a return to Rome, as if the creed itself was inspired and inerrant. Rather, they saw the creed as man-made, yet a needed fence that clarified Scriptural truth and guarded the church and city from heresy. Nijenhuis does add a helpful nuance: “It did not mean every member of Geneva’s population regarded every formulation of the confession as infallible. Apart from the fact that this would have been impossible either to carry out or to check, it would have been completely at variance with Calvin’s views regarding a certain relativity in the wording of the confession. It did mean, however, that the city accepted the religion of the confession.” Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 90.

Nijenhuis is correct to conclude that the main issue for Calvin was authority, particularly whether the authority of the creeds is material or formal.<sup>35</sup> For Calvin it was the former; for Caroli the latter. In that light, Calvin's refusal is understandable; he is a reformer and *sola Scriptura* would remain his formal principle.

Having witnessed Calvin's response to Caroli, attention must now be given to Calvin's positive presentation in his 1559 *Institutes*, with singular focus on what this edition reveals about the way he balances *sola Scriptura* with the formation of and adherence to orthodox Trinitarianism, and with it catholicity.

### III. Calvin's methodology in the 1559 *Institutes*

#### 1. *Infinitude and divine accommodation*

Prior to advancing his treatment of the Trinity, Calvin first begins with the infinitude of the divine nature, stressing not only the accommodation of God to man in revelation but the incomprehensibility of an infinite being to a finite creature. On the one hand, God so accommodates himself to mankind that he can be described as one who "lisp[s] in speaking to us," much as "nurses commonly do with infants."<sup>36</sup> Yet divine speech in the form of accommodation, or lispng, does not "so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity." To lisp he "must descend far beneath his loftiness."<sup>37</sup>

Divine infinity, in other words, is the reason for divine accommodation. His infinite nature should set in place strategic boundaries that are not to be crossed, acting as hermeneutical safeguards. "Surely, his infinity," says Calvin, "ought to make us afraid to try to measure him by our own senses. Indeed, his spiritual nature forbids our imagining anything earthly or carnal of him."<sup>38</sup> Affecting

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3. Calvin would sign the *Confessio Helvetica Prior* at the Synod of Berne (1537), which is incredibly surprising if Calvin has an allergy to confessionalism. (Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 91.)

<sup>35</sup> Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Calvin's methodology is the Creator-creature distinction. Though the biblical authors speak truly, they often do so analogically, anthropomorphically, or parabolically. While they may speak of him according to "our own senses," we dare not assume we should then "measure him by our own senses."

Calvin's fear of entering territory that treads too closely to the divine essence will manifest itself in his articulation of the Trinity as well. "Scripture sets forth a distinction of the Father from the Word," says Calvin, "and of the Word from the Spirit." "Yet the greatness of the mystery warns us how much reverence and sobriety we ought to use in investigating this."<sup>39</sup> How much sobriety is necessary exactly?

One cannot help but notice that sprinkled throughout Calvin's treatment of eternal generation and autotheos are sporadic warnings. At the start he pulls back considerably to say: "Indeed, it is far safer to stop with that relation which Augustine sets forth than by too subtly penetrating into the sublime mystery to wander through many evanescent speculations."<sup>40</sup> Having affirmed that each person fully shares in the one essence, an essence who's unity cannot be divided, Calvin issues one of his most sobering warnings, preaching, it seems, as much to himself as to others: "Here, indeed, if anywhere in the secret mysteries of Scripture, we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation; let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends." If divine revelation acts as a rail guard on the right, God's infinite essence is a rail guard on the left:

For how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measure, a mind as yet unable to establish for certain the nature of the sun's body, though men's eyes daily gaze upon it? Indeed, how can the mind by its own leading come to search out God's essence when it cannot even get to its own? Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself. ...And let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about

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<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13.19.

him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word.<sup>41</sup>

How then should the Trinity be approached within the limits of God's Word and infinite, incomprehensible essence? Are distinctions within this infinite essence appropriate or do they attempt to measure the measureless essence of God?

But if some distinction does exist in the one divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit—something hard to grasp—and occasions to certain minds more difficulty and trouble than is expedient, let it be remembered that men's minds, when they indulge their curiosity, enter into a labyrinth. And so let them yield themselves to be ruled by the heavenly oracles, even though they may fail to capture the height of the mystery.<sup>42</sup>

Is it possible Calvin could, intentionally or unintentionally, be speaking to himself, not merely his adversaries, in such a statement of seasoned wisdom? It is hard to say. What is clear is that Calvin's controversies had produced a reformer who had certainly travelled the maze of the triune labyrinth, even entertaining distinctions "hard to grasp." Though it is impossible to "capture the height of the mystery," Calvin does repeatedly yield himself "to be ruled by the heavenly oracles." On the one hand, it may seem ironic that one so tethered to the syntax of the biblical witness explores the philosophical contours of eternal generation. On the other hand, could Calvin be more consistent? Fearful of the infinite essence, nervous to cross beyond the threshold of biblical vocabulary, Calvin will adopt a position on eternal generation and autotheos that is motivated first and foremost by a defense of Christ's divinity.<sup>43</sup> As biblically oriented as that motivation is for Calvin, there are several reasons why he would press on to retrieve the vocabulary of traditional Trinitarianism.

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<sup>41</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.21.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Unaddressed in this study is Calvin's lengthy apologetic for Christ's deity, yet it is one sandwiched in between Calvin's discussion of methodology and the aseity of the Son.

2. *The unfortunate but important necessity of orthodox, Trinitarian vocabulary*

Despite Calvin's warning not to tread beyond God's lispingshould one venture too closely into the mystery of his infinite essence, properly defining that infinite essence, particularly as it relates to the three persons, is necessary. Its necessity stems, at least in part, from the need to distinguish God from idols. "Unless we grasp these [three], only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God."<sup>44</sup>

Why is it that Calvin can probe God's infinite essence when he previously warned not to tread where incomprehensibility denies access? As incomprehensible as the infinite essence may be, God has chosen to manifest himself in veiled form and his triune identity is no exception, more or less hidden in the Old Testament only to be displayed in the incarnation of the Son. Hence Calvin, who otherwise is suspicious of importing extra-biblical vocabulary, stands behind traditional Trinitarian terminology, if for no other reason than it keeps the creature bound to a biblical understanding of Trinity in redemptive history and guards him from an idolatrous imagination of the divine.

Some, Calvin acknowledges, "hatefully inveigh against the word 'person,' as if humanly devised."<sup>45</sup> Calvin likely has in mind Servetus. By contrast, Calvin issues a defense of "hypostasis," even differentiates hypostasis from "essence," labelling any attempt to treat the two synonymously "uncouth" and "absurd."<sup>46</sup> Correcting misinterpretations of Hebrews 1:3, next Calvin builds his case, demonstrating how the "hypostasis that shines forth in the Son is in the Father." Concurrently, the "Son's hypostasis" is also that "which distinguishes him from the Father."<sup>47</sup>

When Calvin transitions to the hypostasis of the Spirit, he enters the fray of patristic vocabulary. Calvin is convinced that to do justice to a text like Hebrews 1:3, "three hypostases" must be maintained. Yet the "Latins," he remarks, "can express the same concept by the word

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<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

‘person.’” Calvin shows little patience for those hesitant with the patristic vocabulary: “To wrangle over this clear matter is undue squeamishness and even obstinacy.” Calvin suggests translators (especially those inclined to translate word-for-word) use “subsistence” to convey how the three persons wholly and equally possess the one essence.<sup>48</sup> Calvin’s litany of word studies demonstrates how comfortable he is with Nicene and post-Nicene vocabulary. One does not sense a theologian strapped to biblical terminology alone.

When Calvin is pressed by anti-Trinitarians, “heretics” that “rail at the word ‘person,’” or by certain “squeamish men” who “cry out against admitting a term fashioned by the human mind,” Calvin’s appeal to extra-biblical, orthodox Trinitarian vocabulary becomes especially conspicuous. “What wickedness, then, it is to disapprove of words that explain nothing else than what is attested and sealed by Scripture!”<sup>49</sup> When Nicene terms are used to teach that Father, Son, and Spirit are each “entirely God” and yet “there is not more than one God,” they object, believing it is best to “confine within the limits of Scripture not only our thoughts but also our words, rather than scatter foreign terms about, which would become seedbeds of dissension and strife.”<sup>50</sup>

If such words foreign to the Biblical text are “curiously devised” and “superstitiously defended,” producing “contention” not “edification,” and if such words detract “from the simplicity of God’s Word,” then Calvin will release them. Yet if such Trinitarian vocabulary clarifies truths in Scripture that are otherwise distorted, it should not be resisted. “But what prevents us from explaining in clearer words those matters in Scripture which perplex and hinder our understanding, yet which conscientiously and faithfully serve the truth of Scripture itself, and are made use of sparingly and modestly and on due occasion?”<sup>51</sup> Be that as it may, in his admission of extra-biblical terminology, Calvin advises it be used “sparingly and modestly.” Calvin subscribes but he does so

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<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.2. As he will explain elsewhere, “‘Person,’ therefore, I call a ‘subsistence’ in God’s essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality. By the term ‘subsistence’ we would understand something difference from ‘essence.’” 1.13.6.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

reluctantly. With the church, Calvin is “compelled to make use of the words ‘Trinity’ and Persons,” novel words according to Calvin.<sup>52</sup>

As opposed to novelty as Calvin may be, he is forced to embrace it lest false teachers muddy the triune Godhead.<sup>53</sup> Heresy is the mother of confusion; it must be countered by clarity. For Calvin, clarity is a virtue in theology. In an attempt to achieve such clarity, Calvin aligns himself with the patristics, those “men of old, stirred up by various struggles over depraved dogmas,” men who “were compelled to set forth with consummate clarity what they felt, lest they leave any devious shift to the impious, who cloaked their errors in layers of verbiage.”<sup>54</sup> With the rise of Sabellius and Arius, the fathers appealed to *homoousios* in order to communicate that “a Trinity of persons subsists in the one God.”<sup>55</sup>

The reader senses a tension in Calvin. Calvin is, in one sense, a Biblicist of sorts. “Indeed, I could wish they [Trinitarian, extra-biblical terms] were buried...” Calvin wishes everyone would not dissent but peaceably agree that “Father and Son and Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality.”<sup>56</sup> Such Biblicism is a dream and Calvin knows it. He sees his own reflection in Augustine, who, “on account of the poverty of human speech in so great a matter, the word ‘hypostasis’ had been forced upon us by necessity, not to express what it is, but only not to be silent on how Father, Son, and Spirit are three.”<sup>57</sup> For Calvin, “necessity” is a regretful but needed force, keeping one on the road to orthodoxy.

Yet again, Calvin’s Biblicism is apparent in his judgment of those who have a weak lexical conscience. Like many patristics, some in Calvin’s day “do not wish to swear to the words conceived by us.” Calvin warns against censoring such individuals. Such a pass is acceptable “provided they are not doing it out of either arrogance or forwardness or malicious

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<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.3.

<sup>53</sup> “The novelty of word of this sort...becomes especially useful when the truth is to be asserted against false accusers, who evade it by their shifts. ...With such crooked and sinuous twisting these slippery snakes glide away unless they are boldly pursued, caught, and crushed.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.3.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13.5.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.5. Just previous to his mention of Augustine, Calvin also appeals to the example of Hilary.

craft.”<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Calvin’s Biblicism has checks and balances, most importantly his equally serious concern for theological clarity. He warns these individuals that bypassing Nicene terminology puts them at risk for being confused with Arianism or Sabellianism (is Calvin speaking from experience?). One must not forget that in the third and fourth centuries these groups also bypassed extra-biblical terminology, priding themselves as “biblical.” Calvin powerfully validates the advantage, then, of not limiting oneself to biblical language:

To counter Arius, “say ‘consubstantial’ and you will tear off the mask of this turncoat, and yet you add nothing to Scripture.”

To counter Sabellius, “say that in the one essence of God there is a Trinity of persons; you will say in one word what Scripture states, and cut short empty talkativeness.”<sup>59</sup>

In summary, though Calvin slowly comes around to Nicene and post-Nicene vocabulary, regretting along the way that such vocabulary is necessary in the first place, he embraces it for the fundamental reason that it clarifies what heretics otherwise confuse. Calvin exhibits a stubbornly reluctant advocacy of orthodox, Trinitarian terminology, yet a devoted advocacy nonetheless.

### 3. *Eternal generation, autotheos, and Calvin’s contribution*

Calvin’s lexical temperance would not keep him from developing a stream of patristic thought on the matter of eternal generation. At Nicaea eternal generation is captured by that phrase “God of God.” While a survey of patristic thought is not appropriate here, it has been widely

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<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.5.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin then advises how to proceed with those timid with words: “Indeed, if anxious superstition so constrains anyone that he cannot bear these terms, yet no one could now deny, even if he were to burst, that when we hear ‘one’ we ought to understand ‘unity of substance’; when we hear ‘three in one essence,’ the persons in this trinity are meant. When this is confessed without guile, we need not dally over words. But I have long since and repeatedly been experiencing that all who persistently quarrel over words nurse a secret poison. As a consequence, it is more expedient to challenge them deliberately than speak more obscurely to please them.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.5.

recognized that a stream of Nicene and post-Nicene fathers intended a generation of the divine essence from the Father to the Son, though one that has no beginning (contra Arianism). That the essence itself is communicated from the Father, who is unbegotten, is proof that the Son shares the same deity as him who is begotten.

Calvin affirms eternal generation, but he is convinced that in order for the Son to be fully God, the Son must be God in and of himself, contrary to his anti-Trinitarian opponents. As Calvin will argue, a derived essence, even if eternally derived, implies that the Son is less than the Father and threatens to divide the unity of the Godhead, compromising the simplicity of the undivided essence. The Son, in short, must be autotheos. Eternal generation, therefore, cannot be the communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son. Personhood, not essence, must be the target of eternal generation.

At the start of Calvin's treatment of the issue, he observes that the fathers are not uniform. "Sometimes, indeed, they teach that the Father is the beginning of the Son; sometimes they declare that the Son has both divinity and essence from himself, and thus has one beginning with the Father."<sup>60</sup> Calvin believes Augustine is a forerunner of his own view: "Augustine well and clearly expresses the cause of this divinity...when he speaks as follows: 'Christ with respect to himself is called God; with respect to the Father, Son.'"<sup>61</sup>

Calvin's 1559 edition of the *Institutes* is written with the history of his controversies in full view. His argument is motivated in part by "certain rascals"—Valentine Gentile being first among them no doubt. Though these rascals believe there are three persons, they've "added the provision that the Father, who is truly and properly the sole God, in forming the Son and the Spirit, infused into them his own deity." Infused deity is a "dreadful manner of speaking" because the Father becomes "the only 'essence giver' [*essentiator*]." And if the Father is the essence giver

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<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.19.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Calvin may be citing Augustine's comments on Psalm 109.13 and 68:5. Calvin will go on to appeal to Augustine's fifth book on *On the Trinity*. Calvin concludes, "Therefore, when we speak simply of the Son without regard to the Father, we well and properly declare him to be of himself; and for this reason we call him the sole beginning. But when we mark the relation that he has with the Father, we rightly make the Father the beginning of the Son." 1.13.19.

then the Son's deity is a derived deity, which cannot have the same equality as an underived deity.<sup>62</sup>

If Christ must "borrow his essence from elsewhere," Calvin objects, having "been given his essence from the Father," then the Son cannot have "his being from himself."<sup>63</sup> Again, Calvin is not only concerned that a denial of autotheos compromises the Son's full deity but the Godhead's essential simplicity and unity as well.<sup>64</sup> The essence must be divisible to be derived.

Now if we conclude that all essence is in the Father alone, either it will become divisible or be taken away from the Son. And thus deprived of his essence, he will be God in name only. The essence of God, if these babblers are to be believed, belongs to the Father only, inasmuch as he alone is, and is the essence giver of the Son. Thus the divinity of the Son will be something abstracted from God's essence, or a part derived from the whole.<sup>65</sup>

So problematic is such an abstraction and derivation that Calvin is convinced it would result in a Son who is a "half-God" and an essence that has been torn apart. In sum, "the essence is wholly and perfectly common to Father and Son."<sup>66</sup>

If the Father alone is not autotheos, but so is the Son, then what will guard Calvin from an overemphasis on triune unity, whereby the Father simply becomes the Son and the Son becomes the Father? Has

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<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.23.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> The issue of simplicity will return in 1.13.25: "But they are obviously deceived...for they dream of individuals, each having its own separate part of the essence."

<sup>65</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.23. Calvin will make his case, in part, by appealing to the biblical name "God" as that which refers not merely to the Father but every person of the Trinity.

<sup>66</sup> Calvin does anticipate a response: "If they make rejoinder that the Father in bestowing essence nonetheless remains the sole God, in whom the essence is, Christ then will be a figurative God, a God in appearance and name only, not in reality itself. For there is nothing more proper to God than to be, according to that saying, 'He who is has sent me to you' [Ex. 3:14, Vg.]" Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.23.

Calvin, as some opponents charged, fallen prey to Sabellianism in his denial of an eternal generation of the essence? Calvin is cognizant of the dilemma. There has to be a “mark of differentiation,” as Calvin calls it. That “mark” cannot be the essence: “Those who locate that mark in the essence clearly annihilate Christ’s true deity, which without essence, and indeed the whole essence, cannot exist.”<sup>67</sup> The “mark” must be personhood. Begotten eternally is not the essence but the *person* of the Son.

If the generation of essence results in a divided essence, each person “having its own separate part of the essence,” Scripture’s emphasis on the one essence must instead mean “that the essence both of the Son and the Spirit is unbegotten.”<sup>68</sup> Calvin quickly qualifies that calling the Son and Spirit unbegotten in essence does not preclude him from still labelling the Father the “beginning and fountainhead of the whole of divinity.” He is called such because he is “first in order.”<sup>69</sup> First in order, it must be clarified, is not the same as first in essence. The Father can be attributed the “beginning of deity” but “not in the bestowing of essence, as fanatics babble, but by reason of order.”<sup>70</sup> The same nuance is present in Calvin’s 1545 *Catechismus ecclesiae Genevensis*, as well as the 1559 *French Confession*.<sup>71</sup>

Calvin denies the charge that he has created a “quaternity,” in which all “three persons came forth by derivation from one essence.” “On the contrary,” Calvin counters, “it is clear from our writings that we do not separate the persons from the essence, but we distinguish among them while they remain within it.”<sup>72</sup> The persons of the Trinity are not without

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<sup>67</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13.25.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13.26

<sup>71</sup> See question 19 in particular: *Joannis Calvini opera selecta*, ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel, 5 vols. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-52), 2:76-77; CO 6:13-14. For his 1559 *French Confession*, see OS, 2:312. Letham comments on the former: “Here he calls the Father the beginning or origin, the first cause. Again, he is speaking of the relations of the persons, not of the one divine essence or being.” Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 260.

<sup>72</sup> “If the persons had been separate from the essence, the reasoning of these men might have been probable; but in this way there would have been a trinity

the essence or outside the essence; apart from the divine essence no one person is God, nor does any member have his subsistence in the one essence.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, in an “absolute sense,” Calvin explains, deity “exists of itself.” Since the Son is God, he “exists of himself.” His self-existence is not “in respect of his Person,” Calvin clarifies, “since he is the Son” and as Son “he exists from the Father.” He “exists of himself” only in respect to his divine essence. “Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself.”<sup>74</sup>

#### **IV. Did Calvin depart from traditional Trinitarianism?**

Was Calvin’s Trinitarianism a departure from traditional Trinitarianism? Such a question has stirred no small debate in past decades. Some answer in the affirmative, believing Calvin to be paving a new way, criticizing Nicene Trinitarianism along the way.<sup>75</sup> To see Calvin as an innovator is a misreading in the eyes of others who see nothing new in Calvin’s thought. Calvin has, they argue, merely reiterated and retrieved the patristic voices since Nicaea.<sup>76</sup>

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of gods, not of persons whom the one God contains in himself.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.25.

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.25.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> E.g., Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, first edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 327; *idem*, *A New Systematic Theology*, second edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 328; Roger T. Beckwith, “The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Churchman* 115, no. 4 (2001): 308-315; John Murray, “Systematic Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 25 (May 1963): 141; Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 197.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Letham, review of *A New Systematic Theology* (first edition), Robert Reymond, in *Westminster Theological Journal* 62, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 314-319; Paul Owen, “An Examination of Robert Reymond’s Understanding of the Trinity in his Appeal to John Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (2000): 262-281; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origin and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1963), 168-169; Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 54-57; T. H. L. Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952), 61-62; Philip W. Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin’s Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

What many fail to realize, however, is that the question itself is flawed. The patristic pedigree of eternal generation is variegated, justifiably evasive of a simplistic “yes” or “no” answer. The answer that should follow the question “Was Calvin departing from traditional Trinitarianism?” should be: “Which tradition?” Two different traditions are present before, during, and after Nicaea, a reality that many in this debate fail to address, though not missed by Douglas Kelly and Brandon Ellis.<sup>77</sup> Nor is it missed by Calvin himself, who, as pointed out already, acknowledged such heterogeneity in patristic thought.<sup>78</sup>

One tradition, represented by patristics such as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and John of Damascus, attributes eternal self-existence to the Father alone. Designating primacy to the Father, he is the origin from which the divine essence is eternally generated to the Son. The Son’s deity is derived from and caused by his Father. Kelly labels this tradition “subordinationism” since the Son’s essence is caused by and derived from the Father.<sup>79</sup> That label is understandable but also potentially misleading as subordinationisms also characterized Arians and Origenists (though in different ways). It is also doubtful that fathers like Basil, Gregory, and John of Damascus would appreciate such an unorthodox association.

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<sup>77</sup> Many of those I’ve cited in this debate fail to ask this question or entertain whether there is variety in the patristic tradition. While those proposing novelty in Calvin’s Trinitarianism like to cite those fathers who teach an eternal generation of essence, those denying any novelty like to cite those fathers teaching an eternal generation of persons. Though there are exceptions, both sides of the debate fail to see the obvious. Acknowledging that there is diversity among the patristics completely changes the debate. In that sense, Kelly and Ellis are a breath of fresh air. Nevertheless, if there is one side in the debate that is more problematic, it must be those who see Calvin as totally departing from Nicaea-Constantinople (e.g., Reymond). Those who press instead for continuity are correct to critique those who argue for total discontinuity; the problem, however, is that in their attempt to argue for continuity they swing the pendulum too far to the other side, struggling to see that if there is continuity it is with a specific patristic stream of thought.

<sup>78</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.19.

<sup>79</sup> Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 14; idem, *Letter* 38.4; Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 1.42; idem, *That There Are Not Three Gods*, in *NPNF*, 5:336; John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.8. As cited by Kelly, “The True and Triune God: Calvin’s Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,” 82-83.

A second tradition is represented by Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and Epiphanius.<sup>80</sup> Suspicious of imbibing degrees of divinity or ontological subordination in the Godhead, these fathers rejected the belief that the Son's deity is caused or derived. Though their language may not be as explicit as Calvin's, hints of the Son's aseity with reference to the divine essence or divinity are present. The eternal generation of the Son is not denied by these patristics, but they do resist the thought of eternal generation functioning as a means to delivering a derivative essence in the Son.<sup>81</sup>

In view of his *Institutes*, it should be clear that Calvin followed this second tradition.<sup>82</sup> As one might expect, Calvin's many debates with those who taught that the Son had a derived or infused essence also reveal a dependence on certain fathers and councils, Nicaea included.<sup>83</sup> Briefly consider three examples. First, in his debate with Gentile, Calvin appeals to both the Council of Nicaea and Athanasius.

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<sup>80</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 29.2; 40.41, 43; 43.29; Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues sur la Trinité*, vol. 1, "Dialogue 2," Sources Chrétiennes, 239-41; idem, *Thesaurus de Trinitate*, in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 75:128, 145, 177; idem, *In Joannis Evangelium* 15.1; Epiphanius, *Haereses* 62.3; idem, *Ancoratus* 46. As cited by Kelly, who labels this second tradition "full equalitarian." Kelly, "The True and Triune God: Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 84-86.

<sup>81</sup> I have mostly interacted with Kelly, whose treatment is brief. For a more extensive analysis, see Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 64-102. Pay special attention to pages 100-101 where Ellis labels Calvin's view a "complex solidarity" with reference to the classical tradition.

<sup>82</sup> For diverse but in-depth treatments of Nicaea-Constantinople, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peter Widdecombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy*, 318-381 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> E.g., in Calvin, *Opera Calvini* 11:560, Calvin references Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 3; in *Opera Calvini* 7:322, 323.4, Calvin references Epiphanius, *Haereses* 69. Cf. Kelly, "The True and Triune God: Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 86; B. B. Warfield, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1956), 283.

But the words of the Council of Nicaea resound “God of God.” This is a hard saying, I acknowledge. However, no one is better able to remove any ambiguity or a more capable interpreter than Athanasius who composed it. And certainly the counsel of the fathers was no other than that the Son in terms of origin is led out from the Father, in respect of his person, and in no way to oppose his being of the same essence and deity. And so, according to essence, he is the word of God without beginning, according to his person however the Son has a beginning from the Father.<sup>84</sup>

Apparently, Calvin believed his understanding of eternal generation was what Nicaea meant by phrases like “God of God” and he clearly thought Athanasius’s interpretation of the creed only increased his credibility. Such an interpretation of Nicaea (especially in view of that phrase “of the substance of the Father”—*de substantia Patris*), could be debated. It is, as Ellis observes, at the very least a “unique interpretation,” especially given the way the phrase was used by other patristics to teach the generation of the divine essence.<sup>85</sup> Regardless, Calvin believed there was precedence for his position at Nicaea, and therefore orthodox, however unique such a reading may have been.

Second, consider Calvin’s second debate with Caroli in 1545. According to Caroli, Calvin had abandoned the eternal generation of the Son by demanding the Son to be *a se* in his divinity.<sup>86</sup> Calvin countered: It is critical that the Son exists of himself—*a se ipso existentem*— with reference to his divinity or essence. Cyril, “who often prefers to call the Father the origin [*principium*] of the Son,” nevertheless “holds it in the highest degree absurd for the Son not to be believed to possess life and immortality *a se ipso*.” Cyril “also teaches that if it is proper to the ineffable nature to be *a se ipsa*, this is rightly ascribed to the Son.” In

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<sup>84</sup> CO, 9:370. Note again Calvin’s appeal to the fathers in the *French Confession*: “We receive what was determined by the ancient councils, and we hate all sects and heresies which were rejected by the holy doctors from the time of St. Hilary and Athanasius until St. Ambrose and Cyril.” CO, 9:739-42; OS 2:312.

<sup>85</sup> Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 13.

<sup>86</sup> For an overview of the two sides in this 1545 debate, see Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 48-50.

Cyril's "tenth book of his *Thesaurus*, he argues that the Father possesses nothing *a se ipso* which the Son does not possess *a se ipso*."<sup>87</sup>

Third, it should not be missed that Calvin, that same year, also responded to Chaponneau, penning one of his most forthcoming statements summarizing not only his position but the "state of the controversy."

This is the state of the controversy: Whether it may be truly predicated of Christ, that he is, as he is God, *a se ipso*? This Chaponneau denies. Why? Because the name of Christ designates the second person in the Godhead, who stands in relation to the Father. I confess that if respect is had to the person, we ought not to speak thus. *But I say we are not speaking of the person but of the essence.* ...Chaponneau contends that Christ, because he is of the substance of the Father, is not *a se ipso*, since he has a beginning from another. *This I allow to him of the person.* ...I confess that the Son of God is of the Father. Accordingly, since the person has an order [*ratio*], I confess that he is not *a se ipso*. But when *we are speaking of his divinity or simply of the essence* (which is the same thing) apart from consideration of the person, I say that it is rightly predicated of him that he is *a se ipso*.<sup>88</sup>

Calvin could not be more transparent: In his person, the Son is not *a se ipso*; in his essence, the Son is *a se ipso*. The Son is from the Father as Son but the Son is from himself as divine. Calvin believed some fathers, though not all, agreed.

Did Calvin depart from traditional Trinitarianism? Traditional Trinitarianism proves too diverse to make the question legitimate. Nevertheless, Calvin, and his autotheos doctrine, particularly its allergy to any notion of a derivative or caused divine *essence*, does stand firmly within one major stream, a stream that does have ties back to the fourth

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<sup>87</sup> Calvin, *Confession of the Trinity*, in CO ix. 708-9. This is Warfield's translation with modification from Ellis. Cf. Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 49.

<sup>88</sup> Emphasis mine (though not to the Latin). CO x.16. This translation is from Warfield with certain edits from Ellis, though I have abbreviated the passage at various points. Cf. Ellis. Cf. Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 238-9; Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 46.

century. For that reason, it would be misguided to conclude that Calvin is not orthodox or Nicene. One would have to equally declare certain fathers, like Gregory of Nazianzus or Cyril of Alexandria, unorthodox.<sup>89</sup>

Yet neither would it be accurate to simplistically conclude that Calvin merely regurgitates those before him, contributing nothing to the ongoing refinement of Nicene Trinitarianism. To pretend the fathers are uniform and claim Calvin merely echoes that unified tradition, not only misrepresents the fathers in all their diversity but fails to understand Calvin's claims and context, a context in which Calvin's view did prove controversial not only among heretics but reformers.

Additionally, the Reformed tradition that followed did not, as a majority, adhere to Calvin's Trinitarianism. As Ellis has thoroughly demonstrated in his study, not all post-Reformation Reformed and Roman Catholic theologians would side with Calvin; in fact, most would disagree. Calvin's position proved to be the "minority report." The majority of Reformed would continue to side with that patristic stream that saw eternal generation as the communication of the divine essence.<sup>90</sup>

Although it is disagreeable that Warfield utilizes Calvin's doctrine to justify a dispensing with eternal processions, Warfield's overall evaluation is on target: Calvin's "contribution is summed up on his clear, firm, and unwavering assertion of the *autotheotes* of the Son. By this assertion the *homoousiotes* of the Nicene Fathers at last came to its full

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<sup>89</sup> It is worth noting that the Roman Catholic, Robert Bellarmine, who disagreed with Calvin, nevertheless did not think Calvin unorthodox. See Robert Bellarmine, "Secunda controversia generalis de Christo," in *Disputationum de controversiis Christiannae fidei adversus haereticos* (Rome, 1832), 1:307-10.

<sup>90</sup> "In no respect, therefore, did the Reformed mainstream assert *the Son's possession of deity from himself*—the white-hot heart of the conflagration started by Calvin. Indeed, it is absolutely vital for understanding the theological significance of the autothean controversies as a whole that *on all sides, except for the Calvinian minority report, personal procession was held to stand or fall with essential communication.*" And again: "By the turn of the eighteenth century, according to mainstream reckoning the Calvinian Reformed minority account as I have described it here did not represent a distinct approach at all. ...the only approach to trinitarian formulation which did not assume that *personal procession fundamentally means essential communication*—from the traditionalists to the radicals—went into eclipse." Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 168, 196.

right, and became in its fullest sense the hinge of the doctrine.”<sup>91</sup> If Warfield is right that in Calvin we witness Nicaea coming “to its full right,” then perhaps the more appropriate question is: Did Calvin advance traditional Trinitarianism, bringing it to its natural maturity? When one considers how Calvin combined his doctrine of eternal generation, particularly with its stress on personhood as opposed to essence, with his doctrine of autotheos, it is difficult not to answer in the affirmative. All things considered, Ellis appears justified to conclude that Calvin’s Trinitarianism, as it relates to Nicene orthodoxy, possesses both “solidarity and complexity.”<sup>92</sup>

#### **IV. Balancing *sola Scriptura* and Catholic Trinitarianism as a necessary dogmatic tension**

One of the dangers in historical studies is the tendency to paint pivotal figures simplistically. They always prove to be, however, inflexibly complex. Tensions play out in their own conduct; tensions evolve in their thinking as well. We should not assume that such tensions are necessarily problematic, always attempting to iron out what appears to modern eyes inconsistent or at odds. Nowhere does this apply more than in theological, dogmatic construction.

For example, the gospel itself is one grand tension: the power of God manifested in a crucified king. What is foolishness to the world is the power of God to save (1 Cor. 1:18). The foolishness and weakness of God has proved to be, in Christ, divine wisdom and strength (1 Cor. 1:25). Tensions, dialectics, and mysteries are at the very heart of the Christian faith, not because they remove the logic of truth (contra Neo-Orthodoxy) or the truthfulness of truth (postmodernism), but precisely because they accommodate the infinite Creator in his manifold truthfulness to finite, sinful creatures. Following Calvin, the Creator-creature distinction is the starting point, embracing the infinite, incomprehensible God in order to appreciate the way he has stooped so low as to lisp to feeble, rebellious babes.

Tension, in short, can be incredibly *Christian* in character and function. Could it be the case that tension might also be an indispensable

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<sup>91</sup> B. B. Warfield, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” 284.

<sup>92</sup> Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 48.

ingredient in the recipe of theological method? Perhaps that is what is so problematic, from a Protestant perspective, with Roman Catholicism, the kind Calvin experienced in his day, whether it be Sadoletto or Caroli. It is far easier, much more comfortable, and considerably more understandable to simply say the unified tradition of the Catholic church is infallible, and appeal to the creeds for that is where inspired, final authority resides. Or in the case of the curialist, simply to invoke the authority of the pope. Whether a Roman conciliarist or curialist, one need not, at least in the final analysis, work out or work within the tension of biblical authority and catholicity. The Church, the mother who gave birth to the Scriptures, even bestowing authority upon the Scriptures, must simply be trusted. Here is Catholicity, but it is with a capital “C.”

Calvin, however, is evidence that the Protestant methodology is radically different. *Sola Scriptura's* legitimacy will not allow voices of post-canonical humanity to have superiority over the voice of God himself in the Scriptures. Only the biblical witness is revelatory, God-breathed, inerrant, and therefore sufficient, having final authority in the church.<sup>93</sup> Evangelicals—as the reformers were first called—*must do* with Scripture, primarily because of what it inherently is and who it has as its divine author. If Calvin's repeated interruptions in the *Institutes*, which fearfully warn his readers not to play the philosopher, say anything at all, they communicate not only the seriousness with which he trembled at the infinite essence of God but his dedication to *sola Scriptura* not only as an ecclesiastical boundary but as a methodological tool. So often and so strong are Calvin's warnings, as well as his creedal resistance in the Caroli affair, that Calvin runs the risk of appearing inflexibly Biblicist, as untrue as such a conclusion might be.

Simultaneously, a Protestant methodology will not allow a radicalizing of *sola Scriptura*, one that turns the formal principle into *nuda Scriptura*, a tendency current among the radicals of Calvin's day and one equally current among evangelicals today. *Nuda Scriptura's* dismissal of tradition just as easily excuses “tension” as does Rome's appeal to an infallible tradition. Again, consider Calvin. Every time one grows impatient with Calvin's reticence to say anything beyond the words of

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<sup>93</sup> On Calvin's defence of *sola Scriptura*, see my treatment in *God's Word Alone*, 63-74.

Scripture, Calvin accelerates in his retrieval of patristic voices, earnestly voices his adherence to the creeds, and confidently verifies his indefatigable insistence upon his Trinitarian orthodoxy amidst the fires of controversy. While tradition may not be revelatory or inerrant, where it is faithful to the biblical witness and the implications of that biblical witness, it must be embraced, confessed, and considered authoritative. Recognizing its authority is not to swim the Tiber, but to acknowledge that where it is biblically pure it acts in a ministerial fashion, possessing a derivative authority that is always subservient to the one and only magisterial authority.

Nevertheless, if Calvin has actually made any contribution, then mere retrieval will not prove sufficient every time. As critical as the creeds may be, *sola Scriptura* may, in some circumstances, act as a license to bring to maturity either that which was left unaddressed by prior eras or that which was but in seed form. Theologians, therefore, need dogmatic wisdom, for it is very difficult to discern when the circumstances demand using that license. Doing so at the wrong time risks losing a catholic pedigree altogether.

Certainly, to some extent, the Reformation itself demonstrates that such a license is not only permissible but even responsible. The Reformers' doctrine of forensic justification and imputation was not, in the strict sense, a "new" doctrine in the church's tradition. One can find it embedded within the thought life of certain early church fathers.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the political, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal climate in the first five centuries was not one that had justification at its center; Christ's deity would, understandably, have pride of place. While a forensic notion is not absent from the medieval era either, a transformative notion so dominated the penance system that the arrival of the sixteenth-century practically screamed for a reconsideration of man's right standing with God.

In that light, the reformers may have been retrieving the doctrine of justification, but given its speckled history up to that point, they did not merely retrieve but put forward the fullest doctrinal exposition in the history of the church, exploring questions and answers that had previously been untouched. That type of doctrinal formulation does not

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<sup>94</sup> For examples, see Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 105), 21-36.

mean the biblical witness is unclear and insufficient, in need of the church to formulate an authoritative, infallible office. If the church's misguided history on justification and authority proves anything it is that such was not the case, perhaps most painfully evident by the time of the Great Western Schism (1378-1417). Heresy and corruption so often impelled doctrinal development, not because a revelatory, infallible post-canonical tradition was needed to supplement Scripture's deficiencies, but rather because the biblical witness itself, which is not only shallow enough for a lamb to waddle in but deep enough for an elephant to swim, either was muddied by mankind's doctrinal infidelity or unexplored due to mankind's doctrinal ignorance.

A similar point should be made with tradition. Not only do creeds and councils fail to be comprehensive in their articulation of doctrine, but even when their faithful, biblical formulation of doctrine is present, it is not to preclude further dogmatic maturity and refinement. As brilliant as Nicaea may have been, Chalcedon was deemed necessary, not only to correct misconceptions over vocabulary but to explore deeper the two natures of Christ in ways Nicaea had not. As time would tell, that became an imperative task as developing Christological heresies pounded on the church's door.

Calvin's Trinitarianism is not an exact parallel to the doctrinal development of justification mentioned above, in the least because Calvin does see himself as retrieving a notable and explicit stream of patristic thought, one that has ties back to Nicaea. Furthermore, Trinitarianism simply was not at the center of attention like the doctrine of justification was in the sixteenth-century. Nonetheless, as much as Calvin may have exercised a retrieval, his appropriation of *autotheos*, and with it eternal generation in terms of personhood, resulted in a fresh consideration. To call Calvin's doctrine of eternal generation and the Son's aseity a *mere* retrieval is to insult his genius. Tethered as he may have been to both Scripture and a certain stream of patristic thought that reached back to Nicaea, Calvin did argue in such a way that the wider implications of *autotheos* had to be considered with fresh eyes and from new vistas.<sup>95</sup> Did Calvin correct Nicaea-Constantinople? No. Did Calvin subtract from Nicaea-Constantinople? No. But did Calvin build upon

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<sup>95</sup> The centuries that followed would continue to explore the issue, proving that Calvin had touched a nerve, and one needing further clarification.

Nicaea-Constantinople? Certainly. Here is a building project, however imperfect, that attempted to balance *sola Scriptura* with catholicity.<sup>96</sup>

Dogmatics, then, is the attempt to think theologically while keeping one's feet on the ground that we call *sola Scriptura*. That presents a tension if there ever was one. Keeping one's feet firmly planted in the soil of *sola Scriptura* is a challenge when one must not only base one's claims on what Scripture says but reach high to follow through on what may be the "good and necessary consequence" to be "deduced from Scripture."<sup>97</sup>

Perhaps that explains Calvin's constant warnings against speculation, if only in part. He explores the divine essence, finding it necessary at points to move beyond Scriptural vocabulary into creedal vocabulary, which he must do if he is to grasp Scriptural ramifications in real time. Nevertheless, he feels the tension, mostly because that which is deduced from Scripture as a good and necessary consequence is still a *consequence* from Scripture, as necessary as that consequence may be.

The tension Calvin feels is one every theologian should feel: it is the attempt to build upon the shoulders we stand upon, while recognizing that some shoulders are stronger than others.<sup>98</sup> The construction site

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<sup>96</sup> Ellis uses the language of "advancing" and "developing" instead, though I believe to make a similar point: "Calvin's actual trinitarian views were not as unquestioningly traditional as is often claimed, nor, on the other hand, was his allegiance to *sola Scriptura* opposed to received creedal orthodoxy. Throughout his various controversies and in his writings on the Trinity, Calvin claimed to be promulgating and defending nothing other than, catholic Trinitarianism—and even some opponents of his autothean language concurred. But, again, many of the harshest critics of Calvin's views during his lifetime and afterwards were orthodox Trinitarians. ...There is another way of evaluating the import of Calvin's Trinitarianism, which is to see his theology as marking a significant advance in the doctrine of the Trinity—not departing from or undermining classical language and exposition, or merely assenting to it, but developing it." Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, 7.

Ellis's thesis is made over against Warfield, whom Ellis both agrees and disagrees with, his disagreement being primarily concerned with the way Warfield uses Calvin's doctrine of the Son's aseity to move away from the notion of eternal generation altogether, as I've already noted above. See page 11.

<sup>97</sup> "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," 235 (I.VI).

<sup>98</sup> Paul Owen has his own way of saying something similar: "I certainly would affirm that the church not only *can*, but must, *build upon* the foundation of the

known as dogmatics is a process of building up. If we've learned from Calvin, catholic shoulders prove sturdy for such a task, keeping one focused on moving upward rather than looking down, wondering if those shoulders will prove dependable. At the same time, Calvin would remind us that the shoulders we stand upon are only as reliable as the foundation itself. Unless that foundation is the Scriptures, the theologian builds in vain.

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great creeds in order to apply their insights to contemporary theological issues. What I do not believe however, is that it is in keeping with the true spirit of the Reformation to *critique* the statements of Nicaea or Chalcedon especially; for the confessing church *stands under* the witness of those ecumenical councils. There is breathing room to operate *within* the boundaries of the Creeds (e.g., Lutheran vs. Reformed approaches to the two natures of Christ; East vs. West on the Trinity), and we surely can *add to* the creeds as the church is guided by God's Spirit; but we are in no position to *subtract* from the trinitarian and Christological confessions of the ancient church. Or at least, if we do, we can no longer claim substantial continuity with the aims of the mainstream Protestant Reformation." Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism," 281 n. 60.

‘Co-Equal, Co-Essential, and Co-Eternal’:  
Introducing Anne Dutton  
and her Reflections on the Trinity

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With the passing of the Act of Toleration on May 24, 1689, religious liberty was guaranteed for various communities outside of the Anglican state church such as the Congregationalists and Particular Baptists, and a religious pluralism was enshrined within the make-up of English society. Although the Act did not provide such liberty for Anti-Trinitarians, the following decade of the 1690s saw the beginning of a profound Trinitarian controversy that raged on and off throughout the “long” eighteenth century. Contrary to the impression given by various recent historical overviews of the doctrine of the Trinity, the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were actually replete with critical battles over Trinitarianism.<sup>1</sup>

The Ancient Church’s doctrine of the Trinity, encapsulated in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, had remained basically unchallenged until the seventeenth century. Even during the theological tumult of the Reformation, this vital area of Christian belief did not come into general dispute, though there were a few, like Michael Servetus (1511–1553) and the Italians, Lelio Francesco Sozzini (1525–1562) and his nephew Fausto Sozzini (1539–1604), who rejected Trinitarianism for a Unitarian perspective on the Godhead. However, as Sarah Mortimer has argued in her ground-breaking study of seventeenth-century English Socinianism, in the century after the Reformation the Socinian understanding of human beings as “inquiring, reasoning and active individuals who must take responsibility for their own spiritual lives” did

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<sup>1</sup>For an exception, see Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 170–181.

come to play a critical role in undermining the way that Trinitarian communities in England had established theological boundaries for themselves.<sup>2</sup> This was part of a growing tide of rationalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that led to what Philip Dixon has termed a “fading of the Trinitarian imagination” and to the doctrine coming under heavy attack.<sup>3</sup> Informed by the Enlightenment’s confidence in the “omnicompetence” of human reason, increasingly the intellectual *mentalité* of this era either dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as a philosophical and unbiblical construct of the post-Apostolic Church, and turned to classical Arianism as an alternate perspective, or simply ridiculed it as utterly illogical and argued for Deism or Socinianism.<sup>4</sup>

Now, a number of key Particular Baptist authors like John Gill (1697–1771), Caleb Evans (1737–1791), and Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), were deeply involved in this controversy about God’s being and penned significant treatises in defence of his Triunity. However, one Particular Baptist author, who also wrote on this subject and who has been generally overlooked, is Anne Dutton (1692–1765). Following an introduction to Dutton’s life and writing, this article will focus on her discussion of Trinitarian ontology in her tract *A Letter on the Divine Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ: As the Second Person in the Ever-blessed Three-one God* (1757), written in response to a work by the Anglican Evangelical William Romaine (1714–1795).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution. The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 240–241.

<sup>3</sup> See especially William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence. How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 164–178; Philip Dixon, *‘Nice and Hot Disputes’: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London/New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003). The quote from Dixon can be found at *‘Nice and Hot Disputes’*, 212.

<sup>4</sup> G. L. Bray, “Trinity” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL/Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 694.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Dutton, *A Letter on the Divine Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ: As the Second Person in the Ever-blessed Three-one God* (London: J. Hart, 1757).

### Introducing Anne Dutton

Anne Dutton was born Anne Williams to godly Congregationalist parents in 1692 in Northampton, the East Midlands.<sup>6</sup> Her conversion came at the age of thirteen after a serious illness.<sup>7</sup> Two years later, in 1707, she joined the Congregationalist church, although she wrestled with doubt and various fears as a young believer. Subsequently, though, she experienced a significant encounter with the Holy Spirit that she interpreted as the sealing of the Spirit—a phrase derived from such Pauline texts as Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30. As she later recalled the experience, the Spirit used Philippians 4:4 (“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say rejoice,” KJV) in his sealing of her heart:

[This] Word brake in... upon my heart, with such a ray of glorious light, that directed my soul to the true and proper object of its joy, even the Lord himself. I was pointed thereto, as with a finger: In the *Lord*, not in your *frames*. In the Lord, not in what you enjoy *from* him, but in what you are in *him*. And the Lord seal'd my instruction, and fill'd my heart brim-full of joy, in the faith of my eternal interest, and unchangeable standing in *him*; and of *his* being an infinite fountain of blessedness, for me to rejoice in alway; even when the streams of sensible enjoyments fail'd. Thus the Blessed Spirit took me by the arms, and taught me to go.

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<sup>6</sup> For Dutton's life and thought, see especially J. C. Whitebrook, “The Life and Works of Mrs. Ann Dutton,” *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 7, nos. 3–4 (1921): 129–146; Stephen J. Stein, “A Note on Anne Dutton, Eighteenth-Century Evangelical,” *Church History*, 44 (1975): 485–491; Michael D. Sciretti, Jr., “‘Feed My Lambs’: The Spiritual Direction Ministry of Calvinistic British Baptist Anne Dutton During the Early Years of the Evangelical Revival” (PhD thesis, Baylor University, 2009).

The sketch of her early life that follows is dependent in part on Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 48–115. For her own account of her conversion, which she detailed in her *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God, with a Poor, Sinful, Unworthy Creature* (1743), see Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:8–27.

<sup>7</sup> Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 51–53.

...the Lord the Spirit went on to reveal Christ more and more to me, as the great foundation of my faith and joy. He shew'd me my everlasting standing in his person, grace and righteousness: and gave me to see my security in his unchangeableness, under all the changes which pass'd over me. And then I began to rejoice in my dear Lord Jesus, as always the *same*, even when my frames *alter'd*.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Dutton learned to put her faith in Christ alone, and not in her experience of him. Her beliefs about the sealing of the Spirit were probably derived from reading the works of the Puritan Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679).<sup>9</sup>

In 1710, she transferred her church affiliation to an open-membership Baptist church in Northampton, pastored at the time by John Moore (1662–1726).<sup>10</sup> There, in her words, she found “fat, green pastures,” for, as she went on to explain, “Mr. Moore was a great doctrinal preacher: and the special advantage I receiv'd under his ministry, was the establishment of my judgment in the doctrines of the gospel.”<sup>11</sup> It was in this congregation that she was baptized as a believer around 1713.<sup>12</sup>

When she was twenty-two in 1715, she married a Thomas Cattell, and moved with her husband to London. While there she worshipped with the Calvinistic Baptist church that met at premises on Wood Street in the Cripplegate region.<sup>13</sup> Founded by Hanserd Knollys (1599–1691), this work had known some rough times in the days immediately prior to Dutton's coming to the church. David Crosley (1670–1744), an evangelist from the Pennine hills in Northern England, had been the pastor of the work from 1705 to 1709, but he had been disfellowshipped

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<sup>8</sup>Dutton, *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God* in Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:27–28. I have modernized Dutton's capitalization of words in her writings, which Watson retained.

<sup>9</sup> On Goodwin's influence on Dutton, see Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 62.

<sup>10</sup> On Moore, see Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 59–60, n.42.

<sup>11</sup> Dutton, *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God* in Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:47, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 64–65.

<sup>13</sup> On this church's history during this period, see Murdina D. MacDonald, “London Calvinistic Baptists 1689–1727: Tensions within a Dissenting Community under Toleration” (DPhil thesis, Regent's Park College, Oxford, 1982), 109–131.

for drunkenness, unchaste conduct with women, and lying to the church about these matters when accused.<sup>14</sup> The sorrow and sense of betrayal, disappointment and consternation in the church would have run deep. It was not until 1714 that the church succeeded in finding a new pastor. John Skepp (d.1721), a member of the Cambridge Congregationalist church of Joseph Hussey (1659–1726), was called that year to be the pastor.

Now, Hussey is often seen as the father of Hyper-Calvinism, inasmuch as he argued in his book *God's Operations of Grace but no Offers of Grace* (1707) that offering Christ indiscriminately to sinners is something that smacks of “creature-co-operation and creature-concurrence” in the work of salvation. Skepp published but one book, and that posthumously, which was entitled *Divine Energy: or The Efficacious Operations of the Spirit of God upon the Soul of Man* (1722). In it he appears to have followed Hussey's approach to evangelism. It is sometimes argued that Anne Dutton's exposure to Hyper-Calvinism at a young age shaped her thinking for the rest of her life. If so, it is curious to find her rejoicing in the ministry of free-offer preachers like George Whitefield in later years.

Skepp, though, was an impressive preacher, owing in part to what Dutton called his “quickness of thought, aptness of expression, suitable affection, and a most agreeable delivery.”<sup>15</sup> Despite his refusal to freely offer the gospel to all and sundry, the overall trend in the church during his ministry was one of growth. There were 179 members when he came

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<sup>14</sup> For his story, see the small study by B. A. Ramsbottom, *The Puritan Samson: The Life of David Crosley 1669–1744* (Harpenden, Hertfordshire: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 1991). See also details in MacDonald, “London Calvinistic Baptists 1689–1727,” 118–119. Crosley genuinely repented, and years later, having lived a life in accord with genuine repentance, he would know some usefulness again in the Lord's work. He carried on a correspondence with George Whitefield (1714–1770), who noted that their “sentiments as the essential doctrines of the gospel, exactly harmonize[d]” and who wrote a commendatory preface for a sermon Crosley published on Samson. See George Whitefield, “Preface to the Reader” in David Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ* (London 1744 ed.; repr. Newburyport, MA: William Barrett, 1796), iii.

<sup>15</sup> Dutton, *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God* in Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:51.

as pastor in 1714. When he died in 1721, the church's membership had grown to 212.<sup>16</sup>

In the early months of 1719, though, Dutton's life underwent a deep trial as her husband of but five or six years died.<sup>17</sup> She returned to her family in Northampton, and found herself wrestling with spiritual depression. In her words, Dutton sought God "in his ordinances, in one place and another; but alas! I found him not."<sup>18</sup> She was not long single, however. A second marriage in the middle months of 1720 was to Benjamin Dutton (1691–1747), a clothier who had studied for vocational ministry in various places, among them Glasgow University. Anne and Benjamin had met in the final months of 1719 and within a year they were wed.<sup>19</sup>

Ministry took the couple to such towns as Whittlesey and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, before leading them finally in 1731 to a Particular Baptist congregation in Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire, in 1733.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that prior to this call to Great Gransden, Benjamin Dutton had wrestled with alcoholism. But the Lord delivered him completely around the time of the move to Great Gransden. In his own words, he said that he now "stood not in need of wine, or strong drink. The Lord also, of his great goodness, took away my *inclination* thereto; so that I had no more inclination to it, or desire after it, than if I had never tasted any in my whole life."<sup>21</sup>

Under Benjamin Dutton's preaching the church flourished so that on any given Sunday the congregation numbered anywhere between 250 and 350, of whom roughly 50 were members. This growth led to the building of a new meeting-house, which can still be seen in the village. Benjamin decided to go to America to help raise funds to pay off the debt incurred in the building of the meeting-house but the ship on which he was returning foundered not far from the British coast in 1747, and

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<sup>16</sup> MacDonald, "London Calvinistic Baptists 1689–1727," 124.

<sup>17</sup> Dutton, *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God* in Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:63–64.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:70.

<sup>19</sup> Sciretti, "Feed My Lambs," 76–77.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief history of the church, see Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Isaac Taylor Hinston and Holdsworth & Ball, 1830), 4:509–510.

<sup>21</sup> Sciretti, "Feed My Lambs," 91–92.

Dutton was drowned. He had sent the money he had raised by means of another ship, however, so that at least was not lost.

### **“A Talent for Writing”.**

Widowed now for the second time, Anne Dutton was to live another eighteen years. During that time “the fame of her... piety,” as Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey (1773–1834) once referred to her spirituality,<sup>22</sup> became known in Evangelical circles on both sides of the Atlantic and that through various literary publications.

Dutton had been writing for a number of years before her second husband’s demise. After his death a steady stream of tracts and treatises, collections of selected correspondence, and poems poured forth from her pen. Among her numerous correspondents were a number of key figures in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival: the Welsh preacher Howell Harris (1714–1773), the redoubtable Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon (1707–1791), and George Whitefield.<sup>23</sup> Harris was convinced that the Lord had entrusted her “with a talent of writing for him.”<sup>24</sup> When William Seward (1711–1740), an early Methodist preacher who was killed by a mob in Wales, read a letter she had written to him in May, 1739, he found it “full of such comforts and direct answers to what I had been writing that it filled my eyes with tears of joy.”<sup>25</sup> And Whitefield, who helped promote and publish Dutton’s writings, once said after a meeting with her: “her conversation is as weighty as her letters.”<sup>26</sup>

By 1740 she had written seven books. Another fourteen followed between 1741 and 1743, and fourteen more by 1750.<sup>27</sup> And there were yet more, for she continued to write up until her death in 1765. She was clearly the most prolific female Baptist author of the eighteenth century. But she wrestled with whether it was biblical for her to be an authoress.

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<sup>22</sup> Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, 4:510.

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion of these links by Stein, “A Note on Anne Dutton,” 485–490, and Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 198–280.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, “A Note on Anne Dutton,” 487–488.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>26</sup> George Whitefield, Letter to Mr. [Jonathan] B[ryan], July 24, 1741 in *Letters of George Whitefield For the period 1734–1742* (1771 ed.; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 280.

<sup>27</sup> Sciretti, “Feed My Lambs,” 100–101.

In a tract entitled *A Letter To such of the Servants of Christ, who May have any Scruples about the Lawfulness of Printing any Thing written by a Woman* (1743), she maintained that she wrote not for fame, but for “only the glory of God, and the good of souls.”<sup>28</sup> To those who might accuse of her violating 1 Timothy 2:12, she answered that her books were not intended to be read in a public setting of worship, which the 1 Timothy text was designed to address. Rather, the instruction that her books gave was private, for they were read by believers in “their own private houses.”<sup>29</sup> She asked those who opposed women writers to “Imagine then... when my books come to your house, that I am come to give you a visit” and to “patiently attend” to her infant “lispings.”<sup>30</sup> What if some other authoresses had used the press for “trifles”? Well, she answered, “shall none of that sex be suffer’d to appear on Christ’s side, to tell of the wonders of his love, to seek the good of souls, and the advancement of the Redeemer’s interest?”<sup>31</sup>

### **Talking/Writing about the Trinity**

Dutton was not slow to critique theological positions she felt erroneous or inadequate. In 1757, for example, she happened to read William Romaine’s *A Discourse upon the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ* (1755). Romaine, at the time the only Evangelical Anglican clergyman in the English capital,<sup>32</sup> had preached this sermon on John 8:24 (“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not, that I am, ye shall die in your sins”) two years earlier and had it published the same year. In the published version Romaine gave a powerful defence of

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Dutton, *A Letter To such of the Servants of Christ, who May have any Scruples about the Lawfulness of Printing any Thing written by a Woman* in Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:254.

<sup>29</sup> Dutton, *Printing any Thing written by a Woman* in Watson, comp., *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton*, 3:254.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:257.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:256.

<sup>32</sup> On Romaine, see especially Tim Shenton, *‘An Iron Pillar’: The Life and Times of William Romaine* (Darlington, England/Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004). See also the classic account of Romaine’s life and ministry by J.C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century; or, England a Hundred Years Ago* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1880), 149–179.

the essential deity of Jesus Christ—and thus a rebuttal of two major heresies of the eighteenth century, Socinianism and Deism—and was also insistent that the “doctrine of the Trinity is the most necessary article of the Christian religion.”<sup>33</sup> It went through at least five editions in the 1750s and was still being reprinted as late as 1788 (the seventh edition).

In one portion of the sermon, though, Dutton believed that Romaine’s language smacked of Sabellianism, or modalism. Romaine was replying to critics of the nomenclature used to describe the persons of the Godhead, namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

They suppose, with ignorance common to infidelity, that these names were to give us ideas of the manner, in which the persons exist in the essence [of God], but the Scripture had quite a different view in using them. The ever blessed Trinity took the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not to describe in what manner they exist as divine persons, but in what manner the divine persons have acted for us, and for our salvation. These names were to give us ideas of the distinct offices, which the Trinity had agreed to sustain in the œconomy of our redemption. The Scripture informs us... that the covenant of grace was made before the world, and the gracious plan of man’s salvation was settled before he had his being. According to the plan of this covenant one of the divine persons agreed to demand infinite satisfaction for sin, when mankind should offend, and to be the Father of the human nature of Jesus Christ, and our Father through him; and therefore he is called God the Father, not to describe his nature, but his office. Another of the divine persons covenanted to become a son, to take our nature upon him, and in it to pay the infinite satisfaction for sin, and therefore he is called Son, Son of God, and such like names, not to describe his divine nature, but his divine office. Another of the divine persons covenanted to make the infinite satisfaction of the Son of God effectual, by inspiring the spirits of men, and disposing them to receive it, and

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<sup>33</sup> William Romaine, *A Discourse upon the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: J. Worrall and E. Withers, 1756), 19. For the historical context of the sermon, see Shenton, ‘*An Iron Pillar*’, 127–129. I first read this sermon by Romaine in November of 2003, and felt then that Romaine did not clearly distinguish his conception of the Godhead from modalism.

therefore he is called the holy Inspirer, or Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of God, not to describe his divine nature but his divine office. The terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are terms of œconomy and are accordingly used in Scripture, to describe the distinct parts, which the ever blessed and adorable Trinity sustained in our redemption. ...The Scripture makes no difference between the divine persons, except what is made by the distinct offices, which they sustain in the covenant of grace. The persons are equal in every perfection and attribute; none is before or after other; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. And consequently Christ, who was from eternity co-equal with the Father, did not make himself inferior, because he covenanted to become a Son, nor did the Holy Spirit, who was from eternity co-equal with the Father and the Son, make himself inferior, because he covenanted to make the spirits of men holy by his grace and influence. Son and Holy Spirit are names of office, and the names of their offices certainly cannot lessen the dignity of their nature, but should rather exalt them in our eyes, for whose salvation they condescended to sustain these offices.<sup>34</sup>

This text more than adequately displays Romaine's commitment to the affirmation that there are three persons within the Godhead and that these three persons are absolutely co-equal and co-eternal. But it is noteworthy that Romaine does not attempt to distinguish the divine persons by classical patristic terms, namely, the Father's ingenerateness, the Son's eternal generation and the Holy Spirit's eternal procession. In fact, he appears to argue against this way of distinguishing the divine persons. The divine persons are to be differentiated on the basis of the roles that they play in the economy of salvation. The term "Son," for example, says nothing about his divine nature, but about the office he bore to effect the salvation of sinners. Likewise, the name "Holy Spirit" says nothing about his relationship to the other two persons of the Godhead, but has to do with the way he persuades sinners to believe in Christ.

When Dutton read Romaine's sermon, she was "loth to think" that Romaine was not truly Trinitarian, but she was convinced that he had

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<sup>34</sup>Romaine, *Discourse upon the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ*, 18–20.

“given great countenance to the Sabellian error.” The above-cited text essentially distinguished the divine persons solely on the basis of their work in salvation.<sup>35</sup> Dutton thus asked whether or not “the three divine persons... were not Father, Son, and Spirit, prior to their agreeing to act” in eternity past for the salvation of fallen humanity?<sup>36</sup>

She then indicated how she would distinguish the persons by means of classical Nicene Trinitarian terminology:

[T]hose proper names, by which these divine persons are described in the Holy Scriptures, are doubtless descriptive, if not of their nature, as God; yet of their distinct subsistences in, and as possessing of the divine essence, with their mutual relations to each other therein. So that the first divine person, with respect to his begetting the second divine person, is called the Father, and to beget his Son, is the peculiar property of God the Father. The second divine person, with respect to his ineffable and eternal generation, in the divine essence, is called the Son; and to be the only-begotten of the Father, is the peculiar property of God the Son. And the third divine person with respect to his proceeding from the Father and the Son, in the divine essence, is called the Spirit; and to proceed from both, as the Spirit of the Father and the Son, is the peculiar property of God the Spirit. And tho’ there is no priority, nor posteriority, among these divine persons: so that one was before, and another after the other, and a third after both, with regard to the order of time; but each of these three divine subsistences, did together and at once necessarily exist in the eternal self-existent essence of Jehovah. Yet I humbly think, that we may, yea, must conceive, according to the Scripture-names given to these divine persons, with their relative properties, that there was priority, and posteriority, with respect to the order of nature. And yet this infers not any superiority, nor inferiority, among the divine persons: in that the three distinct subsistences, do jointly possess, all the immense and eternal glories, of the one undivided, infinite essence

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<sup>35</sup>Dutton, *Divine Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ*, 4–5.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

of Jehovah... in which these three divine persons are co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal.<sup>37</sup>

Like Romaine, Dutton affirmed her conviction that the three divine persons are “co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal.” The three are “undivided” and share to the full the “infinite essence” of deity. Unlike Romaine, however, Dutton was not chary about using the patristic language of generation and procession to distinguish the three persons. The different names used in the Bible of the three persons speak of eternal relationships in which there is no sense of lesser or greater, but which nonetheless speaks of an order: only the Father could beget the Son, only the Son could be begotten, and only the Spirit could proceed from both the Father and the Son. *Pace* the implications of Romaine’s explanation of the divine names, these relationships are not arbitrary. As Dutton sums up her position:

...the Son’s being begotten of the Father, and the Spirit’s proceeding from both, makes no superiority, nor inferiority, among the divine persons, as each possess the same infinite essence; but only denotes the particular manner and order, in which the divine essence necessarily exists.<sup>38</sup>

To Dutton’s way of thinking, to deny that the divine names describe the “distinct subsistences in the divine essence” is “nothing less than to rob them of their personality; and so, of their divine glory.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Two Other Baptist Critiques**

It is noteworthy that Dutton’s younger Baptist contemporary, Benjamin Beddome (1717–1795), the pastor of the Particular Baptist cause in Bourton-on-the-Water, was also familiar with this idiosyncrasy of Romaine’s Trinitarian theology. In a sermon on Mark 12:28–31 that Romaine published in 1760, the Anglican minister had stated:

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<sup>37</sup>Dutton, *Divine Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ*, 6–7, 8.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

The right knowledge of God then consists in believing, that in Jehovah the self-existence essence there are three co-equal and co-eternal persons, between whom there is no difference or inequality, but what is made by the covenant of grace. Their names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are not descriptive of their nature, but of their offices, they are not to teach us in what manner they exist in Jehovah, but they are covenant names, belonging to the offices, which the divine persons sustain in the covenant. The Scripture does not use these names to teach us, how the divine persons exist, but how they act; how they stand related to the heirs of promise, and not what they are in themselves, as persons in Jehovah. This is a truth of great importance, which I have endeavoured to defend both from the pulpit and from the press, and particularly in a printed discourse upon the self-existence of Jesus Christ. The true object of worship then, to whom our obedience and love are due, is Jehovah Alehim,<sup>40</sup> according to what is said in the Creed, “the unity in Trinity and the Trinity in unity is to be worshipped.”<sup>41</sup>

In an undated sermon entitled *Christ manifested to the soul*,<sup>42</sup> Beddome cited this very passage and then noted that “others contend”—was he aware of Dutton’s critique of Romaine?—that the term “Son” is

a title belonging to Christ as the second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, and expressive of both of equality of essence, and the peculiar relation in which he stands to the Divine Father; and that this is an article of faith which enters into the experience and worship of God’s people.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Alehim” here would appear to be Romaine’s term for what is now transliterated as “Elohim.”

<sup>41</sup> William Romaine, “Upon the right Love of the Lord God” in his *Twelve Discourses upon the Law and the Gospel. Preached at St. Dunstan’s Church in the West, London* (London: J. Worrall and M. Withers, 1760), 262–263.

<sup>42</sup> In Benjamin Beddome, *Sermons Printed from the Manuscripts of the Late Rev. Benjamin Beddome, A.M.* (London: William Ball, 1835), 119–127. I owe this reference to my doctoral student, Rev. Daniel Ramsey of Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>43</sup> *Sermons Printed from the Manuscripts of the Late Rev. Benjamin Beddome*, 119.

Beddome himself was of the opinion that the term “Son” could “be understood in both these senses” in “different passages of Scripture.”<sup>44</sup>

The doyen of Baptist theology in this era, John Gill,<sup>45</sup> was also quite critical of the sort of Trinitarian reflection proposed by Romaine. He did not mention him by name, but it is unlikely he was not acquainted with his views as both men ministered in the English capital during the 1750s and 1760s. In fact, on one occasion during the early to mid-1750s, Gill had breakfast with Romaine, along with Gill’s friend James Hervey (1714–1758), George Whitefield (1714–1770), and John Wesley (1703–1791).<sup>46</sup> For Gill, the eternal Sonship of Christ, and thus his eternal generation, “is an article of the greatest importance in the Christian religion,” even its “distinguishing criterion,” without which “the doctrine of the Trinity can never be supported.”<sup>47</sup> As Gill argued in his systematic theology, published in 1769, without eternal Sonship (and the eternal spiration of the Spirit), there is nothing to distinguish the different persons within the Godhead in eternity past:

Those men I have now respect to, hold that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead, or divine nature; and therefore it must be something in the divine nature, and not any thing out of it, that distinguishes them; not any works *ad extra*, done by them; nor their concern in the economy of man’s salvation; nor office bore by them,

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<sup>44</sup> *Sermons Printed from the Manuscripts of the Late Rev. Benjamin Beddome*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> The standard biographical sketch of Gill is John Rippon, *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the late Rev. John Gill, D. D.* (Repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Gano Books, 1992). For more recent studies of Gill and his theology, see Graham Harrison, *Dr. John Gill and His Teaching* (Annual Lecture of The Evangelical Library; London: The Evangelical Library, 1971); Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory. A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 73–107, *passim*; George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (Eggleston, Co. Durham: Go Publications, 1995); Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); and Timothy George, “John Gill” in his and David S. Dockery, ed., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Rev. ed.; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 11–33.

<sup>46</sup> Aaron C. H. Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon* (London: William Edward Painter, 1840), 1:162.

<sup>47</sup> John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (New ed.; London: W. Winterbotham, 1796), 1:209, 210.

which are arbitrary things, which might, or might not have been, had it pleased God...<sup>48</sup>

Gill especially took aim at the thinking of the Congregationalist Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734), who maintained a position identical to that of Romaine: Sonship has to do with the office of mediator, not the internal relationship of the first and second persons of the Godhead.<sup>49</sup> As Gill responded to Ridgley—and he would have said the same to Romaine: without the Son’s eternal generation “no proof can be made of his being a distinct divine person in the Godhead.”<sup>50</sup>

### Coda

There were at least three reprints of Romaine’s *A Discourse upon the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ* after Dutton’s robust critique, but his argument remained unaltered. It is possible he was unaware of her letter, but her friendship with fellow Evangelicals like Whitefield, who also knew Romaine well, makes this unlikely.<sup>51</sup> Did the Anglican preacher believe then that Dutton’s criticism was not worth answering? If so, he would have been very mistaken. Dutton was indeed right to critique his failure to use classic terminology to differentiate the three within the Godhead. In his sermon, Romaine had rightly asserted: “The doctrine of the Trinity is the most necessary article of the Christian religion, and we cannot take one step in the way to heaven, without being clear in it.”<sup>52</sup> Dutton’s letter provided a clarity that Romaine’s sermon—and one might add, current quarters of Evangelicalism—greatly needed.

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<sup>48</sup> Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1:205, 207.

<sup>49</sup> See Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1:210–212. For the text that Gill is criticizing, see Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Daniel Midwinter, Aaron Ward, John Oswald; and Richard Hett, 1731), 121–131.

<sup>50</sup> Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1:210.

<sup>51</sup> For Romaine’s friendship with Whitefield, see Shenton, ‘*An Iron Pillar*’, 167–169.

<sup>52</sup> Romaine, *Discourse upon the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ*, 19.

“Consolation for the Despairing”:  
C. H. Spurgeon’s Endorsement of Lament Psalms  
in Public Worship<sup>1</sup>

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This article forms part of a work that has as one of its aims, to encourage the rediscovery of the lament psalms in the life of the church. At first glance, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), a preacher from the 19th century, may seem like an unlikely candidate to help us with this project. His life and ministry have become legendary and Spurgeon has often been called “the Prince of Preachers.”<sup>2</sup> The growth of New Park Street Baptist Church from approximately 230 members when Spurgeon, “the boy preacher,” became the Pastor at 19 years of age, to a size of approximately 6,000 at each service in the Metropolitan Tabernacle is widely known. This phenomenal growth, together with Spurgeon’s renowned personal oversight of numerous other ministries such as the Pastor’s College, an orphanage, a Colportage Society, and his prolific writing, has meant that his story has often been told with an accent on the extent and successes of his ministry and a sense of wonder at what God can do.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a longer version of the chapter, “Consolation for the Despairing”: C. H. Spurgeon’s Endorsement of Lament Psalms in Public Worship” in *Finding Lost Words: The Church’s Right to Lament* (eds. G. G. Harper and K. Barker; Australian College of Theology Monograph Series; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017, pp. 37–51. I am grateful to Zack Eswine, Christian George, David Music, and Tom Nettles for taking the time to read and provide feedback on a previous draft of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> See the excellent overviews of Spurgeon’s life and ministries in Drummond, *Spurgeon*, and Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*.

<sup>3</sup> Morden, P. J. “C. H. Spurgeon and Suffering,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35 (2011): 307, makes this observation. For Spurgeon’s many benevolent

Spurgeon's life, however, was also characterized by much suffering and anguish.<sup>4</sup> Serious effects of kidney disease, the stress of needing funds for the many ministries he oversaw, concern for the well-being of his frequently ill and bed-ridden wife, Susannah, as well as his own insomnia and depression, were regular features of his life. Spurgeon spoke openly about his physical, emotional, and spiritual anguish, including his depression.<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon's depression related in part to the physical suffering he endured, but is also traceable to his distress over the Surrey Gardens Music Hall tragedy in October 1856, when seven people died and many others were injured, because of a prankster's shout of "fire." The sight of seeing the crowd fleeing in panic and people trampled to death at one of his services, haunted Spurgeon for the rest of his life.<sup>6</sup>

Given this life-long experience of suffering in various forms, it is perhaps not surprising to find that Spurgeon regularly preached on what we today call the lament psalms.<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon obviously loved the psalms, as his twenty-year, seven-volume "magnum opus" commentary on the psalms, *The Treasury of David*, makes clear. Spurgeon also loved applying the psalms to the needs of his flock. Far from avoiding lament, Spurgeon sought to help his congregation appreciate the value and benefits of

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ministries see Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 393–441; Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 339–92.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 595–665, see Morden, "Suffering," 306–25.

<sup>5</sup> See also Eswine, Z. *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for those who Suffer from Depression*, (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2014), and Skoglund, E. R. *Bright Days, Dark Nights: With Charles Spurgeon in Triumph over Emotional Pain*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000 [reprint Wipf and Stock, 2014].

<sup>6</sup> Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 597–99; Morden, "Suffering," 309–10.

<sup>7</sup> As well as preaching a sermon, Spurgeon often read a passage of Scripture along with verse-by-verse comments. These "expositions" were often published at the end of his weekly sermons in *The Sword and the Trowel*. Spurgeon often preached numerous times on the same lament psalm. For example in Spurgeon, C. H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1861–1917), hereafter abbreviated as *MTP*) there are at least four "expositions" and another four sermons on Psalm 77 (a psalm that Spurgeon believed reflected his own experience; see Morden, "Suffering," 311), and four expositions and three sermons on Psalm 39.

lament psalms in their own personal lives and in their congregational worship. This article will show, therefore, that Spurgeon brought before his congregation the value and benefits of these psalms of sorrow by (1) explaining that it is good and necessary to hear lament psalms in church; (2) encouraging the congregation to follow the pattern of the lament psalms in taking their cries and sorrows to the Lord; (3) reassuring the congregation that such laments are the experience of all true believers; and (4) helping the congregation to apply the pattern of the lament psalms in congregational singing. Thus, as we sample Spurgeon's sermons and "expositions" on lament psalms our focus will not be on his exegesis of the psalms, the content of his sermons, or even his teaching on a theology of suffering. Rather, we will observe how this 19th century psalm-loving and suffering shepherd used lament psalms in church life and showed his congregation the value and benefits of these psalms of sorrow.<sup>8</sup>

### **Spurgeon Oriented His Congregation to the Benefits of Sorrowful Psalms**

Spurgeon recognized that many in the congregation would prefer to have more joyful topics of sermons and therefore needed to be oriented to the benefits of reflecting on grief and sorrow in the lament psalms. Thus, often in the introductions and conclusions to his sermons or expositions of these psalms Spurgeon explains to his congregation that it is good to reflect on such psalms. For instance in his sermon on Psalm 39:6–8 Spurgeon opens with the following:

These are solemn words. Sometimes we have a more joyful theme than this; but I believe that, spiritually, as well as naturally, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. A meditation of a quiet kind, on things not as they are in fiction, but as they prove to be in fact, is always salutary. There is a great mass of sorrow in the world; and all of us meet with something every now and then to calm our spirit, and cool our blood. So, tonight ... by the blessing of God's Spirit, we may go away even more lastingly

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<sup>8</sup> The following survey primarily refers to Psalms 25, 31, 39, 42, 69, 70, 83, 88, and 120.

refreshed than if our hearts were made to leap for joy by meditation upon some transporting theme.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Spurgeon introduces his broader exposition of the psalm with this encouragement: "David was in a great heat of spirit, and much tried, when he wrote this Psalm. There is little that is cheerful in it, yet there is much that may cheer us. Sometimes, when we are unusually thoughtful, we are more likely to be blessed than at other times. Specific gravity is better than specific levity; there are some who have a great deal of the latter quality." In his concluding summary Spurgeon again affirms: "There is much sweet comfort here, though the Psalm reads like a dirge, rather than a hymn. God give us, if we are obliged to sing such words as these, to sing them with a full belief that the Lord will hear us, and will bless our trials to us, and make them work our lasting good!"<sup>10</sup>

In another introduction to this psalm he refers to the variety of life's experiences and how David's psalms reflect those experiences. Sometimes David was very joyful and he wrote joyful psalms. Sometimes, however, "he was very sad, and then he touched the mournful string." "This is a very sorrowful Psalm," Spurgeon noted, "but" he quickly adds, "it is full of teaching." Spurgeon concludes this exposition by affirming, "So, you see, this is a sweet Psalm after all; it is a bitter sweet, a sweet bitter, a Psalm that tends towards our spiritual health."<sup>11</sup> In these introductions and conclusions we get the sense that Spurgeon acknowledges the reluctance of some to hear an exposition on sorrow and mourning and reassures them that there is much to gain from such expositions.

On other occasions Spurgeon orients his congregation to the lament by providing possible justifications for the psalmist's lament before expounding the text. For example, in introducing his sermon on Psalm 120:5, Spurgeon notes that his outline is: "on this occasion, first, to say *a word or two in justification of the psalmist's complaint*; secondly, to justify *God's dealings with us in having subjected us to this dwelling in the tents of Mesech*; and thirdly, *a few words, by way of comfort, to those who are sad at*

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<sup>9</sup> *MTP*, vol. 40 (1894), 49 ("Earth's Vanities and Heaven's Verities," preached Nov 7, 1889).

<sup>10</sup> *MTP*, vol. 40 (1894), 58, 60.

<sup>11</sup> *MTP*, vol. 40 (1894), 572-76.

*heart, by reason of those ill times, and those ill places, in which they abide.*" Then, as he begins his first point justifying the psalmist's complaint, he declares: "I will say, and must say, that it is not only excusable, but scarcely needs an apology, for that Christian man sometimes to cry out, "My soul is weary, I am almost weary of my life ...."<sup>12</sup>

Many times Spurgeon explains that his own calling as a shepherd of the flock and his responsibility to comfort those in the congregation who are in grief or despair is the reason why he must speak on a lament psalm. In these comments Spurgeon anticipates a potential objection from some in the congregation to a sermon that focuses on sorrow. For example, he begins his sermon on Psalm 31:22 with the following rationale:

I desire at this time to speak to those who are much depressed in spirit, the sons of despondency and daughters of mourning, who dwell upon the dreary confines of despair. It may seem objectionable among so large an audience to address my discourse to a class so comparatively small, but I must leave it to your compassion to excuse me; nay, I think I need hardly do that, but may urge as my apology the nature of my calling.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, in his introduction to his exposition of Psalm 88 Spurgeon explains:

I think that this is the darkest of all the Psalms; it has hardly a spot of light in it. The only bright words that I know of are in the first verse; the rest of the Psalm, is very dark, and very dreary. Why, then, am I going to read it? Because, it may be, there is some poor heart here that is very heavy; you cannot tell out of this great crowd how many sorrowing and burdened spirits there may be amongst us; but

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<sup>12</sup> *MTP*, vol. 48 (1902), 242. See also *MTP*, vol. 48 (1902), 457 (on Psalm 42:6). Spurgeon also followed the pattern of the psalmists in noting the many and varied potential causes of sorrow and depression, including physical and constitutional elements, and thus the many potential helps for sorrowful saints. See Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows*; Skoglund, *Bright Days, Dark Nights*.

<sup>13</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 685 ("Consolation for the Despairing;" preached Dec 7, 1873).

there may be a dozen or two of persons who are driven almost to despair.<sup>14</sup>

Spurgeon recognizes that his calling is not only to minister to those in the congregation who may be presently going through these sorrows, but also to prepare others for the time when they will experience such grief. This is the way he introduces his sermon on Psalm 88:7, with an eye toward those who think it may be inappropriate to have a “discourse upon sorrow.” It is worth quoting this introduction in full:

It is the business of a shepherd not only to look after the happy ones among the sheep, but to seek after the sick of the flock, and to lay himself out right earnestly for their comfort and succour. I feel, therefore, that I do rightly when I this morning make it my special business to speak to such as are in trouble. Those of you who are happy and rejoicing in God, full of faith and assurance, can very well spare a discourse for your weaker brethren; you can be even glad and thankful to go without your portion, that those who are depressed in spirit may receive a double measure of the wine of consolation. Moreover, I am not sure that even the most joyous Christian is any the worse for remembering the days of darkness which are stealing on apace, “for they are many.” Just as the memories of our dying friends come o’er us like a cloud, and “damp our brainless ardours,” so will the recollection that there are tribulations and afflictions in the world sober our rejoicing, and prevent its degenerating into an idolatry of the things of time and sense. It is better for many reasons to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting ...; it will work thee no ill. It may be, O thou who art today brimming with happiness, that a little store of sacred cautions and consolations may prove no sore to thee, but may by-and-by stand thee in good stead. This morning’s discourse upon sorrow may suggest a few

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<sup>14</sup> *MTP*, vol. 41 (1895), 478–80. Later in this exposition, Spurgeon again notes: “This subject may not interest some of you, just now; but it is here, so we must mention it; and it may be wanted even by you one of these days .... The day may come when you will turn to this Psalm with the two eights to it, and find comfort in it because it describes your case also.” A similar explanation is found in the conclusion to this exposition.

thoughts to thee which, being treasured up, shall ripen like summer fruit, and mellow by the time thy winter shall come round.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Spurgeon often orients his congregation to the benefits of these lament psalms, explaining that it is good to examine these psalms of sorrow. It is an opportunity and indeed obligation of Spurgeon's as their shepherd to comfort the afflicted and strengthen others for the day of affliction. These psalms are, however, not only beneficial to reflect on, they direct us in expressing grief.

### **Spurgeon Encouraged his Congregation to Follow the Pattern of the Psalmists by Taking Their Cries to the Lord**

Many times Spurgeon explained the benefit of lament psalms by encouraging his congregation to follow the example of the psalmists in expressing their grief. "We all know," Spurgeon reasoned in his exposition of Psalm 39, "that, unless our grief can find expression, it swells and grows till our heart is ready to break. We have heard of a wise physician who bade a man in great trouble weep as much as ever he could. 'Do not restrain your grief,' he said, 'but let it all out.' He felt that only in that way would the poor sufferer's heart be kept from breaking."<sup>16</sup>

Spurgeon also spoke specifically of the tears of those expressing their sorrow. In "Consolation for the Despairing" (on Psalm 31:22) Spurgeon notes that "when David feared that he was cut off from God, he was wise enough to take to crying. He [David] calls prayer crying." Spurgeon then extols the benefits of such an expression of grief from this lament psalm: "Crying is the language of pain; pain cannot cumber itself with letters and syllables and words, and so it takes its own way, and adopts a piercing mode of utterance, very telling and expressive. Crying yields great relief to suffering. Everyone knows the benefit of having a hearty good cry: you cannot help calling it 'a good cry,' for, though one would think crying could never be especially good, yet it affords a desirable relief. Red eyes often relieve breaking hearts."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 13 ("For the Troubled;" preached Jan 12, 1873).

<sup>16</sup> *MTP*, vol. 57 (1911), 46.

<sup>17</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 693 ("Consolation for the Despairing;" preached Dec 7, 1873).

The example of the psalmists' laments that Spurgeon particularly emphasizes, however, was that they expressed their grief to the Lord. Spurgeon encourages his congregation, therefore, to see from these lament psalms that their expression of sorrow is more than a hopeless exercise of merely expressing grief. In "Consolation for the Despairing" Spurgeon adds that "according to our text this cry was addressed to the Lord .... It is important to observe that he cried to the Lord, even though he thought himself cut off from hope .... Ah, soul, if thou be in despair, yet resolve to pour out thy heart before thy God." For those who say "Oh, I cannot pray," Spurgeon replies, "My dear friend, can you cry? .... If you cannot say it in words, tell it with your tears, your groans, your sighs, your sobs .... Never is a child in such a bad plight that it cannot cry. It never says, 'Mother, it is so dark I cannot see to cry;' no, no, the child cries in the dark. And are you in the dark, and in terrible doubt and trouble? Then cry away, my dear friend, cry away, cry away; your Father will hear and deliver you."<sup>18</sup>

Spurgeon regularly applies the example of the psalmist's expression of sorrow before the Lord to the sorrowful believer in his congregation. In his sermon on Psalm 25:19 Spurgeon observes that David asked the Lord "to look, not only upon the trouble, but also upon the misery which the trouble caused him." "So here," Spurgeon continues, "we may bring before God's notice, not only our trial, but the inward anguish which the trial occasions us."<sup>19</sup> This parallel between the psalmist and the grieving believer in Spurgeon's congregation is made regularly throughout the sermon. "It was to God that David took his sorrow .... Observe then, *we must take our sorrows to God.*" Spurgeon contrasts this with taking our

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 693–94. It is also true that Spurgeon noted David's own faults, particularly when David himself identified them, such as, "I said in my haste" (Psalm 31:22). On this occasion Spurgeon notes, "it is well to follow David, but it is better to follow David's son; ... Do not let us imitate David in his speaking in haste, or in his saying, 'I am cut off from before thine eyes;' but at the same time let us take care that we closely copy him in confessing conscious fault, as he here does; in crying to God in the hour of trouble, as he tells us he did; and also in bearing witness to the exceeding goodness of God, notwithstanding our faultiness, as he here bears witness when he says, 'Nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.'" *MTP*, vol. 27 (1881), 158 ("A Hasty Expression Penitently Retracted").

<sup>19</sup> *MTP*, vol. 13 (1867), 157 ("A Troubled Prayer").

sorrows to our neighbors and instead urges that we must make it a rule to bring them before God first: “Your little sorrows you may take to God, for he counteth the hairs of your head: your great sorrows you may take to God, for he holdeth the world in the hollow of his hand. Go to him, whatever your present trouble may be, and you shall find him able and willing to relieve you.” Again, later in the same sermon, Spurgeon tenderly urges the sorrowful (and even suicidal) believer to take their grief to God:

[W]e may further say that *the most sorrowful and the most sinful are welcome to the Lord Jesus*. The most sorrowful may come; I mean those in despair, those who are at their wits’ ends, those poor souls who, through superabundant difficulty are ready to do the most unreasonable things—ready, it may even be, to give way to that wicked, Satanic temptation of rushing from this present life into a world unknown by their own hand. Go, sorrowful one, go now to Jesus, whose tender heart will feel for you. Has your friend forsaken you? Have your lover and your acquaintance become your enemies? Seek no human sympathy just now, but first and foremost, in a flood of tears, reveal your case to the great invisible helper. Kneel down and tell him all that racks your spirit and fills your tortured mind, and plead the promise that he will be with you, and you shall find him true though all else be false.<sup>20</sup>

In his many expositions and sermons on Psalm 39:4 Spurgeon observes that David’s expression of grief begins with “Lord.” He encourages his congregation to follow this same pattern. “That was a good beginning of David’s speech,” argues Spurgeon. “When we turn our burning words towards God, and not towards men, good will come of them. David’s hot heart finds a vent Godward. This was the wisest thing that he could do, cry unto his God, “Lord.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly in preaching on Psalm 39:4 Spurgeon exhorted, “if we are the subjects of the same infirmity as these godly men of old, we must flee where they fled for strength to grapple with these infirmities and overcome them. We must look to the strong for strength

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>21</sup> *MTP*, vol. 55 (1909), 21. See also *MTP*, vol. 40 (1894), 573 (both are expositions).

....”<sup>22</sup> In this sense Spurgeon often spoke of prayer as the resort of the Christian “in every plight.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, Spurgeon recommends the lament of the psalmist in Psalm 69:14 because “You cannot be in any condition of poverty, or sickness, or obscurity, or slander, or doubt, or even sin, but still it is true that your God will welcome your prayer at any time and in every place.” Even in extreme weakness, Spurgeon urges his hearers, “although you can scarcely bend your knee, and are almost afraid to utter words once dear to you, yet your soul desires, pants, hungers, thirsts, and that is the ... very marrow and essence of prayer. Sobs and looks are prayers.”<sup>24</sup>

In his sermon, “Heman’s Sorrowful Psalm” (on Psalm 88), Spurgeon notes that Heman “seems to have been brought about as low as a man can be brought.” Nevertheless, even in this, “the darkest of all the Psalms,” Spurgeon observes, “there was this fact in his favour, he continued praying.” Thus, far from being a negative example, Spurgeon urged his audience, “if you would pray aright, you will do wisely to copy the writer of this Psalm; and first, *tell the Lord your case*.”<sup>25</sup> In pouring out their sorrows before the Lord, Spurgeon encourages his congregation that “Your eyes shall aid you with their liquid pleas, your breath shall assist you as you sigh and sob, every part of your being shall help you as you stretch out your hands unto God. The best prayer is, like a cry, the most natural expression of the sorrow and the need of the heart. Come like that to God ....” Again, Spurgeon notes, “[t]he psalmist says that he

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<sup>22</sup> *MTP*, vol. 60 (1914), 325–26 (“Brief Life is Here our Portion;” on Psalm 39:4). Spurgeon later again speaks of the lament psalm as instruction (“let us go to God with the prayer of the Psalmist”).

<sup>23</sup> *MTP*, vol. 11 (1865), 299 (“The Believer Sinking in the Mire;” on Psalm 69:14).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* Spurgeon often speaks of our various weaknesses and inability to manage the griefs of life on our own as an encouragement to take our sorrows to the Lord. E.g., page 289 in this sermon, and *MTP*, vol. 48 (1902), 464 (“Sweet Stimulants for the Fainting Soul;” on Psalm 42:6; preached “in the winter of 1860”).

<sup>25</sup> Spurgeon continues by noting the example of Heman. “In this Psalm, Heman makes a map of his life’s history, he puts down all the dark places through which he has travelled. He mentions his sins, his sorrows, his hopes (if he had any), his fears, his woes, and so on.” Then Spurgeon urges, lay “your case before the Lord. Go to your chamber, and shut to your door, and tell the Lord all about yourself. Do you lack words? Well then, use no words.”

cried day and night *before God* .... Praying is not whistling to the winds, it is crying before God,—speaking to God.”<sup>26</sup>

For Spurgeon, not only does God hear the grieving cries of his people, God is the only one we can cry to because in his sovereignty these trials ultimately come from God.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in his sermon “For the Troubled” (on Psalm 88:7) Spurgeon notes that Heman not only cries out to the Lord, “[h]e traces all his adversity to the Lord his God. It is God’s wrath, they are God’s waves that afflict him, and God makes them afflict him.” Spurgeon speaks of secondary causes and “the more immediate agent of our grief.” Yet, he urges the believer to remember that “all that thou art suffering of any sort, or kind, comes to thee from the divine hand.” Thus, the call to “cast your burden on the Lord” is something that is easier to do “when you see that the burden came originally from God.”<sup>28</sup>

Confidence in God’s sovereignty and power, however, was no deterrent to earnest prayer. In fact, in addition to the cries and pleas of the psalmists, Spurgeon often noted their earnest engagement with God in prayer. In the introduction to his sermon on Psalm 39:12 Spurgeon observes, “If you read the whole verse, you will see that David used these words as an argument in prayer.” This pattern is also to be emulated by the grieving believer. “It is a grand thing to be able to argue with God in prayer .... it is by well-grounded arguments that we must wrestle with him until we prevail. Expectancy puts in the wedge, but it is solid argument that drives it home. When we want to obtain any mercy from the Lord, we must support our plea by reasons drawn from his nature, his promises, and the experiences of his children as recorded in his Word.” After noting the examples of Luther and the apostle Paul, Spurgeon then adds, “Let it be so with you also, beloved; besiege the throne of grace with the most powerful arguments you can find in the heavenly armoury ....”<sup>29</sup>

In his exposition of Psalm 88, Spurgeon notes how the psalmist pleads with God. Such pleading is not a lack of faith or unbecoming of a

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<sup>26</sup> *MTP*, vol. 41 (1895), 469–71 (“Heman’s Sorrowful Psalm;” preached Sept 25, 1887).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Morden, “Suffering,” 311, 313.

<sup>28</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 13–24 (“For the Troubled;” preached Jan 12, 1873). Though Spurgeon explains that God’s “judicial anger” and punishment for sin have been laid upon Christ in the believer’s place (p. 18).

<sup>29</sup> *MTP*, vol. 57 (1911), 37 (“Strangers and Sojourners;” preached Nov 5, 1863).

believer, rather, “[p]rayer is always best when it rises to pleading. The man who understands the sacred art of prayer becomes a special pleader with God.” Regarding verse 14, Spurgeon states, “Note again the earnestness of the psalmist’s pleadings. We have had many of them already; each verse has, I think, had at least two pleadings in it. If thou wouldst be heard with God, take care that thou dost reason with him, and press thine arguments with the Most High. He delights in this exercise of persevering supplication which will take no denial.” Spurgeon’s concluding comments on his exposition of Psalm 88 commend the psalm as an example of persevering prayer and thus the psalmist is “a pattern to us” in continuing to pray “even when he did not seem to be heard.”<sup>30</sup>

Spurgeon therefore often encouraged his congregation to see the benefit of lament psalms in providing a pattern to follow in the expression of their grief. He encouraged them to follow this pattern and take their sorrows to their sovereign Lord and Savior.

### **Spurgeon Reassured his Congregation That Such Laments are the Experience of True Believers**

In addition to regularly encouraging believers to follow the pattern of the psalmists in pouring out their griefs to the Lord, Spurgeon regularly reassures his congregation that such psalms show that these sorrows and trials are no sign of their inferior status. Along with numerous references to David as a type of Jesus as “the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,”<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon regularly refers to the examples of Luther, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and his own personal weakness to reassure his congregation that the cries of these lament psalms are common in the lives of Christians. While recognizing that there are more than laments in the psalter, and that there are more emotions than sorrow in the Christian life, Spurgeon encouraged his congregation to see

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>31</sup> *MTP*, vol. 48 (1902), 249 (on Psalm 120:5). See e.g., “Tears have ever had great prevalence with God. Christ used these sacred weapons when, ‘with strong crying and tears,’ he prayed to his Father in Gethsemane.” *MTP*, vol. 57 (1911), 48 (exposition of Psalm 39:10–12). Likewise in his introduction to the exposition of Psalm 39 as a “sorrowful Psalm,” Spurgeon calls David “the type of Christ, in whose great heart the joys and sorrows of humanity met to the full.” *MTP*, vol. 40 (1894), 572. Cf. also Morden, “Suffering,” 313–14.

that one significant benefit of the lament psalms is that they help to assure the sorrowing and burdened believer that “somebody else has been just where you are.”<sup>32</sup>

In his sermon on Psalm 69:14 Spurgeon draws a deliberate link between the psalmist and the experiences of believers to reassure his congregation. “True believers, beloved, are sometimes in deep mire, and in fear of being swallowed up.” Spurgeon then notes, “This was the state and condition of the Psalmist when he wrote this psalm.” This then becomes the basis for his outline of this sermon.<sup>33</sup> Later in this same sermon Spurgeon regularly notes his own struggles with doubts and temptations, and that these are in fact the regular experience of ministers as well.

If I were only to reveal my own struggles and conflicts with Satan, I might stagger some of you; but this I know, that no Christian minister will ever be able to enter into the trials and experiences of God’s people, unless he has stood foot to foot with the arch fiend, and wrestled with the prince of hell. Martin Luther was right when he said that temptation and adversity were the two best books in his library.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, in his sermon, “Consolation for the Despairing” (on Psalm 31:22), Spurgeon reassures his congregation that despair is not the lot of just some disobedient or unbelieving Christians:

Yet this bitter sorrow has been endured by not a few of the best of men. If it could be said that only those Christians who walk at a distance from Christ, or those who are inconsistent in life, or those who are but little in prayer, have felt in this way, then, indeed, there would be cause for the gravest disquietude; but it is a matter of fact that some of the choicest spirits among the Lord’s elect have passed

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<sup>32</sup> *MTP*, vol. 41 (1895), 478 (introduction to the exposition of Psalm 88).

<sup>33</sup> E.g., “*first, that the true believer may be in the mire, and very near sinking; secondly, that the true believer may be in such a condition that God alone can deliver him; and thirdly, that in whatever condition the believer may be, prayer is evermore his safe refuge.*” *MTP*, vol. 11 (1865), 289, 290 (“The Believer Sinking in the Mire”).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 293. See also the reference to this saying of Luther in the sermon “For the Troubled” (on Psalm 88:7), *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 22.

through the Valley of Humiliation, and even sojourned there by the month together. Saints who are now among the brightest in heaven, have yet in their day sat weeping at the gates of despair, and asked for the crumbs which the dogs eat under the master's table. Read the life of Martin Luther .... Do not condemn yourself, my dear sister, do not cast yourself away, my dear brother, because your faith endures many conflicts, and your spirits sink very low.<sup>35</sup>

In speaking of the frailty of life at the conclusion to his sermon on Psalm 83:16, Spurgeon identifies with the congregation as he speaks movingly of how many of his close friends have died suddenly, some during that very week. In his closing words Spurgeon tenderly adds, "I seem to feel more than ever I did that I am living in a dying world. It might have been any one of you, it might have been myself. Come, then, and let us all seek the Lord at once; let us each one seek him now."<sup>36</sup>

Spurgeon shows his congregation that these sorrowful psalms are beneficial in large part because they reassure the grieving believer that they are not alone, nor are their sorrows a sign of inferior status. Rather, they provide reassurance that even "the best child of God may be the greatest sufferer."<sup>37</sup>

### **Spurgeon Encouraged the Use of Lament Psalms in Congregational Worship**

Spurgeon recognized of course that there are many joyful psalms and reasons to sing for joy. In keeping with Spurgeon's repeated

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<sup>35</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 688 ("Consolation for the despairing," preached Dec 7, 1873).

<sup>36</sup> *MTP*, vol. 42 (1896), 548 ("Shame Leading to Salvation," preached Oct 31, 1886). Similarly in his exposition of Psalm 120 Spurgeon identifies with the distress and helplessness of being slandered, and therefore that cries to God is the only source of Strength. See *MTP*, vol. 58 (1912), 480.

<sup>37</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 14 ("For the Troubled," preached Jan 12, 1873). Similarly, this sorrowful psalm teaches that "the best of God's servants may be brought into the very lowest estate" (p. 13). It is also true that at times Spurgeon's application comes across as harsh. In his sermon "A Call to the Depressed" it appears that he changes tone from sharp critique to tender understanding in the last quarter of the sermon. See Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows*, 52–53.

explanations of the benefits of lament psalms and reasons for preaching on the lament psalms, however, it is not surprising that Spurgeon also recognized the value of lament psalms in congregational singing as part of the congregation's worship. Thus, when he introduces his sermon, "For the Troubled," Spurgeon directs his congregation to notice that from this passage "we learn that sons of God may be brought so low as to write and sing psalms which are sorrowful throughout, and have no fitting accompaniment but sighs and groans .... their songs are generally like those of David, which if they begin in the dust mount into the clear heavens before long; but sometimes, I say, saints are forced to sing such dolorous ditties that from beginning to end there is not one note of joy."<sup>38</sup>

Similarly when introducing his sermon "Consolation for the Despairing" (on Psalm 31:22) he argues that he has scriptural warrant for speaking to a congregation that is mostly filled with "joyous hearts" on a psalm that is largely sorrowful because it was intended for public worship. The reason for this is because this psalm, "as do several others which are even more full of grief," bears the inscription, "To the chief Musician." Spurgeon concludes: "If, therefore, griefs which to the full could only be known by a few, were nevertheless to be made the subject of public psalmody, I am quite sure they ought not to be passed over in public ministry."<sup>39</sup>

Although Spurgeon's preaching ministry is widely known, it is less commonly known that he took a special interest in music and even composed some hymns.<sup>40</sup> Spurgeon compiled the hymnal *Our Own Hymn-Book* for his own congregation (combining Isaac Watts' *Psalms and Hymns* and John Rippon's *Selection of Hymns*). This in itself is evidence of Spurgeon's interest in singing all the psalms, including lament psalms. The first part of the hymnal (titled "The Spirit of the Psalms")<sup>41</sup> consisted of psalms or paraphrases of all 150 psalms along with 70 alternate versions, making a total of 220 psalms to sing.<sup>42</sup> Spurgeon's personal

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. ("For the Troubled").

<sup>39</sup> *MTP*, vol. 19 (1873), 686 ("Consolation for the Despairing;" preached Dec 7, 1873).

<sup>40</sup> See Music, "Hymnody," 174–81; Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 260–67.

<sup>41</sup> The second part was simply called "Hymns."

<sup>42</sup> Music, "Hymnody," 176. A similar emphasis on the psalms is found in the successor to this hymnal used at the Metropolitan Tabernacle today (*Psalms and*

interest in singing psalms is further evidenced in that he authored 14 of these psalms and slightly edited another one (on Psalm 120).<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, of these 15 psalms, eight of them are (what we label today as) lament psalms.<sup>44</sup>

The psalms and hymns that were sung from the hymnal are often listed at the end of each sermon or exposition in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*. Sometimes Spurgeon's own psalm composition that is based on the lament psalm that he preached is also sung. Thus, on the occasion of the sermon ("Earth's Vanities and Heaven's Verities") and exposition on Psalm 39, the congregation sung Spurgeon's hymn on that psalm. The following are two of the verses:

3 What is there here that I should wait,  
My hope's in Thee alone;  
When wilt Thou open glory's gate  
And call me to Thy throne?

4 A stranger in this land am I,  
A sojourner with Thee;  
Oh be not silent at my cry,  
But show Thyself to me.

Likewise, when the sermon "Consolation for the Despairing" (on Psalm 31:22) was preached (see Spurgeon's reference to the inscription of this psalm above), one of the hymns sung was Spurgeon's on Psalm 70. Three of the four verses of that composition are as follows:

1 Make haste, O God, my soul to bless!  
My help and my deliv'rer Thou;  
Make haste, for I'm in deep distress,  
My case is urgent; help me now.

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*Hymns of Reformed Worship*, London: The Wakeman Trust, 1991, see the preface by Peter Masters).

<sup>43</sup> Spurgeon wrote a further 10 hymns and edited four other hymns.

<sup>44</sup> Although the Hymnal was adopted by other Baptist churches of the time and remained in use at the Metropolitan Tabernacle long after his death, Spurgeon's own compositions did not become popular.

3 Make haste, for I am poor and low;  
 And Satan mocks my prayers and tears;  
 O God, in mercy be not slow,  
 But snatch me from my horrid fears.

4 Make haste, O God, and hear my cries;  
 Then with the souls who seek Thy face,  
 And those who Thy salvation prize,  
 I'll magnify Thy matchless grace.

A similar acknowledgement of sorrow and distress is seen Spurgeon's adaptation (from the Scotch Psalter of 1641) of Psalm 120.<sup>45</sup>

3 My soul distracted mourns and pines  
 To reach that peaceful shore,  
 Where all the weary are at rest,  
 And troublers vex no more.

5 But as for me my song shall rise  
 Before Jehovah's throne,  
 For He has seen my deep distress,  
 And hearken'd to my groan.

Although other examples could be given, these verses show many of the themes highlighted in Spurgeon's sermons and expositions of lament psalms. In this way, Spurgeon not only spoke about the benefits of lament psalms and encouraged grieving believers similarly to express their sorrows to the Lord, he led the congregation in following the instructions of the psalmists to express these laments corporately in song.

## **Conclusion**

In seeking to recover lament psalms in church life today we have in Charles Spurgeon a model of how this may be done. Although faltering

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<sup>45</sup> See above on Spurgeon's exposition, and sermon "The Sojourn in Mesech."

in places himself, nevertheless, he encouraged his congregation to see the benefits of these psalms. As part of his ministry of shepherding the flock, he anticipated potential objections to sorrowful themes, so he oriented his congregation to the benefits of applying these psalms to the sorrowful in their midst and in anticipation of their own seasons of grief. Spurgeon also helped his congregation to see the benefit of these psalms in helping his congregation to know how to express their sorrow and in providing them with a pattern of taking their cries and pleadings to the sovereign Lord as the only One who can help. Spurgeon also drew attention to the benefit of lament psalms by reassuring sorrowful believers from these psalms that they are not alone. Such distresses are not the only experience of believers; but all true believers do experience them in various ways. They anticipated Christ's own suffering and such sorrows are also the experience of all who follow Him. Finally, since these are songs and directed to musicians, they are meant for public worship. This is something Spurgeon encouraged with the use of psalms in congregational singing and his own compositions based on lament psalms. In this, the congregation immediately applied the encouragements of the sermon and not only sang songs of joy, but also corporately took their cries and pleadings to the sovereign Lord and Savior on the basis of his promises in his word.

Humphreys/Patterson—1987:  
A Southern Baptist Debate on the Atonement

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At the height of the Southern Baptist Convention's Inerrancy Controversy (1979-2000), SBC theologians Paige Patterson and Fisher Humphreys consented to a debate over the nature of the atonement at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1987.<sup>1</sup> Often overlooked by those who examine the doctrinal skirmishes within evangelicalism in late twentieth century, the Humphreys/Patterson debate reveals some of the depth of what was in play in SBC theological life. While somewhat an intramural contest among Southern Baptists, the arguments volleyed were well known to the watching evangelical world.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the essence

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<sup>1</sup> Special gratitude is extended to the assistance provided by the libraries at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, including the Paige Patterson archives.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Albert Mohler, Jr. "The Wrath of God Was Satisfied: Substitutionary Atonement and the Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention," August 12, 2013 available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2013/08/12/the-wrath-of-god-was-satisfied-substitutionary-atonement-and-the-conservative-resurgence-in-the-southern-baptist-convention/>. James Ray Nalls categorized Southern Baptist thought on the atonement into three categories: (1) the period of essential unanimity, 1845-1916, (2) the period of emerging divergency, 1917-1958, and (3) the period of extensive multiformity, 1959-1985. Writing in 1985, Nalls concluded that the "atonement has never been the basis of controversy within the life of the convention," 195, which appears not to have anticipated the level of undercurrent controversy in some sections that appeared in the events leading up to the Humphreys/Patterson debate in 1987. See Nalls, "The Concept of the Atonement in Southern Baptist Thought," (Unpublished ThD dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tennessee, 1985).

of the discussion remains and therefore a worthwhile exercise exists in the examination of this dispute.<sup>3</sup> On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Humphreys/Patterson debate, this article seeks to provide the historical setting of the events that led to the debate, the content of the debaters' arguments on the atonement, and an analysis of the significance of the debate both for the SBC in 1987 and for evangelicals inside and outside the SBC in the present day.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Debate a Decade in the Making**

The lives of Fisher Humphreys (1939- ) and Paige Patterson (1942- ) first intersected on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1960s. Humphreys, already a New Orleans graduate, had returned after post-graduate studies in England to pursue the ThD degree in 1967. Patterson, also a ThD student, had been enrolled at New Orleans for masters and doctoral studies since 1965.<sup>5</sup> Humphreys joined

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<sup>3</sup> See Richard Mouw, "Why Christus Victor is not Enough," in *Christianity Today* 56:5 (May 2012): 28 available online

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/may/getting-to-the-cruix-of-calvary.html>. Murray Campbell, "Penal Substitution is the Heart of the Gospel," *The Gospel Coalition*, April 5, 2017 available online

<https://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/article/penal-substitution-is-the-heart-of-the-gospel>. Campbell is responding to Chuck Queen, "It's time to end the hands-off attitude to substitutionary atonement," *Baptist News Global*, March 24, 2017 available online <https://baptistnews.com/article/its-time-to-end-the-hands-off-attitude-to-substitutionary-atonement/#.WRJDPMa1uUn>.

See also Bob Allen, "Atonement tweet sparks blood fuel on social media," *Baptist News Global*, March 1, 2017 available from

<https://baptistnews.com/article/atonement-tweet-sparks-blood-feud-on-social-media/#.WRJGD8a1uUk> and the 2017 Resolution of the Southern Baptist Convention, "On the Necessity of Penal Substitutionary Atonement," available from <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2278/on-the-necessity-of-penal-substitutionary-atonement>

<sup>4</sup> For another recent brief review of the debate see Mark A. Rathel's helpful article, "The Cross and the School of Providence and Prayer: Atonement Controversies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary," in *JBTM* 14//2 (Fall 2017): 30-31.

<sup>5</sup> The two theologians shared a common friend in Richard D. Land, for whom they would both serve as groomsmen in Land's wedding.

the New Orleans faculty in 1970, the same year Patterson accepted the call to serve as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas. In 1975, Patterson would move to Dallas, Texas, to serve as the president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies (later Criswell College) for the next seventeen years. Humphreys would remain at New Orleans until 1990.

In 1978, the Southern Baptist Convention's Broadman Press published Humphreys book-length treatment of the atonement, *The Death of Christ*. Humphreys explained his thesis as, "I believe that God in Christ accepted suffering as his way of forgiving the men whose sins caused him to suffer. He went to all that trouble and experienced all that pain in order to call men to himself for forgiveness. The experiences of Christ are the measure of God's costly forgiveness of sinners."<sup>6</sup> Humphreys called this "cruciform forgiveness" and the concept would serve as his model for explaining the meaning of the atonement.<sup>7</sup>

By 1979, Humphreys' work had been read by Patterson, and the views expressed therein caused Patterson significant concern to the point that a mutual friend, Richard D. Land, encouraged Patterson to call

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<sup>6</sup> Fisher Humphreys, *The Death of Christ* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 116. One reviewer saw this thesis as problematic. John J. Hughes, review of *The Death of Christ* by Fisher Humphreys in *JETS* 23:3 (Sept 1980): 263-264, classified Humphreys as having "a moral-influence view of the atonement."

<sup>7</sup> One can see the roots of Humphreys' views in his doctoral dissertation on the theology of Leonard Hodgson. Humphreys states, "Hodgson did not propose that his view of atonement was the only one, or the best. He tried to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various proposals that have been made. He held that no one view alone is adequate, nor are all views together, if in fact anyone could manage to put them all together," in *God in the Theology of Leonard Hodgson* (Unpublished ThD dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972), 107. Further, in an article on Hodgson he explains, "Hodgson also held a very strong understanding of the atonement, which he always treated as God's response to evil .... Christ voluntarily accepted the pain which is the just punishment for sin, as his way of winning the right to forgive sinners without becoming indulgent or compromising with evil," in "Leonard Hodgson," *The Theological Educator* 40 (Fall 1989): 22-23. For a helpful overview and analysis of Humphrey's "cruciform forgiveness" view, see Matthew C. Rose, "The Social Implications of Certain Theories of the Atonement: An Assessment of Fisher Humphrey's 'Cruciform Forgiveness,'" (Unpublished PhD Seminar Paper, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2014).

Humphreys to discuss the book before Patterson took any action.<sup>8</sup> The conversation, though cordial, did not alleviate any of Patterson's theological concerns. With the election of conservative pastor Adrian Rogers as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Patterson and others were raising the question as to whether or not faculty and other denominational workers believed the same thing about the truthfulness of the Bible as did the majority of Southern Baptists. In the April 23, 1980 edition of the *Baptist Standard*, the denomination's state newspaper in Texas, Editor Presnall Wood called for Patterson to provide a list of names of those whom he suspected of denying the trustworthiness of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> In response, Patterson submitted an essay entitled, "A Reply of Concern," which included a list of seven names of theologians and citations showing their views from their published works.<sup>10</sup> Fisher Humphreys and *The Death of Christ* were fourth on the list. In addition, Humphreys was interviewed for the story and stated, "Paige Patterson is deceiving Southern Baptists. He has not told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."<sup>11</sup>

In 1982, Humphreys published an article in the journal of Southern Seminary, "Salvation: A Southern Baptist Perspective," where he repeated some of the same themes regarding the atonement as found in *The Death of Christ*. In part, he stated that with regard to the atonement, he did "not know that God had to do things precisely this way," thereby

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<sup>8</sup> The accounts of these conversations and events are retold by Humphreys and Patterson in their debate and in other news accounts cited. For the purposes of this article, the debate was transcribed by the author from "A Discussion of the Atonement," video recording, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, October 19, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Presnall Wood, "Concerns About 'Concerned' Organization," *Baptist Standard*, April 23, 1980, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Paige Patterson, "A Reply of Concern," unpublished essay, Paige Patterson Archives. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

<sup>11</sup> Toby Druin, "Patterson, Seven Accused Exchange Charges," *Baptist Standard*, May 14, 1980, 9. Also in this issue is the story, "Criswell Says Patterson to Leave Politics," which recounted the reaction of W. A. Criswell, the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas to Patterson's activities in the denomination in recent years.

questioning the necessity of the cross.<sup>12</sup> Also that year, Patterson published a commentary on 1 Peter, *A Pilgrim Priesthood*. When discussing 1 Peter 1:19, Patterson used Humphreys' *The Death of Christ* as an example of a modern theologian who questions the necessity and substitutionary nature of the atonement.<sup>13</sup>

In 1983, Humphreys taught a summer course on the atonement at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and published *A Dictionary of Theological Terms*.<sup>14</sup> Under the entry "atonement," Humphreys states, in part,

While some Christians do not like theories of the atonement, many Christians find them helpful to try and understand how Jesus' work provided salvation. They point out that the Bible contains a number of explanations of Christ's work .... The work which Christ did is a unique, divine work; there is no exact human analogy for it and, therefore, no complete explanation of it. Perhaps this is why the Bible contains a number of different ways of speaking of it. The church must continue to draw upon all the biblical expressions in order to clarify what it means when it proclaims that 'Christ died for

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<sup>12</sup> Fisher Humphreys, "Salvation: A Southern Baptist Perspective," in *Review and Expositor* 79:2 (Spring 1982): 284. He goes on to restate his "cruciform forgiveness" model as a theory that "may not be" true, but "seems to me to qualify as a distinctive theory of atonement and to be able to explain to people who have participated in costly forgiveness the same thing that an older model like sacrifice explained to people who participated in the Jewish cults" 287.

<sup>13</sup> Paige Patterson, *A Pilgrim Priesthood: An Exposition of the Epistle of First Peter* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 58, asks, "How can one champion such a position in light of Peter's clear statement that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ is a mystery. Still less can the view that the atonement was not 'necessary' or 'substitutionary' in the light of Romans 3:25-26 which declares that Christ's blood was a propitiatory sacrifice which declared God's righteousness by making it possible for God to justify believers and still be absolutely just in so doing."

<sup>14</sup> Fisher Humphreys, "Classroom lecture, 1983, June 21-July 7, Doctrine of the Atonement," audio recording, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

our sins' (1 Cor. 15:3).<sup>15</sup>

In 1986, Southern Baptist historical theologian, Tom J. Nettles, published *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*. In one section on the atonement, Nettles interacts at length with Humphreys' *The Death of Christ*, stating,

Fisher Humphreys plays the part of Abelard against Anselm by rejecting the idea of moral necessity in the atonement and opting for a contemporized setting of moral influence. In preparing the foundation for his rebuilding of a classically inadequate understanding of Christ's death, Humphreys sweeps away the ideas of necessity.<sup>16</sup>

In the summer of 1987, Humphreys and Patterson attended the Southern Baptist Convention's "Conference on Biblical Inerrancy" in North Carolina as well as the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis. While in St. Louis, Humphreys approached Patterson to discuss their longstanding differences and to propose the idea for a public discussion on the atonement. Patterson agreed and they scheduled the event for October in the setting of their first meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana.

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<sup>15</sup> Fisher Humphreys and Philip Wise, *A Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983), 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Tom J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 313-315. Nettles explains why Humphreys' view that the biblical writers never tried to explain how sacrifice can provide forgiveness is not correct: "Paul thus explains the why and how in terms of the eternal moral nature of God (Rom. 3) as expressed in his law (Gal. 3), and he leaves the reader no liberty to conclude that these are merely time-bound cultural models with which modern man may dispense. Justice and mercy kiss each other on the cross, as the Father himself sets forth the Son as an acceptable and adequate sacrifice. God can now forgive without denying his justice (Exod. 34:6-7; Job 10:14)."

**Debating *The Death of Christ***

Almost three-hundred students, faculty, and interested observers appeared on October 19, 1987, to attend “A Discussion on the Atonement” held in the chapel on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Continuing Education, Paul Robertson, welcomed those in attendance at 1 p.m. and proceeded to introduce the two debaters. Robertson explained that each participant would have 20 minutes to give an opening statement followed by a shared dialogue of 45 minutes. After a short break, the participants would return to respond to questions from the audience until 4 p.m. Each was provided a simple folding table on the chapel stage, and both Humphreys and Patterson remained seated for the entire debate. Humphreys made the first presentation.

**“The Jury Is Still Out”: Opening Statements**

Humphreys used his first 20 minutes to recount for the audience the sequence of events from the conceiving of the idea for *The Death of Christ* in 1976 to the present debate. He recounts in brief his phone conversation with Patterson in 1979 and then the “Reply of Concern” article in 1980. While affirming that the quotations cited in the article from *The Death of Christ* were accurate, Humphreys stated his thesis for the debate: “These three quotations give people a distorted view of what I believe—have always believed—about the cross of Jesus and therefore they do not represent me fairly and therefore this kind of criticism shouldn’t have been made.”<sup>17</sup> Before proceeding to explain the meaning of the quotations, Humphreys gave brief affirmations of what he did believe about the cross—that it was a historical fact, that it was and is a gospel act of salvation, and that there are several theological “models” given in the Bible to help one understand how the cross provided salvation for all people.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “A Discussion on the Atonement,” video transcription, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Humphreys explained, “I believe myself that the Bible is filled with models of the atonement—that there are many different pictures of the meaning of the cross that help us to understand how it was God’s great act for providing us with salvation. I furthermore believe, something I have said repeatedly in the book, that all the biblical teachings about the cross are true—

Humphreys' recounted the first quote cited by Patterson from *The Death of Christ*, "I do not know of anyone today who naturally assumes, as the writer of Hebrews did, that sins can be washed away only by the blood of sacrifices."<sup>19</sup> Humphreys explained,

What I am talking about here is [sic] people who are not Christians, naturally assuming a connection between blood and the washing away of sins .... I believe that blood washes away sins, because I believe the Bible and because the Bible teaches it and because it is very important to us and so forth. But I don't think that people naturally believe that .... I think that [was] taken out of context.<sup>20</sup>

In the second cited quotation, Humphreys wrote, "I believe it is unwise to seek for a 'necessity' for the cross. It is quite possible to affirm and clarify the importance of the cross without speaking of it as necessary."<sup>21</sup> Humphreys proceeded to show that this quote occurred during his discussion of Anselm's view that the atonement was logically necessary. Humphreys believes that one need not go that far in his affirmations but rather should simply "read the Bible, believe what it says, and affirm the truth of what it says .... One need not, in order to affirm the importance of the cross, say this is the only way God could have done it."<sup>22</sup>

The third quotation contained an entire paragraph related to Humphreys' discussion of John Calvin's view of the atonement. Humphreys said,

Men today do not ordinarily hold this view of God as simply willing right or wrong, and so they cannot believe that vicarious punishment is either meaningful or moral. No illustration can be given, so far as I can tell, which makes vicarious punishment morally credible to men today. The stories of one soldier punished for another, a child punished for his brother, a man punished for his friend, may be morally praiseworthy from the point of view of the substitute, but they never are acceptable from the point of view of

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every one of them is true."

<sup>19</sup> Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 5.

<sup>21</sup> Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 5.

the punisher. It always seems morally outrageous that any judge would require a substitute. However noble the substitute's act might be, the judge's act seems despicable.<sup>23</sup>

Humphreys explained that here, too, he believed his quotation had been taken out of context by Patterson. Humphreys stated that "in human judgments, we do not in fact allow one person to substitute for another."<sup>24</sup> By human judgments, Humphreys seemingly meant that in human systems the concept of a substitute taking the punishment for another is not acceptable. The only place where something like this occurs is in the paying of a fine for someone else, but not at all in terms of someone dying in the place of another.

At this point in his opening remarks, Humphreys explained the final thing prompting him to seek to arrange the debate. In the months leading up to the debate Patterson and Humphreys were interviewed by Lacy Thompson for a news story in the *Louisiana Baptist Message*. Humphreys emphasized that he hoped the public discussion "would have a peacemaking effect." Patterson stated that he hoped the discussion would provide "clarification that would enable people to see (Humphreys) as a solid evangelical." Further, Patterson said that the "jury is still out on precisely what (Humphreys) means in the book."<sup>25</sup> At the conclusion of his opening statement, Humphreys indicated that he had reflected on Patterson's statement to the *Message* only to conclude that "The jury is not out for everybody."<sup>26</sup> By this, Humphreys seemingly meant that in two cases there were individuals who had come to the conclusion that Humphreys' views of the cross were acceptable and orthodox. First, Humphreys cited his interaction with Wade Akins, a well-known Southern Baptist missionary and personal friend of Patterson, after Akins had contacted him to express his concern after reading the quotations of Humphreys' work in Patterson's commentary on 1 Peter. Humphreys related that after corresponding with Akins and explaining his views, Akins changed his opinion of Humphreys and *The*

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<sup>23</sup> Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 6.

<sup>25</sup> C. Lacy Thompson, "Patterson, Humphreys plan theological discussion," *Baptist Message*, July 23, 1987, 1,7.

<sup>26</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 7.

*Death of Christ* and communicated his support. Humphreys then said, "The jury is not out for Wade Akins."

Second, Humphreys cited the support of Adrian Rogers. Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee and the principal leader of the conservative movement in the Convention along with Patterson and Paul Pressler, was elected in June to serve his third term as the President of the Southern Baptist Convention. Humphreys recounted how in 1985 Rogers preached a sermon entitled, "Snakes in the Garden" on Jude 11 where he quoted the passages Patterson had referenced from *The Death of Christ*. Not citing Humphreys by name, Rogers reviewed for his congregation how one Southern Baptist theologian believed that "It is quite possible to affirm and clarify the importance of the cross without speaking of it as a necessity."<sup>27</sup> In April, 1985, Humphreys received a call from Rogers whereby Rogers sought to establish whether he did in fact have the right understanding of Humphreys' views. After discussing the matter, Humphreys indicated that he was able to clarify his views to the degree that Rogers concluded he had misrepresented the theologian. Rogers stated that he would have preferred Humphreys address penal substitution more specifically, and Humphreys agreed saying, "I surely could have, I didn't talk about it, I talked about three other things in the Bible. I just selected three."<sup>28</sup> Thus, Humphreys concluded, "Dr. Patterson says the jury is still out. It's not out for Adrian Rogers."<sup>29</sup>

Patterson responded with a presentation of his opening remarks that centered upon his remaining concerns with Humphreys' views as

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<sup>27</sup> Adrian Rogers, "Snakes in the Garden," March 10, 1985. Transcript available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com/content.aspx?id=14672>.

<sup>28</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 9. When preparing for the debate Humphreys indicated he sought and received Rogers' permission to relay the facts of their conversation.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Humphreys summarized his views at the end of his opening remarks stating, "I believe everything that the Bible says about the cross. I think that I have interpreted the cross correctly. I am not infallible as an interpreter, but I believe I have interpreted the biblical teachings about the cross accurately, and I know that I believe what the Bible says about the cross. I am here this afternoon to attempt to clarify the views which have been criticized by Dr. Patterson in the past, and thereby try to make a small contribution toward peace in this little corner of the Southern Baptist Convention that I inhabit."

articulated in *The Death of Christ*. With regard to Humphreys' use of Akins and Rogers, Patterson replied,

And regardless of where Dr. Rogers and Mr. Akins stand on the matter I do not feel that they constitute a final court of appeal although I have the utmost respect for the both of them. I nevertheless feel that the word of God is the final court of appeal.<sup>30</sup>

Patterson presented three concerns. First, he explained how he found Humphreys' preference for using a non-biblical model to convey the meaning of the atonement. In *The Death of Christ*, Patterson explained that Humphreys used the term "cruciform forgiveness" as non-biblical model and quoted from Humphreys' volume.<sup>31</sup> Here Patterson underscored that the use of such non-biblical models as "cruciform forgiveness," even if they correspond with the teaching of the Bible, "unnecessarily raises questions about the adequacy of biblical revelation" and relies too heavily on "philosophical theorizing."<sup>32</sup>

Second, Patterson conveyed concern with Humphreys' belief that the atonement cannot be described as necessary. Here Patterson referred to Humphreys' previously addressed statement in *The Death of Christ*, namely, "I believe it is unwise to seek for a 'necessity' for the cross."<sup>33</sup> Patterson argued for the necessity of the cross to fulfill Scripture and cited Matthew 26:54; Acts 13:29; and 1 Corinthians 15:3. Also, he argued that the cross was necessary if God were to take sin seriously and cited Romans 3:25-26 and 5:8-9.

Third, Patterson clarified his concern with regard to Humphreys' belief in substitutionary atonement. He stated that after speaking with

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>31</sup> Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*, 179, "That, at least, is my conclusion about the model of cruciform forgiveness. We have taken it from modern life not from the Bible .... I find this kind of authorization of our model satisfying. Some people may not. They may insist that we prove our model to be true with texts from the Bible, which is impossible. Or, admitting that we cannot avoid using models, they may insist that we employ only models taken directly from the Bible. For reasons I have given repeatedly throughout this book, I find this procedure unsatisfactory."

<sup>32</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 10.

<sup>33</sup> Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*, 55.

Humphreys in June and after hearing him again in the debate, he believed that Humphreys did hold to a substitutionary atonement view. However, Patterson stated that *The Death of Christ* is still less than clear in that regard and should be clarified. Further, Patterson said that he still had concerns with regard to the way Humphreys understood penal substitution in relationship to other models of the atonement. Patterson believed that penal substitution is the one theme that makes all the others have real substance.<sup>34</sup> In order for other subjective models like moral influence or example and Humphreys' "cruciform forgiveness" model to function effectively, acknowledgement must be made that they are dependent upon penal substitution. Patterson then provided an extensive examination of biblical texts supporting the penal substitution view before he concluded by saying that the jury is still out with regard to whether Humphreys believes that penal substitution is the "major motif for understanding the atonement in the word of God."<sup>35</sup>

#### "Agreements and Disagreements": Shared Interaction

After the establishment of the points of contention, the debate proceeded to a time of shared interaction. Humphreys and Patterson engaged in extended and often lively, dialogue over Patterson's three main concerns. With regard to the use of non-biblical models to describe the atonement, Humphreys defended against the charge that he believes non-biblical models are better than biblical models or that he is attempting to substitute new models for old ones. A lengthy exchange followed during which Patterson stressed his view that if one is going to write theology in the contemporary era, he should use biblical models as much as possible to avoid confusion. Humphreys took this to mean that Patterson had no problem with the use of non-biblical models, as long as they were not used with the authority reserved for Scripture. Patterson did not seek to challenge the point further other than to emphasize that "if a man chooses to use non biblical models then he is under an even greater mandate, it seems to me, to make very sure that he does not say things that can be easily interpreted to be critical of the biblical

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<sup>34</sup> "A Discussion on the Atonement," 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

models.”<sup>36</sup> Patterson did not believe that Humphreys accomplished this clarity in *The Death of Christ*. Humphreys stated his disagreement and said,

As near as I can tell, Dr. Patterson believes that it is all right to use these non-biblical models but that you should emphasize the biblical ones and believe in their truth. I believe in their truth and in their authority. I think I’ve interpreted them correctly. It seems to me I have done essentially what I needed to do, but he’s not satisfied.<sup>37</sup>

Concerning the issue of whether the cross was necessary, Humphreys again followed the course of defending his approach as stated in his book. With regard to Patterson’s statement that the cross was necessary to fulfill the Scriptures and to show that God takes sin seriously, Humphreys conceded his agreement. However, Humphreys’ point of contention occurred in his insistence that God has transcendent freedom and nothing is “necessary” for him—even the cross. In response, Patterson returned to Romans 3:25-26 and the statement, “It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Patterson observed,

It seems to say that there is some sort of moral necessity out there that says sin had to be dealt with in this kind of way .... That seems to be present in God’s nature somehow .... [I]t’s not interfering with God’s freedom to say that there is something in his nature if he has already said that’s in his nature.<sup>38</sup>

Further, Patterson questioned, “I don’t think you’re ready to affirm that God is free to do anything he wants to do. Are you going to affirm that?”

Humphreys replied, “No.”

Patterson, “Well, so, then there are some restrictions on God’s freedom growing out of his own nature aren’t there?”

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 19.

Humphreys, “Yes.”

Patterson, “Is it not the case that Romans 3 cites one of those?”

Humphreys, “I don’t think so. But what we are down to now is the interpretation of the verses in Romans, and it’s a very complex subject. What I understand you to be saying is that there is some sort of a tension between God being just on the one hand, or holy, righteous, on the one hand and the justifier on the other hand ....”

Patterson, “I didn’t say it; Paul did.”

Humphreys,

The difficulty is how he could be both. And that’s not how I read the passage .... First of all the word “and” can be translated as you know “even.” And I would understand it to be saying that God is ‘just even the justifier’ .... And that God’s justice, the justice that’s being referred to and has been for about three or four verses there is that justice in which he forgives sinners. That the problem isn’t has God got the right to forgive sinners. That the problem is that we come to understand that God is just—that is he really does forgive sinners. That may not be the interpretation that you would accept, but I am not sure that that verse would authorize us to set up some sort of inner tension in God which places a constraint on him so that when he has made his decision to create and then redeem the world that he has no freedom about how he is going to do that. I think that it is a free choice that he made.

Patterson,

Well, Dr. Humphreys, I have a couple of problems with that. First of all I think that your point, if I followed you correctly, that what is being said there is that he is just being the justifier of them that trust in him, I don’t particularly follow that at all because I don’t see how the fact that he does forgive is necessarily the fact that makes him just. That makes him merciful, but I don’t see how that contributes to justice first of all. Secondly, if there is any chance that you are reading Romans 3 wrong then it seems that it would be unwise for

you to speak of it being unwise to seek a necessity for the cross. It seems like that as long as that's there it would be the only wise thing to do to suggest that there might in fact be a necessity in the cross .... So it seems to me that what you've done in raising the question of the wisdom of speaking of the necessity of the cross is in fact a dangerous move.<sup>39</sup>

After several more interchanges along these lines, Humphreys pressed for a few short summary statements of agreement, to which Patterson clarified specific points of disagreement.

Concerning the issue of penal substitution, Humphreys began by clarifying that he affirmed the concept of substitution in the Bible but that the point of contention surrounds the specific understanding of penal substitution. For example, Humphreys stated that when Matthew 20:28 describes the Son of Man as giving his life as a ransom, it is not a penal substitution as there is no penalty involved. However, Humphreys then said that he believes the account of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and the description of Jesus Christ as "becoming a curse for us" in Galatians 3 are examples of biblical penal substitution. The issue then, for Humphreys, is whether penal substitution is the primary model of the atonement or just one example. Further, he conveyed that penal substitution has some drawbacks in terms of the dilemmas it can create for people. He explained,

[I]n a human law court one person may not be allowed to bear the penalty of another person. I give the one exception of the paying of fines which I would suggest we develop. I would think that would be a good way to do it. But Jesus didn't pay a fine, he died. And in a human law court when Jones is the mass murderer you don't let Smith die for him. And it seems to me to be important that we recognize that and say that openly. And to realize that for thoughtful people at least, for some people, this creates a problem for them. They're saying, "Would God being doing something that looks like it would be wrong if a human judge did it?" If you want to just say that's the way it is, that's fine with me. That's okay, but you haven't explained that's all. What I'm interested in is whether it

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 19-21.

explains or not. That doesn't explain because that diverts people away.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Humphreys explained his understanding of how Leviticus 16 and the rest of the Old Testament atonement texts relate to the death of Christ. He stated his belief that the cross was a sacrifice, Jesus is the High Priest and the paschal Lamb. He believes that the cross relates to the Day of Atonement and also inaugurates a New Covenant. He then explained,

Now, the question I would ask is whether every time you have sacrifice you have punishment? ...Were the animals being punished? The answer is no. There is no picture of punishment there. I don't think there is any picture of punishment. I don't think the lambs were being punished as though there was something penal about it. The one that really looks like punishment is in fact the scapegoat and that's the one that is not used of Jesus. No, this is sacrifice understood in various ways as an *hilasterion*, a propitiation, deflecting the wrath of God from us. The sacrifice saves us from the wrath. Very clear in the Passover we're saved from the wrath of God. We are saved from the wrath of God. There is no doubt about that. Jesus delivered us from the divine judgment. But does the picture of the Passover lamb show him doing that by bearing the divine punishment himself?

Humphreys then answered his own question,

Well it doesn't from the Old Testament. So what I would say is Jesus is the sacrifice who takes away our sins. Sometimes this may get very close to penal. In the case of Isaiah 53 I think it becomes penal. Frequently, usually, and maybe always for all I know it is substitutionary.<sup>41</sup>

Patterson responded quickly to questions Humphreys raised by beginning with Matthew 20:28. With regard to the Son of Man coming as a ransom, Patterson asked,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

What was he freeing them from if it was not to free them from the penalty as well as the presence of sin. Surely, surely, surely the penalty has been exacted and that is part of what they are being freed from, and so I quite disagree with you. Surely penal substitution is involved in Matthew 20:28.<sup>42</sup>

To this and a few other points, Humphreys sought to clarify his views by again affirming his belief that penal substitution is one of the biblical models for understanding the atonement. Patterson replied, and what follows is the exchange revealing the key difference between the two debaters. Patterson stated,

Then we are establishing that penal substitution does in fact run very deeply through the warp and woof of atonement doctrine, aren't we?

Humphreys,

Nothing like a way in which you say it is "the" model of the New Testament. That was the way you put it.

Patterson,

Dr. Humphreys, why sacrifice? Why sacrifice? Why does something have to die?

Humphreys,

Well, you're back to the necessity question aren't you? You're saying why does it have to be this way?

Patterson,

I'm asking you why sacrifice? Why chosen? Why did God chose that?

Humphreys,

I think he chose it because he loves us.

[...]

Patterson,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 29.

But Dr. Humphreys you haven't answered my question. Why did something have to die? Why did he choose sacrifice? .... Or why did God choose sacrifice? Why does sacrifice show his love? Is there no other way he could have shown love?

Humphreys,

Well I think God showed his love in many other ways. Don't you?

Patterson,

I do, too. But why then sacrifice? .... Well why? I don't understand .... You see, I don't understand why you are making a distinction between sacrifice and penal substitution.

[...]

Humphreys,

Well the thing is—the question is whether the animals that were sacrificed were understood by the Hebrew people as bearing the punishment of their sins.

Patterson,

Yes. That's exactly the question.

Humphreys,

The question is not were they understood as delivering the people from their sins. That's clear from the wrath of God. No question about that. They said it over and over again. You will not die if you do these sacrifices and so forth. The question is whether they were understood as being punished. Are you suggesting they were?

Patterson,

Yes, I'm suggesting that exactly. That the penalty for sin is death and that when they put their hands on the head of that goat or that lamb as the case may be and they confessed their sins on the head of that lamb they understood that that lamb, that goat was dying the death that they should die. And that they were going to be free from sin because that guilt had been transferred. Now ultimately that's exactly what John the Baptist does then when he points to Jesus

and says ‘behold the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.’

Humphreys,

Now here’s what’s happening, if—the sacrifice is the dominate picture of the meaning of the cross in the New Testament or in the Bible for that matter. It is the dominate picture. If sacrifice must be read, as Dr. Patterson says, as penal—that the animal is bearing a penalty—then he is correct is saying this is the dominate biblical teaching about the cross. I don’t think that’s true.<sup>43</sup>

#### “A Proposal”: Questions and Closing Statements

After a short break, Humphreys and Patterson returned to answer questions from nine members of the audience. After the questions and discussion, Humphreys was asked to present his closing remarks, and he proceeded to do so in the form of a proposal. Intended as a peace-making gesture, Humphreys read through a series of simple affirmations and then invited Patterson to join him in signing the document. Further, he indicated that his secretary was standing at the back to distribute copies to the audience. The proposal included the following statements,

Over the past several years many Southern Baptists have come to believe that we, Fisher Humphreys and Paige Patterson, hold to radically differing understandings of the atonement made by Jesus Christ. As a gesture of clarification and of peace we offer the following affirmations to our fellow Christians.

First, we believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as historical events which really occurred in the first century.

Second, we believe in the Christian gospel, which is the affirmation “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15).

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

Third, we believe in the truthfulness and authority of all the biblical teachings about the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. For example, Christ was the sacrifice whose blood washed away human sins and created a new covenant between God and man (Matthew 26), Christ was the servant of the Lord who was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our inequities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53). Christ was the incarnate Son of God who went to the cross "that through death he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the devil" (Hebrews 2).

Fourth, we believe that the church should always remember Christ's death and resurrection, and celebrate them, and proclaim them as good news to all the world.

Fifth, finally, we believe in the mystery of the cross. No human understanding of the cross can exhaust the infinite meaning of that unique event in which "God was in Christ reconciling" (2 Corinthians 5).<sup>44</sup>

After reading the proposal, Humphreys asked Patterson if he would sign it. To his stated disappointment, Patterson declined, indicating he could not sign the document without adding the points of significant disagreement revealed throughout the course of the debate. Humphreys expressed his disappointment, and Patterson explained that he felt it was unfair for Humphreys to ask him to sign something he had not seen. Patterson stated that in order to make peace, one does not have to suggest that there is no matter of disagreement. Rather, Patterson believed it was possible for two people to disagree and still have peace.

Lacy Thompson wrote two news stories after the debate, which appeared October 29, 1987, in the *Baptist Message*. Providing a lengthy overview of the central issues, he summarized the event, "Two Southern Baptist theologians discussed their different views of the death of Jesus Christ last week in a public peace-making effort that failed to achieve the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 51.

expectations of at least one of the participants.<sup>45</sup> Focusing on Humphreys' affirmation document, Thompson reported that Humphreys said, "I made a mistake at the end of our discussion. I got carried away. I had prepared an affirmation of the gospel which I felt mistakenly that Dr. Patterson, with all the peace-making he's done would be glad to sign. I embarrassed him, and I have apologized and he has graciously accepted my apology."<sup>46</sup>

### Discussing the Debate

The Humphreys/Patterson debate on the atonement reveals a great deal not only about the views of the participants but also about the state of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1987. SBC conservatives had things well in hand by that fall after surviving the peak years of controversy during 1984-1986. They elected Adrian Rogers to a third term as president, received the report of the Peace Committee in June, 1987, and were on the verge of seeing major transitions in both Southern and Southeastern Seminaries. Yet the subject matter of this debate revealed still the great need for theological examination in all of the Convention's agencies.

Humphreys' denial and uncertainty regarding the necessity of the atonement and the specific penal substitutionary nature of the atonement was not new or novel.<sup>47</sup> Rather, his views reflected the theology of the age rather than the longstanding theology held by the majority of biblical evangelicals dating back to the Reformation and beyond.<sup>48</sup> From 1987 onward, Patterson and Humphreys would continue

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<sup>45</sup> C. Lacy Thompson, "Humphreys, Patterson discuss views of cross," and "Peace-making attempt genuine but ill-planned, professor says," in *Baptist Message*, October 29, 1987, 1,7,9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> For a helpful overview of the history of views regarding this doctrine see Simon Gathercole, *Defending Substitution* (Baker, 2015), 29-54. See also, Garry J. Williams, "Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms," *JETS* 50:1 (March 2007): 71-86.

<sup>48</sup> See Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer, ed., *Atonement* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010), J.I. Packer and

to write in the area of the atonement, and to date neither has changed his view.<sup>49</sup> Humphreys would leave New Orleans for a position at Beeson Divinity School in Alabama in 1990 and would serve there until his retirement in 2008. Patterson would serve as president of Southeastern Seminary (1992-2003) and Southwestern Seminary (2003-Present).

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Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), and John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> For Humphreys, see “The Mystery of the Cross,” in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (Winter 1987): 47-52, “The Humanity of Christ in Some Modern Theologies,” in *Faith and Mission* (Spring 1988): 3-13, “Christ Died for Our Sins According to the Scriptures,” in *CTR 3:2* (1989): 295-305, *The Way We Were* (New York: McCracken Press, 1994, revised ed., Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), “New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary,” in *Encyclopedia of Religious Controversies in the United States*, ed. George H. Shriver and Bill J. Leonard (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), and with Philip Wise, *Fundamentalism* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2004). Rathel, “The Cross and the School of Providence and Prayer,” 31, concludes that “Since the engagement with Patterson, Humphreys has affirmed penal substitution but denies that penal substitution is the primary motif of the New Testament.” In the second edition of *Thinking about God* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 1994), 113-132, in a substantially revised chapter on the Work of Christ, Humphreys does affirm that certain passages do teach penal substitution, but he continues to emphasize that one atonement theme in the Bible should not be elevated above others. (For this, I was helped by Charles Huckaby, who serves in the Roberts Library of Southwestern Seminary, and who also has done capable research on this debate. See Huckaby, “Debating the Atonement: Examining the Humphreys-Patterson Debates of the Inerrancy Controversy,” paper presentation at the Baptist History & Heritage Society, June 2, 2017.) Further, in the third edition of *Thinking about God* (New Orleans, Insight Press, 2016), with which Rathel does not interact, Humphreys offers a further revised chapter on the Work of Christ where much of the second edition language regarding penal substitution and propitiation is removed. Humphreys, 130, concludes, rather, with his consistent theme, “The fact that there are so many biblical ways of thinking about [the Work of Christ] suggests that it is a mystery too great to be understood by any one of them alone.” For Patterson, see “Reflections on the Atonement,” in *CTR 3:2* (1989), 307-320, and reprinted in Bruce A. Little and Mark D. Liederbach, eds., *Defending The Faith, Engaging the Culture: Essays Honoring L. Russ Bush* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), “The Work of Christ,” in *A Theology for the Church*, Daniel L. Akin, ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 596-597; revised edition (2014), 439-480.

## Conclusion

While not considered a major turning point in the Inerrancy Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, a case could be made for attributing greater significance to this overlooked debate on the occasion of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. First, while there were many debates throughout the controversy years, the majority of them concerned epistemology and the defense of biblical inerrancy. One could argue that the Humphreys/Patterson debate was one of the first public events in a SBC seminary to show how a minimized epistemology affects significant and core aspects of one's theology. Second, this debate revealed that there were indeed divergent theological views at seminaries like New Orleans and not just at Southern, Southeastern, Midwestern—the three schools that were the focus of the Convention's Peace Committee Report (1985-1987).<sup>50</sup> Finally, this debate underscores the fact that while there were political issues at play during the Inerrancy Controversy, the primary motivation and the occasion for a conservative movement were rooted in real and crucial theological concerns.

With regard to the motivation of peace-making, Humphreys recounted that he was driven to organize this debate as the result of Clark Pinnock's call for reconciliation at the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy. In his response to Pinnock at the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy, Patterson articulated what he later modeled at the October debate in New Orleans. He stated,

Dr. Pinnock's plea for peace is one which only the unwary souls who have never been under fire could possibly fail to embrace. However, the passion of our Lord calls attention to the enormous cost involved in the purchase of our peace. Therefore, a peace arranged at the price of truth is unthinkable and is, I suspect, a peace that would prove too fragile in this period of testing.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Martin Jacumin, "A Theological and Historical Analysis of The Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee, 1985-1987," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Paige Patterson, "Response to Clark Pinnock," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 86.

Sometimes, the action that will bring about true and lasting peace in the long term requires courage not to compromise under the immediate pressure to accommodate the public pleas for shallow unity and affirmation. The Humphreys/Patterson debate provides the twenty-first century examiner a prescient reminder of this truth.

## BOOK REVIEWS 136-153

***Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love.* By Edward T. Welch. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. 176 pp. \$14.99, Paperback. ISBN 978-1-43354-711-9.**

Ed Welch (PhD, University of Utah) is a well-known biblical counselor, author, and faculty member of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF). In this short volume, Welch offers not only a guide to discipleship, but practical means for believers, and especially members of a local assembly, to walk with each other through life.

The book is structured in two parts: “We Are Needy,” and “We Are Needed,” with each having short chapters applying to one of these major themes. Each chapter is also accompanied by a short section of questions to facilitate discussion, most likely for a small group or one-on-one settings.

In the first part, “We Are Needy,” Welch addresses the difficulty of life that all of us experience, even as those who have been redeemed by Christ. He speaks of this by focusing on the heaviness and busyness of our hearts and what happens when those two factors meet. He then speaks of the weight of sin on our hearts. All of this is to get us to the point of knowing that we need help and need to be willing to ask for help both from the Lord and from others. The whole thrust of this argument is that we would learn to trust others enough within the local church to be transparent and seek their help as we also seek the Lord.

In the second part, “We Are Needed,” Welch begins to unpack the ways in which members of the local church really can walk side by side. He begins this section with the reminder that we have the Spirit as the foundation by which we can truly help others. From there he initiates a pathway to breaking down the barriers we often feel in being transparent and building the kind of relationships we truly need and should have within the local church. He encourages the reader to move from simply greeting one another toward more intimate relationships where true helping can thrive.

There is really nothing to critique within the book. In fact, for such a compact work, Welch handles a lot of information skillfully. This volume would be helpful for elders to read through together as a means to develop a structure for a healthy discipleship environment in their local assembly. It might be something that, after reading together, the leadership would encourage their small groups or main disciple-makers

to go through as well. In this manner the book can serve as a reminder and encouragement of what living life together as a local church ought to look like. I highly recommend this little book as a way of having a big impact on a local community of believers who desire to not only come to church as an event, but be the church to one another in all of life.

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***Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the World of the Prophets.* By Aaron Chalmers. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. xiv + 173pp. \$24.00 Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8308-2468-7.**

*Interpreting the Prophets* by Aaron Chalmers seeks to fill a void among textbooks on the prophets. Chalmers teaches Old Testament and Hermeneutics at Tabor Adelaide, Australia. He is the head of the School of Ministry, Theology, and Culture at Tabor Adelaide and has also authored *Exploring the Religion of Ancient Israel*. He notes that most prophetic textbooks that focus only on the content of the prophetic books produce students who can simply parrot back the interpretations of others. Seeking to address this issue, Chalmers desired to write a book that teaches the “skills which are required to read the prophets well” and the needed “conceptual framework” (xi, 1). While still noting content where appropriate, *Interpreting the Prophets* focuses more on the tools needed for interpretation and can be used as a supplement to more content-based textbooks.

*Interpreting the Prophets* is comprised of six chapters covering (i) the question of “What is a prophet?” as well as the three “worlds” of the prophets—(ii) the historical world, (iii) the theological world, and (iv) the rhetorical world—(v) an exploration of apocalyptic literature, and (vi) a discussion of how to preach from the prophets. In chapter one, Chalmers notes contemporary understandings of the term prophet. He then turns to an inductive study of the Old Testament and concludes that a prophet is a member of the divine council, called by God, a communicator of the

Word of the Lord, an intercessor, and a sentinel. He also discusses ancient Near Eastern prophets (9), and the Hebrew terms *hōzeh*, *ro'eh*, and *nābi'* (11). The move from the prophetic word to prophetic book is described in three steps: (i) oral to written words, (ii) written to collected words, and (iii) collected words to prophetic books.

Chapter two, concerning the historical world of the prophet, is built on the premise that the prophetic books assume a shared knowledge with their intended audience that modern interpreters now lack. Drawing upon insights from archeology and utilizing maps, time charts, and images, a historical sketch of the time frame for the writing prophets is given. This section covers the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians while also noting the highs and lows of the northern and southern Israelite kingdoms. In this chapter, Chalmers also provides helpful guidelines for gleaning from secondary sources.

The Sinai covenant and the Davidic covenant with its attendant Zion theology are understood to be foundational to the theological world of the prophets in chapter three (68). Chalmers describes these important theological moments and exhibits how the prophets were not innovators, but those who built their messages upon this rich theological heritage. The chapter concludes with helpful guidelines for the student to identify theological terms and traditions within the prophetic works (85–86).

The majority of prophetic literature is poetry (118) and thus needs to be interpreted as such. Chalmers spends chapter four explaining literary devices such as parallelism, metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, hendiadys, and merism. He also explains how to discern a literary unit and goes on to discuss some of the prophetic forms, including judgment, salvation, disputation, lawsuit, vision report, and symbolic action. He is balanced throughout and cautions the eager interpreter not to be dogmatic, as the prophets were not slaves to the forms but utilized them for their own purposes (108).

Chalmers understands the apocalyptic genre to be a “subset of prophecy” which “grows out of prophecy” (121). In chapter five, he distinguishes it from traditional prophecy, since it (i) emphasizes a visionary revelation, (ii) often has a narrative framework, (iii) is mediated by a third party, and (iv) focuses on the end of history. In chapter six—preaching the prophets—Chalmers, in essence, continues to teach the skill of interpretation, but now addresses how to bridge the

chasm from “there” to “here,” or in other words, how to apply the prophetic books to today. In this chapter, he engages popular hermeneutical strategies, including the promise-fulfillment framework.

This work is impressive for how much it covers in so little space, while also making scholarly content accessible to the average reader. For example, Chalmers exposes the reader to tradition criticism, in chapter three, and to form criticism in chapter four, yet without the jargon. Tradition and form criticism for Chalmers have an immediate exegetical payoff and he helps the reader see this. Throughout his work, Chalmers also maintains a very balanced position on some of the disputed issues surrounding the prophets. For example, he rightly claims that there is very little evidence for schools of prophetic disciples (26). Redaction of prophetic literature may have begun with the prophet himself, yet it is “impossible to know how closely the written words matched the spoken word” of the prophet (26). With regard to the question of second-Isaiah, he writes, “It is clear, however, that even if these chapters are not the product of a separate prophetic figure, they are addressing a different historical context” (57 n 11).

Evangelicals have often been overly dogmatic on some of these issues that are unprovable, and Chalmers helpfully redirects them to the text versus what occurs behind the text. He argues that inspiration is located in the book, rather than the prophet, and that the interpreter ought to focus on the text, not the process of its origin (31). However, in turning to the text he does not advocate a reader-response hermeneutic, but advocates for the attempt to discover the authorial intention for the original audience (112).

Each chapter contains not only a section on guidelines for interpretation, but also potential problems to avoid. This is particularly relevant in the chapters on apocalyptic literature and preaching, in which Chalmers critiques an overly literal and historical interpretation (as promoted, for example, by Hal Lindsay) that is still popular in many churches today. He also critiques the promise-fulfillment approach to bridge the gap from Old to New Testament and cites Baumgärtel who states the existential irrelevance of typology (159).

While Chalmers is right that the promise-fulfillment approach can render the text irrelevant—focusing only on Christ and not how it also applies to the Christian—it could be argued that this occurs only when the promise-fulfillment approach is used in a truncated fashion.

Chalmers himself unabashedly argues for a Christian hermeneutic that seeks the fulfillment of the Old in the New Testament:

...the prophetic revelation must be taken through the lens of the New Testament to see what light it sheds on the themes, ideas and critiques the prophets raise. To put it bluntly, we cannot let the prophets themselves have the last word: to preach a sermon on an Old Testament prophetic passage without considering the teaching of the New Testament means that we are not engaging in truly *Christian* proclamation (154).

Moreover, the last two paragraphs of chapter six, in which Chalmers briefly explains how to understand Matthew's use of Isaiah seven, could be viewed as typology proper, contra Baumgärtel's caricature (160–162).

*Interpreting the Prophets* is an accessible, evangelical, and very practical handbook on how to exegete the prophets that handsomely supplements the traditional textbook that merely focuses on the content. Its function in the classroom should be evident, but it would also benefit the Christian wanting to dig a little deeper in order to learn how to understand this unique body of literature. Chalmers has succeeded in teaching the attentive reader how to fish for themselves.

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***Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus. (Transformative Word) By Daniel L. Akin. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. 81 pp. \$9.99. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1683590606.***

In a commendation of this slim little commentary, David Allen rightly describes it as a “wonderful little volume on a wonderful little book in the New Testament.” Part of a new series of commentaries from Lexham Press being edited by Craig Bartholomew and David Beldman, this commentary by Danny Akin, the President of Southeastern Baptist

Theological Seminary, is both practical and grounded in some of the key works of scholarship on this rich Pauline text.

An introductory chapter (1–5) provides an overview of the book and the key themes of the letter. With regard to the latter, Akin notes that “being... zealous for good works” is one of two major themes in the letter (4; see also 81, n.9), though curiously Akin does not mention it as a reason for the letter (5). Surely, central to Paul’s writing of this letter is the encouragement to believers to be ardent in the pursuit of doing good.

Eight chapters follow in which the text is carefully explained and reflection questions provided that help the reader deepen his or her understanding of the text and its application to life. Significantly Akin does not ignore or gloss over current debates about the interpretation of certain sections of the letter, such as the meaning of a “one-woman man” from Titus 1:6 (13), the role of women in the life of the church (30–35), and the importance of church discipline (63–70). Four of the chapters contain small-print excurses that deal with manhood and womanhood (36–38), slavery (43), the extent of God’s salvation (49), and church discipline (64). The footnotes at the end of the book (73–81) support Akin’s arguments, but also reveal the way he has carefully interacted with both the original text and also scholarship on the book of Titus.

All in all, this is an impressive and very helpful addition to the Lexham Press series.

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***Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon.* Ched Spellman. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014. 294 pp. \$110.00, Hardcover. ISBN 978-1909697263.**

In *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon*, Ched Spellman argues that the Christian canon serves as a hermeneutical control for the interpretative task. As

such, the concept of canon both “*guides and governs* biblical readers” (3). Spellman, Assistant Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Cedarville University, divides this work into five chapters.

In chapter one, Spellman provides the groundwork for the formation of and the definition of “canon,” as this chapter is an overview of the current state of research of the canon. Spellman helpfully provides an overview of significant historical figures (Zahn, von Harnack, Sundberg) and the distinctions they drew between “canon” and “Scripture” (23–32), as well as a brief overview of contemporary dialogue. He concludes noting that although many “traditional treatments of canon formation deal solely with external historical evidence and rely on extra-biblical references to biblical books or the canonical collection” (44), there is “a growing consensus that internal evidence from the biblical texts themselves can also shed light on the canon formation process” (45).

Chapter two focuses on “The Nature of Canon-Consciousness,” and Spellman distinguishes between Canon 1 and Canon 2. Canon 1 provides a broad understanding of what canon means, whereas Canon 2 describes a narrower understanding, or closed list of canon (46–47). Spellman navigates the reader through the detailed discussion of canon formation and argues that the early church inherited a canon and they “never existed without one” (99). He also shows the “canon-consciousness” of the biblical authors and their awareness of other biblical texts (60–82, esp. 65).

Chapter three discusses “The Canonical Feature of Contextuality,” in which Spellman notes that contextuality can be either “mere” or “meant.” Mere contextuality “is the effect that arises in the mind of the reader when writings are seen in relation to other writings” (110), and meant contextuality relates to how a particular group of writings is connected to the other works as deemed by someone else (120). For example, the Hebrew Bible concludes with Chronicles (123–128) and the New Testament concludes with Revelation (128–140). The location of these works within the biblical canon itself should be taken into consideration in the process of their interpretation.

Chapter four, “Intertextuality within the Canonical Context” examines the quotations, allusions, and echoes found throughout both Testaments. Spellman notes that it “is difficult to read any part of the canon without hearing ‘rumbles of intertextuality’” (148). Indeed, a

biblical author may employ an intertextual quotation from the Old Testament in the New Testament (154), an intertextual allusion (156), or an intertextual echo, which is simply a subtype of an intertextual allusion (159). It would appear, then, that the way to perform a “canon-conscious” reading of the Scriptures would be to pay attention to the intertextual (and contextual) links and to view the Bible as a coherent work that has been stitched together by these references.

The final chapter, “Identifying and Becoming the Ideal Reader of the Biblical Canon,” is a fitting conclusion to this work as it exhorts the reader to become the ideal reader of the biblical text. As is typical of Spellman, this chapter is full of the literary work that pertains to this discussion. Notable, though, is his section on how to identify with the implied readers of the biblical text. To seek understanding of the Scriptures is to confront oneself with the implied reader of the biblical text (200). The reader must “submit to the restraints of the implied reader” (201). This reader is nonetheless a Christian disciple of Jesus who “skillfully reads [the] texts” and can “follow the author’s intention” (205).

Spellman’s work is highly technical. If a reader is unfamiliar with the discussion of canon formation, the canonical approach, contextuality, or intertextuality, this book is not the place to start. However, this technical language does not make the work inaccessible. Those who persevere are rewarded with a coherent argument for how the Christian canon informs the interpretative method. Even though no new evidence regarding the Old Testament’s canonical function is provided, Spellman’s discussions of key figures within the canonical method (Childs, Sailhamer, etc.) are particularly helpful and informative.

Not all will agree with this approach, particularly his discussion of intertextuality and the canon setting the boundaries for interpretation. This, of course, would exclude ancient Near Eastern accounts that may correspond to biblical stories from the Old Testament or the Greco-Roman background for the New Testament. But this is to be expected. Spellman’s work seeks to produce a canon-conscious reader of the Bible, not background studies.

However, a discussion regarding when background studies are appropriate would have been helpful. For example, the “headdress” discussion in 1 Cor 11 has no appropriate biblical or canonical comparison. What is one to make of this canonically? Furthermore, a brief discussion regarding the difference between the Hebrew Bible and

that of the Septuagint would have been helpful. Although Spellman does mention this (Appendix I, II), there is no discussion regarding the differing locations of these works. Are Chronicles (and other works) to be interpreted differently because of their location within the Septuagint versus their place in the Hebrew Bible?

*Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible* will challenge the reader to seriously consider the implications of a canonical hermeneutic. Spellman is thorough, clear, and persuasive in his exhortation for the Christian disciple to become the ideal reader of the Scripture. Although not everyone will agree with everything Spellman argues, this is a helpful work that sheds further light on how the canon influences interpretation.

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***The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them.* By Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock. Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2016. 172 pp. \$9.97, Paperback. ISBN 978-1-78191-764-0.**

Certain questions linger throughout the ages: *What is the meaning of life? How did we get here? Who am I?* While some may attempt to skirt the first two, nobody can escape the third. A person's humanity confronts him on a daily basis. What does it mean to be a human being? Further, what does it mean to be a *male* human or a *female* human? According to the authors, modernity's prevailing answers have been unsatisfactory: "There has never been an age when masculinity and femininity have been so confused" (51).

In *The Grand Design*, authors Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock celebrate the Bible's answers regarding humanity by showcasing the beauty of complementarianism. It is no light issue: "Our earthly complementarity in marriage, all aspects of it, points to the heavenly complementarity between Jesus and His people" (161). The authors bring a wealth of insight to the topic: Strachan serves as Associate

Professor of Christian Theology and the Director of the Center for Public Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, and Peacock, a former professional footballer (or, in American lingo, soccer player), is the Director of International Outreach for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and a pastor at Calvary Grace Church in Calgary, Alberta.

The introduction sets a doxological tone as the authors argue that complementarianism should be understood not as “a sentence to misery but as a summons to happiness” (15). Chapter One outlines the core contours of complementarianism. While men and women, both created in the *imago dei*, share equal value and worth, God has intentionally designed men and women differently in terms of biology and role. This design lifts the eyes onto the mystery of Christ and the Church, telling the story of the gospel. Chapters Two and Three explore biblical manhood and womanhood and the God-ordained differences between the two. Chapter Four examines the practical outworking of these differences in the family, church, and culture at large. What does complementarianism look like in day-to-day life? How should husbands and wives interact in light of their differences? How does complementarianism inform how parents raise children? These questions and more are answered as the authors exhort readers to submit to the authority of God’s Word in these vital areas of life. Chapter Five brings biblical teaching to bear against our hyper-sexualized age. It reveals the incompatibility of homosexuality and transgenderism with the biblical vision of gender and sexuality. Further, it equips readers to lovingly and winsomely engage those who struggle with sexual sin. Chapter Six argues that complementarianism is not a doctrine to be simply jettisoned, regardless of cultural hostility (146). The book concludes with a summons to embrace the entirety of biblical teaching, including the portrait of biblical manhood and womanhood (169).

*The Grand Design* is an excellent introduction to complementarianism, and is of vital importance to contemporary evangelicalism. It orients readers to the importance and value of correctly understanding biblical manhood and womanhood. The book lifts high the biblical text even when it collides with current secular anthropology. It is sweeping in its application of Scripture to relevant topics of the present cultural hour.

Perhaps the most obvious addition the authors bring to the complementarian conversation is their distinctly positive tone. It is a book that argues what complementarianism is *for*, not strictly *against*. This is not to say that other complementarian works are overly negative; however, *The Grand Design* is crafted with a deliberate joy. Readers leave delighting in the differences between men and women rather than shying away from them. Because of this approach, the book serves as a helpful corrective to common misperceptions and mischaracterizations of complementarianism. Specifically, the authors go to great lengths in arguing that men are not superior to women in any way; indeed, “women are just as gifted as men” (76). The book routinely highlights the gifts of women. It stresses that men and women are not inferior to one another; however, God has designed differences so that men and women, husbands and wives, families and cultures may flourish according to God’s wisdom.

Before reading the book, this reviewer was concerned that certain persons may be left out of the discussion, namely singles. This reservation was quickly alleviated. *The Grand Design* speaks to every reader’s station in life, both the married and unmarried. The authors remind singles that “a woman doesn’t become a biblical woman when she gets married, in the same way that a man doesn’t need marriage to be masculine” (76). Singles do not bear an inferior status in the church. Rather than treating singles as a fringe minority, *The Grand Design* shows that they are as much a part of the body of Christ as those who are married and play a significant role in the Great Commission.

Another helpful feature of *The Grand Design* is that even though the book targets a general audience, it provides numerous footnotes for those interested in further research. These footnotes serve as a running bibliography of the most important complementarian works of the last three decades (as well as other works related to the topic). In these footnotes, the authors have left a venerable trail to follow as readers explore God’s design for manhood and womanhood in even greater depth.

While the book contains numerous strengths, one hesitation and one critique may be added. First, readers should be aware of one deeper conversation regarding complementarianism and Trinitarian theology that *The Grand Design* explores. Specifically, the authors posit that the Son eternally submits to the authority of the Father and that this

relationship should inform one's understanding of gender roles. It should be noted that Trinitarian relationships, while emphasized, are not the *sole linchpin* for the authors' understanding of manhood and womanhood. Throughout the book, the creation ideal of Genesis 1 and 2 and various New Testament passages play a central role in defending the book's thesis. Therefore, it seems the authors could avoid this contested Trinitarian view and yet articulate the same complementarian vision using the above passages. Nonetheless, even readers who disagree with the authors on this particular Trinitarian point still stand to benefit from their work.

Second, the book would be strengthened through more interaction with the alternative position—egalitarianism. Certainly, *The Grand Design* aims to display the beauty of biblical complementarianism, not survey other views at length. However, greater attention to how egalitarians arrive at their position may better equip readers to engage with them in constructive dialogue.

Despite these two critiques, *The Grand Design* is a superb volume that should occupy a high spot on the list of resources that pastors and leaders utilize as they disciple others in this pressing area. The book lends itself both to individual reading and to discipleship or group settings. Concise, robust, and well written, it will challenge and encourage readers to see the beauty behind God's design for men, women, singleness, marriage, and parenting. It helps answer the question "Who am I?" in light of the Great I AM.

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***The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers.* By Tony Merida. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016. 300 pp. \$29.99. Paperback. ISBN 13-978-1433685743.**

Preaching displays the glory of God as faithful men point others to the Lord Jesus Christ by expounding the Bible in the power of God's Spirit. To faithfully proclaim Christ and His Word, the preacher must both cultivate personal devotion and stir up a gift for teaching.

Tony Merida is well qualified to help preachers consider their character and mission. Since 2001, he has acquired substantial experience and training in the ministry of the Word, including a Ph.D. in preaching and service as a pastor and a preaching professor. *The Christ-Centered Expositor* is a revision of his 2009 book, *Faithful Preaching*, and maintains the same methodology while refocusing and adding material.

The book defines the task and goal of exposition, engages the preacher about heart issues, overviews the process of sermon preparation and delivery, and provides several practical tools as appendices. The two major divisions of the book focus on the expositor's heart and his message. Appendices include a historical sketch of preaching, advice for preaching in non-pulpit contexts such as weddings and funerals, a sermon outline sheet, and a sermon evaluation form.

The expositor is one who seeks to "responsibly, passionately, and authentically declare the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God" (12). Merida notes that the expositor must draw personal nourishment from Christ and the Word, pursuing Christlikeness through the spiritual disciplines, such as Bible intake, prayer and repentance, and living in community with the church. He must love the Scriptures, which testify to Christ, and love to preach Christ from the Scriptures. He must rely on the Spirit's power and cultivate a vibrant prayer life, since he must receive power from God for a life and ministry that please Him. The expositor must be shaped by an all-consuming desire for God to be glorified in his life, including his preaching and teaching.

To preach expository sermons, the preacher must cultivate his relationship with God and labor in his study of the Word. Merida writes, "Expository preaching involves explaining what God has said in his Word, declaring what God has done in his Son, and applying the message to the

hearts of people” (16). To preach in this way, he gives five steps for one’s sermon preparation: 1) study the text; 2) unify the redemptive theme; 3) construct an outline; 4) develop the functional elements; and 5) add an introduction and a conclusion.

Faithfully preaching the Bible starts with carefully studying the Bible. As the preacher digs into the text of Scripture, he must not only locate it in its immediate historical and literary contexts, but in the bigger picture of God’s plan of redemption in Christ as it unfolds throughout the Bible. He must find the main point of the text “through careful exegesis of the selected passage” and then develop the main point of the sermon “in view of the meaning of the text, the redemptive elements in the text, in light of our particular audience and occasion” (152). The outline should flow from and support the main point of the sermon while also reflecting the structure of the text. Explanation, application, and illustration further augment the outline by demonstrating the clarity, relevance, and authority of God’s Word. Having a clear grasp of the sermon’s point and outline, the preacher is ready to develop an introduction to raise interest and orient hearers to the text and a conclusion that calls for a proper response to the Word. Merida states that through these steps, the preacher’s study yields an expository message from which he may prepare a manuscript or brief notes. Regardless of the written aids used, the expositor needs to pray over and internalize the message before preaching. While each preacher has his own personality, he must avoid distracting behaviors and seek to clearly and passionately communicate the unchanging gospel, while addressing challenges of diverse worldviews and biblical illiteracy.

*The Christ-Centered Expositor* is a strong addition to the multitude of preaching handbooks. Merida effectively integrates and balances the spiritual life of the preacher with the mechanics of preaching, keeping the focus on Christ in both areas. This integration distinguishes the book, since many preaching books focus on the technical aspects of preparation and delivery of the sermon, while assuming or ignoring the preparation of the preacher and the “Christocentric emphasis” present throughout the whole Bible (54). The preacher must be continually transformed by the gospel and His relationship with Christ, and must continually proclaim Christ as he studies and shares the message of the text. The book effectively breaks down a five-step method which beginning preachers can use and from which experienced preachers can

learn. Chapters conclude with summaries, followed by study questions or exercises which can be used to practice the concepts. By including a substantial bibliography, a sermon outline template, and a sermon evaluation form, the book offers further help for preparing and assessing one's sermons. While Merida interacts with other preaching books, cites sources, and uses theological terms and categories, he still writes in an accessible, clear style. These features make *The Christ-Centered Expositor* suitable for a preacher's self-study, useful as a discipleship resource for mentoring, and commendable as a potential textbook, supplemental reading, or book review option in a formal preaching or ministry class.

With all of the aforementioned positives, one small critique can be made. While the book follows a helpful flow and organization, chapter fourteen, "Contextualize the Message," seems out of place after the chapters on sermon preparation and delivery. A treatment of contextualization might have been better located near or integrated with chapter eleven, "Step 4: Develop the Functional Elements," especially since it intersects with the element of application, requiring serious consideration of how Scripture speaks to modern cultural challenges. Such consideration should influence the message *before* the expositor stands to preach.

In the end, the fact remains that in any age and culture, the faithful expositor must be one who seeks to glorify God through preaching Christ and His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. *The Christ-Centered Expositor* provides fresh encouragement and instruction for such preachers and deserves to be widely read and used.

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***The Paradox of Generosity.* By Christian Smith & Hilary Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 261 pp. \$33.95, Hardback. ISBN 978-0-19-939490-6.**

There is no doubt that generosity plays a large role in Christian theology. Proverbs 11:24-25 and Acts 20:35 state that those who give also receive.

One could cite Matthew 20:16 as the great paradox of the Christian life: “The last shall be first.” Jesus was the most generous man who ever lived (he gave his life for those who hated him) and because of this, he gained more than anyone will ever achieve (the name above every name, Philippians 2:8-11). Is this paradox only true for the Christian, or is it true for all? Though the thesis of *The Paradox of Generosity* is not driven by a Christian agenda, Smith and Davidson set out to prove that those who live generously live more fulfilled and happy lives than those who are ungenerous.

The authors move through scientific, economic, and sociological theories to build their case for generosity’s paradox. In chapter 1, surveys given to Americans are summarized in graphs which show those who are more generous with their time and resources enjoy life more. For example, one chart shows that those who describe themselves as “extremely generous” also describe themselves as being in excellent health (34). The opposite is true for those who describe themselves as “extremely ungenerous.” This is one of the many ways the data from the surveys imply that generosity affects a person’s overall happiness. Though the data is compelling, the survey questions are subjective at their core. How does one determine *what* generosity means to an individual person? How does one discern the differences between “very generous” and “somewhat generous?” At most, the authors can only say definitively that people who *perceive* themselves to be generous often also *perceive* themselves to be happy.

Chapter 2 does, however, give helpful caveats. The authors explain that the data collected should not imply strict causation: “Some of the most generous people can actually struggle with personal finances and health difficulties” (50-51). People with a lot of money are not always generous, people who are generous are not always happy, and people who are happy are not always generous. With these clarifications in the background, the authors then posit nine different tendencies of people who are generous. These tendencies include physical healthiness, strong social networks, and general selflessness. The authors describe these effects of generosity as “positive psychological consequences,” yet for the Christian, these effects can only be described as holistic obedience to Jesus (63). Everything the world calls a “psychological consequence” of generosity is, in Christian terms, the reality of a life lived in adherence to

the Word of God. We are generous because of Jesus. We are not social, healthy, or selfless because of our generosity.

The remainder of *The Paradox of Generosity* (chapters 3-5) is full of case studies, stories, and interviews about generous and ungenerous people. Though the stories shed light on cycles of ungenerosity, they do not necessarily convince the reader of measurable evidence that “those who give their resources away, receive back in turn” (224).

In chapter 4, for example, the authors share a short story of a lady named Sarah Walker in Michigan. Sarah is a mother of eight who desires to further her education and work experience. She does not pursue her goals because she “feels stuck,” the authors write (156). Yet the authors declare that the reason for Sarah’s lack of motivation is because of her lack of generosity. Nowhere in Sarah’s story does she (or the authors, for that matter) mention that Sarah is ungenerous. Maybe she is greedy, but even if she does not give to the poor, share her time with those in need, or volunteer, it may not be the reason she feels stuck. There could be a plethora of other reasons, including discontentment with her season of life, which could not be fixed by tithing or volunteering more.

This example is helpful to show some of the inconsistencies in the authors’ use of case studies to bolster their thesis. Humans are complex. Humans are sinful. The authors do well to show instances where greedy behavior is attached to other negative feelings or circumstances, and where generosity is often connected to other positive behaviors. However, these instances where a generous person is also a kind, moral, and happy person may be true in some cases, but not all.

Overall, the authors successfully defend their thesis in part. To some degree, Smith and Davidson prove that generous people are often happier than ungenerous people. But this is as far as the statement can go. It cannot be absolute because the authors do not make this declaration from a biblical worldview. The Bible is the missing element to the thesis of *The Paradox of Generosity*. The Bible reverses the thesis. Instead of generous people receiving happiness and a fuller life because of their generosity, the Bible states that because we are given all things by God and *He* provides all good things through Jesus, we give freely (Matthew 10:8, James 1:17). Proverbs 11:25 and 22:9 say that God will bless generosity. Yet we cannot be generous unless God first gives to us. This is the true paradox of generosity. God gave to us so that we can give

back to Him and others. *The Paradox of Generosity* states that when man gives, he receives. The Bible says that when God gives, we receive.

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