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In This Issue

Included in this issue of *Reformed Faith & Practice* are selections from two new books. Guy Richard's analysis of the covenant of redemption is a chapter from *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, a collection of 27 essays by members of the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary. We offer Dr. Richard's study to whet readers' appetites for the book that Crossway will release in late October.

Nancy Guthrie is a popular writer, blogger, and conference speaker, as well as a student at RTS Global. In all of these labors, she strives, in her own words, "to infiltrate women's Bible studies in the local church with biblical theology." We are pleased to include an excerpt from her latest book, *God Does His Best Work on Empty*, published this month by Tyndale House, along with a brief interview with her. Together, these pieces show and tell how to present redemptive-historical studies of the Bible in an accessible way.

We are grateful to Crossway and Tyndale House for permissions to publish these essays.

The newest addition to the faculty of the Washington, DC campus of RTS is Dr. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto. His reflection on the recent translation of Herman Bavinck's *Christian Worldview* (on which he collaborated) is based on a lecture he delivered at RTS Washington, just prior to his appointment.

JRM

The Covenant of Redemption

Guy M. Richard

Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta

Perhaps the most questionable element of historic federal theology is the covenant of redemption—the idea that there is a pre-temporal agreement between the persons of the Trinity to plan and carry out the redemption of the elect. Many people today have reservations about the biblical warrant for such an idea.¹ The biblical proof-texts employed to support it have come under a fair amount of criticism in recent years. Moreover, there is a sense in which the covenant of redemption feels speculative and unnecessary, because it deals with things happening within the mind of God before the creation of time, and because it seems to run counter to the unity of God. If God really is one God with one mind and will, then why would there need to be a covenant between the persons of the Trinity to establish agreement between them? Would there not already be agreement by virtue of the fact that all three persons share one and the same mind and will?² The covenant of redemption has, for all these reasons, fallen upon hard times within the Reformed community at large.

But the covenant of redemption was not always so suspect. It was, in fact, a commonly accepted idea from at least the middle part of the seventeenth century until the early twentieth century. From the moment it was formally expressed in writing, the covenant of redemption was embraced almost universally within the Reformed world with a speed that is quite astonishing. What was it that led our forefathers in the post-Reformation period to embrace this doctrine so universally and so quickly? We will seek to answer this question by exploring the biblical and

¹ The influence of Karl Barth and, to a lesser degree, John Murray, Herman Hoeksema, and Robert Letham, helped to cultivate many of these reservations in regard to the covenant of redemption within the broader Reformed world. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 64-6; Murray, “The Plan of Salvation,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 130; Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1966), 285-336; Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 196.

² Barth offers a similar criticism to this in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 65; as does Letham in “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 196.

theological rationale that made the covenant of redemption a staple within Reformed orthodoxy so quickly and for so long. My hope is that, in doing this, we will all be able to see the beauty that our forefathers saw in this doctrine. In the course of fulfilling my intended goal, this chapter will survey the origins and development of the covenant of redemption, and then it will explore the biblical and theological rationale that have been used to support it.

Origins and Development

The precise origin of the covenant of redemption is difficult to pinpoint. David Dickson was apparently the first to speak of it by name in a speech he gave to the General Assembly of the Scottish church in 1638.³ After that, we see it appear in a good many treatises published in the 1640s.⁴ But there are hints that the covenant of redemption may have predated all of these occurrences. Johannes Oecolampadius, for instance, specifically referred to a covenant between the Father and the Son in 1525. And it is quite possible that Martin Luther had this same idea in mind as early as 1519.⁵ Theodore Beza, too, may well have been speaking of a pre-temporal covenant when, in his translation of Luke 22:29, he said in 1567 that the Father had “made a covenant with” the Son, which he linked to the eternal testament of Hebrews 9.⁶

These hints at the existence of a pre-temporal intra-Trinitarian covenant continued to be visible to a greater or lesser degree throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the writings of men like Caspar Olevianus, Guillaume Budé, John Calvin, William Ames, Paul Bayne, and Edward Reynolds. Even men from the

³ Alexander Peterkin, ed., *Records of the Kirk of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Sutherland, 1838), 158.

⁴ David Dickson, *Expositio analytica omnium apostolicarum epistolarum* (Glasgow, 1645); Thomas Goodwin, *Encouragements to Faith drawn from several Engagements both of Gods [and] Christs heart* (London, 1645); Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (London, 1645); Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant* (London, 1646); and John Owen, *Salus electorum, sanguinis Jesu* (London, 1647); Johannes Cocceius, *Summa doctrina de foedere et testamento Dei* (Leiden, 1648); and David Dickson and James Durham, *The Summe of Saving Knowledge* (1648; Edinburgh, 1671).

⁵ See, e.g., Johannes Oecolampadius, *In Iesaiam prophetam hypomnematōn, hoc est, commentariorum, Ioannis Oecolampadii libri vi* (Basel, 1525), 268r (Isaiah 55:3); and Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1519), in *Luther's Werke* (Weimar), 2:521.

⁶ Richard A. Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 40.

opposite side of the theological spectrum were willing to speak of a covenant between the Father and the Son. James Arminius did so as early as 1603; and he defined this covenant as a voluntary arrangement to accomplish the salvation of humankind.⁷

It was not until later in the seventeenth century, however, that these hints became expressed much more concretely and the phrase covenant of redemption began regularly to appear. And within a very short period of time, this covenant secured a standard place in contemporary expressions of federal theology. A survey of the writings of men like Thomas Blake, Anthony Burgess, Samuel Rutherford, John Bunyan, Patrick Gillespie, Herman Witsius, and James Durham, and of confessional documents like the Savoy Declaration, the Helvetic Consensus, and the Second London Baptist Confession, will show just how widespread the doctrine of the covenant of redemption became in the latter half of the seventeenth century.⁸

The surprising thing is how rapidly this happened and how little opposition there was to this covenant. Richard Muller has argued that “the seemingly sudden appearance of the doctrine as a virtual truism” within a relatively few years in the 1630s and 40s, suggests that the sixteenth century references were in fact more than merely hints and that the covenant of redemption developed gradually over time from the very beginning of the Reformation. Although the terminology “covenant of redemption” was not used until Dickson’s speech in 1638, the groundwork that would later produce the doctrine was in place long before that.⁹

This evidence further suggests that this doctrine was perceived as being overwhelmingly evident to the ministers and theologians of the latter half of the

⁷ James Arminius, “Oration 1: The Object of Theology,” in *The Works of James Arminius*, eds. James and William Nichols, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 1:415-17.

⁸ Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae foederis* (1653; London, 1658), 14-15; Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated* (London, 1654), 375-7; Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh, 1655), 282-315; John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1660), in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor, 3 vols. (1854; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 1:522-3, 525-6; Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1677); Herman Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* (Leeuwarden, 1677), trans. as *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (London, 1822), 2.2-3; James Durham, *Christ Crucified, or The Marrow of the Gospel* (Edinburgh, 1683), 154-64; *Savoy Declaration* (1658), §8.1; *Helvetic Consensus* (1675), §13; and *Second London Baptist Confession* (1689), §8.1.

⁹ Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*,” 14.

seventeenth century. Rather than seeing the covenant of redemption as unbiblical, speculative, and unnecessary, these men saw it both as biblically and theologically essential and as exceedingly practical. The question is, why? What biblical and theological rationale led these men to embrace this doctrine so overwhelmingly?

Biblical Rationale

The people of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wholeheartedly embraced the covenant of redemption for one overarching reason: they believed that the Bible taught it. And they believed it did so in three main ways. First, they argued that the language of Scripture pointed to the covenant of redemption; second, that the recorded dialogues between the Father and the Son also pointed to it; and third, that the teaching of several individual passages proved that it was true.

Language of Scripture

The Bible frequently uses language that is highly suggestive of a pre-temporal agreement existing between the Father and the Son. According to Dickson, the Bible does this in three fundamental ways. First, it regularly speaks of the salvation of the elect in terms of buying and selling (e.g., Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18). But, as Dickson pointed out, buying and selling presume that prior agreement has been reached regarding the terms of the deal. Second, the titles which are given to Jesus in the Bible indicate that there must have been some kind of prior agreement between the Father and the Son. Thus, the fact that Jesus is called our “propitiation” in Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2, is evidence that an agreement must have been reached beforehand in which the Son consented to give his life as a propitiatory sacrifice and the Father consented to accept it. Third, Jesus regularly speaks about his mission on earth in terms that imply there was prior agreement between himself and the Father. So, we see Jesus talk about the Father “sending” him into the world, “giving” him a specific “work” to do, and investing him with authority to do it; and we also see Jesus “receiving” his Father’s “charge,” devoting himself to his Father’s “business,” and accomplishing the specific work he has been given to do (e.g., Luke 2:49; John 5:36-7; 6:38; 10:18; 17:4).¹⁰ All of these things suggest that an agreement has been made

¹⁰ David Dickson, *Therapeutica sacra* (Edinburgh, 1664), 23-34. See also Durham, *Christ Crucified*, 121-2.

within the Trinity regarding the salvation of the elect; and this agreement is precisely what the covenant of redemption is meant to embody.

Patrick Gillespie argued that agreement is the essential ingredient of all covenants: “the agreement or consent of two or more Parties upon the same thing, maketh a Paction [i.e., a covenant].” In demonstrating this, he turned to Isaiah 28:15—which says, “We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement.”¹¹ He concluded from this that because the two words occur in parallel, they must be synonymous. This meant that all that was required to prove the existence of a covenant between the Father and the Son was to show that there was an agreement between them. And as Dickson’s example demonstrates, the Bible shows this in a great variety of ways.

But Scripture also uses language that describes the salvation of the elect as a transaction between the persons of the Trinity. Thus we see Jesus talk about the elect as those whom the Father “gives” to him (John 6:37, 39; 17:6-9, 24-25) with the expectation that he will do certain things on their behalf—i.e., he will lose none of them (John 6:37, 39); he will raise them up at the last day (John 6:39-40); and he will be “lifted up” after the pattern of John 3:14, so that the elect will believe in him and receive eternal life (John 6:40). We also see Jesus acknowledge that he has come into the world to fulfill his Father’s expectations on behalf of the elect (6:38), which again shows the prior agreement of the persons of the Trinity to the conditions and promises of the transaction of our salvation. For men like Samuel Rutherford, this manner of speaking pointed conclusively to the existence of an intra-Trinitarian covenant in which the terms of our redemption were agreed upon.¹²

Interestingly enough, this kind of transactional language is reflected in the definition of the covenant of redemption that was provided by David Dickson and James Durham in 1648 in *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*:

The sum of the Covenant of Redemption is this, God having freely chosen unto life, a certain number of lost mankind, for the glory of his rich Grace did give them before the world began, unto God the Son appointed Redeemer, that

¹¹ Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 6. Indeed, agreement has been the basic definition of covenant from at least Martin Luther in the 16th century to Charles Hodge in the 19th. See J.V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 172.

¹² Rutherford, *Covenant of Life Opened*, 293.

upon condition he would humble himself so far as to assume the human nature of a soul and a body, unto personal union with his Divine Nature, and submit himself to the Law as surety for them, and satisfy Justice for them, by giving obedience in their name, even unto the suffering of the cursed death of the Cross, he should ransom and redeem them all from sin and death, and purchase unto them righteousness and eternal life, with all saving graces leading thereunto, to be effectually, by means of his own appointment, applied in due time to every one of them.¹³

Dickson and Durham even cited John 6:37 on the title page of their treatise as the main text upon which their subject matter would be grounded, thereby indicating that this pre-temporal arrangement between the persons of the Trinity is the very foundation upon which all of salvation depends and from which it flows.

What is more, several passages of the Bible also use language that describes Christ as being “chosen,” “ordained,” or “appointed” as mediator for his people (see, in this regard, Isa. 42:1-3 and Matt. 12:15-21; Ps. 2:7; Luke 22:29; Acts 2:23 and 36; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 7:22 and 28; and 1 Pet. 1:19-20). Two of these passages bear further study. The first of these is Luke 22:29, which has historically been understood as teaching that Christ was “covenantally” appointed by God as king over his mediatorial kingdom.¹⁴ Even as far back as Theodore Beza in the middle of the sixteenth century, scholars within the Reformed tradition recognized that the original Greek word used in this verse (*diatithemai*) means “to covenant.” They, therefore, concluded that it was not just true that Christ was “appointed” king, as the Vulgate had previously specified (using the Latin word *dispono*), but that God had actually “made a covenant” with Christ to appoint him king.¹⁵

The second passage is Psalm 2:7. Here too we see reference to a covenantal arrangement existing between the Father and the Son. Patrick Gillespie, for one,

¹³ Dickson and Durham, *Summe of Saving Knowledge*, 2.2.

¹⁴ See Cocceius, *Summa doctrinae*, 14.34.2; Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 2.2.3; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), 1:255; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 12.2.14.

¹⁵ Theodore Beza, *Testamentum Novum, sive Nouum foedus Iesu Christi, D.N.* (1567; n.p., 1588), Luke 22:29, 318.

argued that the Hebrew word typically translated as “decree” in Psalm 2:7 (*hoq*) comes from a root which originally meant, among other things, to ordain, appoint, or covenant. Citing several different exegetical traditions, including ancient Targums, he pointed out that “most ancient Interpreters” choose the word “covenant” in their translations of this verse. But what is more important for Gillespie is the fact that the same Hebrew word was elsewhere used interchangeably with the word for covenant (cf. Jer. 31:35-36 and 33:20; see also Ps. 105:10). That is why Gillespie believed that it was entirely appropriate to take Psalm 2:7 as referring to the same basic thing that Luke 22:29 did, namely, to Christ being appointed “covenantally” as mediator.¹⁶

The fact that Christ was “appointed” to his role as mediator certainly implies that there was some kind of previous arrangement wherein agreement could be reached between the persons of the Trinity on what this role would look like and what conditions and blessings would be attached to it. But the fact that both Luke 22:29 and Psalm 2:7 speak of this appointment in covenantal terms certainly seems to make this arrangement more overt and formal. Christ was not only appointed to be mediator, but this appointment apparently took place within the context of a covenant between the Father and the Son.

Even though the Westminster Confession of Faith does not explicitly mention the covenant of redemption by name, it would appear, nonetheless, to be implicitly reflected in the Confession’s use of this language of “appointment.” Thus when the Confession says that “[i]t pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man,” it is obviously referring to the covenant of redemption, albeit implicitly, by adopting the biblical language of the covenantal appointment of Christ.¹⁷ The Savoy Declaration (1658) and London Baptist Confession (1689) both amended the Westminster Confession by adding the phrase “according to a covenant made between them both” to the abovementioned excerpt in order to make obvious and explicit what was previously obvious but implicit in the Westminster Confession.¹⁸

Dialogues between Father and Son

¹⁶ Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 11-12. More attention will be given to Ps. 2:7 below.

¹⁷ Westminster Confession §8.1.

¹⁸ Savoy Declaration, §8.1; London Baptist Confession, §8.1.

The recorded dialogues between the Father and the Son in the Bible also point toward a pre-temporal, intra-Trinitarian covenant. One of the clearest examples of this can be seen in Hebrews 10:5-10, which records the words of Psalm 40 and places them upon the lips of Christ (10:5). The words Christ speaks are directed to God (10:7), and they allude to an agreement between the Father and the Son in the accomplishing of our salvation. Thus, Christ speaks of God's "desires" (10:5), of what gives God "pleasure" (10:6), and of coming into the world to do God's "will" (10:7)—all of which indicate that the Son not only knew about these things before he came into the world (10:5) but, more importantly, that he also willingly consented to take on the body that God prepared for him, to live according to God's desires, and to do God's will long before he actually did any of them. These things had already been written down in the Bible (10:7) long before the Son ever took on flesh and dwelt among us, which means that they must have been determined in the counsels of God even before that.

For Patrick Gillespie, the fact that Christ consented to God's proposals was proof positive that there was a covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son.¹⁹ He reasoned that consent showed not only an awareness of the relevant issues involved but also agreement to the conditions and promises of the arrangement. Thus when the Son consented to God's "will," and did so long before the incarnation ever took place, he was demonstrating that something like the covenant of redemption had to have taken place between himself and the Father.

Gillespie then went on to highlight six characteristics of this agreement to which the Son was consenting, all of which further substantiated a covenant of redemption. First, he said, we see the Father asking the Son to do certain things in order to accomplish our salvation and promising that certain blessings and privileges will follow if and when the Son fulfills those commands (John 6:39-40; Zech. 6:12-13; Mic. 5:4-5; and Isa. 42:1-4). If commands with promises attached to them amounted to a covenant in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17), then commands with promises also constitute a covenant between the Father and the Son.²⁰ His point is that if we are willing to acknowledge a covenant of works between God and Adam in the Bible (even if we call it by a different name), then we ought to be ready to acknowledge a covenant

¹⁹ Gillespie gives five ways that Christ consented to the Father's proposals in Ps. 40. See his *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 14-16.

²⁰ Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 17.

of redemption between the Father and the Son, because there is just as much evidence for the one as there is for the other.

Second, Gillespie pointed to the presence of promises with conditions attached. Here he cites Isaiah 53:10-12, which presents the unified “will” of the Lord (Yahweh) to “crush” the incarnate Son and put him to “grief” and, in so doing, to account many people righteous, *provided that* the Son “makes [himself] an offering for sin,” pours “out his soul to death,” is “numbered with the transgressors,” and bears “the sin of many.” This, as Gillespie says, is nothing more or less than a formal covenant with conditions and promises on both sides.²¹

The third and fourth characteristics that Gillespie mentioned in this regard focus upon the consent that the Son gives to the Father. As John 10:18 indicates, Jesus is not only “charged” or “commanded” by his Father to lay down his life on behalf of God’s people, but he has “received” this charge freely “of [his] own accord.” In addition, in John 17:4, Jesus declares that he has “accomplished the work” that the Father gave him to do. And, as a result, the Father “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).²² This kind of “reciprocation” in the actions of the Father and the Son indicates that something like the covenant of redemption had been established and is now being executed in space and time.

Fifth, there is an “asking and giving” in the dialogues between the Father and the Son in Scripture that reflects the covenant of redemption. So, in Psalm 2:8 the Lord invites Christ (his “anointed”) to “[a]sk of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” And in John 17:5, Jesus asks the Father to “glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” In both cases, the requests were answered affirmatively. The Father gave the nations to the Son as his inheritance, and he exalted him to the place that he had prior to his self-emptying (Phil. 2:5-9). This, according to Gillespie, is the language of transaction or of business contracts (*editio* and *venditio*), either of which would signal some kind of a covenant or agreement.²³

Finally, Gillespie directed his reader’s attention to the language of work and wages in the Bible. This language, Gillespie said, is very similar to the language that is used in covenants that are enacted between the “work-man” and the “work-master” or

²¹ Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 17-18.

²² Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 18-19.

²³ Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 19.

between the “servant” and “his Lord” in every-day life. It is the kind of language in which one party says, “I give this upon condition you do that,” and the other party responds, “I do this upon condition you do that.” Gillespie sees this reflected in passages like Isaiah 53:11-12; 49:3, 6; John 10:17; Hebrews 10:7; 12:2; John 17:4; and Philippians 2:8-9.²⁴

Individual Passages

Thus far we have established that the covenant of redemption was not developed from one or two isolated texts in Scripture but from a complex and thoroughgoing examination of the language that the Bible uses to speak about the relationship between the Father and the Son and the planning and accomplishing of the salvation of God’s people. Sadly, much modern discussion of this doctrine has ignored this evidence and focused on isolated proof-texts like Zechariah 6:13 and Psalm 2:7, which are less persuasive when taken by themselves. If we start by looking for the covenant of redemption in these kinds of isolated texts, we will have a good deal more trouble finding it. But if we start by looking at the language of Scripture—which we have done here—and then come to these isolated texts afterwards, we will be in a better position to see the covenant of redemption for ourselves.

We can confidently turn our focus to examining a few of these isolated texts and to seeing what they have to say about the covenant of redemption. We will look at three main texts: Zechariah 6:13; Psalm 110; and Psalm 2. Because of the limits of this chapter, we will only be able to give a cursory examination of each.

In Zechariah 6:13, we are told about a so-called “counsel of peace” that will be established between two particular people (“them both”). Beginning with Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius in the seventeenth century, this verse has often been cited as a proof-text for the covenant of redemption. Before we evaluate this assertion, however, it bears mentioning that many earlier treatments of this doctrine did not make any reference to Zechariah 6:13. Men like David Dickson and Peter Bulkeley, for instance, relied exclusively upon arguments like those that are mentioned in the prior two sections of this chapter without ever mentioning the Zechariah passage.²⁵ This means that regardless of what one makes of the “counsel of peace,” the validity of the

²⁴ Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 19-20.

²⁵ Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*,” 24.

covenant of redemption is not hanging in the balance. Zechariah 6:13 is not a necessary proof-text for this doctrine. But it does add extra weight in support of it, especially when it is placed alongside the abovementioned arguments.

In the context of this passage, Joshua the high priest is a type of Christ. Like Melchizedek before him—and Christ after him—Joshua is going to be both king and priest. John Calvin pointed out that the word “crown” in verse 11 is actually plural in the original Hebrew and argued that what is going on here is that two crowns are being placed on the one man Joshua. Since both priests and kings wore crowns, Calvin said, this event clearly symbolizes the union of the priestly and kingly offices in one man, which is obviously designed to point ahead to Christ.²⁶

Verse 12 further supports this conclusion. Using an idea common in the Old Testament, Zechariah speaks of the one of whom Joshua is a type by calling him the “Branch.” Several key passages describe this Branch: he will be a descendent of David (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-18) but will also come from the Lord (Isa. 4:2); he will be an heir to the Davidic throne (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-18); he will be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (Isa. 11:2); he will be called “The Lord is our righteousness” (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-18; cf. Isa. 11:4-5); he will be the instrument through which salvation will come to Israel (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-18); and he will be a priest who will offer an eternal sacrifice (Jer. 33:14-18). Thus, Zechariah 6:13 is ultimately and most fully about Christ. He is the Branch; he is the one who will “build the temple of the Lord” and “bear royal honor” and “sit and rule” on the Lord’s throne. And, therefore, he is also the one who will enter into a “counsel of peace” with the Lord.²⁷

What exactly is this “counsel of peace”? For a couple of reasons it seems best to conclude that this counsel is an agreement—or, we might even say, a covenant—between the Branch and the Lord (Yahweh) in and by which the peace of God’s people will be secured and maintained. In the first place, the prophet Zechariah later states that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem as a king “mounted on...the foal of a donkey” and that his kingdom will bring peace for all “the nations.” That peace, according to Zechariah, will be secured by “the blood of my covenant with you” (Zech. 9:9-11). In other words, the prophet himself tells us that the chief business of the Branch is to

²⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 5, *Zechariah and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 152-6

²⁷ à Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:254.

bring peace to the world and redemption “from the waterless pit” in and through the offering of a blood sacrifice and, perhaps most significantly, he tells us that this is what the covenant is all about. The fact that Zechariah himself says this indicates that we should understand “counsel of peace” in a complementary way.

In the second place, there are several passages of Scripture that link the ideas of covenant and peace together. The covenant is regularly spoken of as the vehicle that establishes peace, and, at the same time, peace is spoken of as the chief consequence of the covenant relationship. So, in Joshua 9:15, we read that the Gibeonites deceived Israel into entering into a covenant relationship with them, and, by doing so, they secured for themselves peace between the two nations. The Gibeonites were after peace, but they knew that the way to achieve it was by entering into a covenant relationship with Israel. Covenant and peace went hand in hand.²⁸

Several passages in the Old Testament speak of a “covenant of peace” and describe it as being the vehicle through which God establishes peace for his people. Isaiah 54:10 and Ezekiel 37:26-27 are the most explicit of these. In both passages, the covenant of peace is depicted as an “everlasting” covenant that establishes permanent peace with God (see also Ezek. 34:25). And although these passages do not use the phrase “counsel of peace,” it should be pretty obvious that the two phrases are very similar in their construction and their intention.

The counsel of peace would, therefore, appear to be something that occurs between the Branch (Christ) and the Lord (Yahweh). And it would seem to be an agreement between them to secure an eternal peace for God’s people. Herman Witsius helpfully summarized the teaching of Zechariah 6:13 by saying:

The counsel of peace, which is between the man whose name is the Branch, and between Jehovah, whose temple he shall build, and on whose throne he shall sit, Rev. iii.21. And what else can this counsel be, but the mutual will of the Father and the Son, which we said is the nature of the covenant? It is called a counsel, both on account of the free and liberal good pleasure of both, and of the display of the greatest wisdom manifested therein. And a counsel of peace, not between God and Christ, between whom there never was any enmity; but

²⁸ The idea that covenants establish peace is a well-attested Old Testament principle (see, e.g., Deut. 2:26-34; 20:10-18; Josh. 10:1-4; and 2 Sam. 10:19). Peace is also integral to the Messiah’s work in the New Testament (see, e.g., Luke 2:14; John 14:27; 16:33; Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:13-18 and 6:15; and Col. 1:20).

of peace to be procured to sinful man with God, and to sinners with themselves.²⁹

The second passage that we will consider here is Psalm 110. This psalm, which was written by David, is explicitly Messianic. The opening verse tells us quite plainly that David is writing about someone greater than himself, someone he calls “my Lord” (*Adon/Adonai*). This someone will sit at the right hand of God (v. 1) and will be both king (vv. 2-3) and priest (v. 4). He will not only be greater than David, but he will also be greater than the angels and the Levitical priesthood as well, as Hebrews 1:13; 5:5-6; and 7:17-22 make clear. But what is far more significant for us is that, as Calvin said, we have “the testimony of Christ that this psalm was penned in reference to himself,” which ought to remove any lingering doubts we might have about it (Matt. 22:41-45).³⁰

In this psalm there are at least two interesting indicators that point in the direction of the covenant of redemption. The first is the direct address that Yahweh makes to David’s “Lord” in verse 1, and the second is the oath that Yahweh takes in reference to the same figure in verse 4. In regard to the first, we can say that the address looks ahead to Christ’s incarnation and earthly ministry when, in the words of Calvin, he will be “invested with supreme dominion.”³¹ We know that the Son, as God, already possesses supreme dominion in and of himself; he does not need to be invested with it. But when he humbles himself, takes on human flesh, and places himself in submission to earthly authorities and principalities and to all his Father’s will, he does need to be invested with dominion so that all may know that he really is the Son. These comments in verse 1 would, therefore, seem to be reflective of an agreement or arrangement within the Trinity whereby the Son agreed to humble himself and place himself in submission, and the Father agreed to crown the incarnate Son king and to invest him with supreme dominion.³²

²⁹ Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 2.2.7.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms*, vol. 4, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 295.

³¹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 299.

³² Psalm 110 is a royal psalm and would most likely have been used at the inauguration of Israel’s king. It presents the king as being invested with power and dominion. See Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, vol. 21, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 83.

Secondly, we can say that the language of covenant is reflected in the way that Christ is described as being appointed priest after the order of Melchizedek. The fact that Yahweh swears an oath to do this clearly points to the existence of a covenant relationship. Meredith Kline has argued that in the Bible, “[t]he covenantal commitment is characteristically expressed by an oath sworn in the solemnities of covenant ratification.” He has pointed to Genesis 15 and Hebrews 6:17-18 and 7:20-22, in particular, to support his claim.³³ Palmer Robertson has further argued that this oath does not necessarily have to be part of a “formal oath-taking process.” Citing Psalm 89:3, 34-35, and 105:8-10 and a whole host of other Scripture passages, Robertson declares that “[o]ath’ so adequately captures the relationship achieved by ‘covenant’ that the terms may be interchanged.”³⁴ His conclusion is that the Bible teaches not merely that a covenant *contains* an oath but that it actually *is* an oath. If Kline and Robertson are right, Psalm 110:4 is plainly teaching that there is a covenant existing between Yahweh and Christ, one in which the latter is appointed as a priest who will intercede on behalf of God’s people forevermore.

Hebrews 7:20-22, moreover, helps us to see that the intra-Trinitarian covenant of Psalm 110:4 is a pre-temporal covenant. After telling us that Jesus is unique, insofar as he is made priest with an oath, the author of Hebrews cites Psalm 110:4 and concludes by saying: “*This* makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant” (v. 22, emphasis added). In other words, the point is that the oath (of Ps. 110:4) is what has made Jesus the guarantor of the covenant of grace. Now, a guarantor is one that *guarantees* that the promises of the covenant will in fact be carried out.³⁵ If Jesus is such a guarantor, then this means that the certainty of the covenant of grace is based

³³ Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 16.

³⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 6n7. Robertson points his readers to the work of G.M Tucker for “a full statement of the evidence that an oath belonged to the essence of covenant” (Tucker, “Covenant Forms and Contract Forms,” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 [1965]: 487-503) and to Bible passages like Gen. 21:23-31; 31:53; Ex. 6:8; 19:8; 24:3, 7; Deut. 7:8, 12; 29:12-13; 2 Kings 11:4; 1 Chron. 16:16; Ps. 89:3, 34-35; 105:8-10; and Ezek. 16:8 for further support of his claims (Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 6-7).

³⁵ The word “guarantor” (*enguos*) occurs only here in the New Testament but was commonly used outside the Bible to speak of “a surety who assumed responsibility for another person’s debt if the latter could not meet it” (Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010], 271). Thus, the “guarantor” *guaranteed* that the promised debt-repayment would be made.

upon him and his role as guarantor. But this role is a result of the oath of Psalm 110:4, which means that there is an oath undergirding or guaranteeing the covenant of grace—an oath between Yahweh and Adonai or between Father and Son. If Robertson is right that covenant and oath are used interchangeably in Scripture, then Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7 are teaching that there is a covenant relationship between Father and Son which is undergirding or guaranteeing the covenant of grace, which is precisely what Samuel Rutherford said in the mid-seventeenth century: “the Covenant of Suretyship [i.e., redemption] is the cause of the stability and firmness of the Covenant of Grace.”³⁶ This covenant relationship must be prior to the covenant of grace not only in execution but even in the stage of conception within the mind of God; otherwise it could not function as the basis for it. Thus the intra-Trinitarian covenant of Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7 must be pre-temporal.

The third passage that we will examine in this chapter is Psalm 2. This psalm is also obviously Messianic, as we know from the New Testament’s repeated application of it to Jesus (see, for instance, Acts 4:25-27; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). In examining this psalm, we will look chiefly at three sentences that are all strongly suggestive of the covenant of redemption.

The first sentence is found at the beginning of verse 7, “I will tell of the decree.” The significant word in this phrase is “decree,” which is also frequently translated “statute” in the Old Testament (*hoq*). This word is regularly identified with the idea of covenant, and, as we saw above, it is oftentimes translated as covenant. Psalm 50:16 places “statute” (*hoq*) and “covenant” in parallel, which indicates that there is at least a great deal of overlap between these two terms if not outright synonymity. Joshua 24:25 and 2 Kings 17:15 teach us that God’s statutes and covenant are so closely identified that keeping his statutes is tantamount to keeping his covenant and despising his statutes is tantamount to despising his covenant (see also 1 Kings 9:4-5; 2 Chron. 34:31; Neh. 10:29). But perhaps the clearest passage of all in this regard is Psalm 105:8-10 (which is also found in 2 Chron. 16:15-17). Here, “covenant,” “sworn promise,” and “statute” or “decree” are all used in parallel. The “covenant that [God] made with Abraham” is the same thing as “his sworn promise to Isaac,” which “he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.”

The word “today,” which appears at the end of verse 7, would seem to confirm the idea that the verse’s comments should be understood in a covenantal context. Over and over again in Scripture, the word “today” is used to highlight declarations of

³⁶ Rutherford, *Covenant of Life Opened*, 309.

covenant renewal. One thinks immediately of Deuteronomy 30:15-19 or Joshua 24:15, where the people of Israel are called to renew their covenant with the Lord without delay. They are challenged to choose “this day” whom they will serve and to begin doing so immediately (see also Gen. 15:18; 31:48; 47:23; Deut. 11:2, 8, 13, 26, 28; 19:9; 26:17; Josh. 14:9-12; 22:16, 18, 22, 29; and Ps. 95:7-8). For all of these reasons, Peter Craigie concludes that “[t]he ‘decree’ is a document, given to the king during the coronation ceremony (cf. 2 Kgs 11:12); it is his personal covenant document, renewing God’s covenant commitment to the dynasty of David.”³⁷

This close identification between “decree” and “covenant” and the use of the word “today” all suggest that the words of Psalm 2:7 should be understood within the context of a covenant relationship between the “Lord” and “me.” And since we know that this psalm is ultimately about Christ, the “me” here is ultimately and most fully realized in Christ. That means that Psalm 2:7 is talking about a covenant relationship between Yahweh and Christ, one that is enacted before the foundation of the world and then *renewed* in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4) when the Son becomes incarnate by adding to himself our human nature. This is the covenant of redemption. It is renewed at the incarnation, and that is when Christ is given his “personal covenant document,” if you will. He is invested with power and authority and declared to be Son, as we will see in the very next sentence.

The second sentence that points to the covenant of redemption is also in verse 7: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” This phrase is also part of the coronation ceremony that would apply ultimately and most fully to Christ. It can legitimately be said of David—as can the previous part of the verse as well—but only insofar as he was a type of Christ. In his capacity as type, David can rightly be said to have been “begotten” when God’s choosing him became clearly manifested to the people of Israel. John Calvin put it this way:

When God says, I have begotten thee, it ought to be understood as referring to men’s understanding or knowledge of it; for David was begotten by God when the choice of him to be king was clearly manifested. The words this day, therefore, denote the time of this manifestation; for as soon as it became known that he was made king by divine appointment, he came forth as one

³⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, vol. 19, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 67.

who had been lately begotten of God, since so great an honour could not belong to a private person.³⁸

And the same explanation would also apply to Christ. As Calvin said: “He is not said to be begotten in any other sense than as the Father bore testimony to him as being his own Son.” The verse has nothing to do with the Son’s ontological origin. It does not define the nature or timing of his eternal generation. Rather it refers to “men’s understanding or knowledge of it.” In other words, it refers to the point in time when the Son’s begottenness would be made manifest to the world, or to what the early church understood as Christ’s coronation or induction as king of the universe. According to Calvin, this coronation finds its initial fulfillment in the incarnation, when the Son “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14); but its “principal” fulfillment is found in the “today” of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4). In these two things, Christ is presented to the world as the Son of God in power.³⁹

The fact that the Son’s coronation occurs within a context of covenant renewal is suggestive of the covenant of redemption. It indicates that there would have been a covenant enacted beforehand between the Father and the Son, which would then have been “renewed” at Christ’s incarnation and resurrection, because, in order for a covenant to be renewed, it must first have been enacted. Moreover, when we view this earlier covenant in the light of New Testament passages like Ephesians 1:11 and 2 Timothy 1:9, we see good evidence for concluding that it must have been enacted “before the ages began” in the “counsel of [God’s] will.”

The third and final sentence is found in verse 8: “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” As we mentioned earlier, this verse implies that an agreement had previously been reached between the Father and the Son, which was then carried out in time and space. Conditions are given, and specific promises are attached: if the Son will ask, the Father is promising to give the nations to him as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession. But conditions that have specific promises attached to them indicate that an agreement has been reached beforehand. The Father is not just saying, “if you ask

³⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 17-18.

³⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:18. See also G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 927-8.

me, I will help you.” That is open-ended and general and would not necessarily entail prior agreement. The Father is instead saying something more like this: “if you ask me, I will help you in this specific way.” That kind of specificity implies that there was agreement between the Father and the Son on the precise terms of the help that would be asked for and then provided. And that kind of agreement is exactly what the covenant of redemption embodies.

Theological Rationale

Thus far we have laid out the biblical rationale in support of the covenant of redemption. We have explored the language of the Bible and looked at the covenantal implications of several individual passages. After reading through this presentation, it should be clear that there is a strong biblical argument for the existence of the covenant of redemption. We can understand how our post-Reformation forefathers embraced this doctrine so universally and so quickly. The biblical arguments for it are impressive and widespread.

Historically, this argument has not depended wholly on the language of the Bible and the implications of select individual passages. It has also involved certain theological positions that complemented the biblical arguments and even strengthened them. While there is not enough space to explore all of these positions fully, we will look more closely at two of them: the covenant of works/covenant of grace and the Trinity.

Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace

The existence of a covenant of works in the Bible points to the existence of the covenant of redemption. We see this in a number of ways. In the first place, as I have already mentioned, the same exegetical process that leads someone to embrace the covenant of works will also lead them to embrace the covenant of redemption. This means that the individual who recognizes the exegetical evidence in support of the one should have little difficulty in also recognizing the exegetical evidence in support of the other.

In the second place, the covenant of works is the theological “mirror image” of the covenant of redemption.⁴⁰ This means that the existence of the former covenant—

⁴⁰ Fesko, *Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 138.

even when it is referred to by a different name—necessarily implies the existence of the latter. There is no mediator in either covenant. Whereas the covenant of redemption is enacted between God (the Father) and the “Son of God,” the covenant of works is enacted between God and Adam, who is called “the son of God” in Luke 3:38. What is more, the whole arrangement of Luke 3-4 would seem to be designed in order to point to Adam and Christ as mirror images. Whereas Matthew’s genealogy starts with Abraham and finishes with Jesus, Luke’s begins with Jesus and ends with Adam, the son of God. Why would Luke take his genealogy all the way back to Adam? Why would he not stop with Abraham as Matthew did? Why would he list the names in the reverse order of Matthew’s genealogy? And why would he refer to Adam as God’s son?

The issue is further complicated when we look at chapter 4 and see that Luke records the three temptations of Christ in a different order than Matthew does. To be precise, the last two temptations are reversed in Luke when compared with Matthew. What could possibly account for this difference?

It would appear that Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is attempting to paint out Adam and Christ as mirror images. The order he gives of the temptations just happens to be the exact same order that we find with Adam in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride. What we see in Luke 3-4, then, is a genealogy in which Luke goes all the way back to Adam; and he does it in such a way that he ends with Adam, whom he calls the “son of God;” and then he immediately transitions to the account of the temptations of Christ, in which he records everything in the exact order given in Genesis 3. The point would seem to be that Jesus is the second (and final) Adam, the ultimate Son of God. He came to do exactly what the first Adam failed to do. He came as the “mirror image” of the first Adam to undo the first Adam’s failure in the covenant of works.

Because we know that God does everything “according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11), we know that the failure of Adam did not catch God by surprise but was part of his plan from before the foundation of the world. And this means that God planned to send his Son into the world as the “mirror image” of Adam to succeed where Adam failed and to undo the consequences of his failure as well. If we believe the Bible teaches that the relationship between God and Adam is contained within a covenant, then this would imply that there must also be a covenant between God and Christ that would establish Christ as the “mirror image” of Adam, would involve agreement between the persons of the Trinity to the particular conditions and promises of the arrangement, and would be enacted according to the counsel of God’s will before the foundation of the world.

What is more, the existence of the covenant of grace also points to the existence of the covenant of redemption. Because the covenant of grace is enacted in time and because Christ functions as a mediator in this covenant, these things suggest that there must be another covenant that undergirds, establishes, and guarantees the covenant of grace. We will look at these one at a time. First, because the covenant of grace is enacted in time, this implies that there must be another covenant that is enacted before the beginning of time in which the conditions and promises of the covenant of grace are established and agreed to. To be sure, this might not *require* a covenant to do this. It is possible that the agreement between the persons of the Trinity could be represented in another way and that agreement would then undergird and guarantee the covenant of grace. But, as we have already indicated, the Bible speaks of this agreement in terms of an “oath” between the Father and the Son (Heb. 7:20-22), which is widely regarded as being the constitutive ingredient of the covenant relationship.

Second, the fact that Christ functions as a mediator in the covenant of grace suggests that this covenant is not enacted personally with him and that there must be another covenant that is enacted with him personally. We know from Luke 22:29, Psalm 2, and Hebrews 7, along with many other passages, that there is in fact a covenant enacted with Christ personally. If the covenant of grace cannot encompass this, then there must be another covenant that does. This covenant would then undergird, establish, and guarantee the covenant of grace by establishing and guaranteeing Christ’s role as mediator in it.

The Trinity

When we admit that there must be some kind of pre-temporal intra-Trinitarian covenant that functions as the mirror image of the covenant of works and lays the foundation for the covenant of grace, we immediately raise questions about the implications of such a covenant for our understanding of the Trinity. In particular, how do we avoid the charge that we are separating the three persons of the Trinity by positing three separate wills that must all agree by way of covenant and, thus, that we are guilty of tritheism?

In responding to this objection, the first thing that needs to be said is that the dialogues recorded in Scripture between the Father and the Son suggest that it is quite possible to hold to the covenant of redemption and not be guilty of tritheism. The fact that the triune God has chosen to reveal himself in and through these

dialogues indicates that there must be genuine communication between the three persons of the Trinity within the inner life of God. Listen to what Kevin Vanhoozer says on this point:

Because the way God is in the economy [i.e., in the dialogues that take place between the Father and the Son in time and space] corresponds to the way God is in himself, we may conclude that the Father, Son, and Spirit are merely continuing in history a communicative activity that characterizes their perfect life together.⁴¹

If we can say that there is genuine communication between the persons of the Trinity within the inner life of God without lapsing into tritheism, then it certainly seems reasonable to say that we can hold to the covenant of redemption—which in one sense is simply a genuine dialogue between the persons of the Trinity with regard to the redemption of the elect—without lapsing into it either. The dialogues between the Father and the Son in Scripture allow us to say that the covenant of redemption is completely in keeping with the way God has revealed himself in the Bible.

The formula used by the Council of Florence in 1439 to differentiate the oneness of God from his threeness is helpful in understanding this idea further: “In God all is one, where there is no relation of opposition.” This means that God is to be considered one everywhere except where a “relation of opposition” obtains—as it does, for instance, in the internal actions of generation and spiration. But relations of opposition must also obtain in regard to the communicative activity of God, if there is to be genuine dialogue between the persons of the Trinity. The Father must stand “over against” the Son, and the Son must stand “over against” the Spirit in order for there to be genuine dialogue between them.⁴² This means that the covenant of redemption in no way requires undoing the unity of God. It simply requires acknowledging that relations of opposition can and do exist. Thus, we cannot say that the covenant of redemption is unnecessary on account of the unity of the divine mind and will. To say this is to overlook the relations of opposition within the Trinity and to lose the threeness of God in his oneness.

⁴¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 251. See also the helpful discussion in Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 69-75.

⁴² Sanders, *Triune God*, 131.

The second response to this objection is that because the covenant of redemption deals with the planning and executing of our salvation, we would expect it to be enacted according to the unique mission of each person of the Trinity. The theological maxim *opera ad extra trinitatis indivisa sunt*—which, when translated, says that the external works of the Trinity are indivisible—should never be taken to mean that all three persons of the Trinity always do exactly the same tasks. Rather, each person of the Godhead acts in a way that is suited to his own person and mission. The Father does not become incarnate and die on the cross. The Son does those things. The Son does not come at Pentecost and does not apply the finished work of salvation to the elect. The Spirit does those things. Each one acts according to his own person and mission, but all are involved in every external work of the Godhead.⁴³ Because the mission of each person is unique within God’s indivisible work of accomplishing our salvation, we would expect the covenant that plans and executes that salvation to be enacted along the lines of each person’s mission.

Geerhardus Vos helpfully differentiates between predestination and the covenant of redemption by pointing out that: “In predestination there is one undivided will; [and] in the counsel of peace this will appears as having its own manner of existence in the Persons.”⁴⁴ Vos is highlighting the fact that predestination simply involves God choosing who will be saved, whereas the covenant of redemption involves planning and executing the details of how that salvation will actually be accomplished. Predestination, therefore, does not involve the unique missions of the persons of the Trinity; but the covenant of redemption does. Therefore, we should expect that, in the covenant of redemption, the will of God “appears as having its own manner of existence in the Persons.”

The covenant of redemption, moreover, has historically been understood as an action of the Trinity as a whole. Some have believed that the Father, representing all three persons of the Trinity, entered into this covenant with the Son; while others have believed that all three persons decided the terms of salvation and then commissioned the Father to enter into covenant with the Son upon those terms. Both positions are trying to be faithful to the language of Scripture, which consistently portrays the Father as the one who enters into agreement with the Son, but, at the

⁴³ Scott Swain and Michael Allen, “The Obedience of the Eternal Son,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15:2 (2013): 117, 127.

⁴⁴ GC Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 164.

same time, to protect the Trinitarian nature of the covenant of redemption. Both positions see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as concurring in the enacting of this covenant agreement.

Why Does this Matter?

Thus far we have explored the biblical and theological rationale in support of the covenant of redemption. In doing so, we have surveyed the language of Scripture, the dialogues between the Father and the Son, and several key Bible passages. We also looked at the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, and the doctrine of the Trinity to see how they supported the existence of a pre-temporal intra-Trinitarian covenant. The only thing that remains is for us to consider how the covenant of redemption is to be used practically in our lives and why it matters that there is such a thing as the covenant of redemption. In his treatment of this covenant, Wilhelmus à Brakel lists five practical uses of this doctrine.⁴⁵ We will highlight three.

First, the covenant of redemption guarantees the salvation of the elect and makes it absolutely certain. The “unchangeable” oath of God is standing behind this covenant (or is part and parcel of it) and, thus, our salvation is sure (Heb. 6:17-18). Just as it is impossible for God to lie, so it is also impossible for our salvation to be undone. The elect are completely safe and secure because they have all been given by the Father to the Son in the covenant of redemption, and the Son has done everything that he said he would do in this covenant on their behalf.

Second, the covenant of redemption guarantees that all the conditions of our salvation have already been met in full, which is why this doctrine was historically used to fight against Arminianism. The terms of our salvation, which were agreed upon before the foundation of the world within the Godhead, have all been accomplished in time and space and will be applied to the elect in the fullness of time. The only thing that remains for us to do is to acknowledge this with our gratitude and to give all praise and glory to God.

Third, the covenant of redemption reveals the incredible love that God has shown to the elect. We have been chosen as an expression of the love that God has for himself, the mutual delight of the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father forevermore. The covenant of redemption tells us that we are in effect a love gift from the Father to the Son and from the Son back to the Father. As à Brakel says:

⁴⁵ à Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:261-263.

Love moved the Father and love moved the Lord Jesus. [The covenant of redemption] is a covenant of love between those whose love proceeds from within themselves, without there being any loveableness in the object of this love. Oh, how blessed is he who is incorporated in this covenant and, being enveloped and irradiated by this eternal love, is stirred up to love in return, exclaiming, “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ à Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:263.

Bavinck's Christian Worldview: Context, Classical Contours, and Significance¹

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Many thanks, Dr. Scott Redd, and RTS DC, for this kind invitation to discuss Bavinck's 1904 treatise on *Christian Worldview*. I'm thankful that we have before us today the first English translation of Bavinck's important work, and for the privilege to discuss with you its content and significance.² My talk will fall under three headings. First, why did Bavinck write *Christian Worldview*? What are some contextual features we should note in this regard? Secondly, what are some of the main lines of argument in this key text? Thirdly, how is this work significant for us readers in the twenty-first century?

Why did Bavinck Write *Christian Worldview*?

Let's begin with a brief introduction to Herman Bavinck. The Dutch theologian lived from 1854 to 1921. He earned his PhD at Leiden University, writing on the ethics of Zwingli, and he was regarded by some as a kind of theological right-hand man to Abraham Kuyper – though of course now we are starting to see Bavinck's genius in his own right. The work under consideration in this talk was first published in 1904. Bavinck is perhaps most famous in the Anglophone world for his magisterial four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, which gave us not only a great history of Christian doctrine but also some of the most enduring, catholic, and eclectic articulations of the Reformed faith in the late modern era.³

¹ This is a revised manuscript taken from a lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary, DC, January, 2020. I'm grateful to Michael Allen, Scott Redd, Thomas Keene, and Peter Lee, for their comments on the lecture or earlier drafts.

² Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (trans. and eds.), (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019). Hereafter, *CW*. Dutch original: Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 3rd edn. (Kampen: Kok, 1929).

³ See Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness, and Theological Epistemology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70 (2017): 310-37; Cory C. Brock, *Orthodox Yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Appropriation of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020); Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Confessional,

But what is less well known about Bavinck is his pre-occupation with the relationship between theology and the other academic disciplines. This was for good reason. In 1876, the Higher Education Act in the Netherlands asserted that theology within the universities should be reconfigured into religious studies. Theology was good for private piety, or for the church and the seminaries, perhaps, but it was not to be considered as public knowledge like the other academic disciplines. By way of contrast, Bavinck insisted on the ongoing relevance of the Christian faith for the academy and for the world as a whole, and that without it the human heart remains unsatisfied. Hence, we see at the turn to the twentieth century a focusing of his work on Christianity and the other areas of life, especially with the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, psychology, and the other academic disciplines.⁴ He was concerned to show how Christianity contained holistic insights that continue to aid the modern world.

It is also important to note that early on in Bavinck's career, he did not actually emphasize a *Christian* worldview, but rather a *Calvinistic* world-and-life view. Ten years before he wrote *Christian Worldview*, he wrote an important article, called "The Future of Calvinism", where he made this provocative point:

The words Reformed and Calvinistic, however, though cognate in meaning, are by no means equivalent, the former being more limited and less comprehensive than the latter. Reformed expresses merely a religious and ecclesiastical distinction; it is a purely theological conception. The term Calvinism is of wider application and denotes a specific type in the political, social and civil spheres. It stands for that characteristic view of life and the world as a whole, which was born from the powerful mind of the French Reformer. Calvinist is the name of a Reformed Christian in so far as he reveals a specific character and a distinct physiognomy, not merely in his church and theology, but also in social and political life, in science and art.⁵

International, and Cosmopolitan: Herman Bavinck's Neo-Calvinistic and Protestant Vision of the Catholicity of the Church," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (2018): 22-39.

⁴ See especially his yet to be translated Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), and *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, Cory C. Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutnato (eds.), (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2018).

⁵ Herman Bavinck, "The Future of Calvinism", Geerhardus Vos (trans.), *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 17 (1894): 3. This is not to suggest that Bavinck reconsidered the Calvin or Calvinism

Notice, that for Bavinck, the words Reformed and Calvinist mean different things. Their meanings overlap, of course, but they are not synonymous. Bavinck was saying that to be Reformed means to hold on to a specific set of doctrines. It's an exclusively ecclesial and theological principle. But Calvinism, however, referred to something more all-encompassing and holistic. Calvinism offered a whole world-and-life view, a distinct perspective on social and political life, science (or scholarship), and art. This is rather different from the contemporary, more popular, understandings of the difference between Calvinism and Reformed theology, where the former is often taken to denote a subset of doctrines under the umbrella of the latter.

Why did Bavinck emphasize Calvinism, rather than Christianity, as the worldview to hold and espouse ten years before he wrote *Christian Worldview*? We are here at Reformed Theological Seminary, of course, and I assure you that I'm not saying that Bavinck became *less* Reformed as he matured in his thought.

Rather, a decade before he wrote *Christian Worldview*, Bavinck remained convinced that no matter how many people were becoming more skeptical towards orthodox Christianity, they would still stand on Christianity in some way. Bavinck was arguing for Calvinism because he thought his opponents held merely to less-than-ideal versions of the Christian faith, whether it be Roman Catholicism, or theological liberalism. Liberals, for example, might deny that Jesus is divine or the resurrection, but they still argued that his teachings were helpful and could morally advance society. Bavinck thus held up Calvinism as the full-orbed Christian perspective that could help the world holistically.⁶ He was, in other words, still more sanguine and optimistic about the ongoing influence of Christianity in modern Dutch culture, despite the growth of less-than-ideal forms of the Christian faith.

But at the turn of the twentieth century, Bavinck realized that a new kind of thorough-going unbelief was emerging. He was no longer fighting theological battles

to be insignificant after 1904. See, for example, his *Johannes Calvijn: Eene lazing ter gelegenheid van den vierhonderdsten gedenkdag zijner geboorte, 10 July 1509-1909* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), and "Calvin and Common Grace," in *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies*, trans. Geerhardus Vos (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 99-130.

⁶ See, also, the discussion in George Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and the Neo-Calvinist Concept of the French Revolution," in *Neo-Calvinism and French Revolution*, eds. James Eglinton and George Harinck (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 13-30, especially pages 21-30, and James Eglinton, *Herman Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), chapter 9.

within Christianity – whether Lutherans, Catholics, or theological liberalism. Rather, Bavinck was encountering followers of a more full-orbed atheism in the wake of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzschean nihilists did not say that we could still believe in the basic goodness of Christian teachings despite disbelieving in God – rather, they argued that because God is dead, we have to revise all of Western civilization and all of what we believe. If God is dead, why should there be truth, goodness, or beauty? Hence, the rise of nihilism created a discord between ourselves and the world: what meaning do I have here? Can I even know the world? What does it mean to be good? We should reconsider goodness itself if God is dead. Notice Bavinck’s allusion to Nietzschean nihilism in the introduction to *CW*:

We no longer need God. There is no place for him in our world. Let the old hermit in the forest continue to worship God. We, the youth of Zarathustra, know that God is dead and will not be resurrected.

The convergence of this rejection of Christianity and the inner discord that disturbs us in modern life gives occasion to the question whether the two phenomena exist in a causal relation.⁷

In response to this, Bavinck argues that the human heart is not satisfied until it finds a unified view behind what we do. He suggests that there is a causal link between the “inner discord” that one feels in the modern world, on the one hand, and the rejection of Christianity that is becoming increasingly pervasive, on the other. He wanted to show that Christianity provided a more thorough-going and satisfying alternative to the unbelief in his day.

What was Bavinck’s argument?

⁷ Bavinck, *CW*, 25. Kuyper made similar comments in 1893: “Heine and Feuerbach are old hate; Schopenhauer is a bore; today everything revolves around Nietzsche.” “The Blurring of the Boundaries,” in James D. Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 366.

How, then, did Bavinck construct a Christian worldview? Here, we'll survey his argumentation and also note that it is rooted in the classical doctrine of divine ideas.⁸ A key passage is the following:

Just as sense perception is the basis of all science, the results of science are and remain the starting point of philosophy. Yet it is incorrect that philosophy should be no more than the summary of the results of the various sciences and that they should be set together only as the wheels of a clock. Wisdom is grounded on science but is not limited to it. It aims above science and seeks to press through to "first principles [*prima principia*]. It already does this if it makes a special group of phenomena – religion, ethics, law, history, language, culture, and so on- into the object of its reflection [*denkende beschouwing*] and tries to trace the leading ideas. But it does this, above all, as it seeks for the final grounds of all things and builds a worldview thereon.

If this is the nature and task of philosophy, then it is presupposed – to an even greater degree than sense perception and science - that the world rests in thought and that ideas control all things. There is no wisdom other than that which is in and out of the faith in a realm of unseen and eternal things. It is built on the reality of ideas because it is the "science of the idea" and because it seeks the idea of the whole in the parts and of the general in the particular. It tacitly proceeds from the Christian faith, which states that the world is grounded in wisdom in its whole and in all its parts (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; 1 Cor. 1:21).⁹

Notice three key terms: science, philosophy, and wisdom. Contrary to some contemporary criticisms against worldview thinking, worldview-building is not an armchair, merely intellectual exercise for Bavinck. Instead, he argues that to build a worldview, we have to begin with science – that is, with the deliverances of sense perception. This is the methodological starting point: begin with the inductive deliverances of all of the different sciences.

⁸ For some recent accounts of the classical doctrine of divine ideas, see, e.g., Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 29-72, and Ian McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

⁹ Bavinck, *CW*, 50-1.

This is why, in the editorial introduction to our translation of *Christian Worldview*, we used a map-building analogy as a way of depicting how to build a Christian worldview, rather than the common analogy of using spectacles. While the latter analogy often communicates that a Christian worldview can be put on rather quickly, building a map communicates that constructing a worldview takes progressive and inductive work, which can then be revised as new information arises.¹⁰ Building a Christian worldview has Trinitarian parameters and principles, to be sure, but organization and construction is open to empirical data that promise the correction and enlargement of the maps by which we investigate the world. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between the maps we use and the world investigated – as we explore the deliverances of the sciences, we reconfigure our maps, but as we reconnoitre those maps, we revisit new terrain with them firmly as our guides.

Philosophy pursues the summary of these deliverances, and then, following the guidance of wisdom, pursues the unity behind the sciences into the first principles therein. A worldview, then, is built upon the “final grounds of all things”, after discovering that “the world rests in thought and that ideas control all things.” The empirical phenomena we encounter in daily life and in science – which includes the many academic disciplines – actually lead us to invisible, and, indeed, divine realities. Bavinck is here appealing to the classical doctrine of divine ideas, where creation reflects ectypally the diverse perfections and wisdom of the simple, triune God.¹¹ Reality is thus grounded in divine wisdom, and there is a whole which undergirds the sum of its parts.

How does Bavinck then apply this worldview and metaphysics to particular issues? We will take a look here at two specifically nineteenth century matters that he addressed: epistemology and ethics.

One of the most pervasive issues discussed in nineteenth century epistemology is the connection between subjects and objects – that is, how does the mental representations in our minds actually give us an accurate access of extramental

¹⁰ See our “Introduction” in *CW*, 21-9.

¹¹ On the classical contours of Bavinck’s organicism, see my *God and Knowledge: Herman Bavinck’s Theological Epistemology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), especially chapter 2, and “Divine Providence’s *Wetenschappelijke Benefits*” in Fred Sanders and Oliver Crisp (eds.), *Divine Action and Providence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 96-114. See also the fruitful interaction with Bavinck’s account in Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 112ff.

physical objects? The ideas in our mind, for example, have no weight, mass, or physicality to it, whereas objects in the world are tangible things in the world that we can run into and feel. Consider the black chair that we have before us here. The chair itself is quite heavy – it has a mass, a substance to it. One might presume that it is the presence of this chair that created the mental idea of the chair inside your mind. But the idea of the chair, notice, is quite different from the chair itself. The idea is not exactly in space and time, and has no weight, substance, or mass. How do these two heterogenous realities actually correspond?

Empiricism, which begins with the sense perception of the external object, and rationalism, which begins with the ideas within us, cannot seem to make sense of this connection.

Empiricism trusts only sensible perceptions and believes that the processing of elementary perceptions into representations and concepts, into judgments and decisions, removes us further and further from reality and gives us only ideas [*denkbeelden*] that, though clean and subjectively indispensable, are merely “nominal” [*nomina*] and so are subjective representations, nothing but “the breath of a voice” [*flatus vocis*], bearing no sounds, only merely a “concept of the mind” [*conceptus mentis*]. Conversely, rationalism judges that sensible perceptions provide us with no true knowledge; they bring merely cursory and unstable phenomena into view, while not allowing us to see the essence of the things... in both cases and in both directions, the harmony between subject and object, and between knowing and being is broken.¹²

In short, empiricism begins with objects, but then argues that the ideas in our mind are merely nominal and subjective representations of those objects, having no intrinsic connection to them. Rationalism, on the other hand, begins with ideas, but can only infer from one idea the presence of another idea, not the things outside of the mind, much less the “essence of the things.” By way of contrast, Bavinck argues that the knowability of external reality has to be acknowledged from the very

¹² Bavinck, *CW*, 32. For a more detailed analysis of Bavinck's account of perception, see my “Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid on Perception and Knowing God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 111 (2018): 115-34.

beginning of our scientific investigation, “but this presupposition is of such a great significance that it must be considered and ought to be justified.”¹³

How, then, does he justify the knowability of the world? Here the argumentation is complex, but for our present purposes can be boiled down to a few moves. Firstly, again appealing to the classical doctrine of divine ideas, Bavinck argues that the physical objects in the world can become represented by the ideas of the mind only if the world itself is rooted in ideas, that is, in the divine ideas: “The doctrine of the creation of all things by the Word of God is the explanation of all knowing and knowing about [*kennen en weten*], the presupposition behind the correspondence between subject and object.”¹⁴ “Appealing to Heb. 11: 3 and Romans 1:18, Bavinck claims that “The world becomes, and can only become, our spiritual [*geestelijk property*], for it is itself existing spiritually [*geestelijk*] and logically and resting in thought.”¹⁵

Secondly, Bavinck argues that the world is created with a diversity of parts – there are bodies and ideas, spirits, and physical objects, yet all of these parts are united together by a divine wisdom into a single organic unity: “It is the same divine wisdom [*Goddelijk wijsheid* that created the whole organically into a connected whole and planted in us the urge for a “unified” [*einheitliche*] worldview. If this is possible, it can be explained only on the basis of the claim that the world is an organism and has first been thought of as such.”¹⁶ In the final analysis, Bavinck argues that it is on distinctly Christian, Trinitarian metaphysics – an organic worldview – that epistemically justifies the reliability of our knowledge of external realities: “the Christian – that is, the organic – view gives the answer that thinking proceeds from being, word precedes deed. All things are knowable because they were first thought. And because they are first thought, they can be distinct and still one. It is the idea that animates and protects the organism’s distinct parts.”¹⁷

¹³ Bavinck, *CW*, 40.

¹⁴ Bavinck, *CW*, 46.

¹⁵ Bavinck, *CW*, 46.

¹⁶ Bavinck, *CW*, 51. On the organic motif in general, see James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Toward a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012).

¹⁷ Bavinck, *CW*, 74.

It is important to note that Bavinck's argument led him to a broader and more holistic vision. He did not reject the deliverances of the rationalist or empiricist philosophers. He took them seriously and tried to accommodate both. Sense perception, for example does not negate but rather leads one to ideas. Our ideas, then, can organically correspond to reality precisely because all of reality finds its source in these archetypal divine ideas. The Christian worldview, in Bavinck's hands, leads us to a capacious vision that allows us to accommodate the best insights of the current debates.

Bavinck's argument concerning ethics is particularly potent, especially considering that he wrote it in the years before two world wars. He is wrestling once again with the nonbelieving thesis that ethics – goodness and value – are not grounded in a divine source outside of us. The main alternative considered in the nineteenth century, then, is to argue that ethics and norms are grounded in history. Bavinck counters that the moment ethics and value are grounded not in transcendent norms but rather in immanent history, we have to answer the question: *which history?* Or, perhaps more pertinently, *whose history?*

Bavinck argues that rejecting transcendent norms thus means absolutizing our own preferences and, by extension, the preferences of our own people group in the present – the history of *our* culture, nation, and people will be the absolute standard by which we adjudicate between other histories, cultures, and people groups. This is done precisely because, having done away with divine ideas, we will inevitably seek stability elsewhere: “because a person always needs some form of stability, however, the grave and in no sense imaginary danger quickly arises that through this one-sided historical viewpoint, he is led to a counterfeit nationalism, to a narrow chauvinism, to a fanaticism about race and instinct.”¹⁸

Hauntingly, Bavinck traces this to the German nationalist philosophies arising in his day. Writing in 1904, Bavinck was terrifyingly prescient of the tragedies that would arise just a few decades later:

“The German spirit shall heal the world.” [some people say]. But that is how the so called pure historical view turns into the most biased construction of history. If the theory or the system requires it, then the primal human is a wild animal, then the most uncivilized peoples are the representatives of the

¹⁸ Bavinck, *CW*, 100.

original human race...then Jesus did not come from Israel but from the Aryans.¹⁹

Rejecting transcendent norms, in other words, does not lead to a humble position which allows us to appreciate the diversities of the different peoples and cultures. Rather, the German philosophers with whom Bavinck interacted showed that a kind of nationalism was the result. Germany became the standard by which many were judging the other nations as less developed, primitive, and so on: “Relativism appears, then, to be impartial, as it wants to know of no fixed norms and claims to be concerned with and to speak of only the concrete, the historical. But it makes the relative itself into the absolute and therefore exchanges true freedom for coercion, real faith for superstition.”²⁰

In a provocative fashion – the application of which is not difficult to see in a racially polarized twenty-first century – Bavinck asserted in 1904 that rejecting the Christian faith leads us to the terrible consequence of racism. What may seem to be the most humble and relativistic view turns out to be the most triumphalist and imperialist. By getting rid of the transcendent, we end up absolutizing one particular historical people group.

But how, exactly, then, do we do justice to both the transcendent and the historical? Bavinck insists that ethics has to be based on the transcendent God himself. The true, good, and beautiful subsist in the one God.²¹ The God whose ideas are reflected in the world, and through whom we then know all things, is the same God that created the norms that we encounter within reality. By God’s thought, God granted “reality to things and truth to our intellect”, and, likewise, God determined “the norms for our knowing, willing, and acting.”²² But this one God does not just elevate these moral norms for us – he entered into human history. The Logos became flesh, and so the transcendent ethical ideal, became historical in Jesus. As the Logos enters into flesh, he too invites us to partake in his divine wisdom in Christ: “But just

¹⁹ Bavinck, *CW*, 101.

²⁰ Bavinck, *CW*, 102.

²¹ Bavinck, *CW*, 110.

²² Bavinck, *CW*, 108.

as the wisdom of God became flesh in Christ, so should the truth also enter us.”²³

How is Bavinck's *Christian Worldview* exemplary for us Today?

Let me close this lecture with three brief, interconnected points to this end. *Firstly, Bavinck's Christian Worldview* was *patiently inductive*. Bavinck's treatise dealt with significant subject areas outside of his own, and always dealt with the cutting edge research – as we saw briefly in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. There was this profound sense of a patient confidence in God even as he was detailing the arguments that stem from opposing worldviews and thinkers. He was able to describe the yields of the newest research in his own day, before showing in very particular and specific ways how Christianity offers aid and a more holistic alternative. Bavinck was eager to present Christianity not just as an *opposing* philosophy, but rather as a *fuller* philosophy that fulfils and accommodates other worldviews. He wants to show that Christianity offers a pervasive metaphysics that is anticipated by and fulfils the perspectives of philosophers and scientists.

If we are to follow Bavinck's example, then, *we would not just be reading Bavinck*. We would be reading the deliverances of the cutting-edge research and science. We might not be wrestling with the connection between mental ideas and external objects any longer now, but we have new and urgent questions before us to which we need to turn our attention. How should Christianity be a help to the leading deliverances of today's academy, and to the challenging questions of the present generation?

Secondly, Bavinck's Worldview thinking deepens understanding, rather than simplifies. Worldview thinking in our day often times simplifies thinkers by categorizing them together under an “ism” and then dismissing them. We might be tempted, for example, to say that we need not deal with Derrida and Foucault because they were advocates of “postmodernism”, or we say that Kant and Hume were all proponents of “modernism.” Such a move simplifies rather than deepens, because we reduce them into a simple caricature – a worldview – in order to dispense with them, not noticing the insights, details and complexities that these thinkers uniquely pose. In other words, he opted for patient description rather than facile denunciations.

Bavinck pushes us to explore particular thinkers deeply and to seek to find out their first principles, that which is behind what they are saying, their foundations and

²³ Bavinck, *CW*, 132-3.

assumptions. He treated each thinker with the appropriate care required before he adjudicates on their worldview. We do well, then, to emulate this desire to treat each thinker with patience and care, rather than boxing them into an “ism” that we can dismiss beforehand.

Thirdly, and finally, Bavinck’s Christian Worldview was confidently, rather than brashly, Trinitarian. Bavinck does not set the Christian-worldview as a deductive starting point from which he simply denounces or rejects other worldviews that look different beforehand. Rather, you get a complex, slow, and inductive process in Bavinck’s thought where he argues not that Christianity *trumps* other worldviews from the beginning, but that Christianity is the *inescapable* conclusion that overcomes and fulfils the one-sidedness of unbelieving alternatives. In other words, Bavinck argues not for the indubitability of the Christian faith but rather for its *inescapability*.

A Royal Table: God Fills Our Emptiness with His Kindness

Nancy Guthrie

Life can change in an instant. It can change with an unexpected phone call, a sudden move, a single decision, a simple conversation. Many of us can look back and identify the moment when the course of our lives was altered, for good or for bad. Sometimes it resulted from a choice we made or an action we took. Other times it was the choice someone else made—the choice to drink and drive, the choice to turn and leave, the choice to stay and fight—that changed everything. And sometimes there is no place or no person at which we can point the finger of blame or responsibility. It just happened. It just is.

Life in this broken world can be cruel. Relentlessly cruel.

The Cruelty of Mephibosheth's Life

Life was cruel to a little five-year-old boy named Mephibosheth. At first he had everything going for him. His grandfather was Saul, the mighty king of Israel, and his dad, Jonathan, was someone he could look up to and count on, a man who saw things as they really were and was willing to risk his life to do the right thing. Mephibosheth lived on the grand estate owned by the king. As a five-year-old boy he probably wasn't thinking about what he stood to inherit or the possibility that he himself might be king of Israel one day; he simply enjoyed his life of comfort in the home of the king.

But then in one day, everything changed. A report came in from Jezreel that the Philistines had attacked Israel, and many soldiers were slaughtered on the slopes of Mount Gilboa, including his father and many of his uncles. His grandfather Saul fell on his sword in disgrace. Not only did this leave Mephibosheth without a father and grandfather, it left him without a home. As a member of the royal family in a moment when the throne was threatened, his life was immediately in danger, so Mephibosheth's nurse grabbed him and fled to somewhere safe. But in the chaos and fear of the moment, she dropped him. He fell in such a way that both of his feet suffered permanent damage.

In that one cruel day, Mephibosheth lost his father, his uncles, and his grandfather. In another sense he lost his future as a member of the royal family and even the possibility of one day sitting on the royal throne. He lost his home. And he

also lost his ability to walk, which meant a loss of mobility, a loss of independence, and a loss of dignity.

A friend of the family took him in, but his living conditions changed significantly. This family friend, Makir, lived in Lo-debar. Lo-debar was likely a good place to live if you wanted to stay off the radar of anyone looking to make sure there were no living descendants of Saul, the former king. It wasn't just on the other side of the tracks; it was literally in the middle of nowhere. The capital of Nowheresville. The name of the place meant "no pasture." There was no place for cattle to graze, no place to plant crops. It was a rocky wilderness, a long way from the lush gardens of the royal palace.

Mephibosheth was also a long way from his carefree days as a son of the future king. As he lived out his days in Lo-debar, his nights were likely restless. He was always listening for a knock on the door, convinced that his days were numbered. Lesson number one in royal rule is that when you become the king of a country, you wipe out all of the members of the previous royal family who might be a threat to your claim to the throne. So, Mephibosheth must have lived in constant fear of soldiers showing up in Lo-debar. For fifteen years or so, the knock never came. Nothing happened. Nobody visited Nowheresville.

But then one day, everything changed.

The Kindness of God to David

Mephibosheth's father's friend, David had become king of Israel. And God had made incredible promises to him. God promised to show steadfast love—or, in the Hebrew, *hesed*—to David and his descendants. *Hesed* is one of those Hebrew terms that simply can't be captured by a single English word. Perhaps that is fitting, as what is being communicated is, in many ways, too magnificent to be captured in human language. It stands for a cluster of ideas—relentless and unlimited love, mercy, grace, and kindness. This steadfast or loyal love is essential to God's very character.

David's experience of God's kindness in the promises made to him, combined with his remembrance of the promises he made to Jonathan to treat Jonathan's family with the same kind of God-like lovingkindness, motivated David to ask a question in his royal court. And in that instant, though Mephibosheth knew nothing about it, everything about his life began to change.

One day David asked, “Is anyone in Saul’s family still alive—anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul’s servants. “Are you Ziba?” the king asked.

“Yes sir, I am,” Ziba replied.

The king then asked him, “Is anyone still alive from Saul’s family? If so, I want to show God’s kindness to them.”

Ziba replied, “Yes, one of Jonathan’s sons is still alive. He is crippled in both feet.”

“Where is he?” the king asked.

“In Lo-debar,” Ziba told him, “at the home of Makir son of Ammiel.” (2 Samuel 9:1-4)

Out of the overflow of kindness he had received from God, David wanted to show kindness to someone else. But he was not interested in doing some sort of “random act of kindness.” No, this was much deeper and far more significant. He said specifically that he wanted to show God’s kindness to any living member of Saul’s family. God-style commitment to that person’s good is what David had in mind. It would be risky. It was going to cost him.

David put no qualifiers on his question. He didn’t ask, “Is there anyone who is worthy, anyone trustworthy, anyone who deserves this kind of kindness?” What David had in mind was God-like kindness that is lavished on those who don’t deserve it, those who have done nothing to earn it, those who have nothing but need to offer.

When you and I become aware of how much kindness we’ve received from God, when we savor it instead of taking it for granted, it changes us. It changes our perspective. It changes our interactions. Instead of always being so concerned about how we are being treated, how we are being included, how our needs are being met, we’re increasingly concerned about how others are being treated, whether or not they are being included, whether or not their needs are being met.

We’re able to look up from our own circumstances and situations and begin asking the question, “Whom can I show kindness to?” We find that the place inside us that once seemed so empty has become a reservoir for kindness that overflows onto the people around us.

The Kindness of David to Mephibosheth

Mephibosheth had spent years dreading the day when David’s soldiers would knock on his door. And finally, that day came.

So, David sent for him and brought him from Makir's home. His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low to the ground in deep respect. David said, "Greetings, Mephibosheth."

Mephibosheth replied, "I am your servant." 2 Samuel 9:5-6

Mephibosheth must have come limping or on crutches into the presence of the king. With his disability it must have been difficult or perhaps uncomfortable to bow low to the ground before David. Perhaps his eyes were squeezed shut in anticipation of a sword coming down on his neck. But instead, words of kindness, promises of provision, and assurances of a future fell on his ears.

"Don't be afraid!" David said. "I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will eat here with me at the king's table!" 2 Samuel 9:7

Mephibosheth could hardly believe it. My pastor, Nate Shurden put it this way: "Mephibosheth had been falling all of his life. He fell from his nurse's arms at the age of five and then fell into seclusion, insecurity, and insignificance in Lo-debar. What a fall from grace. But then he came and fell on his face before the king. And instead of ending up at the other end of a sword, Mephibosheth found that he had fallen once again. This time, he had fallen into grace."

This grace came to Mephibosheth because of a promise—a promise David made many years before to Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan, that he would show kindness to his children. As David rolled out the ways in which he intended to show this kindness, it began to dawn on Mephibosheth that this was going to change everything about his life. David's promises were not token kindnesses; these were pervasive, ongoing kindnesses.

David told Mephibosheth that he was going to give him all the property that had belonged to his grandfather Saul. We might easily rush through this point, but imagine how much property Saul, the first king of Israel, must have acquired over the many years of his reign. So surely it was a grand estate. Think Downton Abbey or Biltmore Estate, or the Ponderosa Ranch (and yes, I realize I'm dating myself with that one).

In this one day, Mephibosheth became a wealthy man. He not only had land, he had a staff of servants to work the land and mind the cattle. No longer would Mephibosheth live in the land of nothing with nothing. He was going to have a place to call home, a share in the land of promise, an inheritance to pass along to his children.

In giving Mephibosheth a home of his own, David was not sending him away. Far from it. Instead, he was making Mephibosheth part of the family. “You will eat here with me at the king’s table,” David told Mephibosheth. He wanted Mephibosheth to come in close. He wanted to know him, share life with him. He wanted to see him every night at the dinner table and hear about his day.

Imagine what Mephibosheth’s diet had been like living in “no pasture.” Now imagine what it meant to eat at the king’s table. Imagine the bounty; imagine the grandeur; imagine the guests, the conversation. The food at this table was going to be good, but the fellowship would be even better. Mephibosheth had been without a family for so long, and now he was being adopted into the king’s family. *“And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly at David’s table, like one of the king’s own sons”* (9:11) He’d been an enemy of the state, and now he’d become an adopted son of the king. He didn’t have to be afraid anymore. He didn’t have to hide anymore. The kindness of the king had undone the lifetime of cruelties he had experienced.

The Kindness of the King to You and Me

Just as life changed in a moment for Mephibosheth, so life changed in an instant for a young woman living many years later in Nazareth. The angel Gabriel told her that she was going to have a son. *“He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”*

So, what kind of king was this Son of the Most High? He was kind. The Gospel of Matthew tells us, *“A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn’t speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all.”*

We get a sense of the heart of King Jesus in the story he told about a man who was preparing a great feast. He sent out invitations for the banquet, but the invitees began making excuses for why they would not come. So, he sent his servant into the streets and alleys of the town to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

When you read about these people, maybe your first thought is that Jesus was describing somebody else. You may have your struggles, but you certainly don’t see yourself in the category of poor, crippled, blind, or lame. But “lame” is one way the Bible describes the spiritual condition of every person apart from an encounter with Jesus. We can’t come to him unless he draws us to himself. We’re poor, with nothing

to offer. We're blind. We can't see him until he reveals himself to us. None of us stride with self-confidence into the presence of our King. We all limp our way in.

And none of us deserve to get in. In fact, we deserve just the opposite. We deserve to be treated as enemies because that's what we were. If you are joined to Christ by faith, it is because God sought you out when you were hiding from him, when you were his enemy. He came looking for you out of a desire to show his lovingkindness to you because of the covenant he made before the foundations of the world. Paul writes in Ephesians 1: *"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. . . . He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding"* (Ephesians 1:4-5, 8).

Our King has summoned us to his table. He's calling us to feed on his atoning death as our life. He's calling us to drink in his salvation benefits. As we regularly share a meal at the Lord's Table with our brothers and sisters, we find that our hearts' longing for belonging is being met. We're strengthened for serving others rather than being so concerned about being served. We're strengthened to ask the question "Is there anyone I can show kindness to for Christ's sake and for his honor and glory?"

We're also strengthened for the waiting. When we follow Jesus as our King, it doesn't mean that we can expect to receive an estate or servants or a seat at the best of tables in the immediate present. It doesn't mean our crippling injuries will be immediately healed or that the hurts of the past will be easily forgotten. At least not yet.

Life can be cruel. It can leave us crippled by financial catastrophe, crippled by difficult circumstances, crippled by the cutting words of someone whose opinion mattered. But God has not abandoned us to the cruelty of life in this world under a curse. He has not forgotten us. He has not forgotten his covenant promise to show loving-kindness. He is, even now, seeking out those to whom he can show his kindness. If you have so far lingered away from his presence, hear him say to you, "You don't have anything to be afraid of in my presence. On the cross, my Son, Jesus, became my enemy so you could be my friend. He was put out of the family so you could be adopted into it. He feasted on my wrath and anger so that you can feast forever on my love and mercy."

My friend, if you have come before this King and bowed before him in humility, realizing that you have nothing but need to offer to him, the day is coming when *everything about your life will change*. It will happen in a moment, in the blink

of an eye: Our King will come for us. The greater David is going to spread a table at which we'll be welcomed to sit and feast forever.

Perhaps you sit alone tonight. Perhaps you see yourself as nobody living a nothing life in Nowheresville. I want you to know that the day will come when you will be gathered with a multitude of brothers and sisters. There will be a place for you to call home, a place for you at the table. Jesus said, "Many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 8:11). This is the expansive nature of our King's kindness.

God has not forgotten you. More significantly, he has not forgotten his covenant, made before you were born—before the foundations of the world—to show his loving-kindness to you. When you were not looking for him, when you were hiding from him, fearful that any interaction with him would only add to your shame, he sought you out to draw you to himself, saying, "Don't be afraid! I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to Abraham, your father. I will give you a place to call home, an inheritance in my heavenly land, and there, you will eat with me at the King's table in a heavenly banquet that will never end."

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Biblical Theology and Bible Studies in the Church: A Conversation with Nancy Guthrie

You are a woman on a mission. What is your mission?

I am on a mission to infiltrate women's Bible study in the local church with biblical theology. It's my contention that even in churches in which women are getting a regular diet of biblical theology and redemptive history in what is being preached from the pulpit, what is being offered to them in women's Bible study is often devoid of it. We need biblical theology not only preached from the pulpit on Sundays, but also taught and embraced in the men's and women's Bible studies that meet throughout the week.

Sometimes I look at church websites to see what studies are being offered to the women of a church or in adult Sunday School classes. And I am often disheartened to discover studies that are felt needs driven, studies with little biblical or theological rigor, and studies oriented around self-improvement. I am thrilled when I see studies of particular books of the Bible, as that indicates an expectation that what we need most is God's word and that we can expect it will speak to us. But sometimes even these studies can be oriented to jumping too quickly from what the text says to personal application, untethered to the larger story the Bible is telling that is centered on Christ.

What do you see as the benefit of biblical theology in what is being studied and discussed in small group Bible studies in the church?

Biblical theology keeps the emphasis on what Christ has done rather than on what we must do. When we approach the Bible as a series of stories from which we are meant to draw lessons about how to live, we miss what is being communicated to us about Christ. A biblical theological lens helps us connect the commands of God to the only person who ever obeyed those commands perfectly. It makes being united to Christ by faith urgent and necessary.

Another thing biblical theology does is correct sentimental notions about the future God is preparing for us. For most of my life, my understanding of the trajectory of the Christian life was that we are urged to put our faith in Christ now so that he will accept us into heaven when we die. But when we more fully understand

the story the Bible is telling, rather than a diminished hope of a spirit-with-no-body existence forever somewhere away from this earth, our rich hope is anchored in an eternal life—resurrected body and soul—on a renewed earth.

So, what has been the method of your mission?

In 2009 I began writing five ten-week studies called the *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament* Bible studies. I had been writing books for the broad Christian audience for a number of years, and over the course of writing my previous books I had been introduced to reformed theology and biblical theology and it was changing everything about how I read and understood the scriptures. So as I began writing the first volume in the series, I realized I had to make a decision about whether or not they were going to be distinctly reformed or if I was going to make them more broad in a way that they would not alienate readers who have been shaped by more generally evangelical or dispensational theology. And I decided I wanted them to be distinctly reformed because of the huge void of materials for women’s Bible study that are distinctly reformed. That decision made a difference in how I wrote beginning with the first volume on Genesis as I wrote about the connection between circumcision and baptism, how the promise of land to Abraham will ultimately be fulfilled, and the make-up of those God calls “my people.” My commitment to teaching biblical theology led me to put an emphasis on where the story of the Bible is headed in terms of consummation in every chapter of all five studies, which was completely new to many of those who read the studies.

Then, a couple of years ago my book *Even Better Than Eden*, was published. In that book I traced nine biblical themes from Genesis to Revelation helped especially by the writings of theologians such as G.K. Beale, Meredith Kline, J.V. Fesko, Richard Gaffin, and Geerhardus Vos. The response to that book got me thinking about offering training to women on how to trace major themes in the Bible on their own, so I launched a series of workshops in 2019 around the country and internationally called the Biblical Theology Workshop for Women. And it is hard to express the joy that permeates these workshops. Women love to get treated like they have a brain for theology! But this isn’t just dry theology for the head. As we trace the story of the Bible through the lens of various themes, the climax of the story is always in the same place—in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus—and we are moved to worship. Women leave telling me that their minds are spinning and their hearts are full, and that makes me incredibly happy.

So how does this mission connect with your most recent publishing endeavor, a new book which releases this month called, *God Does His Best Work with Empty?*

Well, I hope it doesn't surprise you to learn that the heart of the book is a biblical theology of the theme of emptiness/fullness. But I don't know that most readers would immediately recognize that.

If you peruse the Christian books offered at a Sam's or Costco, they're mostly written by people like Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer. Even the books by more sound Christian writers are generally very self-help oriented offering behavior modification, psychology, relational good advice, inspiration, believe-in-yourself, achieve-your-destiny kinds of messages. They are titled and packaged and written to meet felt needs, and the answers to the problems dealt with are most often not Christ-centered, but me-centered. I wanted to figure out if I could write a book that is essentially a biblical theology that might be able to sit on the shelf next to some of these other books. In other words, a book that by its title and packaging draws in the reader in regard to felt needs, but instead of offering self-help, psychological, relational, or inspirational answers to the issues, I sought to offer a Christ-centered answer to these felt needs.

Why did you pick the particular biblical theme of emptiness for the book?

In 2009, my husband, David, and I started hosting retreats for couples who have faced the death of a child. Since then we've spent a weekend with over 800 grieving parents talking through the emotional, practical, and spiritual challenges of dealing with the death of child. At one point at the first retreat I said to the gathered group, "I know that there is a huge empty place in your life. There's an empty bedroom at your house, an empty place at the table, in the family photo, a huge empty place in your family and your future plans. Perhaps you see that empty place as your greatest problem. I want you to know that is not how God sees it. When God looks at the empty place in your life, he sees it as his greatest opportunity. Because God does his best work with empty."

I would say something like, "How do I know that God does his best work with empty? Because this is what God has always done from the very beginning." While I would not have been able to characterize what I was doing as biblical theology when I

first began to speak about this at our retreats, really I was tracing the biblical theme of emptiness beginning in the second verse of the Bible, moving from the original creation to the new creation. We read in the first two verses of the Bible, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void.’ Void. Empty. But this emptiness was not a problem to God because “the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Just by the power of his word, “Let there be . . .” he began to deal with the emptiness of the world. We see in Genesis 1 that he filled the world with light and life, beauty and bounty, meaning and relationship.

I then go to the empty womb of Sarai filled by God. And from there to the empty womb of Mary. Just as the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters at Creation, so the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary. Once again the Spirit was hovering, doing his creative work so that Mary’s empty womb was filled with the very life of God. Presenting this theme enables me to look into the eyes of the very sad and empty parents gathered at our retreat and assure them that the same Word and the same Spirit is at work in their lives to fill up their desperate emptiness.

From the first retreat when I said this, my husband began saying that I needed to write a book with that title, and when I finally got around to it, I organized the content of the book around emptiness and fullness as it is pictured and portrayed from beginning to end of the Bible—in the seemingly insatiable cravings of the Israelites in the wilderness, the bitter losses of Naomi, the cruel circumstances faced by Mephibosheth, the meaninglessness experienced by Qoheleth, the destruction anticipated by Habakkuk, the insatiable thirst of the woman at the well and finally the joyful self-emptying of the field worker and pearl merchant. Its conclusion is a reiteration of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:14-19, that they would be strengthened with power through his Spirit in their inner being, that Christ would dwell in their hearts, that they would be filled with all the fullness of God.

The mantra being spoken over and over to women today is, “You are enough.” But convincing ourselves that we are enough is not the answer to our sense of emptiness. “The fullness of God” filling up our “inner being” is the ultimate answer to our emptiness. And it is my prayer that this book will convince readers of this glorious truth.

— Book Reviews —

Benjamin J. Noonan, *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 336 pages. \$38.99, paper.

This volume sets out to survey precisely what its title suggests and, in so doing, forms a kind of companion to Campbell's recent *Advances in the Study of Greek* (Zondervan, 2015). The author is a professor at Columbia International University in South Carolina, member of several scholarly organizations (including the Evangelical Theological Society), and has written on numerous topics related to Hebrew and Aramaic language. Aside from his scholarly qualifications, readers of this journal may also be interested to know that the book begins with an exhortation for students of Scripture to hone their competency in the biblical languages in an epigraph penned by J. Gresham Machen. Throughout, Noonan makes clear his desire that the volume might serve specifically to "interpret the Hebrew Bible faithfully" specifically within a ministry context (p. 25). The volume is written with students, pastors, and scholars in mind and presents a wide array of technical topics in an accessible way.

The contents of the book are appropriately delimited and very well organized given the target readership. Together, the first two chapters play an important role. Chapter one presents an introduction to the various theoretical approaches in general linguistics, without reference to the biblical languages. While this may at first seem far afield, in fact this chapter provides essential background knowledge given the fact that virtually all of the scholarly advances discussed in the book have come about thanks to new developments in linguistics proper. Chapter two then goes on to provide a survey of the study of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, beginning with the Masoretes in the tenth century through the present. This chapter helps to orient the reader within the state of the discussion at large, placing certain well-known scholars

in their intellectual context (e.g., Barr, Waltke, Silva) and introducing more recent but important names that may be less familiar to readers (e.g., Cook, Holmstedt, van der Merwe).

The following eight chapters then discuss specific areas of linguistic study. These areas include: lexicology and lexicography (ch. 3); verbal stems (ch. 4) tense, aspect, and mood (ch. 5); discourse analysis (ch. 6); word order (ch. 7); register, dialect, style-shifting, and code-switching (ch. 8); dating biblical texts (ch. 9); and pedagogical approaches (ch. 10). Few seminary graduates will know much about these topics since they receive little attention even in more recent intermediate Hebrew reference works. Indeed, that the very terms involved in those topics may be completely unfamiliar to some readers only serves to highlight the reality of new developments in the field and therefore the importance of this volume.

Each chapter is organized in a standardized way. First, the topic is situated within modern linguistics, building on the discussion in chapters one and two. Noonan then moves on to discussion of the various scholarly views of the topic for Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic in turn (the latter often being much shorter). This discussion is often organized into broad approaches (e.g., tense-prominent versus aspect-prominent theories of the verbal system), but for certain topics the field is limited enough to focus on the proposals and approaches of individual scholars in succession. In general, the approaches and scholars discussed are presented in a very descriptive style, without much comment as to their merit. However, Noonan does provide a section at the end of each chapter identifying to the way(s) forward for research within that particular topic, which will prove very helpful for those looking for guidance on how to proceed with their own work. On a similar note, Noonan also discusses key literature and resources throughout the book, providing a generous list of further reading at the end of each chapter.

A few critical observations are in order. First, although no fault of the author, the print quality of this volume is unfortunately low. While helping to keep costs down, one might hope that Zondervan would opt for paper and binding quality that assumes the book will need to endure ongoing use. Second, at times the structure of the book can lend itself to monotony, particularly in chapters in which one scholarly view appears after another, paragraph by paragraph, with little or no narrative to carry things along. In that sense, some may use this volume as something closer to a reference work, depending on the topic in view. Even so, the book can easily be read straight through and keep your underlining pencil or highlighter busy. Third, despite its subject matter, there is actually very little Hebrew or Aramaic in the book, aside

from the occasional word or phrase. In one sense, this may be construed as a benefit for students or pastors whose languages have gotten rusty. But, while Hebrew and Aramaic are often translated in the text, in a large number of cases there is no translation, which will occasionally leave some readers in the dark.

Despite these drawbacks, given the many significant developments in this area of scholarship, this book was sorely needed and Noonan has done an excellent job with the task. The past fifteen years have seen a great deal of progress in the study of Hebrew in particular, yet a large portion of the scholarly discussion is confined to papers presented in study units at annual conferences or highly specialized monographs. Noonan has corralled all of that work, organized it, and explained enough of the technical background to enable the reader to come away oriented and equipped. The author is also to be commended for including Aramaic in this project, which could easily have fallen by the wayside as it so often does. Although Aramaic has seen considerably less scholarly activity by comparison, Noonan's survey may help prompt further engagement. Students, pastors, and scholars alike will benefit from this book and owe the author a debt of gratitude.

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**Ian A. McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation*.
Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019. 259 pages. \$35.00, paper.**

The doctrine of the Incarnation has begun to receive attention – serious, searching attention – again from divinity school professors. For years, the topic wouldn't be touched in a serious manner because scholars were captive (whether in liberal or evangelical settings) far too often to the hellenization thesis and (knowingly or not) a variant of so-called “doctrinal criticism.” Yet two years ago, Rowan Williams released *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), and this past year Ian McFarland released *The Word Made Flesh*. We now have serious studies in the doctrine of the incarnation that are worthy of patient study and careful engagement,

for they alert us more fully to exegetical argument and to the wide-ranging resources of the Christian tradition (in this case to Maximus the Confessor but also to Martin Luther as readers of the gospels in their canonical setting).

This volume is not a mere textbook surveying the topics. It is a constructive argument regarding a particular thesis: “It is my contention in this book that a thoroughgoing commitment to Christology developed in these terms—a Chalcedonianism without reserve—continues to provide the most adequate account of Christian convictions regarding Jesus” (3). What does it mean to be Chalcedonian in unreserved fashion? McFarland argues that the creedal definition has not had its fullest impact with respect to the humanity of the incarnate Son. “In other words, although in the majority tradition Jesus’ full humanity is formally affirmed, it is not viewed as integral to his identity, since it is only where his humanity is overshadowed by the power of his divinity that God is revealed” (3). “Therefore (and as paradoxical as it may seem), it is a central thesis of this book that an orthodox account of Jesus’ divinity necessarily includes the affirmation that nothing divine can be perceived in him” (9).

Perception will be crucial to tracing his argument. In perceiving Jesus, we “perceive no one other than God the Son,” though we also “perceive nothing other than created substance” (8). Distinguishing who and what becomes tremendously important, with the terms *hypostasis* and nature serving key roles here (72-78). He advances the thesis in three parts of the book.

Part one of the book addresses “The Great Divide” by considering “the life of the Creator” (chapter 1) and then “the being of creatures” (chapter 2). Chapter one offers a wide ranging survey of the doctrine of God: from invisibility to transcendence to the various perfections of God. Chapter two turns to affirm the dependence and diverse being of creatures, affirming “that although God does not stand over against creatures ..., creatures do stand over against God” (50). While God is both far and near, McFarland lingers patiently over the fact that God’s presence (his providential and sustaining presence) remains “invisible to and unknown by it” (60). In this sense, divine transcendence demands divine invisibility. We ought to ask of McFarland, however, what we make of those intensifications of divine presence that might be called theophanies?

Part two turns to “The Bridge,” analyzing the affirmations “one and the same” (chapter 3), “perfect in divinity” (chapter 4), “and also perfect in humanity” (chapter 5). The problem to be addressed is defined: “It appears to follow that the unavoidable consequence of God seeking to effect genuine communion with creatures would be

the dissolution of creaturely existence. The claim that it need not be so is the burden of the doctrine of the incarnation” (67). More specifically, “the Chalcedonian distinction between nature and hypostasis provides a means of addressing this problem: in taking flesh the hypostasis of the Word can be perceived by virtue of assuming a created and visible *human* nature (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; cf. 1 John 1:1), even though *God’s* nature remains as transcendent (and thus as intrinsically imperceptible) as ever” (88). I might wonder how he’d engage a bit more thoroughly with Cyril of Alexandria’s arguments in his anti-Nestorian writings regarding the impact of the divine nature upon the humanity of Christ; does McFarland deem such an account to “dissolve” the humanity of Christ? He also works through the narrative of the Son’s saving action in chapter five, including a helpful exposition of the Word’s *kenosis* or self-emptying (140-141) and a narrative manifestation of that self-emptying by exegetically reflecting on three episodes in his prophetic ministry where he “rules and saves by emptying himself of pretension, exercising authority in response to those in need” (150, see also 142-150). He speaks of the descent to the grave in more patristic fashion as focused on the full experience of death, rather than as on a harrowing of hell (151 fn. 44).

Part three speaks of the works of this incarnate Son, what is called “The Crossing.” Chapter 6 considers the theme of *Christus Victor* by considering resurrection, ascension, and reign, while chapter 7 turns to the presence of Jesus now. Luther and Maximus the Confessor are the heroes of these two chapters, respectively. “[T]he good news of the embodiment of God in Jesus is not that it should be repeated, but that it should be *inverted*; not that God should live in other human beings as God did in Jesus only, but that human beings should live in God” (212). Christ is uniquely the redeemer from sin; hence the singularity of his works. However, McFarland argues that his work cannot be limited to a single event or moment within his life (217). In many ways he sounds a cry like that of John Calvin who said “from the time he took the form of a servant he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us” (*Inst.* II.xvi.5). I might add also that McFarland helpfully responds to some liberationist approaches that seek to dislocate language of forgiveness owing to political concerns (191 fn. 8); without suggesting that culpability and guilt are experienced in homogenous ways, McFarland nonetheless catches the global and consistent word of the gospel to address the sins of all and also the range of ways in which we all are implicated in the evil pangs of a fallen world (in admittedly variegated ways in diverse settings).

The proposal is Chalcedonian, expounding and employing the distinction of person and nature to make radical claims regarding the singular revelation found in the Incarnation of the Son of God. Shall we pursue it without reserve? Surely not, as any account of this scale will raise questions and invite disagreements. I limit myself here to suggesting three points as especially helpful.

First, McFarland's book – like the recent publication of Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* – helpfully shows that the doctrine of God helps to frame our perception of the scandal of the incarnation. In particular, divine transcendence persists in this new epoch and just so raises the question as to how Jesus is himself divine. Put otherwise, the logic of Chalcedonian Christology only makes sense with an operative notion of divine transcendence.

Second, in the midst of his exegetical work on the divinity of the incarnate Son, McFarland shows why we ought to hesitate to identify the God of Israel (revealed by the name YHWH) with one of the persons of the Trinity alone (104-105). In other words, that the Father or the Son are each YHWH is not the same as saying that YHWH is the Father or the Son (as if not also the other triune persons). We might extend his argument here to say that making such personal differentiation (say, identifying the God of the Israelites as the Father specifically) raises significant questions about divine immutability.

Third, McFarland's seventh chapter helpfully points to biblical material necessitating language of the church as Christ's body while also avoiding some of the recent hyper-Lutheran variants (as in Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2:213-214). Any theology which seeks to honor the biblical data and the Augustinian tradition of the *totus Christus* must navigate these waters. The last century has been one for overexuberance in identifying Christ with human social community, whether in the wider social forms of Ritschlian liberalism or the more churchly dress of *la nouvelle théologie*, and these lush accounts have led to overreactions with an unnecessarily contrastive and even iconoclastic response as in Karl Barth and some in the Reformed world. I might add that it has been a century when confessional Reformed authors have often failed to engage in such discussions as productively as might be wished (though recent writings from both Michael Horton and John Webster do signal signs of change here). McFarland's argument, from a Lutheran perspective, serves as a useful prompt in this regard, and I think he avoids some of the excessive restraint in Webster without lapsing into the lush identification of Christ and church in Jenson.

In conclusion, then, Ian McFarland offers a thin, readable volume that helps draw attention to crucial questions and mysteries regarding the Incarnation. In so

doing, he offers something of a full dogmatics in outline, by ranging from the doctrine of God all the way through the topics of creation, incarnation, salvation, church, sacraments, and end times. While his is a Lutheran and mainline perspective, he ranges ecumenically through the centuries and across the varied church traditions and sometimes argues in ways surprising for a Lutheran (and, frankly, more amenable to a Reformed reading). It's really quite something to read a constructive Lutheran Christology that pushes back on kenoticist accounts; given that many modern Reformed authors have been seduced by what was a more historically Lutheran temptation, it's perhaps a welcome read for those in the Reformed world. Alongside the work of Williams, then, it will be a helpful volume for those desiring a more advanced work in Christology. It also – as is typical for books by McFarland – models an exegetically engaged approach to systematic theology. Even when this reviewer finds himself differing at points, it is refreshing to be differing over exegetical analyses and judgments about canonical synthesis or prioritization. For both its material and its model, then, advanced readers will benefit greatly from a patient and critical study of this book.

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**Han-Luen Kantzer Komline, *Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. xv+469 pages. \$125, cloth.**

The Early Church can be a strange and alien place for many Protestants, filled with odd theological fixations and stranger exegesis. But it is more often the case that we Protestants are the ones who are strangers, awaking in our current day with amnesia and no clear idea how we got here. This makes engaging with the Church Fathers one of the most helpful activities for both ourselves individually and the Church corporately; as we learn the priorities and reasoning of our forebearers, we learn to become more grounded and balanced in the doctrines that are at the center of

our faith. This is what makes Han-Luen Kantzer Komline's new work, *Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account* so helpful.

Augustine is a theologian who could be said to be obsessed with the will, which even the hastiest reader of the *Confessions* can verify. The desires and loves of the human will and his own heart are some of the primary themes in his spiritual journey. Komline's study is a welcome addition to the field and seeks to give a deep, robust account of one of Augustine's most central ideas.

Previous studies of Augustine on the will are mostly examinations of the will's broader historical development or philosophical usefulness/cogency. While looking at Augustine's interaction with or reliance upon Stoic thought is fascinating and necessary, Komline argues that examining Augustine's understanding of the will without its several different theological contexts misses the broader picture. Instead, Augustine's understanding of the will should be viewed as "theologically differentiated"; the will means different things depending on its theological context. For example, the capabilities of the human will and how it operates differs radically depending on its corresponding state: created (*posse non peccare*), fallen (*non posse non peccare*), redeemed (*posse non peccare*), or eschatological (*non posse peccare*). Komline is showing not so much how an abstract theology is guiding Augustine, as the biblical story of redemption itself: "Augustine's conception of will is not only inherently theological; it is inherently biblical" (p. 12).

The book is organized into eight chapters, each of which deals with a single theme in Augustine's writings where the will is featured. Each theme is then unfolded chronologically over the course of the chapter, but the themes are organized in a way that allows a flow of historical movement to be maintained from chapter to chapter. This results in a vivid sense of Augustine's development as a theologian. His insights and innovations slowly result in the reworking of vast sections of his theological system.

The first chapter begins with the created will and how Augustine's early understanding of the will is more heavily philosophical and guided by general theological principle rather than exegesis. He had a high respect for what the human will could perform and how it is a good gift from God. At this stage, his examinations of the will at creation had not yet taken into account the effects of the Fall. Komline continues with chapter two on the fallen will, where Augustine is slowly forced to increase the intensity of the Fall. Though he first views a fallen human will as simply more prone to sinful habits which bind the will, he begins to focus on how assistance is required from God himself. The great watershed event is in his famous exegesis of

Romans 9 in *Ad Simplicianum* where “he comes to affirm that good will itself, not only acting on a good will, is a gift of grace” (p. 116). This central idea is then expanded and clarified with discussions of the redeemed will (chapter 5) and the eschatological will (chapter 8). All the while, Augustine’s thought becomes more and more theologically contextualized and driven by his exegesis of Scripture.

But it is too simple to reduce Augustine’s thought on the will to the four-fold state of man. Though Komline finds this categorization helpful and gives the will in each of the four states a chapter, it is by no means exhaustive. Some of Augustine’s most fascinating insights are when discussing how the divine and human wills of Christ operate (chapter 6) or how the Holy Spirit is working within the will of the believer (chapter 7). There are also helpful discussions of both what the will is capable of (chapter 3) and what God is responsible for in the will (chapter 4). By laying the two chapters side by side, the core of Augustine’s thought is made easily accessible.

One of the chief benefits of Komline’s work is a sense of Augustine’s organic development. His defining focus upon man’s dependency upon God’s grace and love starts a transformation that is not complete until the final years of his life, after decades of engaging in the Pelagian Controversy. Seeing this progression almost forces the reader to ask, “Where am I in Augustine’s life?”

This developmental focus also has the added benefit of offering a fantastic tour of large sections of Augustine’s theology and writings. The meat of each chapter is a series of close readings that deeply engage with the primary material. Exotic stops on this tour include Augustine on marriage, the two trees of Matthew 7:18, or the unity of Christ’s person. Most of the main defining events of Augustine’s life are covered, with the main exception being his involvement in the Donatist controversy. Studying Augustine on the will requires studying far more than just will.

This does make the book relatively dense, but it is also surprisingly well “sign-posted.” Each chapter, section, and subsection lay out precisely what has been covered before and where the argument is going. Komline does not skimp on any portion of her analysis, but practically bends over backwards to make sure that the reader feels comfortable and oriented for the long journey. So, while a tome on Augustine’s understanding of the will might suggest a slog, it is relatively easy to read and not get bogged down in the precise details of a single passage of Augustine.

For students of Augustine, this is an excellent resource. Komline is not merely writing about philosophy, systematics, or biblical theology but something that helpfully speaks to all of them. Of course, the price may be an impediment for some.

However, for those who are willing, Komline offers nothing less than a masterclass in Augustine that deserves to be read and reread.

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Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019, xxvi+ 296, \$15.85, cloth.

The COVID pandemic has interrupted our face-to-face relationships. Recently a friend mentioned that his choir scheduled a Zoom meeting so everyone could see and hear each other. The goal was to maintain contact and encourage; but he said it had the opposite effect on him. The online gathering left him even more pained, reinforcing what has been lost and intensifying the pain of separation.

True pastoral ministry must be face-to-face. There is no substitute for it. Too often books on pastoral ministry focus on technique, offering skills that pastors must have to manage people, in this case the church. They frequently pass over the ongoing personal encounters that are vital to pastoral ministry – encounters undertaken by Christ's undershepherds and grounded in the word of God. As the word is preached and taught, the church is gathered, fed, nourished, and protected. Whether in the pulpit, visiting in the home, or counseling in the study, pastoral care is the ministry of the word.

I discovered Harold L. Senkbeil's *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* perusing a book table at a theology conference, and my interest was piqued. *The Care of Souls* is traditional language used to describe the work of the pastor. The subtitle – *Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* – indicates a view of ministry that emphasizes the disposition of the pastor.

First let me mention aspects of the book that fall outside the practice of Reformed pastoral care. The author is a Lutheran minister with five decades of pastoral experience. As expected, his Lutheran tradition shapes his ministry. Private

confession and absolution, the use of crucifixes, and the signing of the cross are not part of mainstream Reformed pastoral tradition. The sacraments take on a prominence in his pastoral care that would be uncommon in Reformed quarters. The relationship between law and gospel is in keeping with the author's spiritual heritage.

That said, I would be disappointed if the writer had ignored his own tradition. One of the purposes of reading widely is to develop a charitable understanding of the practices of fellow Christians, and to reexamine our own particular understanding of ministry in the light of God's word.

Reservations out of the way, I will explain why I found this book so appealing and recommend it to pastors.

The author begins with what should be an incontestable truth: if a man is to do the work of a pastor, he must understand who a pastor is. The author is clear: "the premise of this book is that action flows from being; identity defines activity. Thus a clearer vision of what the pastoral ministry is will lead to a clearer understanding of what a pastor does day by day" (16).

A fundamental work of any seminary is to impress upon men who a pastor is. From the moment he sets his feet on the ground in his first church, he must be fully persuaded of who he is, an undershepherd of Jesus Christ. If he does not grasp this, he will labor in vain – no matter how hard he works.

Two recurring terms in this book are *habitus* and *the care and cure of souls*. *Habitus* refers to the character of the pastor. *Habitus* is "a pastoral temperament or character worked by the Holy Spirit through his means" (17), or, put in another way, the "disposition of the pastor's soul by which he acquires the skills of a spiritual physician, to discern accurately and then sensitively treat the ailments of Christ's sheep and lambs" (60). Acquiring this temperament takes time, laboring long and hard in using the God-appointed means of pastoral care.

The care and cure of souls refers to the work of the pastor. In his labors, the pastor brings the "the gifts of the Good Shepherd to his sheep and lambs" (19).

The work of the pastor is nothing if it is not word-based. "The text of sacred Scripture is at the heart of all pastoral work" (45). The cure for the soul is the proper application of God's word (40). At a time when the word *contextualization* is bandied about, the author offers a refreshing perspective: "The challenge for pastors in every generation is to link the person and work of Jesus to every shifting era by means of his unchanging word – not to contextualize the message, but to textualize people into the text of Scripture" (17).

The pastor's work is both public and private. Week-by-week, he cares for God's flock as he leads them in corporate worship. But sheep are often injured – by the acts of others or by self-inflicted wounds. Through individual attention, the pastor strives to apply biblical cures to injured souls.

The cure of souls has two components: *attentive diagnosis* and *intentional treatment*.

Attentive diagnosis demands careful listening. “The pastor must first listen to the soul before he can minister to the soul” (69).

One of my colleagues at RTS Jackson teaches an entire course for counseling students on listening. I have asked him to speak to my MDIV students, because good pastors are good listeners. The pastor who fails to listen attentively will frequently misdiagnose; his applications of the word will be faulty.

Pastoral work has as its aim “delivering a good conscience before God” (127). Discernment is required, for frequently those who come to the pastor seek “God's approval apart from faith and repentance; and so feeling good takes precedent over being good” (119).

Senkbeil helps pastors to listen well. He argues that he must especially listen to his sheep and what their words reveal about them in four critical areas – faith, providence, holiness, and repentance. Does this person have faith in Jesus Christ? Is there trust in difficult circumstances that God is for him and confidence in God's sovereign goodness? Is there a fear of God and an understanding of his holiness? Does this person believe he is a sinner who must turn away from sin to God for forgiveness and restoration?

Although the author's counsel for the intentional treatment of souls incorporates a number of the distinctively Lutheran practices mentioned above, the Reformed pastor still finds much that will prove helpful in ministry. The cure of souls is the work of the Triune God through the ministry of word and sacraments and the pastor is but the instrument that God uses in his work; for the cure to be effective, the ministry of word and sacrament must be received by faith; and the threats of the devil, world, and flesh are real, and must be repelled with the word of God.

An essential element of pastoral care is to teach the distressed “how to pray confidently and regularly as a beloved child of the Father in heaven through faith in the Lord Jesus” (106-107).

A follow-up email, designed as a pastoral letter, can reinforce the care that was given.

As a minister with a number of years of experience, I especially benefited from the author's reminder of the threat of *acedia*, which he defines as "a lack or absence of care" for pastoral work (209-210). The inevitable disappointments in ministry have led to apathy and despair. The author describes the warning signs of *acedia* and its treatment. His counsel is frank, honest, and personal. A pastoral *habitus* must include caring for one's own soul and welcoming the pastoral care of other ministers.

I seek to instill in my seminary students Senkbeil's enthusiasm for traditional pastoral ministry. He argues that "there's a framework for pastoral work that translates well over the centuries; it's both transcultural and timely in that it connects with people groups no matter where or when they live." (9). I agree wholeheartedly. The environments in which we minister constantly change, but the fundamentals of pastoral ministry remain the same.

Much more unites Lutheran and Reformed pastors committed to traditional pastoral ministry than divides. For two millennia, Christian pastors have reflected on what it means to be a faithful shepherd, true to God's word. The well of wisdom is deep. *The Care of Souls* leads us there and invites us to drink.

Charles Malcolm Wingard

David VanDrunen. *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020, 400 pp. \$29.99, paper.

Politics after Christendom is the culmination of two and half decades of David VanDrunen's scholarly inquiries into natural law, covenant theology, and two-kingdom theology. For a deeper analysis of his foundational thinking on these topics see his books *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* and *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law*, both published by Eerdmans.

Part One of this book outlines the author's "political theology" which he defines as theological reflections on public and political life in the period between

Christ's ascension and return. He makes the case that political institutions have four key characteristics. They are legitimate, provisional, common, and accountable. That is to say, they are sanctioned by God, they are not eternal, they are for the benefit of both Christians and non-Christians, and they are under divine authority. Part One is a summary of his previous work in other books and articles. For those new to VanDrunen, this will provide a helpful introduction. Those who are unconvinced by his argument should consider his earlier detailed work.

Part Two of the book provides a framework for how this political theology might be applied to various political dilemmas such as religious liberty, the family, economic systems, justice, and political resistance. He first explains the modesty of his proposal. Political theology is grounded in natural law and natural law provides frameworks, not detailed instructions. He does not attempt to provide *the* Christian view stating that "Therefore, while Christians are free to try to persuade others to agree with their political judgments, they should ordinarily not present them as *the* Christian view, that is, as necessary points of Christian dogma or biblical exegesis."

The first issue he tackles is pluralism and religious liberty. He argues for a generally pluralistic society where the basic Noahic institutions of family life, enterprise institutions, and justice are equally available to all. He gives brief attention to racial pluralism and more attention to religious pluralism. He argues that a society should not exclude anyone from its benefits based upon religious beliefs, should not establish a religion for society, and should not generally exclude religious practices. He gives several legal cases from the Supreme Court in this section by way of illustration, such as *Burwell vs. Hobby Lobby* (regarding contraception) and *Yoder v. Wisconsin* (regarding education.) He makes the case that the government has no business becoming involved in either healthcare or education. I wish he had also discussed the 1983 case of *Bob Jones University v. United States* where the Supreme Court upheld the right of the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of religious educational institutions that practice racial discrimination. This would have tied together his section on racial pluralism and religious pluralism and provides an excellent case study for when the two values come into conflict.

Next, VanDrunen turns to family institutions. He makes the case that the main purpose of marriage is procreation and the raising of children and that this is best done in monogamous, heterosexual, and permanent relationships. Further, the very fact that families exist indicates that government should be limited and not encroach into family responsibilities such as providing a social safety net. He does not say whether he believes this means that government should have no role in mediating

divorce, determining who should be married, or passing any other law regarding marriage or sexual relations. Since marriage is open to non-believers, the church can't serve as mediator for all marriage in a society, and yet some institution must administer justice when a marriage falls apart and pass laws deciding who is allowed to marry and at what stage of life.

VanDrunen then turns to economics arguing that free market economies are more consistent with the goals of the Noahic covenant than command economies, but he leaves room for different types of market economies with varying amounts of government intervention. He acknowledges that there is no such thing as a pure market economy or a pure command economy and that there is much room for disagreement on how "pure" a particular economy should be. He asserts that enterprise structures are created (not natural, like family structures) and entered into voluntarily. Yet slavery is an example of an enterprise structure that is not entered into voluntarily. VanDrunen is strangely silent on whether or not this particular enterprise arrangement is a violation of negative natural rights.

VanDrunen spends some time on the issue of human rights. He believes that the Noahic covenant establishes negative universal rights to all people such as the right not to be murdered, raped, stolen from, or even slandered. However, it does not establish positive or welfare rights such as the right to food, housing, or medical care. In his list of negative rights, he avoids mention of two controversial negative rights, namely the right not to be enslaved and the right not to be tortured.

From justice, VanDrunen next turns to laws and customs. These provide the "meat" or details behind justice and can be established by family, enterprise, and government institutions. The Noahic covenant does not provide a list of laws and customs but does provide societies with clues about how they might be established. He advocates a polycentric view of law, that says government is not the only or even most important source of law. Law refers to customary legal order rather than a set of written decrees given by those in authority.

VanDrunen finally argues for a "conservative liberalism" which sounds like a contradiction until one understands that he is not using the modern definitions of those terms which he believes are more properly labeled as "nationalism" and "progressivism." Instead, a liberal politic is one that is pluralistic and tolerant and defends people's negative natural rights. A conservative politic is one that appreciates the accumulated wisdom of the past and embraces slow modest change that is localized rather than wide-scale.

I found Part One of the book to be more satisfying than Part Two. The Noahic Covenant is purposefully non-specific and does not provide a blueprint on how humans should accomplish its goals, what institutions are best for accomplishing those goals, and how those institutions should interact. VanDrunen acknowledges this and yet seems to read back some of his classical liberalism into the Noahic Covenant instead of resting with the ambiguity. I would argue that Part One makes the case that Part Two should probably not exist in a “political theology” but should instead be a separate secular work. However, *Politics After Christendom* is an excellent reminder that Christians should hold their political convictions tentatively and be tolerant of fellow believers with differing views. When combined with a consistent application of the doctrine of the spirituality of the Church, the views presented by VanDrunen provide an excellent alternative path that avoids the pitfalls of the Evangelical Left and Right. One need not accept all of VanDrunen’s legal theories and assessment of classical liberalism and conservatism to appreciate the view he proposes.

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