

Foundations

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Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to pastoral

ministry. Its particular focus is the theology of evangelical churches which are committed to biblical truth and evangelical ecumenism. It has been published by Affinity (formerly The British Evangelical Council) from its inception as a print journal. It became a digital journal in April 2011.

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EDITORIAL

*Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
(Ps 124:8, NKJV)*

It is my pleasure to introduce another edition of *Foundations*. Again, this edition appears in difficult and troubling times, so I am particularly grateful for those who have made the time to write and to seek to enrich the Church despite the constraints and pressures we are living with.

The first article in this edition is from Affinity council member Lee Gatiss. Lee reflects so very helpfully and pastorally on what can often be a difficult concept to get our heads around: the impassibility of God. Perhaps we struggle to relate the language of Scripture (God being grieved over sin, or angry and distressed over our actions) with the theological conviction that God is unchangeably blessed and happy (or as Lee says, God “is not vulnerable to bouts of unhappiness, despair, or depression because we have been naughty or cruel or unfaithful”). It may even be that the former causes us to deny and question the latter and reject what has become known as “classical theism” (a helpful term, which should not however be used to flatten out genuine diversity within an overarching unity). If we have puzzled over these matters then we will find Lee a faithful guide.

The next article tackles what is an increasingly controversial area, the current debates and varying practices within what is known as “complementarianism”. I am very grateful to Sarah Allen for the work she has done to describe the current lie of the land in broadly complementarian churches. This is an area where further theological reflection and discussion is needed. Without this we will either increasingly simply drift with society, or potentially react against this drift by unthinkingly preserving the cultural norms of the church culture we grew up in. Sarah’s article raises a number of important questions, and I hope authors (reflecting the breadth of views in our ecclesiastical circles) will take up the challenge to write further in this area for *Foundations*. Needed areas of reflection range from the nature of gathered Lord’s Day worship through to the kind of complementarity there is between men and women (i.e. the question of ontology).

Following Sarah’s article is a piece by David Filson of Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville and Westminster Theological Seminary on the apologetics and theology of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til and the orbit of Westminster Theological Seminary had a profound influence on apologetic practice in reformed and evangelical churches in the twentieth century. To help us understand Van Til, Filson takes us to a controversy over apologetic method in the mid-twentieth century, unpacking what Van Til meant by a

presuppositional apologetics and how the idea of “paradox” features in his theology. There have been a number of recent criticisms of Van Til’s methodology. It is good, in response, to pause and reflect on Van Til’s teachings in the hands of a pastor and academic like Filson.

Two more historical studies make up the remaining two articles. The first is a paper by Steve Bishop on Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian, politician, academic and all-round polymath. At the one hundredth anniversary of his death it is good to be able to reflect on Kuyper’s legacy. The final article is on Samuel Rutherford and antinomianism by Song-En Poon. This was initially suggested for publication by William MacKenzie, and I am grateful for his recommendation. Seventeenth-century debates may seem far removed to us, but this one touches on issues of our relation to the law of God and the nature of faith and assurance. These are perpetually important matters.

What I hope is evident in these articles is a breadth of interest, ranging as they do from theology with a pastoral edge, to current church practice, to apologetics, to historical theology. My desire for *Foundations* is that it will be used by members of Affinity and the broader evangelical circles in which we move to reflect on all these kinds of areas that together we might “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

Dr Donald John MacLean

Editor of Foundations

*Elder, Cambridge Presbyterian Church and Trustee, The Banner of Truth
October 2020*

PLEASING THE IMPASSIBLE GOD

*Lee Gatiss**

The Bible says, “find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10). But is God not already perfectly happy, and therefore not susceptible to changeable emotional reactions as we so often are? This article unpacks issues of accommodation in divine speech, anthropopathism, and the doctrines of immutability and impassibility (the idea that God is “without passions” as some confessions put it), in order to understand better the scriptural metaphor of pleasing or displeasing God.

If God followed you on social media, what would he make of your posts? What would he “like”, and what would he frown at? Would he retweet or share your contributions, or make some kind of comment on them along with everyone else?

Sometimes social media pops up and tells me that one of my friends has liked a certain product or started following a particular account. I am informed that “*This person* likes Nottingham Forest” or “*That person* likes listening to Awesome Cutlery”. The implication is clear: would I care to do the same? Here’s a button to press if I would. Sometimes Twitter tells me that several people I follow have also started following X. That can be revealing, and raise an eyebrow or two: “Oh, I had no idea they were into *that!*” Or I am told that “*So and so* has commented on Dominic Cummings’ or President Trump’s latest tweet — to do the same, click here.” Would I care to do the same? Maybe, or maybe not.

What if Facebook notified me of the things which *God* had liked today or commented on at some point? What would I do with that kind of data? I’m not trying to scare anyone into conducting a godliness audit of their social media interaction (not that this is necessarily a bad idea). Rather, I want to stimulate thinking about the more basic question: does God like or dislike the things we say or think or do? And if so, how can we tell? Short of him actually opening up an account on Facebook or Instagram, is there a way to know how he views things? Or are we left to guess and speculate using our own ideas and

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imaginations: “I *think* God will like this”, or “I’m not sure he’d like that very much”?

The answer, of course, is to be found primarily in “God-breathed Scripture” (2 Timothy 3:16). As Martin Luther (1483-1546) rightly said, “It is not man’s business to determine what pleases God; it is the business of God alone.”¹ And he has let us know what he likes and dislikes, not exhaustively perhaps, but sufficiently. There are several different ways in which God’s word speaks of his approval of something. He says someone “finds favour with him” or that something gives him pleasure, he delights in it, he is happy. The Bible talks about how something is good in God’s eyes, or acceptable to him, or pleasing. It also tells us what he finds loathsome or abominable, and the various things he hates or finds a stench in his nostrils.

We have thumbs up and laughing reactions on Facebook (and now a hug reaction too), and there’s a heart on Twitter to express our feelings about a post. God uses a number of different words and phrases to express his likes and his dislikes in Scripture — not just a crying emoji or an angry face. He is much more subtle and clear.

I. Studying words

In days gone by the idea of studying particular words in the Bible was very popular. Many sermons and books were just word studies, like extended dictionary articles with application tagged on. There were certain dangers associated with that approach to the Bible which have led to its being abandoned in many parts of the Church. Often a word would be defined without paying attention to the context in which it was used. Or it was just assumed a word meant the same thing in one place as it did in another, when that was not necessarily the case. Bible words were given dictionary meanings – that is, the meanings they had in the English of the day, rather than the meanings they have in the Bible itself.

There are other errors and difficulties associated with word studies. Yet we must not be so cautious of the potential mistakes we could make that we altogether neglect studying God’s actual words. Otherwise, we would never open the Bible and start reading, for fear of making a mistake. “Every word of God is flawless” says Proverbs 30:5. So we can suck on every last one, and all of them in their splendidly rich variety, and they will not ultimately lead us astray.

I am trying to finish a book on the subject of pleasing God. I intend to unpack this whole concept or biblical theme, not just one particular word as it turns up in random places throughout the Bible. Naturally I will attempt to

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, (edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 16:35 (in his lecture on Isaiah 2:8).

pay attention to the context as much as possible too, within the constraints of a short book. So this will not be what is sometimes called “systematic theology” as such, but more like “biblical theology”. That is, I am trying to discover the theology of pleasing God as it is presented by the Bible books themselves, paying due attention to their contexts and their place in the history of God’s plan.

Part of that must be to acknowledge that there is a shift of some kind from Old Testament to New. There is a progression in the Bible’s revelation of God, so that we know more about what pleases him at the end than we do at the beginning. Plus, we have Jesus in the middle, so to speak, who shows us the way more perfectly, and sends his Spirit to help us. These are all vitally important things to take note of when we are trying to work out what makes God happy. We can’t simply lift things straight out of the Old Testament necessarily, and apply them directly to us today without thinking about whether something significant has changed for us in the meantime.

So we might come across a passage in the Old Testament which says God is pleased when people sacrifice bulls and goats and sheep, or when they keep the Sabbath. We cannot just lift those texts straight out of the Old Testament and say God is still pleased with animal sacrifices and the keeping of Sabbaths. The meaning of both sacrifices and special days today has to take account of the radical change to the whole Old Testament system brought about by Jesus. God has not changed, but he always planned to teach us and lead us in a different way after Christ was raised. For example, God’s people used not to be allowed to eat shellfish or pork (see the dietary laws in the book of Leviticus); but Jesus “declared all foods clean” for us (Mark 7:19). Yet in both Old and New Testaments, certain things also remain the same, of course. He did not declare all sexual practices clean, for example.

II. God's happiness

Thinking about pleasing God a bit further, however, leads to some tricky questions, which may lead us into more systematic theology areas – for example, the whole idea of divine emotions and divine language. I have realised after years of thinking about the biblical theme of pleasing God that I need to look at these doctrinal things as well, before the book I am writing starts to dig in to the Bible’s teaching on this subject in more detail. Why? Because I do not want to draw false conclusions from what I find in individual texts. It would be too easy to simply take one verse or passage of scripture and expound it without properly putting it into the context of the Bible’s revelation of God as a whole.

It is easy in everyday life for us to get the wrong impression about someone by not doing that. My Facebook friends are not simply the things they

“like” on social media (such as films, football teams or food). Those things may be revealing, but they are not necessarily the most important things to know about them, or the absolute truth which defines their whole being. Those little revelations need to be put into a bigger context, or I will not actually know the truth about them at all. I need to know about their usual manner and tone of communicating on Facebook (not everyone uses it in the same way), and about all sorts of other aspects of their lives, to put individual revelations into context.

So it is with God and the revelation of his character in the Bible. Each revelation needs to be understood in the context of the whole, and not interpreted so that one part contradicts another. That is a good Anglican (Reformational) principle of hermeneutics, from Article 20 of *The Thirty-nine Articles*: “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another”. No part of Scripture should be interpreted so as to be contradictory to another.

Let us apply this thought to the biblical theme of pleasing God as it emerges in various parts of the Bible, as we ask “what makes God happy?” We chase after certain things because we think they will make us happy. Knowledge, power, wealth, respect, fame, relationships — these things fuel our ambitions and give us *pleasure*. But does God need any of these things? Does he seek after such pleasure? He knows everything. He governs the whole universe. He is completely self-sufficient, and does not need us or anything else to “complete” him, as Psalm 50 for example makes abundantly clear:

*If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine. (Psalm 50:12)*

God is at peace with himself and utterly content. He is indeed “the essence of happiness” as one early Christian writer called Boethius (480-524) put it many centuries ago.² Anything that could possibly make one happy, pre-exists wholly and in a more eminent degree in God, agreed the great medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), as he contrasted God’s happiness with ours.³

When Scripture talks about us displeasing God in some way, he is not waiting on us to make him feel fulfilled and happy. It is not as if what we do can really harm God and drag him down. He is not anxiously hanging on our

² See Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (edited and translated by V. E. Watts; London: Penguin, 1999), 100-101 (3.10).

³ See this idea of God’s perfect “beatitude” or happiness contrasted with ours, in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars, 1-49* (edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón and translated by Laurence Shapcote; Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, Volume 13; Lander, Wyoming: Aquinas Institute, 2012), 1a.26.4.

every word, desperately waiting for us to make him smile, otherwise he will be sad, lonely and incomplete. He does not have such human “passions” which make him vulnerable to manipulation by his creation. Article 1 of *The Thirty-Articles* also tells us that “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.” Anglicanism starts by affirming classical Christian doctrine about God, as do other Reformation-era confessions of faith.⁴ When the Westminster Confession says God is “without passions”, it cites Acts 14:11, 15 as its proof for this. Paul and Barnabas explicitly reason there that they themselves are intrinsically unworthy of worship because they are men “of like passions” with the Lystrans and subject to the actions of others upon them. In their thinking, just as Hermes and Zeus are vain objects of worship, so would “the living God” be if he were subject to such passions. In other words, their point is not that the audience have made a mistake worshipping people who are not really Zeus and Hermes; their point is that even if they *were* Zeus and Hermes they would still be unworthy of praise, because Zeus and Hermes are also *homoioopathēs*, of like passions, and a God who is thus vulnerable to human passions is not worthy of worship. Greek gods were constantly falling in and out of love, getting angry or spiteful, experiencing ecstatic joy and other, more unworthy emotional outbursts. They would never have been described as impassible (incapable of suffering pain or feeling emotion). So, the doctrine of impassibility is not a Hellenisation of the biblical God but quite the opposite – to claim God was passible would be to import Greek categories into him.

So, when the Bible says something we do pleases God, we know from the Bible as a whole that it is not saying God changes his facial expression from a frowny face to a smiley one every time he assesses our thoughts and words and deeds. He is not clicking a series of thumbs up or thumbs down emojis to express his feelings about your actions every second of the day. His thoughts are not our thoughts, and he dwells in inapproachable light, unharmed and not susceptible to emotional blackmail or control. This is why we sing to God our perfect Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4): “Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”⁵

III. God’s metaphors

The language of pleasing or displeasing God is, therefore, metaphorical. It is communication designed to convey something real, but utterly sublime, to us mere mortals. The Lord speaks in a way we can grasp, accommodated to our

⁴ See e.g. *Westminster Confession* / *Savoy Declaration* / *London Baptist Confession* 2.1. *The Second Helvetic Confession* (1566) chapter 3, for example, also speaks of God as “all sufficient in Himself”.

⁵ *Abide with Me* by the Scottish Anglican, Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847).

human understanding. As he communicates to us in this clear and beautiful way, God is not revealing absolutely everything about his inner being. But he is telling us something true, in such a way as our mortal capacity can handle it. As the early church theologian Pseudo-Dionysius put it, “We cannot be enlightened by the divine rays except they be hidden within the covering of many sacred veils.”⁶ This is why Scripture expounds spiritual truths using figures of speech, including the somewhat paradoxical idea of pleasing the already infinitely happy God. It takes something we are familiar with from our everyday relational life and uses it to convey something about God that is useful and joyful for us to know. God’s word tailors its language to our capacity to understand, and is phrased for our spiritual advantage.

Technically, this idea of God expressing his “feelings” in human clothing is called anthropopathism – that is, ascribing human emotions to God, just as anthropomorphism is ascribing human shape to God. We know from the Bible as a whole that God is a spirit (John 4:24), and so does not literally have hands, eyes or ears (or feathers and wings) despite the Bible speaking of us being in the shadow of his wings (Psalm 36:7; 91:4) or of him rolling up his sleeves to bare his holy arm (Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 52:10). So, in the same way, we must be careful not to press the language of divine emotion or pleasure too much or too far beyond its biblical purpose. Otherwise, we may end up with a misshapen understanding of God’s inner self. As the early theologian Origen (185-254) said:

The language of Scripture regarding God is adapted to an anthropopathic point of view... as we ourselves, when talking with very young children, do not aim at exerting our own power of eloquence, but, adapting ourselves to the weakness of our charge, both say and do those things which may appear to us useful for the correction and improvement of the children as children, so the word of God appears to have dealt with the history, making the capacity of the hearers, and the benefit which they were to receive, the standard of the appropriateness of its announcements (regarding Him). It is no human passions, then, which we ascribe to God, nor impious opinions which we entertain of Him; nor do we err when we present the various narratives concerning Him, drawn from the Scriptures themselves, after careful comparison one with another. For those who are wise ambassadors of the “word” have no other object in view than to free as far as they can their hearers from weak opinions, and to endue them with intelligence.⁷

⁶ See Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, 1.2 as cited in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.1.9.

⁷ See Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4.71-72 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 4* (edited by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. C. Coxe and translated by F. Crombie; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 4:529-530.

Ephrem the Syrian (303-373) similarly sang in his *Hymns on Paradise* that the Creator “clothed His majesty in terms that we can understand”, and with metaphors “God clothed Himself” for our benefit, stooping low to the level of our “childishness”. Grace clothed itself in our likeness and used our language, in order to bring us to the likeness of itself.⁸ So when God speaks to us, it is not in full-blown, raw and concentrated majesty, because we could hardly bear that. When there was something even remotely like that, at Mount Sinai, it was frightening and the people begged never to hear it again: they said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19). Instead, God considers our finite human capacity, and the benefits he wishes to convey to us, and communicates appropriately. As the Reformation writer, John Calvin (1509-1564) puts this,

For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont [accustomed] in a measure to “lisp” in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.⁹

So, we must not reduce God’s ineffable being to our very effable and fallible level. His emotional life is infinitely rich and far more complex than ours, in a way we can only begin to comprehend. Because as Garry Williams rightly says,

The denial of passions in God is not a denial of passions of every kind, but specifically a denial of passions of a limited, human kind... Nothing could be further from the truth than the idea that the emotional life of God is deficient, like that of a psychopath. The classical Christian doctrine of God holds that God is immeasurably more emotionally alive than any other being. God does not have affections like ours not because he has no affections, but because he has the highest degree of affections, maximally realized.¹⁰

Deep study of God’s self-revelation in Scripture is the best way for us to make a start on understanding all this, but we will still be meditating on it in glory for thousands and thousands of years. He is an inexhaustible fountain of wonder and goodness.

⁸ See Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* (trans. Sebastian Brock; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 155-156 (Hymn XI. 5-6).

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (edited by J. T. McNeill and translated by F. L. Battles; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1:121 (1.13.1).

¹⁰ Garry Williams, *His Love Endures For Ever: Reflections on the Love of God* (Nottingham, IVP, 2015), 133.

IV. God's moods

As all parents know, bringing up children can be a tiring and frustrating business. It often leaves us exhausted and moody. When I am rested and calm, I can be cheerful and generous to my kids; later in the day, when they become tired and grumpy (and so, on occasions, do I), maybe not so much. But God is not like me. In himself, he does not change. Malachi 3:6 says “I the Lord do not change” – a fact which, in the context, anchors both his impending judgment on those who do not fear him, and the salvation of his people who are not consumed, thanks to his covenant faithfulness towards them despite their Jacob-like waywardness. James 1:17 says that with God “there is no variation or shadow due to change” – unlike the other fixed points of observable light in our universe such as the sun or moon, which are constantly on the move and so casting shadows. He has an immutable, unchanging strategy towards us, willing both the means (every good and perfect gift) and the end (that we should be a kind of firstfruits). God is steady and calm, unlike people, who change and vary depending on how much sleep they have had and how well fed they are, and a thousand other variables, as even Balaam confesses in Numbers 23:19,

*God is not man, that he should lie,
or a son of man, that he should change his mind.
Has he said, and will he not do it?
Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?*

God is immutable in his purpose and constant in his character.¹¹ He is the self-existent God who simply “is” – “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). But that does not mean he is somehow static. He is living and active, even “energetic” as some theologians put it.¹² The world changes, and even the heavens, but God remains the same; as Psalm 102:25-27 puts it:

*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.*

¹¹ Again, this is a point made by various Reformation confessions, e.g. *The Belgic Confession*, 1 says God is “immutable”.

¹² See Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 152 who says “classical theists do not deny that there is a genuine two-way relationship between God and his people, and they insist just as much as their critics do that this relationship is a living thing. It is not static, but it is not really ‘dynamic’ either. We would do better to say that it is ‘energetic’.” He draws on a distinction between *dynamis* (meaning power as potential) and *energeia* meaning realised potential. Nothing in God is under-developed or merely potential.

*You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
but you are the same, and your years have no end.*

So, he is not vulnerable to bouts of unhappiness, despair or depression because we have been naughty or cruel or unfaithful. Though it is true that “we should imitate God’s Immutability in a gracious way, be constant in our love to God and men, in our promises and good purposes” as theologian Edward Leigh put it,¹³ we so often are not. And yet despite this, our salvation is not vulnerable or fragile, because God is not going to suddenly change his mind about us because of something we do that makes him feel bad or sad or mad. As the Genevan theologian Benedict Pictet (1655-1724) put it, “This immutability of God is the fulcrum of our faith and the foundation of our hope.”¹⁴ These are not abstract points, but part of the biblical picture of an unfluctuating God we can rely on for everything, “the rock of my salvation” (2 Samuel 22:47).¹⁵ In contrast to the changeable and temporal things around us, “from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:1-2). This is why Richard Muller concludes that in Reformed systematic theology, “God’s immutability is not a springboard for speculation but a ground of Christian faith and hope in the God whose nature and therefore whose intention and will cannot change.”¹⁶

So, when his word says that we please God or that he delights in us, the idea is that our actions resonate with the harmony of God himself. Or that he will react in a *similar* way to how we react when we feel such emotions as pleasure or disgust. It is analogy, not literalism. As Calvin put it,

*Although he is beyond all disturbance of mind, yet he testifies that he is angry toward sinners. Therefore whenever we hear that God is angered, we ought not to imagine any emotion in him, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience; because God, whenever he is exercising judgment, exhibits the appearance of one kindled and angered.*¹⁷

So, to take another example, when we are told not to grieve the Holy Spirit by our bitter interactions with each other (Ephesians 4:30), this is accommodated language, metaphorical language designed to teach us something. It is not to be pushed too far, so that we imagine the Spirit is curled

¹³ Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity* (London, 1646), 47-48 (II.v).

¹⁴ Benedict Pictet, *Theologia Christiana* (Geneva, 1696), II.xii.3 (*Hæc Dei immutabilitas fidei nostra fulcrum est, ac spei fundamentum*).

¹⁵ “He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken” (Psalm 62:2, 6). See also Psalm 89:26, 94:22, 95:1, Isaiah 26:4 etc.

¹⁶ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. Volume Three: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 319.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.13.

up in a ball all the time with agonising grief and sadness because of our behaviour. It means the Spirit's reaction to our unkind or unforgiving conduct is *akin* to our human emotion of grief. What that means within God's being, must be something far deeper and sharper and more ineffable than can otherwise be expressed. It is meant to arrest our attention, make us sit up, and change.

When I am saddened or angered by the words of people on social media, I can unfollow or unfriend them, or even block them altogether if I want to. So, as Aquinas says in his commentary on Ephesians 4:30, this text does not mean God is susceptible to outbursts of passion in reaction to our sins: "When some person is saddened he withdraws from whoever is depressing him", he says. "Likewise does the Holy Spirit withdraw from one who is sinning... Thus the meaning of 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit' is: do not chase him away or reject him through sin."¹⁸ So it is not about protecting God the Holy Spirit's fragile mood. He is not one of those immoral, fickle and ever-changeable Greek gods from the Homeric myths! In some way it is about doing what is best for ourselves, because grieving him will not be good for us. It is always best for us, if we try to please God because we love him. Otherwise, we may become like those Isaiah spoke of when he said, "they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10).

It is fascinating to see Aquinas here reflecting on this theologically, in the very act of interpreting Ephesians in a commentary. We can observe the same thing in other doctrinally-aware commentators too. So, for example, when Calvin comments on the sadness of God at human sin, which provokes the Flood in Genesis 6, he writes,

Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity... Moreover, this paternal goodness and tenderness ought, in no slight degree, to subdue in us the love of sin; since God, in order more effectually to pierce our hearts, clothes himself with our affections. This figure, which represents God as transferring to himself what is peculiar to human nature, is called ἀνθρωποπάθεια.¹⁹

Even in his sermon on this text, Calvin feels it necessary to say that this figure of speech,

is to horrify us at ourselves and not to indicate that God is changeable... there is no passion in God... They are dregs of the earth who misinterpret these

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (trans. F. R. Larcher and M. L. Lamb; Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute, 2012), 298.

¹⁹ *anthropopatheia*, John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries. Volume 1* (trans. John King; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 249.

passages to make God changeable... contrary to Moses' intention... It is very certain Moses did not intend to change God's image and say that he is subject to passion.²⁰

They knew in those days that you cannot abstract a single text from the revelation of God as a whole, or ignore proper systematic theology when trying to do exegesis – otherwise we end up spouting heresy, or preaching a God in our own image. Scripture itself makes us ask these sorts of questions, not some outside influence such as Greek philosophy, as some have falsely alleged. A proper interpretation of each part of Scripture depends on us not taking it out of the context of the whole. Each verse resonates perfectly with the rest, and should not be made out to be discordant.

On the other hand, in the person of his Son, God literally does have human form and human emotions. It is very clear that he is not apathetic, uninvolved, un-relateable, uncaring or inactive. In his earthly ministry, Jesus was perfectly capable of expressing his displeasure. It was clear what pleased, angered or upset him. In him, we can see something of God's emotional life literally incarnate, made flesh. Jesus wept; Jesus expressed anger; Jesus longed; Jesus loved.

Again, the idea is that if Jesus is pleased with you, that is good for you; if he is not, it would be better for you if you changed your ways. And if you love him, you will naturally want to make him smile. So, in the Gospels, Jesus is not simply showing us in his reactions to things that he is a “touchy-feely” guy in tune with his inner feelings. Jesus' emotions teach us something about what we should care about too, or what we should watch out for.

V. Conclusion

So, these are some of the things we need to be aware of and keep in the back of our minds as we explore what the Bible says about any theme, especially the theme of pleasing God. We need to remember the nature of God (who he is, from his revelation to us as a whole), as well as the nature of his word to us (its trustworthy and clear but “lispering” quality). These theological truths will keep us anchored as we unwrap the various colourful and powerful ways that Scripture preaches to us in individual texts.

It will also help us to remember, as the *Thirty-nine Articles* put it, that “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another” (Article 20). This is a vital truth in all our preaching, all our pastoring and all our politics.²¹

²⁰ John Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis Chapters 1-11* (trans. Rob Roy McGregor; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 563-565.

²¹ This article is expanded from a talk to the Southwark Diocesan Evangelical Union, June 2020.

COMPLEMENTARIANISM, QUO VADIS?

A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE ON CURRENT DEBATE AND PRACTICE

Sarah Allen^{*}

This article examines the current state of complementarian practice and attitudes within UK churches, seeking to understand how, where and why change might be occurring. The research is twofold: the first part is an overview of recent publications and online discussion of complementarianism and related matters. Here questions are raised about the causes for and possible consequences of dis-ease with some theological models and cultural expressions of sex-difference. The second part of the article is an examination, by way of interview and surveys, of practice in churches which could be described as complementarian. Here we consider the way the Church is responding to contemporary culture's growing concern for equality of opportunity and representation, as well as the influence of different ecclesiologies and social settings on practice and change.

While the question of how men and women are different and how they do and should relate to each other have been topics for discussion since the earliest times, it seems as though right now the debate is more widespread and vociferous than ever. The tenets and discourse of feminism are mainstream in western culture, shaping society through equal rights legislation, educational expectations and childcare provision, as well as providing a lens through which the world can be evaluated. In the last seven years discussion has become ever more personal and fastmoving, caused variously by the #metoo movement; popularisation of critical gender theory and what J. K. Rowling describes as a misogynistic “backlash against feminism and a porn-saturated online culture”, as well as the proliferation of social media and blogging.¹

It is no wonder, then, that many in UK evangelical churches are discussing certain questions of doctrine and practice with renewed concern and urgency.

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¹ J. K. Rowling, viewed 18 September 2020, <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>.

The right desire not to place unnecessary stumbling blocks before a new generation, as well as an awareness of how power can so easily be abused, even in Bible-believing churches, has brought under scrutiny our understanding of sexual difference, and our leadership structures and styles. The generation of conservative Christians, many of whom wholeheartedly embraced complementarianism in the 90s, seem now to be questioning at least some of its foundations, and different interpretations of sex and gender have been proposed.² Though this is about who does what on a Sunday, it runs much further into questions of human ontology, Christology and eschatology. This paper will be an overview of some recent debates and publications in the UK and the US, in addition to a survey of current attitudes and practice in UK conservative evangelical churches and seminaries, examining the factors for and results of change. The conclusion will raise some further questions which demand careful attention.

I. Recent publications and discussions

1. Looking Back

Many of today's conversations about sex and gender in both the world and the Church have their roots in the arguments of 1970s second-wave feminism. As laws were made outlawing sex discrimination in the workplace and women protested against what they saw as the restrictions of traditional marriage, some evangelicals began to revise traditional interpretations of key Bible passages. They argued "that restrictive roles for women do not reflect an accurate interpretation of the texts", and in this they were continuing an earlier movement which had seen women ordained in the late nineteenth century.³ Setting themselves apart from the radical theology of Christian feminists, these writers and scholars sought to hold onto the authority of Scripture and doctrinal orthodoxy, whilst arguing for the ordination of women and against a wife's submission in marriage.

² Influential American writer, Aimee Byrd, claims this in the opening of her book *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (see my review in this edition of Foundations). Several of my friends in their 40s have also told me that they would like to leave behind at least the term "complementarianism" if not some of its ideas.

³ Ronald W. Pierce, "Contemporary Evangelicals for Gender Equality", 58-75 in *Discovering Biblical equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* Roland W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 59. The *Women's Bible*, a heavily revised feminist edition of the Bible with its own commentary had been published by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the 1880s; more orthodox groups aligned to early Pentecostalism and the Holiness movement had licenced female preachers and pastors from this point up until the first World War after which a more restrictive fundamentalism arose.

In response to this and to the social impact of secular feminism, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood was founded in 1987 to promote what it called *complementarianism*, “the biblically derived view that men and women are complementary, possessing equal dignity and worth as the image of God, and called to different roles that each glorify him”.⁴ This position was articulated in the Danvers Statement and stood in conscious opposition to hierarchicalism and traditionalism as well as the new egalitarianism.⁵ Known as “the big blue book”, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* was published in 1991 (the year before the Church of England General Synod voted for the ordination of women to the priesthood) and gave confidence to a generation of conservative believers in the US and UK by supporting and applying these ideas in some depth.

This broad collection of papers, offering exegesis of key texts, reflection on doctrine and commentary on differences between the sexes, maintained that, “no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world”.⁶ Other books followed, both popular and more academic, published in the UK and US promoting women’s ministry alongside male headship in the Church, and arguing for the dignity of voluntary wifely submission and a husband’s servant leadership.⁷ At the same time, of course, evangelical egalitarians were also publishing their own books, most notably *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* in 2005 (IVP), a book comparable to RBMW in its breadth, scholarship and irenic tone. The key words in the title point to the competing claims of the movements; both saw men and women as different and complementary but the egalitarians insisted that “complementarianism” itself is necessarily hierarchical.

2. Our Current Climate

The question of hierarchy and equality has not gone away; indeed, discussions have intensified with the affiliations of many shifting over the last five years. Readers here may well have followed the recent discussions regarding the

⁴ Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, viewed 18 September 2020, <https://cbmw.org/about/history/>. The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is hereafter referred to as CBMW.

⁵ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Preface, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Illinois: Crossway, 1991), xiv.

⁶ Danvers Statement, article 9, viewed 18 September 2020, <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

⁷ In the US and in the UK: Sharon James, *God’s Design for Women* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2002); Carrie Sandom, *Different by Design* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2013).

eternal subordination of the Son (ESS).⁸ The debate had been ongoing for years before this more public eruption, but criticism of the idea and accusations of heresy emerged in popular American blogs in 2016.⁹ Though this conception of the doctrine of God had repeatedly been part of the articulation of complementarianism by several key figures, notably Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem, it was not logically essential to the presentation of complementarianism in RBMW. Nevertheless, ESS became almost a symbol of all that was perceived to be wrong with CBMW, though the organisation rapidly and publicly distanced itself, to some degree, from the doctrine.¹⁰

In the UK some key leaders stepped up to defend EFS (eternal functional submission, a more nuanced expression of ESS) and others argued against it, but it seems not to have become a popular concern, being seen by many as an American issue, perhaps reflecting a certain biblicism and distrust in systematic theology.¹¹ Few of the women's workers I asked had kept up with the arguments and one observed, "I find the debate has become so emotive and divisive it has become unhelpful to follow".¹² Though some have been turned off by the debate, others have been pushed to deeper theological thought and more careful expression of doctrine, particularly regarding trinitarian taxis, divine simplicity and the eternal Covenant of Redemption.¹³

⁸ That is, that there is a subordination of Son to the Father within the economic Trinity which goes beyond the incarnation. See Thomas Schreiner (130), Ray Ortland Jr (103) and Wayne Grudem (450) in RBMW, though Grudem's statements are clearly less equivocal than others. This argument is also made by Carrie Sandom in *Different by Design* and others – though their current positions may have changed. A useful and insightful commentary on the debate is this one by Andrew Wilson: <https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/submission-in-the-trinity-a-quick-guide-to-the-debate> (viewed 18 September 2020).

⁹ The first to post was Rachel Green Miller (viewed 18 September 2020, <https://rachelgreenmiller.com/2015/05/28/does-the-son-eternally-submit-to-the-authority-of-the-father/>), followed by Carl Trueman, Liam Goligher and Aimee Byrd on Mortification of Spin. Mark Olivero presents an extremely useful timeline of contributions to the debate, starting with C. S. Lewis in *Christianity and Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper, (reprinted 1967), offering links and brief commentary (viewed 18 September 2020, <http://theologydelish.com/ess-debate-timeline-and-key-players/>).

¹⁰ This is certainly the case in Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019) and Aimee Byrd's *Recovering From Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

¹¹ E.g. John Stevens, FIEC Director wrote a measured and supportive blog about this (viewed 18 September 2020, <http://www.john-stevens.com/2016/06/are-we-all-heretics-now-reflections-on.html?q=complementarianism>.) and the late Mike Ovey, Principal of Oak Hill College, published a monograph supportive of ESS – though this was not a response to the furor (*Your Will Be Done: Exploring Eternal Subordination, Divine Monarchy and Divine Humility* (London: Latimer Trust, 2016).

¹² The majority of others said they were not aware of it.

¹³ Example of this might be, Benedict Bird, "John Owen and the Question of the Eternal Submission of the Son within the Ontological Trinity", *WTJ*, 80 (2018), 299-334 and Fred Sanders <http://scriptoriumdaily.com/things-eternal-sonship-generation-generatedness/> (viewed 18 September 2020).

As Alistair Roberts points out, there is a “dangerous tendency to present a one dimensional and reductive account of a richly multifaceted relation” as regards the Trinity *and* the sexes.¹⁴

A second focus of the those writing against CBMW or some cultural expressions of complementarianism has been the statements coming from some key leaders about the distinctions between men and women and the way they should interact. John Piper in particular received opprobrium for his statements about women in the workplace, and other US conservative church leaders have similarly been criticised for what have been described as variously 1950s, Victorian or even Aristotelean hierarchical ideals.¹⁵ Aimee Byrd and Rachel Green Miller in recent books identify these views which make clear distinctions about the way women and men should relate to each other beyond the context of marriage and church leadership as patriarchal and intrinsically oppressive, laden with stereotypes and implying an ontological difference between the sexes, undermining claims of equality. They make the claim that complementarianism, as expressed in some parts of RBMW, entails that every woman must submit to every man, that every man has authority over every woman. This is not the case, though it may be implied by some culturally US conservative writers.

In addition, Byrd and others object not only to the marketing of separate “gendered” resources for Christian men and women, but also to some separate church and parachurch ministries.¹⁶ While both these writers accept a view of male headship in the family and male eldership in the Church, and also acknowledge that there are some differences between men and women, anger and frustration is palpable in their writing. Some of the language and concepts of feminist discourse, seem to have been co-opted uncritically in such criticisms.¹⁷ However important questions are being asked by them and others, which I discuss below.

¹⁴ <https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/the-eternal-subordination.php>. (viewed 18 September 2020).

¹⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-women-be-police-officers> (viewed 18 September 2020) initiated this argument, but it was Doug Wilson’s brand of extreme cultural conservatism and provocative writing which seems to have been most attacked. Rachel Green Miller’s book *Beyond Authority and Submission* is particularly focused on seeing him, unfairly, as representative of complementarianism.

¹⁶ While writing this I saw a thread on Twitter from a supporter and friend of Byrd’s who, while saying she supported headship in marriage and male eldership, objected in the most serious terms to teaching to separate gendered groups, claiming that behind it was “not so much hatred but even a fear of women”.

¹⁷ For example, the idea that during and after the industrial revolution men and women operated in “separate spheres”, and that men, as a class, ruled over women, as a class, which is described as “patriarchy”. Both of these are core concepts in feminism but do not take into account the wide variety of social and familial structures throughout history, nor the many ways in which law and custom have been applied.

Further claims of misogyny have been raised in relation to attitudes to divorce and domestic abuse from those well within the conservative camp. The way that complementarian teaching has been used by abusers to justify even violent treatment of spouses while the church has remained inactive, has been logged by conservatives and liberals alike.¹⁸ In addition, teaching on sexual purity and modesty and the promotion of “courtship” rather than dating, though not necessarily connected to complementarianism, has been condemned as teaching which further limits women and elevates men, by placing responsibility for male behaviour on women and girls whilst denying them autonomy. One critic writes that “these teachings led to guilt and shame as well as profound ignorance about sex” and connects this with the “rigid gender norms characterized by women’s submission and male authority [which] are at the very heart of the evangelical subculture. Purity culture reinforces that structure.”¹⁹ These accusations seem only to be confirmed by the tragically frequent exposés of inadequate responses to accusations of sexual abuse in some well-known conservative churches as well as instances of sexual infidelity or spiritual abuse by leaders. Complementarianism is seen to be implicated in cultures with unchecked power and exploitation of the vulnerable.

3. *The Broad and the Narrow*

Most of these debates and publications come from the US and demonstrate what Kevin De Young has described as a division between “broad” and “narrow” versions of complementarianism²⁰ – that is, between those who would want a “broad” interpretation of complementarianism (which could be seen as a theological worldview, applying key texts regarding marriage and the church to the whole of life and emphasising fundamental differences of nature between men and women) and “narrow” complementarians (who espouse a more biblicist view, reluctant to go beyond the immediate application of these texts, emphasising significant similarity between men and women).²¹ Exemplifying this latter, as well as some of the writers already cited, might be The Village Church in Texas, where Matt Chandler, head of Acts 29, is senior pastor. Their statement about church jobs says, “Every role is

¹⁸ See Eryl Davies, *Hidden Evil* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2019) and Ruth Tucker, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

¹⁹ Julie Ingersoll, “How the Extreme Abstinence of the Purity Movement created a Sense of Shame in Evangelical Women,” viewed 18 September 2020, <https://theconversation.com/how-the-extreme-abstinence-of-the-purity-movement-created-a-sense-of-shame-in-evangelical-women-127589>.

²⁰ This is referred to here: <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-word-of-empathy-warning-and-counsel-for-narrow-complementarians/> (viewed 18 September 2020).

²¹ Key texts being Genesis 2-3; 1 Corinthians 11.3-16; Ephesians 5.25-32; 1 Timothy 2.11-15; 1 Peter 3.1-7.

open to both men and women, except the roles of preaching the Word of God and officiating the ordinances (baptism/the Lord's Supper) [which] are reserved for elders/pastors/qualified men".²² John Piper would stand as an example of the broader type, who would keep as male-only more elements of gathered worship and express concern about how a woman can maintain her femininity while employed in some roles. Kevin De Young points out that the concerns of the narrow are not with the stated aims of mainstream complementarians in RBMW; rather, they are with a distorted application of these ideas in some churches and teaching.²³

This "broad and narrow" description is, of course, limited and belies an emerging conversation. Certainly, some conservative Christians will find that their personal convictions will not necessarily fit into such neat categories, but might span both. There has also been a palpable squeamishness (particularly, but not exclusively, by "narrow" complementarians) around explanations, other than Ephesians 5, for biblical injunctions to submission and headship.²⁴ A more adequate answer, and one not dependent on stereotype or neuroscience, is needed to the questions of "why" male elders and "why" submissive wives. Natalie Brand's *Complementarian Spirituality*, which explores marital imagery used to describe union with Christ has been a helpful contribution, but calls for supplementary work.²⁵ Alistair Roberts has blogged and spoken on gender prolifically and is due to publish on the topic very soon, with a focus on ontology, locating difference between the sexes in essence, rather than role or performance.²⁶ This, though, could raise questions regarding *imago Dei*, and it may well be that, though the language of roles is excluded, stereotypes are reinstated which alienate those who feel they don't fit the mould. Related to essential difference is Nancy Pearcey's accessible book *Love Thy Body* which considers the great significance of our embodied state as male and female.²⁷

²² This quotation is from their statement on the roles of men and women, viewed 18 September 2020, <https://thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Beliefs/Institute%20-%202017%20-%20The%20Role%20of%20Women%20at%20The%20Village%20Church%20-%20Condensed%20Version.pdf>. It has been commended by Justin Taylor (executive Vice President of Crossway) on The Gospel Coalition website. Writers such as Hannah Anderson, Wendy Alsup and Aimee Byrd would appear to endorse this understanding of male and female roles in church leadership.

²³ Viewed 18 September 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/new-wave-complementarianism-a-question-and-a-concern/>.

²⁴ I have experienced this personally in conversation with complementarians who have been seeking, for great reasons, to maximise female impact in the UK Church. Another aspect of this tendency is an emphasis on mutuality in marriage, with an emphasis on the servant aspect of headship to the point where leadership is erased.

²⁵ Natalie Brand, *Complementarian Spirituality: Reformed Women and Union with Christ*, (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

²⁶ See, for example, <https://theopolisinstitute.com/conversations/the-virtues-of-dominion/> (viewed 18 September 2020).

²⁷ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body; Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

This is fertile and urgent ground for theological research. Some, dissatisfied with complementarianism, might, however, move in another direction. Michelle Lee-Barnewall in *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian* has commented helpfully on the motifs of reversal and unity in key passages around gender, and Andrew Bartlett's *Men and Women in Christ* explores key texts with some interesting conclusions.²⁸

Importantly for our purposes here, however, many of those kicking against what they perceive as an extreme and oppressive cultural complementarianism are responding to phenomena much more prevalent in the US than the UK. Nevertheless, “breadth” and “narrowness” are evident in our churches, and there is evidence of frustration and change on both sides.

II. *Complementarianism in British Churches*

The last thirty years have been a time of considerable change and growth for conservative Christianity in the UK as well as a time of significant social reshaping. As society has changed, so has the role and profile of women in churches, as well as the perception of how men and women should interrelate. Here the focus will be on participation of women in our churches, rather than on Christian marriage, which is much harder to quantify.

1. *Growing Opportunities*

Although Church attendance figures continue to decline overall, numbers in evangelical churches are generally growing, albeit in a very modest way.²⁹ An increased presence and activity of conservative scholars in academic theology, the popularisation of church planting and the development of numerous interdenominational bodies, such as the Proclamation Trust, Christianity Explored Ministries and the Gospel Partnerships for example, are all indicators of health and confidence.³⁰ This greater resourcing of the Church is also, in part, a reflection of our digital age in which networking is easier, information much more accessible and expectations of professionalism higher

²⁸ Michelle Lee-Barnewell, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019). This latter text comes to egalitarian conclusions.

²⁹ See the contrast between Church attendance between 1980 and 2015 here: <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html> (viewed 18 September 2020) and also Peter Brierley's research, viewed 18 September 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54228e0ce4b059910e19e44e/t/5a1591cb9140b7c306789dec/1511363021441/CS3+Page+0.2+Intro.pdf>.

³⁰ Not only has church planting increased, but it appears to have become more formalised and structured, arising not only from individual churches or in small local areas, but with considerable strategy – for example through Acts 29, Co-Mission and groupings like New Frontiers.

in all aspects of life. The growth of the internet means that leaders of smaller churches have access to the output of larger ones very easily: blogs, podcasts, social media, and in particular the conduit of The Gospel Coalition's website, all provide a constant supply of ideas and expectations of what good ministry could and should look like, both for clergy and laity.³¹ Material created by women, or about complementarianism itself (as we have already discussed) often models or suggests avenues for complementarian ministry. It is no wonder then, that this more confident conservative church will want to develop and clarify how their ministries, including evangelism and ministries to women and children, are run.

Models of church leadership have developed as well, with a greater embrace of paid, team ministries and more training and use of lay people. Apprenticeship roles which were relatively rare thirty years ago are now very common, with some larger churches in university towns taking on groups of up to ten trainees for one- or two-year stints. Very many young women are taking up these roles. The increase of home groups and one-to-one Bible studies have provided more opportunities for lay people to teach Scripture to others. Within Sunday gathered worship, interviews, book reviews and longer music slots have opened opportunities for different voices to speak (but not preach). This greater complexity in ministry, along with issues of legal compliance, has meant that non-teaching roles (such as administrator, operations manager or music director) have sprung up and are often performed by women.

At the same time, the last thirty years have seen a significant increase in women in the workplace, including those with small children.³² This has been accompanied by a massive rise in those going to university, where now women outnumber men.³³ The result of this is that below the age of 30 women, on average, earn slightly more than men, and that between the ages of 20-40 the gender pay gap is negligible.³⁴ The women's pension age has risen and many retired or semi-retired women find themselves providing childcare or care for ageing parents. The number of women who, for generations, were both recipients and providers of daytime women's ministry, who visited those

³¹ Unfortunately, this can also lead to a marketplace approach to church, with members shopping around for the most attractive offer and leaders developing ministries to attract these floating consumers.

³² Between 1975 and 2020 the number of women in employment has increased by about 50% , viewed 18 September 2020, <https://www.forwardrole.com/blog/2019/03/women-in-the-workplace-a-look-at-female-employment-in-the-uk>.

³³ In 2018, women were 36% more likely to start degrees than men in the UK. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/aug/28/university-gender-gap-at-record-high-as-30000-more-women-accepted>.

³⁴ "In 2018 the gender pay gap for full-time employees is close to zero between the ages of 18 and 39 years." Viewed 18 September 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2018>

in hospital and the elderly, ran after-school children's clubs and toddler groups, has considerably diminished in number. At the same time the expectation of some congregations that a pastor's wife would be an unpaid worker has diminished; often now wives are in paid work and some who are labouring for the church are given more formal recognition by way of a title and a salary. It seems, then, that for churches which hold to the view that women are not qualified to be elders, there is an increasing need for the "set aside" ministry of women.

Over the last thirty years multiple training opportunities have arisen in the UK for women committed to a complementarian position. The Cornhill Training Course began in London in 1991 and slightly more recently similar courses have been developed by most of the now 14 regional Gospel Partnerships. Women and men learn Bible-handling skills, church history and doctrine side-by-side, as well as taking part in preaching/exposition workshops, and though the uptake is still mostly male, women do follow this route in large numbers. Cornhill began with an intake which was 20% female; today female participation is double that. More recently London Seminary's Flourish Course and the Church Society's online Priscilla course have begun, offering similar training to all-female cohorts.

Higher level theological education is also being pursued by women. Oak Hill College and Union School of Theology provide under- and post-graduate diplomas and degrees in theology which are open to both men and women and geared towards ministry. Union is so keen to encourage women into serious study that they offer scholarships specifically for women.³⁵ Whether or not this has made a difference is unclear, but this year 41% of BA, 14% of GDip and 13% of MTh students will be female. Certainly, the possibility of studying in a local "Learning Community" makes studying much easier for those, male or female, with families. The Biblical Counselling UK course provides another avenue many women have taken to be equipped for ministry in their local churches and beyond; its certificated training, run in conjunction with CCEF and Oak Hill College, is increasingly popular. As time has passed, some women who studied with these institutions are now teaching in them, bringing their own valuable feminine insights into theology, biblical studies and pastoral issues. Amongst these we might particularly note the role of "Tutor for Women" which has been developed at UST, which highlights the desire to see women supported and developed within theological studies.

All these training developments, which allow women to be equipped for ministry in an academic environment supportive of a complementarian reading of Scripture, are vital to the health of the church. Though some may still question the cost-benefit of training women who will never serve as an

³⁵ Some of these are provided by the College itself and others are being offered by Commission Churches (Newfrontiers) for applicants from their own churches.

elder, or who (as did one of my questionnaire respondents, see the Division of Labour section below) might ask if apprentice-style posts are “creating an expectation that there are ministry jobs out there which in reality don’t exist”, the real value of increased training is evident. Carrie Sandom, women’s director of the Cornhill Course, reports that all the female students who have completed the full four years’ training ended up in paid positions in churches. Those who did fewer years are being used, perhaps not as church employees, but as volunteers running Bible studies, offering pastoral care and being involved in evangelism. The influence of such well-equipped women is huge, as with confidence they can serve a younger generation of women and children to stand in an increasingly secular and feminist age, as well as provide wise, theologically-informed support to elders.³⁶ In addition, without such opportunities for training, women keen to serve in their own complementarian churches may well receive theological education in an egalitarian setting which might well redirect their ministries.

2. *Set-Aside Women*

As we might expect from the numbers of women going through some or other form of training, numbers being set aside for ministry by their churches are growing. One hundred and fifty-nine female workers, including 119 in paid posts, have been identified in the 148 churches overseen by the Bishop of Maidstone under the Church of England’s “alternative provision”.³⁷ These 159 women serve in the various fields of music, children’s and youth work, school outreach, student work, families’ care, pastoral ministry, counselling and administration; the majority, though, have the pastoral care of women as their primary responsibility. Such high numbers are, in part, down to some very well resourced, flagship churches with large teams, such as St Ebbe’s in Oxford which employs five women on a staff of fourteen. This may also may represent a conviction of the importance of investment in ministry to and by women as part of a conscious, considered embrace of complementarianism in the context of the Church of England’s egalitarianism.

Among FIEC churches, the number of women known to the organisation as set aside workers grew from approximately seven in 2000, to thirty in 2012 and then doubled to sixty in 2019, which means that almost a tenth of their

³⁶ A universal concern for women I have taught on Flourish is the reluctance of older women (those in their 50s and beyond) to get involved in leading the young, particularly through Bible study. This older generation very often lacked experience and role models or felt as though their contributions were not valued.

³⁷ That is, those congregations unwilling to accept the oversight of a female Bishop. These figures were kindly provided by Rachel Lickiss. Of these workers seven were ordained or licenced.

churches have a female worker.³⁸ Like the Anglican complementarian congregations, these churches are spread around the country, not just in more affluent areas. They tend to be larger than average, often in university towns, with a female worker often being the third appointment made, alongside a Pastor and Assistant. There are, however, smaller churches, and in particular church plants, which have made the strategic choice to have a female employee as a first appointment in addition to the Pastor, or as part of the initial leadership team, in large part because of their ministry contexts and evangelistic focus. 20schemes exemplifies this approach, with a Director for Women's Ministries at the heart of the organisation, training and preparing female workers for church plants in the schemes (Scottish council housing estates) where there are many single-parent families and high levels of unemployment and social need, making for greater opportunities for involvement in the lives of locals.³⁹

Among Grace Baptist Churches there appears to be a similar pattern, with a few larger churches employing more than one woman and then church plants and the occasional smaller congregation having female workers.⁴⁰ Alongside these local church examples, it is worth noting the number of women who have been employed for decades in evangelical parachurch organisations, such as UCCF and Friends International, and increasingly now in key roles in other mission, apologetics, mercy ministry and campaigning bodies.⁴¹

3. Division of Labour

In seeking to find out more about the ministries of female church workers I sent a questionnaire to those who work for FIEC churches and received twelve replies. I also sent a similar questionnaire to leaders of complementarian churches of different sizes and groupings and received a smaller number of replies. Though these are clearly not a scientific sample, they do give a snapshot of complementarian ministry in a diverse range of contexts.

³⁸ I am grateful to Elisabeth Smyth, until very recently Women's Ministry Co-ordinator at FIEC, for providing this information. Given the nature of independent churches it may be that more are employed but not known to the organisation.

³⁹ Joblessness and single-parent households arguably mean that individuals have more willingness to accept help and time in which to meet with church workers than in more middle-class districts.

⁴⁰ I did not find much data on Grace Baptist Churches, but a quick scroll through the links in their church directory shows Grace Church in Guildford, Carey Baptist Church in Reading and Abbey Baptist Church in Abingdon and a new plant in Greenwich as all employing female workers.

⁴¹ For example: Open Doors, Christian Concern, Zacharias Institute and the Christian Institute. See earlier discussion regarding the question of male headship in non-local church settings.

All the women who responded are involved in Bible teaching to women and most were busy with some form of outreach, whether that was in the form of English lessons to recent arrivals, managing a toddler group or leading Christianity Explored. A large proportion of women were involved in counselling or pastoral support of women. Four identified that they were involved in training other women to lead as a main part of their role. These are unsurprising findings and fit with the responses from church leaders, whether or not they had a paid woman on staff; all were encouraging of women teaching the Bible and providing pastoral care to other women and to children, as well as evangelism. This represents an uncontroversial element of complementarianism and is in line with historic Church practice.

There was more diversity over the role of women in gathered worship. All leaders surveyed regularly used women for Bible readings (though one said that he was “a tiny bit uncomfortable with it but live with it”), and all but one were happy to have women praying the pastoral prayer. Five of the thirteen female church workers at times deliver children’s talks and six of them “lead services”, but all indicated that they might at times read the Scriptures or pray.⁴² In several churches where service leading and Bible teaching were reserved for men (elders in most cases), women were invited to speak on church history, international/local needs or personal experience during the service, providing testimony in the broadest sense, which exhorted and informed the congregation.⁴³ This small range seems representative of the different forms of complementarian practice to be seen today.

As far as a biblical rationale for female participation in these elements of gathered worship, 1 Corinthians 11 is read by the vast majority as establishing a precedent for an “up front” female presence in worship through its references to prayer and prophecy. Clearly, though, there is some diversity of interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 in UK churches which would describe themselves as complementarian. None would take the admonition to “silence” in an exclusive and literal manner (e.g. singing), but there seems to be some differences of opinion over whether the verb is about exercising or assuming authority or indeed whether “teach” and “exercise authority” are separate elements or a single activity, i.e. “teach with authority”.⁴⁴ This latter reading is seen by some as allowing forms of public teaching which are non-authoritative, such as a children’s talk, or teaching by one person whose

⁴² Of course, not all evangelical churches would include a children’s address in Sunday gathered worship. Clearly “leading worship” might include a number of elements which might be seen as more or less authoritative, such as welcoming the congregation, praying a prayer of confession, issuing a call to worship, commenting on Scripture etc.

⁴³ One church leader, consistent with the pattern of his Newfrontiers network, regularly invited women to preach, with the understanding that this was done under the authority of the male eldership.

⁴⁴ See discussion in Andreas and Margaret Kostenberger in *God’s Design for Man and Woman* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 206-210.

authority is derived from someone else, for example a woman preaches and it is made clear that she is under the authority of a male elder, or a woman preaches infrequently so that her voice is not seen as central to the church's leadership.

Another area of some diversity is involvement in the leadership of mixed mid-week groups; five of the thirteen women surveyed were involved in leading homegroups (mostly alongside male leaders) and two women had sole responsibility for leading a mixed student group. One pastor expressed the genuine complexity of these teaching scenarios: "Is leading a Bible study 'leading' in the biblical sense? I think an argument can be made [for it to be seen as]... facilitating a conversation, however that can get you into all sorts of issues of 'is this bible teaching authoritative?'" The function of home groups and young adult groups can vary enormously between churches, and even between groups, dependent on the relationships between participants; whether they are networks providing pastoral care and/or teaching hubs will make a difference to their leadership need. Even the content of the teaching within the group, whether this is a discussion of the text from Sunday, discussion about evangelism or apologetics, or a completely separate scripture or theological focus, whether resources are provided by the pastor, or the leaders prepares the study from scratch, will all make a difference to the dynamics of authority and leadership. So, it is no wonder that there are different approaches. One church surveyed has only elders leading studies, another has an elder and a woman from a "woman's pastoral team" for each group; one had "some women" who led mixed groups; another church had female "assistant leaders" alongside male leaders in mixed groups, a slim majority had men from the congregation, not necessarily elders or deacons, to lead these groups.

One feature of complementarianism has been the emphasis on male elderships listening to the voices of women in their congregations.⁴⁵ In my questionnaires I sought to find out how this worked in practice, conscious that often the women elders most listen to can be their own wives, for good or ill. When asked about how women were involved in decision-making processes one pastor noted that he liaised with "mature women" as well as elders' wives; most others mentioned women on the diaconates of their churches, or those employed by the church. For none of these men was there a distinct and structured means of women in the congregation expressing their thinking on spiritual development or the vision of the church, though the means available to men were equally open to women.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See Sharon James, *God's Design*.

⁴⁶ This varies according to church government. In the Free Church, presbytery meetings are public; in FIEC churches quarterly meetings often provide an opportunity for questions to be raised and in C of E churches annual church meetings are open to the congregation. These, of

One leader was honest enough to say that “some women have had certain input they say they would have *liked* to give to the elders, but couldn’t pluck up the courage to come to us” and reflected on the reasons for this – whether a “hangover from a more rigid form of church leadership” or a certain kind of immaturity that women might be “more susceptible to”. Certainly, it could be argued that some women, looking at a male eldership, whether or not women are in diaconate roles, may feel that their concerns about spiritual issues in the church cannot be expressed. The issue of representation is important here; teaching might ostensibly encourage female participation, but without role-models demonstrating this, many will feel that it is not for them. This can be applied to other areas of church life, from informal prayer to evangelism.

All of the leaders surveyed (in non-Church of England congregations) believed that the Bible allows for female deacons, and all except one had this structure in their church.⁴⁷ So elders were used to discussing with women practical and financial matters, as well as those questions arising from the evangelistic and mercy ministries run by women in the church. Where women were employed, three communicated with the elders via email, four had regular conversations with the pastor to discuss their work and five were included in regular staff meetings, with three mentioning that they were at times invited to elders’ meetings to share ideas. In this way most of the women were happy that their ideas and concerns were being heard and taken into account.⁴⁸ It is notable, however, that of the thirteen women surveyed only two had any oversight or mentoring from a woman, leaving them potentially without the support of someone who might be alert to the unique opportunities and difficulties of ministry for women, and potentially isolated should difficulties within the staff team or church arise. This may, in part, be due to the relatively recent growth in employment of women in smaller churches; older women with this kind of experience are few and far between.

4. Attitudes within Churches

A last question I asked both pastors and female workers was about the attitudes within their wider congregation to complementarian views. As might have been expected, all indicated that there were some within their settings who disagreed. One church leader working in a university town

course, are just the formal occasions; pastors felt that they were approachable for conversation or to receive emails at any time.

⁴⁷ One of the Church of England churches did operate with an eldership and a diaconate. Some denominations within the Affinity network do not allow for female deacons (e.g. The Free Church of Scotland).

⁴⁸ One respondent did explain that for a period this had not been satisfactory, due to one other member of staff. Another worker, though happy with regular work communication did not feel that her mentoring by an elder was working well.

commented, “Lots of younger women... have questions, and occasionally real frustrations... Inevitably our position will be a turn-off for some and they won’t settle with us”. In contrast, in a different, small town church it was seen that, “traditional stereotypes of what women should and shouldn’t do have been... *somewhat* uprooted and replaced with... an increasingly biblical model.” Still, women’s ministries were described as “a fledgling creature” and quite a distance from the vision of the pastor. In a church plant on a housing estate, in contrast, “new converts... don’t have an issue with it because they just trust in what the Bible says”. So, some individual churches appear to be facing divergent types of progressive or traditional resistance to a biblical view of equal and different, and some face both pressures simultaneously. These differences are to a considerable degree due to the social context of the churches, as well as the tradition of the congregation. Most respondents, however, indicated that the majority of their congregations were happy with the position of the church leadership, which in all cases had been explained clearly in membership classes or in sermons, and that those who weren’t comfortable were still prepared to view this as a secondary issue.

Perhaps surprisingly, more than half of the women workers I corresponded with had not kept up with recent publications or online discussions (such as those referred to earlier) regarding complementarianism; if employees are not following these, then it is also unlikely that church members or lay elders are. Clearly, then, there is an ongoing need for teaching on these matters, and regular re-evaluation by elders of their church’s approach to the equal flourishing of men and women.

5. Reasons for Differing Patterns

It is worthwhile noting here, then, that visible differences between the use of women in Sunday gatherings are of course not just about textual interpretation, but can often be about the need for unity and wisdom; church leaders may inherit modes of practice and take time to make changes or they might change their own minds about what obedience to Scripture should look like. Most church leaders on the questionnaire wrote about times of change and some of them described ongoing wrestling in their own minds. Several of my respondents, male and female, mentioned the difficulty of such periods of re-evaluation. For female church workers, who are not party to elders’ meetings and for whom the issues have a direct impact in a way they do not for men, this can be especially trying. One women’s worker testified of her grief at having to lay down one ministry she had served in for several years because a change in pastor precipitated a discussion at elder level which had not been had before. She said, “I don’t want to be a boat-rocker, but that is what I’ve become”.

Others expressed the pain caused by having the validity of their roles or ministry questioned by co-workers and congregation, some who felt the woman should be doing more leading, others who felt that she was going beyond scriptural warrant. One woman testified that, “occasionally I get asked to do more than I feel comfortable with as a woman” though she felt able to resolve this with “some good chats”. All these women were keen to submit to their elders’ leadership and to speak in a manner that honoured them, but their examples indicate a need for clarity of thought, decisiveness and protection of female workers by their elders.

In addition, (and perhaps more significantly) decisions about whether a woman can lead a service, speak about an encouragement, give a children’s talk or preach are often significantly influenced by theological and church order commitments other than those of complementarianism, as well as being inflected by denominational tradition. Pentecostal churches, like those in the Newfrontiers network, have a history of female public ministry shaped in part by their convictions about the nature of prophecy today.⁴⁹ Those with cessationist convictions will find that 1 Corinthians 11 proves perhaps less permissive; if New Testament-type prophecy is no longer operational in the church today, then these verses only set a clear precedent for women praying in public, though some may consider that (as one of my respondents stated) they, imply the “appropriateness of a more informal word-ministry”. On this issue, Dr Ros Clarke of the Church Society has written a thought-provoking paper which deserves greater attention.⁵⁰ She argues that aspects of the priestly and prophetic Old Testament roles have an ongoing significance for the Church. The first role, she contends is “teaching, shepherding and administering sacraments” to a congregation of God’s people by a man called by God; the second role, open to men and women, is about “specific messages to speak into particular situations” so is time-limited but not limited to sex. Again, the issue of who does what is seen to be tied to more broad theological and hermeneutical issues than might initially seem to be the case.

Anglicans who operate with church wardens and PCCs have to work out whether these are, or are not, equivalent to eldership and diaconate, and have to manoeuvre in a political culture making difficult choices regarding funding and compliance, with the result that church practice may be less reflective of the convictions of the pastor and many in the congregation than in other church settings. Other forms of church government or tradition may also contribute to the outworking of complementarianism. A congregational structure or other traditions which have placed more emphasis on “every-member ministry” and be more used to the involvement of men who are not

⁴⁹ See Janette Hassey, “Evangelical Women in Ministry a Century Ago: The 19th and Early 20th Centuries” in *Discovering Biblical Equality* (2nd Ed; eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005).

⁵⁰ <http://rosclarke.co.uk>.

elders leading parts of a service or mid-week meetings, might be more likely to encourage the participation of women in similar ways. In contrast, Presbyterian and other elder-ruled churches, which arguably have a greater sense of hierarchy, may be more inclined to see some elements of public worship as only appropriate for the ordained leaders. Again, churches with a more set liturgical structure, or more frequently celebrating the Lord's Supper, might have different approaches to the involvement of women in leadership. A leader who views the Lord's Day gathering as a celebration of covenant renewal, and the elders as having something of a priestly role, will make different choices from the leader who sees it as primarily a singing and preaching/teaching meeting. Questions about who does what are very often answered on the basis of the authoritative, or perhaps even representative nature of these actions, rather than who is capable of doing them well.

It is important that we acknowledge these interconnections of ecclesiology and complementarian practice so that we do not oversimplify arguments. Neither should we draw conclusions from the shop window of a Sunday service about how much women's ministry is valued. Having said this, without the visible championing of women, the use of teaching illustrations featuring women and the deliberate seeking out of women's ideas and opinions, a truly complementarian ministry cannot be said to be flourishing. Though we have not considered marriage here, such a modelling of courageously sacrificial servant leadership, as well as direct teaching, will surely prosper the health of Christian marriages. The practice of *semper reformanda* applies to all elements of church life, not least the way the two sexes are loved and discipled, so this must be an area of church life for elders to examine.⁵¹ Such activity should be undergirded by ongoing theological and biblical work. There is a clear and urgent need for irenic and meticulous research around *imago Dei*, sex and gender, which will drive Christ's Church to worship and to prophetic witness in a world which is so deeply confused.

⁵¹ It was encouraging to hear that the Bishop of Maidstone's Pastoral Adviser, Revd Canon David Banting is conducting research into the ministry of women in the churches under his care, with a view to issuing guidance for the regular monitoring of this ministry in parishes. The FIEC's Women in Ministry Committee, headed by their expanded team of two Women's Ministry Coordinators and a Women's Ministry Development Worker does some similar work to support ministry to and by women, as well as promoting opportunities for women.

THE APOLOGETICS AND THEOLOGY OF CORNELIUS VAN TIL

*David Owen Filson**

This essay provides an appreciative analysis of two key, sometimes misrepresented apologetical contributions of Cornelius Van Til: the definition of presupposition, and paradox and the Trinity. Recent criticisms of Van Til tend to repeat the suggestions that he operated with a Kantian and Hegelian synthesis, accounting for inconsistencies in his theological and apologetical programme. Rather than directly addressing recent scholarship, a relatively unfamiliar debate between Van Til and J. Oliver Buswell will be examined in an effort to let Van Til speak for himself. In doing this it will become evident why he remains an important and needed figure for the Church in a post-postmodern, secular/pluralistic cultural moment, aptly described by Charles Taylor as a "...spiritual super-nova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane".¹

I. Introduction

The Apostle Paul describes the glorious ascension of Christ to the believers in Ephesus in vivid detail, as the victorious Christ reigns over death, leading captivity captive (Eph 4:8-10). This, Paul wedges between his call for unity in the Church, and the gifts given to the Church. Among these gifts are evangelists and shepherd-teachers (4:11). Historical theology and church history are made all the more enlivening when one considers the fact that many of these gifted evangelists and shepherd-teachers are wrapped up in the persons of apologists. The history of apologetics offers much for which believers are to be profoundly grateful. From Justin Martyr (100-65), to Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 202), to Augustine (354-430), to Anselm (1033/4-1109), to the "Angelic Doctor" Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), the early and medieval Church established a long apologetic trajectory. One need not read Calvin's (1509-64) *Institutes* very long to see his was an apologetic burden, as he defended the Trinity against the aberrant views of Michael Servetus (1511-53) and Giovanni Valentino Gentile (c. 1520-66), an adherent of Lelio Sozzini (1525-

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¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 300.

62). Even a confessional document, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643-47) presents its Christology well aware of the ongoing threat of the latter's Socinianism.

Philosophers David Hume (1711-76) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and the scepticism they nurtured for the Academy brought about the need for ongoing apologetic developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Traditional apologetics in the form of classical argumentations drawn from the medieval period, coupled with historical and evidential arguments for the claims of the Bible proved effective and were a priority of the epicentre of Reformed thought in America, Princeton Theological Seminary.

However, sceptical arguments continued to gather ground in academic circles and in wider society. In that context Princeton Seminary graduate, Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), sought to build a bridge between the full flowering of Princetonian apologetics in his beloved professor, the "Lion of Princeton", B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), and the apologetic practice of the Dutch doyen of doctrine, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).

Van Til is due fresh appreciative consideration. In part, this is due to the consideration his work has received in recent years from scholars in the Reformed orbit, calling attention to what they perceive to be Kantian and Hegelian tendencies embedded in his thought, to the point that his relationship, for instance, to Warfield represents departure, rather than development.² These criticisms, while recent in vintage, are of threadbare trajectory, bordering on tired tropes. They fail as a whole to demonstrate actual deep engagement with his corpus, which is the key to a proper understanding of the theological and apologetical programme of this important Christian thinker.

Before these recent entrants into the sparsely-populated field of Van Til's friendly critics, Bible Presbyterian Church pastor, former President of Wheaton College, and later Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, Dr J. Oliver Buswell (1895-1977) had taken exception to perceived inconsistencies in the thought of Van Til. In a review, in the November 1948 edition of *The Bible Today* magazine, entitled "The Fountainhead of Presuppositionalism", Buswell essentially charges Van Til with a number of things, accusations which manifest basic misunderstandings all along the way.³ Despite this, Buswell's critiques provide a useful entry point into an opening up of Van Til's thought.

² Online discussions by scholars, such as Richard Muller and Keith Mathison provide brief criticism. The most recent book-length project is J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019). Fesko's book received thorough critique and correction by Dr James Anderson in a series of blog posts available, here <https://www.proginosko.com/2019/06/reforming-apologetics-introduction/>

³ J. Oliver Buswell, "The Fountainhead of Presuppositionalism" in *The Bible Today* 42, no. 2 (November 1948), 41-65.

II. *The Definition of Presupposition*

At the outset, it must be stated that Buswell and Van Til used terms differently. The very use of the term “presupposition” differed between the two scholars. In what Greg Bahnsen refers to as a “linguistic key to their miscommunication”,⁴ Buswell writes, “In what sense do we students of theology presuppose our basic presupposition? There may be many answers to this question but only one answer is necessary for our procedure: we take our presupposition as a conclusion arrived at on the basis of what we consider good and sufficient reasons.”⁵

Hence, the trajectory is set for misunderstanding. This is strange, when one considers the fact that Buswell is, for all intents and purposes, the one who coined the term “presuppositionalism” with which Van Tillian apologetics would become inextricably linked at a popular level. This occurred in a two-stage evolution of the word, in both instances offered to the world by the pen of Buswell. His May 1948 *Bible Today* article, “The Arguments from Nature to God: Presuppositionalism and Thomas Aquinas”, was actually a review of Edward J. Carnell’s *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*.⁶ Carnell (1919-67) was a student of Van Til, and earlier of Gordon Clark (1902-85) at Wheaton. Sadly, he faced emotional struggles and instability throughout his relatively short life. He departed from Van Til significantly, even while occasionally using similar nomenclature. Ultimately for Carnell, a presupposition is a hypothesis to be tested.⁷ Carnell’s test of a presupposition is that it must bear the weight of non-contradiction, empirical fact and personal relevance.⁸ Once Christianity passes this test, Carnell concludes:

Let us sum up our analysis of the criteria of verification and proceed to a new topic. Having no perfect system of thought, while we walk by faith and not by sight, the Christian suggests that a rational man settle for that system which is attended by the fewest difficulties. The worth of a system of thought is conditioned to its ability significantly to answer those basic question [sic] of life which all people must face. In the light of these observations the Christian throws forth his major premise – the existence of God who has revealed himself in scripture as a foundation for rational coherence.⁹

⁴ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 667.

⁵ J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*. 2 vols. (1962; repr., Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1994), 15.

⁶ See Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, 6th ed. (1948; repr., Alhambra, CA: Green Leaf Press, 1997).

⁷ This bears similarities to Plantinga’s willingness to admit Christian belief as properly basic, as in possibly true.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 108-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

For Carnell, the test of rational coherence adjudicates the validity of the Christian's major premise. Buswell pronounces Carnell's book as "the best work thus far produced", in terms of a "clear understanding of presuppositionalism."¹⁰ He quotes as an example of Carnell's presuppositionalism, "[W]hen one begins his philosophy apart from the assumption of the existence of a rational God, he has thrown himself into a sea of objectively unrelated facts."¹¹ He then likens Carnell's views to those of Clark, who writes, "The Christian, therefore, following the bishop of Hippo [Augustine], is careful to point out that instead of beginning with facts and later discovering God, unless a thinker begins with God, he can never end with God, or get the facts either."¹² Buswell proceeds to critique Carnell, charging him with unfamiliarity with John Dewey (1859–1952) and Frederick Robert Tennant (1866–1957),¹³ and setting him over against a Buswellian explication of Aquinas. Buswell admits that presuppositionalism and the "philosophy of traditional Christian evidences" both depend on the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of apologetics. He notes, "The distinction between the two schools is that the one denies, and the other recognizes that the Holy Spirit uses inductive evidence and arguments from probability as instruments in the practice of evangelization and conviction, these arguments being transitive to the minds of unbelievers."¹⁴

It is not within the scope of this article to explore or evaluate in any depth the nuanced differences between various types of presuppositionalism, such as Clark's or Carnell's, in relation to Van Til. However, Buswell, who coined the term "presuppositionalism", seemed to flatten the definition in a rather general and simplistic manner. To the historical matter at hand, in this review article of Carnell's *Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, Buswell says, "The term 'presuppositionism' was given me by my good friend Dr Allan A. MacRae in a casual conversation some months ago. I caught up the word immediately as an accurate designation for a significant school of thought."¹⁵ While drawing the term presuppositionism from MacRae, Buswell is the first, it would appear, to tailor it into presuppositionalism, and affix it in print to an apologetic method. While probability is not proof, it is likely his doing this

¹⁰ J. Oliver Buswell, "The Arguments from Nature to God: Presuppositionalism and Thomas Aquinas" in *The Bible Today* 41, no. 8 (May 1948), 235.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Buswell is quoting Carnell, *Apologetics*, 124.

¹² *Ibid.* Buswell is quoting Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 1987), 38.

¹³ This is not surprising, as this 1948 article was penned with Dewey and Tennant fresh on his mind, a year before he earned his doctoral dissertation on their philosophies.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 235. Two things of note emerge from this: 1) He first heard this general approach to apologetics which differed from what he called, the "philosophy of traditional Christian evidences", referred to as presuppositionism; 2) He freely admits he "caught up the word immediately".

contributed to his apparent inability to properly distinguish and understand Van Til on the whole notion of presupposition and presuppositionalism. In any event Van Til did obviously not coin or co-opt these terms, but rather accepted them, after they had been employed in the pages of the “The Fountainhead of Presuppositionalism”.¹⁶

The debate in *The Bible Today*, played out in these two articles: the May 1948 review of Carnell, followed by the November 1948 article in which Buswell designates Van Til the “fountainhead of presuppositionalism”. After this he penned a review of Warfield’s *Revelation and Inspiration* in a March 1949 *Bible Today* article entitled “Warfield vs. Presuppositionalism”.¹⁷ Whereas Buswell’s review of Carnell, while certainly critical, was appreciative at points, “Fountainhead” and “Warfield vs. Presuppositionalism” were pointed, clearly aimed at Van Til, and set up the public debate that ensued between them in magazines and journals, books, syllabi and in person. *The Bible Today* historical context saw these articles followed by two from Van Til – “Presuppositionalism” in the April 1949 issue of *The Bible Today* and “Presuppositionalism Concluded” in the June-September issue.¹⁸ The latter article was intended for the May 1949 issue, however “an unusual accident at the printer’s” prevented this. Humorously, however, that May issue was not without commentary to introduce a little levity to the discussion.

The following contribution is from a reader whose name was withheld by request. It may reflect the thought of others, though it does not mirror the mind of the editor.

To the Bible Today –

*I do not like your Presuppositionalism controversy;
it is getting acrimonious, and doesn't show
much grace, common or special.
But I know how you both could sing
I know not how God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.
But I know Whom I have believed,*

¹⁶ As Buswell notes at the beginning of “Fountainhead”, Carnell, having read the earlier book review article of May 1948, while not “resenting” the designation “presuppositionalism”, offered “inductivism” instead. See Buswell, “Fountainhead”, 41.

¹⁷ J. Oliver Buswell, “Warfield vs. Presuppositionalism” in *The Bible Today* 42, no. 6 (March 1949), 182-92.

¹⁸ See Cornelius Van Til, “Presuppositionalism”, *The Bible Today* 42, no. 7 (April 1949); and Cornelius Van Til, “Presuppositionalism Concluded”, *The Bible Today* 42, no. 9 (June/September 1949).

*And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that Day.*

But –

*Scotch is Scotch,
And Dutch is Dutch,
But Calvin was French, you see,
And died at the age of fifty-five,
Not older than "B" or "VanT."*

*He wrote in the language of 1509 –
He wrote not English nor Dutch,
He wrote in the words he understood
And has been translated much.
And the mind of the Scotch interprets Scotch,
And the mind of the Dutch sees Dutch;
But God's great grace is working on
And souls respond to His touch.
And when in the glorious crowning day
The Scotch and the Dutch shall meet,
They both will say "It is all of grace;
We have reached the mercy seat."
But Buswell still will drive his "Bus"
And Van Til his "Van" will drive,
But whether thru tunnel or over bridge,
By grace they will both arrive.*

Anonymous¹⁹

For all the grace and grins that anonymous sonnet afforded, the issues were and are quite serious. And there was a difference between the Bus and the Van. While both were fuelled by grace, only the latter offered an apologetic for that grace as a certainty. The former could only assure one that all the evidence pointed to that grace being the most likely, most probable route to take. Only the Van offered the assured apologetic map that accounted for those things necessary for driving to the destination.

Early on then, Van Til had to face critique and respond to it. However, that Buswell could speak of his presupposition, and commend that presupposition to students of theology as "a conclusion arrived at on the basis of what we consider good and sufficient reasons" is a clue that he and Van Til were

¹⁹ Anonymous, Letter to the Editor, *The Bible Today* 42, no. 8 (May 1949), 261.

miscommunicating, at the most basic definitional level. What did Buswell understand by presupposition, and hence, presuppositionalism? He flattened the concept, saying, "The philosophy of Christian evidences which I am advocating does not differ from presuppositionalism in that I am ever willing to admit or assume anything whatsoever contrary to Christian theism *except* in the well known logical form of an admission 'for sake of the argument.'"²⁰ "Assumption" appears to be key, perhaps part and parcel, of his understanding of what "presupposition" means in the context of the current debate. That this was a naive, simplistic definition on Buswell's part, and that Van Til was never operating on the definition of presupposition as assumption of a particular random fact, as though all facts are equal, hence not culpable of simplistic circular reasoning, is seen in *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*:

*The charge is made that we engage in circular reasoning. Now if it be called circular reasoning when we hold it necessary to presuppose the existence of God, we are not ashamed of it because we are firmly convinced that all forms of reasoning that leave God out of account will end in ruin. Yet we hold that our reasoning cannot fairly be called circular reasoning, because we are not reasoning about and seeking to explain facts by assuming the existence and meaning of certain other facts on the same level of being with the facts we are investigating, and then explaining these facts in turn by the facts with which we began. We are presupposing God, not merely another fact of the universe. If God is to come into contact with us at all it is natural that the initiative must be with him. And this will also apply to the very question about the relation of God to us. Accordingly, it is only on God's own testimony that we can know anything about him.*²¹

Buswell, after flattening the definition so as to show how he, as an evidentialist, complies with presuppositionalism in terms of assumptions, distinguishes between his position and Van Til's approach, asserting that "[w]hen a careful analysis is made, presuppositionalism is logically contradictory". He tells a tale of travel:

For example, I meet a bewildered traveler in the Pennsylvania Station. He tells me that he is bound for Philadelphia, but I see him starting down the stairway for a train which is bound for Boston. What do I do? The presuppositionalists rather generally accuse those who adhere to the traditional philosophy of evidence of saying to the bewildered traveler, "I will go with you down those stairs; I will carry your baggage, I will get on the

²⁰ Buswell, "Presuppositionalism", 244.

²¹ Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), Logos Software, ch. 15.

train and help you to a seat; I will even go with you to Boston, on the presupposition that the train is going to Philadelphia.” How ridiculous! I have read many pages of presuppositionalists’ philosophy in which the bound-for-Boston-to-get-to-Philadelphia view is assigned to traditional evidentialists.

What do we do to try to get such a bewildered passenger on the right track? First, we tell him the simple fact that the train is not bound for Philadelphia but for Boston. If he shakes his head and continues, we point to the sign over the gate. If he still pushes down the stairway, we may even follow him a few steps and show him that the train is headed eastward and not westward. If he still replies, “I am sure this train will get me to Philadelphia”, we may patiently persist: “Assuming for the sake of the argument that you are right, it would logically follow that the station management puts a Boston sign on the gate for a Philadelphia train, and that a train headed eastward out of the Pennsylvania station is bound for Philadelphia. It would then have to follow that Philadelphia is wrongly located on all the maps in common circulation.” Thus by showing the bewildered man the implications and consequences of his false assumptions, in terms of matters of fact which are common ground for us both, he may be convinced of his error and induced to switch over, baggage and all, to the proper gateway and the proper track.”²²

Key to the story Buswell tells is the testing of assumptions by the evidences (for example, locations on maps) – “matters of fact which are common ground”. Buswell concludes, “It is simply not true to say that a man whose presuppositions are anti-theistic cannot be shown his mistakes and then and there have his course changed.”²³

So Buswell operated with the assumption that a presupposition is ultimately an assumption, a pre-commitment. But, in the hands of Van Til, Buswell says:

There is a difference, however, those who hold to presuppositionalism are advancing a negative thesis, denying that there is common ground of reasoning between those who accept Christian presuppositions and engage in the spread of the Gospel, and those who do not accept Christian presuppositions and reject the Gospel.”²⁴

In other words, Buswell would acknowledge that all have prior commitments, be they Christian or non-Christian assumptions. Basic also to his definition of presuppositionalism is the denial of common ground between believer and

²² Buswell, “Presuppositionalism”, 244-45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁴ Buswell, “Fountainhead”, 41.

unbeliever. As will be discussed below, Van Til did, indeed, posit an inescapable “common ground” for all human beings created in the *imago Dei*.

It is not surprising Buswell would be suspicious of the term “presupposition”, at least as far as he saw it applicable to Van Til. For, as John Frame points out, the commonality of the concept arose in idealist philosophical writings:

*Idealism in Germany (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) and Britain (Green, Bradley, Bosanquet) continued Kant's transcendental approach, although it reached different conclusions about the preconditions of knowledge. It was in the idealist literature that presupposition became a common philosophical term. Van Til wrote his doctoral dissertation on the idealist concept of God, and, doubtless, picked up the term from that school of thought, even though he was very critical of idealism in general.*²⁵

This alone, as has been seen, would have set a course of suspicion for Buswell.²⁶ But, Frame's assessment is also instructive in seeking to understand Van Til's developing and multifaceted understanding of presupposition. For, in his Princeton University doctoral dissertation, *God and the Absolute* (1927), Van Til says,

*Beginning as we did with the assumption of the validity of human knowledge we have found that this assumption implies the existence of a completely actual experience. Hence we can now say that human knowledge presupposes the Absolute. If our argument has been correct, then we have all the while been able to search for the Absolute because in reality the rationality of our experience with which we began finds its source in Him. We would not be able to bring the two together if they were not at bottom related; the rationality we possess would be meaningless without God. We would not be able to ask questions about the Absolute or about anything else without the Absolute being the source of our ability. Hence we shall from now on say that we must presuppose the Absolute of Theism if our experience is to have meaning.*²⁷

²⁵ See John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1995), 133.

²⁶ There can be no doubt Van Til was influenced by idealism. Again, he borrowed idealist nomenclature and reworked idealist concepts. He says, “Hence we must take particular pains to note that the method of implication as advocated especially by B. Bosanquet and other Idealists, is really as fundamentally opposed to our method as is the method of ancient deductivism and of modern inductivism. The difference is once more that we believe the Idealists to have left God out of consideration.” See Cornelius Van Til, *Studies in Christian Epistemology*, Logos Software, 1.9.

²⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *Unpublished Manuscripts of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. Eric Sigward (Labels Army Company: New York, 1997), electronic ed.

Note how, in this earliest of writings, Van Til uses the idea of a presupposition, not as a mere assumption or precommitment, but an assumption in the context of a complete experience, sourced in God, who makes sense of rationality and predication, and distinguishes Christian theism from idealism. This statement is, albeit embryonic, programmatic for the trajectory of his thinking, moving forward. Doubtless, Van Til is speaking in philosophical terminology, consistently with the *duplex cognitio*, which is at the heart of Calvin's *Institutes*, Bk. I. The Absolute Van Til presupposes is not equal with thought or an abstraction, "At any rate, it will be seen that Idealism, because it conceives of God as cosmically dependent, has not been able to regard Him as Absolute and has by so doing not escaped any logical difficulties except by creating others. Granted then that Idealism has presupposed an Absolute it has not presupposed one that can really be called such."²⁸ Van Til's Absolute is not dependent: "Now we hold that no one has presupposed an Absolute unless this Absolute be considered as self-sufficient. An Absolute which is cosmically dependent is no Absolute."²⁹ Idealism results in futility:

We must now proceed to draw a further consequence from the idealistic failure to presuppose a genuine Absolute namely that it really amounts to doing without an Absolute in any sense, i.e. making human experience and temporal reality self-interpretative. If we say that our experience is meaningless without the presupposition of the Absolute we cannot then turn about and say that the Absolute has no meaning except in dependence on us. If you do, you have not presupposed an Absolute but a correlative or counterpart and are in for an infinite regress, bouncing back and forth between two semi-absolutes. This being unsatisfactory and refusing to accept the Absolute as sole source of meaning, so that you give it interpretive authority, you are trying to do without an Absolute altogether.³⁰

Van Til sees this most basic issue of definition when he writes, years after his debate with Buswell in 1969's *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*:

It is in this way that we must understand what Buswell means when he speaks of Christian presuppositions. "The primary presupposition of the Christian religion is, of course," says Buswell, "Jesus Christ." Moreover the laws of logic are implied in the Christian's basic presuppositions. According to Buswell the Christian should say: "We take our presupposition as a conclusion arrived at on the basis of what we consider good and sufficient reasons." These good and sufficient reasons were obtained by a purely

²⁸ Cornelius Van Til, *Unpublished Manuscripts*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

inductive procedure. This inductive procedure involves the idea of pure contingency.

For Buswell presuppositions are not the conditions which make experience intelligible. As a Christian, Buswell believes that when Jesus said he was the Son of God he spoke the simple truth. As a Christian Buswell believes the Bible and what it says about God and man, about sin and redemption on its say so as the absolutely authoritative word of God.

However, as an apologist Buswell presents the Bible and "the system of truth" it contains as an hypothesis which may or may not be proved true by an empirical investigation carried on in terms of principles which are not openly Christian but which are distinctively pre-Christian which means, of necessity, from a biblical point of view, non-Christian.

Believers and unbelievers stand on absolutely common ground with respect to the investigation to be undertaken. The one as well as the other must agree to exclude any and every a priori prejudice in favor or against Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. The Christian merely offers the claim of Jesus as the hypothesis which is more probably true than its opposite. But we must ask what are Buswell's and what are the non-Christian's ontological foundations which allow them to make such probability statements intelligible. If the non-Christian is able, apart from Christianity, to make his notion of probability intelligible then for what purpose does he need Christianity? He is thoroughly able to make himself and his world intelligible to himself in terms of himself without God and his revelation.³¹

The idea of revelation is key to Van Til's apologetic programme. Indeed, the Bible of the Triune God and the Triune God of the Bible are central to his understanding of presupposition, not as a hypothesis to be tested. While Van Til posited the Bible, and the Christian theistic system it taught, as the overarching presupposition from which to proceed, Buswell held:

The sense world includes the Bible as well as the light of nature. Certainly from the Bible we can derive correct information. Thus we are not excluded from an argument beginning in the sense world. In the Bible we often find an argument beginning with the light of nature itself, leading to the theistic conclusion.³²

This indicates a basic difference, not only their respective understanding of the term "presupposition", but in how the Bible fits into the apologetic task.

³¹ Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*.

³² J. Oliver Buswell to Cornelius Van Til, 5 February 1937, Box 287, File 80, [1933-39, PCA Historical Center, St. Louis, MO](#). This latter document will be referred to later as *Lengthy Set of Notes* (Buswell's description).

To begin, Scripture is self-attesting, rather than hypothetical, standing in need of verification. The Bible of the Triune God and the Triune God of the Bible bespeaks the all-encompassing nature of a presuppositional approach, with all its epistemological, experiential and ethical implications. The Bible fits into the apologetic task differently for Buswell and Van Til in relation to contingency in argumentation. Again, his more mature thought is represented in *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*:

The doctrine of Scripture as self-attesting presupposes that whatsoever comes to pass in history materializes by virtue of the plan and counsel of the living God. If everything happens by virtue of the plan of God, then all created reality, every aspect of it, is inherently revelational of God and of his plan. All facts of history are what they are ultimately because of what God intends and makes them to be...

It is impossible to attain to the idea of such a God by speculation independently of Scripture. It has never been done and is inherently impossible. Such a God must identify himself. Such a God, and only such a God, identifies all the facts of the universe. In identifying all the facts of the universe he sets these facts in relation to one another...

Such a view of God and of human history is both presupposed by, and in turn presupposes, the idea of the infallible Bible...

If history is not wholly controlled by God, the idea of an infallible Word of God is without meaning. The idea of an essentially reliable Bible would have no foundation. In a world of contingency all predication is reduced to flux...

It thus appears afresh that a specifically biblical or Reformed philosophy of history both presupposes and is presupposed by the idea of the Bible as testifying to itself and as being the source of its own identification.³³

Yet, the same stream of thought is present much earlier in his response to Buswell's articles in *The Bible Today*. In his April 1949 article, "Presuppositionalism", Van Til's very first statement explaining his approach, then being criticized by Buswell, was to affirm his primary goal of teaching the Bible as infallible, along with his own heart commitment to its infallibility, followed by a full statement of God's self-revelation as the utterly unique God of the Bible. He proceeds, then, to affirm the economic and ontological Trinity. This hints at what he would, years later, write in *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*:

God's supernatural revelation is presupposed in all successful rational inquiry on the part of man. And all revelation of God to man is anthropomorphic. It is an adaptation by God to the limitations of the human

³³ Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, chap. 2.1.

*creature. Man's systematic interpretation of the revelation of God is never more than an approximation of the system of truth revealed in Scripture, and this system of truth as revealed in Scripture is itself anthropomorphic. But being anthropomorphic does not make it untrue. The Confessions of the Church pretend to be nothing more than frankly approximated statements of the inherently anthropomorphic revelation of God. For it is such a system that is directly involved in the idea of the self-contained God.*³⁴

The rest of the article reads as a summary of Reformed Christian orthodoxy, set in response to the criticisms Buswell had levelled against him in "Fountainhead" in November of the previous year. The point is that Van Til's method, his apologetic, is nothing apart from not only revelation, but the whole summary system of Reformed theology. Hence, Oliphint rightly elucidates, "Van Til uses the notion of presupposition in a general way, but always to denote the fact that one's own world and life view must be based on the truth as it is found in Scripture, and more specifically, that truth is found, seminally, in the Westminster Standards."³⁵

This methodological difference, grounded not exclusively, perhaps, but certainly programmatically in a divergent view of the way the Bible is affirmed and applied in the apologetic task justifies Van Til, in his sequel article, "Presuppositionalism Concluded", in the June-September 1949 issue of *The Bible Today*, in telling Buswell:

*Coming now to a brief statement of the method of defense of the propagation of what I believe and how it differs from the traditional method I may note first that you have not, for all the length of your article, anywhere given a connected picture of my argument. Yet you at once characterize it in contrast with your own as being "negative and universal."*³⁶

With all due respect to the earnest and godly Dr. Buswell, given his flattened definition of presuppositionalism and his own philosophy of "traditional Christian evidences", with its lack of an all-encompassing functional symbiosis with Reformed confessional orthodoxy and Vosian biblical-theological hermeneutic, it is understandable why Van Til could point out the very one who coined the term "presuppositionalism" had not presented a "connected picture".

In fairness to Buswell, however, none of this is to say that there has been no difficulty defining what Van Til meant by presupposition in a way that was

³⁴ Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, chap. 3.2.

³⁵ Oliphint, in Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (2nd edition; ed. Scott Oliphint, Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 121n5.

³⁶ Van Til, "Presuppositionalism Concluded", 278.

both concise and at least aiming toward comprehensiveness.³⁷ Greg Bahnsen focuses on what may be characterised as function and ultimate intentionality and integrity of process, when he writes:

*No exception is made for the knowledge by which the Christian defends the knowledge of Christ. This means that the apologist must presuppose the truth of God's word from start to finish in his apologetic witness. It is only to be expected that, in matters of ultimate commitment, the intended conclusion of one's line of argumentation will also be the presuppositional standard that governs one's manner of argumentation for that conclusion – or else the intended conclusion is not his ultimate commitment after all.*³⁸

And, by *presupposition*, Bahnsen offers this definition:

*A presupposition is an elementary assumption in one's reasoning or in the process by which opinions are formed. In this book, a "presupposition" is not just any assumption in an argument, but a personal commitment that is held at the most basic level of one's network of beliefs. Presuppositions form a wide-ranging, foundational perspective (or starting point) in terms of which everything else is interpreted and evaluated. As such, presuppositions have the greatest authority in one's thinking, being treated as one's least negotiable beliefs and being granted the highest immunity to revision.*³⁹

³⁷ There are, of course, less commendable characterisations. While not offering a concise definition of presuppositionalism, the authors of *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* offer a description that, due to its tone, presumption, and basic inaccuracies makes it difficult to seriously engage. From statements such as "If Charles Hodge is right, that what is new is not true and what is true is not new, presuppositionalism, being new, falls of its own weight", to proposing Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) as an evidentialist, to claiming that presuppositionalists charge Edwards as not only futile but blasphemous! The tone of this volume is unfortunate: "The presuppositionalist knows how he may know the world and all. This is the glory of presuppositionalism. It has found the secret of knowledge; the open sesame to all truth. A brute fact is a mute fact; but presuppositionalism opens the mouth of mute facts by changing them into part of the world which the presuppositionalist will tell us how to know." See R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 183-88. To the notion that Edwards was an evidentialist, while the question is something of an anachronism, the interested reader is encouraged to see Jonathan Edwards, "The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth", in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 22, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, with Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 80-102; K. Scott Oliphint, "Jonathan Edwards: Reformed Apologist", *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 165-86; and Jeffrey C. Waddington, *The Unified Operations of the Soul: Jonathan Edwards's Theological Anthropology and Apologetic* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2015).

³⁸ Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, n4.

Van Til enthusiasts will forever be indebted to Bahnsen's seminal tome of key selections of Van Til paired with insightful analysis. His definition of presupposition brings clarity and captures, again, the functional scope of the term. However, it is somewhat pedantic. In his excellent study of Van Til's presuppositional thought, Gabe Fluhrer attributes this, in part, to the influence on Bahnsen of W. V. O. Quine, who spoke in his "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" of beliefs forming a "holistic web" that conditions statements, rather than them existing in isolation.⁴⁰ Fluhrer acknowledges that Bahnsen's definition does not explicitly capture the religious "heart" component of John Frame's definition:

Van Til uses the term presupposition to indicate the role that divine revelation ought to play in human thought. I do not believe he ever defines the term. I have tried to define it for him as a "basic heart-commitment". For the Christian, that commitment is to God as he reveals himself in his Word. Non-Christians substitute something else – another god, themselves, pleasure, money, rationality, or whatever – as that to which they are ultimately committed and that which governs all of life, including thought. Our ultimate commitment plays an important role in our knowledge.⁴¹

Again, the revelational nature of Van Til's definition of presupposition comes to the fore in a discussion of so-called "Block-House" methodology, in which certain Reformed doctrines are appended to an Arminian or Romanist construct, rather than acknowledging the revelational character of man and building an apologetic on a consistently Reformed and scriptural foundation. Van Til says:

It is not difficult to see that the Christian position requires the apologist to challenge this whole approach in the interest of the knowledge of the truth. If man's necessarily discursive thought is not to fall into the ultimate irrationalism and skepticism that is involved in modern methodology we must presuppose the conception of the God that is found in Scripture. Scripture alone presents the sort of God whose intuition of system is not bought at the price of his knowledge of individuality, and whose knowledge of individuality is not bought at the expense of intuitional knowledge of system. But such a God must really be presupposed. He must be taken as the prerequisite of the possibility and actuality of relationship between man's various concepts and propositions of knowledge. Man's system of knowledge must therefore be an analogical replica of the system of knowledge which belongs to God.⁴²

⁴⁰ Gabe Fluhrer, "Reasoning by Presupposition: Clarifying and Applying the Center of Van Til's Apologetic" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2015), 52-55.

⁴¹ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 136.

⁴² Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 142.

Van Til struggled to clarify his position for Buswell, because Buswell struggled to understand the covenantal/revelational nature of Van Til's comprehensive method. This misreading resulted not only in a misfire on the most basic level of discussing presupposition, but also misrepresentation of key aspects of the doctrine of Scripture, theology proper, not to mention the implications for anthropology, all of which are central to the apologetic task.

When Buswell penned "Warfield vs. Presuppositionalism" as a thinly veiled prelude to the appearance of Van Til's two articles for *The Bible Today*, in which he explained his apologetic approach, he complained that the publisher appeared to have omitted certain articles from the original publication of Warfield's classic volume on the doctrine of Scripture. He noted the reason had to have been the obvious divergence of apologetic philosophies represented by Warfield and Van Til, who supplied the lengthy introductory essay to the reprinted volume. In his article, Buswell rather cheekily allows, "I do not believe there was any deliberate motive of deception, such as advancing this anti-Warfield philosophy under cover of his name. Rather, the adherents of this paradoxical view seem to fail to realize *what a contradiction is*."⁴³

III. Paradox and the Triunity of God

In "Fountainhead" Buswell is immediately taken with what he perceives as a sort of Barthian paradox in Van Til's thought that directly affects his doctrine of God. While acknowledging that Van Til "believes in the God of the Bible", Buswell asserts that he nonetheless "has certain peculiar notions in regard to the doctrine of God which require special attention. First and most critically important of these notions, as I see the question, is his doctrine of paradox."⁴⁴

Buswell's radar was sensitively attuned to any and all forms of idealism and quasi-idealism. He was particularly alert to any hint of Hegel in philosophy, or a family resemblance along the theological trail of Barth. Buswell's writings are replete with sightings and warnings of the like. So, it is no real surprise – although Van Til may have been shocked – when Buswell observes, "[Van Til] is a well-informed and deeply zealous anti-Barthian; but I have sometimes wondered whether the zeal of his anti-Barthianism is not in part derived from the bitterness of close similarity in certain aspects of his philosophy."⁴⁵ Now, Buswell clarifies that for Van Til paradoxes are only

⁴³ Buswell, "Warfield vs. Presuppositionalism," 184. Emphasis original.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁵ Buswell, "Fountainhead", 48. Van Til's anti-Barthianism was certainly not lost on Barth: *These people have already had their so-called orthodoxy for a long time. They are closed to anything else, they will cling to it at all costs, and they can adopt toward me only the role of prosecuting attorneys, trying to establish whether what I represent agrees or disagrees with their orthodoxy, in which I for my part have no interest! None of their questions leaves me with the impression that they*

apparent, whereas for Barth, they are actually contradictory.⁴⁶ However, Van Til is too close for comfort, certainly too close to escape Buswell's strident critique.⁴⁷ However, once again, one sees the apparent misunderstanding, the trajectory for which is set at the starting point of the definition of the very presuppositions one has about presuppositionalism. The case in point is Buswell's rejoinder to his own distinction between Van Til and Barth, in which he seems to take back what he gave:

I cannot help feeling, however, that Van Til is unwillingly drawn into a very compromising position by his insisting upon, and welcoming, these apparent

want to seek with me the truth that is greater than all of us. They take the stance of those who happily possess it already and who hope to enhance their happiness by succeeding in proving to themselves and the world that I do not share this happiness. Indeed they have long since decided and publicly proclaimed that I am a heretic, possibly (Van Til) the worst heretic of all time. (Karl Barth, Letters, 1961-1968, ed. Jurgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Stoeveandt, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981], 7-8)

There is also a scathing letter from Barth to Francis Schaeffer, wherein he along with Buswell and Van Til are classed together as representing the kind of "criminology" in Van Til's book *Christianity and Barthianism*. Barth characterises them as coming to him as a "detective-inspector" or a "missionary who goes forth to convert a heathen", to which Barth replies, "No, thanks!" See Karl Barth to Francis Schaeffer, 1970, Buswell Papers, Box 278, File 131, PCA Historical Center, St. Louis, MO.

⁴⁶ While not within the scope of this article to embark on a discussion of Barth's dialectical theology, a handful of examples of Barth's commitment to contradiction, replete in the *Church Dogmatics*, can also be found spread across a couple of pages of his commentary on Romans, such as, "Precisely because the 'No' of God is all-embracing, it is also His 'Yes'"; "If Christ be very God, He must be unknown, for to be known directly is the characteristic mark of an idol' (Kierkegaard)"; or:

*To him that is not sufficiently mature to accept a contradiction and to rest in it, it becomes a scandal – to him that is unable to escape the necessity of contradiction, it becomes a matter for faith. Faith is awe in the presence of the divine incognito; it is the love of God that is aware of the qualitative distinction between God and man and God and the world... He who knows the world to be bounded by a truth that contradicts it; he who knows himself to be bounded by a will that contradicts him; he who, knowing too well that he must be satisfied to love with this contradiction and not attempt to escape from it, finds it hard to kick against the pricks (Oberbeck); he who finally makes open confession of the contradiction and determines to base his life upon it – he it is that believes. (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* [1933; repr., London: OUP, 1960], 38-39.)*

⁴⁷ Van Til found himself on the pointy end of not only Buswell's but of Clark's stick as well. Clark, writing to Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. about one of his books, then in process of editing and production, said:

In addition to this group of changes you also mention the reference to Dr. Van Til. So far as the argument is concerned, this section could be deleted, for Dr. Van Til is by no means so important a figure as Brunner. However, he is an excellent example of how neo-orthodoxy has permeated contemporary thinking. Dr. Van Til "adored paradox," he holds that man's mind is incapable of knowing any truth, that the Bible from cover to cover is not the truth, and that theological formulations, creeds, and so on are only "pointers" to something unknowable. The dependence on Brunner, even the wording, makes Dr. Van Til an admirable example.

See Gordon H. Clark, "Gordon H. Clark to Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, October 15, 1951", in *Clark and His Correspondents: Selected Letters of Gordon H. Clark*, comp. and ed. Douglas J. Douma and Thomas W. Juodaitis (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2017), 134.

*contradictions or paradoxes. When the doctrine of paradox is carried so far that correlativism between God the Creator and man the creature is renounced, I cannot see much to choose in this respect between Van Til's position and that of Barth. For the latter, everything which is true for man in material history, is false from the point of view of eternity. For the former vast areas of human historical matter are merely "limiting concepts" or "as if to God".*⁴⁸

This is a significant aspect of the breach between Buswell and Van Til, and requires patient attention be paid to a host of sources. One must consider the published works of each, as well as their unpublished correspondence in the form of letters, annotated syllabi and other materials. Pertinent marginalia by Van Til related to Buswell's thought in, for instance, his own copy of Buswell's *Systematic Theology*, as well as the occasional dialogue he conducted with Buswell in the margins of his copy of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* are also important sources. Buswell calls attention to what he sees as a problematic passage in Van Til's *Common Grace*, setting it up thus:

*[W]hereas for most of us a paradox is a misfortune, something to be carefully studied and resolved, so that the apparent contradiction will be seen clearly to be no contradiction, for Dr. Van Til on the other hand, there are certain specific, deeply established paradoxes which must form a part of theology. He says to hold to this position [the doctrine of the Trinity] requires us to say that while we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory. It is through the latter alone that we can reject the former. If it is the self-contained ontological trinity that we need for the rationality of our interpretation of life, it is this same ontological trinity that requires us to hold to the apparently contradictory. This ontological trinity is, as the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards puts it, "incomprehensible".*⁴⁹

Van Til's point is, in so many words, *finitum non capax infinitum*. Given what appears contradictory, it must be humbly acknowledged as paradoxical and mysterious, given the infinity of God. The larger context of the quotation makes clear Van Til is distinguishing between two, and only two, options for approaching the revelation of God as Trinity: 1) non-Christian epistemology, which can only be satisfied if God is made finite, else the non-Christian

⁴⁸ Buswell, "Fountainhead," 49. Terms in this quotation which might be unfamiliar are defined and discussed below.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43. The quotation of Van Til can be found in Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 2nd ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphint (1972; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 15.

epistemology would destroy itself; 2) Christian epistemology, submitted to God's revelation of himself in Scripture.

Specifically, Buswell's criticisms impact Van Til's understanding of the Trinity and his idea of "the one and the many". Buswell also sees this paradox language affecting a proper understanding of God's relation to man, denying correlativity between God and man. Buswell rejects the language of "the one and the many" and "equally ultimate" as addressing "a problem however, which, in my judgment, is confined to the minds of those who have been affected by non-Christian monistic philosophy". Buswell offers a simple solution: "For the simple Bible believer, and the one who sees the truth of created dualistic realism as Charles Hodge does, it is no problem at all. Whatever exists, exists, and that is that... It actually exists since he has created it, so we call it realistic. It has an important distinction within it, that between personal and non-personal existences, so we call it dualistic."⁵⁰ After all but equating the teaching of Van Til with that of the modernist Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) on the matter of the Trinity being contradictory, Buswell affirms his own orthodox confession of the doctrine of the Trinity, adding the qualifier that "I confess that I see not the slightest contradiction (though of course I see much that is beyond my comprehension) in these magnificent statements [i.e., creedal statements about God being one in essence, three in person]."⁵¹ Of course, "seeing" things of God that are quite beyond our comprehension is precisely what Van Til is getting at when he speaks of embracing mystery and acknowledging the paradoxical nature of the infinite God in his revelation to the finite creature.

Also affecting Van Til's doctrine of the Trinity, according to Buswell, is his use of the phrase "concrete universal", attributing it to his doctrine of paradox. Indeed, Van Til writes:

To use a phrase of Kierkegaard, we ask how the Moment is to have significance. Our claim as believers is that the Moment cannot intelligently be shown to have any significance except upon the presupposition of the biblical doctrine of the ontological trinity. In the ontological trinity there is complete harmony between an equally ultimate one and many. The persons of the trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another and of God's nature. It is the absolute equality in point of ultimacy that requires all the emphasis we can give it. Involved in this absolute equality is complete interdependence; God is our concrete universal.⁵²

⁵⁰ Buswell, "Fountainhead", 44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Van Til, *Common Grace*, 13.

This leads Buswell to beseech Van Til, "O my dear Brother! I do not question your devotion to the Lord and to the Bible. I do not question your sincerity, but look at the mud on your feet! You have been deeply mired in Hegelian idealistic pantheism."⁵³ To be sure, the expression "concrete universal" is Hegelian nomenclature. Kant, a deontologist, posited universals for knowledge and ethics, which universals were not grounded in sense experience, and hence were abstract. Hegel responds by suggesting a "concrete universal", grounded in the reality of the experiential world, which makes sense of, organises and unifies reality.⁵⁴ Van Til co-opts this philosophical language and posits the self-contained, independent Triune God of *aseity* as the "concrete universal". Van Til did, in fact, claim to do away with correlativity between God and man. This must be understood, not as doing away with relatability, but as his attempt to show that God is prior to and independent of man. He had stated this more simply for the readers of *The Bible Today*:

In the syllabi to which you refer and with which you are familiar, I have spoken of the equal ultimacy of the one and the many or of unity and diversity in the Godhead. I use this philosophical language in order the better to be able to contrast the Biblical idea of the trinity with philosophical theories that are based upon human experience as ultimate. When philosophers speak of the one and the many problems they are simply seeking for unity in the diversity of human experience. In order to bring out that it is Christianity alone that has that for which men are looking but cannot find I use the terminology of the philosophy, always making plain that my meaning is exclusively derived from the Bible as the word of God. "In the Bible alone do we hear of such a God. Such a God, to be known at all, cannot be known otherwise than by virtue of His own voluntary revelation. He must therefore be known for what He is, and known to the extent that He is known, by authority alone."⁵⁵

⁵³ Buswell, "Fountainhead," 49.

⁵⁴ Robert B. Pippin writes, "Hegel is confident that he has a theory of a 'concrete universal,' concepts that cannot be understood as pale generalizations or abstract representations of given particulars, because they are required for particulars to be apprehended in the first place. They are not originally dependent on an immediate acquaintance with particulars; there is no such acquaintance." See Robert B. Pippin, "Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich", in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 311-17, 315.

⁵⁵ Van Til, "Presuppositionalism", 219. He quotes himself from *Common Grace*, 14. Compare this paragraph, written for a more popular audience, to the text of *Common Grace*, to the same effect:

In what has been said it is the triune personal God of Scripture that is in view. God exists in himself as a triune self-consciously active being. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are each a personality and together constitute the exhaustively personal God. There is an eternal, internal self-conscious interaction between the three persons of the Godhead. They are co-substantial. Each is as

In this paragraph, not only does Van Til clarify for the readers of Buswell's magazine what he means by such philosophical nomenclature; he also shows what he would intend, ultimately, as primary in presuppositionalism, namely the *principium essendi* (God), and the *principium cognoscendi* (Scripture). More comprehensively, he says in *The Defense of the Faith*:

What has been said about the being, knowledge, and will of God, as the being, knowledge, and will of the self-sufficient ontological Trinity may suffice for purposes of introduction. Enough has been said to set off the Christian doctrine of God clearly from the various forms of the non-Christian doctrine of God. The God of Christianity alone is self-contained and self-sufficient. He remains so even when he stands in relation to the world as its creator and sustainer. All other gods are either out of all relation to the universe or else correlative to it.

The Christian teaching of the ontological Trinity, therefore, gives it a clearly distinguishable metaphysic, epistemology and ethic. In all these three Christian theism is wholly different from any other philosophy of life.⁵⁶

Again, Van Til uses the term "concrete universal" in order to show that the self-contained Trinity makes sense of the particulars of man's experience. Timothy I. McConnel writes:

A concrete universal is one which includes all its particulars, and which also is fully expressed in them. At the same time, the term itself would seem to imply that it also has ontological status, i.e. exists, and is not a mere concept. Van Til argues that only the Christian doctrine of the triune God meets all the qualifications demanded by this notion that originated in idealist philosophy.⁵⁷

much God as are the other two. The Son and the Spirit do not derive their being from the Father. The diversity and the unity in the Godhead are therefore equally ultimate; they are exhaustively correlative to one another and not correlative to anything else. (Van Til, Common Grace, 79)

⁵⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed., ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2003), 29-30. Given this crucial, yet too often misunderstood aspect of Van Til's thought, the risk of simply inundating this article with quotations by Van Til is worth the elucidation they will afford this interested reader:

The independence or aseity of God. By this is meant that God is in no sense correlative to or dependent upon anything beside his own being. God is not even the source of his own being. The term source cannot be applied to God. God is absolute. Jn 5.26, Acts 17.25 He is sufficient unto himself. (Ibid., 24)

Summing up what has been said about God's being, knowledge and will, it may be said that God's being is self-sufficient, his knowledge is analytical and his will is self-referential. In his being, knowledge and will God is self-contained. There is nothing correlative to him. He does not depend in his being, knowledge, or will upon the being, knowledge, or will of his own creatures. God is absolute, He is autonomous. (Ibid., 28-29)

⁵⁷ Timothy I. McConnel, "The Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til", *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 3 (September 2005), 583.

Van Til explained this to Buswell in his reply, insisting that use of these phrases in relation to the Trinity actually corrected Hegelianism by using its own terms:

Take now these two points together (a) that I have consistently stressed the necessity of asking what God is in himself prior to his relation to the created universe and (b) that I have consistently opposed all subordinationism within the self-contained Trinity and it will appear why I have also consistently opposed correlativism between God and the universe and therefore correlativism between God and man. By correlativism I understand a mutually interdependent relationship like that of husband and wife or the convex and the concave side of a disk. I know of no more pointed way of opposing all forms of identity philosophy and all forms of dialectical philosophy and theology. I have also spoken of this self-contained Trinity as "our concrete universal". Judging merely by the sound of this term you charge me with holding Hegelianism. I specify clearly that my God is precisely that which the Hegelian says God is not and yet you insist that I am a Hegelian.⁵⁸

Buswell would not buy this. It walked like a Hegelian, it quacked like a Hegelian, and "[s]tudents of the history of philosophy will need only to have the Hegelianism of this doctrine pointed out. They will see clearly and at once, that a good and sincere man has carelessly tracked in mud from the pagan streets. The 'concrete universal' has no place in Christian Biblical theology."⁵⁹ He goes on: "[B]ut I must hasten to add that I do not believe that Professor Van Til is conscious of the implications of what he has said."⁶⁰ The reality is he had held this suspicion of Van Til as far back as the *Lengthy Set of Notes* of 1937, wherein he makes a note, "You certainly use the vocabulary of idealism more than seems wise in my judgment."⁶¹ Van Til claimed he did not want to be labelled an "intellectual Anabaptist" by failing "to translate Christian truth in the language of the day".⁶²

Similarly, in his April, 1949 reply to Buswell's review of *Common Grace* in the pages of *The Bible Today*, Van Til briefly explained his use of "the one and the many" as an accommodation of sorts to the philosophical questions then currently raised regarding the "unity and diversity of human experience".⁶³ He described the Trinity in this way, to show that only the Godhead is ultimate, and that, rather than seeking to find the answer to the problem of unity and

⁵⁸ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 242.

⁵⁹ Buswell, "Fountainhead", 49.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Buswell, *Lengthy Set of Notes*, 22.

⁶² Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 61.

⁶³ Van Til, "Presuppositionalism", 219.

diversity in non-Christian reasoning, it should be sought in the Trinity, wherein the equal ultimacy of the one and the many find perfect, self-sufficient expression: "The importance of this doctrine for apologetics may be seen from the fact that the whole problem of philosophy may be summed up in the question of the relation of unity to diversity; the so-called problem of the one and the many receives a definite answer from the doctrine of the simplicity of God."⁶⁴ Hence, the "paradox" is seen in that God is not mathematically, as it were, either one or three; he is both, and that absolutely.

This is Van Til, again, seeking to ground his programme in the sovereignty, aseity and sufficiency of the Triune God. What is admittedly a very technical piece of philosophical theology is, at the same time, rife with pastoral implications, a key comfort for the despairing condition of a man seeking to make sense of self and the rest of the universe. After all, as Van Til says, "The Trinity is of the utmost practical significance to us."⁶⁵ The implications of his efforts guard against the ultimate despair of alternatives that lead either to abstract unity or to abstract particularity, both of which would consume the other; and if allowed to be ultimate, would rid the world of meaning and intelligibility. At the same time, if some abstract principle of unity, as well as an abstract principle of particularity are each ultimate, then there is, again, only meaninglessness. Van Til offered this Trinitarian accounting of reality in opposition to any and all forms of non-Christian epistemology, most especially idealism, of which he was being accused of tracking up the carpet:

*The charge that my view of God resembles that of idealistic philosophy has no more foundation in evidence than does the charge that I think of the ontological trinity as an abstract principle of One-and-Many. The basic distinction between the works of God ad intra and the works of God ad extra is constantly employed in what I have written in order to distinguish between the Christian and all forms of non-Christian thought.*⁶⁶

Yet, as the following substantial quotation shows, he was also guarding not only against Hegelian *concretisation*, but any Kantian *chaos*, that would certainly come about. In other words, the Triune God is the only legitimate answer to impersonal principle as concrete absolute, as well as some absolute abstraction in answer to the problem of unity and particularity:

It may be profitable at this juncture to introduce the notion of a concrete universal. In seeking for an answer to the One-and-Many question,

⁶⁴ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 25.

⁶⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, 2nd ed., ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 352.

⁶⁶ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 229.

philosophers have admittedly experienced great difficulty. The many must be brought into contact with one another. But how do we know that they can be brought into contact with one another? How do we know that the many do not simply exist as unrelated particulars? The answer given is that in such a case we should know nothing of them; they would be abstracted from the body of knowledge that we have; they would be abstract particulars. On the other hand, how is it possible that we should obtain a unity that does not destroy the particulars? We seem to get our unity by generalizing, by abstracting from the particulars in order to include them into larger unities. If we keep up this process of generalization till we exclude all particulars, granted they can all be excluded, have we then not stripped these particulars of their particularity? Have we then obtained anything but an abstract universal?

As Christians we hold that there is no answer to these problems from a non-Christian point of view. We shall argue this point later; for the nonce we introduce this matter in order to set forth the meaning of the notion of the concrete universal. The notion of the concrete universal has been offered by idealist philosophy in order to escape the reductio ad absurdum of the abstract particular and the abstract universal. It is only in the Christian doctrine of the triune God, as we are bound to believe, that we really have a concrete universal. In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.⁶⁷

There is a very real sense in which the apologetic methodological impasse Buswell finds himself in with Van Til is as much a matter of theology proper, especially as it touches upon the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is epistemological.

IV. Conclusion

A careful reading of the exchanges between the two men shows that Buswell simply misunderstood Van Til at many key points. This article has focused on two: the definition of presupposition and the concept of paradox and its relation to the triunity of God. Buswell's modified Thomism and Dualistic Realism, his lack of formal covenantal Reformed training and sufficient exposure to and integration of the Dutch tradition of Bavinck and Vos, along with an apparent lack of deep reading of Van Til's broader corpus provided a

⁶⁷ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 48-49. He adds a note: "The reader may note that the meaning I attribute to the phrase 'concrete universal' is sharply contrasted with the meaning attributed to the same phrase by idealist philosophers."

lens through which he could only view Van Til as breathing the air of Idealism and tracking Hegelian mud through his apologetic programme.⁶⁸

While saying that Buswell largely misunderstood Van Til may appear a somewhat simplistic and general conclusion, it actually seems to be the most reasonable explanation for the prolonged disagreement between the two men. Ironically, Buswell, who coined the term he so vigorously critiqued, missed the simple (not simplistic) fact that, for Van Til, presuppositionalism was a label that stuck, because he received it as a way of speaking of a transcendental approach that properly gave pride of place to the *principia* of theology – the *principium essendi* and the *principium cogniscendi*; and this alone properly reflected a biblically faithful, albeit philosophically attenuated, apologetic: “But to engage in philosophical discussion does not mean that we begin without Scripture. We do not first defend theism philosophically by an appeal to reason and experience in order, after that, to turn to Scripture for our knowledge and defense of Christianity. We get our theism as well as our Christianity from the Bible.”⁶⁹ Van Til attempted to show that Buswell’s modified Thomism still did not erase the problem of a Roman Catholic/Arminian probabilistic apologetic method. Again, to respectfully assess the situation, it appears the godly and knowledgeable Buswell either would not listen, or truly could not understand much of the discussion. This is obtuseness uniquely evident in the various editorial comments he made in both segments of Van Til’s reply to his review in *The Bible Today*.⁷⁰ All in all, it seems that the debate yielded little understanding between the two. Van Til desired that Buswell take him on his own terms, qualifications and all, yet the latter showed little willingness. Again, this hopefully encourages modern day commentators on Reformed apologetics to listen carefully to what Van Til is actually saying, as this would help forestall hasty generalisations and caricatures of his thought.

Historically speaking, it appears that, beyond these articles between the two in the pages of *The Bible Today* from late 1948 to the middle of 1949, virtually no direct interaction between the two apologists on these matters

⁶⁸ This is not to say Buswell did not *reference* Vos. See his *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (2 volumes; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 1:46, 278, 383; 2:275, 298. However, this does not indicate significant impact on his theological method.

⁶⁹ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 28-29.

⁷⁰ At times, it even appears that Buswell sacrifices a reasonable scholarly interaction with Van Til’s reply, in an effort at wittiness. For while Van Til asserted that if man would be consistent with self-knowledge and knowledge of God, there would be no more reasoning with them. In this, Van Til seems to be saying that there would be no more need to reason with them in an apologetic encounter. Buswell seizes the opportunity, “This is quite amazing. I understand that the angels are quite consistent in their reasoning, as they are not omniscient, but they are, I believe, always correct as far as they go. This, according to Professor Van Til, means that there is ‘no more reasoning with them!’” See Van Til, “Presuppositionalism”, 283n17. This is an example of how the debate, at times, simply left the track altogether.

ever took place again. While Van Til's *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* engaged critically with the broader contours of Buswell's apologetic, as well as with elements of his theology proper, the material Buswell published in book form in later years only seemed to restate his criticisms of *Fountainhead*. So, the debate remained a fountainhead of misunderstanding, as it were.

A couple of observations about the relation of this article to ministry, given the fact that ministry was central to both Buswell and Van Til, and the fact that theologising today must be done in service to the Christian ministry. Perhaps further study of this discussion between Buswell and Van Til could help future efforts in apologetic debate in two ways:

1) Negatively, Buswell's participation in this debate should motivate one to listen carefully to what Van Tillians are actually saying, and avoid superficial reaction and simplistic definitions and rejections of terms and phrases that must be taken as part of an apologetic system. If the function of the apologetic itself depends upon the Christian system, then it should be no surprise that assessing the parts of the apologetic is also an organic programme.

2) Positively, Buswell sincerely desired to understand where individual unbelievers stood regarding ultimate questions, and he wished to offer practical arguments that respected their starting points. While his arguments were unwittingly compromised, he wanted to work with men, forming his arguments in ways that would respect and reach them in their various life experiences and contexts. Without adopting his probabilistic approach, Van Tillian apologists could appreciatively imitate his desire to be simple, without falling into his tendency, at times, to be simplistic.

Van Til was trained in the Idealism of his day, as is often acknowledged by recent friendly critics of Van Til. Yet, while it will not do to dismiss him as stuck in some sort of Idealistic or Hegelian mire, one must accept his programme as he intended, namely in an effort to interpret the philosophical currents of his day in light of Christian theism, employing particular philosophical nomenclature in effort to push that current to its end, in the interest of the apologetic task. In this case, his intent was to show how only the triune God of Scripture will ever answer the questions some Idealists were pursuing, without dissolving into either rationalism or irrationalism. Likewise, today, one can follow Van Til's lead as new opportunities arise to offer a covenantal Calvinistic apologetic in the face of the various epistemic winds blowing – from postmodern scepticism, to post-postmodern indifference, to the various blends of secularism and pagan spiritualism hawked on social media, to the rejection of scriptural authority in favour of post-conservative/post-evangelical communitarian hermeneutics. If, as Charles Taylor observes, we

have moved beyond the pre-Enlightenment epoch of the impossibility of unbelief, and the post-Enlightenment epoch of the possibility of unbelief, to our current, post-9/11 impossibility of belief, Van Til deserves and rewards fresh, appreciative reading.

Further, Van Til warrants attention today, given the Apostle Peter's commissioning of all Christians to engage in apologetics. Writing not to seminary graduates or PhDs in analytic philosophy, but to Christians facing the heat of Neronian persecution, Peter provides the *textus classicus* on Christian apologetics (1 Pet 3:15-16):

...but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.

A close reading of this text calls the Christian to give an *apologíā* (a defence) when asked for the *lógon* (reason) for the *elpídos* (hope) the believer has. In other words, to be an apologist is to be a hope defender.

In another crucial text, the Apostle Paul speaks to the task of apologetics when he writes to the Corinthian believers (2 Cor 10:3-6):

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

These texts assure every Christian they are called to the task of being hope defenders. The respect Peter calls for is due to the common ground of the *imago Dei*. The warfare nomenclature Paul employs is consistent with the epistemological battle that is at the heart of apologetics. Taken together, these passages call Christian apologetic *hope defenders* to be both a *welcoming committee* and a *wrecking crew*. This is vital for the Church on mission today. The world is in desperate need of hope. Just over a decade ago, afternoon talk shows were the philosophy classrooms for modern women and men. Today, Instagram and Snapchat provide worldview catechesis for maturing millennials and Gen-Z questioners of epistemological authority. Cornelius Van Til is an apologetical gift of the ascended Christ to the Church. A thoughtful and thoroughgoing Van Tillian apologetic in this changing context is well suited for the proclamation of eschatological hope of the returning Christ:

Yet the gift is in order to the task. The example is also meant to be a sample. Christ walks indeed a cosmic road. Far as the curse is found, so far his grace is given. The Biblical miracles of healing point to the regeneration of all things. The healed souls of men require and will eventually receive healed bodies and a healed environment. Thus there is unity of concept for those who live by the Scriptural promise of comprehensive, though not universal redemption. While they actually expect Christ to return visible on the clouds of heaven, they thank God for every sunny day. They even thank God for his restraining and supporting general grace by means of which the unbeliever helps to display the majesty and power of God. To the believer the natural or regular with all its complexity always appears as the playground for the process of differentiation which leads ever onward to the fullness of the glory of God.⁷¹

⁷¹ Cornelius Van Til, "Nature and Scripture", in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (1946; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 271-72.

ABRAHAM KUYPER: CULTURAL TRANSFORMER

*Steve Bishop**

Abraham Kuyper was a theologian, statesman, journalist, church reformer, church historian, church pastor, founder of a Christian university and a Christian political party, and one-time prime minister of the Netherlands. He was a Reformed Christian whose writings have shaped a movement known as neo-Calvinism. Yet he is little known in the UK. In this article, I examine several key themes that shaped Kuyper's approach to theology, culture and society. These include the sovereignty of God, the cultural mandate, the role of worldviews, common grace, the antithesis, and sphere sovereignty. These themes provided the theoretical framework for Kuyper's neo-Calvinism. I look at how they shaped his approach to church, politics, education, art and mission.

I. Introduction

In 1975, D. M. Lloyd-Jones said in his address to the Westminster Conference:

...the Christian is not only to be concerned about personal salvation. It is his duty to have a complete view of life as taught in the Scriptures... As far as the Christian is concerned – and that is what we are interested in now – we are not to be concerned only about personal salvation; we must have a world view. All of us who have ever read Kuyper, and others, have been teaching this for many long years.¹

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was a Dutch theologian and statesman and yet, despite the endorsement of Lloyd-Jones, his works have been largely unread in Britain. This is strange because he founded a Christian university, the Free University in Amsterdam (now called the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), was the editor of a daily and a weekly newspaper, he wrote over 2000 books and articles.² His main works, in English, include *The Principles of Sacred Theology*

* Steve Bishop lectures at City of Bristol College, UK and is a trustee of Thinking Faith Network. He is co-editor of *On Kuyper* (Sioux Center, IO: Dordt College Press, 2013).

¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, "The French Revolution and After", *The Christian and the State in Revolutionary Times*, Westminster Conference Papers (Cambridge: Westminster Conference, 1976, 101).

² A full list of his works is in T. Kuipers, *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography 1857–2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

(1968), *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1946), the 1898 Stone Lectures: *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931), *Common Grace* (2016, 2019, 2020) and *Pro Rege* (2016, 2017, 2019). In *Lectures on Calvinism*, he developed the idea of Calvinism as a *Weltanschauung*, a whole “world-and-life-view”; his Calvinism was not a narrow five-point doctrine.

Kuyper also founded a Christian political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party and became the Dutch Prime Minister (1901-1905).

Fortunately, thanks to the Kuyper Translation project, many of Kuyper's works are being translated from Dutch into English. Although over one hundred years old, these writings provide a theoretical basis for a world-and-life-affirming approach to the public square, one rooted in the Christian faith. It is fitting then, that in 2020, the centenary year of Kuyper's death we look at the contours of his approach.³

Kuyper was born in Maassluis in the nineteenth century and died in The Hague in the twentieth century, but his impact and legacy stretch well into the twenty-first.⁴ In his day Kuyper sought to awake Christians from “a pietistic slumber”⁵ and today his work and writings are helping many to appreciate the fullness of God's good creation.

Kuyper famously declared:

*no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!”*⁶

No area of life is exempt from the claims of the risen Christ. Kuyper not only preached this vision but lived it. He was a multifaceted and multitalented character – even his enemies recognised he was a man of many heads! He was born in a liberal Calvinist home, studied at a modernist university and became a church pastor, before he experienced an evangelical conversion. He edited two newspapers, the weekly *De Heraut* and, the daily *De Standaard*. He shaped

³ For a fuller look at Kuyper and Kuyperianism, see C. G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

⁴ A biography of Kuyper can be found in J. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). See also: J. McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man: The Life and Work of Abraham Kuyper* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2000); F. Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960); L. Praamsma, *Let Christ be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper* (Jordan Station: Ontario Press, 1985). Helpful introductions to Kuyper's work include: P. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); R. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); M. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2019).

⁵ J. Bratt, “The Dutch Schools” in D. F. Wells, (ed.) *Reformed Theology in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 121.

⁶ Kuyper, as cited in J. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1998), 488.

a new Christian political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, became a politician and founded a new church denomination – much of the time also working as a church pastor. He was active in the advancement of Christian schools and education and founded a Christian university. He was a theologian – he was the first professor of theology at the Free University – and wrote an important work on the Holy Spirit. He was also the Prime Minister of the Netherlands for a short time (1901-1905). He certainly took seriously his “square inch” approach. It is not surprising that, in 1898, B. B. Warfield, said of him, “Dr Kuyper is probably to-day the most considerable figure in both political and ecclesiastical Holland.”⁷

In an age of individualism and narcissism, Kuyper’s transformative message stands in sharp prophetic contrast. The neo-Calvinism of Kuyper provides a clear biblical framework for applying Christianity to all areas of life. Many contemporary theologians are looking for a social theology, yet Kuyper marked out one and implemented it over a century ago. As one biographer writes: “... although Kuyper never preached the social gospel, he did frequently accentuate the social implications of the gospel”.⁸

Several key themes shaped Kuyper’s approach to culture. These include the sovereignty of God, the cultural mandate, the role of worldviews, common grace, the antithesis and sphere sovereignty. These themes provided the theoretical framework for Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism.

II. Key Kuyperian themes

1. The sovereignty of God

*If God is sovereign, then his lordship must extend over all of life, and it cannot be restricted to the walls of the church or within the Christian orbit. The non-Christian world has not been handed over to Satan, nor surrendered to fallen humanity, nor consigned to fate. God’s sovereignty is great and all-dominating in the life of that unbaptized world as well. Therefore Christ’s church on earth and God’s child cannot simply retreat from this life. If the believer’s God is at work in this world, then in this world the believer’s hand must take hold of the plow, and the name of the Lord must be glorified in that activity as well.*⁹

⁷ B. B. Warfield, “Introductory Note” in A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), xii.

⁸ Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper*, 51-52.

⁹ A. Kuyper, *Common Grace (Volume 1: The Historical Section): God’s Gifts for a Fallen World (Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology)* (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2016), xxxvii–xxxviii.

These words from the Preface to *Common Grace* sum up Kuyper's position. His approach begins and ends with the sovereignty of God. If God is sovereign, then cultural development is essential: retreating from God's world is not an option.

2. *The cultural mandate*

The term cultural mandate was coined by Klaas Schilder (1890-1952).¹⁰ Kuyper's square inch quote, as cited above, is an embodiment of the cultural mandate given in Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:15. This subduing, ruling, tilling and keeping is a mandate for the development of culture, for the unfolding of the potentialities within the God-given good creation. It is about expressing the kingdom of Christ in all areas of life; no area is exempt. It implies that although the creation is good, it needs to be developed and opened up; as Al Wolters put it: "...the Bible begins with a garden and ends with a city".¹¹

3. *The antithesis*

Antithesis means opposition. In the nineteenth-century Hegel had already utilised the term, however, in Kuyperian thought it took on a different connotation. It marked a difference between those who held to a Christian starting point and those who did not; the difference was in worldview. There is a noetic antithesis between those who start with the knowledge of God and those who do not.

This is, in part, one reason Kuyper advocates the establishment of specifically Christian institutions. A Christian political party or a Christian school will have different starting-points from a party or school based on, for example, naturalistic lines. The foundations will be different and so the out-workings will also be different. Commitment to Christ cannot be accommodated or harmonised with naturalism or any other non-Christian philosophy. There is a cosmic battle between light and darkness, between the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan. There is a marked contrast between belief and unbelief. This notion of antithesis is integral to the idea of rival worldviews. Rivalry is not the only relation between different worldviews: cooperation, emulation and mutual correction will also take place. It should also be appreciated that Kuyper would grant the same freedom to establish distinct schools, political parties or labour unions to those who adopt rival worldviews in a country. This is in fact what happened in the Netherlands.

¹⁰ N. H. Gootjes, "Schilder on Christ and culture" in J. Geertsema (ed.), *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995).

¹¹ A. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 41.

For Kuyper, however, the antithesis also means that there are two kinds of people (regenerate and unregenerate) and thus two kinds of “science” (i.e. scholarship) with different starting points. He uses the terms abnormalist and normalist to show the key difference. The conflict is not between faith and science, but between opposing scientific systems, each based on their own faith.¹² The difference stems from the view one has of sin and how radical was the fall into sin. Kuyper was, of course, an abnormalist:

*... if the cosmos in its present condition is abnormal, then a disturbance has taken place in the past, and only a regenerating power can warrant it the final attainment of its goal.*¹³

Abnormal or normal then refers to the state of creation and to the extent of the fall. The normalist denies the noetic effects of sin. Thus, if the creation is viewed as normal, then reason may have a higher place than for the abnormalist. For Kuyper, “reason is incomplete with respect to convincing others”.¹⁴ Hence the rather low value he placed on apologetics. The issue is to know to what extent the fall has affected reason and the rest of creation. For Kuyper, there was an “abyss” between the two kinds of people and the two kinds of science that could not be crossed without God’s revelation; this leaves reason helpless. Any attempt at unifying the two “systems” denies the power and reality of rebirth (*palingenesis*).

4. Sphere sovereignty

What role does the State have in raising children? Should the State mandate if a baby should be fed on demand or every few hours? Should the State interfere with the running of household finances? Then what about education? Or business? Or the church? It is these and similar questions that Kuyper’s notion of sphere sovereignty addresses.

All things are subject to the sovereignty of God. This conviction led Kuyper, following Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876),¹⁵ to develop his sphere sovereignty. He maintained that there are different independent spheres within creation but God is sovereign over them all. These spheres should remain independent in their own sphere. No one sphere should encroach on another. The State should not then stipulate how the family should be run.

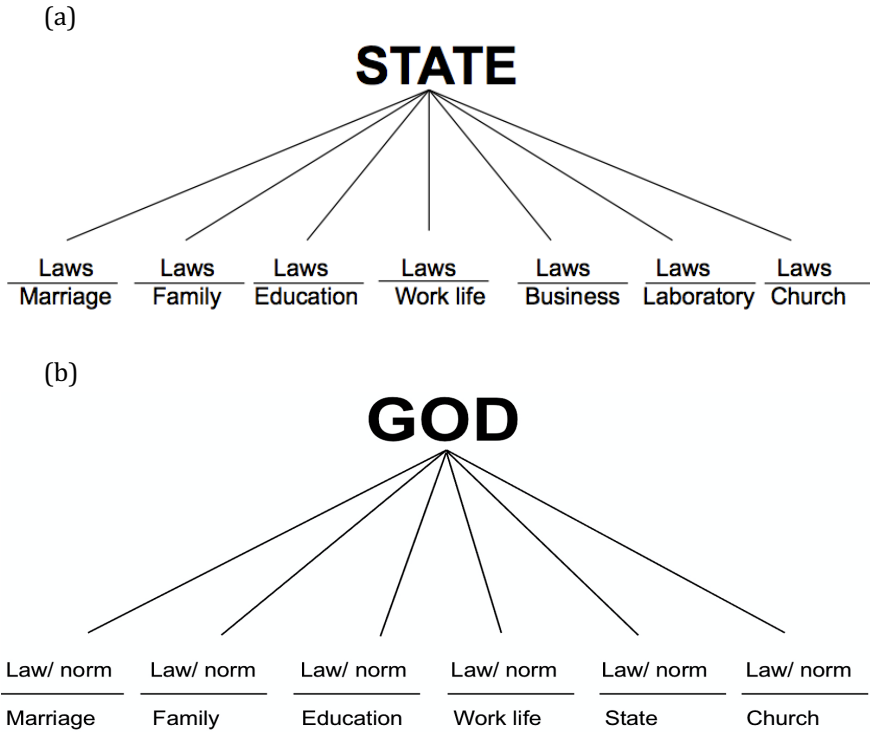
¹² A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931), 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴ O. Anderson, *Reason and Worldviews: Warfield, Kuyper, Van Til and Plantinga on the Clarity of General Revelation and Function of Apologetics* (Toronto: University Press of America, 2008), 49.

¹⁵ On the influence of Groen van Prinsterer on Kuyper see H. Van Dyke, “Abraham Kuyper: heir of an Anti-Revolutionary tradition” in S. Bishop and J. Kok (eds.) *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work & Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Sioux Center, IO: Dordt College Press, 2013), 7-32.

FIGURE 1. A representation of (a) State sovereignty and (b) Kuyper's sphere sovereignty.



This notion provided, for example, a corrective to statism, which maintains that the State, by making laws and regulations, is in control over most areas of life (see figure 1a). Sphere sovereignty starts from the sovereignty of God (see figure 1b) rather than the State or any other created entity or institution. The State is then sovereign in a certain sphere; its regulation of other spheres is limited to the juridical ambit and it should not be regarded as a sort of “container” of all the other social spheres and institutions.

In his 1880 inaugural address to the Free University, Kuyper outlined his idea of sphere sovereignty.¹⁶ This provided the justification, for example, for different types of schools and universities reflecting the different worldviews already present in society. The Free University Kuyper founded was to be a free, Christian university – free from State and even church control.

Sphere sovereignty maintains that God is sovereign. He has established laws or norms for areas of society such as the family, the church and so on. Within their own sphere, these institutions are thus sovereign under God's laws and norms for that aspect of life. No one institution should dominate or dictate to another and there is no hierarchy of institutions. The development

¹⁶ Kuyper, in Bratt, *Centennial Reader*.

and flourishing of every institution or area of life is an outworking of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28-29.

There are some unresolved issues with sphere sovereignty including the question of knowing who decides what the spheres are and what are the boundaries. Kuyper never really defines these issues; he contends that they are organic – i.e. unfolding in their richness according to creational norms as, for example, a plant grows and develops – each sphere has its own principles or goals. Perhaps he deliberately keeps his theory of sphere sovereignty slightly ambiguous.

5. *Common grace*

One major theme that has been closely associated with Kuyper is common grace. Henry Van Til described Kuyper as the “theologian of common grace”.¹⁷ Common grace is bestowed on all, Christians and non-Christians.

On this topic, Kuyper wrote a series of articles, over a six-year period, for *De Heraut*. These were subsequently published in three volumes as *De Gemeene Gratie* in 1902, 1903 and 1904. A major project is under way to translate these works into English.¹⁸ Kuyper begins his foreword to the first volume with this provocative statement: “The Reformed paradigm has suffered no damage greater than its deficient development of the doctrine of common grace.”¹⁹ He then goes on to lament its lack of doctrinal development in Calvinism after 1650.

For Kuyper, common grace is “deduced directly from the sovereignty of God” and is the “root and conviction for all Reformed people”.²⁰ He thinks that resuscitating the doctrine of common grace helps the believer “take hold of the plow”²¹ rather than retreat from the world. Common grace provides the foundation for engagement with the world, thus avoiding spiritual and ecclesiastical isolation and thereby helping believers exercise stewardship.

Kuyper distinguished between particular grace – sometimes called saving grace – and common grace. The first abolishes and undoes the consequences of sin completely for the saved; the second does not cause conversion but

¹⁷ H. R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1972), 117-136.

¹⁸ A section of *De Gemeene Gratie* was translated in Bratt, *Centennial Reader*. A. Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2011); A. Kuyper, *Common Grace (Volume 1: The Historical Section): God's Gifts for a Fallen World (Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology)* (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2016); A. Kuyper, *Common Grace (Volume 2: The Doctrinal Section): God's Gifts for a Fallen World (Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology)* (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2019). The third and final volume will appear later in 2020.

¹⁹ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, Volume 1, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

extends to the whole of humankind. For Kuyper there is a close relationship between the two and separation “must be vigorously opposed”.²² He uses the illustration of two intertwined branches of a tree with the same root system. The root system is Christ, the first-born of all creation. Kuyper’s position on special and common grace is Christological; he writes: “... there is... no doubt whatever that common grace and special grace come most intimately connected from their origin, and this connection lies in Christ”.²³ Special grace, he argues, “assumes common grace”.²⁴ Common grace is only an emanation of special grace and all its fruit flows into special grace. Common grace must have a formative impact on special grace and vice versa. In *Common Grace* Volume 1 he writes of the interrelationship of particular and common grace: “... the glory of common grace would never have sparkled in its springtime if particular grace had not brought it fully into bloom”;²⁵ “... particular grace already presupposes common grace”;²⁶ and without common grace any functioning of particular grace would be unthinkable.²⁷

Common grace means that the creation ordinances of dominion and stewardship over creation, given in the cultural mandate before the fall, are not abolished after the fall.²⁸

Common grace has a twofold effect: on the one hand, it curbs the effects of sin and restrains the deeds of fallen humanity; on the other, it upholds the ordinances of creation and provides the basis for Christian cultural involvement; common grace provides the foundation for culture. The cultural mandate to develop and fill the earth has not been rescinded after the fall into sin. Therefore, cultural withdrawal is not an option for Christians.

It is also important to state what common grace does *not* imply. It is not saving grace. It is not a denial of total depravity or of limited atonement – Kuyper was an advocate of both.²⁹ It does not blur the distinction (antithesis) between the regenerate and the unregenerate, between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, between the church and the world. It does not mean that all things are permissible. Common grace does not nullify the antithesis – they are both important aspects of Kuyper’s thought. Though how he holds them together is open to debate.³⁰ It is important to notice that, for

²² Kuyper, *Centennial Reader*, 185.

²³ Kuyper, *Centennial Reader*, 187.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁵ Kuyper, *Common Grace, Volume 1*, 261.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 505.

²⁸ Kuyper, *Centennial Reader*, 179

²⁹ On the latter see Kuyper’s *Particular Grace: A Defense of God’s Sovereignty in Salvation* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001).

³⁰ See, for example: T. McConnell, “Common grace or antithesis?” in S. Bishop and J. Kok (eds.) *On Kuyper*, 303-316; and S. U. Zuidema, “Christian action and common grace in Kuyper” in *On Kuyper*, 247-286.

Kuyper, common grace and the antithesis should be kept together. Neither is common grace only associated with the church: "... common grace has operated for ages in China and India without there being any church of Christ in those countries".³¹

Incidentally, Kuyper never claimed originality in his development of the doctrine of common grace; rather he described himself as a copyist of Calvin. Kuyper only aimed at making explicit what was implicit in Calvin.³²

6. *Christianity as a Weltanschauung (creation, fall and redemption)*

When Kuyper first introduced Christians to the notion of worldview in his 1888 *Lectures on Calvinism* it was a fresh, innovative and radical notion.³³ Kuyper first identified the Christian worldview in terms of the narrative embedded within creation, fall and redemption. Variants of such a schema have become much more influential in recent decades among evangelicals, such as that formulated by Stott, though not necessarily because of Kuyper's influence. As the Dutch Christian philosopher, Dooyeweerd, puts it:

*[Kuyper] lifted Calvinism, the most radically biblical movement within the Protestant Reformation, out of the narrow sphere of dogmatic theology where it had languished during centuries of inner decline. He raised it to the level of an all-encompassing worldview.*³⁴

I will now turn to examine some key topics that Kuyper addressed, to see how he utilised these themes of common grace, sphere sovereignty and so forth.

III. Some key topics

1. *Church: institute and organism*

Kuyper was a pastor in a church, led a reform of the Dutch Reformed Church and wrote his doctorate on Calvin's and à Lasco's views of the church. He had a deep concern for the church; as he said, the "church question dominates every other issue".³⁵ In a sense, Kuyper turned from studying church history

³¹ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, Volume 1, 301.

³² On Calvin and common grace see Bavinck, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 1909; 1989.

³³ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 11. On the history and origin of worldview see D. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

³⁴ H. Dooyeweerd, "Kuyper's philosophy of science" in *On Kuyper*, 153-178.

³⁵ A. Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded: The Church as Organism and Institution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2013).

to making it. His distinction between the church as an institution and church as organism is an important insight.

Kuyper places a strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. For the church to be truly an institution and organism, the role of the institutional leaders must be to equip the church as organism to be able to do the works of service in the marketplace, in the classroom, in business, in politics, in the laboratory and so forth.

He uses several metaphors to illustrate the distinction between church as an organism and church as institute. The church as an organism is a body and it grows; as an institute it is a house and is built. It is from the organism of church that the institution is born. In essence, the institution is the church organisation with its sacraments, its ministers and so forth; the organism is the church in the world, Christians at work in society, the body of Christ, strengthened and served by the church as institute. The church as institute does not run schools, universities, coffee shops or trade unions; that is the role of the church as organism. For Kuyper, therefore, the church has to do not only with Sunday services or missions but is a nation, busy reforming all facets of life and culture.

2. *Politics*

Kuyper was not only the founder of a Christian political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, he also became the prime minister (PM) of the Netherlands. He once remarked, "politicophobia is not Calvinistic, is not Christian, is not ethical".³⁶

Kuyper distinguished between two types of Christian principles when he was PM: theological and political. The theological principles were related to salvation, whereas political principles concerned norms for public affairs. It was this latter principle, he maintained, was his concern as PM.³⁷ Kuyper as PM would be the statesman, not the theologian. He was committed to democratic pluralism and social reform, based on Christian principles.

His goals as a PM were educational reform, to retard the influence of drunkenness and indecency on society, and to deal with the impact of the industrial revolution on workers. Unfortunately, several pressing issues confronted Kuyper, including the Russian-Japanese war and the railroad strike. These left little time for him to press through with his social reforms.

The railroad strike of 1903 proved to be a severe test for Kuyper's government. The strike almost brought the country to a halt. Kuyper was forced to take measures such as the foundation of a railway brigade, the

³⁶ Cited in Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper*, 48.

³⁷ M. R. Langley, *The Practice of Spiritual Spirituality: Episodes from the Public Career of Abraham Kuyper, 1879-1918* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1984), 7.

setting up of a committee to investigate the status and claims of the railway workers and penalties for the dereliction of duty.

However, one of Kuyper's major achievements during his time as PM was the Higher Education Act. In 1904 the act was passed in the Second Chamber, but rejected by the First Chamber.³⁸ Kuyper took the controversial, but legitimate, step of dissolving the First Chamber and thus there were new elections. Both chambers subsequently passed the bill and it became law in 1905. The law meant that the Free, and other non-State universities, could award degrees and was on the same footing as the public universities.

Several themes were important for Kuyper in his politics – the antithesis and the failure of both individualism and collectivism. He was neither a radical nor a conservative – he rejected the notion of popular sovereignty.

Kuyper held to an Augustinian view of the State and government, in that it was a post-fall necessity rather than a pre-fall institution. "God has instituted magistrates, by reason of sin", he wrote in his *Lectures on Calvinism*. Several Kuyperian political scholars such as James Skillen and David Koyzis take issue with Kuyper on this.³⁹ Where they agree with Kuyper is that the State has a God-given vocation and task. In terms of sphere sovereignty, the State has the task of mediating between the spheres ensuring that no one sphere encroaches on another, and of maintaining internal justice. In Kuyper's words, the State

*... possesses the three-fold right and duty: 1. Whenever different spheres clash, to compel mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each; 2. To defend individuals and the weak ones, in those spheres, against the abuse of power of the rest; and 3. To coerce all together to bear personal and financial burdens for the maintenance of the natural unity of the State.*⁴⁰

3. Education

Education was a critical matter for Kuyper. Education, for him, exemplified his view of the role of the State, sphere sovereignty and the need for institutional pluralism within society. Schools were important as they provided the means of imparting a particular worldview. Kuyper maintained that the so-called "neutral" schools were a myth. Neutrality was a mirage. The school struggle, as it became known in the Netherlands, lasted several decades. It was the fight

³⁸ The Dutch parliament comprises two chambers; the Second Chamber is elected by the people every four years, the less important First Chamber approves or rejects the laws. The First Chamber is elected by members of the provincial parliament.

³⁹ J. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) and D. Koyzis, *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey of Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* 2nd edn. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019).

⁴⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 97.

for parents, and not the State, to control the education of their children: "The school should belong, not to the church, not to the State, but to parents!"⁴¹

The ARP's policy, primarily developed by Kuyper, was that "the government should not be operating schools as a rule but only by way of exception".⁴² Kuyper soon realised that the struggle was to require political change. His first political speech in the Dutch Second Chamber was on the State control of education, this was in 1874.

Kuyper argued, convincingly, that the private schools meant that the State saved a great deal of money because the State had fewer schools to fund. His arguments or reasons for private education are scattered through his newly translated anthology *On Education*. These include (in no particular order):

- The harmony between home and school will be much stronger than in a State school.
- They produce results at least as good as the State schools – without the State schools' "Kantian deism" and "doctrine of moral autonomy".⁴³
- Child rearing, and thus education, is the role of the parents and not the State – it should be an issue of parental choice.
- It is an issue of equality; he observes, "There must be equality in the country, both for those who hold to the Christian and for those who hold to the modernist worldview".⁴⁴
- Education is not neutral; state education flattens and demeans religious faith. He wrote, "There is no neutral education that is not governed by a spirit of its own. And precisely that spirit of the religiously neutral school militates against every positive faith".⁴⁵ As all teachers and educationalists operate from a set of theoretical and pre-theoretical frameworks, neutrality is impossible.
- The need for diversity in education to represent the different cultural and religious worldviews within the Netherlands.

State education and the arguments for it are, Kuyper insists, a product of moral autonomy, and thus a rejection of the sovereignty of God; it was a deification of the State, and (although he does not put it in these terms) it involved State indoctrination. He agreed with his mentor Groen van Prinsterer's polemical remark that government schools are "the privileged school of a specific religious sect".⁴⁶

⁴¹ A. Kuyper, *On Education*, 198.

⁴² A. Kuyper, *On Education*, 45.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁴⁶ Cited in H. Van Dyke, "Government schools or free schools? Abraham Kuyper addresses a long-standing controversy in the Dutch parliament", *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies/Rev. can. d'études néerlandaises* 35.2 (2014), 29-45.

4. Art

Kuyper was not an artist and yet he included a lecture on Calvinism and art in his *Lectures on Calvinism* delivered at Princeton at the invitation of B. B. Warfield.⁴⁷ Art may have seemed to be a strange choice of topic, particularly as many regarded Calvinism as being indifferent or even hostile to the arts. Yet this was the reason that Kuyper chose this topic. If Calvinism was an all-embracing worldview, if Jesus' lordship was to extend to all of life, as Kuyper maintained, then that had implications for all areas of life, art included.

In his lectures he begins by answering the question: Why didn't Calvinism develop an art style? He draws on two unlikely sources, the German philosophers Hegel (1770-1831) and Eduard Von Hartmann (1842-1906). They contended that higher forms of religion were able to develop independently of art, as art was unable to express the essence of religion. Kuyper had argued that the highest form of religion was Calvinism. Such an approach was supported by Kuyper's sphere sovereignty: religion and art should be free from interference from each other.

Calvinism thus had advanced the arts, not by building cathedrals, palaces or amphitheatres; rather it released art from the church's influence and authority. Previously, art and music could only flourish as far as it could serve the church. Calvinism unfastened the ecclesiastical chains that hindered the development of art.

He stresses that art is not merely a human fabrication; in his *The Work of the Holy Spirit* he states emphatically: "Art is not man's [sic] invention, but God's creation".⁴⁸ In *Pro Rege*, Volume 3⁴⁹ he develops the notion that art is a gift of God that shows itself in an ability, which portrays beauty and can be enjoyed by all.

Art as a creation reveals the importance it should have in a fully developed Christian worldview. It is not a mere luxury – it is integral to the creation and to what it means to be a human created in the image of the creative God. Kuyper's view is that art is no fringe on the garment; it is an integral part of the kingdom of God.

5. Mission

Mission is not a term that is usually associated with Kuyper. Nonetheless, Kuyper did write on mission and missions so it is worth examining his

⁴⁷ Kuyper wrote about art in several places, but most extensively in *Pro Rege*, Volume 3 (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2019), also in Chapter 5 of *Lectures on Calvinism, Wisdom and Wonder* and his rectorial address to the VU in 1898 entitled "Calvinism and art". He also gave a series of lectures on aesthetics at the Free University.

⁴⁸ A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2001), 40.

⁴⁹ A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, Volume 3 (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2019).

approach.⁵⁰ In *Pro Rege*, Volume 2 he distinguishes between witnessing and confession: “The first personal duty that you owe your King is to confess him; the second duty, which automatically follows from it, is to be a witness to him.”⁵¹

Witnessing includes, but is more than, confession. Confession is standing up for Christ, but witnessing is an attempt to try and win others for Christ. Many, he notes, confess Christ but often fail to witness. This suggests, Kuyper asserts, that for them, religion is a personal, private matter, so they think there is no need for them to witness. Each Christian, however, has a responsibility not to remain silent for his King: “Nothing can ever excuse you of your duty to witness for your King.”⁵² He makes an important – and sobering – point: “Every human being that lives is a missionary... missionary of Christ or missionary of the Satan.”⁵³ We are all missionaries; the issue is what message are we giving?

One time he lectured on mission in 1890 he outlined several theses as they relate to mission. The first group of eight dealt with dogmatic propositions which focus on determining the relation between missions and the Trinity. His first thesis reads:

*All mission activity originates from the sovereignty of God; is based on the creation of human beings in the image of God; is necessitated by sin; and is grounded in the confession that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.*⁵⁴

As with most subjects, Kuyper begins with the sovereignty of God and with creation, fall and redemption; it is also Christological; it is also Trinitarian. Mission is thus a command, not an option. We are called to mission because we are God’s representatives; we are his image-bearers.

The ultimate missionary is God’s son. All mission pales into insignificance compared with his mission. The incarnation is the first stage of his mission; the church is to be the means of exercise of his mission to the world today.

Kuyper, it seems, was ahead of his time; he saw the need for cultural sensitivity and contextualisation in overseas mission and for church planting:

⁵⁰ Two key lectures by Kuyper deal with his thoughts on mission: “Missions according to Scripture” Calvin Theological Journal 38 (2003):237-247 – delivered in 1871; and “Lecture on Missions” first delivered at the 1890 Mission Congress of the Dutch Reformed Churches, available online: <https://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/Kuyper/AK-Missions.pdf>. Accessed, 12 December 2019.

⁵¹ Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, Volume 2 (Bellingham, MA: Lexham Press, 2018).

⁵² “Lecture on missions”.

⁵³ “Missions according to Scripture”, 238.

⁵⁴ “Lecture on missions”.

*Missions among heathens and Muslims, when preaching law and gospel, should acknowledge the peculiarities of the people and their environment and leave complete freedom for confessing Christ, so that when these people are ready to form their own churches these local peculiarities and forms are preserved.*⁵⁵

He was also concerned that missionaries should be trained properly. He suggests that they should have a “superior education”: “We have to send our best people to the mission field”.⁵⁶ Kuyper sees the church as the instrument God has chosen and uses for mission, not missionary organisations: “The burden and the justification for missions rest with the local church”.⁵⁷ Missionaries should be the responsibility of the sending church. The aim of the missionary should be to become a pastor to those who have become Christians under his ministry; the sender church should be responsible financially until the mission church can support itself.

As Kuyper puts it:

*In summary, missions delivers a command, is directed to the fallen image bearer of God and is based on the confession that the operation of the Spirit is bound to the Word.*⁵⁸

6. *Apartheid*

One black spot on Kuyper’s theology is its relationship to South African apartheid. It was Kuyper’s pamphlet “Uniformity, the curse of modern life” (1869)⁵⁹ which, it is claimed, served as the basis for the “apartheid Bible”.⁶⁰

In “Uniformity” Kuyper expounds the problem of (false) uniformity, he describes it as “a dubious feature – I dare say, the *curse* – of modern life”. He begins with the reasons he sees it as a curse and then discusses how Christians can fight it, particularly in regarding church and State.

His opening thesis seems to undermine his argument: “... unity is the goal of all the ways of God”. What Kuyper is proposing is a unity without uniformity; uniformity is a counterfeit of unity:

In God’s plan vital unity develops by internal strength precisely from the diversity of nations and races; but sin, by a reckless levelling and the

⁵⁵ “Lecture on missions”, thesis 15.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, thesis 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Kuyper, “Uniformity, the curse of modern life” in J. Bratt, *Centennial Reader*.

⁶⁰ M. Rathbone, “Sphere sovereignty and irreducibility: The ambiguous use of Abraham Kuyper’s ideas during the time of apartheid in South Africa”, *Koers* 2015, vol. 80 (1) (2015), 1-8.

*elimination of diversity, seeks a false, deceptive unity, the uniformity of death.*⁶¹

He sees this as heading towards the death of nationalism and patriotism. This levelling he sees as being counter to the ordinances of God. This unity he sees as the oneness of one body, every member has a part and is of equal importance. It is this that the architects of apartheid seem to have overlooked in Kuyper. As Kuyper stresses: “The wall of *separation* has been demolished by Christ, the lines of *distinction* have not been abolished”⁶² (emphasis in the original). The former is as important as the latter – apartheid stressed the latter (the lines of distinction) and ignored the former (separation demolished). Apartheid is a misrepresentation of what Kuyper intended. It is difficult to see how a right reading of Kuyper’s vision could result in the separation and discrimination that characterised apartheid.

Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty led to the pillarisation of society in the Netherlands. The pillarisation there was according to worldview, not skin colour. In the South African context “sphere sovereignty” was used to endorse and provide a theological basis for apartheid. This, however, was a misrepresentation of Kuyper’s view. Kuyper never saw folk or nation as one of the spheres – this was a clear misappropriation and misapplication of Kuyper’s approach. Not that this misappropriation was done deliberately, but it was probably more a case of confirmation bias. Kuyper was read and interpreted in ways that confirm pre-existing ideas and prejudices regarding separation; those aspects that contradicted the view were ignored or suppressed.

III. Conclusion

This overview of key themes and topics in Kuyper has inevitably been too brief. Mention could also have been made of his views on church order, church reform, societal pluralism, ethics⁶³, women, presumptive regeneration, science, scholarship, suffrage, the Holy Spirit, angels, scripture, his founding of the Free University and so on – or his journalism and meditation writings (he wrote over 2000) – he addressed all these subjects and more in his copious works. What it indicates is that Kuyper was a polymath who also put his ideas into practice and transformed the educational, political and cultural landscape of the Netherlands. Not that Kuyper was perfect, far from it. He was a

⁶¹ Kuyper, “Uniformity”.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ See, for example, S. Bishop, “Kuyper and vaccinations a case study in Kuyper’s approach to an ethical issue” *Koers – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 84 (1) (2019). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.84.1.2462>.

workaholic; he did not suffer fools gladly and, unfortunately, he usually regarded as fools those that did not agree with him! He was tenacious but often thought himself to be indispensable and could be pompous, dogmatic and over-bearing. But as the Dutch historian George Harinck observes:

*The reason that Kuyper today is still of more interest than other Christian social thinkers is that he not only had some interesting thoughts but that he made them work, as well. He was not just a social thinker, but, more than any other Dutchman, he changed Dutch society.*⁶⁴

He did so from a distinctively Christian position.

⁶⁴ G. Harinck, "A historian's comment on the use of Abraham Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty", *Journal of Markets & Morality* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 278.

SAMUEL RUTHERFORD'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ANTINOMIANISM

*Song-En Poon**

This paper seeks to examine Samuel Rutherford's particular emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification in his response to the Antinomian Controversy in seventeenth century England.

I. Introduction

1. Rutherford and the Scottish Second Reformation

Samuel Rutherford is popularly known primarily for the letters that he had written.¹ The gems of his *Letters* have been collected and published under the title *The Loveliness of Christ*, which many have come across over the years.² He is also well known for his treatise *Lex Rex*, which has generated much scholarly interest because of the political thoughts contained therein.³ Others would remember him as one of the Scottish commissioners that the Kirk had sent to the Westminster Assembly.

Rutherford was born about the year 1600 and passed into eternal glory on 29 March 1661.⁴ He was a Presbyterian minister, theologian and Professor of Divinity at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews. Rutherford was appointed to St Mary's College in 1639 and served there until 1660, except for the years 1643-1647 which were spent in London at the Westminster Assembly. Rutherford's lengthy tenure as Professor of Divinity reveals the extensive influence that he had on the theological scene during the period that may be termed as the Scottish Second Reformation.

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¹ Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (ed. Andrew Bonar; Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1891).

² Samuel Rutherford, *The Loveliness of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007).

³ Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, rex: the law and the prince; a dispute for the just prerogative of king and people* (London, 1644).

⁴ For an intellectual biography of Rutherford, see John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The Protestant Reformation in Scotland may be divided into 3 periods: (i) the Scottish Reformation (1560-1599),⁵ (ii) the Scottish sub-Reformation (1600-1637),⁶ and (iii) the Scottish Second Reformation (1638-1660).⁷ According to leading Rutherford scholar Guy Richard, Rutherford was “arguably the leading theologian of Scotland’s Second Reformation”.⁸ This echoes the view of James Walker (1821-1891) who, in his survey of Scottish theology and theologians between 1560 and 1750, states that Rutherford was “perhaps... the greatest” theologian of the Scottish Second Reformation.⁹ Richard offers significant support for this claim: comparing Rutherford’s writing output with John Owen’s, he notes that “[Rutherford] published thirteen major theological treatises, amounting to just over 7,000 pages of text, not to mention other works, including sermons, letters, an in-depth catechism (totalling 562 questions and answers – over five times the number in the Westminster Shorter Catechism), and a variety of political writings, all of which increase our total by nearly 3,000 pages”, bringing the grand total to about 10,000 pages, whereas “[t]he twenty-four volumes of Owen’s *Works* account for approximately 13,700 pages”.¹⁰ This certainly backs up the claim that Rutherford was the most learned Scottish divine of the Scottish Second Reformation.

2. Rutherford and the Antinomian Controversy in England

Since this paper focuses on examining Rutherford’s view of sanctification as found in his writings against antinomianism in seventeenth-century England, it is necessary to speak a little about the Antinomian Controversy prior to examining Rutherford’s response.

Antinomian teachings first appeared in London in the 1610s and made further headway in subsequent years. Antinomianism itself is hard to define in the seventeenth century, and is certainly not limited simply to a denial of

⁵ According to Kirk, the Reformation occurred in 1560, but he did not offer an end date for the era. Macleod states that the Reformation period ended with the close of the sixteenth century. J. Kirk, “Reformation, Scottish”, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993); John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 57–58.

⁶ John Macleod identifies the time period between the beginning of the seventeenth century and the Second Reformation as the sub-Reformation age. Macleod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation*, 57–58.

⁷ S. Isbell, “Second Reformation”, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁸ Guy M. Richard, *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 1.

⁹ James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland, 1560-1750*, Cunningham Lectures, 1870–71, Repr. with additional notes from the 2nd ed (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982), 8.

¹⁰ Richard, *Supremacy*, 2.

the abiding rule of the moral law.¹¹ Disputes also centred on the relation of faith to assurance, when justification occurred – i.e. at the point of belief or from eternity – and the nature of sanctification as an ongoing process. Initially, antinomian views were disseminated primarily through preaching and private meetings. However, with the removal of press censorship in the early 1640s, antinomian publications surfaced and became an effective avenue for propagating and defending its beliefs. There were two major waves of responses against English antinomianism: (1) 1630s and (2) 1640s. Among the first wave respondents were Henry Burton and Thomas Taylor. Thomas Gataker, Anthony Burgess and Samuel Rutherford belonged to the second wave.

How did Rutherford get embroiled in the Antinomian Controversy in England? Was he not teaching theology at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews? Was not the Antinomian Controversy in the first half of the century an English thing? Scotland was indeed spared from the encroachment of antinomianism throughout the majority of the seventeenth century; its theology eventually seeped across the border in the 1690s with the republication of Tobias Crisp's sermons. How then did Rutherford come into contact with English antinomianism and get involved in the ongoing controversy? It was through his participation in the Westminster Assembly from 1643-1647. This is evidenced by the dates of his publications against antinomianism.

Henceforth, we proceed to examine Rutherford's doctrine of sanctification as expressed in his treatises against English antinomianism. These works are *The Tryal and Trivmph of Faith* (1645), *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* (1647) and *A Survey of the Spirituall AntiChrist* (1648).

II. Rutherford's doctrine of sanctification

There are three important features to Rutherford's doctrine of sanctification: (1) The presence of indwelling sin in believers; (2) Believers' responsibility to keep the Moral Law, and (3) The necessity for believers to pursue sanctification. We will survey all three aspects in order to establish a clear picture of Rutherford's view on believers' sanctification.

1. The presence of indwelling sin in believers

This is a key characteristic of Rutherford's doctrine of sanctification, because it provides the basis for believers' pursuit of sanctification. He makes it clear

¹¹ For some studies of English antinomianism (with varying degrees of theological accuracy), see David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Theodore Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Whitney G. Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

that "justification is not such an abolition of sin, in its root and essence, as shall be in the state of glory, when root and branch shall be abolished... [and] sanctification being perfected, all indwelling of sin shall be removed".¹² In other words, Rutherford considers sanctification to be a lifelong process that centres on the removal of indwelling sin in those who possess a personal, saving knowledge of Christ.

He asserts that the remnants of sin dwell in every believer: "...being once in Christ, and justified, we remaine sinners, as touching the indwelling blot, but we are not sinners, as we are justified in Christ, as touching the Law-obligation to eternall condemnation, from which we are fully freed".¹³ Although Rutherford acknowledges that justified persons are sinners, he emphasises that believers are "not condemned sinners", differentiating them from unbelievers who remain in a condemned state. This means believers experience a continual and irreconcilable war with the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh after their conversion, such that they will continue to sin against God. This remains true even for those who have proven themselves to be most godly, "the holiest and most mortified".¹⁴ Therefore, while believers' sins have been fully atoned for by Jesus Christ, they are neither perfect nor sinless.

Nevertheless, believers are no longer under the slavery of sin. Just as a captive is unable to lord it over his captor, indwelling sin cannot compel the justified to sin against God: "sin in the justified hath but house-room, and stayeth within the walls as a Captive, an Underling, a servant, it hath not the keys of the house to command all, nor the Scepter to rule: All the keys are upon Christs shoulder, far lesse hath it a Law-power to condemne." ¹⁵ Thus, indwelling sin has lost its power in the lives of the justified and it can no longer condemn them, because Jesus Christ is now the Lord of the justified. By turning to the Lord Jesus, through the help of the Holy Spirit, believers can gain victory over sins.

¹² Samuel Rutherford, *The Tryal & Trivmph of Faith: Or, An Exposition of the History of Christs Dispossessioning of the Daughter of the Woman of Canaan. Delivered in Sermons; In Which Are Opened, The Victory of Faith; The Condition of Those That Are Tempted; The Excellency of Jesus Christ and Free-Grace; And Some Speciall Grounds and Principles of Libertinisme and Antinomian Errors.* (London: Printed by John Field, 1645), 151.

¹³ Rutherford, *The Tryal & Trivmph of Faith*, 289-290.

¹⁴ Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himselfe. Or, A Survey of Our Saviour in His Soule-Suffering, His Loveliness in His Death, and the Efficacie Thereof. In Which Some Cases of Soul-Trouble in Weake Beleevers, Grounds of Submission under the Absence of Christ, with the Flowings and Heightnings of Free Grace, Are Opened. Delieverd in Sermons on the Evangel According to S. John Chap. XII. Vers 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. Where Are Also Interjected Some Necessary Digressions, for the Times, Touching Divers Errors of Antinomians; and a Short Vindication of the Doctrine of Protestants, from the Morall and Fained Way of Resistible Conversion of Sinners; and What Faith Is Required of All within the Visible Church, for the Want Whereof, Many Are Condemned.* (London: Printed by J. D. for A. Crooke, 1647), 527.

¹⁵ Rutherford, *The Tryal & Trivmph of Faith*, 151.

Rutherford emphasised the presence of indwelling sin in believers, because he thinks the antinomians committed a grave error on this doctrinal point. He asserts that they have erred in claiming that believers are perfect in this life.¹⁶ This constitutes a denial of the presence of indwelling sin. He identifies English antinomians Robert Towne and John Saltmarsh as advocates of this error.

Rutherford finds further evidence of perfectionism in the writings of Towne, Saltmarsh and John Eaton who propounded that “God cannot be angry at the sinnes of the justified, because they are done away, and abolished in Christ”.¹⁷ He concludes that the antinomians necessarily reject the presence of indwelling sin in believers. Contrary to his opponents, Rutherford asserts that God is truly angry at the sins of the justified, which is evidenced by his chastisement of believers for sinning, supporting his assertion of ongoing indwelling sin. He explains that God’s anger is directed against the “sinnes of the justified, both to hate, rebuke, and correct their sinnes though God hate not their persons”.¹⁸ In other words, while God does not hate believers, he hates their sins, and his anger is manifested to chastise believers and turn them away from their sins. *Hence, the presence of indwelling sin in believers lays the grounds for believers to pursue sanctification throughout their earthly sojourn.*

2. *The responsibility of believers to keep the Moral Law*

Rutherford maintained that the Law of God remains the rule of life for believers and thus it is their duty to keep it. His arguments were directed against the antinomian counterclaim that frees believers from Law-keeping (as summarised in the Ten Commandments).

He asserts it is necessary for believers to keep the Law because the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles command believers to do so.¹⁹ By Law-keeping, Rutherford is not arguing that believers today must obey every stipulation of the Mosaic Law. He is speaking specifically of the Moral Law: “It is false that

¹⁶ “The Familists are perfect in this life, and so are Antinomians Towne as. p 77, 78. Saltm. free grace 140.” Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall AntiChrist. Opening The Secrets of Familisme and Antinomianisme in the Antichristian Doctrine of John Saltmarsh, and Will. Del, the Present Preachers of the Army Now in England, and of Robert Town, Tob. Crisp, H. Denne, Eaton, and Others. In Which Is Revealed the Rise and Spring of Antinomians, Familists, Libertines, Swenck-Feldians, Enthysiaists, &c. The Minde of Luther a Most Professed Opposer of Antinomians, Is Cleared, and Diverse Considerable Points of the Law and the Gospel, of the Spirit and Letter, of the Two Covenants, of the Nature of Free Grace, Exercise under Temptations, Mortification, Justification, Sanctification, Are Discovered. In Two Parts.* (London: Printed by J. D. & R. I. for Andrew Crooke, 1648), Part I: 66.

¹⁷ Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall AntiChrist*, Part II: 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himselfe*, 582.

wee are freed from active obedience to the Morall Law, because Christ came under active obedience to the Morall Law; for the Law required obedience out of love.”²⁰ However, with regard to the peculiarities of the Mosaic system he said, “To keep one Ceremony of Moses drawes a bill on us of debt to keep all the Ceremoniall Law; because now its unlawfull in any sort.”²¹ Rutherford fundamentally advocates a threefold division of the Law of God, and, for him, believers today are only required to keep the Moral aspect of the Mosaic Law.

Although believers remain under the authority of the Moral Law as a rule of life, Rutherford asserts that they have been freed from the curse of the Law.²² This is by virtue of the atonement of Christ accomplished on the cross, which has also freed believers from servile obedience to the Law.²³ As a result, believers are now able to obey the Moral Law out of thanksgiving to God.

Rutherford emphasises the importance of keeping the Moral Law because it is the instrument that God has ordained for believers' sanctification, by which through their adherence they may grow in holiness. He asserts that “the rule and directing power of the Law... lead us in the wayes of sanctification and holinesse”.²⁴ *Therefore, Law-keeping is the necessary means by which believers are to pursue sanctification.*

3. All believers are obliged to pursue sanctification

Rutherford asserts that it is the duty of every believer to pursue sanctification. He compares sanctification to a wedding coat that requires constant adjustment until it fits the groom perfectly.²⁵ In other words, sanctification is an ongoing task that believers must diligently attend to as they journey towards heaven; it is a lifelong task that can never be completed this side of heaven but will certainly be perfected upon entry into eternal glory. Since pursuing sanctification necessarily involves keeping the Moral Law, this confirms the active responsibility of believers to walk in holiness.

As believers walk in holiness, they grow in holiness. Rutherford considers this to be a key goal of sanctification. For argument's sake, he concedes that God could have made believers perfect at the point of conversion, but he asserts it pleases him to do otherwise, because this is best according to God's infinite wisdom. Thus, he writes:

[Christ] can at our first conversion make us Glorified and perfected Saints; but its his wisdom to take time and succession to perfect his Saints, he took

²⁰ Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*, 275.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

²² *Ibid.*, 588.

²³ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 572.

²⁵ Rutherford, *A Survey of Spirituall AntiChrist*, 108.

*about thirty and three years on the earth for the work of our Redemption, and would for three dayes lodge in the grave, as it were a neighbour to our Father corruption, and the worme our brother and Sister, Iob 17.14. (Though he saw no corruption, Psal.16.10.)*²⁶

By directing believers to consider the time frame taken for the completion of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry and the duration that he spent in the grave until his resurrection, Rutherford points out that it pleases God to work out salvation for sinners across time as opposed to instantaneously because this is best, demonstrating that God's wisdom is beyond human comprehension. This is true both in the outworking of salvation, and of sanctification. Thus, in God's infinite wisdom, he made sanctification a lifelong process and not a one-off event in the lives of believers.

Rutherford elaborates that sanctification is the ordinary means by which God prepares believers to participate in the glory of the heavenly kingdom. He states that:

*[believers] cannot suit with the happinesse of that land, except they have experienced the holinesse of continued Grace in this land, and Christ maketh storms of sin to blow upon his young heirs for their Winter, God keeping life at the root, that they may be fitter for an eternallie green flourishing Summer of Glory; ... Christ consecrated himself through many afflictions, that he might be an heir suitable for Glory,... it was not fit that Christ, who was to make heirs like his rule and samplar, should bring them to glory with a leap and a step, from a justified condition, to a glorified estate, without an intervening progresse in sanctification and holinesse; ... the frame of the government of that kingdom, is that none be received as free Citizens of Glory, but such as have served Apprentices, Minors, little children, under Tutors to Grace, and the way of holinesse.*²⁷

Christ will allow storms of trial and temptation to rage in the lives of believers. The purpose is not to cause them to fall into sin, but to put them through the mill of trials, so that they may grow in holiness having weathered these storms. Therefore, as believers journey on the road of sanctification, they are made fitter every step of the way for the eternal realities that await them at the end of the road. In addition, Christ as the exemplar *par excellence* for believers, went through numerous afflictions as he made his way to the cross, died and rose again, before eventually ascending to heaven, as opposed to entering instantaneously into heavenly glory; thus it is only fitting for believers to follow in the footsteps of their Lord and endure afflictions of their

²⁶ Rutherford, *The Tryal & Trivmph of Faith*, 155.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 159. Emphasis added.

own as they journey towards the eternal kingdom. Hence, there is no other way to the heavenly kingdom except via the highway of holiness; sanctification stands in the way between justification and glorification.

To encourage believers in their pursuit of sanctification, Rutherford assures them that they are not left alone to walk the road, because God has promised and will grant grace to sustain and help them until the journey is completed. He states that:

God hath both promised to cause his covenanted ones walk before him in truth, as did Ezechiah [Hezekiah], as we have it, Ezek.36.27. and he has promised to save and deliver the upright in heart; as is clear Ps.50.23. Ps.34.15. 1 Pet. 3.12. Ps.145.18,19. So all the peace we can collect, for our comfort, from holy walking is resolved on a promise of free-grace, and the duty as performed by the grace of the covenant, may and doth lead us to the promise, and so no ways from Christ but to Christ.²⁸

Rutherford cites multiple portions of the Scripture as proofs of God's enduring promise to strengthen believers as they strive to walk in holiness, so that they shall progress in holiness. When believers put their trust in God and persist in sanctification, they will be drawn into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. Furthermore, during times of great distress, when believers find themselves to be on the verge of compromising, they can cry out to Christ for help to persevere in holiness, because Christ will surely deliver them. Rutherford states that just as a woman will surely save her drowning child when she hears his frantic cries for help, Christ will certainly grant believers added strength to persevere in holiness in their moment of great distress, because he is full of compassion, more compassionate than any mother could ever be.²⁹ Christ will never turn a deaf ear to believers' cries for help to persevere in holiness. Therefore, they must press on and not give up.

Whenever Rutherford speaks about sanctification, he is expressing the relatively modern Reformed theological concept of progressive sanctification. Like Rutherford, Reformed theologian Heinrich Heppe, in his summary of seventeenth-century Reformed theology, discusses the concept of progressive sanctification without using the language of modern Reformed theology.³⁰ Heppe elucidates that "[t]he norm of man's sanctification is the word of God, and Law as well as Gospel; whereby the activity of both comes under consideration. The law demands obedience, the gospel causes man to obey."³¹ There is a distinct emphasis on the role of the Moral Law with regards to

²⁸ Rutherford, *The Tryal & Trivmph of Faith*, 132.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁰ Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: Wakeman, 2000), 568–570.

³¹ Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 569.

believers' sanctification, just as Rutherford has done. Heppe adds that "[s]ubjectively considered the nature of sanctification is man's effort, lasting his whole life, to live in thought, word and action solely according to God's good pleasure and for his glory".³² This corresponds to Rutherford's emphasis on believers' lifelong, active participation in their sanctification. It is unmistakable that Rutherford espouses progressive sanctification for believers; however, he is adamant that the antinomians reject the doctrine of progressive sanctification.

4. *Four major errors in the antinomian doctrine of sanctification*

The antinomian view that believers are perfect implies that there is no indwelling sin in believers. This in turn implies that there is no need for believers to pursue sanctification. The other antinomian claim that believers are freed from obeying the Moral Law, also implies that believers are not obligated to pursue sanctification, because it is through the keeping of the Moral Law that believers engage in sanctification. While these are certainly important factors that strengthened Rutherford's resolve to take the antinomians to task on the doctrine of sanctification, it is imperative to note that he observes crucial errors in their doctrinal view.

Rutherford identifies four major errors that contributed to the antinomian doctrine of sanctification, which he strongly repudiates. First, "confusing sanctification with justification": He charges them with making sanctification a matter of believing that Christ has accomplished it on behalf of believers, thus freeing them from the duty of engaging in the works as traditionally advocated.

Rutherford cites Saltmarsh as a proponent of this view. He interprets Saltmarsh's words, "Christ not onely repenteth in us, but for us, Christ obeyed for us, and is the end of the Law to every one that beleeveth" as evidence implying that Christ has obeyed the demands of the Law on behalf of believers, thereby absolving them from the responsibility of obeying the Law.³³ For Rutherford, this is a failure to distinguish between sanctification (which entails believers' active participation) and justification (which involves believers' faith alone).

The second error is "claiming that the works of sanctification obscures justification". Rutherford observes that the "Antinomians teach... Sanctification is so farre from evidencing a good estate, that it darkens it rather; and a man may more clearly see Christ, when hee seeth no sanctification, then when hee sees it; the darker my sanctification is, the brighter is my justification. So Saltmarsh."³⁴

³² Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 570.

³³ Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himselfe*, 78.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

Rutherford argues that works of sanctification do not obscure justification, rather they give added assurance to believers concerning their justification: "Sanctification doth not... evidence justification, as faith doth evidence it, with such a sort of clearnesse, as light evidenceth colours, making them actually visible; ... sanctification doth evidence justification to be in the soule."³⁵ Rutherford explains that there is a difference in the level of clarity that faith brings to justification, in comparison with sanctification; faith gives believers absolute certainty about their justification in a direct manner, while sanctification attests to justification in an equally real way but it is less obvious to believers because its testimony is indirect, such that believers are required to deduce it for themselves.

Hence, Rutherford compares sanctification to the smoke created by a fire: when a person sees smoke in the sky, he is able to deduce that there must be a fire out there from the mere presence of the smoke, even though he has not seen the fire with his own eyes; in like manner, believers may conclude and be assured of their justification from the works of sanctification that they perform.³⁶ Thus, progressive sanctification is like a signpost that directs believers to their justification, as "gracious effects giveth evidence of the cause", granting them further assurance in addition to that which has been engendered by faith concerning the reality of their justification.³⁷

Third, Rutherford charges the antinomians with "freeing believers from the Moral Law as a rule of life and hence sanctification". Rutherford points to Robert Towne's claim that believers are freed from "the Law with all its offices and authority" as indisputable evidence that the antinomians have freed believers from the Law "as teaching, directing regulating believers in the way of righteousness",³⁸ noting specifically that Towne asserts believers receive the power to conquer sin from the gospel alone, apart from obedience to the Law of God as a rule of life.³⁹ Hence, Rutherford concludes that his opponents regard sanctification that consists in believers' obedience to the Moral Law as a "legal bondage from which Christ has set us free".⁴⁰

The fourth error is the denial of mortification of sin. Rutherford charges Saltmarsh with making mortification a matter of simply believing that Christ has already accomplished mortification on their behalf, thus rendering it unnecessary for them to do so. Rutherford quotes Saltmarsh as follows:

[W]e are to beleieve our Repentance true in Christ, who hath repented for us; our mortifying sinne true in him through whom we are more then

³⁵ Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*, 108-109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 577.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 578.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

*conquerers; our new obedience true in him who hath obeyed the Law for us, and is the end of the Law to every one that beleeveth, our change of the whole man is true in him who is righteousness and true holinesse.*⁴¹

He labels Saltmarsh's view of mortification as a "lawlesse and carnall mortification".⁴²

Rutherford defines mortification as a real and personal thing, consisting in "a subduing of lusts, a bringing under the body of sinne, a heart-deadnesse to the world, (from this) because your Lord died for you, and has crucified the old man".⁴³ This definition is grounded in his convictions of the actual presence of indwelling sin in the justified and their God-given obligation to remove this remaining sin from their lives.

Therefore, even though believers continue to sin after their conversion, like hired servants who habitually strive to please their master they must refrain from falling into habitual sinning, through abstinence from worldly desires.⁴⁴ When believers diligently attend to the mortification of sin in their lives, their tendency to sin becomes feeble in strength and intention like "a dying mans operation" as opposed to "a strong man in vigor and health".⁴⁵ This may be referred to as progressive mortification, a form of ongoing mortification, a duty that is required of all believers in their daily lives.

5. *Rutherford's oversights*

However, a survey of the contentions that Rutherford raised against the antinomians reveals that his assessment of his opponents was not wholly accurate; it was a mix of hits and misses. Contrary to Rutherford's charge of confusing sanctification with justification, the antinomians make a clear distinction between the two. For example, John Eaton states that "Justification and Sanctification are inseparable companions that goe infallibly together, making every true Beleever a double Saint, or rather a true Saint".⁴⁶

In addition, the antinomians affirm some form of ongoing sanctification. For example, Robert Towne uses the term "sanctification" to denote two types of change that occur in believers, namely, an instantaneous change at the point of conversion, followed by a gradual change over a lifetime. He speaks of "the

⁴¹ Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himselfe*, 499.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 448 (duplicate page number; pagination error after page 452).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 516.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ John Eaton, *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone. Collected out of the Meere Authorities of Scripture, and Common and Unanimous Consent of the Faithfull Interpreters and Dispensers of Gods Mysteries upon the Same, Especially as They Expresse the Excellency of Free Justification*. (London: Printed by R. B. at the Charge of Robert Lancaster, 1642), 458.

communication of Christ's perfect holiness, whereby the believer is presented holy and without blame to God",⁴⁷ and "[a]n inward and sensible renewing or changing of the mind, by the operation of the Spirit of Christ, purifying the heart and life by degrees".⁴⁸

Notably, Towne regards the Holy Spirit as the sole agent that brings about the internal renewal of believers so that they remain set apart for God. This essentially excludes the need for believers to obey the Moral Law. In other words, for Towne, ongoing sanctification refers to the work that the Holy Spirit accomplishes in believers. Thus, in spite of Rutherford's oversights, there are indeed genuine differences between him and the antinomians on the doctrine of sanctification.

Furthermore, the antinomians affirm believers' mortification. However, they disagree with Rutherford on what mortification entails. For example, Crisp, who agrees with Rutherford that believers grow in holiness when they pursue progressive sanctification, disagrees on the subject of mortification. Crisp thinks that the commonly held notion of mortification as "the crucifying of the flesh" is a gross misconception of what it truly is.⁴⁹ Since Galatians 5:24 states that "they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof", then mortification of sin cannot possibly be a crucifying of the flesh as commonly understood.⁵⁰ Thus, Crisp asserts that mortification does not entail the killing of fleshly lust, whereas Rutherford insists that mortification of sin is the killing of the remaining sin in believers.

Therefore, the antinomian view of sanctification may be more accurately summed up as follows: *The antinomians affirm sanctification for believers, but they erred in the following manner: (1) there is denial that ongoing sanctification necessitates believers' active participation, and (2) there is denial that mortification involves crucifying fleshly lusts.*⁵¹ This is certainly contrary

⁴⁷ At first glance, it seems as though Towne is advocating the Roman Catholic belief that believers are justified by the infused righteousness of Christ, but a sympathetic reading of the quotation suggests that "communication" may be interpreted as "imputed". Robert Towne, *The Assertion of Grace. Or, A Defence of the Doctrine of Free-Justification, against the Lawlesse, Unjust, and Uncharitable Imputation of Antifidians, or Favorites of Antichrist, Who under a Pretended Zeal of the Law, Do Pervert, Oppugne, and Obscure the Simplicities of the Faith of the Gospel. Containing an Answer to That Book, Entitled, The Rule of He Law under the Gospel, &c. Which Book Set Forth by Dr. Taylor Is Shewed to Be Full Both of Scandall and Danger, as It Was Sent to the Said Doctor a Little before His Death, By Robert Tovvne, Minister of the Gospel.*, 1644, 164.

⁴⁸ Towne, *The Assertion of Grace*, 164.

⁴⁹ Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted In the Perfection and Encouragements of the Saints, Not Withstanding Sins and Trialls. Being Laid Open in Severall Sermons, By the Late Spirituall and Faithfull Preacher of the Gospel, Tobias Crispe, D.D. Volume III.* (London: Printed by M. S. for Henry Overton, 1646), 27.

⁵⁰ Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted In the Perfection and Encouragements of the Saints*, 26.

⁵¹ Author's unpublished PhD thesis, "Samuel Rutherford's Response to the Antinomian Controversy in England and its impact on his Doctrine of Sanctification", University of the Highlands and Islands, 2020, 228.

to Rutherford's view that sanctification entails believers' active keeping of the Moral Law and the mortification of fleshly lusts, which will lead to their growth in holiness.

III. Lessons that we can learn from Rutherford's response to English Antinomianism

Finally, I would like to share three applications from this study of Rutherford's doctrine of sanctification:

(1) *Believers must diligently pursue sanctification.* It is of utmost importance, because it is a divine command that must not be neglected. We are reminded that the Ten Commandments remain binding for us today, thus we are to diligently conform our lives to the Moral Law, which is our rule of life. It is true that we are faced with a different set of challenges from believers of the seventeenth century, but we have been promised the same divine help as we strive to grow in holiness.

(2) *Mortification of sin is a crucial aspect of believers' sanctification.* Many would point to John Owen's treatise *Of the Mortification of Sinne in Believers* (1656) as a title that helped them to know about the subject of mortification and its importance for their lives. Rutherford's treatises examined today, which were published before Owen's treatise (in 1645, 1647 and 1648 respectively), picked up on the same topic. We are shown that mortification of sin is an essential part of our progressive sanctification; if we neglect mortification of sin, it is to our own peril.

Some time back, I came across the following text conversation in a group chat:

Friend A: "Long time no see. How you doing?"

Friend B: "Haha long time no see too. Have been quite tired from school. Learning to love people different from me. *Learning to die to self and sin.*" [Emphasis added]

Are we active at mortifying sin in our lives? Do we seek out specific sins in our lives and work hard at killing them? Or have we become used to living with certain patterns of weaknesses and sins, thus overlooking this necessity? Owen's treatise would be a most suitable place to go to for further discussions on how mortification may be undertaken in our lives. Mortification is our active responsibility, not a passive duty.

(3) *Even the most learned men are but men; they err too.* No man is perfect, except for our Lord Jesus Christ. As we have seen, there were oversights in Rutherford's assessment of his antinomian opponents. Therefore, (i) while we ought to learn humbly from the spiritual giants who came before us, we must not put them on a pedestal of infallibility; and (ii) in all forms of theological

research, especially those that involve controversy, it is of utmost importance that students read first-hand sources of writings, publications and discussions. This will enable them to gain a clearer grasp of the matter at hand and provide a more accurate assessment of what is truly going on, as opposed to an assessment built on another individual's opinion of the matter. Therefore, for theological studies, in particular historical theology, it is vital to read the primary sources; hear it from the horse's mouth and then make a discerning judgment.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a neglected doctrine

Patrick Schreiner, Lexham Press, 2020, 127pp, £10.26 (Amazon)

When Patrick Schreiner wrote this book, he was a professor of New Testament at Western Seminary, Oregon, but has since taken up a similar post at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Missouri.

The book is in a series called “Snapshots” edited by Michael Bird. It is only 127 pages in length but it is rooted in good biblical and systematic theology. He considers the doctrine of Christ’s ascension “by examining this event from the perspective of the threefold office of the Messiah: prophet, priest, and king (*munus triplex*)” (xvi). After an overview of the contents I will give three brief comments.

Strictly speaking, it is a book about the ascension and session of Christ: “I will largely view them as a singular script” (xv). The first chapter shows the centrality of the ascension concept throughout the New Testament; though it is narrated in only two places it is through this hinge that “the Bible transitions from the age of Jesus to the age of the church” (13). The early creeds included “...he ascended into heaven” as did the Protestant confessions. “My goal is to help people think through this piece of the Jesus event and impress its importance” (xv).

The book is very easy to read and highly structured, as each chapter on the threefold office of Christ is governed by five repeated sections:

- i) Jesus’ earthly ministry viewed under each office
- ii) The Old Testament teaching on each office
- iii) The OT teaching on the shift in each office from earthly to heavenly
- iv) Jesus’ ascension fulfils this shift in each office
- v) Jesus’ session fulfils this shift in each office in the life of the church

The ascension of the Prophet; building his church

Here Schreiner limits himself to three aspects of the prophetic role: “prophets were empowered by God’s Spirit, proclaimed the word of God, and performed signs and wonders” (23). He then shows how the Prophet’s ascension is foreshadowed in Adam, Moses and Elijah and that after the ascension event there is a shift in ministry. Applied to Jesus, he writes, “The ascent not only authorizes, but amplifies and multiplies his prophetic work.” (30) Jesus continues to minister as God’s prophet by his Spirit and Word through the church (Eph 4:7-12). “Jesus could say it was *better* if he left earth (John 16:7) and that his disciples would do *greater* works than he did (14:12)” (44).

The ascension of the Priest; interceding in heaven

Although the Gospels do not directly refer to Jesus as a priest, there are many allusions to this role, for he came to save his people from their sins, climaxing in the work of the cross. The author again focuses on three aspects of the priest's role: "priests were chosen from among humanity, acted on behalf of humanity, and offered gifts and sacrifices to God" (50). Moses ascended Sinai, Aaron "ascended" into the Holy of Holies, David ascended the Lord's hill. Jesus fulfils these shadows as he ascends to heaven, intercedes for us on the basis of his shed blood and pours out his blessing of peace on the church by his Spirit. The church is to engage in priestly service, serving God as living sacrifices, being constant in prayer and "instructing and declaring how people can draw near to God" (72).

Ascension of the King; reigning over all

Though I have argued in each chapter that Christ's ascent shifted but also sustained Christ's threefold office, this chapter is unique. While all of the offices are of one piece, kingship is a primary metaphor, and therefore Christ's kingship stands at the pinnacle. To put this another way, the other offices flow from kingship and this office encompasses the others. (76)

Jesus came as the promised King, and this is prophesied in Psalm 2, Psalm 110 and Daniel 7. A shift took place at the ascension; Jesus was given the throne of heaven with all authority over his enemies and to rule his church.

The final chapter: the ascension in theology

The book before you has been about locating the ascension on the biblical map. I argue the ascension needs better narrative positioning. However, the Messiah's ascension needs situating not only in terms of the narrative, but in relation to other doctrines Christians confess. Precise theological grammar needs to be employed to correlate Christ's session to other dogmas. (100)

Schreiner examines how the ascension relates to the Trinity, incarnation, cross, resurrection and eschatology:

- Trinity: "The triune God's singular will from time before time was to glorify himself... the ascent was an essential event in this design." (101)
- Incarnation: "Temporal, material, and physical dimensions are therefore not repudiated in the ascension. In the ascension, they are affirmed." (104)

- Cross: “The Messiah’s ascent therefore confirmed and revealed the truth of Jesus’ cross.” (107)
- Resurrection: The resurrection and ascension are distinct but inseparable; the first declares that Jesus is alive, the second that he reigns.
- Eschatology: “The Parousia therefore should not be seen as merely something forthcoming, but as something to be revealed that is already present.” (111)

He writes, “To state that the ascension is important is easy, but to state how and in what way it coincides with other doctrines is more challenging but also more rewarding.” (114) “The ascension shifted Christ’s threefold work into a new epoch” (115) – he is prophet, priest and king in heaven. The ascension pushes us to remember not only Jesus’ past ministry but his present and future ministry too.

Patrick Schreiner has written a great doctrinal book that nourishes faith in and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is well worth reading.

Comments to stimulate further thought

1. Although Schreiner mentions Revelation 5 in the NT overview, he does not develop this perspective. It would be good to balance the concept of “leaving” earth with the concept of “arriving” in heaven. It is not just that Jesus left earth and arrived in heaven, but that he has taken the scroll; he is enthroned. Revelation 5 is a central passage.
2. Schreiner emphasises the ongoing prophetic ministry of Christ through the Word, the Scriptures (35-37). But he surprisingly makes no mention of the giving of the New Testament Scriptures. At the ascension they did not exist, and their production is the work of the exalted Christ. This should surely be emphasised, alongside the ongoing testimony of Christ through the Old Testament.
3. In several places Schreiner talks about heaven (32, 59, 61) and states that “heaven is not a locality in the way we think of dwellings” and “Scripture portrays heaven as much as a state as a locality”. I found this unconvincing; heaven is a created place where God and created beings exist. He affirms in a footnote, “traditional reformed thinkers have argued heaven is a created location”. Another confusion seems to be asserted when he states, “When Jesus went to heaven he moved from the old creation to the new creation.” The present heaven is not the new creation; it will be transformed on the last day in its union with the physical earth, when there will be new heavens and a new earth.

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Jazz, Blues, and Spirituals: The Origins and Spirituality of Black Music in the United States

Hans Rookmaaker, 1960. Reprint, P&R Publishing, 2020, 242pp, £13.59 (Amazon); Kindle £7.69

Challenges abound in reviewing a reprinted volume sixty years after its first publication. In many ways a work like this cannot be judged in relation to others in the field today. Yet the very fact of its re-issue allows the reader to examine its enduring contribution. This book serves as a challenge for those who share the author's concern to treat all of life as God's creation. When undertaking any cultural engagement from this standpoint, there is lots to learn from Rookmaaker's approach (of his day) to jazz music. Positively, his passion for the music leads to a comprehensive mapping of the spiritual roots of jazz with a rare awareness of the different cultural factors affecting its development. Negatively, the author's enthusiasm can lead him to strong, subjective judgments on the different historical sub-genres of jazz. The main challenge for the reader who wishes to engage this subject today is therefore clear: how to emulate such cultural awareness while ensuring that judgment is reserved until a fuller search for truth, beauty and idolatry is complete.

Hans Rookmaaker (1922-1977) was a Dutch scholar and contemporary of Francis Schaeffer. As well as founding the Dutch branch of the L'Abri Fellowship, Rookmaaker occupied significant academic and journalistic roles in the field of art history. His passion to encourage Christians to take culture seriously left a substantial legacy on evangelicalism that is still felt today. The fact that African American music was a passion rather than an academic pursuit does not render his contribution unimportant. In fact, in many ways he was an expert. However, when discussing the influence of various humanistic philosophies on the music, Rookmaaker does appear to revert to his comfort zone of the visual arts. This can sometimes result in philosophical labels being imposed too quickly on the music when, in reality, the visual arts have been further upstream than music in catching such influences.

The book is structured in a straightforward, chronological manner. It begins with a chapter on the origins of black music followed by chapters on the nineteenth century and the pre-war years of the twentieth century. As jazz develops at a greater pace from the 1920s, a separate chapter is dedicated to each decade from the 1920s to the 1950s. A unique feature is the accompanying catalogue of recordings (complete with ratings) that Rookmaaker presents along the way to give examples of the various styles he discusses. The good news is that readers today need not possess such an extensive record collection but can make use of YouTube or the various music streaming services to get the full experience.

The strengths of the author's approach are apparent in the first two chapters which contain an excellent study of the development of spiritual

songs in the context of slavery. Care is taken when discussing the relationship between African music and Western music and Rookmaaker pays close attention to the religious syncretism that occurred as slaves arrived in South, Central and North America. This helpfully accounts for accompanying musical developments involving, for example, Spanish and French music of slave owners that was adapted by the slaves and gave birth to some of the Latin American genres. He also makes the shrewd observation that the sheer length of time of this slavery is part of the reason for the depth and subsequent development of the blues and then jazz, noting also that slavery and oppression continued in various forms beyond abolition.

Also in these early chapters, the author gives examples of the influence of Isaac Watts' and even Wesley's hymns on the early spirituals. Their popularity seems to have stemmed from the accessibility of the "lining out" style of singing, and from the lyrical content being straightforward without theological frills. The subject matter of a personal relationship with Jesus and the Christian hope was also appealing to the authors of the early spirituals. Making this connection provides a refreshing contrast to other standout histories of jazz which can often downplay or ignore the influence of these spirituals.¹

As the historical survey continues for the remainder of the book, four other strengths are worth noting. Firstly, Rookmaaker commends the principle of engaging with black music on its own terms, rather than imposing the standards of Western music:

We must not apply Western standards in our assessment of quality. We must not expect to find refined modulations, for example, since there was no demand for it; neither can we expect subtle compositional solutions because this music was not designed for the concert hall, and also because these musicians lacked the relevant education. With such expectations we are barking up the wrong tree. The music was not Western music, played in a rough and crude manner; it was the birth of a new kind of music, African American music... (73).

This is also clear at various points when discussing the Western invention of "equal temperament" in music. Without such an influence, early spirituals and jazz music relied more on natural intonation and harmonies which the author helpfully describes as not inferior music but "a difference in musical thinking" (181). As such, he exhorts readers to not write off new music because we don't yet understand it.

¹ For example, Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (London: Pimlico, 2001).

Secondly, Rookmaaker usefully teases out the biblical influences on the imagery employed in the spirituals, for example, the “sweet chariot” and its evolution into the “gospel train” – a device popular in songs and sermons of black churches from the 1920s onwards. Along with biblical imagery, biblical wisdom is shown to influence such spirituals in the way they portray a reality without pretence, reaping what is sown, and facing up to hardship (46-47).

Thirdly, light is shed on the complex and controversial issues of how, when and why African American music was employed by white audiences and even white performers. And fourthly, the author shows a good understanding of the great exponents of jazz and the blues who, in his view, are communicating truth and beauty through their music, informed as it is by God’s truth. These include King Oliver, Bessie Smith, Jelly Roll Morton, Blind Willie Johnson and Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

The main weakness in Rookmaaker’s work seems to be the way in which he readily enthuses about some styles and exponents of this music while labelling others as effectively without any redeeming features whatsoever. Normally these “thumbs down” opinions are accompanied by discussions of how such sub-genres or performers are tainted either by sentimentalism or by philosophical existentialism. He is obviously not a fan of Western Romantic music, which carries over to his criticism of some jazz and swing music, where he believes he spots philosophical connections. Thankfully, he is not always consistent with such criticism, arguing cogently on the dangers of writing off any style of music without weighing its value (178, 210-211).

Sixty years of musical history (including significant developments in jazz) have passed since Rookmaaker’s “publishing event” as William Edgar describes it in the new preface (vii). The very fact of its reprinting is a call for Christians with a passion for music to engage with jazz and other genres today. To stand on the shoulders of this particular giant will mean showing the same commitment to knowing and appreciating jazz or any music on its own terms. It will also mean going beyond the author in putting his own words into practice by being willing to understand and reserve judgment on unfamiliar music, even music we are suspicious of. It will also mean doing the hard work of searching for common grace among the various styles and artists, spotting the false gods that lurk beneath even our favourite music, and applying the gospel that is at the very source of this music to its expressions today. In doing so, there exists a real opportunity to point unbelieving jazz and blues enthusiasts to the Christ who brings true freedom, as some are already doing.²

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² For example, Ruth Naomi Floyd (USA) and the Roots of Jazz (UK).

Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose

Aimee Byrd, Zondervan Reflective, 2020, 224pp, £9.79 (Amazon)

In 1997, Aimee Byrd graduated from college, got married, and set out to be “the perfect Christian wife” (99). She took the symposium *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Crossway, 1991) as her “handbook”, and tried to live it out. Over subsequent years, she was disturbed by “strange teachings on femininity and masculinity which emerged under the rubric of biblical manhood and womanhood” (100). Eventually she decided that she had to “recover” from “biblical womanhood”, and she wants other women to recover from it too. Hence her latest book, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

Byrd’s earlier books include *Housewife Theologian: How the Gospel Interrupts the Ordinary* (P&R, 2013), *No Little Women: Equipping All Women in the Household of God* (P&R, 2016) and *Why Can’t We be Friends?* (P&R, 2018). A member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Byrd is passionate about seeing women well-equipped for biblical ministries. She has rightly raised concerns about the unhelpful overreach of some para-church ministries and the extremes of some aspects of the American “purity” movement. She has correctly criticised the “commodification” of women’s ministries, when money has been made from unnecessarily-gendered “branding” of bible study materials.

Her latest book is divided into three sections:

- 1) “Recovering the Way we Read Scripture” repeats the concerns expressed in *No Little Women* about Bible study materials for women which are sometimes “fluffy” and lightweight. She argues that not only does Scripture consistently present a high view of women, but it contains many portions written from a female viewpoint or containing feminine testimony, illustrating this with a rich reading of Ruth;
- 2) “Recovering our Mission” proposes that our prime aim as believers should not be to live out an ideal of “biblical manhood” or “biblical womanhood”, which she says is so often viewed through a “filter of authority and submission, strength, and neediness” (22). Rather we should all seek to be conformed to the image of Christ. This section revisits Byrd’s concerns about the dominance of some evangelical para-church ministries. She also argues that the complementarian movement has been fundamentally discredited in that some key leaders have promoted the doctrine of the “eternal subordination of the Son” and tied this to the man-woman relationship in family and church life.

- 3) "Recovering the Responsibility of Every Believer" argues, rightly, that the local church is the household of God, and should operate on an "every-member ministry" model. Byrd supports this with examples of women's ministry from the New Testament, and also includes a section on how both men and women are called on to model submission in various contexts; discipleship is not to be narrowly defined as submission for women and leadership for men.

There is much to be applauded here. When she handles Scripture closely, Byrd is fresh, insightful and Christ-centred. Her call for women to think hard about doctrine and to use their gifts, including their voices, for the proclamation of the gospel and the building up of the church, needs to be heard today. In addition, her message about Scripture's emphasis on male and female sibling-partnership in this work is very timely. With regard to the critical aspects of the book, I sympathise with Byrd's frustration, even anger, at some aspects of American culture, especially the commercial exploitation of over-exaggerated femininity. We should reject resources aimed at women which are superficial and feeble. We should be disturbed at the experience of some Christian women who report patronising attitudes in their churches; it is true that in evangelical circles there is sometimes a failure to recognise and use women's gifts. Byrd rightly underlines, by way of contrast, biblical instances of powerful and godly women, as well as the interdependence of men and women in the early Church. One could add to her list of significant examples, Proverbs 31, where the Hebrew language throughout alludes to military imagery, pointing to the extraordinary strength of this woman of valour which brings blessing to the vulnerable and honour to her husband.

However, as Aimee Byrd surveys the various abuses and distortions in the evangelical church with regard to the place of men and women, she places the blame for these firmly at the feet of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. More particularly, she levels her anger at the Danvers Statement (1989), and at the symposium published nearly thirty years ago: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (RBMW). The statement and the symposium were produced in response to the growing influence of evangelical feminism, which (as the name suggests) attempted to reconcile the demands of the feminist movement with biblical Christianity. The position taken by both the Danvers Statement and RBMW was that some governing/teaching callings in the church should be held only by (suitably gifted) men, and that husbands and wives have distinct, non-reversible callings.

Over the past thirty years, people who hold to that central biblical conviction (often described as "complementarian") have differed on how exactly it should be applied. At the more conservative end of the spectrum, some have over-emphasised female submission and interpreted male

headship as centred on governing. Some have implied that “all women should submit to all men” and have presented exaggerated stereotypes of the sexes as ideal. Byrd blames John Piper for this and takes particular exception to his definition of mature masculinity in RBMW, including “*a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships*”.³

Sadly, the polemical tone of the book, betraying Byrd’s anger and hostility towards the leaders of the complementarian movement, seriously diminishes its usefulness. She is right to object to the suggestion that “all women must submit to all men”. But to blame John Piper for this unbiblical teaching is unfair. His inclusion of the phrase “appropriate to a man’s differing relationships” (see quotation above) guards against the idea that “all men must lead all women”. Piper’s affirmation for women limits accepting leadership from men to ways “appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships”. This cannot, on a fair reading, mean that “all women must submit to all men”, although over-zealous complementarians may sometimes have applied it that way. Admittedly, Piper offered some examples of his definition which many (including myself) found too prescriptive and out of step with biblical models. At the same time, as Byrd herself acknowledges, there was much in the “big blue book” that was reflective of careful exegesis and empowering for women. We need some balance here; no human preacher or author is infallible. We are to exercise discernment and wisdom, and test all by Scripture.

It is unfair, too, for Byrd to insinuate that Piper and other contributors present male and female discipleship as totally different in type; this is not true. While some general resources and even Bibles, may often be branded for women or men by publishers, RBMW addresses those specific aspects of church and family life in which sex makes a material difference. Piper’s many other works about discipleship assume that the practical and theological dimensions of prayer, mission and spiritual hunger, amongst other concerns, are equally relevant to men and women. Underlying the complementarian movement is a conviction that men and women are equal, in very many ways the same, and in some significant ways different. They have an equal need for God’s grace and an equal call to know and serve Him.⁴

To understand RBMW it is important too, that we take account of context of both production and reception. Back in 1991 the publication of RBMW was a timely and helpful corrective to false teaching that was weakening

³ John Piper, *A Vision of Complementarity; Manhood and Womanhood defined according to the Bible* in RBMW, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway), 1991, 44.

⁴ For example, *Desiring God*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah: 1996); *Future Grace*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah: 1995); *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Nottingham, IVP: 2005). We might add Don Carson here as another contributor whose discipleship books and commentaries are accessible to men and women.

confidence in Scripture. We read this work now in a very different cultural moment. Since 1991, many others have spoken and written in this area of sex and the church, refining some of the positions outlined in RBMW. And since then, both in America and the United Kingdom, there have been many positive initiatives in terms of biblical women's ministries within local churches, and training women for such ministries. In the UK, for example, the FIEC women's ministry team encourages and supports female church workers. Women are able to access theologically-rigorous training by means of courses such as the Flourish and Priscilla courses. As one would expect, there will always be unhelpful extremes in any movement. But it is ridiculous to lay all the blame for these and other aberrations at the feet of those people who were willing to lead and articulate a biblical response to a God-dishonouring movement that challenged the authority of Scripture. It seems singularly misplaced to attack Piper and Grudem, whose wider teaching has been so greatly used to stir up love for God and his Word and feed a hunger for systematic and biblical learning in countless women and men. Do we have to agree with everything Piper and Grudem say? No! Should we be thankful for their ministry? Surely, yes!

With regard to the controversy over the so-called "eternal subordination of the Son", complementarians have taken a variety of positions on this over the last decades. Byrd's representation of the debate does not do service to the sophistication of theological discussion which had been, and still is, ongoing.⁵ Looking back at church history, one outcome of debate has often been a clearer articulation of biblical truth. One example of this is a careful and biblically faithful paper in a recent issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal* which offers a positive way forward through this minefield: Benedict Bird, "John Owen and the Question of the Eternal Submission of the Son within the Ontological Trinity", WTJ, 80 (2018), 299-334.

Aimee Byrd calls for women (and men) to "recover" from what she regards as the false construct of "biblical manhood and womanhood". She suggests that biblical truth has been overlaid with a thick and ugly cultural "yellow wallpaper" which keeps women firmly in their place and minimises men and women's shared identity as repentant sinners. Her language of "victimhood" and "patriarchy" echoes the false feminist narrative that women as a class are oppressed by the "patriarchy" (men as a class). We should not be deceived by these claims. Looking at history, it is not true that all women have been oppressed by all men. While Byrd herself maintains that there are distinctions between male and female callings in marriage and in church leadership, these are not explored in the book and it would be easy for a reader to come to

⁵ Byrd presents herself and other colleagues as lone, brave voices raising the issue online, unnoticed until men came along to support their claims. This is not a fair representation as debate had been happening for a long while prior to her championing of the matter in 2016; it was Byrd's popularity as a blogger which brought the issue out of academia into a more public domain.

different conclusions because of these presuppositions behind some of her arguments.

Byrd's use of sources here is fascinating. She makes reference to Sister Prudence Allen's massive historical and theological works and also to Mark Garcia's recent biblical theology to argue for ontological differences between men and women in contrast to the emphasis on "roles" which she finds in RBMW. This is stimulating but undeveloped, but it seems to me that actually there are real commonalities between what she condemns and these sources she champions. Differences in nature between men and women are discussed in complementarian literature and the language of "roles", though not without problems, appears to have been used advisedly to emphasise the equality of the sexes, rather than to promote ideas of performance or intrinsic rights. So, the new, alternative vision of the sexes Byrd offers is in reality very close to the old one which she rejects.

Aimee Byrd has good intentions. She is rightly upset at some manifestations of American evangelical culture. But her claim to be a victim of biblical womanhood, and her depiction of other Christian women as victims who also need to "recover" from this movement is over-dramatic. Real victims are those millions of men and women trapped in ungodly ideologies and false religions who have no access to the glories of biblical truth and the wonders of the gospel. Real victims are all who have been deceived by the false promises of sexual liberation and unlimited personal freedom. By contrast, all those who enjoy the benefits of salvation and who have free access to Scripture are not victims; we are blessed.

Sarah Allen

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Bavinck: A Critical Biography

James Eglinton, Baker, 2020, 480pp, £25 h/b (hive.co.uk)

"Why does Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), a prolific theologian who worked within the Dutch neo-Calvinist movement, deserve a biography?" is the question posed by James Eglinton. Anyone who knows a little about Bavinck would know that he deserves one, and anyone who reads this biography would agree that Bavinck is well served by this book.

Eglinton, the Meldrum Senior Lecturer in Reformed Theology at the University of Edinburgh, has produced a superb biography of Bavinck. He was a "Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian", to quote Ronald Gleason's subtitle to his earlier, flawed biography of Bavinck (2012).

This volume is described as a *Critical Biography* – critical in the sense that it is not hagiographic or that it accepts the consensus of previous biographers such as Hepp and Bremner, whom Gleason largely relied upon. Eglinton makes clear where he sees the shortcomings of these previous biographers.

Eglinton draws upon copious primary and secondary sources both in Dutch and English – there over 80 pages of notes and a bibliography of over 30 pages. In particular, he draws upon Bavinck's *dagboek* – diaries/journals that he wrote throughout his life – and his correspondence with Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936). Hurgonie was a long-time friend of Bavinck and a Dutch expert on Islam.

What makes this biography so useful is that Eglinton rejects the “two-Bavincks” hypothesis that has dominated and marred studies of the man for decades. Baldly stated, this hypothesis posits a bi-polar, “Jekyll and Hyde” version of Bavinck; one orthodox and the other modern. Eglinton's PhD thesis on Bavinck (*Trinity and Organism*, 2012) showed the flaws in this picture and presented a coherent picture of his work. Eglinton builds on that here. He informs us that “My biography has a particular aim: to tell the story of a man whose theologically-laced personal narrative explored the possibility of an orthodox life in a changing world.” (xx) It is thus “an attempt to retrace the narrative of his life and, in doing so, to chart the development of his (single, rather than divided) theological vision.” (xx)

Eglinton shows that Bavinck was, as an old Youth for Christ motto states, “Anchored to the rock but geared to the times”. He presents Bavinck as “a modern European, an orthodox Calvinist, and a man of science” (xxi) – science here is taken in terms of the Dutch *wetenschap* meaning all of human knowledge/scholarship.

The book traces Bavinck's movements and developments as he travelled as a student from Kampen (1873-74) to Leiden (1874-1879), back to Kampen (1880) and then as a pastor to a Christian Reformed church in the rural town of Franeker in the northwestern province of Friesland (1881-82), before he returned as a professor at Kampen (1882-1902) and finally to Amsterdam (from 1902 until his death in July 1921). Bavinck lived during a time of great turmoil and change and these shifts and his responses to them are well documented here. As Eglinton puts it: “The ‘age of Renan’ had gone, and the ‘age of Nietzsche’ had arrived – with all that this now meant for Bavinck's task as a modern Calvinist” (244).

The Dutch Translation Project has translated and published several volumes of Bavinck's work – most notably the four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*.⁶ This biography gives us the man behind the dogmatics and, as

⁶ For those too daunted by four large volumes there is also an abridged one-volume version called *Our Reasonable Faith* (1956), which has been reissued with a new introduction as *The Wonderful Works of God* (Westminster Seminary Press, 2020).

such, is the perfect complement to the recent translations. It also shows that Bavinck was more than his dogmatics; he was also a pastor, a preacher, a professor, a parliamentarian and, in later life, developed an interest in psychology and pedagogy. He also became a supporter of the women's movement and suffrage. He shared Kuyper's vision of the need for all of life to be redeemed: "the gospel was good news for body and soul, for art, science, and society" (160, 272).

Richard Mouw's thoughts on the recent Bavinck translations equally apply to this excellent volume:

Happily, this means that it is no longer possible for English speakers to dismiss Bavinck with faint praise, as did James Hutton Mackay in his 1910 Hastie Lectures in Glasgow when he referred to Bavinck as "Dr. Kuyper's loyal and learned henchman."

The book provides an exemplar of what a good biography should be. It is remarkable in that it is both academic and accessible.

Steve Bishop maintains the neo-Calvinist website www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk

Christian Worldview

Herman Bavinck, Translators and Editors: Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton and Cory C. Brock, Crossway, 2019, 144pp, £17.90 h/b (Amazon)

The term "worldview" was first introduced to the Christian world by the neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), who drew upon the insights of James Orr. Unfortunately, the term has since become abused, overused and misused. However, this book by another neo-Calvinist, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), Kuyper's successor as professor of theology at the Free University Amsterdam, is a welcome addition to the worldview literature, particularly as it was written well before the term had become a theoretical one. Incidentally, both Kuyper and Bavinck preferred the term "world-and-life-view" to the contracted form worldview.

This book, which originally appeared in Dutch in 1904, is not a summary of Christian thinking and theology as so much Christian worldview material seems to be today. For some people, then, the title may disguise the content: it is an apologetic for an organic Christian perspective rooted in a creator God, against the arid, one-dimensional worldviews around at the turn of the nineteenth century. Written only a few years after Bavinck joined the Free University, it marked a shift in his work. The editors' introduction serves the

volume well and helpfully places Bavinck's work in its historical and philosophical milieu.

The death of Nietzsche in 1900 marked a change in attitude within Dutch culture – a new form of atheism was emerging that no longer accepted a Christian morality. Bavinck was responding in this volume to that cultural shift. He wanted to show that only Christianity offers a coherent and valid view of reality, and that the new, Nietzsche-inspired, atheism was flawed. He wrote at a time when science and technology were expected to make religion superfluous (25), yet there was an increase in interest in new religions, in a "this-worldly" world religion (26).

Bavinck identifies three key questions which he goes on to examine in the subsequent chapters. These are: what is the relation between thinking and being; between being and becoming; and between becoming and acting?

It is only Christianity, Bavinck argues, that preserves the harmony between them and "reveals a wisdom that reconciles the human being with God and, through this, with itself, with the world and with life" (29).

1. Thinking and being

In the first chapter Bavinck examines epistemological concerns and the relation between subject and object. Even though Bavinck was a professor of theology he shows here his awareness of philosophy. Philosophers are discussed rather than theologians. He discusses nominalism, idealism and voluntarism, and shows how they fail to articulate a coherent view. He emphasises that it is only Christianity that can adequately describe things as they are. He goes further: "No matter how we look at it, the concept of truth and science – if we think consistently and without prejudice – brings us to Christianity" (45).

2. Being and becoming

In the second chapter, once again Bavinck places different philosophical and scientific perspectives alongside Christianity and shows them to be defective. In particular he focuses on the mechanical worldview and makes the interesting observation that "Those who have abandoned the mechanical worldview as untenable continue to honour it secretly as the scientific ideal" (69).

He sees Christianity as an organic worldview – something that Kuyper also maintained. For this Kuyper was occasionally criticised as being reliant on idealism. However, his critics seemed to miss that it is also a biblical metaphor (cf. John 15 and the vine). For Bavinck, "According to the organic worldview, the world is in no sense one-dimensional; rather it contains a fullness of being, a rich exchange of phenomena, a rich multiplicity of creations" (71-72).

The mechanistic worldview, unlike the organic worldview, fails to explain development. It fails ultimately because it has no answers to the origin and development of life: “It is only provided by the Christian confession that God is the Creator and that his glory is the goal of all things. Everything is subservient to this. Everything is directed to it” (83).

3. Becoming and acting

In the final chapter, the issue that Bavinck addresses is one of freedom and ethics. He points out that “This objective reality of logical, ethical, and aesthetic norms points back to a world order that can have its origins and existence only in God almighty” (106).

He goes on to maintain, “If the logical, ethical, and aesthetic norms deserve absolute validity; if truth, goodness, and beauty are goods worth more than all the treasures of this world, then they cannot thank the human – for whom law was made – for their origins” (108).

Christianity thus provides the only coherent and consistent framework for life. The other perspectives, Bavinck ably shows, are incoherent and cannot account for the diversity of creation, among other things. This is hardly surprising given that they deny or ignore the Creator of all things.

This book is a very welcome addition to the rapidly expanding corpus of Bavinck in English.

Steve Bishop maintains the neo-Calvinist website www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk

God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics and the Task of Christian Theology
Steven Duby, Apollos, 2020, 334pp, £30 (ivpbooks.com)

This book might have been called “Knowing God”, had that title not already been taken. It is particularly concerned with how we know God *in himself*, that is to say “without primary reference to the economy” (6). How may we know him, and what is he like, in his ontology, or *being*? How much can we learn of his intrinsic being from natural revelation, from special revelation and from metaphysical theorising? When Scripture speaks of him, or when theologians do so, are the terms that are used immediately transferable from their creaturely origin and sense, such that they can speak accurately of God? Or are they only transferable in an analogical sense – or not at all? These are the main issues explored in this book.

Duby’s aim is not merely to set out his own systematic or biblical theology on these matters. His approach is to summarise the thinking of leading church

fathers and mediæval scholastics, issue-by-issue; to draw upon some representatives from the era of Reformed orthodoxy; to consider some objections and revisions from a range of recent authors, such as Barth and Pannenberg; and lastly to offer his own assessment. His purpose is:

to offer, on the basis of the Bible's account of human knowledge of God in the arc of redemptive history, a sketch of the rationale and practice of Christian reflection on God himself in his transcendence of the economy, which will enable us to reframe the roles of natural theology, metaphysics, and the incarnation in the doctrine of God (6).

By these means he hopes to make a case for bringing together the often-conflicting approaches of those who are suspicious of learning from natural theology, or from metaphysics, or from anything outside the bounds of Christology. He intends to work towards an integration of these approaches “chiefly by the actual practice of theological exegesis”, but interacting with historical and modern insights along the way (7).

The intended scope of the book is therefore very ambitious, and this is both a strength and a weakness. Its 300 pages could easily and usefully have been dedicated to the historical survey alone, or to a biblical exegetical survey. The decision to interact with Barth, Heidegger, Kant, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Plantinga, Schleiermacher and others adds considerably to its complexity, and changes the likely readership of the work. This is not the book from which to gain an overview of the thinking of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Owen or Turretin on the ontology and attributes of God, and their epistemological methodologies. Some of the thoughts of these theologians, on some of the issues, are selectively referred to. But such works as Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* and Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, or individual author's works such as Owen's *Theologoumena Pantadapa* or Turretin's *Institutes*, would be more thorough and useful to that end. Nor, in fact, does the book offer a very detailed analysis of relevant Scripture passages, though it contains a certain amount of exegesis and a good many citations. It is far from being a systematic or complete survey of either historical or biblical material – and nor could it hope to be, given its broad ambit and relative brevity.

The main objective of the book, or so it seems to this reviewer, is to identify a range of important controversies and to interact with responses to them by the modern authors. The book is therefore particularly suited to readers who wish to consider the way that Duby deals with the “concerns” and “anxieties” (much repeated terms) of Barth and the other recent writers who have expressed opposition to historically accepted or debated positions. This Duby does well. In broad terms, he defends the Reformed orthodox – or earlier –

understandings and explains where the “moderns” have worried unnecessarily or wandered unhelpfully.

We may consider whether this is a fair summary of the book with reference to just a couple of the chapters, for the sake of brevity. It has five altogether, addressing:

- i) the purpose of endeavouring to know God-in-himself;
- ii) what can be learnt from general revelation or natural theology, and its limitations;
- iii) what we can learn about God-in-himself from the incarnation;
- iv) the usefulness and dangers of importing metaphysical thinking into divine ontological theology;
- v) and finally, the question of whether scriptural and theological language speaks univocally, equivocally or analogically.

In his third chapter, Duby considers the significance of the incarnation for our knowledge of God. He emphasises its enormous epistemological importance, but also the incompleteness of a theology that seeks to concern itself *only* with the incarnation. On the one hand, “supernatural revelation culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ” and his incarnation must “inform our doctrine of God” (132-133). On the other, neither Christology nor Christ’s incarnation should be seen as the totality of theology: “God’s being is not constituted by the incarnation” (132-133). Duby engages in this chapter predominantly with Barth, who contended that “we shall encounter [God’s essence] either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all”; that it was pointless and even faithless to pursue knowledge of God’s essence or “an abstract *Logos asarkos*” apart from the incarnate Christ; and even that “there is no such thing as Godhead in itself.”⁷ Duby says that Barth’s thinking on the matter has influenced others, such as T. F. Torrance, Robert Jenson and Bruce McCormack. The latter, he says, takes Barth’s ideas so far as to argue that God “gives himself *being*” by the act of election, denying that there is any “metaphysical gap” between who God is and what he does.⁸

In response to all of these authors, Duby makes a number of compelling arguments. Scripture, not Christ, is our immediate source of knowledge about God. All Scripture speaks of God; not all Scripture speaks specifically of the incarnation, nor of God’s economy. It also speaks of the eternal generation and procession of the Son and the Spirit, for example. The incarnation was the “midpoint of Scripture [not] its starting point”.⁹ To understand the incar-

⁷ Duby, 133-34, 178-79, citing Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* II/1-2, 115, 311 and IV/1, 52-53.

⁸ Duby, 137, citing McCormack’s “Grace and Being”, in the *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 98-99.

⁹ Duby, 142, citing Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:110.

nation properly it is necessary to understand the Old Testament revelation of God and his attributes, and the creator-creature distinction therein revealed, and his covenantal dealings with man. Therefore, contrary to Barth, the incarnation is not the “exclusive foundation for the doctrine of God”, vital and central as it is (147). With that said, Duby goes on to map out what we do learn about God in himself from the incarnation: disclosing his many perfections, his plan, his will, his transcendence of the economy; and thence the gracious condescension that the incarnation represents. In seeking to rebalance Barth, Duby quotes persuasively from Aquinas and Owen, opining that Owen’s approach is “better suited to expressing the role of Christ in the divine counsel and its eschatological fulfilment” than that which Barth espoused (175).

In his fifth chapter, Duby seeks to “retrieve the (right) doctrine of analogy” (232). His main modern interlocutors in this chapter are Barth again, and Pannenberg. He sets the scene by explaining how Scripture speaks of man as *imago Dei*, and how that connection between God and man provides the basis for using creaturely terms to describe the divine. He surveys historic understandings of analogical language, from Aristotle to the Schoolmen, and from Suárez to Johann Alsted. From these he derives propositions for some proper controls on the use of analogy. For example, a term (such as “being” or “wisdom”) may be used of God and man, but never forgetting that there is no “proportion” between God and man; God is not a scaled-up or perfected version of man. His being is simple, infinite and immutable. He *is* his attributes. Man has a different kind of being, consisting of parts, of which wisdom might or might not be one. If one seeks to cross-apply terms univocally (that is, having an identical meaning whether applied to God or man), there is a danger that the creator-creature distinction becomes blurred, though that danger can be avoided (261-263). The analogical view guards against this. Barth denied that there was any analogy to be drawn between God and fallen man, except as man is restored in Christ. *Analogia entis* was an “invention of the anti-Christ”.¹⁰

Pannenberg taught that analogical language, borrowed from the realm of creation, could only be applied to the creator if the creator had created out of necessity. Only then could one be sure that the creator had “express[ed] its essence by imparting itself” to its creation.¹¹ But God had created freely. Therefore, he argued, one should not assume that the world will “bear a likeness to God” that is sufficient to warrant the cross-application of worldly terms to him (278). Duby responds to Barth’s “worries” by affirming that *imago Dei* was not wholly eradicated by the fall; therefore “one can affirm a similitude of human beings to God by virtue of creation, even one that endures

¹⁰ Duby, 264-65, citing Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* I/1, xii.

¹¹ Duby, 271, citing Pannenberg’s “Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God”, in *Basic Questions*, 2:171-72.

after the fall" (275-77). This did not mean that theologians could freely look for "whatever potential creaturely analogues might seem helpful for description of God". They must "learn... from Scripture the names and attributes that God would have us apply to himself". As for Pannenberg's concerns, Duby agrees that God did not create out of necessity, but with "liberty of indifference" (278). But God nonetheless displays some of his perfections in what he created, such that analogical language reflecting those perfections may rightly be used to describe them.

There is much that is good and useful in this book. Those who work through it carefully will be stimulated in their thinking about how we know God and what we can know of him – and probably expand their theological vocabulary considerably in the process as they engage with both Scripture and great theologians from the past. Whether or not they benefit from Duby's engagement with his modern "dialogue partners" will depend on their interest in them and the extent to which they have been affected by the thinking that Duby helpfully seeks to qualify or correct. It does also need to be said that this is not an easy book to read. Duby assumes considerable prior knowledge. His writing is often less than clear, and sometimes convoluted. Many of his points could be rewritten more simply and clearly. The style is more academic than pastoral. But his method and purposes are commendable, and he deserves the last word, taken from his conclusion:

God himself has chosen to grant us knowledge of things that do not pertain immediately to the economy or to human responsibilities within it. And such knowledge is indirectly and ultimately practical anyway, inciting wonder and worship, [and] fostering humility... That theologia is not immediately practical [or] oriented to questions of technique and efficiency is in fact one of its salutary aspects. Contemporary preoccupation...with "mission statements", "measurable outcomes" and the like needs to be relativized by the joy of knowing the triune God. (295)

Benedict Bird

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Who God Says You Are: A Christian Understanding of Identity

Klyne R. Snodgrass, Eerdmans, 2018, 240pp, £13.44 (Amazon)

The author, an emeritus professor of New Testament, has written what is probably my new favourite book on identity from a Christian perspective, that

invites us to consider both the radical value of every human being, and how we can become more human by becoming more like Jesus.

Drawing on the Bible, classical sources/context, and related traditions, as well as being open to the insights of the sciences, Snodgrass beautifully explores the different things that make us, us, pushing the reader back to Jesus and forward into the future. The Image of God is central, though not fully unpacked, and Snodgrass moves beyond the various debates about body/spirit/soul etc., arguing for a more holistic understanding of identity. Practically speaking, this is a positive book – one that says a number of things constructively, rather than negatively.

The bulk of *Who God Says You Are* (both book and idea!) is bound up in the author's nine factors:

- i) You Are Your Body – Snodgrass sagely and biblically returns our human form to a central place in understanding who we are. We might be “more than” a body, but we are certainly not less. My only quibble would have been to be *even stronger* on this, particularly with respect to disability theology and the Image of God.
- ii) You Are Your History – this is a really interesting chapter that challenged me, and encouraged me to think more carefully about the way our stories shape us, and the stories of those who preceded us both biologically and generally.
- iii) You Are Your Relations – this was a superb chapter explaining how our capacity and reality of relationships has a profound impact on who we are and who we will become; “Our relations both affirm who we are and draw us out of ourselves... You cannot be who you are without the community around you, and they need you to become the people they should be”.
- iv) You Are Your Mind – noting that this comes *after* the stuff on body, this is a helpful chapter reminding us of the importance (though not ultimate importance) of the mind in making us who we are.
- v) You Are Your Commitments – this is a surprising but really helpful chapter, which resonates with some of James K. A. Smith's work.
- vi) You Are Your Actions – this chapter is *not* saying that “actions maketh man” (to misquote the film *Kingsman*!) but does stress the importance of habit and action in forming identity.
- vii) You Are Your Boundaries – echoing the limitations of being human that being made in the Image of God imply (and vital for understanding both our embodiment and our relational capacity – we are limited) this is a genuinely brilliant bit of theology.
- viii) You Are an Ongoing Process of Change – as someone wary of change, I found this chapter both challenging and encouraging, not least because of the chapter that follows it. Snodgrass writes, “The truth is, you are more than you presently are, and God wants you to be more

than you presently are... All of us know sin, failure, and limitation, but you are more than your sin, your failures, and your limitations..." Amen!

- ix) You Are Your Future – this penultimate chapter is *brilliant*. I loved the way Snodgrass links the importance of God's Kingdom to our own identity formation: "Jesus and the early church taught that the future has invaded the present and determines how life in the present is lived. Christians live in the presence of the future". Amen!

The nine factors are bookended with a helpful introduction exploring the importance of faith in understanding identity, and an invitation "That You Become a Person" which rounds out the book. At the time of writing (halfway through 2019, with an MA Dissertation and a number of conference papers on human identity in theological perspective under my belt) it is not hyperbole to say that this is now the single book I would most widely recommend to leaders and thoughtful Christians on the subject of being human and discovering our identity. In a local church, this book could form a helpful basis for a course on identity, perhaps alongside more popular-level books such as Graham Beynon's *Mirror Mirror* (IVP) or Mark Meynell's *What makes us human?* (The Good Book Company). *Who God Says You Are* is really that good!

Thomas Creedy

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