
God in Eternity and Time

Douglas Vickers

The edifice of doctrine to which *The Savoy Declaration of Faith* invites us contains at its entrance a clear declaration of the being, sovereignty, and salvific purpose of the triune God. Our doctrinal sensibilities are immediately raised to a high level of consciousness. But we pause, as we enter, to reflect on two realities that influence the significance of all of our doctrinal understanding. First, our commitment to biblical doctrine is pointless and barren unless it impinges upon and determines our Christian lives. The relation between doctrine and life should never remain unexplored. Secondly, the doctrinal locus we now come to, by reason that it stands at the beginning of God's anthropomorphic revelation to us, illumines the meaning of our personhood as the recipients of that revelation. Let me comment a little more fully on what that involves.

We exist, as the *Savoy* will go on to make clear, as the finite analogue of God. We are the finite analogue of God both as to our being and our knowledge. We are his image. And by virtue of our created constitution, our very personhood speaks eloquently of God.

God has made available to us an objective revelation of his being, character, and purpose, and because we have been established as the image of God we are able to receive and understand and act upon that revelation. The implication of that for our present study is that the essence of human personhood carries with it the inescapable conviction of the being and Personhood of God. The theology to which we are committed as custodians of the Reformed tradition requires us to state that the awareness of God is indelibly embedded in the human consciousness.

The apostle has stated that in economic language in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:20). Any imagination to the contrary, he says, and any conception that argues against the knowledge of God, and that argues more particularly against the knowledge of his 'eternal power and Godhead', is 'without excuse'. If the creation-covenantal imperative that we should be God-honoring in all things is acknowledged, there can be no escape, on any level of human intellection, from the reality that all of our knowing, and all of our capacity for knowing, are what they are because they are the derivative analogue of the absolute knowledge that exists in God. The fact that absolute being, absolute personhood, and absolute meaning and knowledge exist in God establishes meaning and the discoverability of meaning in the external reality that God has spoken into existence.

John Calvin, whose theological system *The Savoy Declaration of Faith* celebrates, has oriented his doctrine on the corresponding proposition that 'Nearly all the wisdom we possess ... consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. ... no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he "lives and moves" (Acts 17:28)'.¹ In the very act of reflective self-awareness, we can say, man is aware of God. 'Again,' Calvin continues, 'it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon

God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.'² The pressing triad of being and knowledge, it follows, comes to articulation, first, under the headings of being and knowledge, firstly the being and knowledge of God and then of ourselves, and then, as derivative from what is understood on those levels, the matter of behavior. Being, knowledge, and behaviour, or in more formal terms metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, provide the categories in terms of which our discussion of being and our place in relation to God should proceed.

Our immediate title acknowledges and permits us to confine our attention initially to two statements on these levels in the second chapter of the *Savoy Declaration*. 'God,' it is there stated, 'is infinite in being'.³ And from that it follows, 'his knowledge is infinite'.⁴ In those statements the *Declaration* sets the compass within which our discussion proceeds. We are concerned, in short, with the revealed doctrine of the being and knowledge of God. But in the very nature of our creaturehood and finitude, we are concerned with that revelation as it bears on our condition in relation to God. We bear in mind as we proceed that while our immediate address is to the doctrine of God, 'the issues to which we turn bear forcibly on the meaning of the gospel of redemption.'⁵ In his very valuable and accessible *Our Reasonable Faith*, Herman Bavinck observes that 'These two, the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the eternal salvation of souls, are not two independent doctrines which have nothing to do with each other, but are, rather, inseparably related to each other. The doctrine of God is at the same time a doctrine of the eternal salvation of souls, and the second of these also includes the first'.⁶

The *Savoy Declaration* acknowledges these interrelations by setting its doctrine of God within the context of its concern for the realities of redemption. It does that when it states, in that context, that God is 'loving, gracious, merciful ... forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek him ... hating all sin ... who will by no means clear the guilty'.⁷ Indeed, our interest in the gospel requires us to place our argument within the orbit provided by three propositions: *First*, God is; *second*, God exists in eternity and we exist as the created analogue of God in time; and *third*, the eternal God has provided a revelation of himself and his will and his redemptive purpose in terms amenable to our understanding, in the language he created for our communication. All of God's revelation, that is, and in particular all of the Scripture that we have as the medium of God's communication, is, by virtue of its accommodation to our understanding, anthropomorphic. When we say that all Scriptural revelation is anthropomorphic we mean that it is God's accommodation of his timelessness to the temporal mode of existence in which he has established created finite being.

Summary propositions

The propositions we shall look at briefly, though not in detail in the order in which we now summarize them, may be stated as follows. *First*, God is outside of time by virtue of his transcendent eternity and his aseity or his independent and underived, or uncaused, existence.

Second, God created time and thereby established a temporal structure and environment in which all of reality external to himself exists and has its history.

Third, God in his being and his knowledge, referring in that to his knowledge of himself and his knowledge of all that exists and that eventuates in created reality, is timeless.⁸

Fourth, there are, therefore, no successions of moments in the knowledge of God or in the being of God. While he has knowledge of sequences of time events he does not know those sequences sequentially.⁹ God knows all things, as to his own being, his will and purpose, and his knowledge of created reality, in one eternal act of knowing. He did not wait to discover any data of reality or of the eventuation of its history. He therefore has no memory of what has been, in the sense of his having become sequentially aware of it, and he accordingly has no expectation of his own future that he must wait to discover. (Though, as we shall see, memory and expectation exist in the human nature of the Son of God who became man for our salvation).

Fifth, God has nevertheless ordained becoming and the eventuation of history and the awareness of history in his creatures, and in the light of that he eventuates all historical sequences and outcomes by his works of providence. We hold not only to the transcendence, but also to the immanence of God.

Sixth, God has entered into time in the incarnation of his Son and in the Person of his Holy Spirit in the discharge of their redemptive offices. Our redemption is played out within the orbit of temporal boundedness in which, by our natures and by the nature that he assumed in Christ, our existence and awareness are conditioned.

Seventh, by virtue of the nature of our existence as that is derived from God, it is impossible that we should transcend our finitude, and that we should ever acquire the incommunicable divine attributes of infinity, eternity, and immutability. Our existence in the eternal age of the kingdom of God will therefore continue to be a temporal existence, though the potentialities of our action within it have not been revealed to us.

If, then, we state that God is outside of time and that time is a created entity or, as Van Til has put it, that time is 'God-created as a mode of finite existence', we nevertheless state that in the incarnation of his Son, in the union in the divine Person of Christ of the human and divine natures, he entered into time. But, we shall argue, it is necessary to hold to the reality that in that union of natures the eternal and the temporal were not commingled, or joined in a way that gave rise to a mixture of them that violated the one or the other. No greater fact or mystery challenges our contemplation than this, that God in his Son entered into time for our redemption.

We might pause to note the significance of what has just been said. The eternal and the temporal were not, and could not be, commingled at the incarnation (for there was no communication of properties between the natures of our Lord), or at the atonement that he provided (because it was in his human nature that he bore the wrath of God for sinners). It follows also, from the nature of the processes of redemption, that there could be no commingling of the eternal and the temporal at the transition of the sinner from wrath to grace. By that we mean that the creation of new life in the soul, the regeneration that effects the transition from wrath to grace, is completely and solely the sovereign, unsolicited work of the Holy Spirit, the unsolicited grace of God. Any argument to the contrary, or the claim that salvation turns on a divine-human synergism, would imply that the eternal (the grace of God) and the temporal (the activity of the sinner) had been commingled. But we reject all such propositions.

The immortal God

The scope of the doctrinal statement that the *Savoy Declaration* presents in its second chapter includes, by implication or express statement in relation to its consideration of the being of God, the questions of the incomprehensibility of God in his essence, the attributes of God in terms of which he has made his self-disclosure, considering both his incommunicable and his communicable attributes, the knowability of God, the existence of God as a trinity of Persons, and the sense in which there exist distinguishable properties possessed by each of the Persons of the Godhead. God the Father possesses, that is, the distinguishable property of having generated the Son, God the Son possesses the distinguishable property of having been eternally generated, and the Holy Spirit possesses the property of proceeding from the Father and the Son.¹⁰ In his very valuable study of *The Christology of John Owen*, Richard Daniels observes on the point referred to in the preceding footnote that 'The Son is *autotheos* according to his nature, of the Father according to his person'.¹¹ In making those statements we do not assume that our finitude permits a comprehensive understanding of either the trinitarian existence of God or the intra-trinitarian communication between the Persons of the Godhead.

An approach to a consideration of these doctrinal issues is provided by a recognition of what I have referred to as the immortality of God. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, doxologically ascribes honor and glory to 'the only wise God ... the King eternal, immortal, invisible' (1 Tim. 1:17). And he focuses our thought on 'the King of kings and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality ...' (1 Tim. 6:15–16). John Calvin, in his comment on the apostle's statement, directs us to the twelfth book of Augustine's *City of God*. In that work and in his *Confessions* Augustine had wrestled at length with the mystery of time and the relation between eternity and time that the apostle here has in view.¹²

Our primary concern at this point is with the apostolic reference to God as the One 'who only hath immortality'. When we speak of the immortality of God we are taking up aspects of what we have referred to as his aseity. We mean by that that God is independent in his being and existence, and that his existence is not derived from any more ultimate cause than himself or any cause external to himself. God, we say, is in that meaning of the term, uncaused. He is, as Paul remarked to the Colossians, 'before all things' (Col. 1:17). But we do not mean by such a statement that God is before all things in a temporal sense. On the contrary, God is before all things because it is he who called all things into being and established the temporal structure of their existence. He is their cause.¹³

When we say that God alone has immortality we are directing our thought to two things. First, the immortality of God has reference not primarily to time and its possible ending or non-ending, but to a condition of God's existence outside of time. Second, God himself is accordingly the creator of the immortality which, as analogical of his own existence, he has bestowed on those of his creatures whom he has made in his image. For them the temporal process in which they exist will, in fact, be non-ending. The prefix 'im' in immortality as it is here referred to God, a translation of the negating prefix 'a' or alpha in the Greek text, is designed to convey our thought away completely from the region in which mortality or death in time can be contemplated. Our

contemplation of God, on the contrary, cannot legitimately raise the category of mortality in the sense that, in relation to him, the ending or non-ending of time could be contemplated as possible or not possible. The prefix has removed us completely from any such level of consideration. The awareness of God, as the apostle here directs us to it, has reference to a plane of God's existence that has nothing at all to do with the dimensions or possible structures, or the beginning or ending, of time.

The reality of God's immortality rests, in the second place, in the eternity of God, in the sense that only because God has, and is, life in himself can he be the giver of life to his creatures. 'In him was life', John observes (John 1:4). Because God is himself uncaused life, he confers derivative, analogical life on his creatures. If it were necessary, on the other hand, to contemplate a possible beginning or ending of God and of the life of God, then no absolute being would exist, all would then be relative, meaning would have capitulated to contingency, and blank and brute chance would be king. The Scriptures stand against all such arguments.

God, the source of life, is life in himself, and he exists as the locus of all meaning and as the source of the possibility of all creaturely apprehension of meaning. God, the one personal, self-existent, supreme, gracious, and self-disclosing God, is our only absolute. As to our life and the possibilities we have of temporal experiences, the apostle observes that 'God made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth ... [and] in him we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17:24, 28). God is our ultimate cause. He is the ultimate environment in which we live and have our being. He is our ultimate authority.

We could speak of the immensity of God, and with Solomon we could acknowledge that 'the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee' (1 Kings 8:27).¹⁴ The same recognition of the transcendent being of God is reflected in the words of the Chronicler (2 Chron. 2:6). The prophet Isaiah takes up the theme of God's immensity and observes in the final chapter of his prophecy, 'Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool' (Is. 66:1). Again, Jeremiah conveys to us the divine self-disclosure, 'Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord' (Jer. 23:24).

The omniscience, the omnipresence, and the omnipotence of God are thus brought clearly before us. They are contemplated also in that magnificent prayer of David: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me' (Ps. 139:7-10).¹⁵

The attributes of God and the Personality of the Son

The doctrinal issues we have adduced are frequently expanded under the heading of the attributes of God. It will suffice for our present purposes to refer to what has become a standard rubric in the Reformed theological tradition and speak of the communicable and the incommunicable attributes of God. The question has arisen in the history of the church as to whether a distinction can properly be drawn between the *essence* of God and the *attributes* of God. The position to be taken in this respect follows from our understanding that as to his essence, God is incomprehensible. We know God, not because we can comprehend him as to either his being or his knowledge. Rather, we

know God by virtue of his self-disclosure in the attributes of being and character that he has revealed. We have, by virtue of God's objective initiative in revelation on the one hand and our capacity for the reception of that revelation on the other, true knowledge of God, though that knowledge is not, and cannot be, comprehensive. We say, then, that the essence of God is fully contained in, and declared in, each of his attributes. We do not draw a distinction between the essence and the attributes.

Turretin has observed on these issues that 'The divine attributes are the essential properties by which [God] makes himself known ... they ... are attributed to him ... in order to explain his nature. Attributes are not ascribed to God properly as something superadded to his essence'.¹⁶ We agree with Turretin's further conclusion that by virtue again of our finitude we have only 'inadequate conceptions of the essence of God' as that is revealed through his attributes. We can at best have only an incomplete and imperfect understanding of God's revealed attributes.

To observe further on this important doctrinal locus, we hold to the *unity and simplicity of God*, meaning, as we shall see further, that there are three Persons in the Godhead and that 'these three Persons are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory'. It is important to realize the implications of that for the question now before us. By the unity of God we refer, firstly, to God's numerical oneness, or his *unity of singularity* (Deut. 6:4, John 10:30). And we refer also to God's *simplicity*, meaning that God is not composed of parts external to himself. That implies, as has just been stated, that his attributes, taken together, do not constitute parts that make up his essence. If that were so, the doctrine of the simplicity of God would be destroyed.

Perhaps the most direct way to summarize what is involved in God's disclosure of his attributes is to invoke the answer to the fourth question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. 'God,' it is said, 'is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth'. In that statement of God's *infinity, eternity, and immutability* we have in essence the acknowledgment of God's incommunicable attributes. By virtue of our derivative, analogical, and finite existence as the image of God, it is not possible that God could communicate to us the characteristics of infinity, eternity, and immutability. The other attributes referred to in the Catechetical answer are communicable to us, to the extent that, and in the degree that God has ordained in order to prepare us for the place we shall occupy in the eternal kingdom to which he has destined us.

We have said with Turretin that by virtue of our finitude, as that is conditioned further by our recovery from the state of sin into which we had fallen, we are privileged to grasp in this life only a partial understanding of what, in these respects, God has revealed concerning himself. We observe in that connection that the partialness of our understanding is underlined by the fact that in each of the communicable attributes as they are descriptive of the essence of God, God is declared to be infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He is that, not only in his being, but in his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Our address to the attributes of God, and to the respects in which his revelation of them communicates aspects of his essence, does not terminate, however, on the benefits of God's salvific purpose for us, his redeemed people. We are concerned, for our immediate purposes, with the doctrine and the fact of God as he is and exists in himself.

For that reason we take brief note at this point of the trinity of the Godhead as we have already referred to it. In particular, our interest at this stage is in what has to be said of God's existence as three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in consubstantial unity and in one essence. In the brief comments we shall make we leave aside a fuller exposition of the important statements contained on this level in the second chapter of the *Savoy Declaration* that is being addressed in this conference.

The first statement to be made is that the essence of God is not distributed among the Persons of the Godhead. We hold, not to a *distribution* of the essence, but to the fact that the full essence of the Godhead is contained fully and completely in each of the Persons. Turretin makes the point by observing that 'Although there are more persons than one in God, yet there are not more natures. All persons partake of one and the same infinite nature, not by division, but by communication'.¹⁷ If it were the case that there was a distribution of essence among the Persons of the Godhead, we should be contemplating not a trinity, but, as Turretin again refers to it, a quaternity in the Godhead.¹⁸ We would have, that is, first the three Persons, and then fourthly the essence that was distributed among them. But we are not quaternitarians. We are trinitarians.

What has been revealed to us regarding the being of God, the oneness in substance of the three persons of the Godhead, has implications for the knowledge that is possessed by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is not the case, for example, that there is a divine mind in the Father and a divine mind in the Son, and that those divine minds confer and concur in the purposes and works of God. Rather, our doctrine of the unity of God requires us to say that there exists a divine mind that is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son. 'I and my Father are one', our Lord has declared. The essence of the Godhead resides fully in each of the Persons of the Godhead. It follows that there is a divine knowledge that is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit. This will in turn determine our understanding, as we shall see in a moment, of the Person and presence of the Son of God in this world and of his messianic self-awareness.

The relevance for our present argument of what has just been said follows immediately. For if, as we hold to be true, all of the essence of God, and therefore all of the fullness of the incommunicable attributes of God, exist fully in each of the Persons, then what we have referred to as the properties of *infinity, eternity, and immutability* characterize in their full and complete sense each of the Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let us contemplate, then, the incommunicable attribute of infinity and its coming to expression in the omnipresence of God. We say, further, that God, as to his omnipresence, cannot be regarded as distributed in his essence throughout or across space. Rather, the omnipresence of God means and implies that in the fullness of his essence God is present in every unit of space. Recalling our earlier conclusion that time, with space, is a created entity, created, we have said, as a mode of finite existence, we must say in a corresponding fashion that God is present in the fullness of his essence in every point of time. We are confronting in these statements a remarkable implication of what we have already referred to as God's immanence in time and in created reality, as correlative to his transcendence beyond and outside of time and of all that exists external to the Godhead.

It follows that the attribute or characteristic of omnipresence is fully in God the Son, and implications must now be seen to derive from that statement for the presence of the Son of God in this world as our redeemer. We shall return to the question of God's entry into time in the incarnation of his Son, but for the present we observe the following. *First*, Christ possessed a human nature, but in him that human nature was not personalized. That is to say, he did not, by virtue of possessing a human nature, become a human person. He was, and he continued to be, a divine Person.¹⁹ *Second*, the incommunicable attributes of God (infinity, eternity, and immutability) were, by virtue of their incommunicability, not communicated to the human nature of Christ. That important doctrinal point, that has separated elements of the Christian church throughout the centuries, we put previously by saying that there was no communication of properties between the two natures of Christ. *Third*, as the full essence of God resides in Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, he eternally, without interruption in his incarnation, was, and is, characterized, as we have said, by all of the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God.

That last mentioned fact warrants further comment in the context of our present consideration of the doctrine of God. We now say the following regarding Christ's presence in this world: As to his divine nature, he was both in this world and with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. As to his human nature, he was in this world. As to his divine nature, he continued to be omnipresent, that is present in the fullness of his essence in every point of space and time. As to his human nature, he was localized, present at different points of space and time (John 3:13).²⁰ That means that Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, our incarnate redeemer, is present, in the fullness of his divine nature, in every point of space and time, though by virtue of the absence of the communication of properties between his two natures, that is not true of his human nature.

That, then, has remarkable implications for the manner in which Christ fulfills his promise that he would come to us, and that he will be with us 'to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20). That he does so, and has done so, is true not only and simply by reason of the fact that he communicates to us by his Spirit. He is with us *in his actual Personhood*, in his divine Personhood in all of its attributes, though not, until the day of glory, in his human nature. The fact that we cannot see him in his divine Personhood does not destroy the fact that *in the total divine nature of his Personhood he is actually with us*. That is part of the 'mystery of Godliness' which, in its remarkable import, should influence the character of our entire Christian understanding and life. We live, that is, in the company and presence of the divine Person of our Lord.

We whom he has redeemed and brought to himself, therefore, should realize that fact and should live in the light of the consciousness of it. *We actually live in the company of the Person of Christ*. It is not that we live simply or only in the consciousness of what he has done for us in redeeming us or in impressing upon us the conscious awareness of his Spirit. The reality of the presence of Christ with us, which casts its light on the statement in Acts 17:28 that 'in him we live and move and have our being', should influence and determine the meaning of our entire walk in the Christian life to which he has called us.

To be continued in the next issue

References

- 1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ed. John T. McNeill, Trans. F.L. Battles, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, 35.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 3 *The Savoy Declaration of Faith*, II, 1, Various editions. See *The Savoy Declaration*, Ed. Robert E. Davis, Millers Falls, MA: First Congregational Church, 1998.
- 4 *Ibid.*, II, 2.
- 5 See Douglas Vickers, *The Fracture of Faith: Recovering Belief of the Gospel in a Postmodern World*, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, Mentor Imprint, 2000, 56.
- 6 Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, Trans. H. Zylstra, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956, 129–30.
- 7 *The Savoy Declaration*, II, 1.
- 8 See Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Nashville: Nelson, 1998, 172–77 for a dissent from the ‘timelessness’ of God, and Cornelius Van Til’s statement that ‘It [time] is God-created as a mode of finite existence’, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974, 66. In his reliance on Dabney’s *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan [1878] 1975, Reymond does not acknowledge Dabney’s distinction between God’s ‘existence without succession ... existence not related to time’ and ‘the divine consciousness of his own subsistence’. See Dabney, op. cit., 39–40. Reymond has not confronted us with the ‘timeless self-conscious God’ to whom Van Til illuminatingly refers in his classic discussion of the differences between Idealism and Theism (see Van Til’s essay on ‘God and the Absolute’ in his *Christianity and Idealism* [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955, 22]). It is relevant and salutary to consider Van Til’s comment on the position taken by the Arminian theologian, Watson, ‘with respect to the knowledge that God has of temporal events’. Van Til observes that ‘if we introduce time or succession of moments into the consciousness of God in order that we may understand how God is related to time we have to ask ourselves in turn how the consciousness of God is related to the being of God. Thus we should have to introduce succession of moments into the being of God’, *The Defense of the Faith*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963, 35–36.
- 9 That proposition might be considered in the light of the observation of Robert L. Dabney that ‘Since all God’s knowledge is absolutely true to the actual realities known, wherever he knows one thing as destined to depend on another thing, there must be a case in which God *thinks a sequence*. Let the distinction be clearly grasped. The things are known to God as in sequence; but his own subjective act of thought concerning them is not a sequence’. *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, London: Banner of Truth [1890] 1967, Vol. 1, 294. Cf. Jonathan Edwards’ comment that ‘[T]here is no succession in God’s knowledge’, *The Freedom of the Will*, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996, 144.
- 10 See Robert L. Reymond, op. cit., 324, ‘The Father’s Eternal Generation of the Son’, for the distinction he draws between the subordinationism in the doctrine of the Nicene Fathers and what he sees as the contrary position of Calvin, Warfield, and Murray. But see the *contra* argument in the review of Reymond’s, op.cit. in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, 2000, 62, #2. Note also Reymond’s discussion of ‘The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed’s Pneumatology’ which points, he argues, to the denial ‘to the Holy Spirit the attribute of autotheotic self-existence’, op. cit., 331ff. See William Cunningham, ‘The Nicene Creed—the Eternal Sonship’ in his *Historical Theology*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, [1862] 1960, Vol.1, 293ff.
- 11 R.W. Daniels, ‘Great is the Mystery of Godliness’: *The Christology of John Owen*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1990, 309.

- 12 Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. H. Chadwick, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 229, 262–63. The contemporary British philosopher, Paul Helm, has addressed the question of God in eternity and time in an illuminating way in *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. Helm, who presents his work as controverting the positions of an ‘analytic philosophy of religion’ notes that ‘with few exceptions philosophers of religion in this tradition are united in dismissing the idea of God’s timeless eternity’. Helm observes that ‘The classical Christian theologians, Augustine of Hippo, say, or Aquinas or John Calvin, each took it for granted that God exists as a timelessly eternal being. They accepted it as an axiom of Christian theology that God has no memory, and no conception of his own future, and that he does not change, although he eternally wills all changes, even becoming, when incarnate in the Son, subject to humiliation and degradation’. xi–xii. Contra Helm, and against such reformed theologians as Charles Hodge, Robert L. Reymond, in his *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, states that ‘I remain unconvinced ... that God’s eternity necessarily entails the quality of supratemporality or timelessness’ (xxi). (See *ibid.*, 173ff. for Reymond’s comment on Dabney and Hodge). The view of Van Til on this important question is implied in his statement that ‘Time ... is God-created as a mode of finite existence’, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), 66. This and other aspects of Van Til’s apologetic are discussed insightfully and extensively in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1998), *passim*.
- 13 The question of time that is here at issue has been addressed in characteristically expansive fashion by Francis Turretin, the distinguished theologian of Geneva in the early post-Reformation period, in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Trans. G.M. Giger, Ed. J.T. Dennison, Jr., Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992, Vol. 1, 170–71. In the same volume, 202–204, Turretin discusses in an illuminating manner ‘The Eternity of God’, and he raises there the question of God in relation to time. Turretin observes that ‘the eternal duration of God embraces indeed all time—the past, present, and future, but nothing in him can be past or future ... God is called “the ancient of days” ... as before and more ancient than days themselves and the birth of time’ (*ibid.*, 203–204).
- 14 The question of the immensity of God, along with that of other of the attributes of the divine essence, has been widely discussed in the theological literature. Accessible discussions are contained in L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 4th ed., 1949, 60; W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 Vols., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d., Vol. 1, 339; Francis Turretin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 196–201.
- 15 See the very valuable discussion of this Psalm of David in E.J. Young, *Psalms 139: A devotional & expository study*, London: Banner of Truth, 1965.
- 16 Turretin, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, 187.
- 17 Turretin, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, 182.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 19 See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 321–22, ‘[T]he logos assumed a human nature that was not personalized, that did not exist by itself’. In the light of our discussion of the Person of Christ, it may be observed that a tendency has recently emerged among theologically conservative scholars to refer to our Lord as a ‘human being’. See, for example, John Blanchard, *Does God believe in atheists?* Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2000, 555, 558ff. Robert A. Peterson, in his *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983, presented a very valuable discussion of the fact that ‘God Became a Man for Our Salvation’. 11 et seq. In the second edition of his book, however, published under the title of *Calvin and the Atonement*, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, Peterson has amended all such references to Christ as a ‘Man’ to refer to him as a ‘Human Being’ (25ff.). But Peterson does not give any explanation of that change

of designation. With reference to the results of the Council of Chalcedon and the Christological settlement and to our earlier conclusion that at the incarnation (and similarly at the atonement and at the sinner's transition from wrath to grace) there was no commingling of the eternal and the temporal, we have stated that our Lord was not a human person. That is to say, he was not a human being. Nor can he be said to be a divine-human person. He was, we have said consistently, a *divine* Person, that is to say a divine being. He was a divine Person (Being) who took a truly human nature into union with his divine nature. Our argument coincided with that of Berkhof above. We suggest, therefore, that the requirements of Christological doctrine and of doctrinal terminology point away from the designation of our Lord as a 'human person', or a 'human being', and make it necessary to preserve the designation of him as a divine Person (divine being). See the judicious discussion of these doctrinal issues in Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963, 16. Turretin, in his extended discussion of 'The Person and State of Christ' in his op. cit. Vol. 2, 271ff., refers to 'the union of the two natures in the one person in the incarnation' (310) by stating that 'the human nature ... was destitute of proper personality ... because otherwise it would have been a person' (311), a conclusion that is reflected in the statement of Berkhof referred to above. John Owen similarly clarifies the important doctrinal issue at this point, in his reference to 'the *hypostatical* union; that is, the union of the divine and human nature in the person of the Son of God, the human nature having no personality nor subsistence of its own ... He did not become a new person, another person than he was before, by virtue of that union' (Works, Vol. 1, 228–29). It is clear that the terms of our salvation and the achievement of our Lord in the accomplishment of redemption turn on the reality and identity of his divine Personhood and on the mystery of his entering, in his incarnation, into the time that he had made.

- 20 The text referred to, which appears in the *Textus Receptus*, has been omitted from the modern or reconstructed text. But as to the doctrine to which it is addressed, an illuminating and positive statement is contained in William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1954, Vol. 2, 500–501.

This article also appears on the website of the Reformed Congregational Fellowship of New England.

Douglas Vickers is professor emeritus of economics at the University of Massachusetts and the author of The Fracture of Faith (Mentor).

Book Brief

Day One Publications are producing a series of short books that have a new approach to introducing people to church history. Each book focuses on a particular figure and is described as 'a biography that thinks it is a travel guide' to the places where he or she lived and worked. The biography is brief and to the point and the illustrations and maps profuse. So far travel guides have appeared dealing with John Bunyan (John Pestell) and C.H. Spurgeon (Clive Anderson) and in the pipeline are ones on William Booth (Jim Winter), John Knox (David Campbell), George Whitefield (Digby James) and Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Philip Eveson). Those published so far are excellent and deserve to be bought to Christians who want a very practical approach to deepening their understanding of what God has done through some very remarkable people.