

The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary

Volume 25, Number 1

May 2010

“vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo”—Col. 3:3

KERUX: THE JOURNAL
OF
NORTHWEST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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KERUX is a publication of Northwest Theological Seminary and appears three times each year (May, September, December). Editorial offices are located at 17711 Spruce Way, Lynnwood, WA 98037-7431. Correspondence should be directed to the editor at this address. Subscription rates for one year are: \$25.00 (U.S. and Canada); \$30.00 (Elsewhere). All remittances should be made payable in U. S. Funds. **KERUX** is: abstracted in **New Testament Abstracts**, Chestnut Hill, MA, **Old Testament Abstracts**, Washington, DC and **Religious and Theological Abstracts**, Myerstown, PA; indexed in **ATLA Religion Database**, Chicago, IL and the **Elenchus of Biblica**, Rome, Italy.

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ISSN 0888-3513

May 2010

Vol. 25, No. 1

[K:NWTS 25/1 (May 2010) 3-10]

Ruth: The Story Begins

Ruth 1

James T. Dennison, Jr.

This opening chapter is the beginning of one of the loveliest books in the Bible. Yes, it is a lovely romance—gentle, idyllic, tender, full of multiple happy endings. Ruth—a love story from the turbulent days of the Judges. Ruth—a love story to place alongside a love story from the placid days of the Monarchy. Ruth—a story to stand alongside Solomon’s Song. Suggestive, is it not? Solomon’s ancestral mother—her love story; alongside Solomon’s poetic song—his love story. Romantic love *is* found in the Bible—in narrative and in poetry; even as romantic love is found in life—in narrative, in poetry.

But the beginning of Ruth’s love story—the beginning is as tragic as the days of the Judges in which she lived. The opening scene in our drama is filled with images of famine and starvation and helplessness and death! And that tragic motif follows the pilgrims from Judah to Moab. Death removes the loves: the love of Naomi, the love of Orpah, the love of Ruth. And Naomi’s husband died; and Orpah’s husband died; and Ruth’s husband died. Three loving wives, now three bereft widows.

A lovely story? A tragic story! This was not the prospect at the beginning of our story. Elimelech, husband of Naomi, father of Mahlon and Chilion—Elimelech leaves Bethlehem and goes eastward—eastward to Moab. We find no fault with a man who takes his family from a place where they may starve to a place where there is food. But a twinge of irony rises from the name Bethlehem. In the Hebrew language, *beth lehem* means “house of bread”.

You perceive the irony, do you not? In these days when the Judges judged, no *lehem* in *Bethlehem*; no bread in the house of bread.

Is breadless Bethlehem to cast its shadow over this immigrant family? Is Moab a paradise land where there is no shadow of death? Would strangers and sojourners remaining there, hunger no more, neither thirst any more? “Then Elimelech . . . died” (v. 3); “then Mahlon and Chilion also died” (v. 5). In Moab—yes, even in Moab—death comes to the emigrants. In Adam, all die—even in Moab. Death respects no borders; is barred by no boundary markers; is shut out by nothing—nothing in this world. “What man lives [who] shall not see death?” (Ps. 89:48). Death came, at last, in Moab, even as death came in the beginning to Bethlehem. Whether in famine-stricken Judah or bountiful Moab, death comes. Inevitably, inexorably, irrevocably, death comes to those who sojourn, even as it came to those who did not sojourn. It came, did death, to Elimelech, to Chilion, to Mahlon. It came to Naomi, to Orpah, to Ruth. “Thou wilt bring me to death, to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23).

But Naomi, Orpah, Ruth live. The struggle of a widow’s life is thrust upon them—but they live. And now we are impacted by even more poignant ironies. The opening scene shift from Judah to Moab is about to be reversed. Naomi is poised to return from Moab to Judah. And the irony which parallels this reverse location is the life-death reversal. The family had moved in life from Judah to Moab; and there, the reverse of life struck. Now, with the bereavement of death upon them, the widows embark upon a reverse sojourn—from Moab to Judah. Back to Judah, the land of life which turned to death in famine—Judah is now reversed, now a place of life where the Lord has visited his people with food (v. 6). And Moab? Moab, the place of life—Moab has become the scene of death. Reverse ironies piled upon ironies of reversal.

Does not the text suggest these ironies? Notice v. 6. Naomi prepares to “return”—to reverse her sojourn in Moab. Death leaves her longing for the reverse—for life in the land where the Lord gives bread. Now, v. 7—she and her daughters-in-law “return”. Orpah and Ruth join Naomi in the reverse journey from the land of their visitation by death to the land where it is reported there is “bread”. The repetition of the word “return” emphatically underscores the reverse pattern in this drama. Reverse setting; reverse fortune.

I am suggesting that verses 1-7 must be treated as a narrative unit. I am justifying this suggestion by pointing to v. 1 (they go to the land of Moab) and v. 7 (they return to the land of Judah). Verses 1-7 come full circle—where they begin, they end. Naomi is about to return to the place where her story began.

But v. 8 also sets vv. 1-7 off as a unit. For you will notice that v. 8 contains something not found in vv. 1-7. Verse 8 contains dialogue, speech, conversation. Notice, vv. 1-7 no dialogue, no speech, no talking—just reporting, just narrative. Now v. 8 and our characters begin to speak, to talk to one another. The talking signals a new literary unit. Now we are going to see our characters through their own mouths. They will tell us about themselves in their own words.

The first to speak is the aged matriarch. She who had come to Moab a wife now speaks as a bereft widow. And to the end of this chapter, we will hear, we will listen to the voice of women. There are no male characters in vv. 8-22; only the females—Naomi, Orpah, Ruth. And as the inspired narrator places these three women in the spotlight, we are reminded, we are taught (are we not?) that the Bible contains heroines as well as heroes. Is it not so that the Word of God places women at the center of the history of redemption? Are the female characters in the Bible not as much objects of God's redeeming grace, his love, his wonderful affection, as the male characters? Is it not so that the story of God's salvation is for women and girls, as it is for men and boys? Does not the book of Ruth—this lovely book of Ruth—tell you that God loves young girls and mature women and even widows?

But it is not the love of God which moves Naomi to speak. One of our Biblical heroines opens her mouth and from her mouth pours forth complaints: "the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me; call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." Naomi speaks and we learn that our aged heroine is bitter—very bitter! Bitter about the Lord; bitter about life; bitter about her sojourn. Is it not so, even now? The temptation besetting the widow to be bitter; to be very bitter that the Lord has taken away her security, her strength, her love, her husband. Is it not the case that the widow—even the widower—is tempted to talk in bitterness about the sovereignty of God? "Call me Mara," which in the Hebrew tongue means

“bitter”. Naomi has placed her face towards Judah—she is poised to return to the place of her beginning; but Naomi is bitter—very bitter that the Lord has dealt with her as he has.

Naomi’s initial speech in vv. 8 and 9 is a plea to return. She who is poised to return to the place of her beginning implores her daughters-in-law to return to the place of their beginning. Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to remain in the place of their beginning, but our inspired narrator has used this word “return” again even as he used the very same word in vv. 6 and 7. He avoids the term “remain” (which he had used in v. 2) because he is drawing attention to the dramatic irony of the scene. Returning Naomi commands a return to Orpah and Ruth. Naomi sets her face towards Judah; she urges her beloved daughters-in-law to set their faces in return towards Moab. Naomi is detaching herself from them; and in detaching herself, this sad widow is isolating herself from those closest to her. Is it not so? Is it not the temptation of widows to retreat, to withdraw, to urge others—even beloved others—to turn away from them and leave the widowed in loneliness, with memories, with the past, with themselves only? Is it not the temptation of those like Naomi to un-attach themselves from what they once loved?

You will notice that Naomi invokes the Lord’s name in defense of her command. Verses 8 and 9 contain a parallel affirmation—“May the Lord.” The duplication is an emphatic declaration of Naomi’s determination to detach herself, leave Orpah and Ruth behind and disappear into the shadow land which they have never seen. It is as if Naomi leaves them to return to reality, while she enters a land unknown to them—she vanishes into a world of reverse reality, a world of unreality. Notice what Naomi says: “the Lord deal kindly with you”—implication, the Lord has not dealt kindly with me. “You have dealt kindly with the dead and with me”—implication, the Lord has not dealt kindly with the dead or with me. “The Lord grant *you* rest”—implication, the Lord has granted me, will grant me no rest. “The Lord grant you peace in the house of a husband”—implication, the Lord will not grant me the house of a husband, nor a husband’s peace. This land into which Naomi is poised to vanish is a land of bitterness, emptiness, unkindness, loneliness, husbandlessness! “Return,” she says. “Do not follow me! Do not follow me into that land.”

Orpah and Ruth refuse Naomi's plea. And they do so with that word "return"—that omnipresent word "return". Verse 10—"we will return with you. We will not return *from* you; we will return *with* you." This apparent refusal to detach themselves from the aged widow is quite natural—quite natural and commendable. "No, we will not turn away from you, detach ourselves from you, leave you alone, allow you to vanish from our lives. We too will join you in that shadow land to which you are going. Our return will match your return—we will not turn from you nor forsake you."

And Naomi's response? There's that word again—"return" (v. 11). And again emphatically repeated in v. 12—"return". And now we learn why Naomi insists that Orpah and Ruth go back—turn back from her. There are no sons left—none outside her womb, none inside her womb. Naomi is not only husbandless, she is childless. If her daughters-in-law are to receive kindness; if they are to receive rest; if they are not to be embittered, they must return. Back to Moab—the land where you first found husbands; return to the place where you began and begin again—find a man who will restore your life, a husband who will secure and support you, even to old age. "Return! Return! My daughters."

And Orpah? Orpah returns (v. 15). Orpah goes back to Moab. I want you to notice the pattern of vv. 9 and 14. Naomi kissed them; they lifted up their voices and wept (v. 9). Again, they lifted up their voices and wept (v. 14); and Orpah kissed Naomi. The Hebrew phrases are exact duplicates. But who stands outside? Who stands outside the laments and tears in v. 9? Naomi does. She kisses her daughters-in-law. Now, who stands outside the kiss in v. 14? Ruth!! She accepts *no* farewell kiss; she clings, she hugs, she holds tight to Naomi. Naomi detaches herself from Orpah and Ruth in v. 9—she stands apart from them. Ruth will not detach herself from Naomi in v. 14—she stands apart from Orpah; she clings to her beloved mother-in-law. Ruth refuses to leave Naomi alone—to forsake her—to detach herself from her. Ruth will not stop clinging, hugging, holding on to her beloved, widowed, embittered mother-in-law.

We must stop the camera for a moment and freeze-frame on Ruth and Naomi. There are only two in the picture. Orpah is absent—gone from clinging to Naomi. We will not focus on Orpah again. She disappears from the story; she detaches herself from the history of redemption; she returns—returns to

her gods—her Moabite idols. Back to Chemosh, her national deity; back to Chemosh and Baal. Orpah is not in the picture. She has returned to paganism—returned to the land of her beginning. Orpah has returned to death.

Orpah returns to the land which is marked by the death of her husband, the death of her brother-in-law, the death of her father-in-law. Orpah returns to the former ways—to the former days—to the days of a living death. And into that land, Orpah disappears—disappears as she disappears from the picture—disappears from the story. Only Naomi and Ruth, Ruth and Naomi are in the picture. They are the center of the on-going story—the story of life, not death.

“Do not tell me to go back,” says Ruth. “Do not tell me to return to death—to the land of my dead husband—to the land where my dead brother-in-law is buried—to the land where your dead husband remains. Do not tell me to leave you” (v. 16). And there’s that word again—that omnipresent word—“do not tell me to return.” “I will not, I cannot go back. I will go on; I will go forward with you. As surely as I embrace you; as certainly as I cling to you, I will not go without you. I will not leave you. Rather, holding fast to you, I will go where you go. Clinging to you, I will dwell where you dwell. Embracing you, your people will be my people. Hugging you, your God I take for my God.”

We must stop the camera once more. We must pause to savor this statement from this Moabitess, this pagan, this Gentile, this outside-the-covenant woman. We must cling for a moment to this declaration from Ruth’s lips—from Ruth’s heart. We must pause to drink in Ruth’s confession. We must stop—to embrace Ruth’s faith.

Have you begun to fathom the remarkable quality of this woman? Have you begun to understand what has happened to her—what has happened inside her? We must pause to freeze-frame once more—this time on Ruth alone and her confession of faith. If Naomi is feeling empty (v. 21), Ruth is full—full of faith—full to overflowing with trust in the Lord God. Do you see? Ruth’s profession of faith is the result of someone clinging to her. She puts her arms lovingly around Naomi; God put his loving arms around Ruth—with his fullness, his abundant life—God embraced Ruth with his eternal life. Ruth hugs Naomi and declares, “Your God shall be my God” because God first hugged Ruth and said, “You, dear child, shall be my daughter!”

Or have you forgotten your Calvinism? Have you come to Ruth chapter one without the Reformed faith? As we stop the camera and focus on Ruth's declaration of faith, do you somehow think that she has come to this point without someone bringing her there? Oh, you may say to me, God is never a direct character in the book of Ruth—and you are right. But every Calvinist, every Reformed believer, every Biblical Christian confesses that Ruth does not profess the Lord God unless the Lord God first changes her heart in order to confess him. Every Calvinist, every Reformed believer will declare—God acts before man or woman confesses. First God, then man. First God, then Ruth. If Ruth loves the Lord God, it is because he first loved her. If Ruth clings to the Lord God, it is because the Lord God first clung to her. If Ruth draws herself unto the Lord God, it is because the Lord God first drew her unto himself. God the Lord is behind this scene—this freeze-frame—this sweet confession of faith from the lips of once-upon-a-time pagan Ruth. God has been at work. He has been at work in the heart of Ruth—in the life of Ruth. She will not let go of Naomi any more than she will let go of the Lord God himself.

The story of Ruth begins with the issues of life and death. And Ruth chooses life. She chooses the living bond with Naomi, not the death-land of her husband. She chooses the living embrace of her widowed mother-in-law, not the detachment, the return to death of her sister-in-law. She clings to the living God, not the dead idols of her native land. Ruth separates herself from death—detaches herself from the arena shrouded by the pall of dead, lifeless finality. And Ruth attaches herself to life—to the arena ablaze with fresh, vital, throbbing, embracive life. Ruth hugs life, not death. Ruth hugs the Lord God, not dead idols. Ruth hugs the arena of no more death, not death evermore. By faith, Ruth clings to the Lord and to his arena. By faith, Ruth clings to the Lord and to his life. By faith, Ruth clings—yes! Ruth clings to Jesus Christ.

And there, the story of Ruth ends. Yes, the story of Ruth which begins in Moab and the land of death, ends in Bethlehem-Judah and the land of the Lord Jesus Christ. For you know that this lovely book ends with the genealogy of David (Ruth chapter 4). And David's genealogy ends with the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew chapter 1 and Luke chapter 3). And now, you know the rest of the story—the rest of the story which is, in fact, the heart of the story of Ruth. God first loved Ruth, the Moabitess, Ruth, the pagan, Ruth, the Gentile because God ordained her to be the ancestral mother of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, you know not only how Ruth comes to faith in the Lord God of Israel—a Gentile grafted into the trunk of Israel before due time. But now, you know that the Lord Jesus Christ is present in this story—in the beginning of this story of Ruth. For the one whose life emerges from this story is present from the beginning. He whose story is the end of the life of Ruth; he whose story is the end of Ruth’s faith; he whose story is the beginning and the end of the everlasting story—the Lord Jesus Christ is here in this story.

For he is your life, as he was the life of Ruth. And he is your God, as he was the God of Ruth. And he is your Savior, as he was the Savior of Ruth. You do hang on the neck of the Lord Jesus Christ, do you not? You do cling to the embrace of the son of Ruth, son of David, Son of God, do you not? You do hug the Lord Jesus Christ as your life—your eternal life—do you not?

The story of Ruth never ends—never ends until he comes—until Ruth’s greater son comes again to raise up her body and my body and your body who believe on his saving name with saving faith; raises it up into a land of never-ending salvation, never-ending life, never-ending love, never-ending rest. For on that day, the story begins anew. The Lord God who embraced Ruth, who embraces you who believe on his name—on that day, Ruth and Boaz and David and all the saints will be embraced by Jesus Christ in the land of life everlasting.

[*K:NWTS* 25/1 (May 2010) 11-23]

The *Tractoria* of Prudentius of Troyes (d. 861)

Francis X. Gumerlock

Introduction: Prudentius and the Ninth-Century Predestination Controversy

When the doctrine of predestination, the relationship of grace to free will, and the extent of Christ's atonement became topics of debate in the mid-ninth century, Gottschalk of Orbais was not alone in asserting the inability of the human will to choose good apart from special enabling grace, God's predestination of the elect to salvation and the reprobate to merited punishment, and the shedding of Christ's blood for all believers.¹ Remigius of Lyons, Florus of Lyons, Lupus of Ferrières, and Prudentius of Troyes similarly promoted such strict Augustinian tenets as the faith of the church. This article briefly introduces the life and writings of Prudentius and provides a translation of his *Tractoria*, which contains four chapters that succinctly illustrate his doctrine of grace.

¹ For an argument against the notion that Gottschalk stood virtually alone in a world gone Semi-Pelagian, see Francis X. Gumerlock, "Predestination in the Century Before Gottschalk," (Part 1) *Evangelical Quarterly* 81:3 (July 2009):195-209; (Part 2) *Evangelical Quarterly* 81:4 (Oct 2009):319-337.

The Life and Writings of Prudentius Related to Predestination

Born in Spain and then named Galino, Prudentius moved to the Frankish empire, was educated in the palace school at Aachen. He was appointed chaplain to the Frankish court of Louis the Pious and later elevated to the bishopric of Troyes sometime before 847.² Some of his writings are printed in Volume 115 of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. Four of them are related to his theology of grace during the Gottschalk controversy.

1. *Letter to Hincmar and Pardulus (Epistola ad Hincmarum et Pardulum)*. The priest-monk Gottschalk of Orbais was tried and condemned for errors related to predestination at a synod in Mainz in 848 and afterward at another synod at Quierzy in the spring of 849. At the latter council Hincmar, bishop of Reims, had Gottschalk flogged and defrocked, and then imprisoned him in the monastery at Hautvilliers. Since Gottschalk's teaching had been fairly influential and his writings were well circulated, Hincmar invited a number of theologians to dialogue on the issues that Gottschalk raised. Probably in 849, Prudentius wrote to Hincmar and Pardulus of Laon in this letter divided into thirteen chapters.³ Perhaps concerned that Augustine's doctrine was not being condemned with Gottschalk, Prudentius begins in the first chapter by saying that the Roman popes attested to the catholic orthodoxy of Augustine and mentions Innocent, Zosimus, Celestine, Leo the Great, and Gregory the Great as supporters of Augustine. In the second chapter, Prudentius shows how Prosper of Aquitaine and Fulgentius of Ruspe defended Augustine's doctrine. Chapter three and four speak of three questions that were currently in dispute: the predestination of the reprobate; whether Christ died only for the elect; and whether it is the will of God that all humans be called and saved. Chapters five through the end contain a collection of citations from church fathers which answered these matters:

2 On Prudentius, see A.H. Tegels, "Prudentius of Troyes, St.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Vol. 11 (New York: Gale, 2003) 793; Michael Walsh, "Prudentius Galindo," in his *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) 988; E.A. Livingston and F. L. Cross, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 1342.

3 PL 115:971-1010.

- Chs. 5-7 From the writings of Augustine
- Ch. 8 From Fulgentius' *Ad Monimum*
- Ch. 9 From Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob*
- Ch. 10 From Isidore of Seville and Jerome
- Ch. 11 From Prosper of Aquitaine's *Responsiones ad Capitula Gallorum*
- Ch. 12 From Cassiodorus' *On the Psalms* and Bede
- Ch. 13 From various authors on the issue of grace and free will.

The citations are mainly on the subject of predestination and show that Prudentius believed in the predestination of the elect and the just foreordination of the punishment, but not the sin, of the reprobate. Toward the end of the letter, Prudentius shows his sentiment on grace and free will: that the human will is not free for righteousness, but that freeing grace must precede the movement of the will toward God.

This letter is unavailable in English translation.

2. *On Predestination against John the Scot (De Praedestinatione contra Joannem Scotum cognomento Erigenam)*. When Hincmar realized that many leaders in the church, while not condoning Gottschalk's behavior (which was seen by both sides as arrogant, rebellious, and somewhat bizarre), held positions regarding the doctrine of salvation that resembled Gottschalk's, he invited John Scottus Eriugena, an erudite teacher in the palace school, to write on the issue. At the end of 850 or in early 851, Eriugena wrote a book on predestination in nineteen chapters that denied two-fold predestination.⁴ Soon afterward, Wenilo, the bishop of Sens, excerpted many statements that Eriugena had written and sent them to Prudentius for refutation. Against these, Prudentius took up his pen in the autumn of 851 or in 852 and published *On Predestination against John the Scot* with a preface addressed to Wenilo.⁵

Prudentius' method was to cite a short statement from Eriugena's work that he considered erroneous and to follow it with a lengthy correction. Prudentius supported his corrections with three hundred and fifteen patristic

⁴ John Scottus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*. Mary Brennan, trans. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

⁵ PL 115:1009-1366.

quotes from the writings of Jerome, Augustine, Fulgentius, Leo, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, and Bede.⁶ According to James C. Prichard, a historian of the nineteenth-century, Prudentius found Eriugena's propositions "full of Pelagianism and other heresy, and accused their author of making an impudent and treacherous attack upon catholic doctrine, under the pretext of opposing Godeschalcus."⁷ According to a 1988 book on Eriugena by John J. O'Meara, Prudentius' refutation accused the Scot "of Pelagianism, of impudent blasphemy, sophisticated folly, vanity, and the use of vain knowledge instead of the opinion of Scripture and the Fathers."⁸

Positively, Prudentius taught in this work that God ordains, disposes, dispenses, destines, and predestines the things that he did or is going to do (Is. 45:11), and this includes his creation and destining of the fire of hell (Mt. 25:41).⁹ On free will, Prudentius asked: "How can you call that free which, you say, has been so spoiled as a punishment for original sin that it can neither wish to live rightly nor is able to live so, if it wishes...?"¹⁰ For Prudentius, divine grace creates in man a will to do good, as the apostle said: *For it is God who works in you to will and to do* (Phil. 2:13).¹¹

On Predestination against John the Scot is also not available in English translation.

6 For the number of patristic quotes, John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 48.

7 James C. Prichard, *The Life and Times of Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims* (London: John Henry Parker, 1849), 149. On Prudentius' use of Augustine, see Pierre Petitmengin, "D'Augustin a Prudence de Troyes: les citations augustiniennes dans un manuscrit d'auteur," in *De Tertullien aux Mazarabes. Mélanges Jacques Fontaine*, Vol. 2 (Paris, 1992).

8 O'Meara, *Eriugena*, 48.

9 PL 115:1022

10 PL 115:1087. Citation from John Marenbon, "John Scotus and Carolingian Theology: From the *De Praedestinatione*, Its Background and Its Critics, to the *Periphyseon*," in Margaret T. Gibson and Janet L. Nelson, eds., *Charles the Bald. Court and Kingdom*, 2nd rev. ed. (Burlington, VT: Viviarum, 1990) 312.

11 PL 115:1052; Cf. David Ganz, "The Debate on Predestination," in Gibson and Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 285-302 at 293.

3. *Tractate or Letter to Wenilo (Epistola Tractoria ad Venilonem)*.¹² In 856, a gathering of bishops met in Sens for the ordination of a certain Aeneas to the bishopric of Paris.¹³ On this occasion Prudentius addressed this letter to Wenilo, the archbishop of Sens, and to the other bishops in attendance. He said that he could not attend due to sickness, but was sending a priest named Arnold as a legate from his church. Prudentius continued that he consents to the ordination, if Aeneas would subscribe to four “chapters,” or brief statements representing the teaching of the church against the Pelagians. Because Prudentius addressed the letter not only to Wenilo but to all of the bishops, it is referred to as a *Tractoria*, meaning a tractate or treatise. It was Prudentius’ hope that all of the bishops in attendance would affirm their consent to the chapters.

The first chapter expresses the inability of the human will to choose anything good after the Fall and assigns the beginning of a good will to the grace of God. The second asserts two-fold predestination. The third says that the blood of Christ was shed for all believers; and the fourth states that the saving will of God extends to those who are actually saved.

Realizing that some of the bishops (including possibly himself) had subscribed to the canons of Quierzy in 853, Prudentius nevertheless wants it known that *these* four chapters are what the church every day confesses, preaches, and holds.

How the bishops gathered at Sens responded to the *Tractoria* is unknown, but there is no evidence of a negative reaction to it. Hence, the four chapters are often referred to in literature as the canons of the Council of Sens of 856.

The *Tractoria* is translated below.

4. *The Annals of St. Bertin (Annales Bertiniani)*. Prudentius also edited a good portion of a historical chronicle called the *Annals of St. Bertin*. The short

12 PL 115:1365-1368.

13 For the date of 856, Friedrich Kempf, Hans-Georg Beck, Eugen Ewig, and Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The Church in the Age of Feudalism*. Anselm Biggs, trans. (Saint Louis: Herder and Herder, 1969) 163; Pietro Palazzini, *Dizionario dei Concili*, Vol. 5 (Vatican City: Città Nuova Editrice, 1963) 151; Michael Ott, “Prudentius,” *The Original Catholic Encyclopedia* at <http://oce.catholic.com>.

entries in the chronicle for the years 835-861 that Prudentius wrote provide valuable additions to our historical knowledge of the mid-ninth century.

Interestingly, under the year 859, Prudentius explained that Pope Nicholas I confirmed the teaching of double predestination and particular redemption. He wrote: "Pope Nicholas faithfully confirmed and catholicly [sic] decreed concerning the grace of God and free will, the truth of double predestination, and the blood of Christ and how it was shed for all believers."¹⁴ What exactly Prudentius was referring to in this statement would make a great subject for research, an academic paper, or an article.¹⁵

Another value of the *Annals* is its entry about Gottschalk. It reads:

Gottschalk, a man of Gaul, a monk and priest of the monastery of Orbais of the parish of Soissons, was bloated with his knowledge and given to certain superstitions. He went to Italy in the name of religion, but was then shamefully banished. He next sought out Dalmatia, Pannonia, and Noricum, and taught there with pernicious speech and writing certain things—especially under the name of predestination—opposed to our salvation. In the presence of King Louis the German he was discovered and convicted by a council of bishops. Finally he was forced to return to the metropolitan city of his diocese, Rheims, over which that venerable man Hincmar presides. To the extent that he deserved to be punished for his lack of faith, he received it there. That most strenuous defender of the Christian faith, King Charles [the Bald] called together a council of the holy bishops of that diocese and commanded Gottschalk to be presented before them. [Gottschalk] was lead in, was publicly whipped, and was forced to cast into flames his books with their many assertions.¹⁶

14 Janet L. Nelson, trans., *The Annals of St-Bertin*. Ninth-Century Histories, Vol. 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) 91.

15 On Pope Nicholas, see Jane Carol Bishop, "Pope Nicholas I and the First Age of Papal Independence," Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 1980).

16 Cited in Paul Edward Dutton, ed., *Carolingian Civilization. A Reader* (Petersborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1993) 50.

This short account offers a helpful chronology, written by a contemporary, of the travels of Gottschalk and the ecclesiastical trouble into which he landed. The language with which Prudentius refers to Gottschalk in the entry is evidence that many of the strict Augustinians, whose theology was similar to that of Gottschalk, had distanced themselves from his person.¹⁷ Gottschalk's request in his *Longer Confession* for a trial by ordeal did not sit well with them; and this is probably what Prudentius had in mind when he wrote that he was "given to certain superstitions."¹⁸ Prudentius also described Gottschalk's speech as "pernicious" and opposed to salvation. An almost universal criticism among Gottschalk's contemporaries was the manner in which he taught two-fold predestination, in a way that seemed to leave no room for the conversion of sinners through repentance.¹⁹

In addition, Prudentius referred to Gottschalk as one "bloated" with knowledge. The ecclesiastical leaders of the time were amazed at Gottschalk's ability to recite large portions of church fathers from memory,²⁰ but interpreted his tendency to be argumentative as a sign of pride. Florus of Lyons, whose theological views, like those of Prudentius, resembled Gottschalk's in many respects, also seemed annoyed by the wandering monk's pugnacity, stubbornness, and unwillingness to receive correction. At the end of his *Sermon on Predestination*, Florus exhorted his readers to close their ears "against the wicked tongue of this very vain and very wretched man [Gottschalk]." He continued:

17 Bernard Boller, *Gottschalk d'Orbais de Fulda à Hautvillers: une dissidence* (Paris: Editions SDE, 2004) 124, n. 257, makes this same observation.

18 Cyrille Lambot, ed., *Oeuvres théologiques et grammaticales de Godescalc d'Orbais* (Louvain: "Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense" Bureaux, 1945) 74-5. An English translation of Gottschalk's *Longer Confession* is in Ronald Hanks, "Gottschalk's Doctrine of Double Predestination," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 12:1 (1978):31-64. A new translation of it is forthcoming in Victor Genke and Francis X. Gumerlock, *Gottschalk of Orbais: Translated Texts of a Medieval Predestination Controversy*, which is completed and currently under consideration for publication by an academic press in the United States. On Gottschalk, Matthew Gillis is currently finishing his doctoral dissertation at the University of Virginia entitled "Reform and Authority in the Carolingian World: A Study of Gottschalk of Saxony."

19 Francis X. Gumerlock, "Gottschalk of Orbais: A Medieval Predestinarian," *Kerux* 22:3 (Dec 2007):17-34 at 26-7.

20 Hincmar of Reims, *Epistola ad Nicholam*, PL 126:45-46.

For, although he is ready to argue and is obstinate against the truth, this unfortunate man, inflated with a diabolical spirit [i.e., pride], preferred to separate himself from the church of Christ and its ministers than to turn away from his profane and vain speech.²¹

An English translation of *The Annals of St. Bertin* by Janet L. Nelson was published in 1991.

Other Writings of Prudentius

Volume 115 of Migne's *Patrologia Latina* contains a historical notice on Prudentius, dated 1861, that lists other writings by him including *Praecepta ex Veteri et Novo Testamento* (*Precepts from the Old and New Testaments*), *Poemata* (*Poems*), *Vitam beatae Maurae [sic] virginis Trecensis* (*Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Troyes*), and possibly *Collectanea ex CL psalmis* (*Commentaries on the 150 Psalms*).²²

A Puzzling Question

Hincmar, in Chapter 21 of his *De Praedestinatione dissertatio posterior*, written in 856 after Prudentius' *Tractoria*, expressed amazement that Prudentius had subscribed to a canon on free will at the Council of Quierzy (in 853) but afterward wrote the 'four chapters' to Wenilo.²³ If this account is accurate, it means that after Prudentius' *Letter to Hincmar and Pardulus*, and after writing his treatise *On Predestination* against Eriugena, Prudentius consented, approved of, and subscribed to the canons of Quierzy which can be summarized as follows: There is only one predestination, that of the elect; the free will of man is healed through grace; God wills all men to be saved;

21 Florus of Lyons, *Sermo de praedestinatione*. PL 119:102 and PL 125:59. Translation mine. A translation of the entire sermon is forthcoming in Genke and Gumerlock, *Gottschalk of Orbais*.

22 PL 115:971-972.

23 Hincmar, *De praedestinatione dissertatio posterior*, 21. PL 125:182.

and Christ suffered for all men.²⁴ Then shortly thereafter, Prudentius wrote the *Tractoria*, which counters the canons of Quierzy.

Several explanations have been put forward in the literature for why Prudentius would have approved the canons of Quierzy. Victor Genke questions the veracity of Hincmar's account.²⁵ C.J. Thorne, Jr. suggested that Prudentius subscribed "either out of reverence for Hincmar or fear of Charles the Bald," the king of France (West Franks) and grandson of Charlemagne who had called the council to stop the dispute over predestination.²⁶ Paul Burns wrote similarly that Prudentius may have been intimidated by the presence of the emperor at the Council of Quierzy.²⁷

I think another possibility exists. Because Quierzy was convened for the purpose of settling the controversy that had polarized the Frankish ecclesiastical leaders, perhaps Prudentius saw the canons as vague enough to allow for his strict Augustinian interpretation of them. Predestination could rightly be explained as one, but having two aspects, as Gottschalk had explained in his *Longer Confession*.²⁸ And what strict Augustinian would disagree with the statement of Quierzy that free will is healed through grace? As for God wanting all to be saved and Christ suffering for all, there is similar phraseology in Scripture,²⁹ so perhaps he affirmed the statement with the knowledge that so-called "universalist" passages can be interpreted as synecdochic figures of speech meaning "many."

24 The canons are in PL 121:1085-1086; PL 125:63-64. English translation in Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Roy J. Deferrari, trans. (Saint Louis: Herder, 1957) 126-7.

25 Genke and Gumerlock, Introduction to *Gottschalk of Orbais*: "If Hincmar is to be trusted at this point, Prudentius of Troyes subscribed to the document, too."

26 For example, C. G. Thorne, Jr., "Prudentius (Galindo) (d. 861)," in J.D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978) 810.

27 "St. Prudentius, Bishop (861)" under April 6 in Paul Burns, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints. New Full Edition*, Vol. 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 36.

28 Gottschalk, *Longer Confession*. Lambot, 67-8.

29 1 Tim. 2:4; Rom. 8:32.

Or perhaps, as Prichard thinks,³⁰ the views of Prudentius were not as solidified in 853 at the time of the Council of Quierzy as they would later become, especially after 855 when the bishops of Lyons, Vienne, and Arles opposed the doctrine of Eriugena at the Council of Valence and upheld two-fold predestination.³¹ The similarity in theology between the later theology of Prudentius and that of the theologians of Lyons, and the possibility of their influence upon Prudentius, is hinted by James Ussher and Timothy Roberts.³²

The question of Prudentius' alleged inconsistency merits additional research. Such research might include a comparative investigation between Prudentius' earlier and later writings on the issue, and comparison of Prudentius' *Tractoria* with the theology of Remigius and Florus of Lyons and with the canons of the Council of Valence, which reflected the theology of these leaders from Lyons.

Conclusion: The Contributions of Prudentius

According to one scholar, "Prudentius was regarded by his contemporaries as being among the most learned theologians of his day."³³ His writings show that he held a prominent place in the discussion on predestination in the Frankish Church in the mid-ninth century. After Hincmar condemned Gottschalk and opened the discussion on predestination to other theologians, Prudentius poured through the writings of the Fathers, and found that Augustine and others did teach that the punishment of the reprobate, merited by their sins, was divinely foreordained. This he expressed in his *Letter to Hincmar and Pardulus*.

30 Prichard, *Life and Times of Hincmar*, 154: "It appears indeed that Prudentius was long in much uncertainty as to these questions, and with difficulty made up his mind."

31 The canons of the Council of Valence are translated in Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 127-32.

32 James Ussher, *Gotteschalci, et praedestinationae controversiae ab eo motae, Historia* (Dublin, 1631), reprinted in *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, Vol. 4. (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1864) 172; Timothy Roland Roberts, "A Translation and Critical Edition of Ratramnus of Corbie's De Predestinatione [sic] Dei," Ph.D. diss (University of Missouri-Columbia, 1977) 15.

33 Burns, *Butler's Lives of the Saints, New Full Edition*, 4:37.

When Eriugena's *On Predestination* entered the debate, archbishop Wenilo of Sens saw many problems with Eriugena's treatment of the issues and entrusted to Prudentius the task of refuting it. This shows that Wenilo very much respected Prudentius' orthodoxy, his command of the Fathers, and his ability to refute Eriugena, one of the most distinguished teachers in the empire. There is no doubt that Prudentius' *On Predestination against John the Scot* influenced the widespread distaste for Eriugena's treatise.³⁴

In the *Annals of St. Bertin*, Prudentius uniquely informed posterity that Pope Nicholas I decreed that double predestination and definite atonement were Catholic doctrines. Finally, Prudentius' *Tractoria* to Wenilo and the bishops gathered for the ordination of Aeneas contains strict Augustinian tenets in its four chapters, and strongly encouraged both Aeneas and the other bishops to subscribe to them. Prudentius' insistence on making subscription to two-fold predestination and particular redemption a requirement for ordination is very unusual in ancient and medieval Christianity. In the Middle Ages it seems to be an anomaly; and for this Prudentius deserves a place in the history of doctrine.

Prudentius of Troyes *Tractate*

Epistle of Saint Prudentius, bishop of Troyes, to Wenilo, which he sent through a vicar on the occasion of the ordination of Aeneas of Paris, since he was not able to be there.

Prudentius most sincerely wishes eternal salvation in the Lord to the venerable father and the rest of the fathers and brothers, beloved and reverend fellow bishops.

Having been afflicted with almost every known infirmity, I am prohibited from attending your holy and desirable gathering. This [infirmity] is understood to pertain to the most just judgment of God as far as it concerns the merit of my sins, but as far as it concerns His undeserved and unfailing mercies, it

³⁴ The Council of Valence in 855 expressed its disgust for Eriugena's treatise referred to as "Scottish hodge-podge," and produced canons against its propositions. After such reactions, even Hincmar distanced himself from Eriugena.

pertains to His most merciful bounty. However, as far as I am able, I exhibit the presence of my consent through letters and through our church's legate, the priest Arnold. Because he who should be ordained, having been instructed by all in the apostolic see and by the writings and sayings of the blessed fathers Innocent, Zosimus, Boniface, Sixtus, Leo, Gelasius, Celestine, Gregory, Hilary, Ambrose, Augustine, Isidore, Primasius, Fulgentius, Gregory, Jerome, Cassiodorus, Bede, and other equally catholic and orthodox men, wishes by confessing to subscribe, and by subscribing to confess, particularly to the four chapters which the whole catholic church has fought for and been victorious against Pelagius and the followers of his heresy, and has entrusted for the memory of posterity in very extensive literature carrying authority and truth, I profess my consent to his ordination. However, if [he confesses and subscribes] to other opinions, I absolutely do not consent, nor do I recommend that the faithful of Christ consent.

Although I have no doubt that your prudence is more vigorous than my aged knowledge, I have judged it necessary to briefly attach a series of four chapters, set forth so that your goodness may more easily recognize what I believe and to what truth I consent.

Concerning Free Will

First. Evidently, that one should confess that free will, lost in Adam by the merit of disobedience, is restored to us and freed through our Lord Jesus Christ. Meanwhile [we live] in hope [of salvation]; later [we shall possess it] in reality, just as the Apostle says, "For in hope we have been saved" (Rom. 8:24). Nevertheless, we should assign the grace of the omnipotent God to every good work, whether in proposing, beginning, working out, or finishing with perseverance. And we should know that without it we are in no way able to do anything good, whether to propose, or to will, or to work.

Concerning Twofold Predestination

Second. That one should believe and confess that by the most high and secret counsel of the omnipotent God, some were predestined to life by the gratuitous mercy of God before all ages, and some were predestined to punishment by an inscrutable judgment. Evidently, whether unto salvation or unto

damnation, He has predestined what He had foreknown He was going to do in judging, as the prophet says, “He who made the things that are future” (Is. 45:11).

Concerning the Death of Christ

Third. That one should believe and confess with all catholics that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for all persons believing in Him throughout the whole world, but not for those who never believed in Him, do not believe today, or will never believe, as the Lord Himself says, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28).

Concerning the Will of God

Fourth. That one should believe and confess that the omnipotent God wills to save whomever [He wants], and that no one is in any way able to be saved unless He saves them; and all those to be saved, He willed to be saved. And from this, [concerning] those who are not saved, it is clearly not His will that they should be saved, as the prophet says, “All things whatsoever God willed, He did in heaven and on earth, in the sea, and in all of the abyss” (Ps. 135:6).

Also, it may be that some have consented, approved, and subscribed to other opinions, which the church universally condemned against Pelagius. Nevertheless, against him and his companions, the church every day rejoices over, confesses, preaches, holds, and will hold these things, having been delivered from his very depraved opinions through the apostolic see, at the insistence of the most blessed Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, and Augustine, with two hundred and fourteen other bishops, and having been made common throughout the whole world through many epistles as well as books. May He [God], through His bounty, deign to forever preserve these things happily through all of your consent, [knowing that] your praiseworthy paternity and fraternity is unbreakable and very strong through heavenly grace.

Classic Orthodox Calvinists on the Notion of Any Human Merit

“We **condemn** therefore those which teach that **for the worthiness of their works there is due unto them** either remission of sins, or eternal life, **or any other good gift**. For though we should perfectly fulfill the commandments of God, yet we should be but unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).”¹

“Eternal life therefore is indeed prepared and given unto them who testify their repentance by the true fruits thereof, which are sometimes put off and deferred unto the *last moment of a man’s life*, whereof we have a singular example in that poor thief crucified with Jesus Christ . . . but **I add that this is not that by their works they have satisfied for their sins either in whole or in part, or that they deserve by the value of desert of them in any sort or manner whatsoever any blessing temporal or spiritual**: but only because that good works being the testimony and effects inseparably following of faith, and that faith witnessing before God according to the covenant of the Gospel, *That whosoever shall believe in the Son shall be saved.*”²

1 Jerome Zanchius (1516-1590) was an ardent Italian Calvinist who itinerated throughout Protestant Europe in the 16th century. He published *De religione christianae fides* in 1585. It was translated into English in 1599 under the title *Confession of the Christian Religion* (variant: *The Whole Body of Christian Religion*). The quotation above is from chapter 21.9 (“Of Good Works”). “Any other good gift” refers to even temporal rewards on the alleged meritorious ground of human works—an impossibility in sinners, as Zanchius notes from our Lord’s infallible statement in Luke 17.

2 Theodore Beza (1519-1605) was the illustrious successor to John Calvin in Geneva on the latter’s death in 1564. The quotation above is found in *Master Bezaes Sermons upon the Three First Chapters of the Canticle of Canticles* (1587) 130. The word “whatsoever” excludes any

“VI. Do Our Good Works Merit Any Thing in the Sight of God? . . . [W]hen we say that we obtain rewards from God by our own good works, men immediately conclude that our good works must merit something at the hands of God. We must know, therefore, that our good works are necessary, and that they are also to be done for the rewards which are consequent thereon; **but that they are, nevertheless, not meritorious, by which we mean that they deserve nothing from God, not even the smallest particle of spiritual or temporal blessings.**”³

and all suggestion of works from a sinner forming the meritorious ground of reward “temporal or spiritual”.

³ Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) was one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and a leader of the Calvinistic Reformation in that city. Our quotation above is from his authoritative commentary on that document: *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1956) 485 (Question 91). Notice his absolute disclaimer: “not even the smallest particle of spiritual or temporal blessings” are “meritorious”—“they are . . . not meritorious”. No sinner, in any era of the history of redemption, is able to merit earthly (temporal) blessings or heavenly (spiritual) blessings.

John Calvin, Eternal Generation, and Communication of Essence: A Reexamination of His Views

Benjamin W. Swinburnson

The name John Calvin has always been associated with controversy and debate. The antithetical structure of his famous *Institutio* makes quite plain that Calvin was never satisfied with simply stating the truth until he set it plainly over against the errors so prevalent in his day.¹ During his life and long after his death, nearly every distinctive “Calvinistic” doctrine has been subjected to relentless debate. Whether it his doctrine of natural revelation, Scripture, predestination, free will, original sin, union with Christ, the sacraments, or the church, scholars and theologians continue to fiercely debate his views. Even the validity of the moniker “Calvinist” to describe Calvin’s views has come under scrutiny.² This phenomena was not limited to the 16th and 17th century, but has continued unabated to this very day. It should be no surprise that one of the most vigorous historical-theological debates in the recent scholarly literature concerns “Calvin and the Calvinists,” that is, Calvin’s general theological relationship to the “Calvinists” who came after him.

1 Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1989) 18-23.

2 See Richard A. Muller’s recent lecture entitled, “Was Calvin a Calvinist? Or, Did Calvin (or Anyone Else in the Early Modern Era) Plant the “TULIP”?” available online at: <http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/lectures/Richard%20Muller%20-%20Was%20Calvin%20a%20Calvinist.pdf>.

Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity is no exception to this general pattern. Controversy surrounding his views began already in his own lifetime. In fact, Calvin was forced to return to his development and defense of this Patristic doctrine throughout his career. An "unholy trinity" of anti-Trinitarians (Pierre Caroli, Valentinus Gentilis, and Michael Servetus) was a continual theological thorn in his flesh, either accusing him of heresy or propounding heretical views in and about Geneva.³ A central issue that arose from these 16th century polemics was the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God. What precisely were Calvin's views on the subject? Did it represent a distinctive break with Patristic and Medieval orthodoxy? If so, what is the precise nature of Calvin's distinctiveness?

Different answers have been given to these questions over the past four hundred years. Broadly speaking, two schools of interpretation have emerged. One school views Calvin's teaching on eternal generation as being in substantial continuity with his Patristic and Medieval predecessors and Reformation successors, while the other tends to view him as making some kind of distinctive break with past interpretations of the doctrine—a break (it is argued) that was not always consistently implemented by his successors. Both schools of thought tend to agree that Calvin embraced a form of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, but they disagree as to how he defined it. Specifically, the main area of dispute concerns Calvin's acceptance or rejection of the idea of communication of essence in eternal generation.

This doctrine, as classically defined in Reformed theology, states that God the Father, by an eternal personal act, by necessity of nature, generates the person (not the essence) of the Son by communicating to him the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead, without division, alienation, or change.⁴

³ These controversies (and others) are concisely summarized in Wulfert De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide* (2008) 159-67.

⁴ This definition is adapted from A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (1991) 182. Cf. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1992-1997) 1:292-93; Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1852) 181-184. The doctrine explicitly appears (implicitly or explicitly) in several Reformed confessions, the *Irish Articles* being perhaps the most famous example: "The essence of the Father doth not beget the essence of the Son; but the person of the Father begetteth the person of the Son by communicating his whole essence to the person begotten from eternity" (Article IX).

All generation involves the communication of essence. A parent communicates their essence or nature to their children when they give them birth (generate/beget). Likewise, in eternal generation, God the Father communicates his divine essence to the Son, by which the Son possesses the same essence (*homoousion*) with him. Although the idea of communication of essence is common to both human and divine generation, they are not entirely the same. The main difference consists in the fact that in human generation, only a part of the essence of the parent is communicated to the child; in divine generation, the whole essence is.⁵ It is important to underscore that on this construction, it is the *person* of the Son that is generated, not the essence. The idea of communication of essence is not in any way intended to mean that the essence of the Son is begotten, derived, or somehow separated from the essence of the Father. It is the self-same essence of the Father that is communicated or shared with the Son *by means of* eternal generation.

Clearly, Calvin did not articulate this doctrine of eternal generation in this more advanced and precise *form*. But did he affirm the *substance* of what it teaches? In this article, it is our intention to prove that a strong case can be made that he did. As noted above, two different answers have been given to this question over the past four hundred years. Before we turn directly to Calvin's *corpus*, it is important to survey, as briefly as possible, the history of interpretation on Calvin's doctrine of eternal generation. Our interest here is not in the development of the doctrine of eternal generation in Reformed theology *per se*, but only in specific reflection on Calvin's views. It is noteworthy that as early as the late 16th century, disagreement had arisen as to the precise nature of Calvin's views on the subject. This survey will show that our thesis stands in line with a distinct school of thought on Calvin's views of eternal generation that was fairly well-established (at least in outline) only a few years after his death. After this historical survey, we will examine three lines of evidence from Calvin's works that we believe lend strong support to our thesis. Finally, we will conclude with an examination of two common objections concerning Calvin's views on eternal generation and the Nicene Creed.

⁵ For a much more detailed delineation of the differences between divine and human generation as understood by the Reformed, see Turretin, 1:292-93; Ursinus, 181-84.

Calvin and Communication of Essence: A History of Interpretation

Explicit discussion of Calvin's doctrine of communication of essence began in the 16th century among Lutheran and Romanist polemicists, many of whom attacked Calvin's Trinitarianism as heretical (most notably, Pierre Caroli). Robert Bellarmine, however, exonerated Calvin from the charge, arguing that there were indications in his *Institutio* that he affirmed both the idea the *Aseitas*⁶ of the Son and communication of essence in eternal generation.⁷ Others were not so kind, insisting that his conception of the *Aseitas* of the Son compromised the orthodox doctrine of eternal generation. Thus it appears that the first analyses of Calvin's views on communication of essence were forged in the midst of sharp polemics. Many Roman Catholics and Lutherans (eager to find fault with Calvin's theology), often alleged that he rejected the doctrine of communication of essence, thus further confirming the unorthodox nature of his theology. Bellarmine's exoneration of Calvin in this context is extremely important, in our opinion. While it would have been extremely advantageous polemically to brand Calvin a heretic (especially to Romanist eyes), he actually argues against the general consensus of his own party.⁸

Very likely in response to these polemical attacks, many of Calvin's contemporaries and immediate successors self-consciously sought to clear him from the charge of heresy for his alleged rejection of the doctrine of communication of essence. For example, Josiah Simler (speaking representatively for Reformed theologians) insisted that "we do not deny that the Son has his essence from God the Father, but we deny that the essence is begotten."⁹ This

6 The Latin term "*Aseitas*" (Greek: αυτοθεος) refers to the divine attribute of self-existence, and is literally rendered into English by the phrase "God of himself" (*a-se-itas*). Therefore, to ascribe *Aseitas* to the Son and the Holy Spirit is to affirm that they, together with the Father, possess the same self-existent Godhead. In other words, the Father did not create the Son or the Holy Spirit's divine nature. That divine nature is always self-existent, without beginning or end. For a concise, detailed summary of this concept in Trinitarian theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (1985) 47.

7 See the discussion in Roberto Bellarmino, *Opera Omnia* (1870) 334ff.

8 These early critiques of Calvin are accurately surveyed in B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (1931) 252-58.

9 Josiah Simlero, *Responsio ad maledicum Francisci Stancari Mantuani* (1563) fol. 15.

does not mean that the Son has a part of the Father's essence, or that there are two different divine essences. Rather, the Son has the whole Divine essence in common with the Father. In human generation, the son derives a part of his being from his father, and thus becomes a separate substance. But in the divine generation, "not part but the whole essence" is communicated (*communicatur*) by eternal generation (*generantis*). It is precisely in this context that Simler mentions the name of John Calvin (*nomino Ioannes Calvinus*), who refuted the former error against the likes of Servetus and Valentinus Gentilis. It is clear from the context that Simler sees himself standing in line with Calvin in affirming both eternal generation and communication of essence.¹⁰

In the 17th century, discussion of Calvin's conception of eternal generation continued, especially with reference to his analysis of the Nicene Creed. In 1605, the Roman Catholic apologist Matthew Kellison chastised many of his British countrymen (including William Whitaker) for embracing the Nicene phrase "God of God" with respect to the Son as well as the idea of communication of essence in eternal generation. He argued that Calvin "in diverse places avoucheth that Christ is not God of God, as the Nicen council calleth him," and that he "denieth that by eternal generation God the Son hath his essence from his Father."¹¹

Similar arguments appear to have been propounded at the Westminster Assembly. We know from Daniel Featly's published speeches at the Assembly that he was moved to defend the Nicene Creed from the charge that it was out of accord with Calvin's Trinitarianism.¹² We also know that after the Assembly, Francis Cheynell also felt the need to clear Calvin from the charge that he and Beza rejected the idea of communication of essence in eternal generation (see our discussion below). However, the scanty nature of the evidence allows us only to conclude that some kind of debate took place among

The Latin reads: *Non negamus Filium habere essentiam a Deo Patre, sed essentia genitam negamus.*

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that Warfield, in his analysis of Calvin on communication of essence (see below), mentions Simler's own affirmation of communication of essence, but fails to mention his reference to Calvin and the harmony he sees between their views (Warfield, 274-75).

¹¹ Matthew Kellison, *A Svrvey of the New Religion: Detecting Many Grosse Absvrdities Which It Imphieth* (1605) 138.

¹² The speeches can be found in Daniel Featly, *Katabaptistai katapystoi. The Dippers dipt. Or, The Anabaptists Duck'd and Plung'd over Head and Ears* (1651) 187-216.

these British divines with regard to Calvin's views on eternal generation and communication of essence, without being able to precisely define the terms of such debate.¹³ It is noteworthy that none of these 16th or 17th century writers examine Calvin's works on this subject in any kind of systematic detail to demonstrate their point.

Of relevance to this debate on Calvin's views at Westminster is the Assembly's published decisions regarding the "three Creeds." On December 7, 1646, the House of Commons requested the Westminster Assembly to send them their completed work on the original *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*.¹⁴ In that document, Charles Herle, Henry Robrough, and Adoniram Byfield state that the Assembly had "proceeded onely to the finishing of fifteen Articles" (2). While they were not able to touch all thirty-nine before the order for a new confession of faith came before them, this quotation makes it evident that these fifteen articles were considered "finished," and as such were sent to the House of Commons at their request. Included in these fifteen "finished" articles is article 8, "Of the Three Creeds":

The Creeds that go under the names of the *Nicene Creed*, *Athanasius Creed*, and that which is commonly called *The Apostles Creed*, are thorowly to be received and believed, for that they may be proved by most certain warrant of holy Scripture (7).

13 In his published speeches, Featly discusses two separate objections made to the "three creeds" described in the Thirty-Nine Articles "either at the Titles, or to the Creeds themselves" (Featly, 187). As to the latter, certain men (who are not explicitly named) objected to the phrase "God of God" in the Nicene Creed, apparently on the basis of Calvin's conception of the Son as *αυτοθεος*, which they deemed incompatible with the idea that the essence of the Father was communicated to the Son in eternal generation: "But it hath been objected, if he be God of God, then he must have his essence communicated to him from the Father, and so be *essentius a patre*, essentiated, or nated from the Father" (190). But for Featly "this will not follow" (*ibid.*). Rather the Son is only "*genitus a patre*, begotten of his father, and so he is *recipiens essentiam*, or *habens essentiam communicatam a patre*" (*ibid.*). Moreover, he notes that this manner of speech is approved by Theodore Beza, who speaks of the Son, "*a patre per ineffabilem totius essentiae communicationem ab aeterno*; the Sonne is from the Father by and unspeakable communication of his whole essence from eternity" (*ibid.*). Featly is clear that "we doe not deny that the Sonne hath his essence from God the Father, but we deny that the essence is begotten" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Featly insists that this does not "in any way contradict *Calvin* his *autotheos*, God of himselfe" (190-91). He, along with many others in the Reformed tradition, viewed the doctrines of the *Aseitas* of the Son and communication of essence as complimentary rather than contradictory.

14 *The proceedings of the Assembly of Divines upon the Thirty nine Articles of the Church of England* (1647).

We emphasize again that this article was included among the other fourteen “finished” articles included in the document. While it is clear that the Assembly was engaged in vigorous debate on this point, this document suggests that at some point the debate had been resolved, and the minority opposition failed to win the day. In other words, evidence exists that the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, with their “full” doctrine of eternal generation, were apparently (at some point) officially accepted and approved by the Westminster Divines (the “excepters” notwithstanding).¹⁵

In the early 20th century, Calvin’s Trinitarian views were examined in characteristically programmatic fashion by B. B. Warfield. Warfield argued against the compatibility of communication of essence with Calvin’s view of the Son as *αὐτοθεός*. His argument is largely indirect, and rests primarily on Warfield’s deductions from Calvin’s understanding of the Son’s *Aseitas*.¹⁶ Furthermore, Warfield is quite open about the fact that one of his interests in examining Calvin’s conception of eternal generation is to vindicate (or at least draw a connection between) the construction of his Princeton teacher and predecessor, Charles Hodge.¹⁷

Warfield argued that with respect to the patristic doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, Calvin “seems to have drawn back from the doctrine...

15 As Chad Van Dixhoorn has noted (“New Taxonomies of the Westminster Assembly [1643-52]: The Creedal Controversy as Case Study.” *Reformation and Renaissance Review* [2004]: 82-106), it is true that on August 25, 1643 the Assembly “mooved that the determination of this 8th Article shall be put off till all the 39 be finished, & so it was concluded: & the assembly adjourned till munday” (cited in Van Dixhoorn, 98). Van Dixhoorn also accurately points out that the House of Commons, on October 13, 1647, excluded the eighth article on the “Three Creeds” from legal enforcement, and for this reason it was “left in an ambiguous legal position” (ibid.). But Van Dixhoorn fails (to my knowledge) to note the publication in 1647 of what the Assembly regarded as its “finished” word on the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, including the disputed eighth article on the “Three Creeds.” While the House of Commons may not have enforced it, there appears to be some evidence that the Assembly itself eventually resolved the issue of the “Three Creeds,” and accepted the eighth article prior to the publication of their “finished” (although in many respects “imperfect”) work.

16 This is an important point to emphasize, as Warfield recognized that a great deal of Calvin’s statements in the *Institutes* and elsewhere which seem to reject the idea of communication of essence are actually directed towards the constructions of Valentinus Gentilis (see our discussion below).

17 Warfield, 251-52. This is important to underscore. All attempts at descriptive historical research (including this present study) are not immune from being influenced by our own prescriptive theological proposals.

as it was expounded by the Nicene Fathers.”¹⁸ The latter, according to Warfield (following the secondary sources of Sheldon and Shedd), taught that the eternal generation was something which is “always occurring, a perpetual movement of the divine essence from the first Person to the second, always complete, never completed.”¹⁹ This was an idea that Calvin clearly repudiated (*Institutes*, 1.13.29). Thus Calvin’s position is that of one who “affirms the eternal generation of the Son, but who rejects the speculations of the nature of the act which they called ‘eternal generation.’”²⁰ Not only this, but Calvin (as Warfield later writes) seems to have rejected “the entire body of Nicene speculations”²¹: “... it would seem at least very doubtful if Calvin...thought of this begetting as procession as involving any communication of essence.”²² Thus Warfield sees Calvin as not only rejecting the “Nicene speculation” regarding the time of the Son’s eternal generation, but also the idea of “communication of essence” concomitant with it.

But the influential character of Warfield’s work should not cause us to overlook other analyses of Calvin’s understanding of eternal generation in the 19th century. For example, in 1850, Richard Field argued that Calvin “willingly acknowledged to be true” the Nicene declarations that Christ “hath his essence and deity communicated unto him by eternal generation from the Father.”²³ Though not nearly as comprehensive as Warfield, Field provides extensive quotations from the primary sources of Calvin, Bellarmine, Beza, Kellison and others to demonstrate his point.

Still, Warfield’s thesis has wielded great influence in the 20th century, especially among Presbyterian and Reformed scholars. For example, Lorraine Boettner (a student of Warfield’s) argued that the Scriptures “do not teach the doctrine in question,” and that “This, apparently, was also the position held

18 Ibid., 247.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 250.

21 Ibid., 257.

22 Ibid., 257-58.

23 Richard Field, *Of the Church* (1850) 43.

by Calvin” (citing the final sentence of *Institutes*, 1.13.29).²⁴ Likewise John Murray argued that Calvin’s understanding of the *Aseitas* of the Son “ran counter to the Nicene tradition” in rejecting the Nicene fathers’s (including Athanasius’s) interpretation of the phrase “very God of very God.”²⁵ As we shall argue below, we believe that both Murray and Boettner were mistaken in their analyses, but both fairly clearly indicate their dependence on Warfield’s analysis for their interpretation of Calvin.

In more recent years, heated discussion has arisen over the views of Dr. Robert Reymond, who appeals to Calvin as a precedent for his own rejection of the idea of (a continual) communication of essence. The first edition of Reymond’s *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* was significantly revised in a second edition, especially the section dealing with the Trinity in general, and the eternal generation of the Son in particular.²⁶ In both editions, however, Reymond not only expresses strong reservations about the compatibility of the doctrines of the *Aseitas* of the Son and communication of essence, but goes so far as to assert that Calvin explicitly rejected the latter doctrine. According to Reymond, “John Calvin contended against the subordinationism implicit in the Nicene language” (1st ed., 327). This is changed in the second edition to read, “. . .John Calvin contended against all subordination of the Son to the Father with respect to his divine essence” (2nd ed., 326). In an explanation of an extensive quote from Warfield, he states that “Calvin rejected that body of speculation in the Nicene tradition of the doctrine of the Trinity which would have included. . .the ancient Fathers’ conception of a *continuing* ‘generation’ and ‘procession’ entailing the *ongoing communication of essence*. . .” (2nd ed., 333). Again, he argues that “with Calvin. . .Christians should not believe that Father, through an eternal act of begetting in the depth of the divine being that is *always* continuing, is begetting the Son’s essential being out of his being” (2nd ed., 335).²⁷

24 Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (1985) 123.

25 John Murray, “Systematic Theology.” *WTJ* 25 (May 1963): 141.

26 Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (1998). *Idem*, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (2001).

27 It should be pointed out that Reymond doesn’t seem to distinguish between a communication of essence that is ongoing or continuing, and a communication of essence that is eternally completed. If he only has the former in view, it might be possible that he leaves room for Calvin to

Reymond's views have come under heavy criticism from two contemporary scholars, namely, Paul Owen and Robert Letham. Owen's critique of Reymond deals extensively with Calvin's writings on eternal generation, so it is especially noteworthy for our purposes.²⁸ Owen correctly argues that Calvin's comments in *Institutes*, 1.13.29 "should *not* be taken as an indication that Calvin rejected the statement of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed," but rather "as rejecting the tendency to picture the 'generation' of the Son as an eternal act, as opposed to an eternally completed act" (270). Owen argues extensively that "Calvin regards his own version of the Trinity to be in continuity, not only with Augustine and the Council of Nicea," but also with earlier fathers like Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Cappadocians (273). Though critical of Reymond's interpretation of Calvin, Owen does not deal extensively and explicitly with the idea of communication of essence in relation to eternal generation, although the concept is implied throughout his discussion. Likewise, Robert Letham's review of Reymond is highly critical of both his interpretation of the Nicene fathers as well as John Calvin. Like Owen, he argues for a basic continuity between Calvin and the Nicene fathers on eternal generation.²⁹ But he does not isolate the doctrine of "communication of essence" as a key point of contention.

A more recent assessment of Calvin's doctrine of communication of essence in eternal generation appears in the work of Richard Muller. Because of the influential character of his work, it is worthy of special attention. Muller maintains that the insistence on the aseity of the Son "became...the distinctive feature of Reformed trinitarianism."³⁰ Accordingly, "the concept of the

hold the latter. This distinction was the specific question that Peter Lombard raised in his *Sentences* (I.ix.10-15) to which Calvin refers. Should we say that "the Son is always begotten" (*Filius semper gignitur*), or that he always has been begotten (*semper genitus est*). Reymond *seems* (though we can't be certain) to interpret all forms of eternal generation as involving an ongoing or continuous communication of essence. Calvin, although he abhorred such speculations, at least recognized the two positions as being distinct. Reymond and Boettner seem to interpret Calvin's statements in *Institutes*, 1.13.29 as an outright rejection of communication of essence. We believe he is only rejecting medieval speculations as to the precise *mode* or *manner* of communication of essence.

28 Paul Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism: An Examination of Robert Reymond's Understanding of the Trinity and His Appeal to John Calvin." *CTJ* 35 (2000): 262-81.

29 Robert Letham, "Review of *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* by Robert L. Reymond," *WTJ* 62:2 (Fall, 2000): 314-319 (esp. 318-19).

30 Richard A. Muller, *The Triunity of God* (2003) 324.

Son's aseity became a defining factor in [Calvin's] understanding of the Son's eternal generation: specifically, Calvin defines the generation of the Son from the Father as an origination of sonship, not of divinity.³¹ In other words, the eternal generation of the Son involves only a bestowal of Christ's peculiar personal property and does not have reference to the substance of the Deity. Furthermore, Muller contends that "the radical statement of the Son's aseity found in Calvin's trinitarian polemic is not echoed by all of the early orthodox Reformed theologians," appealing specifically to various formulations of communication of essence to demonstrate this point.³²

Specifically, Muller examines the works of Ursinus and Polanus, apparently viewing the latter as more consistently "Calvinian."³³ It seems that the precise point of difference between the Calvin-Polanus position and that of Ursinus is the idea of a communication of essence in the eternal generation of the Son.

These formulations are, to say the least, quite distinct: where Ursinus speaks of a communication of Deity or Godhead by eternal generation, Polanus speaks more restrictively of a communication of Sonship or subsistence.³⁴

Where Ursinus affirms a communication of essence by eternal generation, Calvin-Polanus deny it (according to Muller). However, this polarization of Ursinus and Calvin does not seem to accurately reflect the testimony of the primary documents.

Muller argues that Polanus viewed eternal generation as "a 'communication' of existence or subsistence, such that the Son is begotten, but the divine essence that he has is itself not begotten."³⁵ This is does not seem entirely accurate. Though Polanus (with the rest of the Reformed) did deny that the divine essence was begotten, he did not view the eternal generation as *merely* a

31 Ibid., 325.

32 Ibid., 326.

33 Ibid., 326-27.

34 Ibid., 327.

35 Ibid.

communication of *existence* or *subsistence*, but clearly affirmed that it involved a communication of *essence*.

And as the very divine essence itself is communicated to the Son: so omnipotence, knowledge of all things, ubiquity, and other essential attributes of the Godhead, are likewise by eternal generation communicated unto him.³⁶

Polanus, no less than William Bucanus, affirms *both* the aseity of the Son and communication of essence.³⁷

Muller seems to make a similar mistake in his treatment of the teaching of Zacharias Ursinus, which he seems to portray as standing in tension with Calvin's understanding of the aseity of the Son (326). But as Warfield demonstrated (in a work frequently referenced by Muller), no such opposition exists between the two men.³⁸ Ursinus, no less than Calvin and Polanus, affirms the aseity of the Son. Ironically, if this is correct, Muller's treatment may leave us with a mild form of the "Calvin against the Calvinists" thesis: Calvin's consistent articulation of the aseity of the Son is compromised by at least some of his later successors. However, we believe that when Calvin's understanding of eternal generation is rightly articulated, the supposed tension

36 Amandus Polanus, *The Substance of the Christian Religion* (1600) 44-45 (cf. 43). See also Polanus's expanded discussion in his *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (1615) 201-04.

37 William Bucanus, *Institutions of Christian Religion* (1606) 15: "Ob. 5. The Essence of the Father is communicated to the Sonne by generation, therefore there is one Essence in the Father, another in the Sonne, because there is one Essence begetting, and another begotten. Answ. Wee must distinguish betwixt generation and communication: for the person begets and is begotten, but the Essence neither begetteth nor is begotten, but communicated." In fairness to Muller, he does note that "Bucanus also speaks of the essence as communicated, but notes that it is not begotten" (327). But the citation he gives is from p. 11 of Bucanus's *Institutions*, and does not account for the citation (given above) of p. 15 in which Bucanus explicitly affirms that communication of essence takes place "by eternal generation."

38 Against a similar attempt by the Lutheran dogmatician, Johann Gerhard, to polarize Calvin and Ursinus on this point, Warfield cites this passage from the latter's *Loci*: "It must not be supposed, however, that Ursinus separated himself from Calvin as to the Self-existence of the Son as He is God: his language is: 'the Son is begotten of the Father, of the essence of the Father, but the essence of the Son is not begotten, but, existent of itself (*a se ipso existens*), is communicated to the Son at His begetting (*nascenti*) by (*a*) the Father.' 'And what is said concerning the generation of the Son', he adds, 'is to be understood also of the procession of the Spirit' (*Loci*, p. 524)" (Warfield, 262). Cf. Ursinus's comments in his *Scholasticae in Materiis Theologicis Exercitationes* (1589) 239-40.

between himself and his successors on this point is significantly weakened if not eliminated.³⁹

It appears that most 20th century scholars have basically followed Warfield, contending that Calvin did not teach a communication of essence in eternal generation. However, H. E. W. Turner and Frances Young are notable exceptions.⁴⁰ They argue that Calvin argued “vigorously against the view that the Father is the *essentiator* of the Son...and claims that the essence of God belongs to the one true God alone” (113). They also note that Calvin’s use of *autotheos* with reference to the Son was criticized by Romanist theologians as a denial of the Nicene Creed and the eternal generation of the Son. According to Turner and Young, however, “Calvin...denied neither.” For Christ may be from another “either by production or communication of essence.” In refuting the former view (production), Calvin “sometimes used language which might appear to exclude the latter [communication of essence], which he clearly accepted” (ibid.). Thus they distinguish between the views of Gentilis (eternal generation involves the production of a new essence bestowed upon the Son), and the traditional view (eternal generation involves the communication of the one divine essence from the Father to the Son). This is an extremely important distinction, and in our opinion, is the key to understanding Calvin’s apparently contrary statement on the matter.

Other similar proposals could be examined, such as those of Thomas F. Torrance and Paul Helm.⁴¹ But our survey is sufficient to show that since the 16th century, two distinct views have been taken regarding Calvin’s understanding of communication of essence. On the one hand, there are those who have placed a distance between Calvin’s views and those of his Patristic predecessors and Reformation successors. They have maintained that Calvin’s conception of the Son’s *Aseitas* either explicitly excludes or implicitly stands in tension with the idea of communication of essence as expressed or implied in the Nicene and

39 In fairness to Muller, he does speak only of a “potential contrast” among the Reformed on this point (326), and also accurately notes that “definitions that speak of the communication of essence are not necessarily opposed to the notion of the Son’s *aseitas*” (327).

40 See their entry on “*Communicatio Essentiae*” in Alan Richardson and John Stephen Bowden, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (1983).

41 Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (1994) 4. Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (2004) 53-55.

Athanasian Creeds and the early fathers. On the other hand, there have been those who have sought to vindicate Calvin from these charges, arguing that Calvin's polemical writings on the Trinity have been misunderstood. Rather than refuting the Nicene conception of communication of essence in eternal generation, he was actually refuting the errors of Caroli, Servetus, and Gentilis. With regard to the latter of the three, Calvin was refuting Gentilis's tritheistic understanding of *production* of essence in eternal generation, rather than the patristic idea of *communication* of essence.

As noted above, it is our contention that the latter position is essentially correct in its assessment of Calvin's views. We propose to present what we believe are three fresh lines of evidence to support this position. We will present them in (what we regard as) their order of weight and importance, the first providing the strongest evidence, and the last providing the least strong. Our thesis is that while Calvin does not formally employ the language of "communication of essence" in a consistent manner to describe the eternal generation of the Son, he nevertheless affirms the substance of the doctrine. In so doing, Calvin stands in general continuity with both his Patristic (Nicene) and Medieval predecessors and 17th century successors.⁴²

Three Lines of Evidence

The first line of evidence comes from Calvin's confessional documents. There is at least one direct statement in a public confessional document where Calvin appears to affirm the substance of the doctrine. Calvin produced or heavily influenced a number of confessional documents in his long career at Geneva. Among these are two catechisms (1536/38, 1542/45). The first catechism (one version in French, another in Latin) is best described as a compendium of his 1536 *Institutes*. The 1536/38 catechism does not speak at length regarding the eternal generation of the Son in general, nor the idea of communication of essence in particular. There is only one comment on the article in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, our Lord":

⁴² The phrase "general continuity" is used to indicate that while there are certain differences in the way in which Calvin *presents* the doctrine, the basic substance of his teaching on this subject is the same.

Besides all this, Jesus Christ is called Son of God—not, however, like the believers by adoption and grace merely, but truly and by nature. Hence, is the only and unique Son, to be distinguished from all the others.⁴³

The *Genevan Confession* adds nothing to this general statement. In fact, it does not even include a chapter on the Trinity or the Deity of Christ—to the ire of Peter Caroli, who on this basis accused Calvin and Farel of Arianism.

In 1545, however, Calvin’s catechism was modified, most significantly through its utilization of a question and answer format. More substantially, it also included an expanded explanation of the eternal generation of the Son:

46. M. Why do you call Him the only Son of God, seeing that God calls us all His children?

C. We are the children of God not by nature, but only by adoption and by grace, in that God wills to regard us as such (Eph. 1:5). But the Lord Jesus who was begotten of the substance of His Father (*qui ex substantia Patris est genitus*), and is of one essence with Him, is rightly called the only Son of God (John 1:14; Heb. 1:2) for there is no other who is God’s Son by nature.⁴⁴

In this question and answer, Calvin clearly utilizes the language of both the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds by affirming that Christ is “begotten of the substance of His Father” (*ex substantia Patris est genitus; engendré de la*

43 James T. Dennison, Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Century in English Translation. Volume 1: 1523-1552* (2008) 372-73, cf. 425.

44 Dennison, 474. The Latin reads: “*M. Cur Filium Dei unicum nuncupas: quum hac quoque appellatione nos omnes dignetur Deus? P. Quod filii Dei sumus, non id habemus a natura, sed adoptione et gratia duntaxat: quod scilicet nos eo loc habeat Deus. At Dominus Iesus, qui ex substantia Patris est genitus, uniusque cum Patre essentiae est, optimo iure Filius Dei unicum vocatur: quum solus sit natura (Ioan. 1, 1 . Eph. 1, 3. Heb. 1 :1.)* (Hermann Agathon Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum* [1840] 130). The French of the 1542 edition is as follows: “46. M: Pourquoi l’appelles-tu Fils unique de Dieu, vu que Dieu nous appelle tous ses enfants? E: Ce que nous sommes enfants de Dieu, ce n’est pas de nature, mais seulement par adoption et par grâce, en tant que Dieu nous veut réputer tels (Éphésiens 1:5). Mais le Seigneur Jésus, *qui est engendré de la substance de son Père et est d’une même essence, à bon droit est dit Fils unique* (Jean 1:14; Hébreux 1:2). Car il n’y a que lui seul qui soit naturel” (the French text is available online at: <http://calvin2009.blogspot.com/2007/11/le-catchisme-de-leglise-de-geneve-1545.html>).

substance de son Père). The original Nicene Creed of 325 A.D. specifies that Christ was “only-begotten from the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father” (γεννηζέντα εκ του πατρος μονογενη, τουτέστιν εκ της ουσίας του πατρος; *natum ex Patre unigenitum, hoc est, de substantia Patris*). Likewise the Athanasian Creed declares him to be “God of the substance of the Father begotten before all words” (*Deus est ex substantia Patris ante saecula genitus*) which is nearly identical to the language of Calvin in his 1545 Latin edition of the *Catechism*.

The fact that this phrase appears in the 1545 edition of the catechism is especially important for our study. It appeared several years after Calvin’s troubles with Pierre Caroli, who had accused Calvin and Farel of heresy because of their refusal to subscribe (at his demand) to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. Furthermore, in the same year Calvin published a pamphlet against Caroli, in which he defended himself against his accusations. Calvin made it clear that in refusing to subscribe to the Creeds, he was not in any way depreciating them or casting them down.⁴⁵ His use of the language of these Creeds in his 1542/45 *Catechism* further demonstrates this point and confirms the fact (noted by Irena Backus) that in his later works Calvin “made very sure he relied on the Nicene and post-Nicene terminology when defending the doctrine of the Trinity, and that he put it first while insisting on its complete unity with the biblical doctrine.”⁴⁶

It seems difficult for us to understand this language apart from the idea of communication of essence. It clearly was the way most of the Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers understood it. If Calvin were simply to limit the eternal generation of the Son to the bestowal of a distinct personal property without reference to the divine essence, to speak of the Son as being begotten “from the substance of the Father” is a very imprecise (if not contradictory) way of

45 “*Calvino quidem et aliis propositum nequaquam erat symbola abiicere aut illis derogare fidem, sed quia sic aggressus erat eos Calorul, suspectam sibi esse eorum fidem, donec symbolorum subscriptione eam probassent, nolebant in praeteritum tempus tali invidia gravari*” (*Ioannis Calvinii Opera*, [1863-1900] 7:315). “To be sure, for Calvin and the others, there was by no means an intention to reject the creeds, or to take credit away from them, but because Caroli had attacked them in this way (their faith was suspected by him until they had proved it by subscription of the creeds), they were not willing in the past to be oppressed by such odium.”

46 Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (2003) 180.

speaking. If all Calvin held was that the Father *qua* person bestows the personal property of “Son” through eternal generation, he would only be speaking of the Son being begotten “of the person of the Father.” As it is, he retains the Nicene and Athanasian language describing his generation “from the substance (*substantia*, substance) of the Father.” It seems to us that if Calvin rejected the idea of communication of substance or essence, this articulation of eternal generation would contradict his other teaching. In light of Calvin’s rigorous theological consistency, such a thought seems difficult for us to maintain. As it is, Calvin clearly utilized the very patristic language in his 1542/45 *Catechism* that had almost always been understood to involve the idea of communication of essence.⁴⁷

The second line of evidence is more indirect and consists specifically of those passages in Calvin’s *corpus* which seem to clearly imply the idea of communication of essence in eternal generation. The clearest of such quotations can be found in his *Institutes*, 1.13.8 to which we will limit ourselves for the sake of space.

Nor is this omitted by John: for before he descends to the creation of the world, he says, that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.” We, therefore, again conclude, that the Word was eternally begotten by God (*Sermonem extra temporis initium a Deo conceptum*), and dwelt with him from everlasting. In this way, his true essence (*vera essentia*), his eternity, and divinity, are established.

Here Calvin argues directly from the eternal generation of the Son to his essential Deity. The one clearly logically implies the other: because the Son is eternally begotten by God, his true essence and divinity are established.

If Calvin only conceived of eternal generation with reference to the personal relations and properties of the Father and the Son, entirely *in abstracto* from their shared essence, it seems difficult to make sense out of Calvin’s argument. All one could conclude from the eternal generation of the Son is that

⁴⁷ It is important to note that certain portions of Calvin’s writings indicate he did not view his statement of the aseity of the Son as a radical development away from Patristic orthodoxy, but as standing in line with it. He would even affirm against Caroli “...that Athanasius made the Son *autotheon*” (*CO*, 9:268). Athanasius affirms both communication of essence and the aseity of the Son without contradiction. We believe the same was true for Calvin as well.

the Son possessed a distinct personal property that differentiated him from the Father. In other words, one could only (by definition) establish on the basis of eternal generation the idea that the Son had his own distinct subsistence. One could (in the nature of the case) conclude nothing about his substantial Deity, because he would possess this irrespective and notwithstanding his personal relationship to the Father. However, Calvin does not argue in this fashion. For him, the eternal generation of the Son is proof of his essential Deity. Implied in this argument is the idea that eternal generation involves some kind of communication of essence. As is the nature of the Father, so is the nature of the Son. Like begets like. A Father who is God by nature will beget a Son who is God by nature.

Third, there are also those in the 17th century who explicitly deny that Calvin rejected the idea of communication of essence. The most notable example of these theologians is Francis Cheynell, a member of the Westminster Assembly—and the only one to author a full-length, systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. He writes:

Calvin and Beza did not deny that the Godhead was from all eternity communicated to the Son by the Father; only they say,

- 1.) *That the Godhead which is communicated is in it self, of it self truly, properly, essentially Divine; because the self-same Godhead is in the Father and the Son whole and entire in both.*
- 2.) *Because the Godhead which is communicated, is not begotten; the unbegotten Godhead is communicated to the only begotten Son by an eternal generation.*
- 3.) *Because the Godhead which is communicated, is not caused, produced, created by the Father, as Valentinus Gentilis dreamt...⁴⁸*

He goes on to defend Calvin and others against those who say that “these reverend divines (Calvin, Beza, Viret, etc.) are guilty of Heresie, Blasphemy,

⁴⁸ Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Trinunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (1650) 232.

Atheism” because they affirm the aseity of the Son. Furthermore, he directs his readers to Calvin’s works against Valentinus Gentilis, which he believes will show that Calvin’s true intention was to teach that Christ is “one God with his Father, and that the Godhead which is communicated to the Son by generation is an unbegotten Godhead, a self-Deity.”⁴⁹ Clearly for Cheynell, an affirmation of the Son’s aseity and the notion of communication of essence in eternal generation are not contradictory.⁵⁰

Finally, there is the testimony of his contemporaries, both critical and sympathetic to Calvin’s system. Theodore Beza, who had firsthand knowledge of much of Calvin’s struggle with Caroli and (later) the anti-Trinitarians (Gentilis, Blandrata, Servetus), does not fail to articulate a doctrine of eternal generation that involves communication of essence: “The Son is of the Father by an ineffable communication from eternity of the whole nature.”⁵¹ At the very least, it seems somewhat odd that Calvin’s immediate successor would teach something so allegedly contrary to the distinctive views of his mentor (without comment or explanation), particularly considering the intense controversy surrounding it. This potential oddity is further intensified when we remember that Beza had firsthand knowledge of many of Calvin’s Trinitarian debates.

It is true that a handful of Reformed theologians, appealing to the aseity of the Son, seem to have explicitly denied the idea of communication of essence in eternal generation. Gisbert Voetius, in his *Disputations*, mentions only three: Keckerman, Trelcatius, and Maccovius. But as Warfield notes, even they would admit the idea, provided it be accompanied by certain important explanations.⁵² It is also noteworthy in this regard that Voetius himself takes issue with these theologians and argues that “these authors are to be excused because they took the word ‘communication’ too physically and had

49 Ibid., 233.

50 Cf. the comment of Mark Jones (*Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of Thomas Goodwin [1600-1680]* [2009] 135, n. 81). Though unpersuaded by Cheynell’s argument, Jones notes that it is “fairly representative of how some have defended Calvin.”

51 Cited in Warfield, 274. The same view was argued by Beza’s students in the Academy at Geneva (presumably with his approval): Theodore Beza, *Propositions and Principles of Divinitie, propounded and disputed in the university of Geneva, by certain students of Divinitie there, under M. Theodore Beza, and M. Anthonie Faius, professors of Divinitie* (1591) 5-6.

52 Warfield, 275.

Valentinus Gentilis in view.”⁵³ While acknowledging these minority voices, it is important to emphasize that the vast majority of Reformed theologians (too numerous to cite) affirmed communication of essence in eternal generation. Many of them (as Cheynell demonstrates) believed they were following Calvin in so doing.

From a more critical perspective, the great Roman Catholic polemicist, Robert Bellarmine, also read Calvin as teaching a communication of essence in eternal generation. This was noted by B. B. Warfield, but he dismissed his argument as resting on evidence that is “somewhat slender” and which “reduces to a single passage in the ‘Institutes.’”⁵⁴ The passage, taken from *Institutes* 1.13.23, reads as follows:

What will they find, by which to distinguish him [i.e., the Son from the Father]? If the difference be in the essence (*essentia*), let them tell us whether he has communicated the same to the Son (*annon cum Filio eam comunicaverit*). But this could not be done partially; for it would be an abomination to fabricate a demigod. Besides, this would miserably dismember the Divine essence. The necessary conclusion then is, that [the Divine essence] is entirely and perfectly common to the Father and the Son (*Patris et Filii sit communis*). And if this be true, there cannot, in respect of the essence, be any difference between them. If it be objected that the Father, notwithstanding this communication of his essence (*essentiando*), remains the only God with whom the essence continues, then Christ must be a figurative god, a god in appearance and name only, not in reality; because nothing is more proper to God than TO BE, according to that declaration, “I AM hath sent me unto you.”⁵⁵

53 I have cited from Warfield’s translation (Warfield, 275, n. 132). The whole Latin passage reads: “& autores illi excusandi: quod putemus illos communicationis vocem physice nimis accepisse; & respexiste ad Valentin. Gentilem” (Gisberti Voetii, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum* [1648] 1:465). I would note (as does Voetius) that Maccovius appears to have James Arminius, rather than Gentilis, as his chief target. See Johannis Macovii, *Metaphysica* (1668) 54-56.

54 Warfield, 258-59.

55 This citation is taken from the John Allen translation (1813).

Questions can and have been raised about Calvin's precise meaning in terms of the words "*comunicaverit*," "*communis*," and "*essentiando*." Yet it seems noteworthy to us that this passage convinced Bellarmine (one of Calvin's greatest opponents) that he affirmed communication of essence, even when it would be polemically advantageous for him to conclude otherwise. When read in light of his clearer statements in his 1542/45 *Geneva Catechism*, the evidence may be a bit thicker than Warfield and others have supposed.

Objections

In our judgment, these three lines of evidence provide strong evidence that Calvin embraced in full the Nicene doctrine of communication of essence in eternal generation. Not only does Calvin explicitly affirm the Nicene language used to express this truth, many of his contemporaries and successors (both friend and foe) denied that he rejected the concept. Still, as even many of these writers have recognized, there are certain places in his writings that have been construed as a rejection of the Nicene understanding of communication of essence. Therefore, it is fitting that we address some of these objections in order to confirm the thesis outlined above. Though these objections have been presented in various forms, the most significant ones can be essentially reduced to two heads.

Objection #1: Calvin was critical of the Nicene Creed because of its alleged subordinationistic construction of the Deity of the Son.

This objection has been stated by various scholars. To take just one example, John Murray argued that Calvin was not "willing to accede to the interpretation of the Nicene fathers, including Athanasius, placed upon... 'very God of very God.'"⁵⁶ This is simply mistaken. Although Calvin did argue that this phrase was a difficult saying, he took his own interpretation directly out of Athanasius. As Calvin states in his *Impietatis Valentinus Gentilis Detecta* . . . (1561):

But the words of the Council of Nicea run: *Deum esse de Deo*. A hard saying (*dura locution*), I confess; but for remov-

⁵⁶ Murray, 141.

ing its ambiguity no one can be a more suitable interpreter than Athanasius, who dictated it. And certainly the design of the Fathers was none other than to maintain the origin which the Son draws from the Father in respect of Person...⁵⁷

Calvin's interpretation of the phrase "*Deum esse de Deo*," perfectly accords with that of Athanasius. In fact, it was from him that Calvin derived his own understanding of the saying.⁵⁸

Others have pointed to Calvin's refusal to subscribe to the Nicene Creed as proof of his critical stance towards its formulations. Warfield is much more balanced on this matter, arguing that "Calvin refused to subscribe to the ancient creeds at Caroli's dictation, not in the least because he did not find himself in accord with their teaching..."⁵⁹ In book four of the *Institutes*, Calvin states that he unequivocally accepts all the ecumenical creeds (Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, etc) insofar as they deal with doctrines of the faith:

In this way, we willingly embrace and reverence as holy the early councils, such as those of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus I, Chalcedon, and the like, which were concerned with refuting errors—in so far as they relate to the teachings of faith. For they contain nothing but the pure and genuine exposition of Scripture, which the holy fathers applied with spiritual prudence to crush the enemies of religion who had then arisen.⁶⁰

57 *CO*, 9:368. I have simply cited from Warfield's English translation (Warfield, 249). Strangely, right after he quotes this passage, Warfield argues that Calvin's position was "that of one who affirms the eternal generation of the Son, but who rejects the speculations of the Nicene Fathers respecting the nature of the act which they called 'eternal generation'" (ibid., 250). If Calvin agrees with Athanasius's own interpretation of the phrase "*Deum esse de Deo*," how then can it also be said that he rejects his speculations (interpretation?) of the same idea? The same error is made by Reymond, who after quoting the same passage from Calvin, argues that "... it is quite clear that Calvin... was willing to be critical of the language of the Nicene Creed and doubtless some of the understanding behind it" (Reymond, 2nd ed., 328).

58 Stephen M. Reynolds, "Calvin's View of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds" *WTJ* (1961, 23): 33-37. Willem Nijenhuis, "Calvin's Attitude towards the Symbols of the Early Church During the Conflict with Caroli," *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation* (1972) 73-96.

59 Warfield, 207.

60 *Institutes*, 4.9.8.

The only qualification Calvin gives to his embrace of these councils is that it relates “to the teachings of the faith.” Surely, the doctrine of eternal generation as formulated by those councils is to be included in this category. On this point, Calvin sees himself in direct continuity with the Nicene fathers, whatever his distinctive contributions in its articulation and defense may be.

Objection #2: Calvin explicitly repudiates the idea of communication of essence in his Institutes, 1.13.23.

In Institutes, 1.13.23, Calvin states that “. . . whoever says that the Son has been given essence (*essentiatum*) from the Father denies that he has being from himself.”⁶¹ This statement (and others like it) has been read by some as drawing a contrast between Calvin’s understanding of the *Aseitas* or *αυτοθεος* of the Son and the Nicene doctrine of communication of essence with its (implied) subordinationism.⁶²

As even Warfield admits, these passages are not dealing directly with the orthodox formulation of communication of essence, but with Valentinus Gentilis’s tritheistic interpretation of eternal generation, in which a part of the Father’s essence is “bestowed” upon the son.

When it is argued that “whoever asserts that the Son is essentiated by the Father denies that He is self-existent” (& 23), and “makes His divinity a something abstracted from the essence of God, or a derivation of a part from the whole,” the reference to Gentilis’ peculiar views of the essentiation of the Son by the Father, i.e., His creation by the Father, seems to preclude a confident use of the phrase in the present connection [i.e., as a rejection of communication of essence].⁶³

An examination of Calvin’s Latin proves useful here. In the above passage, Calvin does not have in view the idea that the Son’s nature is communicated (*communicatio*), but whether the Father *essentiates* (*essentiatum*) the Son’s

61 *Nam quisquis essentiatum a Patre Filium esse dicit, a se ipso negat esse.*

62 Reymond (2nd ed.), 327.

63 Warfield, 259.

essence such that the end result are two different gods: the Father and the Son. In fact, the terminology is taken right out of Gentilis's book on the subject. As Calvin notes in the title of his work against Gentilis: "*Impietas Valentini Gentilis detecta et palam traducta, qui Christum non sine sacrilega blasphemia Deum essentiatum esse fingit.*"⁶⁴ Notice the parallel between the Gentilis's "blasphemous sacrilege" that Christ is "*Deum essentiatum*" in the title to Calvin's work against Gentilis, and the assertion in the *Institutes* that whoever teaches that "*essentiatum a Patre Filium*" denies that the Son is God of himself. The concern in each statement is with Gentilis's tritheistic conception of the Son's *essentiation* from the Father, and not the Patristic idea of *communication of essence* by means of eternal generation.

Conclusion

These three lines of evidence will likely not convince everyone that Calvin affirmed a communication of essence in eternal generation. Indeed, scholars of very high caliber have come to quite different conclusions. Still, in our opinion, more evidence exists to support the hypothesis than is often supposed. A firm and conclusive study would have to take into account a detailed survey of Calvin's anti-Trinitarian writings, nearly all of which remain in the original French and Latin. If a more careful study of Calvin's *corpus* vindicates our interpretation of the evidence outlined above, we will have another tool with which to further dismantle the more extreme forms of the "Calvin against the Calvinists" theses that have so dominated historical studies for many years. This will only strengthen a growing consensus concerning the general continuity between Reformation and Post-Reformation orthodoxy as well as the church's commitment to a Trinitarian theology that is at the same time fully biblical, Nicene, Athanasian, and Reformed. Ultimately, it will hopefully serve to enrich the church's understanding of her blessed union with the eternally-begotten Son of God, who "having become with us the Son of Man... has made us with himself sons of God."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Jean Calvin, *Impietas Valentini Gentilis detecta, et palam traducta, qui Christum non sine sacrilega blasphemia Deum essentiatum esse fingit* (1561).

⁶⁵ *Institutes*, 4.17.2.

Reviews

[K: *NWTS* 25/1 (May 2010) 50-53]

Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. 232 pp. Paper. ISBN: 0805431985. \$24.99.

The past fifty years have brought with it a revival of Molinism, the view advocated by the Jesuit Counter-Reformer Louis de Molina (1535-1600) who believed that God possesses and utilizes his middle knowledge (*scientia media*) to create a world in which creatures retain their libertarian freedom. Of late, many philosophers have come to Molina's defense, including William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Thomas Flint, and others. Arminians like Craig have found Molina's view advantageous for a theology largely sympathetic with Arminianism and one that seeks to act as a middle position in the Calvinism-Arminianism divide. Following Craig, Kenneth Keathley has also adopted Molinism in his new book, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. Keathley rejects the Reformed belief that God's sovereignty entails necessity, especially with regard to freedom whereby man's actions are understood in terms of God's causal determinism (14). For Keathley, such a view excludes libertarian freedom, with which Keathley refuses to dispense. However, Keathley believes libertarianism can still be affirmed if one adopts a middle knowledge position. According to Keathley, God possesses natural, middle, and free knowledge. Natural knowledge means God, prior to the divine decree, knows everything that *could* be. Also prior to the divine decree, God possesses middle knowledge, meaning that God knows everything that *would* be. God then utilizes middle knowledge in his deliberation of what world he wants to decree. Since God is able to foreknow what a libertarian free creature *would*

do in different possible worlds, God is able to use his middle knowledge to simultaneously preserve man's libertarian freedom and yet establish the type of world he desires. Posterior to God's decree, God also possesses free knowledge which means God knows everything that *will* be. Soteriologically, Keathley believes his position entails a rejection of five-point Calvinism. Keathley trades Calvinism's TULIP for what he calls ROSES: R is for radical depravity, O is for overcoming grace, S is for sovereign election, E is for eternal life, and S is for singular redemption. It is clear, however, that ROSES is far more sympathetic with the synergistic conditionality of Arminianism than the unconditional, monergistic nature of grace in Calvinism. Nevertheless, since Keathley's book indicates that his main goal is to provide a biblical account for Molinism, I will examine Keathley's attempt to reconcile Molinism with the sovereignty of God.

There are at least two strengths to Keathley's work. First, Keathley rejects Open Theism for its denial of God's exhaustive omniscience. Such a move is commendable in light of the unbiblical nature of Open Theism. Second, Keathley seeks to preserve God's control over events and persons in history. Keathley spends pages affirming numerous Scriptures which clearly demonstrate that God is Lord over all things and as Lord, he is in control (21-25). However, from this point on, Keathley unravels exactly how it is that God has control; for Keathley, Calvinism's determinism is not an option since man possesses libertarian freedom. Keathley believes middle knowledge is the key to explaining how it is that God can be in control and yet man possess libertarian freedom. Unfortunately, Keathley's middle knowledge position lacks biblical support and should be criticized on several counts.

First, Keathley seeks to present the "biblical" case for Molinism and he goes to great lengths to cite numerous passages which demonstrate that God possesses counterfactual knowledge. However, Keathley's presentation fails in two ways. (1) Keathley never shows that God uses this counterfactual knowledge to determine what world he will and will not create. Molinism is grounded in the fact that God not only possesses knowledge of what man would do, but that God uses his middle knowledge in deciding what world to decree. However, the verses Keathley lists never specify that God uses his middle knowledge to decide what world to decree. Keathley admits: "Scripture never states explicitly that God utilizes middle knowledge to accomplish his will"

(41). Other Molinists like Craig have made the same confession. Therefore, the “biblical” justification for God’s use of middle knowledge prior to the divine decree is left vacuous. (2) It is also questionable whether the verses Keathley believes support middle knowledge actually do so at all. Scripture is clear that God does indeed possess knowledge of all counterfactuals (1 Sam. 23:10-13; Matt. 11:20-21). However, counterfactual knowledge and middle knowledge are not identical nor does the former prove the latter. And again, none of these passages demonstrate that God exercises use of this counterfactual knowledge posterior to his divine decree.

Second, Keathley’s case for middle knowledge is dependent upon libertarian freedom (contra-causal freedom), meaning that man can always do otherwise than he chose to do. The implication of libertarianism is that there can be no single factor, internal or external, which necessitates or determines that man choose one thing over another. However, libertarianism is severely problematic. For instance, libertarian freedom is incompatible with God’s exhaustive sovereignty. If man can always do otherwise, then God can in no way guarantee the outcome of any particular choice. Furthermore, if man can always choose otherwise, then God cannot know ahead of time the exact choice man will make since God’s foreknowledge of such a choice means that man will indeed choose that which God foreknows rather than an alternative choice. Consequently, libertarianism is incompatible with God’s exhaustive foreknowledge, even if it be knowledge of what a creature *would* do in another possible world. Once God determines what world he will create, he foreknows every decision his creatures will make (free knowledge). This being the case, man must choose that which God has foreordained in this world, thereby negating libertarian freedom. In the end, Keathley is in the same predicament as the Open Theist. The only difference is that Keathley inconsistently affirms God’s foreknowledge and meticulous control while affirming libertarianism, while the Open Theist seeks to be consistent by denying God’s exhaustive foreknowledge in order to preserve libertarian freedom.

Third, Keathley’s case for Molinism cannot avoid the conclusion, especially in light of his affirmation of libertarianism, that God is dependent upon the creature for his knowledge, even if it be of what free creatures would do in a given circumstance. Consequently, God’s foreknowledge is not based on God’s decree, but God’s decree is based upon God’s foreknowledge—a view

which deviates from the biblical witness (Isa. 40:12-17) and resorts to the conditionality of Arminianism. Such a move conditions God's choices upon the libertarian freedom of man, a notion in complete tension with Romans 9. Some Reformed scholars (Travis Campbell for example) have even argued that middle knowledge compromises God's self-existence.

Overall, Keathley's interaction with opposing scholarship is lacking altogether and consequently Keathley's case for Molinism appears to avoid tough objections to his view. Keathley uses William Lane Craig as his primary resource for Molinism, but never interacts with evangelicals who have presented numerous objections to Molinism, including Paul Helm, Travis Campbell, and others. The same can be said concerning Keathley's case for libertarian freedom. Why does Keathley not address the numerous objections to libertarianism, both biblical and philosophical, that have been posed by John Feinberg for example? How can Keathley expect others to be persuaded by his view if he neglects to refute those who bring serious problems to bear against the Molinist position?

Finally, while the intention of this review was limited to an evaluation of Keathley's case for Molinism, it should be observed that Keathley's work as a whole abounds with caricatures and misrepresentations of Reformed theology, which in no way serves to advance the debate. Keathley, for example, is so bold as to associate Calvinism's determinism with Islam and the atheistic, Darwinian determinism of Richard Dawkins. Again, Keathley often errs when he picks extreme representatives of Calvinism to refute, only to then conclude that he has shown Calvinism to be inadequate (e.g., 80-84). The all too well-known straw man argument infiltrates Keathley's presentation around every turn.

In conclusion, Calvinists will find themselves in agreement with Arminian Roger Olson when he argues that a middle way position between Calvinism and Arminianism is simply not possible. Keathley's work is another unsuccessful attempt to reconcile libertarian freedom with Scripture's affirmation of God's sovereign, meticulous control over all things.

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[K:NWTS 25/1 (May 2010) 54-55]

John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007. 240pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-5813-4964-1. \$17.99.

Piper's response to N. T. Wright is a useful book for those looking for a basic orthodox assessment of the biblical passages on justification. This is its strength. His writing style is also lucid, making the book very useful for a broad audience. Piper goes through numerous biblical texts, engaging Wright's basic exegesis and refuting it. Above all, he defends the Pauline and Reformation teaching that the active obedience of Christ is imputed to believers in justification (contra Wright). For this, the book is to be commended.

Further, Wright generally reduces the righteousness of God to one category—God's faithfulness to his promises. Here, Piper does a good job showing that God's righteousness must involve more than his faithfulness to his promises. He shows from Rom. 3:25-26 that God's passing over sin creates a problem for God's covenant faithfulness. How can God be righteous in dealing with sin and so keep his covenant promises? If, however, the righteousness of God were simply God's covenant faithfulness and nothing else, no aspect of his righteousness could stand above the covenant to raise this question.

Another pillar of the New Perspective is that justification by faith only relates to Gentiles. Again, Piper takes on the issue. Following Romans 3:29-30, he shows that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith alone. These are only a few of Piper's helpful assessments of the biblical text.

At the same time, those looking for a penetrating understanding of Wright's presuppositions in modern critical biblical scholarship beyond E. P. Sanders will want more. While Piper does present a basic understanding of the New Perspective on Paul and Sanders' influence on Wright, he does not evaluate the influence of Ernst Kasemann or G. B. Caird (Wright's doctoral advisor)¹ on Wright's political approach to righteousness.

In this respect and others, Piper's book does not engage the eschatological

¹ Admittedly, the reviewer has not yet read Caird either. Thus, I note him, not so much to correct Piper, but as an encouragement for further research. I thank Benjamin Swinburnson for referring me to Caird's influence on Wright and to Wright's introduction to Caird's book, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*.

approach of modern biblical studies, either in its critical or orthodox manifestations. Piper argues that the righteousness imputed to us in justification is the obedience and righteousness of Christ (as noted). But we believe he would have strengthened his case by expounding the eschatological nature of that righteousness. That is, Adam looked ahead to a righteousness that he did not possess. This obedience would only arise as a result of his active obedience to God's law and commandment. Christ has now accomplished what Adam failed to accomplish. Thus, his positive obedience to the law while on earth must be essential to the righteousness he has imputed to us. He does not simply bring us back to the garden, but brings us to eternal glory and eschatological righteousness. This righteousness can never be reversed. For it is the culmination of Christ's active obedience to the law while on earth (as it would have been for Adam), come to its eschatological fruition in his death and resurrection. All of this is essential to the triumph of Christ's righteousness in his resurrection, now imputed to us. For in him (and all that he is), we have eschatological righteousness. Praise God!

In the end, Wright's own political approach to righteousness simply brings us back to the Garden of Eden, now made cosmic (a la Kasemann). As a result, the church's present call is that of political engagement to put the world to rights, to justify the world as we see it. This is a failure to recognize that Christ has fully accomplished eschatological justification and now imputes it to his people by faith. The consummation alone will bring our mortal bodies into a new relationship to that righteousness, as they are caught up in the heavenly places where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.

As noted, we believe that Piper's assessment could have been strengthened by expounding the eschatological associations of the righteousness of Christ in Paul. Nonetheless, we recognize that Piper defends many of the aspects of Christ's righteousness individually (i.e., topically) in a succinct manner. Clearly, his work deserves recognition and appreciation for that. N. T. Wright himself considered the work significant enough (even if only because of its influence) that he thought fit to respond to it in his next book, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision*. While we do not recommend Piper's work as the best book to turn to on this matter, we hope that it continues to help many in the church who read it.

—Scott F. Sanborn

[K:NWTS 25/1 (May 2010) 56-57]

David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008. 253pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8028-4007-3. \$26.00.

Did you ever try to catch an eel slithering through the water? Did you ever try to squeeze a chunk of jello in your hand? This is what David Wells, distinguished professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, is trying to do in this book. He is contrasting historical Protestant orthodox theology with the postmodernism of our culture. This is the fifth book in a series that he has written dealing with this subject. The others are: *No Place for Truth; or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (1998); and *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (2005). Concerning the series, he writes, “Running through these four books have been five themes that I am taking up here” (Truth, God, Self, Christ and Church). “Since this is so, I am not, for the most part, documenting the literature and research upon which this book rests since that has already been done. It therefore has no footnotes” (xiii).

In the first chapter, Dr. Wells discusses the state of evangelicalism today. He contends that it is no longer what it used to be, committed exclusively to the doctrines of historic Reformation Protestantism. Instead, the term covers a broader spectrum. There are those who are “classical” evangelicals, but there are also two other classes of evangelicals. The first is the marketers, whom he discusses in chapter 2. The second are the emergents, whom he discusses in chapters 3-7 in contrast with orthodox truth and postmodernism.

The marketers are adjusting Christian orthodoxy by attracting the attention of the “unchurched” by marketing techniques. They do so by making their church “seeker friendly” and the message easy to understand, i.e., dumbed down in content. However, the so-called customers, according to the church-marketing polls, don’t really want that. Instead they say (by about 90%) that they desire to hear about doctrine or belief (55). By adjusting the message to just get people to their church, they get many who will come only for the

experience, but never truly believe. Instead of looking for unchurched people, they should be looking for unconverted people (44).

In chapters 3-7, he discusses the emergents, but not as the central concern. He shows that as the emergents react to the present postmodern society, they relativize Christianity by gutting it of its content and making it something that it really is not. They have so compromised Christian teaching that it is no longer Christian. In each chapter, he discusses one of the following doctrines contrasting it with postmodernism: Truth, God, Self, Christ, and Church.

There are many reasons to like this book. Among them, it deals with a core problem of life in the United States. It analyzes postmodern relativism very well and comes to good conclusions about it. Wells grabs the eel by the tail. Furthermore, he does not water down the historic Christian faith. Rather, he contrasts its absolutes with postmodernism's relativism. And the book is eminently readable. You can hand it to your friend, who is enamored with all of the personal choices and openness of our society, and yet who does not want to answer to God. You can know he or she is going to get challenged with substance in these pages.

I have one caveat. On p. 116, Wells writes, "My focus here is not apologetic or evangelistic. . . . My focus is the church. It is on what happens after the apologetic questions have been resolved and the gospel has been believed. It is not on the terrain that has to be crossed before belief happens. My focus here is what happens afterward." I think I understand what he is getting at, namely, that he wants to have the church shape up. All well and good. However, every time the Bible is presented, it has a message for the believer and the unbeliever, whether in the church or outside the church. It is a savor of life to the living and a savor of death to the dying (2 Cor. 2:15-16). But also, nature is God's revelation of truth as well. God's revelation of himself in nature is known to everyone including the postmodernist. God's footprints are everywhere. It is his creation. Furthermore, man is his creation as well and he knows God intuitively. As a result, he suppresses that knowledge and worships false gods and false ideas (Rom. 1:18-20). This knowledge with its subsequent response by sinful man destroys all relativity because it is sin that blinds man and only God can change that. And God does through Jesus Christ! This truth gives a firm foundation for all that Dr. Wells expounds in this book.

—J. Peter Vosteen