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

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For the Faculty: James T. Dennison, Jr. (Editor), Scott F. Sanborn, J. Peter Vosteen

Typing and formatting: Tin L. Lee

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Vos Reviews William Henry Green

The intrepid Benjamin Swinburnson has uncovered, once more, a previously unknown document by Gerhardus (notice how his name is spelled at the end of the review) Vos written in 1896 as part of a tribute to his beloved former professor's long career at Princeton Theological Seminary.[1] We are reprinting it here in the interest of the distinctive Vosian critique and emphases. (1) The devotion to Biblical supernaturalism, ever the bane of Deistic, Rationalistic, Idealistic, Existentialistic, Linguistic and post-Modernistic approaches to the Bible (these are always essentially pagan when reduced to their base principles). (2) The unmasking of liberal, higher-critical fundamentalism which has ruled OT and NT studies for more than 200 years. Vos (with Green) skillfully reduces their major presuppositions to turning the Bible on its head, i.e., the Pentateuch is a late addition to Jewish religion because the whirling dervish prophets stand first in Israelite religious evolution—that is, 'madness' before 'legalism' (Vatke, Wellhausen, Van Seters, Thompson and a host of 'moderns' since the turn of the 19th century). (3) The rejection of any organic unity to the OT, since all the minute, disparate layers (documents such as J, E, D, P, trito-Isaiah, pseudo-Zechariah, etc.) are hopelessly endeavoring to smooth out a hodge-podge of religious notions—all of which requires more and more redactors (editors). And you thought your Bible was written by Moses and Isaiah, etc. No, No, the 'modern' interpreter of the ancient text informs you (and he/she has a Ph.D., so shut up and listen, hear!), Moses is a 'myth' and Isaiah didn't write more than the first 39 chapters of his book (if even that). It's all redacted, don't you

1 The occasion was a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Green's appointment as Instructor at Princeton on Commencement Day, May 5, 1896; cf. "Professor Green's Jubilee." *The Princeton College Bulletin* 8/3 (October 1896):54-55.

see?! Anonymous editors worked over these hoary texts and invented their own religion of the Jews. Organic continuity? Impossible! Contradiction (which, you will recall Emil Brunner, Neo-Orthodox colleague of Karl Barth, said was "the hallmark of truth"), opposition, tension, hallucination, fabrication—that is what we have in the OT, say the critical fundamentalists. From this morass of sewer sludge, Vos reminds us that the unfolding message of the OT is from God (eschatological revelation) who graciously invites his readers/hearers to enter his supernatural arena by means of listening to and believing on his Word—written and living (cf. John 1:1ff.). And that message still stands, as the critical fundamentalist theories of deconstructing and reconstructing the Bible fade in and out—fadish scions of mimesis, i.e., these fundies only see the mirror of themselves in the text of the Bible. Thus these modern interpreters of the ancient text must make the Bible fit their worldview, so they concoct yet one more anti-supernatural theory of how the Bible fits and reflects their own unsupernatural (pagan) world. Always, always making God in their own image. "And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary".

We have made a few stylistic changes in the review below which appeared in *The Princeton College Bulletin* 8/3 (October 1896): 77-79.

—Editor

The Higher Criticism Of The Pentateuch. By William Henry Green, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Oriental and Old Testament Literature in Princeton Theological Seminary. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895. pp. vii, 178.

The Unity Of The Book Of Genesis. By William Henry Green, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Oriental and Old Testament Literature in Princeton Theological Seminary. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895. pp. x, 583.

The two latest publications of Dr. Green, though companion-volumes, differ considerably in aim and character. *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* is a brief popular treatise in which the history, methods, conclusions, the religious and theological tendencies of the prevailing criticism are lucidly set forth in their most general outlines. It addresses itself to the public at large and requires no scientific acquaintance with the subject to be understood. At the same time, the reader will feel at each step that the discussion is in the hands

of a master, and that only thorough familiarity with the minutest details could have produced the ease and assurance with which the subject is handled. In *The Unity of the Book of Genesis*, on the other hand, the author exhibits by patient study of section after section and by a careful testing of the critical views in regard to each, the solid basis of facts on which the generalizations of the briefer volume rests.

At the basis of his criticism of the modern view, Dr. Green lays a positive argument in favor of the unity of the Pentateuch. This argument takes for its point of departure a rapid survey of the history of O. T. revelation. It is shown that the organic structure of the Old Testament, as it offers itself to us, presupposes the Mosaic legislation, and that the historical framework of the Pentateuch is so inseparable therefrom as to compel the assumption of a common origin. Dr. Green further explains how all the component parts of the Testament are strictly subordinated to and in harmony with its place and purpose within the Biblical organism. The choice of this position for a point of attack upon the critical hypothesis offers a double advantage. In the first place, it furnishes the key to the solution of by far the greater part of the literary and historical difficulties with which the critics claim the traditional view of the Testament is beset. Dr. Green is able to show that, his theory of revelation being accepted and consistently applied, the difficulties disappear and all the facts fall into line. And secondly, the fascination which the latest phase of criticism seems to possess, is undoubtedly due to its bold attempt to press all the phenomena of the O. T. into the service of one great constructive idea. By only emphasizing and carrying out the conception of an organic revelation, to the needs of which all parts of the Scriptures are harmoniously subservient, the charm of the critical hypothesis may be offset by that of a scheme even more attractive in its grandeur and simplicity.

Next the arguments in favor of the Mosaic authorship are formulated succinctly but with great force and clearness. The critics are accustomed to refer to these under the comprehensive and somewhat depreciating title of tradition. Tradition in this case includes the testimony of the whole O. T., the N. T. and, in the latter, of none less than Christ, of a large part of the Pentateuch itself, as well as of the Jewish and the Christian church, and this by no means according to conservative claims merely but, to a large extent, on the admission of the critics themselves. The objections that will invalidate this mass of

the most weighty testimony must surely be insurmountable. Dr. Green groups them under four heads: (1) anachronisms, inconsistencies, incongruities; (2) obviously composite origin; (3) clearly recognizable development of the law passing through several stages; (4) disregard of the law in preexilic history. Of these four the second group is examined at some length in the fourth chapter, which may be safely pronounced a model of critical discussion and which for keenness, cogency and exhaustiveness within such narrow limits, surpasses everything yet written on the subject on the conservative side. The author shows how all the phenomena on which the claim of composite authorship is based admit of satisfactory explanation. But he goes further than this by applying a sort of immanent criticism to the modern theory, and contending that, notwithstanding the utmost license enjoyed by the critics in adjusting their own criteria, in choosing their own division, in neutralizing contrary-evidence by inferences from their own hypothesis, and in thus making out the best possible case for themselves, they nevertheless have not been able to build up a consistent theory. Even to the finest manipulation the material will not yield everywhere. In numerous instances the divisive critics are forced to unreasonable assumptions. Especially the Redactor refuses to be made an intelligent agent. The numerous operations which the critics are compelled to ascribe to him do not reveal any plan or principle. The various sets of criteria, by aid of which the documents have been disentangled, are far from concurrent. The literary characteristics of the assumed writers, though originally obtained on the basis of the alternate use of the names Elohim and Jehovah in certain long sections, are yet found to clash with the use of these names in other sections. The resultant documents are not continuous notwithstanding the fact that in numerous instances the critics reason from isolated clauses as if no lost material had been connected with them originally.

In the *Unity of the Book of Genesis* these inner defects of the critical hypothesis are exposed in detail, each section being examined in regard to the first two groups of alleged evidence of composite authorship mentioned above. It would be a mistake to think that Dr. Green's argument in this part of the discussion is of force only to those who, with us, believe in the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch. We discredit the critical theory, whatever one may be inclined to accept in its place. We do not see how an unprejudiced reader can fail to perceive that the critical structure rests on altogether too precarious

ground to be accepted even as approximately probable. One might be tempted to go further than this and draw from Dr. Green's reasoning the conclusion, that, if the Pentateuch actually originated as the critics suppose, the very conditions of its origin render every attempted analysis of its component parts highly problematic. The much-vaunted agreement of the critics among themselves is no evidence to the contrary. As Dr. Green well says: "The consensus of divisive critics settles not the truth of the hypothesis, but what they consider its most plausible and defensible form. The partition of the Pentateuch is a definite problem with certain data, to which any solution that is offered must adapt itself. Experiments without number have been made to ascertain the practicability of this partition and what lines of division offer the best chance of success…And the present agreement of critics, so far as it goes, indicates what is believed to be the most practicable mode of carrying out the hypothesis that has yet been devised." (*Unity of the Pentateuch*, p. 130.)

The concluding pages of the *Unity of the Pentateuch* are devoted to an inquiry into the religious and theological bearings of the dispute. Dr. Green proves that the modern view destroys the historic credibility of the Biblical record and presupposes the origin of the O. T. religion from naturalistic sources. He reminds us that in point of fact the most prominent advocates of this style of criticism have been until recently, pronounced anti-supernaturalists. Finally he explains how the tenets of the dominant school rendered the same service against the cause of revealed religion which at one time the now antiquated Deistic and vulgar Rationalistic style of thinking were made to render. The documents are placed at so great a distance from the events that ample room is allowed for the development of those legendary traits which the Biblical records present as miracles, or dated so late that the most extraordinary disclosures of revealed truth can appear as the result of natural growth and the most marvellous instances of prediction as *vaticinia ex eventu*.[2] To a far larger extent also than is commonly supposed, the naturalistic taint inheres not merely in the results of this criticism, but in its very method and principles of investigation, whence they vitiate the whole process. As Dr. Green tersely

2 (Ed.) Literally "prophecy after the event", a favorite higher critical canon, i.e., that there is no predictive prophecy in the Bible because that would require supernatural insight/revelation. Hence all *apparent* prophecy is 'history' written after the event. In other words, the 'prophets' of the Bible are liars, fakes and charlatans; modern liberal fundamentalists like to say—this is how we come to experience their "actuality"! More anti-supernatural rot.

expresses it, the pernicious tendencies are inwrought in its whole texture from beginning to end.

There is one point of view from which the conservative theory regarding the O. T. appears at an immense advantage over its modern rival. If both may for a moment, and for argument's sake, be called hypotheses experimenting with the Biblical material, the conservative view alone accepts and uses this material as it is without reconstruction, whereas the critics are compelled to make it tractable by a manipulation, which is in reality an inference from their hypotheses, and in so far disqualifies it for establishing the same. The critics themselves admit that the traditional theory is firmly embedded in the Biblical records, and that the latter have been shaped into accordance with it by later hands throughout. This virtually amounts to saying that the critical hypothesis is by limitations in its very nature doomed to remain within the sphere of the barely possible, and can never be raised into that of the demonstrably actual. The extent to which it has been compelled to draw the large masses of historical evidence into the range [of] its reconstructive theorizing has hardly left anything unmanipulated available for the purpose of verification. If this circumstance makes it difficult to disprove the theory by historical evidence, it involves for the critics the more serious drawback of rendering their scheme incapable of objective proof. It may be safely left to the sober judgment of intelligent people to determine the claims to scientific acceptance of a theory which proceeds on the principle, that the facts, though at present contradicting it at each stage of experiment, ought not to be admitted as contrary evidence, because on the hypothesis itself the facts have been meddled with. Unfortunately, in the sphere of literary criticism, such a claim is not a-priori excluded, as it is in the province of physical science, by the inviolability of the facts. But nobody will be foolish enough to accept the bare possibility of its truth or the unlimited need of the critics to resort to it as sufficient evidence of its substantiality. On the contrary, each new hypothetical assertion of this kind encumbers and endangers the chief hypothesis which it is intended to bolster up.

GERHARDUS VOS

[*K:NWTS* 25/2 (Sep 2010) 9-35]

Muller on Divine Essence and Attributes: A Review[1]

Scott F. Sanborn

If Plato's dialogues, Shakespeare's plays, and Jane Austen's novels deserve to be called classics because every rereading brings forth new gems, so also does Muller's third volume (*The Divine Essence and Attributes*) deserve to be called a classic among the works of historical theology. It is a tour de force. It is rich in historical theological insight. And it does great justice to the worthy theologians whose thought on the doctrine of God Muller unpacks in these pages. Above all, it ultimately witnesses to the richness of the Scriptures above all merely human works. We are fully in Dr. Muller's debt.

This volume represents a continuation of Muller's attempt to show the continuity between the Reformers and later Reformed theology of the late 16th through the early 18th century. There is so much in this fine volume that any review of its contents can only begin to scratch the surface. And this review will only highlight some of its elements without doing justice even to the balance of the whole.

The initial stages of the book deal with Medieval background on the nature and attributes of God. This is one of the strengths of this book, as with all of Muller's scholarship—it sets before us the background of Reformed scholasticism in both Medieval scholasticism and the Reformers. We begin

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1 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Three: The Divine Essence and Attributes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003. 608pp. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-8010-2294-4. $59.99.

our discussion of some of the topics of this book by noting Dr. Muller's claim that the Reformed scholastics held different views on the relationship of God to metaphysics. While Muller argues that Reformed scholastic doctrine derives essentially from the Scriptures and not from metaphysical speculations about the divine nature, the matter of metaphysics has some introductory importance for our subject. For any claims about the divine nature seem to involve metaphysical assertions. But perhaps (according to Muller) not all the Reformed agreed on this point.

As defined by Aristotle, metaphysics studies Being as Being (Being *qua* Being). Thomas Aquinas taught that God was Being essentially and thus could be discussed in metaphysics. However, Aquinas stressed that God's Being was analogous to our being. God does not possess being in the same way that we do. His Being is underived,[2] immutable and eternal. Our being is dependent, contingent, and finite. In the 16th century, the Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian Francisco de Suarez rearranged the materials in Aristotle's work entitled the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle's work was a series of notes on the nature of being that were probably compiled later by someone else. Many among the Reformed accepted Suarez's rearrangement of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and with it his essential acceptance of Aquinas's view that God was the subject of metaphysics. Among the Reformed, Alsted falls in this category, and, we might add, Jonathan Edwards (with some possible modifications) as exemplified in his work *On Being*.

However, already in the Middle Ages, Duns Scotus had pointed out that the study of metaphysics deals with Being *qua* Being. And he argued that insofar as God is Being, his Being is univocal to our being. That is, "to be" or have being is the same thing for God as it is for us. In this respect, he disagreed with Aquinas.

Some among the Reformed took seriously the claim that metaphysics deals with Being *qua* Being. However, they claimed that, as a result, God was not the subject of metaphysics. God was not a substance. He was not composed of matter and form. Therefore God was not considered under the discussion

2 Muller points out that for the Reformed, strictly speaking, God is not even self-existent. For this may suggest that God causes his own existence and thereby imply a contradiction. For it may imply both that God *does* exist (in order to cause his own existence) and that God *does not* exist (in order for his existence to be caused by himself).

of metaphysics. Bartholomaeus Keckermann and Johannes Maccovius fall under this category. The reviewer wonders if they drew this last conclusion from Aristotle's claim in the *Metaphysics* that if we are to study Being, we must study it in its most fundamental manifestation which is substance.

God's Simplicity

According to Muller, the Reformed scholastics saw an interrelationship between God's simplicity and perfection as well as infinity and immutability, all of which are essential attributes of the first order. These are related to God as infinite Spirit. God is a spirit, and spirits are non-composite (simple) and invisible. Further, since God is immutable, he is necessarily non-composite. The simplicity of God's nature is that by which all his attributes are ultimately one in essence. God is not a composition of various discrete characteristics. At the same time, God is infinite and thus not limited as created spirits. Thus God is Spirit and immutably simple.

While Muller does not raise the question, we may ask if this is in harmony with the eschatological interpretation of John 4:24, "God is a Spirit". We see no disharmony here. For it may be affirmed that the qualities of God as a simple Spirit are fundamental to his essence as that is revealed in his heavenly and eschatological throne room. Thus, the coming of the new age in Christ brings God's people into greater vital union with God, their simple, infinite, and immutable Redeemer.

Muller has an excellent summary of the transcendental nature of being, that Being *qua* Being transcends all distinct categories. Then he relates this (at least by way of analogy[3]) to God's simplicity. God is simple and his essence transcends all *real* distinctions. Real distinctions are distinctions between things and this can have no place in God because God is not a composite being. At the same time, the Scriptures distinguish God's attributes and distinguish the three persons of the Trinity. Therefore, the Reformed asked; what is the *nature* of the distinction between God's attributes? In answer, the Reformed generally rejected the *formal* (or *modal*) distinction between attributes as well as

3 We make this qualification because Muller earlier states that some of the Reformed did not believe that God could be discussed under metaphysics.

the real distinction. Otherwise, Reformed scholastics differed on their answer to this question. Some considered the nature of the distinction to be *eminent*; others thought it was *virtual*, and still others *rational*. Here we briefly define each of these proposed distinctions. The formal (generally rejected) is the formal distinction between qualities like the formal distinction between the woodiness and hardness of a table (Scotus). The eminent affirms the causal foundation of one thing in another. That is, it affirms that each of the *ad extra* manifestations of God's attributes find their distinct causal foundation in God's essence (*ad intra*). The virtual does not affirm that God's essence (*ad intra*) is the foundation for the distinction between God's attributes. It only affirms that the distinction between attributes reflects the *ad extra* exercise of God's power or potency. And the rational is a reasoned analysis based on the thing that (unlike the others) "does not specify the nature of its foundation" (287; Aquinas). Muller clearly defines each of these distinctions in greater detail, showing how they are developed in the 16th and 17th centuries. These developments are either rejected or modified by various Reformed theologians. The Reformed generally reject the formal (modal) distinction between attributes, especially as developed more realistically by Suarez and used by Conrad Vorstius and the Socinians. At the same time, they differ in their choice of the rational, eminent, or virtual distinctions.

However, the Reformed do affirm the formal (modal) distinction between the three persons of the Trinity (at least in its original Medieval form). As John Howe affirms against Benedict Spinoza, God is not an omni-modus simplicity.

The discussion of the distinction between God's attributes involves the problem of predication with respect to those attributes. That is, it deals with those truths that can be predicated of God. Along these lines, Muller claims that the Reformed are spread across the philosophical spectrum. All are eclectic to some degree. Some are modified Thomists, others are more Scotistic, while some follow Nominalist arguments at points. However, with respect to the problem of predication, the fully Nominalist position does not seem to be an option. At least reading Muller's discussion of predication gives one this impression. The Reformed were guarded in their use of the term attribute. However, this care did not arise from the Ockamist concern that "attribute" ascribes characteristics to God that he does not possess inherently. Rather,

the Reformed were concerned that the term "attributes" might lead to the impression that the attributes are merely constructs of the human understanding. For the Reformed, the concrete relation between human understanding and the divine nature was crucial and their simultaneous assertion of God's incomprehensibility did not undermine this point.

In spite of these philosophical concerns, Muller shows how the Reformed received their doctrine of God from Scripture. Philosophy was simply a handmaid to theology, not its *principium*. For instance, following Jerome Zanchi, the Reformed scholastics often began their discussion of God's attributes with an exposition of God's names, not philosophical speculation. There was even debate over using the term "nature" (a term prominent in philosophy) with reference to God since it is a term derived from the creation.

Following the belief that Reformed scholasticism was excessively philosophical, it is sometimes thought that the Reformed scholastics did not deal adequately with the Creator-creature distinction. However, we find that they were very sensitive to the issue. For instance, following the reservations of Zanchi, some of them were apprehensive about the distinction between the incommunicable and the communicable attributes. For they thought that the communicable attributes might imply that God communicated to creatures attributes that were properly his alone. Thus some, like Franz Burman, distinguished between the Absolute and Relative attributes. For Burman the Absolute attributes were a different category from the *via negativa* and the *via eminentiae*, which were both categorized under the Relative attributes. Peter Van Mastricht followed a similar model, distinguishing between *quid*, *quantus*, and *qualis* (222).

Even those like Francis Turretin who accepted the distinction between the communicable and incommunicable attributes did so with qualifications. For instance, they followed Aquinas in claiming that (properly speaking) creatures do not participate in the divine nature. Rather they participate in the divine goodness which is communicated to them in the good effects of God's power. In this way, the Reformed scholastics sought to guard the Creator-creature distinction while acknowledging our participation in the divine goodness.

Together with these concerns, the Reformed sought to guard the utter independence and self-sufficiency of God. Muller's allusions to the divine self-

sufficiency show the care that the Reformed scholastics took on this issue. For instance, properly speaking God is simply life itself rather than self-existent. For to call God self-existent suggests that God continuously causes himself to exist. And this is contradictory. For it would imply both that God *does* exist (in order to cause his own existence) and that God *does not* exist (in order for his existence to be caused). Thus, it is better to say that God simply exists and is life itself (1 Jn. 5:20; 4). As John says, "He has life in himself" (Jn. 5:26).

Returning to God's simplicity, we may conclude by noting the importance of this subject against Atheism in our own day. And here Dr. Muller's work can help us understand the penetrating reflections of the Reformed scholastics on this issue. Recently, Richard Dawkins has picked up David Hume's argument against the argument from design and spread it far and wide. He argues that if the complexity of the world requires a complex cause (namely God), then that complex being must require an even more complex cause *ad infinitum*. Even Christians who reject any form of the argument from design will now find themselves dealing with Atheists who consider this argument one central pivot in their arsenal of unbelief. That is, they will reject out of hand a God who is rich in the manifestation of his attributes, considering him to be complex in the same way that the world is complex and even more so.

The Reformed view of divine simplicity presented in this volume speaks against such a composite understanding of the divine richness. Honest philosophers would do well to consider the arguments in this book. And ministers would be advised to do the same as they deal with the present intellectual climate. Alvin Plantinga has responded to Dawkins by noting that divine simplicity is at odds with Dawkin's own view of complexity as composition. However, perhaps because of the brevity of his comments, Plantinga suggests that a more precise definition of the divine simplicity may not be helpful in this discussion. But we would suggest that it can be. God as a necessary being is immutable and therefore non-composite (simple); and yet he must be rich in order to account for the richness of the cosmos. Further reflection on the nature of the distinctions among the divine attributes may help us here. Whatever one's approach may be to Atheism, certainly a careful reading of this volume will fill in the gaps and expand one's knowledge of God's simplicity leading to a greater witness to Christ.

Above all, further reflection on God's simplicity and spirituality will enrich the church's appreciation of the transcendent eternal glory of its Creator and Redeemer. And this discussion is essential for all that follows in this volume. All of God's attributes are simple in his own nature and thus none of his attributes (not even wrath and mercy) are at odds with one another. Instead, they all work in harmony in the richness of the divine nature. In fact, Muller does not fail to give us food for eschatological thought. When we observe our fellow humans, composed, and therefore capable of contrary virtues and vices, we are led to him who is non-composite and non-contradictory. And, we may add, to the eschatological city where he is most supremely present.

God's Immutability

We have already seen briefly how Muller describes the relationship between God's immutability and his simplicity. Yet this attribute has far more to offer. For instance, in Muller's discussion of God's immutability, we find an example of how the Reformed dealt with objections to the divine attributes. First, he points to the question—did not God change when he created the world (for in creation God first acted in a way that he did not act before)? Also, does not the incarnation change his nature now that a hypostatic union exists for the second person of the Trinity—a hypostatic union that did not exist before? In addition, do not the divine passions show that God is affected by creation and thereby changed by it?

First, Muller argues that in both the creation and incarnation, God only takes on a new relation external to his internal divine nature. As for creation, when God exerts his power, he exerts it toward something outside himself; therefore, this does not change his internal nature. It simply places something outside of himself that is now in a new relation to himself. It seems that Muller has in mind the fact that relations were considered accidental qualities in Aristotle's *Categories*. A new relation does not change the substance of the entity that is coming into the new relation. Muller suggests that the Reformed scholastics dealt with the incarnation in a similar fashion. The incarnation did not change the divine nature. Instead, the second person of the Trinity simply took on a new relation, now hypostatically related to a human nature. That is, the divine nature assumed something new in relationship to itself, but it did not change internally.

Second, God does not have passions properly speaking. For a passion is passive. Simply put (as Muller will show later), God's will is eternal and is not passively dependent on his foreseeing the activity of the creature. Therefore, his will is not passive and so neither can his affections be passive passions. They cannot change.

Perhaps in this earlier section, however, Muller is showing how the Reformed made the same point without assuming the immutability of the divine will in the argument. Instead, the argument seems to be grounded in the Creator-creature distinction in terms of the creature's finite nature. Thus, quoting Edouard Wéber, Muller states that a passive passion is "the property of a subject which, through an action exerted by an exterior agent, receives a determinate quality and, in the reception, is altered by it" (310). However, "finite creatures do not alter the divine being or add new properties to it" (311).

Some may object that denying passions to God denies that God has a relationship with his creation. But Muller claims that this does not deny "relationality to God" (311). Aristotle's *Categories* make a distinction between quality and relation. "The denial of a particular quality…does not impinge at all on the issue of relationality" (311). And thus, God does not have passions properly speaking because this would mean that the creature changes the immutable God—and this is impossible. Instead, God's nature simply bears different relations to different creatures. And in this way, we might add, God loves Jacob and hates Esau.

In his discussion of God's immutability, we see an example of how Muller ends numerous sections of the divine attributes with the ways in which reflection on that attribute contributes to Christian piety. Following these throughout this volume, we begin to see patterns emerging. For instance, many of the attributes have implications for redemptive history and God's promises. They also show us the greatness and glory of God by comparison to the vanity of this world. And in some respects they provide a paradigm that we are called to imitate, almost an indicative/imperative relationship. Muller also includes other elements of piety that do not easily fall within these categories. However, we will focus on these as examples, showing how they are illustrated in his discussion of God's immutability.

In terms of God's redemptive historical dealings with the world, God's immutability teaches us that he is unchangeable in his love to his saints and in his wrath upon the reprobate in final judgment. This is a source of both comfort and warning. As we have seen, God's immutability is also related to his spirituality and perfection. Comfort is supplied by God's spirituality through which he is able to overcome all our spiritual enemies. And God's perfection teaches us that he is the fountain of all good things (in this life and the life to come, we might add); thus we should place our confidence in him who is able to provide us all that is truly good. In addition, his perfection provides comfort to the godly in their weakness; encouraging them that despite their weakness, God will perfect his work in them; finally perfecting them at the day of Christ Jesus.

As for the contrast between God and this world, God's immutability is contrasted to this world of change and decay. Therefore, the world is vain compared to God. And God's perfection is contrasted to the imperfection and vanity of all created things, none of which can supply our needs as God can. Thus, we are to consider all things as vanity compared to God. In a similar way, God's spirituality teaches us that we are to look to that which is invisible, longing for the day when we will see God. Perhaps, we may add, in some respects we find the seeds here of what will be later called the semi-eschatological consciousness of the New Testament.

Finally, we are called to *imitate* God's unchanging nature by being unchangeable and constant in our promises and in our love to God and humanity. And we are to imitate God's perfection, being perfect as he is perfect, letting patience have its perfect work in us and perfecting holiness in the fear of God. In this imitation, the Reformed scholastics showed sensitivity to redemptive history. When God appeared to Abraham, he appeared as El Shaddai, the all-sufficient one and thus the all-perfect one. And by this, God encouraged Abraham to walk before him (Gen. 17:1-2). So also God's sufficiency should make us *want* to walk before him as the one who is sufficient in all things. And here, we might add, we find not simply the imitation of Abraham, but a call to the saints to identify with him who is all-sufficient in Christ as he revealed himself to Abraham. In this, we begin to see some of the *existential* insight of Reformed scholasticism into how the divine sufficiency should stir within us the desire to trust in that sufficiency. And we see some sensitivity to the

indicative/imperative structure of redemptive history. Finally, the redemptive historical note is sounded when the Reformed note that God's immutability implies that God will be faithful to his promises to come in Christ.

God's Infinity

Muller does a fine job discussing God's infinity. Reformed scholastics spoke of God's infinity in relation to space and time. God's infinity in relation to space is his omnipresence. And his infinity in relation to time is his eternity. However, the Reformed scholastics defined infinity and each of its perspectives more precisely. God's infinity is not simply a characteristic he has in relation to his creation. It is his own character per se. Thus, they distinguished between God's infinity in terms of his own inner nature and in relation to his created order. If his infinity is not his own character apart from creation, he cannot transcend creation. If he is not eternal apart from creation, he cannot transcend the temporal order. And if he is not immense inherently, he cannot transcend created special categories.

This has further implications for God's infinity in relation to creation. If God does not transcend creation, he cannot be omnipresent. As Augustine made clear, God's omnipresence implies that God's whole being is present to every place in creation. This is possible only because God transcends the creation. Any being that does not transcend the creation is contained in it. All such beings are extended in space and time. Thus, their whole essence cannot be present to every aspect of creation.

Some of the scholastics described God's infinity in relation to creation with greater precision. For instance, God's omnipresence is not only dependent upon his transcendence of space, but also his transcendence of all magnitude and multitude. As multitude is calculated with numbers, God must also transcend all numerical quantity. Neither does this change when numerical quantities are extended to infinity. It cannot: God transcends even the *infinity* described by mathematics. Thus, *God's own infinity* is not the same as the infinity of mathematics; rather, God's infinity transcends mathematical infinity.

Muller claims that the Reformed describe God's eternity as eternal duration. In support, he quotes the Leiden Synopsis: "eternity is the attribute of the

duration of the essence of infinite God."[4] Here duration is to be distinguished from succession. Muller makes it clear this does not mean there is succession of time in God. There is no before or after for God himself. Following Boethius, the Reformed believed that all time is eternally present to God. Muller says that the Reformed did not teach that God is outside of time. However, when he does this he makes a clear qualification. God is not outside of time in the sense that he cannot relate to time. Here he seems to be heading off a critique laid against the Reformed scholastic view of God's eternity. It is sometimes objected that if God transcends time, he cannot relate to time. Muller is showing that the Reformed scholastics formulate their view of eternal duration to head off this criticism. God is not a remote Epicurean god. However, Muller clearly shows that the Reformed believed that God transcends the category of time when he makes the set of distinctions we have summarized above and when he equates the Reformed view with Boethius. Above all, this is the clear implication of his discussion of God's infinity which implies both the divine transcendence and immanence as it relates to *space and time*.

God's relationship to time is similar to his relationship to space. God's omnipresence implies that God both transcends all spatial categories and is immanent to them. So also his eternal duration means that God's eternal nature both transcends all time and is present to all periods of time. As Boethius might say, God is eternally present to all time without being contained in any of it. God's omnipresence implies that all *space* (while distinct from the divine nature) is contained within God's immensity. So also God's eternal duration implies that all *time* (while distinct from the divine nature) is contained within God's eternity. Yet just as the creation is not infinity immense, neither is time infinity eternal. God's immensity transcends *space*, and only as such is he immanently present to all space. So also God's eternity transcends *time* and only as such is he immanently present to all time.

Finally, Muller shows that even those creatures that are said to be *forever* (and thus by implication glorified saints) will never become eternal in the same way that God is eternal. Quoting William Jenkyn's commentary on Jude, he labels them *sempiternal* rather than strictly *eternal*, reserving the latter term for God himself.[5] Muller argues that creatures cannot possess eternity

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4 *Synopsis purioris theol.*, VI.xxviii.

5 "Similarly, distinction can be made between the eternity and/or eternal duration of God,

in precisely the same way that God has it. The Reformed claimed (or so we would argue) that the saints will participate in God's eternity to the greatest degree possible for creatures. Nonetheless, they distinguished the eternal life the saints will possess in glory (in which previous world history will *simply* be past to them) from God's unique eternal nature (in which world history in one respect remains eternally present to him, even if in another respect he should look back to it as past). Again, we see the importance of making the Creator-creature distinction at all points.

God's Will and Middle Knowledge

Muller's treatment of Middle Knowledge is superb. If only William Lane Craig (whom Muller alludes to in a footnote) would come to grips with Muller's careful analysis of this issue. Middle Knowledge was a view promoted by the Jesuit Luis Molina to defend a semi-Pelagian view of grace and thus it is sometimes referred to as Molinism. It is now advocated by Craig. According to this view, God must have a knowledge of contingent things that might occur contingently apart from his decree. Those who advocate Middle Knowledge often claim that the Reformed view of God's decrees cannot do justice to contingency in our universe. It follows, on the Molinist view, that God must look down into the future (so to speak) and see those things that will take place apart from his decree and then decree them. If he does not do this (but instead decrees them prior to foreseeing them), these things do not truly fall out contingently. This is also the case with moral agents. God must foresee their actions prior to the decree in order for true contingency to exist in the created order. This way of supporting semi-Pelagianism was adopted by James Arminius and Simon Episcopius, as it has been in our day by Craig.

Muller shows how the Reformed view of the decree is consistent with a contingent universe by carefully expounding the Reformed arguments on the subject. But before laying out his discussion, we should clarify for our readers the nature of contingency. For the Reformed, those things that come to pass by secondary causes are contingent. Only creation, miracles, the application of

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which 'looks backward and forward' and is 'without beginning or end,' and the sempiternity or everlastingness of things that are in a sense 'for ever' and continually 'look forward to that which is to come,' but which remain 'alterable and dependent'" (359).

redemption, and the consummation come to pass apart from secondary causes. Everything else in world history is contingent.

However, those who believe in Middle Knowledge claim that the Reformed view of the decree is *inconsistent* with this affirmation of contingency. By way of contrast, Muller articulates how the Reformed doctrine of the decrees fits with the contingency arising from secondary causes. According to Muller, the Reformed believed that (logically prior to the decree) God possessed knowledge of every possible world with all its variations, possible histories, and contingencies. However, he only decreed one of these worlds.

In other words, if God knows many possible worlds with all their various possible cause and effect relationships, in choosing one, he has chosen a world in which contingent things take place contingently. And in this way, he both knows these contingencies before he decrees them and having decreed them, he knows they will occur before they take place.

Thus, God's knowledge of all possible worlds with all their various contingencies does justice to the contingency of the present world, even though he only chooses one of these worlds. For in choosing one of these worlds, he does not undermine the contingencies it envisions. Instead, by decreeing that world, he simply guarantees that the contingencies of that possible world will actually exist as contingencies. His decree therefore secures the existence of a contingent order.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's own view of possible worlds was largely dependent on this Reformed scholastic analysis. However, according to Muller, Leibniz held to the view that these worlds had independent consideration prior to God and it was from these options that God chose one world. This is where the Reformed disagreed with Leibniz, holding that these possible worlds find their foundation in the divine mind (they are not possible independently of his mind) and from these worlds God freely decreed one. Nonetheless, Muller points out that Rationalist philosophers like Leibniz found the Reformed arguments on this point more persuasive than the Molinist perspective.

Muller also includes a very interesting analysis of the different Reformed approaches to dealing with conditional outcomes in Scripture. Here he high-

lights different approaches to the implication of 1 Sam. 23:9-13, namely, that if David had stayed in Keilah, he would have been betrayed.

As for the divine will, Muller deals in detail with distinctions between the secret and revealed will of God and the decretive will (*voluntas beneplaciti*) and perceptive will (*voluntas signi*). Reformed scholastics did not believe that these later two perspectives on the divine will were contradictory because they are not directed to the same end. As an example, Muller examines how the Reformed reconciled God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac with God's secret will to spare him.

Then he shows how the preceptive will alone can be rightly distinguished in the *voluntas absoluta* (absolute will) and the *voluntas conditionata* (conditional will). God absolutely wills to act effectively in history and reveals this to his prophets. But the revealed will rests in a condition (to save men upon a condition of faith). The Arminians wrongly apply the *voluntas conditionata* to the decretive will. They also wrongly distinguish between the *voluntas antecedens* and the *voluntas consequens*, using this distinction to attribute fluctuating passions to God.

Ironically, the Arminians claim that the Reformed distinctions split God's will in two. But it is the Arminians who attribute to God two real contradictory wills. For they claim that God both *antecedently* wills the salvation of everyone and *consequently* does *not* will the salvation of everyone. And both of these wills are eternal in God. Thus God is an eternal contradiction (a la Arminianism).

Arminians also imply that secondary causality is not under God's control. However, if God is the final cause of all things, there cannot be a final cause above his will. God's will only appears to differ in relation to different periods of time. Since God's eternal will comes into different relations to different points of time, from the point of view of one time it appears that the divine will related to it comes after the divine will in its relation to a previous point of time. However, in itself, God's will is eternal, unchanging, and the final cause of all things.

Muller also expands on the distinction between God's necessary and free will, a distinction that will resonate in his discussion of John Owen's view of divine justice. According to this distinction, God necessarily wills everything

that is necessary to his own nature *ad intra*. On the other hand, he is free to choose between alternative possibilities *ad extra*.[6] With reference to this freedom of the divine will, the Reformed can loosely speak of the contingency of the divine will *ad extra*. Of course, this contingency always depends upon the divine nature and not upon created beings themselves. In fact, some of the Reformed argue that the contingency of the divine will (insofar as it is free) is the ground of all contingency in the created order. This is an interesting observation in itself. At the same time, if true, it would reinforce the fact that the contingency of God's will cannot be grounded in the contingent order (a la Middle Knowledge) for that contingency itself is grounded in God's will, freely considered.

Muller examines the distinction between the *voluntas efficiens* or *effectiva* and the *voluntas permittens* or *permissiva* (permissive will). While John Calvin may have some questions about this distinction (according to Muller), the vast majority of Reformed theologians followed the Italian Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, in making this distinction. Under this distinction, it must be affirmed that God accomplishes all things either by efficient cause alone or by co-efficiency with secondary causes. As a result, God's permissive will with respect to sin is allowed, but only by means of secondary causes. According to God's permissive will, he does not positively will sin. Instead, he negatively wills it. Thus, God wills only the defects, not the effects.[7] As a result, God himself does not effect sin. Rather, he permissively wills it by not withdrawing the divine concursus required for the existence of things in their accomplishment. On the other hand, in the redemption of his people, he positively works in their hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit to effect their regeneration and sanctification. As a result, God is not the author of sin.

Brian Armstrong has argued that many of the scholastic distinctions concerning the divine will made by later Reformed theologians departed from the Reformers. However, Muller points out that there is perhaps more continuity

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6 We may note in passing that this is where Middle Knowledge gets its name. As Muller shows, it is the view that there is a middle knowledge between God's necessary knowledge (based on the divine possibility) and his free knowledge (dependent on the decree). In making only a distinction between God's necessary and free knowledge, the Reformed reject Middle Knowledge.

7 While Muller does not raise the question, we might ask whether this fits together with a privative notion of evil among Reformed scholastics.

between the Reformers and later Reformed scholastics on the divine will than on the knowledge of God. Each made these distinctions not for the purpose of speculative reflection on the divine essence per se, but for the purpose of salvation. These distinctions were not an attempt to pry into the divine mysteries or to make philosophical distinctions beyond those initiated by the Reformers (contra Armstrong). Instead, in continuity with the Reformers, they defended the fully gracious nature of redemption.

As with other sections, Muller closes his discussion of the divine will with its implications for piety. Since God is sovereign in his decrees, we can trust in the heavenly Father and find salvation in him alone. Also, God's will is free and not bound to temporal things. Thus, nothing can happen to his people apart from the good will of their heavenly Father. Arminians cannot do full justice to this comfort of the saints since they believe that God's will (and thus God himself) is dependent on temporal things.

In concluding our discussion on the divine will, we note one possible reservation about one aspect of Muller's analysis. Our reservation involves one further question that might be asked about the relationship of the divine will to human history. Are things good because God so wills them or does God will them because they are good? According to Muller, the Reformed assert two sides of this coin. To us God's will is the highest rule of righteousness. But God's will corresponds to his most holy nature. As a result, Muller believes that the Reformed advocated the primacy of the will in God, placing them more in the Scotus or Nominalist camp than the Thomist camp on this point. At the same time, this does not mean (contrary to earlier scholarship) an utter arbitrariness on God's part. Nevertheless, Muller later presents arguments that do not suggest the primacy of the will, but an interrelationship between will and intellect in God.

However, we wonder if there is some ambiguity here with respect to the term "things". Are we to think of God's decree insofar as God chooses an alternative between two things, the choice between which is morally indifferent, such as whether God decrees that the New York Yankees will play on a certain day or not? Or are we to think of the ground of God's moral commandments to rational creatures, whether God will forbid adultery or not? If the choice is morally indifferent, we are to consider God's free decree. If the choice respects

the moral standards his image bearers must follow (should he freely create them), then his nature compels him to prescribe certain laws for them. At the same time we ask, do not both God's free and subsequently necessary decrees (as conceived by the Reformed) fit with the primacy of the intellect in God? For God's *knowledge* of all possible worlds is the basis of his freely chosen decree and God's nature is the ground of his moral commandments. And even the divine commands that are not necessary to the divine nature (such as the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) are known as possibilities to the divine mind prior to the decree of the divine will.

God's Justice and Righteousness

Muller's general discussion of God's justice is very helpful. It uncovers the breadth of the Reformed conception of righteousness. God as the highest good defines the true nature of righteousness and justice. God's justice first involves God being true to himself. God's righteousness is the "universal *rectitude and perfection* of the divine nature" (481). Second, it involves God being true to who he is in relation to his creation as its Creator and sustainer and as the one who is the goal of the creation. In this respect, Wolfgang Musculus related God's righteousness to his power stating: "the *iustitia Dei* is the power by which God rightly accomplishes these ends" (477).

N. T. Wright, take note. Muller quotes John Calvin as stating that the righteousness of God involves his "faithfulness in fulfilling the promises" (479). This is not a novel development of the New Perspective on Paul.

Muller spends a good deal of time dealing with John Owen's evaluation of God's justice in the latter's *Dissertation on Divine Justice.* Owen deals with the question of whether punitive justice is absolute and necessary to God or whether it is free to God, obligating him to no particular response to sin. Owen argues that it is absolute and necessary to God, agreeing with Maccovius, and also agreeing (with some modification) with Sibrandus Lubbertus and Johannes Piscator. He disagrees with William Twisse and Samuel Rutherford, who held that God's justice did not obligate him to punish sin.

Owen rejected what he considered an excessively Scotistic approach to God's justice. The Arminians and Socinians are Owen's chief antagonists

since they both: (1) deny Christ's full penal satisfaction for sin; and (2) claim that vindicatory justice is not a necessary attribute of God, but a free exercise of his will *ad extra*. However, since Twisse and Rutherford only hold to the second point, Owen believes they are orthodox. Nonetheless, he believes his disagreement with them on this point is important and Francis Turretin follows Owen in this evaluation.

Nonetheless, Owen and Turretin argue that vindicatory justice is not the proper work of God. And we may be able to summarize Muller's evaluation of this issue into two points. First, God's nature did not obligate him to execute his wrath absolutely considered. That is, God was free to create or not create creatures that might fall under his divine wrath. Thus, God might have existed for all eternity without executing his wrath and nonetheless have been completely true to his nature. However, having freely chosen to create moral creatures in a state of testing, he was obligated to punish sin should they fall. Second, God can choose to have mercy (even though the exercise of that mercy must satisfy the divine justice, contra Twisse and Rutherford). Thus, God is slow to wrath.

Owen and Turretin generally followed the Anselmic tradition, while giving it greater precision. Twisse, on the other hand, used Scotus's critique of Anselm. According to Muller, Calvin argued against Anselm that there was no absolute necessity to the atonement, but that it arose from a heavenly decree. However, the way that Muller describes Calvin's disagreement at this point suggests his similarity to Owen. For Calvin only rejected the idea that God was obligated to send Christ. But he did not reject the fact that Christ was necessary for our salvation, should God freely choose to save us. Nonetheless, Muller afterwards claims that there is a Scotistic element in Calvin's identification of the decretive will as the sole ground of the merit of Christ. However, we may ask, does the evidence support this claim? On this point, we believe we need more convincing.

Together with Dr. Muller's excellent exposition of Owen's treatise on divine justice, we voice one more reservation. Muller notes that Owen, to support his view of divine justice, appeals to Maccovius, Francis Junius, Moise Amyraut and John Cameron all in the same breath. Muller deduces from this that Owen included the Amyraldian divines (Amyraut and Cameron) among

the orthodox camp, for Owen includes them with Maccovius and Junius, who are clear examples of orthodoxy. This fits with Muller's continuing claim that the Amyraldians are orthodox. But is this justified? We are not persuaded, especially when orthodoxy is defined confessionally. First, we note that a theologian is not orthodox just because he holds to an Anselmic or modified Anselmic theory of the necessity of the atonement over against orthodox theologians who reject Anselm's view. Other factors can come into play that determine one's orthodoxy. Secondly, Owen himself is not orthodox with respect to the Westminster Confession or the Helvetic Consensus, being sympathetic with Cameron and Amyraut on the Mosaic covenant. As a result, at least with respect to Westminster, Owen consciously demurred, working with a committee to develop the Savoy Declaration. Thus, according to Reformed confessional standards, the Amyraldians (who could not sign any of the above confessions) were not orthodox.

God's Holiness

As Muller notes, early Reformed theologians generally did not discuss the holiness of God separately in their systems. However, later writers dealt with it in more detail while remaining in continuity with the Reformers on its essential nature. They claimed that God's holiness is his separation from sin and the world. And in this respect, we might add, they recognized its transcendent character, by which we now recognize that it is preeminently associated with God's transcendent eschatological throne room. In addition, the Reformed argued that holiness is not one perfection, but the unity of all God's perfections in opposition to sin. And so it is related to his simplicity and spirituality.

God's Goodness and Related Attributes

Muller's section on God's goodness is helpful. God's goodness, for the Reformed, is first his essential attribute, which (like unity) is a primary perfection. Second, it is a primary characteristic of all God's relationships with the finite order. Thus, it is the primary affection of God's will. As a result, in Reformed theology, it is often found with other affections of the divine will such as love, grace, and mercy.

Muller believes that the Reformed focused on the egress of the divine goodness (the communication of the divine goodness *ad extra*) rather than the goodness of God's eternal nature. This suggests a volitional understanding of the divine goodness and related attributes. Thus, Muller argues that this points more toward a Scotistic approach and away from a Thomistic one.

We also note a couple of other aspects of the divine goodness. Muller mentions three kinds of good: (1) the pleasurable; (2) the useful; and (3) God as the fountain of goodness. To the reviewer, this sounds similar to the Aristotelian and Thomistic view that there are three kinds of good: the moral, the useful, and the pleasurable. Muller also notes a teleological orientation to the good, stating that God is the chief good of all creatures so that all terminate their desires in him. Here we see that the influence of Newtonian science (with its disregard for final causality) had not invaded the Reformed scholastics at this point. Instead, we recognize the influence of a modified Aristotelians on the issue of causation (whether of a Thomist or Scotist variety).

The reviewer also wonders if some of Muller's other suggestions on the divine goodness reflect a continuing Thomist concern. Earlier in this book, Dr. Muller suggests that many of the Reformed taught something which, with some modification, came to be identified with Leibniz—namely, that this is the best of all possible worlds. In other words, God's works are perfect. However, later in the book, he points to Reformed writers who state that God could have created a greater number of excellent entities, perhaps following the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. How might these two perspectives be reconciled? Muller does not appear to raise the question. Perhaps, we are lead to believe (from the Reformed scholastic point of view) that this is the best of all possible worlds, but not the greatest (or most excellent) of all possible worlds. That is, it is the best, in the sense that God's wisdom chose this above all possible worlds to be the world he would decree. Thus, it is the best in the sense that God always does what is best. On the other hand, when things are considered in terms of the goodness God has constituted in their natures, God could have created a world with a greater multitude of excellent entities. Is this how the Reformed reconciled the interrelationship of these two claims? Perhaps further research will shed light on this question.

God's Omnipotence and Majesty

Muller deals extensively with God's power, arguing that the Reformed often adopt language which suggests the Scotus distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. *Potentia absoluta* is God's absolute power; what he is able to do. *Potentia ordinata* is God's ordained power; what God has ordained to take place. However, Muller suggests that the Reformed rejected the speculations of the late Middle Ages surrounding this distinction. Thus, they denied the claim that God could sin or make something with two contradictory qualities, as is affirmed in transubstantiation. For the latter teaches that the wafer is both bread and the body of Christ simultaneously. On the contrary, the Reformed affirmed that God could not do what is absolutely impossible to be done. Thus, he cannot do anything to limit his nature such as make a rock bigger than he can lift. As a correlative, he cannot create anything infinite. His creation must be finite.

In addition, Muller has fine sections on God's majesty and dominion, each of which flesh out many of the interrelationships between these attributes and the other divine attributes and works *ad extra*. Reflection on these sections will lead those meditating upon the kingdom of God to a greater appreciation of how his kingdom is grounded in his divine, eternal nature. And thus, the reader will be lead to understand more fully what it means for God to be "with us" in the coming of the kingdom.

God's Affections or Virtues and Love

The Reformed refer to the divine virtues or affections rather than the divine passions. Those who use the term virtues do so because they consider it more precise, for affections are often considered changeable in general usage.

However, none of the Reformed scholastics that Muller has examined refer to the divine passions. Passions are passive qualities. They arise first from a knowledge of the object and then terminate in the knower. They also suggest some subjection of the knower to the object. But God knows all things from eternity. Thus, his knowledge is not a passive response to things. It originates

from himself and terminates in the object. Neither is God subject to his creatures in the outflow of his affections.

The Socinians (by contrast) argued that there were changing affections in God because they believed that the affections of God were grounded in their objects.

It may be asked whether this view of affections leads to a cold view of God in his dealings with men. To the contrary, argues Muller, because the Reformed believed that God's love and affections were eternal, they found their lives and hearts grounded in God's eternal unchanging affections to them in Christ. On the other hand, we may ask (though Muller does not raise this question)—are the more casual forms of worship in our own day grounded in an Arminian approach to God's affections? For the Arminian view of the divine affections must be as conditional as the Arminian view of the eternal decree.

Owen distinguishes between the works of God *ad intra* and *ad extra*, placing the affections in the latter category. However, love is both an affection of God *ad extra* and an inherent eternal attribute of his nature.[8] In this way, the Reformed distinguished between *voluntary* love of God *ad extra* and the *natural* love of God. The latter may be distinguished in three ways: (1) in the *ad intra* love of the Father for the Son from which the *ad extra* love of God for the redeemed flows; (2) in the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (according to some Reformed scholastics); and (3) in the love of the Father for the Son as the pattern of salvation. (However, we are not sure how this third point is a precisely *ad intra* relation.) At the same time, Muller suggests that the intra-Trinitarian relations are not the only thing that grounds God's love for himself. He argues that God's love for his own being (dealt with under the divine essence and attributes) is essential to his natural love for himself. This is in addition to the love of the Father for the Son and occasionally the Holy Spirit that binds them together (dealt with under the doctrine of the Trinity).

The Reformed also discuss the "*amor voluntarius*, dividing it either into two main parts, the *amor benevolentiae* (love of benevolence) and *amor com-*

8 Muller later suggests that some of the Reformed argued for the eternity of all of God's affections, while others argued that only love and joy are eternal since God directs these toward himself.

placentiae vel amicitiae (love of delight or friendship) and then dividing the *amor benevolentiae* into subcategories" (566). In this way, they are in continuity with the Medieval tradition and precursors to Jonathan Edward's great work *The Nature of True Virtue*.

God's Grace and Mercy

For the Reformed, the grace of God is both an eternal attribute of God and a divine affection displayed in creation and redemption. As Muller states, God's grace is "one of the perfections of the divine nature" and is "a characteristic of God's relations to the finite order, apart from sin, in the act of divine condescension to relate to finite creatures" (570). The Reformed went so far as to state that "God is eternally 'capable of manifesting his benevolence to creatures apart from any merit'—'even if there were no creature' in existence" (570). From this point of view, God's grace is an eternal attribute and flows out from himself in the very act of creation itself.

As to its nature, Muller states that "*grace* is nothing else but unmerited favor; it is always opposed to merit" (571). Thus, creatures *qua* creatures cannot strictly merit anything before God. Muller follows this up by stating that the modern Reformed view of common grace finds its roots more in Reformed orthodoxy than in Calvin and his contemporaries. For the later Reformed scholastics more clearly articulated God's grace as his bounty extending to all creation.

As for the nature of the redemptive grace, Muller clearly articulates the Reformed view. He also notes that the Reformed argued for the forensic "imputation of Christ's righteousness" (573). Let those of the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision take note; this doctrine was fully in harmony with the view that God's righteousness involved his faithfulness to his covenant promises (noted earlier). In fact, though Muller does not say so, it is reasonable to assume that the two were mutually reinforcing. For in those promises, God pledged to impute to his people eternal righteousness.

As for God's mercy, by contrast to grace, only post-fallen humanity is a fit subject for mercy. For mercy presupposes misery in the creature. Some of the Reformed even refer mercy to an eternal attribute of God (and not simply

a divine affection *ad extra*), insofar as God is ready to give mercy freely to creatures once they are in a state of misery.

The Reformed also dealt with the objection of the Stoics (such as Seneca) who claimed that God did not show mercy. According to Seneca, mercy would show a weakness in God for mercy implies *misericordia*, something that strikes the heart. That is, it implies that the one who is merciful is brought under the sway of the object of his mercy. Thus, Seneca believed that mercy was a quality of the weak, while clemency was a quality of the wise. Musculus responds by claiming that mercy does not imply a negative affection, a grief or heaviness of heart. Instead, it expresses God's goodness manifested to the sinner in his misery.

Another objection to the Reformed doctrine of mercy was voiced by the Lutherans. They claimed that the Reformed doctrine of reprobation was merciless and cruel. Muller describes Marcus Friedrich Wendelin as responding with the "infralapsarian view of the confessions". Wendelin shows that the Reformed doctrine of reprobation is God's decree to leave some in their sins, from which they already deserve eternal damnation and consequently to punish them eternally.

Contra the Arminians, the Reformed argued that justice and mercy are equal in God himself. Nonetheless, in respect to us, God is more merciful to the saved than he is just to the damned. Further, God's mercy springs more immediately from the divine nature in that it arises purely from God's goodness, whereas God's justice is a response to sin *ad extra*.

God's Anger and Hatred

Muller concludes this volume with a discussion of God's anger and hatred. The Reformed generally considered the language of the divine anger to be a metaphor or an accommodation to our capacities. It considers the effects of God's judgments and their relation to the divine affections. However, it does not imply the deficiencies of anger (found in disordered affections) as they are found in human beings.

The Reformed once again answered the Stoics, who objected that God was never angry with human beings since anger is a defection. Musculus responded

that anger is not always a deficiency. Rather, it is an affection or virtue of God. For virtue must be angry against injustice. And sin is an injustice against the divine majesty and wrongs his creation.

At the same time, anger or wrath is not an ultimate attribute in God, but is his holiness, justice and truth in response to unholiness, injustice and falsehood among sinners. Further, God does not delight in the death of the wicked, calling them to repentance. But in the same sinner not repenting, God delights in the execution of justice toward the sinner conditionally.

God's Attributes and the Centrality of Christ

As we conclude this review, we might ask how reflection on this book might lead to greater reflection on Christ, as the Savior of his church. Here we will explore some implications implied in this volume as well as some not noted by it, but for which the book might provide further reflections.

First, we will consider Christ's divine nature; second the divine transcendence and the necessity of Christ's merit; and third, God's presence with his people in Christ.

First, let us consider Christ's divine nature. As Christ is God, so also all of the divine properties relate to Christ in terms of his divine nature. As Muller's book encourages us to reflect on the divine properties, it also calls us to reflect upon the properties of Christ. He is to be worshipped and adored as the one who is far above us, infinite and eternal, worthy of all our obeisance.

Second, the divine transcendence points to the uniqueness of Christ's merit and its necessity for our salvation.

As Turretin stated, there is no proportion between our language about God and God himself; thus, precisely univocal and equivocal language are inadequate. In other words, there is no adequation between our understanding and God's nature.

If there is no definable proportion between God and ourselves, what of our attributes can reach his? What of our holiness can reach his holiness? What of our goodness can reach his goodness? What of our best glory can reach

his infinite and eternal glory? If our attributes cannot reach his, then we have nothing that we can give to him (nothing to pay to him) that can truly merit anything before him.

This implication is not missed by Reformed orthodoxy. The Westminster Confession taught that the lack of proportion between God and ourselves implied that even Adam could not properly merit anything from God in innocency. God's acceptance of his obedience in the covenant of works results only from God's voluntary condescension.

Nor are these implication missed by Dr. Muller. He points out that the Reformed rejected the distinction between distributive and communitive justice because there is no proportion between God and man (489). And, as we have noted, he articulates the Reformed view of God's eternal grace manifested in creation. As he states, this grace is always opposed to merit.

Turretin, who made the above comment on disproportionality, recognized its implications for the nature of Adam's potential 'merit' before the fall. For Turretin, Adam could not truly have merited God's favor.[9] Instead, we might say, we label what he could have accomplished "merit" only improperly speaking by way of its analogy to the work of Christ. That is, the unique place of Adam's obedience in the covenant of works had its analogue in Christ's obedience in the covenant of grace. Nonetheless, it was not "merit" properly speaking.

Only one who is true God can obey in such a way that his obedience is proportional to the divine nature. The fact that Christ performed this obedience in his human nature is no hindrance to this fact. For though Christ performed his obedience in terms of his human nature, it was his divine person that performed these works in his human nature. Thus, the dignity and nature of the divine person who performed this work make that work proportional to the divine perfections. As such only Christ could *truly merit* our salvation and eschatological life. Adam may have led us to eschatological life by his obedience, yet that obedience would not have merited the blessing strictly speaking, but only by way of God's condescension to accept his obedience as the ground of our eternal blessing.

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9 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XVII.v.7.

It was the Reformed qualifications to the analogy of Being that allowed them to assert this fundamental metaphysical necessity of Christ's obedience for true merit before God. Thus we might ask: was Rome so controlled by a defective model of the Analogia Entis that they failed to recognize the full significance of the Creator-creature distinction as Cornelius Van Til claimed? And was it for that reason that they saw no problem with a theology of merit? They failed to recognize the disproportion between God and ourselves and implicitly thought that we might give something to God (in some sense) that God should repay us.

Finally, let us consider God's union with his people. The careful ways that the Reformed scholastics distinguished between God and ourselves can help us to understand the boundaries within which to explain our union with God in Christ. Our union can never undermine the Creator-creature distinction. God alone will forever be truly and essentially eternal, unchanging, self-subsistent, and omnipotent. And he will always possess what are commonly called his communicable attributes in a way unique to himself and far transcending our capacities—we only derivatively experiencing them through his goodness. Nonetheless, as Muller states several times in this volume, God communicates himself in his grace. And finally in heaven, we will participate by way of communion in the perfections of God to the fullest extent possible for creatures. What is astonishing in all of this is that what we could never accomplish as creatures (true merit) has been imputed to us, namely the merit of Christ. Perhaps these two perspectives (rather than strict apotheosis) is closer to what Athanasius had in mind when he said, "he was made man that we might be made God".[10] For, he follows that by noting that in Christ's unique "achievements", we behold "the divinity of the Word".[11]

Dr. Muller's book provides a wealth of historical and theological reflection; a book that is well worth reading several times; a book that provides much to chew on and one that by grace may be the basis for further reflection on the revelation of God in Christ for the good of his church and the glory of his name. Read it, ingest it, and adore your Savior, who is the God of all glory.

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10 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54.

11 Ibid.

[*K:NWTS* 25/2 (Sep 2010) 36-42]

The Aaronic Benediction

Numbers 6:22-27

James T. Dennison, Jr.

These are familiar words; they have been pronounced on numerous occasions from numerous pulpits as the finale to morning or evening worship. They are words reprised in the 67th Psalm (v. 1). There is no question that the Mosaic version here in Numbers 6 takes precedence over that found in the Psalter—at least to those of us who hold to Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Liberals reject the premise that Moses is the author of these words; liberals reject the premise that Moses ever existed—he is a myth, invented by the Jews—even as the words of this benediction were invented by the Jews during the era of the Babylonian Exile and later.

The words of Aaron's benediction are placed among a host of details relating to the responsibilities of the Levitical priests—responsibilities which the priests of the tribe of Levi had for the tabernacle of the Lord from the sojourn in the Wilderness of Sinai up to the entrance into the Promised Land of Canaan and beyond to the era of Solomon's Temple. In our text, we find the peculiar privilege of the Aaronic priests—Aaron and his sons (v. 23). They are permitted to bless the children of Israel—to invoke God's name in benediction upon the people of God. This privilege belongs to the office of the priest—it is not a privilege that belongs to lay members of the congregation of Israel. It is now the ordained minister who raises his hands to bless you with the benediction. It is a privilege of his office. This privilege is not given to the elders or deacons or to the ordinary members of the congregation. This privilege belongs to the priests alone—to the ministers of the flock of God.

What a privilege! A privilege more wonderfully experienced by the New Testament pastor than by the Old Testament priest; more wonderful because Christ, the great High Priest, has performed the blessings of salvation once and for all for his people. The beloved of the Lord Jesus are pressed down into his grace, his unmerited favor and love, his perfect work of interceding on their behalf, of being not only a mediator of better things than Aaron and his sons, but of being the sacrifice itself which once and for all puts an end to the Levitical priesthood, the Levitical ritual, the Levitical office. The benediction of Christ Jesus is richer by far than that of Aaron because it is the blessing of God the Son whose riches far surpass in reality the shadows of the Levitical priesthood. As poignant as this benediction of Numbers 6 is, it is far richer to the sons and daughters of the eschatological Israel of God—the congregation of the people of God of the end of the age—the wandering children of God gathered under the benediction of the eschatological priest, Jesus Christ, whose eschatological mediation brings us near unto God—whose eschatological sacrifice puts an end to the sacrifices of the Levites. Indeed, the benediction of Numbers 6 is sweeter by far to us—we who would see Jesus as the eschatological benediction of God for his sons and daughters.

Now, there are a few details to note about Numbers 6:22-27. First, there is a ring structure here in verses 23 and 27. Next, there is a numerical progression in verses 24-26. Finally, there is a positional symmetry in verses 24, 25 and 26. By positional symmetry, I mean there is a directional posture which places the one blessed in front of the one blessing. Let me elaborate on these various details.

Ring Structure

The ring structure which sets Numbers 6:23-27 apart from the rest of this portion of the book of Numbers is found in the poetic nature of this benediction. This is Hebrew poetry; it is the first poem in the book of Numbers, but it is not the last. The ring around the benediction proper encloses verses 23 and 27. The terms “bless” and “sons of Israel” occur in both these verses. The opening and closing of this blessing is ringed by the balanced expression “bless the sons of Israel.” The jewel at the center of the ring is the benediction itself in verses 24-26. Notice how the ring structure features the gem of

blessing at the center. The ring is around the benediction proper—the gift of blessing pronounced on the people of God. As if God were to say, "I will ring you around with blessings; I will surround you as my people with benediction; I will be the circle, the loop, the coil which enwraps you—which surrounds you—which embraces you in blessing, my children." The blessing of God upon his children is the circle of his embrace; the ring of his affection; the enwrapping of his goodness—his delight—his grace, in love around you—you!—who are his sons and daughters.

Numerical Progression

This poem of benediction is also a marvelous numerical progression. If you remember your days in math or algebra, you learned about simple numerical progressions, such as 2+2=4, 4+2=6, 6+2=8: a progression of even numbers by a factor of two. Here in Numbers 6:24-26, we have a numerical progression of odd numbers by a factor of two. Now, you will say to me: but there are no numbers in the text. And you are right! But I am referring to the poetic Hebrew text which you do not have in front of you. However, I want to point out this feature of the original Hebrew text because it is theologically significant. Verse 24 in the Hebrew text has 3 words; your English version has 7 words, but the original, inspired text, by an economy of composition, has only 3. Verse 25 has 5 words in the original Hebrew text. Notice the progression: the 3 words of Hebrew in verse 24 plus 2 equals 5 words of Hebrew in verse 25. By now, you are anticipating me and by the rule of numerical progression, you are expecting verse 26 to have 7 words in the original Hebrew text—and you are correct; verse 26 does indeed have 7 Hebrew words. 3-5-7: a numerical progression of odd numbers by a factor of two.

Now this exercise in numerical progression is not just an intriguing numbers game. The benediction of the Lord becomes longer and longer as it moves from beginning to end; or may we say that God's blessing becomes richer and richer as we move from verse 24 to verse 26. From his blessing which keeps us (v. 24) to his blessing which shines his face upon us in grace (v. 25) to his benediction in the beaming of his countenance upon us and giving us Shalom (peace) in verse 26. Such is the progression of God's blessing—opening more fully, more wonderfully, more sweetly from beginning to end.

Are you not wrapped around by the circle of this precious progression of God's blessing, God's shining face, God's grace, God's countenance, God's Shalom? Surely, you would take refuge within the circle of blessedness; surely, you would take your place at the center of this longer yet longer, richer yea richer coil of benediction! And how much more when you know the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ; the benediction of your precious Savior, your beloved Lord, your God! The benediction of the Lord Jesus is the ring of God's embrace around you.

Word Order

The next thing to observe about the form of this benedictory poem is the order of the words. In the original Hebrew text, there is one word in the same place in each verse 24 through 26. That word is the name Yahweh, Jehovah, Lord. In each verse, 24, 25 and 26, the name for the Lord is in the second position in the Hebrew text of each line. Now, many of your English versions show the same feature because of the definite article (the English word "the") and the fact that in English, we prefer to put the subject of a sentence in the beginning of the clause. Not so in the Hebrew of these verses. Verse 24 reads literally: may he bless you (one Hebrew word) the Lord (second Hebrew word). Verse 25: may he shine (one Hebrew word) the Lord (second Hebrew word). Verse 26: may he lift up (one Hebrew word) the Lord (second Hebrew word). In each case, the first Hebrew word is a verb—a word of action. And who is the source of this action? The Lord, the Lord, the Lord. He is the repeated source of the action of blessing in each line of this poem. The structure of the poem tells you so—God the Lord is always at the same place in each verse. His is the unchanging position in the text because not only is he himself unchanging, his blessing, his benediction, does not change either.

Positional Relation

Now, I would like to direct your attention to the positional relation or posture in the poetic structure. The Lord blesses you (v. 24). The relational posture is God towards you—the Lord's blessing towards you. You, the object of the Lord's blessing. Now in verse 25, we discover more of the Lord's positional

relationship towards us. In this beautiful line, the Lord's face is positioned towards us. The Hebrew text literally reads: "make shine the Lord his face unto you." Here is the Lord's shining, glorious, heavenly face radiating, beaming, glistening towards you—you! What a blessing!

And verse 26, the Lord's countenance—once again his face (verses 25 and 26 are duplicates at this point)—the Lord's facial countenance is lifted up towards you. The Lord positions his face towards you and lifts up his countenance in your direction. The Lord of all eternity, who dwells in unapproachable light, whose sinless perfection cannot bear even the sight of iniquity—the Lord deigns to lift up his face upon you. What wondrous grace is this! What matchless love is this! The Lord all-holy, all-glorious, all-gracious would let his heaven-radiant, his heaven-beaming face shine upon you—upon me—we who deserve his scowl of wrath—his frown of rejection—his glare of condemnation. Out of his grace, from the riches of his eschatological shalom—his beaming face shines out upon you—upon me. Are you not dumbstruck! Lord, what mercy; Lord, what grace; Lord, what benediction is this, O Lord, my Lord, my God, my Savior, my Sanctifier. Do you see? This benediction places you in positional relation to the Lord. Your posture towards him; his posture towards you is one of relational benediction—relational blessing: he blesses; you are blessed.

The Lord blesses you. Do you not bless the Lord! "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." The Lord Jesus Christ blesses you. Do you not bless the Lord Jesus Christ? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." Does this language flow up out of your heart? Do you talk this way; do you pray this way; do you live this way? The Lord God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—blesses you. Do you not bless the Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Do you not bless the Triune God, taking his blessed Triune name upon your lips, in your prayers, in your life? Then let us hear it. Let us hear this conversation fill your mouth as it fills your soul as it fills your heart as it fills your life. Let us hear—let us see your lips—let us see your lives bless the Lord.

The Lord makes his face shine upon you. Do you not turn your shining face to the Lord? The Lord Jesus Christ makes his face shine upon you; do you

not turn your beaming face to the Lord Jesus Christ? Does this language come from your lips, from your heart? Do you talk this way; do you pray this way; do you live this way? The Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, shines his heavenly face upon you? Do you not reflect his shining face in your beaming countenance—your face shining before the face of your Lord?

The Lord gives grace to you. Do you not treasure the grace given by the Lord? The Lord Jesus Christ gives grace to you; do you not delight in the grace given to you by the Lord Jesus Christ? Does this language come from your lips; does this feeling arise from your heart? Do you talk this way; pray this way; live this way? The Lord God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—gives grace to you—undeserved, unmerited grace to you. Does your mouth not testify to his grace to you; do your prayers not overflow with gratitude for his grace to you; does your life not show the effect of his grace to you?

The Lord lifts up his countenance upon you and gives you peace. Do you not lift up your countenance upon the Lord and give him peace—or are you always at war with the Lord, at odds with those around you; a source of tension, stress and conflict wherever you go, in whatever circles you move—bringing suspicion, distrust, argument, self-centeredness, intransigence, stubbornness. The Lord Jesus Christ lifts up his countenance upon you and gives you peace. Do you spurn the peace that passes understanding being more interested in alienating others, playing the 'big shot', bringing a dark cloud into relationships, being continually hard to get along with because you—you—are the person that calls the shots, wears the pants, runs the show (and you make sure everyone knows it). The Lord God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—lifts up his face upon you and gives you shalom. Let this peace flow like a river from your mouth, from your heart, from your life.

Let the rich fullness of the Aaronic benediction draw you within the circle of the Lord's own blessedness—a gracious benediction made richer still in these last days through the priestly work of his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ—a benediction that places you before the face of the Lord, in Christ Jesus; a benediction that grants you the grace of the Lord, in Christ Jesus; a blessing that gives you the peace of the Lord, in Christ Jesus. A heavenly benediction pronounced in an earthly venue placing your face before the eschatological benediction that never ends—the eschatological benediction in the eschato-

logical priest, Jesus Christ. A heavenly blessing from a heavenly high priest with heaven's grace and peace beaming upon you.

And now, blessed sons and daughters of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, let these riches of Christ's benediction change the way you speak, the way you pray, the way you live.

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Calvin's Idea of *Meritum Christi*

Philip Tachin

Contemporary scholarship has argued that Calvin's view of the *meritum Christi* is traceable to the Scotistic tradition.[1] In this article, I argue that Calvin's understanding of the *meritum Christi* ("the merit of Christ") cannot be easily reduced to the Scotistic traditions despite their similarities and that his view is uniquely his. In doing this, I relate his doctrine of merit to his Christology because it is the person of Christ that gives meaning to the value of his atoning work.

Interpretation of Calvin's understanding of *meritum Christi* should not be done in isolation from his teaching on Christology. It is only by observing the thread of continuity between his view of *meritum Christi* and his Christology that justice can be done to his concept of merit. Many of the misleading conclusions drawn by some Calvin scholars in this respect come about because they fail to connect his concept of the merit of Christ with his main Christological thrust. A close examination of Calvin's theology shows that there exists a necessary circularity in the connection between Trinity, Christology and soteriology.

The Difference between Calvin and Scotus on *Meritum Christi*

Calvin developed his theology of *meritum Christi* as occasioned by Soci-

1 John Duns Scotus (1266-1308).

nus' questions to him.[2] David Willis says Socinus' questions are not extant but may be inferred from Calvin's answers to them. One question presumably asked by Socinus may be stated plainly: "Can God's *fidelity* be counted on if his *will is mutable*, as would seem to be implied by a doctrine of the *merits of Christ* and by a doctrine which admits that God sometimes removes faith once apparently given"?[3] Calvin answers those questions in Books II and III of the *Institutes*, which cover the merit of Christ and the assurance or certainty of faith and salvation.

The merit of Christ was not fully developed in the earlier editions of the *Institutes* until the 1555 version, in which Calvin treated the topic extensively. Socinus' questions had serious implications for the doctrine of the merit of Christ including his divinity which prompted Calvin to give more serious considerations to them in the 1555 edition.[4] Though originally his purpose of developing it was to answer the questions of Socinus, this became an important foundation for discussing the nature of merits of works under "*De justificatione fidei et meritis operum*" ("Concerning Justification by Faith and the Merits of Works"). Under this heading, Calvin disputed the Papist teachings on personal merits in addition to the merit of Christ. He argued that the merit of Christ is God's manifest grace to us. The merit of Christ strictly speaking is not one of human merits before God, though he performed his meritorious work in his humanity. We will concentrate here on one of the questions which relates to the merit of Christ. In it, Socinus is pressing the issue of the immutability of divine will which should guarantee salvation for those who are being saved by God. If this is the case, God's fidelity is reliable. But if Christ's merit were to effect a change in God's will whereby he would not have saved those whom he in fact does save on account of Christ's merit, then the divine will would be mutable and consequently divine freedom would be diminished.

Willis paraphrases Socinus' question: "If the justification of men depends on the sheer mercy of God, how is it necessary that Christ's merit should at the same time intervene? How can one say both that God freely forgives and that

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2 Laelius Socinus (Lelio Francesco Maria Sozini) (1525-1562).

3 David Willis, "The Influence of Laelius Socinus on Calvin's Doctrines of the Merits of Christ and the Assurance of Faith," *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, ed. by Richard C. Gamble (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 59 (emphasis mine).

4 See Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.17, note 1, 528.

Christ merits our forgiveness?"[5] Calvin's response shows the justification of teaching the merit of Christ: "It is by Christ's merits that the Father who has always loved us and who is now reconciled to us embraces us and discloses his love."[6] But Willis says the sum total of Calvin's response is found in what he says: "Both God's free favor and Christ's obedience, each in its degree, are fitly opposed to our works. Apart from God's good pleasure Christ could not merit anything; but did so because he had been appointed to appease God's wrath with his sacrifice, and to blot out our transgressions with his obedience."[7] Willis thinks the content of Calvin's answer was influenced by Socinus. But what exactly is the nature of that influence; whether it forces Calvin to grant Socinus' position is what Willis does not make clear. Furthermore, Willis argues Calvin's connection with Scotus thus:

> The resemblance between Calvin's argument on the merits of Christ and that of Scotus on the same subject has been noted and is indisputable. . . . Both argue that apart from God's good pleasure, Christ could not merit anything. Scotus says that Christ's work, and especially his willingness, was meritorious because of the *acceptatio* of God. If it had pleased God, a good angel could have made satisfaction by an offering which God could have accepted as sufficient for all sins. For every created offering is worth exactly what God accepts it for and no more.[8]

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5 Willis, 60.

6 Ibid.

7 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.17.1, 299 (This page is from Ages Digital Library).

8 Willis, "The Influence of Laelius Socinus," 61. He endorses Wendel's view (see Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Sources et evolution de sa pensée religieuse* [Paris, 1950], 94, 171). Elsewhere he says Wendel "raises critical questions about the implication of Calvin's view of the merit of Christ for the doctrine of the humanity of Christ" (Willis, ibid., 59). For similar conclusions, see also scholars such as Albrecht B. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 413-438; Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, 219-232; Williston Walker, *John Calvin: The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 414; Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 138-150; also his "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought," *Archive for Reformation History*, 77 (1986): 74-78; Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 191; Joseph Wawrykow, "John Calvin and Condign Merit," *Archive for Reformation History*, 83 (1992): 73-90.

McGrath argues in the same direction, tracing the history of interpretation of the merit of Christ from Augustine into the late medieval division of intellectualist and voluntarist traditions and terminating at Calvin as an heir of the Scotistic voluntarist view.[9] Muller also interprets Calvin's view "*probably* as an intensification of the Scotistic view."[10]

It is not so easy to dispute the claims of such great scholars who are authorities on Calvin. Yet a careful examination of their claims may yield helpful alternative interpretations. If McGrath is right to interpret Calvin as saying "the basis of Christ's merit is not located in Christ's offering of himself (which would correspond to an intellectualist approach to the *ratio meriti Christi*), but in the divine decision to accept such an offering as of sufficient merit for the redemption of mankind (which corresponds to the voluntarist approach),"[11] does this not run counter to Calvin's teaching on the significance of the perfect active obedience of Christ that "only he who was true God and true man *could* be obedient in our stead,"[12] i.e., that Christ's divinity is a basic requirement for our redemption? Here the basis of the merit of Christ for Calvin is clearly in his obedience, which was able to counter the disobedience of Adam, satisfy "God's judgment, and pay the penalties for sin."[13] I believe the *cause*, which is divine pleasure, should not be confused with the *basis*, which is the personal obedience of Christ. This cause should be understood in the sense of the choosing of the means to save us rather than causing Christ to be who he is essentially.

Moreover, does Calvin's statement that "apart from God's good pleasure, Christ could not merit anything" mean exactly the same as what Scotus says? Or what precisely does Calvin mean by this? It is not necessarily the case

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9 Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 138-150. The "extra Calvinisticum" is another area that McGrath argues is voluntarist or *via moderna* oriented (McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought: A Study in Late Medieval Influences upon Calvin's Theological Development," *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, 33-34).

10 Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 191 (emphasis mine).

11 McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 115.

12 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.12.3, 234 (page from Ages Digital Library).

13 Ibid.

that two or more persons use similar words to mean exactly the same thing. Willis himself later cautions that it "would be a mistake to overemphasize the Scotistic element here."[14] The difference between Calvin and Scotus, according to Willis, is that the former does not talk about what Christ merited for himself, but what he merited for others, because the question of whether Christ merited anything for himself is "unprofitable."[15] And Scotus himself "says that Christ's superabundant merit is indispensable, but not entirely sufficient for our salvation;" and its goal was just to take "away the obstacle which blocked the way to heaven."[16] If this is Scotus' thinking, then one can see the ambiguity in the word "indispensable," as it loses its reasonable meaning when the merit of Christ is both "indispensable" and also "not entirely sufficient" at the same time. Scotus' position diverges from that of Anselm, who teaches that forgiveness of sin required infinite satisfaction, which could only be done by a person whose dignity is also infinite.[17] But Calvin is directly opposite to Scotus' view: "Christ's merit means exactly that no merit is required or can be offered to supplement or complete Christ's deserving."[18] Willis minimizes what I consider to be the serious difference that exists between Calvin and Scotus: "Calvin and Scotus are interested in *slightly* different things in the way they relate Christ's merits and the will of God."[19] The question is how slight is "slightly"? To understand the difference between Calvin and Scotus, it may be proper to ask why Scotus draws his conclusions as such.

Although their statements are similar, I consider the similarity only apparent but not real. McGrath says: "Scotus seems to suppose that for an action *a* to have infinite intrinsic worth, it must be the case that *a* is caused by—not just predicated of—a divine person."[20] So, in effect, Scotus is saying that

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 David Willis, "The Influence of Laelius Socinus on Calvin's Doctrines of the Merits of Christ and the Assurance of Faith," 62; see also note 1.

17 See Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 1.20,21; 2.18.

18 Willis, 62.

19 Ibid. (emphasis mine).

20 Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 132.

apart from becoming incarnate Christ surrendered every qualifying decision to the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit, who would decide his fate. He clearly asserts that "the Father acts from himself; the Son not from himself."[21] Whether this is of the ontological or economic Trinity is unclear from Scotus, but it does not allow for the aseity of the Son that Calvin affirms. And it is the aseity of the Son that expresses his freedom. In effect, Scotus says Christ emptied himself of all his ontological prerogatives and therefore everything he did was only as a man without qualification. Scotus gives primacy to the will of God. Calvin appears to tread the same path by saying,

> For his will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things that are. For if it has any cause, something must precede it, to which it is, as it were, bound; this is unlawful to imagine. For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it.[22]

Here the will of God is the determinative entity, but Calvin does not necessarily subordinate the divine intellect or knowledge of God to the divine will.

While Scotus is willing to emphasize the supremacy of the Father's will, he seems not to do the same for the Son. However, he grants that "God assigned a reward to us because of Christ's affection for justice elicited in his willing submission to God's will in the passion. This affection is an act of Christ's human will, and is therefore finite in value."[23] This seems to assume the Thomistic notion of condign merit—finite nature warrants finite value. Yet for Aquinas, the condign merit of Christ is not premised on his humanity but on his divine personality. Scotus places the Son's voluntary submission only within the context of his incarnation which necessarily makes his meritorious accomplishment to be of finite value with respect to his human nature. He does not allude to the impact of Christ's divinity on the meritorious value of his

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21 Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125, citing Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 3.1.1, n.18 in *Duns Scotus*, *John*, *Opera Omnia*, ed. by Luke Wadding, 12 vols. (Lyons: Durand, 1639), 7.29.

22 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.2, 949.

23 Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 130.

work. But Calvin upholds the absolute freedom of the Son even in his incarnation: "True, Christ himself was born a mortal man; but this was a voluntary submission, and not a bondage laid upon him by another."[24] This "voluntary submission" predates his incarnation; it occurred when he agreed with the Father. This agreement could only arise from his self-existence (*autotheos*) and therefore the agreement is absolute because it is not just of human inclination, but stems from his ontic person.

Again, Scotus' view probably stems from his understanding of infinity, for which reason the incarnate Christ could not be properly construed in the sense of infinite existence. To him, "[Infinity is not a property but an intrinsic mode of being.] From this it follows that intensive infinity is not related to the being said to be infinite as a kind of attribute that accrues to it extrinsically."[25] Infinity is therefore not a property of an attribute of a thing or being. Rather, "intensive infinity expresses an intrinsic mode of the entity."[26] This means that it is the mode of being that defines whether a thing is finite or infinite, not its property. "Therefore, the intrinsic mode of anything intensively infinite is infinity itself, which intrinsically expresses a being or essence which lacks nothing and which exceeds everything finite beyond any determinable degree."[27] Applied to the state of incarnation, the Son's mode of being in his incarnation is finite, and so also is his accomplished work of salvation; it is only the approval of God that defines it as infinite. As such, his properties do not define his mode of being. Yet the question is how one separates mode of being from ontological properties. Does a mode of being diminish one's personal properties so that he becomes something other than he is essentially? Bavinck explains that God's "infinity is synonymous with perfection and does not have to be treated separately."[28] If infinity is an attribute, as Bavinck says, then Calvin upholds the notion that the perfection and infinity of Christ derive from his divinity. If Scotus denies this, then he would have to understand

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24 Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 368.

25 John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*, trans. by Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 5.10, 111.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 5.11, 111-112.

28 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2, 160.

the *kenosis* as Christ emptying himself of his divinity. It will become clear on this note that Scotus' view does not comport with Calvin's Trinitarian and Christological views.

For Scotus, Christ accomplished his work in human flesh, but his "human nature actualizes no potentialities in its subject" the Word.[29] And since "nothing outside God can bring about any effect internal to God," what Christ accomplished in the flesh was finite and of no effect to the intrinsic being of God.[30] The humanity of Christ, being accidental to him, his meritorious accomplishment cannot be attributed to his divine ontic being. Scotus may be guarding against *communicatio idiomatum* between the natures, but doing so does have other implications for the work of Christ, since he reduces the entire work to the humanity of Christ, as if his divinity has no effect on it. The crux of his Christology in this regard is that Christ's work was an "offering by the human nature to the Trinity, and not … an offering by the Son (the second person of the Trinity) to the Father."[31] Calvin offers an opposing view of the nature of the work of Christ in itself as it bears the mark of the one who did it:

> He now clearly shows how Christ's death is to be estimated, not by the external act, but by the power of the Spirit. For Christ suffered as man; but that death becomes saving to us through the efficacious power of the Spirit; for a sacrifice, which was to the an [sic] eternal expiation, *was a work more than human*. And he calls the Spirit *eternal* for this reason, that we may know that the reconciliation, of which he is the worker or effecter, is eternal.[32]

Calvin's position comports with the confessions of orthodoxy: "Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which

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29 Cross, 117.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 131.

32 Calvin, *Commentary on the Hebrews*, 180 (emphasis mine except for the word 'eternal').

is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature."[33] Also,

> So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him.…These are the reasons why we confess him to be true God and true man—true God in order to *conquer death by his power*, and true man that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.[34]

"By his power" here refers not to his humanity (as it is subject to death and weakness), but to his ontic power as Son of God. This means his offering was both in his humanity and in his divinity because by humanity alone he could not have conquered and inevitably could not have offered what was acceptable to God. So while his human spirit was what he offered to God, it was offered by his divine power, which gave impetus to its infinity in order to pacify God's infinite wrath against the infinity of sins.

However, one is not sure of the consistency in Scotus' theology when he also avers that "when Christ…offered himself on the cross he made adequate satisfaction for an infinity of sins."[35] Though he bases this statement of adequate satisfaction on divine *acceptatio*, how does the logic hold that "infinity of sins" is intrinsic, but the offering for them is not infinite except only as God freely accepts it? If it may be argued that it is God who qualifies the infinity of the act of sin against him as well as the offering for the sin without those acts being really infinite in character, does it not amount to arbitrariness in divine justice to make something to be other than what it really is? As a matter of fact, there is no compelling evidence to show that Calvin was saying that Christ's merit ontologically construed could not merit anything before God, as was Scotus. It is doubtful if Scotus' view of the work of Christ can fit into Calvin's matrix of Prophet, Priest and King in the strictest sense, since these

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33 *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 8.7.

34 *The Belgic Confession*, Art. 19.

35 Cross, *Duns Scotus,* 131.

epithets take into view the harmonious work of the two natures in his work of redemption. Scotus' theology undeniably breeds Socinianism, which brought into question the merits of Christ. This can be discerned in the connection that Willis establishes between Socinus' question and Scotus. Both Scotus and Socinus failed to see Christ's merit as what originally qualified him to be the ordained means for our salvation. Calvin's theological position makes no room for Socinianism and this difference should not be ignored.

Calvin's view is not Scotistic but is drawn largely from his vast study of the church fathers,[36] the medieval scholastics and his independent Biblical exegesis. Though elements of Scotism are found in his way of framing the idea of the merit of Christ, Calvin's view is essentially or materially different from Scotism. Calvin's view of the merit of Christ is premised on Christ's condignity which sounds more Thomistic than Scotistic. Whatever may be the historical links between Calvin and Scotus, their views of the merit of Christ at critical points are opposed to one another.

The Merit of Christ in Calvin's Christology

Calvin's Christology must be understood from the background of his Trinitarian theology. His main thrust is to expound Christ as the sum total of the gospel to whom the whole of Scripture testifies. Christ is God in the absolute sense who also became man for us. The ontic status of Christ is the background for understanding the nature of biblical Christology as it bears on his redemptive work. To this he says,

> But John spoke most clearly of all when he declared that that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father [John 1:1–3]. For John at once attributes to the Word a solid and abiding essence, and ascribes something uniquely His own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was Creator of the universe. Therefore, inasmuch as all divinely uttered

36 See Anthony N. S. Lane's concerns too in *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); also B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1956), whose works have shown that Calvin never got stuck to one particular influence.

> revelations are correctly designated by the term 'word of God,' so this substantial Word is properly placed at the highest level, as the wellspring of all oracles. *Unchangeable*, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself.[37]

Calvin takes us back to the beginning of creation, which Christ precedes. This means our Christology should not begin with the incarnation, but should go back to the pre-creation in accordance with John's testimony. Calvin recognizes that what Christ was before his incarnation, he still is because he is *unchangeable*. This means even in his incarnation nothing was added to or subtracted from him. This is the cardinal principle for true biblical Christology.

Everything that Christ obtained for our salvation is, therefore, grounded in the fact that what God required for our salvation was already found in Christ's being as God. Calvin's clarity on this cannot be any clearer.

> For as the names of God that have respect to his outward activity began to be attributed to him after the existence of his work (as when he is called Creator of heaven and earth), so *piety recognizes or allows no name which intimates that anything new has happened to God in himself*. For if there had been anything adventitious, the passage of James would fall to the ground: that 'every perfect gift comes from above, and descends from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of change' [James 1:17].[38]

Christ was not on an adventure to add anything to himself which he had not attained before. As God, he holds all things in himself. The glory and eternal life that he obtained in his humanity are for us, not for himself because he owns all glory and life.

Calvin further argues this principle which is crucial for answering the question of the merit of Christ. He says, "For because something begins to be manifested at a certain time, we ought not therefore to gather that it never

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37 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.7, 130.

38 Ibid., 1.13.8.

existed before."[39] If this is true, then Christ's merit, which began to be manifest in the flesh, was already something to be recognized in qualifying for his mediatorial work. For to seek to establish when he obtained merit for us, one "will find no beginning." Thus what Calvin speaks of as "the beginning of merit to be in him"[40] should be understood differently.

This stands in sharp contrast to Scotus' Christology. Scotus' Christology leans more on the side of the humanity of Christ. The Son of God was predestined to be human. Incorporated in this predestination is the glory that Christ would attain when he shall have finished his redemptive work. This means the merit of Christ for the satisfaction of divine justice was also part of the predestined aspects of his work, so that his work could only be counted *de congruo* rather than *de condigno*.[41] The whole Christological thrust of Scotus does not represent Christ in his capacity as a divine person who acts in accordance with his nature as the Son of God but only what God was accomplishing through Christ as if Christ was a mere instrument.

Calvin contemplates the magnitude of the problem to be solved and the solution that is proportionate to it. In this case, the gap that stands between us and God is not a finite one but an infinite one, so that no human being could overcome it. The gap or "cloud" that has been cast between us and God is the result of sin which has broken off our relationship with God.[42] This is Calvin's immediate context for understanding what he refers to here as the "cloud." This chasm is the result of "our uncleanness and God's perfect purity" and it is doubly problematic in view of the Creator-creature distinction that was in place before we became unclean. In fact "no man, unless he belonged to God, could serve as the intermediary to restore peace;" furthermore, it would have been a hopeless situation for us "had not the very majesty of God descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to him."[43]

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39 Ibid., 131.

40 Ibid., 2.17.1, 529.

41 Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, III, ed. by Luke Wadding (Lyons: Durand, 1639), d. 7, q. 3, no. 2; XIV, 349a.

42 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:12:1

43 Ibid.

The same point was made when Calvin responded to Stancaro's denial of the divinity of Christ on the grounds of his being the Mediator. According to Stancaro, "Christ was not the mediator between God and men with respect to his divinity, for this would attribute to him a divinity inferior to that of the Father," for which reason "Christ was Mediator only as man."[44] In his response, Calvin says, "But we maintain, first, that the name of Mediator suits Christ, not only by the fact that he put on flesh, or that he took on the office of reconciling the human race to God, but from the beginning of creation he already truly was Mediator, for he always was the head of the church, had primacy over the angels, and was the firstborn of every creature (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:15; 2:10)."[45]

When Calvin refers to the mediatorship of Christ in 1Tim. 2:5, his primary concern is the unity of God and the exclusiveness of the mediatorship of Christ when Paul says "there is one Mediator between God and men." In the same passage above, Calvin also stresses the connection that the transcendent God has with us through "the man Christ Jesus." This mention of the humanity of Christ should not be placed over and against the divinity of Christ. It is the middle position that Christ takes by combining divinity and humanity together in his reconciliatory work that is paramount. Calvin does not make the humanity of Christ to be the sole ground for understanding the Mediator. He makes this very clear: "When he [Paul] declares that he is 'a man,' the Apostle does not deny that the Mediator is God, but, intending to point out the bond of our union with God, he mentions the human nature rather than the divine."[46] Nothing can be clearer than that Calvin appeals to the ontological status of Christ preliminary to understanding the person of the Mediator. We must not minimize this emphasis upon the divinity of Christ in Calvin because it shows the ontological status of Christ to be crucial in Calvin's Christology.

The divine ontological aspect of Christ was decisive in electing Christ for our redemption because the "heavenly decree" could not have stipulated one whose ability to earn salvation for mankind was uncertain. For a Mediator

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44 Joseph Tylenda, "Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro," *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, 5, ed. by Richard Gamble (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 161.

45 Ibid, 168.

46 Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 43

whose ability was unknown and who would fail would jeopardize even the very mercy of God upon which the heavenly decree to save was based. Calvin underscores the essentiality of the ontological integrity of Christ the Mediator, for the power that he possessed in view of his task "cannot be properly attributed to the human nature."[47] In his Trinitarian theology, Calvin teaches that Christ as the Son of God is *autotheos*. This understanding grows out of the association of Christ with the name Jehovah.[48]

I will begin here by examining Calvin's passage which has been interpreted by some scholars as Scotistic.

> In discussing Christ's merit, we do not consider the beginning of merit to be in him, but we go back to God's ordinance, the first cause. For God solely of his own good pleasure appointed him Mediator to obtain salvation for us. Hence it is absurd to set Christ's merit against God's mercy. For it is a common rule that a thing subordinate to another is not in conflict with it. For this reason nothing hinders us from asserting that men are freely justified by God's mercy alone, and at the same time that Christ's merit, subordinate to God's mercy, also intervenes on our behalf. Both God's free favor and Christ's obedience, each in its degree, are fitly opposed to our works. Apart from God's good pleasure Christ could not merit anything; but did so because he had been appointed to appease God's wrath with his sacrifice, and to blot out our transgressions with his obedience. To sum up: inasmuch as Christ's merit depends upon God's grace alone, which has ordained this manner of salvation for us,

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47 Joseph Tylenda, 13.

48 The name Jehovah or YHWH (I AM THAT I AM) was revealed to Moses in Ex. 3:14. This explains God's aseity with the significance of overall independence by virtue of self-existence, self-sufficiency, and self-containment. Calvin argues that Paul attributes this name to Christ as one who introduced himself to Moses (Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1858], 56; this one was written in May 1537 to Simon Grynee to explain his position on the accusation of Sabellianism against him). Hodge explains that "self-existence and necessary existence, as well as omnipotence and all other divine attributes, belong to the divine essence common to all the persons of the Trinity, and therefore it is the Triune God who is self-existent, and not one person in distinction from the other persons" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 467).

> it is just as properly opposed to all human righteousness as God's grace is.[49]

Though Scotus also agrees on this point, in Book II, chapter XVII, where this passage is found, Calvin makes it explicit that he is following Augustine. This might imply a silent objection to Scotus for the reason that the similarity to Scotus is only formal, not material. He cites Augustine before reasserting his own opinion. Augustine's overall context for setting forth his view is his contention against Pelagianism. Pelagianism made human ability for good works the grounds for earning salvation from God. In the *Enchiridion*, Augustine sets the mercy and grace of God against human works or merits as far as works of the flesh cannot count before the holy majesty of God. The grace of God is demonstrated in the fact that he has shown his wonder of grace in taking the human nature that is very low to manifest his glory: "In this the grace of God is supremely manifest, commended in grand and visible fashion; for what had the human nature in the man Christ merited, that it, and no other, should be assumed into the unity of the Person of the only Son of God?"[50] Here Augustine underscores how we may understand the *anhypostatic* human nature of Christ—that it is of no value in itself except as it is united to the person of Christ who was divine before the incarnation. His argument therefore is that the humanity that Christ assumed had no merit of its own as to merit union with the Son of God, but it was a demonstration of God's grace that such flesh should be counted worthy.

But looking at the other side of the dignity of Christ as the Son of God, Augustine says, "Indeed it was Truth himself, God's only-begotten Son—and,

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49 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.17.1, 529. He follows Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, xv.30, 31 (MPL 44.981 f.; trans. NPNF V. 512).

50 Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, trans. and ed. by A. C. Outler (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), XI. 36, 361. See also *The Trinity*, 13.23, 362, where Augustine defends the incarnation against those who denied it and states that the reason for resisting human merit and pride is that apart from the incarnation human nature is worth nothing, so that only "in the man Christ it advertises the grace of God toward us without any previous deserts on our part, as not even he won the privilege of being joined to the true God in such a unity that with him he would be one person, Son of God, by any previous merits of his own." Clearly, he is not against the intrinsic value of the merit of Christ considered in his ontological being as God but his humanity, which of itself could not merit anything. A little further along he explains that man was conquered by Satan because he was a man characterized by pride, but the one who conquered Satan was "both man and God," which points to the ontological and qualitative difference between Christ and other humans with regard to merits before God.

again, this *not by grace but by nature*—who, by grace, assumed human nature into such a personal unity that he himself became the Son of Man as well."[51] Here we can see the tension between what is not meritorious and what is also meritorious, as indicated by "not by grace but by nature," simultaneously held in the person of Christ. On the one hand, this view stands against Pelagianism and Roman Catholicism's teaching on human works of righteousness, so that only by grace alone could humanity benefit from God's mercy. On the other hand, Augustine shows how Christ by right of nature, not by grace, merited the favor of God for us. It would make more sense, therefore, to place Calvin in the same line of thought, since he is following Augustine. On this point, it would be in order to place Calvin in the intellectualist tradition and also as a radical modified Thomist on the concept of *meritum Christi*.

If we interpret Calvin on the above passage to say the death of Christ was of no value in itself except by divine acceptance, it will ultimately place Christ at divine mercy like any other person. If this interpretation is correct, then Calvin's view here would not be consistent with his Trinitarian and Christological frame. Paul Jensen presents the implication of such interpretation: "If Calvin is interpreted as holding this belief, he was maintaining the possibility that God could have refused to *accept* Christ's sacrificial death as meritorious and, if that holds true, God's justice did not dictate the nature of satisfaction that was *required*, rather his will dictated the nature of the satisfaction that was *provided*."[52] Jensen's alternative to Calvin's reading is that satisfaction was the prerogative of God's will while "the *nature* of the satisfaction," which is Christ's death, was the prerogative of God's justice; which is to say, "God was free to provide or not a satisfaction for sin."[53] The divine will does not antagonize divine justice, but both aspects cohere in God as his intrinsic properties.

To interpret Calvin through Scotistic spectacles will obviously turn Calvin against his entire Christological frame. The Scotistic view, which is founded on the idea that God could have chosen anything at all to merit salvation for us,

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51 Ibid., *Confessions and Enchiridion*, 362 (emphasis mine).

52 Paul Jensen, *Calvin and Turretin: A Comparison of their Soteriologies*, 127 (emphasis his).

53 Ibid. (emphasis his)

diminishes the exclusive, unique and extraordinary claims of Christ, since it obviously implies that nothing intrinsically meritorious was found in him except as the grace of God, as might be the case with any other human being. This would run counter to Calvin's thought and he would resoundingly reject it.

Calvin's original point is not whether the value of Christ's merit was intrinsic or not, but whether all of his work may be properly called meritorious, which he affirms. He is not denying the intrinsic merit of Christ, but he is dealing with the logic of Socinus' question which is *how mercy and merit meet*. The struggle in Socinus is with harmonizing God's free mercy towards sinners and at the same time requiring merit for that same mercy which necessitates the death of Christ. The problem with Socinus results mostly from his denial of the divinity of Christ, which makes Christ essentially human. By so doing, he places Christ purely as a man in distinction from God and from this arrangement it becomes rationally impossible that human merit could meet God's judicial demand for satisfaction. In that case, God's mercy would also become unrealistic. On this logic, Calvin says no man can merit God's favor. He retrieves Christ from the Socinian error and places him where he properly belongs, stating that both Christ and God's mercy are given to us from one source—God's good pleasure. This is clearly noticeable in Calvin's conditional clause "if anyone would simply set Christ" which suggests that if we look at Christ merely or *simply* as an ordinary human like any of us without recourse to his divinity, then he could not have merited God's favor for us.[54]

But Calvin's point is different. Calvin says, "inasmuch as Christ's merit depends upon God's grace alone, which has *ordained this manner* of salvation for us, it is just as properly opposed to all human righteousness as God's grace is."[55] God in his grace decides the best means, for God is perfect in all his ways. In that case, God's mercy precedes Christ because it is by that mercy that the Son of God was elected to be the Christ through whom the mercy would become available to us. It is therefore the case that without divine mercy or good pleasure Christ could not merit anything since he could not have been decreed to become our means of divine mercy.

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54 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.17.1, 529.

55 Ibid. 12.17.1, 299 (page taken from Ages Digital Library) [emphasis mine].

Furthermore, we find some allusion to the intrinsic character of the value of Christ's merit in what Calvin says. If the value of Christ's merit were based on the human nature that Christ shared with sinners, no person could merit God's grace. But the ground for Christ's merit goes back to "God's ordinance" as the "first cause." What Calvin means here by "first cause" of Christ's merit does not mean the ordinance showed mercy to Christ. Calvin does not indicate that the decree meant that the Father would accept the Son's merit as it pleases him. The decree rather means that when God decided to provide a satisfaction for the sins of humanity, he chose in his justice, the means that was fitting by meritorious qualification. The decree to ordain Christ for redemption only affirms that the personal merits of Christ cohere with the divine plan of salvation. He says that Christ is the total sum of the decree, being "the most excellent luminary of grace and predestination."[56] Again it may be observed from what Calvin says above that it is "God's mercy" or "God's good pleasure" or "God's grace alone" that is the ground by which Christ's merit is available to us, not merely by divine will. And there is no compartmentalizing God's will and his good pleasure, as they are indivisible aspects of his one perfect reality. All of God's grace in Calvin's thought is directed towards the sinner, not towards Christ, as if he were in need of grace for himself. That grace is in Christ and it flows through him to the sinner.

The reason for our inability to merit God's favor lies in our unworthiness, which Christ fills with his. As Calvin says, "In short, the name of Christ excludes all merit, and everything which men have of their own; for when he says that we are *chosen in Christ*, it follows that in ourselves we are unworthy."[57] This is an ontological contrast between our unworthiness and the worthiness of Christ. The Son of God possessed the merit that was required for our redemption, for which reason he was appointed Mediator by the decree. "God's pleasure" refers to the nature of the means of redemption that was selected. God did not show mercy to that means; if he had, it would have been irrational for God to direct his mercy to Christ instead of to sinners, who are the object of redemption. This is what Calvin means when he says that "inasmuch as

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56 Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. by J. K. S. Reid (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), IV, 64.

57 Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 8 (emphasis his).

Christ's merit depends upon God's grace alone, which has ordained *this manner* of salvation for us, it is just as properly opposed to all human righteousness as God's grace is."[58] We must conclude, therefore, that though Calvin uses an expression similar to that of Scotus, his understanding of the relation between merit and the decree is certainly different.

The basic thrust of Calvin's view is that "Christ rightly and properly… merited God's grace and salvation for us" and foundational to this position is the conviction that "Christ's merit does not exclude God's free grace but precedes it."[59] Two important observations must be made here. First, when something is said to be properly the case, it touches the essence of that which makes it to be the case, and that essence is intrinsically, not extrinsically premised. So logically, it means that Christ's merit is what belongs to him by virtue of what he has accomplished through perfect obedience and this merit ultimately depends upon who he is essentially. Merit is not imputed or accorded to Christ's work. Second, Calvin says Christ's merit precedes God grace, which means the grace of God did not fill up a vacuum that was in Christ. But before God's grace chose the means to save us, Christ was already meritorious. The Lamb of God was already worthy on account of who he is and in this case his merit preceded the grace of God.

The definitive character that the divinity of Christ gives to the redemptive historical is climatically expressed in the contrast that Paul stresses between Adam and Christ. Whereas Adam's disobedience brought condemnation and death through sin, Christ's obedience brought justification and life through righteousness (Rom. 5:1-19). The infinity of Adam's sin resulted from his violation of an eternal order. Christ's perfect obedience involves two basic considerations. First, obedience to that eternal command still remains in force as far as the covenantal relationship between God and man remains, so that the infinite value of Christ's merit is reckoned with the object (namely God) to which that obedience was directed. Second, the passive and active obedience that Christ demonstrated was the action of God to redeem mankind, which qualifies that obedience as infinite and perfect.

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58 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2. 17. 1, 529 (emphasis mine).

59 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.17.1, 298.

Christ came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it by his perfect, active and passive obedience. Again, in 1 Cor. 15:40-47, Paul's eschatological frame contrasts Christ and Adam in a way that shows that the heavenly intrudes and redefines the whole state of affairs in the redemptive history. The new order that Christ introduces is heavenly and spiritual; Christ is called the "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45) in contrast to the Adamic earthly, natural and living-soul order. More particularly, Paul grounds the efficacy of the resurrection order in Christ's origin in verse 47: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven." The redemptive covenantal context provides the grounds whereby the divine ontic person of Christ exhibits his saving powers in redemptive history.

The ontological merit of Christ does not destroy the concept of merit as God's gracious bestowal of value to what he deems as such, but rather expresses it, so that without the merit of Christ no human being could merit God's favor. His merit is of God and as such is the grace of God given to us that we might have a right standing with him. Calvin explicates this elaborately.[60] Following Paul, Calvin says:

> Christ is given us to be our righteousness [1 Corinthians 1:30]. He alone is well founded in Christ who has perfect righteousness in himself: since the apostle does not say that He was sent to help us attain righteousness but himself to be our righteousness [1 Corinthians 1:30]. Indeed, he states that he has chosen us 'in him' from eternity 'before the foundation of the world,' through no merit of our own 'but according to the purpose of divine good pleasure' [Ephesians 1:4-5, cf. Vg.]; that by his death we are redeemed from the condemnation of death and freed from ruin [cf. Colossians 1:14, 20].[61]

Here Calvin very clearly locates the righteousness or merit of Christ that comes to us in the pre-existent Christ. He is the righteousness of God given to us to provide for us what is lacking. Contrary to the Scotistic understanding of merit based on divine acceptation (which implies that it was alien to Christ), Calvin

60 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.15:1-3, 267-270.

61 Ibid., 3.15:5, 272.

in the above passage says Christ has "perfect righteousness *in himself*" which qualified him to be given to us.

Socinus' attack on the merit of Christ was to reduce him to a "mere instrument or minister, not as the Author or leader and prince of life, as Peter calls him [Acts 3:15]."[62] Calvin despised this attitude. When Calvin says "if anyone would simply set Christ by himself over against God's judgment, there will be no place for merit," he is actually arguing that such an opposition would contradict the very nature of God and would not allow the opportunity for satisfaction of divine justice by Christ in his human nature. That there would be no place for merit is not meant to contradict the fact that Christ's merit was of himself; in fact, Christ's merit according to Calvin even "precedes" God's mercy which made it possible for God's mercy to be genuine. Having taken his Son who was meritorious by all standards, he has bequeathed to us the satisfaction of his own justice. Calvin says: "In discussing Christ's merit, we do not consider the beginning of merit to be in him, but we go back to God's ordinance, the first cause. For God solely of his own good pleasure appointed him Mediator to obtain salvation for us."[63] Here Calvin goes beyond the humanity of Christ to his ontological pre-existence, which meritorious status was recognized and selected by the good pleasure of God to be the only Mediator. Clearly, Calvin does not give room to those who stop at the humanity of Christ in order to reduce him to a mere instrument of salvation.

The concepts of merit and righteousness are correlative. Where there is righteousness there is merit. Perhaps we can take the language of righteousness as Paul uses it to explain the sense of the merit of Christ. Righteousness comes by perfect obedience to the established law because it is a moral end. It must come through an act. Paul says that Christ is the embodiment of the righteousness of God that becomes ours by faith (Phil.3:9). Christ as God's righteousness is not simply the act of his being sent to die for our sins, but Christ's obedience to God unto the point of death on the cross is also an essential part of that righteousness. Therefore, the whole life of obedience of Christ is the righteousness of God that is given for our redemption and only Christ could be obedient to God in the perfect way because of who he was.

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62 Ibid., 2.17:1, 298.

63 Ibid., 298-99.

This is Calvin's point. If the righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of God because he himself is of God, then it is infinite in character because it is of God. This is Calvin's idea of the merit of Christ.

Calvin interprets Phil. 3:9 that Christ's righteousness becomes ours because God takes what Christ obtains by his perfect obedience and confers it upon us.[64] Calvin, in line with Paul, contrasts the righteousness of man which comes by human efforts and that which is of God and which is given to us through our faith in Christ: "These he [Paul] represents as so directly opposed to each other, that they cannot stand together."[65] Christ's merit or righteousness is opposed to human merit because his is of divine origin. Though Calvin recognizes that Christ mediates as man, yet he does not only mediate as mere man but as the God-man, and his righteousness is therefore not of man but of God. By the unique identity of the person of Christ, his merit or righteousness is divine because he is divine. It is not as though merit was first conferred upon him and then finally to us.

But on the contrary, what was not originally of Christ namely, our sin, was conferred upon him so that what was originally his (that is, his merit or righteousness) was conferred upon us (2 Cor. 5:21). The contrast between sin and righteousness here is rooted in the ontological and moral deterioration in our case and perfection as in the case of Christ. Calvin recognizes Paul's teaching here that sin which is originally ours is contrasted with righteousness which is originally Christ's so that "we are judged of in connection with Christ's righteousness, which we have put on by faith, that it might become ours."[66] It is by our solidaric union with Christ that what he owns becomes ours, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ which came only by the sacrifice of Christ (Phil. 3:9). I take ἐν αὐτω to refer both to the eternal being of Christ (as is characteristic of Pauline usage elsewhere) and also to union with him in his accomplished work of redemption. Our redemption stands on this unity of the pre-existent and incarnate person of Christ.

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64 Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 83.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Albany: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 126.

In Calvin's Christology, it is very clear that the ontic merit of Christ cannot be divorced from the fact that it is "the very majesty of God" that has "descended to us."[67] This statement recognizes all that accrues from the person of Christ by right as *autotheos* whose merit was intrinsically infinite. The person of Christ and his work are conjoined in Calvin's thought, so that denial of his ontic merit jeopardizes the unity of his two natures in which he performed the mediatorial work. There cannot be a split between the person and work of Christ because the work is performed by one person with both natures. It therefore follows that Christ's absolute perfection, where everyone else had failed, was due to his ontological worth, acting to safeguard his humanity from falling as Adam did.

In explicating the nature of the power of Christ, Calvin says it obtains in Christ by virtue of his divinity, for "this power cannot be *properly* attributed to the human nature."[68] Here Calvin gives primacy to the deity of Christ rather than his humanity. This provides the frame of understanding that the merit of Christ, by which divine wrath is removed, is the highest expression of the power of Christ and may also be properly attributed to the person of Christ by virtue of his divinity. Helm makes a categorical assertion of Calvin's view of Christ's merit: "Christ, being divine, has infinite merit, the creatures no merit at all."[69] Negatively construed, Christ "could not fulfill other aspects of the office [of mediator] unless by his divine power: it was not within man's capability to overcome death and the devil, nor could man alone win righteousness, give life, or grant all the benefits which we receive from him."[70]

Calvin's precision on this matter is obvious as he applies this to Christ's qualification for the priesthood: "'You are my Son, today I have begotten You' (Heb 1:5; 5:5, Ps 2:7), by which he clearly shows *no one is equal to or suitable for this office without divinity*" because "this divinity is a necessary requisite of the office of priesthood."[71] If Calvin is indeed correct here, then

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67 Ibid., 2.12.1, 464.

68 Joseph Tylenda, citing Calvin in "Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro," *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, ibid., 13 (emphasis mine).

69 Helm, *Calvin's Ideas,* 336.

70 Ibid., 13-14.

71 Ibid., 14. Cf. Calvin, *Commentary on the Hebrews*, 102.

the infinite worth of Christ's work must be also based on the grounds of his divinity instead of being based on divine acceptation. If the divinity of Christ is necessary for his priesthood, so also is his divinity necessary for the goal of his work, which is the outpouring of his meritorious person and work unto us to safeguard us from divine wrath. After all, God hated us for our sins before also showing love to us. Calvin consistently points out that Christ was appointed Mediator according to the divine good pleasure, but this does not exclude his prior qualifications. He was chosen to give us merit because of who he is; in fact he had "taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was *his by nature* ours by grace."[72] It must be understood that Calvin is not here talking of Christ communicating characteristics uniquely his in order to make us divine; rather he is saying that what grants us a righteous standing before God is Christ's merits.

Conclusion

Finally, the Heidelberg Catechism of 1561 which was written by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus which has become the universal document of the Reformed tradition was based on Calvin's Catechism that he wrote in Geneva in 1545. The Christological trust of the Heidelberg Catechism especially Question 17 and its answer could be said to be an abridged idea of Calvin on the nature of the Mediator who bears two natures.[73] In Ursinus' exposition of the catechism, he underlines the divine qualities that are essential to Christ's mediatorial work such as "infinite wrath of God against sin" and the punishment of that was "infinite in greatness, dignity and value" which requires the "infinite strength" of the Mediator.[74] The Belgic Confession of 1561 has the same attestation with the Heidelberg Catechism on the respective functions of the divine and human in Christ in meeting the requirements of divine justice. Both confessional standards were adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed

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72 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.12.2, 465.

73 Compare the Heidelberg Catechism Question 17 and its answer to Calvin's *Institutes*, 2.12.2-3. Cf. also *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 8:3, 7 and *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 40 and its answer.

74 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1852), 87.

Church in 1617 as keeping in tune with the Calvinistic position on the nature of the mediator. Both confessions have a serious breach with Scotism, if there was any connection at all between Calvin and Scotism. The differences between Calvin and Scotus outweigh the similarities and as such it is unwarrantable to describe Calvin as a Scotist.

—Theological College of Northern Nigeria Bukuru, Jos, Nigeria.