

THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE SANCTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

The Reformed confession of “Grace Alone” obviously involves the doctrines of faith, election, justification and perseverance. The conception of irresistible grace is comfortably applied to the same doctrines. However, sanctification is a special case in that the theological focus shifts from divine action to human effort. This emphasis on human striving must avoid the Catholic view of works righteousness, and reject the Thomistic teaching on cooperative grace and condign merit. Analysis of these issues raises again the question of the proper use of human reason in theological reflection.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Karl Barth, “There can be no doubt that in practice [Calvin’s] decisive interest is primarily in the problem of sanctification”. Indeed,

we might regard it as established beyond any doubt that, as distinct from Luther, Calvin must be called the theologian of sanctification (Barth 1958:509).

In Reformed theology the doctrine of sanctification is closely related to the doctrines of faith and justification — all of which are based on the grace-full and loving sovereignty of God. This cluster of doctrines requires a strong denial of the Thomistic understanding of operating and cooperating grace. In addition, they deny condign merit and thereby affirm irresistible sanctification. These affirmations and denials are by no means self-evident either in terms of biblical revelation, reason, common sense, or theological tradition. Nevertheless, they flow directly from among the deepest and most powerful springs of Reformed commitment. The Reformed conclusions about irresistible grace and irresistible justification do not surprise theologians, but that the doctrine of sanctification, being a work of God, is also irresistible is not so often noticed, not so often articulated, and sometimes even denied.

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The purpose of this essay, offered as a tribute to my friend, Pieter Potgieter, is a brief analysis of the interlocking doctrines of (1) irresistible grace, (2) irresistible justification, and (3) irresistible sanctification, concluding with a suggestion about the role of rational connections in doctrinal reflection.

2. IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The theological term “irresistible grace” in the English language is usually associated with the fourth letter of the TULIP mnemonic: T = Total depravity, U = Unconditional election, L = Limited atonement, I = Irresistible grace, P = Perseverance of the saints. This acrostic purports to summarize the orthodox Reformed doctrine of the Synod of Dort (1618) in opposition to the erroneous Arminian view. The Fourth Arminian article states that the “grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good”. Thus

the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and *co-operative grace*, can neither think, will, nor do good . . . But as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible[.] (ed. Schaff 1983 [1931]:547 [emphasis added]).²

The Arminians assert both cooperative and resistible grace. In opposition, the Canons of Dort expound the doctrine of predestination insisting that according to God’s decree, the hearts of the elect are graciously softened and God inclines them to believe. However, the gentle terms “softening” and “inclining” are modified by the stronger declaration that election is

the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race . . . a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ[.]

The decree of God concerning the elect is

effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, *and sanctification*[.] (ed. Schaff 1983 [1931]:582 [emphasis added]).

Election is founded on the divine will not on a human life of foreseen faith or a life of foreseen holiness — however acquired. Moreover, sanctification is understood as part of the election decree. That is, faith, sanctification and all the gifts of salvation flow completely from the good pleasure of

2 In this formulation God rather than man seems to be cooperating.

God's gracious election. Regeneration is a supernatural work and it is not within the power of humanity to choose to be regenerated or not. Rather "all in whose hearts God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly and effectually regenerated[.]" (ed. Schaff 1983 [1931]:590). Regeneration or sanctification is therefore both certain and irresistible.

The proper understanding of God's grace in election involves the irresistible bestowal of true faith, justification, sanctification and perseverance. The latter gift includes the certainty or assurance of salvation on the believer's part. According to Heinrich Hepppe, perseverance is

not an advantage which the believer might appropriate to himself by moral effort and exercise, but a supernatural gift which proceeds solely from God's free grace (Hepppe 1950:584).

The fifth head of doctrine at Dort concerning the perseverance of the saints declares that true believers "sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into [great and heinous sins]". However, they are not permitted

to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin against the Holy Spirit nor does [God] permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction (ed. Schaff 1983 [1931]:593).

According to Dort, the perseverance of the saints is not a popular doctrine. "Satan abhors it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrite abuse, and heretics oppose it." (ed. Schaff 1983 [1931]:595). The irresistibility of God's grace is illustrated by, but it is not restricted to, the Arminian debate because the assertion that the omnipotent and loving will of God cannot be finally frustrated is divined from the Reformed conviction of the sovereign grace of God and clearly includes faith, justification, and perseverance.

Sanctification, being a divine act, is likewise irresistible because justification and sanctification are closely connected. In Calvin they are defined as a two-fold grace resulting from God's gift of faith. That justification and sanctification are twin graces means they are two doctrines, not one. On the other hand, each is an intimately related gift of God. Following Calvin, Barth insists that in sanctification

we are not dealing with a second divine action which either takes place simultaneously with [justification], or precedes or follows it in time (Barth 1958:502).

In contrast, Thomistic theology, as well as Arminian, holds the resistibility of grace as an important conviction. Interestingly, the fundamental outline of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is similar.³ The first part consists of God's movement to mankind (*ST.I; Inst. I and II*). The second division is mankind's movement to God (*ST.I.II; Inst. III and IV*). Both theologies teach that in the relation between Supreme Being and created beings the initiative always belongs to God, but a response is expected from the human creature. Sharp differences concerning the nature of this response separate Catholic and Reformed theology, leading the former to suggest resistible grace and the latter to assert irresistible grace.

According to Thomas in the "Treatise on grace" (*ST I.II. qu. 109-114*) human nature may be considered in two ways: first, in its pre-fall integrity and second, in its post-fall corruption. In the former, human beings were able to do the good proportionate to their nature but the fall corrupted this natural goodness. Nevertheless, since human nature is not totally corrupted by sin, some good can still be done with the natural endowments remaining. In the state of corrupt nature God's grace is needed (1) to heal and (2) to enable works of supernatural virtue (*qu. 109. art. 2*). In other words, God's grace first creates and then restores or perfects human nature (*ST I.1.8*).

Reformed theology also affirms a human response in salvation but it is greatly attenuated by a strong sense that the dominion of sin includes the serious deprivation of freedom of choice. According to Calvin, any discussion of human freedom must avoid two errors. First to be avoided is the denial of human responsibility that leads to complacent acceptance of sin. Second, the affirmation of human responsibility that leads to confident acceptance of merit for salvation is likewise wrong. The proper answer to this dilemma is that no good thing remains in human power, yet

in spite of this [a person] should nevertheless be instructed to aspire to a good of which he is empty, to a freedom of which he has been deprived (*Inst., II.2.1*).

Within these dual, and contradictory, assertions Reformed theology attempts to emphasise the gravity of sin's destruction and the magnitude of God's grace. The more logical and commonsensible Catholic position, on the other hand, maintains that the natural gifts were only corrupted while

³ The *Summa Theologica* (*ST*) in the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province is cited by part, question, and article. The *Institutes* (*Inst.*) in the Library of Christian Classics edition ed. by John T. McNeill and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles is cited by book, chapter, and paragraph.

the supernatural gifts were removed. Calvin denies that the reason was perfectly unblemished in the fall and the will largely unimpaired (*Inst.*, II.2.4). Calvin admits that the restoration effected in Christ includes faith, love of God and neighbour, zeal for holiness, etc. Additionally, human reason was not completely wiped out but he insists it is greatly corrupted. Being inseparable from human nature, the human will does not perish but it cannot strive for the right. Calvin concludes,

[W]e see implanted in human nature some sort of desire to search out the truth to which man would not at all aspire if he had not already savored it (*Inst.*, II.2.12).

Thomas's basic conviction of the divine-human relation requires human cooperation within the operation of God. The distinctions between immediate and intermediate, universal and particular, primary and secondary, necessary and contingent causality make the same point.⁴ According to Thomas, God is the first mover and the last end, moving the soul inwardly and inspiring the good will. This means that human beings are turned to God only because God turns them.

[M]an cannot prepare himself to receive the light of grace except by the gratuitous help of God moving him inwardly (qu. 109. art.5).

God's grace is not merely extended to humans but bestowed on them. The

preparation of the will cannot take place without the habitual gift of grace which is the principle of meritorious works (qu. 109. art. 6).

Grace is defined as an habitual gift that leads to meritorious works (qu. 111. art. 2).

Thomas's concept of God as first mover and last end utilizes indirect, impersonal, and philosophical modes of understanding. In contrast, Reformed theology more often employs direct, personal, and historical categories. Sin, therefore, is understood as a direct and personal affront to God placing humans in an adversarial relation to God and making meritorious works impossible. Thomas sees sin as a defect in human nature as originally created. "[S]in is nothing else than to stray from what is according to our nature" (qu. 109. art. 8). Because of the fall, human nature cannot redeem itself from sin. Grace is required by which God (1) initially moves the hu-

4 Although Reformed doctrine denies the Catholic distinction between God's free gift of grace and the meritorious award of glory, the Reformed distinction between universal and special grace serves the same theological purpose of identifying some room for the exercise of human freedom and responsibility.

man creature to will and act and (2) bestows on some persons a habitual gift (qu. 111. art. 2). The divine activity includes both God's general operating grace and God's special bestowal of the habitual gift. That is, "man prepares himself, only in so far as his free choice is prepared by God" (qu. 112. art. 4). Again,

in their natural order the first in the justification of the ungodly is the infusion of grace, the second is the movement of free choice towards God (qu. 113. art. 8).

In Thomism the relationship between God's operating grace and man's cooperating grace is a fundamental divine-human dynamic.⁵ Since the latter depends on the former, human beings are not absolutely but only relatively free in their responses. Still, while initially dependent on God's action (operating grace), human beings receiving habitual grace become responsible for exercising their role in cooperating grace. This role involves the notion of *grace infused* (not *imputed*, as in Reformed theology). Infused grace becomes habitual in the individual person and thus appears to be a personal possession that issues in personal responsibility.

Calvin rejects the ideas of grace infused or imparted but accepts the notion of grace implanted. On this view, sin entirely deforms but does not entirely destroy human nature. Human beings do not become "senseless sticks and blocks" (ed. Schaff 1983 [1931]:591). Nevertheless, in Reformed theology the implanted desire to search out the truth does not have the same important function as the infused grace that becomes habitual and leads to meritorious works in Catholic theology.

Calvin objects to the distinction between operating and cooperating grace. His belief that the effective desire for good should be attributed to God ("implanted in human nature") is not unlike operating grace. However, the idea of human cooperation suggests to Calvin "that man by his very own nature somehow seeks after the good — though ineffectively". Thomas teaches "man is helped by God's gratuitous will, in so far as a habitual gift is infused by God into the soul". Thereby humans may be inclined of themselves "moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good" (qu. 110. art.2). Acquiring eternal good seems to be conditional on human effort. The chief offence of this view, according to Calvin, is the ambiguity that leads to a perverted interpretation.

5 Philip Walker Butin's *Revelation, redemption, and response: Calvin's trinitarian understanding of the Divine-human relationship* is a splendid attempt to understand the divine-human relation in trinitarian terms.

They thought we co-operate with the assisting grace of God, because it is our right either to render it ineffectual by spurning the first grace, or to confirm it by obediently following it (*Inst.*, II.2.6).

In other words, in Catholic theology human beings are considered able to accept or reject God's grace.

The relation between operating and cooperating grace reappears in the Thomistic teaching of the divine bestowal of grace in order that human merit be rewarded by eternal glory. That is, God preordained to give grace in order that the elect might merit glory (*ST* I.23.5). In discussing whether the gift of grace is greater than the gift of glory Thomas speaks of the ungodly as worthy of punishment while the just "by the fact of their justification are worthy of glory" (qu. 113. art. 4). Accordingly, in Thomas divine justification is expounded in connection with human merit.

In affirming *sola gratia*, Reformed theology denies merit to the godly and rejects the distinction between operating and cooperating grace. Referring to Thomas by name, Calvin objects that God's foreknowledge of human action does not include any merits that God did not bestow (Calvin [trans. Reid] 1961:155). "God's grace does not find but makes those fit to be chosen" (*Inst.*, III.2.8). Calvin rejects Thomas' attempt to include human effort as any part of salvation. Against the view that "God is said to predestine glory for man on account of merits, because he has decreed to bestow upon him grace by which to merit glory," Calvin says "predestination to glory is the cause of predestination to grace, rather than the converse" (*Inst.*, III.22.9) (see also Partee 1978:14-22).

The Thomistic view of grace has the logical advantage of allowing a relative freedom to God's human creature and requiring of everyone an accountability. Among the difficulties from a Reformed perspective is first, that the concepts of infused and cooperating grace depend on the conviction that grace perfects nature in such a way that human nature can be understood in itself with divine grace receding into the deep and impersonal background. Grace infused and become habitual asserts that salvation depends partially on the individual human will rather than entirely on God's special and personal grace. The context of decision belongs entirely to God, but the content of decision belongs partially to the human being. Second, since human responsibility is never perfectly accomplished, one's salvation, while certain in Christ according to Roman theology, can never be certainly known by any individual except by special and direct revelation.

The present point is that the Thomistic distinction between God's operating grace and human cooperating grace affirms the sovereign initiative

of God and also the genuine accountability of humans. However, if individuals are genuinely responsible for cooperation, they are also genuinely able to reject it. The human possibility of refusing to cooperate with God's grace assumes a doctrine of resistible grace which Reformed theology cannot accept, insisting to the contrary on irresistible grace and a personal knowledge of the certainty of one's salvation.

3. IRRESISTIBLE JUSTIFICATION

The most popular short summary of Protestant theology is "Justification by faith alone". The longer, and more accurate, phrase would be "Justification through God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ by faith alone". In either case, faith can be, and often is, mistakenly understood by Protestants as a human achievement, a special kind of work, meaning that faith is governed by the personal pronouns, my faith or our faith. However, deeper reflection recognizes and takes with absolute seriousness that saving faith is entirely a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Reformed theology confesses this faith to be an irresistible gift of the sovereign God. The precise relation between divine grace and human responsibility is a classical theological debate. Augustine and Pelagius, Luther and Erasmus, Calvin and Wesley, Gomarus and Arminius come to mind. Nearly all theologians affirm both God's election and human choice but with many variations of emphasis. In addition, the faith alone formula leaves unexplained the biblical imperative to good works, the holy life, or the doctrine of sanctification. In Reformed theology God's sheer grace is affirmed in such a way that "works righteousness" is denied. However, striving toward the holy life cannot be ignored. The result is the paradoxical confession that sanctification involves human action but not works righteousness. Likewise sanctification (requiring human action) cannot be collapsed into justification, which involves only divine action — except for the human acceptance of it.

Perhaps the most elegant solution to this problem is Thomas's. The balanced and sequential dynamic seen in the Thomistic view of operating and cooperating grace reappears in the Catholic concept of condign merit. Salvation is outlined in three steps. First, God's sovereign and operating grace is bestowed or infused. Second, on the basis of this gracious bestowal, an adequate human response is enabled. Third, divine operating grace plus human cooperating grace produces salvation (Purves & Partee 2000:119-120). In opposition, Reformed theology bases human response entirely on the fact of salvation rather than salvation on human response — even partially. According to Protestant theology, the process of sanctification is the consequence of, not the cause of, salvation.

The conviction that salvation belongs completely to God is vigorously expounded in the Reformed doctrine of predestination as previously indicated. Calvin discusses this complicated doctrine in the final edition of the *Institutes* as part of soteriology. God's eternal election is considered in connection with the gift of faith. In the Westminster Confession a century later predestination (Chapter III) is treated as part of the creation decrees. In both documents, but in quite different ways and creating different intellectual problems, the doctrine of eternal predestination teaches that election does not depend on human but on divine choice (John 15:16). God's irresistible grace is revealed in and by Jesus Christ and applied to the church and individual members of the body of Christ in faith, which is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. Grace is God's special, irresistible and unconditional gift rather than a general, resistible and conditional human choice.

In Book III of the *Institutes*, Calvin understands the work of the Holy Spirit, faith, sanctification, justification, prayer and predestination as *participatio Christi*. If "union with Christ" can be claimed as the "central dogma" in Reformed theology, it means, among other things, that there is no finally separated "human moment" of the self (Partee 1987:191-199; also, Purves & Achtemeier 1999). In other words, anthropology cannot be developed apart from theology, specifically Christology.

This point is essentially denied by some Reformed orthodox theologians when sanctification is considered

man's effort, lasting his whole life, to live in thought, word and action solely according to God's good pleasure and for His glory (Hepppe 1950:570).

Indeed, the chapter on sanctification in Hepppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* seems more Roman than Reformed. Holiness is defined as a disposition suited to God infused into the heart. Moreover, sanctification is regarded as the continuation of justification to gradual completion (Hepppe 1950:565). In justification man's relation to grace is purely passive, but in sanctification man cooperates with grace. Against this view, normative Reformed theology maintains that neither grace, nor faith, nor justification, nor election, nor sanctification can be properly considered apart from Christ. The Reformed understanding of God's will or the more foundational Reformed doctrine of union with Christ does not allow the human to be sufficiently separate from God to envision cooperation with God's impersonal general grace apart from God's personal and special grace. In other words, God's grace toward us and God's justification of us are both irresistible. In the ex-

position of Grace Alone, the same irresistibility logically applies, and should be extended, to the doctrine of sanctification.

4. IRRESISTIBLE SANCTIFICATION

According to Calvin, as already noted, in Christ we receive a “twofold grace” (*duplex gratia*) in reconciliation and sanctification (*Inst.*, III.1.1.). This means that while

man is justified by faith alone, and simple pardon, nevertheless actual holiness of life, so to speak, is not separated from free imputation of righteousness (*Ibid.*).

In agreement, Barth says that when

we speak of justification and sanctification, we have to do with two different aspects of the one event of salvation.

Barth points out that this relation is parallel to Christological doctrine.

That Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one person does not mean that His true deity and His true humanity are one and the same, or that the one is interchangeable with the other (Barth 1958:503).

While claiming that God’s grace toward us is irresistible, Reformed theology also teaches that God’s justification of us is irresistible because it is entirely God’s action and not ours. Calvin’s theology does not sharply separate the self and God as the famous opening sentence of the *Institutes* declares. This same conviction is articulated in Book III by the invocation of the Holy Spirit who is responsible for the application of grace in union with Christ and the gift of faith that produces the double grace. Nevertheless, irresistible justification includes a human response to God’s grace. This “subjective moment” in the doctrine of justification is announced, but neither carefully analyzed nor emphasized. Reformed theologians generally accept (1) complete human passivity in God’s revelation of grace and (2) almost complete human passivity in the divine bestowal and human acceptance of justification by faith. In Jesus Christ sinners are forgiven and thereby justified. In him sinners are made righteous in the sense that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to them. This imputation is direct and personal. It does not happen over a person’s head. On the other hand, in Reformed theology the response to the gift of justification presumes some kind of personal acceptance of a gift that cannot be rejected because it is irresistible.

In the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), the relation between free will (Chapter IX) and effectual calling (Chapter X) expounds God’s

special grace and humanity's remaining sin. The concept of cooperating grace is not present. Man, in the state of sin, cannot convert himself or prepare himself for conversion (WCF IX, 3).

This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it (WCF X, 2).

God's almighty power determines those who have been predestined unto life and effectually draws them to Jesus Christ, "yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace" (WCF X, 1). God's conversion of the sinner by grace alone enables the sinner "freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good" yet not perfectly in this life (WCF IX, 4). Only in the state of glory is the will of man made perfectly and immutably free to good alone (WCF IX, 5). These citations demonstrate the Reformed affirmation of freedom ("they come most freely") but this freedom is exercised in the context of God's irresistible grace. That is, human freedom and divine irresistibility are both asserted but their relation is mysterious and miraculous. According to Barth, sanctification includes the freedom given in the strength of the Holy Spirit to look to Christ "and thus to lift up ourselves". This lifting up of ourselves, while a divine mystery and miracle, "is a work which is eternally resolved and seriously willed and effectively executed *by God*" (Barth 1958:554 [emphasis added]).

According to Roman Catholic theology the doctrines of justification and sanctification are not sharply distinguished and neither is irresistible. Justification and sanctification are seen as a continuous process in which the human will has an important function. Likewise, in Reformed orthodoxy, human striving is often emphasized in such a way that God's sovereign grace almost disappears. David Fergusson suggests,

The setting out of an elaborate *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) in some of the Reformed Confessions creates the impression of a steady movement of the believer ever onwards and upwards (Fergusson 1999:381).

The basic and anxious question is whether this "steady movement" is directed by God's particular providence or is the result of human effort or some combination of the two. To the extent that sanctification is understood as an irresistible grace of God, the "fear of hell", which Fergusson lists as the third obstacle to surmount in a contemporary doctrine of sanctification, is overcome.

The major difference between the Catholic and Protestant doctrine of sanctification is that the Catholic view of human nature and cooperating grace does not so strongly emphasize the divine decrees and irresistible grace. Since one cannot be saved apart from God's (operating) grace, in this special sense Catholics can affirm salvation by grace alone. However, the cooperative function of the will means that human striving plays a secondary, but very real, part in salvation. In opposition, Reformed theology insists that justification and sanctification are one in divine origin but two in human experience. They are not continuous or sequential. Each is distinct from the other but dialectical and paradoxical in relation. Justification is accomplished once-for-all by the work of Jesus Christ and sanctification is being accomplished day-by-day through the work of the Holy Spirit. Justification (our status before God) requires sanctification (our process before God). Atonement and the bestowal of justification are entirely a result of God's grace, not a possibility for human achievement — even by way of cooperation. Sanctification involves the advocacy and power of the Holy Spirit enabling the elect to strive to live a holy life, but this human striving does not rise to the level of cooperation with God.

In the Reformed doctrine of justification within the union in Christ there is an almost invisible "human moment" of acceptance of God's grace, but the main emphasis is on human passivity. The doctrine of sanctification, on the other hand, sometimes focuses on human activity so strongly that the advocacy of the Holy Spirit appears conditional on human effort. This conclusion is improper because the conviction of irresistibility as applied to the doctrines of grace and justification also applies to sanctification.

In a twentieth-century exposition of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification Emil Brunner quietly abandons the divine irresistibility in favour of human freedom. His exposition is forthrightly divided into (1) Sanctification as the work of God and (2) Sanctification as the task of man (Brunner 1960:Vol. III, Chapter 21). Brunner is, of course, attempting to articulate the relation between God's assurance to us and God's claim on us. This distinction is set within the context of his sharp criticism of the objectivity of fundamentalism on the one hand and the subjectivity of liberalism on the other. Therefore in addressing the divine/human dynamic, Brunner is not employing traditional subject and object categories, which he replaces with the categories of I-Thou and the concept of "Truth as Encounter". In addition, with his always-admirable clarity, Brunner asserts the absolute freedom and omnipotence of God but argues that God "limits Himself, in order that a creature may have room alongside of Himself". The divine omnipotence, according to Brunner, implies creaturely independence.

God *so* wills to be “almighty” over us, that He wins our hearts through his condescension in His Son, in the Cross of the Son. No other Almighty Power of God could thus conquer and win our hearts. The heart is the one sphere which cannot be forced. No love can be forced — God the Creator makes us so free that even His coercion could not force us to love Him (Brunner 1950:Vol. I, 254).

Brunner recognizes that the Reformers’ teaching of Grace Alone was intended to reject all forms of synergism and that both “faith and freedom are wholly the gift of God” (Brunner 1960:Vol. III, 316). In spite of this affirmation, Brunner seems to explicitly adopt the Thomistic view of operating and cooperating grace.

Certainly our transformation through Christ, the new life is God’s act alone. *But our cooperation (unser Mittun) is included in this act of His.* The indicative of grace is never without the simultaneous imperative of discipleship (Brunner 1960:Vol. III, 297 [Emphasis added]).

In dealing with the assurance of pardon (or the certainty of saving faith) Brunner rejects both rational certainty and the certainty of sense perception as objectified and possessed by “the autonomous solitary self”. According to Brunner, the certainty of faith arises in, and is based on, the encounter with God (Brunner 1960:Vol. III Chapter 18). While Brunner’s conception of truth as encounter correctly emphasises the grace of divine event as occasion, it does not sufficiently protect God’s continuing grace in the human situation. Moreover, by rejecting the divine irresistibility of sanctification in favor of sanctification as in part a task of man, Brunner enhances the anxious responsibility of human beings in the Catholic and Arminian direction at the cost of confidence in divine providence in the Reformed sense.

One might argue that the doctrine of sanctification, and within it the question of divine and human responsibility, is better referred to the mystery of union with Christ than to the mystery of Brunner’s I-Thou encounter category. However, the proper location of the mystery does not answer the question whether sanctification is resistible or irresistible. Furthermore, no criteria are advanced to distinguish the human actions that are mandated and the works righteousness that must be denied. As we have seen, the Thomistic view of operating and cooperating grace is based on the conviction that Grace Perfects Nature. The Reformed conviction of Grace Alone produces a concept of irresistibility that is always applied to the doctrines of grace, faith, justification, election, perseverance and should also be applied to the doctrine of sanctification. This application is appropriate in that God’s providence is confessed and human confidence is established and comfort is advanced. However, human freedom, responsibility, and accountability are

often asserted as mandates of the holy life without relating these admonitions to God's special grace. On the other hand, a strong doctrine of irresistible sanctification taken to its logical conclusion results in either antinomianism or a perfectionism that denies the reality of present sin.

Reflections on the doctrine of sanctification depend greatly on the ordinary processes of human thinking. According to most theologians, divine revelation is not determined by human reason, but reason is directly involved in working out connections and conclusions. Since the analysis of theological distinctions is not a matter of revelation, the employment of common human logic is necessarily required and the final appeal of the distinctions drawn is to their faithfulness and reasonableness. That the proper use of reason in theology is a complicated topic is seen in the attempts to answer (or ignore) Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the limits of reason alone*. Even the newest of Protestant theologians recognise that the relations are not self-evident among the confessions of Grace Alone, Scripture Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone. How reasonably can four alones stand together? Among the oddities of this situation is that reason must be employed to analyse the use of reason.

As Reformed theology developed over the centuries, attention shifted between the confession of faith and the logic of faith. This movement from individual and personal to rational and objective is inevitable when the church turns to the educational task of explaining its prophetic witness. For example, Chapter I of the Westminster Confession declares,

The whole counsel of God is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture (WCF I.6).

This "either/or" statement is a sophisticated attempt to explain the relation between revelation and reason. The exercise of deduction and necessary consequence is governed not by direct revelation from God but by the rules of human logic. On first reading one might assume the Westminster authors believed that their own deductions and conclusions were, or ought to be, valid and true for everyone in the world. However the learned divines at Westminster were making a careful and logical move that they accepted from Thomas Aquinas who learned it from Aristotle (Minutes of the Sessions of the Assembly of Divines, Session 640, 15 May 1646, and Aquinas, Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle [1015a20-b15]). The claim is that necessary consequences are not located in the mind of the deducer but in the text itself! That is, the theologians at Westminster thought affirmations can be drawn from Scripture exactly without adding to or diminish-

ing from its meaning. Put another way, proper conclusions based on biblical premises are as necessarily true as the source. A conclusion necessarily (as opposed to possibly) deduced from Scripture is itself to be regarded as divine truth.

The authority given to human reason in this formulation, and especially the role of logic as developed in classical philosophy, is very great. Furthermore, the position allows that both true premises and good and necessary consequences may be denied by ignorant or sinful thinkers. This means the ontological relation between source and deduction requires expansion into an epistemological complement of individuals and communities who possess rectified, regenerate, or sanctified reason, as the divines recognised. The first two parts of this sequence (Scripture and deduction) were carefully defined at Westminster, but the latter two (redeemed reason in individuals and communities) are indicated without precise definition.⁶ In any case, logical consequences drawn from revelational or doctrinal premises remain a regular part of theological discourse and the epistemological need for a concept of “sanctified human reason” to supplement ordinary human reason is occasionally recognized (Berkhof 1953:34). If the notion of a redeemed reason superior to ordinary reason were more extensively developed, Protestants would require the ability to recognize when their leaders were employing the one and when the other. This would be a problem parallel to the Catholic difficulty in distinguishing fallible and infallible pronouncements of the Pope.

In recent years considerable attention has been devoted to “reasons of the heart”. Studies of subjects such as emotional intelligence and social acu-

6 In recent theology three-fourths of the carefully-formulated Westminster sequence has been quietly abandoned with the result that for many “conservative Christians” an essentially unmodified Westminster view of Scripture stands alone as the sole access to the counsel of God. The theological application of distinctions, connections, and conclusions to Scripture requires renewed reflection. Two of the most obvious issues are, first, today’s scholarly consensus concerning the human and historical (as opposed to the divine and philosophical) aspects of the Bible does not allow us to view the *nature* or *purpose* of Scripture as primarily logical rather than narrative. To think of Scripture as designed to furnish the single, absolute, certain and mechanical source for all necessary theological principles and propositions is wrong. Second, the guild of theologians needs to manufacture a clear, carefully nuanced, and most importantly a socially usable explanation of the correct way for drawing and understanding theological conclusions — some of them (like the doctrine of the Trinity) good and necessary articles of faith.

men deal with kinds of knowledge not accessible to the logical or discursive reason. (Charles Dickens's *Hard times* contains a savage attack on reason that ignores the heart.) These new sensibilities may signal some relief from Christian theology's long thralldom to classical philosophy and its singular exaltation of reason. John Calvin admired "sound reasoning" (*Inst.*, IV. 15.20), but the role of God's permission in Reformed theology in the light of God's providence and predestination remains an intellectual puzzle. In a solid understatement Calvin says,

We do not grasp how God wills to take place what he forbids to be done. [I]n a wonderful and ineffable manner nothing is done without God's will, not even that which is against his will. For it would not be done if he did not permit it (*Inst.* I.18.3).

Later, Calvin denies a distinction between God's will and permission. The will of God is the necessity of all things, "Accordingly, man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault" (*Inst.*, III.23.8).

Calvin's conclusion states,

Human reason ... neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim at, this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us (*Inst.*, II.2.18).

Nevertheless, at the level of intellectual connection and conclusion, Christian theologians — including Calvin — have been carefully trained by Plato and Aristotle. The western theological mind seems to prefer the calm clarity of rational and objective categories to the wilder powers of experiential and subjective categories. Obviously the human head and heart belong together but the proper balance is difficult to maintain. In spite of the difficulty, Christians and Christian theologians

are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful ... if it takes root in the heart (*Inst.* I.5.9).

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