

No ‘Absolute Impeccability:’ Charles Hodge and Christology at Old and New Princeton

By James J. Cassidy

I. INTRODUCTION

Scottish Common Sense Realism (hereafter CSR) remains the ongoing scapegoat for the problems—whether real or merely perceived—in Old Princeton theology. Whether it is the issue of theology as a science, the use of right reason, or theistic evolution, CSR continues to be the whipping boy. However, recent research has shown that perhaps not all (apparent?) variations from the Reformed tradition at Old Princeton may be equally laid at the feet of CSR.¹ One such example is the little-discussed answer to the question of Christ’s capability to sin in the Christology of Charles Hodge. The third professor of the seminary has expressed himself provocatively for one with such a reputation for conservatism:

This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It was not a *non potest peccare*. If he was true man He must have been capable of sinning . . . Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people.²

According to Hodge, Christ was not absolutely impeccable. This is not to say that Christ actually sinned. In fact, the context in which this statement is found concerns the necessity of Jesus’ sinlessness (both original and actual) to his being a mediator. Rather, to deny his impeccability is to say that Jesus could (i.e., had the ability to) have sinned. Perhaps something original was taught at Princeton after all.³

What are we to make of a statement such as this one? The purpose of this essay will be to explore the background and context in which Hodge is writing and teaching to see if we can find the soil in which

such thought may be planted, nurtured, and grown. In other words, what are the theological and intellectual preconditions necessary to lead Hodge to draw these conclusions about the temptation of Christ and the

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1. See for instance Mark Noll, *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 33; D.G. Hart, “Princeton and the Law: Enlightened and Reformed,” in Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko, and David Van Druenen eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 44–75; Paul K. Helseth, “‘Right Reason’ and Theological Aesthetics at Old Princeton Seminary: The ‘Mythical Evangelical Magisterium’ Reconsidered,” in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L.W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 129–153; and the other literature cited in fn. 112.

2. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1871; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) II.457. Hereafter abbreviated as *ST*. See also his comments in the context of the discussion on the two wills of Christ where he offers a slight qualification to this statement by saying that for Christ there was “the metaphysical possibility that He should have yielded” (*ST* II.405). In this statement he qualifies the possibility of sin by the term “metaphysical,” meaning in his human nature. See also the explication in Michael Paget, “Christology and Original Sin: Charles Hodge and Edward Irving Compared,” *Churchman* 121/3 (2007): 229–47.

3. Much has been made in scholarship on Old Princeton over Hodge’s famous claim that “a new idea never originated in this Seminary.” See, D.G. Hart, “Systematic Theology at Old Princeton Seminary: Unoriginal Calvinism,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David Van Druenen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 3–4; *The Princeton Theology: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, ed. Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 38. The original statement may be found in A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 521. It is worth giving the quote in context:

potentiality of his sinning? Further, does this square with Chalcedonian Christology? And what are the implications of Old Princeton theology in current Christological discussions, particularly among Barthians and those in the *New Princeton* tradition? To these ends, therefore, we will proceed as follows: first, we will explore closely the theological and intellectual context in which Hodge develops his distinctive Christology; second, we will ask if his Christology squares with Chalcedon and its subsequent implementation in the Reformed tradition, particularly by Bruce McCormack and *New Princeton*; and finally we will draw some conclusions from the history of Princeton Christology and offer a proposal for the future of theological methodology and the relation between innovation and conservation in the dogmatic enterprise.

II. HODGE'S CHRISTOLOGY: BACKGROUND AND FORMULATIONS

Biographical Setting

Charles Hodge from the beginning was fed the things of God. Born in Philadelphia on December 28, 1797,⁴ Charles was raised almost entirely by his mother Maria, née Blanchard. His father, Hugh Hodge, was a well-reputed doctor who died when Charles was only six

months old. Maria, we are told, labored and suffered in prayer for him and his brother (also named Hugh—who would become a doctor like his father.)⁵ From early on his brother acted as guardian of his younger sibling and remained very close and supportive of Charles throughout his life—even going so far as to provide for him and his children when the seminary was unable to supply adequate remuneration.

In Philadelphia he was pastored by the well known Ashbel Green, who would become President of the College of New Jersey in 1812—the year the seminary was established. He was also spiritually nurtured by his mother, “who was a Christian” and regularly took him and his brother to church while also drilling them in the Westminster Catechism (Paxton, 8). However, it was not until he arrived at the College—in the same year Green became President and the seminary was founded—that he underwent a conversion experience during a revival led by Archibald Alexander (Hart, “Princeton and the Law,” 55). After graduating Nassau Hall in 1815, he spent a year studying back in Philadelphia and then matriculated at the seminary in 1816.⁶ Having graduated in 1819 he returned again to Philadelphia to study Hebrew at the behest of Archibald Alexander, who was already eyeing him up as a professor for the seminary. In 1820 he was named assistant teacher of Oriental Languages, in which position he taught seminary students the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. During this year he traveled into New England, where he became familiar with Nathaniel Taylor—the father of the New England Divinity.⁷ His service at this time was not exclusive to the academy, however. From very early on Hodge proved himself a churchman as he filled pulpits and ministered in local churches (Noll, *The Princeton Theology*, 14).

In 1822 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America elected Hodge to take the chair of Oriental and Biblical Literature. The next great endeavor he undertook was to form the periodical *Biblical Repertory* in 1825, which he would rename the *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* and then *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. Already Hodge showed a strong polemical edge, as the publication would be used to make known and critique works of European biblical scholarship for an American audience. This knack for defending the faith was accented all the more during his 1826–28 trip to the continent, where he spent time in the cities of Paris, Halle, and Berlin, among others. While in Germany he heard Friedrich Schleiermacher lecture, along with a host of other critical pastors and theologians.⁸ It was during this time of “breathing

Again, Drs. Alexander and Miller were not speculative men. They were not given to new methods or new theories. They were content with the faith once delivered to the saints. I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this Seminary. Their theological method was very simple. The Bible is the word of God. That is to be assumed or proved. If granted, then it follows, that what the Bible says, God says. That ends the matter. In light of the context—abstracted from which the statement about being unoriginal is usually quoted—it may be asked how to take his famous statement. Is he speaking in hyperbole? Is he referring here especially to Alexander and Miller and no so much to himself or other members of the faculty? Is he promoting unoriginality as such?

4. This is the date recorded by William M. Paxton, *Discourses Commemorative of the Life and Work of Charles Hodge, D.D., LL.D.* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmad, 1879). 6. However, the Trustee Minute, preserved in the same volume as an appendix, recorded December 27 as his day of birth.

5. William M. Paxton, *Discourses*, 7.

6. Paxton, *Discourses*, 10. Paxton informs us that Hodge gave the Valedictory and finished with second honors behind John Johns, later an Episcopal Bishop in Virginia.

7. Earl William Kennedy, “An Historical Analysis of Charles Hodge’s Doctrines of Sin and Particular Grace” (Princeton, Ph.D. Diss., 1968).

8. A.A. Hodge, *Life of Charles Hodge*, 170–71. For the importance of Hodge’s trip to New England and Europe on his theology see Earl William Kennedy, “An Historical Analysis.”

a poisonous atmosphere” that he shaped and sharpened his own faith and theology.⁹ And such was evident from his intense writing labors in the *Review* for forty-three years (1825–68).

In 1840, five years after the appearance of his much-acclaimed commentary on Romans, Hodge was given the chair of Systematic Theology, in which role he would relieve some of the labors of the aging Alexander. When his mentor and spiritual father died in 1851, Hodge took on the extra responsibility of Polemic Theology as well. In 1872 and 1873 his *magnum opus*, the three-volume *Systematic Theology*, was published. As Latin was becoming less and less used by incoming seminary students, it was necessary to have a full dogmatics theology in English. Thus it came about that Hodge's three-volume set would replace the three volumes of Francis Turretin's *Elenctic Theology* which had served to feed his students for so many years.

April 24, 1872 saw the great semi-centennial celebration of Hodge's professorial career, conceived and put together by his pupil and colleague William Henry Green along with a committee of seventy Princeton alum (Hodge, *Life*, 509). Over 400 former students showed up, in addition to many others (512). After this, he continued to teach and preach and be generally useful in the Kingdom. For example, at the age of seventy-six, he spoke at the Evangelical Alliance of 1873 in New York City. With great energy and zeal, he spoke about the unity of the church (547). Because of this, it seemed as if Hodge would be able to go on forever laboring in useful ministry (Paxton, *Discourses*, 15). But his body would eventually weaken as he preached one last sermon at a funeral of an old friend in Washington City. Soon after this he became ill and passed into the arms of his faithful Savior at 6:00 PM on Wednesday, June 19, 1878.

The Peccability of Christ in 19th Century Context

By all indications, the question of Christ's peccability was not broadly discussed in Hodge's day. Yet it was broached in the previous century by one with whom Hodge was quite familiar—"President Edwards," as Hodge was fond of calling him. In his magisterial work *On the Freedom of the Will*, the Northampton pastor says that Christ's "holy behavior" was necessary and that it was impossible that it should be otherwise.¹⁰ He then goes on to give eleven reasons as to why it was impossible for Christ to sin. Interestingly, he does not invoke his divine nature as one of the reasons. Rather, his reasons can be classified in at least two categories.

First, he points to the work of the Spirit by which Christ is upheld "under all temptations" (Edwards, 281). Second, the promises of God—which cannot fail—forbid that Christ should sin. Here he cites a number of Scriptural passages in support of his conclusion (283). Yet, for Edwards, the answers he proffers avoid the important ontological issues surrounding the person of the God-man in the hypostatic union of the two natures. In other words, he does not address directly the issue of the ability—or lack thereof—of the God-man's person to sin. He restricts his answers to the work of the Spirit and indelibility of the divine decree.

Moving now into the nineteenth century we would do well to consider one of the few American theologians who addressed this issue at length—W.G.T. Shedd. Shedd vigorously defends the teaching that Christ was impeccable.¹¹ However, he argues very differently than Edwards. He makes his stand on metaphysical grounds. The second Adam differs from the first, because the first was only *posse non peccare*, but the second is *non posse peccare*. Adam's will was holy and able to resist temptation, yet it was not impossible that he be overcome by it. From here Shedd will argue by making two major points. First, Christ's will is omnipotent and could not be overcome by temptation (Shedd, *DT*, 659). This is proven, in part, by Hebrews 13:8. If Christ was able to sin then he could not be called the same yesterday, today, and forever. Because Christ is divine, and the divine person of the *Logos* dominates the person of Jesus Christ, he is therefore unable to sin:

9. See Alexander's warm and fatherly letters in *Life of Charles Hodge*, 160–1. Alexander exhorts Hodge to maintain a strong devotional life as he breathes the "poisonous air" of German academia. He also encourages him by letting him know that according to God's grace he will return home filled with a rare knowledge of world scholarship which will place him on a level with other learned scholars in America. He is also careful to warn him everywhere of Kantian philosophy and "Neology." The latter term simply means "new teaching" and was a pejorative term used by the British to describe German rationalism. Embedded in the term is the negative assumption that German rationalism is inherently anti-Christian. When Hodge speaks about there being no *new* methods, theories, or ideas coming out of the seminary and/or the *Biblical Repertory*, almost certainly this German "new teaching" is what he has in view. Of course, the "new" in Hodge may also have reference to numerous other movements against which he fought, such as the "new measures" of Charles Finney, the New School Presbyterians, or the New Divinity of New England. In other words, Hodge is not condemning originality in theological scholarship, but—narrowly—a certain kind of trendiness that finds itself in movements where rationalism prevails.

10. Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 281.

11. W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003) 659–71. Hereafter *DT*.

The possibility of being overcome by temptation is inconsistent with the omnipotence of Christ. It implies that a finite power can overcome an infinite one (Shedd, 659).

Shedd continues by discussing how the person of Christ is “dominated” by the divine nature. At the hypostatic union the humanity of Christ has no personhood (*anhypostasis*); such is provided by the eternal Son (*enhyposstasis*, Shedd, *DT*, 660). The person of the God-man could never be overcome by temptation because it is everywhere upheld by his divine nature. Second, impeccability is consistent with temptability. As if to anticipate Hodge’s argument, Shedd argues that just because Christ could not be overcome by temptation, that does not mean he could not be tempted. Christ was tempted with real temptation, yet that temptation could never have the victory over him (Shedd, *DT*, 662).

One last contemporary of Hodge’s who ought to be considered is R.L. Dabney. The Union Seminary professor explains that the “old doctrine” of the Reformed Churches is not only that Christ did not sin, but that he could not have sinned. Yet, “in recent days” there are some theologians “of whom better things should have been expected” who deny the absolute impeccability of Christ.¹² Dabney cites men like Ullmann, Farrar, Schaff and “even Dr. Hodge” (Dabney, *ST*, 471). At this point the Southern theologian argues along similar lines to Shedd. He explains that Christ did not have a separate human personality apart from union with the person of the divine Word. The divine nature serves as a “shield” to the lower nature, keeping it from error (Dabney, 471). But, secondly (and like Edwards), there is also a decreative necessity which makes Christ’s falling into sin an impossibility—for the whole counsel of God’s plan of redemption cannot fail.

Therefore it seems Hodge’s immediate influences stayed “orthodox” on this issue. However, Hodge had other influences as well—some not so orthodox. During his travels in Germany, he came in contact with a number of German pietists, two of whom are Schleiermacher and a little-known (at least to us today) theologian, Carl Ullmann. Ullmann, a member of the mediating movement in Germany, set himself apart because of his advocacy for a more conservative approach to biblical scholarship. One of his more well known works is his

The Sinlessness of Jesus: An Evidence for Christianity.¹³ In this volume, Ullmann writes:

*The idea of sinlessness—anamartesia—does not in itself exclude the possibility of sinning. On the contrary, it is only where this possibility is in some manner presupposed, that sinlessness, properly so called, can be conceived. Absolute impeccability exists only in Him who is infinitely removed from evil, who never can be tempted with evil,—that is, in God. But wherever there is human nature, and consequent liability to temptation there is also, by reason of this very nature, the possibility of sin.... He, then, of whom it may be said that by reason of his nature sin was possible to him, and yet by no special condition thereof necessary,—that he was, on the contrary, capable of abstaining from sin, and did actually continue to do so,—is a sinless being.*¹⁴

The similarities between what Ullmann says here and what Hodge says are striking. Ullmann, like Hodge, affirms the sinlessness of Jesus, but states that this fact does not detract from the possibility of his sinning. But what is even more striking is the use of the technical phrase “absolute impeccability.” For Ullmann, such an incapability to sin is restricted to God alone. And what is more, the very idea of sinlessness must itself presuppose that the sinless agent is himself human and capable of sinning in the face of actual temptation. It is clear, therefore, that what makes Jesus capable of sinning is the fact that he has a fully human nature—otherwise humanity and temptation become meaningless terms with reference to the incarnate Christ. For both Hodge and Ullmann, safeguarding the real, actual, and full humanity of the God-man is of utmost importance.

Another point needs to be made to solidify the historical connection between Hodge and Ullmann. The latter was very much at the front and center of ecclesiastical life in Germany during the days in which Hodge traveled and studied on the continent. A letter written to Hodge soon after his return to the States by Professor Tholuck at the University of Halle—with whom Hodge became close acquaintances while in Germany—speaks about Ullmann’s 1829 appointment to the University (Hodge, *Life of Hodge*, 209). In addition, Hodge shows familiarity with his work throughout his *Systematic Theology*.¹⁵ Although at times critical of Ullmann as being too close to Schleiermacher’s pantheism, Hodge also interacts with his work appreciatively.

One last contextual consideration ought to be addressed before moving on to a close analysis of

12. Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 470. Hereafter, *ST*.

13. Carl Ullmann, *The Sinlessness of Jesus: An Evidence for Christianity*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882).

14. Ullmann, *The Sinlessness of Jesus*, 33–34. The emphasis is his.

15. For example see *ST* I.76–77, 174; II.428; III.20.

Hodges's Christology as such. Francis Turretin did not live in Hodge's day, except through his writings. The *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* was available only in Latin in the nineteenth century until the unpublished English translation was made available to students by George Musgrave Giger after 1850. It was adopted by Archibald Alexander at the beginning of Princeton Seminary's training and Charles Hodge was tutored in the thought of the Genevan Protestant scholastic. It is interesting to note, however, that Turretin does not tackle the issue of Christ's impeccability directly. But he does give some clues as to how he would answer the question of the hypothetical possibility of Christ sinning.

In 13.12 Turretin asks the question concerning Christ's faith and hope. Rome denied that there was any growth in terms of our Savior's knowledge, practically communicating divine attributes to the human nature. Turretin answers that the Savior did grow in knowledge, and that he also had faith and hope. But these things were given to him by the Spirit. The grace of the Spirit which rested on Christ, however, was not divine as such. In other words, Turretin is careful to guard against any notion that the Spirit communicated any divine attributes to Christ's humanity, because "the finite cannot receive the infinite." We might conclude, then, that for Turretin Christ could not sin because of the gift of the Spirit (which is similar to Edwards' position).

Still, this conclusion must needs remain somewhat speculative and tentative. Turretin does not address the issue directly. And while he does give us hints as to how he would answer the question of Christ's peccability, his silence leaves us with a point of no little significance. Whatever were Hodge's influences with respect to this question, they were not found in his theological tradition. If anything, as our research shows, he was most likely influenced by the not-so-traditional theology of German pietism. Perhaps Hodge and the Princeton theology were not so "rigid," "unbending," or "unoriginal" after all.

Charles Hodge on Christology

Hodge opens his chapter on the person of Christ with some preliminary considerations. Here he develops a kind of "anthropological analogy." He says that the makeup of the human person serves as an analogue for the hypostatic union. As the soul and body are two distinct substances, they are united in one man without separation or confusion:

The union of soul and body in the constitution of man is the analogue of the union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ. No analogy is expected to answer at all point. There is in this case enough of resemblance to sustain faith and rebuke unbelief.¹⁶

This analogy is not new, however. It is already present in, for instance, Aquinas¹⁷ and Turretin.¹⁸ Hodge explains that what is present in man is like unto what is present in the Incarnation. As in man we have two very different substances—spirit/soul and body—which are joined without separation or confusion, so also Christ has two natures—divinity and humanity—joined in the person of the Son without separation or confusion. At the outset we can see the Princeton professor's zeal for maintaining a thoroughly Chalcedonian formulation. He wants to give full due to both natures in such a way that they maintain their own integrity (without confusion), all the while adhering to the union found which is in the person (without separation). Again, Hodge is painstakingly lucid:

The person is the possessor of all the attributes both of the soul and the body; and we may predicate of him whatever may be predicated of his body; and we may predicate of him whatever may be predicated of his soul ... whatever is true of either element of his constitution is true of the man. What is true of the one, however, is not true of the other ... each has its properties and changes, but the person or man is the subject of them all.... Hence, inconsistent, or apparently contradictory affirmations may be made of the same person. We may say that he is weak and

16. ST, II.380. See the helpful commentary in Bruce M. Stephens, *The Prism of Time and Eternity: Images of Christ in American Protestant Thought from Jonathan Edwards to Horace Bushnell* (Lanham, MD: The Scarcrow Press, 1996), 130.

17. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols. (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948), III.2.6.

18. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992). A possible reference to an analogy with the dual substances of man may be detected in 13.6.18; more explicitly see 13.7.10 and 16. Two striking features need to be pointed up here about both Aquinas' and Turretin's use of the analogy. First, the analogy is used sparingly, almost parenthetically by both. By contrast, Hodge makes the analogy the leading section of his work on the person of Christ, and it is just about three pages in length. This indicates somewhat of an advance within the tradition. Second, for Turretin the analogy breaks down at a significant point. In 13.7.16 he says that the soul and body are "incomplete natures," where as the divinity of Christ is never incomplete but self-existent without his humanity. While Hodge acknowledges that analogies can only go so far, he remains silent on the particulars.

that he is strong; that he is mortal and immortal... (ST, II.379).

Here we see there are three elements to Hodge's doctrine of man in his ontological make-up: 1) he is a spiritual substance, 2) he is a physical substance, and 3) there is a union of the substances in the particular person. The two different substances always remain distinct, yet—because of the union—attributes proper to each substance may be predicated of the person (though never of the other substance). In this way, two opposing things (such as mortality and immortality) may be attributed to the same person without a true contradiction resulting.¹⁹ For example: is Charles Hodge mortal or immortal? The answer is “yes,” he is both. He is immortal with reference to his soul, he is mortal with reference to his body. And yet paradoxically we can, and must, say that the person of Charles Hodge is both mortal and immortal because his mortal body is no less a part his person than is his immortal soul.

Let us propose a concrete example of what Hodge is trying to say. We can imagine a fine country parson living and laboring in the Scottish lowlands. He is a faithful man of God who preaches the Word of God accurately and correctly, Sabbath in and Sabbath out. But he is a sickly type. He always seems to be ailing. He's taken some wine for his stomach's sake, but he always ends back in bed—again and again—too frail to labor for very long. On account of his faithfulness and the grace given him, we can say he is a strong man. And we can also say—even in the same breath—that he is a weak man. Have we contradicted ourselves? No, because he is not both strong and weak with respect to the same thing. His soul is mighty by grace and filled with wisdom from above. But his body is weak as it wastes away day by day. This is not terribly far from Paul's inner man/outer man distinction. The same man is at the same time both wasting away and being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Furthermore, the communication of the properties of each substance are *never* to the other substance (e.g., we cannot say that the soul is mortal or that the body is invisible). Rather, the communication of the properties

19. So Stephens, *The Prism of Time*, 132. This defense of the Chalcedonian Christology is dubbed by contemporary philosophers as “the reduplicative strategy.” This approach was also adopted by Thomas Aquinas; see e.g. *Summa Theologia* III.13.1 and III.16.10–12. See also the explication, recent objections, and defense of the approach in Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 412 and the literature cited there.

20. ST, II. 383. Again, the specific texts to which he alludes need not detain us here.

of each substance is always and only *to the person* in whom the two substances are joined. The properties of the substances guarantee no confusion, and the person in whom the substances are joined guarantees no separation. It is distinction without division. Dr. Hodge is one person in body and soul. He is soul and he is body; he is a compound of body and soul.

In section two of the chapter Hodge moves to discuss the Scriptural proofs for the doctrine of Christ's person. In a very orderly fashion, he says that there are three facts about Christ: 1) he was fully human, 2) he was fully divine, and 3) he was one person. There are also “three distinct classes of passages of Scripture”: 1) those which treat the different elements of the doctrine separately, 2) those which combine the teaching that Christ is God and man, and 3) those which present the doctrine of the incarnation “formally” and “dogmatically” (ST, II.380). Under the first he treats those passages (which ones specifically need not detain us here) that teach that Christ has a true body, a rational soul, is truly God, and that he is one person. Regarding the singular personality of Christ, it is important to point out that for Hodge Christ has no dual personality. He does not possess a divine personality and a human personality. This point will be pertinent to considering Hodge's doctrine of the peccability of Christ.

The second argument is that the Old Testament and New Testament both speak “at once” and “at the same time” of the Christ as being a man and being God.²⁰ And the third argument deals with the exegesis of particular passages:

the doctrine of the incarnation does not rest on isolated proof-texts, but upon the broad basis of the whole revelation of God concerning the person and work of his Son, yet there are passages in which this doctrine is so clearly stated in all its elements, that they cannot be properly overlooked in treating of this subject (ST, II.384).

It is worthy of note here how sensitive Hodge is to the necessity of carefully considering the exegesis of Scripture on the basis of what we might call today Biblical Theology. He is not interested in ripping passages of the Bible from their broader context in a “proof-texty”/atomistic way. He demonstrates contextual sensitivity as he develops the doctrine of Christ's full humanity and divinity from selections of entire pericopes.

Next, in section three of this chapter, Hodge goes on to discuss the hypostatic union itself. At the outset he explains what he means by “nature.” Nature is to be

equated with the idea of substance. Substance is that which is something, it exists—and as such has extension, attributes, or “accidents.” These accidents manifest their substance. Therefore, for example, that which is mind cannot have the accidents of matter. That which has accidents of divinity cannot also have the accidents of humanity. Here, in Hodge’s understanding of nature, we find the foundation for a proper distinction of the two elements of the hypostatic union:

This being so, we are taught that the elements combined in the constitution of his person, namely, humanity and divinity, are two distinct natures, or substances. Such has been the faith of the Church universal. In those ancient creeds which are adopted by the Greek, Latin and Protestant Churches, it is declared that Christ as to his humanity is consubstantial with us, and as to his divinity, consubstantial with the Father (*ST*, II, 388).

This thought is further explicated in the following subsection in which he explains that the two natures—which are very different—are united and yet are not mingled or confounded. It is important to note that the union is not a union of mixture in which some kind of *tertium quid*—a third thing—is formed. This is impossible given the fact that the two natures are opposite. We do not have in Christ some third kind of nature which is infinitely finite, or finitely infinite. While Christ is a theanthropic person, he does not have a theanthropic nature. That would be nonsense—akin to speaking of square-circles.

This also means that the attribute of each nature cannot be transferred to the other. In a statement which surely has Lutheran Christology in its scope, Hodge says that if the attributes of humanity were to be transferred to a divine nature, God would no longer be God. Or, vice versa, if divine attributes were to be transferred to a human nature, such a human would no longer be human:

If therefore infinity be conferred on the finite, it ceases to be finite. If divine attributes be conferred on man, he ceases to be man; and if human attributes be transferred to God, he ceases to be God (*ST*, II, 390).

Moreover, this mingling would—as it were—dilute the two natures found in Christ. Christ would be somehow less than fully God and full man. Each nature retains its own properties. Therefore, we can say that Christ had two wills and intellects—one divine/infinite and one human/finite. This point is, again, relevant to the

point under discussion with reference to the peccability of Christ.

Lastly, we may consider the union as taking place in the person of the Son. It is a personal union. First, the union is not a mere indwelling, as the Holy Spirit indwells men’s hearts. In other words, the union is not like a liquid or gas contained within a bottle. It is not, as it were, a ghost in the machine. Second, the union is such that there is only one person, and the personality of Christ is provided for not in the human nature but in the divine.²¹ As man’s personality is in the soul, so Christ’s personality is in the divine nature. While Hodge does not use the language here, what he is teaching is the classic *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* doctrine. The former term refers to the fact that Christ’s human nature has no personhood, and the latter term denotes the fact that our Savior’s personhood is provided for by the person of the eternal Son.

By way of summary, we may say that there are three basic components to Hodge’s Christology that “make it tick.” First, we may speak of “substantial integrity”—that each nature, or substance, maintains its own integrity without dilution with the other. Second, and very much related to the first, is the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*—that the divine nature is not contained within the human. Lastly, and related to the second, the union of the natures is “in the person”: it is a personal union. There are not two persons, one human and one divine, in Christ. The humanity of Christ has no personhood in itself; rather, the personhood of Christ is provided for by the person of the Son of God, the eternal *Logos*.

Some Critical Questions

So, what is it about Charles Hodge’s Christology that would lead him to agree with German theologians like Schleiermacher and Ullmann and leave him out of step with his own tradition? It seems like an odd move from the man who claimed that nothing new ever came from his theological journal or seminary. Was Hodge correcting his tradition? Or was he dead wrong? If so, what can we learn positively from his mistake and/or any inconsistencies between his “no absolute impeccability” and his Christology as a whole? Lastly, what can we learn from Hodge’s advancement (or inconsistency, as the case may be) with reference to current discussions in Christology?

In short, Hodge’s motivation seems to be to carefully

21. Stephens is correct in saying that for Hodge the humanity of Christ is impersonal; see *The Prism of Time*, 131.

guard the absolute continuity between Christ's humanity and ours. Jesus is consubstantial with us in our humanity - yet without sin.²² But, what is more, Hodge is zealous to uphold the Chalcedonian formula that Christ's two natures are united in the one person without confusion, change, division, or separation. If the flesh of Christ is to be true humanity, it must have some kind of real ability to fall into sin. If the will is the "seat" of man's decision making, and there were two wills in Christ that were not changed or confused, then it must be that in at least some way we can say that Christ could have sinned.

The response given by someone like Shedd, however, proves altogether unsatisfying on Chalcedonian grounds. For Shedd, the divinity of Christ is what keeps his humanity *from the possibility* of sinning. Notice that this is different from saying that the divinity kept Christ from falling. On Chalcedonian soil one can say the latter but not the former. It is true that Christ could never have fallen in his person, as the personhood provided for in the hypostatic union was the person of the divine Son. But Christ's divinity does not and cannot prevent the possibility of his humanity from sinning—that would be to communicate an attribute of the divine nature to the human nature. This would be a clear violation of the Chalcedonian statement that there was no change in the respective natures.

Secondly, it is noteworthy how Dabney quickly moves in his discussion of the issue from speaking about Christ's holy *person* to his holy *will*. He does not seem to distinguish between these two things. Orthodox Christology has held that there is only one person in Christ—the divine Word. But it also has held, over against the *monothelites*, that Christ has two wills—one human and one divine. In other words, just because Christ is impeccable in his person does not necessarily mean that he is impeccable in both wills. Surely, he would be impeccable in his divine will, but can we say the same about his human will? Dabney does not address the issue and can even at times be read as a *monothelite* himself. Could it be that Hodge's strange and quirky statement is more orthodox than his orthodox tradition?

22. Pace Paget, "Christology and Original Sin," 242. Paget misreads Hodge as one who "labors to establish discontinuity" between his humanity and ours. He is mistaken to assume that Irving's proposal that Christ shared our *fallen* flesh necessarily makes his humanity more continuous with ours.

23. I do not want to overstate my case here. It is not as if the Christology of his day found in representatives such as Shedd, Dabney and Edwards was heretical. Even if one detects a slight docetic tendency in American Christology, the charge of Docetism against them is not

That said, it is important to keep in mind the fact that all that is possible for man must be possible for Christ *in his humanity*. And, it must be added, in his humanity *alone*. There are things which were possible for his humanity which were impossible for his divinity. For example, the suffering that he went through—inclusive of his death—occurred only in his humanity, not in his divinity. If the divine nature would uphold the lower nature in the area of temptation, then why would it not also uphold the lower nature in suffering and death? Likewise, it was not only possible, it actually happened, that Christ in his humanity would become sin. To be sure, he became sin that was not his own, but according to Paul he who knew no sin of his own did in fact become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, if Christ could (and did!) become a sin-bearer in his humanity (but not his divinity), what is wrong with setting forth the hypothetical possibility of his also succumbing to temptation?

Even so, Hodge could have stood to make greater qualification of his provocative statement. He is not clear that the possibility of Christ sinning would not have been in his person (which was fully divine and well as human), nor in his divine nature, but exclusively in his human nature. When Christ slept, God was not also sleeping at the same time. That was an event in the life Christ's humanity.

Yes, Hodge said something new for his day. But it was not something new with reference to the Chalcedonian definition. In fact, it was a correction of much of the Reformed Christology of his day,²³ as well as an advancing of the older and ancient Christology. What is more, Hodge also offers us a positive historical example of what it means to be original and creative in doing theology while remaining faithful to an orthodox biblical, historical, and systematic theology. Now we are in a better position to bring Hodge into dialogue with more recent Christological formulations as we trace the path of Christology throughout the history of Princeton Seminary. To that we now turn.

III. FROM THE THEOLOGY OF PROFESSOR CHARLES HODGE TO THE CHARLES HODGE PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY: BRUCE MCCORMACK AND 'REFORMED KENOTICISM'

The Historical Background

After the reorganization of Princeton Seminary's board in 1929 along modernist lines, the seminary did not remain long in the hands of classic liberalism. The faculty, in fact, remained strongly conservative with the

presence of men like Geerhardus Vos, William Park Armstrong, and Casper Wistar Hodge. Vos retired from the seminary in 1932, with Hodge dying in 1938 and Armstrong not long after in 1944.²⁴ Already in 1938, the well known theologian and supporter of Barth, Emil Brunner (1889–1966), was called for a year to Princeton Seminary as a visiting professor.²⁵ Although Brunner stood against Barth on Natural Theology, he was committed to much of the Swiss pastor-theologian's agenda. Brunner's outspoken rejection of liberalism makes him somewhat of a surprising choice at a school which was and is seen by many as having gone to the modernist dogs just eight years previously.

Furthermore, only seven years after the fundamentalist-modernist split at the seminary, 1936 saw the induction of the anti-liberal John A. MacKay as the third President of the seminary. However, far from being a fundamentalist in the likes of J. Gresham Machen, MacKay was convinced that Barth provided a helpful third option between liberalism and fundamentalism.²⁶ In fact, it may well be argued that Princeton Seminary actually never went "liberal" at all. It went from being the bastion of conservative Calvinism to becoming the unofficial home of American Barthianism.²⁷

Still, the seminary maintained a reputation for conservatism within the circles of the PCUSA. With scholars like Bruce M. Metzger, who defended the reliability of the New Testament documents, and Thomas W. Gillespie, who became president of the seminary in 1983, relative to lingering liberalism in other mainline institutions of higher theological education, Princeton seemed conservative.

It is against this background that we turn to the Princeton theologian—perhaps more than anyone else—who is responsible for the revival of theological interest in Karl Barth in America. Bruce L. McCormack graduated with the Ph.D from Princeton Seminary in 1989 with a gigantic dissertation on the theology of Karl Barth. This dissertation would later be reworked and published in 1995 as *Karl Barth's Critically-Realistic Dialectical Theology*—for which he received the Karl Barth Prize. Since that time his read of Barth has been the reigning paradigm, even if hotly contested by many.

But more to our purposes here is his work on Christology.²⁸ Mapping out the development of McCormack's thought on Christology is not easily accomplished. However, we can risk over-generalization at this point and set a simple framework. McCormack has moved from description to a positive and original constructive theology. In other words, he moves

from a scholarly description of Karl Barth's Christology to his own original contribution in advancing a "Reformed kenoticism." Let us look at this development in greater detail.

*McCormack's Christology in New Princeton*²⁹

Bruce L. McCormack, in his 1989 dissertation on Karl Barth, has done a work of historical theology.³⁰ It is not—as such—a work of dogmatic theology. His thesis is that Barth is not "neo-Orthodox."³¹ He has in his scope the theory presented by Han Von Balthazar that Barth moved from a dialectical theology in his two editions of his Romans commentary, to embracing a theology of analogy in his work on St. Anselm. It is this older model of Barth's theology—as it sees his thought returning to a more traditional, "orthodox," position—which has given rise to the terminology of "neo-Orthodox." McCormack is concerned to show that there was no such break in his theology and to offer a new periodization in the development of his thought. McCormack argues that Barth remains a dialectical theologian throughout, from Romans II to the end of his life.³²

It is at this point that we can say much of McCormack's work on Barth is a tracing of the continuity of Barth's dialectical theology in the development of his Christology. Barth remained dedicated to a dialectical view of the relation between God's Self and humanity,

warranted. Hodge's correction and then advancement of the Chalcedonian formula should be seen as a correction concerning a finer technical point of Christology and not a systemic improvement (as would be needed in other Protestant Christologies such as that found in Edward Irving or John Williamson Nevin).

24. See the helpful biographical summaries at the end of volume 2 in David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996).

25. He served only one year, to 1939. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1972), 934.

26. His building on Barth's work is clearly seen in, for example, *The Presbyterian Way of Life* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960) 43, where he refers to Karl Barth as "that great Neo-Calvinist."

27. A point painstakingly made time and again by Cornelius Van Til. See also D.G. Hart, *Calvinism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 291–292.

28. We will be interacting with only his scholarly published materials and not with his internet contributions.

29. Some of what follows is taken from James J. Cassidy, "Trinity and Election," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71.1 (2009): 53–81.

30. Bruce L. McCormack, "A Scholastic of a Higher Order: The Development of Karl Barth's Theology, 1921–31," (Princeton Theological Seminary: Ph.D Diss., 1989). Later reworked and published as *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

31. McCormack, "A Scholastic of a Higher Order," 2.

32. McCormack, "A Scholastic of a Higher Order," 15.

but it developed as his understanding of Christology changed. McCormack points up at least two major shifts in the Basel professor's thinking on Christology. The first occurred in 1924 when he came across the early church's doctrine of *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* Christology.³³ In this Barth saw a close connection to his veiling-unveiling dialectic. Yet, even at this point, his theology remained "pneumatocentric" and "existentialist." This means, in short, that Barth conceived of the revelation-event occurring in a person in the "here and now."³⁴

The second stage occurs in 1936 when the pneumatocentric gives way to the Christocentric. This shift is explicated in part at the end of McCormack's published 1995 volume. But it is more fully developed in his provocative article "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology."³⁵ Here McCormack points up the fact that Barth's

33. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically-Realistic*, 327.

34. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically-Realistic*, 328.

35. Bruce L. McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Reprinted without substantial change in Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 183–200. Since McCormack's interlocutors are working from it, references below are all from the earlier version. Portions of what appear below are taken from James J. Cassidy, "Trinity and Election," *WTJ* 71 (2009): 53–81.

While we are unable to enter into an in-depth discussion of current evangelical Christology, we do want to direct the attention of the reader to the important volume edited by C. Stephen Evans, *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Evans sets the definition for contemporary Kenotic Christology: "For on the kenotic view, as we shall see, Jesus has no hidden divine powers in reserve, so to speak, to draw on in a pinch, but has chosen to endure the human situation in the same way that all of us must" (p. 7). This sets the general tenor for the rest of the book, even though there are detractors from kenosis represented. But we shall soon see how Evans' kenotic Christology here is consistent with McCormack's view. In brief, what is under criticism here is the so-called *extra Calvinisticum* – the teaching that the divine nature cannot be contained within the human nature of Christ. In other words, for traditional Reformed Christology, the divine nature remains greater than the human nature in that the *Logos ensarkos* does not lose anything of his divine nature in the incarnation. However, on Evans' definition Jesus had "nothing in reserve." But this view is contrary to the theological insight of – for instance – John in his Gospel, where Jesus is portrayed as the sovereign King over all earthly authorities – even Pilate. The message of John, at least in chapter 18 of his Gospel, is that Jesus can end his suffering at will exactly because he is fully divine and can draw on his divine power "in a pinch" should he will to do so (cf. 18:36 and 19:11). What makes his redemptive-historical work so profound is that in the midst of it all he restrains his

unique contribution to the doctrine of election is that Jesus Christ is not just the object of election (hardly a new idea in Reformed theology), but that he is also the electing subject; and as such is no abstract *Logos asarkos* but was, is, and always will be Jesus Christ, the God-human ("Grace and Being," 93). He notes that seventeenth century Reformed Orthodoxy made a distinction between the *Logos asarkos* (the eternal divine Word before and apart from taking on human flesh) and the *Logos ensarkos* (the eternal divine Word in the flesh in time). They further expressed this difference through another distinction, that of the *Logos incarnandus* (the eternal divine Word who *is to be* incarnate by virtue of the eternal decree of God) and the *Logos incarnatus* (the eternal divine Word in the flesh in time). So, building off of this seventeenth century distinction, Barth can say that the *Logos incarnandus* has his being determined "by the eternal divine decision for incarnation in time" ("Grace and Being," 94). The difference, however, between what Barth wants to say versus what the seventeenth century orthodox wanted to say was that they spoke of the *Logos incarnandus* only as the object of election (whereby the *Logos* is determined to become flesh only because of a previous decision by God to elect certain people in Christ), whereas Barth wants to say that he is also the subject—the electing God. Therefore, there is no *Logos* apart from or prior to the act of electing. So, it is Jesus Christ – the *Logos* to be incarnate – who elects and not some abstract absolute *Logos asarkos*.

McCormack goes on to explain that Barth was motivated in this direction by a desire to avoid speculation and abstraction. If we posit a *Logos asarkos* apart from the incarnation then we would have to go elsewhere to determine who the *Logos* is. This would lead us to seek other epistemic grounds for knowing the *Logos* other than Jesus Christ. Because of these concerns, Barth criticized the *extra Calvinisticum* found in Reformed Christologies. McCormack quotes from Barth's criticism as follows:

There is something regrettable about that theory insofar as it could lead, as it has to the present day, to disastrous speculation about a being and activity of a *Logos asarkos* and, therefore, about a God who could be known and whose divine essence could be defined on some other basis than in and from the perception of his presence and action as incarnate Word. And it cannot be denied that Calvin himself ... went a long way in falling prey to the temptation of reckoning with such an 'other' God ("Grace and Being," 96).

McCormack goes on to explain that Barth's concern here is not so much epistemological, but ontological. How can God come into time without undergoing a fundamental ontic change? The answer is found in the eternal self-determination of God to be a God who is "for us": the God who freely decides to be who he is. In this way the divine decision to act in election grounds and constitutes the divine essence, without changing it (96–97). Thus, there is nothing "left over," no *extra*. McCormack explains:

... the identity of this Logos is, in fact, *already established* prior to the eternal act of Self-determination by means of which the Logos *became* the *Logos incarnandus*. And if all that were true, then the decision to assume flesh in time could only result in something being added to that already completed identity; an addition which has no effect upon what he is essentially (97, emphasis his).

Given the *extra*, Jesus Christ tells us nothing of the God who is. The *extra* leaves too much "extra stuff" unsaid about the divine nature of Jesus Christ. McCormack is concerned that the humanity of Christ not become a mere accident—an arbitrary assumption—by an abstract divine essence. On the traditional view, the person of Jesus Christ does not seem to contain the fullness of deity such that McCormack asks, "Is Jesus Christ 'fully God' or not?" (97).

The solution to this problem proposed by Barth is that God is not some unknown being, but that in his making himself known through Jesus Christ he shows himself to be who he always was: the eternally electing God. His being is not abstract, but determined by his act toward us. The eternal God is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is the eternal God. His humanity and his divinity are co-extensive, with nothing left over. Following on Karl Rahner's famous maxim, McCormack concludes, "Perhaps the most significant consequence of this move is that the immanent Trinity is made to be wholly identical in content with the economic Trinity" ("Grace and Being," 100).

God, in an act of self-determination, chooses to be triune in covenant with humanity. This decision is not arbitrary, but has metaphysical significance:

What Barth is suggesting is that election is the event in God's life in which he assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity ... He takes this human experience into his own life and extinguishes its power over us.³⁶

It should be noted that this act involves no change in God's essence (here McCormack wants to safeguard the doctrine of immutability), because his essence is determined by his act. There is no essence to speak of which may change apart from his act of election. Thus, God's essence is not hidden to human perception. God's essence is knowable in his act. In so much as we can perceive Jesus dying on the cross, that much we see the essential God. For Barth, says McCormack, God's act and his essence are identical because there is no essence where there is not first God's free decision in election ("Grace and Being," 99).

Now, McCormack is quick to caution us not to confuse Barth with Hegel or process theology at this point. God does not become conscious of himself in history; God exists as a self-conscious being before creation.³⁷ God's being as it is constituted by his election is a being which exists eternally and prior to time. God's decision to be triune in election is a *primal* decision, not one which takes place in time.³⁸ Nevertheless, God in electing—and thus constituting his own being—has an eye toward time and creation. History *is* significant for God's essence, but only because God freely chooses to allow it to be so.

Even so, McCormack does note that Barth himself did not speak in this way; that is, of election constituting Trinity. Barth wrote on the Trinity in *CD I/1* and *I/2* before his more mature thought as expressed in his doctrine of election in *CD II* and *IV*. Elsewhere McCormack has argued that there was a progression in Barth's thought after listening to a lecture by Pierre Maury in

power and undergoes the suffering for us. But, alas, that is an exegetical paper for another time.

36. "Grace and Being," 98. See also his comments in "The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 185–242. Here he summarizes his position saying: "What makes this decision [to be God in the covenant of Grace] truly 'primal' is that there is no other being of God standing back of it.... The eternal event in which God chose to be 'God for us' is, at the same time, the eternal event in which God gave (and continues to give) to himself his own being—and vice versa. So there are not two eternal events, one in which God gives being to himself and a second ... in which he enters into a relationship with the human race; these are, in fact, one and the same event. Thus divine election stands at the root of God's being or 'essence.'" (210).

37. It may be helpful here to note that it seems as if McCormack wants to distinguish between God's eternal act of election and his temporal work of creation. McCormack says that Barth's position is that the former alone is constitutive of his being.

38. By this McCormack believes he is maintaining the Creator-creature distinction. "Grace and Being," 100.

1936 which led to his unique doctrine of election.³⁹ But Barth never went back to correct his less mature thought on the Trinity in light of his more mature doctrine of election. Therefore, McCormack wants to “register a critical correction” to Barth’s view of the Trinity. He does so by explaining that

The decision for the covenant of grace is the ground of God’s triunity and, therefore, of the eternal generation of the Son and of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from Father and Son. In other words, the works of God *ad intra* (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz. election). And that also means that eternal generation and eternal procession are willed by God; they are not natural to him if ‘natural’ is taken to mean a determination of being fixed in advance of all actions and relations (“Grace and Being,” 103. Emphasis is his).

39. Karl Barth’s *Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 456ff. See also his recent response to critics in, “Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. Van Driel,” *SJT* 60/1 (2007): 63f; reprinted in *Orthodox and Modern*, 261–77. It is worth noting how Barth stated his theology after the shift in his thinking due to Pierre Maury’s lecture. McCormack explains that for Barth there is no higher desire in God than to be gracious. Therefore, “God’s purpose in creating and sustaining the world are his redemptive purposes.” To see things in any other way than that God’s grace constitutes who he wills to be leads to “a speculative doctrine of God which would seek to establish the meaning of His power, goodness, and wisdom without reference to the goal which God has set for Himself in that gracious election of the human race which is the ground of all His activities” (460). It should be pointed out that in shifting the doctrine of election from an eternal self-referential *decretum absolutum* to an actualistic election of all humanity in the revelation-event of Jesus Christ, Barth’s formulation is more than undoing the historic Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. He has also undone the Reformational principle of *solī Deo gloria* (i.e., the idea that the ultimate motivation for all which God brings to pass is for his own glorification, and not first and foremost for the salvation of mankind). Barth says that there is no higher desire in God than to will to be gracious, whereas the Reformers taught that there is no higher desire in God than that He be glorified. Despite Barth’s efforts to the contrary, this central commitment will inevitably result in an anthropocentric religion.

40. “Grace and Being,” 105–107. Here McCormack anticipates his later work on the passibility of God and *kenosis*. See his “The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth’s Doctrine of the Atonement,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspective: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 346–366; “Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” *IJST* 8/3 (2006): 243–251; and *Orthodox and Modern*, 201–33.

41. “Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” *IJST* 8.3 (2006), 243–51. This project is already hinted at by his “The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth’s Doctrine of the Atonement,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*.

McCormack then turns to discuss Jesus Christ as the object of election. But, here again, he is not speaking of the *Logos asarkos* as being the object of election, but of Jesus Christ as the elect human. So all humankind is elect in him. For he comes to take the wrath and judgment of God upon himself as the God-human, and not as a mere man. It is the God-human, in his two united natures, who suffers for us. It is not that Jesus is a mere human being manipulated by the divine being, but is himself the self-willed suffering Subject. In Jesus Christ God freely elects to suffer for us, and—at the same time—man freely elects to suffer. Therefore, Jesus is not only electing Subject but also elected Object. And what is more, in Jesus Christ “double predestination” is preserved, though altered from its historical formulation. For Barth, Jesus is both elect and reprobate. He is the electing God and the reprobate man who freely becomes both the reprobate God and the elected man.⁴⁰

At the point we are in a better position to understand where McCormack intends to go with a positive formulation of a Reformed kenoticism. In his 2006 article “Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” the Charles Hodge Professor sets forth a constructive dogmatic formulation: “The goal of my project is to elaborate a Reformed version of kenotic Christology.”⁴¹ McCormack begins by surveying the Lutheran Christology which made *kenosis* a possibility. This is found, in part, in its unique doctrine of the communication of attributes. Here it was held that the human nature participated in divine attributes. Christ—in his state of humiliation—only exercised his shared divine nature when he wanted, but not all the time. However, in his state of exaltation, the use of his divine nature that is shared in the human is always “unceasing” (“Karl Barth’s Christology,” 245). McCormack makes clear here that this form of *kenosis* in Lutheran Christology is actually a *kenosis* of the human nature. It is not a self-emptying of the divine attributes, but rather the addition of the divine attributes to the humanity of Christ. In this way, Lutheran *kenosis* actually had more in common with the ancient doctrine of *theosis*.

There is a change come the nineteenth century, however. Gottfried Thomasius formulates a new *kenosis* in response to Hegel, historicism, and the rise of critical scholarship (245). Thomasius made a distinction among the attributes of God: those which are “immanent” and those which are “relative.” The immanent attributes are those which belong to God essentially—independent of and apart from creation. The relative attributes, on

the other hands, are those which are true of God only with respect to the created order. And among those attributes are omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. And it is these three attributes of which the *Logos* divests himself at the incarnation—but which are regained at his exaltation.

McCormack draws some interesting insights in his comparison between sixteenth and nineteenth century kenosis Christologies:

But these two forms of kenoticism also had something else in common. Neither was willing to accept a 'communication' of human attributes to the divine—the so-called *genus tapeinoticum* (or 'genus of humanity'). And that is a point of no small significance ("Karl Barth's Christology," 247).

The Princeton professor continues by explaining how the doctrine of a suffering God has gained a great deal of popularity in our own day. Many get at this by adopting a Hegelian notion which identifies the second person of the Trinity with the humanity of Jesus Christ. This is problematic for at least two reasons. First, this introduces the risk of formulating separate subjects within the Godhead and that may lead to tritheism. Second, in distinguishing the subjects of the Father and the Son, it so separates the Father from the Son in the suffering of Christ that it makes the Father a mere onlooker and not one who suffers himself.

In response to these problems, McCormack proposes several better options: 1) actualize the notion of "nature," 2) reject the *genus majesticum*, 3) reject any direct communion of natures, and 4) affirm a *genus tapeinoticum* which allows the triune God to suffer. In other words, he wants to humanize God or have the human attributes of Jesus shared to the divine (247).

We can get to this different, "Reformed" understanding of *kenosis* through the work of Karl Barth, particularly his later treatment of the incarnation in *CD IV/1*. In this way kenosis is by addition, not subtraction. The Godhead takes to himself the attributes of humanity in eternity. "For the 'humiliation of the Son' in time has its root in the humility of the Son in eternity" (248–9). Quoting from Barth, McCormack writes, "there is in God Himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination" (249). This subordination is found in the Godhead in which the Father commands and the Son obeys—thus constituting his being in this way from all eternity. In other words, for McCormack, God is essentially humble:

What I am suggesting is that 'humility' is not something added to God in his second mode of being at the point at which he assumes flesh; it is his second mode of being already in eternity (McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology," 249; emphasis his).

This proposed solution eliminates what McCormack sees as a major weakness in the communication of operations tradition (i.e., the idea that the two natures work together in the one person); namely, it is impossible for the human nature to not be overcome by the divine nature in the one person (250). But, more positively, it also preserves the possibility of divine (in fact, triune) suffering. To be sure, McCormack is concerned to see that classical notion of divine impassibility done away with in theology.⁴²

IV. SOME HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The progression in the history of Princeton seminary's Christology may yield some interesting lessons as well as counsel for moving forward into the future of Reformed Christology. First, both Hodge and McCormack offer us something new and provocative. At least, 'new' in the sense of differing from traditional Reformed statements and formulations.

Also, Hodge has cautioned us—along with those in the Reformed tradition of his day—against confusing the natures of Christ. And it is here that Hodge offers his successor helpful interlocution. Part of the problem with Christology in Hodge's day was a collapsing of the human nature into the divine. The humanity of Christ was not given proper due. Hodge takes seriously the Chalcedonian formula that the two natures must remain distinct, yet never separated. This collapsing of the natures is likewise seen in contemporary Christology, particularly in that of Bruce McCormack. The difference is that rather than collapsing the human into the divine, McCormack collapses the divine into the human—jeopardizing the full divinity of Christ. And not just the divinity of the *Logos*, but the entire Trinity. Along the way he also introduces at least two ancient heresies: *patripassianism* and *subordinationism*. There is great theological value to zealously maintaining the distinction of the natures.

Whether one agrees with Hodge's new and provocative statement about Christ not being absolutely

42. For more on McCormack's advancement of divine passibility see, "The Ontological Presuppositions," 364; and "Seek God Where He May Be Found," 76. *Orthodox and Modern*, 15 and 205.

impeccable is almost beside the point for our purposes here. What we wish to highlight is what historical lesson we can learn from Hodge's intent—which was to zealously maintain the distinction in the natures. Against the backdrop of Reformed tendencies to so emphasize the divinity of Christ at the expense of his full humanity, Hodge maintains the distinction and highlights his full humanity—*without sacrificing anything of his divinity or the integrity of his person*.

McCormack also wants to highlight the full humanity of Christ, but he does so at the expense of his divinity. If God takes on certain human attributes at the incarnation so that God himself actually suffers, then Christ is less than fully God. For Barth, Jesus Christ is the God-man from all eternity—he is the primal savior by way of election for us. He is always—from everlasting to everlasting—the electing God and the elected man. In this way, the divine nature is humanized; and if humanized then no longer divine. This is seen, for instance, in McCormack's advancement of divine passibility. What Christ, in his humanity, goes through he also goes through in his divine nature. And not just him, but the entirety of the Trinity as well. This must mean, by implication, that when Christ slept so did the Trinity; also, when Christ died so did the Trinity and when Christ hungered and thirst so did the Trinity. It seems that what McCormack is advocating is not so much one person in two natures in the (eternal) incarnation, but *three persons* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in *one nature* (God-man). At best, this is a new form of the old error of monophysitism, better known as Eutychianism.

Barthians are not pleased with what they perceive as

an underplaying of Christ's human nature in modern American Reformed theology. That concern is legitimate. However, their solution is not. And herein lies the importance of giving Charles Hodge a new and fresh reading on Christology. He is able to affirm a full and robust doctrine of Christ's humanity without falling into Barthian pitfalls. Christ is fully divine, but is fully human as well—two natures without confusion and without separation. What keeps these two natures together—keeping Hodge's two natures from spinning off into a Nestorian two-person theory—is a rigorous *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* doctrine of the union of the two natures *in the person* of the Son of God. In this way Christ remains essentially divine by virtue of the personality of Christ being provided for by the eternal *Logos*, and only contingently human—yet fully so. In Hodge's view we are left with one person in two natures, with each nature communicating its attributes to the person and never to the other nature. This is both a preservation and advancement of the Chalcedonian Christology.

Lastly, Hodge not only leads the way of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the nineteenth century, but he also shows us today how to be conservative and creative in theology at once and the same time. Charles Hodge did teach something “new.” But it was not new for novelty sake. It was an attempted (whether it was successful or not is up for debate!) improvement and correction of the received Reformed Christology of his day. Hodge sought to take us forward by taking us back. He sought to advance theology by conserving it and by going back—in a radical way—to the Christology of Chalcedon. ■