

## Robert Lewis Dabney and the Problem of Original Sin

By C. N. Willborn

### INTRODUCTION

Robert Lewis Dabney (1820–1898) is one of the most interesting personalities of nineteenth century American religious life, if not American social life in general. Before the Civil War divided the United States, Dabney was a revered professor at the Old School seminary in Farmville, Virginia—Union Theological Seminary. A native Virginian, he had declined an invitation from Charles Hodge to join him at Princeton. He was a strong Unionist right up until the day Virginia voted to secede from the Union. Indeed, he had some scathing remarks for South Carolina when she led the South in secession. He served in the Confederate Army assisting General Jonathan Jackson and preaching to many troops. After the War he became embittered over the affairs of Reconstruction and eventually left Union for Texas. In Austin, Texas he became part of the founding of the University of Texas where he taught the Philosophy courses. He was also instrumental in the founding of Austin Theological Seminary (1884) with fellow Presbyterian minister, R. K. Smoot. After losing his eyesight around 1890 he continued to publish and travel up until his death on January 3, 1898.

We live in a day when his Reformed theology is loved by many while he is personally rejected by perhaps many more. The latter ban on Dabney is due to his great sin of partiality in regard to men and women of color. The embitterment that seems to have led to his partiality, often referred to as racism, became most pronounced after the War ended in 1865. Still, with this sin visibly portrayed in writings, he was considered by contemporaries who disagreed with his view of race as a most impressive teacher of Reformed theology. A. A. Hodge's evaluation is often cited, crediting Dabney with being the greatest teacher of theology in the United States, if not the world. W. G. T. Shedd, the preeminent theologian at Union Seminary (NY) said Dabney was, in his

estimation, the greatest living theologian of his time. But Dabney was more than a theologian and philosopher. He was an active churchman and loving family man. In his domestic life Dabney was much blessed with a wife he described as “the first and last love affair of my life.” His devoted wife was Lavinia Morrison, daughter of Rev. James Morrison, a Presbyterian minister.

The Dabneys were blessed with six sons from their marital bliss, three of whom lived to maturity. Dr. Charles W. Dabney, the eldest, was a distinguished author and educator. He served as President of the University of Tennessee and later as President of the University of Cincinnati. The younger sons were Samuel B. and Lewis Meriwether, both of whom became notable lawyers in Texas. Dabney died in Victoria, Texas and left behind his three sons and beloved wife, after fifty years of marriage. The bodies of he and Lavinia await the resurrection united to Christ in the seminary cemetery on the campus of Hampden-Sydney College in Farmville, Virginia.

In the Virginian's theology he often took moderate positions. He was committed to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as the best and soundest summary of Scripture doctrine. Concerning the Westminster Standards he said they were characterized by two “remarkable traits.” They are marked, argued Dabney, by their “scripturalness, and ... moderation.”<sup>1</sup> He argued that the Westminster Divines “avoid every excess, and every extreme statement. They refrained, with a wise moderation, from committing the church of God on either side of those

---

THE AUTHOR: Dr. C. N. “Nick” Willborn is the pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Oak Ridge, Tenn., and an editor of *The Confessional Presbyterian* (see more in editor biographies).

1. Francis Beattie, Charles R. Hemphill and Henry V. Westcott, eds., *Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly, 1647–1897* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1897), p. 93.

'isms' which agitated and perplexed the professors of the Reformed theology."<sup>2</sup>

He illustrated the moderation of Westminster with the doctrine of the Trinity, which he said they argued not on metaphysical grounds or rationales, "but passes it all by in dead silence, neither approving it or deigning to refute it.... Because it is wholly extra-scriptural."<sup>3</sup> Another doctrinal position he includes as moderately offered by Westminster is lapsarianism—being neither infra- nor supralapsarian. Some of the men involved in the composition of the Westminster Standards were known supralapsarians. Others were not. And so, they simply asserted "that the decree is sovereign, and God's election of his redeemed unconditioned; but further it will not go.... Without naming or sanctioning the sublapsarians it adopts the mildness of their theory, while it refuses to raise or to approve the proposition that the several parts of God's infinite and eternal thought have or can have any real order of sequence in his own consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Again, he brings up the doctrine of the will in the prelapsarian, Edenic state of mankind. Some, like Jonathan Edwards, argued from philosophical necessitarianism that Adam necessarily sinned in the garden. Dabney averred this position to be philosophical rather than scriptural and preferred to simply state the fact of Adam's sin rather than try to prove it extra-scripturally. Westminster too seems to offer an

account without meandering into the metaphysical. Again, he calls upon the topic of millennialism, which was a much-debated topic in his day. The Divines believed in the second advent of Christ and so present it in simplest of Biblical terms. They refuse to dogmatize because, as he said, "these unfulfilled prophecies [that relate to the millennial question] are obscure to our feeble minds. It is too modest to dictate a belief amidst so many different opinions."<sup>5</sup>

To the topic of this paper, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, we find Dabney arguing Westminster's moderation once more. The Divines were certainly aware of the debates surrounding the transmission issue. "Joshua La Place was asserting mediate imputation," Dabney explains, "and Garrissoles was denouncing him as a betrayer of the whole doctrine.... Again our wise divines refused to follow this debate beyond the limits of express Scripture."<sup>6</sup> The Assembly concluded on this topic, "that the guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed and his corruption conveyed to all the race except the divine Son of Mary.... But further the Confession will not go."<sup>7</sup> Dabney's rendering of this doctrine has been labeled as "Agnostic" by Warfield. His doctrine of the origin of sin was "an attempt," according to Warfield, "to accept the fact of the transmission of both guilt and depravity from Adam without framing a theory of the mode of their transmission or of their relations one to the other."<sup>8</sup>

According to Dabney, a serious question surrounds the teaching on imputation of Adam's sin. "How can it be justice, for me, who gave no consent to the federal arrangement, for me, who was not present when Adam sinned, and took no share in it, save in a sense purely fictitious and imaginary, to be so terribly punished for another man's deed."<sup>9</sup> This question has provided the impetus for many scholars to seek philosophical, rational, and biblical solutions to this dilemma of reason.

Historically, Dabney explains, there are five descriptive answers to this question. They all focus on the *mode* by which Adam's sin affects his progeny.<sup>10</sup> First, there is the "Wesleyan" view that eliminates the accusation through the second Adam's repair of the first Adam's condition. Second, is the solution offered by Edwards and his peculiar doctrine of "arbitrary identity." Third, is the "Realistic" view of Baird and Shedd which proposes a "generic unity" between Adam and his posterity. Fourth, is the "mediate imputation" view of Placæus and some of the nineteenth century New England school. Finally, the position taken by Turretin in opposition to Placæus and adopted in a form by the Princeton school—"immediate imputation."<sup>11</sup> Taking into account

2. Beattie, *Memorial Volume*, p. 95.

3. Beattie, *Memorial Volume*, p. 97.

4. Beattie, *Memorial Volume*, p. 97.

5. Beattie, *Memorial Volume*, p. 101.

6. Beattie, *Memorial Volume*, p. 100.

7. Beattie, *Memorial Volume*, p. 100.

8. Benjamin B. Warfield, "Imputation," in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 9.308. Warfield correctly lists Robert W. Landis as a proponent of this view as well.

9. Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* [hereafter ST] (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 338.

10. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1959), p. 42. "If the union existing between Adam and his posterity is analogous to that which exists between Christ and his people and may thus be called representative union, the next question that arises is that of the *mode* by which the sin of Adam comes to be reckoned to the account of posterity" [italics added].

11. Dabney, ST, pp. 338–42. See also George P. Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin in American Presbyterian Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), p. 75. Also of note is Warfield's list of "diverse types of theology" among Presbyterian scholars—"Federalistic," "New School," "Realistic," and "Agnostic." The question arises as to where Warfield would place Edwards; in the Princeton, "Federalistic" line or the "New School" line? Gerstner hints that Warfield may have seen Edwards as belonging to the immediate imputation school. See John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Powhattan, VA: Berea

the varied positions held, even within Reformed camps, led one twentieth century theologian to say, “The greatest problem in theology is that of the origin of sin.”<sup>12</sup> More particularly the gnarly question of how Adam’s sin affects his progeny has entangled theologians.

In this paper we shall attempt to examine Dabney’s many and varied interactions with the varying views on this very important doctrine. This is necessary to present his “agnostic” position with any degree of accuracy. In doing this, we shall find Dabney summarily dismissing some positions (e.g., mediate imputation) while dealing in greater detail with Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge. As one of his reviewers said: “He arrays himself against Turretin [*sic*] and Dr. Hodge no less than against Placæus and the Arminians.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, his biographer, Thomas C. Johnson has reminded readers: “Dr. Dabney was almost as little inclined to commit himself to immediate imputation as to mediate. He did up Breckinridge thoroughly, without altogether pleasing Princeton in the end.”<sup>14</sup> R. J. Breckinridge was the Danville Seminary professor who encouraged Robert Landis to pursue the thorny issue.

Since Jonathan Edwards is so intimately associated with New England Theology, we shall first comment on Dabney’s view of Edwards before we turn our attention to his dealings with Charles Hodge. Hodge is important because of his continuing widespread influence upon evangelicalism and the particularly widespread dissemination of the immediate imputation view. Finally, we shall consider Dabney’s position in relation to the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms* and Calvin.

#### DABNEY AND JONATHAN EDWARDS’ “ARBITRARY IDENTITY”

While refraining from labeling Edwards as “unorthodox,” John Gerstner maintained that “[t]raditional Reformed orthodoxy never did (and does not today), accept Edwards’ identity doctrine.”<sup>15</sup> If this is true, and Dabney certainly thought so, then how can Edwards’ view of imputation, which is built upon this philosophical invention, be acceptable? While Gerstner thinks Edwards’ view of imputation is within orthodoxy, Dabney considered it as mere speculation and, as such, “worthless.”<sup>16</sup>

Unlike W. G. T. Shedd, Dabney seemed to find no doctrine of imputation in Edwards.<sup>17</sup> This is because Dabney forced Edwards to be consistent with his philosophical foundation of “arbitrary identity” or “personal identity.” It is true that Dabney never alleges that Edwards explicitly denies imputation, but it is, nevertheless, evident that he does not believe Edwards’

reasoning for imputation provides for an acceptable imputation doctrine.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Dabney asserted: “We find President Edwards endeavoring to evade the objection, by asserting that our federal oneness with Adam is no more arbitrary, in that it was constituted by God’s *fiat*, than our own personal identity: for that also is constituted only by God’s institution.”<sup>18</sup> The Pelagian objection is that we are not, in any *real* sense, one with Adam, therefore, we cannot justly be punished for something he did. Edwards would say that we are one with Adam in the sense that just as Adam was divinely constituted, so every person is individually divinely constituted.<sup>19</sup>

This, Dabney objects, does not answer the opposition. Because our existence does not depend on a previous relation, that is, Adam as our natural head, “our existence is nothing else than a result of the will of God, sovereignly ordaining to restore our existence out of *nihil*, by a perpetual recreation.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, as Gerstner has noted in relation to Edwards’ teaching, “All members of the posterity repeat the very same sin as Adam. It is *not truly imputed* to them but repeated by them. It is true continuous repetition—a continuous creation.”<sup>21</sup> That is Edwards’ arbitrary or personal identity of mankind, and Dabney sees no imputation but rather some form of repetition that warrants liability for one’s sin.

Gerstner maintains a similar conclusion to Dabney by interjecting a telling quote from Edwards: “It is not derived down naturally but God withholds his Spirit

Publications, 1992, 93), 2, 329. Samuel Baird, on the other hand, directly aligns him with Hopkins in the lineage of Placæus. For his discussion see “Edwards and the Theology of New England,” in *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 10 (January 1858): 587.

12. Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 1, 291.

13. Anonymous, “Dr. Dabney on Imputation,” in *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 24 (January 1873): 32.

14. Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 159.

15. John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1993), 2, 333.

16. Dabney, ST, p. 339.

17. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), p. 171. In a footnote to a lengthy quote from Edwards’ “Original Sin,” Shedd states contra to Hodge that Edwards “explicitly imputes the guilt of the *first rising* of evil desire as well as of the corruption resulting from it.”

18. Dabney, ST, p. 338.

19. Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1970), 3, 390–91; also quoted in Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 2, 324–26.

20. Dabney, ST, p. 338.

21. Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, 2, 326–27.

from them in judgment for their first sin.”<sup>22</sup> Dabney anticipated a conclusion such as Gerstner’s when he summarized Edwards’ “personal identity” in the following manner:

Because our existence is dependent and successive. Its sustentation is a perpetual recreation. Its succession is a series of moments of which one moment’s existence does not cause or produce a succeeding moment’s, not being coexistent with it, as cause and effect must always be.<sup>23</sup>

The inevitable conclusion is that God deals with mankind in each *moment* of time in a manner consistent with, indeed identical to, His dealing with Adam. This is the “identity” the human race has with Adam. The identity is not one of a *true* federal and/or natural relation.

Earlier it was stated that Dabney seemingly perceived Edwards to teach no imputation at all. It certainly appears, from a consistent reading of Edwards arbitrary “personal identity” view, that this is correct. G. C. Berkouwer refers to J. Ridderbos’ study of Edwards’ theory of identity to suggest that Edwards’ is some form of realist, albeit not that of Shedd, Breckinridge and others. In addressing this, Berkouwer provides a quote that supports Dabney’s thesis. “Such a view,” says Ridderbos, “does not stress an imputation *per se* but ‘the

result of the unity, which consists by God’s decree, between Adam and his posterity.”<sup>24</sup> Gerstner concludes the same while acknowledging that some have seen Edwards as a proponent of the mediate imputation teaching.<sup>25</sup> We are united to Adam by a decree of God, said Edwards, therefore is there a place for imputation or natural generation?

It is obvious that Dabney did not view Edwards in the mediate school for he discussed that position under a separate head and never once referred to Edwards. He certainly could not place him in the federal school of immediate imputation as could Samuel Miller.<sup>26</sup> It is not clear, however, whether Dabney aligned Edwards with the New England theology as did Archibald Alexander and Samuel Baird. The logic of Dabney’s argument against Edwards however could certainly lead to such a conclusion. Dabney, on the other hand, disdained any hint of speculation. Perhaps he felt there was a degree of speculation in Baird’s and Alexander’s conclusion. Whatever the case be in relation to the New England theology, Dabney did not find Edwards’ position on transmission of Adam’s sin tenable or particularly orthodox. “Hence,” he wrote, “we repudiate this Edwardsian speculation as worthless, and contradicted by our own intuitions.”<sup>27</sup>

#### DABNEY’S RELATIONSHIP TO HODGE’S IMMEDIATE DOCTRINE

In addition to Edwards as a foil for his position, Dabney took a manly posture against his fellow Old School Presbyterian contemporary, Charles Hodge. In so doing, he espoused perhaps even more clearly his own position. As stated above, Dabney’s position is that of an “agnostic,” believing that man inherits Adam’s sin but is not sure how or rather in what order. The latter position was first espoused in seed form by Robert J. Breckinridge (1800–71) at Danville Seminary in Kentucky. Breckinridge was a familiar name to many due to the political nature of his family and through his publications in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* and subsequently in his own, *Danville Review*. In his systematic treatment of Scripture published in 1858, he summarily offered this position:

It is infinitely certain, that God would never make a legal fiction a pretext to punish as sinners, dependent and helpless creatures who were actually innocent. The imputation of our sins to Christ, affords no pretext for such a statement; because that was done by the express consent of Christ, and was in every respect, the most stupendous proof of divine grace. Nor is the righteousness

22. Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, 2.327.

23. Dabney, ST, p. 338.

24. G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 456. Berkouwer goes on to suggest that Edwards’ scheme “is the real basis of realism.” However, he adds, this is not the realism of Shedd and others.

25. Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, 2.328–29. It was this very fact, that Edwards “had rejected all of imputation but the name,” that drove A. Alexander, in the *Princeton Review*, to conclude that Edwards was explicitly evident in the New England theology that bore his name. Baird follows Alexander’s evaluation to conclude: “This doctrine of mediate imputation—although, practically, it or something similar is inevitable, upon adoption of Edwards’ theory of identity—is irreconcilable on logical principles with that theory.... The view thus taken by Placæus, met with no countenance at the time; and in it he had but few followers, until the rise of Edwards and Hopkins. Of the school of the latter, Edwards was the real founder—the Socrates.” See Baird, “Edwards and the Theology of New England,” in *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 10 (January 1858): 386–87.

26. Samuel Miller, *The Life of Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey*, in *The Library of American Biography*, vol. 8, ed. by Jared Sparks (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, & Co., 1837), pp. 1–256.

27. Dabney, ST, p. 339. For a treatment of Dabney’s critique of Edwards’ speculative bent see Sean Michael Lucas, “He Cuts Up Edwardsism by the Roots’: Robert Lewis Dabney and the Edwardsian Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century South,” in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* ed. D. G. Hart, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), pp. 200–14.

of Christ ever imputed for justification, except to the elect: nor ever received except by faith, which is the grace of the Spirit peculiar to the renewed soul. In like manner the sin of Adam is imputed to us, but never irrespective of our nature and its inherent sin. That is, we must not attempt to separate Adam's federal from his natural headship—by the union of which he is the Root of the human race: since we have not a particle of reason to believe that the former would ever have existed without the latter. Nay Christ to become our federal head, had to take our nature.<sup>28</sup>

It was Breckinridge's contention that there is a distinguishable though inseparable relationship of sin imputed and the sinful corruption of human nature. To put it another way, inherent sin and imputed sin are not to be confused, but also not to be dealt with one without the other. There is a communication of the two without priority.

Here is where Breckinridge left the matter, but he urged his theological successor in the seminary, Robert W. Landis (1809–83), to expound the doctrine as he perceived it. Landis produced a sizeable volume on the topic, which was published posthumously.<sup>29</sup> Warfield said of the position, as espoused by Landis and Dabney, it is “characterized by an attempt to accept the fact of the transmission of both guilt and depravity from Adam without framing a theory of the mode of their transmission or of their relation one to the other.”<sup>30</sup>

As noted before, a serious question surrounds the teaching on imputation of Adam's sin. “How can it be justice, for me,” wrote the Virginian, “who gave no consent to the federal arrangement, for me, who was not present when Adam sinned, and took no share in it, save in a sense purely fictitious and imaginary, to be so terribly punished for another man's deed?”<sup>31</sup> This question provided the impetus for many scholars to seek philosophical, rational, and biblical solutions to this dilemma over the course of many centuries. It takes a serious concern about any possible accusation of injustice in God and attempts to relieve the tension.

The primary difficulty, as Dabney saw it, was that the immediate, precedaneous imputation doctrine—both of Turretin and Hodge—was built upon the presupposition of an exact parallelism with the imputation of Christ's righteousness. A critic of Dabney acknowledged this presupposition in Turretin and the Princeton school. At the same time, he denied that Dabney proved any “want of parallelism between the two federal transactions.”<sup>32</sup> This supposed exact parallelism, Dabney explained, is “an analogy ... not a perfect parallel.”<sup>33</sup> On

this ground, he disputed Charles Hodge's “doctrinal use” of Romans 5:12–21.<sup>34</sup>

The first issue Dabney wanted to exploit was the condition of Adam's posterity. Hodge insisted that Adam's posterity, considered in their individuality, are not personally sinful and therefore guilty of personal sin. They are, Hodge averred, liable to punishment alone. With the Realists, Dabney viewed this position as opening the door to charge of injustice in God. Somehow, Dabney reasoned, we are not only liable because of Adam's sin, but really and personally sinful in our first state of existence, since punishment cannot exist without prior guilt.

From this point he addressed Hodge's “rigid parallelism” between Adam and Christ. In fairness to Hodge, it should be noted that Hodge does refer to his parallelism as an analogy and he does admit points of difference.<sup>35</sup> Dabney, however, was not satisfied with Hodge's qualification and pressed Hodge for a greater consistency in his explanations of the Adam/Christ parallel.

The primary point Dabney wished to make was that an exact parallelism leads to untenable consequences for the Reformed scholar. An *ordo salutis* derived from an exact or rigid parallelism is one best characterized as synergistic and thus Arminian. George Hutchinson, writing in the twentieth century, observed:

There is good reason to charge Hodge with ultimately falling back upon the Wesleyan doctrine of universal redemption. For in his attempt to escape the charge of Nominalism he maintains, following Calvin, that no man is finally condemned for Adam's sin alone (that

28. Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Objectively Considered* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1858), 1.498–99.

29. Robert W. Landis, *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, 1884); 541 pages. George Hutchinson has described the book accurately when he said “the book is bulky and maddeningly repetitive” (*The Problem of Original Sin*, p. 61, n2).

30. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (1932; rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), p. 308. This article was first published in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1909.

31. Robert L. Dabney, ST, p. 338.

32. Anonymous, “Dr. Dabney on Immediate Imputation,” p. 52.

33. Robert Lewis Dabney, *Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney*, 3 vols., (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 1.263. Dabney also believes that Hodge is aware that “all Calvinistic doctors” teach this truth!

34. Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.262. Dabney is simply concerned for the consequences of Turretin and Hodge's strict “immediate” doctrine. Dabney said: “But we shall show that the doctrinal use which is attempted to be made of the passage is not only unnecessary to the analogy of faith, but untenable and self-contradictory.”

35. Hodge, ST, 2.203.

is for a *peccatum alienum*) as the Nominalists taught, but also for his own inherent hereditary depravity. But Hodge further maintains, in order to defend his doctrine of universal infant salvation, that hereditary depravity is insufficient grounds for the final perdition of an individual. No one will ever be finally condemned who has no actual sins to atone for, that is, for original sin alone. On what basis, then, is such a person saved? By the gracious redemption of Christ of course; there is no other way of salvation. But if every naturally born son of Adam is under condemnation, and if all these, except who live to commit actual sin, are saved by the redemption of Christ, how can one escape the inference that Christ redeemed all except those who voluntarily reject that redemption by means of actual sin?<sup>36</sup>

Hutchinson's conclusion was that this was effectively the doctrine of Wesley and the New School theologian, Henry B. Smith. "At least," he says, "it appears to be, in effect, the doctrine that all are in principle condemned in Adam while all are in principle redeemed in Christ."<sup>37</sup> Readers should note that in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge argued from Romans 5:12–21 that the "all" in Christ must have been absolute, leaving infants dying in infancy as the only class of people to which it could apply. His Romans commentary on these verses, however, takes a more traditional approach to the text by arguing that "all" related to those who shall be saved through union with Christ.

Neither Dabney, nor Hutchinson, imputed universal salvation to Hodge, but both foresaw a great threat to the Reformed church if Hodge's exegetical approach was accepted. Dabney, rather, took a more moderate position on issues from lapsarianism to imputation. Rather than seeing the various elements or consequences of the fall unfolding sequentially, he saw them as a whole. Hodge held with others in the tradition "the consequences of the fall, namely guilt and depravity, must come upon the race in the same order in which they occurred in Adam." Dabney responded: "Now common sense tells us, that when a holy creature [i.e., Adam] committed his first sin, the depravation of his heart, the falling under guilt were, temporally speaking, synchronous: but

that, causatively speaking, the depravation, or subjective corruption, must precede, and the guilt follow."<sup>38</sup> Hutchinson provides helpful commentary on Dabney when he said, "Now if this was the case with Adam, who was not corrupted of God but of himself, how could it be any different with his posterity? Temporally, they are guilty when corrupted and corrupted when guilty; but causatively, put first things first, they are guilty because corrupted rather than corrupted because guilty."<sup>39</sup> Dabney's position was one of non-commitment to any precedence in the order in which Adam's sin is conveyed to his progeny.

Already we have seen that Dabney considered the most common and difficult objection to imputation as the question of justice—"How can it be just for God to impute the penalty of a sin, except in a purely fictitious sense, which does not rightfully belong to a person?" Hodge, he believed, could not answer the objection as long as he insisted on emphasizing federal union with Adam while relegating natural union to a place of near silence. Granted, Hodge did acquiesce to the truth of natural union as it is presented in the Standards of the Reformed churches and in the Holy Scripture as it related to the corruption of human nature. Indeed, he admitted that Adam was not only the federal head of mankind, but the natural spring of humanity. Union with Adam was thus both federal and natural in differing respects.<sup>40</sup> However, Hodge retained federal liability to punishment without grounding it in the imputation of Adam's guilt. All that was imputed, according to Hodge, was liability to punishment. Murray reckons that Hodge wrongly attributed this to his definition of *μαρτία* as singularly being reckoned to Adam's progeny. Dabney identified this as an inconsistency.

Dabney penetrates this concession on Hodge's part with characteristic incisiveness. Hodge agreed with qualifications that the ground for imputation is *natural* as well as federal union. He is forced to do so because his own church's doctrine stated: "Our first parents...being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation."<sup>41</sup> This natural union results in a depraved and corrupted human nature. Therefore, at such a time "as their existence doth actually unite them to Adam" they are condemned<sup>42</sup> due to union with corrupted Adam.

It is true that Dabney found a good deal of agreement with Hodge's doctrine of sin. For instance, he found Hodge's exegetical work in relation to Romans 5:12–21, overall, as extremely helpful. On this he said, "we have no theoretic motive to reject Dr. Hodge's exposition;

36. Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin*, p. 105.

37. Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin*, p. 105.

38. Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.269.

39. Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin*, p. 78.

40. Hodge, *ST*, 2.196.

41. Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.1, 3.

42. Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.271. Dabney calls this simultaneous existence of corruption and guilt "one coëtaneous complex."

for his exegetical conclusions contain nothing inconsistent with our doctrine.”<sup>43</sup> However, he remained convinced that Hodge drew harmful conclusions that might provide a “slippery-slope” for many into Arminianism, especially as they applied his principles to Christ’s redemptive work. It is clear that neither Dabney nor Hodge denied the imputation of Adam’s sin. The argument arises over “the grounds of that imputation and its consequences,” as Hodge admits.<sup>44</sup> What was imputed and was there a priority in transmission? Hodge said liability to guilt was imputed. Dabney said both liability to guilt *and* culpability for Adam’s sin are transmitted, but in what order he maintained we do not and cannot say. Reformed orthodoxy taught that God imputed the guilt of Adam’s sin to his posterity as their federal head, that this imputed sin warranted condemnation, and that original sin entailed the corruption of human nature through natural generation. The above observations illustrate that new options arose in nineteenth century American Reformed thought in ways that perhaps even proponents did not recognize as modified ideas.

#### DABNEY’S POSITION PRESENTED

While Dabney is not willing to expound a theory as to a specific mode whereby Adam’s sin is imputed to his race, he is certain that one’s view is important, indeed, “decisive of his whole system of theology.”<sup>45</sup> He argued his “agnostic” view from three grounds—Calvin, confessionally, and biblically. We shall consider them in the following order. First, he argued his case as being consistent with Holy Scripture, especially Romans 5:12–21. It is in this context which he also places himself in company with Calvin, therefore, we shall intertwine our comments on Calvin with our look at Romans 5:12–21. Second, he argues from the language of the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms*.

Before addressing particulars of Dabney’s position, it is important to remember that he did not argue for either immediate or mediate imputation. He believed these distinctions to be contrived and, therefore, such that they cast dark clouds across the Biblical teaching and bring confusion to the “intuitions.” Dabney stated his convictions in unquestionable clarity.

My conviction is, that this scheme [i.e., the development of “immediate, precedaneous imputation”], like the supralapsarian, is a novelty and an *over-refinement*, alien to the true current of the earlier Reformed theology, and some of Placæus’ day were betrayed into the exaggeration by the snare set for them by his astuteness, and their own over-zeal to expose him.<sup>46</sup>

With this ever in mind, we proceed to Dabney’s first witness—Scripture and Calvin.

DABNEY’S ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE AND CALVIN  
First, he considered 1 Corinthians 15:21–49 as very instructive. Dabney is careful to show the marked differences evident within the passage when he wrote: “In almost every thing they [i.e., the first Adam and the second Adam] are contrasted; the one earthy, the other heavenly; the one source of death, the other of life; yet they have something in common.”<sup>47</sup> Yes, there are differences. What is this which they hold in common? It is their “representative characters,” said Dabney.<sup>48</sup>

Verse 22 was an important verse for Dabney: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” Dabney made no commitment to a mode of imputation at this point. He simply said: “Adam is *somehow* connected with the death of his confederated body” [italics added].<sup>49</sup> He continued to sound like Turretin and Hodge as he speaks of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness for the redemption of the elect and the imputation of Adam’s guilt for mankind’s ruin. The difference, however, is understood when he differentiates between the two so as to annul the parallelism. The difference, Dabney explained, is that one is natural while the other is supernatural and thus not parallel but analogous.

Next, Dabney gives the fundamental teachings of Romans 5:12–17. Justification through faith is the theme being elucidated by the Apostle. “Adam’s federal headship and our sin and death in him,” he avers, is being used by the author to illustrate the main point.<sup>50</sup> The significance of Adam’s use as a type of Christ “is indisputably this: that like as we fell in Adam, we are justified in Christ.”<sup>51</sup> Again, it is easy to see that Dabney is making no commitment to a mode of imputation. Rather, he is most comfortable in simply stating the obvious intent of the text.

As he proceeds through the text, he drew three primary significations. First, in verses 12–14, “all men sinned and were condemned in Adam; death, the established penalty of sin, passing upon them through his

43. Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.262.

44. Hodge, ST, 2.204.

45. Dabney, ST, p. 350.

46. Dabney, ST, p. 347.

47. Dabney, ST, p. 331.

48. Dabney, ST, p. 331.

49. Dabney, ST, p. 331.

50. Dabney, ST, p. 331.

51. Dabney, ST, p. 331.

sin.”<sup>52</sup> Second, in verses 15–17, Dabney saw the truth that Adam’s sin is imputed. He provides further commentary on this in his *Discussions* as he draws from Calvin.

So, on verse 15, Calvin said:

What the apostle delivers, ‘perished through the offense of one,’ understand thus: that corruption is transfused from him into us. For neither do we thus perish by his fault as though we were ourselves without fault; but because his sin is the cause of our sin, Paul ascribes our death to him. Our sin I call what is inborn in us.... Moreover it is important to note here two differences between Adam and Christ ... that in Adam’s sin we are not condemned through imputation alone..., but we thus sustain its punishment, because *we are also guilty of fault*, so far, to wit, as our nature vitiated in him is involved in guilt before God.... The other difference is, that the benefit of Christ does not reach to all men, as Adam’s involved his whole race in condemnation (emphasis added).<sup>53</sup>

There is no doubt that Dabney approves of Calvin’s assessment. It is possible to conclude that the crux of Dabney’s doctrinal differences with the Princetonian is contained in this passage.

Of special interest is Calvin who understood “we suffer his punishment, because we also ourselves are guilty.”<sup>54</sup> This alone does not support Dabney’s view, indeed, all Reformed presentations of imputation could claim this statement. However, when Calvin continued, the situation changes. Owen’s translation is crystal clear where it stated: “as our nature is vitiated in him, it [i.e., our nature] is regarded by God as having committed

sin.” Calvin denied that imputation alone explains our guilt before God. Our guilt before God can only be understood first in terms of *peccare*, which “signifies to be corrupted and vitiated ... we are all imbued with natural corruption, and so unrighteous and perverse.”<sup>55</sup> Second, our guilt involves Adam’s guilt. These two aspects of original sin are to be understood as having been communicated to Adam’s progeny without distinction of priority. Dabney embraced this *in toto* as exhibited in his discussion of Hodge.

In following Calvin at this point in his understanding of Romans 5, he leaves the imputation issue open, neither favoring the immediate or the mediate view of imputation.<sup>56</sup> This is the essence of Dabney’s “agnostic” doctrine of imputation where he views the elements of original sin as “one coëtaneous complex.”

Finally, Dabney argues, from verses 18 and 19, that the legal language of καθιστηναι δικαιοι and δικαιωσιν ζωης “prove that it is a forensic change which is implied. Then it follows that likewise our legal relations were determined by Adam.”<sup>57</sup> This is helpful in seeing the analogous relationship of the two Adams and in defining the differences between the two federal relationships. It is important to remember that all of this, natural corruption (vv 15–17) and legal imputation, not simply one aspect, is imputation for Dabney. Still, remembering that he is not committed to an order of transmission from Adam to his progeny.

**DABNEY AND THE CONFESSION AND CATECHISMS**  
Throughout the writings of Dabney, one finds reference to the Standards whereby he executed his theology. Indeed, his *Systematic Theology* is framed according to the *Westminster Confession*. In his discussions of the doctrine at hand, he referred many times to the *Confession*. In a few instances, he pointed out departures from the *Confession*. More often, however, he simply raised the *Confession* as the standard, asking men to say no more than the document to which they subscribed.<sup>58</sup>

He was very pleased that the Westminster Assembly had refrained from extremes and excesses on issues such as decrees (i.e., supra- and infralapsarianism), eschatology, and imputation (i.e., immediate and mediate). Douglas Kelly noted: “Dabney certainly followed the advice of the Scottish Commissioner Henderson to the Westminster Assembly of the 1640s: ‘Let us avoid all scholastical disputes and unnecessary distinctions.’”<sup>59</sup> Because the Assembly succeeded in this regard, remaining so thoroughly biblical, Dabney could say one year before his death: “the Confession will need no amendment until the Bible needs to be amended.”<sup>60</sup>

52. Dabney, ST, p. 332.

53. Calvin cited in Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.261–62.

54. John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Epistle of Paul the Apostle To The Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols. (1844–1856; repr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 19.210.

55. Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.261.

56. See Dabney, *Discussions*, 1.262 where he stated: “Calvin’s exposition seems, on the whole, founded on the truest insight into the apostle’s scope, and the fairest and most scholarly.”

57. Dabney, ST, p. 332.

58. Dabney’s spirit concerning this doctrine was perhaps heightened by the refusal of one presbytery to admit Dr. Baird on the basis of his disagreement with Dr. Hodge. Cited in Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin in American Presbyterian Theology*, p. 71, n. 38.

59. Douglas Kelly, “Robert Lewis Dabney,” in *Southern Reformed Theology*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 45.

60. Robert L. Dabney, “The Doctrinal Contents of the Confession of Faith,” in *Memorial Addresses of the Westminster Assembly, 1647–1897* (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee on Publication, 1897), p. 94.

Drawing from the *Shorter Catechism* Question 18, Dabney begins by telling us that “original sin is the general term, expressing both elements, of imputed guilt and total depravity.”<sup>61</sup> Note that sinful man’s condition consists of: 1) the guilt of Adam’s sin; 2) lack of original righteousness; 3) corruption of nature “whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually” (*Westminster Larger Catechism* 25). It is from this fallen man that “all actual transgressions” flow. All of this is *original sin* for Dabney.

Original sin is “so called because *native*, and because the fountain of all other sin.”<sup>62</sup>

*Native* is a very important concept if we are to understand Dabney’s opposition to immediate imputation. *Native* relates to that aspect of mankind identified by Dabney as *habitus*. According to Doug Kelly, “*habitus* ... essentially meant [for Dabney] the basic dispositional and motivational complex at the roots of the human personality that determines what one’s character is and thus what one’s choices and actions are.”<sup>63</sup> This *habitus*, with which men are constituted, is described by Dabney as “vicious,” “evil,” and “perverted.”<sup>64</sup> Is depravity to be found “in the perverted *habitus* of the will, causatively corrupting and blinding the understanding, and thus qualifying the soul as a whole morally evil?”<sup>65</sup> For Dabney, the answer is, absolutely!

So, man in his native state, possesses a *habitus* that involves the guilt of Adam’s sin, lack of original righteousness, and corruption of nature. This is *original sin* for Dabney. Does this mean that this “vicious,” “evil,” and “perverted” disposition of soul is God’s product. Dabney would answer, absolutely not! This original sin “does not change or destroy any part of [the soul’s] substance.”<sup>66</sup> The *essentia* of the soul, originating with God, remains the constant metaphysically.<sup>67</sup> These descriptive terms for the depravity of man are for Dabney not attributes “but *accidens* of the human soul.”<sup>68</sup> God, therefore, is free from any accusation of having made man sinful and thus being the author of sin.

So far Dabney has said that original sin, as defined above, is native to man’s being. Original sin is a “soul” issue. This is clearly seen in the *habitus* or disposition of man in his individual origination. This “evil” disposition is accidental to the soul not of the essence of the human soul. In this way, Dabney seeks to guard God from heinous accusations.

Two questions arise at this point. First, how does he reconcile his view that original sin “is not a substantial corruption of the soul”<sup>69</sup> with the *Confession* when it says the first man became “wholly defiled in all the parts

and faculties of soul and body”? (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6.2). Second, and perhaps most germane to our purposes, how is this original sin communicated to Adam’s progeny?

First, quoting from Chapter 6 of the *Confession*—“wholly defiled, in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body”—Dabney explains that too often the temptation has been to think of the faculties of man compartmentally.

But when we thus discriminate the faculties, we must not forget the unity and simplicity of the spirit of man. It is a *monad*. And, as we do not conceive of it as regenerated or sanctified by patches; so neither do we regard it as depraved by patches. Original corruption is not, specifically, the perversion of a faculty in the soul, but of the soul itself<sup>70</sup> (emphasis added).

He begins by describing the soul of man as a *monad*. This serves in preserving the church from the type of compartmentalizing that only serves to generate Arminian conclusions or, at best, an inconsistent Christian anthropology.<sup>71</sup> Then he quickly alludes to the soteriological implications. This perspective is typical of Dabney’s ability to think beyond the immediate topic to the effect a given conclusion will have upon one’s doctrinal system in general. Finally, he speaks to the question raised above when he says that as a monad the soul itself, not a single faculty, is affected by original sin. A reading he might possibly give to the *Confession* might sound like “every aspect of the soul—intellect, will, and affections—has been negatively disposed toward God.” This reading is vindicated by Dabney’s lucid interpretation of this passage of the *Confession*.

We mean, first, that as to the chief responsibility of the soul, to love God, every soul is totally recreant.... Second ... there is [in the acts of the unregenerate] a fatal

61. Dabney, ST, p. 322.

62. Dabney, ST, p. 322.

63. Kelly, “Robert Lewis Dabney,” pp. 51, 52.

64. Dabney, ST, pp. 569–79.

65. Dabney, ST, p. 572.

66. Dabney, ST, p. 322.

67. When Dabney speaks of God as the originator or creator of the soul, he is not speaking as a creationist. He prefers to understand the origin of the soul as an “insoluble mystery” consisting of both divine and human causation. While he sounds like a realist so far as he goes, he refrains from labels. See ST, pp. 320, 321.

68. Dabney, ST, p. 322.

69. Dabney, ST, p. 322.

70. Dabney, ST, p. 323.

71. For Dabney on this topic see ST, pp. 298, 570, 571, 578.

defect as to God, which places them on the wrong side of the moral dividing line. . . . But third, native depravity is total, in this sense; that it is so far as man's self-recuperation is concerned, decisive and final.<sup>72</sup>

In this manner, he presents the *Confession* as supportive of his eventual position on "imputation." It is becoming clear that Dabney's position, free from the "over-refinements" of the immediate school, is, at least, confessionally consistent.

Now, the second question attached to Dabney's *habitus* view of original sin is how this is passed along to Adam's posterity. One would expect Dabney to simply refer to *Westminster Larger Catechism* 26: "Original sin is conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity by natural generation, so as all that proceed from them in that way are conceived and born in sin" (emphasis added). Instead, he includes this as one of nine "proofs of a native and total depravity."<sup>73</sup> From these "proofs" he enters his discussion of "imputation." To the insensitive reader, this may be seen as no more than a capitulation to the modified view of Hodge. To the scrutinizing student, however, Dabney is unveiling the cautious nature of his system of thought.<sup>74</sup>

"It is not Adam's sin which is imputed to us," says Dabney, "but the guilt (obligation to punishment) of his first sin. This much misunderstood doctrine does not teach that Adam's act was actually made ours. This consciousness repudiates."<sup>75</sup> There are "legal consequences" to Adam's sin. These "legal consequences," extend to "ours in his."<sup>76</sup> This is the result, according to Dabney, that Adam's progeny is treated as Adam because of what he did.

The logical question is "upon what grounds does God so act toward Adam's race"? Dabney answers briefly, yet clearly: "The grounds of this *legal union* we hold to be two; 1st the *natural union* with him as the root of all mankind; 2d the *federal relation* instituted in him, by God's covenant with him."<sup>77</sup> Here is Dabney's position in skeletal form. This is his version of the so called

"agnostic" doctrine of imputation. It provides Dabney a position consistent with and defensible by the *Confession* and *Catechisms* without the complications of Hodge's "over-refinement."<sup>78</sup> He certainly cannot be accused of unnecessary distinctions. He has given no time to priorities in that which is communicated to mankind from Adam. He has said no more than the Standards. The latter was a chief gripe of his against Hodge.

#### ANALYTICAL CONCLUSION

The opening premise was that the origin of sin poses the greatest problems in theology. We have discussed a very important aspect of hamartiology as we have examined the imputation of Adam's sin. Even more specifically, we have endeavored to explore the view of one of American Presbyterians' most able theologian/churchmen, Robert Lewis Dabney. He has been presented through various avenues. From his critique of Jonathan Edwards to his intricate evaluation of Charles Hodge, his vast concerns have been expressed.

It is easy to see that he truly believes that no doctrine can be isolated from one's system. Therefore, in discussing the origin of sin and its communication to Adam's progeny, Dabney's discussions broach a variety of theological topics. For example, he is compelled to include discussions on the origin of the soul, the constitution of the soul, human ability, regeneration, and justification. Indeed, one's view of the mode whereby Adam's sin is imputed is decisive of his whole system of theology. Dabney may not satisfy everyone's concerns, but he is true to his presupposition.

In calling Dabney's view "agnostic" one should not assume that imputation is devalued or ignored by this complex man. Imputation is central to his theology. As will be discussed later in this analysis, imputation is a Scriptural truth. Dabney's objection is to the "over-refinements," which in his opinion erect false distinctions like "immediate" and "mediate." His commitment to the doctrine of imputation becomes evident early in his examination of the older Edwards' doctrine of original sin.

Dabney found no doctrine of imputation in Edwards. Regardless of Edwards' sentimental use of the term, Dabney is concerned that Edwards' presuppositions be revealed and pressed to their consequential ends. Once they are evident, he is convinced Edwards' "imputation" is merely an impersonal identity based upon God's sovereign design. This was seen in Dabney's explanation of Edwards' doctrine of "arbitrary/personal identity" wherein man is united with Adam only by Divine decree.

For Dabney, Edwards' explanation of the existence of

72. Dabney, ST, pp. 324, 325.

73. Dabney, ST, pp. 324–28, for a discussion of the nine proofs of native depravity in man.

74. Dabney is here exhibiting a caution as he surely recognizes that he cannot argue for "natural generation" alone. If he were to he would, of course, be doomed when he enters into his exposition of Romans 5:12–19.

75. Dabney, ST, p. 329.

76. Dabney, ST, p. 329.

77. Dabney, ST, p. 329.

78. See *Westminster Larger Catechism* 22 and 26 for justification of this conclusion.

sin and its transmission neither answers the common objection against God's justice, nor provides adequately for parallel discussions such as the origin of the soul or justification. Further, while Dabney does not say so explicitly, Edwards provides, not only the foundation but the impetus, for the New England theologians to eventually deny the foundational tenets of orthodox hamartiology and, thus, undermine the Reformed soteriology as well. Samuel J. Baird develops this ably in his *A History of the New School*.<sup>79</sup>

One could wish that the Virginian would have provided as detailed a critique of Edwards as he did of Hodge for example. He did not, but there is enough mixed throughout his theological and philosophical writings to see where he would provide a challenge to Edwards. Perhaps no one of his generation was more able to delve into Edwards' philosophical interests than Dabney.<sup>80</sup> This, of course, makes him eminently qualified to deal effectively with Edwards' theology as has been shown.

Unlike his discussions on Jonathan Edwards, Dabney is extensive in his interaction with Charles Hodge—in both his *Systematic Theology* and *Discussions*. Because Dabney and Hodge say so much that agrees, it would be easy to pass over Dabney's concerns and attribute his disputes to the crusty character of the late nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian. Given the fact that so little attention has been paid to Dabney's doctrine of imputation this may well be the reason. However, it is the estimation of this writer that Dabney, America's finest teacher of theology of the nineteenth century, has much to contribute to the church's understanding and application of this crucial doctrine. Therefore, his interaction with Hodge, arguably the darling of American Presbyterianism, cannot be neglected.

In final analysis, perhaps it would be helpful to mention several points of commonality that exist between Dabney and Hodge. Hodge and Dabney agree as to the seat of original sin. In fact, while never using the term "monad" to describe the human soul, Hodge does refer to the faculties of the soul as a unit. He attributes the seat of original sin to the "whole soul." These two also agree that it is not the *essentia* that is corrupted, but the *accidens* of the soul. Thus, Hodge can say the "natural disposition" of man is corrupted. This relates similarly to Dabney's doctrine of the *habitus* of man.

Perhaps more surprising to some is the agreement the two have in defining the nature of imputation. It is not Adam's sin but the guilt of his first sin which is imputed to Adam's posterity. Guilt, as well, is defined by both as obligation to punishment rather than criminality.

Finally, Dabney sounds like Hodge rather than Landis (with whom he shares the label "agnostic") when he explains the grounds for our legal union with Adam as both natural and federal.

With all of this common ground, is it justifiable for Dabney to raise such stringent objections to Hodge's position? Dabney was convinced of it. As has been seen in our discussion of Hodge, Dabney is always concerned for the logical consequences of any position. He is also adamantly opposed to "over-refinements" and blind allegiance. In Hodge, Dabney finds blind allegiance to Turretin's "over-refinements" of this doctrine.<sup>81</sup>

The root of Dabney's dispute with Hodge is that Hodge is not satisfied with maintaining the *natural* and *federal* union of Adam with his natural descendants. Hodge has to develop a system of priority in the imputation of guilt and corruption. In so doing Dabney finds Hodge providing more problems than answers. For instance, we have seen the problem of immediate imputation relating to the immediate creation of the soul. In general, Dabney prefers leaving mode of transmission and so the question of "precedaneous" out of the discussion. He prefers to allow the "insoluble mystery" to remain.

What about Dabney's charge that Hodge tries to maintain an exact parallelism between imputation of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness? Is this legitimate or a case of quibbling? Hodge attempts to soften his treatment of Scripture (especially Romans 5) by saying the cases are analogous and have some differences. Dabney appreciates the capitulation but is not satisfied any more than he was satisfied with Edwards' use of the term imputation to describe his doctrine. It would not matter how many differences Hodge admitted. Dabney is convinced that Hodge's doctrine undermines the doctrine of justification. If the parallel holds, just as Adam's guilt is imputed and from this corruption follows, then Christ's righteousness must be imputed. Then "as part of the consequent reward of that imputed merit, has regeneration wrought, infusing the sanctified nature of His redeeming Head into his soul."<sup>82</sup> From this

79. Samuel J. Baird, *A History of the New School*, (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1868), pp. 167–183.

80. This is evidenced by Dabney's insightful discussion of Edwards' aesthetic philosophy in his chapter entitled "Moral Feelings," in *A Practical Philosophy* (1897; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1984).

81. In a forthcoming publication, the author argues that Hodge did not follow Turretin as closely as Dabney surmises and as some might wish. See C. N. Willborn, "Charles Hodge, the Sin Problem, and History," in *Charles Hodge: American Reformed Orthodox Theologian*, ed. Ryan McGraw (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023).

82. Dabney, ST, p. 345.

it is seen that Dabney considers this critical in order to preserve the Reformed *ordo salutis*. If Dabney was correct, his concerns are more than a mere quibbling.

Finally, Dabney is convinced that Hodge did not answer the objection that an imputation without our participation in it is unjust. He is convinced that the immediate view cannot answer the objection for it neglects the true nature of the natural union. In essence, according to Dabney, Hodge would have us answer the objection at the expense of God's justice. By that it is meant to say that the fact of God's way being just, justifies the means. Well, of course, he is right. But since there is a question as to whether Hodge is attributing the proper activity to God, there remains the question as to whether God could do it. Dabney says Hodge's immediate imputation is "intrinsically" wrong and so to represent God as having dealt with man accordingly is wrong.

Involved in this question of justice, is the relationship of participation. Dabney contends that man is worthy of guilt because he "participated" in Adam's sin as is evidenced by man's propensity toward and participation in personal sin. This has been seen in discussion of Calvin's exposition of Romans 5. Hodge, on the other hand, denies this, insisting that it should never be insisted that mankind is in anyway other than federally involved in sin.

Dabney comes very near to sounding like the Realist school as he argues this point. The distinction, a distinction which Dabney would maintain vehemently, is that he does not see this as an actual or real participation, but one owing to the natural union with Adam. In doing this, he seeks to take the argument away from the judicial category of the Pelagians and rationalists and place it in its own category. Basically, by placing it in an unparalleled category, men will have no grounds for claiming injustice even if they reject the doctrine. The unparalleled category to which we refer is the supernatural realm of mystery. Hodge provides grounds for the claim because he insisted on pursuing the issue with his logic. Dabney preferred leaving the discussion in the realm of revelation, supernatural and divine mystery. One may not agree with the revelation, but that does not grant one grounds for crying "unfair." At this point he is following closely Robert W. Landis.<sup>83</sup>

Dabney insisted that Hodge does not answer the objection. Certainly no one would argue with his ultimate insistence that the doctrine of imputation is wrapped

in mystery. The issue of mode of transmission is open. It is true that guilt and corruption are "one coëtaneous complex." Sinners must deal with their condition knowing God is justified in condemning them as sinful and sinner.

The lessons from Dabney are numerous. Perhaps none are more important to the scholar and pastor than this—avoid the temptation to over-refine doctrines to which Scripture speaks generally. Another lesson of significance is to live and work alert to the effect that any one position has upon other aspects of theology. No doctrine stands in isolation. Finally, we live in an age of hero-worship. Dabney's freedom to disagree and critique his fathers and brothers, with such a marked civility, should encourage us all to be more like the Bereans. ■

83. We agree with Hutchinson when he says that Dabney is never a slavish disciple of Dr. Landis. However, the affinities are too strong to deny or ignore.