

**The Doctrine of the Covenant and the “Immediate Vision and Fruition” of the Trinity:
The Deeper Protestant Conception**

- I. My lecture will not be as directly about the beatific vision as many of you might like. Rather, my lecture is designed to orient our understanding to two distinct and contrasting ways of thinking about the prospect of human beatitude: the Roman Catholic and the Reformed.
- A. It is especially the concern of this lecture to show what I consider to be antithetical conceptions of nature that operate in Roman Catholic and Reformed doctrines of man—and how those conceptions of nature forge incompatible conceptions of how man relates to God and what man needs to see God in his heavenly glory.
 - B. One way to get at the differences is to compare and contrast the image of God and covenant in the deeper Protestant conception to the image of God and the *donum superadditum* of the Roman Catholic conception.
 - C. My thesis, in part, is this: the Roman Catholic conception of the image of God—its conceptions of nature, grace and sin—cannot be reconciled with the reformed conception of the image of God and its conceptions of nature, sin and grace.
 - D. And these differences at the beginning have decisive implications for incompatible doctrines of the beatific vision—the vision of God at the consummation of all things.
- II. The Deeper Protestant Conception
- A. Image of God
 - 1. So, let us examine a deeper Protestant conception of the image of God.
 - a. First, and talking now about the nature of the image of God, the reformed position on the image of God is that *natural religious fellowship* is given in the creational image endowment itself.
 - b. Second, the ethical orientation of Adam is such that he is *entirely inclined* toward God in *mutable but true* knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with no *inherent* tendency to sin (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).
 - c. Third, Adam, the created image of God, as such, without any additionally infused grace (or *donum superadditum*) is ordered *naturally* to see God.
 - d. Focusing precisely on the I Cor. 15:45 text: if there is a natural body, then there is a spiritual body, Vos comments, “The Apostle was intent on showing that in the plan of God from the outset *provision* was made for a higher kind of body...the abnormal body of sin and the eschatological body are not so logically correlated that the one can be postulated from the other. But the world of creation and the world to come are thus correlated, the one pointing forward to the other” (*The Pauline Eschatology*, 169, n. 19).
 - e. Finally, the image of God would be the distinct work of the Spirit’s creative breath that would endow and sustain Adam with this dynamically eschatological religious fellowship bond (Gen. 2:7).
 - 2. But the question from a reformed standpoint is this: how does Adam *attain* this eschatological end to which he is ordered by creation (Genesis 2:7)?
 - a. What does he *need* in order to advance from earthly to heavenly fellowship with God.
 - b. The answer, in a single word, is *covenant*.
 - B. Covenant of Works and Image of God
 - 1. If Adam is ordered to see God, if he is ordered to the spiritual (I Cor. 15:45) and the heavenly (I Cor. 15:47), and if he is created to advance beyond Eden, beyond probation on earth, to the consummation of fellowship with God in heaven, what Adam *needs* is a voluntary act of condescension we call *covenant*.
 - 2. WCF 7:1 makes this very distinction: Adam, as the created image of God, can have no “fruition of God” as his blessedness and reward apart from the revelation of the covenant of works.
 - a. First, and taking these in different order, covenant is given to one who is *already ordered eschatologically to see the glory of God in heaven*, beyond probation in earthy Eden.

- b. Second, covenant also holds forth to Adam the prospect of being *confirmed* in righteousness and holiness in his fellowship with God in heaven.
 - c. Third, it is the *natural* communion bond, given in the act of creational image endowment, that will be eschatologically advanced by covenantal obedience.
 - d. Fourth, if the Spirit confers on Adam a natural communion bond as the image of God (creation), the same Spirit will perfect that communion bond through perfect obedience in covenant relation to God (consummation).
3. This covenantal condescension is fully gratuitous and the reward is not strictly proportionate to the natural act of obedience (see the OPC Republication Committee Report on this issue).
 4. And, of *utmost importance*, we must affirm that the essence of covenantal condescension is radically non-ontological.
 - a. The covenant does not infuse an ontological supplement into Adam, making him fit for the *visio Dei*.
 - b. He comes from the hand of God, as the image of God, fit for the *visio Dei*.
 5. The covenant concept is radically non-ontological, as it is (a) given to a creature already oriented to God in righteousness holiness and knowledge, (b) already in a religious bond of communion, and (c) already ordered to see God by nature.

III. The Deeper Roman Catholic Conception

- A. I want to turn now to an overview of the deeper Roman Catholic conception of the image of God and the Roman Catholic substitute for covenant, the *donum superadditum*.
- B. Image of God and the Donum Superadditum: The Deeper Roman Catholic Conception
 1. Image of God: Not Ordered Naturally to See God
 - a. Lawrence Feingold, in his masterful work on Aquinas and his interpreters (*The Natural Desire to See God According to Saint Thomas and His Interpreters*), makes explicit that man, as created in the image of God, is not by virtue of that creation ordered to heavenly beatitude.
 - (1) On pages 323-25, he cites Thomas, who says, that man by nature is ordered to a connatural end—an end of merely contemplating God through his works. To be ordered to a supernatural end of seeing God man needs *grace*, grace that adds something beyond what man has by nature as the image of God.
 - (2) He continues, “On the basis of this foundation, hope and charity that give the will an adequate inclination to that supernatural good, and the infused moral virtues are *necessary* so that we may work toward that supernatural end” (324).
 - b. This grace of infused moral virtues is called the *donum superadditum*.
 - (1) Feingold: “Another way to present the relation between the two orders of nature and grace is by using the analogy of the *excitus* and *reditus*. Creation puts the creature *outside of God*, giving it a place in the *hierarchy of being*. Man’s natural end maintains the creaturely proportionality even while centering him on God as his end. The natural end thus effects a return to God according to the measure of the creature, as man loves and glorifies God according to the *proportion of his nature*. The return accomplished by the supernatural introduces the creature in the sphere of the *divine* through charity. The supernatural end liberates man and angel from the limits of their creaturely proportionality, and brings them into mystical marriage with God” (*Introduction*, 37).
 - (a) Adam *needed* supernatural grace, with which he must cooperate, in order to see God, rise above the proportion of his created nature, as he ascends the hierarchy of created being in mystical marriage with God.
 - (b) Dr. Strimple along these lines quotes the Roman Catholic Robert Bellarmine, perhaps the finest of the counter Reformation Roman Catholic theologians of the 16th century, this grace—this

- donum superadditum*, would “exalt (Adam) above human nature and make (him) participant in the nature of God.” (Strimple).
- (2) Grace inaugurates an *ontological ascent for man*, who, as created is “outside of God” and through supernaturally infused grace can *return to God as elevated above his human nature to participate in the divine nature*.
- c. The *donum superadditum* is therefore an *ontological* conception of grace.
2. Image of God: Not Naturally Inclined Toward God
- a. Robert Strimple, my professor of systematic theology at WSC in the 90's, in his class entitled *God's Created Image*, commenting on the Roman Catholic view of the image of God, says, “the Roman Catholic view, moral agency was con-created and natural and the divine image consists in this and was not lost. Moral excellence, however, was superadded and supernatural—a *donum superadditum*.”
- (1) He continues, “Why this distinction between the natural image and a super-added gift of original righteousness—of mora
- (a) Bellarmine: “Man naturally consists in flesh and bones. He therefore has community of nature partly with the beasts and partly with the angels. By reason of the body he has sensual desires and appetites. By reason of the soul he has propensity to spiritual good. But between these two propensities, there exists a certain *battle*. And from that *inherent battle* there arises a difficulty in doing good.”
- (b) The entailment inherent in this distinction, according to Strimple is that “in man’s lower nature there was already, at creation, the potentiality of sin.”
- (2) This is spoken of in traditional, Roman Catholic circles, using the term *concupiscence*—a natural effect of man’s dual nature, of his having two kinds of appetites.
- (a) Strimple says, “That original righteousness that was maintaining harmony within man, in spite of this conflict that arises between the spiritual and the sensual. That original righteousness was lost in the fall—which the church’s sacraments now work toward restoring.”
- (b) George D. Smith, a Roman Catholic, in *The Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church*, says: “The importance of this doctrine lies in this. That if Adam’s endowments were natural, then since by his sin he lost them, both for himself and for us, it will follow that man’s nature now is intrinsically and essentially vitiated by being deprived of some elements originally proper to it. Human nature will therefore be in itself an evil thing. If, on the other hand, these endowments were something given to him over and above all that went to make up his full manhood, then it follows that in spite of their loss, human nature remains complete—in essence unimpaired by original sin, intrinsically whole and good in itself.”
- b. The objections from the standpoint of the deeper Protestant conception ought to be coming into fairly sharp focus: too low a view of man as created and too high of man as fallen.
- c. Summarizing, Strimple says, “As a result, Rome’s doctrines of sin, of regeneration, of sanctification, as well as the entire Roman Catholic ethic, are controlled by principles that have their roots in the *pagan* view of human nature and *not at all* in that which is specifically *Christian*.”
- C. Summary: The *donum superadditum* is (a) an ontological supplement to enable man through cooperation with infused grace to ascend the hierarchy of being and participate in the divine nature and (b) an ethical supplement to address inherent conflict in man that would prohibit such cooperation. The ethical problem in man a function of his finitude--his under-proportioned/participated creaturely

essence. Man is not ordered to God by nature nor is he inclined to God by nature.

1. Hence, a covenant is not *possible* on RC premises.
2. The *donum* inserts an alien supernatural relation that is not organically related to the state of nature (Vos' point in RD 2, 12-14).
3. In the nature of the case, the Roman Catholic insists that one must be elevated above nature and made partaker of the divine nature by "*Grace*." above the creaturely proportions of the natural human essence.

D. It seems that that one of the greatest problems with the *donum* is that it is no longer *man*, created naturally in the image of God, who has fellowship with God, but some thing (or someone) else.

IV. Implications for the *Visio Dei*

A. The Deeper Roman Catholic Conception (Thomas)

1. Let me offer a synopsis here of Daria Spezzano's treatment of Thomas Aquinas on the beatific vision in *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*. This very brief overview must do for now, and I will leave it to others to talk about the role of christology and sacramentology as the postfall mode by which the potency of "grace" comes to be realized in the beatific vision.
 - a. She says, as she expounds Aquinas, that Adam's "natural powers of intellect and will are incapable of attaining supernatural beatitude on their own, but also human nature, as their source is itself radically insufficient, ontologically under-proportioned for eternal life and so incapable of producing the acts necessary to get there" (*The Glory of God's Grace*, 19).
 - b. Hence, "Thomas (following Albert the Great) posits that the intellect itself is re-proportioned by the gift of a supernatural intrinsic disposition in the soul, by which God can be seen immediately: the light of glory" (*The Glory of God's Grace*, 31-32).
 - c. Spezzano says that Thomas' "answer is that the essence of God itself becomes for the intellect the medium of the beatific vision (playing the role of species by informing the intellect). . . the re-proportioning of the created intellect by the light of glory disposes it for *union with the divine essence*, making it perfectible by the divine essence as form by giving it a higher potency suitable for such a higher actualization" (*The Glory of God's Grace*, 32-33).
 - d. And the movement of this "reditus" to God is a sacerdotal movement, an ontological ascent that is construed as a "process of increasing similitude to God" as the creature ascends the hierarchy of being into union with the divine essence itself, understood as an "increasingly perfect participation of the creature in the light of the divine intellect, resulting in more and more perfect likeness to God" (*The Grace of God's Glory*, 37).
 - e. Thus, "the light of glory is participated more fully by the one who possesses more charity" (*The Grace of God's Glory*, 39).
2. After the fall, this divinizing of humanity has reached its climax in Christ, and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, enable participation in the flesh of Christ, which is the perfect human participation in the divine nature itself.

B. The Deeper Protestant Conception

1. The deeper Protestant conception of the *visio Dei* involves not a divinizing of the human by participation in the divine essence.
2. It is instead the advancement of the natural communion bond in a movement of estate from earthly fellowship in Eden to heavenly fellowship in Sabbath Rest.
3. This means, then, that Adam would become the image of God in its eschatological fullness only when his mutable bond of fellowship with God on earth advanced to an immutable bond of fellowship with God in heaven.
4. I Cor. 15:45c tells us that this communion bond has been advanced by the breathing of the Spirit a second time in the resurrection and ascension of Christ as the Last Adam and life-giving Spirit.
5. Put expansively, it is not sacramentally graced participation in the essence of God, but

Spirit-wrought restoration and consummation of the covenantal communion bond that characterizes the essence of the covenant relation itself. And it is the latter that Christ brings to the church in Spirit-forged union with Himself.

6. Pentecost, in grand scope, is not only the gifting of the Spirit, who himself brings to climax the covenant relationship in union with the person of Christ, as crucified and ascended. It is also the conferring of the image of Christ (the second and Last Adam) upon a people united to Him by the Spirit (and through faith).
 7. Standing over against this view is the Roman Catholic view of a two stage divinizing of man as he sacramentally participates in the divine nature through union with the divine essence.
- C. I will leave you with a few thoughts on the answer to WLC 90 What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment? A. At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and for ever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment. (WLC 90)
1. First, we can say that what awaits the church at the end of the age is the *immediate* vision of God.
 2. Second, this immediate vision in heaven of the triune persons in union with Christ is the “fruition” of a *covenant*.
 3. Third, that vision is more specifically a “perfect and full communion” enjoyed with Christ that brings “inconceivable joy” to the body of Christ, the church.
- D. Postscript
1. The parallels between Roman Catholicism and Barthianism are important to note.
 - a. Both affirm that man, created in the image of God, is by nature is in need of gracious supplementation.
 - b. For Rome, concupiscence requires the supplementation of the gracious donum.
 - c. Thus, there is a deep, structural continuity between classic Roman Catholicism and Barthianism.
 2. Neither, taken separately or together, can arrive at the deeper Protestant conception.