

To Kristen Kurtz,

You are the treasure of my life.

Table of Contents

Part One: Theological Method and Defining Divine Immutability

Chapter One: Theology and Economy

Chapter Two: Definitions, Deviations, and Denials of Divine Immutability

Part Two: A Three-Fold Witness for Divine Immutability

Chapter Three: Historical Witness: Divine Immutability in the Halls of History

Chapter Four: Biblical Witness: Divine Immutability in the Pages of Scripture

Chapter Five: Theological Witness: Divine Immutability in Christian Reason

Part Three: Divine Immutability and Soteriology

Chapter Six: Divine Immutability and the Economy of Redemption

Conclusion: An Unchanging Redemption in an Unchanging Redeemer

Extended Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Abbreviations

PART ONE: Theological Method and Defining Divine Immutability

Chapter One: Theology and Economy

- “In the Beginning, God”: God as the Principle and Source of Theology
- Theology Proper and The Economy of Redemption
- Mutualism and Metaphysics: Modernity’s Aversion to Classical Divinity
- “Light Thrice Repeated”: Trinitarian Lessons from the Great Tradition
- Thesis and Method: A Dogmatic Account of the Soteric Significance of Divine Immutability

Chapter Two: Definitions, Deviations, and Denials of Divine Immutability

- Toward a Definition of Divine Immutability
- Deviations and Denials of Divine Immutability
- The Problem of Relations and Soteriology
- The Problem of the Incarnation
- The Problem of Creation and Divine Action
- The Problem of Volition and Knowledge
- The Problem of Divine Freedom and Contingency
- Conclusion

PART TWO: A Three-Fold Witness for Divine Immutability

Chapter Three: Historical Witness: Divine Immutability in the Halls of History

- Divine Immutability in the Early Church
- Divine Immutability and Medieval Theology
- Divine Immutability in the Confessions and Confessors of the Reformation and Post-Reformation

- Divine Immutability in the Modern Era
- Conclusion

Chapter Four: Biblical Witness: Divine Immutability in the Pages of Scripture

- Exegesis in Relation to Christian Dogmatics and the Search of a Biblical Articulation of Divine Immutability
- “From Everlasting to Everlasting”: Divine Immutability in the Old Testament
- “Heirs of the Promise”: Divine Immutability in the New Testament
- Excursus on Biblical Concerns Pertaining to God’s Changelessness
- Conclusion

Chapter Five: Theological Witness: Divine Immutability in Christian Reason

- The “Enamel” of All Perfections: Theological Reasoning and Divine Immutability
- All That is in God, is God: Divine Simplicity and Divine Immutability
- God as Agent, Not Patient: Divine Impassibility and Divine Immutability
- Life in Himself: Divine Aseity and Divine Immutability
- No Beginning, No End, and No Succession: Divine Atemporality and Divine Immutability
- No Quantity, Dimension, or Locality: Divine Infinity and Divine Immutability
- Wisdom, Power, and Presence: The “Omnis” and Divine Immutability
- Conclusion

PART THREE: Divine Immutability and Soteriology

Chapter Six: Divine Immutability and the Economy of Redemption

- From Constructive Articulation to Soteric Application

- Lessons from Divine Immutability's Biblical Pattern
- Divine Immutability and Functional Christology
- Divine Perfections and Soteriology
- Divine Immutability and Union with Christ

Conclusion: An Unchanging Redemption in an Unchanging Redeemer

Tables and Figures

General Index

Scripture Index

Bibliography

Acknowledgements

In the duration of my working on this project, the world seemed to be in a state of constant fluctuating. As a small sample size of the change that occurred while writing this book: my wife and I had our first child, my dear mother passed away from cardiac arrest, I moved into my first faculty post, and the world experienced a global pandemic that shut down our country for the better part of a year. And that's not to mention the political, racial, and societal unrest that permeated and punctuated these last few years.

It was during these ever-altering days that I conducted my research and writing. Writing in days riddled with change, the doctrine of divine immutability became more than a theological construction to be examined and moved into a Christian truth to be cherished. While my life was ever changing, my God was ever the same. I can now utter with Kierkegaard, "in God's changelessness, there is rest." It is therefore that the first thanks and acknowledgment necessary for this book is to the Triune God. You are unchangeably good and have proven to be the Father of lights in whom there is no shadow of turning. To you, Lord, be every ounce of honor and glory now and forevermore.

Behind this book is an embarrassment of riches. Many friends, family members, and academic colleagues stand behind the words you see here. First, since this book is a revision of my doctoral dissertation, I'd like to thank my doctoral committee who have now become my editors. Dr. Matthew Barrett and Dr.

J.V. Fesko have been invaluable throughout this process. Their input was always erudite, and they consistently pushed me to make the project better. They are not only great doctoral supervisors and editors, but they become great mentors and friends. Without these two, this book would have been an impossibility.

There are a number of other academic colleagues who made this work possible. I'd like to thank Dr. Russell Meek, who has read every word of the manuscript and edited every syllable. I'd also like to thank Dr. Matthew Millsap and the entire Library staff at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Any academic knows that librarians are the real heroes and Dr. Millsap personally went out of his way on numerous occasions to track down hard-to-find journal articles for me. I'd also like to thank Jordan Steffaniak for working through a pre-published edition of this manuscript and for offering erudite and thoughtful feedback.

For a majority of the time I was working on this book, I was also a pastor at Emmaus Church in Kansas City, Missouri. Therefore, I'd like to thank the saints of Emmaus Church as they were gracious with their pastor's time and were more than supportive of my desire to pursue both pastoral ministry and academic theology. Moreover, they kept my soul. Thank you to the members and fellow pastors of this wonderful body of believers

I'd also like to thank my family. Outside of my editors, the only other person to read every word of this project was my father—Ron Kurtz, Sr. My dad worked the material diligently and offered insightful feedback. However, more important than the particulars of the feedback he gave is what his reading of each

chapter represented—his support. He’s been in my corner for as long as I can remember, and I am eternally grateful for him. I’d also like to thank two other family members, Joshua and Meagan Brown. Most of the hours I spent writing this book, Joshua Brown was likely within arm’s reach. We clocked countless hours at coffee shops in St. Louis, Kansas City, and San Antonio through the years of this project. He and his dear wife are more than family, they are our best friends.

Finally, the most profound thanks belong to my immediate family. My wife, Kristen Kurtz, and our daughter, Finley Jane Kurtz, have my heart. When this book goes to print, my daughter will be turning two. Though she is young in age and small in size, in her I’ve found a deep well of joy. In her laughs and hugs, I’ve found the sweetest of writing breaks. Being her dad is a true gift and I pray that she grows to treasure the unchanging triune God and cherish his gospel.

With joy I dedicate this book to my wife, Kristen Kurtz. I’ve had to accept the hard truth that there is not an acknowledgement section long enough to capture how important Kristen has been to my life and career. She is my closest friend, my nearest neighbor, my greatest adventure, and in her I have found an ocean of kindness and a lifetime of love. Thank you for the countless sacrifices you have made to make this book possible, Kristen. I love you.

There are surely many who I have failed to mention here, and for that I extend my apologies. Each name in these acknowledgements, and many who are not here named, are all evidence of James 1:17 that our unchanging triune God is the Father of lights who is the giver of good gifts—to him be the glory forever.

Chapter One

Theology and Economy

“In the Beginning, God”: God as the Principle and Source of Theology

The opening salvo of the greatest drama in history begins with the clause, “in the beginning, God.” (Gen 1:1) In these four words we not only find a robust protology but also insight into proper theological method, which becomes a roadmap in the hands of curious pilgrims. These initial words of sacred Scripture ground the rest of the story in the primary mover and actor in the unfolding narrative—God himself. As it is with the inaugural lines of Scripture, it should be with our theological method and trajectory: the entirety rests on the foundation of God.

The nature of systematic theology is such that where one decides to start is not a neutral decision; it is a theological one. Where we begin reveals the theologian’s prolegomenous intuition and often charts, from the start, where the dogmatic journey will lead.¹ Jumping off the starting block of anthropology, for instance, will cause the theologian to take a different dogmatic course than if he or she began with ecclesiology or eschatology. The voyage that begins with an

¹ See Bavinck’s two sections, “The Method and Organization of Dogmatic Theology” and “The History and Literature of Dogmatic Theology” for a summary of systematic starting points and procedures. He stated, “From the time the pursuit of dogmatics began, it needed a way of organizing the material treated.” Then, beginning with Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Bavinck works through a large portion of theological antiquity demonstrating dogmatic organization. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:95–204.

eschatological focus may differ in both order and outcome than that expedition that began with revelation. Expressing this point, Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders stated, “*Where one begins theologically is often as important in shaping the end product as how one proceeds theologically.*”²

Learning the implications of possible theological starting points is an important lesson for the student of theology. However, arguably more important is the lesson that not all doctrines are created equal in terms of capability of bearing the theological weight of dogmatics. It is not only the case that, starting with, say, ecclesiology or soteriology will impact where the theological trajectory leads, it is that these doctrines cannot, and should not, bear the foundational burden of theological reasoning. The doctrine of God alone has the exclusive identity qualified to uphold the weight of all other theological loci and fields. As John Webster stated, “the only Christian doctrine which may legitimately claim to exercise a magisterial and judicial role in the corpus of Christian teaching is the doctrine of the Trinity, since in that doctrine alone all other doctrines have their ultimate basis.”³

² Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, eds., *The Task of Dogmatics: Explorations in Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 15, emphasis original. The authors continue, “We might say that where you start and how you get to your goal are two fundamental issues in theological method. It is like preparing to set out on a journey. Before embarking upon the trip, one must consider where it will begin and where it will end.”

³ John Webster, “*Rector Et Iudex Super Omnia Genera Doctrinarum?*: The Place of the Doctrine of Justification,” in *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 1:161. It is important to

Elsewhere Webster described the theological task as having two primary components: “Christian theology is a work of the regenerate intelligence, awakened and illuminated by divine instruction to consider a twofold object.” That twofold object is, “first, God in himself in the unsurpassable perfection of his inner being and work as Father, Son, and Spirit and in his outer operations, and second by derivation, all other things relative to him.”⁴ Webster makes use of Franciscus Junius in articulating the importance of rooting all theology in the doctrine of God, and for good reason. The sixteenth-century Reformed theologian dedicated many pages to theological prolegomena and throughout his work demonstrated the importance of building from a Trinitarian foundation. In his *Treatise on True Theology*, Junius provided the trustees of the University of Leiden and the consulars of the city thirty-nine theses describing a true theology. Thesis twenty-four stated, “The material of this theology consists of divine matters: of course God, and whatsoever topics have been arranged with respect to him.” Later in his exposition of thesis twenty-four, Junius continued, “God is the subject matter of theology . . . it is God himself that is the subject, or things that are ordered with

note that Webster would have us be less concerned about the material order of dogmatics as long as each emphasis is rooted in, and conscious of theology proper.

⁴ John Webster, “*Omnia . . . Pertractantur in Sacra Doctrina Sub Ratione Dei: On the Matter of Christian Theology*,” in *God Without Measure*, 1:3. Steven Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 25, articulates a nearly identical understanding, saying, “the object of theology is principally God himself and then, derivatively, other things as they stand in relation to God.”

respect to God, as to the universal principle and end of those things.”⁵ Junius’s insistence of God as the first principle of theology would make its way into a public disputation in which he stated,

In most-sacred Theology God is treated not only as the principle upon which it is constructed and the source of our knowledge of it but also as the subject and the foremost, primary locus of theology from which all the others flow forth, by which they are held together, and to which they should be directed. Hence Theology derives its very name from this starting-point.⁶

Lewis Ayres described this theological movement which roots all other theological loci in one controlling emphasis in his discussion of the workings of systematics:

“anyone attempting to conceive the field as a whole is faced with the dual task of finding some guiding principle under which to relate the disciplines and giving an account of the various rationales of the individual disciplines.”⁷

As we have seen, and will see, that “guiding principle” is none other than the Triune God. That God should be the principle and source of Christian theology ought to come as little surprise as his *a se* essence renders that not only material matter finds its source in him, but intellectual matters as well. Subjecting all

⁵ Franciscus Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 177–79.

⁶ Franciscus Junius, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae / Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation: Volume 1, Disputations 1–23*, ed. H. van den Belt et al., *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions* 187 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 151.

⁷ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 393. While Ayres concedes that systematic theology can be defined in this way, he slightly bemoans the over-fragmented state of theological expertise as one of the contributing factors to non-Nicene reasoning.

corresponding theological fields to this one field—the Triune life of God—seems self-evident, as there is an asymmetrical relationship between the doctrine of God and any other theological field. We can, without much difficulty, think of God without having our mind immediately drawn to ecclesiology, for example. However, there is no contemplating the *ecclesia* without pondering its chief cornerstone, founder, and sustainer. We can consider God’s fullness of life in himself without necessarily considering the divine economy of redemption, but it is unfathomable for the theologian to examine the dramatic salvation of man without reflecting on the Savior. This asymmetrical paradigm could be carried to all fields of theology. All theological truth is grounded and rooted in the triune life of God: ecclesiology is the study of God’s people, revelation and bibliology is the study of God’s Word, soteriology is the study of God’s redemption, anthropology is the study of God’s creatures. The fullness of God’s triune life in himself is the only foundation fit to shoulder the burdensome weight of theological reasoning. This triune God is the “orienting factor in all the various loci of dogmatic theology.”⁸

Theology Proper and The Economy of Redemption

“The doctrine of God is prior to the economy of God’s works, both materially and so also logically, since the being of God in and for himself is the ground of God’s

⁸ DUBY, *God in Himself*, 25.