

The Mystery of Derivative Personhood

Douglas Vickers

Post-Reformation theology in its English language expression came to its highest and to a quintessential formulation in the Westminster confessional documents. The Savoy Declaration (1658), whose chapters on the human will and the effectual calling of the sinner by the grace of God engage us at present, leans heavily on the Westminster Confession (1647). Indeed, only minimal differences of statement occur in the chapters under consideration. But it is of interest that among those minor differences is, first, a statement about the capacity of man in his natural state; and second, a statement about the intentions and the salvifically operative work of God. While the points at issue do not indicate any essential divergence of theological doctrine, they do bear on what is to be seen as a sound formulation of what we have referred to in our title as the mystery of derivative personhood.

First, in its opening statement on “Free Will” Savoy inserts that “God has endued the will of man with ... *power of acting upon choice*,” the italicized phrase being omitted by Westminster, Savoy apparently intending thereby to expand the connotation of the “natural liberty” of the will. Second, in its opening statement on “Effectual Calling” Savoy omits a phrase inserted by Westminster after the reference to God’s “appointed time.” Westminster refers to God’s “appointed *and accepted* time.” Third, in the third paragraph of the same chapter Westminster states that certain people there referred to are “saved by Christ *through the Spirit*,” the italicized words being omitted by Savoy. Fourth, in the final paragraph of the chapter Savoy is more expansive than Westminster by stating that people there referred to are “not ... effectually drawn by the Father, [so that] they neither do nor can” come unto Christ.

Our intention at present is not to split theological hairs on these points of inclusion and omission. Suffice it to say that out of seventeenth-century England came a most magnificent consolidation of the Reformed expression of the Christian truth. But what is at issue is the warning (as applies, of course, to all areas and levels of doctrinal formulation) that meticulous care is warranted in the consideration of the twofold question we are now addressing; namely, the state and capacities of the human will (including the reasons why that state is what it is), and the manner (including the certainty of accomplishment) in which God by his Spirit has set about rescuing man from the state of sin that makes his state of will what it is. Our doctrine, in short, is that at the Fall man lost his free will in a profoundly significant sense, being thereby disabled from knowing and doing anything of eternal good, and that if any are saved they are saved only by the sovereign, unsolicited, irresistible grace of God set forth in Christ.

Our objective now is to suggest in brief terms what is to be seen as lying behind the doctrinal claims of both Westminster and Savoy in the respects we have noted. We hope thereby to contribute to a clearer understanding of man as he is connoted by a describable state of will (fallen or redeemed) and the mystery of his personhood as God has constituted it and ordained its operation and function. In setting our objective in those terms we are concerned to bring to prominence some aspects of the meaning and fact of what apologetic theology has referred to as the Creator-creature distinction. We approach, first, the biblical meaning of mystery, and second, the most basic and foundational element of mystery in God’s creative constitution of human personhood. Why, in other words, is man in possession of faculties referred to in the chapters of the Savoy we have under consideration; and why, given the state of those faculties as they have been vitiated by sin and our first parents’ fall, is the intervention of divine grace necessary to rescue the human condition?

The meaning of mystery

To say simply, as it is true we must, that on many levels of possible cognition there is mystery for man but not for God, leaves unaddressed the questions of “why” that lie behind the more basic issues that now engage us. For what are we to understand as the possible meaning of mystery, particularly as that comes to us from the Word of God? The biblical connotation of mystery confronts us on two levels, the failure to distinguish between which has led to quite superficial conclusions in the theological literature.

Consider, first, the usage that is common in the Pauline vocabulary. We read in Paul’s

letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 3:3-5) the following: “By revelation he [God] made known unto me the mystery ... which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto us by his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” And again, Paul asks the Ephesians for their prayers that he might speak boldly and effectively “to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). Mystery in those contexts refers to something, some element or component of knowledge, that had at one time remained hidden in the mind and purpose of God but had now been revealed. What was once mysteriously unknowable has now become the object of meaningful personal, human knowledge. In Matthew 13:11 our Lord stated to his disciples that “it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Paul says again to the Ephesians that God had “made known unto us the mystery of his will” (Eph. 1:9).

In those statements, the apostle is in no sense stating or claiming that what has now become knowable regarding the will and purpose of God is assimilable to and in the human mind in precisely the form and manner in which that element of knowledge resides in the divine mind. In fact, we shall confront in due course the question of the sameness, or the identity, of knowledge as man and God respectively possess it. Does man know precisely what and how God knows? we shall ask. Or in terms that have engaged theological discussion throughout the centuries, we shall ask whether man’s knowledge as compared with God’s knowledge of given objects of knowledge is or is not univocal. If the relation between man’s knowledge and God’s knowledge were claimed to be that of univocality we would be saying that there was, in fact, a precise sameness between what God knows and what man knows. At the other extreme, if it were claimed that there was no relation or correspondence at all between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge, or that statements of knowledge were altogether different on God’s and man’s respective levels, we should be saying the relation in view was one of equivocality. In that case words and statements would be understood as meaning completely different things to God and man respectively. We shall see in what follows that the relation between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge is *analogical*, neither *univocal* or *equivocal*. The meaning and relevance of the terms will become clear.

What Paul has said in his foregoing usages of the term “mystery” is that in some respect and to some degree man can and does have knowledge of the same elements or objects of knowledge as God possesses. But as will be argued, the relation is one of degrees and one of a correspondence rather than identity between what resides in the mind of God and man respectively, and it is the existence of that correspondence that accords truth and validity to human claims of knowledge. Cornelius Van Til, who employed the motif of analogy as central to his doctrines of being and knowledge, insisted rightly on the importance of the notion of correspondence in the sense we have indicated. In the course of his discussion of the so-called coherence theory of truth he comments that “There was coherence in God’s plan before there was any space-time fact to which his knowledge might correspond, or which might correspond to his knowledge. On the other hand, when we think of human knowledge, correspondence is of primary importance. If there is to be true coherence in our knowledge there must be correspondence between our ideas of facts and God’s ideas of those facts.”¹ “Since the human mind is created by God and is therefore itself naturally revelational of God, the mind may be sure that its system is true and corresponds on a finite scale to the system of God. That is what we mean by saying that it is analogical to God’s system.”² And “Man’s knowledge of the facts is then a reinterpretation of God’s interpretation. It is that that is meant by saying that man’s knowledge

¹ Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing for The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969), 3. Again, “True human knowledge *corresponds* to the knowledge which God has of himself and his world,” *Ibid.*, 1, italics added. See also the discussion in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, PA.: P&R Publishing, 1998), 169.

² Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed for The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1974), 181, cited in Bahnsen, *op. cit.*, 226.

is analogical of God's knowledge."³ As for Paul, it is clear from his writing that there were three things that were to him mystery, in the sense that his current possession of knowledge of them was a matter of revelation and surprise. First, it was a mystery now revealed that God should have set forth a redemption for sinners; second, that God should have done that in the way he did, by sending his own Son into the world to complete his redemptive mission; and third, that Paul himself, the self-confessed chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), should be numbered among the beneficiaries of that redemption.

But the biblical doctrine of mystery resides on a second level. When Paul reflects in the Ephesian letter on the great issues of the Person and purpose of Christ he stands back from his subject, as it were, and says "This is a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32). Who, that is to say, can plumb the depths of meaning of what God has revealed as to his purpose in Christ his Son? Ought we not to place our hands upon our mouth and contemplate the awesome reality that "great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16)? Who, again, can plumb the depths of God's revelation and purpose? Who among us has not stood in the presence of God's revelation and exclaimed "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). The issue that demands recognition on this second level, and which should arrest our humble dependence on God's revelatory mercy, is put in the very words of God as the prophet Isaiah records them: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:8-9). What is being said there is not, to use the terminology we mentioned a moment ago, that the relation between God's knowledge and man's knowledge is equivocal, meaning that there is no relation at all between them. The statement is being made that there does not exist at the points envisaged a relation of univocality. Rather, man does have a true knowledge of the objects of God's knowledge, but not a comprehensive knowledge. The knowledge that man possesses is true because there is a clear correspondence between the contents of the divine and the human minds respectively. That correspondence not only establishes the truth of God's revelation and declaration to man, but it substantiates also the claim that while man's knowledge of the things that God knows is thus analogical (as distinct from univocal or equivocal), man's knowledge is, or can be, true in the sense that he can know precisely what God wants and intends him to know. His knowledge as thus substantiated is sufficient to establish a true and eternally significant relation between God and man. In other words, as we shall go on to see, what has now been said is nothing other than an implication on the epistemological level of the Creator-creature distinction.

In short, there exists not only a quantitative, but also a qualitative distinction between man's knowledge and God's knowledge. Certainly God knows in a manner different from that in which man acquires knowledge. Man knows things sequentially, as they become available for knowing in the unfolding drama of the temporal process. Man's knowledge is sequentially acquired and stored. His knowledge of things today is necessarily different from his knowledge yesterday. The unfolding temporal process has done two things. It has expanded the possible range of objects of knowledge; and it has developed a change in the knowing capacities of man the subject, as distinct from the object, of knowledge. But time itself is a created entity. The temporal process within which the possibility of man's knowledge inheres is itself God-created and God-sustained. God, the old southern American theologian Dabney has said, knows sequences (as they occur in human history) but he does not know those sequence sequentially. "Since all God's knowledge is absolutely true to the actual realities known," Dabney says, "wherever he knows one thing as destined to depend on another thing, there must be a case in which God *thinks a* sequence. Let the distinction be clearly grasped. The things are known to God

³ Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 204, cited in Bahnsen, op. cit., 490.

as in a sequence; but his own subjective act of thought concerning them is not a sequence.”⁴ God knows all things, including the knowledge of himself and his purposes in creation and redemption, in one eternal act of knowing. There is no succession of moments in the knowledge of God, as there is no succession of moments in the being of God. All that is and exists external to the Godhead, and all of the processes of time in which they come to being, are what they are because God thought them in one eternal act of knowing before the foundation of the world. All that is, and all that happens, is what it is because all of reality external to the Godhead exists and functions in accordance with God-created laws of being and operation.

But apart from the difference in the *manner* of God’s knowing and man’s knowing, there necessarily exists also a *qualitative* difference or distinction. Certainly, to take a simple example that has actually had currency in the theological literature, God and man both know that David was king of Israel. But that in no sense says that God’s knowledge of David’s kingship is identical with man’s knowledge of it. For how could man compass in his finitude what lies in the mind of the infinite God? “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?” (Rom. 11:34). God necessarily knows layers of meaning inherent in such a seemingly simple instance of knowledge as we have taken that are unavailable to the finite mind of man. God, who established all of the facts and the fact situations of reality, knows the infinite interrelations, causations, and teleological relations between facts in a respect and on a dimension that is unattainable to man in his finitude. A claim to the contrary would be the ultimate epistemological monstrosity.

The principles that determine the possibility of human knowledge that we have laid down briefly have been widely discussed in the theological literature. The question of univocal, equivocal, or analogical knowledge became the subject of debate in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church some years ago (in the 1940s) in the context of a controversy in which the philosopher Gordon Clark and the apologetic theologian Cornelius Van Til were the principal participants.⁵ It is sufficient to note for our present purposes that we have aligned our argument with the claim that the relation between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge is analogical. As to the meaning of mystery as we have construed it, Turretin argues from the same starting point that “we readily grant that there are things which far surpass the comprehension not only of men, but even of angels ...”⁶ And Turretin throws valuable light on our argument regarding the relation between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge in his general statement regarding the attributes of God. “The communicable attributes are not predicated of God and creatures *univocally* because there is not the same relation as in things simply univocal agreeing in name and definition. Nor are they predicated *equivocally* because there is not a totally diverse relation, as in things agreeing only in name. They are predicated *analogically* ...”⁷ The analogical relation between the communicable attributes as they exist in God and as they are communicated to man extends to the relation between God and man as to knowledge.

That, then, sets in epistemological perspective the sense in which what is “mystery” is nevertheless knowable to man. We can possess, that is, an analogical representation of what, though it is known fully and in all its ramifications in the mind of God, is to us a mystery. As to the generalized notion of mystery in that sense, Bavinck refers to the “mysteries of Christianity,”

⁴ Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), vol. 1, 294. Compare Jonathan Edwards’ comment that “[T]here is no succession in God’s knowledge,” *The Freedom of the Will* (Morgan, PA.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 144.

⁵ The relevant issues are discussed in, for example, John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), 21, and in Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of his Thought* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1995), 97. For an evaluation of this controversy that supports the position of Clark and his present-day rehabilitators see Herman Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy* (Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, 1995).

⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, PA.: P&R Publishing, 1992), Vol. 1, 29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 190, italics added.

and goes on to say that they “belong to an order that is not incidentally supernatural (as a result of sin) but is *intrinsically and strictly supernatural* for every human.”⁸ Our deficiencies in knowledge, that is, are not due simply or only to sin. Again at this point, as at other points of doctrinal construction, we are careful to distinguish between finitude and sin. There are realms of being and knowledge that because they are, as Bavinck has said, *intrinsically and strictly supernatural*, are beyond our attainment. The deficiencies of knowledge on certain levels and in relation to certain divinely-ordained matters, if deficiencies they are to be called, are due to our finitude and not to our sin. We are dependent on God’s revelation for what we can and do know of such mysteries, for example the mystery of God’s existence as a trinity of Persons, the mystery of the incarnation of the second Person of the Godhead, and the full extent of the mystery of redemption, including the resurrection of our Lord who, as the apostle has argued, “was raised again for our redemption” (Rom. 4:25). The mystery of those things is declared to us, we have an understanding of them adequate to our eternal security, but we in no sense comprehend them. The very mystery of being stares us in the face as incomprehensible. And the “mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16), or “the mystery of our religion” as Bavinck refers to it, the mystery of God’s grace, “comes out to meet us as a reality in history and in our own life. But we do not fathom it. In that sense Christian theology always has to do with mysteries that it knows and marvels at but does not comprehend and fathom.”⁹

But the theological literature has taken various positions on these questions. The careful analyses on the matter of mystery that Bavinck and Van Til have presented have been the objects of ridicule, particularly in works published by TheTrinity Foundation under the leadership of John Robbins.¹⁰ A prominent case in point is the recent *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond* by Paul M. Elliott, in which the contributions of both Bavinck and Van Til on the questions we have discussed are quite misunderstood and misapplied. In their claims for what is essentially a univocal relation between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge, the Trinity Foundation school has failed to take account of what we have elaborated as the second level of the biblical doctrine of mystery.

But a further question now invites us. Given, as has been said, that mystery exists for man but not for God, and given that our finitude means that the veil of comprehension has been only partially drawn for our understanding, what are we to say of such claims of the Savoy Declaration that “the will of man ... [has] ... a power of acting upon choice,” at the same time as it says that “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good”? It is not necessary to enter at length the old philosophic question of the meaning of “free will,” but it is necessary at this point to consider a related, and for our theological understanding a closely related, question. Does man have free will in certain matters and on certain levels, but not on others? Does man still possess, in spite of his state of sin, what Savoy has just stated as the “power of acting upon choice”? Is the nature of man’s derivative personhood relevant to our answers to such questions? For man himself is a created entity, and he came from the hands of his Creator in possession of certain capacities of soul and moral attributes. Those capacities included freedom of the will, but yet, if we are to understand the mystery of God’s revelation soundly, it remains true that God has announced an “eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”¹¹ We shall consider in what follows the extent to which light is thrown on these questions by an understanding of

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 304, italics added.

⁹ Bavinck, *ibid.*, 619.

¹⁰ See The Trinity Foundation catalogue at www.trinityfoundation.org. Robbins has himself published a pamphlet, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth* (The Trinity Foundation, 1986) that evinces a lamentable failure to understand what Van Til has said.

¹¹ Westminster Shorter catechism, Question 7.

what we refer to as the mystery of derivative personhood. Man came to self-consciousness as the image of his Creator. In what respects, therefore, we shall ask, does man's imaging the being and Person of God inform the difficult question of human freedom in the context of divine sovereignty?

The mystery of derivative personhood

We pass over at this point as being beyond the range of our immediate interest the important history of the philosophic discussion of "free will." We note briefly, however, that an important work on the subject was produced by the eighteenth-century American philosopher-theologian Jonathan Edwards. His work is of particular interest, not only because his *Inquiry into ... that Freedom of the Will which is supposed to be essential to moral agency ...* established Edwards as the leading philosopher of his time, but because it brings together a number of theological motifs that bear vitally on its principal question.¹² Edwards sets out there to controvert the Arminian notion that the human will is capable of determining its own action. On the contrary, he says, there is no "freedom of will lying in the power of the will to determine itself."¹³ For "every act of the will is some way connected with the understanding, and is as the greatest apparent good is."¹⁴ And "It is ... impossible for the will to choose contrary to its own ... preponderating inclination."¹⁵ Given, in Edwards' perceptive scheme of things, that the will does not perform an act based simply on its own determination, or, as we may put it, does not perform an uninstructed act, a conjunction of the faculties of the soul is involved in any act of the will. For Edwards, the explanation of the action of the will as it exists by nature lies in "a certain deformity in the nature of the dispositions and acts of the heart."¹⁶ As our Reformed doctrine maintains, and as Edwards saw it, the explanation is grounded in "the total depravity and corruption of man's nature, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin."¹⁷ That is the source of the natural man's "fixed bias and inclination."¹⁸

For the present, our interest in Edwards' *Inquiry* is in the fact that he argues clearly that the faculties of soul, together in their determinative power and influence, are to be seen as relevant to whatever is to be said about the freedom of the will. It is necessary, then, to reflect at this stage on the manner in which the understanding of the whole man and his faculties and capacities, first in his created state of innocency, secondly in his state of sin, and finally in his regenerate state, bears on our questions.

At the very beginning of our investigation we are confronted by the fact that man came from the hands of his Creator-God and was established as the image of God.¹⁹ I have discussed the creation of man as the image of God in other places and it is sufficient for our present purposes to recall a principal conclusion. That is that doctrinal integrity requires us to say not that man *bears* the image of God, but that man *is* the image of God. We can now inspect some of the implications of that truth as it bears on our question of the mystery of derivative personhood.

We recall our earlier proposition that man is analogical of God. Man, that is, is the

¹² Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications. 1996).

¹³ Op. cit., 329.

¹⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁶ Ibid., 341.

¹⁷ Ibid., 325.

¹⁸ Ibid., 321.

¹⁹ I have discussed at length man's creation as the image of God in my *Christian Confession and the Crackling Thorn* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), Ch. 3.

analogue of God both as to his being and his knowledge. Man as the image of God was created like God in every way in which a finite being can be like the infinite and personal God. When we say that man is derivative of God, or that it is his derivative personhood in which we are interested, we are saying simply that man is what he is because in his creation God conveyed to him certain attributes and characteristics that imaged God himself. Therein, of course, lies a profound mystery. It is mystery of the second or higher level of which we spoke previously. Who can look at the very subject and issue of being and say that no mystery is involved in it? Why did God create? Why did he create in the manner and for the purposes he did? The questions multiply as the mystery deepens. Why did the infinite, eternal God call into being from nothing not only the material and the angelic universes, but establish within those universes the images of himself?

But more than the mystery of being is involved. Our doctrine states that God created all things of nothing. But what is “nothing”? It is true that it is impossible for the human mind to think of nothing. We might think that “nothing” is that *from* which God created. Or it is that *into* which God created. But we pause to reflect on the fact that there was, before God created, nothing external to the Godhead that provided the medium of his creative work. For if there had been any thing or law or category of reality external to the Godhead on which God was dependent or which determined or circumscribed his creative action, the God of whom we would be speaking would not be the sovereign God of the Scriptures.

When we reflect on man as the image of God we are forced to the conclusion that, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism has it, man was created “in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.”²⁰ But further, man is the image of God in that he is an immortal, rational, spiritual, moral, and speaking person. Coming to prominence is the fact that the image of God in man constitutes him a moral person. And it is that inescapable calibration of morality that comes to pointed relevance in our consideration of the mystery of derivative personhood. Certain quality criteria of action, certain standards of behavior, standards against which his actions of will are to be assessed, come into view. Man is a moral person because God who created him is a moral Person. The necessity of morality that is thus contemplated exists because man, as the image of God, was established in a state of responsible freedom. And we shall go on to see that it is the endowment of responsible freedom that strikes to the heart of the relevance for our subject of derivative personhood. Man was endowed at his creation with responsible freedom because God whose image he is exists in responsible freedom. The imperatives of morality, or as we have expanded that to conceive of responsible freedom, necessarily conjure the notion of obedience under law, or action consistent with law. We know, of course, that man as he was created was given the moral law of God, in terms of which he was to work out his journey into understanding and his fulfillment in the world of all of his creation mandates. But if responsible freedom implies in that way obligation for obedience under law, can it similarly be said, we must ask, that God also exists under responsibility to law? The answer is the affirmative. But we said a moment ago that there was not, and there could not have been, any law external to God himself to which he was or could have been responsible. But God’s freedom of responsible action acquires its dimension of morality from the fact that God, in all his deliberations, thoughts, actions, ordinances, and works, is true to the law of his own being. God “cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:12).

Coming to focus, therefore, is the fact that man as he was created had free will. He had free will because he was the image of God. Man’s freedom was a derivative freedom. It was a responsible freedom of action. If that had not been the case it could not be said that man was the image of God. That reality has influenced the seventeenth-century authors of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which asks, “Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?” The answer follows that “Our first parents, *being left to the freedom of their own will* fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.”²¹ The issue is quite simply that man was created with the endowment of free will, but that he lost that free will at the

²⁰ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 10.

²¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 13, italics added.

Fall.

To contemplate in this manner the meaning of derivative personhood forces the conclusion that in addressing our subject we must take into account in proper perspective the responsible freedom of both God and man. Man as he existed in his initial state of innocency was not only free in the respects we have noted, but he naturally exercised that freedom in a loving obedience to the law of God. There we have before us a profoundly important aspect of the mystery of creation. Of course creation considered in itself and its totality as the action of an infinite God is mysterious. But what our argument forces upon us is the necessity of seeing more precisely at what point the mystery exists. It is true that all of the doctrines of the Christian faith terminate in mystery. And the responsibility laid upon us is that of seeking to grasp the precise locus of mystery in whatever doctrinal issue is before us. The real mystery that we are to contemplate at present, then, is not that man possessed free will at his initial creation. The mystery is that God had decreed that man, his rational and moral creature, should share with him the attribute of responsible freedom and be like him in that respect. The locus of the mystery exists, that is, not in some aspect of what Adam possessed, but in the action of God in his ordination and communication of that possession.

If our first parents had continued in obedience to the covenantal obligations that creation as the image of God imposed upon them, their responsible freedom would have been naturally expressed in consistently holy relations with their Creator. We cannot, of course, envisage what might then have terminated Adam's probation, or the manner in which, being then confirmed in righteous moral state, he would have been elevated to the eternal reward that God had conditionally promised him. For the fact that God had told him that in the day he ate of the forbidden tree he would die carries with it *per contra* God's promise of eternal life. The promise to Adam of curse and malediction in the event that he ate of the forbidden fruit carried with it the promise of blessing and benediction in the event of his obedience to the demands of his covenantal obligations. That is clear from only a brief consideration of the outcome of the achievements of the second Adam. For the first Adam was a type of the second, Christ. And it is an important part of our doctrine that the second Adam came to do for us what we were obligated to do under the original covenant that the first Adam repudiated but could not do for ourselves. And as the second Adam merited in his human nature the reward of obedience, the first Adam would have done likewise. Further, in his gracious accommodation to Adam God gave him a sacramental confirmation of that promise in that he was allowed to eat of the tree of life until, having by his sin lost his sacramental qualification, access to the tree was withdrawn from him.

We refer again, now, to Savoy's statement that "God has endued the will of man with ... natural liberty, and *power of acting upon choice* ..." ²² We have seen the potential action of that power of choice in man's prelapsarian state. The question now follows as to the extent to which, and the respects to which, that power of choice continues in the state of sin, or, if it continues, what change, if any, is to be understood in the connotation of it. At this point it is necessary to avoid a doctrinal difficulty into which, it would appear, no less a thinker than Edwards had fallen. For Edwards, as we have seen, focused his thought on the antecedent contribution to the actions of the will that were necessarily made by the faculties of understanding and emotion, the mind and the heart. We have seen him speak of the "bias" that sin has introduced to the heart and the manner in which that sways and determines the will. But in all that, Edwards leaves the impression that if only that "bias" were removed, the will would function normally and correctly. The will, Edwards appears to teach, does in fact retain what Savoy here refers to as "natural liberty" and the damning cause of man's moral failures is in the heart, not the will.

But doctrinal precision requires us to say that at the Fall all of the faculties of the soul were affected and they all, the mind, the heart, and the will, were, as our doctrine has it, totally depraved. Or to put the same point in a different way, it is because all of the faculties of the soul were disabled by sin that we say that total depravity now describes the whole person. At, and as a result of, the Fall the mind or the intellectual faculty was darkened so that the sinner could no

²² Savoy Declaration of Faith, various editions, Ch. IX, I.

longer see and understand and appreciate the things of God (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Cor 2:14); the heart or the emotional faculty was turned from the love of God to the hatred of God (Rom. 1:30; Jer. 17:9; Gen. 6:5); and the will or the volitional faculty, no longer able to receive holy instructions from the mind and the heart, was enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6:16). In order to produce right action, it follows, a renewing, regenerating work of God must affect all of the faculties. The blindness of the mind must be taken away (2 Cor. 4:6); the heart must now be inclined to love God and the holy things of God (Jer. 24:7); and the will must again be strengthened from its clearly weakened condition (Rom. 6:17). That necessity for a work of renewing and strengthening of the will must be allowed to inform our conclusion as to the “power of acting” in man’s fallen state.

The state of the faculties in the condition of sin that descended on the race as a result of Adam’s fall can be put differently. We have said that man’s actions as a sinner are such that because he is a sinner he will naturally commit sin. Sin is his natural habitat. In that state man has what Savoy states as “power of acting upon choice” if all that is meant thereby is that the man is not subject to external constraints. But of more immediate and more profound relevance for doctrinal understanding is the conjunction, and the states of interdependencies, of the faculties of soul as we have considered them. In other words again, man in sin is capable of acting in a way that is consistent with his real nature. That is true, of course, of all of God’s sentient creatures. A horse is capable naturally of doing horse things. A cow a cow. And the apostle Peter has given us a pointed example of the same thing. One might take a sow, Peter says, and wash her and make her presentably clean to any desired degree. But the moment one’s back is turned “the sow that was washed [returns] to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22). The problem was that the poor sow was all along nothing but a sow. As a result of all the washing, all one had was a prettied-up sow. So it is with the sinner. He, too, is capable of doing naturally only what is consistent with his real nature. And as his real nature is sinful, all he can naturally do is to sin.

It follows, then, that we should be moving at too shallow a level if we were to conclude that no essential difference describes the capacities of the will in man’s respective states of innocency and sin. But our present objective requires us to address again the element, or the locus, of mystery that inheres in these respects in man’s relation to God. For in spite of his sin, man is still the image of God. He is still an immortal, rational, spiritual, moral, and speaking person. But what now, we must ask, is the nature of the relation between God and man, as to the capacities for action, and the responsibilities for action, that man still possesses?

At a minimum, a number of differences have now entered the God-man relation, and the recognition of them again allows us to contemplate the mystery that is involved. Again we encounter, now on a different level and with vastly different overtones of meaning, the mystery of derivative personhood. If man had continued in the state of innocency there would have remained a precise and natural convergence between his actions of responsible freedom and the perfect requirements of the law of God. Man would have retained a clear understanding of the requirements of God’s law, he would have loved that law as the precipitate of his love for God his Creator, and he would naturally have enjoyed his action in keeping the law. But now that sin abounds in the human condition, and while man is again and still responsible for his actions of will, he has lost the freedom that he initially enjoyed. Such is the sorry bequest of our first parents’ fall. Man in sin, the indictment insists, is free only to be sinful.

As to the mystery of derivative personhood that now confronts us, a number of conclusions are to be stated. First, it must be said at the outset that now the locus of mystery has moved from the previous recognition that God created in such a way as to endow his creature with the analogue of the responsible freedom that he himself possesses. The locus of mystery now is that God allows personal (and still responsible) actions of man’s will at the same time as he has “foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.” But it is on that very point of difficulty or, as we refer to it, mystery, that a secure hold on the derivative nature of man’s personhood throws its light.

For what, in a sentence, was principally at issue in God’s creation of man and his dealing with him? In short, it was the desire on God’s part that he, and principally his Son to whom the acts of creation were delegated, should be glorified. For all of the reasons we have already adduced, so long as man continued in his initial state of righteousness that ultimate divine

objective and desire was realized in the God-man relation. In such a primeval state man was himself holy and all that he thought and all of his actions contributed the God's desired end of his own glory. That followed with a naturalness from man's free actions. But what, we ask further, is to be understood as the "glory of God" which, it has been said, was the ultimate objective in creation? The glory of God, we can say, is the demonstration to all of created reality, to and in the angelic as in the material spheres, of the infinite perfections of God. Adam in his covenantal obedience, as is now the case in the holy lives of God's redeemed people, would have been like God and would therefore have been naturally the reflection of God's infinite perfections.

But now the God-man relation is bereft of that naturalness that emanates from man's actions of will to the glory of God. For to recall what has already been said, man is now and still responsible, but he no longer enjoys the attribute of freedom. Sadly, he is now the slave of Satan and sin. That change in relation contains a number of implications for our present discussion.

First, it has to be said that man's loss of freedom is his own fault. Adam's sin, the guilt of which has been imputed to, or placed to the account of, all who descend from him by ordinary generation, was an ethical lapse, in the sense that on the level of willing action he did what he ought not to have done. But that ethical lapse entailed his fall, and the fall of the whole human race of which he was the federal or representative head, into a state of sin. Now that we are all in that state of sin, our being so implies naturally that we will take sinful actions. There is, we see, a most important inverse causation. Adam's ethical lapse led to a state of sin. Now that we are, as a result, in that state, the state itself leads to sinful actions.

Second, maintaining our focus on human responsibility for action even though the freedom of action that previously existed has passed away, and maintaining that human sin is clearly culpable, we see that there can be no charge of impropriety against God in his supervising government of his creatures and his control over all their actions. For again, man is in the state that he is because of his own deliberate action and his misguided employment of his previously held freedom.

What that means is that man in his natural state of sin can have no complaint against God who sovereignly orders his ways. We must bear in mind at this point that as we have seen already, when man was still in his state of innocency the accordance between his free actions and God's desire for his own glory was the natural outcome of the God-man relation. Adam knew that he was dependent on God his Creator for all his action and achievement in his given mandates and he lovingly accepted God's care and overriding supervision. That understanding was of the essence of the implications of man's derivative personhood. In that circumstance, God's ordering and providential control over the affairs of his creature was a natural aspect of the constituted relation between them. But now the relation is drastically and damagingly changed. Now, instead of the natural convergence of man's actions and God's desires, God's providential ordering of human affairs persists and moves on in its divinely appointed way, though an enmity rather than the previous loving relation exists between man and God. But by his action, God is now accomplishing nothing other than what, in man's original state, naturally followed from man's holy employment of the responsible freedom with which he had been endowed. And moreover, if, as is unarguably the case, God is the sovereign Lord over all things that he has spoken into existence, what argument can possibly be adduced to deny him the natural privilege of doing what he will with his creatures? The apostle has replied to any possible objection to God's sovereign government of men and the universe in his crisp statement, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20). And again, "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20).

That being given, what now is the light thrown on our enquiry and consciousness of mystery by the fact and reality of derivative personhood. Two final things are to be said. First, the locus of mystery has shifted from that of God's endowment of man in his derivative personhood with the responsible freedom that he himself possesses. The locus of mystery now resides in the fact that man having disastrously misused that freedom nevertheless remains subject to God's freely chosen ordination of human affairs. And against that, we have seen, man can have no complaint. For it could not be otherwise. God who is the maker and governor of all things must inevitably bring all things to the demonstration of his infinite perfections, or to what we have

referred to as the glory of God. Man in sin can have no complaint against God. Man in sin is culpably sinful. He remains under his initial obligation of righteous action before the holy God to whom he owes his very existence and every prospect of good that he enjoys in this life.

But what, finally, is to be said of man in his regenerate state, those in whom the Holy Spirit of God has worked that renewing work in the soul that our Lord described to Nicodemus as being “born again?” We say, as in the preceding case, that it is the consciousness of his derivative personhood that must again determine the answer to our question. For not only is man still and irreversibly the image of God as we previously connoted that, but it is still his derivative personhood that establishes him as what and who he is. Two things are to be said.

First (and we must leave unsaid at this point all that is involved in the communication to the individual person by the Holy Spirit of the benefits of the redemption that Christ provided) the new person in Christ in his derivative personhood has been raised from the state of estrangement from God to a participation in the kingdom of Christ. As such, he not only enjoys again the capacities and faculties of soul that Adam lost in the Fall, but he has been raised to a higher estate. That higher estate consists in the fact that now he is joined to Christ in an organic, vital, spiritual, and indissoluble union. “Where sin abounded [in and as a result of Adam’s fall], grace did much more abound [in the higher estate of union with Christ]” (Rom. 5:20).

Second, that implies that the new-born person in his derivative personhood is brought back to the state of responsible freedom that had been lost in Adam. Whereas the unregenerate sinner is free only to sin, the Christian believer is now free to love and serve his Creator. Again, as the process of sanctification in the Christian life develops, the individual who has thus been brought to Christ will serve God with a new naturalness that is reminiscent of the naturalness that Adam exhibited in his primeval state of innocency. Now again, there will be a natural convergence of the actions of will of the individual and the requirements of holiness to which God has called him.

But does mystery persist? Of course it does. Who among us has not stood with amazement and contemplated the goodness of the providence of God as we have become conscious of the mysterious working of the ways of God on our behalf? The ways of God are still past finding out, but now we know that God’s sovereign and gracious purpose is making “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28). May God give us a calm contentment as we thank him for the perfection of all his ways, and as we strive in this short and uncertain life and earthly pilgrimage to show forth in our lives something of his infinite perfections.