

BOOK I: REFORMED CHURCH HERMENEUTICS

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“The summit of happiness is reached when a person is ready to be what he is.”

— Desiderius Erasmus

CHAPTER TWO: WHO AND WHAT IS GOD?

Who and what is God? This paper shall look at the God of the *Holy Bible* as well as the God outside of the *Holy Bible*, in order to answer this profound and important question.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section A. God of the *Holy Bible*

Section B. God outside of the *Holy Bible*

Section C. The God of the *Holy Bible* is the same as the God outside of the *Holy Bible*

A. God of the *Holy Bible*

The God in the *Holy Bible*—all-knowing, eternal, and all-powerful—is by definition the supreme ruler of the entire universe. In the West, for more than 1500 years, this proposition has had profound political, social, and economic implications, as well as profound theological and ecclesiastical presumptions. This same God of the *Holy Bible*, who was the supreme mover of everything that occurs, was believed to be the first cause and the end of all human endeavors. In the West, this God of the *Holy Bible* was at the very heart of secular law and jurisprudence. Indeed, the *Holy Bible* describes this God as being *all-knowing*:

Psalms 139: 4, 16: “For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.”

Psalms 147:5: “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.”

Isaiah 42:9: “Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

Job 37:16: “Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of his cloud to shine?”

1 John 3:20: “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

The *Holy Bible* also says that God alone is *eternal*:

Isaiah 40:28: “Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.”

Psalms 90:2: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

1 Timothy 1:17: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise

God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Romans 16:26: “But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith....”

John 8:58: “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”

Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

And, finally, the *Holy Bible* describes God as being *all-powerful*:

Job: 42:2: “I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.”

Jeremiah: 32:27: “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?”

Romans 1:20: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse....”

Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Matthew 19:26: “But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”

Luke 1: 37: “For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

Colossians: 1: 16-17: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

Clearly, the *Holy Bible*’s description of God—omniscient, omnipotent, and eternal—leaves nothing outside of the grip of His sovereignty. Indeed, this has been the stated position of the Western Church for nearly two thousand years; and

of Western political theorists and scientists up through the at least the late eighteenth-century; and of the Church Fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo, who thus opined:

Therefore God supreme and true, with His Word and Holy Spirit (which three are one), one God omnipotent, creator and maker of every soul and every body; by whose gift all are happy who are happy through verity and not through vanity; who made man a rational animal consisting of soul and body, who, when he sinned, neither permitted him to go unpunished, nor left him without mercy; who has given to the good and to the evil, being in common with stones, vegetable like in common with trees, sensuous life in common with brutes, intellectual life in common with angels alone; from whom is every mode, every species, every order; from whom are measure, number, weight; from whom is everything which has an existence in nature, of whatever kind it be, and of whatever value; from whom are the seeds of forms and the forms of seeds, and the motion of seeds and of forms; who gave also to flesh its origin, beauty, health, reproductive fecundity, disposition of members, and the salutary concord of its parts; who also to the irrational soul has given memory, sense, appetite, but to the rational soul, in addition to these, has given intelligence and will; who has not left, not to speak of heaven and earth, angels and men, but not even the entrails of the smallest and most contemptible animal, or the feather of a bird, or the little flower of a plant, or the leaf of a tree, without an harmony, and, as it were, a mutual peace among all its parts;-- that God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence.¹

But by the late-eighteenth century, the conventional wisdom in the West was that the omnipotence of God of the *Holy Bible*, at least within the secular community, was merely a matter of personal opinion and believe; and that it could not be relied upon in such matters as government, law and public policy. For one thing, such vague descriptions of God's omnipotence and omniscience (i.e., foreknowledge)

¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 158.

appeared to contradict what was obviously observed as “free will” or “freedom” among human beings. The philosophy of secular humanism, since even the days of Cicero,² has been to advance an argument based upon “human free will,” as follows:

1. Since all human beings have “free will,” there is no such thing as prophecy, fate, predestination, divination, or the foreknowledge of God;
2. And since there is no such thing as fate, predestination, divination, or divine foreknowledge, there is no “fixed” order of human events;
3. And since there is no fixed order of human events, there is no definite “cause” of anything that occurs, such as future human behavior or future human events;
4. And since there is no fixed order of “causes” of occurrences, future human behavior, or future human events, then there is also no divine “foreknowledge” of future occurrences, future human behaviors, or future human events;
5. And, finally, since there is no divine “foreknowledge” of future occurrences, future human behaviors, or future human events, the God of the *Holy Bible* cannot be “all-knowing” or “omniscient.” And since this God cannot be “all-knowing” or “omniscient,” and since all human beings have “free will,” no human being should be compelled—through government policy, law, or otherwise—to live according to the divine decrees that are thus contained within the *Holy Bible*.³ Hence, in western political thought and jurisprudence, at least since the late eighteenth-century, there has been a sharp split in terms

² Ibid., p 154-157.

³ Augustine of Hippo objected to this conclusion, on the basis that human “free will” was itself “caused by God” also “certain to the foreknowledge of God.” In *The City of God*, he asked, “How, then, does an order of causes which is certain to the foreknowledge of God necessitate that there should be nothing which is dependent on our wills, when our wills themselves have a very important place in the order of causes?” *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950, p. 155).

of how and whether the *Holy Bible*'s conception of God ought to be the basis for secular law and government. See, e.g. Table 1, below, "The Sharp Dichotomy"

Table 1. "The Sharp Dichotomy Regarding Religion and the Sovereignty of God."

<p>Christian Theology and Philosophy -----></p>	<p>God is omniscient and omnipotent; God controls human events through divine Providence. Human beings have <i>restricted</i> "free will."</p>
<p>Secular Ideology, Humanism; and Philosophy -----></p>	<p>No evidence that God controls human events through divine Providence. No evidence of an all-knowing God. Human beings have <i>unrestricted</i> "free will."</p>

The orthodox Christian faith—which the Reformed Church considers itself a constituent part—believes that secular ideology is short-sighted, irrational, illogical, and dangerous. This orthodox Christian faith holds that there must be a cause to everything that exists, and that God is the "First Cause" of all that exists, and that "things happen for a reason."⁴ For this reason, this orthodox Christian

⁴ Augustine of Hippo opined on the necessity of causation or of the First Cause...

For even that very concession which Cicero himself makes is enough to refute him in this argument. For what does it help him to say that *nothing takes place without a cause*, but that every cause is not fatal, there being *a fortuitous cause*, a *natural cause*, and a *voluntary cause*? It is sufficient that he confesses that whatever happens must be preceded by a cause.⁴ For we say that those causes which are called fortuitous are not a mere name for the absence of causes, but are only latent, and we attribute them either to the will of the true God, or to that of spirits of some kind or other. And as to natural causes, we by no means separate them from the will of Him who is the author and framer of all nature. But now as to voluntary causes. They are referable either to God, or to angels, or to men, or to animals devoid of reason, by which, in accordance with their own nature, they seek or shun various things, are to be called wills....

The City of God (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 155.

faith has long held that when any human endeavor— sacred or secular, church or state—violates God’s moral laws, it will ultimately deteriorate, suffer, and die. See, e.g., Table 2, below:

Table 2. Moral Infallibility of God’s Word

Law of Moses (Life)	Law of Sin (Death)
Virtue	Vice
Liberty	Slavery

The orthodox Christian faith also embraces a Westernized conception of “natural law,” which embraces the laws of the sciences as instructive as to the ultimate divine purpose of the Creator. In other words, God’s purpose may be inferred through observing and studying the anatomy of His creations in nature. And to the secular humanist position on “free will,” many in the Western Church, taking Augustine of Hippo’s theological conclusions as their foundation, have advanced the following responses:

First, they say, God’s purpose may be inferred through observing and studying the natural anatomy (i.e., natural law) of all of his His creations. And, second, they say, that God’s *foreknowledge* of the free and voluntary will of human beings,⁵ does not ipso facto nullify human “free will.” While it is true that God has not created human beings as irrational animals, plant life, or inanimate objects, and that He has given them “free will,” the existence of this “free will” does not mean that God has no foreknowledge of that “free will”; or that God has no ultimate control over that “free will”— indeed, the central theme of the *Holy Bible* is that human “free will” is thus restricted or limited by God’s sovereign will.⁶ Whether that restriction is called *fate* or *predestination* may be a matter of sheer semantics.⁷

⁵ Augustine of Hippo opined that God has foreknowledge of the human will, even though that human will is both free and voluntary:

For one who is not prescient of all future things is not God. Wherefore our wills also have just so much power as God willed and foreknew that they should have; and therefore whatever power they have, they have it within most certain limits; and whatever they are to do, they are most assuredly to do, for He whose foreknowledge is infallible foreknew that they would have the power to do it, and would do it.

The City of God (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 156.

⁶ On this point, Augustine says:

B. God outside of the *Holy Bible*

But atheists, non-Christians, and others have frequently asked me, “but what about other faith traditions? Are people who have never heard of Jesus Christ doomed to hell? Indeed, isn’t there a God who exists outside of the four corners of the *Holy Bible*?” To these questions, as previously mentioned, the orthodox Christian faith, taking the Apostle Paul’s theology on the law of nature as their cue,⁸ have long held that the “laws of Nature,” which contains such propositions as “The Golden Rule” and the laws of gravitational pull, together with the innate

But all of them are most of all subject to the will of God, to whom all wills also are subject, since they have no power except what He has bestowed upon them. The cause of things, therefore, which makes but is not made, is God; but all other causes both make and are made. Such are all created spirits, and especially the rational....

In His supreme will resides the power which acts on the will of all created spirits, helping the good, judging the evil, controlling all, granting power to some, not granting it to others. For, as He is the creator of all natures, so also is He the bestower of all powers, not of all wills; for wicked wills are not from Him, being contrary to nature, which is from Him....

The City of God (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 155.

⁷ Augustine of Hippo rejected the idea of “fate” or “irresistible election.”

But that all things come to pass by fate, we do not say; nay we affirm that nothing comes to pass by fate; for we demonstrate that the name of fate, as it is wont to be used by those who speak of fate, meaning thereby the position of the stars at the time of each one’s conception or birth, is an unmeaning word, for astrology itself is a delusion But an order of causes in which the highest efficiency is attributed to the will of God, we neither deny nor do we designate it by the name of fate, unless, perhaps, we may understand fate to mean that which is spoken, deriving it from *fari*, to speak.... **But it does not follow that**, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, **there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God**, and is embraced by His foreknowledge, **for human wills are also causes of human actions**; and He who foreknew all the causes of things would certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our wills....

Wherefore, if I should choose to apply the name of fate to anything at all, I should rather say that *fate* belongs to the weaker of two parties, *will* to the stronger, who has the other in his power....

The City of God (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 154-155, 156

⁸ **Romans 2:13-16** (“For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, *do by nature the things contained in the law*, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”) **Romans 1: 19-20** (“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For *the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse....”)

moral conscience that is implanted universally upon every human soul, are the same fundamental laws that are contained in the *Decalogue*⁹ and of the *Sermon on the Mount*.¹⁰ Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church have generally embraced this position, to wit: that natural law is the law of Christ and that it is reflected in the Ten Commandments and The Golden Rule.

Thomas Paine, in his *Age of Reason*, set forth the unorthodox Christian viewpoint that the laws of nature (i.e., the general or natural revelation of God)—without the *Holy Bible* as a supreme guide— are the only basis upon which human societies can reasonably rest the foundations of civil law, jurisprudence, and government. Without question, Paine’s views grew out of the countervailing American mood of the late eighteenth century. That mood had become war-weary from the religious conflagrations in England and Europe, and from the monarchical tyranny that had been founded upon the “divine right of kings”—both of these phenomena had grown out of Protestant-Catholic disagreements largely over biblical hermeneutics and interpretations of the *Holy Bible*. In late eighteenth-century British North America, the religious mood now shifted away from “special revelation,” which embraced the *Holy Bible* as the supreme source of constitutional law, to “general revelation,” which looked only to God’s creation or to the natural law (i.e., the law of reason) as the supreme source of constitutional law and jurisprudence.

America’s Founding Fathers were mostly Christian, but in an effort to avoid the same sort of religious intolerance and conflict that had ravished England and Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, they debated, compromised, agreed, stipulated and ratified the new and novel idea of universal God without preference for any particular religious dogma. The God of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and, through logical extension, the God of the new United States Constitution (1787), would be a God whose divine decrees were to be found only in “nature” and in “reason.” Ecclesiastical interpretations of the *Holy Bible* were placed upon the marketplace of other equally important and diverse ideas and perspectives. For example, in the *Age of Reason*, First Part, Section Seven, Founding Father Thomas Paine wrote:

⁹ Exodus 29:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-17.

¹⁰ Matthew 5-7.

It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite. The Creation speaketh an universal language, independently of human speech or human language, multiplied and various as they may be. It is an ever-existing original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this word of God reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.

Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in the immensity of the Creation. Do we want to contemplate his wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible whole is governed! Do we want to contemplate his munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the Scripture, which any human hand might make, but the Scripture called the Creation.

The only idea man can affix to the name of God is that of a first cause, the cause of all things. And incomprehensible and difficult as it is for a man to conceive what a first cause is, he arrives at the belief of it from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it. It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is more impossible to conceive a time when there shall be no time.

In like manner of reasoning, everything we behold carries in itself the internal evidence that it did not make itself. Every man is an evidence to himself that he did not make himself; neither could his father make himself, nor his grandfather, nor any of his race; neither could any tree, plant, or animal make itself; and it is the conviction arising from this evidence that carries us on, as it were, by necessity to the belief of a first cause eternally existing, of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of, and by the power of which all things exist; and this first cause man calls God.

It is only by the exercise of reason that man can discover God. Take away that reason, and he would be incapable of understanding anything; and, in this case, it would be just as consistent to read even the book called the Bible to a horse as to a man. How, then, is it that those people pretend to reject reason?

Almost the only parts in the book called the Bible that convey to us any idea of God, are some chapters in Job and the 19th Psalm; I recollect no other. Those parts are true deistical compositions, for they treat of the Deity through his works. They take the book of Creation as the word of God, they refer to no other book, and all the inferences they make are drawn from that volume.

I insert in this place the 19th Psalm, as paraphrased into English verse by Addison. I recollect not the prose, and where I write this I have not the opportunity of seeing it.

"The spacious firmament on high, With all the blue ethereal sky, And spangled heavens, a shining frame, Their great original proclaim. The unwearied sun, from day to day, Does his Creator's power display; And publishes to every land The work of an Almighty hand.

"Soon as the evening shades prevail, The moon takes up the wondrous tale, And nightly to the list'ning earth Repeats the story of her birth; While all the stars that round her burn, And all the planets, in their turn, Confirm the tidings as they roll, And spread the truth from pole to pole.

"What though in solemn silence all Move round this dark terrestrial ball? What though no real voice, or sound, Amidst their radiant orbs be found? In reason's ear they all rejoice And utter forth a glorious voice, Forever singing, as they shine, THE HAND THAT MADE US IS DIVINE.

A significant result of the American Revolution (1775 – 1781) was that the religious dogma of the Church of England—i.e., the *Holy Bible* as being the supreme source of constitutional law-- would be sternly prohibited from having an authoritative role within American constitutional jurisprudence. Gone were the days of Sir Edward Coke! No ecclesiastical courts were transferred from England to the new American colonies. During the early years of the United States of America, the secular courts took over jurisdiction of most legal matters that had previously been adjudicated in England's ecclesiastical courts. Hitherto, the *Holy*

Bible had been expressly incorporated into the English legal system and constituted the Supreme Law, as shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Thomas Woods, *Institutes of the Laws of England* (1720)

“As Law in General is an Art directing to the Knowledge of Justice, and to the well ordering of civil Society, so the Law of England, in particular, is an Art to know what is Justice in England, and to preserve Order in that Kingdom: And this Law is raised upon fix principal Foundations.

1. Upon the *Law of Nature*, though we seldom make Use of the Terms, *The Law of Nature*. But we say, that such a **Thing is reasonable**, or **unreasonable**, or against the....

2. Upon the revealed Law of God, Hence it is that our Law punishes Blasphemies, Perjuries, & etc. and receives the Canons of the Church [of England] duly made, and supported a spiritual Jurisdiction and Authority in the Church [of England].

3. The third Ground are several general *Customs*, these Customs are properly called the *Common Law*. Wherefore when we say, it is so by Common Law, it is as much s to say, by common Right, or of common Justice.

Indeed it is many Times very difficult to know what Cases are grounded on the *Law of Reason*, and what upon the *Custom* of the Kingdom, yet we must endeavor to understand this, to know the perfect Reason of the Law.

Rules concerning Law

The *Common Law* is the absolute Perfection of *Reason*. For nothing that is contrary to Reason is consonant to Law

Common Law is common Right.

The Law is the Subject’s best Birth-right.

The Law respects the Order of Nature....”

Source: Thomas Wood, LL.D., *An Institute of the laws of England: or, the Laws of England in their Natural Order* (London, England: Strahan and Woodall,

1720), pp. 4-5.

In 1789, the First Amendment's Establishment Clause officially sealed the separation of the *Holy Bible* from American constitutional jurisprudence; the federal government could not establish religion or restrict the free exercise of religion. Nevertheless, the God of Nature (i.e. "reason"), as exemplified in the *Declaration of Independence* (1776), continued to serve the supreme standard for American jurisprudence. Natural law (i.e., the law of reason) has the source of the English common law. The American constitutional and legal system thus established a system of jurisprudence that was based upon the "General Revelation" of God (i.e., the laws of Nature), not the "Special Revelation" of the Sacred Scriptures (e.g., the *Holy Bible*).

C. The God inside of the *Holy Bible* is the same God who is outside of the *Holy Bible*

There is only one God and He does not take different positions depending upon whether the circumstances are secular or sacred. In other words, the God inside of the *Holy Bible* is the same as the God who is outside of the *Holy Bible*. One way of looking at this issue is to consider the differences, similarities, and intersection between God's "general revelation" and "special revelation."

(1). What is General Revelation?

"General revelation" is the natural law or the laws of Nature which Thomas Jefferson has referenced in the American *Declaration of Independence*. This "general revelation" encompasses man's reasoning ability, right reasoning, and assessment and conceptualizations about God's natural creations, the sciences. But it is important to recognize that "general revelation" is not inconsistent with the "special revelation" of God, because they both come from the same God. As the Apostle Paul writes:

Romans 2:14-15: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another...."

Indeed, standard orthodox Christian beliefs exegete that the God of the *Holy Bible* is the same God of Nature and natural law. This connection between “special revelation” (i.e., Church) and “general revelation” (i.e., State) was at the heart of Church and State relations in the West. And in the United States, where this connection has become more and more obscured by the influence of consumerism and secularism, a social and moral crisis of dire importance has emerged.

Dr. Kenneth Talbot, President of the Whitefield College and Theological Seminary, asks, “How can we know that God exists? What is the source of our knowledge? How do we know what God has decreed?” Turning to the *Westminster Confessions* (1647), Dr. Talbot introduces us to the following explanation:

Of the Holy Scripture I. Although **the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God**, as to leave men inexcusable; **yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church**; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; **which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary**; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased....

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis. Exodus. Leviticus. Numbers. Deuteronomy. Joshua. Judges. Ruth. I Samuel. II Samuel. I Kings. II Kings. I Chronicles. II Chronicles. Ezra. Nehemiah. Esther. Job. Psalms. Proverbs. Ecclesiastes. The Song of Songs. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Lamentations. Ezekiel. Daniel. Hosea. Joel. Amos. Obadiah. Jonah. Micah. Nahum. Habakkuk. Zephaniah. Haggai. Zechariah. Malachi.

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: The Gospels according to Matthew. Mark. Luke. John. The Acts of the Apostles. Paul’s Epistles: Romans. I. Corinthians. II. Corinthians Galatians. Ephesians. Philippians. Colossians. I Thessalonians II. Thessalonians I. Timothy. II. Timothy.

Titus. Philemon. The Epistle to the Hebrews. The Epistle of James. The First and Second Epistles of Peter. The First, Second, and Third Epistles of John. The Epistle of Jude. The Revelation of John.

General revelation of God is thus the natural law, the laws of nature, and the general notions which the mind receives from the light of nature. This idea encompasses human reason and experience. But the Reformed Church tradition exegetes that “general revelation,” alone, is inadequate for understanding God’s will. The reason for this is mankind’s Original Sin, which separates mankind from the ability to be upright or to think uprightly. The presumption here is that “there must be something more” than simple reflection and unconscious knowing, in order to attain happiness, truth, and the knowledge of God. According to the Reformed Church tradition, there must be something more than “general revelation”; and man’s efforts must be directed towards the knowledge of God, for which “general revelation,” standing alone, is unsuitable.

Dr. Talbot exegetes that God created Man in His Own image. He created Man as a thinking, as a reasonable being, and as having the moral law of God written in his heart. This human reason and knowledge of God’s moral law is innate and inborn. This human reason is also called the human “conscience,” or that inborn rational law of the mind. Dr. Gordon Clark holds that this “human reason” or “conscience” is possessed by human beings a priori, or without prior human experience. In other words, *God has created man with an intuitive knowledge of God*, as a thinking, rational, and moral being. Hence, knowledge of God’s moral laws is implanted within man.

The *Holy Bible* teaches us that “general revelation” is the natural law or the moral law. See, e.g.:

Psalms 19:1: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth knowledge.”

The *Holy Bible* also teaches us that “general” or “natural” revelation only provides an opaque, vague knowledge of God; and that the affects of Original Sin has so defected man’s memory and knowledge of both God and of his former good life in the Garden of Eden:

Romans 3: 10-11: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”

1 Cor. 1:21: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

1 Cor. 2:14: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

In other words, notwithstanding mankind’s access to “general revelation,” the Reformed Church tradition holds that mankind’s sinfulness (i.e., Original Sin) is so thoroughly wicked, that it has affected mankind’s ability to understand God or to conform to God’s moral laws. Mankind’s imperfect understanding of God, however, does not completely wipe away his access to God’s innate divine moral law of conscience or of “general revelation.” Mankind thus perpetually confronts God.¹¹ This is what St. Augustine of Hippo wrestled with in his *Confessions*, where he contemplated the very essence of who and what is God. Thus extrapolating from “general revelation”—and not the Sacred Scriptures—Augustine considered whether God’s essence constituted “immutable immateriality” where writes:

“I no longer thought of you, god, by the analogy of a human body. Ever since I inclined my ear to philosophy I had avoided this error... For whatever I conceived to be deprived of the dimensions of space appeared to me to be nothing, absolutely nothing; not even a void, for if a body is taken out of space, or if space is emptied of all its contents (of earth, water, air, or heaven), yet it remains an empty space—a

¹¹ When Man studies creation, he sees elements of God, divine order, and divine power. Thus, Man cannot help but to confront God at every turn. He cannot help but to draw innate propositions, truths, maxims, and rules from this observation of creation—this is the law of reason or the law of nature. Natural law is simply another way of saying that Man sees God (i.e., “law” and “order”) in nature. What this also means is that Man does not “create” human logic; but human logic is formulated out from God’s external creations that are imposed upon the human mind. Human logic and human experience do not “create” laws; but they simply acknowledge pre-existent truths that have been established or created by God. Hence, Man does not derive knowledge from “human logic,” but from God the Father and Creator.

spacious nothing, as it were. Being thus gross-hearted and not clear even to myself, I then held that whatever had neither length nor breath nor density nor solidity, and did not or could not receive such dimensions, was absolutely nothing. For at that time my mind dwelt only with ideas, which resembled the forms with which my eyes are still familiar, nor could I see that the act of thought, by which I formed those ideas, was itself immaterial, and yet it could not have formed them if it were not itself a measurable entity. So I thought about you, life of my life, as stretched out through infinite space, interpenetrating the whole mass of the world, reaching out beyond in all directions, to immensity without end; so that the earth should have you, the heaven have you, all things have you, and all of them be limited in you, while you are placed nowhere at all. As the body of the air above the earth does not bar the passage of the light of the sun, so that the light penetrates it, not by bursting nor dividing, but filling it entirely, so I imagined that the body of heaven and air and sea, and even of the earth, was all open to you and, in all its greatest parts as well as the smallest, was ready to receive your presence by a secret inspiration which, from within or without all, orders all things you have created.”¹²

God is therefore not inside of a body and is in essence omnipresent goodness and omnipresent truth—easily and readily accessible to every human mind and heart. For Augustine, the blessed and righteous person who desires to will what God wills, rather than to have God will what they wish, can see and hear Truth (i.e., God).

Having thus considered the essence of God, while extrapolating from “general revelation,” Augustine next turns to the problem of defining “evil.” He reasoned that since God made everything that is made; and that all things made are good; and, taken together in their totality, all things made are very good; and that thus there must be a divine and natural law governing all things; and that this divine and natural law is in nature complete goodness. Therefore, “evil” must be a turning away from God’s divine and natural law (i.e., God’s purpose and will).

¹² *Confessions* (New York, N.Y.: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2007), pp. 90-91.

Augustine opined that “evil” itself, like the human act of “thinking,” is also immaterial and spiritual—like the air or the wind. Evil has not substance or materiality; because God made all substance and materials good, and very good; “evil” must therefore be the “absence of substance” or the “absence of nature”—as in a deformity or a defect of the human body; as in a deaf ear or a blind eye. Augustine held that “evil” is nothingness; the absence of nature, goodness, and substance; and that “evil” is a *spiritual immateriality* which turns away from God. In *Confessions*, Augustine writes:

All things created are very good; but evil is itself the deterioration of that goodness. God is perfect and absolute goodness, but the degradation of goodness is evil.

“And I asked *what wickedness* was, and I found that it was *no substance*, but a *perversion of the will bent aside from you*, god, the supreme substance, toward these lower things, casting away its inmost treasure and becoming bloated with external good.”¹³

“Evil, then, the origin of which I had been seeking, has no substance at all; for if it were a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance and so a supreme good, or a corruptible substance, which could not be corrupted unless it were good. I understand, therefore, and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, nor is there any substance at all not made by you.”¹⁴

Augustine then concludes that all things created by God work together in harmony, according to moral and natural law. “And I saw that all things harmonize, not only in their places but also in their seasons.”¹⁵

But what is “time?” Augustine also asked. He concluded that although human beings experience time as a beginning and an end, as a chronological order; God himself has no beginning or end, and no chronological order. God thus exists “outside of time.” God, who exists outside of time, is the supreme catalyst of chronological order, what we call “time.” For this reason, God is also called the

¹³ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁵ Ibid.

great, I AM. “And I saw that you,” Augustine wrote, “who alone are eternal, did not begin to work after unnumbered periods of time—because all ages, both those which are past and those which shall pass, neither go nor come except through your working and abiding.”¹⁶

Importantly, the “general revelation” is in essence a form of truth, albeit a truth that is a lower form of Truth, which is God. Augustine thus recognized that God is Truth, and where there is truth, there is God. But Augustine acknowledged that Truth exists only partially inside of the human mind, so that Truth is not completely comprehensible by the human mind. As Augustine concluded: “I realized that I found the unchangeable and true eternity of truth above my changeable mind.”¹⁷

To prove this very point, that God has implanted innate knowledge within each of us, Augustine asked the fundamental question, How is it that we have an idea of something that we have never before seen, such as Heaven? How is it that we long for something that we have never before had, such as Happiness? And, furthermore, if we have never seen God or experienced Heaven or complete Happiness, then how will we know that we have met, reached, or obtained these things, whenever, if ever, we encounter them? Unless we have within our innate knowledge, some defective, vague notion of some former time when we were actually in Heaven or a Garden of Eden, or when we actually possessed Happiness, then how can we know what Heaven or Happiness is? Is Happiness, God? Or is Happiness derived from our former collective experiences in the Garden of Eden, which we have dimly forgotten? Or do we intuitively have a vague memory of a Paradise Lost? Has Original Sin so damaged our collective memory of God, Heaven and Paradise, that we humans can only now vaguely remember and imagine our former experiences with them, and in them? These questions explain, at least in part, the religious nature of human beings.

More fundamentally, Augustine asked how do we account for “our power of memory?” What are our memories, save images of things past remembered? Is not God already implanted within our memory of Him, from some obscure past moment in time? What, then, is this “power of human memory” but a spiritual

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 104.

power of immateriality that is without substance? Is the knowledge of God implanted within our memory, albeit defective and nearly forgotten? Do we have some vague knowledge of God in our memory of Him, but our memory of Him is not altogether clear? These questions are what makes mankind inherently religious by nature! We have an innate, vague idea of God, which runs in many directions. Indeed, in *Confessions*, St. Augustine says:

For we have not entirely forgotten anything if we can remember that we have forgotten it. For a lost notion, one that we have entirely forgotten, we cannot even search for. How, then, do I seek you, Lord? For when I seek you, my god, I seek a happy life. I will seek you in order that my soul may live. For my body lives by my soul, and my soul lives by you. How, then, do I seek a happy life, since happiness is not mine till I can rightly say: 'It is enough. This is it.' How do I seek it? Is it by remembering, as though I had forgotten it and still knew that I had forgotten it? Do I seek it in longing to learn of it as though it were something unknown, which either I had never known or had so completely forgotten as not even to remember that I had forgotten it?¹⁸

Where, then, did I find you so as to be able to learn of you? For you were not in my memory before I learned of you. Where, then, did I find you so as to be able to learn of you—save in yourself beyond me. Place there is none. We go 'backward' and 'forward' and there is no place. Everywhere and at once, truth, you guide all who consult you, and simultaneously answer all even though they consult you on quite different things. You answer clearly, though all do not hear in clarity. All take counsel of you on whatever point they wish, though they do not always hear what they wish. He is your best servant who does not look to hear from you what he himself wills, but who wills rather to will what he hears from you.¹⁹

Augustine's self-questioning led him to the neo-Platonic ideal that God is Truth. The soul, with joy, shall recognize Truth when it sees it; for Happiness, says Augustine, is joy in Truth. Augustine's self-questioning here is derived from neo-

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

Platonism, where the idea of the “forms” appears *a priori* implanted into the human mind—the ideal Body Politic; the ideal Family; the Ideal Good Life; the ideal Man or Woman, etc. These so-called ideals, according to Augustine, are nothing more than manifestations of Truth (i.e., God). What we are imagining are not ideals but images of God. We innately know how to distinguish “Right from Wrong.” When we seek the ideal polity, we seek a polity ruled by God; when we seek the ideal family, we seek a family ruled by God; when we seek the good life, or the happy life, we seek a good, happy life approved by God, and so forth. This is why Augustine says “the happy life, which is nothing else than joy in truth... For where I found truth, there I found my god, who is the truth. From the time I learned this I have not forgotten.”²⁰

We sense that complete happiness (i.e., God) and complete perfection (i.e., God) is just over the horizon—but have not yet arrived at the present moment. And, then, too human beings must acknowledge pre-existence, even before their own existence—because human beings have never created themselves; because inanimate matter has never created spiritual animation; and because “unthinking materials” have never created “thinking immaterial thoughts.” Where did “thinking” and “reasoning” come from, save from a Creator? Who created “thinking” and “reasoning,” save a superior Being who was itself capable of Thinking and Reasoning?

At the same time, human beings must thus also acknowledge that it has created nothing; that a Creator of creation—above human beings—implanted natural laws within His creation; and that humans must confront these laws of God at every turn. Human beings must also acknowledge that it cannot, through human artifice, philosophy, and science, create the laws of nature. But instead the laws of nature (i.e., the laws of God’s creation) both predate and govern human existence. This fundamental order of things in God’s creation exists separate and apart from mankind’s fallible, sin-infected ability to reason. Hence, human beings are constantly drawn to the source of all creation, who is God. And He is constantly unraveling the mysteries of body, soul, and nature. The problems of law, political science, and moral philosophy are not therefore divorced from religion.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

If we start off, then, with the proposition that God the Father is eternal, immaterial, omnipresent, omnipotent, immutable Truth, then there simply is no space—material or immaterial—that is outside of Him, because all things are held and contained within Him, and are governed by his divine Providence.

(3). **The *Holy Bible* as Revealed Truth**

Because of mankind's lack of complete knowledge and on-going search for Truth, together with mankind's innate ability to know "right from wrong," we human beings are inherently "religious" by nature. But without special, divine revelation (e.g., prophetic intervention) our human intuition and knowledge is incomplete. The *Holy Bible* is a special compilation of letters, narratives, and psalms which help to clarify who and what is God. That written compilation of revealed divine oracles—its moral decrees and divine admonitions—is reinforced by the laws of nature. For, as the Apostle Paul says:

Romans 1:18-21: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. **For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:** Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Thus, if we study God's creation, and the laws of this creation, we ought to be able to observe "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, even his eternal power and Godhead." Hence, "God outside of the Holy Bible," as manifest in the laws of nature in creation, is sufficient, writes the Apostle Paul, for non-believers, atheists, non-Christians, etc., to be "without excuse." For this reason, the great Apostle Paul also wrote: "[f]or when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their

conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another....”²¹

Were the American Founding Fathers, given all that they knew at the time, without excuse for having failed to deduce from the general laws of Nature that providence of the God of the *Holy Bible*? Indeed, they certainly had squarely before them the stern example of the New England Puritans! And so, were the American Founding Fathers fundamentally wrong about the nature of God?²² Although the God of Nature is the same God in the *Holy Bible*, the American Founding Fathers refused to explicitly acknowledge this connection in any of their founding documents, leaving future generations in a quandary over the role and meaning of religion, the Christian faith, and the *Holy Bible* within the public sphere. In separating their Church from the State, and at the same time ignoring the fundamental essence of mankind’s religious nature and the nature God—even as Founding Father Thomas Paine had described Him in the *Age of Reason*—the American Founding Fathers may have set in motion a new kind of religious conflict, not a religious war between Protestants and Catholics, but a religious war between Theists and Atheists (or Deists). I believe this is the current condition of American life as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century.

The American Founding Fathers may have misjudged the effects of Original Sin upon mankind; and they may have misjudged the need for a *spiritual cure* for this disease.²³ The same misjudgment may be said of many African American civil rights leaders of mid-twentieth century.²⁴ To be sure, the need for Christ

²¹ Romans 2: 13-14.

²² Perhaps the American Founding Fathers’ chief mistake was that they failed to state explicitly what role they expected the *Holy Bible* and the Christian Church to have in the public life. Their most troublesome legacy has been the “unconstitutionality of Christian holiness in public life,” because Christian holiness was at the foundation of the rise of western civilization ever since the fall of the Roman Empire. Christian holiness is what set Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformers apart from the Roman Catholic magisterial hierarchy. Freedom to live in Christian holiness is what drove the first and second of Puritan non-conformists across the Atlantic ocean to colonial New England.

²³ For example, the American Founding Fathers protected the institution of American slavery in the original constitution, and, as a result, the American republic was nearly obliterated within the next sixty years, as it was torn apart in civil war. In President Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, he acknowledged the possibility of divine retribution because of the national sin of American slavery.

²⁴ In other words, the plight from slavery to freedom neglected both (a) the evil consequences of slavery upon the character of African American victims of slavery and (b) the need for a *spiritual cure*. African American civil rights leaders correctly sought for changes in public policies and laws, but they omitted the promotion of spiritual reformation and moral development within the lives of individual African Americans.

presupposed mankind's inability to conform its thoughts and actions to any righteous standard, whether that righteous standard was one conceived within the "general revelation" of the laws of nature, or found within the pages of the *Holy Bible*. And the need for Moses had presupposed the need of a schoolmaster, a priest, and a prophet, to teach, to preach, and to pastor the unruly, unsophisticated, and unlearned flock. A complete separation of the Church from the State only meant that the State could take no interest in the religious, moral, and spiritual development of the citizenry.²⁵ It meant that God could not be acknowledged within the American public sphere as the Creator of all things created, including the creation of mankind itself, as well as the creation of law and government. It meant that, not only would the *Holy Bible* be removed from the secular law libraries within American law schools, and no longer acknowledged as the foundation of Anglo-American common law, but that even "general revelation" would be read out of the *American Declaration of Independence* and out of American constitutional jurisprudence as well. But if the State could not do these things, then certainly the Church must; however, in the Western world, at least up to the time of the eighteenth century, no nation had ever existed without a national Church to help guide and stabilize its spiritual and moral life. In the new United States of America, we believed national churches to be the source of religious intolerance and corruption; and so we embarked upon a risky proposition that could potentially separate ancient morality from modern-day public policy and jurisprudence—and, to be sure, American slavery and plantation capitalism certainly hastened that separation.

Today, it is the plain duty of the Church of Jesus Christ, during these difficult days of the American republic, to set aright this mistake, this misperception of who and what God the Father and Creator of all, is. The God of nature, who is the God of the *Holy Bible*, is the supreme governor of all things created, including even what we today call the secular affairs of mankind, such as law and civil government. All of this we acknowledge to be subject to God's divine providence.

²⁵ So that, if the moral condition of inner city African Americans deteriorated to the point of widespread breakdown of nuclear families and to the point where the proliferation of street gangs and crime become normative phenomena, the State would be foreclosed from implementing Christ-oriented family enrichment programs.

CONCLUSION

Who and what is God? This paper does not do justice to this profound question, but I have tried to set forth in broad outline the reasons why the God of the *Holy Bible* is the true God—the God of creation and all of humanity. For others who do not find many of the teachings within the *Holy Bible* (i.e., “special revelation”) to be practicable, understandable, or valid, there is a God who is outside of the *Holy Bible*—the same God—that may be appealing, through “general revelation,” as the God of reason, science and order. These two Gods—i.e., “general revelation” (i.e., the laws of nature; the law of science; conscience) and “special revelation” (i.e., the *Holy Bible*)—do not contradict each other, because they are one and the same God.

THE END