Evangelical Calvinism

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Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church

edited by

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and Bobby Grow

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"Suffer the little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Infant Salvation and the Destiny of the Severely Mentally Disabled

Myk Habets

INTRODUCTION[1]

As of April 20, 2007 the Roman Catholic Church no longer holds to a view of Limbo, a state which includes the souls of infants who die subject to original sin and without baptism, and who, therefore, neither merit the beatific vision, nor yet are subjected to any punishment, because they are not guilty of any personal sin.[2] This reassessment was occasioned by a number of factors of which two seem uppermost. The first factor is based upon pragmatic-pastoral motives, namely; the increased number of infants today who are born to parents who are not

1. I am grateful to Amos Yong, Bobby Grow, Charles Hewlett, Marcus Johnson, and others for providing critical feedback on a draft of this article and to those who interacted with its contents when it was read at the annual conference of the Systematic Theology Association of Aotearoa Zealand, Auckland, 20 November, 2009.

2. The official position of the Roman Catholic Church was made public by the International Theological Commission in a forty-one page report published as, "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized." The thirty-member International Theological Commission acts as an advisory panel to the Vatican, in particular to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. See Roman Catholic Church, "Hope of Salvation."

practicing Catholics and the many others who are the unborn victims of abortion who die without baptism.[3] The second factor is due to semi-theological motives, namely; the principle that grace has priority over sin, and a greater theological awareness today that God is merciful and "wants all human beings to be saved." God's love and mercy is considered incompatible with the idea that infants who die do not enter God's saving presence. In short, the official Report states:

> [P]eople find it increasingly difficult to accept that God is just and merciful if he excludes infants, who have no personal sins, from eternal happiness, whether they are Christian or non-Christian. From a theological point of view, the development of a theology of hope and an ecclesiology of communion, together with a recognition of the greatness of divine mercy, challenge an unduly restrictive view of salvation. In fact, the universal salvific will of God and the correspondingly universal mediation of Christ mean that all theological notions that ultimately call into question the very omnipotence of God, and his mercy in particular, are inadequate.[4]

The Report makes it clear that belief in Limbo has never been a dogmatic definition of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, and at least since the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*) the doctrine has not been taught. In the relevant section of *CCC* we read:

> As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," (Mark 10:14, cf. 1 Tim 2:4), allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died

3. In addition to this are the sheer numbers of infant deaths we now know of due to advances in medical science. Up to twenty-five percent of all human conceptions do not complete the twentieth week of pregnancy. One out of four conceived human embryos die. Seventy-five percent of fatal deaths occur in the first twelve weeks. Neonatal death (that is, death in the womb), Paranatal death (that is, death at the time of birth) occur in massive numbers. According to one conservative study an estimated 4,350,000 babies (foetuses, embryos, infants) died in 1999 alone. See the United Nations website for infant mortality rates and other information at http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3A77.

4. Roman Catholic Church, "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized," para. 2.

> without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.[5]

Belief in infant salvation is thus raised to the level of hope not dogma. The Report makes this clear when it concludes:

> [T]hat the many factors that we have considered above give serious theological and liturgical grounds for hope that unbaptised infants who die will be saved and enjoy the Beatific Vision. We emphasise that these are reasons for prayerful hope, rather than grounds for sure knowledge. There is much that simply has not been revealed to us (cf. Jn 16:12). We live by faith and hope in the God of mercy and love who has been revealed to us in Christ, and the Spirit moves us to pray in constant thankfulness and joy (cf. 1 Thess 5:18).[6]

Equally clear within the Report are the many theological issues which have to be considered in making such a decision, most notably in a Roman Catholic context the principle of the "hierarchy of truths",[7] the universal salvific will of God, the unicity and insuperability of the mediation of Christ, the sacramentality of the Church in the order of salvation, and the reality of original sin.[8] What the Roman Catholic revision of Limbo highlights is both the theological and pastoral issues bound up with the question of the fate of infants who die. Central to such issues are the universality of sin, the doctrine of original sin, the universality of the work of Christ, and the nature of God, amongst others. Each of these issues requires careful examination before a conclusion over the issue of infant salvation can be reached, tentative as it must be, given the sparse biblical testimony.

While this is not an exegetical essay it is incumbent upon us to at least outline the representative texts upon which any discussion of the fate of infants who die is based upon. While there are no biblical texts which directly answer the question before us there are a cluster of texts

5. Roman Catholic Church, *Catechism,* Part Two, Section Two, Chapter One, Article One, VI The Necessity of Baptism, para. 1261.

6. Roman Catholic Church, "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized," para.102.

7. That is, the primacy of Christ and his grace, which has priority over Adam and sin. Ibid., para. 7.

8. Ibid., para. 1.

which shed light on the issue, if one is attuned to them. Among these we may at least mention the following:

1. Deuteronomy 1:39. The children of the rebellious Israelites were not penalised on account of their parents' sin. They were too young to have knowledge of good and evil and, unlike their parents, would be permitted to enter the Promised Land. The Promised Land which the children would inherit was typical of God's eternal kingdom (see Hebrews 11:13–16). This is argued convincingly by Mohler, Jr. and Akin, "The Salvation of the 'Little Ones.'"[9]
2. 2 Samuel 12:23. Since David believed in the reality of the heavenly afterlife, his words would make no sense if the dead child was not safe in heaven. Compare this with David's despairing cry over his rebellious son Absalom's death in 2 Samuel 18:33. The Cushite's report of Absalom's death offers no hope for the dead rebel (see v.32).
3. 2 Kings 4:26. Concerning the dead child of the Shunammite woman, the mother affirmed—in answer to Gehazi's question, "Is it well with the child?"—that "it is well." The inference is obvious. In its dead condition, there was nothing to fear in respect of the child's eternal welfare. Interestingly, no mention is made of the child's circumcision, the sign of its Israelite status and gracious acceptance by God.
4. Ezekiel 16:21. During Israel's wicked and idolatrous apostasy, children were sacrificed by fire to the ancient pagan Canaanite deity Moloch. God calls the sacrificed little ones "my children." They were evidently safe with God despite the sins of the parents.
5. Jonah 4:11. God showed particular compassion towards the infants of wicked Nineveh (assuming that those who don't know their right hand from their left include infants). Significantly, God was "gracious and merciful...slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness" (v.2) towards Gentile children. Being outside of the covenant community was no barrier to their salvation.
6. Jeremiah 31:15–17 and Matthew 2:18. There is every reason to believe that the children killed by Herod's men were as eternally

9. Mohler and Akin, "The Salvation of Little Ones."

safe as those sacrificed to Moloch (see no. 4 above). We may say of such victims that "the children shall come back," (see Jer 31:17). Notwithstanding the parents' grief, their children's position was not hopeless however horrific their death was.

7. Mark 10:13–16, Matthew 18:1–6, and 21:15–16. The loving view of little children expressed by Jesus Christ is consistent with the Old Testament—they are eternally safe.
8. If God's kindness extends to animals and birds, we dare not imagine infants are less kindly regarded (see Matthew 10:29–31).
9. Matthew 19:14 expressly states that the kingdom belongs to little children.
10. The basis of their salvation is the same for adults, i.e. by God's free, unmerited grace and favour alone (see Ephesians 2:8).
11. Their salvation is not based on their supposed absolute innocence (since all fell in Adam, see Romans 5:12ff.).
12. God is able to act directly on those incapable of responding to God's saving truth. In short, regeneration can occur in the womb. Clearly, Jeremiah and John the Baptist are examples of this (see Jer 1:5 and Luke 1:44).
13. The Baptist C. H. Spurgeon and the Presbyterian Charles Hodge believed that since the saved are a "great multitude which no one could number" (Rev 7–9), this must include infants many of whom have died throughout human history. On the analogy that the prison population is much smaller than the general population, it is argued that more are saved than lost. This must also include children dying in infancy.[10]

VOICES FROM THE PAST

The destiny of children who die before baptism has been of perennial interest in the Christian tradition. One of the first to explicitly and directly consider the idea was Gregory Nyssen who wrote a work specifically on the destiny of infants who die entitled *De infantibus praemature abreptis libellum*.[11] Gregory is clear that infants have the stain of original sin and

10. For some of these texts I am indebted to Clifford, "Infant Salvation: Are All Those Who Die in Infancy Saved?"

11. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Infants Early Deaths*, 35–41.

yet they have no personal guilt. They have not done any deeds and thus they cannot be recompensed or rewarded. Furthermore, they certainly have committed no wrong deeds and so they cannot be punished. They are, in a sense, in a neutral position, not good enough for heaven and not bad enough for hell. As such, Gregory cannot say that unbaptised infants attain the same state as the baptised. Gregory thus retains a typically Eastern apophatic reticence on the issue and fails to finally explain what the state of unbaptised infants is or where they go.

This rather neutral position was roundly dismissed by Augustine of Hippo in a rather typical, Western-Latin, imperialist tone.[12] Augustine insisted instead that baptism was necessary for salvation and that due to the stain and guilt of original sin even babies would be consigned to hell if they were not baptised.[13] He did, however, concede that once in hell their torment would be the mildest of all its residents. Little comfort to grieving parents I am sure. Augustine addressed the question because Pelagius was teaching that infants could be saved without baptism. In countering Pelagius, Augustine affirmed the necessity of baptism as he applied the logic of his doctrine of original sin to the issue.[14] Nothing could be clearer for Augustine, than that without baptism one cannot inherit eternal life.

The Council of Carthage in AD 418 formally rejected the teaching of Pelagius and enshrined Augustine's position as authoritative. It condemned the opinion that infants "do not contract from Adam any trace of original sin, which must be expiated by the bath of regeneration that leads to eternal life." Positively, this council taught that "even children who of themselves cannot have yet committed any sin are truly baptised for the remission of sins, so that by regeneration they may be cleansed from what they contracted through generation." It was also added that there is no "intermediate or other happy dwell-

12. See Augustine, *De verbis apostoli sermo* xiv, coll. 1738.

13. Augustine earned the unenviable title *durus infantum pater* for his part in the controversy with Pelagius over the destiny of infants. In Warfield's opinion this is "a designation doubly unjust," and that "he was even preparing its destruction by the doctrines of grace, of which he was more truly the father," Warfield, "The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation," 412–13. In Warfield's opinion Fulgentius, Alcimus, and Gregory the Great gave far stronger expression to the woe of unbaptised infants than Augustine ever did. See ibid., 413.

14. For a history of the debate and an exposition of Augustine's position see Warfield, "Introductory Essay on Augustin and the Pelagian Controversy," 12–109.

ing place for children who have left this life without Baptism, without which they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, that is, eternal life."[15] This teaching was adopted by the Council of Trent in its fifth session, thus becoming part of Canon law.[16]

Augustine's strict view held sway throughout much of the middle Ages. Anselm of Canterbury and Hugh of St Victor are typical advocates here as is Dante's description in one of his poems. Dante pictures

> "young children innocent, whom Death's sharp teeth have ere yet they were freed from the sin with which our birth is bent," as imprisoned within the brink of hell, "where the first circle girds the abyss of dread," in a pale where "there is no sharp agony," but "dark shadows only," and whence "no other plaint rises than that of sighs; which from the sorrow without pain arise."[17]

It was not until Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard that this view was softened. From this point on a milder version of Augustine's position predominated and paved the way for Aquinas's formal revision. According to this softer version infants who die without being baptised are denied the beatific vision due to original sin but they are not subjected to any punishment due to a lack of mortal sin. In effect, as per the earlier position, they exist neither in a state of heaven nor hell. From the turn of the 12–13th centuries the concept of Limbo was a common belief of the Roman Catholic Church that espoused such thinking.

PERENNIAL ISSUES: GRACE, SIN, AND SALVATION

Placing this question squarely in the middle of a Protestant context the issue of baptism is substituted for that of personal faith. Given the Reformation *solas* (*gratia, fide, scriptura, Christus,* and *Deo gloria*), and a rejection of a Roman Catholic sacramentalism, the issue revolves around the lack of personal faith in Jesus Christ by an infant. For this reason the same issues pertain to the fate of the severely mentally disabled.

In order to account for such situations various Protestant traditions devised their own responses to the issue. For my purposes I will limit

15. See *Enchiridion Symbolorum,* 223.

16. The Council of Trent, Fifth Session, Decree on Original Sin, see ibid., 1514; and *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 511.

17. Cited in Warfield, "The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation," 414–15.

myself to two such Protestant traditions, the Reformed and the Baptist, and I do so for various reasons. In the first place, I am a Reformed theologian and so I am seeking to resource my own tradition as much as any other. Second, Reformed theology stands self-consciously in the stream of the Augustinian tradition, thus the themes of original sin, the centrality of Christ, and its constituent sacramental dynamics are present. Third, the Reformed tradition has given divergent answers to this dilemma and thus a fresh study of the theme may be of use today. Finally, as Warfield once remarked, "It is the confessional doctrine of the Reformed churches and of the Reformed churches alone, that all believers' infants, dying in infancy, are saved."[18] It would seem Warfield's bold claim is not as universally held as he thought. In addition to thinking through these issues within the context of Reformed theology I will bring this perspective into dialogue with certain Baptist thinkers, and again I will do so for various reasons. In the first place I am a Baptist (Baptist Union of New Zealand). In the second place I lecture at a Baptist college and thus the Baptistic world is the one in which I am most typically immersed. Thirdly, Baptists have also considered these issues in some depth and have attempted to come to their own conclusions and thus it will be worthwhile bringing these two traditions into critical dialogue for the mutual benefit of each. Finally, being personally Reformed and Baptist I believe that these traditions are best suited to represent an Evangelical Calvinist answer to the fate of infants who die and that of the severely mentally disabled.[19]

In 1891 the Princeton Presbyterian Benjamin B. Warfield outlined various proposals to account for the destiny of infants who die.[20] In his

18. Ibid., 436.

19. Perspectives on this issue from outside Reformed and Baptistic ones are, of course, available. One thinks, for instance, of Lusk, *Paedofaith*, 67–72. Written from the perspective of the Federal Vision it seems to argue that all children of Christian parents have "faith" and are thus saved, as faith is not cognitive assent but covenant inclusion. This typically Federal Vision perspective is not conducive at all to an Evangelical Calvinism. Wesleyan, Eastern Orthodox, and others views are not part of the discussion in this chapter.

20. Warfield, "The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation," 411–44. For an analysis of Warfield's position see Clark, "Warfield, Infant Salvation, and the Logic of Calvinism," 459–64. Clark criticises Warfield's arguments and concludes that "Contrary to Warfield's thesis, then, it seems most reasonable—given the inner logic of his Calvinist system—to resolve the trilemma by affirming that only some of the infants who die are elected by God and will be saved," ibid., 464. It is unclear if this is Clark's

view there were three general positions: the "ecclesiastical," the "humanitarian," and the "gracious." The ecclesiastical view asserts that salvation comes through membership in the visible church, of which baptism is the vehicle of entry. Thus baptised infants will be saved, all others will not. This was quickly recognized as the Roman Catholic view.[21] The humanitarian view asserts that the individual must cooperate with God in salvation in using their free will to accept salvation. Infants cannot exercise this free will (neither can the severely mentally disabled), thus an "age of accountability" is introduced. Those under this age are not held responsible for the guilt of Adam and are saved. Many Baptists and Arminians were included in this view.[22] Finally, the gracious view asserts that salvation is by grace alone therefore the elect are saved, the numbers and identity of such are known only to God. Thus infants who are elected by God will be saved. Warfield identifies this with the Reformed position and accepts it as his own.[23]

As useful as his taxonomy is, Warfield has yet failed to give a clear answer as to the destiny of those who die in infancy. His position, however, accords most clearly with those of Loraine Boettner when he wrote:

> Most Calvinistic theologians have held that those who die in infancy are saved. The Scriptures seem to teach plainly enough that the children of believers are saved; but they are silent or practically so in regard to those of the heathens. The Westminster Confession does not pass judgment on the children of heathens

personal position or simply the logic he sees in Warfield's arguments. This issue will be taken up later in the essay.

21. It is also identified with the Lutheran and Anglican views. Martin Luther is perhaps the strongest advocate of such a position when in response to the Anabaptists, he argued forcefully for the salvation of baptised infants only, or of those who intended to get baptised but died before being able to do so. See Luther, *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism,* 35:27, 37; *Concerning Rebaptism,* 40:251; *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage,* 43:245; and for an overview of his theology at this point, see Zietlow, "Martin Luther's Arguments for Infant Baptism," 150. Luther's strong stance was adopted in the original 1530 *Augsburg Confession,* but under Melanchthon's guidance this was mitigated in the subsequent 1540 revision. See Schaff, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds,* 3–73, especially 13.

22. A representative Baptist text here is Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 654–56. Erickson's view is predicated on the idea of an age of accountability or responsibility coupled with the idea of a "conditional imputation of guilt" from Adam to the infant until the age of moral accountability.

23. He goes on to outline five distinct Reformed interpretations of this position, however, in Warfield, "The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation," 431–34.

> who die before coming to years of accountability. Where the Scriptures are silent, the Confession, too, preserves silence. Our outstanding theologians, however, mindful of the fact that God's "tender mercies are over all His works," and depending on His mercy widened as broadly as possible, have entertained a charitable hope that since these infants have never committed any actual sin themselves, their inherited sin would be pardoned and they would be saved on wholly evangelical principles.[24]

He goes on to include Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, and B. B. Warfield as holding to such a view. But is an appeal to and hope in God's "mercy" sufficient here?

There are, however, contrary voices in the Reformed tradition. G. C. Berkouwer believes that "the practice of infant baptism rests upon a definite confession,"[25] and thus guarantees the security of believer's children. Thus baptism is the means by which infants may be assured of salvation. This is the Reformed doctrine of covenant succession. This is illustrated well in the old Dutch Reformed "Form for the Baptism of Infants." This Form states that believing parents acknowledge their children are sinful objects of wrath from conception and are therefore subject to all manner of misery, even eternal condemnation; yet as recipients of the divine promise of grace, they are "sanctified in Christ" and so as "members of his church ought to be baptised."[26] Here baptism and salvation are linked so as to affirm that the *baptised* infants of believers, if they should die, are saved, while those of unbelievers, and thus the unbaptised, are not. The theological rationale for such practice is that of covenantal succession by means of baptism.[27]

A defense of this possession, despite not using the technical vocabulary, was given recently by Mark Beach.[28] Beach critiques a number

24. Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 143.

25. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 161.

26. *Psalter Hymnal*, 125.

27. Perhaps the strongest current advocate of such a position today is Engelsma, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, 13–16. For a discussion of this point see Mouw, "Baptism and the Salvific Status of Children," 238–54. For a possible Reformed defence of the position that un-baptised infants who die go to hell, see Sproul Jr., "Conform Ye My People," 26. It is a "possible" defence as Sproul says that all who die without receiving Christ as saviour go to hell, while also equivocating over the exact destiny of children who die.

28. Beach, "Original Sin, Infant Salvation, and the Baptism of Infants," 47–79. Beach appeals to the following texts to prove his point: Gen 7:21–23; Exod 6:12; Lev 19:23;

of contemporary Baptist theologians charging their theology as "hopelessly inconsistent."[29] According to his reading, Stanley Grenz, Millard Erickson, Gordon Lewis, and Bruce Demarest all present, in the final analysis, an argument for the salvation of all infants who die on the basis that they are not guilty of original sin, judgment is according to works which they cannot commit, and they cannot exercise saving faith. Thus God graciously saves them by a direct act of grace. Beach correctly shows how this view evades a doctrine of original sin, and posits two kinds of salvation for two different kinds of people—infants and adults. In the former, faith is not a requirement while for the latter it is. Beach then perceptively asks why infants who die need the cross of Christ to be saved. He answers that according to Baptist logic they don't, despite assertions from such Baptists to the contrary. If infants are not guilty of original sin then the cross of Christ has no impact upon them. Infants are thus saved apart from Christ's work on the cross. This, argues Beach, is patently unbiblical.

Instead, Beach resorts to a standard Reformed interpretation of original sin and imputed guilt, and then appeals to the cross of Christ as the only means of salvation for the elect, young or old. He then adds the concept of covenant succession by asserting the necessity of baptism for salvation as infants, like adults, require faith to be saved. In the case of infants, faith is supplied by the believing parents such that the infants are children of promise and are thus covered by the blood of Christ. In the final analysis, according to Beach, *baptised* infants who die are saved while the rest are not. Warfield's fears over baptismal regeneration are thus realized in Beach's argument.

As tightly argued as Beach's argument is, it is not compelling nor is it, in the final analysis, consistent with confessional Reformed theology, as the next section highlights.[30]

26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 6:10; 9:25; Exod 11:4–7; 12:12, 29–30; Num 21:21–35; Deut 2:34; 3:6; 7:2; and 1 Cor 7:14, ibid., 76–77.

29. Ibid., 72.

30. Other significant discussions on infant salvation from a Reformed perspective include: Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*; Shedd, "Infant Salvation as Related to Original Sin"; Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant*; and Strawbridge, ed. *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*.

CONFESSIONAL THEOLOGY

Beach's conclusions go against much of the standard Reformed arguments that assert that no Reformed confession states either that *all* infants who die are saved or that infants of unbelievers are *not* saved. All that can be found within the Reformed confessions is a positive assertion that infants of believers who die are saved.[31] We see this illustrated in a sophisticated way in the Synod of Dort, Article I/17, which teaches the salvation of believer's children, but importantly, remains silent on the fate of unbelievers.[32] It reads:

> Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.

In the words of Cornelis Venema, ". . . Article I/17 offers a ringing, unqualified affirmation of the confidence believers may have in the election and salvation of their children whom God calls to himself in infancy."[33] This, it can be argued, should be the universal position of Reformed theology.

The reason for the inclusion of Article I/17 in the Canons of Dort was the insistence of the Arminian Remonstrant's that according to Calvinistic logic, God incomprehensibly (arbitrarily) elects some people to salvation and others to reprobation. This applies to infants as equally as it does to adults, thus some children of believers who die in infancy will be reprobates. The Synod of Dort inserted Article I/17 to categorically refute such a position. In studying the background material to the Synod of Dort, and to the writing of Article I/17 in particular, it is interesting to note the diversity of views amongst the delegates on the issue of infant salvation. Venema's study has shown that the various delegations at the Synod were asked to draft responses to the Remonstrant articles and amongst them the responses varied.

31. For a comprehensive overview of infant salvation in the various creeds and confessions of the Reformed churches see Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation,* 298-330.

32. For a brief background study of Article I/17 see Gootjes, "Can Parents Be Sure?"; and Godfrey, "Election and Covenant."

33. Venema, "The Election and Salvation of the Children of Believers Who Die in Infancy," 57–100.

On the basis of texts such as Rev 20:1; 21:17; and Luke 18:16, the English delegates to the Synod of Dort argue for the elect status of all infants who die.[34] The Swiss delegates argued that the children of believers who die are elect as they are part of the covenant of grace, they have not reached "the years of discretion" and thus are saved, and their ministering angels will be sent out for their sake.[35] The Bremen delegates likewise affirm the elect status of infants of believers who die and add "they also, with a view to the covenant, are holy. In order to confirm this, they are initiated by holy baptism and put on Christ."[36]

It was the three Dutch professors—Polyander, Thysius, and Walleus—invited to present formal papers at the Synod, that most clearly present an argument against the Arminian charge and argue, in forthright language, that the infants of believers alone are saved, all others are "unclean, alienated from Christ and from the covenant of grace."[37] Apart from exclusion from the covenant of grace by not being baptised, the professors appealed to a common Reformed practice that argued that infants of believers were incapable of breaking the conditions of the covenant given they had not reached an "age of discretion" and thus would not be judged by God on this account.[38] This general line of argument was followed by Sybrandus Lubbertus and Franciscus Gomarus, theologians who were also invited to make a response.[39] The Drench delegates follow the same line of argument and importantly, also include in their discussion "adults who have been insane from the beginning of their life,"[40] that is, those we now classify as severely mentally disabled.

34. Ibid., 66–67.

35. Ibid., 67–68.

36. Ibid., 69.

37. Ibid., 69–71.

38. Ibid., 70 n.18, points to various Reformed theologians who support such an idea of an "age of discretion," before which infants cannot break the covenant and thus will not be judged on this basis. Venema includes in this list Ulrich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger.

39. Ibid., 71–72.

40. Ibid., 74–75. Vos, *The Covenant of Grace*, 23, applies this principle with vigour when he writes: "It is true that some of the children of believing parents are not of the elect, and turn out to be covenant-breakers. But an infant that dies before reaching the years of discretion cannot be a covenant-breaker; it cannot despise and violate the obligation of the Covenant of Grace. Therefore we have the best of reasons for believing that all children of believing parents dying in infancy are not only within the Covenant of Grace, but also of the number of the elect and shall certainly be saved."

Still another group, the delegates from the Particular Synod of South Holland, presented something of a mediating theology between the Reformed responses we have so far considered. While offering hope for all believing parents whose infants have died, they still affirm the possibility of the reprobation of some children of believers. In the final analysis they leave it to the judgment of God.[41]

As it stands, Article I/17 is a clear statement that believing parents of infants who die may have an assurance that their child is with the Lord, and an equally clear statement that all children of believers who die in infancy or are severely mentally disabled are elect and saved. In the subsequent history of Reformed theology there have been no formal arguments over Article I/17, thus we must take this to mean this is the prevalent Reformed confessional view.[42] What is not clear, however, is the role that baptism plays. Is baptism required for infants of believing parents for them to be considered part of the covenant community or not? As we have seen, various delegations to the Synod of Dort held differing views on the issue of covenantal succession. These differing views have continued within Reformed theology.

The other major confessional treatment of the destiny of infants who die is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It will be instructive to compare the Canons of Dort to the WCF in order to build a clearer picture of formal Reformed stances on this topic.[43]

41. Venema, "The Election and Salvation of the children of Believers Who Die in Infancy," 72–73.

42. This is not to imply there have not been a variety of views on the Article. Venema clearly canvasses two broad reactions to the Article which he calls, the objective view and the subjective view. The objective, stronger, or positive view insists Article I/17 is a positive affirmation of the salvation of all children of believing parents who die in infancy. The subjective, or weaker view argues that Article I/17 only speaks of the attitude or hope that believing parents should have with respect to their infant children, ibid., 81–92. Examples of the first position include Vos, *The Covenant of Grace*; and Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: vol. 4,* 724–27; and Bavinck, *Saved by Grace,* 69. Examples of the second position include Hoeksema, *Believers and their Seed,* 149–58; and Beeke, "Children Dying in Infancy," 22–23.

43. Also relevant are the writings of the Westminster divines on infant salvation outside of the WCF. Davis (http://www.the-highway.com/infant-salvation_Davis.html) lists the following: Baillie, *Anabaptisme*; Burgess, *Baptismall Regeneration of Elect Infants*; Carter, *The Covenant of God with Abraham, opened*; Cawdrey, *The Inconsistencie of Independent way with Scripture and it self*; Cawdrey, *A Sober Answer to a Serious Question propounded by Mr. G. Firmin*; Dury, *A true relation of the conversion and baptism of Isuf*; Marshal, *A Defence of Infant-Baptism*; Marshal, *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants*; and Wallis, *A Defense of Infant-Baptism.*

The Westminster Confession of Faith follows in the same vein as that of Dort. In WCF 10.3 we read:

> Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how He pleases: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.[44]

Immediately we can see the continuity between WCF 10.3 and Article 1/17 of the Canons of Dort. Both refer specifically to the doctrine of election as the means by which infants may be saved, both make reference to the severely mentally disabled as being included in the same category of infants who die, and both unequivocally provide an assurance of salvation for the parents of such individuals. The Canons of Dort and the WCF also make it clear that a Reformed doctrine of infant salvation (and that of the severely mentally disabled) does not rest on their supposed innocence (Roman Catholicism), is not based on anything intrinsic within the individuals, such as implicit faith or some such (Arminians),[45] nor is it based on a sentimental appeal to the mercy and grace of God (many Baptists).[46]

As with the Canons of Dort, however, WCF 10.3 does have a variety of interpretations attached to it. Some interpretations have asserted that there are non-elect infants who die and are thus damned. This is, however, a mistaken interpretation and one that a close study of the Confession rules out immediately. In order to guard against this misinterpretation the PCUSA added a Declaratory Statement to the WCF in 1903 which reads:

> . . . with reference to Chapter 10, Section 3, of the Confession of Faith, that it is not to be regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. We believe that all dying in infancy are

44. It is noteworthy that the *Second London Baptist Confession* follows the exact wording here in chapter 10, article 3. See *The Baptist Confession of Faith and The Baptist Catechism*, 25.

45. See Wesley's letter to John Mason dated 21 November 1776, in Wesley, *Works,* vol. 12, 453. Cf. Rishell, "Wesley and Other Methodist Fathers on Childhood Religion," 778–784; and Willhauck, "John Wesley's View of Children." I am grateful to Peter Benzies, a former student of mine, for pointing me to these Wesleyan sources.

46. This last position is clearly modelled by the Reformed theologian Smedes, "Can God Reach the Mentally Disabled?" 94, but is found in many popular tracts on infant salvation amongst Baptists, Reformed, and the many who make up those called the Evangelicals.

> included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how he pleases.[47]

Thus all infants who die are elect and thus saved. This view is clearly presented by Vos in his contention that WCF 10.3 does not support the assertion that there is a class of "non-elect infants dying in infancy."[48] Article 10 of the WCF describes the effectual calling of the elect and clarifies that this normally takes place through the "ordinary means of grace." The inclusion of 10.3 speaks to how infants may be saved without such "ordinary means" and thus presents their salvation in terms of an extraordinary manner. When we note the inclusion of the infants of unbelievers and also include the severely mentally disabled, this addition is a significant clarification of the issue and addresses Warfield's fears over baptismal regeneration.

One final Reformed confession is worth mentioning, the Confession of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1829), Tennessee, USA. Written as a corrective to certain aspects of the WCF, chapter 10, article 3 of the Confession reads:

> All infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit [Luke 18:15,16; Acts 2:38, 39], who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth [John 3:8]; so also are others who have never had the exercise of reason, and who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.[49]

According to this confessional Reformed view, infant death and severe mental disability is indicative of divine election.[50] It would appear this is the final Reformed position (though not confession) on the topic.

47. For the background to and commentary of these changes see Hart and Muether, "Turning Points in American Presbyterian History."

48. Vos, *The Covenant of Grace*, 24.

49. *The Creeds of Christendom,* 3:773. Formed in 1810, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church is a small Reformed and Presbyterian denomination with its headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee. It has its own Confession which is a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith, specifically in regards to predestination, the eternal decrees, and infant salvation. It's official website http://www.cumberland.org/center/believe.htm describes itself as a moderate form of Calvinism and evangelical, and to this extent it approaches an Evangelical Calvinism.

50. A 1908 article in the *New York Times* reported that the issue of infant salvation was a dead one and that a proposed paper for Calvin Day at the next Assembly entitled "Calvin and Infant Salvation" be deleted from the programme as it was "hurting the

BAPTIST RESPONSES

This latter view is shared by many theologically Reformed figures, past and present, including many Baptists. There is a modest body of literature in Baptist circles on infant salvation given the generally held assumption that all infants who die go to heaven.[51] The following surveys several Reformed and Baptist thinkers on the topic.[52] The famous Baptist pastor, Charles Spurgeon believed that all infants who die go to heaven and that there is no other Calvinist view. He then characteristically went on to use this as an occasion for an evangelistic sermon![53] Spurgeon argues his point on the basis of the goodness of God, the character of Christ, the ways of grace, the fact that the number of saved souls will be a great multitude, and selected biblical texts. He then asks parents to make sure they are saved so they may see their dead infants again. So certain is Spurgeon that he wrote, "I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to paradise. Think what a multitude there is of them!"[54]

John MacArthur recently argued for the salvation of all infants who die on similar grounds to Spurgeon.[55] MacArthur's arguments are

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Church to keep up discussion as to infant salvation and infant damnation, and that it was a dead issue." The motion was lost 86 to 55, however "Most of the speakers expressed the opinion that the Presbyterian Church of today does not teach nor believe in infant damnation," see "Presbyterians on Calvin."

51. See the typically brief discussion by Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," 109–62.

52. While modest, Baptist thinking on infant salvation does exist. In addition to what follows, Richard Fuller's (1804–1876) short tract on the topic has been highly influential on Baptist thinking; Fuller, *Infant Salvation, Baptism and Dedication*; as evidenced in part by its regular citation and that it is reprinted as "Infant Salvation, Dedication, and Baptism," in Haynes, *The Baptist Denomination*, 185–93; and "Infant Salvation," in Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopaedia*, 2:581. Perhaps the earlier statement on infant salvation from the Anabaptist tradition goes to Hübmaier, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, 93.

53. Spurgeon, "Infant Salvation."

54. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon at His Best*, 95. The fact that Spurgeon thought there may be more infants in heaven than adults is also found in the thought of John Newton, who once said the number of infants in heaven "so greatly exceeds the aggregate of adult believers that, comparatively speaking, the kingdom may be said to consist of little children." Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, 4:552.

55. Although MacArthur is a Dispensationalist, by aligning himself with a version of Reformed theology in recent years he has adopted a pseudo-Reformed-Dispensational theology. MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God*. For MacArthur's MP3 sermons on the

generally based on four premises: first, all children are conceived and born as sinners;[56] second, the salvation of every person is a matter of God's grace, not human works; third, salvation is based upon the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross; fourth, salvation is by grace, damnation is based on works. This last point is crucial for MacArthur's argument: infants and young children are incapable of sins which cause damnation, especially the sin of unbelief; children are incapable of believing; therefore they are incapable of unbelief; thus infants are saved. In arguing on this basis MacArthur appears to rely on the same theological foundation as the 2007 Roman Catholic statement on Limbo when it argued that "Grace is totally free, because it is always a pure gift of God. Damnation, however, is deserved, because it is the consequence of free human choice."[57]

John Piper holds a slightly different and idiosyncratic view. According to him infants become believers in heaven and thus they grow up there and exercise saving faith. He writes,

> God in his justice will find a way to absolve infants who die of their depravity. It will surely be through Christ. But beyond that we would be guessing. It seems to me that the most natural guess would be that babies will grow up in the kingdom (either immediately, or over time) and will by God's grace come to faith so that their justification is by faith alone just like ours.[58]

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topic see: MacArthur, "The Salvation of Babies Who Die," Part 1: and Part 2. Another Dispensational perspective by a Baptist is offered by Zuck, *Precious in His Sight,* 217–41, especially 218–26; and included in Radmacher, another Baptist, in *Salvation,* 229–236. Dispensationalists have long discussed this topic, in addition to those already cited see for instance: Chafer, *Systematic Theology,* 7:196–99, who argues that the salvation of infants is "on other terms than those imposed upon the adult portion of humanity," ibid., 196; Baker, *A Dispensational Theology*, 460–466; and Geisler (also Baptist), *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 360–66.

56. This is a crucial point and one that is made clearly by a number of Baptists including Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, 221; and Lightner, *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe*, 7–8; as well as by non-Baptists, for instance, Downs, "Child Evangelization," 5–13.

57. Roman Catholic Church, "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized," Introduction, para. 7. The fact that this argument, in itself, is incompatible with Reformed theology seems to be lost on MacArthur. This is most probably due to his lack of familiarity with confessional Reformed theology and his commitments to Dispensational theology.

58. See Piper, "What Happens to Infants Who Die?" Based largely upon John 9:41, Piper contends that "if a person lacks the natural capacity to see the revelation of God's

Albert Mohler and Daniel Akin, however, correctly point out that this is actually an argument for a post-mortem salvation, something first suggested by Gregory of Nyssa.[59] In their opinion, "The problem with this position is that Scripture teaches no such post-mortem opportunity. It is a figment of a theologian's imagination, and must be rejected."[60] In this they are surely correct. What Piper upholds is a view of salvation by faith alone which takes priority over a theology of salvation by grace alone.[61]

The final Baptist theologian we shall consider, Ronald Nash, argues for infant salvation in his little work *Answers to Grieving Parents,* but he is clear that it is not based on any of the following four faulty arguments: infants are innocent,[62] universalism, post-mortem salvation, or baptismal regeneration.[63] Infant salvation is based upon the fact that infants are incapable of moral good or evil, yet divine judgment is administered based on sins committed in the body (1 Cor 5:10). This view, argues Nash,

will or God's glory then that person's sin would not remain. God would not bring the person into final judgment for not believing what he had no natural capacity to see." Appealing to Romans 1:20, Piper makes clear that this principle does not apply to the unevangelized given their access to general revelation. See the useful distinction between those who die in infancy and the unevangelized in Nash, *When a Baby Dies*, 98-99. Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, 2:162, offers an alternative (and untenable) position, that all infants about to die are given the full consciousness of an adult that enables them to make the decision to accept God's gift of salvation.

59. See the view of Roman Catholic theologian Dyer, "The Unbaptized Infant in Eternity," 10–22.

60. Mohler and Akin, "The Salvation of the "Little Ones." Mohler is a Reformed Southern Baptist. Universalism is also rejected, as is the argument based on election. According to Mohler and Akin, to argue for infant salvation based on the doctrine of election is to "avoid answering the question." No further explanation is given as to why this may be the case. Oddly enough, however, they go on to ague for the salvation of all infants who die on the basis of their election! Perhaps Mohler and Akin are arguing against the charge of arbitrariness in God only electing some not all infants to salvation? It is hard to tell.

61. This unusual view is shared by Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 360–66.

62. This is a commonly held to view amongst Baptists. See for instance the Southern Baptist theologian, Ingle, who writes that infants do not inherit "lostness" from Adam but choose it when they become a "morally responsible person." See "Children and Conversion," 9, and "Moving in the Right Direction," 153–54. This view is shared by Inchley, *Kids and the Kingdom*, 14, 33; and Jeschke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church*, 104.

63. Nash, *When a Baby Dies*.

is consistent with that established by Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and others. Nash also makes the explicit link between infants who die and the mentally handicapped when he writes, "I will argue that all children who die in infancy and all mentally handicapped persons whose intellectual and moral judgment cannot exceed that of children are saved."[64] How is this Reformed and not an Arminian theology? "For Arminians, active repentance and faith are necessary conditions of salvation . . ." According to Reformed theology, however, "if Christ died specifically for those whom God chose or elected, then infant salvation [and that of the severely mentally disabled] becomes possible."[65] It is Reformed, then, because it is grounded in God's gracious election.[66] Nash, in arguing this way, is being consistent with the Reformed confessions, as we have seen, and is also modeling a pastoral approach which is theologically robust.

By way of summary, Reformed theology, while sponsoring a degree of interpretations on the matter, is confessionally clear that the children of believers who die in infancy may, with assurance, be considered elect, and as such, are saved. It also teaches that this also applies to the severely mentally disabled and, with less certainty, it is implied that all infants who die are, in fact, elect and saved. The arguments for such a position rest on the testimony of Scripture which points in this direction, a theology of God's gracious election, the reality of original sin and guilt applied to all, and the saving work of Christ for the elect. An appeal to some form of covenant succession is sometimes combined with the necessity of baptism, but as we have seen, this is a minority view and cannot be held to be the confessional Reformed position. Warfield summarizes this well:

> [A]ll who die in infancy are children of God and enter at once into His glory—not because original sin is not deserving of eternal punishment (for all are children of wrath), nor because they are less guilty than others . . . nor because they die in infancy (for that they die in infancy is not the cause but the effect of God's mercy toward them), but simply because God in His infinite love has chosen them in Christ, before the foundation of the world, by a loving foreordination of them unto adoption as sons in Jesus

64. Ibid., 59–60.

65. Ibid., 82.

66. Unlike MacArthur, Nash does not place the emphasis for his view upon the inability of infants to damn themselves, but uses this as a subordinate argument to unconditional election. Ibid.

> Christ. Thus, as they hold, the Reformed theology has followed the light of the Word until its brightness has illuminated all its corners, and the darkness has fled away.[67]

Warfield's summary should not be taken to imply that the current Reformed position is without its problems. It is not. There remain darkened corners into which the light of the Word has yet to shine. In a critique of Warfield's view, which is really the same as the standard Reformed position on election, David Clark questions the arbitrary nature of affirming the election of *all* infants but only of *some* adults, and in so doing he resuscitates the Remonstrant complaint made at the Synod of Dort. We read, "The position that all infants who die are saved and only some adults are saved can be held, given the gracious view, only by conceding that God's decisions are based on arbitrary grounds. Is the salvation of all infants who die held for sentimental reasons?"[68] Here we come full circle back to the argument based on sentiment. Clark concludes, "Someone taking Warfield's gracious view, however, cannot hold that God acts reasonably in saving all infants who die and only some adults."[69] To this we could add the salvation of the severely mentally disabled and thus intensify Clark's complaint of arbitrariness.

I believe Clark is correct to challenge Warfield's Classic Calvinist arguments in this way. However, such criticisms are misplaced when they do not consider the wider theological commitments that instruct such a view. Here I am specifically thinking of Warfield's and older Reformed views of original sin, imputed guilt, and double election in the line of the scholastic-Westminster theology. Under such a logico-casual scheme as is offered by Reformed scholasticism, the charge of arbitrariness does indeed seem warranted. In addition, the doctrines of original sin and limited atonement, with which such scholastic theology works, are insufficiently coordinated so as to give the impression that the work of Christ for the salvation of infants who die and the severely mentally disabled is merely a general prevenient grace applied to those without

67. Warfield, "The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation," 438.

68. Clark, "Warfield, Infant Salvation, and the Logic of Calvinism," 462. A defence against the charge of arbitrariness in God's election is offered by Berkouwer, *Divine Election,* 53–101. It may also be noted that Article I/17 of the Canons of Dort was devised precisely to answer this charge of arbitrariness raised by the Remonstrant Arminians of the day, specifically for the children of believers. See Venema, "The Election and Salvation of the children of Believers Who Die in Infancy," 60–64.

69. Clark, "Warfield, Infant Salvation, and the Logic of Calvinism," 462.

recourse to the ordinary means of grace. This would be a consistently Arminian doctrine of salvation! A reconsideration of a Reformed doctrine of original sin from the perspective of an Evangelical Calvinism is thus in order to more robustly address the destiny of infants who die and the severely mentally disabled.

REFORMING THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN

No doctrine of salvation can ignore the doctrine of original sin. This is especially true within the context of Reformed theology which adheres to a broadly Augustinian view of sin and the generally held view of imputed guilt. The primary aspect of sin in Genesis is its entrance into the world. Genesis 3 presupposes certain things. First, the primitive perfection of humanity is assumed. This perfection enabled Adam and Eve to fulfill the purpose for which God had made them. Humanity was not originally sinful. The biblical account does not leave open the possibility for us that sinfulness is a necessary predicate of humanness. A good God cannot create a bad human. Scripture teaches that the world was a good place, with good people in it. Sin was alien, intrusive, and foreign.

Second, Genesis 3 presupposes the fall of Satan into sin. The story of humanity's fall is precipitated by sin already in the Devil, who comes personally to Eve and addresses her. Whether the speaking serpent is literal or figurative, for our purposes we must agree that sin did not originate with humanity, although it originated in humankind through a man and a woman.

Third, Genesis 3 presupposes a specific probationary command given by God to Adam. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden with a specific prohibition addressed to them by God, namely the command forbidding them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Whether one accepts the covenant scheme (the covenant of works) or not it is clear that the probationary period involved Adam and Eve in a choice between good and evil, sin and holiness, right and wrong. However, there is more at stake than merely a personal choice. It is clear from the terms of the curse meted out (Gen 3:17–19) that the choice Adam made had profound consequences for himself and *all* humanity after him. Similarly, the curse on Eve in Gen 3:16 had respect to every child-bearing woman after her. Adam and Eve's actions had private and public, personal and community (covenantal)

consequences. But what was the nature of this Edenic probation? John Murray answers:

> The Adamic administration is . . . an administration in which God, by a special act of Providence, established for man the provision whereby he might pass from the status of contingency to one of confirmed and indefectible holiness and blessedness, that is, from *posse peccare* and *posse non peccare* to *non posse peccare*.[70]

Against this backdrop the fall had drastic results. The divine response to Adam and Eve's sin is manifold, and corresponds to the seriousness of the crime of each of the characters. All of Adam's relationships are affected—with himself, with Eve, and with God. There is now enmity between God and his creatures. In addition the woman will have pain in child-bearing, and Adam in his work, and finally, the primitive couple are driven by God away from the garden, and are subject to laws of death and corruption. In its simplest form we may summarize the effect of this original sin by adopting these words from Gary Wills:

> . . . we are hostages to each other in a deadly interrelatedness. There is no "clean slate" of nature unscribbled on by all one's forebears . . . At one time a woman of unsavoury enough experience was delicately but cruelly referred to as "having a past." The doctrine of original sin states that humankind, in exactly that sense, "has a past."[71]

Original sin has two aspects, first; spiritual perversion, pollution, and disintegration, and second; guilt. The first aspect is universally agreed upon; the second is contested in much recent theology.[72] While it is clear that Adam and Eve were guilty before the Lord and had to accept the consequences of their actions, what about their descendants? What lies behind these questions is the specific question of imputation or impartation: Adam, as the first human being, represents every human being morally and legally. This appears to be the simple and uncontested fact from Scripture. Adam's sin may justly and legally implicate all

70. Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray,* 2:49.

71. Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*, 384, cited in Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be,* 198.

72. Whilst a bit dated the following is still a useful survey, McDermott, "Current Theology: The Theology of Original Sin: Recent Developments," 478–512. Cf. Henry, "Original Sin: A Flawed Inheritance," 3–12; and Fitzpatrick, "Original Sin or Original Sinfulness?" 701–17.

Adam's human descendants as a consequence of God's solemn promise to him that if he even touched the tree in the middle of the garden he would die (Gen 3:3). Although the text does not specifically call this a "covenant", it does exhibit the elements of a solemn promise or legal agreement made by God with Adam.

In Paul's theology Adam's sin implicated his descendants. Adam has a relationship to the fallen race parallel to Christ's relation to the redeemed in Rom 5:12–18. Adam's one sin brought condemnation to all generated in the fallen human family (vv. 16, 18). Christ's one sacrifice brings justification to all who have been regenerated in his moral and spiritual family. Adam's representation of all humans is not an arbitrary legal fiction. His legal representation is justified by the fact that each descendant has an Adamic nature not only as human but also as depraved or fallen (John 3:6).

In light of the importance of Rom 5:12–21 for a doctrine of original sin it will pay us to consider it in a little more detail. A reading of Rom 5:12–21 clearly shows two things: first, there is *continuity* between Adam and Christ, and second, there is a very real *discontinuity* between them; thus the relationship between the two is asymmetrical. In light of this we should not expect from this text a perfect symmetry between the two parallel stories.[73]

As we begin to look at this text we may immediately dismiss a few erroneous views from the start. Whatever one may think about the literalness or otherwise of Adam one must take Paul here at face value and on his own terms. For *him* Gen 3 is definitely literal. He is interested in the distinction of epochs. "We may be certain," writes Henry Blocher, "that Paul, in Romans 5, attributed a major role to an individual Adam and to his transgression in the beginning; this is what he meant, regardless of whether it appeals to our sensitivities."[74] The interpreter is tempted to do one of two things: first, loosen the link between Adam and Christ (Pelagianism), or second, tighten it (strict Augustinianism).[75] According

73. See Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 258–75, especially 258–66. Many of Grenz's conclusions are conducive to those of Henry Blocher's and my own which follow.

74. Blocher, *Original Sin*, 64. I am indebted to Blocher's work on original sin as the following will indicate. Blocher has developed his views in the following: Blocher, "The Theology of the Fall and The Origins of Evil," 149–72.

75. C. E. B. Cranfield and James D. G. Dunn are examples of the first move; Augustine, William Shedd, and John Murray of the second. See further in ibid., 65–76.

to the first view all sin because they have *inherited* a bent towards sinning from Adam. They inherit from Adam a *propensity* to sin but are guilty because of their *personal* sins. This may be referred to as *original death* over *original sin*. In reply, Paul's emphasis in Rom 5.18ff. on the one act of disobedience, which constituted all human beings sinners, is so insistent that the idea of Adam simply as the remote cause of sin's introduction fails to match the force of Paul's language.

According to the second view, by virtue of Christ's headship, and of our being "in him," his righteousness, which is alien to us, is reckoned (*imputed*) to our account. Similarly, by virtue of Adam's headship, and of our being "in him," his sin and guilt, which are alien to us, are reckoned (*imputed*) to our account. This position argues that *immediate imputation* of sin and guilt is the possession of every human being. This position requires "death" in Rom 5 to be primarily *spiritual*—death as inflicted before birth, before conception even, in a logical sense at least. However, natural death seems prominent in Paul's mind in vv. 13, 14, not spiritual death (1 Cor 15 would seem to confirm this). This classical Calvinist account fails to adequately account for v.14 that "they did not sin after the likeness of Adam's transgression", and the emphasis in Reformed thought that all sinned in Adam.

Both interpretations above appear to share a disjunctive presupposition: *either* we are condemned for our own sins (and Adam's role is reduced to that of a remote fountainhead, losing much of its significance), *or* we are condemned for Adam's sin (and the equity of that transfer is hard to see). Now, what if this "either/or" were misleading? What if there was a third possibility intended by Paul? French Reformed theologian Henry Blocher presents an alternative hypothesis. In short it is as follows: The role of Adam and of his sin in Rom 5 is to make possible the imputation, the judicial treatment, of human sins. His role thus brings about the condemnation of all, and its sequel, death. Why? Because if there is no law and sin is left undefined, then it cannot be made the object of judgment. But God sees each individual in Adam and through Adam, in the framework of creation. Therefore God sees all sins as committed against the Genesis 2 command, as grafted on to Adam's sin in Eden. How did the punishment—death—reach all persons on the basis of their actual sinning? It reached them in the same way that death entered Adam's person: since all were in Adam, the head, sin could be reckoned to them according to the terms of the Adamic covenant, as offshoots of his sin.

In other words, Adam represents all humanity as its federal or legal head. But all humanity is not simply condemned due to Adam's *personal* sin. Rather, Adam, representing humanity, sinned and thus made it lawful for God to punish all human sin according to a violation of the covenant he made with Adam (humanity). We are punished for our own sinful actions but we are punished on the basis of the covenant which Adam, on behalf of us all, entered into. Adam is thus our covenant representative, not our substitute in the garden in committing a personal sin. In this regard Mohler and Akin argue that:

> [T]he Bible teaches that we are to be judged on the basis of our deeds committed "in the body." [2 Corinthians 5:10] That is, we will face the judgment seat of Christ and be judged, not on the basis of original sin, but for our sins committed during our own lifetimes. Each will answer "according to what he has done," [2 Corinthians 5:10] and not for the sin of Adam. The imputation of Adam's sin and guilt explains our inability to respond to God without regeneration, but the Bible does not teach that we will answer for Adam's sin. We will answer for our own. But what about infants? Have those who die in infancy committed such sins in the body? We believe not.[76]

What is important for Paul in Rom 5:12–21 is not the power of Adam's headship but the more pervasive power of Christ's work in redemption! A "refrain" is evident throughout this text holding it all together: "how much more" vv. 9, 10, 15, 17; and "overabundance" in v. 20, to say that Christ is a more powerful head than Adam ever was. Since justification has been established in chapters 3 and 4 of Romans (hence Rom 5:1, "Being therefore, justified . . ."), the issue is now that of *assurance*, of the fullness of the life to come as a sure inheritance. And the grand parallel with Adam serves as the grounding of that assurance: if Adam's role was so dramatically efficacious in securing the condemnation of all people in him, and therefore the reign of death, *how much more* is Christ's work efficacious for those in him, leading to eternal life!

The hypothesis Blocher proposes easily accounts for the imperfect symmetry between the two "heads" of humanity. Adam's role is more firmly cast than in the "looser" reading of Romans 5; at the same time,

76. Mohler and Akin, "The Salvation of the 'Little Ones.'" The fact that the guilt of Adam is imputed to all people is still an inherent problem in this position, however, making it ultimately unacceptable.

the unattested and difficult thesis of the imputation of an *alien* (another's) personal sin is avoided—without downplaying the tragic realism of the Augustinian-defined human predicament.[77] For Blocher, and I agree, Paul is not really talking about "inherited" sin. A better reading, truer to the text, would be to recognize that "the notion of inherited sin is not really in view here. Paul is talking about the universal nature of sin in that it affects all peoples."

If a federal headship is adopted then many of the objections raised so far do not apply. The doctrine preserves individual distinction. If God appointed Adam as the head of the human race, his acts rightfully counted as those of the entire community. That all members should stand under the obligation to pay the legal debt agrees with legal principle and practice, biblical and otherwise. The problem with the federal view is that the imputation of alien *guilt* strains the sense of justice in most readers.

I find the forensic or federal view of Adam's headship to be the most acceptable in the face of the biblical testimony. However, I do not find classical Calvinist statements of this position entirely satisfactory. It appears obvious to me that there is something different about Adam and me—the first temptation came *to* Adam. But our plight is different. Because sin lies at the core of our being, temptation already has a foothold *within* us (cf. James 1:14). According to Ephesians 2:1 we, unlike Adam, are born "dead in our trespasses and sins." Adam's sin has tainted us and permanently tainted the world. It has altered us and our world. But we are also told that we sin when we commit evil actions. So how do we rethink the problem of original sin within the confessional boundaries of Reformed theology?

A first observation has to be that we must not succumb to the rigid separation of the biological versus the spiritual, seeing them as mutually exclusive. After all, we are a synthesis of biology and Spirit: we are spiritual down to our toes, or to our instincts; we are living bodies right up to our mental activities, our longings, our loves.[78] If original sin involves both, it is human indeed. Contemporary studies in both theology and biology show convincingly that while there is a distinction there is no separation between bodily processes and personal freedom. This

77. Blocher, *Original Sin*, 80.

78. Humans are, in fact, bodies of their souls and souls of their bodies. The language comes from Karl Barth and Thomas Torrance. See Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Forsyth Torrance,* 37–39.

brings us back to the issue of original sin: while we have a sinful nature does that mean we are automatically guilty before God *for the sin Adam personally committed?* In sympathy with Blocher I agree:

> With all due respect to the Reformed theology to which I am indebted, I have been led to question the doctrine of alien guilt transferred—that is, the doctrine of the imputation of all of Adam's own trespass, his act of transgression. If Scripture definitely taught such a doctrine, however offensive to modern taste, I should readily bow to its authority. But where does Scripture require it?[79]

This position is entirely consistent with Calvin's when he argued in the *Institutes* that depravity is passed along from Adam to his progeny, while guilt is not. What is passed along "is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed 'original sin,' meaning by the word 'sin' the depravation of a nature previously good and pure."[80] Calvin continues:

> . . . Adam, by sinning, not only took upon himself misfortune and ruin but also plunged our nature into like destruction. This was not due to the guilt of himself alone, which would not pertain to us at all, but was because he infected all his posterity with that corruption into which he had fallen.[81]

As has been pointed out before, such a mediated notion of inherited sin reads Romans 5 differently.[82] Being born sinners is not a penalty, or strictly speaking the result of transference, but simply an existential, spiritual fact for human beings since Adam. As a result of what Adam did humanity is no longer innocent but rather, born in sin and thus find themselves hostile to an all holy God. How is this fair? It is fair because of the covenant structure found within the narrative of Genesis 1–3. When God enters into covenant relationship with a people it is at his prerogative and initiative—and it is so for both the original covenant partner and their descendants. This is the right the Creator has over the creation. Calling upon Genesis 5:3 for support, the mandate and blessing of Genesis 1:28 is that the male and female should multiply, thus fathers

79. Blocher, *Original Sin*, 128.

80. Calvin, *Inst.,* 2.1.5.

81. Ibid., 2.1.6.

82. See the discussion by Allen, *Reformed Theology*, 97–98.

beget children in their own image and likeness. Since procreation is not merely biological, but is also human, it is no wonder that the determinant of the father's condition should be reproduced in the child's. Fallen Adam multiplies as fallen, and "what is born of the flesh is flesh." It is a fact that generates tragic consequences, but a rightful fact nevertheless.

Adam's headship involves a deeper privilege than ordinary fatherhood. It includes the dignity of defining what it means to be human. Being human *after the fall* is equivalent to bearing Adam's image (1 Cor 15:49)—this is how we come to be, and to be what we are. We are created "in Adam"; hence the impossibility of the blessing of divine fellowship remaining on Adam's descendents after he had rebelled. Grace is now, as always, necessary for the *visio Dei*.

How is this view different from the standard Reformed "federal" view? In reply we may note: it sees no necessity for the idea that alien guilt was transferred (that is, Adam's *particular* act was reckoned to the account of all). It emphasizes loss or deprivation in a relational framework (which immediately entails guilty depravity), since the rightness of the consequences "from Adam to his seed" is more easily perceived from that angle. Adam's legal capacity as the representative of the race is buttressed by a wider conception of his headship (biological and spiritual).

THE VICARIOUS HUMANITY OF CHRIST

As we have had occasion to see, common to classic Arminianism, classic Calvinism, and much Baptist thought, explicit, conscious faith is required for one to be saved. In the case of the Arminian and Baptist, a supposed innocence of all infants is proffered, or for classic Calvinists, the faith of the believing parents is substituted for that of the infant through baptism. But both positions are incorrect biblically and theologically. What is required is a middle position in which faith is required but not the faith of the individual as an independent work. A *vicarious* faith is necessary—but who's? Parents' or a sponsor's faith for Baptism is not sufficient any more than it is with an adult or believer, if it were then it would be a work and thus Pelagian. Only the faith of Christ is sufficient, for adult/believer and infants and the severely mentally disabled. Thus the vicarious humanity and faith of Christ is necessary. According to Christian Kettler:

> Let me carefully define what "vicarious" means in terms of the vicarious humanity of Christ. Unfortunately, it can often mean to some people, "pseudo" or "false," as in the father getting a "vicarious" thrill from his son's accomplishments as an athlete . . . In that way it is "false," not real . . . . [But] the vicarious humanity of Christ does not mean that Christ's humanity is unreal. Quite the contrary! It does mean that the vicarious humanity of Christ speaks of the deep interaction between Christ's humanity and our humanity at the level of our being, the ontological level. So the atoning work of Christ is neither simply a means by which we are declared righteous by God, nor simply a demonstration of God's love. It is both, but much more, in the sense of God desiring to recreate our humanity at the deepest levels, addressing our needs and fears, our doubts from within our very being.[83]

Pressing the issue further, we can at least suggest that if regeneration precedes conversion, as all forms of Reformed theology assert, and one is saved by the faith of Christ as Galatians 2:20 and many other such texts witness to, and election is Christologically conditioned, then infants who die are saved on the same basis as adults and thus they do not require baptism to be saved (baptismal regeneration), nor to be included in the covenant community, the vicarious humanity and faith of Christ is sufficient for the salvation for all the elect—for infants who die, the severely mentally disabled, and adults. Contrary to Dispensational theology and certain articulations of Covenant theology, the basis of salvation is always the same for all people at all times.

It was Thomas Torrance who, throughout his lengthy career, sought to bring the doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ back to its central place in Reformed thought, when, for instance, he wrote:

> However, it is still this emphasis upon the vicarious humanity of Christ which we lack. If the emphasis is upon the fact that God has acted for us in Christ, then our human response is by way of cooperation, because an act on the part of man is required in addition to and complementary to the act of God. Hence Protestantism often teaches, or tends to teach, that we are all co-workers and "co-redeemers" with Christ and God! But for Calvin and Knox that error is obviated in their teaching about the vicarious and priestly nature of the human Jesus. It was in the Eucharist that their stress upon that came out most strongly. It was through union with Christ in his vicarious humanity nourished in sacra-

83. Kettler, *The God Who Believes*, 6.

> mental communion that the concern of the Reformed Kirk with human and social care in the lives of people was grounded.[84]

In a previous work I have argued that it is not only for theological reasons but also pastoral that we need to bring back the doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ.

> According to Torrance the vicarious humanity of Christ means that only Christ's response is ultimately valid. All other responses to God are excluded because Christ is the ground and the norm of our response to God. Torrance makes this clear throughout his essay "The Word of God and the Response of Man" where we read, "In the Gospels we do not have to do simply with the Word of God and the response of man, but with the all-significant middle term, the divinely provided response in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ." The humanity of Christ occupies a unique place in which he is the exclusive representative and substitute in all our relations with God, "including every aspect of human response to Him; such as trusting and obeying, understanding and knowing, loving and worshipping" . . . Because the incarnate Son of God is fully human (*enhypostasis*), his response personalises ours. In all of his soteriological activity: "Jesus Christ is engaged in personalising and humanising (never depersonalising and dehumanising) activity, so that in all our relations with him we are made more truly and fully human in our personal response of faith than ever before."[85]

According to Evangelical Calvinism, the vicarious humanity of Christ means that only Christ's response is ultimately valid. All other responses to God are excluded because Christ is the ground and the norm of our response to God. The humanity of Christ occupies a unique place in which he is the exclusive representative and substitute in all our relations with God, "including every aspect of human response to Him; such as trusting and obeying, understanding and knowing, loving and worshipping."[86] Christ is the exclusive response of God to humanity and the exclusive response of humanity to God. Torrance can write: "therefore when we are justified by faith, this does not mean that it is our faith that justifies us, far from it—it is the faith of Christ alone that justifies us

84. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 45.

85. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 76. Citing Torrance *God and Rationality*, 145; and *The Mediation of Christ*, 64–66.

86. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 145.

. . ."[87] The incarnate Son of God is the only proper response of humanity to God and God to humanity. In short, "We have no speech or language with which to address God but the speech and language called Jesus Christ."[88] Only through a participation in his person and work can men and women achieve union and communion with God.[89] For infants who die and for the severely mentally handicapped, this means that salvation is certain on the same grounds as for the rest of the elect.

Thus only an Evangelical Calvinism has the necessary resources to adequately address such a theologically rich and pastorally pressing issue such as the one before us.

WHAT OF THE SEVERELY MENTALLY DISABLED?

So far we have been examining the case of the eternal destiny of infants who die and I have tentatively concluded that they go to be with the Lord in blessedness. Now we turn our attention to a class of peoples which, I believe, conform to the same theological conditions as infants who die—the severely mentally disabled. Severe mental disability may be defined as cognitive disability, those with severely diminished mental capacity, the mentally defective, or the older nomenclature, the mentally retarded. By such terms is meant those human persons who's IQ may be measured as 25/20 and below.[90] When we take into consideration social as well as medical factors we may further define the severely mentally disabled with recourse to the category of the "moral imbecile." The moral imbecile is one who lacks the kind of abstract thinking that can make connections, follow out consequences of their actions, or learn from past mistakes. Thus the severely mentally disabled persons of which this essay speaks of are unable to make rational decisions, and are unable to account for moral right and wrong. They live in a world of their own

87. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 159–160.

88. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 78–79.

89. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 145; 153–64; and *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 88–89.

90. Standard IQ tests are divided into various sections: 140+ genius; 120–140 very superior; 110–100 superior; 91–100 normal/average; 80–90 dull/feebleminded; 50–70 moron; 20/25–50 imbecile; below 20/25 idiot. It is the last category of "idiot" alone that I am calling the severely mentally disabled. On the emergence of the IQ test and its various adaptations see Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome,* 57–60.

seemingly affected only by external physical stimuli, and often not even that.[91]

To further define the severely mentally disabled we may appeal to the definition of such given by the World Health Organization's 1985 report *Mental Retardation: Meeting the Challenge*.[92] According to this report mental retardation involves four levels—mild, moderate, severe, and profound. Furthermore, the definition includes two essential components: intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Of these four levels only 1.5 to 5 percent of all individuals classed as "retarded"[93] are found in the category of the profoundly mentally retarded.[94] It is these individuals I refer to as the severely mentally disabled.[95]

Scripture is largely silent on the presence or destiny of the mentally disabled. "In fact, researchers who set out looking for a biblical theology of disability will be quickly disappointed because our contemporary notions of disability are for the most part foreign to the worldview of the biblical authors,"[96] writes Amos Yong. He continues to add that "the Bible does not say anything about what we today call intellectual disability."[97] That is not to say Scripture is of no use to us in formulating a theological account of and response to disability. Scripture does speak of people with physical deformities and disabilities, notably it speaks of

91. This definition approximately corresponds to the definition of "idiot" given by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon, authors of the modern (Binet-Simon) IQ test. Henry H. Goddard further refined this test which became the standard in the field of mental retardation: "idiots" were those with a mental age of fewer than two years; "imbeciles" ranged from two to seven years; "proximates"/"morons" were ages eight to twelve. See Scheeringberger, *A History of Mental Retardation*, 144.

92. World Health Organization and Joint Commission on International Aspects of Mental Retardation, *Mental Retardation: Meeting the Challenge*.

93. Ibid., 9. The profoundly mentally retarded according to WHO are those with IQ scores less than 20 and thus correspond to the earlier category of "idiot" according to the Binet-Simon test.

94. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, 4, offered a definition of the severely mentally disabled as "an instance of arrested mental development . . . [who thus] lingers in the region of intellectual childhood." This suits our definition here very well.

95. In addition to biological, cognitive, and genetic factors, I am aware of the social, cultural, economic, and political constructions of human disability. These do not concern us in this essay, however.

96. Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 20.

97. Ibid., 21. For a survey of Scripture and disability see further in ibid., 21–27; and in a more comprehensive treatment in a forthcoming volume by Yong provisionally entitled *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*.

the deaf, the blind, the lame, and the dumb/mute. While a biblical theology of disability is not my goal here we may simply say that in Scripture human disability is abnormal, even though those with disabilities come from the Creator God (Ex 4:11). Such severe disability is often portrayed as a result of the fall and corruption of the world. In the Old Testament it is linked to uncleanness (although even here see the later reversal of the eunuch in Isa 56:3–5), or being unfit to serve in priestly service and other activities to do with the religious cult (Lev 21:16–23).

Given these restrictions, however, Scripture does make it clear that all people, even those with disabilities, are equal image bearers of God and thus deserve respect and dignity, care and inclusion (Lev 19:14; Job 29:12–17; Jer 31:8; Zeph 3:19). The fact that disabilities are not God's final intension for people is implicit in the healing narratives of the New Testament. This is evident in Jesus' healing of the blind, the lame, and the deaf (cf. Luke 5:17–26; 9:37–43; 13:10–13; 18:35–43).[98] In a world in which God has, for whatever reason, allowed disabilities to exist, however, lessons of hospitality, service, grace, love, acceptance, and friendship are embodied in faith communities which are made of people from the "centre" and those of the "margins."

After defining the severely mentally disabled and briefly noting the biblical texts which speak to it, I think it a fair conclusion that the same issues that have to do with the destiny of infants who die are bound up with the destiny of the severely mentally disabled. Both categories of persons are in the same position, it would seem to me. Thus the theological principles which apply to the one group, infants, apply also to the other group, the severely mentally disabled. We need not say more about the salvation of the severely mentally disabled here, then, given there is nothing more to add.

CONCLUSION: ECCLESIAL INCLUSION AND SACRAMENTS

There is one substantial difference between infants who die and the severely mentally disabled, however, and it is the obvious fact that the severely mentally disabled are not dead; they are with us and are part of our lives, our families, and our communities of faith. A fundamental

98. In his helpful survey of Scripture, Yong concludes, "Clearly, then, 'disability' in the New Testament functions rhetorically to call attention to negative realities such as sin, evil spirits, spiritual degeneration, and moral reprobation" (*Theology and Down Syndrome*, 27).

issue thus arises, if we are to consider the severely mentally disabled as "saved" by the gracious election of God then what status should we accord them within the church? More specifically, should the severely mentally disabled be baptised and take communion? This question has not been asked before in the literature, at least not to my knowledge. Amos Yong has addressed these issues in relation to the mentally disabled in general, but not to the severely mentally disabled. Thus he approvingly cites Joseph Bernardin who seeks to find signs that would indicate the readiness of a developmentally delayed person to receive the sacraments. Included in his helpful list are desire, relationships, and a sense of the sacred; however that may be made manifest.[99] In short, cues are taken from the disabled person of an interrelation, interpersonal, and intersubjective kind.

Such indicative signs as are noted above are all well and good in general but do not apply to the *severely* mentally disabled as we have defined them here for such persons exhibit no such signs of the sacred or of any outward response to God. At this point I can accept the position of Beach, who, in a recent essay argued that,

> Any doctrine of infant salvation which bypasses the necessity and fullness of Christ's redemptive work is contrary to Scripture and must be rejected. I also argue that all humans—whether young or old, mentally handicapped or of sound mind—reach eternal blessedness only through Christ's full redemptive work on the cross and the Spirit's renewing operation.

He then provides what is most important at this point in my own argument: "From that perspective, I also argue that the sign of salvation may not be separated from the thing signified, which is to say, if one participates in the reality of salvation he or she must receive the sign of that salvation—the mark of baptism."[100] And later we read:

> This means, then, that if any class of children are recipients of the divine promise of salvation, such that they are saveable and in fact saved only by the saving operation of Christ and his Spirit, then they are likewise the proper subjects of the sign and seal of that salvation, baptism.[101]

99. Bernardin, *Access to the Sacraments of Initiation and Reconciliation for Developmentally Disabled Persons*, 9, cited in Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 210.

100. Beach, "Original Sin, Infant Salvation, and the Baptism of Infants," 51.

101. Ibid., 76.

In the ecclesial contexts of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Presbyterianism, the issue of baptising the severely mentally disabled is a mute one, given their commitment to paedobaptism. But in Free Church and especially Baptist ecclesial contexts, of which I am involved, where believer's baptism is the norm, the issue of baptising the severely mentally disabled is as acute as is the issue common to all ecclesial traditions of whether or not to administer the Eucharist to the severely mentally disabled.

If the arguments proffered in this essay so far are accepted, then Beach is correct to insist on the baptism of all those considered part of the family of faith—young and old, men and women, and the severely mentally disabled. This is obviously not an argument for paedobaptism as only infants who die are considered elect of God and saved. Thus, before their death their elect status is uncertain. Baptismal regeneration has never been acceptable to Reformed or Baptist theology and thus it is not valid to appeal to this in the case of infants or adults who may be severely mentally disabled. The only legitimate consequence of the theology developed so far is to baptise, if their parents or guardians are willing (normally believing parents), the severely mentally disabled and, also if their parents or guardians allow it, to allow them to receive the Eucharist. As means of grace Baptism and the Eucharist feed and nourish the recipient and these acts, speak powerfully to the inclusion of all God's children in the covenant of grace by grace through faith, not of works (Eph 2:8, 9).

Reformed and Baptist communities are thus on solid theological ground to offer Baptism and Communion to the severely mentally disabled, thus showing their inclusion in the family of God, the Body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Saints. Such acts of inclusion, grace, and fellowship would provide a powerful sign of the reality of the Kingdom of God, breaking into the structures of fallen reality, pointing powerfully to the salvific work of the triune God of grace. To exclude such persons from our central ecclesial acts is, I suggest, a violation of the very meaning of what it means to be the Church–Baptist, Presbyterian, or otherwise.

Bold infidelity turn pale and die;
  Beneath this stone four sleeping infants lie.
Say, are they lost or saved?
  If death's by sin, they sinned
For they are here.
  If heaven's by works in heaven they can't appear.
Ah, Reason, how depraved.
  Revere the Bible's sacred page.
The knot's untied:
  They died; for Adam sinned.
They live; for Jesus died.[102]

102. This epitaph was found on a grave in St Andrews' Churchyard in Edinburgh, Scotland. Cited in Baker, *A Dispensational Theology,* 465.

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