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*Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology*  
by Edwin Chr. van Driel (review)

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and “the ability to act as referee.” Among other sources, Daley refers to canons 6 and 7 of the Council of Nicaea, which affirm the practical authority (*exousia*), prerogatives (*presbeia*), and “consequences of rank” attending episcopal leadership in general, and Rome’s in particular.

None of this is to say that McPartlan’s argument about the primarily “communion configuration” (82) of the papal office is wrong. It simply calls for a widening in his account of Eucharistic presidency (and, by implication, of universal jurisdiction) to include the often very difficult practical task of judging whom to admit to the Church’s communion and whom to exclude. In other words, the practice of Eucharistic presidency must include the practice of excommunication—which, on a large scale, can implicate entire jurisdictions. This, in part, is what is meant by the office of the keys, given to be exercised by all bishops, but chiefly and in a unique way by Peter’s successor, the first among equals, servant of the servants of God. It goes without saying that all such judgements must concretely express the charity and solicitude proper to Christ’s redemptive office. Here the burden of McPartlan’s book is spot on. For it is only thereby that the papacy, in addition to exercising its other responsibilities and prerogatives, will continue to serve the truth of the Gospel and the unbreakable unity of the one true Church. N-V

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**Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology** by Edwin Chr. van Driel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 194 pp.

AT LEAST FROM THE TIME of Rupert of Deutz, Edwin Chr. van Driel observes, Christian theologians have considered the place of redemption from sin amongst the motives for the Incarnation. Responses have divided into two camps, or “families”—infralapsarians and supralapsarians. He summarizes those positions as follows: for infralapsarians, “the divine will to become incarnate logically follows the divine will to allow sin,” while for supralapsarians, “the divine will to become incarnate logically precedes the divine will to allow sin” (4–5). According to van Driel, Western theology has favored the former; that is, until a resurgence of supralapsarian positions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology. He therefore selects three

supralapsarian resurgents as his primary interlocutors: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Isaak August Dorner, and Karl Barth. By engaging these theologians, he seeks both to “draw up the supralapsarian family tree” (5) and to develop his own supralapsarian arguments.

Van Driel utilizes two analytical distinctions in his investigation. First and foremost, he distinguishes between the three ways in which God is related to the world: creation, redemption, and consummation. These serve as three distinct “bases” for supralapsarian arguments. Each of his interlocutors exemplify one of these three “bases.” Next, van Driel distinguishes between two conceptions of the recipient of the Incarnation: (1) human nature and (2) human persons. This distinction, he contends, is obfuscated by all his supralapsarian interlocutors, resulting in Christological incoherence. These distinctions are not, then, merely analytic, but are put to constructive use throughout *Incarnation Anyway*.

Following an Introduction, van Driel gives a dense and impressive sketch of Schleiermacher’s supralapsarian “argument from redemption” (per the first aforementioned distinction). Schleiermacher’s argument, rather tersely put, runs as follows: given that humans are nonreciprocally related to God (i.e., absolutely dependent), the Incarnation cannot be *in response to* sin, but must be logically prior to sin. Van Driel objects, however, that this solution is internally incoherent: “The same notions of absolute dependence and divine causality that lead Schleiermacher to his supralapsarianism lead him to hold a form of divine omnipotence that excludes any alternative for reality as it is” (31). And yet, it is essential to Schleiermacher’s doctrine of redemption that any human being is possibly the Redeemer, given that sin is in no way essential to human nature. Van Driel, once he has exerted tremendous effort to save Schleiermacher from this dilemma, concludes that it is finally intractable. Thus Schleiermacher’s supralapsarian argument fails.

Dorner’s supralapsarian argument is grounded in his doctrine of creation, which van Driel finds curious. “Dorner’s root intuition is that the relationship between God and human beings is one of free, mutual love and embrace” (34). Surprisingly, Dorner derives from this premise a series of necessary arguments for creation and the Incarnation. Van Driel presents objections to Dorner’s claimed necessity, but still derives from Dorner a series of less dubious arguments for the supralapsarian conclusion and objections to the infralapsarian conclusion.

Like Schleiermacher’s, Dorner’s supralapsarian arguments entail problematically necessary divine operations *ad extra*, thereby raising problems for both Christology and the divine will. For these reasons, van Driel argues, “the argument for supralapsarian incarnation should

not be embedded in the doctrine of creation [or redemption] but in eschatology [i.e., consummation]" (62). With this observation, van Driel transitions to the primary interlocutor for the supralapsarian position he will develop: Karl Barth.

Two full chapters are devoted to Barth, one to Barth's "supralapsarian narrative," the other to his "supralapsarian ontology." By "supralapsarian narrative," van Driel intends Barth's reading of Scripture under the matrix of election. Election, which is primary in the order of divine decrees, is eschatological. Thus, Barth's argument is "based" in eschatology or consummation. Moreover, Barth's insistence that Jesus Christ is "subject and object" of the divine election entails that "incarnation stands at the very beginning of God's relating to what is not God" (81)—at least, so long as the assertion can be rendered coherent.

The following chapter, on Barth's "supralapsarian ontology" analyzes the aforementioned assertion that Christ is both subject and object of election in order to clarify Barth's supralapsarian argument from consummation. Here he gives a penetrating analysis of three possible interpretations of Barth's deeply disputed assertion, distinguishing his own position from that of Berkouwer, Brunner, and McCormack. He follows this with an extended reflection on two "objects" of election: (1) human nature in Christ and (2) *das Nichtige*. Van Driel is critical of both accounts of the "object" of election, insofar as Barth (1) fails to retain an adequate account of human agency in the eschaton and (2) assumes "creational entropy."

Following the Barth chapters, van Driel rehearses and sharpens his case for grounding supralapsarian arguments in eschatology. He then presents a series of objections to what he dubs infralapsarian *felix culpa* arguments, as well as Robert Grosseteste's supralapsarian arguments in *De Cessatione Legalium*. While he reiterates his preference for Barth's eschatological approach, he moves his second analytic distinction to the fore: Barth's supralapsarian Christology suffers insofar as it conceives the recipient of the Incarnation as human nature rather than human persons.

Finally, van Driel supplies three arguments of his own in support of supralapsarian Christology, which lack the aforementioned detriments of the other accounts. Very briefly, van Driel argues from the eschaton's "abundance" vis-à-vis, in van Driel's terminology, the proton that the means whereby abundance comes (i.e., Christ) cannot be contingent upon sin. I take it that this argument is built upon the premise that abundance orders divine motives. Second, he argues from Scripture that the beatific vision ("seeing God face to face") is a sensible, embod-

ied vision. If sensible vision is part of beatitude, and beatitude cannot be contingent upon sin (*per* the first argument), then the Incarnation is not contingent upon sin. Finally, God has revealed his desire for friendship with creatures, and friendship entails making oneself as available to the other as much as possible. Since this desire for friendship is prior to the need for redemption, his supralapsarian conclusion follows.

*Incarnation Anyway* retrieves a neglected question in Christian theology. Van Driel demonstrates both the importance of the question and the remarkable range of theological considerations a response elicits. Moreover, he draws attention to several related yet distinct modern attempts to secure the primacy of Christ. He isolates the central theological and conceptual issues at stake concerning each thinker with remarkable precision, and consistently works to render his interlocutors' positions as coherent and compelling as possible. Van Driel argues with impressive rigor.

But *Incarnation Anyway* is not without its weaknesses. Perhaps its greatest weakness stems from a lack of engagement with the medieval debates. For instance, van Driel asserts that the medieval conversation was problematic insofar as it was speculative, addressing the counterfactual question, "Would God have become human if human beings had not sinned?" (164). But of course, his putatively modern criticism of medieval speculation was raised much earlier by Bonaventure and accepted by Scotus, and this after both Albert and Thomas issued serious worries about the counterfactual posing of the question. Such oversights are unfortunately frequent, and above all marred by the insistent use of the supralapsarian and infralapsarian categories of later Reformed dogmatics. This prevents van Driel from seeing, for instance, that neither the modern arguments he recites nor his own final arguments engage Scotus's Christological argument for the so-called supralapsarian conclusion.

In spite of this, van Driel's *Incarnation Anyway* is a real achievement. Even the shortcomings prove the point: the question of the divine motive for the Incarnation is both demanding and central to Christian theology. As van Driel demonstrates, there is ample reason to hope that it will once again be taken up and given serious reflection by theologians today.

N V

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