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在基督教神学里，没有比三一神论更基本更重要的教义了。“神学”这个词本身就是由希腊文theos(直译为上帝）和logos(直译为话或论述）组成。神学是有关上帝的论述，关于上帝的话，这就意味着它涉及对上帝的认识。神学是关于上帝的教义，我们在神学中所关切的是有关上帝的真知识。

上帝论是根基，因为系统神学中研究的其他每个课题都与上帝论相连，并且只有在与之相关的情况下才能被理解。圣经是上帝的话；人是按神的形象所；罪就是违背神的律法；救赎是上帝的拯救工作；教会是上帝的子民；末世论是上帝的终极目的，等等。如果我们的上帝论偏差了，那么其他的一切都会偏差。这就是为什么当前福音派和改革宗神学家之间关于上帝论的争辩(译注[[1]](#footnote-0))是极为重要的。这些争辩并非是关乎非基要的事情，也不是关于第二或第三教义(译注[[2]](#footnote-1))的争辩。这些争辩关乎全能上帝的本质，就是创造宇宙以及其中一切万物的那一位，祂向我们显明祂自己，救赎了我们，召我们在圣灵和真理中来敬拜祂。一个错误的上帝论会导致偶像崇拜。因此这些争辩中的利害关系，再大不过了。

走进詹姆士·多尔扎（James Dolezal）

多尔扎博士是凯恩大学的一位神学教授。他从威斯敏斯特神学院获得博士学位，撰写的博士论文是关于上帝的纯一性的教义。该论文以《上帝无部分：上帝的纯一性以及上帝的绝对性的形而上学》（God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness）为标题发表（Pickwick, 2011）。这是一部杰出的作品，因为其起源于神学论文，也是一部技术性和学术性相当强的作品。2017年7月，多尔扎博士的第一部畅销书，《上帝的本体：福音派神学和古典基督教神论的挑战》（All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism），由宗教改革遗产出版社（RHB）出版。我有幸拜读了出版前的手稿，出版后我也为此书写了简单的总结评论。我第一次读这个手稿的时候，仅仅几页就能清楚知道这本书将要掀起一些波澜。为什么？因为在这本书里，多尔扎认为：当代许多福音派和改革宗的神学家们，不管是有意识或无意识的，已经拒绝和（或）错误地重新定义古典基督教神论（classical Christian theism）的元素。换句话说，他们已经拒绝了或者错误地定义了基督教上帝论里面的元素。这是一项严重的指控，并且若是准确的，这是一个不容忽视或置之不理的毁灭性的指控。多尔扎不仅认为许多的福音派和改革宗神学家们已经摈弃了古典基督教神论，他也举出了一些名字。因为这些名字中有一些是当今福音派世界中非常受欢迎并且非常有影响力的人物，所以这本书无可避免地会激怒一些人。

走进约翰·傅瑞姆

傅瑞姆博士在几个神学院教授神学大约50年，如今退休了。傅瑞姆在很多作品中对上帝论作了大量的论述，包括他的《系统神学》（P&R，2013）和《上帝论》（P&R, 2002），这是他的“主权神学”系列的四卷之一。傅瑞姆也是《没有别神：对开放神论的回应》（No Other God: A Response to Open Theism）一书的作者(P&R, 2001)。傅瑞姆博士深受他学生的爱戴，并且被他之前的同事以及评论家所尊敬。事实上，许多他之前的学生、同事，甚至评论家，都为《用爱心说诚实话》（Speaking the Truth in Love）这本书撰稿。该书是为纪念他所作的长达1200，于2009年出版。傅瑞姆是当今最受欢迎并且最有影响力的改革宗神学家之一。然而，他也是被多尔扎所指名的，对古典基督教神论持有明显错误的人之一。那不是一件小事。如果多尔扎错了，那他就是曲解了一个重要神学家的著作。如果多尔扎是对的，那么傅瑞姆在过去几十年里的广泛影响和受欢迎会对教会的上帝论产生一个极大的负面的神学影响。毫不意外的，傅瑞姆就多尔扎的书写了一篇很长的回应，题目是：《福音派的经院哲学：关于詹姆斯·多尔扎的〈上帝的本体〉一书的思考》（Scholasticism for Evangelicals: Thoughts on All That Is In God by James Dolezal）。在读了多尔扎和傅瑞姆之后，我确信傅瑞姆的回应中有一些严重的问题需要提及。然而，在更仔细研究傅瑞姆的回应之前，我们需要理解有关多尔扎所关切的问题以及他所提出的指控。

《上帝的本体》（All That Is in God）

就某种意义说，多尔扎的书没有什么特别之处。大部分只是重述了教会最初几个世纪以来正统基督徒所相信、认同并且教导的上帝论——他们相信上帝论是由上帝自己在圣经中启示的。这是在教会的伟大信条中所能找到的合乎圣经的上帝论的重述。此外，同样与我们的目的相关的是，它是被十六和十七世纪改革宗神学家所捍卫的合乎圣经的上帝论，也是在那些世纪改革宗信仰宣言中所发现的教义。比如，《威斯敏斯特信条》在以下的语句中简明扼要地阐明了古典基督教上帝论：

第二章：论上帝与三位一体

1. 上帝是独一的，又真又活的；在其存有和完全上都是无限的 ，祂是至纯之灵，无形、无体、不动情 、不变、无量、永恒、不可测度、全能、全智、至圣、最自由、最绝对，祂按照自己不改变和至公义的旨意行作万事，为的是荣耀祂自己；祂极其慈爱，有恩典，有怜悯，恒久忍耐，有丰盛的慈爱和信实，赦免罪孽、过犯和罪恶；祂赏赐那殷勤寻求祂的；同时，祂的审判最为公义，极其可畏；祂憎恶诸恶，断不以有罪的为无罪。
2. 上帝拥有一切生命、荣耀、良善和福分，是本乎祂自身，出于祂自身；惟独祂本乎自己，并对自己而言是完全自足的，不需要祂所造的任何受造之物，也不从他们得任何荣耀，却只在他们里面，藉着他们，向着他们，并在他们身上彰显祂自己的荣耀；祂是万有惟一的根源，万有都是本于祂，依靠祂，归于祂；祂对他们有至高的统治权，藉着他们，为着他们，并在他们身上行祂自己所喜悦的事。万有在祂眼前都是赤露敞开的；祂的知识是无限的，无谬的，不依赖任何受造物；所以，对于祂而言，没有什么事物是偶然的，或不确定的。祂的一切预旨、作为和命令都是至圣的。天使、世人和其它所有受造之物，都当照祂按其美意所吩咐的敬拜祂，侍奉祂，顺服祂。
3. 在上帝的统一性中有三个位格，即圣父上帝，圣子上帝，圣灵上帝，同实质、同权能、同永恒 。圣父既非受生，亦非被发出；圣子在永恒中为父所生，圣灵在永恒中由父和子发出。

若要去定义和辩护这份信仰宣言中古典上帝论的所有内容，这显然远远超出了本文的范畴。这样的尝试会将这一篇文章变成一部多卷本 。对于那些对古典基督教上帝论的圣经和神学案例感兴趣的人来说，十六和十七世纪改革宗的伟大的神学著作现在还很容易读到，更不用说二十和二十一世纪的著作了。主要是多尔扎的书中并没有提到任何最近几个世纪以来不为正统基督徒所相信和捍卫的东西。然而，他的书在二十一世纪初却是有争议的。为什么呢？什么变了呢？

正如多尔扎所解释的，我们的神学已经变了。更具体来说，我们的上帝论已经变了，并且多尔扎认为这种变化不是变得更好。因此，他的书首先定义了古典基督教神论和他所称为“共生主义神论(theistic mutualism)”之间的基本区别。他认为“共生主义神论”已经渗入到福音派和改革宗神学中，渐渐取代了古典基督教神论。但是，什么是古典基督教神论和共生主义神论？这两种上帝论之间有什么区别？这里，我们只能总结一下多尔扎著作中更充分阐述的主要观点。像他所解释的，古典基督教神论的特点是“坚定地致力于维护神性的自存性，不变性，不动情性，纯一性，永恒性以及神圣位格之间本质的统一性”。根本的以及不可违背的信仰是：上帝存有的任何方面都不是从祂自身之外获得的，也绝不是以任何方式导致的（《上帝的本体》，页1）。例如，我们在以上所引用的的《威斯敏斯特信条》的第二章中看到了这种教义的阐述。

共生主义神论，与古典基督教神论相比，趋向于拒绝许多历史上所定义的教导。正如多尔扎所解释的，“为了把上帝描绘得更具有关联性，持共生主义神论的人坚持，上帝与祂的受造物之间包含在一种真正的互让（give-and-take）关系里。”（页1-2）。有一种趋势是拒绝或者从根本上重新定义上帝的属性，比如上帝的纯一性，永恒性，不变性，和不动情性。举例来说，约翰·傅瑞姆显然不满意传统的“不变性”教义。他写道：

神学家有时将上帝的后悔(relenting，译注[[3]](#footnote-2))描述为“拟人化”。那样的描述中有一定的真实性，因为上帝的后悔是历史中上帝与祂子民之间的相交的一部分，在这样的互动中上帝的作为与人的行为非常相似。（系统神学，376-77）

傅瑞姆接着拒绝了古典神论中对神圣永恒性，不变性和纯一性的理解：

“但是历史的进程会改变，并且作为在历史中的代理人，上帝自己在改变。在星期一，祂想要一些事情发生，在星期二，想要别的事情发生。祂今天忧伤，明天又喜悦。在我看来，拟人化对这些叙述的描写来说太弱了。在这些叙述中，上帝不仅仅是时间中的代理人。祂也真的在时间里，随着别的改变而改变。并且我们不应该说祂的非时间性的、不变的存在比祂在时间里改变的存在更真实，正如拟人化这个词所暗示的。两者都是真实的。（《系统神学》，页377）。

这在本质上不同于古典基督教神论。例如，在威斯敏斯特信条里所阐述的古典神论。

多尔扎继续他的解释：共生主义神论致力于对上帝和世界单义的（univocal） 思考和解说。因此认为上帝以某种人的行为方式与这个世界互动，即使是在一个更广泛的层面上。（页2）多尔扎观察到这些观点已经被过程神学家们以最强的形式所表达出了，被形形色色的开放神论者们以一种稍微弱的形式表达出来了。多尔扎认识到，保守福音派和改革宗的神学家所教导的共生主义神论正好驳斥了过程神学(process theology)和开放神论(open theism)。然而他认为，尽管他们与过程神学和开放神论有所不同，他们仍共享一个相似的神性本体论（页3-4）。他们都允许在上帝的存有上有某种程度的改变和（或）二元性。傅瑞姆在以上引用的语句中表达这种改变以及存有的二元性，并且似乎意识到多尔扎所说的要点。他说：“我的方法表面上与过程神学相似，过程神学也承认上帝存有的两种方式，即超越的（transcendent ）和临在的（immanent），有时称为上帝的“原始的（primordial）”和“必然的（consequent）”属性。（傅瑞姆，上帝论，页572，強调是我加上的）。值得强调的是，傅瑞姆说的相似只是“表面的”。他清楚地指出过程神学是不合乎圣经的，并注意到它与他自己观点之间的差异（页572-73）。我们不能低估这种差别。它们是真实的。然而，多尔扎观察到既然两者都声称“上帝存有的两种形态”，他们也有令人担忧的相似性。多尔扎的著作的剩余篇章致力于捍卫古典基督教神论的各种元素，以对抗共生主义神论的批判 。

我赞同多尔扎对古典基督教神论的委身。**古典神论是合乎圣经的上帝论，这就是为什么在我们的信条和信仰宣言中能够找到上帝论。**也是为什么从早期教会一直到二十世纪正统基督教神学家所捍卫的教义。我也相信，多尔扎令人信服地论证了当代许多福音派和改革宗神学家所教导的上帝论已经偏离了古典神论。我认为这一点甚至在傅瑞姆对多尔扎的回应中也很清楚。

**福音派的经院哲学：傅瑞姆对多尔扎的回应。**

傅瑞姆对多尔扎著作的回应值得详细研究，因为它揭示了许多严重的误解。我不计划对他的每一行话作出回应，但是有几个重大问题不容忽略。

**传说中的经院哲学妖怪**

傅瑞姆回复中有一个问题与它标题中的第一个词有关，就在他回复的第一个词本身：“经院哲学”。

首先，傅瑞姆对“经院哲学”的定义是让人混乱的。他起初说这是“一种神学”。然后他谈到“经院哲学的方法和结论”、“经院哲学的教义特点” 和“经院哲学传统中所强调的上帝论的各个方面” 。在后来的篇幅中，傅瑞姆谈到“古典基督教神论”（即经院哲学的方法）。简而言之，经院哲学通常和一种特定的教义内容等同，尤其是古典基督教神论的内容。其次，纵观这篇回复，读者观察到一个不太隐晦的尝试，将“经院哲学”等同于一些坏的或危险的东西（比如，只会以罗马天主教为终点的滑坡）。简而言之，他似乎想要将经院哲学与古典基督教神论等同，同时也暗示着经院哲学是通往罗马的一条危险的滑坡。

（至少）有两点需要说明。首先，经院哲学与方法有关，而不是关于特定的神学内容。它是一种需要仔细和精确定义、区分以及论证的方法，并且它不总是采取相同的形式。路德宗的神学家约翰·格哈德（Johann Gerhard）所采用的学术方法与改革宗神学家阿曼杜斯·波莱诺斯（Amandus Polanus）所采用的方法在某些方面有所不同。并且他们两个对各自方法的应用又在某些方面与弗朗西斯·图伦丁（Francis Turrentin）的使用不同。无论如何，学术方法并不决定，也不暗含任何特定的神学内容。它可以也已经被用来教导罗马天主教的神学内容、改革宗的神学内容、路德宗的神学内容、甚至是非神学性的内容。这一点已经在过去几十年被反复论证过（要得到一个有帮助而简明的解释，请参考理查德·穆勒Richard Muller，《后宗教改革时期改革宗教义》Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics，第一册，34-37页）。

第二，将经院哲学等同于罗马天主教的观点（或者是通往罗马天主教的滑坡）的想法是不真实的和误导人的。首先，罗马天主教使用了其他的方法来构建他们的神学（比如，教理问答）。其次，改革宗和路德宗的神学家作为十六和十七世纪罗马天主教的劲敌，也是唯独圣经的最坚定的倡导者，他们使用了经院哲学式方法。这些稻草人版本的“经院哲学”根本没有理由继续延续下去。尽管有堆积如山的证据表明经院哲学的真实本质，但继续推动这些扭曲，似乎是一种恐吓策略，旨在吓跑更正徒。

在这种对经院哲学的误解中明显的混淆，为系统神学工作中历史神学的必要性提供了一个明确的论点。如果一个人的系统神学将要涉及到对经院哲学或者其他历史悠久的观点的讨论，那么他需要良好的历史神学（基础）来保证这些观念有准确的定义。对历史神学的轻视可以导致一个人持续的错误并且攻击“稻草人”（假想敌）。

共生主义神论的共识?

傅瑞姆的回复中最令人困惑的论述之一（同时也是最讽刺的），是位于他文章的开头。他写道：

多尔扎认为“共生主义神论”在今天以及近代福音派作家中非常普遍。他援引了例子，比如，唐纳德·麦克劳德（Donald MacLeod，页21）、詹姆斯·奥利弗·博斯韦尔（James Olivver Buswell ，页23）、罗纳德·纳什（Ronald Nash，页23）、唐纳德·卡森（Donald Carson，页24）、布鲁斯·韦尔（Bruce Ware，页24）、巴刻（James I. Packer，页31）、阿尔文·普兰廷格（Alvin Plantinga，页68）、约翰·范伯格（John Feinberg）、J·P·莫兰德（JP Moreland）、威廉·莱恩·克雷格（William Lane Craig ，页69）、凯文·范浩沙（Kevin Vanhoozer ，页72）、莱恩·李斯特（Ryan Lister，页92）、斯科特·奥利芬特（Scott Oliphint，页93），对，还有约翰·傅瑞姆（页71-73，92-95）。古德恩因着他在三位一体中，坚持维护“永恒的功能性从属论（eternal functional subordination）”后来加入这一群体内（132-33）。这一群体将今天福音派中许多重要的思想家汇集到一起，我有荣幸成为其中一个，尽管我并不在凡事上赞同他们所有人。我想，多尔扎应该比他现在更尊重这一群体的人。反对这样的共识难道一点也不令人畏惧吗？

同样，至少需要提出两点。首先，多尔扎的书我读了不止一次，我没有发现有任何不敬之处。显然，他相信在这些作家的著作中所教导的上帝论是错误的，但是，将分歧和批评等同于不尊重是错误的。加尔文在圣餐的教义上不同意路德的观点，但是我却没发现有任何证据表明加尔文不尊重路德。如果共生主义神论是不符合圣经的（我相信它是不符合的），那保持沉默就会是对基督和祂的教会的不尊重。第二，考虑两千年来古典神论的支持者的名字，这有些讽刺。我们不仅仅是说奥古斯丁和阿奎那。我们是在讨论所有正统改革宗神学家的共识和信仰告白。这些人中许多是教会历史上最重要的神学家。我们能不问傅瑞姆他自己的问题吗？反对这样的共识难道一点都不令人畏惧吗？

事实上，它（上述内容）指出了一个关于傅瑞姆的观点与威斯敏斯特信仰告白在这个课题上的教学关系的问题。威斯敏斯特信仰告白清楚地表述了古典基督教神论，包括神性不可变的教义。根据推测，作为一个在美洲长老会（PCA）被按立的牧师，傅瑞姆赞成威斯敏斯特信仰告白。但是一个支持傅瑞姆所表述的看法的人怎能赞成威斯敏斯特信仰告白的第二章内容？这是两种不同的关于上帝的教义。

对幻影说(Docetism)的指控

傅瑞姆的回应中有一个严重的问题，那就是他暗示多尔扎（以及所有的古典基督教神论者）提倡一种关于基督道成肉身、受死和复活的幻影说的观点。在他的回复中解释了为什么他反对古典神论对神性不变性的理解。傅瑞姆写道：

“基督在时间和空间中与我们同在，担当我们的罪，并且在祂里面给我们新的生命。祂来成为了我们盟约的主。这就是福音，并且我决定不要接受任何形而上的假定，那会对这种上帝与人之间的盟约关系有所妥协。”

这是一个奇怪的声明，因为古典基督教神论者已经讨论了几个世纪，（关于）道成肉身与不变性的教义如何和为何不矛盾。他们中没有人相信神性的不变性损害了道成肉身的现实或上帝与人的盟约。值得提醒我们的是：那些发展出圣约神学的神学家正是相信并捍卫神性之不变性的古典神论者。

傅瑞姆继续解释说，在他看来，上帝与他百姓的关系涉及到上帝里面的“一种改变”。然后他说，“但如果我们说上帝只是似乎在这些语境中改变，那么，我们必须也要说，上帝只是似乎进入了时间中，上帝的儿子只是似乎成为人（这就是教科书上对幻影说的定义），祂只是似乎死在十字架上并且复活。难道我们要这样说吗？”同样的，这假定了道成肉身需要某种神性的可变性，以及确定神性的不变需要幻影说式的道成肉身。然而，道成肉身并不意味着圣子的神性转变为人性，好像一只毛毛虫蜕变成一只蝴蝶。也不意味着神性倒空祂所有的属性，好像基督虚己论（kenotic Christology）所教导的那样。我不相信那是傅瑞姆所相信的或者有意要传达的。但是当‘道成肉身’在傅瑞姆的方法中成了反对神性之不变性时，那么人就会开始疑惑他到底是什么意思。当然，古典基督教神论从来没有否定其中任何一个而是为两者辩护，迦克墩信经的定义守卫着神性的不变性和道成肉身的现实。正统基督徒一直会为两者辩护，因为两者都是圣经所教导的。

傅瑞姆继续说了一些令人困惑的东西。关于多尔扎的看法，他说：

这暗含着耶稣并没有“字面意思的”成为人、受苦，并且为我们而死。祂并不是“字面意思的”从一个童贞女而生，他没有行出“字面意义的”神迹。当然，多尔扎承认：这些信心的教义中有“一些是真实的东西”，但是基督教历史上的每一个异端都愿意这么说。

这些语句暗示了多尔扎他自己说，关于基督的道成肉身、生于童贞女、受苦以及受死的教义，只是有“一些真实的东西”，它们并非是字面意义上发生的事情。然而，多尔扎并没有这样说。在第20页，傅瑞姆指出的“一些是真实的东西” 这个短句的来源，多尔扎正 在谈论拟人化的语言。为避免误解，有必要引用多尔扎所写的全部内容。

那些赞同共生主义神论温和版本的人通常愿意否认圣经对上帝的字面或恰当的说法：当圣经说到上帝拥有身体时（比如，诗篇18：7-9；89：13；以赛亚书65：5），在空间中移动性的行走时（比如，创世记11：5；出埃及记3：8），或甚至改变祂的想法时（比如，出埃及记32：14）。但当圣经说到上帝经历着关系、情感或代理的改变时，我们被告知，这些改变恰恰是在上帝里面，并且如果不是这样，那么这段经文就毫无意义，甚至不真实。但事实并非如此，古典神论者只是把这些看作是圣经的拟人化（或拟人）语言的又一例证，启示了关于上帝一些真实的东西——比如祂真正与罪的敌对，祂满有怜悯的恩慈或者祂对历史事件护理性的引导——随着时间的推移而处于某种形式（即改变），而这些与祂的丰富存有是不相称的。这种不恰当的或者非字面形式的属性形式并不会掩盖关于上帝的真理，就像说到上帝的右手或者鼻孔不会隐晦祂的真理一样。（20-21页）。

注意多尔扎是如何以及在哪里使用了这个词汇“一些真实的东西”，并且将之与傅瑞姆所说他使用的方式进行比较。傅瑞姆写道：“当然多尔扎承认关于信心的教义有“一些真实的东西”。傅瑞姆将这个词汇“一些真实的东西”从它的语境中拿出来，并且用它来暗示多尔扎否定了字面所说的基督的道成肉身，从童贞女所生、受难、以及受死。然而，当多尔扎使用这个词汇“一些真实的东西”时，他并不是在讨论“这些教义”（基督的道成肉身、从童贞女所生、受难，并且受死）。因此，傅瑞姆的评论就极其误导人了。在接下来的段落中，同样关于多尔扎所说的误导性的观点继续着，当傅瑞姆问：“为什么我们应该从字面意义上相信上帝是不改变的，但是不相信字面意义上在耶稣里道成了肉身？”错误的困境重复出现在傅瑞姆的回应中，并且清楚的暗示着，多尔扎和其他的古典神论者选择不变性而否定道成肉身的事实。然而，无论是多尔扎或者任何其他的古典神论者都没有否认道成肉身的事实或者祂的生、死以及复活的历史事实。

圣经主义和历史神学

这里还有一些其他的问题可以解决，包括但不限于对于三位一体的本质属性和位格属性的古典基督教教义的明显误解，以及隐含的向社会性三位一体（social trinitarianism）的移动。但是我想要以傅瑞姆回应中显示的神学方法的问题作为结束。我相信那关于神学方法的问题是我们在当今福音派和改革宗神学中所见证的许多神学偏差的基础。

傅瑞姆在他的作品中的许多地方已经明确表明（比如，《用爱心说诚实话》，第17页），他跟随的是约翰·慕理（John Murray，1898-1975）的神学方法，约翰·慕理是在威斯敏斯特神学院任教36年之久的系统神学教授 。傅瑞姆说慕理的方法基本上是释经法。傅瑞姆在这个问题的看法清晰地阐明在他的论文《为一些近乎圣经主义的事情争辩：对神学方法中的唯独圣经和历史的反思》（In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism: Reflections on Sola Scriptura and History in Theological Method）。他在那一篇论文中的主要目的是呼吁神学家在他们的著作中归回到唯独圣经。这本身是一个值得赞赏的目的，并且反映在改革宗经院主义神学家的著作中，他们教导说圣经是属乎外在的知识论原理（principium cognoscendi externum），是神学中认识的外在准则。圣经注释实在是需要的，为的是用它来作为神学中认识的外在准则。并且这样的注释是这些神学家所作的。所有的更正教徒都热忱地拥护唯独圣经的教义，但是在理解它的方式上有显著的不同。

方法论问题的重要性在于傅瑞姆回应的背景中，但它不止在一处凸显出来。傅瑞姆在对多尔扎的回应将近结尾的时候，写道：

像（理查德）穆勒，他（多尔扎）试图使系统神学完全从属于历史神学。但是这是本末倒置的。我们可以从历史中先于我们的神学家那里学到很多，但是唯独圣经要求我们通过直接研读圣经来检验他们所说的一切。

这里没有空间来讨论出现在傅瑞姆和穆勒之间的争论。足以说明的是，这些争论很显然使傅瑞姆对于历史神学非常谨慎，这一点的证据已经在关于“经院哲学”一词含义的混乱中被注意到。为了坚持傅瑞姆所维护的关于经院主义的本质的主张，人们必须对过去几十年历史神学家所作的相关研究一无所知。然而，回顾过去，尝试决定经院哲学实际是什么，并非使系统神学置身于历史神学之下。它是要确保，当我们在系统神学中讨论经院哲学时，我们能准确地定义它 。教会历史中的任何其他的神学观念，也是如此。

没有什么比讨论唯独圣经本身更与之直接相关的了。如果一个人要诉诸于十六世纪唯独圣经的原则，那么这个人必须努力明白十六世纪唯独圣经的教义是什么。通过回顾和研究十六、十七世纪的改教家和神学家们——换句话说，通过研究历史神学，我们发现唯独圣经并非是当代圣经主义的倡导者自信断言的那样。此外，通过学习历史，人们发现所有形式的异端都通过诉诸于他们声称的宗教改革中唯独圣经的原则来为他们错误的教义辩护。因此，神学并不是仅仅援引某一章节的经文就可以攻击历史正统的圣经教义这样简单，这‘对当代思想家毫无意义’。苏西尼派那样做了。我们可以做得更好。

在《祂从天上来寻她》（From Heaven He Came and Sought Her）的序言中（Crossway, 2013）, 大卫·吉布森（David Gibison）和乔纳森·吉布森（Jonathan Gibson）对“圣经主义者”和“合乎圣经”的人之间进行了一个有用的区分（38页）。唯独圣经这一原则的原倡导者们是非常合乎圣经的，但他们不是现代意义上的或者傅瑞姆在他论文中描述的圣经主义者。例如，唯独圣经原则的最原始的倡导者都是古典基督教神论者。他们都在正统教义的范畴内工作。他们毫不困难地教导从圣经中推断出来的必然结果的教义（比如，神性之纯一性 ）。他们还批判地鉴了过去神学家的著作（比如，托马斯·阿奎那Thomas Aquinas）。因为他们谨慎地使用经院式的方法，他们的神学丰富深刻地明了圣经真理，滋养了世代的教会。拒绝他们的方法论，并且将他们唯独圣经的观念替换成一种激进的个人圣经主义，对系统神学和教会来说通常都是灾难性的。

结论

十多年前，有许多著作批判那些自称是福音派的人，其实他们在倡导开放神论：否定和重新定义——除了其他事情外——还有上帝的无所不知。当然，这些开放神论者，宣称他们的观点是更忠实于圣经的。今天，其他的福音派神学家（他们中许多著书反对开放神论者）正在否定并且重新定义上帝的其他属性，包括上帝的纯一性、不变性和不动情性。我不相信在多尔扎著作中提到的任何人当前公开地在教导开放神论 ，但是他们肯定在提倡一种危险的神论。从一个地方移动到另一个地方不需要太大的推力。

詹姆斯·多尔扎的书是一本重要的书，值得称赞的是，他愿意承受他的论点必将造成的压力。他在这本书里说了一些需要说的话。在二十和二十一世纪的福音派和改革宗神学中出现了一个戏剧性的转变，这个转变使得来自保守和认信传统的神学家不受惩罚地采用和教导从前只被那些在信仰的边缘或在信仰的边界之外的人所提倡的教义。这是一个危险的情形。我推荐多尔扎出版的这本书。

我不知道约翰·傅瑞姆是否会读到我的回应。但是很有可能他的一些学生会读到。我想要他们知道我是怀着一种“铁磨铁”的动机来写下这些的。我对傅瑞姆没有任何个人的敌意。几年前我和他互通的小信件总是很亲切。我不希望他或者那些和他持一样观点的人读到对这些观点的批判时会感到激动 ，但是关乎上帝论的不是小事 ，而我们没有人，包括傅瑞姆，是完全无误的。傅瑞姆提出重要的问题并且挑战了古典上帝论。但是我们正统的信心先辈们早在几个世纪之前就意识到这些挑战了，他们对此提供了忠于圣经的 、有见识的答案，我们能否仔细思考并且使这些答案更加清晰，从而澄清古典 教义？当然可以。但是我们不能摈弃古典基督教神论，而用一直在变换的神学的新兴观念来代替它。

当值得信任的神学家们拒绝了已经被教会历史中每一位正统的基督徒，包括改革宗唯独圣经原则的拥护者们所相信、所告白、所教导的合乎圣经的上帝论的教义时，那有些话就不得不说 。古典基督教神论不是先前世代的神学家们凭空发明的。这个教义是基于仔细考察圣经及其必然的含义。每一个能想到的反对意见都被考虑过了，并且现在仍有数千页的文献来解释和捍卫这一圣经的教义。基督徒最好重新去认识圣经中关于上帝论的丰富教义。唯独荣耀归于神！

http://www.reformedbeginner.net/unlatched-theism-an-examination-of-john-frames-response-to-all-that-is-in-god-2/

Unlatched Theism: An Examination of John Frame’s Response to All That Is in God

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There is no doctrine in Christian theology more fundamental or more important than the doctrine of the triune God. The very word theology is a combination of the Greek word theos, which is translated “God,” and the word logos, which can be translated “word” or “discourse.” Theology is a discourse about God, a word about God, and that means it involves the knowledge of God. Theology is the doctrine of God, and our concern in theology is the true knowledge of God.

The doctrine of God is fundamental because every other subject studied in systematic theology is connected to the doctrine of God and understandable only in relation to it. Scripture is the Word of God. Man is created in the image of God. Sin is a transgression of the law of God. Redemption is the salvific work of God. The church is the people of God. Eschatology is the final goal of God. And so on. If our doctrine of God is off, everything else will be off. This is why the current debates among evangelical and Reformed theologians regarding the doctrine of God are profoundly important. These are not debates over nonessentials. These are not debates over secondary or tertiary doctrines. These debates involve the nature of God Almighty, the One who created the universe and everything in it, who reveals Himself to us, who redeemed us, and who calls us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. A false doctrine of God results in idolatry. The stakes in these debates, therefore, could not be any higher.

Enter James Dolezal. Dr. Dolezal is a professor of theology at Cairn University. He received his Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary, writing his dissertation on the doctrine of divine simplicity. The dissertation has since been published under the title God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness (Pickwick, 2011). It is an outstanding work, but also a very technical and academic work because of its origin as a dissertation. In July 2017, Dolezal’s first popular-level book, All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism, was published by Reformation Heritage Books. I had the privilege of reading the manuscript prior to publication, and I also wrote a brief summary review of the book after it was published. The first time I read the manuscript, it became abundantly clear within only a few pages that the book was going to create some waves. Why? Because in this book Dolezal argues that a number of contemporary evangelical and Reformed theologians, whether wittingly or unwittingly, have rejected and/or wrongly redefined elements of classical Christian theism. In other words, they have rejected and/or wrongly redefined elements of the Christian doctrine of God. That is a serious charge, and if accurate, a devastating one that cannot be ignored or brushed aside. Not only does Dolezal argue that many evangelical and Reformed theologians have abandoned classical Christian theism, he also names names. Because some of these names are the names of very popular and influential figures in the contemporary evangelical world, it was inevitable that this book would ruffle some feathers.

Enter John Frame. Dr. Frame is now retired after teaching theology at several seminaries over the course of an almost fifty-year career. Frame has written extensively on the doctrine of God in a number of works, including his Systematic Theology (P&R, 2013) and The Doctrine of God (P&R, 2002), one of four volumes in his Theology of Lordship series. Frame is also the author of No Other God: A Response to Open Theism (P&R, 2001). Dr. Frame is loved by his students and respected by his former colleagues and critics. In fact, many of his former students, colleagues, and even critics contributed to Speaking the Truth in Love, the 1,200-page Festschrift published in his honor in 2009. Frame is one of the most popular and influential Reformed theologians writing today, and yet he is one of the men named by Dolezal as holding to significant errors regarding classical Christian theism. That is no small matter. If Dolezal is wrong, he has misrepresented the work of an important theologian. If Dolezal is right, then Frame’s widespread influence and popularity over the course of many decades may have had a profoundly negative theological influence on the church’s doctrine of God. Frame has, not surprisingly, written a lengthy response to Dolezal’s book in an online article titled “Scholasticism for Evangelicals: Thoughts on All That Is In God by James Dolezal.” Having read both Dolezal and Frame, I am convinced that there are some serious problems in Frame’s response that must be addressed. However, before examining Frame’s response more closely, we need to understand the issues that concern Dolezal as well as the charges that he has made.

ALL THAT IS IN GOD

In one sense, there is nothing remarkable about Dolezal’s book. Much of it is merely a restatement of the doctrine of God believed, confessed, and taught by orthodox Christians from the earliest centuries of the church onward—the doctrine of God they believed to be revealed by God Himself in Scripture. It is a restatement of the biblical doctrine of God found in the great creeds of the church. Furthermore, and equally relevant for our purposes, it is the biblical doctrine of God defended by the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is the doctrine found in the Reformed confessions of those centuries. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, clearly and concisely states the classical Christian doctrine of God in the following words:

Chapter II: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity.

I. There is but one only, living, and true God: who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

II. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them: He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth. In His sight all things are open and manifest; His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.

III. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding: the Son is eternally begotten of the Father: the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

It is obviously well beyond the scope of this article to define and defend all of the elements of the classical doctrine of God found in this confessional statement. Such an attempt would turn this post into a multivolume book. For those who are interested in the full biblical and theological case for the classical Christian doctrine of God, the great Reformed theological works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not to mention those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, remain readily available. The point is that Dolezal’s book is saying nothing that was not believed and defended by every orthodox Christian up until recent centuries. And yet, his book is a controversial one at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Why? What has changed?

As Dolezal explains, our theology has changed. More specifically, our doctrine of God has changed, and Dolezal argues that this change has not been for the better. His book, therefore, begins by defining the basic differences between classical Christian theism and what he calls “theistic mutualism.” He argues that theistic mutualism has infiltrated evangelical and Reformed theology, gradually displacing classical Christian theism. But what are classical Christian theism and theistic mutualism, and what are the differences between these two doctrines of God? Here, we can only summarize the main ideas explained more fully in Dolezal’s work. As he explains, classical Christian theism “is marked by a strong commitment to the doctrines of divine aseity, immutability, impassibility, simplicity, eternity, and the substantial unity of the divine persons. The underlying and inviolable conviction is that God does not derive any aspect of His being from outside Himself and is not in any way caused to be” (All That Is in God, p. 1). We see this doctrine expressed, for example, in chapter 2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith quoted above.

Theistic mutualism, in contrast with classical Christian theism, tends to reject many of these teachings as defined historically. As Dolezal explains, “In an effort to portray God as more relatable, theistic mutualists insist that God is involved in a genuine give-and-take relationship with His creatures” (pp. 1–2). There is a tendency to reject or radically redefine divine attributes such as simplicity, eternity, immutability, and impassibility. John Frame, for example, is clearly not satisfied with the classical doctrine of immutability. He writes:

*Theologians have sometimes described God’s relenting as “anthropomorphic.” There is some truth in that description, for divine relenting is part of the historical interaction between God and his people, an interaction in which God’s activity is closely analogous to human behavior. (Systematic Theology, 376–77)*

Frame then goes on to reject the classical theistic understanding of divine eternality, immutability, and simplicity:

*But the historical process does change, and as an agent in history, God himself changes. On Monday, he wants something to happen, and on Tuesday, something else. He is grieved one day, pleased the next. In my view, anthropomorphic is too weak a description of these narratives. In these accounts, God is not merely like an agent in time. He really is in time, changing as others change. And we should not say that his atemporal, changeless existence is more real than his changing existence in time, as the term anthropomorphic suggests. Both are real. (Systematic Theology, 377)*

This is radically different from the classical theistic doctrine as expressed, for example, in the Westminster Confession.

Dolezal continues his explanation: “Theistic mutualism is committed to univocal thinking and speaking with regard to God and the world and thus conceives God as interacting with the world in some way like humans do, even if on a much grander scale” (p. 2). Dolezal observes that such ideas have been expressed in their strongest form by process theologians and in a slightly weaker form by open theists of various stripes. Dolezal recognizes that conservative evangelical and Reformed theologians who teach theistic mutualism rightly reject process theology and open theism. He argues, however, that despite their differences with process theology and open theism, they still share a similar divine ontology (pp. 3–4). All allow for some measure of change and/or duality in the very being of God. Frame expresses such change and duality of existence in the sentences quoted above and seems to recognize the point Dolezal has made when he says, “My approach bears a superficial resemblance to process theology, which also recognizes two modes of existence in God, transcendent and immanent, sometimes called the ‘primordial’ and ‘consequent’ natures of God” (Frame, Doctrine of God, p. 572, emphasis mine). It is important to emphasize that Frame says that the resemblance is only “superficial.” He clearly states that process theology is unbiblical and notes the differences between it and his own view (pp. 572–73). We cannot downplay these differences. They are real. Dolezal, however, observes that since both claim that there are “two modes of existence in God,” there are also troubling similarities. The remaining chapters of Dolezal’s book are devoted to defending the various elements of the classical Christian doctrine of God against the criticisms of the theistic mutualists.

I share Dolezal’s commitment to classical Christian theism. Classical theism is the biblical doctrine of God, and that is why it is the doctrine of God that one finds in our creeds and confessions. That is why it is the doctrine defended by orthodox Christian theologians from the early church to the twentieth century. I also believe that Dolezal has demonstrated conclusively that the doctrine of God taught by many contemporary evangelical and Reformed theologians is a departure from classical Christian theism. I think that is made clear even in Frame’s response to Dolezal.

**Classical theism is the biblical doctrine of God, and that is why it is the doctrine of God that one finds in our creeds and confessions.**

SCHOLASTICISM FOR EVANGELICALS: FRAME’S RESPONSE TO DOLEZAL

Frame’s response to Dolezal’s book is worth examining in some detail because it reveals a number of serious misunderstandings. I do not intend to respond to every line of his response, but there are several significant problems that simply cannot be ignored.

The Scholastic Bogeyman

One problem in Frame’s response has to do with the first word in his title and in the first word of the response itself: “scholasticism.” First, Frame’s definition of “scholasticism” is confused and confusing. He speaks of it initially as “a type of theology.” He then speaks of “the methods and conclusions of scholasticism,” “the doctrines characteristic of scholasticism,” and “aspects of the doctrine of God that were stressed in the scholastic tradition.” In a later section, Frame speaks of “‘classical Christian theism’ (i.e. the scholastic approach).” In short, more often than not, scholasticism is equated with a particular doctrinal content, specifically classical Christian theism. Second, throughout the response the reader observes a not-so-subtle attempt to equate “scholasticism” with something bad or dangerous (e.g., “a slippery slope that could end only in Roman Catholicism”). In short, he seems to equate classical Christian theism with scholasticism while also implying that scholasticism is a dangerous slippery slope to Rome.

Two points (at least) need to be made. First, scholasticism has to do with method, not any particular theological content. It is a method that involves careful and precise definition, distinctions, and argumentation, and it doesn’t always take an identical form. The scholastic methodology as applied by the Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard differs in some ways from the scholastic method as applied by the Reformed theologian Amandus Polanus. Both of their applications of the method differ in some ways from Francis Turretin’s use of it. In any case, the scholastic method does not determine or imply any particular theological content. It can be and has been used to teach Roman Catholic theological content, Reformed theological content, Lutheran theological content, and even nontheological content. This point has been demonstrated repeatedly over the last few decades (for a helpful and concise explanation, see Richard Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 1, pp. 34–37).

Second, the idea that scholasticism equals Roman Catholicism (or a slippery slope to Roman Catholicism) is untrue and misleading. In the first place, Roman Catholics have used other methods (e.g., catechetical) in constructing their theology. In the second place, the Reformed and Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who were the strongest opponents of Roman Catholicism and the strongest advocates of sola Scriptura used the scholastic method. There is simply no excuse for the continued perpetuation of these straw-man versions of “scholasticism.” Continuing to push these distortions in spite of the mountains of evidence demonstrating scholasticism’s true nature comes across as a scare tactic intended to frighten Protestants away.

The confusion evident in this misunderstanding of scholasticism provides as clear an argument as any for the necessity of historical theology in the work of systematic theology. If one’s systematic theology is going to involve discussions of scholasticism or any other concept with a long history, one needs good historical theology to ensure that those concepts are defined accurately. A disdain for historical theology can lead one to perpetuate errors and attack straw men.

A Consensus on Theistic Mutualism?

One of the most perplexing (and simultaneously ironic) statements found in Frame’s response is located close to the beginning of his article. He writes:

*Dolezal thinks that “theistic mutualism” (TM) is very common among evangelical writers today and in the recent past. He cites as examples Donald MacLeod (21), James Oliver Buswell (23), Ronald Nash (23), Donald Carson (24), Bruce Ware (24), James I. Packer (31), Alvin Plantinga (68), John Feinberg, J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig (69), Kevin Vanhoozer (72), Ryan Lister (92), Scott Oliphint (93), and, yes, John Frame (71-73, 92-95). Wayne Grudem joins the group later for his adherence to “eternal functional subordination” in the Trinity (132-33). This group brings together many of the most important thinkers in evangelicalism today, and I am honored to be included in it, though I do not agree with all of them on everything. Dolezal, I think, should be more respectful of this group than he is. Is it not even a little bit daunting to stand against such a consensus?*

Again, at least two points need to be made. First, I have read Dolezal’s book more than once, and I do not detect any disrespect. Obviously, he believes that the doctrine of God being taught in the works of these writers is wrong, but to equate disagreement and critique with disrespect is mistaken. Calvin disagreed with Luther on the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, but there is no evidence of which I am aware indicating that Calvin disrespected Luther. If theistic mutualism is unbiblical (and I believe it is), it would be disrespectful to Christ and His church to remain quiet. Second, there is some irony here considering the names of the proponents of classical theism from the last two thousand years. We are not speaking only of Augustine and Aquinas. We are talking about the consensus of all the orthodox Reformed theologians and confessions as well. These were many of the most important theologians in the history of the church. Could we not ask Frame his own question? Is it not even a little bit daunting to stand against such a consensus?

In fact, it raises a question concerning Frame’s view and its relation to the teaching of the Westminster Confession on this subject. The WCF clearly expresses the classical Christian doctrine of God, including the doctrine of divine immutability. Presumably, as one ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America, Frame subscribes to the WCF. But how can one who holds to the views Frame expresses subscribe to chapter 2 of the WCF? These are two different doctrines of God.

Charges of Docetism

A seriously problematic part of Frame’s response is found in his suggestion that Dolezal (and by extension all classical Christian theists) advocates a docetic view of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. In the section of his response explaining why he rejects the classical theistic understanding of immutability, Frame writes:

*Christ came to be with us in space and time, to take to himself our sins, and to bring us new life in him. He came to be our covenant Lord. This is the Gospel, and I determined not to accept any metaphysical premise that compromised this covenantal relation between God and man.*

This is an odd statement given that classical Christian theists have been discussing for centuries how and why the incarnation does not contradict the doctrine of immutability. None of them believed divine immutability compromised the reality of the incarnation or God’s covenants with man. It’s worth reminding ourselves that the very theologians who developed covenant theology were classical theists who believed and defended the doctrine of divine immutability.

Frame continues by explaining that in his view, God’s relationship with His people involves “a kind of ‘change’” in God. He then states, “But if we say that God only appears to change in these contexts, must we also say that God only appears to enter time, that the Son of God only appeared to become man (that is the textbook definition of Docetism), that he only appeared to die on the cross and rise again?” Again, the assumption is that the incarnation requires some kind of divine mutability and that to affirm divine immutability entails incarnational Docetism. However, the incarnation does not mean that the divine nature of the Son transformed into the human nature as a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. Nor does it mean that the divine nature empties itself of attributes, as kenotic Christology teaches. I do not believe that is what Frame believes or intends to communicate, but when “the Word became flesh” is opposed to divine immutability in the way Frame opposes them, one is left wondering what he does mean. Certainly, classical Christian theism has never denied either and has defended both. The Definition of Chalcedon guards both the immutability of the divine nature and the reality of the incarnation. Orthodox Christians have always defended both because both are taught in Scripture.

Frame continues by saying something that is baffling. Concerning Dolezal’s view, he states:

*It implies that Jesus did not “literally” become man, suffer, and die for us. He was not literally born of a virgin. He did not work literal miracles. Of course Dolezal confesses that there is “something true” about these doctrines of the faith, but every heretic in the history of Christianity has been willing to say that much.*

These sentences suggest that Dolezal himself says that there is merely “something true” about the doctrine of the incarnation, virgin birth, suffering, and death of Christ and that these are not things that “literally” happened. However, Dolezal says nothing like this. On page 20, which Frame notes is the source of the phrase “something true,” Dolezal is discussing anthropomorphic language. It is necessary to quote what Dolezal wrote in full to avoid any misunderstanding.

*Those who subscribe to the softer version of theistic mutualism are usually willing to deny that the Bible speaks literally or properly of God when it speaks of Him possessing body parts (e.g., Ps. 18:7–9; 89:13; Isa. 65:5), moving about locomotively in space (e.g., Gen. 11:5; Ex. 3:8), or even changing His mind (e.g., Ex. 32:14). But when the Bible speaks of God as experiencing changes of relation, affection, or agency, we are told that these changes are properly in God and that the text would be meaningless or even untrue if this were not so. But it is not at all obvious that this is the case. The classical theist simply regards these as yet further instances of the Bible’s anthropomorphic (or anthropopathic) language, revealing something true about God—such as His true opposition to sin, His gracious compassion, or His providential guidance of historical affairs—progressively in time and under a modality (viz., change) that is improper to His plenitude of being. Such improper or nonliteral forms of attribution do not obscure the truth about God any more than talk about God’s right arm or nostrils obscures the truth about Him. (pp. 20–21, emphasis mine)*

Notice how and where Dolezal uses the phrase “something true” and compare that to the way Frame says that he uses it. Frame writes: “Of course Dolezal confesses that there is ‘something true’ about these doctrines of the faith.” Frame takes the phrase “something true” out of its context and uses it to suggest that Dolezal denies the literal incarnation, virgin birth, suffering, and death of Christ. Dolezal, however, is not discussing “these doctrines” (the incarnation, virgin birth, suffering, and death of Christ) when he uses the phrase “something true.” Frame’s comment is, therefore, extremely misleading. In the following paragraph, the same misleading idea about what Dolezal is saying continues when Frame asks, “Why should we believe literally that God is changeless, but not that God literally became flesh in Jesus?” The false dilemma appears repeatedly throughout Frame’s response, and the clear suggestion that is being made is that Dolezal and other classical Christian theists choose immutability and deny the reality of the incarnation. However, neither Dolezal nor any other classical theist denies the reality of the incarnation or the historical reality of His life, death, and resurrection.

Biblicism and Historical Theology

There are a number of other problems that could be addressed here, including but not limited to the apparent misunderstanding of the classical Christian doctrine regarding essential properties and personal properties in the Trinity as well as the implicit move toward a social Trinitarianism. But I want to conclude by focusing on the issue of theological method revealed in Frame’s response. I believe that issues related to this theological method underlie many of the theological aberrations that we are witnessing in contemporary evangelical and Reformed theology.

Frame has made it clear in a number of places in his writings (e.g., Speaking the Truth in Love, p. 17) that he follows the theological method of John Murray (1898–1975), professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary for thirty-six years. Frame says that Murray’s method was basically the exegesis of Scripture. Frame’s views on the matter are most clearly expressed in his essay “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism: Reflections on Sola Scriptura and History in Theological Method.” His main goal in that essay is to call theologians back to sola Scriptura in their work. This in itself is a laudable goal and one reflected in the work of Reformed scholastic theologians who taught that Scripture is the principium cognoscendi externum, the external principle of knowing in theology. The exegesis of Scripture is certainly required in order for it to serve as the external principle of knowing in theology, and such exegesis was done by these theologians. All Protestants heartily embrace the doctrine of sola Scriptura, but there are significant differences in the way it is understood.

The significance of the issue of methodology is in the background of Frame’s response, but it comes to the fore on at least one occasion. Near the conclusion of his response to Dolezal, Frame writes:

*Like [Richard] Muller, then, he [Dolezal] tries to make systematic theology totally subordinate to historical theology. But this is to put the cart before the horse. We can learn much from the theologians who have preceded us in history, but sola Scriptura requires us to test everything they say by the direct study of Scripture.*

There is not space to get into the debates that have occurred between Frame and Muller. Suffice it to say that these debates have apparently left Frame very wary of historical theology. Evidence of this has already been noted in the confusion about the meaning of the word “scholasticism.” In order to assert what Frame is asserting about the nature of scholasticism, one has to remain unaware of the relevant research that has been done by historical theologians over the last several decades. Looking to the past, however, in an attempt to determine what scholasticism actually was is not subordinating systematic theology to historical theology. It is making sure that when we discuss scholasticism in systematic theology we define it accurately. The same goes for any other theological concept in the history of the church.

This is nowhere more directly relevant than in the discussion of sola Scriptura itself. If one is going to appeal to the sixteenth-century principle of sola Scriptura, one must make the effort to understand what the sixteenth-century doctrine of sola Scriptura was. By going back and actually studying the Reformers and the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—in other words, by doing historical theology—we discover that sola Scriptura was not what contemporary advocates of biblicism confidently assert that it was. In addition, by studying history, we discover that all manner of heretics have defended their false doctrines by appealing to what they claim is the Reformation sola Scriptura principle. Theology is not as simple, then, as merely quoting a chapter and verse of Scripture and attacking historic orthodox biblical doctrines that “make the least sense to modern thinkers.” The Socinians did that. We can do better.

In their introduction to the book From Heaven He Came and Sought Her (Crossway, 2013), David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson make a helpful distinction between being “biblicist” and being “biblical” (p. 38). The original advocates of the sola Scriptura principle were profoundly biblical, but they were not biblicist in the modern sense or in the sense Frame describes in his essay. The original advocates of the sola Scriptura principle were all classical Christian theists, for example. They worked within the boundaries of orthodox doctrine. They had no difficulty teaching doctrines that were deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence (e.g., divine simplicity). They also critically appropriated the work of past theologians (even Thomas Aquinas). Because of their careful use of the scholastic method, their theologies were rich and profound expressions of biblical truth that nourished the church for generations. The rejection of their methodology and the replacement of their concept of sola Scriptura with a radically individualistic biblicism has been disastrous for systematic theology specifically and for the church generally.

CONCLUSION

More than a decade ago, numerous books were written criticizing self-professed evangelicals who were promoting open theism, denying and redefining, among other things, the omniscience of God. These open theists, of course, claimed that their view was more faithful to Scripture. Today, other evangelical theologians (many of whom wrote against open theism) are denying and redefining other attributes of God, including simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. I am not convinced that any of the men named in Dolezal’s work are currently teaching open theism, but they are certainly promoting an unlatched theism. It will not take much of a push on the door to move from one place to the next.

James Dolezal’s book is an important one, and he should be commended for his willingness to endure the pressure that his arguments will surely generate. He is saying something in this book that needed to be said. There has been a dramatic shift in twentieth- and twenty-first-century evangelical and Reformed theology, a shift that has enabled theologians from conservative and confessional traditions to adopt and teach with impunity doctrines that had previously been promoted only by those either on the fringes of the faith or well outside of its boundaries. This is a dangerous situation, and I commend Dolezal for publishing this book.

I do not know whether John Frame will read my response, but it is likely that some of his students will. I want them to know that I write all of this with an “iron sharpens iron” intent. I have no personal animosity toward Frame. The little correspondence I had with him years ago was always cordial. I don’t expect him or those who share his views to be excited to read a criticism of those views, but the doctrine of God is not a minor issue, and none of us, Frame included, is infallible. Frame has raised significant questions about and challenges to the classical doctrine of God. But our orthodox forefathers in the faith were aware of these challenges centuries ago, and they provided biblically faithful and thoughtful answers to all of them. Can we think through and sharpen those answers and thereby clarify the classical doctrine? Certainly. But we cannot discard classical Christian theism and replace it with ever-changing theological novelties.

When trusted theologians reject the biblical doctrine of God that has been believed, confessed, and taught by every orthodox Christian in the history of the church, including Reformed proponents of the sola Scriptura principle, something has to be said. Classical Christian theism was not something that previous generations of theologians created out of thin air. This doctrine was based on careful study of Scripture and its necessary implications. Every conceivable objection was considered, and thousands of pages still exist explaining and defending this biblical doctrine. Christians would do well to reacquaint themselves with the riches of the biblical doctrine of God. Soli Deo gloria.

https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/unlatched-theism-an-examination-of-john-frames-response-to-all-that-is-in-god/

1. 犹3“要为从前一次交付圣徒的真道竭力地争辩”，既然上帝论是关乎信仰根基的，那么“争辩”——乃至“竭力地争辩”都是基督徒分所应当的；并且，我们确认这种“争辩”——态度上的温柔与立场上的坚定——并不会使教会不合一，因为教会本是真理的柱石和根基。 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. “第二或第三教义”的意思不是系统神学中序列第二或第三的教义，而是指重要性，即第二等级重要/次要、第三等级重要/再次要教义。 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. relenting译“后悔”，参ESV耶15:6和拿4:2；NASB耶20:16和珥2:13。 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)