

## *Soli Deo Gloria* as Pinnacle of Dispensationalism's *Sine Qua Non*

Christopher Cone

In 1957, Charles Ryrie wrote an article published in *Bibliotheca Sacra* entitled, “The Necessity of Dispensationalism.”<sup>2</sup> In the article, Ryrie emphasized the concepts he later referred to as the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism,<sup>3</sup> and in particular he focused on the goal of history as being centered on God’s glory: “the differing dispensations reveal the glory of God as He shows off His character in the different stewardships culminating in history with the millennial glory.”<sup>4</sup> Ryrie’s later iteration of the *sine qua non* (“without which not”) culminated with “the underlying purpose of God”<sup>5</sup> as “the total program of glorifying Himself.”<sup>6</sup> Despite Ryrie’s emphasis on the centrality of God’s doxological purpose, few later dispensational thinkers have echoed the doxological purpose as a necessary and distinctively dispensational theme. It is not unusual for dispensational thinkers to acknowledge God’s glory as the highest end, yet Ryrie stands nearly alone in his assertion of God’s glory as *uniquely necessary* for dispensational thought.

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Christopher Cone, Ph.D., is President and Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Calvary University in Kansas City, Missouri. Christopher can be reached at [ccone@calvary.edu](mailto:ccone@calvary.edu).

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<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, “The Necessity of Dispensationalism,” *BibSac* 114, no. 455 (July 1957): 243–54.

<sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1965), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Ryrie, “Necessity of Dispensationalism,” 248.

<sup>5</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

It seems clear enough that the consistent application of the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic would uncover both the Israel-church distinction *and* the centrality of the doxological purpose. If this be the case, then the significance of including the two conclusions as part of the *sine qua non* is based not on their methodological usefulness, but rather on their explanatory value. The three elements are not altogether methodological. In fact, only one of the three components is methodological. In addition to that methodological factor, one is theological, and the other is teleological.<sup>7</sup> The *methodological* distinctive of dispensational thought is a hermeneutic one (the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic consistently applied). The *theological* distinctive (the Israel-church distinction) is an explanatory litmus test so significant in its practical implications that there may be no single greater theological difference between the dispensational and reformed systems. It is, however, the *teleological* distinctive that undergirds the theological distinctive. Recognizing the doxological purpose through exegetical examination (governed by literal grammatical-historical hermeneutics) highlights a number of theological keys, including the demand for the Israel-church distinction. If Ryrie is correct, the dispensational order of process would follow this pattern:

- (1) Exegete the Scriptures applying a consistently literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic.
- (2) Recognize the glory of God as God's highest end, and that end which governs all other ends.
- (3) Understand key theological distinctions (including the notable Israel/church distinction) observable through the application of a literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic and *confirmable* in light of the doxological purpose which permeates Scripture.

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<sup>7</sup> The order of the three elements were not particularly important in Ryrie's thinking. In a private conversation he confirmed verbally to me that there was no particular reason he listed them in the order he did. Inclusion of the three were vital, as was their flow, but the order (in which they were listed) was not.

The three elements of Ryrie's *sine qua non* flow from methodological, to teleological, to theological, and ultimately from methodological to explanatory. The flow of these three is sufficient to draw a fairly comprehensive and definitive contrast between dispensational and Reformed thought.

Although there is a rich heritage in reformed theology of acknowledging the centrality of the doxological purpose, there has also been a subtle drift toward a more soteriological focus. In contrast to Ryrie's brand of *sine qua non*-based dispensational thought, modern day reformed theology seems practically centered on a redemptive purpose rather than on a doxological one. It is within the distance covered by this drift that Ryrie finds perhaps the greatest contrast *in conclusions* between dispensational and reformed understanding: dispensational thought sees God's glory as *necessary* for understanding the different administrations and economies described in Scripture, while the reformed understanding of Scripture is simply not dependent on the doxological theme. In Ryrie's estimation, simply recognizing a literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic and thus arriving at a complete distinction between Israel and the church is not sufficient to distinguish between dispensational and reformed thought. The great theme of *soli Deo gloria* (to God [be the] glory) is a pivot point that underscores the contrast between the two systems. In light of the reformers' emphasis on *soli Deo gloria* and subsequent drift toward a more soteriological center, if Ryrie is correct about the necessity of the doxological center and its uniqueness to the dispensational understanding, then when it comes to *soli Deo gloria*, dispensationalism is the truer descendant of the Reformation heritage. In this, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, that implication is a significant reminder of the orthodoxy and value of dispensational thought to Christian understanding.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria* in the Biblical Data**

Cataloging the activities of God as recorded in Scripture provides perspective on God's purpose in engaging those activities:

The major works of God revealed in Scripture all serve the doxological purpose.... This doxological purpose is at the center of God's revelation to man, and there is therefore no higher purpose for man but to glorify God ... this doxological purpose is not only man's highest calling, but is the intended design of all that is.... The aim, therefore, of Biblical theology is to communicate the truth about God, to the extent to which God has revealed Himself in Scripture, and for His own doxological purpose. Rightly understanding then the primacy of the doxological design is a necessity without which no consistent and coherent theology can result.<sup>8</sup>

David ascribes to God greatness of deeds, and recognizes that all the nations will worship him (Ps 86:9–10). John narrates a still-yet-future song that will celebrate all the nations fearing him and glorifying his name (Rev 15:4). In a general sense, God's identity and his deeds are worthy of praise. His glory is well deserved. Still, Christians are not left with only a general understanding of his doxological purpose as his highest end, as the Scriptures provide numerous specific examples. In each of these activities of God, his own glory is identified as the highest purpose.

God predestines and calls for the purpose of his glory (Eph 1:4–6). In fact, it was through his glory—or as an expression of it, that he calls believers to salvation (1 Pet 1:3). The ministry of Christ was for his glory and the Father's (John 13:31–32). The earthly ministry and plan of salvation executed by Christ was for his and the Father's glory (John 17:1–5). God is glorified in fulfilling his promises to his people (2 Cor 1:20). Jesus is glorified in the equipping of his people (Heb 13:21). Creation itself declares his glory (Ps 19:1–6). One of the reasons given for the worthiness of God to receive glory is that he is the Creator (Rev 4:11). God is glorified by his truth (Rom 3:7). His name is glorified in saving, helping, and forgiving his people (Ps 19:9). God is glorified in Christ's accepting of his people (Rom 15:7). He is glorified in his entire plan (Rom

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena on Biblical Hermeneutics and Method*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary P, 2012), 15–16.

16:25–27). Christ redeems for his glory (Eph 1:7–12). The Holy Spirit seals for his glory (Eph 1:13–14). The demonstration of mercy unto salvation is for his glory (1 Tim 1:15–17). He is glorified in his people's sanctification (2 Tim 4:18). His strengthening of his people is for his glory (Jude 24–25). He is to be glorified in all the actions of his church (1 Cor 10:31). Thankfulness for grace is purposed for the glory of God (2 Cor 4:15). The fruit of righteousness is for the glory of God (Phil 1:11). His working in his people is for his glory (2 Thess 1:11–12). He is glorified before all time, now, and forever (Jude 24–25). He is glorified in the suffering of his people (1 Pet 4:16). He is glorified when his disciples bear fruit (John 15:8). He will be glorified when every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:11). He is glorified in illness (1 Sam 6:5; John 9:1–3). He is glorified in healing (Luke 17:11–18). He is glorified in death (John 21:19). He is glorified in resurrection (John 11:4). He is glorified in judgment (Rev 14:7). He is glorified in the deliverance of Israel (Isa 60:21, 61:3). He is glorified in the fulfilling of his covenants and the summing up of all things (Isa 25:1–3, 43:20; Luke 2:14; Rom 4:20, 15:8–9; 2 Cor 1:20; 2 Pet 1:3–4; Rev 19:7). And in case these specific statements are not convincing enough, Peter states that God is glorified in all things (1 Pet 4:11). Inarguably, through the lens of the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic, the doxological purpose is central in Scripture, as Ryrie suggests.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria* in Other Notable Dispensational Perspectives**

Although Ryrie does not specifically spell out the primacy of the doxological purpose in his *Basic Theology* to the extent he did in *Dispensationalism Today*, he does note that one of the four primary purposes of the knowledge of God (theology) is “to generate true worship of God (Rom 11:33–36).”<sup>9</sup> Of course, many other dispensational thinkers agree with Ryrie that God's primary revealed focus is doxological, but few suggest that the idea is central to dispensational theology.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1982), 26.

One who agrees with Ryrie regarding the importance of *solī Deo gloria* is John Walvoord, who critiques reformed/covenant theology as “unduly restrict[ing] the larger purpose of God to soteriology.”<sup>10</sup> Walvoord adds his own understanding that

a more tenable position is that the larger purpose of God is the manifestation of His own glory. To this end each dispensation, each successive revelation of God’s plan for the ages, His dealing with the nonelect as with the elect, and the glories of nature combine to manifest divine glory. There is provided a unity to the plan of God which does not require merging Israel and the church or the present form of the kingdom of God with the future Messianic kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

Walvoord focuses on the unity of the Scriptures through the doxological purpose, rather than through artificial relationships necessitated by a particular understanding of the redemptive center. Walvoord’s simple explanation underscores an aspect of necessity for the doxological purpose in dispensational understanding that is not present in reformed thought—it provides the unifying theme of the Bible.

In contrast to Walvoord’s understanding of unification, Lewis Sperry Chafer suggests that “the true unity of Scripture is not discovered when one blindly seeks to fuse these opposing principles [law and grace, as in the theological covenants of covenant theology] into one system, but rather it is found when God’s plain differentiations are observed.”<sup>12</sup> For Chafer, it is the dispensations themselves that unify Scripture. Chafer also recognizes that any

plan of interpretation, which in defense of an ideal unity of the Bible, contends for a single divine purpose, ignores drastic contradictions and is sustained only by occasional or accidental

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<sup>10</sup> John F. Walvoord, “A Review of ‘Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God,’ by George E. Ladd,” *BibSac* 110, no. 437 (January 1953): 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Fort Worth, TX: Exegetica, 2015), 51.

similarities—is doomed to confusion when confronted with the many problems which such a system imposes on the text of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, Chafer is not supportive of a grand narrative or singular purpose of God, though he does acknowledge that in this age, God's divine purpose is "a complete demonstration of grace."<sup>14</sup> Further, Chafer suggests that "the dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity."<sup>15</sup> Chafer does not discuss the doxological purpose or the glory of God as God's end, and in most of the discussion regarding purpose and objectives, either salvation or the kingdom are in view. Chafer provides evidence that even prominent dispensational thinkers sometimes were not focused on *soli Deo gloria*.

Citing George Peters's recognition of a kingdom center,<sup>16</sup> Dwight Pentecost views the unifying purpose of God in Scripture as pertaining to the kingdom,<sup>17</sup> specifically fulfilled in Christ: "Thus the ages are the time periods within which God is revealing His divine purpose and program as it centers in the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup> Pentecost follows Chafer in considering that "the divine purpose in the outcalling of the church is to display the infinity of His grace."<sup>19</sup> Pentecost also agrees with Chafer in expressing concerns regarding improperly identifying a unity in God's purpose: those who "emphasize the unity of God's purpose from the fall of man until the eternal state ... fail to make any distinction between God's program for Israel and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>16</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1952), 1:176, quoted in J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965), 49.

<sup>17</sup> Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 484.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 133.

that for the church.”<sup>20</sup> Like Chafer, and unlike Ryrie, Pentecost does not sense a need to identify a unified purpose of God in Scripture. Instead, the distinct and diverse aspects of God’s kingdom plan<sup>21</sup> as expressed in Christ are thematically unified enough to make Scripture cogent. Pentecost does not ignore the doxological purpose entirely. He quotes Dennett in recognition of God’s achieving his glory in the pursuit of his purposes.<sup>22</sup> Pentecost identifies those purposes specifically as realizing redemption and manifesting God’s sovereignty.<sup>23</sup>

Clarence Larkin in *Dispensational Truth* primarily refers to *glory* as it relates to Christ, and not in any sense of doxological purpose. Although the subtitle of Larkin’s work is *God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages*, there is virtually no discussion of any particular purpose. Larkin does recognize that without the fall, “the Universe would never have had the supreme spectacle of His forgiving love and redemptive grace as revealed on Calvary.”<sup>24</sup> Larkin identifies God’s purpose in this dispensation as “to gather out a ‘People for His Name,’ called THE CHURCH, composed of both Jew and Gentile.”<sup>25</sup> For Larkin it seems that a unified purpose is elusive, as he points to the future “ages of the ages” and admits that “what the ‘Ages of the Ages’ shall reveal of the Plan and Purpose of God we do not know, but if we are His we shall live to know, and possibly take part in their development.”<sup>26</sup> Larkin also acknowledges that it is “the purpose of God to set up a Kingdom on this earth.”<sup>27</sup> Larkin seems to associate God’s purpose with Christ and his kingdom without specifically identifying any preeminent and overarching purpose of God.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Dennett, *Daniel the Prophet* (London: G. Morrish, 1919), 9, quoted in Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 316.

<sup>23</sup> Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 370.

<sup>24</sup> Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth or God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Glenside, PA: Clarence Larkin, 1918), 68.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 178.

C. I. Scofield in *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* does not discuss glory in the context of God's purpose, and his limited discussion of purpose is reminiscent of Chafer's in that statements of purpose are related to salvation, especially. Scofield notes,

God's purpose in promising to reward with heavenly and eternal honors the faithful service of His saints is to win them from the pursuit of earthly riches and pleasures, to sustain them in the fires of persecution, and to encourage them in the exercise of Christian virtues.<sup>28</sup>

Early French theologian and contemporary of John Nelson Darby, Emile Guers (1794-1882), underscores three components of his theology, not vastly dissimilar to Ryrie's. As Mike Stallard puts it, Guers agrees with Ryrie directly on the two points of literalism and diversity of classes and privileges in the entire body of the redeemed (Guers's third point is the literal value of the word *day* in prophecy).<sup>29</sup> However, Guers does not identify God's purpose as doxological. Still, Stallard recognizes that, "the fact that Guers has written a book on the future of national Israel shows that he believes that God is doing more in history than individual redemption."<sup>30</sup>

John Nelson Darby addresses the purpose of God being manifest in the heavenly glory of the church and the earthly glory of Israel.<sup>31</sup> Rather than a precisely doxological purpose,

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<sup>28</sup> C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Charleston, SC: Armor of God Ministries, 2010), 48, accessed August 1, 2017, [http://www.armorofgodbooks.com/books/scofield/Rightly\\_Dividing\\_the\\_Word\\_of\\_Truth.pdf](http://www.armorofgodbooks.com/books/scofield/Rightly_Dividing_the_Word_of_Truth.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Mike Stallard, "Emile Guers and Charles Ryrie: A Case Study of Continuity in the History of Dispensationalism Concerning Literal Interpretation" (paper presented at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, September 14, 2016), 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> J. N. Darby, "The Purpose of God," in *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 30, *Prophetic I* (Addison, IL: BibleTruth Publishers, n.d.), accessed August 1, 2017, <http://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-purpose-of->

Darby observes a more christological expression of doxology: “The good pleasure of the Godhead was that all its fullness should dwell and manifest itself in Christ. Such was the purpose of God ....”<sup>32</sup> Still, God’s glory is ultimately displayed in Christ through the church: “For it [the church] will be the sphere and means of the display of the glory and blessing of Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

Charles Baker, who advocates for a mid-Acts dispensationalism,<sup>34</sup> argues for the eternal purpose of God, and specifies that

God’s purpose and decrees are all just and good and that when the final decree is carried out all of God’s creation will unite in giving all glory and honor to God. God’s decrees, while they concern man, do not find their end in man, but in God. Whatever He has decreed, He has decreed for His own glory.<sup>35</sup>

Henry Thiessen recognizes the centrality of the doxological purpose, saying,

Though God sincerely seeks to promote the happiness of his creatures and to perfect the saints in holiness, neither of these is the highest possible end. The end is his own glory. All his works in creation (Ps. 19: 1–6; Prov. 3:19), preservation (Neh. 9:6; Rev. 4:11), providence (Ps. 33:10f.; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11), and redemption (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:10f.) have this end in view.<sup>36</sup>

Thiessen consistently applies the doxological purpose even in practical matters. In discussing, for example, the existence of evil, he asserts that God overrules evil for God’s purpose and glory and exhorts his readers that “the fact that God has turned

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 468.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grace Bible College, n.d.), xii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 156–58, 162.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Thiessen, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 82.

evil into good ought to induce his children to trust him to do the same with the evil of the present generation.”<sup>37</sup> Although he makes no statement regarding the uniqueness of the centrality of doxological purpose to the dispensational understanding, Thiessen demonstrates that the doxological purpose of God matters in the believer’s practical application of Scriptural truth.

Arno Gaebelein suggests, “All the glorious manifestations of Jehovah recorded in the Word of God are the manifestations of ‘the Lord of Glory’... the focus of His Glory is the cross.”<sup>38</sup> Gaebelein does not identify an overarching purpose in this context other than to recognize “what a stupendous thought that He came from Glory to die for us so that He might have us with Him in Glory!”<sup>39</sup> He adds that “the revelation of His eternal purposes ... locates His kingdom on earth after ... the judgment of His second coming...”<sup>40</sup> Gaebelein’s focus is christological, with a view to Christ’s second coming and the culmination of Christ’s kingdom.

As evidenced in the particular perspectives highlighted above, there has historically been diversity in the viewpoints of dispensational thinkers as to whether there is actually a metanarrative, and if so, whether it is christological, soteriological, theocratic, or doxological. Ryrie’s particular conclusions seem nearly unique, echoed only by Walvoord—that there is an overarching purpose, and that purpose is the glory of God. In fact, Ryrie’s perspective is so unique among dispensationalists, that Craig Blasing critiques Ryrie’s view because of its uniqueness, first observing that the doxological purpose was not “a particularly distinctive feature of earlier

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, “The Lord of Glory,” in *The Lord of Glory: Meditations on the Person, the Work and Glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope,” 1910), accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.wholesomewords.org/etexts/gaebelein/lordof1.html>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, “The Biblical Logic of Premillennialism,” in *Meat in Due Season: Sermons, Discourses and Expositions of the World of Prophecy* (New York: Arno C. Gaebelein, 1900), accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.wholesomewords.org/etexts/gaebelein/meat4.html>.

dispensationalism.”<sup>41</sup> Blaising observes, as has been catalogued above, “Other dispensationalists used salvation and redemption as unifying themes but defined them to include national and political salvation and even the redemption of the entire creation.”<sup>42</sup> Although Blaising correctly notes that “Ryrie distinguishes dispensationalism from covenantalism as the difference between a doxological versus a soteriological perspective,”<sup>43</sup> Blaising misses a key point when he counters, “Most evangelicals, especially among the Reformed, would have agreed on the comprehensive doxological purpose of God.”<sup>44</sup> Blaising is correct, yet he does not address the aspect of the *necessity* of the doxological purpose as central in the theological systems, nor does he address the practical departure of reformed thinkers from the doxological center in favor of a soteriological one, as Ryrie underscores.

In short, dispensationalists have been inconsistent in articulating this point. This may be at least partly due to their building on the reformed redemptive platform and in some cases even the reformed theological methodology. Such inconsistency could have been avoided had dispensational thinkers built their system exclusively from the exegetical data (as Ryrie prescribes) rather than utilizing an integrative method of building on existing reformed doctrine with a dispensational eschatological and ecclesiological perspective.

The lesson we learn from Ryrie is to allow the text to direct us to the purpose of God as revealed within and to rely on that same text to provide the theological particulars. If we do that, our theology will resemble Ryrie’s far more than it will that of the other dispensationalists to whom Blaising refers and will be arguably much more biblical. Ryrie’s doxological recognition challenges exegetes to be consistent in their hermeneutic and to consider how applying the interpretive method consistently will

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<sup>41</sup> Craig Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

unveil God's remarkable purpose and plan. Ryrie's *sine qua non* is a lesson in reform for dispensational thinkers, first and foremost, as Blaising's accusations of inconsistency ring true (even if his thesis falls flat). Still, the reformed camp is not without its own consistency problems. In fact, it is by borrowing from reformed methodology that dispensationalists have found inconsistency so comfortable.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria* in Contemporary Reformed Theology**

Charles Hodge recognizes the glory of God as the great end of all things,<sup>45</sup> saying that "the Bible declares the glory of God, an infinitely higher end, to be the final cause for which all things exist,"<sup>46</sup> but in practice he seems to elevate the redemptive plan to a nearly equal height. Hodge notes that

all the works of God declare his wisdom. They show, from the most minute to the greatest, the most wonderful adaptation of means to accomplish the high end of the good of his creatures and the manifestation of his own glory. So also, in the whole course of history, we see evidence of the controlling power of God making all things work together for the best interests of his people, and the promotion of his kingdom upon earth. It is, however, in the work of redemption that this divine attribute is specially revealed.<sup>47</sup>

Louis Berkhof explains that the wisdom of God "implies a final end to which all secondary ends are subordinate; and according to Scripture this final end is the glory of God."<sup>48</sup> He adds that, "*The final aim is the glory of God* Even the salvation of men is subordinate to this. That the glory of God is the

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1940), 1:425.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:423.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:394.

<sup>48</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Banner of Truth, 1965), 74.

highest purpose of the electing grace is made very emphatic in Eph. 1:6,12,14” (emphasis added).<sup>49</sup> Berkhof is adamant that

the supreme end of God in creation, the manifestation of His glory, therefore, includes, as subordinate ends, the happiness and salvation of His creatures, and the reception of praise from grateful and adoring hearts.... His declarative glory is intrinsically of far greater value than the good of His creatures.... The glory of God is the only end that is consistent with His independence and sovereignty.<sup>50</sup>

Still, in acknowledging this, Berkhof closely connects the glory of God with the soteriological purpose—nearly equating the two in practice: “The social gospel of our day likes to stress the fact that man is elected unto service. In so far as this is intended as a denial of man’s election *unto salvation and unto the glory of God*, it plainly goes contrary to Scripture.”<sup>51</sup> He speaks of “the great redemptive purpose of God”<sup>52</sup> and later refers to “the grace and glory of God in Christ.”<sup>53</sup> (It is worth noting that in the eight scriptural instances in which the two words *grace* and *glory* appear in close context [Ps 84:11; John 1:14; Rom 5:2; 2 Cor 4:15; Eph 1:6; Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 5:10; and 2 Pet 3:18], they are not so closely related as to be interchangeable, except in Psalm 84:11, where God is giving grace and glory, rather than describing his own grace and glory. In Ephesians 1:6, for example, the two are distinct, though one leads to another).<sup>54</sup>

Berkhof tightly connects the purposes of election, noting that it

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 125; emphasis added.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>54</sup> This is a maneuver not unique to reformed theologians, as Chafer, for example, also focuses on the church as displaying “His glory and grace” (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* [Chicago, IL: Moody, 1915], 115).

calls man to a certain end: *the great goal to which the Holy Spirit is leading the elect*, and consequently to the intermediate stages on the way to this final destiny. It is a calling to the fellowship of Jesus Christ, I Cor. 1:9; to inherit blessing, I Pet. 3:9; to liberty, Gal. 5:13; to peace, I Cor. 7:15; to holiness, I Thess. 4:7; to one hope, Eph. 4:4; to eternal life, I Tim. 6:12; and to God's kingdom and glory, I Thess. 2:12.<sup>55</sup>

Notice, in this context, while Berkhof has previously established the priority of the doxological purpose, the teleological priority becomes somewhat unclear, as Berkhof closely connects God's glory to aspects of the redemptive plan. Still, Berkhof repeats, even after this context, the primacy of God's glory and the redemptive plan's subjectedness to it: "Whatever their proximate aim may be, their final aim is not the welfare of man, but the glory of God, which is the highest conceivable aim of man's life...."<sup>56</sup> But on the other hand, Berkhof notes that good works are necessary "as required by God ... as the fruits of faith ... as expressions of gratitude ... unto the assurance of faith ... and to the glory of God."<sup>57</sup> Although he periodically reminds the reader of the primacy of the doxological purpose, in other contexts that primacy is not so clear. In the body of Christ, Berkhof sees the glory of God "as manifested in the work of redemption."<sup>58</sup> Although the redemptive purpose is subject to the doxological one, in practical terms so much focus is on the redemptive aspect that the doxological focus is sometimes lost.

Now, it is important not to be unfair to Berkhof and present him as equating the glory of God with God's other attributes and activities—Berkhof is clear in his assertions that he does not equate God's glory with anything else. However, Berkhof illustrates the very subtle *practical* equating of God's glory with God's redemptive activities to the extent that the redemptive purpose is read back into passages, leading to

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<sup>55</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 521.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 602.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 604.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 625.

supersessionism, for example. Some of these passages, which, if allowed to stand alone without the redemptive-priority theological lens, would contradict supersessionism and instead favor the Israel/church distinction.

Berkhof describes dispensational premillennialism as “a new philosophy of the history of redemption, in which Israel plays a leading role and the Church is but an interlude.”<sup>59</sup> It is notable that Berkhof sees the primary distinction between the two systems as found in their respective philosophies of redemption. He adds, “In reading their descriptions of God’s dealings with men one is lost in a bewildering maze of covenants and dispensations.... Their divisive tendency also reveals itself in their eschatological program.... [T]here will also be two peoples of God.”<sup>60</sup> In speaking of the eschatological aspect of the millennium as a literal expression of the kingdom of God, Berkhof asserts, “The theory is based on a literal interpretation of the prophetic delineations of the future of Israel and of the Kingdom of God *which is entirely untenable*” (emphasis added).<sup>61</sup> Berkhof cites a number of writers (Fairbairn, Riehm, Davidson, Brown, Weldgrave, and Aalders) and notes that “the books of the prophets themselves already contain indications that point to a spiritual fulfillment.”<sup>62</sup>

In raising this argument against dispensational premillennialism, it is worth noting that Berkhof states an antithesis to Ryrie’s *sine qua non*: the overarching principle is in the redemptive philosophy of history—the literal interpretation of OT prophecy is untenable—and the distinction between two peoples of God (Israel and the church) is not scriptural. Recall Ryrie’s implied process as discussed earlier:

- (1) Exegete the Scriptures applying a consistently literal (grammatical historical) hermeneutic.
- (2) Recognize the glory of God as God’s highest end, and that end which governs all other ends.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 787.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

- (3). Understand key theological distinctions (including the notable Israel-church distinction) observable through the application of a literal (grammatical-historical) hermeneutic, and *confirmable* in light of the doxological purpose that permeates Scripture.

Berkhof's flow of the three concepts would be as follows:

- (1) Understand the redemptive philosophy that governs the narrative.
- (2) Discover key theological concepts and relationships (including the theological covenants and the singular people of God).
- (3) Acknowledge a sometimes literal, sometimes allegorical hermeneutic that supports the redemptive philosophy and its specific findings.

In Berkhof's model, the teleological *is* the methodological which drives the hermeneutical and supports the theological. In Ryrie's model there is a stated attempt at applying the hermeneutic method and allowing the exegetical results to stand on their own merit. In Berkhof's model, the hermeneutic model is subject ultimately to the metanarrative of the redemptive plan.

Kevin DeYoung takes Berkhof's approach to its logical conclusion. In his article entitled "Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete," he suggests, "No Christian should be interested in constructing a big theological system that grows out of a shallow and misinformed understanding of the smaller individual passages."<sup>63</sup> Although few Christians would disagree with such a pointed statement, the implications of what DeYoung means in his elaboration of that statement might be more problematic. DeYoung adds, "We come to the exegetical task ... with a way of looking at the world, with a

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<sup>63</sup> Kevin DeYoung, "Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete," *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), February 23, 2012, accessed August 1, 2017, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2012/02/23/your-theological-system-should-tell-you-how-to-exegete/>.

system.”<sup>64</sup> He further explains how Christians can avoid the error of being “misinformed” when approaching the individual passages:

Without a systematic theology how can you begin to know what to do with the eschatology of Ezekiel or the sacramental language in John 6 or the psalmist’s insistence that he is righteous and blameless? As a Christian I hope that my theology is open to correction, but as a minister I have to start somewhere. We all do. For me that means starting with Reformed theology and my confessional tradition and sticking with that unless I have really good reason not to.<sup>65</sup>

Essentially, in order to approach the individual passages correctly—such as Ezekiel’s eschatological pericopes, or John 6, or assertions of good and evil in the Psalms—a person must begin with reformed theology and the confessional tradition (i.e., the Westminster Confession). In beginning with a system of theology and then working toward exegesis, DeYoung is modeling Berkhof’s three-step process of starting with the grand teleology, moving to the theological particulars, and then applying hermeneutic methodology. DeYoung illustrates this specifically in his handling of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4:

The 144,000 are not an ethnic Jewish remnant ....[they] represent the entire community of the redeemed,”<sup>66</sup> because “...it makes sense that God would seal all of His people, not just the Jewish ones ... the 144,000 are called servants of God. There is no reason to make the 144,000 any more restrictive than that ... the 144,000 mentioned later in chapter 14 ... is generic, everybody

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> DeYoung, Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin DeYoung, “Theological Primer: The 144,000,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), April 28, 2017, accessed August 1, 2017, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2017/04/28/theological-primer-the-144000/>; Kevin DeYoung, “Who Are the 144,000 in Revelation?” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), January 17, 2012, accessed August 1, 2017, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2012/01/17/who-are-the-144000-in-revelation/>.

kind of language.... Are we to think that the 144,000 refers to a chosen group of celibate Jewish men? It makes more sense to realize that 144,000 is a symbolic number that is described as celibate men to highlight the group's moral purity and set-apartness for spiritual battle.... the number itself is stylized. It is not to be taken literally.... 144,000 is God's way of saying all of God's people under the old and new covenant.... The bottom line is that the number and the list and the order of the tribes are all stylized to depict the totality of God's pure and perfectly redeemed servants from all time over all the earth. That's what Revelation means by the 144,000.<sup>67</sup>

DeYoung's approach is not an anomaly/exception, but is emblematic of contemporary and accepted Reformed methodology: his blogs are hosted by The Gospel Coalition, "a fellowship of evangelical churches in the Reformed tradition,"<sup>68</sup> and his hermeneutics book, *Taking God at His Word*, published by Crossway, is endorsed by David Platt, D. A. Carson, Matt Chandler, and John MacArthur.

In considering contemporary reformed methodology and the tension between doxology and redemption that results, one might wonder if these are inherited from the Reformation or if they are later additions. If they are organic to the Reformation, then it might be fair to recognize contemporary reformed theology and covenantalism as a true inheritor of the Reformation legacy. On the other hand, if the reformers prescribed something altogether different, we may discover that contemporary reformed theology is a departure from, rather than descendant, of the Reformation.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria* in the Reformation**

Leading up to the Reformation, Thomas Aquinas had been the most influential theological voice, representing the Roman Catholic worldview in an intricate balancing act with

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<sup>67</sup> DeYoung, "Who Are the 144,000?"

<sup>68</sup> The Gospel Coalition, "Preamble," accessed August 1, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents>.

Aristotelian philosophy. In the hundreds of references to *purpose* in his *Summa Theologicae*, he sparingly refers to God's purposes. He acknowledges "the purpose of God to Whom it pertains to measure grace,"<sup>69</sup> and occasionally refers to "the purpose of the grace of God."<sup>70</sup> He recognizes that "God gives to each one according to the purpose for which He has chosen him."<sup>71</sup> Although Aquinas affirms that "God and nature do nothing without a purpose,"<sup>72</sup> he identifies only the purpose for the universe but says nothing specifically of *God's* purpose: "the entire universe, with all its parts, is ordained towards God as its end, inasmuch as it imitates, as it were, and shows forth the Divine goodness, to the glory of God."<sup>73</sup>

Aquinas adds a notable practical application that later appears in the Westminster Confession, "Now our end is God towards Whom our affections tend in two ways: first, by our willing the glory of God, secondly, by willing to enjoy His glory. The first belongs to the love whereby we love God in Himself, while the second belongs to the love whereby we love ourselves in God."<sup>74</sup> Aquinas's inclusion of the prescription of enjoying God and his glory underscores that the relational and human aspect of doxological purpose was not a Reformation development, but was plainly stated prior. Initially, *solī Deo gloria* in the Reformation seemed more about departing from Catholic veneration and returning the focus to God, rather than seeking out a metanarrative. Still, the centrality of God's doxological purpose was evident in the reformers—especially in John Calvin.

John Calvin states early on in his *Institutes* that "the mark of sound doctrine given by our Saviour himself is its tendency

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3.7.11. Micro Book Studio software. The numbers refer to the Part, Question, and Article.

<sup>70</sup> E.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, 3.6.3, ad. 3 (reply to Objection 3).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.27.5, ad. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.36.4, arg. 2, and 3.65.4, arg. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.65.2, arg. 3, co. (I answer to that)

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-2.83.9, arg. 5, co.

to promote the glory not of men, but of God.”<sup>75</sup> He adds that “the world ... was made to display the glory of God.”<sup>76</sup> Calvin asserts not only doxological purpose, but acknowledges God’s sovereignty in setting the parameters for the execution of that purpose, noting that “it belongs to God to determine what is most conducive to His glory.”<sup>77</sup> Calvin recognizes that the salvific plan is part of that doxological focus: “the purpose of the Lord in conferring righteousness upon us in Christ, was to demonstrate his own righteousness.”<sup>78</sup> Calvin views God’s glory as such a preeminent concept that “we never glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory.”<sup>79</sup> Although salvation is a great means of demonstrating the glory of God, Calvin suggests that the condemnation of sinners shows God’s glory also.<sup>80</sup> So pervasive is the doxological theme in Calvin’s understanding that he proclaims, “God as the Lord and governor of nature who ... at his pleasure, makes all the elements subservient to his glory.”<sup>81</sup> Christ exhibits glory in his resurrection and in his kingdom and shares it with his Father.<sup>82</sup> It is not until Calvin’s final mention of glory in *The Institutes* that he identifies any concept as remotely equal to the purpose of God’s glory. In that context he says that all articles of faith “must be directed to the glory of God and the edification of the Church.”<sup>83</sup> In light of the many contexts and oft repeated theme of doxological preeminence, it is unlikely that Calvin is in this last reference equating the edification of the church and the glory of God. On the contrary, to that point Calvin is unwavering throughout *The Institutes* regarding God’s glory as

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<sup>75</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed August 1, 2017, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.ii.viii.html>.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5.5. The numbers refer to the book, chapter, and section.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.9.4.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.13.1.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.13.1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.24.14.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.14.18.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.17.17.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, “One Hundred Aphorisms,” in *Institutes*, 4.76.

central. Although he does not discuss the doxological center as *necessary*, he states it repeatedly as factual.

Martin Luther's primary focus in his *95 Theses* was to challenge the prevailing culture of indulgences as a means of remission for sin. Luther's document left little doubt as to the prominence of God's glory in Luther's theological understanding. The sixty-second thesis celebrated the true treasure of the church as being the gospel of the glory and grace of God.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the pronouncements of both Calvin and Luther regarding the lofty ranking of God's glory, it is fair to recognize there is a hint in both Luther and Calvin of equating the means (the intermediary purposes of God) and the end (the final purpose of God). Luther does not engage the topic as comprehensively as Calvin, and thus his allowance seems a bit more liberal, whereas Calvin's strong stance up until his final mention might cause one to read charitably and suggest there is in fact no hint of conflating the means with the end. It is evident—especially in Calvin's case—that the doxological purpose was recognized as preeminent by the time of the Reformation's apex. Calvin might even be read to view God's glory as a unifying principle of history, as he repeated the theme of all things serving the doxological purpose.

After Luther and Calvin, *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith* declared in 1647 that the chief end of man was "to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."<sup>85</sup> Although the Catechism did not address the chief end of God, the *Westminster Confession* of 1646 noted that

God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and

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<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther, "95 Theses (1517)," Martin Luther, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

<sup>85</sup> "Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed August 1, 2017, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/westminster1.i.i.html>.

immutable counsel of His own will, *to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy* [emphasis added].<sup>86</sup>

The Shorter Catechism is in this subject matter more reminiscent of Thomistic theology than of Calvin's, as it primarily reflects the end of man, rather than the end of God, whereas Calvin speaks a great deal more to the issue of God's own end. In light of this, it seems that the key contribution of the Reformation in regards to *soli Deo gloria* was a return to an idea not prominent in Catholic thinking—that it was not only the highest end of all creation to glorify God, but that it *was God's own purpose* to glorify himself. The other aspects of universal highest ends and human doxological ends, including the prescription of man's enjoyment of God and his glory, were all carryovers from earlier theologies. The real Reformation heritage was in the recognition of God's own doxological metanarrative as central.

### **The *Soli Deo Gloria* Exchange and the Reformed Legacy Revitalized in Dispensational Thought**

If there has been historically in reformed thought such a high view of God's doxological purpose, then how did the redemptive center gain such prominence to the point that Ryrie would view God's doxological purpose as one of only three definitive distinctives of dispensational thought differentiating it from reformed understanding?

Jonathan Edwards helps us understand how the move from God's glory as the highest end to a greater focus on the redemptive center is possible within a theological framework that claims to position the doxological purpose as the ultimate one. Edwards asserts the glory of God is the supreme and

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<sup>86</sup> "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," 5.1, The Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, accessed August 1, 2017, [http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf\\_with\\_proofs/](http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/).

ultimate end of all of God's works.<sup>87</sup> Yet, importantly he understands that *part of the glory of God* is God's manifesting of that glory. Edwards writes,

[The glory of God] includes the *exercise* of God's perfections to produce a proper *effect*, in opposition to their lying eternally dormant and ineffectual: as his power being eternally without any act or fruit of that power; his wisdom eternally ineffectual in any wise production, or prudent disposal of anything, etc. The *manifestation* of his internal glory to created understandings. The *communication* of the infinite fullness of God to the creature. The creature's high *esteem* of God, love to him, and complacency and joy in him; and the proper *exercises* and *expressions* of these.<sup>88</sup>

It is in this point that Edwards begins to combine the end with the means. He recognizes that these means (exercise, manifestation, communication, and expressions, for example) seem to be a plurality, yet he explains how they are actually part of the singular primary goal. He carefully considers that, "These at first view may appear to be entirely distinct things: but if we more closely consider the matter, they will all appear to be one thing, in a variety of views and relations. They are all but the *emanation of God's glory*."<sup>89</sup> Edwards does this by distinguishing between God's internal, external, and essential glory, but yet by asserting that in order for one to be fulfilled they must all be fulfilled. Consequently, the means of God's glorification *is* part of God's glorification, and thus seems to have equal import as part of the end itself. Edwards notes that,

What has been said may be sufficient to show, how those things, which are spoken of in Scripture as ultimate ends of God's works, though they may seem at first view to be distinct, are all plainly to be reduced to this *one thing, viz. God's internal glory or*

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<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Made the World," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.iv.html>.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.2.7. The numbers refer to the part, chapter and section.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

*fullness existing in its emanation.* And though God in seeking this end, seeks the creature's good; yet therein appears his supreme regard to himself.<sup>90</sup>

In God's seeking his own glory he must seek his creature's good. Thus, Edwards's idea can be understood to convey that redemption *is in a sense equated* to the glory of God:

But if strictness of union to God be viewed as thus infinitely exalted; then the creature must be regarded as nearly and closely united to God. And viewed thus, *their interest must be viewed as one with God's interest*; and so is not regarded properly with a disjunct and separate, but an undivided respect ... if by reason of the strictness of the union of a man and his family, their interest may be looked upon as one, how much more so is the interest of Christ and His church...? (emphasis added).<sup>91</sup>

Simply put, Edwards understands that God's and God's people's interests are so aligned as to be one and the same. Thus, it can be said that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and it could also be said that God's chief end is his redemptive purpose—as the two purposes (doxological and redemptive) are essentially synonymous.

Martin Luther's summary of his own encounter with salvation shows a view similar to Edwards's, even if not as precisely explicated. Luther recounts that in his study of Scripture he found that “other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.”<sup>92</sup> In this narrative statement, Luther

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Works,” trans. Andrew Thornton, from the “Vorrede zu Band I der Opera Latina der Wittenberger Ausgabe. 1545,” in *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clemen, 6th ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967), 4:421–28, accessed August 1, 2017, <https://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/preflat-eng.txt>.

conveys that he views salvation as analogous to the glory of God. The two are at least so interrelated that they can be understood conceptually as one. What Luther hints at even during the Reformation, Edwards provides and explains thoroughly.

Edwards's and Luther's redempto-centric maneuver show how the Reformation heritage of *solī Deo gloria* could be gently reconfigured to de-emphasize (at least in a practical sense) the doxological purpose as central in God's plan. In that reconfiguration there is a return to a more Thomistic approach of emphasizing the salvific purpose of God, certainly not in contradiction of God's doxological purpose, but perhaps in ignoring it. Thus, within the Reformation there was present the seedling that would soon overshadow the newly refined doxological understanding that Calvin had so effectively elucidated. Edwards especially shows that the newly reemphasized redemptive approach was more theologically rooted in Aristotelean thinking than in exegetical discovery. This departure from Calvin's Reformation legacy, especially, would leave a gap in reformed thinking that would later be filled by a renewed emphasis on *solī Deo gloria* by Ryrie and other similarly inclined thinkers.

### Conclusion

Ryrie's recognition of the primacy of God's doxological purpose as a central and necessary tenet of orthodox theology represents a brilliant return to a vital principle that was understood well by the reformers, but in practice was quickly relegated to a status secondary to the redemptive purpose of Thomism. The Reformation heritage of *solī Deo gloria* invites Protestants to follow the doctrine to its logical conclusion—a conclusion that Ryrie recognized and reinvigorated by his inclusion of God's doxological purpose in the *sine qua non*: God does all things for the expression of his own glory and demands that his creation does the same.

Once the importance of the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic is understood as first principle, the centrality of *solī Deo gloria* may be perceived with clarity in Scripture, and

therefore, the centrality of *solī Deo gloria* in faith and practice. Although the consistent application of the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic is the methodological necessity of the *sine qua non* and the distinction between Israel and the church is a premiere theological distinctive discernible from that hermeneutic method, it is the centrality of the doxological purpose that is indeed the philosophical pinnacle of the dispensational triad. *Soli Deo Gloria*.