
This extensive PhD-dissertation is as much a work in constructive theology as in historical reconstruction. The author takes his stance firmly in Reformed scholasticism, arguing that it is here that we find the most faithful heir of Scotistic metaphysics in that it gives pride of place to the notion of the divine will or decision (*decretum*). Scotistic metaphysics, in turn, is considered to be the only viable option for a Christian theology that wants to avoid both determinism and sheer randomness in its view of history. Whereas Thomism saw both God’s being and God’s agency as necessary, and late medieval nominalism considered both to be contingent, Scotism advocated God’s necessary being but contingent agency. It connected these two notions by giving a pivotal role to the divine will—something which according to Bac was characteristic for “the dominant Christian tradition” (p. 33) although not for Thomas (a claim which, oddly enough, places Aquinas at the fringes of the Christian tradition). Many Dominicans, however, read Thomas in a Scotistic way, in that they as well structurally placed God’s will in between God’s necessary knowledge of all possibilities and God’s actual foreknowledge of future contingents. Paraphrasing the well-known label “perfect being theology” which is commonly used to characterize Anselm’s theological thought, Bac claims that Reformed scholasticism embodies a “perfect will theology.” Although starting from faith and revelation, both are largely forms of natural theology in that the truth of the faith is established by means of rational arguments.

Following up on his supervisor Antoon Vos, Bac especially assigns a crucial role to Duns Scotus’s concept of synchronic contingency, by means of which Scotus ascribed real alternativity to both divine and human actions. Now the thrust of the argument is that if God’s will is contingent because of there being alternatives to what God actually wills, then what happens as a result of God’s will can never be absolutely necessary. For in terms of modal logic, if the antecedent is not necessary, the consequent cannot be so either. Of course, there is still the necessity of the consequence (“if God wills x, then x will necessarily happen”), but this is only a conditional necessity which, while securing the actualization of the divine will, does not jeopardize the contingency of history or even the freedom of human agency. Bac rightly argues that this view cannot be equated with determinism. It is rather a form of compatibilism, which is still a live option in the current philosophical debate...
on freedom. It remains difficult, however, to see how a collapse into determinism can be avoided, since whether a certain human action is absolutely necessary or only conditionally (because of its being contingent upon God’s will), in both cases it is necessary, and therefore, one is inclined to add, not free.

Bac is more confident here, however, and goes on to contrast the Scotistic-Reformed model with four seventeenth-century competitors, represented by respectively the Jesuit scholar Francisco Suárez, the Remonstrant theologian Simon Episcopius, René Descartes (who turns out to be an extreme nominalist), and Baruch de Spinoza. These authors are largely read through the lenses of their Reformed contemporaries and critics, especially Gisbertus Voetius and Melchior Leydecker. It is argued that in different ways all four of them deviate from the Scotist-Reformed position, but in doing so they invariably run into intractable modal problems. “The five dominant positions of seventeenth-century thought [one wonders where this qualification leaves other options, especially contemporary Lutheran theology, VdB.] express different modal intuitions about divine knowledge and will. Modern logic enables a more detailed appraisal, which shows that the Reformed model is the only consistent position” (p. 400). This is a huge claim of course, but it is skillfully and elegantly argued for in the second, analytical part of the book.

In the third and final part, Bac addresses the present-day relevance of perfect will theology by showing how it may help us unravel some of the most vexed questions in contemporary theology, viz. the nature of human freedom and the problem of evil. Both problems seem to be exacerbated by a strong emphasis on the divine will, but Bac argues that our dependence on God’s will does not rule out but rather enables genuine human freedom. As to the problem of evil, he suggests that “the Reformed position” (p. 495) favors a greater good theodicy. Although Bac is careful enough not to couch this in terms of God being the author of evil, the common objection against this view (as displaying moral insensitivity) is not really dealt with. In a surprising final twist, however, Bac embraces universalism as the eschatological outcome of history. He tries to justify this from the biblical sources and suggests that it is only a minor deviation from Voetius, Leydecker, and the likes. In fact, however, this turn brings him much closer to Karl Barth, and therefore it is unfortunate that Barth’s views on the relation between God’s being and agency (much discussed as they are these days) are absent from his discussion.

*Perfect Will Theology* leaves me unconvinced on a number of counts. First of all, that Scotus exerted a profound structural influence on Reformed theology is open to debate. It would be a surprise to the Reformed scholastics themselves (who usually quoted Aquinas more often than Scotus), but it has also been