

An Evaluation of Dolezal's Criticisms of Oliphint's "Mutualism" in
All that is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Theism
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Richard A. Ostella,
pastorowrc@gmail.com
westminsterreformedchurch.org

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Pet. 3.8)

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!² It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!³ It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. (Ps 133.1-3)

If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view - HF

Introduction

Dolezal's subject is God in relationship to His creation. The author's complaint is that whereas classical theism accounted for this relationship without compromising God's immutability, mutualism has it that God and His creatures are affected by each other, and this compromises God's essential nature.¹ Oliphint's mutualism (in *God With Us*, 2012) is an example for Dolezal of "misleading theology under the guise of the Reformed faith."² I propose to present a sketch of Oliphint's position noting some principles that Dolezal fails to discuss but that need explanation (theological paradox and reduplicative predication), respond to his criticisms of Oliphint, and indicate problems with Dolezal's way of framing God's relationship as Creator to His creation. In the conclusion, I will indicate some important implications of his view for the subjects of divine incomprehensibility and the satisfaction of Christ.³

I. Dolezal's sketch of Oliphint's position is accurate

He notes that Oliphint, like Frame is a "proponent of the timeless-*and*-temporal doctrine." This derives from Oliphint's understanding of God in relation to creation: "God freely determined to take on attributes, characteristics, and properties that he did not have, and would not have, without creation. In taking on these characteristics, we understand as well that whatever characteristics or attributes he takes on, they cannot be

¹ Dolezal, *All*, p.1 fn.1. I am using Dolezal's term "mutualism" in the softest of senses to designate that the relationship of God and man is such that God is affected by the actions and prayers of humans, but without any change in His essential, eternal, and unchanging properties. This seems to me to fit with Oliphint's position.

² *All*, xii.

³ I should mention that Dolezal is to be commended for his effort to preserve the emphases of classical theism, as is done for example in the book review by Dennis Jowers in the most recent *JETS*, Vol 60, No.4 (2017), 893-898.

of the essence of who he is, nor can they be necessary to his essential identity as God.”⁴ On Oliphint’s account, “creatorhood is a new and temporal property”; it is “a mode of being that God has taken on in addition to His divine essence in order to interact with creatures...” thus, only by assuming the temporal “covenantal property” of Creator can God create or act in time and “What sets Oliphint’s view apart... is ... his incarnational explanatory template [whereby] he seems to conceive of God’s assumed temporal properties as creaturely properties rather than new divine properties.”⁵

Granting that this sketch of Oliphint is accurate, two principles that Dolezal misses or downplays need some explanation. They are the principles of paradox in theology and reduplication in Christology.

A. Theological Paradox

Oliphint uses the term paradox to refer to “two (or more) teachings... that seem to be contradictory.”⁶ He goes on to say that paradoxical explanation is the attempt to articulate antinomies, which are metaphysical realities that seem to conflict. These are revealed to us by Scripture and thus our attempts to explain them involve teachings that seem contradictory.

For his mentor, Van Til, a paradox is an apparent contradiction *or* any intellectual tension.⁷ It relates to the philosophical notion of contradiction.⁸ The coherence of God and His revelation calls us to avoid contradictory thoughts and practices. Simply put: being God’s image bearers, we are to be like Him. God is logical because He is truth. If there were contradictions in God’s knowledge, then some of His knowledge would be false, He would not be the truth, and He would not be God. Accordingly, there is no contradiction in God’s self-revelation in creation and Scripture; therefore, man, His

⁴ *All*, 94; from Oliphint, *God With Us*, 110. How God can be both timeless and temporal (immutable and mutable) is a mystery. It is a paradox for Oliphint because he believes that both are taught in Scripture. As a paradox, it is explained to the degree we can explain it, with the paradox of the dual natures of Christ as a pattern to guide us by analogy. Just as Christ is eternal according to His divine nature and temporal according to His human nature; likewise, God reveals Himself to be eternal according to His divine nature (essential properties) and temporal according to His covenantal character (human properties He takes to Himself in creating the world and relating to it).

⁵ *All*, 95.

⁶ *God With Us*, 37.

⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: P&RP, 1954) 9-10.

⁸ The idea of contradiction has almost universal recognition. Outside the history of Western philosophy, some people try to make sense of statements like "you are to meditate on one hand clapping." However, this example shows that one of the reasons that contradiction is wrong is that it is meaningless and blocks communication. You cannot make sense of "one hand clapping." Try to clap with only one hand; it becomes "one hand waving." It is ambiguous (you can "clap" one hand against something) but what is meant is "clap your hands together but only use one hand" (trying it I cannot even keep one hand still!). That is self-contradiction. It breaks down communication; very often, it breaks down honest communication.

image bearer, to be like Him, must avoid contradiction.⁹ Nonetheless, we must come to terms with *apparent* contradictions, beliefs that seem inconsistent. Importantly, we know that there is no inconsistency between them because God has revealed them. Therefore, paradoxicality should be no surprise. After all, we are creatures and He is the Creator. We have limited knowledge; we cannot penetrate all the interconnections that exist within the truth that God knows. Pointedly, paradox is the “*result of our ignorance about interconnections.*”¹⁰ Moreover, we know that a set of beliefs is a paradox by the following ingredients.

- 1) There are (at least) two claims or beliefs.
- 2) Both are in Scripture; they are *clear* threads of biblical teaching, *clear* threads of truth.
- 3) They seem to contradict each other. This means we have difficulty seeing how they fit together in the fabric of Scripture. It means that human reason has trouble

⁹ Therefore, to fulfill our role on earth receiving God's communication to us in nature and in Christ, we ought to be logical, consistent, and non-contradictory in our thinking. Cf. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (P&R, 1972): “The rules of logic must be followed in all our attempts at systematic exposition of God’s revelation, whether general or special,” 9. Using logic is an “ought to”; it is an ethical ought. Being logical is being godly. It is God-like. It is good and proper. It is required of us not only academically or intellectually but also morally and spiritually. How else are we going to obey the Lord when He says, “Come now let us reason together”? To place a healthy emphasis on logical and critical thinking is a hurdle all its own. However, once we jump this obstacle, we face other ones such as the problem that human reason may take on a magisterial role rather than a ministerial role. When that happens, the reasoning self forgets (avoids, denies) the reality that he is duty bound under the authority of God’s revelation and he will have difficulty accepting “mysteries that are beyond reason’s ability completely to comprehend” (Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology*, [P&R Publishing, 2006; cf. the insightful citation from Owen, 255, fn.39] 88-89). In the end, this is a failure to practice the most humble use of logic.

¹⁰ John Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox” in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1979), 321. Frame goes on to explain that “we do not know precisely how they ‘dovetail,’ *how* they take account of one another. We know that they *do* dovetail, for we know that God’s plan is wise and exhaustive, and usually we know how they fit together to some degree, but the gaps in our knowledge often demand that we rest content with a paradoxical formulation” (underlining mine).

accepting one teaching because of the other.¹¹ Intellectual tension exists in a tenacious and profound way.¹²

4) There is a constant danger: we have the tendency to damage one teaching or the other by our reasoning. Thus, we take a biblical truth and use it to deny another biblical truth! This is a red flag. Van Til uses the word contradiction in response to those who claim the presence of actual contradiction. He states that when “contradiction” is wrongly attributed to two truths, one is “thrown overboard” to solve the problem logically.¹³

The use of theological paradox for an intellectual tension grounds a reply to Ciocchi’s opposition to paradox; for him it is not a helpful model.¹⁴ Briefly, in reply, paradox refers to intellectual tensions, to what Ciocchi acknowledges: intractable

¹¹ There may be other factors that make acceptance of x difficult, but the juxtaposition to the corresponding thread is central as a cloud that hinders seeing x clearly and accepting it wholeheartedly.

¹² Not every difficult set of teachings constitutes a paradox. Difficulties such as Jephthah’s vow in relation to Jesus teaching on vows are not paradoxical because they do not push against each other. Church history and the history of theology reveal a limited number of paradoxes easy to identify. Paradoxicality is not difficulty in arriving at comparable truths, but difficulty in harmonizing truths that are clear (by themselves Christ’s deity and His humanity are quite clear, but reflection on their interconnection takes theologians all over the map. Some are the trinity, the deity and humanity of Christ, the Bible is the word of God and the word of men, sovereignty and responsibility, God’s decree and His desire, and moral inability along side of full responsibility.

¹³ *Defense* 69. This is not merely a debate between reformed and non-reformed thinkers because, for one example, Van Til wrestled on the basis of paradox in opposition to some reformed thinkers in his book, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: P&RP, 1954). In more ways than one, J. I. Packer compliments and gives detail to Van Til’s approach to common grace and the free offer of the gospel in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961). Packer’s definition of antinomy (appearance of contradiction, apparent incompatibility) equals Van Til’s use of paradox, though Packer restricts paradox to a figure of speech, 18-19. Van Til uses antinomy and paradox interchangeably, *Defense*, 67, fn.36.

¹⁴ A look at his two main objections will clarify the principle of paradox. a) First, he claims that the notion of paradox fails “because it implies a distinction between types of contradiction,” David M. Ciocchi, “Reconciling Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom,” *JETS* 37/3 (September 1994): 398. b) Second, Ciocchi also claims that paradox as a theological model probably fails because of “its reliance on the dogmatic claim that a logical reconciliation... is known to be impossible.” Ciocchi, *Reconciling* 396. but this implication is unnecessary since the use of the word “contradiction” is simply deflective: opponents make the charge of actual contradiction and they eliminate one belief or the other by logical analysis. Defenders, like Van Til and Oliphint, take both beliefs as clearly biblical and claim appearance not actuality because God gives us both threads, so both must be true and coherent, however difficult it may be for us to reconcile them in the fabric of truth.

tensions,¹⁵ that understandably are due to God's incomprehensibility. Van Til therefore states that as creatures made in the image of God who is incomprehensible, "Our knowledge is analogical [creaturely and so finite] and therefore must be paradoxical."¹⁶ In this connection, Oliphint says that what seems to be contradiction is not ultimately one because "God is exhaustively coherent."¹⁷ So, logical reconciliation is not impossible *with God*.

B. The Principle of Reduplication in Christology

Dolezal is correct when he says, "What sets Oliphint's view apart... is ... his incarnational explanatory template [whereby] he seems to conceive of God's assumed temporal properties as creaturely properties rather than new divine properties."¹⁸ To understand this incarnational template, we need to think through some things about the

¹⁵ However, his formulation of an intractable tension between paradox and reason is simply another paradox. For Ciocchi, tensions such as the paradox/reason tension and the sovereignty/responsibility tension are so difficult that they lead him to agnosticism about resolution and to suspension of debate regarding them. He expresses his agnosticism in the "Reconciling" article (JETS 1994) and the call for suspension is the point of "Suspending debate about sovereignty and freedom" (JETS 1998). For short, his paradox/reason tension is for all intents and purposes another theological paradox and is most likely misstated because his paradox/reason tension boils down to the tension between a ministerial and a magisterial use of reason. Thus, and contrary to Ciocchi, when we face tensions such as the deity and humanity of Christ that the records of church history and historical theology show to be "intractable tensions," it is reasonable to conclude that these thoughts transcend our thoughts like the heavens transcend the earth. We should be excused for thinking that it is *impossible* for us to fully comprehend these thoughts revealed to us by the incomprehensible God! For Turretin, reason serves theology as its handmaiden and must function "in subjection to Scripture" and not preside over Scripture; "reason... neither can nor ought to be constituted the rule of belief," Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-97), 1:24-28. Ciocchi's tension thus becomes: paradox (reason in its ministerial role) vs. reason (reason in its magisterial role). On context, we must saturate ourselves with a passage by prayerful meditation and reflection in order to absorb the pattern of thought. We must work hard at grasping the writer's purpose in a verse within a paragraph, within a book in the New Testament, within the Bible, within the history of redemption, remembering that the ultimate author is the Holy Spirit. This is easier to say than to do: we need to practice the art of careful contextual thinking. We need to expend much effort to absorb the patterns present in the word of God (cf. the outline of sound words, 2 Tim 1.13). Failure in the handling of paradoxes shows up in the twisting of words and the forcing of passages beyond clear contextual warrant. Granted, sometimes we will have to debate about what is contextually clear. Thinking there may be contradiction leads us to closer reading of the text; that is a benefit, especially when we engage with open-minded humility.

¹⁶ In *Defense of the Faith* (P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, 2008, 4th edition, edited by Scott Oliphint), 67-68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fn.38.

¹⁸ Dolezal, *All*, 95.

two natures doctrine of Christ and then about the application of the principle of reduplication.

We begin with *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 21: “The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.” This is truly a mystery; **great indeed** per 1 Tim 3.16.¹⁹ The *Westminster Confession* builds on the Christology of Chalcedon (451)²⁰ by speaking of “one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.”²¹ Therefore, when the second person of the trinity took human nature, He did not add a human person to Himself. He is one person and in our thinking of Him we are to neither divide the person nor confound the natures. Therefore, “The person is the acting subject” so, “the whole work of Christ is to be attributed to his person” and “the infinite merit of the Redeemer’s work must be ascribed to his person because of his divinity; while it is his humanity alone that made him capable of, and liable to...suffering and death.”²²

Similar to Dolezal’s emphasis on classical theism, we should remember that the church has embraced the Chalcedonian Creed as vital to her understanding of her Lord. Granting that no creed is equal to Scripture, its importance as a beacon of light for our present journey is immense. In this connection, Berkouwer says, “The ancient church

¹⁹ 1 Tim 3.16: **Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.** The human mind will never be able to exhaust the character of this mystery, accordingly, as Oliphint says, the four negative of Chalcedon (inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably) “are meant only to insure that our thinking about this one person is biblical; on “unchangeably” he helpfully states that this negative refers to the natures themselves: “The divine nature does not change...it cannot change, and the human nature does not change into something other than fully human (yet without sin)” K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Crossway, Wheaton, 2012), 140.

²⁰ “We...teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus...perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body...in all things like unto us without sin...to be acknowledged in two natures...the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person.” Chalcedon continues: “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, [is] to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person.” Philip Schaff in *The Creeds of Christendom*, II, 62.

²¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*: The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man (VIII, Of Christ the Mediator).

²² *Creeds*, I, 31-32.

weeded its garden and produced much fruit” but “in later times people have tried by means of more refined concepts to override the decision of the ancient church. However, the result was nearly always that in contending with the words of the church the polemicist actually clashed with what the church intended, namely, to confess that Christ was truly God and truly man, and not to offer a scientific formulation of the mystery of the incarnation”; moreover, this is not mere traditionalism, “on the contrary, it is to have rapport with the living past in which the church went neither to the right nor to the left in defending the biblical message concerning Jesus Christ, the Word, who became flesh.”²³

At stake here in the discussion with Dolezal is how God can be both immutable and mutable. This is a paradox for Oliphint because he believes that both claims are taught in Scripture. As a paradox, it is explained to the degree we can explain it. Therefore, we need to apply a principle of reduplication to enable us to distinguish the qualities that belong to each nature: Jesus is God in terms of His divine nature; then we say by reduplication, Jesus is man in terms of His human nature. We get help on how God can be both immutable and mutable by analogy with the paradox of the dual natures of Christ as a pattern to guide us. So, just as Christ is eternal according to His divine nature and temporal according to His human nature; likewise, God reveals Himself to be eternal according to His divine nature (essential properties) and temporal according to His covenantal character (human properties that He takes to Himself in creating the world and relating to it, condescending as He does by way of covenant). The Father is God in terms of His essential properties and He is Creator in terms of nonessential properties that He added to Himself without change.

It will become clear that the application of the principles of paradoxicality and reduplicative predication provide the answers to the complaints that Dolezal raises against Oliphint’s form of mutualism and I dare say against all “mutualists” of reformed and otherwise orthodox conviction (Carson, Ware, Packer, Lister, and Frame). This opens to the next point, namely, that Dolezal’s criticisms of Oliphint miss the mark.

II. Dolezal’s criticisms of Oliphint are misplaced

1. Mutualism involves strange implications

a. According to Dolezal, Oliphint’s incarnational analogy carries the strange implication that God’s “covenantal properties” are a second and created nature, and thus that “God as Creator is in fact a creature.”²⁴ In reply to Dolezal: No, God is not “in fact a creature” because the person who creates is God the Father and He creates in terms of properties He has added to Himself without change (note the use of reduplicative predication). This does not make the first person of the trinity a creature. Notably, how

²³ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, 70-71.

²⁴ *All*, 95, fn.47.

the person of God can have “two natures” without altering His deity is a mystery like that of the incarnation (note the paradox).²⁵

b. Another perceived strange implication is that for Oliphint Creator is not properly a divine reality inasmuch as nothing truly divine can begin to be; as in “God began to be Creator.”²⁶ If God becomes Creator, then His creating cannot be His actions *as God*.²⁷ In counter to this point, we note that being Creator is a reality for the *person* of the Father. The first person is divine, and becoming Creator is a divine experience freely chosen in a way that does not alter His immutable essence. This is similar to how the second person of the trinity experienced the reality of having a human nature without compromising His immutable divine nature. God’s creating is *His* action in terms of His hugely powerful and wise covenantal properties that He added without altering His eternal properties. The first person has both natures, which should not be confused while not dividing the person.

2. Mutualism lacks clarity about Creator versus creature

For Dolezal, it is unclear what prevents other creatures from potentially being Creator in the same sense as God is, just as all humans are human in the same sense as the Son is.

Reply: a) This is incorrect because the contingent properties that the Father adds are hardly on the same plane as human creative abilities.²⁸ b) Also, it is the second person of the trinity who took a human nature which is hardly comparable to a human person with a human nature.

3. Mutualism affirms change in God

Creation is... “an action that God begins to perform at some point in time. It thereby denotes a real change of activity in Him by requiring that He pass from a state of inactivity to activity, of not-creating to creating.”²⁹

Reply: again, there is no change in Himself by adding something, and how that can be is a mystery (i.e. a paradox); the threads are a) He is eternal God and b) He adds temporal activity by becoming Creator without change in Himself. God’s “action” in creating is something that has a beginning, Gen 1.1; “before” the beginning there was no creating going on. Similarly, Christ’s action as a man is something that has a beginning. But God becoming Creator and Christ becoming a man both without change in any

²⁵ We need to apply a principle of reduplication: Jesus is God in terms of His divine nature; then we say by reduplication, Jesus is man in terms of His human nature. Likewise, the Father is God in terms of His essential properties and He is Creator in terms of nonessential properties He added to Himself without change.

²⁶ *All*, 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁸ The power of creation is way beyond human power (incomparably greater) but choosing to operate within the constraints of the daily cycle that He created shows that He has assumed the human quality of operating within time in order to delight in the accomplishment of one day as He looks forward to the work of another day.

²⁹ *All*, 96.

immutable properties are beyond our comprehension; we know them by God's self-revelation. Holding to both, the mutualist affirms paradox.

4. Mutualism uses an unavailable dualistic strategy

For Dolezal, mutualists teach that when God acts to create or produce changes in the world, "He Himself is moved"³⁰ or changed in the process by becoming the actor He previously was not. So, "this strategy of denying essential change while admitting nonessential change in God is not available to those who claim to hold to a classical conception of immutability."³¹

Reply: by "He Himself is moved," and saying that He becomes "the actor He previously was not" Dolezal (inadvertently, in principle) divides the person of the Father. But as we must not divide the person of Christ so we must not divide the person of God the Father. Therefore, the strategy of drawing analogy to Christ *is* available to help us understand creation in the OT in light of the mystery of godliness of the NT. We deny essential change regarding the second person while admitting nonessential change and can apply this to understanding the first person in the OT.

There is no good reason here to be troubled by Oliphint's or mutualists' views.

The theological reasoning here gets complicated but the point simply put is that Scripture reveals that God is unchanging and He operates in ways that involve change as creating in six days, feeling delight, pausing each night, and waiting to begin again. By analogy with Christ, we can say that both these lines of thought are true (God is unchanging and He starts, stops, and begins again); both are true of the person who does not change in terms of His divine nature and who does (He the first person does) experience change in terms of freely added properties.

5. Dolezal has it that mutualism's incarnational analogy is groundless.

He thinks that Paul Helm's critique of Ware on this point is also apropos against Oliphint's argument: "The analogy with the incarnation is not apt, for Christ is two natured, but the immanence of God is not a nature of God alongside his transcendence."³²

Reply: if immanence refers to qualities He has in terms of what He has added to Himself, then it *is* analogous to the incarnation. After all, for example, God presented Himself to Abraham in the form of a man. Surely, this encounter is not simply a story in which God is one of the characters. Does it not do justice to the text to take it to be speaking of God who was personally there in such a way that we can say that Abraham washed the feet of God just as the apostles could say that they touched God when they touched the incarnate Christ?

III. Dolezal's confession of God as eternal Creator is problematic as seen in his two complaints

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

³² *Ibid.*, 96, fn.47.

A. If something begins to exist then it cannot be divine; so, creation is not a divine work³³

If being Creator is something that God becomes, Dolezal says, “it would seem to follow that His actions in and toward the world as Creator are not properly the actions of God *as divine*. It is not an aspect of God's divinity.”³⁴ An entailment of mutualism per Dolezal is that God did not create the world.

Reply 1: Granted (per Oliphint), being Creator [in action] is something that God became [began to do], but His actions as Creator are actions of God *as divine* because they are actions of the person, just as Jesus sleeping in the boat is an action of God as divine because it is the action of the second person in terms of His human nature that He really and truly took to Himself.

Reply 2: What is the problem here?

Granted, God is the eternal one but is being Creator an eternal property of God, one that is essential to His being? If we mean that He always had the potential to create, that is surely acceptable. Contingency comes into view when we think of the world's creation as a beginning; it was not and then came to be. Surely, when the world was not, then God was not *acting* as Creator. When it came to be, it was because God then acted as Creator.

There is nothing strange about saying that the eternal God creates the world as the eternal one. But is it not also true that when the world began, God began to create, and in that sense He became Creator? This is especially so, as we hear His revelation of His process of creating over six days. In Genesis 1, we hear Him tell us of what He was doing, ceased doing, looked back on with delight, and then began again each next day. He reveals Himself creating in stages in time. It is in this historically qualified and divinely revealed sense that we are justified in saying that God became the Creator of the world system by the completion of the process over six days. Therefore, contrary to Dolezal, we are not just identifying God as Creator by observing His created effects in time³⁵; instead, we are identifying the process and stages in which He was active in time, as He reveals it to us in Genesis 1.

Reply 3: It does seem strange to talk, as Dolezal does, about an eternal act. Is Dolezal ambiguous on “will” when he speaks about God’s eternal act of will? He stresses the fact that the human act of producing follows chronologically from planning; plan and act are distinct. But not so for God: “In God willing is producing.”³⁶ But should we not distinguish between God's will of plan and God's will of putting the plan into action? Granted, the producer is timelessly eternal but is His act of production, His producing

³³ My replies here are the same for his claim about mediation. He has it that if God must acquire new properties to mediate His activity in the world, then He could not act in the world *as divine*, as God. But by analogy with the doctrine of Christ’s two natures in one person, Dolezal commits the mistake of dividing the person. What he says of God, he in effect says of Christ, namely, that Jesus could not act in the world *as divine*.

³⁴ *All*, 97

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

timelessly, eternal? Is it not correct to speak of God's plan to create in distinction from His creating?³⁷

B. Mutualism has it that God is a finite causal agent

Dolezal complains that these ideas of God undergoing change are not obvious “to those [like himself] who refuse to think of God as a finite causal agent.”³⁸

Reply: But this way of thinking about God does not represent mutualism accurately on analogy with Christ. The reason that God is not reduced by mutualism to “a finite causal agent” is because the agent is the first person of the Godhead. He is not a finite person. Instead, He is the infinite, eternal, and unchanging One who graciously chose to add contingent properties to Himself to relate with us and to save us for the manifestation of His eternal and unchanging glory. Even His glory is immutable and yet it becomes hidden with Christ in humiliation, manifested in stages in history (at His baptism, transfiguration, and resurrection), and will be marvelously reflected in the glory of the eternal Sabbath.

Conclusion

First, we may rightly say that most (if not all) of the complaints that Dolezal raises against conservative (orthodox) thinkers (many of whom are Calvinists) can be meaningfully answered by appealing to the principles of paradox and reduplication applied to God by analogy with the two natures doctrine of Christ. As a bottom line, every argument of Dolezal against mutualism that in principle contradicts the two natures doctrine of Christ fails by *reductio ad absurdum*.³⁹

Second, we may also be rightly concerned that in principle and consistently applied, Dolezal's denial of change in God ultimately denies the satisfaction of Christ's death on two counts.⁴⁰ On one hand, it denies God being appeased, i.e., brought from anger to a state of satisfaction regarding His outraged justice due to our sins. For Dolezal, it would seem logical to conclude that God does not experience these things in relation to, and within, His creation. On the other hand, on Dolezal's terms, Christ Himself, who added mutability to His immutability in the incarnation, *that He, God*, did not experience our punishment and thereby satisfy the Father's wrath. The very gospel is at stake here.

³⁷ Then we must ask, was His plan to create something that is less than Himself and distinct from Himself necessary or what it His free decision?

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁹ This claim can be tested and developed through interaction with Dolezal's treatment of the following writers: Buswell (23), Nash (23), Carson (23-24), Ware (24-28), Packer (31-32), Lister (32-34), Frame (92-94), and Oliphint (94-97).

⁴⁰ Granted, Dolezal does not discuss the efficacy of the work of Christ; so, readers must wait to see how he deals with the satisfaction of Christ as well as how His satisfaction is to be understood in terms of the two natures doctrine.

Third, Dolezal seems weak on the text.⁴¹ In contrast, consider how Genesis 1.1-31 brings us to the point in 2.1-3 when God *becomes* the Creator of the world-system in its finished form. This is not a metaphor writ large in which God is presented in a story about a human being who took various steps to create the world. If it were such a story then per H. Van Til, it is a large metaphor that simply tells us that the covenant God of Abraham is the Creator.⁴² But then it is not a historical accounting of what happened in the creation from its beginning until its completion by God who is active within history by means of human properties that He has added to Himself without change in His divine nature. Therefore, contrary to Dolezal, does it not do better justice to the text to conclude that by these human properties, God *experienced* seeing things come into being in stages, He paused within time each day to assess, take delight, and speak of His delight?⁴³ Then on the seventh day having finished His work as Creator, He *became* the Sabbath King over all that He created and made. In the end, we must bow and worship saying, “such knowledge that God reveals to me truly, though in part, is too wonderful for me.” And, we cannot help falling on our faces before Jesus Christ the Lord to say, “no one knows the Son but the Father, no one can plumb the depths of the incarnate God except God who is eternal and all-knowing.”

⁴¹ Although his project is all about preserving the mystery of God’s immutability, it appears that he fails to come to terms with the mystery of God’s incomprehensibility. Close at hand is the fact that he fails to give sufficient place to paradox. By contrast, we need to affirm paradox with a strong emphasis on the biblical texts that support the lines of thought in tension, and we need to be diligent to do justice to them in context.

⁴² Howard Van Til, *The Fourth Day*, p. 84.

⁴³ The idea that God experiences things is according to Dolezal wrongheaded (*All*, p. 31 fn.49). The kind of things to which Dolezal objects are attributing chronological relations to God (Buswell), God being affected by creatures (Nash), personal interaction with God who has a vulnerable love, feels pain, and enters a give and take with humans (Carson), God changes from being angry to showing mercy (Ware), God has experiences and feelings (Packer), He has self-controlled mutability (Lister), He can feel with humans the flow of time (Frame), and God added properties to Himself that He would not have without creation (Oliphint).