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THE DUTY OF LOVE TO GOD: THE SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY
OF JOHN LEADLEY DAGG (1794-1884)

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Jared Richard Longshore
May 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

THE DUTY OF LOVE TO GOD: THE SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY
OF JOHN LEADLEY DAGG (1794-1884)

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PREFACE

I entered into the Biblical Spirituality Ph.D. program in light of an ever-growing awareness of the connection between theology and piety. At that time, six years of pastoral ministry had brought a deep appreciation for Paul's words to Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16). I am incredibly grateful to the Lord for his kindness in seeing me into the program. It took no time to discover that I had found teachers and fellow students who were eager for the "teaching that accords with godliness" (1 Tim 6:3). I will never forget my first seminar with Dr. Haykin as we dove headlong into the works of Andrew Fuller, mining the elephant of Kettering for jewels of doctrine and piety. The program proceeded to be not only a joy, but a vigorous challenge to my own discipline, intellect, and character.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Tom Nettles for serving as my supervisor. I feel like one final little soldier of Christ marching in line behind this great general. That string of soldiers is four decades long and does not go unnoticed by this private first class. His depth of theology and piety is no secret. He is known to break into song in the middle of teaching. We sang as he taught in the classroom; we sang around his dinner table. I am honored that Dr. Michael Haykin and Dr. Bruce Ware agreed to serve on my committee. In the classroom, they displayed a robust understanding of the truth, and a love for it as well. I am indebted to various libraries and archives including the James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Mercer University Library, and the American Baptist Historical Library. Thank you.

I have engaged this project with a view to serving the church, and the work simply could not have been done without the prayers, encouragement, and support of the

bride of Christ. Providence Church and my fellow pastor Shawn Bergen celebrated with me and provided encouragement as the journey began. Two years in, Grace Baptist Church welcomed me in with open arms and supported me to see this project through to the end. Pastor Tom Ascol has been a particular blessing from the Lord in study, ministry, and life. He was the first to put Dr. Dagg in my hand and tell me of the riches therein. I know of no other who embodies the duty of love to God more clearly than pastor Tom.

When I began the program, I had no idea that I would be blessed with the companionship of so many faithful men. The brothers in the program have been a source of delight as I journeyed to Louisville from Southwest Florida. We laughed more than I ever thought possible for Ph.D. students, we prayed, debated, read, wrote, encouraged, counseled, and indeed we ate barbeque and ice cream. The memories made over our time together will not be quickly forgotten. I am especially thankful for my dear brothers Eric Smith and Ryan Griffith. The sweet friendship we shared—even in the slough of despond—is indeed a glimmer of that we will enjoy in the celestial city.

This project is dedicated to my lovely wife, Heather. It would not be done without you, my dear. Nine years of marriage, each one has been full of pastoral ministry and higher education. Five children, each one receives blessing by your rising “while it is yet night” (Prov 31:15). No words are more fitting than—“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates” (Prov 31:11-12, 31).

Jared Longshore

Cape Coral, Florida

May 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Leadley Dagg (1794-1884) stands out as a striking theologian in the midst of nineteenth-century America, so striking, that his obscurity is quite an enigma. He has been deemed America's first Baptist systematic theologian, a title that, in and of itself, beckons for attention.¹ Furthermore, Dagg has been identified as the representative figure of Baptists in the South during the nineteenth century.² He has been heralded as "one of the most profound thinkers produced by his denomination."³ Yet, his significance lies not only in his depth of thought, but his piety as well. Dagg has been regarded as a theologian unsurpassed when it comes to the devotional use of doctrine.⁴ In his *Manual of Theology*, Dagg asserted again and again that theology must engage the heart and life. It is no surprise that 1 Timothy 6:3 is the verse that finds a place on the title page of his main theological work, "the teaching that accords with godliness."⁵

Multiple contemporaries of Dagg attested to his excellence at employing doctrine for the purpose of godliness. William T. Brantly Jr. related to Dagg's son, John F. Dagg—"Your father was a powerful preacher in his daily walk. His doctrine and his life coincident gave such convincing proof that he was honest in the sacred cause, that his

¹Robert G. Gardner, "John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), vi.

²Ibid.

³John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), i.

⁴Timothy George and David Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 70.

⁵All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

words in public carried additional weight in view of this fact.”⁶ P. H. Mell remembered Dagg’s warm commencement speeches as president of Mercer—“I never knew any one who, on any occasion so successfully unsealed the fountain of tears as Dr. Dagg always did on these occasions.”⁷ William T. Brantly, attracted by Dagg’s intellect and piety, said, “I take more pleasure in Dagg than in any other.”⁸ S. G. Hillyer and Jeremiah B. Jeter observed the remarkable caliber of Baptists who attended the first southern Baptist convention in Augusta, Georgia. Both noted that Dagg was one who stood out in the midst of this group when it came to ardent devotion and intelligence.⁹ His piety and intellect being well proven, there are multiple other factors that converge to add to the significance of this devotional theologian.

One of these factors is where and when he lived. Nineteenth-century America was a fascinating period containing notable developments like the Civil War, westward expansion, Indian conflict, foreign missions, the establishment of theological institutions, and denominational division—including Dagg’s own Baptist denomination, in which he played a major role. Dagg serves as a window into this intriguing period. Born while George Washington, the first president of the United States, was in office—Dagg lived to see the first twenty-one presidents of the United States. Ministering in both North and South, Dagg heralded the gospel in cities as large as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in rural towns as small as Frying Pan, Virginia. He published his systematic theology in 1857—four years before the outbreak of the Civil War. Dagg was too old to see battle in the Civil War, but he did fight in the Battle of Baltimore on September 13, 1814. As

viii. ⁶John Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg* (Rome, GA: J. F. Shanklin, printer, 1886),

⁷Ibid., x.

⁸Ibid., viii.

⁹Robert G. Gardner, *A Decade of Debate and Division: Georgia Baptists and the Formation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 36.

Francis Scott Key stood aboard a British ship in the harbor, receiving inspiration for *the Star Spangled Banner*, Dagg stood underneath those bombs bursting in air in what he called “a fearful night.”¹⁰

Dagg not only lived during this intriguing time, but he played a leading role in Baptist life during the midst of it. Robert Gardner has noted that Dagg “was an eminent and trusted theological leader of his denomination . . . he occupied a position of consequence in the theological world of his day, and justly deserves careful examination.”¹¹ Dagg’s leadership in the formation of Southern Baptists appears in his role in the inaugural meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). During the spring of 1845, when Baptist churches in the South met to form the SBC in Augusta, Georgia, Dagg was not only present, but served as one of the vice presidents of the Board of Domestic Missions along with his son.¹²

Dagg also served in various influential roles in Baptist life prior to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. He labored on the Board of Managers of the Triennial Convention from 1826 to 1836. He was a vice-president of the Triennial Convention from 1838 to 1845. He served on the Board of Directors of the American Baptist Home Missions Society from 1832 to 1836. He was a vice-president of the American Foreign Bible Society from 1837 to 1843. Finally he held various positions, including president and vice-president of the Baptist General Tract Society from 1824 to 1843.¹³ By any measure, Dagg was a leading Baptist in his day. And his impact endured

¹⁰Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg*, 16.

¹¹Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg,” *Review & Expositor* 54, no. 2 (1957): 263.

¹²John Dagg and Southern Baptist Publication Society, *First Annual Report of the Southern Baptist Publication Society: With Proceedings of the Meeting Held at Griffin, Ga., 1848* (Charleston, SC: Published by the Society, 1848), 6.

¹³Mark Dever, “John Dagg: First Writing Southern Baptist Theologian | Founders,” accessed August 28, 2015, <http://founders.org/fj19/john-dagg-first-writing-southern-baptist-theologian/>. Dever compiles this helpful list of Dagg’s various service in this article.

beyond his own era in his theological writings that were widely spread throughout the nineteenth century. Dagg's influence among Baptists in his day is well illustrated by the glowing words of Spencer Cone in a letter he wrote to Dagg on August 16, 1841. Cone, an eminent pastor in New York, wrote, "I was much disappointed in not seeing you in Baltimore . . . that you lacked influence either with the South or North, I cannot, for a moment, admit, for I know no one whose voice would have commanded more respect in our anxious and important session."¹⁴

Dagg's labor as a pastor, professor and university president also make him a theologian worthy of consideration. He served as a pastor for eighteen years in northern Virginia and Philadelphia. Then, he spent nineteen years as a professor, theologian, and president of an academic institution in Alabama and Georgia. Serving such an extended amount of time in both the church and the academy, Dagg was particularly keen on the relationship between doctrine and piety. Dagg was no ivory tower theologian. Neither was he an anti-intellectual pastor led by the current of the times. Dagg represents a commitment to rigorous thinking and ministerial service, and as such is a true pastor-theologian.

Finally, Dagg's sufferings contribute to his being an exceptional example of doctrine and devotion. By the age of 25, Dagg depended on crutches to walk due to an ankle injury. At the age of 29, only a few months after returning to Virginia from Washington where he attended the Fourth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention, Dagg saw his wife depart to be with Christ. In the same year, his eyesight began to fail, eventually requiring him to depend on others to read to him. It was under these conditions that Dagg travelled to Philadelphia with his four children—all under the age of six—to pastor the prominent Fifth Baptist Church in that city. After nine years of

¹⁴John Dagg, Edward Winfield Cone and Spencer Wallace Cone, *Some Account of the Life of Spencer Houghton Cone: A Baptist Preacher in America* (New York: Livermore & Rudd; Trübner, 1856), 255.

faithful ministry, Dagg's third physical tragedy struck at the age of 40 when his voice began to fail. The church longed to keep their beloved pastor, but the loss of his voice would eventually result in his resignation. A man who has been so acquainted with grief displays a depth of spirituality in his theology unmatched by those who have not faced the like.

Thesis

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to answer the question: what role did Dagg's concept of the duty of love to God play in his life, theology, and ministry? In pursuit of that end there are several other related questions that will be addressed. How does the law of God relate to the gospel of God in Dagg's theology? What are the necessary implications of the duty of love to God upon Dagg's concept of the nature and purpose of the church? How are Dagg's fundamental doctrines of the nature of God and the nature of man influenced by his theological approach? How does Dagg's focus on the purpose of theology influence his soteriology? How does Dagg view the relationship between the intellect and the affections as they relate to spirituality? Finally, how does Dagg's robust Calvinism influence his approach to missions?

The thesis of this dissertation is that the duty of love to God served as the organizing theme of the theology of John Leadley Dagg. This fundamental concept of man's responsibility to love God appears repeatedly throughout his writings. Dagg did not set love and duty in opposition to one another, but rather showed their inevitable connection in the Christian life. There is no aspect of Dagg's theology that the duty of love to God does not touch. Whether it is his approach to ethics, apologetics, eschatology, or anthropology, the duty of love appears as the central influencing theme.

Background

I was first introduced to John Dagg through a fellow pastor and mentor. He handed me Dagg's *Manual of Theology* and remarked that Dagg was "warm." I was

immediately struck by the devotional nature of Dagg's theology. His ability to relate doctrine to life drew me further in to study this godly man. I noticed that Dagg did not sacrifice depth of study for devotional fervor. Rather he exemplified that the deeper the theology, the deeper the devotion.

The further I looked into the doctrine of Dagg, the more interesting he became to me on a number of levels. He suffered immensely, yet called for joy in the Christian life. He held to a robust Calvinism, and employed it for the cause of evangelism and missions. He held to the ongoing usefulness of the law of God in the life of the believer, yet he gloried in the gospel of grace. Finally, his commitment to the Bible appeared worthy of admiration. He may have read the puritans as early as at fourteen and he published his own *Grammar of the English Language*. His own grandson recorded, "He was well versed in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He was a profound mathematician. He was well informed in the natural sciences, and he was a metaphysician and logician,"¹⁵ but when it came to his *Manual of Theology*, he referenced no human authority—only the Holy Scriptures. Even as he advanced his own doctrine, he warned his readers, "I will here give him the caution, once for all, not to adopt any opinion which I may advance, farther than it is well sustained by the word of God."¹⁶

History of Research

There have been a number of works on John Leadley Dagg since his death on June 11, 1884. The first was a Master's thesis at Mercer by his great, great grandson Hillyer Hawthorne Straton in August of 1926.¹⁷ Straton's thesis is highly biographical. It provides a helpful perspective into the life of the man and supplements the

¹⁵S. G. Hillyer, *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1902), 48.

¹⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 5.

¹⁷Hillyer Hawthorne Straton, "John Leadley Dagg" (Th.M thesis, Mercer University, 1926).

Autobiography on this point. Straton touched upon Dagg's work as an author and president as well, but he left Dagg's doctrine largely unexamined.

Thomas E. Cuttino wrote a master's thesis in April of 1954, which was presented to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁸ Cuttino's thesis serves to summarize Dagg's main works, including his *Manual of Theology*, *Manual of Church Order*, *Christian Ethics*, and *Evidences of Christianity*. Cuttino did not seek to examine Dagg's doctrine in great detail, but rather aimed to "present in summary fashion the basic ideas of Dagg's theology."¹⁹ Cuttino also indicated that Dagg is representative of Southern Baptists in the late nineteenth century.

Robert Gardner provided the first doctoral thesis on John Dagg in 1957.²⁰ Gardner sought to fill a gap in the literature of early American Baptist history. He contended that a theological, ecclesiological, and ethical atmosphere of Baptists in the south before the civil war had not been carefully described at the time of his writing. He advanced Dagg as the representative and central figure in the South who fills that gap. Gardner sought to understand Dagg and relate him to his contemporaries and those who came the century before him. His thesis covered Dagg's thinking on a number of disciplines including epistemology, anthropology, soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, and social ethics. Gardner's research was thorough, yet he did not seek to find a center to Dagg's theology or trace its influence into the various disciplines he addresses. Rather, Gardner dealt with these various disciplines individually to elucidate Southern Baptists' thinking on them in the nineteenth century.

¹⁸Thomas E. Cuttino, "A Study of the Theological Works of John Leadly Dagg" (Th.M thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1954).

¹⁹Ibid., 2.

²⁰Gardner, "John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian."

Paige Patterson focused on Dagg's soteriology in his doctoral dissertation presented to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1973.²¹ Patterson analyzed Dagg's view of the sovereignty of God, the fall of man, the atonement, and saving grace, specifically in how they relate to Calvinism.²²

Mark Edward Matheson addressed Dagg's epistemology as it relates to his view of the Scriptures in his doctoral dissertation in 1984.²³ Matheson examined both John Leadley Dagg and James P. Boyce, contending that they were influenced by Scottish Common Sense Realism.

Mark Dever followed suit in comparing Dagg and Boyce in his master's thesis presented to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1987.²⁴ Dever was not concerned with their epistemology, but as Patterson was, with their soteriology. Dever sought to examine specific aspects of their soteriology as it evidenced their Calvinistic system. He explored the doctrine of depravity and atonement as it appears in the theologies of Dagg and Boyce, drawing out comparisons and contrasts between the two in light of their various influences.

Finally, Paul Sanchez has written a recent master's thesis on Dagg's theology in 2012 at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.²⁵ Sanchez limited his study to

²¹Leighton Paige Patterson, "An Evaluation of the Soteriological Thought of John Leadley Dagg, Baptist Theologian of Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974).

²²Patterson contends that Dagg's soteriology began to diverge from the Calvinistic system. A comparison of Patterson and Dever's 1987 thesis on this point of Dagg's soteriology is insightful.

²³Mark Edward Matheson, "Religious Knowledge in the Theologies of John Leadley Dagg and James Petigru Boyce; with Special Reference to the Influence of Common Sense Realism" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984).

²⁴Mark Edward Dever, "Representative Aspects of the Theologies of John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce: Reformed Theology and Southern Baptists" (Th.M thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987).

²⁵Paul Anthony Sanchez, "A Modern Analysis of John L. Dagg's Manual of Theology" (Th.M thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

Dagg's *Manual of Theology*. He summarized this primary work of Dagg, and then compared it to certain other theologies to show its value to the modern theologian.

As beneficial as each of these works has been in understanding John Leadley Dagg, there has yet to be a work that isolates the center of his theology and details how this central theme influenced the various aspects of his doctrine and ministry. Many have noted that Dagg is a reverential theologian of the highest capacities. His doctrinal system has been identified as “vibrant experiential Calvinism.”²⁶ But what made Dagg so? What was at the burning center of this affectionate doctor of theology? This dissertation seeks to answer just that question.

Methodology

The primary methodology of this dissertation is an inductive analysis of John Dagg's primary works. His major works have received the most attention, beginning with his *Manual of Theology*, but quickly extending to his works of ecclesiology, ethics, apologetics, and many letters and newspaper articles. Dagg's *Manual of Theology* was the first of his four major works and he laid down his doctrine of the duty of love to God most vividly in this work. In order to grasp the influence of the duty of love to God in Dagg's thinking, this main systematic theology must be thoroughly understood. In his *Manual of Church Order*, he not only remained biblical to the core, but the concept of the duty of love to God played a significant role in the various aspects of ecclesiology that he emphasized. The same influence appears in his *Evidences of Christianity* and *Christian Ethics*. The lack of an official biography on Dagg is regrettable and results in recourse to his *Autobiography* in order to gain insight into the man himself. Dagg, evidencing humility that is well documented by others, did not want it published.

²⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, preface to new edition.

Various secondary sources have been analyzed as well. Works of Baptist history serve to fill in the background of this study, especially those that pertain to American Baptist history in the nineteenth century. Dagg did not produce his theology in a vacuum, and although he did not reference other authors in his own theology, he was well acquainted with them. Therefore, time has been given to examine those whom Dagg himself read and often employed in his own classroom as professor and president. These sources help to form a coherent picture of Dagg's theology, detailing where he departs from his own sources and where he follows them.

CHAPTER 2

THE DUTY OF LOVE TO GOD

In order to prove that the duty of love to God served as the organizing theme of the theology of John Dagg, one must first define the duty of love to God. What exactly is this duty? How did Dagg understand this idea? What are the essential components of the duty of love to God? I will seek to answer these questions in the present chapter. Some might anticipate that the duty of love to God is merely the outworking of Dagg's theology. But it would be wrong to file this concept solely in the folder of piety. Rather, it is the interpretive grid through which Dagg did his theology. It is the atmosphere in which he engaged in religious study as well as Christian living. John 7:17 serves as the first and key text Dagg referenced in his systematic theology. He wrote, "If we set out, in our search for religious truth, from a sense of duty, and with the purpose of making the best possible use of it, we may hope for success. The Lord will bless our efforts; for he has promised, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.'"¹

Essentially, I will argue that the duty of love to God was Dagg's theological framework that consisted of a high appreciation for the law of God held in harmony with a deep emphasis on holy affections. In this chapter, I will demonstrate Dagg's high view of the law of God by delineating his teaching on the subject in his ethical teaching. Then, I will illustrate how holy affections held a key place in both his life and thought. Finally, various aspects of the duty of love to God will be drawn out from Dagg's primary material.

¹John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 14.

Law: Dagg and Duty

Dagg viewed Christ as the end of the law for righteousness, but not for duty. He heralded the substitutionary work of Christ for his people, “To them, the obedience and death of Christ are reckoned, as if they had personally obeyed the law, and suffered its penalty.”² Yet, he did not see the work of Christ as an end to man’s obligation to obey the Ten Commandments. He, rather, viewed the Ten Commandments as perfectly fitted to man’s relation both to God and his fellow man. In this section, I intend to show Dagg’s high appreciation for the law of God. Through the lens of his ethical teaching, his appreciation of the law of God and its place in the duty of love to God will be rightly observed.

Dagg believed strongly that right and wrong exist in the world. In his ethical work Dagg analyzed all moral actions in terms of “right and wrong” which he called “moral qualities.”³ If anyone wants to fulfill the duty of love to God, this is the place to start—“In teaching men their duty . . . it is necessary to investigate the moral quality of human actions.”⁴ Dagg argued that no long reasoning process is required to demonstrate that human actions are attended with moral qualities because “our first notions of right and wrong . . . are derived from consciousness.”⁵ To the one who desires a long train of argument, he replied, “we have no higher demonstration that the sun is bright, or that the vegetable world is clothed in green.”⁶ This moral quality regards not only what man does, but also what he fails to do. Also, it concerns not only actions committed, but intended actions. Furthermore, Dagg demonstrated from the tenth commandment that moral quality even resides in human desire.

²John Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), 121.

³Ibid., 13.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 27.

⁶Ibid., 14.

If moral quality exists, then moral obligation must as well. An action is morally right as it fulfills moral obligation and wrong as it fails to comply with moral obligation. In assessing various theories of moral obligation Dagg noted that some contend that personal happiness alone determines moral obligation. Thus an action is right as it aligns with or results in personal happiness. Others argue that moral obligation is determined by what is universally good. In this case, actions that promote universal good are deemed right. Dagg argued that these various theories fall short without God. The true doctrine is that “moral obligation is founded on the will of God.”⁷ Dagg taught that God is the moral governor of the world and, as such, submits to no other power. Human beings may have various thoughts and feelings regarding right and wrong in the world. Nevertheless, it is the divine will and not the human that determines the moral quality of an action.

Having demonstrated that human beings are morally obliged to obey the will of God, Dagg continued by showing that human beings are aware of such obligation. Man might have an excuse if he was obligated to obey God’s will, but did not know he was so obliged. To dispel any idea of man’s ignorance of this, Dagg advanced the teaching of the human conscience. He defined the conscience as “that peculiarity in the constitution of our minds, by which they are qualified to exercise moral approbation and disapprobation, and to feel moral obligation.”⁸ After defending the existence of the human conscience from various objections, Dagg explained that the conscience discovers the moral quality of actions, urges that attention be given to moral quality, approves or disapproves of actions, and even exhorts toward right actions and away from wrong. Nevertheless, the conscience is in need of improvement. The fall has left it less than reliable. In fact, many have become so hard of heart in this life that they are left hopeless.

⁷Dagg, *Christian Ethics*, 46.

⁸Ibid., 49.

But, the conscience is so intricate to human nature that even in its fallen state it remains to haunt those who rebel against it:

Sometimes, indeed, remorse sleeps, because the moral sensibility has become benumbed. But conscience is immortal, and, in the future world, will be found to be the worm that dieth not, preying for ever on the vitals of the lost. Even before death, the stupefied conscience sometimes awakes, and begins its work of torture. In the chamber of the dying sinner, the exclamation has been heard: 'Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell and damnation!' Such outbursts from the world of woe sometimes meet the wicked, as the door of their eternal prison opens to receive them.⁹

Having shown how far conscience can bring humans to knowledge of their moral obligation, Dagg proceeded to teach how mankind comes to a full knowledge of duty. He spoke of the knowledge that comes from conversation with fellow human beings, as well as that which comes from natural revelation. Natural revelation confirms what conscience speaks to man. Yet, "the instructions of natural religion are not sufficiently impressive, to arrest men who are going head-long in a course of vice."¹⁰ The special revelation of the Bible is needed if men are ever to be brought to a sufficient knowledge of their moral obligation and be motivated to fulfill it. Quoting 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Dagg remarked, "the Bible is a rule of duty."¹¹ Dagg emphasized that the Bible "teaches duty in respect of both internal affections and external conduct; and none of its instructions are properly received, if they fail to produce holiness of heart and life."¹² He continued by showing how the various parts of the Bible inform mankind of their moral obligation and motivate them to fulfill it. Then, he turned to address the two precepts "on which we are taught that all the law depends."¹³

⁹Dagg, *Christian Ethics*, 78.

¹⁰Ibid., 114.

¹¹Ibid., 121.

¹²Ibid., 122.

¹³Ibid., 124.

Having reasoned from moral quality, to moral obligation, to conscience, to natural and special revelation, Dagg ascended to the law of God—the law of love. Dagg described how the duty of love to God and the corresponding duty of love to man is laid down in the Ten Commandments. He acknowledged that the Ten Commandments held a covenantal position for Israel, but he continued to say, “but they were given to them as men, and are adapted to the relations which men of all nations and ages bear to God and one another, and they are therefore obligatory on all men.” He argued from Romans 13:8, 9 and Ephesians 6:2, 3 that Paul acknowledges their authority over mankind. Therefore, Dagg viewed the Ten Commandments as the definition of love to God and neighbor that is “now binding on men of all nations.”¹⁴

Dagg’s high appreciation for the law of God is seen in the development of his ethical thought. Contending that all mankind is under moral obligation to the will of God, the law of love detailed in the Decalogue is a great kindness. When various theories of moral obligation fail, when conscience falls short and natural revelation leaves man wanting, mankind can turn to the Bible and find their duty displayed. And the law of God found therein precisely defines humanity’s obligation of love to God. Dagg viewed the law of God as the ever-present obligation of all mankind—both Christian and unbeliever. Indeed Christ fulfills the law, but he does not abolish it. It stands, therefore, to remind us of our utmost duty, which is none other than the duty of love to God.

The duty of love to God concerns not only the law of God, but also the human heart. Dagg was not only determined to adhere to what God reveals, he was also resolved to apply it to the heart.

¹⁴Dagg, *Christian Ethics*, 124.

Holy Affections: Dagg and Love

Religious truth must be “deposited deep in the heart, where its sanctifying power ought to be felt.”¹⁵ John Dagg opened the first chapter of his *Manual of Theology* with these words. This quote highlights Dagg as a theologian who is concerned with the heart. He labored to show how every Christian doctrine relates to spirituality. He was not merely concerned with Christian intellect. Neither was he ultimately concerned with Christian activism. For Dagg, the heart of Christian piety was holy affections. This is striking in light of Dagg’s love for the academy and activism. Over the course of his life as a professor of theology, denominational statesman, ethicist, and president of an academic institution,¹⁶ Dagg maintained a consistent focus on Christian love consisting of holy affections.

A true understanding of the duty of love to God is impossible without understanding Dagg’s deep emphasis on holy affections. Therefore, in the following section, I will present a brief analysis of Dagg’s understanding of the affections, and then demonstrate his deep emphasis on the affections in both life and doctrine.

The Nature of Holy Affections

Broadly speaking, Dagg argued for a “Puritan” understanding of the affections. Mark Dever noted that Dagg was “nourished in the tradition of English Puritanism.”¹⁷ More specifically, Dagg appears to follow the thought of Jonathan Edwards that “the

¹⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 13.

¹⁶Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg in Georgia,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 3 (January 1968): 43. John Dagg (1794-1884) lived to be ninety-one years old.

¹⁷Dever makes this observation from the fact that Dagg was reading John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, and Thomas Boston by the age of fourteen. Dagg’s pastor William Fristoe also has connection with the Philadelphia Association, which is rooted in the 1689 confession. Mark Edward Dever, “Representative Aspects of the Theologies of John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce: Reformed Theology and Southern Baptists” (Th.M thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 64.

affections are no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.”¹⁸ Dagg revealed a reliance on Edwards at this point in two ways.

First, Dagg expressed appreciation for the teaching of Jonathan Edwards. He referred to him as a faithful minister of the gospel along with men like George Whitfield and Samuel Davies.¹⁹ He also alluded to Edwards’s work *True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils*.²⁰ Furthermore, Dagg’s close friendship with Basil Manly Sr., who displayed a detailed knowledge of Edwards’s work, strengthens the connection between Dagg and Edwards.²¹ Tom Nettles saw such a strong influence of Edwards upon Dagg that he lists Dagg as one who “found a coherent framework for [his] theology in the mighty thoughts of the great theologian of the First Great Awakening.”²²

Second, Dagg’s own writing on the affections followed the thought of Edwards. He highlighted the connection between the mind and the heart in the same way that Edwards did. Edwards insisted that the truth of God must be rightly understood in the mind in order to produce religious affections in the heart. Dagg too said, “The virtuous mind enlarges the sphere of its affections, as its knowledge increases.”²³ Also, Dagg agreed with Edwards that true affections consist in more than mere self-love. In *Religious Affections*, Edwards labored to show that it is no sign of true religious affections if the affections in question arise only from self-interest. Dagg followed, “if our love to God

¹⁸Jonathan Edwards, “Religious Affections,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2:96.

¹⁹John Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 288.

²⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 280. Dagg referenced Edwards’s teaching without mentioning his name.

²¹Dever points out the close friendship between Manly and Dagg. Manly suggested Dagg for the position of President at Mercer University. Dever, “Representative Aspects,” 29. Thomas J. Nettles details the Edwardsean aspects of Manly’s theology. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Ross-shire: MPG Books, 2005), 2:274–276.

²²Nettles includes Mell, Mallery, Mercer, and Manly as others who were impacted by Edwards’s thought. Nettles, *The Baptists*, 274.

²³John Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), 79.

proceeds from a belief that he loves us in particular, it is merely a modification of self-love.”²⁴ Finally, Dagg understood that properly animated affections will result in obedience. Edwards’s last true sign of religious affections focused on Christian obedience and practice. In the same way, Dagg maintained that one who loves God supremely will only be satisfied if he or she is doing his will. Having established a general understanding of Dagg’s view of holy affections, we can now turn to see how they characterized his life.

Affections and Dagg’s Personal Life

On February 14, 1794 John Dagg was born into a home that had a fair respect for religion. Dagg spent the first thirty years of life in the Calvinist stronghold of northern Virginia.²⁵ Yet neither his father nor mother was Christian on their wedding day. But, when Dagg was around eight years old, his parents were soundly converted through the combined efforts of a touring Baptist preacher and a Presbyterian minister. Both the religious excitement that attended the preaching Baptist, and the careful inquiry that took place under the Presbyterian minister, would find a place in the piety of John Dagg.²⁶ His own conversion came years later when he underwent conviction at the age of fourteen.

In the year 1808, fourteen year-old John Dagg was reading through books from the Puritan hall of fame, including John Bunyan’s *Heavenly Footman*, Richard Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, and Thomas Boston’s *Fourfold State*. His heart was being affected even at this early stage as he recounted, “serious thoughts of religion entered my mind, and dreams of the Day of Judgment, disturbed my slumbers; but now, a deeper sense of sin affected me, than I had ever previously experienced. I saw clearly its tendency to dethrone God, and felt that by this tendency its guilt was to be estimated . . . I

²⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 280.

²⁵Dever, “Representative Aspects,” 96.

²⁶The preaching Baptist was William Parkinson, who would later become pastor of the First Baptist Church of New York. The Presbyterian minister was William Williamson, who served as Dagg’s teacher. John Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg* (Rome, GA: J.F. Shanklin, 1886), 4.

was restless and unhappy.”²⁷ His restlessness resulted in earnest prayer that he might receive saving grace. In bed the night before his fifteenth birthday, he remembered Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” This text gave him a ray of hope. The next morning—his birthday—he prayed that God might bring him into the spiritual world on the very day he had brought him into the physical world. That evening on his way home from school, he stopped to read Boston’s *Fourfold State*. He remembered what followed upon reading a line of exhortation:

I rose, and retired behind the corn-house. Here, while in prayer to God, my soul was relieved by a joyful sense of divine acceptance. The prayer of the morning seemed to be answered; and the following words, though originally spoken in a far higher sense, appeared applicable to my case: ‘Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.’ I returned to the dwelling house, and to intercourse with the family, concealing with some effort the happy change that I had experienced.²⁸

It may have been better if Dagg had spoken of his conversion, for he did not profess his faith publicly through baptism until some four years later. He lamented his lack of love for God after his conversion—“the wonder was, that I did not love more; and this wonder has not yet ceased. The hymn, ‘Come let me love,’ . . . I often repeated throughout; and felt the force of every line.”²⁹

His call to ministry was a matter of the heart as well. He wrestled with the thought of entering the ministry for about four years. The question “pressed closely on [his] conscience.”³⁰ He struggled with a decision as whether to become a lawyer or enter

²⁷Dagg, *Autobiography*, 8.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 9. Interestingly, Dagg mentioned Ps 2:7 as a text that came to mind at his conversion. The function of Scripture in relation to the affections arises in Edwards’s *Religious Affections*. Edwards labored to correct the misunderstanding that a text of Scripture immediately coming to mind proves that affections are truly spiritual. An awareness of Edwards’s argument may cause one to raise an eyebrow at Dagg’s reference to Ps 2:7. But, Dagg’s language that this text appeared “applicable” to his case distinguishes his experience from the one Edwards worked to correct in *Religious Affections*.

²⁹The hymn “come let me love” is from Watts. It is a fitting illustration of Dagg’s heart at this time as it repeatedly calls for God’s grace and assistance so that the worshiper might love as he or she ought.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 20.

the ministry. One would provide him with a life of prestige; the other would result in a life of poverty. After much desperate prayer his heart declared, “give me reproach and poverty, if I may serve Christ and save souls.”³¹ He was ordained to the ministry in November of 1817 at the age of 23.

In the home, Dagg both loved and was beloved. His children had the greatest respect for him.³² He felt deep affection for his wife, Fanny H. Thornton, whom he married on December 18, 1817, when he was 23. After giving birth to three daughters, Fanny had a son, John F. Dagg, but the happy father received a dreadful blow when Fanny died three weeks after John’s arrival. Their marriage lasted only a brief five years. Dagg testified that his first emotion was not sorrow. He knew where Fanny had gone and his heart followed her. He remembered, “Only a thin veil seemed to separate me from the happy assembly . . . I could almost hear their triumphant songs.”³³ Even in the earthly blessing of marriage, Dagg’s affections were not focused on this world. Eight years later after moving to Philadelphia to pastor a church there, he married Mary Davis in 1832. Mary had lost her first spouse as well, which left her a single mother to two small boys.³⁴ Dagg said of his second marriage, “We formed our union, with no romantic expectations of happiness on earth. Affliction had saddened our spirits, and taught us to look beyond

³¹Dagg, *Autobiography*, 20.

³²*Ibid.*, xiii.

³³*Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴At the time of their marriage, John and Mary Dagg had six children, ranging from about newborn to thirteen years old. John and Mary had one additional child together while in Philadelphia, a daughter named Mary Jane, who would marry the Reverend C. D. Mallery. Dagg explained in his *Autobiography* that when they left for Tuscaloosa in 1836, they had seven children. Mark Dever laments the lack of a biography on Dagg and points out the difficulty of coming up with an accurate picture: “His life must be pieced together from his very sketchy autobiography, correspondence, and dissertations written on some aspect of his theology. Thus mistakes are frequently made concerning Dagg. Combining various author’s errors, Dagg becomes a Princeton graduate who was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia and died in 1888. Not one of these three facts is true.” Dever, “Representative Aspects,” 26.

the present life, for perfect and enduring bliss.”³⁵ God would give them thirty-two years of faithful marriage and fruitful ministry.

As a minister, Dagg labored in multiple spheres of service. As a preacher, he was plain, logical, clear, and learned; yet he pressed the word on the hearts of his hearers.³⁶ As a theologian, he has been classified as “an experiential Calvinist, not simply a scholastic theologian.”³⁷ Dagg was a pastor who sensed a deep connection with his flock. When he considered a call to pastor Fifth Baptist Church in Philadelphia, he sent them a candid letter expressing his heart that leaving his church would be no light matter. As an educator and administrator, he exemplified both firmness and gentle affection. P. H. Mell, a dear friend and colleague of Dagg, said, “His learning and ability, his simplicity of character, and unselfishness and disinterestedness, his gentleness and courtesy, conciliated to him the cordial cooperation of his colleagues, and commanded their confidence and love . . . the students all venerated him, and looked up to him as to a father.”³⁸ Finally, Dagg was highly respected and influential as a denominational leader. Spencer H. Cone, a friend and minister in New York, lamented that Dagg could not attend the 1841 Triennial Convention in Baltimore. He claimed that he could think of no one who would have been more influential.³⁹

Any sketch of Dagg’s life must include his endurance through various afflictions. He lived through the death of both of his wives and multiple children. And he

³⁵Dagg, *Autobiography*, 33.

³⁶Dever remarks that Dagg “was direct and searching, at times moving the congregations to tears.” Dever, “Representative Aspects,” 107.

³⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, preface. Paul Sanchez states that Dagg is a “theologian with a pastor’s heart.” Paul Anthony Sanchez, “A Modern Analysis of John L. Dagg’s *Manual of Theology*” (Th.M thesis., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 50. Dagg’s theological approach has been regarded as “moderate Calvinistic Augustinianism.” Malcolm Lester. “John Leadley Dagg,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 346.

³⁸Dagg, *Autobiography*, ix.

³⁹Dever, “Representative Aspects,” 29.

experienced personal hardship as well. By his thirtieth birthday, Dagg was using crutches to walk. Eventually, he would preach sitting down. This physical affliction came from a bad fall he experienced in his early years. Dagg's physical problems did not end there. Upon the death of his first wife, he devoted himself to rigorous reading early in the morning. Due to the dim lighting, his eyesight began to fade, and he became partially blind. He lost his ability to read and write, eventually having his daughter assist him with both. Blind and lame, Dagg ministered to his flock in Philadelphia. It was here that trouble struck again. When preaching one day to his congregation, Dagg felt his voice begin to give way. His soreness increased and a disease of the throat left him incapable of preaching. This affliction led to his resignation in 1834 from his position as pastor of the Fifth Baptist Church in Philadelphia.⁴⁰ S. G. Hillyer, Dagg's son-in-law, remembered his endurance, "Just here, pause and contemplate the man—so lame that he could not walk without a crutch, so blind that he could neither read nor write, and at last, so broken in voice that he could not preach! And all these calamities came upon him while he was yet in the morning of his life."⁴¹

Dagg's self-conscious descriptions of the pivotal junctures of his life are filled with the language and framework of the theme of holy affections. He depicted his conversion as a matter of the heart as he is brought from unhappy conviction to joy in the Lord. He described his call to ministry as a deep matter of conscience that included much agonizing prayer. The many witnesses of his ministry reveal a man who cared deeply for his sheep, especially that they might draw near to God. His doctrinal teaching focused on the impact of theology on the heart. In his family, Dagg spoke of a deep affection for his

⁴⁰S. G. Hillyer wrote of how this church loved their pastor deeply. He added, "His church in Sansom Street, Philadelphia, numbered about one thousand members. It may have required a year to make his rounds, but his aim was to become personally acquainted with every household." S. G. Hillyer, *Christian Index: Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Foots Davies Company, 1902), 48.

⁴¹Ibid.

loved ones while still using the earthly blessing of family for heavenly purposes.⁴² Finally, Dagg's great physical struggles appear to have aided him in keeping his affections on the heavenly city. Setting his mind on things above, he preached, "We are travelling to our final home, through a desert land, a waste howling wilderness, but we seek a city; and God is not ashamed to be called our God, for he hath prepared for us a city."⁴³

Holy Affections and Dagg's Doctrine

In comparing the theologies of John Dagg and James P. Boyce, Mark Dever said, "Dagg preached and exhorted, Boyce taught and instructed. In their respective theologies, Boyce taught that theology was a science; Dagg insisted that it must be a life-transforming act of devotion."⁴⁴ Dagg focused his theology on the third member of the Trinity. He emphasized doctrine at the point of it "entering the human heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁵ Affections played an important part in his doctrine of God and his doctrine of the Christian life.

Doctrine of God

Affections held a significant place in Dagg's doctrine of God's nature, his doctrine of God's will, and his doctrine of the incarnation. First, affections held a central place in Dagg's analysis of God's nature. He understood holiness to be the leading attribute of God. God's holiness is not necessarily a distinct attribute, but an accumulation of all of God's perfect moral attributes. Dagg spoke of God's holiness as

⁴²This claim is evidenced by his long and fruitful ministry alongside of his second wife, Mary, as well as his daughter's assistance with reading and writing once he had gone blind. Many of Dagg's children went on to do faithful work for the Lord, including his son John F. Dagg, who became a minister. Dever briefly sketches out the influential ministry of Dagg's posterity. Timothy George and David Dockery. *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 185.

⁴³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 362.

⁴⁴Dever, "Representative Aspects," 104.

⁴⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, iii.

the sum of his goodness, truth, and justice. The holy nature of God calls forth holy affections from the heart of man. Dagg claimed, “As the pious man studies the character of God, the beauty and glory of that character open to his view, and his heart is drawn out towards it with more intense affection.”⁴⁶ Since the primary aspect of God’s character is holiness, the affections must involve a deep reverence for God.

Second, holy affections intensify by studying the doctrine of God’s will. When a Christian examines the will of God, he or she beholds God in action. Since God’s will directly concerns the actions of mankind, it brings his glory up close. If God’s will was not made known, then God might seem detached and distant. But, since God has made known his will to mankind, Christians can behold his glory vividly like the heavenly beings that surround his throne and see his desires more clearly than others. Therefore, Christians must study the will of God if they are to respond with intense affection like that of the heavenly beings. The will of God includes his commands, but these commands are not merely a list of rules calling for begrudging submission. Rather, they are designed to engage the heart. The will of God that is laid down in Scripture “supplies the sincere milk which the child of grace needs and craves. It not only gives precepts, but precisely such precepts as are adapted to the holy affections of the new-born soul, and tend to increase and strengthen them.”⁴⁷ There is a key aspect of Dagg’s view of the affections here. He saw the nearness of God as an essential prerequisite to holy affections. Dagg illustrated this point,

In the ordinary experience of mankind, the affections are attracted most strongly by objects near at hand. To the imagination, distance may lend enchantment; but the affections of the heart play around the fireside, and fix their firmest hold on those with whom we converse most familiarly.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 92.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 229. Edwards’s influence appears here again for when teaching of the determination of the will Edwards claimed the more lively one’s apprehension of a thing, the more influence it has upon the will. He wrote, “My idea of the sun when I look upon it is more vivid, than when I only think of it. Our idea of the sweet relish of a delicious fruit is usually stronger when we taste it, than when we only imagine

The will of God brings the Almighty King of heaven to earth. Therefore it is worthy to be studied with a view to producing holy affections.

Third, holy affections related closely to Dagg's doctrine of the incarnation. God not only draws near through his precepts, but he draws near through His Son. In Christ, the glory of God is displayed, "claiming our supreme affections."⁴⁹ When Christians behold the incarnate Christ, their hearts stir with affection. Dagg exhibited an affectionate piety that depends upon Christ. It is in Christ that holy affections can be kindled for it is in Christ that God draws near to man. Therefore, apart from Christ, there can be no holy affections. Christ also exemplifies a life of holy affection. Christ is not only the key that opens the human heart of holy affection He is also the model of how to live a life of holy affection. Dagg illustrated this point with observations from His life, "we see him, as the affectionate brother and friend, weeping in the sorrows of others, and alleviating their sufferings by words and acts of kindness. The tenderness with which, when hanging on the cross, he committed his mother to the care of his beloved disciple, is an example of filial love."⁵⁰ Indeed, holy affections served a central place in Dagg's doctrine of God, but they were critical to his doctrine of the Christian life as well.

Holy Affections and Dagg's Philosophy of the Christian Life

Holy affections appear in various facets of the Christian life. First, holy affections are birthed in the heart at regeneration. The new life that a Christian experiences is a life of affection toward God. Dagg explained that this change of heart is a moral change. There is no love for God in the unregenerate heart, but at regeneration "new affections

it" Jonathan Edwards, "Freedom of the Will," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1834), 1:7.

⁴⁹Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, 9.

⁵⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 229.

are brought into exercise.”⁵¹ Regeneration happens at a decisive moment in the human heart. At one moment there is no love for God, then in an instant the heart is filled with holy affection. These new affections are genuine, but opposing affections for the world remain. At the point of regeneration a war begins between holy affections and carnal affections. Christians need not worry for the Holy Spirit will bring the victory in this battle. When this great moment of regeneration occurs, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart and “the law of God is written there.”⁵²

Second, holy affections are also manifested in true obedience because, as Dagg contended, they are the motivating impulse behind the keeping of God’s commandments. Dagg understood Christian obedience to move from the heart to the hands. He contended, “If we love him supremely, we cannot be satisfied to be inactive.”⁵³ If one truly longs to be with God, then he or she will want to do what pleases him. (2 Cor 5:8-9). Moreover, if Christians enjoy the glory of God, then they will want to live lives of holiness that correspond to that glory. Dagg was particularly helpful here on the issues of legalism and antinomianism. He warned that God mocks surface level religious exercises. He pointed out that it is a particular beauty of the morality of the Bible that its commands often concern the heart. He emphasized that the Bible directs Christians to both their internal duties and their external duties. To say that the flow of Christian obedience is from the heart to the hands is not to say that it only concerns the heart.⁵⁴ Holy affections will undoubtedly result in external obedience; external obedience is only acceptable if it springs from holy affections.

⁵¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 278.

⁵²Ibid., 278.

⁵³Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 140.

⁵⁴This same principle appears in *Religious Affections*, where Edwards puts forward Christian practice as the last true sign of religious affections.

Third, holy affections are an essential ingredient of faith. Dagg cited 2 Thessalonians 2:10 in order to detail the true nature of faith: “although faith may be contemplated as merely intellectual, and as antecedent to all emotion; it is not, in this abstract view of it, that faith in Christ [that] is enjoined in the Gospel, and has the promise of salvation. Men must receive ‘the love of the truth, that they may be saved.’”⁵⁵ This understanding of faith distinguished Dagg’s understanding of holy affections from those of mere enthusiasts. It also distinguished him from those who would define faith as strict intellectual assent. This is one of the many times where Dagg displayed a thorough understanding of the theological issues in his day. Although he only cited Scripture explicitly in his systematic theology, Dagg was aware of the danger of the error of Sandemanianism. Furthermore, Dagg read Andrew Fuller and expressed an awareness of his *Strictures Against Sandemanianism*.⁵⁶ Any faith that is merely intellectual is but a dead faith.

Fourth, holy affections are expressed in prayer. In the same way that affections result in external obedience, they must also result in sweet words of prayer. In fact, Dagg defined prayer as “the expression of desire or devotional feeling.”⁵⁷ He spoke of God as an affectionate father to the praying Christian. His teaching on prayer portrayed the close association he sees between duty and love. He exhorted, “Words of affection from a dutiful child, are pleasing to an earthly parent; and God condescendingly accepts from us such tokens of love as it accords with our nature to render; and he is justly offended if we withhold them.”⁵⁸ Prayer not only allows Christians to express their affections to God, but also strengthens their affections.

⁵⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 177.

⁵⁶Robert Gardner has gathered a list of works consulted by Dagg. Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), 411.

⁵⁷Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 141.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 156.

Dagg's understanding of the various ways that holy affections are intertwined with saving faith impacted his understanding of the work of evangelism. If conversion is a change of heart, and regeneration the birth of new affections, then the call to trust Christ necessarily includes a call for holy love to God. It appears that Dagg followed in the steps of his own evangelistic tutors, John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, at this point.⁵⁹ During the Civil War, Dagg published an evangelistic tract entitled *Proclamation of Peace*. In this call to the unconverted, Dagg warned those in the midst of battle that the real war they must ultimately be concerned with is their war against God. He exhorted all who may read his tract to "listen to the news with exulting joy. Lay down your arms, cease your war against God; accept the grace which he freely bestows, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, he ended his exhortation with a hymn from Charles Wesley, "Jesus, lover of my soul! Let me to thy bosom fly."⁶¹ Evangelism, for Dagg, was a call to those who do not love God—a summons that they come and love him with hearts full of holy affection.

Certainly, holy affections held a central place in the life and thought of John Leadley Dagg. He employed the language of affections throughout his works and displayed a self-conscious understanding of how holy affections operate in his personal life as well. He held to a puritan understanding of the affections and followed Edwards on the topic particularly. Christianity is a religion of the heart. As he expressed it in a tract, "How little like Heaven is the religion of mere intellect! Rational Christianity—what is it? Religion without feeling—what is it? It is ice. It may shine, but it is cold and motionless.

⁵⁹Dagg's language in *Proclamation of Peace* is similar to that of *Call to the Unconverted*. Specifically, by confronting sinners directly with the holiness of God and calling them to turn from sin and receive the grace of God. John Dagg, *Proclamation of Peace* (Raleigh, NC: Publisher unknown).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

If love is the noblest *passion* of the soul, to banish the passions from religion, is to banish all that fits us for Heaven.”⁶²

Having acknowledged these foundational components of the duty of love to God, and having traced them through Dagg’s own thought, Dagg’s own detailing of the doctrine can now be assessed.

Aspects of the Duty of Love to God

Dagg highlighted various facets of the duty of love to God in his *Manual of Theology*. Ten observations follow that further define the duty of love to God.

First, the duty of love to God is an immediate duty. Dagg provided no breathing room to those who claim they cannot love God because they do not know him, saying—“he is not to us an unknown God.”⁶³ Dagg evidenced a clear apprehension of Romans 1:19, contending that there is no need for a drawn out investigation before rendering to God the duty of love. Furthermore, to those who would plead that they might know of him, but know not enough of him, he rebuked—“We already know enough of him for this; and to postpone the performance of the duty until we have completed our investigations, is to commence them with unsanctified hearts, and in rebellion against God.”⁶⁴

Second, the duty of love to God corresponds to Christian religion. He explained that the duty of love to God is perfectly fitting to the Christian faith as it is revealed in Scripture. Making his point, he contrasted the worship of false gods with the worship of the true God, commenting, “Heathen gods could not claim the supreme love of their worshipers.”⁶⁵ These false gods could not call for the love of their worshipers

⁶²John Dagg, *The More Excellent Way* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1852), 98.

⁶³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 43.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

because they were not worthy of such love. In fact, sometimes their actions were so immoral that their worshipers would disapprove. This is not so with the God of the Bible and the glorious salvation that he has worked in his Son Jesus Christ. In view of such a religion, what could be more fitting than the duty of love to God?

Third, the duty of love to God is a simple duty. Dagg acknowledged the perplexities of finer points of religion and morality. But the duty of love to God is plain even to humble minds. As gravitation is the simple principle that binds all in this natural world, so the duty of love is the simple principle that binds every human being in religion. The duty of love to God is admirable for “the learned philosopher stands in the presence of this precept as a little child, and feels its power binding every faculty that he possesses.”⁶⁶

Fourth, although the duty of love to God is simple, it is at the same time comprehensive. The duty of love to God incorporates love to mankind made in his image. The duty of love to God not only gives rise to love to man, but without the former the later cannot be. Dagg reasoned, “We love our neighbors because they are God’s creatures, and the subjects of his government, and because he has commanded us.”⁶⁷ Also, the duty of love comprises obedience to his commands. Dagg’s emphasis on loving God did not exclude conformity to the commands of God. Rather, the one who truly loves God will obey God. The reason Christians obey God is because they delight to please God in all they say and do.

Fifth, the duty of love to God promotes universal good. It is a particular sweetness of this duty that it serves universal happiness. Who would not want to live in a world where every citizen loved God and others? Dagg envisioned a deplorable society in

⁶⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 44.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 45.

which all kind affections had vanished. On the contrary, “Perfect obedience to the great law of love is sufficient to render all creatures happy.”⁶⁸

Sixth, the duty of love to God is a love of benevolence.⁶⁹ Dagg defined benevolence as, “the disposition to do good to an object.”⁷⁰ This definition helps to clarify what Dagg meant by the duty of love to God. He contended that all mankind *must* be inclined to do good to God. This inclination needs to reside in the heart of every human being. But, Dagg warned that this inclination to do good to God must not simply arise from a desire for personal gain. Dagg claimed that such a desire is merely self-love. Dagg insisted that the idea of self-love is not the “first principle” nor “central affection” of virtue.⁷¹ Rather, “to constitute virtue, there must be an intentional promotion of happiness in others; and this intention must be disinterested.”⁷²

Tom Nettles affirms that Dagg assumed not only Edwards’ definition of virtue, but his concept of disinterested benevolence as well—“Dagg assumes Edwards's definition that true virtue is ‘benevolence toward Being in general.’ He also assumes Edwards's argument that the generality of mankind recognizes that an action done purely for self-gratification has no real virtue in it. Promotion of happiness must be intentional, not accidental, and this promotion of happiness must be for others, and, as to one's personal advantage, it must be disinterested.”⁷³

⁶⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 45.

⁶⁹Here, Dagg reveals great similarities to Jonathan Edwards, who argued, “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general.” Jonathan Edwards. “Nature of True Virtue,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 1:122.

⁷⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 48.

⁷¹Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 47.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 46.

⁷³Tom J. Nettles, “Founders Ministries | Edwards and His Impact on Baptists,” accessed April 16, 2014. <http://www.founders.org/journal/fj53/article1.html>.

Seventh, the duty of love to God includes a love of complacency. Whereas benevolent love concerns a disposition to do good, as Dagg explained, loving God also “implies cordial approbation of his moral character.”⁷⁴ In other words, although Dagg argued that benevolent love is to be disinterested as to personal gain, he did not mean that the duty of love requires one to be disinterested in God himself. Much to the contrary, the duty of love to God simply cannot be fulfilled with an interest—a warm approval—of God’s character. On this point, Dagg explained that the duty of love to God includes more than gratitude for benefits received from God. Gratitude is an appropriate response to the many blessings that God bestows upon his children. Nevertheless, the duty of love to God regards more than this—it pertains to an approbation of the divine being as He is in Himself.

Dagg distinguished between God’s natural attributes and His moral attributes. Although His natural attributes may call for great respect, His moral attributes must be cherished if man is to fulfill the duty of love. God’s natural attributes like His omnipresence, omnipotence, and eternity spark admiration in the human heart. But, a divine being could possess these natural attributes and not be good or loving. In fact, a divine being could possess all of these attributes and be a tyrant king. This would not result in a worshipful response of love in the creature. But, when God’s moral excellencies are known, then the human heart is warmed with appropriate affection.

Eighth, the duty of love to God incorporates joy in His happiness. One who truly has a benevolent disposition toward another must desire to see the happiness of the other increased. In this way, if a person truly fulfills the duty of love to God, then he or she must delight in God’s own happiness. In the human sphere, one not only delights in the happiness of another, but strives to increase the happiness of others. Dagg pointed out that humans cannot truly increase the happiness of God since it is infinite. Nevertheless,

⁷⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 49.

humans must rejoice or delight in the happiness that God possesses—“He is not only perfectly holy, but perfectly happy; and it is our duty to rejoice in his happiness.”⁷⁵

It follows that man has a duty that encompasses both his head and his heart. He must engage his mind for if he does not, then he has no knowledge of God in which to delight. The heart is not permitted to function on its own detached from the mind, for “we cannot love with all the heart, if the intellectual and moral powers are not brought into exercise.”⁷⁶ Dagg anticipated that some might struggle with the idea of loving God since He is invisible. Therefore he illustrated how love is not dependent on the presence of physical bodies:

Our eyes do not see his spiritual essence; but it is equally true, that they do not see the minds with which we hold familiar intercourse in social relations, and toward which our warm affections flow. The father and mother whom we love, are not the mere outward forms which our eyes see, but the invisible minds that care for us, and love us. Though the minds themselves are unseen, their love and tender care are incessantly manifested in words and actions, which could originate in nothing but parental affection.⁷⁷

The invisibility of God is no hindrance to giving Him the affection of the heart. Indeed, God communicates to His creatures in a multitude of ways. Dagg poetically portrayed the communication of God through nature:

He may be seen in every object that we behold; perceived in every movement of nature; and felt in every enjoyment of life. The heavens, the earth, the mountains, the vales, the forests, and the grassy plains, are all full of the Deity. The rising sun, the fanning breeze, and the flowing stream, are moved by his hand, and guided by his unseen mind. His kindness supplies our food, and raiment, and health, and the blessings of every passing hour.⁷⁸

Ninth, the duty of love involves reverence. Dagg lamented the casual way in which God is often approached. This flippancy in communing with the Creator has no place in the duty of love to God. The one who has truly taken in God’s glory will possess

⁷⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 49.

⁷⁶Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 137.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 136.

a holy fear of God. Those who claim to love God but “have no solemn sense of his infinite grandeur and holiness, have yet to learn the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom.”⁷⁹

Tenth, the duty of love is accompanied with humility. This humility springs from two sources. First, the duty of love to God is seasoned with humility as the Christian considers the greatness of God as Creator. The history of mankind proves that man has made great advancements in knowledge, yet the achievements of mankind only go to show the glory of God more vividly. He was before all of mankind and looks down on all the activities of man. When one juxtaposes the achievements of man with the achievements of God, the result is humility. Second, humility enters the heart of man as he considers God’s holiness and human depravity. God is not only greater than all of mankind, but He is incredibly pure and righteous. Dagg illustrated this humility by referencing Isaiah’s response when he saw the Lord in Isaiah 6:5. This is the humble response of all who truly see God and fulfill the duty of love to Him.

In conclusion, the duty of love to God stood as Dagg’s theological framework consisting of a high regard for the law of God held in harmony, and in a profound sense identical with, a deep emphasis to holy affections. Between the dangers of a heartless legalism and a spineless love, Dagg heralded the duty of love to God. He stood upon the Word of God that refuses to pit love against law. And in this way he echoed the very disciple whom Jesus loved—“And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments” (2 John 1:6).

⁷⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 92.

CHAPTER 3

WORKS

No place more clearly depicts a theologian's central framework than in his major writings. For this reason, any attempt to prove that the duty of love to God serves as the organizing theme of the theology of John Leadley Dagg must include an examination of his works. Did the duty of love to God influence his systematic theology? How did this central theme influence the development of his ecclesiology? What are the implications of the duty of love to God upon Dagg's elaborate ethical system? How did the duty of love to God inform his approach to the Scriptures? This chapter addresses these questions and serves to display how the duty of love to God influenced his thinking in his *Manual of Theology*, *Manual of Church Order*, *Moral Science*, and *Evidences of Christianity*. An analysis of each work follows with attention given to how the duty of love to God instructed Dagg's systematic theology, ecclesiology, ethics, and his doctrine of Scripture.

Manual of Theology (1857)

As Francis Scott Key stood captive on a British ship watching the “rockets red glare” and receiving inspiration for the “Star Spangled Banner”, John Dagg laid beneath those “bombs bursting in air” in what he called, “a fearful night.”¹ It was a scary night indeed in Baltimore, September 13, 1814, and although “the dawn's early light” of September 14 would result in “the stars and stripes still floating in the breeze,”² John

¹John Dagg. *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 16.

²Ibid.

Dagg and his fellow soldiers had no idea the story would go that way. Dagg tried to sleep beneath the “roar of cannon and bombs,”³ but was awakened three times to prepare for a battle that never came. In the heat of such a battle two things become abundantly clear: first, there is such a thing as good and evil; second, life in this world is very temporary. Dagg would later become a theologian and these two truths served as pillars for his study of religion: man is both moral and immortal. As he himself put it, “That men are immortal and under a moral government, by which their future state will be made happy or miserable, according to their conduct in the present life, are fundamental truths of religion.”⁴

If human beings are moral and immortal then any study of the divine must have ramifications on their lives. First, if they are moral then they study God as their judge. Any discoveries made of this moral judge’s character or judgments ought to affect greatly their behavior. Second, if human beings are immortal, then their study of God and response to him hold eternal consequences. Dagg’s vision of theology shows us that doctrine and life are inseparable and the former informs the later. In this section I will demonstrate how the duty of love to God shaped Dagg’s systematic theology. Certain aspects of Dagg’s doctrine will be analyzed with a view to their impact on spiritual life.

First, theology is done by means of revelation. In order to learn truths about God and the ways of God one must have those truths revealed to him. Dagg pointed out, “We need information respecting that unseen world and the right method of preparing for it, and no other knowledge can be so important to us as this. Can it be that we have no means of acquiring it?”⁵ Dagg spoke of one’s own conscience and the conscience of others as sources of revelation, though they are scarred by the fall. He added to these that

³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 16.

⁴Ibid., 17.

⁵Ibid., 18.

the natural course of this world speaks to us of the divine. Though the word of God is the final and authoritative source of revelation, for our purposes it is critical to see the revelatory character of each of these three sources. God is the one who has written his law on the heart of humanity.⁶ He is the one who has created this world, ordered its events, and breathed out His Holy Scriptures. Therefore, since the divine moral governor of the world has communicated to moral beings, those moral beings have an obligation, *a duty*, to attend to that revelation. Thus the very nature of revelation requires a spiritual life of study or heeding of the Word of God.

Second, theology at its core is the study of God Himself. The central information that God reveals in his word is information about Himself. Yet humans are not instructed merely to know facts about God without being affected in the heart. It is not as if one is permitted to engage in the study of the divine as he or she engages in the study of a historical person. In such a case the nature of the historical figure does not necessitate that the study be done in love. On the other hand, the nature of God insists that the one who seeks to know him does so in love. Dagg made it clear that love is not only a result of knowing God but must be the manner of heart while the study of theology is being executed.

It is not necessary that we should enter into a formal demonstration that God exists, or a formal investigation of his attributes, before we begin the duty of loving him. We already know enough of him for this; and to postpone the performance of the duty until we have completed our investigations, is to commence them with unsanctified hearts, and in rebellion against God.⁷

Dagg continued by showing the attributes of God, which consist not only of natural attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; but consists also of moral excellencies like goodness, truth, justice, holiness, and wisdom. Since these moral attributes of God are so beautiful one cannot truly know God in his holiness

⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 19.

⁷Ibid., 43.

without a change in his or her own moral life. Therefore, the nature of God insists upon the study of theology being done in love. To the extent that it is done so, it will be profitable; but to the extent it is not, it will fail.

If, from what we already know of God, we admire and love him, we shall desire to know more of him, and shall prosecute the study with profit and delight; but, if we have already shut him out of our hearts, all our intellectual investigations respecting him may be expected to leave us in spiritual blindness.⁸

Third, theology is not merely the study of God's attributes but includes the study of God's will and works. Whereas the proper study of God Himself requires love, the study of God's will and works motivates joy and delight in the spiritual life. The reason for this is that God's work in creating and sustaining the world is a manifestation of His own holy character. God's existence and attributes are enough for Him to require supreme love from His creatures. But in order for such love to be drawn out the works must be recognized:

In the existence and attributes of God a sufficient foundation is laid for the claim of supreme love to him; but, for the active exercise of the holy affection, God must be viewed not merely as existing, but as acting. To produce delight in him, his perfections must be manifested.⁹

Therefore, what God commands to be done in this world and what God actually does in this world are both manifestations of His holy goodness to be looked upon with joy. God's work in creation and providence testify to His glory. When His work is rightly appreciated He will not only be acknowledged, but treasured.

Fourth, theology includes the doctrine of mankind in relation to God. The Scriptures make clear that God created man good yet he fell into sin by breaking His command. Human sin is not merely a failure to reach our own potential or a wronging of our neighbor, but an offense against holy God. If this aspect of the nature of human sinfulness is not properly seen then the correct response of the spiritual life will not occur:

⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 44.

⁹Ibid., 96.

“In order to sincere repentance toward God, it is indispensable that we should understand that we have sinned against him. Men do not usually compare their actions with his righteous law, but with the actions of other men.”¹⁰ Dagg showed that humanity has fallen into sin resulting in a state of depravity, condemnation, and helplessness. This accurate knowledge informs our practice of repentance. Since mankind is depraved, condemned, and helpless then repentance is not a hearty try to do better or a pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. Rather,

Genuine repentance is a deep-felt and abiding sense of sin, a condemnation of ourselves before God on account of it, a turning away from it with abhorrence and loathing, and a fixed purpose of soul never again to commit it, or be at peace with it. This sense of sin drives the soul to Christ.¹¹

Here again it proves true that one cannot engage in theology without considering corresponding duties. One cannot faithfully study the sinfulness of humanity without the proper result of repentance.

Fifth, the study of theology does not leave mankind hopeless in sin but instructs that a savior named Jesus Christ has come. Dagg spoke to both the person and work of Christ. Christ, in his person, is both human and divine. He has always existed in glory with His Father, yet He was made flesh, for He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:6-7). Christ then was resurrected and ascended in exaltation into heaven to sit on His glorious throne. Christ then stands as the mediator between sinful man and holy God as a prophet, priest, and king. Such an extraordinary revelation as this requires a response in the life of moral humans, for,

We have contemplated the divinity of Jesus Christ, not merely in these transient outbursts which occurred while he was on earth, but in the full demonstration which

¹⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 140.

¹¹Ibid., 139.

has been given since he ascended to heaven, and the impression on our hearts ought to be strong and abiding.¹²

Since a study of Christ reveals him as the salvific mediator between God and man then the appropriate duty is a life of faith.

Sixth, theology speaks not only to the nature of God the Father, which necessitates love; or God the Son, which necessitates faith; but also the nature of God the Spirit, which calls for the duty of dependence. Dependence is the appropriate response to a theology of the Spirit for the Spirit is revealed as “the sanctifier and comforter of God’s people.”¹³ Dagg emphasized the Nicean view that the Holy Spirit is a person distinct from both the Father and the Son. He also showed that the Spirit is a divine person along with the Father and the Son. When both the work and personhood of the Spirit is rightly understood, one cannot help but respond in dependence upon this blessed comforter, for “No believer, who has any just sense of his dependence on the Holy Spirit, for the divine life which he enjoys, and all its included blessings, can be indifferent towards the Agent by whom all this good is bestowed.”¹⁴

Seventh, the very nature of saving grace prompts a spiritual life of humble gratitude. Dagg went to great lengths to show that grace is undeserved favor from God to man. He spoke of the covenant of grace, the blessings of grace, and the sovereignty of grace in an effort to illustrate the unworthiness of man to receive such kindness from God. The previous theological revelation of mankind’s sinfulness and depravity serves to show the immensity of God’s grace, “That salvation is entirely of divine grace, may be argued from the condition in which the Gospel finds mankind. We are justly condemned, totally depraved, and, in ourselves, perfectly helpless.”¹⁵ Also, once grace is rightly understood

¹²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 231.

¹³Ibid., 241.

¹⁴Ibid., 235.

¹⁵Ibid., 259.

then other aspects of theology, such as faith, can be more fully comprehended, “Faith renounces all reliance on our own works, all expectation of favor on their account; and asks and receives every blessing as the gift of divine grace through Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ Thus leading to the appropriate response, “When salvation is so received, all boasting is effectually excluded.”¹⁷ Dagg expounded the true grace of God by highlighting justification, adoption, regeneration, sanctification, perseverance, and perfection. He explored the full riches of God’s grace by instructing on election, particular redemption, and effectual calling. Such a thoroughly Calvinistic understanding of God’s grace promotes, in Dagg’s doctrinal development, a response of humble gratitude by destroying the pillars of pride upon which men stand.

The doctrine of grace is the remedy for self-righteousness. It is a remedy which the unholy heart greatly dislikes, but if once received, it proves an effectual antidote to the evil. It slays all self-dependence, and lays the guilty sinner prostrate at the feet of mercy.¹⁸

Eighth, no theology is complete without the study of the future world, which by its very essence mandates a spiritual life of preparation. Dagg stated it plainly,

Every man knows that the time of his continuance on earth is short and uncertain and while fully assured that he must leave this world, and that the time of his departure is just at hand, to make no inquiry concerning the world to which he is going, or to disregard authentic information concerning it, and the means of obtaining happiness there, is folly in the extreme.¹⁹

Dagg taught that a full doctrine of the future world includes the immortality of the soul, resurrection, the last judgment, heaven, and hell. In light of the moral judgment that is coming to all, the eternal torment of hell, and the eternal pleasure of heaven; the spiritual life of those who study such a doctrine ought to be transformed by the study. This study does not leave man passively awaiting glory. Rather, “the motives to holiness, and to

¹⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 259.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 337.

¹⁹Ibid., 340.

diligence in the pursuit of it, are drawn so abundantly from the future world, a knowledge of that world is of great importance to all men.”²⁰ This final aspect of theology serves as a magnificent seal to the argument sustained throughout: theology by its very essence calls for the duty of human faith, love, and obedience. Dagg, full of experiential religion, even pressed his reader at the end to apply the theology presented throughout:

Reader, what are your prospects in the future world? Have you received the love of the truth, that you may be saved? Does the truth as it is in Jesus enter your heart, with sanctifying power? Are you daily striving, by a holy life, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.²¹

Essentially, Dagg argued that the spiritual impact of theology is apparent from the nature of the study itself, as well as the nature of those doing the study. Theology cannot be done apart from the spiritual practice of the heart and no spirituality can be faithfully exercised apart from a robust theology. Theology in all of its various aspects informs and shapes the responsibility of man. The nature of revelation requires a spiritual life of diligent study. The nature of God himself requires such a pursuit be done in love. God’s will and works move the heart to delight in the glory of God manifested. Human sinfulness cannot be examined apart from a heart of repentance. The nature of the person and work of Christ demands a spiritual life of faith while the Holy Spirit leads one to a life of dependence. The sovereign grace of God when truly understood will result in humble gratitude, and the study of the future world mandates a spiritual life of preparation. Having seen the essential relationship between Dagg’s systematic theology and the duty of love to God, his ecclesiology must now be examined.

Manual of Church Order (1858)

It is abundantly clear from Scripture that the Christian life is not to be lived in isolation, but community. When the Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost in Acts 2

²⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 340.

²¹*Ibid.*, 379.

“*there were added* that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41, emphasis mine). This group of new believers was added to the church that “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The writer of Hebrews reminds believers that a corporate spirituality is not optional, saying, “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some” (Heb 10:24-25). Yet God has given much more than a mere command to live in Christian community, he has given instruction on how that community is to be ordered. Since he has done so, Christians must make a diligent search into the commands of their Lord with hearts ready to obey.

Church order and the ceremonials of religion, are less important than a new heart; and in the view of some, any laborious investigation of questions respecting them may appear to be needless and unprofitable. But we know, from the Holy Scriptures, that Christ gave commands on these subjects, and we cannot refuse to obey. Love prompts our obedience; and love prompts also the search which may be necessary to ascertain his will.²²

In this section I will present the relevant principles found in Dagg’s *Manual of Church Order* concerning the corporate aspect of the duty of love to God. These principles will be addressed under three headings: the public obedience of the church, the nature of the church, and the leadership and practices of the church.

The Public Obedience of the Church

The public obedience of the church consists in both baptism and discipline. Dagg began by presenting baptism as a Christian ordinance of perpetual obligation. He pointed to Matthew 28:19-20 showing that “the commission was given, just before Christ ascended to heaven, and was designed for the dispensation which was to follow.”²³ After addressing certain Quaker objections to his argument he went on to show that the meaning of the verb βαπτίζω is to immerse. Dagg used tables of examples that show the

²²John Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 12.

²³*Ibid.*, 14.

usage of βαπτίζω in both the Scriptures and classical Greek literature. He concluded, “After thoroughly examining the collection of examples, we find that they fully establish the meaning to immerse.”²⁴ He confirmed this result with biblical examples of baptism where the context supports immersion, and an argument that immersion clearly signifies the death and resurrection of Christ. To those who claimed that baptism is merely a ceremony and therefore need not be followed in such detail, Dagg replied, “Baptism is indeed a ceremony; but it is a ceremony of God’s appointing.”²⁵

Next Dagg showed that baptism is not only a perpetual obligation of immersion, but the ceremony is an act of Christian profession, the proper subjects being those who have repented and believed. The wisdom of God is seen in establishing baptism as the act of Christian profession,

The profession of renouncing the world, and devoting ourselves to Christ, might have been required to be made in mere words addressed to the ears of those who hear; but infinite wisdom has judged it better that it should be made in a formal and significant act, appointed for the specific purpose.²⁶

Dagg put forward Romans 10:10 showing the need for Christian profession. Then he argued that the placement of baptism in Christ’s commission (Matthew 28) proves it is the ceremony of profession. As such, it is evident that the proper subjects of baptism are those who have repented of sin and trusted in Christ.

The corporate aspect of baptism is seen in that it is not only a public profession of an individual’s faith, but a prerequisite to local church membership. Baptism is a matter of obedience and it is the initial act of obedience in the Christian life.

It stands at the head of the way. In this act, the believer gives himself to God, before he gives himself to the people of God The members of every Christian church must profess subjection to Christ. They cannot walk together in obedience to his

²⁴Dagg, *Church Order*, 35.

²⁵Ibid., 66.

²⁶Ibid., 71.

commands, unless they are agreed on this point. As profession is necessary to church-membership, so is baptism, which is the appointed ceremony of profession.²⁷

Since baptism is a clear command of Christ, it is necessary that a Christian obey his Lord before he joins the community that will obey together.

Dagg showed that Christian obedience marks the beginning of the church as well as the disciplined life of the church, “The churches should labor incessantly, to promote brotherly love in their members, and increased devotion to the service of God.”²⁸ This labor of love is seen as the members of the church encourage one another to do good works using the means of both the Word of God and prayer. If certain ones in the community refuse to live in obedience to Christ’s commands, then the church is to exclude them from membership. The life of corporate obedience requires discipline and though the way is difficult, the stakes could not be higher, “when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”²⁹

This first aspect of church order demonstrates that the Christian life is one of public and corporate obedience. This community is made up of those who have submitted to Christ in baptism and honor Christ by striving to live holy lives. God in his wisdom has instituted both baptism and discipline as means to display the obedience of the church to the world. These practices of public obedience are a joy to those who take God at his word; but for those who think them unsophisticated, “they must leave the pleasure of obedience to those, who think it no humiliation to tread where they find the footsteps of their Lord and Master. Though Christ’s yoke is easy, it is still a yoke; and pride and false delicacy may refuse to wear it; but love can make it welcome and delightful.”³⁰

²⁷Dagg, *Church Order*, 95.

²⁸Ibid., 270.

²⁹Ibid., 274.

³⁰Ibid., 68.

The Nature of the Church

Dagg continued by illuminating the nature of the church, which requires explanation of both the local and universal church. Any Christian seeking to live the duty of love to God corporately must grasp the necessity and distinction of the local and universal church. By careful exegesis Dagg marked out the important qualities of each, helping believers to live in obedience to God and unity with one another.

Dagg defined the local church very specifically as “an assembly of believers in Christ, organized into a body, according to the Holy Scriptures, for the worship and service of God.”³¹ Similar to his careful analysis of βαπτίζω, Dagg showed that “the Greek word ἐκκλησία denotes *an assembly*.”³² Two strong supports undergird this claim. First, the use of the word by classic Greek authors reveals the meaning of an assembly. Second, when the word is used in reference to Christians who would be to spread out to assemble, the plural form is used.³³ Yet the local church must not only be an assembly, but an organized and independent assembly. By organized, Dagg meant that members were clearly marked and distinct from non-members. This organization is seen both in that a number of people “were added” to the church in Acts 2:41, as well as the clear distinction between the church and unbelievers in 1 Corinthians 14:23. The local church is independent, for Dagg explained, “No intimation is anywhere given that the acts of one church were supervised by another church.”³⁴ In light of this vision of the church, every Christian ought to join a local assembly of believers, organized according to the word, for the purpose of worship and service. Such a corporate commitment by no means weakens

³¹Dagg, *Church Order*, 74.

³²*Ibid.*, 75.

³³Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 16:1,19; 2 Cor 8:1.

³⁴Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, 83.

one's spirituality, but rather, "Union tends to strengthen our faith, and warm our devotions."³⁵

Christians not only belong to a local church but they also belong to the universal church. Although the word church is often used in the singular to refer to a local church, it is also used in the singular to refer to the universal church.³⁶ The universal church "is the whole company of those who are saved by Christ."³⁷ Members of the universal church make themselves known to the world by their profession of faith in Christ and their holy lives. Although there is no external organization of the universal church, there is a spiritual union that marks this company of believers. Dagg proclaimed that the universal church "is in progress of construction, and will be completed at the end of the world, after which it will endure for ever."³⁸

Learning about the nature of the church reveals the principle that the Christian life is not a solitary life. Christians are called to belong to a local community of believers who assemble for the purpose of worshiping God. In that local community, they will experience the love of the body of Christ, resulting in their being held accountable and encouraged in their walk with the Lord. Christians also belong to the universal church, which is being built up by Christ. As a part of the universal church, they link arms with others outside of their assembly and join in the joyful responsibility of standing as a witness to the gospel of the kingdom. Even the very nature of the church itself cannot be understood apart from Christian duty.

³⁵Dagg, *Church Order*, 94.

³⁶Eph 1:22; 3:21

³⁷Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, 100.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 137.

The Leadership and Practices of the Church

The word of God plays a central role in the leadership of the church. Dagg explained, “The ministers of Christ are a separate class of persons distinguished by a special divine call to preach the word.”³⁹ These ministers are a distinct class because they have been called to a unique service. Dagg clarified the nature of their work, “The special service for which the ministry is designed is the preaching of the word.”⁴⁰ For a man to engage in this work, he must be called by God and should have that call recognized by a group of ministers as well as the church. When a minister engages in his work he may serve a local church, but he serves the universal church as well:

As true ministers are members of Christ’s spiritual body, so their ministry is intended for its benefit:--“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Their office pertains to the spiritual, universal church, of which they are all members. The ministry of some of them may have a relation also to local churches, placed under their special charge; but they serve in these for the good of the whole body of Christ.⁴¹

Local churches are to “choose, from among the ministers of the word, bishops or pastors to teach and rule them.”⁴² The churches should also choose deacons who assist the pastors and minister to the physical needs of the congregation.

Dagg highlighted the practices of public worship and communion, showing that the death and resurrection of Christ stand at the center of the life of the church. Communion, also called the Lord’s Supper, is a ceremony instituted by Christ that is to be continually practiced by the church. This institution serves as “a memorial of Christ, a representation that the communicant receives spiritual nourishment from him, and a token of fellowship among the communicants.”⁴³ Each local church is to observe this practice

³⁹Dagg, *Church Order*, 241.

⁴⁰Ibid., 243.

⁴¹Ibid., 246.

⁴²Ibid., 263.

⁴³Ibid., 209.

when assembled publicly and it ought to be received by those who have professed faith in Christ and been baptized. Dagg held that “the first day of the week is the Christian Sabbath, and is specially appropriate for the public worship of God.”⁴⁴ He showed from the Decalogue as well as the practice of the church in the New Testament, that the first day of the week is the designated time for the church to assemble and worship the risen Christ. Showing how the Bible is central not only to the leadership of the church, but also to the worship of the church, Dagg said, “In public worship, we not only address God in prayer and praise, but we honor him by reverent attention to his word.”⁴⁵ Examining the leadership and practices of the church helps one to see the importance of both the Word of God and the word made flesh, in the life of the Christian community.

In summary, John Dagg’s *Manual of Church Order* displays a much-needed point in our day: the Christian life is a corporate life of duty. This corporate spirituality is shaped by many principles from Dagg’s work. First, baptism reveals that the corporate Christian life is not a private life but a public life. Second, discipline emphasizes that the corporate Christian life is not one of disobedience but obedience. Third, the nature of the church implies that the corporate Christian life is not one of irresponsibility but accountability. Fourth, the leadership of the church insists that the corporate Christian life is not led by the opinion of man, but the Word of God. Fifth, the practices of the church illuminates that the corporate Christian life is not focused on the things of man, but on the person and work of the Savior Jesus Christ. For Dagg, the church is the body in which Christians fulfill the duty of love to God together.

⁴⁴Dagg, *Church Order*, 232.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 240.

Elements of Moral Science (1859)

James Thornwell, the southern Presbyterian theologian and contemporary of Dagg, noted that “The Gospel, like its blessed Master, is always crucified between two thieves—legalists of all sorts on the one hand, and Antinomians on the other.”⁴⁶ Dagg worked out his system of ethics with a clear sensitivity to this danger. Christianity is a religion of immense grace and immense duty. Grace is not contrary to duty, nor is duty contrary to grace. But often it is seen that way. To live a healthy Christian life, grace and duty must be properly understood. Christians must uphold the wonder of grace and the necessity of good works. Grace must not be trivialized into a mere object that helps Christians do better. Duty cannot be downplayed as an add-on to the Christian life. Christians need good models if they are to uphold the gospel, and avoid both legalism and antinomianism. John Dagg provides such a model. In his work *a Practical View of Christian Ethics*, he presented a system of morality that emphasizes both God’s grace and man’s duty.

In this section, I argue that John Dagg viewed the Christian life as a life of duty that requires divine grace. I will establish this argument by summarizing some of the pertinent points in his work: the constitution of man, his moral obligation, the means to fulfilling his duty, and the nature of his duties. Taken together, these points will prove that a Christian must depend on sovereign grace as he commits to a life of great duty.

First, Dagg addressed the constitution of man, arguing that man is both a moral and imperfect being. The conscience of man provides the context for seeing both of these truths. He defined the conscience as, “that faculty by which we discern the moral quality of actions, and by which we are capable of certain affections in respect to this quality.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶James Thornwell, *Collected Writings of James Thornwell*: (New York: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871), 2:385.

⁴⁷John Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), 50.

He offered support from Romans 2:15 where Paul says of the Gentiles who do not have the law, “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness.” The existence of a conscience in every human being proves that man is moral. Some may object to the idea of the human conscience since people from different times and lands have different understandings of what is right or wrong. Dagg pointed out that this does not prove the absence of conscience, but rather that there is diversity of conscience. This diversity of conscience is a result of education in some cases and corruption in others. Notably, Dagg claimed that the universal similarity of conscience far outweighs the diversity of it. For example, “Where has it ever been thought right, to requite kindness with intentional unkindness?”⁴⁸

Dagg continued by showing that man is not only moral, but immoral. The conscience serves man in many ways, but it cannot repair him completely. Man is fundamentally flawed as a result of the fall.⁴⁹ The conscience provides some help. It motivates man to investigate the moral quality of a given action. The conscience convicts man when he does wrong, and approves him when he does right. It also moves a man toward what is right when he considers any given action. But, since man is an imperfect being, the conscience stands in need of improvement. This improvement comes by studying the will of God. Having established that man is a fallen moral being, Dagg proceeded to moral obligation.

Second, Dagg argued that man is under moral obligation to the will of God. Dagg began by showing the reasonableness of moral obligation. For instance, “to say that we ought to tell the truth, or that it is our duty to tell the truth, is to say that we are under moral obligation to tell the truth.”⁵⁰ There is no way around moral obligation. The

⁴⁸Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 53.

⁴⁹Ibid., 83.

⁵⁰Ibid., 29.

question is not whether man is under moral obligation, but to whom is he morally obligated.

Dagg examined many different theories concerning the nature of moral obligation. Some say that man is morally obligated to seek his own happiness. A slight nuance to this first approach is that man must be true to his own emotions. Another theory says that man simply knows right from wrong intuitively, thus he is morally obligated to his own intuition. Dagg showed that these three theories do not prove true because they each claim that man is morally obligated to himself. Since being obligated to oneself is no obligation at all, the true ground of moral obligation must be found outside of oneself.

The true doctrine is that “moral obligation is founded on the will of God.”⁵¹ God’s holy nature grants him the right to this position. Echoing Jonathan Edwards, Dagg reasoned that if man is morally obligated to promote the happiness of being in general then he must be god-ward oriented, for God has more happiness than anyone. If man is morally obligated to do what is right in the eyes of others, then he must ultimately consider God’s opinion, for he is the only just judge. If man is to promote universal order, then this must include the God who created the universe and its order. Basically, there is no way to escape man’s moral obligation to the will of God. All other theories fall short. Therefore, God determines what is right and wrong, not the individual, not the society. If this is true, man finds himself in quite a predicament. He is an immoral being with a god-given moral compass in his chest, called a conscience. Furthermore, he is under moral obligation to his holy and just Creator. This being so, he needs both knowledge of his obligations, and power to fulfill them.

Third, Dagg demonstrated that both the knowledge of duty and the power for duty come from God. If man is morally obligated to the will of God, then it only makes

⁵¹Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 46.

sense that he must go to God to discover his obligations. God speaks through nature: “the voice of nature proclaims the existence of God.”⁵² There is a sowing and reaping principle in the natural course of this world. That principle teaches man right from wrong. Natural revelation teaches man to seek both his own good and the good of his neighbor. But natural revelation has its limitations. It is enough to make man accountable to God, but it cannot reconcile him to God. Nations that have only known the blessing of natural revelation are corrupt societies. The people of these nations may have been very intelligent, yet without biblical revelation they have continued in abominable practices. In his present condition of moral and noetic darkness, mankind needs more revelation than God provides through nature.

The Bible is the revelation that man needs in order to know truly his duty. The Bible does not contradict natural revelation. Rather, it confirms it and clarifies it. The Bible teaches things that natural revelation does not. For example, the Bible teaches that man must obey God from the heart, and not just the hands. Man must not only perform the right action, but he must experience the appropriate affection. Furthermore, the Bible offers motives that natural revelation does not, namely, the cross of Christ. This is a critical point in Dagg’s understanding of Christian ethics. Man must be motivated by divine grace in order to meet his moral obligations. Indeed, he needs the strongest motivations, and they can only come from the heart of the Bible. The Old Testament teaches the cross in shadows, but in the New Testament the doctrine is made most plain. By way of example he references 2 Corinthians 5:14 and Romans 2:4. He eloquently summarizes, “Hearts, which the thunders of Sinai could not shake, have been moved by the groans of Calvary. If the moral power of the cross fails, no motive can be effectual.”⁵³

⁵²Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 106.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 119.

God not only teaches man his duty, but he provides man with the power needed to fulfill his duty. God's revelation alone, strictly speaking, does not provide what is needed for man to fulfill his duty. The Old Testament presents God's revelation more clearly than natural revelation. But it is clear from the lives of those in the Old Testament that they needed something more. The New Testament provides greater clarity still, but the revelation of the New Testament alone does not supply man with the power needed to obey God. Dagg emphasized that the work of the Holy Spirit provides the only remedy to man's fallen condition. He offered many biblical texts to support his claim: 1 Corinthians 3:7; Acts 26:14; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; and 2 Corinthians 3:6. Ultimately, if man is to fulfill his moral obligation, then he needs the full operation of Trinitarian grace: the grace that is from God, through his Son, and by the Spirit. He pointed out that the New Testament explicitly shows the necessity of the work of Christ and the Spirit in the Christian life. Therefore, Dagg explained, "There cannot be pure morality without religion, so there cannot be a perfect system of moral science without theology."⁵⁴ Any system of morality that excludes the work of the Holy Spirit is unsatisfactory.

Fourth, Dagg described the many different duties of man, all of which show the need for divine grace. Dagg began by describing man's duties to God. He must love and revere God, which include taking joy in God himself and his ways. God requires obedience from the heart for "without it, no service can be acceptable in his sight."⁵⁵ Man's duties to God continue, including gratitude, trust, repentance, prayer, and even the observance of the Sabbath. Man's need of divine grace is revealed by the high standard of his duty.

⁵⁴Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 129.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 141.

Man not only has duties to God, but he has duties to his fellow man. First, he must perform duties of reciprocity. These duties include rendering to each man his God-given rights, dealing with others in a just and fair way, and avoiding injury to another's reputation or character. Man also has duties of benevolence. These duties go beyond simple justice and fairness. These duties include seeking the welfare of others. For instance, one performs these duties when he seeks the improvement of another's physical, intellectual, or moral state. These duties must be performed in relation to one's own means. Duties of benevolence are not only evident from the state of society, but the Bible clearly teaches them as well. These duties are taught by the example of God Himself: God gave his own Son to die on a cross for sinners. This holy example ought to motivate Christians to fulfill their duties of benevolence. Dagg included forgiveness as one such duty, calling it "the noblest and loveliest form of benevolence."⁵⁶ He showed that the forgiving person not only avoids retaliation, but he returns good to those who have wronged him. The nature of man's God-given duties proves that he must receive divine grace in order to fulfill them. Dagg included many more duties of man in great detail which, due to the scope of this chapter, will only be mentioned. These include truth telling in oaths and contracts, domestic duties (the responsibilities of marriage, husbands, wives, parents, and children), public duties, duties to self, and the responsibilities of civil government.

Regrettably, Dagg included slavery as a power of civil government.⁵⁷ He distinguished between citizens of a given country and non-citizens. Slavery was most applicable to the non-citizens. He claimed support for American slavery from the curse of Canaan in Genesis 9:25. Dagg's exegesis of this and other Old Testament texts was out of character. He neglected the carefulness with which he normally addressed the Scripture.

⁵⁶Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 217.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 338

He understood slavery as a necessary evil alongside of war and capital punishment. Dagg admitted the cruelty of some slave owners and thus was intentional to include the society's duties to slaves. He considered that the advance of the gospel might bring slavery to an end: "The gospel tends in its effects to abolish imprisonment, capital punishment, war, and involuntary servitude."⁵⁸

Clearly, John Dagg presented a theology of Christian ethics that includes the high standard of biblical morality coupled with the immeasurable power of divine grace. Dagg's view of the law is an essential component of the duty of love to God and finds full expression in his ethical work. The Christian life is a life of obedience to God's comprehensive commandments that is empowered by God's abounding grace. Man exists as a fallen moral being. He is accountable first and foremost to God his Creator. God has revealed the duty of mankind in creation and more completely in the Bible. He has also provided what man so desperately needs in his Son and the Spirit. Therefore, there is no other way to live a moral life than to come to Christ by the power of the Spirit. Those who do so can begin to live a life of obedience both to God and his fellow man.

The Evidences of Christianity (1869)

Christians need a sure foundation if they are to fulfill the duty of love to God in the midst of a hostile world. Living the Christian life is no easy thing. Christ warns in John 16:33, "in the world you will have tribulation." The world mocks Christian convictions. It scoffs at Christian hope. It stands repulsed by Christian morals. Satan himself seeks to "ensnare our souls, and lead them into everlasting torment."⁵⁹ Add to that Christ's call for unwavering devotion in Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Given these realities, it is obvious

⁵⁸Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 371.

⁵⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 377.

that the Christian life cannot be lived incidentally. If Christians are to fulfill the duty of love to God, they will need truth claims that run deep, holiness that stands out, courage that is unshakeable, and hope that does not fade. Such things cannot simply be found anywhere, but they can be found. There is solid ground where Christians can stand and be clothed with grace for the life to which God calls them. That solid ground is the Word of God.

John Dagg understood the Bible to be vital to the Christian faith. In fact, he devoted an entire work to proving that the Bible is from God. He reasoned that if he could prove that the Bible to be from God, then men would be bound to believe and obey it. His aim was not strictly evangelistic, nor apologetic, but he wrote for the Christian as well. He knew that as any man grasps the divine origin of the Bible, confidence in the Christian life would follow. He testified to the blessing he received from his study: “In prosecuting the investigation after this method, I see with my own eyes; and after having completed it, my own feet feel the ground firm beneath me.”⁶⁰ If Christians seek a firm foundation, they need look no further than the Word of God. In this section, I contend that John Dagg viewed the Bible as a sure foundation for the duty of love to God because it is the Word of God. By way of support, I will illustrate how he labored to prove the divinity of the Scriptures, and draw some implications for Christian living from his study. Dagg offered five main arguments for the divine origin of the Bible.

First, the beneficial effects of the Bible on mankind prove its divinity. The Bible positively affects both human morals and emotions. The Bible has led to the eradication of many evils like gladiatorial games and the killing of unwanted infants. It has diminished other evils such as slavery. Furthermore, it has bestowed blessings on society by elevating the status of women and the poor. Some will argue that the Bible has

⁶⁰John Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), 6.

caused great evil in the world. Dagg responded that the Bible has been the occasion of great evil, but not the cause.⁶¹ Sinful men and women have been the cause of great evil and such sinners have erroneously used the Bible's teaching as occasions for sin. The Bible also bestows the blessing of happiness on mankind. Nations that do not have the Bible are places of abuse, corruption, and war. Yet, where the Bible is known and loved, humans flourish in a society of stability and justice. The same is true for families that devote themselves to the Bible; they are like little pictures of heaven. Dagg claimed this as the first proof of the divinity of the Bible: "The holiness and happiness which it produces demonstrate the holiness and benevolence of its author; and give proof that it is what it claims to be, the book of God."⁶² In other words, the Scriptures foster the duty of love to God therefore the Scriptures must be the word of God.

Second, the perfect morality taught in the Bible proves its divinity. The Bible presents both a perfect precept and a perfect example. The moral precepts of the Bible far exceed in their purity the precepts of other books. The morality of the Bible not only addresses the outward actions of mankind but also the inner motivations of the heart. The Bible presents a simple and complete system of morality for mankind. Even more, it presents motives to holiness. Dagg claimed that no man could create such a beautiful system—"The divine origin of the Bible is sufficiently proved by the perfection of its morality; since human wisdom, even in the wisest and best of men, could not have invented so perfect a system."⁶³ The Bible also presents a perfect example of morality. Christ stands as a perfect example of devotion to God and love to mankind. In him, one can find the perfect harmony of true virtue. He was tender with the weak, firm with the

⁶¹Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 40.

⁶²Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity*, 39.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 52.

wicked, holy among sinners, and bold toward hypocrites. This perfect morality revealed in the Bible “must be of superhuman origin.”⁶⁴

Third, the superhuman doctrine of the Bible confirms its divine origin. The Bible portrays the character of God in a way that no man could. Man has imagined many deities throughout history, but none of them compare to the God of the Bible. The Bible teaches a redemption that no man could have envisioned. A single substitutionary atonement, provided by the Son of God, is simply too heavenly to have come from the mind of man. The doctrine of the Bible is perfectly fit for the condition of man. It not only “meets man in his fallen condition, but leads him out of it.”⁶⁵ All of the doctrines of the Bible fit perfectly together. They call and motivate man to holiness. Every time the Holy Spirit uses doctrine to sanctify Christians, they grow in their conviction that the word of God is divine.

Fourth, the fulfillment of prophecies contained in the Bible proves its divine origin. Dagg claimed this is one of the critical purposes of prophecy: “among the important purposes which the prophecies of the Bible subserve, one of great value is the attestation which they give to the divine origin of the book.”⁶⁶ The Bible contains prophecies about the Messiah that are gloriously fulfilled: the time of his birth, his descent, his forerunner, his work, and his divine as well as human nature. Also, the Bible includes prophecies that have been fulfilled concerning the Hebrew nation, ancient cities, and the papacy. Furthermore, Christ himself makes predictions about his own death and resurrection, which come about just as he said they would. Putting all this together, it “forms an immense mass of evidence, establishing conclusively the divine origin of the Bible.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity*, 62.

⁶⁵Ibid., 70.

⁶⁶Ibid., 104.

⁶⁷Ibid., 152.

Fifth, the miracles associated with the Bible show its divine origin. Christ and the apostles performed many miracles. Even Christ's opponents could not deny this fact, "the enemies who opposed the religion, and persecuted the Master and his disciples, did not deny the miraculous facts, but attributed them to diabolical influence."⁶⁸ Christ and the apostles performed miracles to show the divine authority of their teaching. The Old Testament contains similar miracles that point to its divinity. Miracles authenticate the Christian faith in a unique way. In fact, the very progress of the Christian faith was brought about by miraculous power.

The *Evidences of Christianity* not only proves the divine origin of the Bible, but reveals the character of the divine author. The proofs presented in the work teach significant truths about God's character. Wherever God's Word goes it produces blessing, therefore God must be good. The Bible teaches a perfect morality so God must be holy. God must be gracious for the Scriptures teach a coherent system of doctrine, which is adapted to man's fallen condition and centers on redemption. The prophecies of the Bible get fulfilled, so God must be truthful and sovereign. Finally the miracles associated with the Bible also reveal God's power. If this kind of God speaks in the Bible, then it is a trustworthy place to go for the duty of love to God. Dagg highlighted four fruits of the duty of love to God that grow naturally from the soil of the divine word.

First, Christians can come to the Bible with confident hope. The Christian's future is wondrously portrayed in the Bible. As Christians grasp the truth that the Bible is the Word of God, they will grow in confidence of their great hope. Dagg encouraged readers on this point, "This book describes an inheritance reserved in the heavenly land for all the followers of Christ, and conveys to them a duly authenticated title to this vast estate. To study the evidences of Christianity is to examine the seals which authenticate

⁶⁸Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity*, 173.

this title.”⁶⁹ Christian hope is based on the glorious promises found in the Bible. What extraordinary confidence in future blessing comes, when the Bible is known as the word of God.

Second, Christians come to the Bible in humble obedience. The Bible is full of commands for Christian living. The Bible calls for a holy life that is all too uncommon. If Christians are to live holy lives, then they must come to the Bible convinced that it is the Word of God. Dagg pointed to both the high morality and the motivational power of the Bible: “its laws are the highest standard of duty, and its motives the strongest that omnipotent love can present.”⁷⁰ Christians will never strive towards such a high standard, if the standard is not from God. In the same way, Christians will not receive the motivational power of the love of God, if they doubt the divinity of the Scriptures. But, if one is convinced that the Bible is God’s very word, then he will aim for the high standard of holiness and be moved by the great love of God revealed in the Bible.

Third, Christians will come to the Bible as a tool for bold evangelism. If the Bible is the Word of God, then there is no better instrument to use for the salvation of souls. The world mocks Christian convictions, leaving many Christians hesitant to present the truth with boldness. Many develop evangelistic strategies that emphasize service and deemphasize speaking the truth. Service and relationships have their place in evangelism, nevertheless, Romans 10:17 says, “faith comes by hearing.” Where can Christians find courage to proclaim the Word of God? They can find it in the divine origin of the Bible. As Christians realize that God Himself speaks through the Bible, they will take it up and employ it in the work of evangelism. This evangelistic purpose in fact was one of the primary purposes of Dagg’s work *the Evidences of Christianity*. He knew that if he could show the Bible to be the Word of God, then people would be obligated to

⁶⁹Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity*, 15.

⁷⁰Ibid.

listen to it. Christians who grasp this truth realize that salvation does not depend on their cleverness, but on the saving Word of God. A deep conviction that the Bible is the Word of God results in bold evangelism.

Fourth, Christians approach the Bible as a means of sweet communion with God. Healthy relationships depend on knowing one another. If the Bible is the Word of God, then Christians must come to it in order to grow in their knowledge of God. In the same way a husband needs to hear the heart of his wife in order to commune with her, so Christians must hear the heart of God in order to grow in their relationship with him. The examination of the divine character of the Bible is important for if the Bible is not the Word of God, then Christians could go elsewhere to commune with him. Dagg rebuked Christians who have no delight in examining the divine origin of the Bible. He claimed it reveals that they do not love God—“he who is unwilling to make this examination, or who takes but little pleasure in it, shows that his heart and his treasure are not in heaven, and proves himself unworthy of eternal life.”⁷¹ The one who loves God will care a great deal whether the Bible is the word of his beloved. As he is convinced, he will often return to God’s word in order to grow in sweet fellowship with him.

John Dagg saw the Bible as a strong foundation for the duty of love to God because he knew it to be the Word of God. His defense of the divinity of the Bible reveals that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, and that the God of the Bible is worthy to be praised. Since the Bible is the word of God, Christians can come to it as a firm source of truth. They will find hope for the future. They will be ready to live holy lives before an unbelieving world. They will find power for courageous evangelism. They will discover a source for sweet communion with the God who speaks.

The major works of John Leadley Dagg are replete with the duty of love to God. He displayed that every systematic doctrine corresponds to a duty of mankind. He

⁷¹Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity*, 16.

presented the church as the redeemed who fulfill the duty of love to God together. The duty of love to God gave rise to his high and detailed ethical system that gloried in sovereign grace. Moreover, Dagg viewed the Scriptures as the divine authoritative Word for the purpose of pressing on in the duty of love to God. While most vividly displayed in his systematic theology, the duty of love to God stood at the heart of his other writings as well, giving shape and nuance to each topic he addressed.

CHAPTER 4

DOCTRINE

Far from an ossified orthodoxy, Dagg saw doctrine as dynamite for an affectionate and obedient Christianity. On this point, Dagg had much in common with the Puritans. J. I. Packer highlighted a similar understanding in the thought of John Owen: “The giving of spiritual understanding is not, of course, an end in itself; as Owen recognizes, it is always to be seen and valued as a means to something further—knowing and enjoying God.”¹ The fact that John Dagg was an experiential theologian has been well established. In the preface to the latest printing of *the Manual of Theology*, Tom Nettles pointed to Dagg as “an experiential Calvinist, not simply a scholastic theologian.”² Mark Dever too claimed, “Dagg presented theology as always an expression of piety—a loving heart desiring to know more of its Beloved.”³ Paul Sanchez as well referenced Dagg’s rigorous call to holiness, saying, “he repeatedly calls for devotion, submission, and adoration of the God about whom he writes.”

Although Dagg was known for his devotional use of doctrine, a reason for his devotional use has not been developed. It is one thing to admire his devotional use, but it is another thing to learn to follow in his footsteps. In order to follow in his steps, one must understand what was functioning beneath his development and utilization of theology. What is the organizing principle that influenced his devotional approach to

¹J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 82.

²John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications), 2009 (preface).

³Timothy George and David Dockery, *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 168.

doctrine? The answer: the duty of love to God. This is what made Dagg a master teacher in the purpose of doctrine. When he approached doctrine, he approached the communication of the very God in whom he delighted—the communication of the very God he revered.

In this chapter, I will argue that the duty of love to God determined Dagg’s doctrinal methodology. This is demonstrated in his approach to both the nature and the purpose of doctrine. The former is the communication of God and the latter is godliness. Dagg’s concern to love and obey God shaped the way he approached God’s Word. I will delineate Dagg’s understanding of both the nature and purpose of doctrine within the context of his Trinitarian framework, demonstrating the power of the duty of love to God in his approach to doctrine. Essentially, Dagg approached doctrine eager to listen to the God he loved, and eager to respond in the obedience of love.

Doctrine: Trinitarian Communication

In the opening of his *Manual of Theology*, John Dagg spoke of the different ways doctrine may be viewed. His explanation presented a Trinitarian framework, “we may view [doctrine] as coming forth from God, with supreme authority; or as a system revealed by Jesus Christ, all the parts of which beautifully harmonize with each other . . . or as entering the human heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and transforming it into the image of God.”⁴ All the members of the Trinity play a part in the delivery of doctrine: God sends it forth authoritatively, Christ reveals the system in all of its harmony, and the Spirit enters the truth into the heart of man. In the following sections, each aspect of this Trinitarian scheme will be explored, in an effort to show how they instructed Dagg’s devotional use of doctrine.

⁴Paul Anthony Sanchez, “A Modern Analysis of the John L. Dagg’s Manual of Theology” (Th.M thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 51.

Doctrine: Coming Forth from God

The first way Dagg viewed doctrine was as truth coming forth from God. His devotional approach depended on this: God is the origin of true doctrine.⁵ Dagg never lost sight of this fundamental truth. When one studies doctrine, he is essentially listening to what God has said about himself. Doctrinal study is a holy exercise because it is a study of God's holy Word. The theologian, therefore, does not only learn about God; he learns from God. Robert Gardner has rightly determined that Dagg viewed the Bible fundamentally as divine revelation when he remarked, "Although the Bible was written by inspired men, they are to be regarded simply as the instruments employed by God for the production of his work."⁶ Dagg understood doctrine as originating with God. This conviction informed his use of doctrine for devotional purposes.

In this first view of doctrine, the Bible holds a central place. Doctrine must begin as truth radiating from God in the Bible. The Bible is the ultimate source of doctrine. Men may indeed teach doctrine, but Dagg insisted, "To this holy book, as the highest standard, the last appeal is always made."⁷ This point is so foundational for Dagg, that his main theological work referenced no human authors, only the Bible. His lack of citing human authors does not mean that he ignored historical theology; his awareness of historical arguments is readily apparent. But, he excluded human authority from his work in an effort to put his readers into direct contact with their ultimate authority. He even warned readers against receiving any of his own thoughts, if the Bible did not support them. Since the Bible played such a central role in Dagg's theology, a deeper investigation of his key work on the subject will prove profitable. Dagg's understanding

⁵I say "true doctrine" to distinguish it from false doctrine and doctrinal error. Finite man will construct a theology that contains errors. The errors are not from God. The point here is, all doctrine that faithfully expounds the Bible, has at its source, the word of God.

⁶Robert G. Gardner, "John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), 73.

⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, iv.

of doctrine will appear more clearly from a partial survey of his work: *Origin and Authority of the Bible*.

Dagg began his inquiry into the origin of the Bible by showing the importance of the question. He pointed out three things concerning the nature of man that proves the study to be a serious one. First, man is a rational being. As soon as a child is old enough to talk he begins to question the origin of things. The Bible is no exception. It is only natural for man, as an intelligent being, to question the origin of the Scriptures. Second, man is a moral being. The Bible not only claims to speak the truth, but it tells people how they are to live. When one considers the level of morality commanded in the Bible, it is fitting to inquire as to the origin of the book. Third, and most compelling, man is an eternal being. The vast majority of mankind assumes that there is life after the grave. If man is indeed eternal, how crucial is an examination of the origin of the Bible? The Bible speaks to this eternal state. The Bible tells man what he must do to enter eternal happiness, and avoid eternal sorrow. If man is an eternal being, standing on the precipice of eternity, then no other study could be more relevant to his current circumstance.

Dagg continued by posing the question whether the Bible is from heaven, or from men. He reasoned that, if the Bible is from men, then it must be from good men; for bad men are so opposed to purity that they would have never developed such a high moral standard. Then, citing 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:37, and 2 Peter 1:19-21, he referenced what the authors of the Bible themselves say about the book. Dagg anticipated the objection of circular reasoning, so he quickly argued for the propriety of examining the character and testimony of one in question. If one seeks to know the truthfulness of a stranger, then it is only appropriate to listen to his testimony and assess his character. This truth led Dagg to his pointed defense of the origin of the Bible.

Dagg contended that the character of the revelation contained in the Bible proves its divine origin. First, he demonstrated the character of God displayed in the Bible to be from God. Drawing on Exodus 34:6-7, he contrasted the holy God of the

Bible with the false gods of Greece and Rome. The latter are the vile creations of men, the former, a divine display of holiness. Then, he mentioned the character of Christ as another sign of the Bible's divine origin. Many writers have created fictional heroes, but none of them compare to the life of Christ. Mere man could not possibly have dreamt up his wisdom, purity, and teachings. The message of salvation serves as another evidence of the Bible's divinity. Man could not have envisioned salvation through substitutionary atonement. Furthermore, those who read the Bible live a more blessed life, and this is a sign of its divine nature. Both societies and families that attend the word faithfully, experience greater holiness and happiness. Finally the miracles and prophecies of the Bible prove its divinity. Dagg marshaled all of these points in support of his argument that the Bible is from God.⁸ But this is not the only work where he makes this argument. His work previously mentioned, written sixteen years later in 1869 and entitled *the Evidences of Christianity* elaborated these points.

This later book serves as another example of Dagg's idea of doctrine as coming forth from God. He exulted in the preface, "may the glorious effulgence of divine truth emanating from the Bible, banish all darkness of ignorance or doubt from the mind of every reader!"⁹ The truth emanating from the Bible is divine. The light shining forth from the Scriptures is light from God. Dagg employed this language of light in other works as well. In *the More Excellent Way*, he began by advocating a Christianity that combines both light and heat. The Christian must have knowledge and affections. In his conclusion he declared, "rays . . . emanate from the divine throne, and collect around the saint in heaven."¹⁰ Even in heaven, light emanates from God. He provided five arguments to support his claim that divine light radiates from the Scriptures: the Bible's effects,

⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 28.

⁹John Dagg, *The Evidences of Christianity* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), vi.

¹⁰John Dagg, *The More Excellent Way* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1852), 96.

morality, doctrines, prophecies, and miracles. Much of his argumentation from *Origin and Authority* is repeated in this work. The purpose of this chapter does not require a survey of this latter work. The pertinent point is that Dagg returned to the subject sixteen years later, offering an expanded and refined defense of the Scriptures as coming forth from God. This goes to show Dagg's foundational concept of doctrine as radiating out from the Father.

Dagg was not alone in his view of doctrine, but stood in the Reformed stream concerning the subject. Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, claimed, "Our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author."¹¹ Beeke and Jones as well stated, "a basic premise of Reformed thought in general . . . [is] the idea that no knowledge of God is possible unless it comes from him."¹² This basic premise appears in the writing of James Pendleton, who was a Calvinistic Baptist contemporary of Dagg. Under a heading titled "the Bible a revelation from God", Pendleton wrote that the Bible "is the book of God, properly so called, because it contains a revelation from him."¹³ Pendleton went on to argue that this revelation from God serves as the basis for Christian worship, ethics, and the certainty of what the future holds. James P. Boyce agreed, defining revelation as "the knowledge which God conveys by direct supernatural instruction, pre-eminently that given in the book known as the Bible."¹⁴ Dagg's contemporary Presbyterian W. G. T. Shedd claimed a similar definition of revelation. He wrote, "Revelation in its general and wide

¹¹John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 32.

¹²Joel Beeke, and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 11.

¹³James Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1878), 25.

¹⁴James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 47.

signification is any species of knowledge of which God is the ultimate source and cause.”¹⁵ This survey of other Calvinistic theologians puts Dagg’s particular approach to doctrine in context. He stood firmly in the reformed camp. But what made Dagg unique among his contemporaries was the way this emphasis upon revelation coming from God served his use of doctrine. How did Dagg’s view of doctrine shape his emphasis on spirituality?

The main way that this view of doctrine shapes Dagg’s use of it is this: since doctrine comes forth from God, it has authority. This is a theme that runs throughout Dagg’s works. In a world of half-truths and whole-lies, doctrine is an authoritative word that Christians can use to love God. With a clear view of the divine origin of the Bible, the authority of Bible doctrine cannot be neglected. Many Christians may struggle to imagine a world without God’s voice. What would it be like to try and love God, without a definite word on how to do so? Some have lived so long in the light of divine doctrine, that they have forgotten such a possibility. Thus, Dagg’s emphasis leads to gratitude as Christians are reminded that they have a dependable word from God. Dagg detailed certain nuances of the authority of Scripture and he applied the concept to the Christian life.

Dagg highlighted three facets of the authority of Bible doctrine. First, the Bible is a supreme authority.¹⁶ God’s word is not merely one authority among others, but it is the ultimate authority. Man may teach helpful things, but all of his teachings must be brought into subjection to the ultimate authority. Both the conscience and nature instruct man as to his duty, but neither have final authority. Next, the Bible is an independent authority.¹⁷ The authority of the Bible is not given to it by another entity. If this were true,

¹⁵William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1888), 1:62.

¹⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 40.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

then the entity that gave authority to the Bible would be a superior authority. Instead, the Bible derives its authority from the fact that it is the very Word of God. Finally, the Bible is an immediate authority.¹⁸ Here, Dagg struck a familiar note. The word of God is a direct authority for every individual person. It is the responsibility of every person to attend to the word of his God. Since Bible doctrine is authoritative, people can use it for devotional purposes. Dagg made three applications.

First, man uses doctrine as an authoritative source of faith.¹⁹ Man believes in the authoritative word that comes forth from God's own mouth, and by doing so, he grows in love for God. Knowledge is essential to love. A man can only love something to the extent that he knows it. Dagg argued in one of his works that the Christian's love "will forever increase, in proportion to the increase of our knowledge."²⁰ Loving God is not a mindless activity, but one that requires faith in the truth of God: the Bible provides what is needed. The reliability of Bible doctrine gives Christians a firm foundation for the exercise of love to God.

Second, man uses doctrine as an authoritative source of commands for rendering to God the obedience of love.²¹ God, the authoritative King of Kings, has laid down clear instruction for how Christians are to live. Bible doctrine not only teaches truth about God and his ways, but truth about the behavior of his children. Love and obedience are not contrary ideas, but dear friends that intimately relate to one another. Jesus himself, said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Christians, who are confident of the divine origin of the Bible, do not need to hesitate to obey difficult commands. There is no question as to their truthfulness or accuracy. Bible doctrine

¹⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 41.

¹⁹Ibid., 40.

²⁰Dagg, *The More Excellent Way*, 97.

²¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 40.

provides Christians authoritative instruction so they can express love to God through obedience.

Third, man uses doctrine as an authoritative source of promises in which to hope.²² If the Bible is from God, then the promises of future blessing are trustworthy. Man cannot love God without hoping in his promises. The love between friends greatly depends on trusting the promises of one another. Even more so, loving God depends on trusting his promises. The reason for this is that the relationship between God and man is a covenantal relationship. God's promises are essential to this covenantal relationship. Fallen man cannot love God by simply studying his Word and obeying his commands. Rather, he must discover God's promises in his Word, and trust that God will be faithful to those promises. By doing so, he grows in love toward God. This is the life of love that Paul speaks of in Galatians 2:20, "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Dagg understood Christ to be vital to the idea of covenant, for, "in the eternal covenant, promises are made to the Son, as the representative of his people."²³ Christ not only holds a vital place in the eternal covenant, but he plays a vital role in divine communication. With this first view concerning the origin of doctrine established, it is now necessary to turn to the revelation of doctrine by Christ.

Doctrine: Revealed by Christ

The second way Dagg viewed doctrine was as a system revealed by Christ. God the Father announces his word, and the Son orchestrates that word into a coherent system for man. Both the person and work of Christ play a part in this second aspect of Dagg's doctrinal approach. He claimed that doctrine may be viewed "as a system

²²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 40.

²³*Ibid.*, 257.

revealed by Jesus Christ, all the parts of which beautifully harmonize with each other, and cluster around the doctrine of the cross, the central point of the system.”²⁴ The person of Christ and the work of Christ serve as the great organizer of biblical truth. Dagg asserted that any systematic theology should have at its core, the crucified and risen Savior. Doctrine is more, not less, than an authoritative word from God. Doctrine is the authoritative word of God clearly and coherently displayed to man through his Son. In this section, I aim to show that Dagg viewed doctrine as a system of truth revealed through Christ’s person and work. Then, I will demonstrate how such a view informs his use of doctrine.

This second view of doctrine focuses on Christ as the mediator between God and man. Dagg took up this theme when addressing the three offices of Christ: prophet, priest, and king. He noted that the offices of Christ are perfectly fit for the nature of man: “as ignorant, we need Christ, the prophet, to teach us; as guilty, we need Christ, the priest, to make atonement for us; and as depraved, we need Christ, the king, to rule over us.”²⁵ For the purposes of this section, Christ’s mediation as prophet and work on the cross will be assessed.

Dagg explained that Christ is the one true prophet who reveals the doctrine of God. First, Christ is the ultimate prophet.²⁶ He stands head and shoulders above all other prophets of God. Moses was a prophet, but he does not compare to Christ. Elijah was a great prophet in his day, but he is not like the prophet Christ. At the mount of transfiguration, both of these men show up to speak with the superior prophet, and God thunders his own voice from heaven instructing the disciples to listen to his Son. This evidences that Christ stands in a category of his own as the supreme prophet of God.

²⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, iii.

²⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 231.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 209.

Second, Christ is the only true prophet.²⁷ He is not only superior to all other prophets, but he is the true prophet that spoke through all of the other prophets of God. Referencing 1 Peter 1:11, Dagg proved that Christ was speaking through the prophets of old. Yet, Christ continues to stand as the one true prophet after his resurrection and ascension. Dagg advanced John 1:1 to support the point that Christ continues to deliver the revelation of God through the apostles and the Bible. As Romans 10:17 states, faith comes from hearing the word, and the word is “the word of Christ.”

Third, Christ is a fitting prophet due to his incarnation.²⁸ Christ is well suited to reveal God’s word to man for he knows what it is like to be man. Hebrews 4:15 reminds Christians that Christ can sympathize with their weakness since he too has been tempted. Although that text deals primarily with Christ’s priestly work, it applies to his work as prophet as well. Dagg spoke of the motivational power of Christ’s work on the cross. Christ the prophet can speak to human hearts in a way that nothing else can.²⁹

Fourth, Christ is a worthy prophet for he is the divine Son of God.³⁰ Proclaiming the truth of God is no minor responsibility. The right man is needed gently to deliver the truth to man, but the right man is also needed faithfully to deliver the extraordinary truth of God. Dagg, referencing Romans 11:23, acknowledged man’s need of a divine mediator, for, “who has known the mind of the Lord?” Such knowledge is too wonderful, too vast, for man to attain. But Christ is able to reveal the doctrine of God for he himself is divine. Having examined Christ as the mediator who reveals God’s truth to man the relationship between doctrine and the cross must be observed.

²⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 209.

²⁸Ibid., 209.

²⁹Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 118.

³⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 210.

The cross serves a central place in Dagg's approach to doctrine. Dagg claimed that the doctrine, which Christ reveals, bundles around the cross. Christ is the prophet that reveals the truth of God, but he displays it most vividly in his work on the cross. In the cross, Christ reveals the whole system of doctrine. He unveils the glory of God's perfections, the tragedy of man's condition, and the beauty of the way of salvation.

God's moral perfections are displayed in the cross. Man sees the justice of God as the Son suffers the penalty of sin. At many points, Dagg argued that a just judge could not pardon the guilty simply because they were sorrowful. Thus, Christ's sufferings reveal that God is a just judge who will by no means clear the guilty. Yet, God's love is also exhibited in the cross for it is there that sinners receive forgiveness as the Son suffers condemnation. The perfections of Christ are seen at the cross as well. He shows his human compassion as he tenderly speaks to his mother, and he manifests his divinity as the Roman soldier testifies that he is the Son of God.

Salvation is displayed in the cross. By referencing many texts from both the Old and New Testaments, Dagg argued that Christ "made an efficacious sacrifice for the sins of his people."³¹ He advanced Matthew 20:28 in order to show that the sacrifice Christ made was the giving of his own life as a ransom for sinners. Thus, Christ's sacrifice is a propitiatory sacrifice that atones for sins. He noted 1 Peter 2:24, showing that Christ's sacrifice was substitutionary. Those who put their faith in this glorious sacrifice will be saved. Dagg acknowledged Romans 3:25, 26 and Romans 5:9, to clarify that the sacrifice of Christ is the meritorious work that permits sinners to be justified before God. This sacrifice achieves the particular redemption of a specific people. Furthermore, Christ's sufferings were proportional to the sins that he bore for his people.

³¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 210.

Taking a commercial view of the atonement he claimed, “Christ did endure just so much suffering, as would expiate the sins that were laid on him.”³²

Dagg was not alone in his view of doctrine as truth that is revealed by Christ. Again, he found agreement with others in the Reformed tradition. Beeke and Jones pointed out that Christ “is the Mediator not only in salvation, but also in all communication between God and fallen humanity.”³³ In *The Marrow of Theology*, William Ames spoke even more directly than Dagg of the necessity of Christ’s divine and human nature, for his purpose of revealing the truth of God: “it was necessary that he should be God . . . and it was necessary also that he should be man . . . for if he had not been God, he would not have understood the will of God perfectly . . . if he had not been man, he could not have fitly set it forth to men.”³⁴ Pendleton evidences great similarity with Dagg on this point. Considering the role of Christ in revelation, he wrote, “We may therefore say that to Christ as prophet the world is indebted for all that it knows of God. As words are used to express ideas, it is probable that the second person of the Trinity was called the WORD, because through him divine revelations have been made to men.”³⁵ Boyce saw Christ functioning in this way as well. He detailed the various ways Christ revealed God’s truth, including his life that revealed God’s character, his general teaching, and the specific teaching he vested in His apostles.³⁶ The relationship between Christ and revealed doctrine was not as pronounced in Dagg’s contemporary Methodist Miner Raymond. Raymond addressed revelation at the outset of his theological work, but he neglected to emphasize the clarifying and mediatorial role of Christ.

³²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 329.

³³Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 23.

³⁴William Ames and John Dykstra Eusden, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1968), 133.

³⁵Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 213.

³⁶Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 292.

This second view of Dagg informs his devotional use of doctrine in this way: since Christ reveals doctrine, it is a clear and beautiful system of truth. Doctrine, not only comes forth from God with authority, but that authoritative word is clearly and wondrously displayed in Christ. How unsettling might it be to have an authoritative word that is unclear? To know something is the ultimate truth, but fail to comprehend it, would be a troubling experience. Christ and his work on the cross ensure that this is not the case. As Christ displays a coherent system of truth, the majesty of doctrine appears. The beauty of the truth captures the heart of man, enabling him to grow in faith, love, and obedience. Three devotional uses seem to arise from this particular focus of Dagg.

First, man uses the clear system of doctrine to see the glory of God.³⁷ Doctrine serves as an agent of transformation because it shines forth the perfections of God. In the previous section, man uses the authoritative word as a source of faith. But here, Dagg went even further. His point here was that Christ reveals the manifold perfections of the divine character, and by beholding that character, man is transformed into the same image. Therefore, for Dagg, godliness was much more than simply knowing the truth, or doing what is right. Rather, it requires seeing and savoring God in Christ. An example of his thought comes from his teaching on the saint's conformity to God in heaven:

God's people are striving and praying for a higher degree of conformity; and they are looking to the future world for the consummation of their wishes . . . As they study the divine character here, they grow in conformity to it: 'We, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' The same transforming influence which the knowledge of God exerts in this life, will continue in the future world. As we make progress in the knowledge of God, we advance from glory to glory, in the likeness of God; and this progress will be interminable, through all our immortal existence. We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.³⁸

Second, man uses the clear system of doctrine to learn the way of salvation. If man does not know the way of salvation, then there is no way he can grow in godliness.

³⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 232.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 360.

The cross is the key to Christian devotion. Without the cross, there will never be love to God. Dagg encouraged Christians to a devotional life that centers on the saving cross: “this doctrine is essential to Christianity. It is the grand peculiarity of the Christian scheme. Hence Paul determined to know nothing but ‘Christ crucified,’ to glory in nothing but ‘the cross of Christ.’”³⁹ In Dagg’s mind, the cross is the nucleus around which both doctrine and devotion gather.

Third, man uses the clear and beautiful system of doctrine to subdue his soul before God. When doctrine is viewed at the cross it has immense devotional power. Dagg testified that it is the love of Christ in the cross that provides such powerful motivation to godliness: “a powerful motive, to love and obey Christ, is drawn from the love which he has manifested in dying for us.”⁴⁰ He went on to say that when a Christian’s affections grow cold; he should meditate on Calvary, for there he will find a remedy. One reason that the cross has this effect is that it shows man the hideous nature of his sins. At the cross, one sees the immeasurable suffering that Christ endured for his sin. With such glory displayed through the cross, Christians ought to heed Dagg’s advice: “it may be profitable to linger yet a little time at the cross, that we may again survey its glory, and feel its soul-subduing power.”⁴¹ Christ plays a critical role in Dagg’s understanding of doctrine as divine communication. But his Trinitarian framework is not complete without turning to see his focus on the Spirit’s role in divine communication.

Doctrine: Entering the Heart by the Spirit

The third way Dagg focused on doctrine is as it enters the heart of man by the Holy Spirit. In fact, Dagg constructed his entire theological work around this idea,

³⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 213.

⁴⁰John Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 9.

⁴¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 233.

showing how the Spirit uses each doctrine to sanctify the human heart. Dever noticed this in the work of Dagg; he stated that his “entire theology [is] done ‘in tandem’ with the Holy Spirit. Each doctrine is treated as a sanctifying tool of the Holy Spirit.”⁴² Doctrine is authoritatively announced by God, and beautifully organized by Christ; yet, it will never move the heart of man to devotion without the influence of the Holy Spirit. Gardner also highlighted this in Dagg. Writing on Dagg’s approach to the Scriptures, he said, “The Bible is certainly indispensable, but it must be accompanied by an act of God. Religious knowledge comes to man as the Holy Scripture is illuminated by the Holy Spirit.”⁴³ Every application of doctrine to the heart of man is done through the Holy Spirit. This third view of Dagg distinguished him from many others. Many theologians would agree that the Holy Spirit uses doctrine to sanctify believers, but Dagg was very intentional to construct his theology with this point in mind. In this section, I will show that Dagg views doctrine as entering the heart of man by the Spirit, then, illustrate how this particular view instructs his use of doctrine.

The clearest picture of Dagg’s view appears in his theological work. He acknowledged that the Holy Spirit’s use of doctrine played a significant part in his theology.⁴⁴ Then, he went on to connect each doctrine with the appropriate response in the heart of man. First, Dagg claimed the doctrine of God enters the heart of man, resulting in the duty of loving God. Second, the will and works of God call for the duty of delight in ways. Next, the doctrine of the fall leads man to the duty of repentance. Dagg moved to the doctrine of Christ, which results in the duty of believing in the Savior. Fifth, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit warms man’s heart to the duty of living and walking in the Spirit. Then, Dagg connected the doctrine of divine grace to the duty of gratitude. Lastly,

⁴²George and Dockery, *Baptist Theologians*, 71.

⁴³Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian,” 89.

⁴⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, iii.

the doctrine of the future world summons the duty of preparing for that future world. In each case, doctrine leads to duty. Duty is not a cold and loveless task, but a warm and joyful response to the powerful doctrine that has entered one's heart by the Spirit. In the beginning of his work, Dagg detailed how doctrine should be received: "let us be careful that we do not merely receive it coldly into our understandings, but that its renewing power is ever operative in our hearts."⁴⁵ Lest duty be misunderstood, it is necessary to understand how Dagg viewed the sovereign operation of the Spirit.

In his *Practical View of Christian Ethics*, Dagg sought to emphasize the necessity of the Spirit for true virtue. He began by listing the different sources whereby man can discover his duty. Then he turned to a section where he admitted the inability of the Bible itself to produce obedience. Referencing Romans 3:2, he exhibited the great blessing of the oracles of God to the Old Testament saints. Nevertheless, "the people abused their high privileges, rejected the authority of God, killed the prophets whom he sent, and crucified the Messiah raised up for their deliverance."⁴⁶ Jeremiah 31:33 shows that the new covenant will provide what the old covenant lacked, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." But it is not simply the letter of the New Testament that is needed. Dagg reasoned that the New Testament would be just like the Old if the Spirit does not operate on the heart of man. 1 Corinthians 3:7; Acts 16:14; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5, and 2 Corinthians 3:6 all support the truth that the Spirit is needed, if man is ever to be sanctified in the truth.

Man's fallen nature renders the sovereign work of the Spirit necessary. Since man has sinned against God, his conscience no longer works properly. Not only does the conscience lack the power rightly to determine good from evil, it lacks power to motivate

⁴⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 18.

⁴⁶Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics*, 126.

man to godliness. The only remedy is the sovereign work of the Spirit. Man is totally depraved and helpless before God's holy word. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." The crucial point is this: man cannot simply study doctrine and will himself to faith and obedience. He must be born again by the Spirit through the word.⁴⁷ Then he must continue in daily dependence on the Spirit as he meditates upon the doctrine from God.

Dagg found friends in the Reformed tradition again on this point. In distilling a succinct summary of Puritan thought on this issue, Beeke mentioned the operation of the Spirit and the word for the Christian's cultivation of holiness: "through humble feeding on Scripture . . . the Spirit teaches us His mind and establishes an ongoing realization that holiness remains essential to being worthy of God."⁴⁸ Notably, the Spirit here is bringing the mind of man into submission to his own mind. Yet, Calvin went even further, aligning with Dagg that the Spirit not only teaches, but draws the heart of man towards godliness through the Word. Highlighting the influence of the Spirit, he said, "we have a thorough conviction that, in holding [the word], we hold unassailable truth . . . because we feel a divine energy living and breathing in it—an energy by which we are drawn and animated to obey it."⁴⁹

Although his contemporary Calvinistic theologians would agree with Dagg on the role of the Spirit in doctrine, Dagg was unique among them in his emphasis on this point in his own theological work. For example, Pendleton addressed the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in similar terms as Dagg. But, Pendleton did not labor to show how each doctrine was employed in the heart of man by the Spirit. Yet, it is interesting that

⁴⁷Here John 3:8 and 1 Pet 1:23 collide to show that one must be born of the Spirit through the living and abiding word.

⁴⁸Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 406.

⁴⁹Calvin and Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 34.

Pendleton was the contemporary of Dagg who revealed the greatest similarity with Dagg on this point. He would at times apply the doctrine he had just expounded. One example comes from Pendleton's sermon ending to the doctrine the prophetic office of Christ. He preached, "Happy, thrice happy, are those who reverently hearken to his teachings! They not only find rest to their souls in this life, but will in the life to come be exalted to the enjoyment of eternal glory in heaven. Awful will be the doom of those who turn away from the teachings of Christ."⁵⁰ Such exuberant application and sober warnings run in the same vein as Dagg. What Pendleton expressed on occasion, Dagg expressed continually.

Adding to Dagg's uniqueness was his focus on the Spirit's application of the doctrine as the authoritative word of God revealed through Christ. He would agree that the Spirit must work through the preaching of a given text, or a personal Bible study. But, he offered an approach to doctrine as an entire system, with that same work of the Spirit in mind. The distinction may be slight, but it is worthy of noting. If the Spirit works to take the text of a given sermon and enter it into the heart of man, how glorious is it that he can take the whole system of doctrine, gathered around the cross, and place it into the heart with sanctifying power? Dagg admitted that his focus on the Spirit's use of doctrine resulted in his sacrificing some academic breadth. In order to understand all of the various theological arguments of the nineteenth century, other theologies must be consulted. Nevertheless, Dagg's work signals these theological arguments while employing doctrine for the sake of piety. Having established Dagg's focus on doctrine as entering the heart of man by the Spirit, the influence of this view upon his use of doctrine will be presented.

Viewing doctrine through the lens of the Spirit's application, Dagg employed doctrine as a powerful means of devotion. Since it comes from God, it has authority. And, revealed by Christ, it has clarity. Yet, it is the Spirit that gives doctrine its power in the

⁵⁰Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 214.

Christian life.⁵¹ As mentioned before, to have an authoritative word that is not clear would be a tragedy. Yet, it would also be a tragedy to have an authoritative and clear doctrine that failed to exert a powerful influence over the Christian life. The Spirit provides that power. As Ephesians 6:17 says, the Word of God is “the sword of the Spirit.” When doctrine is viewed as the mighty sword in the hand of the Holy Spirit, Christians can take confidence in it as a means to holiness. Dagg highlighted three devotional uses that stem from this view of doctrine.

First, man comes to doctrine in prayerful dependence on the power of the Spirit. If man does not have the power to make the truth effectual, then he must come to the truth depending on another. How often do Christians come to the book without first calling upon God for the Spirit’s help? How many men open a theological text without a humble recognition of the Spirit’s work? A man may have the most fabulous pen in the entire world, yet it will not write without ink. So too, man comes to doctrine as an almighty weapon, yet if he wants it truly to work in his heart, he must depend on the Spirit. The word of God and prayer, these are the tools for loving God with all the heart, soul, and mind. Man desperately needs the Spirit to operate on his heart, for Dagg noted, “our carnal affections tend to shut out the truth from the heart.”⁵² Dagg showed biblical support for this application from Psalm 119:18 where the Psalmist prayed, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” This attitude of heart belongs to every Christian who opens the word. This longing for the Spirit’s work appears on the Lord’s Day as well, for, “it is prayed for by the faithful minister of the gospel, and by every devout hearer, when at the beginning of a sermon, they ask God to make his truth effectual.”⁵³

⁵¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 234.

⁵²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 286.

⁵³Ibid.

Second, man comes to doctrine expecting the powerful influence of the Spirit. He not only prays for the influence of the Spirit, but through faith, he expects the Spirit to wield the mighty sword. Dagg never presumed that the Spirit will work in the hearts of those who grieve him. Those who are hardened need the Spirit to work his great work of regeneration. But, those who have been born again, and humbly pray for the Spirit's influence, ought to have confidence that the Spirit will work through the word. This is not presumption because God's word makes abundantly clear that Spirit indeed does this sanctifying work.⁵⁴ How different might a theological course be if those involved entered into the study expecting the Spirit to work in their hearts? When Dagg launched into his study of the church, he called for such a disposition: "Let us, therefore, prosecute the investigations which are before us, with a fervent prayer, that the Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth, may assist us to learn the will of him whom we supremely love and adore."⁵⁵

Third, man comes to doctrine with a view to application. If the Spirit applies doctrine to the heart, then man ought to come to doctrine ready for application. Dagg claimed that doctrine must be studied for the purpose of holiness. When doctrinal knowledge is attained, it must be used for the purpose of sanctification. In fact, since the Spirit uses it for just that purpose, to use it otherwise "is to treat the Most High with contempt."⁵⁶ This requires man to be a student of his own soul and life. Paul shared the same wisdom with Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching." Dagg warned, however, that this is not easy and cautioned, "Human depravity is prone to make an improper use of divine truth."⁵⁷ He provided an example of

⁵⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 285. Dagg cited support for this claim from 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2; and 1 Cor 6:11.

⁵⁵Dagg, *Church Order*, 12.

⁵⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 13.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 137.

the misuse of doctrine from the doctrine of God's will. God's will of purpose can be used as an excuse for sin. This is what Paul referenced in Romans 9:19, "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?'" But, God's will of purpose must never be used as an excuse for disobeying his will of command. One might also run into knotty theological issues that the finite human mind cannot comprehend. Even so, the promises of God must be believed and the commands of God must be obeyed. In fact, it is the tough doctrinal concepts that "furnish an opportunity for the exercise of confidence in the divine veracity: and our state of mind is never better or safer than when, in simple faith, we take God at his word."⁵⁸ This illustrates that in application, man must yield his heart, mind, and life to God completely. When man comes to doctrine fully ready to trust and obey, he will be positioning himself to use doctrine in the way the Spirit intends.

In this chapter, I have argued that the duty of love to God determined Dagg's doctrinal methodology. He approached doctrine as the living word of the God whom he loved and adored. Furthermore, he studied doctrine with a constant view to employing it for the duty of love to God. He refused to engage in doctrinal study for mere intellectual advancement. Rather, the authoritative word of God was to be organized around the cross of Christ and worked into the heart by the Spirit. The duty of love to God held such a central place in Dagg's approach to doctrine that he could say—

The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of speculation . . . to study theology, for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, or preparing for a profession, is an abuse and profanation of what ought to be regarded as most holy. To learn things pertaining to God, merely for the sake of amusement, or secular advantage, or to gratify the mere love of knowledge, is to treat the Most High with contempt.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 330.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 13.

CHAPTER 5

GOD

Dagg found wide agreement with his contemporary Baptist theologians in the substance of his doctrine. Yet, he struck a unique note at many points as he delineated his doctrine of God in a devotional state of mind for a devotional purpose. Where others leave that devotional purpose implicit, Dagg rendered it explicit. As he wrote of the doctrine of God, he labored to display him as the God who is worthy of the duty of love, the God whom we should not only discover, but in whom we should delight.

In this chapter, I will argue that the duty of love to God served as the organizing theme for Dagg's doctrine of God. This is evident in (1) the way he contended for the existence of God, (2) the way he depicted the attributes of God, (3) the way he wrote of the person and work of Christ, and (4) the way he spoke of the person and offices of the Holy Spirit.

The Existence of God

Dagg advanced four arguments for the existence of God. First, the truth that there is a God appears from the moral nature of humans. Dagg spoke of the human conscience as foundational to the moral nature of humanity. The conscience works in every human being as a moral governor. This moral governor is critical because society depends on the moral character of its citizens. Dagg imagined a society without the human conscience: "Banish from every member of human society the restraints which this conscience and the moral sense of the community impose on him, and you will desolate the earth, or convert it into a hell."¹ The moral nature of mankind is evidenced

¹John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 50.

by the fact that civil governments are instituted to administer justice. As grateful as human beings may be for civil governments, Dagg highlighted that humans have never yet found an earthly government that is completely satisfactory. The lack of that complete satisfaction beckons for another governor—“The idea of God’s existence, as the moral ruler of the universe, accords precisely with the tendencies and demands of our moral nature; and, without admitting it, our moral faculties and the phenomena which they exhibit, are totally inexplicable.”² Dagg not only proved the existence of God but spoke of his character and work as the moral ruler of the universe. A sense of dutiful devotion begins to arise from Dagg’s first defense of the existence of God. He concluded that mankind is under moral obligation because God is the moral governor of the universe.

Second, the truth of God’s existence is vividly displayed in the workings of the world. The cause-and-effect relationships that appear constantly in the universe prove that God exists. Dagg employed this argument from Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274AD) which focuses on empirical evidence and works back to God as the First Great Cause. The power of this argument comes from the fact that humans see it displayed in the world on a daily, even hourly basis:

We meet it in the sun-beams, which impart to plants and animals, the warmth necessary to life . . . we behold it in the descending shower which fertilizes the earth, and causes the grass to grow . . . we find it in the bones of the body, fitted for their respective motions . . . in the throbbing heart, the circulating blood, the digesting stomach, and the heaving lungs.³

When the devotional heart grasps this truth the world becomes a theatre of worship. Every place where man goes he can behold God at work and render to him the duty of love. After advancing the cosmological and teleological argument, Dagg proceeded to prove the existence of God from the actions of mankind.

²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 51.

³Ibid., 54.

Third, the existence of God is seen in that nearly all of mankind has engaged in some type of religious worship of a ruling invisible power. There have been many different societies of mankind throughout history. Some of these human civilizations have not advanced very far in the arts, sciences, or literature. But, a common belief in the existence of the divine can be traced throughout almost all of these civilizations. Dagg took this universal witness as strong evidence for the existence of God.

Fourth, divine revelation most clearly proves the existence of God. As in all of his theological arguments, Dagg put the greatest weight on the Scriptures. God's existence is simply assumed throughout the entire Scriptures. He cited Genesis 1:1 showing that God created the world. Hebrews 11:6 shows the existence of God to be a fundamental principle of religion. Psalm 14:1 declares that those who do not acknowledge the existence of God are simply fools. Furthermore, divine revelation confirms what natural revelation teaches. Dagg referred to Psalm 19:1-2, Romans 1:20, and Job 12:7 to illustrate that biblical revelation itself points to the witness of natural religion.

A comparison of Dagg with his contemporaries on this point serves to highlight his focus on the duty of love to God. This is seen in his emphasis on the moral argument for the existence of God. In Dagg's theology, the moral argument uniquely comes first. Hodge addressed it only after first dealing with the ontological, cosmological, and teleological.⁴ Boyce did not deal in detail with the moral argument. Pendleton concerned himself with only the cosmological and teleological.⁵ Strong appears favorable to the moral argument as he wrote, "Among the arguments for the existence of God, however, we assign to this the chief place, since it adds to the ideas of causative power

⁴Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 233.

⁵James Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 11.

and of contriving intelligence, the far wider ideas of personality and righteous lordship.”⁶ The duty of love to God, with its high regard for the law of God, served an organizing function as Dagg viewed God primarily as the moral governor of the world.

Dagg’s case for the existence of God was no mere intellectual exercise. He sought to prove the existence of God from a devotional heart that desires all mankind to give themselves to the duty of love to God. After marshaling these four arguments to prove the existence of God, he lamented the depravity of mankind evidenced in that they do not believe that God exists. The only solution for depraved human beings is a new heart. Here again the head and heart come together in Dagg’s theology. If one occasionally doubts that there is a God, then he or she must walk with God. As a person walks with God, he or she will be confident of His existence. For Dagg, the argument for the existence of God is no mere scientific formula—yet he was rigorous in his thinking on the subject. After working through the proofs for God’s existence he reminded his readers that the God who exists is the great moral governor of their lives, the orchestrator of the events of this world, and the glorious Creator whom the Bible declares is worthy of the duty of love.

The Attributes of God

Dagg spoke of eleven different attributes of God in his *Manual of Theology*. He tied each attribute to a devotional response of love in the human heart. An analysis of each of these attributes will serve to highlight further the role of the duty of love to God upon Dagg’s doctrine of God.

Dagg began with God’s unity. He demonstrated that natural religion does not contradict the doctrine of God’s unity and does in some ways prove it. For example, no matter where one goes in the world, he or she will find the same principles at play. When

⁶Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1947), 84.

a person enters a different country, he or she does not experience an entirely different world there with a different set of laws governing nature. For example, “Light which emanates from the remote fixed stars, possesses the same properties, and obeys the same laws, as that which comes from the sun of our own system.”⁷ This unity in the laws of nature implies unity in the God who created and governs nature. Even so, what natural religion only implies, the Bible teaches explicitly. He referenced Deuteronomy 6:4 as a key text that God is one. The unity of God leads to the universality of the duty of love to God. Dagg asserted, “It leaves us in no doubt to whom our allegiance is due; and it fixes one centre in the universe to which the affections of all hearts should be directed.”⁸ A key aspect of Dagg’s theology appears in his assessment of this first attribute. He regularly appealed to nature to prove his arguments. Mark Dever has noted this tendency in Dagg—“appeals to conscience and to the common sense of humanity were used as important confirmations of spiritual truth.”⁹

Dagg next addressed the spirituality of God. He provided a helpful definition of the term *spirit*: “The term *spirit* is used to denote an immaterial and intelligent substance, or being; one which is without the peculiar properties of matter, and possesses properties analogous to those of the human mind.”¹⁰ Dagg selected John 4:24 as the strongest biblical text for supporting the doctrine of God’s spirituality. This text not only proves God’s spirituality, but it also instructs man concerning how he is to worship. Since God is spirit, worship must be done in spirit. Worshipers do not truly worship if they only come to God with certain physical postures. They must rather give praise to God with

⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 56.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Mark Dever, “Representative Aspects of the Theologies of John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce: Reformed Theology and Southern Baptists” (Th.M thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 106.

¹⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 57.

their minds and hearts if they are to worship him appropriately. Dagg's understanding of God's spirituality protected him from constructing a theology of worship that concerned only physical forms. Dagg, highly regarding the law of God, also related the significance of God's spirituality to the second commandment, writing,

The reason assigned for this commandment is, that the Israelites saw no form when God manifested his presence to them at Mount Sinai. He appeared to them in cloud and fire We are not to understand from these things, that God is either cloud or fire. These are material, and not spiritual substances. As what is purely spiritual cannot be perceived by our bodily senses, God was pleased to employ these material symbols to give a sensible demonstration of his presence.¹¹

He then showed the error of pantheism in light of God's spirituality.

Dagg continued by speaking of God's immensity and omnipresence. He pointed out the uniqueness of God's omnipresence since all of the material things we consider in the world have a specific location—even the spiritual angelic beings exist in a specific location. God on the other hand is at all places in his fullness. Dagg cited First Kings 8:27, Psalm 139:7, and Jeremiah 23:23 as biblical support for the truth that God is everywhere. This truth has massive implications for the way that man conducts himself in the world. Dagg united the concept of God's omnipresence with his understanding of God as the moral governor of the universe. If the moral governor of the universe is everywhere, then he is always near to every human being. There is nowhere to go to flee from him, and no matter the activity that one is engaged in, God is there. This truth awakens concern from those who do not know Christ—it awakens consolation for those who do.

Dagg then wrote of God's eternity. He defined God's eternity as "existence without beginning, without end, and without succession."¹² Among other texts, he cited Hebrews 1:10-12 and Genesis 1:1 to support "that everything, except God, had a

¹¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 58.

¹²*Ibid.*, 65.

beginning.”¹³ These two texts prove that creation had a beginning, but they do not specifically prove God’s eternity. Dagg would have been better to give primary exposition biblical texts that are more precise to his point. Later in his analysis, he cited Isaiah 57:15 which says that God “inhabits eternity.” This text describes the mystery that God exists in all eternity in a “perpetual now.”¹⁴ Under the heading of God’s eternity, Dagg spoke of God as unchangeable. Dagg provided multiple texts that show that God is unchanging in his essence and his attributes. These two attributes of God, his eternity and immutability, shape man’s response of worship. First, when man considers God’s eternity in light of his own short life, he will approach God in humility. This is a distinct aspect of Dagg’s concept of the duty of love to God, which arises from a clear understanding of the nature of God. Second, as one considers the unchangeableness of God, he or she can take confidence in God’s faithfulness. In view of such a glorious God, Dagg questioned, “Who will not reverence the Ancient of Days, the eternal God?”¹⁵ Sermonic and piety provoking statements like this one cause Dagg’s theology to stand out among his contemporaries, in that he employed doctrine for the purpose of stirring loving affections for God.

Dagg then addressed God’s omniscience. He referenced texts like Job 37:16, Psalm 147:5, Isaiah 42:9, and Romans 11:33 to prove that God knows all things. Scripture is not the only proof for this doctrine because an honest assessment of creation reveals that its creator must have all knowledge. Nevertheless, the mode and operation of God’s infinite knowledge is unknown to mankind. Insight into the function of God’s knowledge can only be examined by seeing how it differs from man’s knowledge. Man gains knowledge through his senses, but God does not gain knowledge in the same way.¹⁶

¹³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 64.

¹⁴Ibid., 65.

¹⁵Ibid., 66.

¹⁶Mark Matheson has pointed out that Dagg’s theology is significantly influenced by Common

Man keeps knowledge of the world by the use of his memory, but this is not God's way of retaining knowledge. Rather, his eternity allows him to behold all things in a perpetual now. Man uses the knowledge he gathers to make appropriate decisions in the world. This is not how God uses knowledge because he has exhaustive knowledge of all possibilities and actualities. As he summarized it, "God has perfect knowledge of things possible, and these depend on his power. He has, also, perfect knowledge of things actual, and these depend on his power."¹⁷ Dagg related God's omniscience to the devotional life of man. He warned those who stand guilty in sin that God sees into their hearts. God knows not only the actions of man, but his thoughts as well. At the judgment, the omniscient God will expose all of the secrets of men's hearts. On the other hand, the faithful rejoice in this truth. God, who loves them in Christ, knows them deeply. Christians can gladly follow their Lord even when they do not know what to do. The God in whom they trust knows all and will guide them in his wisdom.

Dagg continued detailing the attributes of God by teaching of God's omnipotence. Jeremiah 32:17, Matthew 19:26, and Revelation 1:8 are cited by Dagg as texts proving that God can do all his holy will. He contrasted God's infinite power with mankind's weakness. Men and women often attempt things that they are unable to complete. God, on the other hand, can do all that he pleases to do. God's omnipotence is closely associated with his sovereignty, which is another significant aspect of Dagg's doctrine of God. Tom Nettles has demonstrated that "no small part of Dagg's theology centers upon the doctrine of God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners."¹⁸ It is true that

Sense Realism. Matheson's point finds fair ground here as Dagg describes the attribute of God's omniscience. Specifically, the empirical emphasis of Common Sense Realism appears in this section of Dagg's work. Mark Edward Matheson, "Religious Knowledge in the Theologies of John Leadley Dagg and James Petigru Boyce ; with Special Reference to the Influence of Common Sense Realism" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984), 135.

¹⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 69.

¹⁸Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 115.

there are certain things that God cannot do like steal, lie, or deny his own existence. But these are things he will not do because he is holy. To those who assert that this means God is not omnipotent, Dagg objected, “It derogates nothing from the omnipotence of God, that he does not accomplish what he has no desire or will to accomplish.”¹⁹ Essentially, God’s omnipotence stands in harmony with his purity. Dagg employed the attribute of God’s omnipotence for the edification of man’s heart. He declared that such great power must stir the heart of man to awe, wonder, and holy fear. No worshiper can approach God with irreverence if he or she rightly comprehends God’s omnipotence.

Dagg moved on to present a key attribute of God for the duty of love—divine goodness. He said that God’s goodness is most commonly spoken of as God’s love or benevolence. God’s goodness concerns his disposition to promote the happiness of others. Dagg rooted God’s goodness in the Scriptures, pointing to texts like Exodus 34:6, Psalm 103:2-8, and 1 John 4:8. Then he proceeded to explain how God’s goodness can be observed in nature. One example of this is that he has filled the world with people who are able to enjoy pleasure. Fittingly, God has made the natural occurrences of this world pleasurable when he did not have to. For instance, eating food does not necessarily need to be an enjoyable experience, but the goodness of God has made it so. Dagg addressed the objection that God must not be good because there are painful realities in the world. To this objection, he readily admitted that the world is full of suffering. Nevertheless, the existence of pain in the world does not deny God’s goodness. First, on the whole, there is more enjoyment in the world than there is pain. Second, much of the pain in the world is a result of sin. God’s goodness, Dagg claimed, is the chief attribute of God for drawing man to the duty of love. The former attributes of God might be contemplated as attributes

¹⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 74.

of an evil God, but once they are seen in relationship to the attribute of God's love, the heart of man is filled with affection.²⁰

Dagg also affirmed the attribute of God's truth. He explained that the attribute of God's truth concerns both his veracity and his faithfulness. God's veracity concerns his ability to always declare the truth. Man often seeks to say the true thing, but fails because he has his facts wrong. This misunderstanding of the facts never occurs with God. Dagg points out that God's omniscience secures his veracity. God's faithfulness concerns his fulfilling of his promises. God's truthfulness is not limited simply to his telling the truth, but extends to him doing the truth. A man may make a promise and then leave his promise unfulfilled due to a physical inability. But this is not the case with God for he is omnipotent so he will always accomplish what he promises. The implication of this attribute for the Christian life is faith. Since God is truthful in all that he says and does, then man must take him at his word and expect the fulfillment of his promises. No worship is true worship if it lacks faith. A true view of God's veracity and faithfulness will aid Christians to live by faith.

Dagg next spoke of the justice of God. Isaiah 28:17 and Romans 2:6 serve as support for the truth that God is perfectly just. God's justice refers to his rendering each man his due according to his or her deeds. As with many of the other attributes, Dagg said that this attribute can be seen from a simple observation of nature. Yet, he did not provide any examples of how it does so. God's justice should instruct the heart of man in the fear of the Lord. The duty of love to God is provoked by this attribute of God as Dagg remarked, "an abiding assurance that a just God sits on the throne of the universe, is indispensable to the proper exercise of piety."²¹

²⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 75.

²¹Ibid., 86.

Dagg then spoke to the holiness of God. God's holiness is not so much a distinct attribute, but the union of God's moral attributes, specifically his goodness, truth, and justice. Dever explained this further by saying that when Dagg spoke of God's holiness, his concern was "not simply God's moral rectitude, but His God-ness."²² God is all together different from any other in that he is beautifully holy and pure. In reference to this primary attribute, Dagg cited the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:11, "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness." God stands at the center of all things. God is to be worshiped simply because he is God. God's holiness gives devotional meaning to his attributes of excellence and power and calls for love to God that is also marked by holiness.

A survey of Dagg's contemporaries reveals both agreement and disagreement regarding the nature of the holiness of God. The Methodist divine John Miley felt no burden to explain the holiness of God as a union of his moral attributes. Instead, Miley was concerned to couch the holiness of God in his moral government.²³ Neither did the Calvinistic Presbyterian William Shedd follow Dagg when he speaks of God's holiness as the "perfect rectitude of his will."²⁴ The Old School Presbyterian Charles Hodge was not as decisive as Dagg on the subject claiming holiness as "a general term for the moral excellence of God."²⁵ But the greatest distinction can be seen in Strong compared with Boyce and Pendleton. Strong claimed, "Holiness is not a complex term designating the agreement of the divine perfections... (but is) perfectly distinct from that of other attributes."²⁶ On the other hand, Boyce and Pendleton followed Dagg—Pendleton

²²Timothy George and David Dockery, *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 180.

²³John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1892), 1:199.

²⁴William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1888), 1:362.

²⁵Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 413.

²⁶Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 1:269.

quoting him directly.²⁷ Finally, Dagg followed the Scottish theologian John Dick, whose theology he used in his teaching at Mercer. Dick remarked,

The holiness of God is commonly represented as a perfection as distinct from the other properties of his nature as wisdom, power, and immutability are from each other. But this I apprehend is a mistake, and has led to the use of words without any precise idea annexed to them. Holiness is a complex term, which does not express a particular attribute, but the general character of God as resulting from his moral attributes.²⁸

The framework of the duty of love to God is at play in Dagg's understanding of the holiness of God. The holiness of God cannot be detached from God's moral qualities. Dagg's understanding of the holiness of God related both to his concept of duty as well as love.

Dagg concluded his assessment of God's attributes by looking at God's wisdom. He mentioned that many often fail to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. The key is that wisdom always concerns action. He cited 1 Corinthians 1:25 and 1 Timothy 1:17 as texts that declare God's infinite wisdom. Since God is infinitely wise, he always chooses the best course of action in any given circumstance. The wisdom of God is far too deep for us fully to comprehend as finite creatures. And it is precisely because God's wisdom is so deep that it motivates us to the duty of love. Dagg demonstrated God's wisdom serves as a consolation to the human heart. In life, man often does not know what decision to make and the world is full of danger. God brings light, truth, and order into the midst of this confusion and trouble. Those who love him can rejoice that he will work out all things by his wisdom for their good. He indeed is a loving God, who is worthy of the duty of love.

²⁷Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 62.

²⁸John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (Philadelphia: Published by J. Whetham, 1836), 1:274.

The Person and Work of Christ

The duty of love to God also serves as the organizing theme of Dagg's Christology. This appears in his analysis of the duty that corresponds to the doctrine of Christ, Christ's person, states, and offices.

The Duty of Believing in Christ

Dagg's Christology stood out in that he details the duty that corresponds to the doctrine of Christ. Before writing of the person, states, and offices of Christ, Dagg introduced his Christology with the duty of believing in Jesus Christ. Dagg advanced five aspects of the duty of faith. First, the duty of faith is foundational. He illustrated the foundational nature of faith with an earthly example. In order for a man to flee from his burning house that man must indeed believe that it is on fire. In the same way—"faith lies at the foundation of every religious affection and of every religious duty."²⁹ Second, faith is a heart duty. Dagg indicated an awareness of the false teaching of Sandemanianism and accurately teaches the true nature of faith. Dagg consulted the works of Andrew Fuller who thoroughly routed Sandeman in his *Strictures Against Sandemanianism*.³⁰ In agreement with Fuller, Dagg exclaimed—"A faith which dwells exclusively in the intellect, and leaves the heart untouched and cold, is the dead faith which the apostle James describes."³¹ Dagg found agreement with Hodge who writes—"That saving faith is not a mere speculative assent of the understanding, is the uniform doctrine of the Protestant symbols."³² Third, Dagg spoke of the duty of faith as a God-oriented duty. Faith is not merely belief in a truth; it is belief in God's truth. Dagg wrote that faith "is

²⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 176.

³⁰Robert Gardner has collected a list of works consulted by Dagg. See Robert G. Gardner, "John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), 409.

³¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 177.

³²Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 91.

the receiving of *God's testimony* concerning his Son [emphasis mine].”³³ On this point, Dagg evidenced strong agreement with the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 that states, “By this faith Christians believe to be true everything revealed in the Word, recognizing it as the authority of God Himself.”³⁴ Dagg was so thoroughly rooted in his Calvinistic Baptist heritage at this point that Robert Gardner claimed that when it comes to the person and work of Christ, “The Philadelphia Confession of Faith is merely Dagg in miniature.”³⁵

Fourth, Dagg described the duty of faith in Christ as a duty of delight in Christ. The duty of faith includes receiving all of Christ. Dagg warned, “If any part of his character, of his offices, or of his doctrine, is unwelcome to the heart, true faith does not dwell there . . . the true believer delights in Christ.”³⁶ Fifth, the duty of faith is a necessary duty. Dagg invoked John 8:24 proving the necessity of faith for eternal life. Dagg’s many contemporary protestant theologians emphasize the same point. James P. Boyce, a fellow Baptist contemporary with whom he corresponded, remarked, “It is by faith that men come into vital union with Christ, through faith that they are justified.”³⁷ Whereas Dagg had general agreement with many of his contemporary theologians including Boyce, Pendleton, and Hodge, he was unique in that he emphasized the duty of faith at the introduction of his doctrine of Christ. None of these other theologians included such a warm call to piety in connection with their systematic treatment of Christology. Seeing this uniqueness in Dagg aids in grasping the organizational function of the duty of love to God on his Christology.

³³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 177.

³⁴Stan Reeves, *Confessing the Faith* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012), 32 [14.2].

³⁵Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian,” 151.

³⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 177.

³⁷James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), 385.

The Person of Christ

Dagg was fairly straightforward as he presents the person of Christ. He first addressed the humanity and then the deity of Christ. He found common ground with his contemporaries when arguing for the deity of Christ. Dagg began by referencing various proofs of Christ's divinity including the names ascribed to Him, attributes, works, and the fact that he is presented as an object of worship. The Baptist James Pendleton followed almost an identical pattern proving Christ's divinity from his names, attributes, works, and worship.³⁸ The Methodist John Miley followed a similar line, proving the deity of Christ by citing his names, attributes, works, and worshipfulness.³⁹ Hodge took a slightly different approach. He considered the testimony of the Old Testament, then the New Testament, before examining some particularly pertinent passages.⁴⁰ Where Dagg and Hodge found agreement was in the importance of Philippians 2:9. Dagg considered this text under its own heading.⁴¹ Hodge claimed, "we have in (Philippians) 2:6–11 the clearest declaration of the divinity of Christ."⁴²

The States of Christ

After addressing objections to the deity of Christ, Dagg continued by delineating the states of Christ. He considered Christ's original glory, humiliation, and exaltation. Dagg appears somewhat unique in his inclusion of the states of Christ after his person and before his offices. The Methodist theologian Miner Raymond did not concern himself with the states of Christ. Rather after proving the deity of Christ in a similar manner to Dagg, Raymond moved directly to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ Dagg's

³⁸Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 72.

³⁹Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 1:239.

⁴⁰Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 483.

⁴¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 188.

⁴²Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 514.

⁴³Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1877), 2:396.

fellow Calvinistic Baptist Pendleton neither formulated the states of Christ. Instead he moved from the person of Christ directly to the offices of Christ.⁴⁴ Boyce, writing after Pendleton as another Calvinistic Baptist, did not single out the states of Christ as their own head either. He also moved directly from the person of Christ to the offices of Christ.⁴⁵ Interestingly, Dagg appears to follow at least some of the theologians he consulted on this point. Dagg read the German protestant theologian George Christian Knapp who took time in his theological work to address the humiliation and exaltation of Christ.⁴⁶ Similarly, the theologian John Dick, whom Dagg not only read but employed in his classes at Mercer, addressed the humiliation and exaltation of Christ under their own headings.⁴⁷ Dagg took time to build on the theologies he consulted and included Christ's original state before addressing his humiliation and exaltation.

Dagg's inclusion of Christ's original state is not unimportant. Dagg aimed to kindle piety by depicting the original state which Christ willingly left for the salvation of his people. He wrote,

We read with interest the history of men who have passed through great changes in their condition, and who, in every condition, have displayed great and noble qualities. But no changes of condition possible to men, can equal those which the Son of God has undergone. Once rich in his original glory, he became so poor that he had not where to lay his head: and from this depth of poverty, he has been exalted to supreme dominion, and made proprietor and ruler of all worlds. Through these changes he has ever exhibited such moral perfections as have been most pleasing to God. In whatever condition we view him, let us delight in him, as did his Father.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 198.

⁴⁵Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 272.

⁴⁶Georg Christian Knapp and Leonard Woods, *Lectures on Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: T. Wardle, 1845), 331. Knapp appears in the list of works Dagg consulted, which was compiled by Robert Gardner.

⁴⁷Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 2:91.

⁴⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 231.

Here Dagg's distinctive focus on the duty of love to God shines through. In his doctrine of Christ he found wide agreement with many theologians of his day, he built upon the theological works he consulted, and he advanced his Christological system for the purpose of the duty of love to God.

The Offices of Christ

Dagg proceeded to examine Christ as the mediator between God and man who holds the offices of prophet, priest, and king. Dagg found wide similarity with multiple contemporaries. Hodge delineated the offices of Christ in a similar manner. But the Methodist theologians Miley and Raymond do not seem as concerned to address these specific offices of Christ. Miley concerned himself with the incarnation and the corresponding sympathy that Christ has with sinners.⁴⁹ Yet, there was no intentional consideration of the offices that Christ holds as mediator. Dagg's fellow Baptists Pendleton and Boyce addressed the offices of Christ in the same manner he did. This similarity among these nineteenth-century Baptist theologians is not surprising as each was informed by the 1689 London Baptist Confession. The eighth chapter of the confession concerns Christ the Mediator: "God was pleased, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus . . . to be the mediator between God and humanity. God chose Him to be prophet, priest and king."⁵⁰

Prophet. The duty of love to God can be seen working in Dagg's instruction on Christ as prophet. He emphasized that Christ is superior to all the prophets who came before. In fact, he is the only true prophet since he is the one who qualified them for their service. The nature of Christ as God and man serves a significant place in his function as

⁴⁹Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 1:30.

⁵⁰Reeves, *Confessing the Faith*, 23 [8.1].

the prophet who “makes revelation from God to men.”⁵¹ Yet, Christ’s function as prophet is not a strictly intellectual doctrine, but it serves the affections. Dagg, emphasizing the human nature of Christ as prophet, remarked, “he spoke with the voice of a man; and, instead of the terrific thunders heard from Sinai, addressed those who were willing to receive his instructions, in the accents of tenderness, as an affectionate friend.”⁵² This line from Dagg contains his regard for both the law and holy affections that constitute the major ingredients of the duty of love to God. Though not as strong, this devotional element is found in Pendleton as well—“Truly we may say there is no teacher, no prophet, like Christ. Happy, thrice happy, are those who reverently hearken to his teachings!”⁵³ Although his teaching on Christ as prophet accorded with Dagg’s, Boyce did not express his views with the same devotional warmth seen in the two Baptist theologians who preceded him. Hodge agreed with Dagg in structure, dividing the doctrine into the nature and the execution of the office, but he did not focus on the affectionate response of the doctrine in the same way. Dagg’s contemporary Presbyterian W. G. T. Shedd also lacked the devotional element. He divided the doctrine in a similar manner, but he makes no application by calling for a loving response to the prophetic office of Christ.⁵⁴ Dagg’s views were distinct not in the content, but in the manner in which they engaged and employed the doctrine.

Priest. A similar function of the duty of love to God can be seen in Dagg’s teaching on Christ as priest. It is in this office that Christ made a sacrifice for his people’s sins. Dagg developed his view along the common Protestant trajectory in contending for the substitutionary nature of Christ’s atonement. He then wove in the significance of both

⁵¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 208.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 210.

⁵³Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 214.

⁵⁴Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:366.

Christ's divine and human natures. At this point the duty of love to God, with its high appreciation for the law of God, is revealed. In his atoning work Jesus was made fully aware of this sins of his people—"Now, if we suppose that the Spirit, which was given to Christ without measure, opened to his view, when hanging on the cross, the full glory of the divine law which the Church, his bride, had violated; and the full enormity of the sins which his people had committed; what intense agony would these discoveries produce!"⁵⁵

The agony of Christ on the cross was intrinsically related to the perfect and holy law of God, against which the church had rebelled. Dagg's view of the atonement of Christ will be dealt with more fully in the following chapter, but for now the point is to demonstrate the function of the duty of love to God in Dagg's teaching of Christ as priest. Pendleton, as on other doctrines, struck a similar devotional note when addressing the priestly office of Christ. Boyce exemplified a cooler analysis of Christ as priest, dividing the doctrine into Christ as priest and Christ as victim. He also developed the doctrine similarly to Dagg, without the specific note on Christ and the law or the devotional response. The Presbyterians Shedd and Hodge lacked the devotional element as well yet demonstrated a similar doctrinal teaching. Hodge provided a thorough examination of terms associated with Christ's priesthood.⁵⁶ Shedd broke down the doctrine along very similar lines to Dagg showing that Christ's priesthood consists in atonement and intercession.⁵⁷ Yet, one looks in vain for an affectionate call to spirituality like that of Dagg in the Presbyterians. The Methodists Miley and Raymond did not concern themselves with delineating Christ as priest in any detail.

⁵⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 217.

⁵⁶Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 468.

⁵⁷Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:371.

King. The duty of love to God operates no less significantly in Dagg's teaching of Christ as king. Dagg moved from proving Christ's kingly reign before His incarnation to emphasizing his unique function as king in His human nature. Still more specifically, Christ rules as king over His church where He "exercises his supreme authority for the benefit of his people, for whose sake he sanctified himself to undertake the work of mediation."⁵⁸ As Christ's people, Christians do not disdain His reign, but delight in it.⁵⁹ Pendleton followed a very similar line to that of Dagg highlighting Christ's kingly rule before his incarnation, then His rule over the church.⁶⁰ But Pendleton lacked the emphasis on the delightful response of the people of God to His rule, opting to tie in the necessity of baptism at this point in relation to Christ's kingly reign over the church. Boyce included a reference to Christ's rule over the church, but he is distinguished from Dagg in his expansive references to Christ's rule over the world, universe, angels, and even Satan.⁶¹

Dagg again evidenced similarity with the Scottish theologian John Dick and differences with nineteenth-century Methodists. Dagg took time to detail the kingly office of Christ whereas his contemporary Methodists did not concern themselves directly with the subject. Dick on the other hand dealt with the subject quite extensively. Dick also considered the kingly office of Christ within the realm of his mediatorial position. He also approached the subject of Christ's kingly office "chiefly in its relation to the church."⁶² Where Dagg was more devotional concerning Christ's kingly reign over the church, Dick was more detailed. Dick listed various aspects of Christ's kingly rule including Christ's founding, ordering, upholding, and defending the church.

⁵⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 225.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 215.

⁶¹Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 295.

⁶²Dick, *Lectures in Theology*, 2:140.

Dagg's awareness of Dick sheds greater light on Dagg's theology that centers on the duty of love to God. Dagg aimed at a devotional theology even stating that he intentionally neglected citing other theologies. But this should not lead one to think that he was unaware of them. He read Scottish theologians, the German Protestant theologian George Knapp, and, as previously noted, the eighteenth-century Baptist Andrew Fuller to name a few. His focus on the duty of love to God is not a neglect of the intellect. He did not pursue experience at the sake of rigorous thought. In his doctrine of the kingly office of Christ, one can see Dagg boiling down the Scottish theologian and employing the doctrine for the devotional response of the heart. Dagg did this again and again throughout his work—rigorous thinking employed for the duty of love to God.

In his teaching on the various offices of Christ, Dagg's experiential Calvinism, which undergirds the duty of love to God, shines through. Other theologies were advancing in Dagg's day that had the experience without the Calvinism. Questions remain, also, as to the relationship between Dagg's Calvinism and the theological commitments of his fellow Baptists in the nineteenth century. An examination of Dagg's relationship to both serves to highlight the centrality of the duty of love to God in Dagg's thinking and his Calvinism that reinforced it.

He lived during an intriguing era in Baptist history. At the same time Charles Finney propagated his Arminian ways with great fervency, many Separate Baptists arose during this period with a fervent ministry as well, albeit without Finney's doctrinal error. Nevertheless, the similarity in passion has led many to think there was a similarity in doctrine as Baptists began to call upon sinners to repent with great zeal. The nineteenth-century Baptist historian David Benedict recounted, "As a general thing, the discourses of that age (pre Andrew Fuller) were very dull and monotonous, and were greatly deficient in the pathos and fervor of that class of evangelical preachers who were not trammelled by

such rigid rules in their theological creed.”⁶³ Dagg stood as an example of a fervent Baptist Calvinist, even holding to Gill’s view of the atonement more so than Fuller’s, who evidenced a sweet and passionate zeal to see people put faith in Christ. It is a misunderstanding to consider that the two separate theological streams (Baptists and Finneyism) were identical due to their similar emphasis on Christian experience.

There is some question about when the strong Calvinist heritage of the Baptists began to wane in nineteenth-century America.⁶⁴ Robert Gardner has recorded that in the 1790’s, the decade in which Dagg was born, 82% of the 70,000 Baptists in America were Particular or Regular.⁶⁵ Fifty years later, as Dagg sat with his twenty two year old son in Augusta, Georgia at the first meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, he was numbered among the 293 delegates each of whom represented a church that was an adherent of Calvinistic doctrine.⁶⁶ Certainly Dagg’s straightforward Calvinism as the first American Baptist theologian, which reappears in Pendleton and then Boyce, suggests the drift came later rather than earlier in the century. This suggestion is only strengthened by noting Boyce’s employment of Dagg’s Systematic Theology during the initial years of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.⁶⁷

⁶³David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon, 1860), 141.

⁶⁴Nettles writes, “The last half of the nineteenth century saw an almost imperceptible and very gradual alienation from thoroughgoing Calvinism on the part of Baptists in the North who separated in 1845 from their Southern counterparts” (Nettles, *By His Grace*, xlv). Dever sees it slightly different claiming, “Calvinism was waning in the north both before the second half of the nineteenth; and by the second half of the nineteenth century, a great many Baptists in the north would have self-consciously thought of themselves as non-Calvinists” Mark Dever, *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 9.

⁶⁵Robert Gardner and Georgia Baptist Historical Society, *Baptists of Early America: A Statistical History, 1639-1790* (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 61.

⁶⁶Timothy George writes, “Each of the 293 ‘delegates’... who gathered in Augusta to organize the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, belonged to congregations and associations which had adopted the Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith as their own.” Timothy George and John Albert Broadus, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 11.

⁶⁷Mark Dever, “Representative Aspects of the Theologies of John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce: Reformed Theology and Southern Baptists” (Th.M thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 32.

Timothy Smith provided very intriguing statistics showing that, although other variations of Baptists appear in the nineteenth century such as Freewill, Anti-mission, and Seventh-Day, these were splinter groups that collectively made up less than 10% of American Baptists in 1865.⁶⁸ In fact, in 1855 82% of the 935,000 American Baptists were still Regular. And a decade later at the close of the Civil War, the percentage was approximately 83% of the over 1.1 million American Baptists who were Regular. Granted, the Philadelphia Confession was not the only confession at this time as the New Hampshire Statement of 1833 had been widely disseminated among American Baptists by the middle of the nineteenth century. But the New Hampshire Statement should not be understood as a watering down of the Regular Baptists' Calvinism. Although many regard the New Hampshire Statement as reflecting a weakened if not an altogether abandoned commitment to Calvinistic soteriology, Tom Nettles has persuasively argued otherwise. Nettles has pointed out that "rather than interpreting the *New Hampshire Confession* as a gradual retreat from the Calvinism of former days, it is better to see it as an affirmation of the Calvinist position on the particular issues raised by the presence and growth of Free Will Baptists in New England."⁶⁹ Northern Baptists began to diverge from their Calvinistic roots before Baptists in the South. Nevertheless, Dagg's contemporary Francis Wayland from the North held to a moderate Calvinism. Wayland advocated that Christ died for all men (and falsely considered himself to be in agreement with Andrew Fuller at this point), nevertheless, he still illustrates the evangelical Calvinism that marked Northern American Baptists in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 20.

⁶⁹Nettles, *By His Grace*, xliii.

⁷⁰Nettles, *By His Grace*, 104. Nettles writes, "Wayland identified himself, so he thought, with the Fullerites of the nineteenth century. However, such a statement on atonement as Wayland's would never be admitted by Andrew Fuller, for he believed that—in fulfillment of the covenant made between Father and Son—Christ actually redeemed for Himself a specific people."

The Person and Work of the Spirit

As the duty of love to God appears in Dagg's delineation of the existence and attributes of God, and in the person and work of Christ, so it appears in his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. His specific instruction on the Holy Spirit is short. Boyce was more rigorous in his analysis of the Spirit.⁷¹ Yet, Dagg's the influence of the duty of love to God can be seen in his focus on the duty of living in the Spirit, the person of the Spirit, and the office of the Spirit.

The Duty of Living in the Spirit

He began, as he did with each doctrine he addressed, with the duty that corresponds to the doctrine. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit calls for the duty of living and walking in the Holy Spirit.⁷² Dagg listed how dependent mankind is upon the Spirit not only for the existence of spiritual life, but also for the cultivation of spiritual life. The duty of love to God consists in a high appreciation for the law of God, and here is one point of many at which Dagg protected against legalism. Christians must take God's law as their rule of life, but they do not do so according to their own strength. They are instead completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. The law is not the only aspect of the duty of love to God that appears in Dagg's doctrine of the Spirit. The duty of love to God also consists in a deep appreciation for holy affections. When Dagg considered the Christian's response to the work of the Spirit in his or her life, he resounded,

No believer, who has any just sense of his dependence on the Holy Spirit, for the divine life which he enjoys, and all its included blessings, can be indifferent towards the Agent by whom all this good is bestowed . . . to him, the communion of the Holy Spirit will be the sweetest foretaste of heaven, that can be enjoyed on earth. And to him, therefore, the study of the Holy Spirit's character and office, will be a source of delight.⁷³

⁷¹Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 130

⁷²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 234.

⁷³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 235.

One finds significant similarities in a comparison of Dagg to contemporary theologians from his own denomination. Pendleton, writing shortly after Dagg, configured his analysis of the doctrine of the Spirit in a similar way, but absent was any distillation of the Christian's duty in relation to the doctrine of the Spirit.⁷⁴ Boyce provided a more thorough analysis of the relationship of the Spirit to the other members of the Godhead. He examined the personality and divinity of the Spirit in a similar way to Dagg although he did so under the heading of the Trinity rather than a specific chapter devoted to the Spirit.⁷⁵ Boyce, although he provided a detailed account of the specific work of the Spirit in redemption, did not consider any specific devotional response incumbent upon believers as a result of the work of the Spirit. Perhaps Dagg found greatest unity on the work of the Spirit with his fellow Baptist Charles Mallery. Mallery published his work *Soul Prosperity* only three years after Dagg published his *Manual of Theology*. Similar themes are found in both, but one particular emphasis that they share is dependence upon the Spirit of God for spiritual life. Mallery recorded, "The foundation of soul prosperity is laid in that gracious and wonderful work wrought by the Spirit of God which we call regeneration."⁷⁶ Mallery revealed more similarity with Dagg as he connected love to God with the work of the Spirit. He wrote, "If God in His own essential nature be love, what else can His image be as impressed by the Holy Spirit upon the soul?"⁷⁷

Dagg had commonalities as well as some distinctions on the doctrine of the Spirit with his contemporary theologians of other denominations. Concerning the leading Presbyterians, Dagg's agreement was doctrinal and uniqueness devotional. Where Dagg

⁷⁴Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 91.

⁷⁵Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 130.

⁷⁶Charles Mallery, *Soul-Prosperity: Its Nature, Its Fruits, and Its Culture* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1860), 5.

⁷⁷Mallery, *Soul-Prosperity*, 51.

opted for a devotional consideration of the impact of the doctrine, Hodge went for definitional precision and historical analysis.⁷⁸ The Methodist Miner Raymond contended for the personality and divinity of the Spirit in a similar manner to Dagg.⁷⁹ Yet there was very little consideration of the work of the Spirit and thus no consideration of the gratitude and devotion of mankind to the Spirit. The Methodist John Miley broke down the doctrine of the Spirit along similar lines to Dagg. He argued for the personality and divinity of the Spirit, then addressed the procession of the Spirit. Miley touched a similar theme to Dagg, although not to the same degree, as he considered the worshipfulness of the Spirit as a proof of his divinity. Miley pointed out that an offense against the Spirit is a direct offense against God. Although Miley was essentially supporting the divinity of the Spirit rather than calling for a response to the doctrine of the Spirit, his inclusion of the worshipfulness of the Spirit revealed a closer connection to Dagg than that of Raymond.

The Person of the Spirit

Dagg proceeded to contend for the personality of the Spirit with three clear arguments including the nature of the one whom Christ promised in John 14:16, the things attributed to the Spirit in the Bible, and the inclusion of the Spirit in the Great Commission. Pendleton followed these three proofs exactly when arguing for the personality of the Spirit.⁸⁰ This may evidence a stronger influence of Dagg upon Pendleton than has been identified previously. Boyce did not precisely follow this triad. He instead listed a number of texts that prove the personality of the Spirit followed by a number of texts that prove the distinctiveness of the Spirit from the Father and the Son.⁸¹

⁷⁸Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 522.

⁷⁹Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 1:480.

⁸⁰Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 91.

⁸¹Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 131.

Dagg exemplified a greater divergence from his contemporary theologians of other denominations when it comes to proving the personality of the Spirit. Hodge provided a more thorough analysis of proofs that include arguments from grammar, the relationship of the Spirit to human beings, and history.⁸² Miley followed similar arguments to prove the personality of the Spirit including his offices and relationship to the Father and the Son in the form of baptism.⁸³ Raymond did not divert from Miley as he proves the personality of the Spirit by His association with the Father and the Son in their various works of creation and redemption.⁸⁴

Dagg expressed great similarity with his contemporaries in advancing the doctrine of the divinity of the Spirit. He demonstrated the divinity of the Spirit by his association with the Father and the Son in the Great Commission and benediction, the grievous nature of sin against the Spirit, and his divine attributes and works.⁸⁵ Pendleton focused on the divine attributes and works ascribed to the Spirit.⁸⁶ Boyce advanced a barrage of texts and proofs for the divinity of the Spirit, uniquely pointing to his influence over Christ as a proof of his divinity.⁸⁷ Hodge gave proofs from a survey of the Old and New Testaments. Then, similar to Miley, considered the call to worship the Spirit as a proof of His divinity.⁸⁸

⁸²Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 523.

⁸³Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 1:258.

⁸⁴Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 1:490.

⁸⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 238.

⁸⁶Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 92.

⁸⁷Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 133.

⁸⁸Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 528.

The Office of the Spirit

The previous examination and comparison of the person of the Spirit illustrates the wide agreement Dagg has with his contemporary protestant theologians, but as he examined the office of the Spirit some distinctions begin to appear. Dagg defined the office of the Holy Spirit as the “Sanctifier and Comforter of God’s people.”⁸⁹ Dagg demonstrated a high regard for the sovereignty of the Spirit in both his work of regeneration and sanctification as he considered—“As it is his office to change the soul, and from the state of death in trespasses and sins, bring it into a new life, so it is his office to change our vile body, and fashion it like the glorious body of Christ.”⁹⁰ Boyce advanced the same point concerning the work of sanctification, saying, “But it is the especial work of the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the process of Sanctification, as he is also of the act of Regeneration.”⁹¹ Hodge examined the office of the Holy Spirit more broadly. He delineated the various functions of the Spirit in the work of redemption. And he also added that one aspect of the Spirit’s office is his function as “the source of all intellectual life.”⁹² As has been seen in previous comparisons, Dagg focused in on the impact of each doctrine upon personal piety whereas Hodge often provided a wider lens.

Yet, where Dagg agreed with his contemporary Calvinistic Presbyterians in substance, a greater contrast can be seen between him and his contemporary Methodists. Raymond detailed his doctrine of entire sanctification. Wesleyan perfectionism has its own and broader distinctions from Dagg’s doctrine. Space does not permit a comparison of Dagg’s doctrine of sanctification with Raymond’s. But their differences in the operation of the Spirit in sanctification are profitable to address. Dagg has uninhibitedly spoken of the Spirit as the Sanctifier of the people of God. Raymond at times seemed to

⁸⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 241.

⁹⁰Ibid., 241.

⁹¹Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 416.

⁹²Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 530.

agree. But the sovereignty of the Spirit in sanctification, which appears in Dagg, is clearly disregarded in Raymond. Raymond taught that sanctification ultimately hinges on the cultivation of one's own intellect. And the cultivation of one's own intellect depends upon mental exercise. Raymond added that to those who pray with faith for the influence of the Spirit, "God, the Holy Trinity, will surely come and make him his abode."⁹³

Raymond conditioned the work of the Spirit upon the action of man. Dagg advocated no such condition upon the operation of the Spirit. Therefore the duty of love to God is no burdensome task that man must initiate in order for God to act. Rather, the duty of love to God is a responsibility that God himself empowers Christians to fulfill. The initiation of God does not extinguish the responsibility of man. Dagg admonished, "The cessation of prayer would be the cessation of spiritual life."⁹⁴ Nevertheless, prayer is not an activity that man must render in order to receive the presence and operation of the Spirit. Instead, "True prayer proceeds from the Holy Spirit, imparting spiritual life, and enkindling those spiritual desires which find their vent in prayer."⁹⁵ Therefore, the duty of love to God, which requires the operation of holy affections, can be fulfilled through prayer. And prayer has at its source the sovereign operation of the Spirit functioning in his office of the Sanctifier of God's people.

In this chapter, I have argued that the duty of love to God served as the organizing theme of Dagg's doctrine of God. Dagg put forward the moral government of God as a primary evidence of his existence. Where many of his contemporaries would opt for other historical arguments, Dagg saw the moral argument as the most pertinent to man's reason and condition. Dagg addressed the various attributes of God in a similar fashion to his contemporaries. But he considered how each one evokes love to God and

⁹³Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 2:393.

⁹⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 242.

⁹⁵Ibid.

considers the holiness of God as the sum of his moral attributes. Dagg spent time not only advancing the doctrine of Christ, but also the duty of believing upon him. Dagg moreover illustrated strong agreement with the 1689 Confession of the London Baptists in his analysis of the mediatorial work of Christ in his offices of prophet, priest, and king. His evangelical Calvinism related to the duty of love to God in many ways. Finally, Dagg highlighted the work of the Spirit as the sovereign sanctifier of God's people. The Spirit empowers God's own for the duty of love to God. In this way, he was distinguished from Methodist contemporaries while finding commonality and agreement with his contemporary Calvinistic Baptist and Presbyterian ones.

CHAPTER 6

MAN

John Dagg believed that man possesses qualities that prove his noble purpose.¹ He possesses an intricate physical makeup that allows him to perform the most extraordinary feats. He has a highly developed intellect that enables him to view the world in profound ways. He is equipped with a moral nature that grants him the ability to judge right from wrong. He is fitted with an emotional quality that conditions him to feel the highest joys and the deepest sorrows. He possesses an authority over creation that permits him to create, build, destroy, contain, teach, shape, and influence. With all of these unique qualities, one wonders, why does man exist? What is he designed for? Could it be that man exists merely for this world? Dagg argued that these nobler purposes are heavenly: “man was originally designed for religion, as certainly as the eye was formed for the purpose of vision.”²

Dagg rightly understood that a study of mankind is inextricably connected to God. The doctrine of man leaves us no choice but to look to the heavens to find our purpose. John Calvin agreed, right from the opening of his *Institutes* he claims, “no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves.”³ Not only do we possess qualities that must have

¹John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 15.

²*Ibid.*, 14.

³John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 4.

come from God, but we possess qualities that perfectly fit us for relationship with God. The fall of man displays the tragedy of that broken relationship. When man fell from his original state, he lost the central reason for his existence. Furthermore, after the fall, man's condition portrays his inability to do what he was designed to do.

In this chapter, I will argue that the duty of love to God shapes Dagg's doctrine of man. To support this point, I will detail Dagg's understanding of man from different angles, showing how the duty of love to God informs each of them. First, he understood man's original state as one in which man is equipped for the duty of love to God. Next, he viewed the fall of man fundamentally as a breach in man's loving relationship with God. Then, he saw the present state of man as one of powerlessness for the duty of love to God. Last, he held that the great responsibility of man is one of repentance, which includes turning from the love of sin to the love of Christ.

The Original State of Man

Dagg viewed the original state of man as one in which he is equipped for the duty of love. In the beginning, man had all that he needed to love God with all of his heart, mind, soul, and strength. God created man with the capacity for this relationship of love because he made man in his own image. Genesis 1:27 held a central place for Dagg's understanding of man in his original state. Since man is created in the image of God, he possesses intellectual powers, holiness, authority, and immortality. Dagg referenced Ecclesiastes 7:29 as support for the idea that man was created holy. It reads, "See, this alone I found, that God made man upright." As a holy being with intellectual power, man could know God, enjoy him, and partake in intimate fellowship with God in the garden.

When Dagg is compared with other theologians on this topic, what stands out is his focus on the purpose of the original state of man. Many theologians seek to discover the essence of the image of God in man. Grudem notes that many theologians

have tried to do this.⁴ Millard Erickson highlights three different categories that theologians have used to consider the image of God in man: substantive, relational, and functional.”⁵ But, Dagg aimed at the purpose for which man possesses the image of God. The fact that Adam and Eve continued happily serving God for some amount of time “proves that their Creator had endowed them with the powers necessary for this service.”⁶ He admitted that there is no way of knowing how long our first parents continued in their original state of holiness. But, that they continued for some time proves that man possessed the necessary powers to love God. He offered support for these powers from Genesis 1:27. So, before Dagg got into the exact nature of the image of God, he highlighted that man possessed it so that he could dutifully serve God in a loving relationship. Erickson makes this point as well, noting that “the image refers to the elements in the makeup of man which enable the fulfillment of his destiny.”⁷ Yet, Erickson has a broader scope in mind concerning man's destiny while Dagg had a razor sharp focus on man's purpose dutifully to love God with all his heart. Dagg's view reflects the teaching of the Second London Baptist Confession and may have been drawn directly from that widely known document. Concerning the original state of man, it reads, “they had the law of God written in their hearts *and the power to fulfill it* [emphasis mine].”⁸

Dagg went on to detail the nature of the image of God in man's original state by using Scripture to interpret Scripture. He gained insight into Genesis 1:27 by

⁴Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 443.

⁵Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2 edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 498.

⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 141.

⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 513.

⁸Stan Reeves, *Confessing the Faith* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012), 18 [4.2].

examining how Paul references the image of God in Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24. He claimed then that the image of God “includes 'knowledge, righteousness and true holiness.’”⁹ Dagg followed those who have gone before him on this point. Again, the Second London Baptist Confession detailed the image of God the same way, “they were made in the image of God, being endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.”¹⁰ Calvin, also, highlighted the same texts, “in the first place, he mentions knowledge, and in the second, true righteousness and holiness. Hence we infer, that at the beginning the image of God was manifested by light of intellect, rectitude of heart, and the soundness of every part.”¹¹ Even as Dagg detailed the nature of the image of God, he never let the purpose of this image escape his view. He explained, “it, therefore, refers to their mental endowments, by which they were fitted for the service of God.”¹² After establishing the key texts to understanding the original state of man, he continued to consider each aspect of the image as it relates to the duty of love to God.

The image of God consists of intelligence. God has created a world that declares his glory, and intelligence is needed if one is to perceive his wonders. Psalm 19:1 says, “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Many creatures behold the sun in all of its splendor, but they do not render sentient praise to the Creator. They do not render praise because they lack the intelligence that is a part of the image of God. But, man looks to the wonders of the created world and senses that the Creator is magnificent. In fact, God's glory shines forth through creation with such clarity that intelligent creatures are held accountable to God by what they see. This point is made by Paul in Romans 1:20, which says, God’s “invisible attributes,

⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 142.

¹⁰Reeves, *Confessing the Faith*, 18 [4.2].

¹¹Calvin and Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 108.

¹²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 142.

namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Again, what distinguishes Dagg from other theologians is his focus on the purpose of the image of God. Some might highlight that the intelligence of man makes him capable of subduing the earth, or advancing society. But, Dagg applied the truth to man's duty of love to God.

Purity is included in the original state of man. Adam and Eve possessed this purity in the garden. Dagg insisted that this purity was needed “to fit our first parents for acceptable service to God,” again focusing on the purpose of the original state.¹³ Purity is not merely an aspect of the image of God, but it is a necessary part of man's design so that he can love God. Dagg illustrated his point by showing that the fallen angels still have intelligence, but they are enemies of God. What do they lack? Purity of heart. The Scriptures teach that this holiness is vital if one is to experience relationship with the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 commands, “Strive... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Again, Isaiah 35:8 warns, “And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.” Dagg's great focus on man's duty to love God appears from his comparison of the love Adam and Eve felt for one another, with the love they felt toward God: “Even their love to each other, pure and unalloyed, was far inferior to that which they both felt to him (God).”¹⁴

Generally speaking, Dagg saw a moral constitution to man, which was a part of his original state. Although, he argued that man loses his purity in the fall, he did not say that man loses his moral constitution. This moral constitution, Dagg described as the conscience. This conscience is one of the key differences between man and other creatures: “We are conscious of moral approbation and disapprobation in the

¹³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 142.

¹⁴Ibid.

contemplation of virtues and crimes; but we never imagine that these emotions are felt by a brute.”¹⁵ That man has a conscience is simply a natural observation of all mankind. He claimed, “we are conscious of a moral constitution in our minds.”¹⁶ The conscience can be sinned against, and is in need of improvement after the fall. Nevertheless, it is a distinct component of man's nature that separates him from other creatures.

Drawing upon 1 Corinthians 11:7, Dagg included dominion as an aspect of the image of God in man. In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul commands, “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God.” Dagg saw this as a reference to authority that is connected to the image of God. He noted that in the beginning, man ruled over the beasts of the earth in a peaceable way since man had not sinned against God. As expected, even here, Dagg showed how this aspect of the image of God equips him for duty of love. He pointed out, “from every creature which Adam named he could learn something of God; and, with every new lesson, a new tribute of adoring praise was rendered to the Maker of all.”¹⁷

A final aspect of the image of God is man's immortality. By immortal, Dagg meant that man will live forever. In the original state, man was created to live forever, and experience a happy relationship with God. Dagg included happiness as he addressed man's immortality. Although man's happiness is lost in the fall, his immortal soul remains. This immortal soul, without holiness, results in eternal destruction. Yet, the immortality with which man is endowed can result in loving God forever. The saints will live forever in heaven. What hat will they experience there? Love. Dagg exulted, “Love will also, in the eternal world, be our glory and bliss, as well as our strength. The rays which emanate

¹⁵John Dagg, *A Practical View of Christian Ethics* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2006), 15.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 143.

from the divine throne, and collect around the saint in heaven, and mantle him with glory, are rays of love.”¹⁸

What is striking about Dagg was his laser sharp focus on the purpose of man's original state. In this original state, man enjoyed the image of God unscarred. This image of God provided what was necessary so that man could love God. With his intellect, man could know God. His purity provided what was needed so that he could love God. Since man has authority over creation, he can discover more about God through his dominion over the earth. Finally, he is designed to live forever so that he can experience a happy relationship with God that is unending. The constitution of man necessitates that he pursue God and devote himself to religion: “As religious beings, let us seek to understand the truths of religion. As immortal beings, let us strive to make ourselves acquainted with the doctrine on which our everlasting happiness depends.”¹⁹

Dagg’s description of the original state of man illustrates how the duty of love to God shaped his anthropology. Adam found himself equipped for a loving relationship with God. He also found himself in a dutiful relationship with commands to be obeyed. Furthermore, he was commanded by God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Tragically, Adam disobeyed his loving Creator. As a result, he fell from his original state. The glorious image of God was damaged. Yet, even in the story of man's fall, Dagg argued that man’s design and duty to love to God remains unabated.

The Fall of Man

John Dagg viewed the fall of man fundamentally as a falling away from loving relationship with God. Man enjoyed a happy covenantal relationship with God in the garden. Yet, he disobeyed God, broke his covenant obligations, and suffered the loss of

¹⁸John Dagg, *The More Excellent Way* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1852), 98.

¹⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 18.

the sweet fellowship he enjoyed. The fall of man can be approached from many angles. There are knotty theological questions regarding original sin. There are also many insights to be gained from the actions of each person in the garden: God, Adam, Eve, and Satan. Yet, in the midst of so many potential observations, Dagg focused on the duty of love to God that existed in the garden and that was violated by our first parents, and the resulting consequences of their sin as it corresponds to their original duty.

Dagg began by asserting the historical truthfulness of the fall. The fall is not simply a mythical story. Again, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, he shows that the Bible speaks of the fall as a historical event in places beyond Genesis 3. Mark Dever notes that this was not a universal conviction of evangelical Baptists at that time.²⁰ It appears that it was not a universal conviction of Methodists at that time either, as one of their theologians makes plain—“We have herein affirmed, that the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve, the sin historically or perhaps symbolically set forth in the book of Genesis as partaking of forbidden fruit, have accrued to the entire race.”²¹ The historicity of the fall is essential to Dagg's focus. If Adam was not a real man, in a real loving relationship with God, then the essence of the fall could not be a breach in that relationship. But, since Adam was a real man, his relationship to God is of utmost importance. His relationship to God was not only important for himself, but also for his posterity.

Adam's covenant relationship with God in the garden played a significant part in Dagg's thinking. Since some do not believe the term “covenant” is appropriate for Adam's relationship to God, Dagg explained why the term is fitting. He argued for a broad meaning of the word covenant since it is used with a wide meaning in the

²⁰Timothy George and David Dockery, *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 186. Dever references the sermons of Francis Wayland as an example.

²¹Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1877), 2:79.

Scriptures. He referenced Jeremiah 33:20 to show that the word covenant can refer to an “immutable ordinance.”²² Acts 3:25 demonstrates that the word can be used as “a sure and stable promise.”²³ Exodus 34:28 shows that the word can be used as a simple precept. Finally, Genesis 31:44 illustrates that the term can be used in reference to “a mutual agreement.”²⁴ Dagg sealed his argument by showing how Hosea 6:7 speaks directly of God's covenant with Adam, “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant.”

Dagg continued addressing the idea of covenant by demonstrating that God's covenant with Adam was a covenant of works. In other words, it had conditions. If those conditions were met then the Scriptures imply that the covenantal relationship would continue. On the other hand, Genesis 2:16,17 make plain that if the covenant stipulations were broken, then a penalty would result. The reality of a covenant of works in the beginning underscores the duty of love to God. The covenant was one of duty and of love. This protects against the idea that the duty of love is some kind of burdensome consequence that fallen man must render to God. Duty is not a cumbersome responsibility, but a sweet obligation that existed even before the fall. The fact that Adam broke covenant with God does not mean that the covenant was wearisome. The covenant became wearisome when sin entered the heart of man. The drudgery came as a result of Adam's rebellion and was not inherent in God's covenant with him. In fact, the garden was a paradise of sweet fellowship with God. Adam fulfilled his duty out of love to God.

Dagg highlighted this idea of duty and love by considering the trees in the garden. He claimed that these trees were placed close together in the garden, and each of them stood as a symbol. He said, “the tree of life was the symbol of the divine favor; and the other tree, the symbol of the divine prerogative.”²⁵ The tree of life reminded man of

²²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 144.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 145.

²⁵Ibid., 147.

God's goodness and love. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil testified to Adam and Eve that God had authority, and they must obey him. This tree “perpetually reminded the subjects of this probation, that the favor of God could be enjoyed only by respecting his prerogative.”²⁶

Dagg insisted that God's covenant was just. When the authority of God is made known, it is natural for fallen man to question God's justice. Man complains that the penalty of such a minor offense as eating a fruit is unwarranted. Dagg responded, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? It is enough that God has done it.”²⁷ He continued by arguing that the simplicity of the requirement does not show God's injustice, but Adam's wretchedness. From man's first sin we learn that disobedience of any kind is a rejection of God's reign. Dagg went on to show the heart of Adam and Eve's rebellion.

The actual sin of Adam and Eve in the garden includes a violation of both love and duty. In this sinful act they cast off God's authority, and sought after their own natural desire. Dagg understood Adam and Eve's violation of the covenant to be a departure “from the straight line of duty.”²⁸ Yet, it was not only a departure from duty, but also a betrayal. They rebelled against God, and they loved other things more than God. Dagg claimed that their natural desire overcame their desire to love and revere God. Dever crystallized Dagg's view on this point: “Love of self replaced the love of God.”²⁹

The penalty for their betrayal was not only a change in their constitution, but a change in their relationship to God. Adam and Eve lost much more than the physical ease of the garden. God warned Adam in Genesis 2:17, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

²⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 147.

²⁷Ibid., 145.

²⁸Ibid., 147.

²⁹George, *Baptist Theologians*, 170.

Dagg explained the meaning of this penalty, “What was death to his living soul? He knew, by happy experience, what it was to have the communion and favor of the living God; and to be cut off from these was the most dreadful death.”³⁰ Thus, Dagg continued to keep the concept of a loving relationship with God central. The sting of the fall is not strictly working by the sweat of one's brow, nor is it pain in child bearing. But it is the loss of intimate communion with God. Man finds himself in a world where pain and sorrow abound, but these pains and sorrows exist to reveal man's deepest pain: the absence of loving relationship with God. Dagg showed that this spiritual death is a far greater penalty than if Adam had simply died physically at the moment of his rebellion: “He was spared to live a life of depravity.”³¹ Dagg illustrated this point with the cherubim's guarding of the tree of life. Many points have been made about this revelation in Genesis 3:24, but Dagg noted that this occurred to exclude man from the symbol of divine favor. The tree of life was the blessed reminder to man that he was in sweet communion with his Creator. Now, upon man's rebellion, he would no longer have access to this glorious reminder.

Other theologians have emphasized this theme of the fall as well. Calvin remarked, “As Adam’s spiritual life would have consisted in remaining united and bound to his Maker, so estrangement from him was the death of his soul.”³² This appears in the Puritan Thomas Watson as well, “When we lost God’s image, we lost his acquaintance. God’s banishing Adam out of paradise hieroglyphically showed how sin has banished us out of God’s love and favour.”³³ Berkhof also highlighted the spiritual death that results from sin: “Sin separates man from God, and that means death, for it is only in

³⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 149.

³¹Ibid., 148.

³²Calvin and Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 150.

³³Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Banner of Truth, 1957), 148.

communion with the living God that man can truly live.”³⁴ Although many theologians note the break in fellowship between God and man, Dagg focused on it in a unique way. His entire theology was saturated with the duty of love to God. His devotional theology appears as he took time not only to record the tragedy of the fall, but to express it in words like this: “Stung with remorse, harassed with fears, God offended, and their souls undone, they bade farewell to their late blissful abode, and became wanderers on the earth, until their bodies, sinking under the weight of the ills inflicted, should crumble into dust.”³⁵

Dagg’s work here also intersected with Charles Mallary’s *Soul Prosperity*. Mallary, a Baptist contemporary of Dagg, constructed his work to instruct mankind how to prosper their souls in light of their terrible fall. He addressed the nature, effects, and means of soul prosperity. Mallary’s focus on the soul of man dovetailed with Dagg’s theological focus on the heart. This is most clearly seen as Mallary identified the nature of soul prosperity. He wrote—“Love to God and man is an all-pervading element in true holiness, the life-blood of piety, the quintessence may I not say?—of soul prosperity.”³⁶

Dagg included one final tragic result of man's fall. Adam and Eve not only experience the absence of loving relationship with God, but they experience his curse. In Genesis 3:16 God announces, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” Pain will not only mark the beginning of life, but it will continue throughout life as man works by the sweat of his face before finally returning to the dust.

³⁴Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 259.

³⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 150.

³⁶Charles D. Mallary, *Soul-Prosperity: Its Nature, Its Fruits, and Its Culture* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1999), 51.

Dagg's view of the fall reveals his emphasis on man being designed to love God. In his original state, man experienced a loving covenantal relationship with God. God lovingly provided for man's needs and man loved God his Provider. Also, this relationship was one of responsibility and duty, for man received clear instruction concerning what he was to do and not do. Since the covenant included love and duty, man's violation of the covenant was a violation of love and duty. In the fall, man cast off God's authority by choosing to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But this rebellion, at its core, was also a break in fellowship with God. Adam and Eve no longer wanted to depend on God's good wisdom, but they chose to love themselves rather than God. Finally, the penalty of the fall tragically reveals the loss of loving relationship with God. Man did not simply lose paradise, but he lost communion with his Creator. He was cutoff from the symbol of divine favor to experience a life of separation from the God of love. As a result of this tragic fall, man suffered a change in his constitution. He would no longer have the unmarred image of God.

The Present State of Man

Dagg understood the present state of man to be one of powerlessness for the duty of love to God. In his original state, man had what was necessary to love God, but after the fall he no longer has the capacity to do so. The image of God in man has been severely damaged. Dagg detailed the present state of man in four categories: actual sin, depravity, condemnation, and helplessness. In this section, I will present Dagg's view of man in his present state in order to demonstrate how the duty of love to God shapes Dagg's anthropology.

Dagg put great weight on Adam's propagation of his own fallen image to his posterity. He contrasted this fallen image with the image of God: "Adam had been created in the image of God; but when the image had been lost by transgression, he begat

a son in his own likeness.”³⁷ Here Dagg cited Genesis 5:3 which states, “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth [emphasis mine].” Dagg claimed that man in his present state inherits both a fallen character and a fallen condition. He is flawed at the very core of his character, and he stands in a state of condemnation. His emphasis on the propagation of Adam's fallen nature to his posterity calls for the question: Does man, in any way, possess the image of God in his present state?

Dagg certainly emphasized the absence of the image of God in fallen man more so than the existence of the image of God. The quote mentioned above displays his thinking on the subject. It not only references the propagation of a fallen nature, but the loss of the image of God. Here it is again, “Adam had been created in the image of God; but *when that image had been lost* by transgression... [emphasis mine]”³⁸ Paul Sanchez summarized Dagg's thought on the subject, “The fall either completely or nearly eradicated man’s likeness of God.”³⁹ It seems that “nearly eradicated” is most accurate. Although Dagg never affirmed that the image of God remains in man, it appears that he would agree it remains in some small capacity, though severely scarred. For example, he explained that fallen man still possesses certain pleasant characteristics: “We do not mean . . . that no amiable affections have a place in (man's) heart . . . (God) has been pleased to implant natural affections in hearts which desire not to retain him in their knowledge.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, this appears to be true in light of Dagg's focus. His aim was to contrast the present state of man with the original state of man, specifically, as each

³⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 150.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Paul Anthony Sanchez, “A Modern Analysis of John L. Dagg’s *Manual of Theology*” (Th.M thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 40.

⁴⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 152.

relates to loving God. Thus, the image of God, to the extent that it equips man to love God, is completely lost.

Theologians vary their emphasis on this subject depending on their context. Thomas Watson, writing similarly to Dagg, wrote a practical and devotional theology. He addressed the subject in the same way, “When we lost God's image, we lost his acquaintance.”⁴¹ Calvin, also, emphasized the loss, yet without neglecting the remaining presence of God's image: “although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity; and, therefore, our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ.”⁴² Grudem, referring to Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9, strikes a balance, “After the fall, then, we are still in God’s image—we are still like God and we still represent God—but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin.”⁴³ Finally, Erickson underscored the remaining presence of the image of God in fallen man, “The image of God has not been lost as a result of sin or specifically the fall.”⁴⁴ Against the backdrop of other theologians, Dagg's purpose stands out. He constructed his theology around the duty of love to God. Therefore, when it comes to the present state of man, he was concerned to show what is missing: the capacity to fulfill the duty of love to God. Dagg explains man's present state in four categories.

First, the present state of man is marked by actual sin. Man, in his present state, is one who breaks God's laws. Dagg offers biblical support for this idea from Romans 3:9-19, 1 John 5:19, and Ephesians 2:2,3. He pointed to the multitude of sins that occur in

⁴¹Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 148.

⁴²Calvin and Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 107.

⁴³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁴⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 513.

the brief historical time span between the Creation and the Flood. Then, he noted that the flood did not bring an end to man's sin. Even the people of Israel, though far more advanced than others, were marked by their rebellion against God. No one is exempt from this corruption. The fact that man is plagued by sin can be seen from an honest assessment of society and history. History books are filled with wars, corruption, and wickedness. Societies may have their laws, but the very presence of these laws proves that they are necessary to restrain human sinfulness. This human sinfulness relates directly to man's relationship with God. Sin is not simply failing to live up to one's own potential, nor is it falling short of a societal standard. Rather, "the actual transgressions of men consist in doing what God has forbidden, and in leaving undone what he has commanded."⁴⁵ This first aspect of the present state of man is only the tip of the iceberg. Dagg went deeper to discover the depths of man's dreadful condition.

Second, the present state of man is one of depravity. Depravity is a disease that plagues the heart. To explain the concept, Dagg referenced Genesis 6:5, which says, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." He continued by stating that man's depravity is total. This does not mean that man is as bad as he could be. There are indeed still signs of God's common grace in the present state of man. But, total depravity means that there is a complete absence of holiness, and a complete focus on wickedness. Dagg spoke to the reason for this total depravity in man, and his reason ties directly to his focus on the duty of love to God:

The love of God is dethroned from the heart, and therefore the grand principle of morality is wanting, and no true morality exists. A total absence of that by which the actions should be controlled and directed, is total depravity.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 151.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 153.

The reason man is totally depraved is because love to God no longer reigns supreme in his heart. This “love of God” is “that by which the actions should be controlled and directed.” Here the wretchedness of sin is truly seen. Sin is not only a breaking of God's holy law, but sin strikes down the love for God that once ruled in the heart. Dagg gave personal testimony to his understanding of sin on this point: “a deeper sense of sin affected me, than I had ever previously experienced. I saw clearly its tendency to dethrone God.”⁴⁷

Total depravity is a state into which man is born. He does not become depraved over the course of his life by the sin he commits. Rather, it is something that he receives at birth from his depraved parents. Dagg marshaled Psalm 51:5, John 3:6, and Genesis 5:3 to support this idea. Having established the biblical foundation, Dagg went on to illustrate this idea from nature. Certain plants and animals reproduce their characteristics. Humans pass down diseases and personality traits to their children. Moreover, there is no foundation to the argument that God should permit the holiness of parents to be passed down to their children. Holiness is something that only comes from the Lord himself, and it is his freely to dispense. Depravity, on the other hand, rightfully belongs to the human race. Being so, man is not only without love to God, but he is also under the judgment of God.

Third, in his present state, man finds himself under God's condemnation. God's condemnation means that he is displeased with man, has declared him guilty of death, and sentenced him to it. Again, Dagg showed this to be true both from the Scriptures, and from the course of nature. Galatians 3:10 says, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Paul also remarks in Ephesians 2:3 that even Christians “were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Nature illustrates the Scriptures on this point. From the very beginning of life

⁴⁷John Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg* (Rome, GA: J.F. Shanklin, printer, 1886), 8.

we know sorrow, pain, and hurt. During man's healthy years he will work by the sweat of his brow. In his latter years he will know the unique pains of old age before returning to the dust. This condemnation is a universal principle that is experienced by every human being. This too, like depravity, comes upon man as a result of Adam's sin.

Dagg took great care to show that God's condemnation is just. God is right to distribute justice according to each man's due. Yet man conjures up many complaints against God's condemnation of sinners. Man may try to blame God for creating him a certain way, or for putting Eve in the garden as Adam's tempter. The essence of Dagg's defense against such wicked accusations was, "Every agent is responsible for himself."⁴⁸ Corrupting influences do not exonerate a criminal for the penalty of his crime. Additionally, there is no safe haven in the complaint that our account should not be charged because of Adam's sin. Dagg showed that there is a union between mankind and Adam that justifies God's condemnation of all men. He spoke of three types of union between Adam and his posterity: moral, natural, and federal. The moral union emphasizes that Adam's descendents approve of his sin against God. The natural union seems to mark the physical relationship between Adam and his descendents, which results in the propagation of a depraved nature. Finally, the federal union deals with Adam standing as the covenantal head of his descendents in the beginning. This federal union made the future state of mankind dependent on Adam's obedience. Dagg reasoned that the moral union and natural union alone prove God's condemnation to be just. Nevertheless, God's good decision to establish Adam as the federal head of all mankind ought not to be trivialized. Indeed, Isaiah 53:6 and 1 Peter 2:24 evidence that this is same principle that stands at the heart of Christ's salvation of sinners. Dagg reminded those who continue to struggle with God's just condemnation of sinners,

⁴⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 159.

Who will dare affirm that God's way is not best? It becomes us to feel assured, whatever darkness may yet remain on this subject, that God would not have given up his Son to free us from condemnation, if that condemnation had not been just; and that he would not have made so great a gift, so costly a sacrifice, if the scheme had not been worthy of his infinite wisdom.⁴⁹

Mankind's federal union with Adam was a key doctrine to Dagg's Calvinistic system and set him apart from his Methodist contemporaries. In his *Objections to Calvinism*, R. S. Foster aimed to destroy certain Calvinistic doctrines. He contended that man cannot be justly condemned according to the Calvinistic doctrine of human depravity:

But if he must sin and cannot avoid it, if the thing is absolutely and entirely beyond his power and all other available power, the man cannot be to blame for it, can he? Let it not be said he brought the disability upon himself. If this were so, it would relieve the case. But this, you know, is not the fact. His disability came with him into the world; it was communicated as a part of his existence; it was his very and essential nature. And now was he to blame for an existence and nature which were forced upon him, which never at any period he consented to and which he never could avoid? His first parent may be to blame, but surely he cannot be responsible; for he not only did not bring the disability upon himself, but it was imposed on him without the possibility of its removal. Let him sin; no being in the universe can censure him; he is not to blame.⁵⁰

Dagg therefore diverted from his contemporary Methodists concerning the nature of man's union with Adam, which serves as a precursor to further disagreements over the nature of man's depravity. God executes a just condemnation on mankind in light of their representative Adam breaking the duty of love. In the same manner, God will only justify those who have as their representative the Lord Jesus Christ who fulfilled the duty of love.

Fourth, in man's present state, he is helpless. Man cannot save himself. His inability to save himself relates to the two previous categories: depravity and condemnation. Man is unable to save himself from condemnation because God is the one who has sentenced him. God is not only just, but he is also unchanging. When an earthly father promises a punishment for disobedience, he may waver in holding to his word.

⁴⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 162.

⁵⁰Randolph S. Foster, *Objections to Calvinism as It Is: In a Series of Letters Addressed to N.L. Rice* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1856), 124.

This is not true of the God of the Bible. What he has said will surely be carried out. What's more, the law provides no help to man in his fallen condition. Man cannot obey the law and receive pardon from the sentence of condemnation. Dagg cited Romans 3:20 to show that no one can be declared righteous by the law. Is there any hope for man in his helpless condition? Yes, "there is a method of rescue from condemnation; but it is not one of man's devising or executing."⁵¹ Man is also helpless to escape his depravity. The first problem is that man simply does not want to be free from sin. He loves sin, not God. Therefore, at the very core of his being, he is incapable of liberating himself from his depravity because he is inclined toward sin. Nevertheless, even if man was somehow inclined to do right, Dagg showed that he lacks the moral power to do his duty. He mentioned Galatians 5:17 to demonstrate that even if man wanted to do right, his flesh keeps him from doing what he wants to do.

Dagg's Calvinistic anthropology differed greatly from Miner Raymond, one of his contemporary Methodists, who wrote,

Do the posterity of Adam come into existence actually in a condition of utter loss, helplessness and hopelessness? And does that condition continue till regeneration? Are mankind previous to conversion in a condition of total depravity? Some affirm; we deny. We will admit, if it pleases, that man considered apart from the grace of God, if he can be so considered, is totally depraved. With such an admission our formula would be, He is totally depraved, but not totally deprived; but the admission and accompanying formula is made in accommodation to those who have a partiality for the term, in which partiality we do not at all participate. The fact, as we see it, is, that the race came into existence under grace.⁵²

The same appears in John Miley as he hedged the effects of the fall—

There is also a spiritual death in distinction from the spiritual life—such as man originally possessed. This death is inseparably connected with sin and must have been the immediate consequence of sin in Adam. His spiritual life was only realized in union with the Holy Spirit. Sin was the severance of that union with the consequence of spiritual death. Such was now the state of Adam and Eve. With the full execution of the penalty this death must have been utter. But it is reasonable to

⁵¹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 169.

⁵²Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 2:84.

think that in this case, as in that of physical death, there was a partial arrest of judgment, or an instant gift of helping grace.⁵³

Dagg, on the other hand, saw no prevenient grace that softens human depravity leaving man able to choose to love God. Man instead needs the regenerating grace of God to turn his total love for sin into love to God.

Multiple scholars have misunderstood Dagg's anthropology at certain points. Patterson contended that Dagg's soteriology "begins to diverge from a Calvinistic model."⁵⁴ He sought support his thesis with an evaluation of Dagg's anthropology. He claimed, "even on the doctrine of man a softening perspective has been observed in Dagg."⁵⁵ Patterson sought to chart Dagg's softening of Calvinistic anthropology in three areas: human responsibility, free agency, and union with Adam.

Human Responsibility. Patterson was uncomfortable with Dagg's contention that man is both helpless to save himself and at the same time responsible. Patterson mistakenly pitted Andrew Fuller against Dagg on this point. Analyzing Dagg's thought, Patterson wrote—"The combined result of depravity and actual sin is helplessness. Yet even though man is helpless, he is responsible. Andrew Fuller is unable to see the logic in such Calvinistic persuasions."⁵⁶ But Fuller's agreement with Dagg on both human depravity and responsibility can be seen in his own works. In fact, Fuller's pivotal work *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* largely depended on human responsibility. One of his chief arguments in that work was that "Every man is bound cordially to receive and approve whatever God reveals."⁵⁷ The only question then remaining concerns Fuller's

⁵³John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York, N.Y.: Methodist Book Concern, 1892), 1:432.

⁵⁴Leighton Paige Patterson, "An Evaluation of the Soteriological Thought of John Leadley Dagg, Baptist Theologian of Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974), 6. Patterson quotes Andrew Fuller in *Gospel Worthy* for support, but fails to see that Fuller is drawing a distinction between natural and moral inability, rather than denying complete inability without qualification. Patterson, "An Evaluation," 71.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁷Andrew Fuller, Andrew Gunton Fuller and Joseph Belcher, *The Complete Works of the Rev.*

agreement with Dagg concerning the depravity and helplessness of man to save himself. Fuller readily agrees with Dagg, identifying the need of special power from God if man is to be saved—“From the depravity and perverseness of the human heart arises the necessity of a special and effectual influence of the Holy Spirit. When souls are effectually turned to God, it is spoken of as a special exertion of almighty power.”⁵⁸ Fuller agreed with Dagg that man is helpless to save himself yet responsible to believe on the Lord.

Free Agency. In his analysis of Dagg’s anthropology, Gardner was unsatisfied with Dagg’s handling of human freedom. Gardner wrote, “The moral freedom of man—is least satisfactorily handled.”⁵⁹ Gardner could not see how Dagg reconciles human freedom and God’s providence. He wrote,

Dagg plainly leaves the free agency of man behind; man is free so long as he wills to do good, or wills to act in such a way that God can bring good from his act. Dagg makes the unwarranted claim that men are as accountable when divine providence is operative as they would be if it were not But how the freedom of man exists as anything more than a figment of the imagination is difficult to understand.⁶⁰

Patterson then picked up on Gardner’s analysis and claimed it supported his thesis that Dagg was weakening on Calvinism—

Gardner is correct in noting a degree of inconsistency present that would not have been as evident in the stronger Calvinists. The evident reason for this is to be found in Dagg’s attempt to hold strongly to Calvinistic positions regarding God’s sovereignty, salvation as a possibility through grace alone, and perseverance of all saints, while at the same time maintaining the essential free agency of man.⁶¹

Andrew Fuller: With a Memoir of His Life by Andrew Gunton Fuller; Reprinted from the Third London Edition; Revised, with Additions (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 2:349.

⁵⁸Fuller, *Complete Works*, 2:518.

⁵⁹Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), 142.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 143.

⁶¹Patterson, “An Evaluation,” 73.

But Dagg was not as inconsistent as Gardner would like to think and Dagg's maintaining of free agency is not a cooling off of his Calvinism.

Dagg followed the thought of Jonathan Edwards, a robust Calvinist, on the issue of free agency. Dagg clarified the definition of free agency which is by no means inconsistent with the providence of God, he wrote—"What is free agency? If it signifies freedom from accountability to a higher power, there is no free agent but God. This, however, is not the sense in which the term is technically employed, and in which it denotes voluntary agency—agency without compulsion."⁶² This is precisely the way Edwards approached the subject in *Freedom of the Will*—

The plain and obvious meaning of the words *Freedom* and *Liberty*, in common speech, is *The power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases*. Or in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as he wills.⁶³

Holding to this accurate understanding of free agency is not inconsistent with God's providence and neither is it at odds with a robust Calvinism.

Union with Adam. Patterson held that Dagg's emphasis on man's moral union with Adam signaled a drift toward moderate Calvinism—

Very brief comment is made by Dagg about the natural union, but the federal union again receives considerable attention. However, at this point a tendency toward a more moderate Calvinism again may be observed. Dagg views the moral union as the crucial factor and admits that many maintain that the covenant with Adam is a covenant of nature and thus that no federal headship is involved.⁶⁴

But that Dagg viewed the moral union as "the crucial factor" is unfounded. Dagg listed mankind's moral, natural, and federal union. Then proceeded to spend the majority of his time detailing the federal union. Patterson rightly notes that Dagg "admits" that many maintain that the covenant with Adam is a covenant of nature and that thus that no federal

⁶²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 121.

⁶³Jonathan Edwards, "Freedom of the Will," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1834), 1:11.

⁶⁴Patterson, "An Evaluation," 65.

headship is involved. However, having made that admission Dagg then went on to oppose that view and clearly contended, “there is a federal union between Adam and his descendents.”⁶⁵ A federal union that Dagg was sure to include “made the future character and *condition* of his descendents dependent on his obedience [emphasis mine].”⁶⁶ On this point, Dagg appears in lock step with his fellow Calvinistic Baptist James Pendleton who wrote, “Adam was the representative of his race. I am aware that the Scriptures do not say in so many words that he was the federal head of his posterity, but they say that which can be explained on no other supposition.”⁶⁷

These clarifications concerning Dagg’s anthropology reveal the strength of Dagg’s Calvinism and his focus on the duty of love to God. By seeing that Dagg related man's helplessness to both depravity and condemnation, his understanding of man's present state becomes clear. The essence of man's present state is one of powerlessness for the duty of love to God. The deepest tragedy of man's present state is not simply that he is condemned, but that he cannot save himself from his condemnation. Similarly, the most troubling fact is not that man is depraved, but that he is helpless to overcome his depravity. What man once possessed before the fall is gone. He no longer possesses what is needed to love God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Dagg insisted that the Scriptures make this abundantly clear by citing: Romans 5:6; 2 Timothy 2:26; 2 Peter 2:19; Romans 6:16,17; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; Ephesians 5:14; and Colossians 2:13.

It is essential to receive this truth about one's present helpless condition in order to return to the duty of love to God. Those who think they can help themselves will not turn to Christ for help. They will not look to the heavens and seek grace from the God who is generous and ready to save. Yet the Scriptures, as well as nature, resound with the

⁶⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 165.

⁶⁶Ibid., 166.

⁶⁷James Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society), 171.

truth that men of all ages and nations are helpless to save themselves. Those who readily admit their inability move in the right direction.

The Great Responsibility of Fallen Man

Dagg understood repentance to be the great responsibility of fallen man. The duty of love to God stands at the heart of repentance. Repentance is the dutiful thing to do because it relates to turning away from sin as a violation of God's righteous law. Yet, repentance is also the loving thing to do for it relates to true sorrow in the heart over sin that has offended our gracious Creator. When the doctrine of fallen man is examined, the only proper response in the human heart is repentance. The connection between repentance and the duty of love to God is seen in three things: the nature of repentance, the cause of repentance, and the result of repentance.

Dagg explained that repentance is a matter of the heart: “Genuine repentance is a deep-felt and abiding sense of sin, a condemnation of ourselves before God on account of it, a turning away from it with abhorrence and loathing, and a fixed purpose of soul never again to commit it, or be at peace with it.”⁶⁸ Notice how the duty of love to God permeates this definition. First, repentance is something that is “felt”, and it is felt down deep in the heart of man. Surface level apologies do not qualify as genuine repentance. Rather, true repentance must flow from a heart of love for the one who has been offended. Second, repentance is something that happens “before God”, or in relationship to God. Sin is never something that is merely committed against another human; it is always an offense against God. If sin is committed against God, then the heart of repentance must be broken before God. Dagg explained, “In order to sincere repentance toward God, it is indispensable that we should understand that we have sinned against him.”⁶⁹ Third, repentance includes a dutiful turning away from sin. The man, who merely apologizes

⁶⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 139.

⁶⁹Ibid., 140.

without turning from his wicked way, is not in the way of repentance. Repentance is a matter of the heart that expresses itself by turning away from sin toward obedience in Christ. But how can fallen man accomplish this?

Dagg thoroughly demonstrated that God must bring about repentance in the human heart. He alluded to Ephesians 2:1 to show that the human heart is dead in sins. Therefore, the only hope for sinners is that “the spirit of God quickens” them so that they become painfully aware of their rebellion.⁷⁰ God uses means to bring about repentance in the human heart. The course of nature clearly warns man that he is in danger. Yet, nature alone cannot lead man to repentance. God uses the Scriptures to show man the way of repentance: “how welcome is the light which the Bible throws on our path! It gives a far clearer discovery of our danger, and, at the same time, opens before us the door of hope.”⁷¹ Dagg did not, therefore, set responsibility as the exact measure of ability as his contemporaries among the Methodists did. Man is responsible to do a great many things for which he has no present moral ability. Even so, the duty to love God, fully consistent with his ability in the unfallen state, continues as an absolute moral requirement even though his corrupt affections as a child of Adam make the duty impossible to perform. He remarked that many men, when they discover their dreadful condition, try and figure out a self-sufficient way of escape. This method never works. Rather, fallen man must look to the Lord for strength to fulfill his duty. This point brings great clarification to Dagg's understanding of duty. A common misconception of duty today is that man must fulfill his duty by his own power. This idea could not be farther from Dagg's mind. Much to the contrary, Dagg labored to show that man is helpless to perform his duty. His only hope is the God of love, who can reinstate the grand principle of love back into his empty heart.

⁷⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 138.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 171.

The connection between repentance and the duty of love is clearly seen in Dagg's focus on the result of repentance. Repentance results in the restoration of fellowship between God and man. A clear sign that Dagg viewed this to be the result of repentance appears from his comparison of the Decalogue and the Gospel. As he made the biblical case for repentance he acknowledged that the Decalogue does not call for repentance. Why is this so? Because “it was not designed to restore men to the favor of God.”⁷² On the other hand, the gospel proclaims repentance from the outset because “without it, not a step can be taken in the way of return to God; and, without it, there is no possibility of obtaining the divine favor.”⁷³ Therefore, central in Dagg's mind is the fact that repentance leads to the restoration of loving communion with God. The great end of repentance is not simply a happy society, but a happy and loving relationship with God. For this reason, although repentance is a sorrowful and bitter responsibility, “these tears have their sweetness.”⁷⁴

In this chapter, I have argued that the duty of love to God shapes Dagg's doctrine of man. In his original state, man possessed what was necessary to love and obey God. In his fall, man lost his loving relationship with God. In his present state, man lacks the power for the duty of love. Finally, man's great responsibility in his present state is to repent of the sin that has caused this breach in his loving relationship with God.

⁷²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 139.

⁷³Ibid., 140.

⁷⁴Ibid., 139.

CHAPTER 7

SAVING GRACE

The duty of love to God includes a deep commitment to holy affections. Where love is the corresponding affection to the doctrine of God, gratitude is the corresponding affection to the doctrine of saving grace. Dagg considered that one reason gratitude does not swell in the heart is because of a misunderstanding of the nature of grace. Dagg therefore labored to show the true nature of grace, the sweetness of its blessings, and the sovereignty of its operation. A deeper grasp of God's saving grace will result in a deeper gratitude to God.

In this chapter, I will argue that the duty of love to God informed Dagg's doctrine of saving grace. I will demonstrate the influence of the duty of love to God upon his soteriology in both the structure and content of his doctrine. Particularly it will appear in his understanding of the covenant of grace, the blessings of grace, and the sovereignty of grace. Dagg structured his theology for the promotion of piety. Since he understood that gratitude corresponds in degree to the blessing received, he aimed to show the increasing sweetness of the blessings of grace in order to stir holy gratitude in the hearts of Christians. He then demonstrated the sovereignty of grace for gratitude grows in the heart when one realizes that all the blessings received are completely undeserved. Throughout his analysis of saving grace, Dagg exemplified a robust Calvinism that provokes undeserving sinners to marvel with thanksgiving at the grace of God.

The Covenant of Grace

The duty of love to God informs Dagg's doctrine of the covenant of grace.

Before addressing the nature and operation of grace, Dagg set the context for the study by examining the covenant of grace. He did not provide a lengthy analysis of the covenant of grace, but that which he did provide displays peculiarities when compared with classic English covenant theology.

Tom Ascol has examined "the development of that particular branch of classic federal theology which traces its roots from Calvin through the German Rhineland, to [William] Ames, [Johannes] Cocceius, [Herman] Witsius, [John] Owen, the Westminster Confession, and the Second London Confession."¹ He explains that there are three elements that "form the structural foundation upon which the English Federalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is built."² Those three elements include the covenant of grace, which is progressively revealed through various biblical covenants, the covenant of works, which was made with unfallen man, and the covenant of redemption, which was the pretemporal agreement of the Trinity. Dagg seemed to conflate the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption. He did not use the term "covenant of redemption", but only "covenant of grace." Nevertheless, his analysis of what he called the covenant of grace focused primarily on what classic English Federalism identified as the covenant of redemption.³ This may have been common practice for nineteenth-century Baptists for R. B. C. Howell explained that the covenant of redemption was "called by most writers the covenant of grace."⁴

¹Thomas Ascol, "The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 20.

²Ascol, "Critical Analysis," 3.

³In the remainder of this chapter I will use the term covenant of grace, as that is the term Dagg employed.

⁴Robert Boyle C. Howell, *The Covenants* (Wilmington, OH: Hampton House Books), 1855, 31.

Two important themes arise in Dagg's analysis of the covenant of grace that evidence the influence of the duty of love to God upon it. First, Dagg's emphasis on the covenant of grace reveals he was not only concerned with salvation as it impacts the believer, but he was burdened to exalt the God who does the saving. Dagg refused to engage the study of soteriology apart from a transfixed view on the glory of God. Second, Dagg's teaching on the covenant of grace itself portrays an underlying focus on stirring the human response of the duty of love to God.

Doctrine of the Trinity

In preparation for his instruction on the covenant of grace, Dagg began his chapter on saving grace by addressing the Trinity. Dagg was unique in his placement of the doctrine of the Trinity at the head of his chapter on saving grace. After his first chapter on the study of religious truth, he entered into the doctrine of God. This second chapter of his systematic theology appears to be a natural place to address the doctrine of the Trinity, yet Dagg saved the subject for this later chapter on saving grace. His contemporary Baptists did not follow him. Boyce addressed the Trinity early with many subjects separating it from salvation. Pendleton followed Boyce in addressing the subject early in his theology. Strong examined the Trinity in his early volume and did not broach soteriology until a later volume. The peculiarity of Dagg further appears in that other contemporaries of Dagg followed the normal pattern of addressing the Trinity early including Dick, Gill, Shedd, Hodge, and Raymond.

Dagg purposed this distinction in his theology. He wrote, "We have spoken of this doctrine as belonging especially to the economy of grace. It is here that it is most clearly unfolded to our view, and without this doctrine, the covenant of grace, and its developments in the great work of salvation, cannot be understood."⁵ The doctrine of the

⁵John Dagg, *A Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 248.

Trinity is not only a presupposition to the economy of grace. Dagg's contemporaries would certainly have agreed with him on that point. But the doctrine of the Trinity is part and parcel of the economy of grace for the grace is indeed the grace of God. Dagg resisted engaging in any doctrine apart from his central focus of cultivating love in the human heart to God. He wrote

In exercising and cultivating our gratitude for the blessings of salvation, we must distinctly recognise that they come from God, and that they are intentionally bestowed. When we trace them to their source, the infinite love of the triune God; and when we receive them, as conferred according to his eternal counsel, we are prepared while we enjoy the benefit, to return thanks to its Author, and to exclaim with liveliest emotion, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."⁶

Concerning the content of Dagg's doctrine of the Trinity, he found wide agreement with many other theologians of his day. He did not investigate the doctrine as thoroughly as Boyce, Hodge, Shedd, or Miner. But he found vast agreement as to the substance of the doctrine. Dagg surveyed the teaching of the Trinity in the Old and New Testaments giving greater emphasis to the teaching of the New Testament. He proceeded then to address the error of the Sabellians. He struck a humorous and fatal blow by summarizing their error: "According to this view of the doctrine, we might paraphrase the words of Christ, in John, xiv. 16, thus: 'I, who am the same person with the Father, will pray the Father, who is no other than myself, in a different office, or mode of manifestation, and he shall give you another comforter, who is not another, but the same person as my Father and myself.'"⁷ Dagg pivoted to reject the equal and opposite error of Tritheism by demonstrating from 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 that there is but one God.

Dagg was more wary of efforts to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity than were his contemporaries, though most of his fellow theologians were not keen on the idea either. Shedd spent the majority of his treatment examining the biblical instruction of the

⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 245.

⁷Ibid., 248.

doctrine, claiming, “The doctrine of the Trinity is one of revelation, not of natural religion, and therefore the first work to be done respecting it, is to deduce it from the language of Scripture.”⁸ Hodge also noted that efforts at illustration “are of little value” since they cannot make what is inconceivable intelligible.⁹ Dagg, on the other hand, argued that such illustration is not only pointless, but dangerous—“Attempts have frequently been made, to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity, by means of material objects . . . these efforts to explain the doctrine, are not simply fruitless, but they lead to error.”¹⁰ Dagg was perhaps too cautious in his negation of efforts to illustrate the Trinity. His mathematical mind might have played a small part in his bias. Hodge was superior on this point in regulating such efforts to the realm of little value, while acknowledging that such efforts might evidence glimmers of “triplicity in unity” in creation.¹¹

Nevertheless, Dagg was accurate in his contention that a full comprehension of the subject is not necessary to the duty of faith. Dagg labored to show that the mystery of the Trinity is no excuse to reject the doctrine. Dagg argued that the propositions of Scripture are enough to support the doctrine. If it is revealed in the Word of God, then it ought to be embraced even if human understanding falls short of full comprehension. Dagg’s high regard for the law of God, an essential component of the duty of love to God, appears at this point. Not only is the God of grace central to his study of saving grace, but what that God has breathed out in Scripture must be taken at face value. Dagg’s understanding of law was not limited to the Ten Commandments, albeit an excellent summary, but it extends to all that God commands in the Scripture. The duty of mankind corresponds to what God has revealed. And since God has revealed himself as Trinity in

⁸William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1888), 1:258.

⁹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 1:478.

¹⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 249.

¹¹Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:478.

the Scripture, man is obliged to receive him as such. Dagg also demonstrated that the intellectual difficulties pertaining to the Trinity are not unique to the doctrine. The same difficulty, for instance, arises in the doctrine of God's omnipresence.

Dagg placed the doctrine of the Trinity in a place of priority. He positioned the doctrine here to exalt the triune God who saves. Dagg analyzed the doctrine of saving grace to stir gratitude in the human heart toward God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Dagg's pre-commitment to the Word of God appears as he exhorted mankind to take God at His Word concerning the doctrine of the Trinity no matter the human inability fully to comprehend the doctrine. On both these counts, the duty of love to God is at work instructing Dagg's formation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Dagg, moreover, found unity with his contemporaries in the content of his doctrine but distinction in his structure and purpose. Ultimately, Dagg addressed the doctrine of the Trinity to set the stage for his investigation of the covenant of grace.

Covenant of Grace

Dagg gave more attention to the covenant of grace than did either Pendleton or Boyce. He found more agreement with Hodge on the subject than these two fellow contemporary Baptists. Pendleton and Boyce both advanced instruction on the decrees of God, demonstrating their conviction of God's sovereignty in the affairs of man, but neither delineated the covenant of grace in any significant way. Hodge on the other hand examined the covenant of grace as well as the covenant of redemption in great detail. In this section, I will address Dagg's teaching on the subject, compare him with his contemporaries and major influences, and then relate the connection between the duty of love to God with his understanding of the covenant of grace.

Dagg wrote, "The three divine persons co-operate in man's salvation according to an eternal covenant."¹² He warned against a misunderstanding of the covenant of grace

¹²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 253.

in light of the wide range of meaning concerning the word covenant. People should not imagine a long drawn out process of one party providing terms to another following the acceptance or rejection of them by the other party. This may be the process of human covenants, but not so with the covenant of grace. All that is meant in the term covenant when considered in the covenant of grace is that the three members of the Godhead cooperated in the planning and execution. Dagg provided an example of this cooperation of the Godhead in their work of creation. He cited Genesis 1:26 as an example of the intercommunication of the Godhead in the work. Considering such cooperation ought not to lead to a false concern of disagreement among the Trinity for “In every work of God, the divine persons must either agree or disagree. As they alike possess infinite wisdom, disagreement among them is impossible.”¹³

Dagg continued by teaching that the agreement of the Trinity not only concerns the work to be done in the salvation of sinners, but also the purpose of that salvation. Dagg proved the eternity of the covenant of grace on both exegetical and theological grounds. He cited multiple texts that support the eternity of the covenant of grace including Hebrews 13:20; Ephesians 3:11; Titus 1:2; and 2 Timothy 1:9. He added that the proof of the eternity of the covenant of grace can be simply proven from the fact that the participants in the covenant are eternal, unchangeable, and omniscient. Although the covenant of grace has one eternal purpose, Dagg highlighted that it can be viewed as consisting of various parts or revealed to mankind throughout history in fitting ways.

Dagg proceeded to examine the content of the covenant of grace. In doing so, he emphasized the work of the Son in his humiliation, suffering, and exaltation. The Son joins with the Father in sending the Spirit to exercise His part of the covenant. After addressing the representative function of Christ for His people, Dagg distilled the heart of

¹³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 254.

the covenant in thoughtful wording—“The promise of eternal life was made, before the world began, to the people of God, in him as their representative.”¹⁴ The office of the Holy Spirit is essential to the covenant of grace as He bestows the rewards of Christ’s work upon His people. In this operation of the Trinity, Dagg signaled the authority of the Father and the subordinate role of the Son and the Spirit. Yet, he clarified that the subordination in office does not in any way necessitate inferiority of nature.

Before closing his treatment of the covenant of grace, he exemplified a high regard for God’s revealed truth yet again, saying, “The order of operation in this mysterious and wonderful economy, can be learned from divine revelation only. Here we should study it with simple faith, relying on the testimony of God.”¹⁵ He also distinguished between the covenant of grace and the new covenant while claiming that there exists “a close connection between them.”¹⁶ Dagg spoke of the new covenant as that which Paul mentioned in Hebrews 8:8. The difference between the covenant of grace and the new covenant concerns the participants in each, while the connection is seen in that the promises are the same. Dagg built his teaching of the covenant of grace upon his previous teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity. Having shown the nature and relationship of the Godhead, he proceeded to address the cooperative agreement of the Godhead in the salvation of sinners. Here again Dagg worked to put God at the center of the doctrine of saving grace in an effort to stir mankind to the duty of love to God.

As stated before, Dagg was unique in his emphasis on the covenant of grace in comparison to Pendleton and Boyce. Boyce did not deal with the covenant of grace in any detail. Neither did it play a prominent role in the theology of Strong. Pendleton gave only a reference to it under the heading of the purposes of God when he said, “it accords

¹⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 255.

¹⁵Ibid., 256.

¹⁶Ibid., 257.

with reason to suppose that in their triune communings and consultations—to speak after the manner of men—they decided from eternity on the programme to be carried into effect to eternity.”¹⁷ Yet, Pendleton did not delineate the covenant of grace in a detailed way. In order to see Dagg’s agreement with other Baptists, one must turn to the Baptists who had gone before him.

Dagg followed John Gill in many ways, although perhaps not all, on the subject of the covenant of grace. Gill, likely leading Dagg on this point, contended that the covenant of grace was not “protracted to any length, as it often is with men.”¹⁸ On another point of similarity, Gill illustrated the reasonableness of the covenant of grace from the covenant of creation. Citing the same text, Gill reasoned, “It may be concluded, from the consultation, concerning the formation of man, thus expressed, *And God said, Let us make man in our image*. If there was a consultation of the divine Persons about the making of man at first, then much more about the redemption and salvation of him.”¹⁹ Dagg neglected to make any distinction between the covenant of grace and a pretemporal covenant of redemption. Gill too wrote,

This covenant is the same with the covenant of grace; some divines, indeed, make them distinct covenants; the covenant of redemption, they say, was made with Christ in eternity; the covenant of grace with the elect, or with believers, in time; but this is very wrongly said; there is but one covenant of grace, and not two, in which the Head and Members, the Redeemer and the persons to be redeemed, are concerned.²⁰

However, Dagg was less than clear concerning the relationship between the covenant of grace in eternity and the covenant of grace applied to the redeemed. He concluded his treatment of the covenant by saying that the covenant of grace should not

¹⁷James Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1878), 97.

¹⁸John Gill, *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 139.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 140.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 145.

be considered as identical with the new covenant, explaining that the former was not made with man and the latter was. He went on to explain that although the covenant of grace and the new covenant were made with different parties, there is a close connection between them in that they consist of the same promises. Gill, much more clearly, explained that the new covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace.²¹ Whatever disagreement there might have been between Dagg and Gill, it was minor. The significance in the comparison comes in their agreement that the covenant of grace is understood as foundational to a right apprehension of God's saving grace.

Dagg differed from Hodge in that Hodge distinguished between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. Hodge detailed numerous differences, arguing, "The two, however, ought not to be confounded, as both are clearly revealed in Scripture, and moreover they differ as to the parties, as to the promises, and as to the conditions."²² Although Dagg claimed that there were different parties in the covenant of grace and the new covenant, he did not make that distinction concerning the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption. Furthermore, when Dagg did mention this distinction between the covenant of grace and the new covenant, he did not acknowledge any difference in their promises, but stated that the same promises that are made to the Son are then made to the people of God in the new covenant. As seen above, Hodge claimed that the promises differed in the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption. He also made a case for faith as the stipulation of the covenant of grace, which was opposed explicitly by Gill and seemingly by Dagg as well since he makes no mention of such a stipulation.

The duty of love to God appears as an informing principle upon Dagg's doctrine of the covenant of grace in two primary ways. First, Dagg put the God who is worthy of the duty at the very center of divine grace in his acknowledgement of the

²¹Gill, *A Body of Divinity*, 251.

²²Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:359.

covenant of grace. Dagg's treatment of the covenant of grace, in light of some of his contemporaries passing over the doctrine, necessitates the question of why he included it in his theology. The primary reason Dagg included the covenant of grace in his theology of divine grace is that he might emphasize the Godness of grace. Before considering the various aspects of salvation, Dagg was burdened to highlight the source from which this grace came. His high regard for the law of God led him constantly to look upward to what God reveals, to what God does in the economy of grace, and to what God has done in eternity past in planning and preparing such a great salvation.

There is a long tradition of theologians who warn of the danger of mere self-love. The doctrine of saving grace can be manipulated to serve only self-love if not understood accurately. Dagg advanced his doctrine of the Trinity and his corresponding doctrine of the covenant of grace in an effort to display the perfections of the God who saves and not inappropriately reduce saving grace strictly to its operation on the individual. The significance of what Dagg strove to accomplish can be seen in a fitting passage from the Scottish divine Henry Scougal who wrote,

The love of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer any thing for his sake, or at his pleasure. Though this affection may have its first rise from the favors and mercies of God toward ourselves, yet doth it, in its growth and progress, transcend such particular consideration, and ground itself on his infinite goodness, manifested in all the works of creation and providence.²³

Dagg aimed to promote the duty of love to God for his excellencies in the salvation of man and avoided promoting that which could satisfy mere self-love.

Second, Dagg used language consistent with holy affections as he approached the doctrine of the covenant of grace. This appears in Dagg's language as he called the

²³Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2005), 46.

covenant of grace “this mysterious and wonderful economy.”²⁴ Another example arises as he took time to consider man’s approach to God in relationship to the covenant of grace. He considered how the work of the Godhead proceeds from the Father to the work of the Son, and from the Son to the work of the Spirit. But, in human devotion, the Spirit intercedes in believers who make their prayer through Christ to the Father who is ultimate. Such a focus on man’s duty in relation to any given doctrine is what distinguishes Dagg as a theologian. Finally, Dagg evidences a deep concern for holy affections as he demonstrated the power of this doctrine to promote worship. He wrote, “In the covenant of grace the triune God is so presented to the view of the believer, that he may worship without distraction of thought, with full confidence of acceptance with a clear perception that God is to him all and in all.”²⁵ The promotion of such devotional feeling in reference to the covenant of grace was almost nonexistent in other systematic theologies in Dagg’s day. Having laid the essential groundwork for the doctrine of saving grace, Dagg proceeded to enumerate the many blessings of grace.

Blessings of Grace

Dagg continued his analysis of saving grace by considering the various blessings of grace. The duty of love to God informs his teaching on the blessings of grace in a similar way as it did his view of the covenant of grace. The duty of love to God informs both the structure of his doctrine as well as the content. In this section, I will examine Dagg’s teaching of the blessings of grace, comparing him with his contemporaries and others on certain aspects of his soteriology, and then highlight how the duty of love to God informs his soteriology as he listed out the blessings of grace.

²⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 256.

²⁵Ibid.

Dagg began this section with a clear definition of grace that he carried through the rest of his doctrine on the subject. In a nutshell, “Grace is unmerited favor.”²⁶ Dagg revealed the limit of his high regard for the law of God in his emphasis that grace is unmerited. He insisted, “For the same reason that salvation is not of works, it is not of the law.”²⁷ Dagg appreciated the law for what it does, but he was sure to communicate what it cannot do, namely save sinners. For that reason, “The Scriptures represent grace and law as opposed to each other.”²⁸ Moreover, he argued that salvation is not in any part a result of works but entirely of grace. Faith and works are appropriately distinguished as he explained what faith does—“Faith renounces all reliance on our own works, all expectation of favor on their account; and asks and receives every blessing as the gift of divine grace through Jesus Christ.”²⁹

Dagg referred back to his teaching on the doctrine of man to ground his argument that salvation is totally of grace. Mankind is totally depraved and completely helpless apart from the divine activity of God. Dagg keyed in on the fact that the blessings of grace themselves indicate that salvation is totally of grace. This was one of his primary purposes in distilling each blessing. He desired to exalt the grace of God leaving mankind to stand in grateful wonder at the God who saves. Before addressing each blessing of grace in turn, Dagg pointed out that the sovereign operation of grace can be seen in the giving of Christ and the Spirit. Dagg transitioned directly out of his teaching on the covenant of grace as he spoke of the Son being freely given to accomplish the salvation of God’s people and the Spirit being freely given to apply that salvation. Where then is the place of works in the life of believers? Good works result

²⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 258.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 259.

from salvation, evidence one's right standing with God, and will be acknowledged by Christ as proof of one's standing at the final judgment. Dagg proceeded to identify seven blessings of grace and addressed each beginning with what he viewed as the most foundational blessing and advancing, as up a stair case, to the sweetest blessing of grace.

Pardon

Dagg began his analysis of the blessings of grace by considering pardon. He defined pardon essentially as forgiveness of sin that comes through Jesus Christ for all who repent. Pardon implies a penalty and Dagg was clear to identify the penalty as the wrath of God. He quoted Hebrews 9:22 to ground his claim that forgiveness only comes through Jesus Christ. As a Baptist, Dagg considered that baptism was to be administered upon the reception of the blessing of pardon. The blessing of pardon relates to all those who repent. It is administered upon them at the very beginning of the Christian life for—
“To escape the wrath to come, is the first desire of the awakened sinner; and mercy, mercy, forgive, forgive, are the first words uttered in his earnest prayers.”³⁰

Dagg was unique among theologians of his day in that he addressed pardon under its own head apart from justification. His fellow Baptists Pendleton and Boyce only addressed justification. Strong, also, coming after Pendleton and Boyce, concerned himself only with justification. Theologians of other denominations followed suit including Charles Hodge and Miner Raymond. It appears that Dagg was again following John Gill in making this distinction between pardon and justification. This is apparent not only in that they made the same distinction, but in that they identified the same difference in the two doctrines and use similar language. Gill wrote, “Pardon is of men that are sinners, and who remain such, and may be called so, though pardoned sinners; but justification is a pronouncing persons righteous, as if they had never sinned.”³¹ Dagg too

³⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 264.

³¹Gill, *A Body of Divinity*, 359.

wrote, “A pardoned criminal, and a just man who has committed no crime, stand on different ground.”³² Moreover, Dagg wrote concerning justification, “Such is the greatness of divine grace to the sinner who returns to God through Jesus Christ, that he is treated as if he had never sinned.”³³ Interestingly, Gill employed language that Dagg might be picking up on when he wrote, “Though these are not to be separated, yet they are to be distinguished; and I should choose to consider them, not as distinct parts of the same thing, but as distinct blessings of grace.”³⁴

Justification

Dagg moved forward to the blessing of justification. He demonstrated that justification is the act of a judge in declaring a person righteous. The Bible teaches that justification is by faith and not by works. But faith must not be understood as the meritorious cause of justification. Justification, rather, is attributed to the blood of Christ, his perfect obedience and sacrificial death being the meritorious cause of the blessing. Dagg, a masterful ethicist, acknowledged that many claim the imputation of sin and righteousness that is fundamental to Christ’s substitution is diametrically opposed to the laws of justice. To such an objection to the doctrine of justification, Dagg remarked, “There is no higher rule of justice than God himself; and what the Judge of all does, must be right.”³⁵ Dagg identified three key aspects of the union of the people of God with their savior Jesus Christ. First, there is a union of consent seen in that Christ consents to suffer for their sins and they welcome such a kindness. Second, there is a spiritual union that comes by the Holy Spirit indwelling both Christ and His people. Third, there is a federal union, for Christ stood as the representative of his people in the covenant of grace.

³²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 265.

³³Ibid., 266.

³⁴Gill, *A Body of Divinity*, 352.

³⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 270.

Dagg found both agreement and disagreement with some of his contemporary theologians on the doctrine of justification. He was in complete harmony with his fellow Calvinistic Baptists Pendleton and Boyce. Each claimed that justification is essentially a judicial act of God whereby he declares sinners to be righteous, and thus not guilty of punishment and worthy of reward due to Christ's righteousness. The Presbyterian Hodge followed suit quoting both the Westminster and Edwards on the subject and thoroughly grounding such a divine declaration of acquittal to the imputed righteousness of Christ.³⁶ On the other hand, when compared to Charles Finney, Dagg portrayed significant differences on the subject of justification. The heart of the difference is that Dagg viewed justification as a divine judicial declaration in which the sinner is truly declared righteous and thus not worthy of penalty, but instead worthy of reward due to the imputed righteousness of Christ. Finney rather viewed justification as a non-judicial declaration in which the sinner is not declared righteous, but nevertheless forgiven and rewarded as if he were righteous due to the merciful disposition of God in general not the imputed righteousness of Christ.³⁷ In the former, there stands a sinner not guilty before God dressed in the bloody robes of Christ's righteousness. In the later, there stands a sinner guilty before God, but not treated as such because God is nice.

Interestingly, in the Methodist theologian Miner Raymond there appears a residue of Finney's theology. Raymond was not as confused as Finney on the subject, nevertheless, he left a critical aspect of the doctrine out in his most pointed description of justification. Raymond wrote, "Justification, in its primary idea, is an act of God, as chief magistrate, ordering the non-execution of penalty."³⁸ Yet, the heart of justification is not merely the withholding of a deserved penalty. Such a definition fits with Finney's

³⁶Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:116.

³⁷Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 318.

³⁸Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology*. (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1877), 2:324.

erroneous view. Instead, the doctrine includes a declaration of righteousness that leaves the sinner worthy of reward.

Adoption

As the blessings of grace increase, Dagg climbed to the doctrine of adoption. How is adoption a sweeter blessing than justification? Dagg answered, “Though a judge may fully acquit one who is arraigned before him on a charge of crime, he does not confer, on the man so acquitted, any of the privileges or advantages which belong to a son.”³⁹ Dagg reasoned that the doctrine of adoption consists of the love and discipline of God being confirmed for believers, as well as their position as His heirs. Boyce and Pendleton were more thorough in their list of blessings that come as a part of the believer’s adoption into God’s family. Hodge, somewhat surprisingly, did not address the doctrine of adoption under its own head in his soteriology. Dagg found general agreement on the subject with Raymond who gave the specific doctrine a similar amount of space.

Regeneration

Dagg proceeded to speak of regeneration, which he contends is a better blessing than those that have gone before because it touches on the human nature. The previous blessings concern one’s state or relations, but this blessing is a moral change that comes by the Spirit and inclines an individual to holiness.⁴⁰ Dagg emphasized that the change that takes place is a moral change that comes about by the work of the Spirit through the Word. Dagg spoke of regeneration in both a comprehensive sense and a specific sense. His use of the term in these two senses has at times resulted in confusion.

In Patterson’s treatment of Dagg, he wrote, “Dagg will be presented as representative of Baptists who were generally rejecting the idea that regeneration is a

³⁹Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 275.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 277.

soteriological event logically preceding, if not chronologically preceding, repentance and faith.”⁴¹ Patterson continued,

The relationship between regeneration and faith marks another area in which Dagg is gradually slipping away from the Calvinistic model. Dagg writes that ‘Faith is necessary to the Christian character; and must therefore precede regeneration, when it is understood *in its widest sense*.’ Dagg continues by arguing that even in the more restricted sense of the beginning of spiritual life, faith, *at least the kind about which James speaks*, must precede. This admission marks a decisive departure from traditional Calvinism. In fact, it renders Dagg inconsistent in some respects, since elsewhere he is insistent about the fact that men cannot come to God unless the Spirit makes this possible. Dagg does not resolve this inconsistency. He was maintaining the traditions of Calvinism in a day of expanding missionary and evangelistic horizons, and the inconsistency mirrors the resulting dilemma [emphasis mine].⁴²

There are two important points to clarify that leave Patterson’s conclusion about Dagg’s departure from Calvinism untenable. First, as Patterson included in the quote, Dagg wrote that faith precedes regeneration *in its widest sense*. Dagg clearly defined what he meant by “widest sense” in the paragraph prior to the one Patterson quoted. Dagg explained, “The term regeneration is sometimes used in a comprehensive sense, as including the whole formation of the Christian character.”⁴³ So what Dagg meant by faith preceding regeneration in its widest sense is that if a Christian is to grow in maturity—be formed in Christian character—then he needs faith. But Dagg was explicitly not referring to regeneration in its particular sense, which Dagg defined as “the first production of divine love in the heart. In (this) sense, the work is instantaneous. There is a moment known only to God, when the first holy affection exists in the soul.”⁴⁴

Second, when Patterson quoted Dagg saying that faith may precede regeneration even the restricted sense, he fails to see that Dagg stated “in the sense in

⁴¹Leighton Paige Patterson, “An Evaluation of the Soteriological Thought of John Leadley Dagg, Baptist Theologian of Nineteenth-Century America” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974), 7.

⁴²Patterson, “An Evaluation,” 145.

⁴³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 279.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

which James uses the term.”⁴⁵ Dagg referenced James 2:17 at this point revealing that faith “in the sense in which James uses the term” means a dead faith. Dagg himself wrote in the next sentence, “But a faith which exists before the beginning of spiritual life, cannot be a living faith.”⁴⁶ In other words, the only faith that precedes regeneration is a dead faith. For a living faith, the specific regeneration of the Spirit is needed. Dagg explained how this specific work of regeneration occurs—“In his own time and manner, God, the Holy Spirit, makes the word effectual in producing a new affection in the soul : and, when the first movement of love to God exists, the first throb of spiritual life commences.”⁴⁷ Patterson, nevertheless, was right to indicate Dagg’s evangelistic and missionary mindfulness; his error lies in thinking that his Calvinistic convictions caused any dilemma.

Sanctification

Dagg advanced to the blessing of sanctification in which the work of regeneration is continued. Dagg acknowledged the warfare that exists in the life of every true believer. The Holy Spirit works in the midst of this warfare to sanctify and prepare the people of God for heaven. Dagg detailed two main ways in which the Holy Spirit does his sanctifying work. The Spirit first works through the truth. Dagg cited John 17:17 as evidence that sanctification comes in this way. Believers seek this influence of the Spirit as they open their Bibles to meditate on God’s Word. The Spirit, in the second place, works through providence. Dagg emphasized the sanctification that comes through providential afflictions. His acknowledgement of afflictions is not surprising coming from a man who at the time was almost completely blind, lame, and mute. Although not

⁴⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 279.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

substantially different, Pendleton was a bit more thorough in his examination of sanctification. He included multiple components of sanctification including mortification of sin and growth in Christian character. Boyce also provided more detail on the doctrine and, like Pendleton, provided a more concise definition of sanctification, identifying it as simply “to make holy.”⁴⁸

Dagg evidenced significant disagreement with his contemporary Methodists on the doctrine of sanctification. This appears in a comparison between him and the Methodist Miner Raymond. Raymond tried to defend the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. He sought support from Ephesians 3:19. Raymond contended that Paul’s reference to being filled with the fullness of God constitutes a superior state of grace. This superior state of grace is far above what is normally attained by most Christians and should be sought after by believers. Such a state, as Paul describes, is worthy of the name Christian perfection.⁴⁹ Dagg taught no such doctrine. Instead, he explained that concerning Christian perfection, “the resurrection of the body is included, and the fashioning of it like the glorious body of Christ.”⁵⁰

Final Perseverance

Dagg continued to climb the latter of the blessings of grace by addressing final perseverance. He dealt extensively with this particular blessing, providing four proofs for the truth that Christians persevere in holy obedience to the very end. He began by arguing that the work of regeneration necessitates perseverance because the life bestowed in regeneration is immortal. He then contended that the believer’s union with Christ cannot be broken. Next, he proceeded to prove perseverance by the promises of God. Finally, he

⁴⁸James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 410.

⁴⁹Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 2:390.

⁵⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 301.

provided a detailed argument that when apostasy is mentioned it concerns those who were never truly believers. Boyce and Pendleton argued for the same nature of perseverance and defended it in similar ways. Strong addressed the doctrine of perseverance, but the definition of the doctrine begins to shift in his work. Strong claimed, “The Scriptures declare that, in virtue of the original purpose and continuous operation of God, all who are united to Christ by faith will infallibly continue in a state of grace and will finally attain to everlasting life.”⁵¹ Yet, missing from this definition is an acknowledgement of perseverance in obedience. Dagg warned, “It is a wretched and fatal perversion of the doctrine, if men conclude that, having been once converted, they will be saved, whatever may be their course of life.”⁵²

Perfection

Dagg reached the highest of the blessings of grace as he concluded with the blessing of perfection. He explained that this blessing of perfection will not arrive until Christ returns. As he provided instruction on this doctrine, his emphasis on duty and love appears at multiple points. He was not only concerned with moral perfection, nor was he merely concerned with a loving relationship with God. Dagg could not think of one without the other. So he warned the one who would indulge in sin and excuse sin in this life. He admonished that such a one “has reason to fear that the love of sin has never been crucified in his heart.”⁵³ Again the spiritual battle that rages on in the Christian life is none other than a conflict between the love of God and the love of the world. This war will cease upon Christ’s return and the people of God will be caught up in a world of perfection—holy love.

⁵¹Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1947), 881.

⁵²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 296.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 303.

Dagg struck an Edwardsian tone in his work titled *The More Excellent Way*, in which he wrote, “The rays which emanate from the divine throne, and collect around the saint in heaven, and mantle him with glory, are rays of love He is brought to the very fountain of pleasure, and immersed in the ocean of bliss; but that fountain, that ocean is love; for God is love.”⁵⁴ This comes remarkably close to Edwards’s sermon *Heaven Is a World of Love*, in which Edwards preached, “And here the place with respect to the cause and fountain of love which is there . . . the God of love dwells in heaven. Heaven is the palace, or presence-chamber, of the Supreme Being who is both the cause and source of all holy love.”⁵⁵ Dagg’s uniqueness among his contemporary theologians on this doctrine appears in his insistence to consider holiness and love as the essential and inextricable ingredients of Christian perfection.

The Duty of Love to God and the Blessings of Grace

The centrality and significance of the duty of love to God to Dagg’s doctrine of grace appears as he said,

The doctrine that salvation is of grace, is not a useless speculation; but it enters into the very heart of Christian experience; and the faith which does not recognise it, does not receive Christ as he is presented in the Gospel. It is, therefore, a matter of unspeakable importance, that our view of this truth should be clear, and that it should be cordially embraced by every power of our minds.”⁵⁶

The influence of the duty of love to God appears in the way Dagg structured this section of his theology. He did not follow the more common organization of logical order. Rather, he addressed each of these seven blessings of grace in view of how sweet each blessing is in human experience. He intended to stir up the duty of love to God in the heart of his readers. He desired to show them just how marvelous the grace of God is so that they

⁵⁴John Dagg, *The More Excellent Way* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1852), 96.

⁵⁵Jonathan Edwards and Kyle Strobel (*Charity and Its Fruits: Living in the Light of God’s Love*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 280.

⁵⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 261.

would render unto Him the thankfulness that He rightly deserves. His effort to promote the duty of love to God appears in each blessing.

It was noted previously that Gill might have influenced Dagg in his addressing pardon and justification under two individual heads. Yet, the duty of love to God is seen operating here as well. When thinking through pardon and justification in a merely systematic way, or simply in relationship to the other aspects of soteriology, one might naturally combine them. Yet, when considering how each brings a blessing to the human condition that prompts gratitude in the heart, it is understandable that the doctrines might be addressed separately. The former removes the penalty and the latter restores God's favor. Dagg, moreover, was adamant that this blessing does not exonerate man from his duty. He wrote, for example, "He who believes that all his sins, past and future, were forgiven at his first conversion, in such a sense that he may dispense with all subsequent penitence, and rest satisfied with his first forgiveness, has need to learn again the first principles of the doctrine of Christ."⁵⁷ Dagg revealed a high regard for the duty of repentance at this point that is not extinguished because of the blessing of pardon.

As opposed to Finney, Dagg came to his accurate view of justification primarily because of his correct interpretation of Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, his accurate view of justification aptly fits the system of the duty of love to God. Which system produces more gratitude in the heart of man? Finney left man guilty, but pardoned because of God's kindness. Dagg left man not guilty because of the righteous mediator Jesus Christ. Surely to be restored to favor with God in light of a verdict of not guilty is a sweeter blessing than to be only forgiven. This, in fact, was Dagg's main reason for addressing the doctrine of justification after his distillation of the doctrine of pardon. Again, Dagg intentionally employed the blessing of adoption for the purpose of the duty of love to God. Moreover, in this effort he was set apart from his contemporary

⁵⁷Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 265.

Presbyterians. Driven by the duty of love to God, Dagg consoled, “Even now, whatever may be our poverty, affliction, or reproach, we are the objects of our Father’s care, and he gives us, as an earnest of the future inheritance, so much of it in present enjoyment, as he sees to be best for us.”⁵⁸

The operation of the duty of love to God upon Dagg’s doctrine of regeneration appears in the thorough discussion he provided on the danger of self-love and thus the need of the Spirit’s regeneration. He laid the foundation for this initial work of the Spirit by describing man in his fallen condition. He demonstrated that it is man’s hatred of God that causes their error in judging His character. An accurate revelation of God, therefore, will not suffice to remedy man’s condition. Rather, man needs the effective power of the Holy Spirit to extinguish his disdain for God and instill love for Him. Anything less than this supernatural operation leaves man with only the love of self. But, as the Spirit gives new life at regeneration, a new love beyond that of mere self-love is produced in the heart. Dagg explained, “Our love to God does not produce a disregard to our own happiness, but it rises above the consideration of it. It is, therefore, not a modification of self-love.”⁵⁹

Dagg portrayed a commitment to the duty of love to God in his teaching on sanctification and final perseverance. This primarily appears in his focus on the pursuit of holiness. When Methodists became entangled in Christian perfectionism, Dagg emphasized that there would be a battle for a holy life until the return of Christ. Moreover, that battle was not only one of dutiful obedience to the law of God, but one of loving commitment to the God who was sanctifying them by the Spirit. When perseverance wanes in the Christian life it is because heat of love to God has diminished. Here again, the matter is not only of obedience but love to God. As Dagg said concerning the one who has wandered, “The fire of divine love in the heart, though its flame may be

⁵⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 277.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 281.

smothered for a time, is more easily rekindled than when first produced.”⁶⁰ Lines like this one set Dagg apart and evidence the influence of the central theological framework of the duty of love to God.

Finally, his teaching on the perfection that comes upon Christ’s return evidences no small influence of the duty of love to God. Heaven will not only be a place where the believer is with God. Nor is it strictly a place where the Christian will be holy like God is holy. Instead, this final Christian perfection is the consummation of the duty of love to God. At this point the fight will cease between the love of God and the love of the world. Where others might speculate about the secret things of God, Dagg grounded himself in the truth revealed that heaven would be a place where the duty of love to God will continue in perfect bliss. Dagg revealed his healthy understanding of duty by explaining that heaven will be a place where such dutiful work is continued. He wrote that they would engage in “the most delightful employment. The future happiness of the saints is called a rest: but it is not a rest of inactivity.”⁶¹ If the duty of love to God is a begrudging duty, the problem lies not in the command, but in the sinner. In heaven, sin will be no more and therefore the duty will be found to be a sheer delight. Mindful of this truth, Dagg exclaimed, “We long to join the happy company, who dwell for ever in the presence of our God. O to be free from sin, as they are;--to behold the face of Jesus, as they do;--to partake of their bliss, and unite in their everlasting hallelujahs!”⁶²

The Sovereignty of Grace

Dagg concluded his assessment of the doctrine of saving grace by considering the sovereignty of grace. His aim was to stir the affections of his listeners to greater

⁶⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 291.

⁶¹Ibid., 362.

⁶²Ibid., 379.

thankfulness to God for such a marvelous salvation. Yet, he knew that if such blessings were considered as due payment for services rendered then no gratitude would burn in the human heart. He, therefore, proceeded to teach the sovereignty of grace for “in order to the full exercise of gratitude to God it is necessary to be thoroughly impressed with the conviction that the blessings received are wholly undeserved, and proceed entirely from the mere mercy and grace of God.”⁶³ In this section, I will compare Dagg’s understanding of the sovereignty of grace with some of his contemporaries and others, evidencing his robust Calvinism as an essential ingredient to the duty of love to God. Dagg explained the sovereignty of grace when he wrote, “God bestows the blessings of His grace, not according to the works of the recipient, but according to His own sovereign pleasure.”⁶⁴ He then proceeded to address the doctrines of election, particular redemption, and effectual calling.

Election

Dagg explained election by saying, “All who will finally be saved, were chosen to salvation by God the Father, before the foundation of the world, and given to Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace.”⁶⁵ Dagg then highlighted that the Scriptures do indeed teach that God has a chosen people, and that they are chosen unto salvation from eternity. He emphasized that God chose his people not because of their works but because of his own grace, surely not in view of their own works or faith, but in reference to Christ. Boyce essentially taught the same doctrine, though he labored to specify the individual nature of God’s election more so than Dagg. Dagg nevertheless agreed with Boyce on the point. Pendleton addressed election under the heading of the purposes of

⁶³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 245.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 305.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 309.

God and stood in agreement with Boyce and Dagg on the subject. Where Dagg has agreement with his fellow Calvinistic Baptists he stood in disagreement with Arminian Methodists. Miley objected to the Calvinistic doctrine of election. He isolated Romans 8 and claimed that what Paul spoke of as foreknown was the character of the individual predestined.⁶⁶ Raymond renounced the doctrine of election as did Miley, claiming that at least at certain points election refers not to individuals unto salvation, but to the raising of Gentiles to equal religious privileges.”⁶⁷

Dagg addressed certain objections that arise against the doctrine of election and sought to settle each of them. One objection claims that the doctrine of election steals all motivation to human effort. But Dagg responded that such an objection “proceeds on the supposition that God has preterdetermined the end without reference to the means.”⁶⁸ Another objection claims that election is unfavorable to morality. Yet, Dagg responded that the inducement toward morality lies in the warning of future retribution for evil deeds, which the doctrine of election does not eliminate. Gardner took exception with Dagg’s reasoning at this point, remarking, “moral action is required as a concomitant of salvation, but no amount of moral action is helpful apart from salvation. This could drive the non-elect to despair, and undercut the interests of morality in their cases.”⁶⁹ Yet, Dagg’s answer to the objection holds. The doctrine of election would only be guilty of the objection if it taught that a given individual still alive was indeed a reprobate without any hope. Since the doctrine teaches no such thing, any despair resulting in decreasing morality is not due to the doctrine of election.

⁶⁶John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1892), 2:261.

⁶⁷Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 2:419.

⁶⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 315.

⁶⁹Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), 198.

Another objection is leveled against the doctrine of election that insists the doctrine makes God insincere in his invitation to all men to believe. Dagg answered, “If God’s word teaches the doctrine of election, and if it contains commands or invitations to all men to seek salvation through Christ, it is highly presumptuous in us to charge God with insincerity, because we cannot reconcile the two things with each other.”⁷⁰ Gardner gave Dagg a demerit on this response as well, claiming, “Dagg begins to answer this by running for cover.”⁷¹ Gardner saw some sort of retreat in Dagg’s assertion that it is presumptuous for finite human beings to charge the infinite God with wrongdoing. But, if Gardner indicts Dagg with cowardly running for cover, then he must level the same charge against the Apostle Paul⁷² and the Synod of Dort divines—“To those who murmur at the free grace of election, and just severity of reprobation, we answer with the Apostle: ‘Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?’”⁷³ This point reveals a key component at work in Dagg’s theological system. The duty of love to God includes a high regard for the law of God. Therefore, when Dagg asserted the greatness of God and the finitude of man, he was not retreating or casting reason to the wind. He instead acknowledged a revealed truth, namely the greatness of God and the perfection of His Word. He then made the accurate logical deduction that if there is a seeming contradiction in the Word of God, fallen finite man ought to acknowledge the foolishness of charging God with lying.

Dagg continued to answer the objection by arguing, “The fact that they are unwilling, and that God knows they will remain unwilling, unless he change their hearts,

⁷⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 319.

⁷¹Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian,” 199.

⁷²Rom 9:20

⁷³Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 585 [1:18].

abates nothing from the sincerity of the requirement.”⁷⁴ Gardner called this a mystifying sentence and objects, “This would seem to make the requirement a sham.”⁷⁵ Gardner claimed that the requirement is a farce because the human is unwilling to obey the requirement. This reveals a significant component of Dagg’s understanding of requirement or duty, and shows its operation at this point in Dagg’s doctrine of election. Dagg viewed the law or commands of God as man’s duty. What makes duty legitimate is not man’s ability to fulfill that duty, but God having actually required it. Dagg revealed his acquaintance with Edwards’s distinction between moral and natural inability on this point as well.

Particular Redemption

Dagg progressed in his study of the sovereignty of grace by examining the doctrine of particular redemption. He provided the concise definition—“The Son of God gave His life to redeem those who were given to Him by the Father in the covenant of grace.”⁷⁶ Particular redemption, like election, is contextualized by the covenant of grace. Dagg taught plainly that Christ came into the world to save a particular people. He instructed that both the purpose and consummation of redemption is particular. He labored the point that the universal invitations will not result in universal salvation. Nevertheless, he esteemed such universal calls, claiming, “With this universal call to absolute and unconditional surrender to God’s sovereignty, the doctrine of particular redemption exactly harmonizes.”⁷⁷ Dagg’s right appreciation for such a universal call has led some to question his Calvinism. An examination of that point will soon follow. But one final aspect of Dagg’s doctrine of particular redemption must be solidified. That is,

⁷⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 319.

⁷⁵Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian,” 199.

⁷⁶Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 324.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 331.

his insistence on distributive justice as fundamental to the atonement. Dagg explained, “In the language of Scripture, sins are *debts*, the blood of Christ is a *price*, and his people are *bought*.”⁷⁸

Dagg examined the doctrine of those who advocate for a view of the atonement as moral rather than commercial. Dagg admitted respect for those who hold such a view, but ultimately found their argument inconclusive. Gardner spoke to Dagg’s analysis at this point, stating, “This is essentially the position of Andrew Fuller, and Dagg takes pains to reject it.”⁷⁹ But, Gardner may paint with too broad a brush here. Although not in full agreement with Fuller, Dagg did not necessarily labor to prove a commercial view of the atonement. He rather denied too great a distinction between the moral view and the commercial view, stating, “Though justice in government, and justice in commerce, may be distinguished from each other, it does not follow, that whatever may be affirmed of the one, must necessarily be denied of the other.”⁸⁰ He equated moral justice with distributive justice and said, “It is not true, that the principle of distributive justice repels the notion of so much suffering for so much sin.”⁸¹ Whatever may be the case on the moral and commercial views of the atonement, Dagg stood in complete agreement with Fuller on the universal call of the gospel.

Dagg saw no predicament in holding to particular redemption and at the same time advocating for universal calls to repentance and faith. The primary reason he saw no predicament is because he followed Andrew Fuller in his excellent work *the Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. Dagg simply said, “Some have maintained that, if the atonement of Christ is not general, no sinner can be under obligation to believe in Christ,

⁷⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 328.

⁷⁹Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian,” 193.

⁸⁰Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 328.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

until he is assured that he is one of the elect. This implies that no sinner is bound to believe what God says, unless he knows that God designs to save him.”⁸² As Fuller argued that it is the duty of every human being to believe what God reveals, so Dagg followed with his concept of duty. Dagg’s high regard for the law of God came through at this point once again. He found man’s duty in the law of God, even when the command is “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Patterson examined Dagg’s doctrine of particular redemption and argued that Dagg, while faithful to his Calvinistic heritage, was not fully convinced of the Calvinistic doctrine. He wrote, “Dagg obviously believes that the atonement is limited in its scope, and he thus may be said to be faithful to his Calvinistic background. On the other hand, he is much less certain about the proper language with which to express such truths and seems less than fully convinced on the subject himself.”⁸³ Patterson reached for three supports for his claim that Dagg was not a fully convinced Calvinist on particular redemption. First, Dagg was not certain about the proper language. Second, he stated respect for those who view the atonement in moral terms. Third, he encouraged people to rest on the authority of God’s Word even when the “harmony of its parts is not apparent to our weak understanding.”⁸⁴

Taking these points in reverse order, it has already been demonstrated that Dagg’s high view of the Word of God led him to rest in the teaching of the Bible when finite human minds lack complete understanding of a particular doctrine. Surely, such a statement is no denial of particular redemption, but an affirmation of its being clearly taught in the Word of God and thus worthy of acceptance. Second, Dagg’s respect for Andrew Fuller and others who view the atonement in moral terms is no proof of a cooling

⁸²Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 330.

⁸³Patterson, “An Evaluation,” 110.

⁸⁴Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 330.

Calvinism. To show respect to theologians who differ from you is not to diminish your own position even in the slightest. Finally, Patterson claimed that Dagg was unsure of the proper language to use. Patterson claimed this because Dagg, although in disagreement with such a usage, acknowledged that some use the term atonement in an abstract sense. But Dagg's acknowledgement of such a usage, and subsequent disagreement with it, proves no hesitancy in his own language concerning particular redemption. It appears that Dagg was not unsure, but rather very confident of what language to use when expressing the doctrine.

Furthermore, the abstract usage Dagg referred to was employed by "persons who maintain the doctrine of particular redemption" to permit an understanding of the death of Christ as sufficient for all while efficient only for the elect.⁸⁵ This view, which Dagg thought not quite Calvinistic enough, is none other than the view of the Synod of Dort—"The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world."⁸⁶ As has recently been noted, "The discussions on the atonement introduced by Andrew Fuller's gravitation toward the view of the Synod of Dort do not signal a departure from the fundamental Calvinist soteriology."⁸⁷ If Fuller's gravitation toward Dort does not constitute a departure from Calvinism, surely Dagg's maintaining a more limited view of the atonement than Dort does not constitute a departure either.

⁸⁵Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 326.

⁸⁶Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 586 [2:3].

⁸⁷Thomas Ascol and Tom J. Nettles, "Who Is The True Revisionist? Response to Steve Lemke." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 58, no. 2, (2016), 90.

Effectual Calling

Dagg concluded his survey of the sovereignty of grace by addressing effectual calling. God the Father elects his people, the Son dies for this particular people, and finally—“The Holy Spirit effectually calls all the elect to repent and believe.”⁸⁸ The sovereignty of grace is seen in Trinitarian form as the outworking of the covenant of grace. Dagg taught that there is an external call that is often ineffectual, but there is also this other call, which he is concerned with in this doctrine, that is both internal and effectual. The Holy Spirit evidences almighty power in effectual calling as new life is imparted to dead sinners. This effectual calling, then, results in regeneration. Dagg illustrated again his high regard for the law of God when he answered an objection to this doctrine. Some may object that if the grace needed to repent and believe requires the initial sovereign action of the Spirit, then those who have yet to experience such quickening are not blameworthy. In usual fashion, Dagg responded—“The objection virtually assumes, that men are under no obligation to serve God further than they please.”⁸⁹ Dagg demonstrated, in accordance with the duty of love to God, that duty corresponds not to man’s moral ability or desire, but to God’s character and decrees.

Dagg found great commonality with his contemporary Calvinistic theologians both in his denomination and in others. The Presbyterian W. G. T. Shedd wrote of effectual calling in a similar way. He cited the *Westminster Confession of Faith* on the subject, then remarks, “Everything in redemption runs back, ultimately, to God.”⁹⁰ Boyce, like Dagg, distinguished between an outward call that is ineffectual and an inward call that is effectual.⁹¹ Strong, also, demonstrated agreement on effectual calling. Although he avoided the word “irresistible”, he acknowledged, “We prefer to say that this special call

⁸⁸Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 331.

⁸⁹Ibid., 334.

⁹⁰Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:490.

⁹¹Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 367.

is efficacious,—that is, that it infallibly accomplishes its purpose of leading the sinner to the acceptance of salvation.”⁹²

The duty of love to God operates upon Dagg’s doctrine of effectual calling in two specific ways. First, as with the other aspects of God’s sovereign grace, the doctrine is meant to remove all entitlement to such a great salvation. With entitlement removed, the human heart is positioned to abound in thanksgiving and love toward God. Dagg’s effort to show man his inability and exalt the grace of God was an effort to see God get glory and man get good. He warned, “Self-righteousness is ruinous to the soul Many who have been alarmed by a view of their outward sins, have reformed their lives; and, relying on their morality, have, without any heart-religion, without any true faith in Christ, fatally dreamed their life away in the vain hope that all will be well at last.”⁹³ Dagg would spare his listeners this terrible situation. Second, Dagg reverently exalted the God of grace. He checked human objections to God’s sovereign grace at every turn since he engaged the doctrine with a heart devoted to loving God. A thorough grasp on the duty of loving God will position theologians appropriately when facing truths that are difficult to reconcile. He admonished—“Instead of demanding God’s reasons for what he does, it becomes every man rather to inquire, what reason he can render to God, for violating his holy law, and rejecting the call of his gospel.”⁹⁴

In this chapter, I have argued that the duty of love to God informed Dagg’s doctrine of saving grace. I have shown how it operated in his view of the covenant of grace, the blessings of grace, and the sovereignty of grace. At each point, Dagg maintained substantial agreement with his contemporary Calvinistic theologians, while displaying significant disagreement with Arminian theologians. He was distinguished

⁹²Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 792.

⁹³Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 336.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 334.

from others in the way the duty of love to God appeared in his teaching of the doctrine of saving grace. A high regard for the law of God and a deep commitment to holy affections are sustained throughout his treatment of the doctrine. He angled to show along the way the unmerited favor of God is sweet beyond measure and calls forth the duty of love-filled gratitude.

CHAPTER 8

CHURCH

John Dagg admitted that an investigation into the appropriate operation of the church is not as essential as an investigation into the new birth. But, that does not mean that it is unimportant. He reasoned that Christ had laid down instruction concerning the church in the Scripture, so a diligent study of His instruction is required. A search into the nature and function of the church is not detached from the doctrine of the new birth, because the love to God that awakens upon regeneration includes a desire to know and obey the will of the Savior. At the outset of his *Manual of Church Order* he exhorted, “Let us, therefore, prosecute the investigations which are before us, with a fervent prayer, that the Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth, may assist us to learn the will of him whom we supremely love and adore.”¹

Dagg navigated an uncommon path on the topic of ecclesiology. Gardner has noted that when it comes to the subject, Dagg “agrees neither with his Pedobaptist friends nor with many of his Baptist friends.”² Certainly, he agreed more often with the fellow Baptists in his own denomination than he did with his Presbyterian acquaintances in another one. But, he sympathized with Presbyterians more so than many of his contemporary Baptists. Many of Dagg’s ecclesiological distinctions arise from pre-commitments inherent in or stemming from the duty of love to God. The intent of this

¹John Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 12.

²Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), 218.

chapter is to demonstrate that the duty of love to God coordinated Dagg's doctrine of the church. It did so in three primary ways: It coordinated his approach to (1) the ordinances of the church, (2) the nature and discipline of the church, (3) and the particular duties of Baptists.

The Ordinances of the Church

The duty of love to God coordinated Dagg's teaching the ordinances of the church. This can be observed in his instruction concerning both baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

Dagg developed his position on baptism with scrupulous attention given to God's commands. When others employed theological extrapolation, often from faulty premises, Dagg launched a ruthless, investigator-like examination into the meaning of biblical words and context. This might be expected from the man who, at the age of twenty-one, lived as a tutor in a home full of Presbyterians. One in that family winsomely invited Dagg to read John M. Mason and admitted a desire to convert him to Presbyterian ways.³ Dagg happily accepted the book, refuted Mason in writing, and cemented his Baptist convictions. The head of the household, Cuthbert Powell, upon hearing of Dagg's work, asked to read the manuscript. After doing so, Powell was so impressed with Dagg's intellect that he recommended him to the legal profession.⁴ Neither Dagg's conviction nor his keen insight had faded by the time he readdressed the subject in his *Manual of Church Order*.

Dagg addressed the subject of baptism in five divisions:

³John M. Mason, and Ebenezer Mason, *Essays on the Church of God* (New York: Robert Carter), 1843.

⁴John Dagg, *A Manual of Theology, Autobiography* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 19.

First, he considered the perpetuity of baptism, stating, “Water baptism is a Christian ordinance of perpetual obligation.”⁵ Dagg cited Christ’s Great Commission in Matthew 28 as support for his argument. To the Quaker objection to physical baptism he replied, “Our more spiritual dispensation needs fewer helps of this kind: but we are yet in the body, and God has judged it fit to assist our faith by visible representations. To reject their use, is to be wiser than God.”⁶

Dagg, then, spent the majority of his treatment of baptism on the meaning of the word baptize. Dagg provided two tables containing various usages of the Greek words βαπτω and βαπτίζω. His burden was to prove the meaning *immerse* for the Greek word βαπτίζω. In order to prove his meaning he listed the usage of this word in the Greek New Testament, Septuagint, and other classical Greek texts. Dagg provided three classifications for βαπτίζω. In every case in which the word was used, it meant to immerse literally and strictly, to immerse in a less strict sense, or it was used metaphorically.⁷ Dagg concluded, “After thoroughly examining the collection of examples, we find that they fully establish the meaning to *immerse*.”⁸ Dagg’s avid concern for the Word of God is seen in the great effort he gave to get at the original meaning of the Greek word.

Dagg addressed objections to immersion in cases of cold climates, sickness, and delicate natures. His answer to such objections reveals his thinking on the nature of duty and love. He responded,

Our simple reply to this argument is, that it is Christ’s command. We dare not, by our fallible reasonings from general principles, attempt to determine the will of our divine lawgiver, when we have in our possession his express command on the very subject. Christ knew all the climates of the earth, and all the conditions and ranks

⁵Dagg, *Church Order*, 13.

⁶Ibid., 18.

⁷Ibid., 27.

⁸Ibid., 35.

among men, and he has adapted his religion to these as far as appeared best to his infinite wisdom. If the infirm and sick cannot obey, there is an end of responsibility in their case. If the delicate and refined will not, they must leave *the pleasure of obedience* to those, who think it no humiliation to tread where they find the footsteps of their Lord and Master. Though Christ's yoke is easy, it is still a yoke; and pride and false delicacy may refuse to wear it; but *love can make it welcome and delightful* [emphasis mine].⁹

Dagg's third division of his teaching on baptism concerned the subjects of baptism. As expected, he argued that repentance of sin and faith in Christ was prerequisite to the ordinance. Dagg cited no less than seventeen biblical texts to support his position. The proper subjects of baptism is a closely related teaching to what Dagg taught under his fourth heading, namely, "Baptism was designed to be the ceremony of Christian profession."¹⁰ He tied in the advance of the gospel throughout the world to the public profession of God's people through baptism. He found support for his reasoning in the placement of baptism in the Great Commission. What some consider foolish and embarrassing, Dagg saw as a bold step of obedience to the call of being separate from the world.¹¹ Pendleton neglected this point in his treatment of baptism, claiming the design of baptism was only a symbol of purification and union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.¹² This distinction, although slight, signals Dagg's missionary spirituality and eager desire to see the gospel extend to the ends of the earth. But, in order for the church rightly to testify to Christ's work, the church must be rightly ordered, and baptism played a critical role in that order. Dagg stated this in his fifth division concerning the connection of baptism with church order, in which he stated, "none but baptized persons can be admitted to membership."¹³

⁹Dagg, *Church Order*, 68.

¹⁰Ibid., 70.

¹¹Ibid., 71.

¹²James Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 74.

¹³Dagg, *Church Order*, 73.

Dagg held wide agreement with his fellow Baptists on the subject of baptism. A slight difference has been observed between him and Pendleton, but when it came to the meaning of baptism they were united. Pendleton defined baptism as “the immersion in water, by a proper administrator, of a believer in Christ, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ When it came to theologians of other denominations, the differences were substantial. Bannerman, a contemporary Presbyterian, displayed significant disagreement with Dagg’s position on baptism. The primary area of disagreement regarded the proper subjects for baptism. An analysis of two of Bannerman’s major arguments in favor of infant baptism and Dagg’s rebuttal of them will demonstrate the influence of the duty of love to God upon Dagg’s understanding of baptism.

First, Bannerman argued, “the Church of God, made up of His professing people, has been essentially the same in character in former and in later times, and has always included infants among its members.”¹⁵ Bannerman sought proof for his position in the covenant. His argument was essentially that the covenant is one in former and later times and therefore the church is one in former and later times. He contended, “The covenant is the charter of the Church of God in every age; and that charter remaining unchanged and identical from age to age, the Church that is built upon it must, in all its essential features, be one and the same also”¹⁶ Bannerman had previously said that his argument for infant baptism must first appeal “to the express statements of the Word of God.”¹⁷ Indeed, he tried to do so but fell short. His argument did not begin with the express statements of the Word of God, but a non sequitur that God’s eternal covenant of grace confirms the unity of Israel and the Church.

¹⁴Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual*, 64.

¹⁵James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 2:75.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 2:76.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 2:68.

Dagg directly opposed this position by arguments from express statements of Scripture. He began to show the distinction between Israel and the Church by demonstrating that *ἐκκλησία* is not used in the Septuagint to denote the Hebrew congregation at all places. He sealed his argument by pointing to Acts 7:38,

The next mention of the New Testament ecclesia is equally decisive: ‘The Lord added to the ecclesia such as should be saved.’ The time was the feast of Pentecost, when the worshippers of the Hebrew cahal were assembled at Jerusalem. From this assembly the converts to the new religion were made; and when made, they were added to the ecclesia. No proof more decisive can be desired; that the ecclesia to which they were added, was not the cahal to which they had previously belonged.¹⁸

This comparison of Bannerman and Dagg illustrates Dagg’s rigorous focus on the Word of God in his instruction on baptism. Where Bannerman relied on theological deduction, inattentive to the specific teaching of Scripture; Dagg diligently attended what God revealed.

Bannerman’s second argument concerned the relationship between circumcision and baptism. He taught, “the ordinance of outward admission into the Church has, in its essential character and meaning, been the same in former and in later times, and has always been administered to infants.”¹⁹ Bannerman aimed to equate circumcision with baptism. His primary text was Colossians 2:12, which he claimed implied that “Baptism comes to Christians now in the room of circumcision.”²⁰ Dagg took exception to such exposition of Colossians 2:12, claiming the context proves that Paul is using circumcision to symbolize regeneration. He insisted, “We need authority for changing the form of the seal, as great, and as express, as that by which the original form was instituted; but we look for it in vain in the Holy Scriptures.”²¹ His conclusion was, “Whatever analogy there may be between the two rites, their identity is not taught in

¹⁸Dagg, *Church Order*, 158.

¹⁹Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 2:68.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 2:85.

²¹Dagg, *Church Order*, 192.

these verses.”²² Dagg displayed a deep concern to love God by obeying His commands as they relate to baptism. The Lord’s Supper is an ordinance in which he exemplified the same.

Lord’s Supper

Dagg addressed the Lord’s Supper under four headings:

First, he considered the perpetuity of the Lord’s Supper. He claimed it was an institution of Christ to be observed to the end of the world. After addressing various objections to the perpetuity of the Lord’s Supper, he proceeded to describe the design of the Lord’s Supper as “a memorial of Christ, a representation that the communicant receives spiritual nourishment from Him, and a token of fellowship among the communicants.”²³ Third, he claimed that the appropriate communicants must be church members, who are to partake of the table when gathered together in public assembly. This set the stage for his fourth, and most controversial point, which was a denial of open communion. Dagg argued, “baptism is a pre-requisite to communion at the Lord’s table.”²⁴ He acknowledged the agreement between his position and Pedobaptists who themselves disallow the unbaptized from participation in the Lord’s Supper. Their difference consisted not in the requirement of baptism, but in the nature of it. Dagg answered ten arguments for open communion. Three of his responses will be examined as they pertain to duty and love.

Dagg considered the argument that strict communion is contrary to brotherly love. His answer demonstrated that he considered the loving thing to be the lawful thing and vice versa. He asserted, “Neither the law nor the spirit of brotherly love, can require

²²Dagg, *Church Order*, 193.

²³Ibid., 209.

²⁴Ibid., 214.

us to treat our brethren otherwise than he has enjoined. We give them the love, and withhold from them the token, in obedience to the same authority, and in the exercise of the same fraternal spirit.”²⁵ Dagg advocated for principled tenderness:

[T]here are surely many modes of testifying and cherishing the warmest affection toward erring brethren, without participating in their errors. We may be ready, in obedience to Christ, to lay down our lives for our brethren—though we may choose to die, rather than, in false tenderness to them, violate the least of his commandments.²⁶

He addressed another argument that claims the propriety of open communion in view of the call for toleration found in Romans 14:1-3. He denied that toleration required changing God’s law on the matter. And he believed that Christ’s instruction laid down concerning the ordinance was nothing less than law: “If Christ has given a law for the organization of churches, we have no right to substitute another, because it would be, in our judgment, more accordant with the proper estimate of moral actions.”²⁷ Dagg pivoted from exalting God’s law to examining it closely. He concluded his case by an exegetical argument of Romans 14:1-3 that denied its application to the Lord’s Supper: “That God receives a man in one sense, can be no reason that we should receive him in a sense widely different.”²⁸ God received the weak as members of his spiritual church, but it does not follow that he has received them as members of the local church. Dagg considered that Christians should receive the weak in the same sense in which God receives them. This distinction between God’s heavenly or spiritual church and His local church reappeared as he addressed a final argument for open communion.

Dagg sought to answer the open communion argument that the communion table is the Lord’s, so to restrict any of His people from it is an error. Dagg contended

²⁵Dagg, *Church Order*, 218.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 222.

²⁸Ibid., 223.

that there are two tables, one spiritual and open to all God's people, the other physical and open only to members of the local church. He referenced Song of Solomon 5:1 as an example of the former. After making this distinction, Dagg downplayed the offense of strict communion: "To the rich feast of spiritual good which the Lord has spread, we rejoice to welcome every child of God When with open hearts and hands we give this welcome, why will they be offended, if we do not also give them a crumb of our ceremonial bread, and a drop of our ceremonial wine?"²⁹ Although Dagg's effort to minimize the offense of his position is commendable, his identification of a heavenly table from Song of Solomon perhaps found more support from his Puritan forefathers than Scripture.³⁰ Moreover, his effort to minimize the significance of the Lord's Table, although quite eloquent, could unnecessarily lead to a devaluation of the ordinance.

These three arguments that Dagg considered provide great insight into his thinking on the duty of love to God as it relates to the Lord's Supper. Strict Communion, on its face, appears to be the less loving position. One might easily envision an objector running through the list in 1 Corinthians 13 in an effort to prove it to be so. But, Dagg refused to acknowledge that his position was less loving than the position of Open Communion. In his mind, loving God and people could never be strengthened by relaxing even one of the least of God's commandments.

Dagg found general agreement with his fellow protestant theologians, while having specific disagreements primarily over the appropriate communicants of the Lord's Table. Pendleton, like his fellow Baptist Dagg, argued for Strict Communion. He, too, identified the similarity between Baptists and Pedobaptists on the subject. Pendleton

²⁹Dagg, *Church Order*, 225.

³⁰Thomas Watson referred to Song of Solomon 5:1 in relationship to the Lord's Supper. But, even in his work, he spoke of the ordinance of Christ, not a heavenly table of the universal church. Thomas Watson, *The Holy Eucharist, Or, the Mystery of the Lord's Supper Briefly Explained* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668), 51.

made his case from the Great Commission of Christ and the fact that baptism was a previous institution to the Lord's Supper.³¹ Bannerman offered various proofs for the Lord's Supper qualifying as an ordinance. Then, he proceeded to address the error of transubstantiation.

Miley described the nature of the Lord's Supper in a similar way, yet he straightforwardly disagreed with Strict Communion. Miley claimed the only proof the adherents of Strict Communion had was the natural order of things.³² He did not deal with the strict communion argument that the Lord's Supper is a local church ordinance to be obeyed when the members are assembled. As mentioned previously, Pendleton relied more heavily on the argument from the natural order of things, but Dagg proved his case from the truth that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance to be exercised in the local assembly. Miley did not provide any argumentation to reject this view, but simply stated, "The table is the Lord's table, and not the exclusive property of any particular church."³³

Dagg developed his view of the Lord's Supper from his commitment to love and obey the God who instituted it. This led him rigorously to analyze Christ's teaching on the subject and follow precisely whatever He prescribed. Such dutiful obedience to commands, that admittedly are not as clear as others laid down in the Word, brought on questions as to his love for other brothers and sisters in Christ. Dagg did not waiver in his contention that Strict Communion is a loving position. Perhaps at no greater point would it have been easier for him to exalt obedience at the expense of love. But, he labored to prove that what is most obedient to God is what is most loving to Him and others. Having established the influence of the duty of love to God upon Dagg's view of the ordinances, its operation on his view of the nature and discipline of the church can be examined.

³¹Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual*, 92.

³²John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1892), 3:368.

³³*Ibid.*, 3:370.

The Nature and Discipline of the Church

The duty of love to God coordinated Dagg's teaching of the nature and discipline of the church. This can be seen in the way it served his teaching on the local church, universal church, and church discipline.

Local Church

Dagg addressed what he called various moral characteristics of local churches. First, he examined the church as an assembly. In like manner to his thorough analysis of baptism, Dagg closely examined the meaning of the Greek word *εκκλησια*. His conclusion was that the word denoted "a particular or local assembly."³⁴ Therefore, he defined the local church as "an assembly of believers in Christ, organized into a body, according to the Holy Scriptures, for the worship and service of God."³⁵ Second, he provided instruction concerning the members of the church. After examining various epistles addressed to New Testament churches, he remarked, "No doubt can exist that these churches were, in the view of the inspired writers who addressed them, composed of persons truly converted to God."³⁶

Third, Dagg drew upon various texts to show a church is no random assembly, but an organized one. This organization required an identifiable membership. He demonstrated from Acts 2:47 that whatever unorganized assembly was present in Jerusalem at the time, individuals from that assembly were "added to" the number of believers that constituted the organized assembly known as the church. Moreover, it is clear that the church at Corinth was organized, in that Paul acknowledged as they gathered there would be the organized members of the church and unbelievers who would also be among them (1 Cor 11:18).

³⁴Dagg, *Church Order*, 77.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 74.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 79.

Fourth, Dagg taught that the organized assembly of believers was independent from every other assembly. Closely related, Dagg claimed that Christ gave instructions to the apostles for how the church was to be ordered and that instruction “was designed to be perpetuated to the end of time.”³⁷ He admitted the explicit instruction in the Scriptures concerning church order did not abound, but he claimed that what is laid down by example ought to be followed. Those who doubt such teaching from Christ to the apostles, misunderstand the role of the church in relationship to the advance of the gospel. Dagg explained,

The organization and government of the churches, which were to hold forth the word of life, and be the golden candlesticks, among which the glorified Jesus was to walk, were matters intimately pertaining to his kingdom; and it cannot be supposed that he gave no instruction respecting them. Whatever he had commanded on these points, the commission required that they should teach men to observe; and the accompanying promise of his presence till the end of the world, clearly demonstrates that the observance was to be perpetual.³⁸

Within this division, Dagg signaled congregational authority. He argued from Matthew 18 that the word of the congregation is final: “The ecclesia not only hears, but decides; not only decides, but announces its decision. Here organization is clearly implied, and also right of jurisdiction.”³⁹ Dagg addressed the design of the local church as his last moral characteristic. He explained that the assembly of believers was designed to enable corporate worship, encouragement, and instruction. He explained, “Union tends to strengthen our faith, and warm our devotions.”⁴⁰

Dagg found general agreement with his contemporary Baptists when it came to the local church. Pendleton agreed with Dagg concerning the nature of the local church. He defined the church at the outset of his work as, “a congregation of Christ’s baptized

³⁷Dagg, *Church Order*, 88.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 86.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 94.

disciples, united in the belief of what he has said, and covenanting to do what he has commanded.”⁴¹ He also agreed with Dagg concerning congregational church government. Pendleton explained the difference between Congregationalism and other forms of government like Episcopacy and Presbyterianism. He demonstrated from various texts that “the governmental power is in the hands of the people.”⁴² When Dagg is compared to his fellow Presbyterians and Methodists there is less agreement.

Bannerman provided multiple nuanced definitions of the word church. Two of his definitions are notable. He claimed, “the word Church is applied in the New Testament to a number of congregations associated together under a common government.”⁴³ He claimed that this was the case with the church in Jerusalem, stating that there were too many members for them only to have been one church in that city. Dagg disagreed with this understanding of the church. He rejected the idea that multiple congregations of Christ could be associated under one government. And he did so on exegetical grounds. He opposed Bannerman’s argument directly in his work *the First Formation of Independent Churches*, in which he argued, “In Acts xi. 22 the church at Jerusalem is mentioned, not as the only or universal church, but as strictly local (‘the church which was at Jerusalem’).”⁴⁴ He concluded that the “first formation of independent churches occurred soon after the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles.”⁴⁵ Dagg dealt in detail with Galatians 1:21-23 to support his argument, contending from the Greek construction that the church in Jerusalem was singular prior to the gospel going to the Gentiles.

⁴¹Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual*, 7.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 101.

⁴³Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 1:12.

⁴⁴John Dagg, “The First Formation of Independent Churches,” *The Baptist Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (October 1871): 480.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 481.

Bannerman also reasoned, “The word Church is applied, in the New Testament, to the body of professing believers in any place, as represented by their rulers and office-bearers.”⁴⁶ He took as his key example the use of *ἐκκλησία* in Matthew 18:17, claiming, “our Lord referred to the synagogue Court known and established among the Jews, which had its elders and officers for the decision of such matters of discipline.”⁴⁷ This is the kind of argument that Dagg rejected. He sought, rather, to take the plain meaning of the words of Scripture. He cited Matthew 18:17 multiple times throughout his work, each time indicating that the word church in the passage meant the assembly of believers.

Miley offered a general definition of the church as “an assembly of Christian believers, of persons who believe in Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of men.”⁴⁸ He differed from Dagg, but not in the same way as Bannerman. After citing various examples of church polity in the Scriptures, Miley concluded, “Plainly, no system of Church government is indicated in the New Testament, much less is one distinctly defined and divinely required. The Church is left to exercise its godly judgment in adapting its operations and actions to the emergencies and exigencies of the time in which its actions is required.”⁴⁹ As was noted previously, Dagg held that there existed divine instruction concerning church order and that divine instruction, however subtle, should be followed from a sense of duty and delight.

The duty of love to God coordinated Dagg’s thinking on the local church as he highly regarded what God had commanded about its nature and operation. When God chose the word *ἐκκλησία* to define His people, Dagg took God at His Word. When Christ said to tell one’s fault to the *ἐκκλησία*, Dagg checked his hesitation to entrust such

⁴⁶Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 1:14.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 3:234.

⁴⁹Ibid., 3:415.

discipline to the laity, and obeyed Christ. He regarded God's commands highly enough to obey when human wisdom thought otherwise. He loved Christ enough to employ his orders concerning the church. Dagg constructed his understanding of the church with the end in view of dutifully spreading the love of God in the gospel to the world. In view of such an end, the King could be trusted:

The means which our King employs, for diffusing the blessings of his reign, are not such as human wisdom would have adopted. It has pleased the Lord, "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." It has seemed good to infinite wisdom, that the religion which is to bless mankind, should be propagated by the simple instrumentality of the Christian ministry and the Christian churches. If we seek military force, or legislative enactments, to accomplish the work, we turn away from the simplicity of Christ, and convert his kingdom into one of this world; and, whenever human wisdom has attempted, in any particular, to improve the simple means that Christ ordained, the progress of truth and righteousness has been impeded.⁵⁰

The Universal Church

After addressing the local church, Dagg continued by addressing the universal church. In a day when some Baptists completely denied the reality of the universal church, Dagg argued, "The Church universal is the whole company of those who are saved by Christ."⁵¹ He claimed that this church was visible in that the members were known by their confession of faith and godly lives. The universal church has a spiritual unity and no physical organization whatsoever. Dagg advanced various Scriptures in support of the universal church. His strongest case was made from Ephesians 3:21, which says, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Dagg silenced his opponents when he said, "Local churches, like theatres, exist only in the present world; and when the end of time arrives, they will cease to exist. It is therefore impossible that this text

⁵⁰Dagg, *Church Order*, 10.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 100.

should refer to local churches, either as a genus, or as individuals; for it speaks of glory in the church, world without end.”⁵²

A comparison of Dagg with his contemporary Landmark Baptists on this point is beneficial. J. R. Graves contended that there was no such entity as the universal church. In his *Old Landmarkism*, he argued that the word church,

is used in the New Testament 110 times, referring to the Christian institution, and in 100 of these it undoubtedly refers to a local organization; and in the remaining 10 instances it is used *figuratively*—by synecdoche—where a part is put for the whole, the singular for the plural, one for all . . . there is no occasion whatever for any *misapprehension* touching this use, nor is there one passage that affords the shadow of a ground for the idea of an invisible church in heaven.⁵³

Pendleton, although in substantial agreement with Dagg on many points of ecclesiology, joined Graves in his landmark proclivities. He published *An Old Landmark Reset*, which took the denial of a universal church to its conclusion of denying the validity of Pedobaptist ministers.

Dagg objected to this work by name in his *Church Order*. Although Dagg agreed with Pendleton that credo-baptism was a pre-requisite to local church membership, he avoided rejecting the Pedobaptist ministry because of his understanding of the universal church. Dagg questioned, “Have all those offended Christ who have recognised as his ministers, Whitfield, Edwards, Davies, Payson, and other such men from whom they have supposed that they received the word of Christ, and by whose ministry they have thought that they were brought to know Christ?”⁵⁴ He proceeded to equate Landmarkism with Pedobaptism in its adherence to a visible church catholic. He lamented the substitution of the visible church catholic for the spiritual church of Christ and the substitution of baptism for regeneration as the doorway to the church. These two

⁵²Dagg, *Church Order*, 110.

⁵³J. R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House: Graves, Mahaffy & Co., 1880), 39.

⁵⁴Dagg, *Church Order*, 288.

erroneous substitutions have led to great corruption on various levels. The Landmark position, in light of their denial of the universal church, claimed that Pedobaptists had no authority for their ministry. Dagg sealed his objection with, “We answer, that, if the Holy Spirit has qualified men to preach the gospel, they preach it with divine authority.”⁵⁵

Dagg not only struck a winsome note of evangelical spirituality on this point, he displayed the outworking of the duty of love to God. His strict loyalty to Baptist principles did not exclude his happy acceptance of his Pedobaptist brothers and their ministry. He avoided the trap of following a line of argument beyond the tracks of Scripture. He was helped in his evangelical spirituality, not by being less biblical, but by being more so. He refused to be narrower than the commands of Christ; and yet, wherever Christ led he followed, no matter how narrow the path.

Church Discipline

Dagg included a chapter on discipline in his *Manual of Church Order*. He viewed discipline as more than simply the correction of wayward members. It included the admission, improvement, and removal of members. He taught that discipline was a responsibility of the church. It was the church that “should admit baptized believers to membership.”⁵⁶ It was the church that “should labor incessantly, to promote brotherly love in their members, and increased devotion to the service of God.”⁵⁷ It was the church to which belonged “the right to excommunicate.”⁵⁸

Since it is the responsibility of the church to admit members, Dagg taught that the church should hear each candidate’s testimony. Surprisingly, he claimed that, although admission to membership belonged to the church, admission to baptism

⁵⁵Dagg, *Church Order*, 292.

⁵⁶Ibid., 268.

⁵⁷Ibid., 270.

⁵⁸Ibid., 273.

belonged to the minister. He sought proof for this position from the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Phillip in the book of Acts. He added that the minister has superior knowledge. Pendleton, more accurately, found church authority essential to the administration of baptism. He contended that a proper administrator of baptism was

. . . a person who has received from a church authority to baptize. While the validity of an ordinance is not affected by every irregularity in its administration, it does seem incredible that baptism should be valid in the absence of the church authority referred to. What other authority is there? Will any one say, the authority of Christ? The supreme authority is undoubtedly his; but does he confer on men the right to baptize, *through his churches, or, independently of his churches?*⁵⁹

Baptism might not be the doorway to the church so as to confer church membership. Nevertheless, it is a church ordinance, and as such, a candidate should be recommended to the church by the ministers and confirmed by the congregation.

Dagg explained that spiritual improvement included regular attendance of Sabbath worship. He grounded the weekly worship of God's people in the fourth commandment. God's law is not contrary to man's good, but designed to promote it:

A regular return of one day in seven has been wisely appointed by the great Author of our being, who knows our frame, and perfectly understands what is best for the promotion of our highest interests. They who neglect this provision of his benevolence, reject the counsel of God against themselves, and bring spiritual leanness on their souls.⁶⁰

Prayer meetings are also an essential part of the health of the church, in fact, "the prayer meeting of a church is the thermometer by which its spiritual temperature may be known."⁶¹ Dagg concluded his chapter on church discipline by listing several passages that demonstrate the church's responsibility of excommunication. When it comes to discipline, the stakes could not be higher. Dagg warned, "when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it."⁶²

⁵⁹Pendleton, *Baptist Church Manual*, 65.

⁶⁰Dagg, *Church Order*, 271.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 273.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 274.

Dagg differed in considerable ways with his Methodist contemporary John Miley on the subject of discipline. Miley questioned whether Christ's words in Matthew 18 had anything at all to do with the church taking action. He contemplated whether Christ's words were strictly in regard to personal relationships.⁶³ It is difficult to see how he could have come to such a conclusion being that Christ's gives clear instruction to move out of the realm of personal relationships by telling it to the church. When Miley did address the word church in this passage, he wondered whether it referred to "the official council."⁶⁴

Dagg's teaching on church discipline stems from the duty of love to God. Throughout his teaching, he demonstrated a commitment to obey God's law on the subject no matter how hard that obedience may be. He, also, revealed a firm belief that discipline was most loving. It was both lawful and loving to admit only baptized believers into the church. It was both lawful and loving to obey the fourth commandment and diligently encourage others to do the same. Even when it came to excommunication, Dagg saw the love inherent in the Word of God. Referring to 1 Corinthians 5:5, he remarked, "The happy result of this excommunication, the only one which is particularly recorded in the history of the New Testament churches, is a strong encouragement to the exercise of faithful discipline."⁶⁵

Duty of Baptists

Dagg concluded his *Manual of Church Order* by highlighting the responsibilities incumbent upon his fellow Baptists. The duty of love to God coordinated his understanding of the duty of Baptists. He revealed a commitment to obey God and

⁶³Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 3:469.

⁶⁴Ibid., 3:470.

⁶⁵Dagg, *Church Order*, 274.

love fellow Christians with different ecclesiological convictions. He was so concerned to love other brothers and sisters from other denominations that he lamented,

Much that has existed, and that now exists, among the professed followers of Christ, cannot be contemplated by one who sincerely loves him, without deep distress. Different creeds, and different ecclesiastical organizations, have divided those who bear his name into hostile parties, and Christianity has been disgraced, and its progress retarded. The world has seen hatred and persecution where brotherly love ought to have been exhibited; and Christ has been crucified afresh, and put to open shame, by those who claim to be his disciples.⁶⁶

Yet, he mixed this evangelical spirit with a shameless commitment to follow in the footsteps of Christ: “The true disciple of Christ ought not to permit the odium of the Anabaptist name to deter him from strict obedience to all his Lord’s commands.”⁶⁷

Walking the line of obedience to God and love to man, Dagg marked six duties of Baptists.

First, Dagg claimed it was the duty of Baptists “to maintain the ordinances of Christ, and the church order which he has instituted, in strict and scrupulous conformity to the Holy Scriptures.”⁶⁸ He was keenly aware of how narrow-minded many found such a position. In the name of unity, many seek to downplay the significance of church order. But, Dagg saw no appropriate way to diminish what God had clearly revealed in His Word. In fact, those who disregard God’s law in the slightest must ask themselves whose opinion matters most: “The man who can disobey God, because the thing commanded is of minor importance, has not the spirit of obedience in his heart; and the man who, knowing the will of God, forbears to declare it, because the weight of human authority is against him, fears men more than God.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶Dagg, *Church Order*, 11.

⁶⁷Ibid., 299.

⁶⁸Ibid., 300.

⁶⁹Ibid., 300.

Second, Dagg said that it is the duty of Baptists “while rendering punctilious obedience to all the commands of God, to regard the forms and ceremonies of religion as of far less importance than its moral truths and precepts.”⁷⁰ He understood that there were more important matters than the various forms of church government. He added that putting too great an importance on certain ceremonies has led to terrible corruption in the church. This second point, when contrasted with the first, sheds light on Dagg’s concept of duty. One biblical command might be less important than another, but it did not follow that strict obedience could be neglected. He was able to weigh the importance of certain commands against others while rendering meticulous obedience to both.

Third, Dagg stated that it was the duty of Baptists to present all the aspects of doctrine in their appropriate proportions.⁷¹ He warned against the tendency of Baptists inordinately to exalt their convictions concerning church order, claiming, “because we differ from other professors of religion in our faith and practice respecting the externals of religion, we are under a constant temptation to make too much account of these external peculiarities. Against this temptation we should ever struggle.”⁷²

Fourth, Dagg taught that it was the duty of Baptists to live upright and holy lives in all things.⁷³ He wisely warned against obeying God in ceremonial requirements, but neglecting the more significant commands of God. He illustrated his point by explaining that the children in a given family who obey in the small matters should be the first to obey in the weightier ones. So it should be with Baptists, who, having a commitment to obey God’s law concerning ecclesiological specifics, should honor God through obedience to his moral law. Dagg considered the advance of the gospel

⁷⁰Dagg, *Church Order*, 301.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., 302.

⁷³Ibid.

throughout the world to be directly connected to the moral character of God's people. He denounced those who have brought shame upon the gospel of Christ by their ungodly lives. Such people embolden sinners in their unbelief.

Fifth, Dagg argued that it was the duty of Baptists to "bring all men to the knowledge of the truth."⁷⁴ His main emphasis on this point was missionary work. He referred to various Baptist missionaries including Carey, Judson, and Rice. Dagg served on various missionary boards, foreign and domestic, during his ministry. His routine attendance at missionary board meetings, winsome calls to the unconverted in his doctrinal works, and his inclusion here of a missiological duty binding upon Baptists, all serve to demonstrate that he viewed missions as a matter of diligent obedience to God's commands.

Finally, Dagg explained that it was the duty of Baptists "to promote the spiritual unity of the universal church, by the exercise of brotherly love to all who bear the image of Christ."⁷⁵ His emphasis was on *spiritual* unity. He spoke of the numerous efforts that have been made to blend together the various denominations. All such efforts were erroneous. What he called Baptists to seek was a spiritual unity. What he called for was for "every individual to stand on Bible ground, and to take his position there, in the unbiased exercise of his own judgment and conscience."⁷⁶ This was where he himself took his stand, "there we strive to take our position; and there, and there only, we invite our brethren of all denominations to meet us. We yield everything which is not required by the word of God; but in what this word requires, we have no compromise to make."⁷⁷ Such a position was not at odds with spiritual unity, for, "We rejoice to see, in many who

⁷⁴Dagg, *Church Order*, 302.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 303.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

do not take our views of divine truth, bright evidence of love to Christ and his cause. We love them for Christ's sake; and we expect to unite with them in his praise through eternal ages."⁷⁸

Dagg's detailed list of Baptist duties confirms the coordinating power of the duty of love to God upon his ecclesiology. He refused to give an inch when it came to obeying Christ's law. He unashamedly lived out his Baptist convictions in the church. Furthermore, he called upon Baptists not only to hold their convictions, but to teach others. Baptists must weigh the importance of various doctrines and rejoice in their brothers and sisters in Christ from various denominations. But, loving those with differing ecclesiological convictions did not require waffling obedience to Christ's ecclesiological commands.

In this chapter, I have argued that the duty of love to God coordinated Dagg's doctrine of the church. This can be seen in his teaching on the ordinances of the church, the nature and discipline of the church, and in his teaching on the duty of Baptists. In his ecclesiology, as in many of his other doctrines, he refused to believe that a tender heart required a softening of the law. He ruthlessly argued for the meaning of Christ's words as they related to the ordinances, nature, and government of the church. He winsomely contended for the validity of ministers of the gospel who differed from him on these matters, even as some of his fellow Baptists denied the credibility of such ministers. He called for an evangelical spirit that pursued the unity of the universal church. But, he denied that such unity must be applied to the organization of the local church.

He pointed to the love God in Christ as the fuel for obedience in matters of ecclesiology. He illustrated this from human relationships,

Love must be exercised according to the relations which we bear. When a parent loves his child, he feels bound to exercise parental authority over it for its benefit; but the love of a child towards a parent requires obedience. So love to God produces

⁷⁸Dagg, *Church Order*, 303.

obedience; for it is impossible to love God supremely without a supreme desire to please him in all things. Hence this one principle contains, involved in it, perfect obedience to every divine requirement.⁷⁹

The love of God for his people is brought into laser-sharp focus in Christ. By the mediation of Christ, God's people can more clearly see the beauty and glory of God. Beholding God in Christ warms the heart of a believer and compels him to obey Christ in all things. Standing at the very heart of Dagg's ecclesiology is the duty of love to God; and standing at the very heart of the duty of love to God is the cross of Christ. He encouraged, "When our love to the Savior grows cold, we should repair to his cross, and fix our thoughts on the exhibition of love there presented. And when we feel our hearts melt, the recollection that the suffering Savior is God over all, must produce a full purpose to yield to him the obedience of all our powers during our whole existence."⁸⁰

⁷⁹Dagg, *Church Order*, 9.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 10.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In 1894, upon the death of John Leadley Dagg, his son in law S. G. Hillyer remembered him:

Dr. Dagg was a man of varied and extensive learning But great as were his attainments in secular learning, the subject matter which most intensely engaged his heart and life, was Revealed Religion . . . here he found a vast territory of sacred learning which it was his delight to explore. It is simply amazing that with his bodily infirmities, and amidst his professional engagements he could read so much. But all this learning he consecrated to the service of God. He was a man of profound and earnest piety. His heart burned with the love of God, and the love of man.¹

These are fitting words for the man who said in his latter years that he did not want anyone to write his biography “until he can tell how I have finished my course on earth.”² His earnest piety and love of God pervaded his written works. By an analysis of those written works, this dissertation has shown that the duty of love to God was the organizing theme of the theology of John Leadley Dagg. This argument, initiated in chapter one, has been demonstrated in the following chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 sought to define the duty of love to God. The duty of love to God was shown to be more than merely the result of Dagg’s theology. It was the theological framework in which Dagg constructed his theology. It was demonstrated that the duty of love to God includes a significant appreciation for the law of God in the Christian life along with a deep commitment to holy affections. The duty of love to God appeared to play a role in Dagg’s life, doctrine, and ministry.

xii. ¹John Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg* (Rome, GA: J.F. Shanklin, printer, 1886),

²Dagg, *Autobiography*, iii.

Chapter 3 advanced the central argument of this dissertation by analyzing the influence of the duty of love to God upon Dagg's four major theological works. It influenced his systematic theology as each doctrine related to a corresponding duty. His ecclesiological work evidenced a strict adherence to whatever Christ has commanded. His ethical work centers on God as the moral governor of the universe and the subsequent duties of mankind. His work of apologetics focused on the truthfulness and divinity of the Bible. He claimed that the Bible was a trustworthy source of commands and promises in which to delight, believe, and obey.

Chapter 4 demonstrated Dagg's high regard for the law of God and deep emphasis on holy affections in his approach to doctrine. He renounced any theological study that aimed at mere intellectual satisfaction. He contended that the study of doctrine must be done out of love to God and His revealed Word. Doctrine is that which comes forth from God, is organized by Christ, and employed in the human heart by the Spirit. Therefore, it must not only be considered and examined; it must be cherished and obeyed.

Chapter 5 examined the role of the duty of love to God in Dagg's doctrine of God Himself. He developed his understanding of the attributes of God with a view to how it impacted piety. He considered the various offices of Christ as they served man in the pursuit the duty of love to God. He demonstrated that people are under obligation to believe on Christ, and in so doing will fulfill the duty of love to God. He explained that the nature and work of the Holy Spirit necessitate that human beings live in dependence upon Him. Therefore, the God who is worthy of the duty of love works to enable people to fulfill that duty.

Chapter 6 assessed Dagg's anthropology in light of the duty of love to God. He considered that man was made in the image of God, and emphasized that being so, man was able to fulfill the duty of loving God. He, then, emphasized that the fall of man was fundamentally a fall out of loving relationship with God. Demonstrating wide agreement with various Reformed theologians, Dagg regarded man's present state as one in which

he is totally depraved, condemned, and helpless to save himself. Fallen man is unable to fulfill the duty of love to God, which is a duty incumbent upon man in both his unfallen and fallen state. The duty of love to God, when considered as the duty of fallen man, consists of repentance.

Chapter 7 addressed the shaping influence of the duty of love to God on Dagg's soteriology. Dagg displayed a covenantal understanding of divine grace, uniquely addressing the Trinity within the chapter of his systematic theology devoted to soteriology. He, then, structured the blessings of grace along the lines of their increasing sweetness. Rather than following a traditional pattern of the order of salvation, he considered the value of each blessing as it relates to the Christian life. Then, he exalted the sovereignty of grace by showing its undeserved nature. Dagg explained that gratitude plays a critical role in the duty of love to God in view of such a great salvation.

Chapter 8 surveyed the significance of the duty of love to God to Dagg's ecclesiology. He was deeply concerned to obey what Christ had commanded concerning the ordinances. Yet, he was also concerned to love those who held to varying ecclesiological practices. Church discipline was not only a matter of strict obedience, but of love to God and man. Dagg, also, called upon Baptists to fulfill various duties that included believing and obeying the Word of God on all matters of ecclesiology, while resisting the temptation to hold such matters to be as critical as those of soteriology.

The significance of this dissertation is seen on a number of levels. First, this dissertation adds to the growing body of research regarding American Baptists and Calvinism, especially in the South. Some have identified a strong Calvinistic heritage that marks American Baptists.³ Others see much more ambiguity when it comes to a unified historical identity for American Baptists: "Baptists have been unified on very little

³Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), xlv.

throughout their history . . . there is no Baptist theology, only Baptist theologies.”⁴ Dagg himself has been misunderstood due to his affectionate and missional Calvinism. An analysis of the thoroughly Calvinist theology of this leading nineteenth-century American Baptist, who was instrumental not only in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, but also in the initial years of the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, must play a role in the ongoing discussion.

Second, this work contributes to the question of the role of the law in the life of the believer in Baptist thought. Various Baptist works continue to be written regarding the role of the moral law in the Christian life. The recent rise of new covenant theology has spawned a robust conversation regarding Baptist covenant theology. This examination of a theology of duty, mixed with a theology of affections, supplies an essential component to this current and significant question.

Third, this dissertation provides an important angle on Baptist ecclesiology. Dagg’s *Manual of Church Order* is still regularly cited in the ecclesiological works of modern Baptists.⁵ Many theologians are reconsidering the nature and purpose of the church along Baptist lines. Yet, a Baptist ecclesiology that fails to build upon the presuppositions expressed in this dissertation falls short of the historic Baptist ecclesiological position.

Finally, this dissertation presents the first comprehensive study of the theology of John Leadley Dagg that identifies the center of his theological system. Dagg has been identified as a leading Baptist figure in the South.⁶ His influence in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention has been duly noted. Moreover, his theological influence in

⁴Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 248.

⁵Mark Dever, Jonathan Leeman and James Leo Garrett. *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 2015

⁶Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg Pioneer American Baptist Theologian” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957), vi.

the initial years of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is well founded. Yet, the frame from which he constructed his theological system has yet to be identified. This dissertation exposes that framework, demonstrating the organizing power the duty of love to God upon Dagg's theology. His own words serve as a fitting conclusion,

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” In this manner the Bible commands the chief of all duties. No reasons are assigned for the requirement. No proof is adduced that God exists, or that he possesses such perfections as entitle him to the supreme love of his creatures. Jehovah steps forth before the subjects of his government, and issues his command. He waits for no formal introduction. He lifts up his voice with majesty. Without promise, and without threat, he proclaims his law, and leaves his subjects to their responsibility.⁷

⁷John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009), 43.

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ABSTRACT

THE DUTY OF LOVE TO GOD: THE SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY OF JOHN LEADLEY DAGG (1794-1884)

Jared Richard Longshore, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Chair: Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

This dissertation argues that the duty of love to God served as the organizing theme of the theology of John Leadley Dagg. Chapter 2 defines Dagg's concept of the duty of love to God. This chapter serves a fundamental function in the dissertation as it identifies the precise nature of the duty of love to God. Chapter 3 surveys Dagg's writings with a view to how the duty of love to God is expressed in each of them. Chapter 4 explores Dagg's understanding of doctrine itself. This chapter explains that it is Dagg's emphasis on doctrine as the divine communication of the Trinity that leads to his experiential theology. Chapter 5 investigates Dagg's doctrine of God in relationship to the duty of love to God. Chapter 6 transitions from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of man. This chapter reveals that Dagg's focus on the duty of love to God permeates his anthropology. Chapter 7 concerns Dagg's soteriology. Dagg's understanding of saving grace is shaped by his understanding of the duty of love to God. Chapter 8 brings the duty of love to bear on Dagg's ecclesiology. This chapter examines Dagg's understanding of the local and universal church. Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the content and stating its significance.

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