

Preface

The Forum for Evangelical Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary sponsored the discussion of God's sovereignty that gave birth to the following essays. The forum began as an attempt to broaden the theological conversation at a mainline Protestant seminary by faculty members who thought the conversation needed broadening. Philip Meadows, now of Cliff College, began the forum. When he left Garrett-Evangelical, the task of keeping the forum alive fell to Steve Long and George Kalantzis. The point of the forum was never to react against other theological positions, but to provide a place where evangelical and/or orthodox (broadly construed) seminarians and faculty could engage with questions of doctrine and discipline with a certain freedom of thought that would allow for robust truth claims to be made and then subjected to theological critique. We were, and are, well aware that the terms "evangelical" and "orthodox" do not designate an uncontested subject matter even among those who would accept the titles. In fact the contested nature of these terms was what we sought to investigate. We also wanted to broaden the ecclesial context for the discussion so that "evangelical" was not simply associated with a certain trajectory of Reformed thought. The forum was an attempt to discuss "evangelicalism" within a Wesleyan perspective that affirms the rootedness of the Christian life in the church catholic. We sought to be both catholic and evangelical. This should help the reader understand the different ecclesial traditions represented among the diverse list of presenters in this work.

The following work grew out of a yearlong dialogue on God's sovereignty sponsored by the Forum during the 2006–2007 academic year. Each of the participants provided an essay that was the subject of a lunchtime conversation by seminarians and faculty members. Students

discussed each essay first in the absence of the presenter and then with the presenter leading us through her or his position. Student participation was essential to the success of these theological discussions around the table in the seminary's commons, and we are deeply grateful to all the students who participated in these conversations. We are especially grateful to Jimmy Cooper who helped organize the event and wrote the introduction to our conversation. What follows emerges from that conversation, even if the conversational nature of our venture does not always come through.

Theology is an ongoing dialogue where we often find ourselves in the middle, trying to make sense of what others have said before us and where others are taking what has been said at present into the future. We recognize the danger that too often we speak past each other in our affirmations and criticisms, using terms so equivocally that we may miss the heart of the matter altogether. We wonder if the term "suffering" as employed by theologians from antiquity until modernity and then in modernity may not be evidence of such a thoroughgoing equivocation. This is inevitable in good theology. No one should have the power to police the conversation so thoroughly that she or he alone gets decide what a term means by individual fiat. Language is too rich and complex for that to lead to anything but the worst form of authoritarianism. By displaying our conversation in the following essays we hope that we, with the assistance of you the reader, might dispel the misunderstandings of each other's positions and come to a better understanding of who God is, and how we should set that forth in word and deed. Sometimes our dialogue takes the form of sharp differences; at other times it discovers deep commonalties. For the dialogue to work, participants must be willing to speak the truth in charity in an effort to speak well of God by being faithful to Scripture within the context of the best of Christian tradition. All the participants in our forum on God's sovereignty shared this willingness, even though—as the reader will see—we do not share conclusions as to where it should take us at present or into the future. We offer our reflections in hopes that others might benefit from them, help us discern where we are incorrect and where we have spoken well, and advance the conversation, not for its own sake, but for the glory of God. George Kalantzis and Steve Long both left Garrett-Evangelical at the end of the school year that explored the question of God's sovereignty. They

would like to thank Garrett-Evangelical for providing space and financial support for the work of the forum and extend their deep gratitude to all the participants who so graciously made their work available for a broader audience.

Soli Deo Gloria

D. Stephen Long
George Kalantzis

Feast of the Epiphany 2008

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