Markus Holmbom

The Holiness of God

Rediscovering the Forgotten Center of Christian Theology

V&R

The Holiness of God

Reformed Historical Theology

Edited by

Herman J. Selderhuis

In co-operation with

Andreas J. Beck (Leuven), Irene Dingel (Mainz), Benjyamin F. Intan (Jakarta), and Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids)

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Rediscovering the Forgotten Center of Christian Theology

By

Markus Holmbom

VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT

This study is the revised version of a dissertation titled 'A Theological Retrieval of Stephen Charnock's Theology of God's Holiness'. Research for this dissertation was conducted as a partnership between Union School of Theology, Wales (UST), and Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (VU). Copyright © 2026 Markus Holmbom. All Rights Reserved.

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Abbreviations

CSB	Christian Standard Bible
EAG	The Existence and Attributes of God
ESV	English Standard Version
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PRRD	Post-Reformed Reformed Dogmatics

Preface

This volume is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation defended on 21 April 2026 at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam titled 'A Theological Retrieval of Stephen Charnock's Theology of God's Holiness'.

For publication, the manuscript has been revised and updated in several respects. The most significant revisions consist in a fuller integration of historical and biographical context, particularly in relation to Stephen Charnock's life and theological development. In addition, the distinction between the exposition of Charnock's theology and the subsequent retrieval and development of his thought has been clarified in a few places. Further editorial and formatting revisions have also been made throughout the work for the sake of clarity, consistency, and conformity with the style requirements of the present series.

The central argument and overall structure of the dissertation remain unchanged. It is my hope that this study will contribute both to the growing scholarly interest in Stephen Charnock and to contemporary discussions concerning divine holiness, providence, evil, and divine simplicity.

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Markus Holmbom
June 6th, 2026

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The present chapter introduces the research project. It begins by outlining the study's relevance and the task of theologically retrieving the English Puritan Stephen Charnock's (1628–1680) theology of God's holiness (1.1)—a divine attribute of central importance for Christian theology and practice.

The chapter then presents the research questions (1.2), which are broadly reflected in the methodology used to retrieve Charnock's theology and in the study's structure (1.3). This is followed by a presentation of Charnock's life and historical context (1.4).

Finally, the chapter surveys the state of research (1.5). This includes current scholarship on Stephen Charnock (1.5.1), divine holiness (1.5.2), and the two theological areas most profoundly shaped by his theology of God's holiness: God and evil (1.5.3) and divine simplicity (1.5.4).

1.1 Research Conspectus

God is holy. No attribute is as frequently ascribed to Him in Scripture.[1] This should draw the attention of anyone who seeks to understand who God is. But what does it mean for God to be holy? And how does our understanding of God's holiness shape our theology? Furthermore, since holiness is one attribute that God explicitly calls man to imitate (Lev 19:2, 1 Pet 1:16), a proper awareness of it is essential for growing in likeness to him.

1 Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, ed. Mark Jones (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 1017. Charnock observed this. "More often is he entitled 'holy' than 'almighty,' and set forth by this part of his dignity more than by any other. This is more affixed as an epithet to his name than any other". I will use Jones's edition throughout, as it modernizes Charnock's English and helpfully identifies incomplete references. It will be cited as EAG. Charnock's discourses on God's existence and attributes are also found in the three major editions of his Works: Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock.* 5 vols., preface by James McCosh (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864–1866; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010); Stephen Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock.* 5 vols., preface by William Symington (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); Stephen Charnock, *The Works of the Late Rev. Stephen Charnock,* 9 vols., ed & preface by Edward Parsons (Leeds: J. Crossley and R. Parke, 1815). I cite these as Works (Nichol), Works (Symington), and Works (Parsons), respectively. For Charnock's other texts, I will primarily use the Nichol edition.

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Despite the centrality of God's holiness in Scripture and its importance for the Christian life, it has received relatively little emphasis in theological reflection. For instance, as Richard Muller overviews the doctrine of God's holiness in early Reformed theology, he notes that it wasn't "singled out for separate discussion in any of the systematic works of the major second-generation Reformers", but present in their thought more like an "idea or theme", and often linked to a short discussion of God's righteousness or justice.[2]

One notable exception from the era is the English Puritan Stephen Charnock (1628–1680), whose series of lengthy lectures, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, offers a rare and substantial treatment. Commenting on this work, Muller states:

> Of considerable significance as both a contribution to the English Reformed theology of the seventeenth century and as a codification of doctrine evidencing the broad resources and major opponents of the Reformed position is Charnock's *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*. Originally delivered as lectures to his congregation, Charnock's *Discourse* certainly stands as one of the more elaborate and detailed treatises on the subject written in the seventeenth century.[3]

Given Muller's observation that separate discussions of God's holiness were scarce and brief in the post-Reformation period and considering how highly he regards Charnock's discourses and frequently cites them elsewhere, it is noteworthy that he omits Charnock's work in his discussion of this attribute.[4] But Charnock's discourse on God's holiness ought not to be overlooked. It stands out in its era and contains at least three features that make it relevant for contemporary theological discussion.

1. A positive understanding of God's holiness.
   While many theological discourses on God's holiness perceive it in terms of separation or speak of it in relative terms, Charnock's view was fundamentally based on God's intrinsic nature. In a summary statement, he

2 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725,* 4 vols., 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:497–503. I will cite these as PRRD.

3 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:132. Cf. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 59. Beeke comments that, these discourses are "perhaps the most extensive and incisive Puritan treatise on the doctrine of God".

4 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:497–503. Muller instead turns repeatedly to Charnock's London contemporary, Edward Leigh, and his much shorter treatment of this attribute.

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saw the nature of God's holiness not just negatively as "a perfect and unpolluted freedom from all evil" but positively as "the rectitude or integrity of the Divine nature".[5]

2. A theology of God's holiness that affects the conception of God's nature. Charnock understood God's holiness as an essential attribute that affects everything God is.[6] It is as equal to God as it is the beauty and integrity of all that God is. Charnock's theology of God's holiness thus informed his understanding of God's perfections and the unity and diversity of his attributes.
3. A treatise of God's holiness intertwined with God's relation to moral evil. Charnock framed most of his discussion on God's holiness around how God relates to evil in his absolute sovereignty and purity. He did this for at least two reasons. First, he did so because he saw that these attributes of God, as he understood them, raised questions about how God, in his nature, relates to evil. As a second reason, he believed that we gain a deeper understanding of God's holiness by discussing it in this context, as it becomes unveiled to us through God's relationship with evil.[7]

In sum, the present study is motivated by the theological significance of God's holiness and Stephen Charnock's standout treatment of this attribute in the 17th century. As such, it is a work that explores how Stephen Charnock's theology of God's holiness, particularly regarding God's nature and God's relation to evil, can be developed and retrieved to inform contemporary theological discussion.

1.2 Research Question and Sub-questions

The main research question of this project is: How can Stephen Charnock's theology of God's holiness, especially in reference to God's nature and God's relation to evil, be retrieved?

This question is explored through six sub-questions. While some overlap, they generally correspond to the structure of the study: questions one and two address Charnock and his historical context (Chapter 2); questions three to

5 Charnock, *EAG*, 1053.

6 Charnock, EAG, 1053–55.

7 Charnock, *EAG*, 1052. His disposition of the treatise, given after a scriptural foundation, illustrates these points. "For the better understanding of this attribute, observe: The nature of this holiness. The demonstration of it. The purity of his nature in all his acts about sin. The use of all to ourselves".

five focus on his theology (Chapters 2–4); and question six considers how his theology can be developed and retrieved today (Chapters 5–7).

1. How did the biographical and historical context of Stephen Charnock shape his theological framework?
2. What characterizes Stephen Charnock's theology of the attributes of God in its historical context, with special reference to God's holiness, God's relation to evil, and the unity and diversity of God's attributes?
3. How did Stephen Charnock understand God's holiness?
4. How did Stephen Charnock think God relates to evil?
5. How did Stephen Charnock's understanding of God's holiness relate to his conception of God's nature?
6. How can Stephen Charnock's theology of God's holiness and its implications for understanding God's essence and God's relation to evil be developed and retrieved today?

1.3 Method and Disposition

This study is a theological retrieval of Stephen Charnock's theology of God's holiness. Theological retrieval, as Kevin Vanhoozer defines it, is "theological discernment that looks back in order to move forward",[8] or as John B. Webster likewise spoke, theology that uses historical resources to address present problems within the tradition.[9] Thus, the theological past is intentionally pursued to connect with the theological present.[10] As such, theological retrieval views earlier theologians as colleagues to learn from, disagree with, and develop thoughts from.[11]

Given the content of the theology that is retrieved from Charnock, this is, first and foremost, a systematic theological study. Namely, a study on God's holiness and its two primary theological implications on God's relation to evil and divine simplicity via the retrieval of Charnock's ideas.

However, given the nature of retrieving theology from the past, it is also necessarily a historical theological study, as it first looks to understand Charnock's theology in a historical context. The methodology aligns well with the

8 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 23.

9 John B. Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval", in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10 Oliver D. Crisp, *Retrieving Doctrine: Essays in Reformed Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2011), viii-ix.

11 Crisp, Retrieving Doctrine, viii.

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Cambridge school of intellectual history, as it seeks to recapitulate Charnock's theology by being attentive to his life, motives, influences, theological setting, theological language, his own works, and church historical context. As Quentin Skinner has convincingly argued, such a study is crucial to avoid fallacious readings and lays a foundation for retrieving and developing Charnock's theological ideas.[12]

By retrieving Charnock's theology of God's holiness, its theological framework will be imported. This means that not just his ideas about divine holiness will be retrieved, but also the theological context in which his thoughts on this attribute are situated and depend. Moreover, I will not merely apply what he taught to the present discussion by retrieving Charnock's theology. I will first critically reflect on and constructively build upon his ideas to develop his theology of God's holiness. This will include balancing and refining his theology, but it is never directly opposed to what he taught. The development of his theology will then be brought into dialogue with contemporary thinkers. In summary, this entails a two-step retrieval of his ideas, which will be reflected in the study's structure.

The introduction (Chapter 1) is followed by three chapters, where Charnock's theology of God's holiness (Chapter 2), its implications for God and evil (Chapter 3), and the unity and diversity of God's attributes (Chapter 4) are critically analyzed within their historical context. These three areas are then constructively developed and retrieved in corresponding chapters (Chapters 5–7), after which the study is evaluated (Chapter 8).

1.4 A Biographical Portrait of Stephen Charnock

Though biographical information about Stephen Charnock can be found in archives, dictionaries, and testimonies, the fullest accounts are given in the prefaces and memoirs included in various editions of his collected works.[13]

12 Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", in *Visions of Politics: Volume One Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 59–97.

13 Prefaces or memoirs from his collected works: William Symington, "Preface", in *The Works of Stephen Charnock,* vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); James McCosh, "Memoir of Stephen Charnock", in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock,* vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864–1866; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010); Edward Parsons, "Memoir of Stephen Charnock", in *The Works of the Late Rev. Stephen Charnock,* vol. 1 (Leeds: J. Crossley and R. Parke, 1815). Other dictionary, testimonial, and biographical sources include:

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Most of these sources are predominantly hagiographic, so this should be considered when assessing Charnock's life.

Charnock lived at the onset of the English Civil War (1642–1651), during which religious conflict concerning the manner of governance and freedom of religion was at the center.[14] He entered college young and matriculated in Cambridge in 1642 at Emmanuel College[15], where he experienced Christian regeneration and the birth of his faith.[16]

Emmanuel was sometimes called the "Puritan College"[17] for fostering the broad "evangelical holiness movement" labelled Puritanism.[18] This was "no single, unified, organized movement"[19], but a two-stranded renewal movement loosely unified by two contending strands of thinking about how to reform the ill state of the church, "with its worldly, often immoral and ill-

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Edmund Calamy and Samuel Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial.* 2 vols. (London: W. Harris, 1775), 1:159–61; Richard L. Greaves, "Stephen Charnock", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*online ed.*) (Oxford University Press, 2004). https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5172; William G. Blaikie, "Charnock, Stephen", in *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885–1900.* Vol. 10, ed. Leslie Stephen, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887); John Johnson, "Eklampsis Tōn Dikaiōn, or, The Shining Forth of the Righteous a Sermon Preached Partly Upon the Death of That Reverend and Excellent Divine, Mr. Stephen Charnock", in *Early English Books Online,* University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A39134.0001.001; Stephen Charnock, "The Sayings of That Reverend and Great Preacher Mr. S. Charnock, Who Departed This Life on Wednesday the 28 of July, 1680, and Was Solemnly Interred the 30th Following", in *Early English Books Online,* University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/B02133.0001.001; Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006).

14 John Morrill, "The Religious Context of the English Civil War," *The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1984): 155–78.

15 McCosh, "Memoir", viii; Parsons, "Memoir", xii.

16 McCosh, "Memoir", xi–xii; Parsons, "Memoir", xii.

17 McCosh, "Memoir", viii.

18 Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, xviii.

19 Carl R Trueman, "Reason and Rhetoric: Stephen Charnock on the Existence of God", in *Reason, Faith and History: Essays in Honour of Paul Helm*, ed. Martin Stone (Abingdon, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), 30. Cf. David D. Hall, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 46. Hall writes, "the word 'puritan' … cannot do justice to the complexities of a coalition that encompassed reformers who agreed on some matters and disagreed on others". John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603–1689* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 16–19; Patrick Collinson, "Antipuritanism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Cofey and Paul C. H. Lim, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19–33. Spurr and Collinson describe the Puritans through the negative eyes of those outside. For example: "The puritan was no card-carrying member of something called puritanism, but rather an individual who stood out as different from his or her neighbors, as more religious, and who was mocked for it" (Spurr, 16).

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educated, clergy, and its ignorant people".[20] One group looked to Scripture and aimed to draw forth and systematize its truth, root it internally and personally, and connect the church with its head, Christ. The other looked more to the church and strove to preserve it externally through a visible unity towards the world in a universal Church of England with strict ecclesiology and clergy.[21] Charnock experienced this division firsthand, as his tutor, William Sancroft (1617–1693), was closely tied to the royalist cause and later became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Richard Holdsworth (1590–1649), the Master of Emmanuel when Charnock came there, was approved to be one of the Westminster divines but never attended, as he was imprisoned in 1643.[22]

As a non-conformist Puritan, Charnock devoted himself to a small ministry in Southwark after college, through which seven or eight were converted to Christ.[23] Leaving for Oxford in 1649, he obtained a fellowship through parliamentary visitors in New College in 1650, was incorporated Master of Arts for his merits in 1652, and labored a few years as proctor of the University.[24] As the persecution of religious dissenters became increasingly narrow-minded, Charnock sought refuge in Ireland in 1655. He became the chaplain of Henry Cromwell, the chief governor of Ireland.[25] In Dublin, he also served as an official minister at St. Werburgh's Church and as a lecturer at Christ Church, and was undoubtedly the most highly paid minister in Ireland.[26] He preached "every Lord's day, with much acceptance, to an audience composed of persons of different religious denominations, and of opposite grades in society".[27] "His calm, grave manner, great learning, and fervent piety procured for him high esteem, even from some who did not share his sentiments, and made a great impression".[28]

This peak of public ministry in Charnock's life was cut short by the restoration of the monarchy with King Charles II (1630–1685) in 1660. He was discharged from his duty, and because of the Act of Conformity in 1662, was

20 McCosh, "Memoir", viii.

21 Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, viii-ix; Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 28; Hall, *The Puritans*, 76–77.

22 Blaikie, "Stephen Charnock", 134; McCosh, "Memoir", ix–x.

23 Calamy and Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, 160; McCosh, "Memoir", xiii–xiv; Parsons, "Memoir", xvi; Symington, "Preface", 5.

24 Calamy and Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, 160; Blaikie, "Stephen Charnock", 134; Symington, "Preface", 6; Parsons, "Memoir", xiii.

25 Calamy and Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, 1:160; McCosh, "Memoir", xvi; Symington, "Preface", 6–7; Parsons, "Memoir", xiii.

26 Greaves, "Stephen Charnock"; McCosh, "Memoir", xvi–xvii.

27 McCosh, "Memoir", xvii; Symington, "Preface", 6. Cf. Blaikie, "Stephen Charnock", 134.

28 Blaikie, "Stephen Charnock", 134.

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hindered from resuming ministry elsewhere for a long time. He returned to England and moved to London, where he pursued dedicated study in private for fifteen years while making several trips to France and Holland.[29]

During this period, he spent 12 hours, five days a week, in his study[30] and "was probably revolving those thoughts which were afterwards embodied in his great work on the 'Attributes'".[31] He lost his library in the Great Fire of London in 1666, but continued his studies, pausing only to visit his patients and practice medicine for a living.[32]

When the government's religious restrictions relaxed, Charnock was to return to church ministry. Thomas Watson (1620–1686), one of the Westminster divines and an ejected minister of St. Stephen Walbrook, had gathered a church after the restoration that was allowed to meet in Crosby Square from 1674. Charnock accepted a call from this "congregational church" to become co-pastor with Watson in 1675.[33]

It was in this setting that Charnock delivered his *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*. However, the series was cut short by his sudden death in 1680, at the age of fifty-two, for reasons unknown.[34] Edward Parsons (1762–1833) records, with reverence, that "while preparing for the delivery of the next discourse, on 'The Mercy of God,' he was called away to rest from his

29 Greaves, "Stephen Charnock"; McCosh, "Memoir", xxii; Symington, "Preface", 7; Parsons, "Memoir", xiii–xiv.

30 McCosh, "Memoir", xxiv. Cf. Parsons, "Memoir", xv.

31 McCosh, "Memoir", xxii–xxiii.

32 Ibid., xii, xxiv.

33 Parsons, "Memoir", xiv; McCosh, "Memoir", xxiii; Parsons, "Memoir", 7. Parsons tells us that this church was congregational, McCosh that it was "presbyterian or independent", and Symington is silent on the matter. Other testimonies confirm that Charnock was an independent Puritan. Cf. Crawford Gribben, *The Irish Puritans: James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2003), 110–15; St. John D. Seymour, *The Puritans in Ireland 1647–1661* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921); Hansang Lee, "Trinitarian Theology and Piety: The Attributes of God in the Thought of Stephen Charnock (1682–1680) and William Perkins (1558–1602)" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2009), 11n3. http://hdl.handle.net/1842/3295. Lee refers to Gribben's and Seymour's studies to show that Charnock did independent church ministry in Dublin. Richard L. Greaves, *God's Other Children: Protestant Nonconformists and the Emergence of Denominational Churches in Ireland, 1660–1700* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 14; Larry Daniel Siekawitch, *Balancing Head and Heart in Seventeenth Century Puritanism: Stephen Charnock's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2012), 27. Siekawitch refers to Greaves, who calls Charnock a "moderate independent".

34 Blaikie, "Stephen Charnock", 134; McCosh, "Memoir", xxiv–xxv.

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labours, and to enjoy that mercy to eternal life as the supreme object of all his desires".[35]

1.5 Status Quaestionis

1.5.1 Stephen Charnock

Interest in Stephen Charnock was sparked after his death by the 1681–1682 publication of his works by his Oxford friends Richard Adams (1626–1698) and Edward Veal (1632–1708).[36] Yet although Charnock has been widely read, scholarly work on him in modern times is limited. One explanation is that post-Reformational protestant thought has been critiqued as rationalistic and rigid. For example, Thomas Forsyth Torrance (1913–2007) wrote, "'God'… [in post-Reformation theology] appears to lack the kindness, humanity, familiarity of the 'God' of the Reformation, for tendencies towards impersonality, abstraction and even harshness".[37] In the same spirit, Robert Tudur Jones (1921–1998) expressed that Charnock specifically "goes beyond Scripture into the realm of scholasticism".[38]

Authors such as Richard A. Muller, Joel R. Beeke, Randall J. Pederson, and John Spurr have nuanced this perception of post-Reformational theology and English Puritanism.[39] Regarding Charnock, some apologetic monographs and articles defend him against such charges, while others concentrate on analyzing his theological methodology and various topics.

Hansang Lee has investigated how Charnock and William Perkins (1558–1602), another Puritan, discussed God's attributes within a Trinitarian framework.[40] Lee contends that Charnock did not treat God's attributes in metaphysical abstraction but as expressions of the trinitarian life of God, reflect-

35 Parsons, "Memoir", xx.

36 Symington, "Preface", 16; Charnock, *Works* (*Nichol*), A Treatise of Divine Providence, 1:3–5.

37 T.F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), lxxix. Referenced by Park, who opposed this point. Park, "Stephen Charnock's Christological Knowledge of God", 73n5.

38 R. Tudur Jones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety", *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 195. Quoted in: Park, "Charnock's Christological Knowledge of God", 73n4.

39 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:21–33; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 59–84; Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, preface, 142–46; J.I. Packer, *Puritan Portraits* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2012), 47–56. Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 5–6.

40 Lee, "Trinitarian Theology and Piety".

ing an integration of Reformed scholasticism and Puritan piety. As a study with an overlapping conclusion, Larry Daniel Siekawitch examined Charnock's doctrine of the knowledge of God to show how he, influenced by the Cambridge Platonists and the French School of Saumur, harmonized rational thought with deep devotion, illustrating the Puritan balance between head and heart.[41] Similarly, Jae Eun Park argues that Charnock's Christocentric knowledge of God is essential to his theology.[42] It prevents him from being dismissed as a rigid rationalist by revealing a God who actively pursues a devotional purpose throughout his work.

Julián E. Gutiérrez S. has written a more analytical and less apologetic monograph on Charnock's theological method, examining Charnock's work within the Reformed scholastic tradition in his dissertation.[43] Gutiérrez analyzes the method, presuppositions, and theological content of Charnock's *Discourses*, exploring how these elements contribute to his theological framework. Also within the study of methodology is Carl R. Trueman's essay on the nature of Charnock's articulacy in arguing for God's existence, how he used reason and rhetoric to persuade his audience of the reality of God.[44]

A couple of articles have been written on Charnock's understanding of God's activity in creation, a topic that permeates his discourses on God's attributes. Gutiérrez[45] and Jan Hoek[46] examine how Charnock integrates God's transcendence and immanence in his doctrine of God, and how this impacts his theology of God's providence, emphasizing how he presents God as governing the world with both majesty and intimate care. In contrast, F. K. Drayson highlights Charnock's emphasis on God's absolute rule and authority over creation, while maintaining human responsibility in his sovereignty.[47]

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41 Siekawitch, *Balancing Head and Heart*.

42 Jae-Eun Park, "Stephen Charnock's Christological Knowledge of God in A Discourse of the Knowledge of God in Christ", *The Confessional Presbyterian* 10 (2014): 73–81.

43 Julián E. Gutiérrez S., "The Lord Reigns Supreme: An Investigation on Stephen Charnock's Exegetical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology Concerning the Existence and the Attributes of God" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2017).

44 Trueman, "Reason and Rhetoric".

45 Julián E. Gutiérrez S., "Who Is This King of Glory? Recovering the Identity of the God of Providence", in *Divine Action and Providence*, ed. Thomas H. McCall and Michael C. Rea (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 151–70.

46 Jan Hoek, "God Nearby and God Far Away: Stephen Charnock on Divine Attributes", *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 48, no. 1 (2014): e1–e7.

47 F.K. Drayson, "Divine Sovereignty in the Thought of Stephen Charnock", in *Puritan Papers* (*Vol. 1, 1956–1959*), ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000).

Markus Holmbom: The Holiness of God

Frank L. Bartoe examines Charnock's doctrine of regeneration, focusing on how it restores God's image in believers and highlights the emphasis on renewal and conformity to God's holiness in this transformation.[48] Vern S. Poythress evaluates Charnock's understanding of divine simplicity in his discourse on God's immutability.[49] He contends that though Charnock identified God's attributes with God's essence, he did not reduce them to "a complete collapse", but maintained that they are mutually inclusive.[50] Poythress critiques Charnock for lacking a fuller trinitarian perspective, arguing that he failed to ground the unity and diversity of God's attributes in the unity and diversity of God's persons.

Gavin Ortlund retrieves Charnock's view of Christ's intercession, emphasizing that his intercessory work continually applies the efficacy of his sacrifice, providing comfort and assurance to believers.[51] John Murray has previously drawn from Charnock on the same topic.[52]

These former works on Charnock are generally helpful for the present study and align well with its aims. Several insights may be highlighted. In my view, Lee, Siekawitch, and Park have rightly shattered the caricature of Charnock as a rigid rationalist. They demonstrate that Charnock did not lose the warmth of heart to cold reason but combined passionate piety with sharp thinking. My work will further confirm their shared insight that Charnock's Christocentric theological epistemology was not just formative but foundational for his theology. While I agree with Gutiérrez that Charnock used scholastic ideas and methods, I will emphasize that they didn't constrain him. He freely used various philosophical ideas and methodologies but frequently subordinated them to Scripture, seeking to bring every thought under its authority.

One way to view the present study on Charnock is that it synthesizes several trajectories in his theology with God's holiness at the center. Thus, it's an investigation that may situate several former studies on Charnock in the fuller context of his theology. The key to this is understanding the significance of God's holiness in Charnock's thought.

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48 Frank L. Bartoe, *A Soul Framed in Christ: Stephen Charnock on the Renewal of God's Image* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2021).

49 Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 396–431.

50 Poythress, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 401–2.

51 Gavin Ortlund, "The Voice of His Blood: Christ's Intercession in the Thought of Stephen Charnock", *Themelios* 38, no. 3 (2013): 429–42.

52 John Murray, "The Heavenly, Priestly Activity of Christ", in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*. Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 48–59.

Previous studies, which survey Charnock's discourses on all God's attributes, initially indicate the place of his theology of God's holiness. However, as I will argue, they do not adequately pursue to perceive how he conceives it (cf. Ch. 2.4). Frank L. Bartoe investigates the functional centrality of holiness in Charnock's theology, how he perceived that the Christian religion is about conforming man to God in his holiness, but he does not fully engage with how Charnock understood what divine holiness is.[53] Lee notes that Charnock "looks upon God's holiness in His essence, nature, and operations as a glorious perfection of honour, beauty, and life"[54], and Gutiérrez points out that his discourse "illustrates the centrality of the notion of divine holiness in Charnock's understanding of the divine nature".[55]

Yet Lee and Gutiérrez primarily conceive of holiness in Charnock's thought "as the ethical principle by which the other perfections of God operate".[56] Though Gutiérrez is right, I think, to add that "holiness is not simply a steady representation of a moral quality, but 'the essential glory of his [God's] nature … the peculiar glory of his nature'", he does not inquire into what Charnock meant. How did Charnock understand God's holiness to glorify God and his attributes? And what does this tell us about how he perceived what God's holiness is? As we shall see, these are some of the key questions that Charnock elaborated upon more fully than his Puritan contemporaries to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of God's holiness.

Furthermore, one of the most immediate contexts of Charnock's theology of God's holiness, given that it occupies about half of his discourse on this attribute, is his discussion of God and evil. A study on God's holiness in Charnock may thus put the limited studies by Drayson, on God's sovereignty and human freedom, and Bartoe, on regeneration and the renewed image of God's holiness in man, in the integrated context of Charnock's discussion of God's concurrence with sin and greater good purposes with evil (cf. Ch. 3.2–3). This illustrates that Charnock's theology of God's holiness is an intersection of theological trajectories.

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53 Bartoe, *A Soul Framed in Christ*, 16; Charnock, *EAG*, 1149. Bartoe quotes Charnock, stating, "the Christian religion is of a divine extraction. The Christian religion discovers the holiness of God and forms the creature to a conformity to him". One way to perceive Bartoe's work is that he investigates conformity to God's holiness in Charnock's thought but omits its discovery.

54 Lee, "Trinitarian Theology and Piety", 193.

55 Gutiérrez S., "The Lord Reigns Supreme", 199.

56 Gutiérrez S., "The Lord Reigns Supreme", 201. Cf. Lee, "Trinitarian Theology and Piety", 193–94.

Another trajectory is Charnock's Christocentric theological epistemology, which culminates in the vindication of God's holiness in the Son on the cross. This marks God's historical and purposeful self-revelation in Charnock's thought, of the nature of his being, perfection, and glory.

At this juncture, Charnock's theology of God's holiness intersects with his understanding of the unity and diversity of God in his attributes. Gutiérrez, Lee, and Beeke appear to overlook this point in their treatments of Charnock's theology of God's holiness and largely assumed reading of Charnock on divine simplicity. Poythress also ignores it despite his arguably more accurate, though limited, study of divine simplicity in Charnock's discourse on God's immutability (cf. Ch. 4.2).

In summary, the present study will take a closer look at Stephen Charnock's theology of God's holiness to offer a more precise understanding that opens a panoramic view of his theology. Doing so sheds light on its key implications for the relationship between God and evil, as well as the unity and diversity of God's attributes.

1.5.2 Divine Holiness

As we shall see, Charnock's theology of God's holiness stands firmly within the Western Protestant tradition, as developed by the Reformed orthodox during the post-Reformation period and further shaped by distinctives in English Puritanism (cf. Ch. 2.2).[57] This study seeks to retrieve his theology systematically rather than exegetically within the context of contemporary evangelical theology today, while remaining deeply biblically grounded.[58] As with Charnock himself, the systematic reflection here engages Scripture to support its doctrinal claims and attends closely to biblical coherence.

Providing the contextual background for the study of God's attributes, Muller has observed a historical resurgence during the Reformation, particularly in the period that followed.[59] The writings of the Reformed orthodox

57 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:30–33. By Reformed Orthodox, I follow Muller's characterization of a confessional phase of Reformed theology, roughly spanning the mid sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, marked by dogmatic articulation using a scholastic method of theological reasoning (c. 1525–1725).

58 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–17; D.A. Carson, *Evangelicalism: What Is It and Is It Worth Keeping?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009); Michael Reeves, *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).

59 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:205–26.

represented an "increasingly elaborate discussion of the attributes"[60], and as noted earlier, Muller situates Charnock's treatment "as one of the more elaborate and detailed treatises on the subject written in the seventeenth century".[61] Summarizing the view of God's holiness in the era, he writes:

> Holiness, has, moreover, two implications, both of which are typically stated in relation or in contrast to creatures. First, it can indicate the absolute 'moral purity' of God and stand, therefore, in relation to his justice or righteousness .... Second, 'the word is also employed to denote God's infinite excellence above all that is low and created'.[62]

In other words, holiness was conceived as a relative term, referring to how God, in his transcendent moral purity, is separated from the world and relates to it in his justice. This view was further established by the influential 1878 study on the meaning and use of קדשׁ, conducted by Wolf Wilhelm Friedrich von Baudissin (1847–1926).[63] Baudissin argued that the original root was a biliteral קד, meaning "to cut", and thus to separate, a view that continues to influence theologians today.[64]

However, recent evangelical scholarship has increasingly questioned whether holiness should be defined in terms of separation. Gentry states that "the church of Jesus Christ, at least in the western world, has not understood very well the meaning of the word 'holy,' nor what it means to worship a holy God".[65] Gentry points to Claude Bernard Costecalde's 1986 study of

60 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:214.

61 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:132.

62 Muller, *PRRD*, 3:499.

63 Peter Gentry, "The Meaning of 'Holy' in the Old Testament", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170 (October 2013): 401; W.W. Baudissin, "Der Begriff der Heiligkeit im Alten Testament", in *Studien zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte, Vol. 2* (Leipzig: Fr. Wilh. Grunow, 1878).

64 R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1985), 36. "The primary meaning of holy is 'separate.' It comes from an ancient word that means 'to cut,' or 'to separate.'" Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 73. "The Hebrew word for 'to be holy,' quadash, is derived from the root qad, which means to cut or to separate". Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 217. "The stem קדשׁ, related to חדשׁ, is usually traced to the root קד, meaning 'to cut, separate,' and hence it expresses the idea of being cut off and isolated". Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 268. "The Hebrew word for 'holy' (qôdeš) comes from the verb 'to cut or separate'". Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 256. "The verb from which it is derived suggests to 'cut off' or 'to separate'".

65 Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy", 400; Muller, *PRRD*, 3:499.

קדשׁ, which argues that holiness is better understood in terms of devotion than separation, moral purity, and transcendence.[66]

A central problem with defining divine holiness primarily in terms of separation, as Baudissin's study reinforced, is that it fails to capture what it means for God to be holy in himself. If holiness is defined merely in terms of separation, as God's moral transcendence, it cannot account for holiness as something intrinsic in God. John E. Hartley expresses this point well: "separation does not get at the essential meaning of holiness—neither in reference to God, the Holy One, nor in reference to the variety of items described as holy—for it fails to provide any content to the concept of being holy".[67]

This highlights the challenge of developing a coherent theology of God's holiness, a difficulty that is increasingly acknowledged in contemporary theological reflection. This recognition is often characterized by three observations: 1) holiness in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, is a rich and variously used concept; 2) it is never clearly defined; and 3) it has been understood in several ways.[68] As James Robson puts it, "Holiness is never actually defined in the Old Testament" and its "root קדשׁ (and its cognates and antonyms) is embedded in narrative and law, speech and psalm, and we are left to infer what is meant by it".[69] Because of this, Michael Bird adds that it is "noto-

66 Claude B. Costecalde, *Aux Origines du Sacré Biblique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1986); Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy", 401–2.

67 John E. Hartley, "Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean", in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 420. Cf. Sinclair Ferguson, *Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), Ch. 1, The Ground Plan. Ferguson also acknowledges this point.

68 The observations that holiness is a rich concept in Scripture, difficult to define, and understood in various ways can be found in both theological dictionaries and scholarly accounts. Ernst Kornfeld and Helmer Ringgren, "קָדוֹשׁ", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* vol. 12, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 521–46; Hartley, "Holy and Holiness"; Johannes Behm, "ἅγιος", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (1964), 88–119; Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1: Revelation and God (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), Ch. 30: The Holiness of the Lord; Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 2.3.1.2, 4. Holy; Stephen J. Wellum, "Retrieval, Christology, and Sola Scriptura", *SBTH* 23, no. 2 (2019): 586–90; John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), Ch. 13, God's Attributes: Righteousness and Holiness.

69 James E. Robson, "Forgotten Dimensions of Holiness", *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33 (2011): 125.