

# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**



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**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL  
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GRANDVILLE, MICHIGAN**

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of the  
Protestant Reformed Churches  
Grandville, Michigan

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# Editorial Notes

With this issue of the *Journal* we begin our eighteenth year of publication. We are grateful that God continues, in His grace, to make the publication of our *Journal* possible and we are grateful for the gracious reception of it by our readers.



In this issue all three articles are parts of series and therefore continuations of past articles. Prof. R. Decker continues his discussion of pastoral care, and particularly of the pastoral care of married people. The pastoral work of the church is an often neglected part of the ministry and these articles sorely need to be read and studied by those who are responsible for the welfare of the church of Christ. Too much emphasis is put these days on counsellors, administrators, advisers, and special ministries to the neglect of the pastoral office. May God restore the work of pastor to His church.

Prof. Hoeksema continues his translation of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's polemical work against Prof. W. Heyns, a work about the important question of the relation between the simplicity of God's will and the free offer of the gospel. While this work can in a sense be said to be dated — because it deals with the views of a man long dead — it nevertheless contains relevant and important material on the question of the free offer.

Prof. Hanko continues to write on the history of the idea of the free offer — material which was originally presented in an elective course in the Seminary. In this issue, he deals with the Marrow Controversy, which plagued the Presbyterian Churches in Scotland in the seventeenth century.



We once again include a list of Seminary publications. You may be interested in a few revisions of this list. The main one is the addition of a syllabus on "The Belgic Confession," a creed of the Reformed Churches and an important tool in the instruction of God's people in the abiding truths of the Reformation.

While there is no mention made in this list of various other publications — due to the fact that they have only recently been published or are about to be published, we mention them here. Rev. Lubbers has just

published a new commentary on the book of Hebrews entitled, *The Glory of the True Tabernacle*. It can be ordered from the Seminary Bookstore. The congregation of our Hudsonville Church has recently published, as was announced in an earlier *Journal*, a book containing a number of Meditations by the late Rev. Gerrit Vos under the title, *O Taste and See*. We have been informed that, because of the good reception of this volume, another volume is in the process of being prepared. Entitled *The Un-speakable Gift*, it will contain selected Meditations dealing with the life of Christ. The publication date is as yet uncertain, but keep your eyes open for future announcements. Finally, we have advertised under our Seminary publications a syllabus which contains a translation of Dr. H. Bavinck's book, *Biblical and Religious Psychology*. This syllabus contains only the first half of Bavinck's volume, the part dealing with Biblical Psychology. The other half, dealing with Religious Psychology, is almost ready for publication. It will probably be ready sometime before our mailing of the Spring issue of the *Journal*. If you would like to have this section of Bavinck's book — or the entire translation — send your order to the Seminary Bookstore.

# Pastoral Care of Married Persons (2)

Prof. Robert D. Decker

## **The Calling of Christian Wives**

We live in a lawless age, especially in the sphere of morality. Everything, so it seems, is geared to the satisfaction of man's lust. A few years ago people talked about the "new Morality." Now the world speaks of a "sexual revolution" in which people are coming out of their closets, getting rid of their old inhibitions, and becoming "free." All of this knows no bounds. Men and women alike burn in their lust and wicked passions toward one another. Homosexuality and lesbianism are no longer to be condemned (though the Bible does so in the clearest of terms, cf. Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:21-25; 19:1-26; Rom. 1:26-32). The world and even much of the church condone these terrible sins as an acceptable "alternate lifestyle." Homosexuals and lesbians are to be accepted in the church and in some instances are allowed to serve in church office. These corruptions permeate stage and film, not only, but book and magazine as well. All appeal to the lustful nature of man. And, it is corruption of the worst sort, shocking, unmentionable. Modesty and virtue are forgotten words. The world knows no shame.

This has had devastating effects on the holy bond of marriage. Many live together apart from the marriage relationship altogether. Husbands and wives are shared and swapped at will. Pre-marital relationships are common and virginity is a rare relic of the past. As far as marriage itself is concerned, it is viewed as a voluntary contract to which equal partners agree. The husband is not the head of the wife and the wife is not to be subject to her own husband. "Roles" (a bad term; it should be "callings,") are switched and merged and responsibilities are shared. Certainly, we are told, the wife is not bound to the home and the bearing of children. Her talents go beyond cooking meals, changing diapers, and cleaning the house. The wife must be free to work, study, develop her talents, and pursue her own interests. In these and other ways she will find her fulfillment.

This lawlessness has made its impact on the churches. This explains why the stand on divorce has been relaxed by many churches. This is why too there is so much discussion in the churches on the subject of the place of women in the church and in society in general. There is

continued pressure for change even within orthodox and traditionally Reformed churches.

In this context we are called to live chastely both within the holy bond of marriage and outside of that bond. There are many grave temptations especially confronting the youth of the church. God's people must listen to and obey the Word of God as it speaks on this, the most beautiful relationship among men. Marriage after all is a picture of the great mystery of Christ and His Bride, the church (Eph. 5:32). Pastors are being confronted by more and more marriage problems in their congregations. If they are going to deal effectively with these problems they must know what the problem is and how to solve it. The only way they are going to know this is in the light of the Word of God. Scripture reveals the origin, the institution, and symbolic significance of marriage. Scripture speaks clearly on the calling of husbands and wives. The marriage problems are at bottom, *sin* problems. When husbands and wives sin against each other and God by failing to be faithful to their respective callings, there is trouble in the marriage. The only cure for sin is to be found in the cross of Jesus Christ. Unfaithful husbands and unfaithful wives must be led to see their sins, confess those sins, and live together as husband and wife in obedience to the Word of God.

In this article we propose to answer, in the light of Scripture, the question: "What is the calling of Christian wives?" The first passage to which we call attention is Ephesians 5:22-24: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Scripture exhorts us to be followers of God and walk as dear children. Literally the text reads: Be ye, therefore, imitators of God. God must be the pattern of our lives. We must be God-like in every respect. This involves walking in love, the love of God (vss. 1, 2). This is the general theme of the chapter. Everything following is but a development of that theme. Being imitators of God means we are to be submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of God. In this way we walk in love as God's dear children. Specifically this means wives are to submit themselves to their own husbands and husbands are to love their wives. Children are called to obey their parents and fathers are not to provoke their children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Servants (literally, slaves) are to be obedient to their masters and masters must not threaten their servants (Eph. 5:21-6:9).

Wives are called to submit themselves unto their own husbands (vs. 22).

What does this mean? Can it really be true that in the late twentieth century wives are called to *submit* to their own husbands? How must we understand this Word of God? Does it still apply in our times? Notice the text addresses wives. The text does not speak of wives in general although every wife is called to walk in obedience to the will of God (cf. vs. 17). The Word of God is addressed to the church, the elect in Christ (chapter 1), the redeemed by the blood of Christ (chapter 2), and the sanctified by the Holy Spirit of Christ (chapter 3). The Scripture is addressing the Christian wife. The subject in this passage is the Christian marriage. It is this marriage which by the grace of God reflects the great mystery of Christ and the church (vs. 32). Godly wives are told to be: "in subjection to your own husbands" (vs. 22). "Your own" means more than mere possession. A very special and exclusive relationship is meant by "your own." The implication very clearly is that each wife has her own husband and each husband has his own wife. This means too that a man and woman do not just happen to meet, fall in love, and decide to marry. A man and woman are brought together by God Himself and are called by God Himself to live together in the bond of marriage reflecting the great mystery of Christ and His Bride, the church.

Christian wives are called by God to submit themselves to their own husbands. Yes, submit! This verb, submit, means to arrange under, to subordinate, to subject or put in subjection, to yield to another's control, to follow another's direction, advice or admonition. The idea, therefore, is that Christian wives are to place themselves under their own husbands. To yield under their husbands, to be in subordination to their own husbands is the calling of wives. The implication plainly is this that the wife must give herself over to her own husband completely. Her entire life as a godly wife must be subjected to her own husband. In one word, the Christian wife is called by God Himself to obey her own husband. This, in general and in spite of what people are thinking and saying these days, is the calling of Christian wives.

Specifically the passage explains what this involves. Wives are called to submit themselves to their own husbands as "unto the Lord" (vs. 22). This does not mean that this is the *way* wives must submit to their own husbands. That is true enough, but the text means more than this. Nor is the meaning that the husband is the lord of his wife. Again, this in itself is true. The Scripture elsewhere calls wives to follow the example of Sarah who called Abraham her lord (cf. I Peter 3:6). The emphasis is rather on the fact that the service of submission which the wife yields to her own husband is service to the Lord God. When the wife submits to her own husband she is submitting to the Lord. The converse is equally true.



When the wife rebels and refuses to submit to her own husband she is living in disobedience to the Lord God. This is the plain and simple meaning of this text of Holy Scripture. The wife who is unsubmitive to her own husband lives in a very grievous sin.

Verse twenty-four emphasizes this same truth and further explains the idea. The text teaches that the church is subject to Christ. Christ is the absolute, sovereign Lord and King of the church. The church is subject to Christ completely. What Christ commands the church to be and to do, that the church must be and do. In everything the church is subject to Christ. One may never conceive of the church apart from the rule of Jesus Christ. The church was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, saved by the blood of Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit of Christ by means of the Word of Christ. The church lives out of the Christ by means of His Word and lives for the sake of Christ. Ultimately the church has only one calling, one reason for existence, and that is to serve the Lord Christ to the glory of God's Name. Now then, the text explains, even as the church is subject to Christ, "so let the wives be to their own husbands" (vs. 24). In that same way! This means that the wife in a very real sense exists for the sake of her own husband! This is the proper relationship according to God's Word. This is exactly why God brings a man and woman together in marriage. This is plain too from the origin and institution of marriage according to Scripture. (Cf. my article in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, April, 1984, vol. XVII, No. 2, pp. 28ff.) Just as the church exists to serve Christ completely so the wife exists for the purpose of serving her own husband. Just as the church is called to live exclusively for Christ so the wife must live for the sake of her own husband. To this the text adds, "in everything." This simply makes the admonition absolute. Literally, in every way and in every circumstance, the wife must submit to her own husband. The wife is called by God to obey her own husband in every instance. She must look to her own husband for all her guidance. She must be completely submissive to his will, to the will of her own husband. In plain words, she must do exactly as her own husband tells her to do!

This certainly means that the wife may never oppose the will and word of her husband. Whether she likes it or not, her husband's word is the last word. Let us understand this! This does not mean that a husband ought to ignore his wife's feelings and opinion. *Not at all!* A husband who does this, who pays no attention to his wife's ideas and opinions, is nothing less than a fool. Together the husband and his wife ought to sit down and discuss the everyday problems, troubles, and matters which concern their marriage and their family. Together and with much prayer and searching

of the Scriptures the husband and wife ought to seek the Lord's will for their lives. Still more, that a wife's calling is to obey her own husband in everything does not mean that the wife is a mere slave to her husband. This certainly does not imply that the husband may do with his wife as he pleases. Verse twenty-five has much to say to this point and our intention is to discuss this in our next article. But it does mean the wife must always yield to her own husband. She must obey him not partially or just when she "feels like it" or only sometimes or only when her husband is reasonable. Scripture certainly means the wife must obey her own husband in everything. Always she must submit to her own husband. The wife is called to do this without murmuring, without complaint, without sulking, nagging, or grudge. Cheerfully and joyfully the wife must obey her own husband in everything. It is precisely because so many wives, also in the church, refuse to be obedient to this calling and rebel against this Word of God that there are so many marital troubles these days. When godly wives submit to their own husbands in everything, there are the foundations for a stable and happy marriage.

So strongly does the Word of God emphasize this truth that it even instructs believing wives to be submissive to unbelieving husbands! "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation (manner of living, R.D.D.) of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting of hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" (I Pet. 3:1-6). Among other truths this passage teaches that believing wives ought to be in subjection even to unbelieving husbands (those who "obey not the word") because it is possible that the disobedient husband may be won by the chaste manner of living of his believing wife. This same truth is found in I Corinthians 7:12-16: "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: (the meaning of this is that the Apostle in what follows is no longer quoting the words of Jesus. He is still speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.) If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving

husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart, A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" There remains the possibility in the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever that the unbelieving spouse may be sanctified by the believing spouse. Hence if possible they ought not separate. There are instances of this in the church today. Pastors in dealing with such marriages must emphasize this truth of Scripture. The truth remains: wives are commanded to be in subjection to their own husbands in the Lord. In everything they are to submit to their own husbands just as the church submits to the gracious rule of Christ.

There is only one exception to this rule and that is when the husband demands of his wife that which is contrary to the Word of God. When being in subjection to her own husband involves disobedience to the Word of God, then obviously the wife must obey God rather than man. But even then she may not rebel or attempt to usurp her husband's God-ordained place. This is the calling of Christian wives. In submission to her own husband the wife serves the Lord God.

This principal, foundational truth must govern pastors in all their care of married persons. This truth must be preached from the pulpits of the churches so that congregations are instructed in it. It must be taught to the children and youth in the catechism classes. It ought to be stressed from time to time when the pastor and his fellow elders do the work of family visitation. The pastor when dealing with problem marriages must be alert to the possibility that the trouble may be caused by the wife's refusal to submit to her own husband as unto the Lord. If that be the case the pastor must not hesitate to bring this truth of God's Word to bear on the problem. Wives who are unsubmitive to their own husbands must be admonished from the Word of God to repent of this sin. They must be commanded from the Word of God to submit to their own husbands. If they persist in this sin they must be disciplined in the love of Christ and with the fervent hope and prayer that by this means they may be brought to repentance and faith. In this way only will they be reconciled to their own husbands, to the church, and to God. There can be only one reason for problems in a marriage. That reason is *sin!* We shall have more to say about this, the Lord willing, when we deal with the calling of husbands in our next article. Let it be stressed, however, that sin in the form of unfaithfulness to the Word of God and one's calling as a husband or a wife

is always the root of the problems. Usually both wife and husband are at fault. For this reason too, it is terribly unwise for the pastor to listen only to one of the spouses. He must visit both at the same time in order to hear both sides. And always the faithful pastor will point out the sin or sins in the light of the Word of God. Always he will call either or both wife and husband to faith and repentance. He will attempt by means of the Word of God to bring about reconciliation. The only cure for sin is the cross of Christ. Any pastor who does not care for married people in this fashion is simply unfaithful to his holy calling and responsibility as a minister *verbi Dei*, minister of the Word of God!

Scripture admonishes wives to be in subjection to their own husbands upon the ground that the husband is the head of the wife. The inspired apostle writes: "Wives submit yourselves. . . . For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing" (Eph. 5:22-24). The Apostle draws a comparison here between the marriage relationship and that of Christ and the church. Christ is the head of the church and He is the saviour of that church. The church is subject to Christ. The husband in that same way, "even as," is the head of the wife. The marriage relationship, in other words, pictures or reflects the marriage of Christ and His Bride, the church. This is the "great mystery" concerning Christ and the church of which this passage is speaking (cf. vs. 32). Because the husband is the head of his wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church, the wife must submit to her own husband as unto the Lord.

This certainly means that marriage is a sacred union. It may never be taken lightly! This is the reason why Christian young men and women ought to seek marriage. The Christian young woman needs a Christian husband with whom she can serve the Lord. She must prayerfully seek that kind of husband. Likewise the Christian young man needs a wife with whom he can serve the Lord. Prayerfully he must seek that kind of wife! Pastors must remind the young people committed to their spiritual care to seek Christian mates. Pastors must do this in the preaching and teaching but also privately whenever the opportunity arises. Christians marry not for their own benefit first of all. To satisfy one's carnal lust must not be the motivation for young men and women to marry. That is sinfully selfish. People who marry for that reason almost invariably find themselves unhappily married. Such marriages almost always end in separation or divorce. A Christian young man seeks a Christian wife and a Christian young woman seeks a Christian husband because they desire to serve the Lord. They desire to reflect Christ and the church in their

marriage. For this reason too Christian youth may not seek marriage partners outside of the church. This always means trouble. The result almost always is that the son or daughter of the church is led away from the church into the world. When the sons of God saw the daughters of men "that they were fair" and when they took them "wives of all which they chose," it was only a short while before the world was ripe for the judgment of the flood. It was not long before "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Gen. 6:1-7). Pastors must never weary of warning the youth of the church of this terrible sin of being unequally yoked together with an unbeliever and its terrible consequences.

Marriage is a sacred union reflecting Christ and the church. It may never be joked about or ridiculed. To ridicule marriage or deny its sacredness is to ridicule and deny the reality which it reflects, the great mystery of Christ and the church. This is the deepest reason wives must be in subjection to their own husbands. The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.

That Christ is the head of the church implies several important truths. As the head of the church Christ is the legal representative of the church. Christ is appointed of God to stand at the head of the church. Christ represents the church from all eternity. The church is chosen or elect in Christ before the foundations of the world (cf. Eph. 1, Col. 1:14-19, John 1:1-14). Christ as the head of the elect assumed their guilt and satisfied the justice of God by His atoning sacrifice on the cross. By the power of His resurrection the elect have everlasting life and glory. Christ is also the organic head of His people. The church is united by faith to Jesus Christ, made one with Him in whom are all the blessings of salvation. Thus the church lives out of its head, Jesus Christ. By His Spirit Christ lives in the hearts of His people. As the head of the church Christ provides for all the needs of the church. Christ comforts, directs, corrects, nourishes, and preserves His elect unto life eternal. Finally Christ as the head of His church is the sole authority of the church. Christ alone has the right to rule the church by God's appointment and Christ alone has the power to rule the church as the only begotten Son of God. And Christ actually provides for the church and rules the church through His ordained representatives: the minister, elders, and deacons.

Scripture says: even as Christ is the head of the church, the husband is the head of the wife. The husband, therefore, is the legal representative

of the wife. He is that not merely before the world, but before the face of God. The husband is responsible for his wife. He is also her provider. The husband is called as the head of his wife not only to supply her earthly needs and that of his family, but spiritually he is called to provide for her. The husband must lead his wife in the way of godliness. As head of the wife the husband is the ruler of his wife. Let the world of unbelief say what it will about this, the Scripture teaches that the husband as head of the wife must rule his wife. The husband is placed by God as head of the wife and as such he must rule her. A woman's liberation does not come in the way of rebellion against her husband's rule. That is the slavery of sin, a most horrible slavery indeed! The husband must rule his wife in the love of God and according to the Word of God. This to be sure is his calling as we shall see, D.V., in our next article. But rule he must. In this lawless and rebellious world in which we are called to live, pastors must emphasize this clear teaching of the Bible. Trouble in a marriage is inevitable when the husband fails in his calling as head of the wife or when the wife rebels against the rule of her husband. Because he is her head as Christ is the head of the church the wife must submit to her own husband as unto the Lord.

This is the plain, simple meaning of this passage of the Word of God. This is the teaching of all of Scripture. Genesis 2:18-25, where the origin of marriage is revealed, teaches that Adam was first formed. The woman was literally taken out of the man by God. She was created out of Adam to be a help meet for him. Eve was made to fit Adam, to be subject to him, to help and assist him in his calling as king of God's creation, to complement him, to supply what he lacked while he stood alone. The New Testament teaches the same. The woman is forbidden both to teach and to usurp authority over the man in the church. The woman is instructed to keep silence in God's church: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (I Tim. 2:11-13). The Bible calls wives to submit to their husbands and presents Sarah, who called Abraham her lord, as the example they must follow (I Pet. 3:1-6). So clear is the Bible on this whole matter that any attempt to introduce another view in the church can only be a twisting of the Scriptures and a denial of the plain meaning of God's Word.

Does this mean that the husband is superior and the wife is inferior? Is the wife of less worth than her husband? Is the husband the lord and master of the wife while she remains a harried, tired slave? May the husband do with his wife as he wishes? Must a wife cater to and obey her husband's every whim and wish? *Never!* That's sin! This is not the way in which Christ cares for and rules His church! It does mean that these are the God-ordained places or callings of the husband and wife. Sub-

mitting to her head the wife is serving the Lord God. This is the wife's true fulfillment. Together they are one in Christ in Whom there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). Both are partakers of the riches of the grace of salvation.

In this way the submissive wife experiences the blessings of God. The submissive wife has true freedom. The freedom of which the unbelieving world speaks is only the slavery of sin. What the world calls freedom, the Bible calls the lordship of sin. And in all its sinful lusting the world perishes under the judgment of Almighty God. Godly wives live in subjection to their own husbands. In this way they are serving their God. This is freedom for them, the freedom to love and serve the Lord. Into this freedom Christ brought godly wives through His suffering, death, and resurrection. By the power of His wonderful grace godly wives live in that freedom to the glory of God. In this way Christian wives find true fulfillment and happiness. They have the favor of God. They may look forward to the joy of heaven. In this way Christian wives have happy marriages. Those marriages are not perfect. Of course not! All of God's children are sinners with but a beginning of the new obedience. Christian wives and their husbands will readily confess their sins and faults to each other and to God. They will forgive till seventy times seven. Their marriages will be happy. In such marriages the great mystery of Christ and His church will be reflected. Along the straight lines of these Biblical principles pastors must care for married persons.

To be continued. . . .

# The Simplicity of God's Will and the "Free Offer" (12)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

*[In harmony with our intention announced in Volume XV, No. 1, we continue with our translation of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's polemic against Prof. W. Heyns entitled The Gospel, or, The Most Recent Attack on the Truth of Sovereign Grace. We continue here with the translation of Chapter X.]*

## Chapter X

### Heyns' Appeal to Scripture

Now that we have somewhat reviewed and judged Heyns' method of argumentation, it does not surprise us that with him we find many more texts which are supposed to prove that Holy Scripture teaches a general, well-meant offer of grace and salvation than with anyone else. If such terms as "proclaim," "bestow," "forgive," etc. are supposed to mean the same as "offer," then Scripture is simply full of the general offer. That this method of reasoning, however, does not hold water in the light of Scripture and in the light of our Confessions became clear in the preceding chapter. Nevertheless we also want to pay attention in detail to some of the most important passages of Scripture to which Heyns appeals, in order to prevent even the appearance of evil, as though we intend to pass by in silence the texts which Heyns holds before us. Even though it is true that on his part Heyns does not touch with so much as a finger, and also can never explain, the many passages of Scripture to which we have repeatedly called attention in order to prove that Scripture clearly teaches the very opposite of a general offer, we shall not follow that tactic with respect to the texts adduced by him. However, do not take it ill of us if we do not treat every single text mentioned by him. Many of these we have previously discussed repeatedly, as in "Grace Not an Offer" and in "A Triple Breach." It will be sufficient to refer to these works. Besides, the texts cited by Heyns really all come down to the same thing. In his explanation and application of them to the matter of the general offer the professor



always commits the same error. Hence, it may be considered sufficient if we here call attention to some of the most important texts. [Translator's note. The author in this paragraph calls attention to two booklets from his pen which deal with the same subject and in which many of the texts adduced by Prof. Heyns are explained. One of these was published in an English translation: *A Triple Breach in the Foundation of the Reformed Truth*. This was originally written and published in the Dutch language, *Drie Scheuren in het Fundament der Gereformeerde Waarheid*, and was a reply to a brochure by Prof. L. Berkhof entitled *De Drie Punten in Alle Deelen Gereformeerd* (*The Three Points in All Parts Reformed*). The other had as its full title *Een Kracht Gods Tot Zaligheid of Genade Geen Aanbod* (*A Power of God Unto Salvation or Grace Not an Offer*). This was written in response to articles by a Rev. H. Keegstra in the Christian Reformed magazine *De Wachter*. This latter work has to date not been translated into English.]

And then we call attention first of all to the fact that Prof. Heyns really has found two *loci classici*, two standard texts, according to which he wants to explain the whole of Scripture, at least when it comes to two elements of his view. With respect to the first element in his argumentation which must be proved, the professor refers to Isaiah 45:22. However, let us allow him to say what he wants with this passage. He writes as follows:

"With respect to the preceding concerning the Gospel as a general, well-meant offer of grace, there are two things which had to be established by declarations of Holy Scripture, but for which up to now no proof has been furnished.

"First of all, that limitation to the elect in the manner in which that must take place on the basis of God's Word with such texts as I Cor. 15:22 may not take place with such Gospel invitations as Isaiah 55:1 and Matthew 11:28-30, not only because there is no basis for this in God's Word, but because this brings God's Word into conflict with itself.

"Proof for this is to be found in the Gospel invitation, in the offer of grace of Isaiah 45:22, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.' Here there comes in words not capable of a twofold explanation the invitation to come to God and to be saved by Him Who only can save to *all men* to the utmost bounds of the inhabited world, altogether in harmony with the mandate of the Savior to preach the Gospel to *all creatures*,

"More proof is not necessary for him who acknowledges that Scripture must be explained in harmony with itself. A Gospel invitation, an offer of grace and salvation so unmistakably and incontestably to all men, whoever

or whatever they may be, as a personal message for them and to them, is decisive for the conception which we must have of all other passages: for no other passage can be in conflict with it. Isaiah 45:22 exposes the limitation of other Gospel invitations to the elect or to the spiritually qualified — in any event to the exclusion of the many — as a twisting of Scripture with the help of arbitrary eisegesis. Besides, this will be established by the Scriptural proof to which we can appeal for the other (element).”

Now Heyns should not take it ill of us if we express our amazement at the method which he here defends. We have asked ourselves whether our esteemed opponent, who can so sharply attack the rationalistic method of explaining Scripture, who calls the devil the chief teacher of the method which wants to explain Scripture in the light of the *many* texts which *clearly* teach predestination (and it is also not at all a question *who* the professor has in view when he writes this) does not now himself carry the rationalistic interpretation to the extreme when in the light of one single text he considers even the possibility to be excluded that other texts could be explained in a limiting sense. But we have noticed more often that with all his sharp language and severe judgments and accusations, Heyns himself does precisely the things of which he accuses others. But besides, this is too naive, is it not? One single text could be deemed sufficient for the proposition that Scripture may nowhere be understood in a limiting sense? That has certainly never yet been the method of Reformed men.

In addition to this there is the fact that Isaiah 45:22 can certainly not serve the purpose which Heyns imagines. If the professor had been willing to take the trouble to investigate the text carefully, especially also in the light of the context, he would surely not have appealed to it as a standard-text for his view. In the first place, we do not have here an offer, but a calling and a promise which is completely limited by the content of the calling. “Look unto me,” — that is the calling. That is altogether different from an offer. And note carefully that it is God, the Lord of heaven and earth, Who has created the heavens and formed the earth and made it, Who is the Lord, and there is no God beside Him (vs. 18, 21), Who here calls. And when He calls, then no creature has the right to neglect that calling, to cast it to the winds, to despise it, to act as if He does not call. The creature must answer. He must say Yes or No. For God is GOD. And the idols are no gods. “Look unto me” means: “Turn away from the idols, forsake them, and bow down before Me in the acknowledgement that I alone am God, and that there is none beside Me.” And then the creature says, “Yes, Lord, Thou alone art God,” or he says, “No, Lord, I will never acknowledge Thee,” and, “Yes, idol, thou art my God.” And in both

instances God is justified when He judges. He judges concerning the first: be saved; and over the second: be accursed! There is no offer whatsoever in the text, therefore. *Precisely because God is GOD, He can never offer anything.* Offering is not a divine work. He who says that God offers something does not know God, reduces God to an idol! What we do indeed have in the text is: calling and promise. The text is thoroughly particular in its content. Expressed dogmatically, the text intends to say: "He who looks unto me shall be saved: for I am God, and there is none beside Me!" But I will go even further. I will also deny that the *general* element which Heyns thinks he finds in the text, as though here salvation is offered or promised to all men, head for head and soul for soul, is altogether missing from it. Heyns wants to make of the text an offer, and to make of "all the ends of the earth" all men. And in both instances he does violence to Scripture. Not only do the words "all the ends of the earth" surely not mean *all men*, but also in the light of the context they cannot possibly mean that. Notice that the following context also very plainly teaches that God does not only call all the ends of the earth, but that all the ends of the earth also actually come and are saved. For the chapter continues as follows in the immediate context: "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." And that this is intended in the saving sense appears plainly from the immediately following verse (24): "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come." The ends of the earth, therefore, also come. From the east and west and north and south they look unto the Lord. And they are also saved. Now is that all men? Certainly not, for at the end of verse 24 we read: "and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed." And if then you finally ask: but who then are these ends of the earth which look unto the Lord and are saved by the almighty word of righteousness that is gone out of his mouth? then verse 25 tells us that all the seed of Israel is meant: "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." And if Heyns understands prophecy and is not a Chiliast, then he will grant me that "the ends of the earth" and "every knee and tongue" mean the same as "all the seed of Israel," the same also as "all Israel" in Romans 11:26, i.e., spiritual Israel, the elect from the ends of the earth. [The author later changed his interpretation of "all Israel" in Romans 11:26, cf. his *God's Eternal Good Pleasure, in loco.*] But "the ends of the earth" never mean all men. This is not even true if you should understand verse 21 as referring only to the external call. It was still eight hundred years after this word was spoken by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah that even that external call, in so far

at least as it goes forth through the preaching of the gospel, came to all the ends of the earth. And even thereafter it did not go forth to all men. There is, therefore, no single respect in which the explanation which Heyns wants to give of this text holds good. His explanation is in every respect wrong. There is no offer; the entire context is very particular; Heyns himself is compelled to understand *every* knee and *every* tongue in a limited sense; and his explanation also does not fit reality. Heyns will now also concede this to me. And, if he is willing to accept advice from me, serious advice, then I would counsel him, in the first place, not to let everything depend on one text; but in case he nevertheless wants to do that, then not to treat that one text so superficially. At stake, is it not true, is the knowledge which God's church will have of Scripture.

The second element in the reasoning of Heyns he wants to prove especially with an appeal to Ezekiel 33:11. This second element which must be proved is that God wills the salvation of all men without exception. Also here we shall allow Heyns to speak for himself:

“That other element is that with which we concluded our preceding article, namely, that although God unchangeably executes His decrees of election and reprobation, He nevertheless is and remains the God Who, as He expressly and repeatedly declares in His Word, does not will the destruction but the salvation of all His creatures.

“Such a declaration we have *par excellence* in Ezekiel 33:11, ‘As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?’

“This declaration is expressly directed to the *wicked*, testifying to the wicked that God has no pleasure in their death but in their life in the way of conversion. It is a declaration sworn with a solemn oath; and it is a declaration in which lies the ground for a serious admonition and a poignant question.

“Undoubtedly that word *wicked* is used by the Lord intentionally. A wicked man is a man who lives wickedly, who is not concerned about God's commandments and who walks in a way of unrighteousness, who even among men is recognized as a wicked man and is considered wicked by them. If the Lord has no pleasure in the death of such a wicked man, then it is certain that He has no pleasure in the death of any man. His death, which according to the righteous judgment of God shall certainly strike him if he does not repent, is to the Lord not a matter in which He has pleasure, not something which He desires, which is enjoyable for Him. To declare that is to declare that there dwells in the heart of God love toward the wicked, a love of sinners, love which desires and seeks for its

objects not evil but good. If the text only stated that God has pleasure therein, that the wicked turn and live, then we could still think that the wicked, so long as he does not turn, so long as he is a wicked man, is the object of God's undivided wrath and aversion; but by the words that He has no pleasure in their death it is expressed that this is not so, that with God love toward the wicked is not excluded, but that there is with Him a love toward the wicked which asserts itself so much that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Once again, that is love for sinners.

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"When, however, one thinks that the Gospel can be a well-meant offer of grace and salvation not for all to whom it comes, but only for the elect, then this text would have to be read as follows: 'As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the elect wicked, but that the elect wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye from your evil ways, O elect of the house of Israel, for why will ye die?' Can that be? Does such a reading make good sense? Does it fit in the context of the text? Or does such a reading do violence to the text?"

And then Heyns proceeds to make it plain that the attempt to read here "elect wicked" does violence to the text.

Now to begin with the last item, we can certainly agree with the professor when he says that we would do violence to the text if we would read: "I have no pleasure in the death of the elect wicked, but that the elect sinner turn and live. Turn thou, O elect sinner!" I do not believe that Heyns has ever heard of such a reading. He exactly demonstrates by writing this that he understands neither the text nor the explanation of his opponents. At least I do not want to believe that he does not write about these things in all seriousness. And thus he here makes a straw man, in order then in the following paragraphs in all seriousness to take aim at it. Surely, if there would be found anyone who would read the text in this manner, he would not only do violence to the text, but he would rob the text of all its power. And that, not because there is in this text even the least comfort for the reprobate (the sinner who does not turn), still less because the text teaches that God loves the reprobate (the sinner who does not turn); neither because there is here a well-meant offer of grace for the reprobate wicked (the sinner who does not turn), for the latter could not even understand the text thus; but for the simple reason that the viewpoint of the text is not that of God's sovereign predestination, neither of election nor of reprobation. The viewpoint is *ethical*. The question is: how shall we then live, if we pine away in our sins? Is there hope for the sinner with God? Therefore the answer is: Most assuredly, in the way of conversion. The sinner will taste that God is merciful and kind, that He

abundantly forgives, *if he turns*. The viewpoint, therefore, is thoroughly ethical. Indeed, the sinner who turns is the elect; and indeed, the sinner who does not turn is the reprobate. But you would nevertheless do violence to the text if you would insert the terms of predestination here in the place of *wicked* and *converted*. For the divine *demand* of conversion does not come only to the elect, but also to the reprobate; and it comes not to the elect and the reprobate *qua talis*, that is, considered as predestinated, but as rational, moral creatures. And viewed thus, it then remains forever true that the way of life for the sinner is the way of conversion. Heyns can also see this. We do not read the text as Heyns presents it.

In the second place, it will also not be difficult for professor Heyns to discern that there is in this text not only no general, well-meant offer, but even *no offer whatsoever*. Heyns says that there is, but he will never be able to make this plain. If you carefully analyze the text in all its parts, then you get the following: a. God says something about Himself. He says that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; that He indeed has pleasure in his turning and living. b. God swears that which He says of Himself with an oath: "As I live. . . ." c. On the ground of this oath, in which God makes known what pleases Him, He comes to the house of Israel with the demand and the calling to turn. If God indeed has pleasure in the turning and the life of the wicked, why then should they die? Surely, only because they hate God and love the way of wickedness! There is therefore absolutely no offer in this text. Even if it should be true that we may read the text, "I have no pleasure in the death of any wicked," Heyns would still gain nothing by way of proof for his presentation of a well-meant offer. Also this the professor will surely discern.

In the third place, I also believe that it will not be difficult for me to convince Heyns that there is also in the text no element of a *general love for sinners*. If people had not long become accustomed to such terms in the Christian Reformed Churches, they would be horror-stricken if they would read of a professor in the Theological School that he believed in a general love for sinners. Pray, what is after all the difference between such a general love for sinners and general saving grace? Everyone will grant that there is no difference. Heyns himself can discern no difference. And what now is the difference between this presentation and that which our fathers at the Synod of Dordt condemned as unscriptural and un-Reformed? There is no difference. And yet Heyns proclaims this general love for sinners in the above-quoted paragraphs without scruple. God desires the salvation of all His creatures, writes the professor; that is here, therefore, of all men. Therefore the term *wicked* may not be limited in Ezekiel 33:11. God loves all the wicked, with the desire to save them,

with a great love for sinners. And He swears this here with an oath! And when Heyns writes all this, then there appears to be no one whose hair stands on end, then there is no one any more in the Christian Reformed Churches who reaches for his pen! How is the gold become dim! And yet it is not difficult to convince even Heyns that the text in Ezekiel 33:11 precisely does not teach this, teaches it so little that no wicked man could even receive that impression from the text. I will not now speak of "elect" and "reprobate" wicked, as Heyns thinks I have to do in order to deny a general offer. This is not the viewpoint of the text, as I have already remarked. But I shall indeed make distinction between "wicked who turn" and "wicked who do not turn." This distinction is very plainly based on the text itself. And then I make bold to say that also Heyns does not have the courage to read the text thus: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, whether he turns or does not turn." In the first place, this would be altogether in conflict with Holy Scripture. For His Name's sake God indeed has holy pleasure, not in this, that the wicked do not turn, for that displeases Him; but indeed in this, that He casts the wicked who does not turn into everlasting destruction. God shall even laugh at his destruction. To prove this I would have a hundred texts at hand, but I proceed from the supposition that Heyns knows these texts as well as I. In the second place, such an explanation does not take into account the second part of the text. It simply will not do to apply *wicked* in the first part to *all* wicked without distinction. Such an explanation also does violence to the text. For in the first part the Lord says in what He has *no* pleasure; in the second part He says in what He *indeed* has pleasure. We have to do here, therefore, with a contrast. Now the Lord says in the second part that He has pleasure herein, that the wicked *turn and live*. He has pleasure, therefore, in the life of the wicked *only* in case he turns. Turning and life are inseparably tied to one another. But from this it also follows then that the wicked who do not turn are in the first part of the text excluded. So that we must undoubtedly read the text as follows: I have no pleasure therein, that the wicked does not turn and dies, but therein, that he turns and lives. He who does not turn is certainly slain by God with everlasting death; and in death as the punishment of sin God certainly has pleasure, for it is a demonstration of His righteousness. But he who turns shall live, *not because he turns*, for that could never merit life for him, nor could it blot out his previous sins; but because God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked who turns, but in eternal mercy has blotted out his transgressions! And thus Heyns shall have to grant me that there is precisely no general love of sinners in the text, but exactly a love to the sinner who turns.

And so, finally, Heyns shall also have to concede that although no mention is made here of the elect and the reprobate as such, the text is nevertheless so particular in its content that there is absolutely no possibility that the reprobate ungodly could gain the impression that God here promises or offers him something. He has no part in these things. For he just exactly never turns. On the other hand, the text, also by virtue of its context, is precisely intended as rich comfort for God's elect people. For they are after all the wicked who do indeed turn. And Heyns will grant me that that turning is a gift of God, a gift of His grace, through His Spirit and Word. The professor will also grant me that God bestows that gift of conversion on whom He will, and that He bestows it only out of pure, sovereign grace on His elect. And if then those elect, those wicked who turn, cannot comprehend that they even in the way of repentance shall receive life – after all, their conversion does not blot out their guilt and does not give them the right to life – then God swears by Himself that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but therein, that in the way of conversion they should receive life. Turn ye, turn ye, O house of Israel (God speaks here after all also to the church), for why should *ye* die? If I had not been merciful toward you with an eternal mercy, then you would have to die in your sins; then no turning would be of any avail, nor would a way of conversion be open. But now it is different. There is no reason why ye should die. Turn to Me, then, and live!



## The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (5)

Prof. H. Hanko

*[In our last article, we discussed the history of the Westminster Assembly, especially as that history had bearing upon the question of the free offer and as it influenced subsequent Presbyterian thought. In this article, we turn our discussion to the so-called Marrow Controversy.]*

### **The Marrow Controversy**

In order to understand the Marrow controversy in its historical per-



spective, it is necessary to make a few remarks about the history of the Reformation in England, and especially about the history of the churches of the Reformation subsequent to the Westminster Assembly.

Although the Reformation was never as strong in England as on the continent, due to the efforts in England to make a Protestant State Church from a Roman Catholic Church – which differed from the Reformation on the continent where reformation took place by way of separation from the Romish Church – nevertheless, Arminianism itself did not appear in England until 1595, when it was taught by Peter Baro, Margaret professor of Divinity at Cambridge. His teachings occasioned the formulation and adoption of the Lambeth Articles which were added to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. The Lambeth Articles made specific certain points of doctrine involved in the defense of the truths of sovereign grace over against Arminianism, which were less explicit in the Thirty-Nine Articles.<sup>1</sup> In 1596 Baro resigned his position because of his views.

These same views were, however, taught and defended by others. We have noticed earlier how Amyrauldianism came into England and was taught by the Davenant School and represented at Westminster by the men who belonged to this school of thought. But the same ideas were taught by Richard Baxter (1615-1691). In his doctrine of Christ and the atonement he was Grotian; in his teachings on salvation he was Amyrauldian and Arminian. He believed it his calling to fight a certain antinomianism which had appeared in the church, but he became in fact neo-nomian and taught justification by faith and the works of the new law.

It is of some interest to note in this connection that the charge of antinomianism is often an easy charge to make and was many times brought by Arminians in their opposition of the truth of justification by faith alone. When some in the church lived lax lives, certain opponents of the truth of sovereign grace were quick to find fault with the truth of justification by faith alone and blame this doctrine for wicked excesses among the people, when, in fact, the problem lay elsewhere. Already the Heidelberg Catechism addressed itself to this problem in Question and Answer 64: “But doth not this doctrine (of justification by faith) make men careless and profane? By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”

It is important to understand this because the question of antinomian-

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1 One who would like to consult the details on this question can find them in Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. III.

ism and neo-nomianism occupied an important place in the Marrow controversy.

However all that may be, Baxter was opposed by John Owen, especially in his famous book on the atonement: *The Death of Death In the Death of Christ*.<sup>2</sup> In the introduction referred to in the footnote, J.I. Packer claims that Owen was writing against: 1) classical Arminianism, 2) Amyrauldianism, and 3) the views of Thomas More. He also claims that Usher, Davenant, and Baxter, while holding to a modified Amyrauldianism, had not yet appeared in print with their views at the time Owen wrote his book. But, Packer insists, and correctly so, the book is not only about the atonement; it is also about the gospel:

“Surely all that Owen is doing is defending limited atonement?” Not really. He is doing much more than that. Strictly speaking, the aim of Owen’s book is not defensive at all, but constructive. It is a biblical and theological enquiry; its purpose is simply to make clear what Scripture actually teaches about the central subject of the gospel – the achievement of the Saviour. As its title proclaims, it is a “treatise of the redemption and reconciliation that is in the blood of Christ; with the merit thereof, and the satisfaction wrought thereby.” The question which Owen, like the Dort divines before him, is really concerned to answer is just this: what is the gospel? (p. 11).<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the gospel Owen taught that the preacher may not preach that Christ died for each one who hears and that God’s love is for each one.<sup>4</sup> Man cannot save himself. Christ died for sinners. All who confess sin and believe in Christ will be received. And those who do confess sin and believe in Christ are those whom God has chosen from all eternity.

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2 This book ought to be assigned reading for all who study theology and especially the issues which are a part of the whole concept of the relation between the free and well-meant offer of the gospel and the atoning work of Christ. Of particular significance is the *Banner of Truth* edition of 1979, because it contains an interesting and valuable introduction written by J.I. Packer, which introduction was later printed separately.

3 *Op. cit.*

4 While we cannot go into the question here, it would be extremely instructive for modern defenders of the free offer to read what Owen has to say about those texts which are so commonly quoted in defense of a universal purpose of God to save all men, texts such as II Peter 3:9, I Timothy 2:4, etc. He scoffs at the notion that these texts refer to any but God’s own elect.

All who hear the gospel face repentance and faith as a duty, but to this is always added a particular promise so that the general command which comes to all through the preaching is always accompanied by a particular promise which is made only to those who repent and believe, i.e., the elect.

The preacher's task, says Owen, is to *display* Christ. In this connection, Packer claims that Owen held to the ideas of an offer and invitation.<sup>5</sup> But this is not entirely true. Owen used repeatedly the word "offer," but, as we have noticed before, it can be used in a good sense – as many early theologians used it. He used it in the sense of Christ present, Christ portrayed, Christ set forth in the gospel – a meaning which comes directly from the Latin root: *offere*. It is also true that Owen used the word "invitation," but used it in the sense of the invitation of a king, i.e., the command comes from King Jesus to all who hear the gospel to repent from sin and turn to Christ. Yet Packer makes a point of it that Owen presses home the idea, so important a part of Puritan thinking, that God through Christ urges upon all sinners to believe, and does this with the tenderness of entreaties and most urgent pleas.<sup>6</sup>

These issues were also to occupy the attention of the men who were involved in the Marrow controversy. And they were of particular concern in connection with the dispute over the free offer of the gospel. The Marrow controversy arose over a book called *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which was first published by Edward Fisher in 1645 and re-published in 1648 or 1649. The first part of the book, the part which is of particular concern to us, is written in the form of a conversation between Neophytus, a new convert to the faith, Nomista, who represents the position of legalism, Antinomista, who represents the position of anti-nomianism, and Evangelista, a pastor, who speaks the views of the author and expresses what Edward Fisher considered to be the truth of Scripture. It is therefore a discussion about the relation of the gospel to antinomianism and neo-nomianism.

The book did not attract a great deal of attention when it was first published, but came to the attention of the Scottish theologians in the early part of the eighteenth century under rather interesting circumstances.

The Presbytery of the Church of Scotland called the Auchterarder

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5 *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

6 We refrain at this point from entering into a discussion of the question whether this is legitimate preaching. We shall return to it later.

Presbytery was examining a certain candidate, William Craig, for licensure in the ministry. In the course of the examination he was asked to subscribe to the statement: "I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ." To this rather strange statement and clumsily worded article of faith William Craig refused to subscribe. Put into a bit more simple language, the expression simply meant that it was heretical to teach that it is necessary to forsake sin in order to believe in Christ. Or to put it yet differently: orthodoxy says that one can come to Christ without forsaking sin. Because he refused to subscribe to this statement, William Craig was denied licensure to the ministry and the matter came to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for resolution. The statement under question became known as "The Auchterarder Creed."

The General Assembly, after long discussion, decided: 1) that subscription could not be required of any statement but what the Assembly itself required. The Auchterarder Presbytery was reprimanded for going beyond anything which the General Assembly had required of her ministers. 2) The creed of Auchterarder was condemned as being antinomian because it taught that repentance was not necessary to come to Christ. 3) At the same time, the Assembly also warned against the evils of denying the need for holiness (antinomianism) and warned against the teaching that good works are the basis for salvation (neo-nomianism).

While the Assembly condemned the Auchterarder Creed, the Presbytery itself was not disciplined because the members of the Presbytery gave to the creed a good interpretation, namely, that one must come to Christ with his sins to obtain pardon for them; else there was no point in coming to Christ. While the Assembly accepted this interpretation, it nevertheless insisted that the creed itself was capable of an antinomian meaning and ought to be condemned.

During the course of the discussion over this matter, a delegate by the name of Thomas Boston (famous for his book, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*) leaned over and whispered to John Drummond that he knew a book which answered admirably all the points which were under discussion. He referred to *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* which he had picked up at a friend's house and read with great enjoyment. Shortly after the Assembly concluded its meetings the book was republished by those who were impressed with its contents.

Because of its popularity and doubtful teachings, the book soon became the object of official scrutiny, and the contents of the book were officially treated by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1720. After study, the book was condemned on the following grounds:

- 1) It held that assurance was of the nature of faith.
- 2) It taught a universal atonement and pardon in the cross. (While this point was not specifically discussed in the book, the Assembly considered it a necessary part of the teaching of the book that the universal offer of the gospel was a warrant to each man to receive Christ. It was at this critical point that the whole question of the offer of salvation entered the discussion.)
- 3) It taught that holiness was not necessary to salvation.
- 4) It taught that the fear of punishment and the hope of reward are not allowed to be motives of obedience.
- 5) It held that the believer is not under the law as a rule of life.

While it is clear that the book was particularly condemned for its anti-nomian teachings, nevertheless, the point of major concern to us is the second point which involves the relation between the atonement of Christ and the free offer of the gospel.

There were many in the church who were dissatisfied with this condemnation of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. Twelve such men, later called "The Marrow Men," protested this action of the Assembly. These twelve included, among others, such well-known theologians as Thomas Boston, James Hog, Traill, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine. A commission was appointed to examine the question. In the course of the investigation it became evident that the Marrow Men had, among other things, asserted that in condemning the universal offer of salvation, the Assembly had condemned the divine commission to preach to all men salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> It also became evident that the Marrow Men, while denying that they taught a universal atonement, nevertheless did exactly teach that the atoning work of Christ was universal in some sense. These men distinguished between a giving of Christ in possession and a gift of Christ as warranted men to receive Him. The former was limited to the elect; the latter was offered to all. In connection with this, they maintained that while the statement, "Christ died for all" is clearly heretical, it is sound and orthodox to teach that Christ is dead for all.

The commission reported to the General Assembly in 1722 where the original decision of 1720 was maintained and the Marrow Men were once again condemned for their views.<sup>8</sup>

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7 It is of more than passing interest that this objection of the Marrow Men is identical to the objection that has been repeatedly raised by the defenders of the offer against those who maintain that the offer is essentially Arminian.

There have been various interpretations given to the Marrow controversy, some of which we mention here in an effort to highlight the issues which were involved.

Some have maintained that the Marrow Men were concerned with various evils which were present in the church. Among these evils was the evil of legalism which really taught a salvation on the basis of the works of the law. Also among these evils was the error of a conditional grace. Christ, so it is said, was being separated from His benefits in the preaching. The church could not offer the benefits of Christ to all because they had to know who the elect were before these benefits could be offered to them. But those who were elect could be known as elect only by the manifestation of election in their lives. Thus Christ's benefits hinged upon this manifestation of election in a holy and sanctified life. Hence, the offer was made conditional. One receives salvation only if he is elect, i.e., if he manifests election in his life and if he is assured of his election. Hence all the preaching was made conditional – conditional upon the works of sanctification, which works were the manifestation of election.

The Marrow Men, on the other hand, were interested in grace. They taught that God, moved by love to all, made a deed of gift and grant to all that whoever believed might have eternal life. This, so it was said, was the offer. This was not Arminian or Amyrauldian, but a gospel of free grace, offered freely to all, a grace which was, therefore, not conditional. The defenders of the offer were, therefore, to be considered the orthodox, while the General Assembly and the church (which had rejected the offer) were given over to the legalism of salvation dependent upon the condition of holiness.

This interpretation of the Marrow controversy is, therefore, an attempt to turn the tables: an attempt to charge those who repudiated the offer as being proponents of a conditional salvation, while the defenders of the offer were the ones who taught sovereign and free grace.

This interpretation (and defense) of the Marrow Men is false. While it is a rather interesting (though complicated) attempt to defend the Marrow

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8 There is here an interesting historical note. It has been pointed out that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has officially condemned the idea of the free offer of the gospel, and that, therefore, all the Scottish Presbyterian Churches which trace their origin to the Church of Scotland are bound by that decision. Some, in the interests of maintaining the free offer, have denied this; but the evidence nevertheless supports this contention. That decision of 1720, reaffirmed in 1722, has never been retracted.

Men and in this way to defend the offer, it cannot be supported by the evidence. This is true, first of all, because the General Assembly did not teach a legalism, but specifically and concretely warned against it. Who can tell whether there were those in the church who were teaching such views? But if there were, the fact remains that the General Assembly (the same one which condemned the offer) refused to uphold this position and warned against it.

In the second place, this view is wrong because the General Assembly was never guilty of teaching a conditional salvation. This is simply a misinterpretation of their position. The orthodox did indeed insist that the promises of the gospel were for the elect alone, though they were to be publicly and universally proclaimed along with the command to repent and believe. They maintained a general proclamation of a particular promise, in the same sense as was maintained by the Dort divines.<sup>9</sup>

This has always been Biblical and Reformed. But this is by no means a conditional promise. It is certainly true that the promise of the gospel is for the elect alone. It is also true that a holy and sanctified life is the fruit of election as God works His sanctifying power in the hearts of His people through the Spirit of Christ. We may even go so far as to say that it is only in the way of a sanctified walk that the elect child of God lives in the assurance of His election in Christ. No one certainly would ever dare to say that a person can walk in sin, refuse to confess it, but nevertheless experience the electing grace of God in Christ. But this by no means implies a conditional salvation. On the contrary, it was the Marrow Men who taught a conditional salvation. For if salvation merited in the work of Christ on the cross was publicly proclaimed as being for all, the question naturally arises: How is it to be explained that not all receive it? The only answer which can possibly be given, the answer that was given by the Marrow Men, is that this salvation comes to an individual upon the condition of faith. Only those who receive it by faith become the heirs of salvation.

In the third place, the Marrow men very clearly taught, in defense of a free offer, that the atonement of Christ, upon which the offer rests, is universal in some sense of the word. Thus the offer expresses God's universal love for all and His desire to save all. The salvation which men receive, therefore, is a salvation dependent upon man's act of faith.

McLeod<sup>10</sup> and C.M. M'Crice<sup>11</sup> take a slightly different position. They

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9 Cf., e.g., *Canons* II, 5.

10 John McLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), pp. 133-8, 143-68, 175-80.

maintain that a certain hyper-Calvinism had come into the Church of Scotland from the Netherlands. This hyper-Calvinism had as its chief characteristic that the call of the gospel and its promises were for the elect only. The gospel does not come to a man who will not receive it because responsibility is limited to and by ability. This, according to McLeod, is essentially an Arminian position, except that the Arminians broadened the concept of ability far more than the hyper-Calvinists in the church. Hence, in opposition to this, the Marrow Men taught a universal love of God and a universal offer of the gospel. Christ belongs, therefore, to all, not in possession, but in the free offer.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation, while presenting the position of the Marrow Men in an essentially correct way, misinterprets the history and occasion for the controversy. There are especially two errors which are made in this interpretation. In the first place, simply without any proof the idea that the promises of the gospel are limited to the elect only is branded as hyper-Calvinism. This simply is not true. And it is not true because this view is the traditional view of those theologians from the time of Calvin on who have maintained the particular character of salvation and grace. If this is hyper-Calvinism, all the fathers at Dort were hyper-Calvinists!

In the second place, it is not true that the orthodox in the Church of Scotland (or at any other time) denied that the gospel comes to all men because it does not come to a man who will not receive it because responsibility is limited to and by ability. The Reformed have always maintained that all men are responsible before God for their sin. This responsibility has nothing to do with ability at all. And it is exactly because of this that the command of the gospel confronts all with their obligations to forsake sin and repent at the foot of the cross. The Heidelberg Catechism addresses itself exactly to this question in Question and Answer 9. It has just made a statement concerning the total depravity of man and insisted that man is so corrupt that he is incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness, except he is regenerated by the Spirit of God. The Catechism then asks: "Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in his law, that which he cannot perform?" And the answer is: "Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts."

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11 Introduction to the 1920 edition of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.

12 This is also essentially the position of E.F. Kevan in his book, *The Grace of Law*, (Baker Book House, 1965). Cf. footnote 84.



A third interpretation, which is also the correct one, is presented by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia in its pamphlet, *Universalism and the Reformed Churches*. This pamphlet (unfortunately out of print) maintains that the Marrow controversy was a direct result of the Davenant view of the atonement and the offer, which view continued to be taught in the churches in Britain because the Westminster Assembly did not specifically condemn it.<sup>13</sup> This weakness of the Westminster Confession was corrected by the Church of Scotland in its condemnation of the Marrow Men in 1720 and 1721. The Marrow Men taught, according to this pamphlet, a modified Calvinism, which has been the scourge of the church to the present.

The point in the Marrow controversy which particularly concerns us has to do with the nature of the preaching of the gospel. We must understand that the controversy arose in connection with a view of preaching which was fairly common in Britain especially among some of the Puritans. Already in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the Puritans opposed the partial reformation and worldliness in the State churches. In their opposition to these weaknesses, they tended to stress strongly the subjective elements in the Christian life, and the stress on these subjective elements led to a certain view of preaching which was found in many pulpits.

The following elements especially were included in that view:

In the first place, the Puritans stressed that it was important to preach the law, for this was a means which God used to prepare men for true conversion. While the Puritans themselves did not completely agree on this and there was a certain development among the Puritans on this matter, some of the later Puritans especially taught that the preaching of the law was accompanied by certain gracious influences of God in the hearts of the unregenerate which God used to bring men to know their sins and recognize themselves as sinners. The preaching of the law was, therefore, accompanied by a certain preparatory grace which was to be sharply distinguished from saving grace. This preparatory grace was given to all who heard the preaching, but did not in itself save. It was necessary to salvation, but did not in itself guarantee salvation. It wrought in the hearer a certain conviction of sin under which a person could labor for a long time, burdened with sin and guilt, troubled by a conscience which plagued him incessantly, and which moved him to seek relief from the grief which his sins brought about.<sup>14</sup>

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13 For a detailed discussion of this point, see our last article in the *Journal*.

Boston, e.g., in his book, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, distinguished between an awakening grace and a converting grace. Sometimes these people who labored under the conviction of sin were called "seekers" to emphasize that they were earnestly seeking relief from their anguished grief over sin and looking for that which would bring peace to their hearts. In this state they were enabled to pray – even for regeneration and conversion; they were able to go to church to hear the gospel as it presented Christ Who had come to save from sin. But, although this seeking could go on for years, yet it could ultimately result in nothing so that the seeker himself would go lost.<sup>15</sup>

The Canons of Dort have something to say about this matter in III & IV, B, 4:

...the Synod *rejects* the errors of those who teach: that the unregenerate man is not really nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God. For these are contrary to the express testimony of Scripture. "Ye were dead through trespasses and sins," Eph. 2:1, 5; and: "Every imagination of the thought of his heart are only evil continually," Gen. 6:5, 8:21.

Moreover, to hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery, and after life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and those that are called blessed, Ps. 51:10, 19; Matt. 5:6.

While the Dort theologians were addressing the Arminian error, which was slightly different from the error described above, nevertheless, it is striking that there is certainly clear similarity. Both the Puritans and the Arminians ascribed these actions which the article mentions to the unregenerate; and both the Arminians and the Puritans explained these actions by a certain grace of God which was given to all who hear the gospel. Basically, therefore, this view of the Puritans stands condemned by the Canons of Dort.

In the second place, it was to this spiritual state of many that the

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14 Paul Helm has a detailed discussion of this aspect of Puritan preaching in his book, *Calvin and the Calvinists*, (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1982). See especially pp. 61ff.

15 An interesting and instructive description of this kind of preaching and the effects of it are to be found in *Diary of Kenneth MacCrae*, edited with additional material by Iani H. Murray, (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980).

preaching was addressed. Some have called the Puritans the world's greatest psychologists, and there is a certain element of truth to this. The preaching was often described in terms of an offer in order to encourage those who were under the conviction of sin to embrace the gospel. Through the preaching, God's mercy was portrayed with the intention of disarming the most alienated mind of his suspicions and to relieve the most troubled spirit of his fears. It was intended to assure the hearers that no sinner had sunk beyond the reach of mercy and no sins were so great that they were beyond forgiveness. Thus earnest entreaties and tender remonstrances were necessary to bring the sinner to Christ.<sup>16</sup>

This idea led in turn to various distinctions. On the one hand, distinctions arose between various degrees of "seeking." There were those who had a felt need, who hungered and thirsted, who were weary and heavy laden, etc.; and there were those who had not even progressed this far. The first were under far more serious obligations than the second. There were also various degrees in the conviction of sin. The question often arose whether a sinner was truly and sufficiently under the conviction of sin, or whether his conviction was only apparent and not a genuine matter of the heart. On the other hand, there were distinctions made between the assurance of faith. A sinner might, e.g., neither presume to be an elect, nor might he conclude that he was not. And the assurance that he was an elect went through various stages until he stood in the full assurance of his salvation in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

What did all this have to do with the idea of the offer?

The word "offer" had been used frequently prior to the Marrow controversy. It is found, as we noticed, in the Westminster Confession; it was used by John Owen and other Puritan divines. But usually it meant the setting forth of Christ as the One Who had come as the Savior from sin. But as the need for pressing home upon the sinner convicted of sin the sufficiency of the cross of Christ, the idea shifted to that proposed by the Marrow Men. And so they began to teach that no man need doubt this warrant to receive the Savior's blessings. Everyone who hears the preaching has a warrant to receive and embrace the gospel. No man living has a warrant to refuse. God expressed in the gospel His desire to save all.

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16 See, Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (Baker Book House, 1956), pp. 141ff.

17 It is important to keep these ideas in mind, for we shall have to return again to them when we discuss the idea of the offer as it developed in the Netherlands under the influence of the *Nadere Reformatic*.

And, it was believed, this was the only way in which the gospel could be pressed home upon the sinner convicted of sin.

This was somewhat understandable. The unregenerate sinner, who, under the preaching of the law, had been convicted of sin, who cried out for relief from the oppression of sin and guilt, had to be assured that Christ wanted his salvation and that the gospel, which presented Christ crucified, was indeed directed to him.

It was precisely this emphasis which led to a certain universality of the atonement.

The original passages in the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* which had come under the scrutiny of the General Assembly read as follows:

God their Father, as He is in His Son Jesus Christ, moved with nothing but His free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all, that whosoever of them all shall believe in this His Son shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Go and tell every man without exception that here are good news for him; Christ is dead for him, and if he will take Him and accept His righteousness he shall have Him.<sup>18</sup>

C.G. M'Crie says that the Marrow maintained that "Gospel giving is not giving into possession, but giving by way of offer."<sup>19</sup> M'Crie also says that in 1742 these men expressed themselves in these words: "There is a revelation of the Divine will in the Word, affording a warrant to offer Christ unto all mankind without exception, and a warrant to all freely to receive Him, however great sinners they are or have been."<sup>20</sup>

A.A. Hodge defines the issues in the Marrow controversy very clearly. He says that the Marrow Men spoke of a double reference of the atonement. Their desire was to establish "the warrant of faith." The atonement thus had a designed general reference to all sinners of mankind as such. Christ did not die for all so as to save all, but he is dead for all, i.e., available for all if they will receive him. Thus God, out of general philanthropy for all sinners made a deed of gift of Christ and of the benefits of His redemption to all indifferently to be claimed upon the condition of faith. This is God's giving love in distinction from His electing love. Thus the Marrow Men held to a general and a particular love.

Hodge further explains the views of the Marrow Men as including the

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18 M'Crie, editor, (David Bryce & Son, Glasgow, 1902).

19 *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland* (Macrieven & Wallace, 1907), p. 125.

20 *Ibid.*

idea that the deed of gift or grant of Christ is not itself the general offer, but is the foundation of the general offer upon which the offer rests. This grant is real, universal, an expression of love, conditioned by faith. The warrant upon which the faith of every believer rests and by which faith is justified is this deed of gift.<sup>21</sup>

W. Cunningham defines the preaching which characterized the Marrow Men in the following words:

(It proclaims) the glad tidings of salvation to all men indiscriminately, without any distinction, setting forth without hesitation or qualification, the fulness and freeness of the gospel offers and invitations – of inviting, encouraging and requiring every descendant of Adam with whom they come into contact, to come to Christ and lay hold of Him, with the assurance that those who come to Him He will in no wise reject.<sup>22</sup>

Guthrie says of the Marrow:

That though none cordially close with God in Christ Jesus, and acquiesces in that ransom found out by God, except such only as are elected, and whose heart the Lord doth sovereignly determine to that blessed choice, yet the Lord has left it as a duty upon people who hear His Gospel to close with the offer of salvation, as if it were in their power to do it.<sup>23</sup>

From all this, the central issues in the Marrow controversy are clear.

In the first place, the idea of preaching as generally taught involved a conception of conversion and faith different from historical Reformed Theology. Conversion in the line of the covenant is essentially no different from conversion when it is effected among the unchurched. It took place later in life and not in infancy, and it was preceded by a conviction of sin which was not the work of saving grace, but resulted from the preaching and an accompanying preparatory grace. It brought a man into a state of conviction in which he hungered and thirsted for righteousness and sought escape from the burden of sin and guilt which afflicted his tortured conscience.

By this view of preparatory grace, a certain common grace was introduced into the thinking of the church and was made responsible for acts

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21 A.A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953, Grand Rapids), pp. 380ff.

22 William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1979).

23 Quoted by McLeod, *op. cit.*

in the unregenerate which Scripture assigns only to the regenerate child of God.

In the second place, the Marrow Men spoke of the offer as necessary to the troubled sinner that he could have no reason why he should not come to Christ. The offer was not merely the proclamation of the gospel which set forth Christ as the God-ordained way of salvation. The offer was a "warrant" to believe in Christ. The Marrow Men wanted to press home the demands of faith not only, but to do this by giving to everyone the *right* to believe in Christ. Everyone had not only the obligation to believe, but also the right. In this way they thought to urge upon sinners the blessedness of finding salvation from sin in Christ. Thus the offer expressed God's earnest desire to save all. It revealed God's intention to make all partakers of Christ. It spoke of God's love which extended to all.

In the third place, this necessarily involved a conception of the atonement. By their distinction between the statements, "Christ died for all" and "Christ is dead for all," they gave a certain universality to the atonement; for though they denied the former statement, they maintained the latter. The atonement was not only sufficient for all, but it was intended for all by God, for it was a manifestation of a universal love of God for all. It thus established the warrant for all to believe; and in this way it was also made available for all.

In the fourth place, this all involved a certain view of predestination which was essentially Amyrauldian. The counsel of God with respect to predestination contained a determinative decree and a hypothetical decree. The former belonged to God's secret will and the latter to God's revealed will. It was especially the latter which was proclaimed through the preaching. But the revealed will of God expressed God's will as desiring the salvation of all who hear the gospel.

Finally, all this in turn introduced a conditional salvation into the work of God. The Marrow Men claimed that by making this salvation conditioned upon faith, they in fact made the work of salvation particular because only the elect actually came to faith. But the fact is that the whole work of salvation was made dependent upon man's work of faith (even though the Marrow Men denied this), because one had to explain how only some were saved when in fact God desired the salvation of all, earnestly urged all to come to Christ, and provided an atonement which was sufficient for all, intended for all and available to all. In fact, this atonement was the *warrant* for a man to believe and gave him the *right* to come unhesitatingly to Christ. Why then do not all come? They do not all come because they do not all exercise saving faith.

It is true that the Marrow Men taught that saving faith was worked in

the hearts of the elect by God. And it was in this way that they hoped to escape the charge of Arminianism. But this will not work. And it will not work for two reasons. In the first place, how is it to be explained that God on the one hand desires to save all and expresses this desire in the preaching of the gospel; and on the other hand actually gives faith and saves only a select few? The Marrow Men, as the Amyrauldians before them, resorted to a distinction in the will of God to make this plain. But such a distinction sets God in opposition to Himself – as being One Who on the one hand desires to save all, and on the other hand, desires to save only some. In the second place, by making faith the condition of salvation, faith is set outside the work of salvation. If it is true that God desires to save all, but that only such are saved who actually believe, then it is also true that the blessings of salvation are dependent upon faith. Then faith is not one of the blessings of salvation, but is a condition to salvation. One cannot have it both ways. Faith is either the one or the other. It is either part of salvation or a condition to salvation; but both it cannot be. In separating faith from the benefits of salvation, as they had necessarily to do, the Marrow Men made faith the work of man. No pious talk of faith as the work of God would alter this fundamental truth.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia is correct, therefore, when it finds these “ambiguities” in Marrow thought:

1. “Christ has taken upon Him the sins of all men” and being a “deed of gift and grant unto all mankind” is not a universal purchase of the death of Christ, therefore it logically follows that –
2. the saving deed of gift and grant of Christ to all mankind is effective only to the elect, i.e., an infallible redemption gifted to all secures only a portion of its objects.
3. “A deed of gift and grant to all is only an offer.” In other words Christ is gifted to all, without that He died for them.
4. Since the gift of Christ to all is not a benefit purchased by the atonement, the substance of the free offer of the gospel does not consist of Christ as redeemer, but only as a Friend,<sup>24</sup>

The Marrow Men were rightly condemned by the General Assemblies of the Scottish churches. They had attempted to introduce into the church ideas which were foreign to the historic faith of Calvinism and had attempted to bring the church into an Amyrauldian theological position. That the Marrow Men could have had such influence on subsequent Presbyterian thought is hard to understand, especially in the light of the

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<sup>24</sup>Quoted from a mimeographed paper published by this denomination, referred to earlier in this article.

fact that their views stand condemned by the church. Those Presbyterians who have their roots in the Scottish churches ought to take note of the fact that, insofar as they teach the offer as maintained by the Marrow Men, they run contrary to their own adopted theological position.



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