Editor's Notes

Welcome to the pages of the first issue of volume 49 of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. The first article in this issue is the transcript of the speech that Dr. John Bolt gave to the student body and faculty of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, as well as area ministers this past spring. Dr. Bolt is familiar to the constituency of the Protestant Reformed Churches as an outspoken critic of the treatment of Herman Hoeksema by the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. Besides critical of the treatment of Hoeksema, he also finds fault with the doctrinal formulations of the 1924 Synod defining and defending common grace. In his article, Dr. Bolt points out what he believes to be the inadequacies of the "Three Points" and offers alternative formulations. Even though the very worthwhile question-and-answer session that followed Dr. Bolt's speech cannot be reproduced here, we trust our readers will profit from the transcription of the speech.

Our readers are once again favored with an article by a familiar contributor to *PRTJ,* Dr. Jürgen Burkhard Klautke, professor in the Academy for Reformed Theology in Marburg, Germany. This article is the transcription of a speech by Dr. Klautke at a conference sponsored by the PRCA denominational Committee for Contact with Other [Foreign] Churches. The speech is a stirring defense of the truth of God's covenant of grace, according to which elect believers are "in Christ," as is the language of our Lord in His High Priestly prayer. Along the way, Dr. Klautke engages in necessary polemic against those who have perverted the truth of God's Word that believers are "in Christ.

This issue contains the first three parts of an eighteen part "John Calvin Research Bibliography" by the undersigned. This bibliography was constructed over the course of a number of years and copies of it were distributed to students who took a newly developed interim course on "The Theology of John Calvin." It was thought that publishing this bibliography would make available a valuable resource for any who are interested in doing research on the great Reformer John Calvin. Each section of the bibliography corresponds to a class

session devoted to that main topic, with the related sub-topics that were covered in the class listed beneath each main topic.

Prof. David Engelsma, emeritus Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, contributes a review article of *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Thought*, edited by Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde. The book examines the teaching of leading Reformed theologians of the sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries on the freedom of the will. It demonstrates that the Reformed tradition has consistently rejected the error of "free will," while at the same time upholding genuine human freedom. Be sure to read this very worthwhile extended review—and then perhaps get the book and read it for yourself.

As always, this issue of *PRTJ* contains a number of excellent book reviews. This is a much appreciated feature of any theological journal, and that certainly is the case with our journal. We take this opportunity to express our thanks to the men who regularly contribute book reviews. Hopefully they know how much our readers anticipate their regular contributions in each new issue and benefit from them.

We remind our readers that our journal is made available free of charge. The cost of its production and mailing are covered by the seminary. Your gifts, therefore, are appreciated. And many of you do send gifts periodically. We are grateful for your support.

Now read and enjoy.

Soli Deo Gloria!

—RLC

The Unfinished Business of 1924[1]

John Bolt

It is definitely out of the ordinary for a Christian Reformed seminary professor to have lectured at the Protestant Reformed Theological School—about the events of 1924, no less!—and now to have that lecture published in its *Theological Journal*. Of course, I am not a stranger to this topic, having written three essays on the subject over the last fifteen years.[2] What may have surprised some is the extent to which I have been critical of my own church's dealing with common grace and sympathetic to much of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's critique of the doctrine.

I acknowledge that these three articles were not entirely innocent and that the title of the third one—"Herman Hoeksema was right (on the three points that really matter)"—was quite deliberately provoc-

1 This article is a revised version of a lecture I gave at the Protestant Reformed Theological School on April 14, 2015. I have removed most but not all of the elements fitting an oral presentation so that I could preserve some of the directness and liveliness of the oral in this written version. Herewith my thanks to the faculty for the invitation and to all those present for the hospitality with which I was received and the courteous, thoughtful question-and-answer session after the lecture. A note on the title: After I had finished preparing this lecture I came across another claim by a former CRC Minister that common grace remains "unfinished business for the CRC": Edward Heerema, *Letter to My Mother: Reflections on the Christian Reformed Church in North America* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press,1990).

2 John Bolt, "Common Grace and the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo (1924): A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective," *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (2000): 7-36; idem., "Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good: The Temptations of Calvinist Politics (Reflections on the Third Point of the CRC Kalamazoo Synod, 1924," *CTJ* 35 (2000): 205-37; idem., "Herman Hoeksema was Right (On the Three Points that Really Matter)," in Arie C. Leder and Richard A. Muller, eds., *Biblical Interpretation and Doctrinal Formulation in the Reformed Tradition: Essays in Honor of James De Jong* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 295–318.

ative. My interest and intention was more than merely academic and historical; over the years I have become persuaded that 1924 was a tragedy for the Christian Reformed Church and for the Reformed witness in North America. Not only did the CRC lose an important theological counter-weight in the person and theological passions of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, the events of 1924 and the years after left a legacy of broken churches and families that has poisoned Christian fellowship among Reformed people, especially in West Michigan, to this very day. Furthermore, because the 1924 decision was hastily formulated in the heat of debate it lacked theological precision and led to confusion in the Christian Reformed Church, particularly blurring the boundaries between particular grace and God's providential care of the world. It became my conviction that the first step to any possible clarification and healing was for Christian Reformed folk to face some hard questions that had to come from within. I was not looking to stir up trouble with my articles but I did hope to stimulate serious self-reflection within the CRC. My articles have, understandably, been well-received in the Protestant Reformed Churches but I am also grateful for the well-wishers within the CRC, including some of my faculty colleagues at Calvin Seminary who have been supportive of the general thrust of my writing on this subject.

My Journey with the Doctrine of Common Grace in the CRC

My own interest in the period of roughly 1920 to 1924 in the Christian Reformed Church goes back to my seminary student years in the early 1970s. I wrote my CRC history paper on the Ralph Janssen controversy[3] and providentially had an opportunity to speak

3 Dr. Ralph Janssen was a professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary whose teaching came under suspicion by students and his faculty colleagues for its alleged (higher) critical approach to Holy Scripture. After several years of back-and-forth discussion involving the Calvin College and Seminary Board of Trustees (called the Curatorium) and the synod of the Christian Reformed Church, Prof. Janssen was eventually deposed by the 1922 Synod. The primary "evidence" used to convict him were the student notes of his lectures. It is worth noting here that Janssen's appeal to the doctrine of common grace and his criticism of Rev. Herman Hoeksema (who reciprocated as one of Janssen's most vocal public critics) played a major role in the fateful events of 1924.

with a retired CRC minister who had been one of Janssen's students and who expressed some appreciation for the way he made the Bible come alive.[4] Then, without access to the infamous "student notes" used as evidence against him, I had no way of independently checking Janssen's orthodoxy. But, I did wonder whether the CRC's process against Janssen was truly just. That happened in 1922. I also wondered: How did Rev. Hoeksema's fortunes change so dramatically in only two years from 1922 to 1924? Did the Christian Reformed Church change its mind about such issues as the historical criticism of Scripture? Why did Janssen appeal to the doctrine of common grace to no avail in 1922 only to have the CRC become fixated on defending the doctrine a mere two years later? A seed of curiosity was planted in those years: Could there still be unfinished business left over from 1922–24?

I was still working on my dissertation in 1980 when I started a two-year terminal teaching job in the Religion and Theology Department at Calvin College. My research on Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper had led me to other critics of Kuyper such as Arnold van Ruler, Klaas Schilder, Jochem Douma, also from the Liberated Reformed Churches, and Wim Velema from the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. I therefore came to my teaching post at Calvin disposed to doing some revisionist thinking about common grace. To my delight I found that Protestant Reformed students began to trust me and engage me in honest discussions because I took them and their views seriously. That was not always the case at Calvin College.

When I started teaching at Calvin Seminary in 1989, conversations with colleagues included discussions about the way the doctrine of common grace had shaped the CRC where we now lived and worked in the 1990s. We judged that the influence had not been altogether beneficial. A friendly and warm personal connection with Prof. David Engelsma of the PRC Seminary started in the 1990s when we worked together on the board of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society to

4 Rev. Elbert Kooistra (1891–1995); Rev. Kooistra graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1921 and accepted a call to serve the Christian Reformed Church, Austinville, Iowa. As president of the consistory of that church, he signed a letter of protest against Janssen's deposition to the next meeting of synod in 1924.

bring Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* into English translation. As the editor of the *Calvin Theological Journal* that same decade, along with editorial committee member Richard Muller, we dreamed up the idea of preparing a theme issue of *CTJ* commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the CRC's Kalamazoo Synod of 1924 and the infamous "three points." We asked CTS Ph. D. student Randy Blacketer to write an article on the so-called "Well-meant offer of the Gospel,"[5] and I intended to write an editorial introducing the issue. I got a little carried away in my reading and research for that editorial and ended up with my first essay whose thesis was that the CRC synod had acted in unseemly haste by failing to appoint a proper study committee to examine the doctrine of common grace, and that there was significant evidence to warrant the judgment that 1924 was "payback time" for Rev. Hoeksema's involvement in the Janssen deposition.[6] There were, I suggested, influential and important forces in the CRC that wanted to shut down the anti-common grace virus in the CRC. (On that essay I did get some pushback.) To dramatize the hastiness and sloppiness of the drafted Three Points, in a subsequent article I proposed a rewriting of the third point that I was convinced would have satisfied Hoeksema and avoided the problematic language of Kalamazoo.[7] My third essay also proposed a rewrite of the most troubling first point[8] but in my view the problem with 1924 cannot be solved simply by rewriting the Three Points.[9]

5 Raymond A. Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-called Well-meant Offer of Salvation," *Calvin Theological Journal* 35/1 (2000):37-65.

6 As an additional bit of evidence to support this, it is worth noting that on the *Agenda* for the 1924 Synod there were no fewer than eleven distinct "protests" against the 1922 decision to depose Prof. Janssen. I will be referring to the *1924 Acts of Synod* a number of times in this article. Readers who wish to check out the passages for themselves should know that there is online access to the CRC *Acts of Synod* at http://www.crcna.org/resources/synod-resources; the 1924 Acts are available at http://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynod/1924acts_et.pdf.

7 John Bolt, "Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good," *CTJ* 35 (2000):233.

8 John Bolt, "Herman Hoeksema was Right," 303.

9 That hasn't stopped me from trying, however; the Appendix to this

Is There a Problem with Point Two? What's at Stake?

What, then, do I think is wrong with 1924? I am not going to repeat what I have already said in my previous articles where I dealt with the third and first points but, by taking a closer look at the second point, I think we can move the discussion forward considerably. Here is Kalamazoo's Point Two:

> Concerning the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession, there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Belgic Confession, Art. 13 and 36, where it is taught that God through the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart, restrains sin in its unhindered breaking forth, as a result of which human society has remained possible; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.

On the face of it, this is the least problematic of the three and I can appeal to a creditable Protestant Reformed source for warrant. Here's what Prof. Herman Hanko said about it:

> It has been said that the second point, which deals with the restraint of sin, can stand the test of orthodoxy if permitted to stand by itself. There is an element of truth in this. Surely the heresy of the second point is not as great if it is divorced from the first and third points.[10]

Furthermore, he notes, "Hoeksema did not deny a restraint of sin. But he found restraint of sin in God's providence, as God directed all the circumstances of the life of men. Restraint of sin was not grace, for it was under God's providential rule that men developed in sin throughout the ages. Sin is restrained outwardly by all the circumstances of life which are determined and executed by the decree of God's will."[11]

article contains my revised three points along with a commentary on the changes.

10 Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 2000), 96.

11 Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 94-95.

Hanko adds a very interesting and helpful footnote at this point: "It has been commonly said that common grace confuses the work of the Holy Spirit with that of the policeman."[12]

I was inspired, among other things, by Hanko's comment that "The Three Points form a unity." That may have been obvious, but starting with the premise of unity I began to ask myself what that unity could have been for those who advocated for the doctrine. Questions followed: "What was the narrative frame for Synod 1924's proclamation of the Three Points? What was the main concern of common grace defenders in the CRC? What important dimension of Christian discipleship did they judge Hoeksema and Danhof to be denying?" In other words, from the perspective of those who defended common grace, what was at stake? Can we find evidence for a single answer?

It is not easy to answer these questions because I believe there were likely different motives in play. In his apology for the Three Points, Louis Berkhof is only concerned to demonstrate that the doctrine of common grace is clearly taught in Scripture and the Reformed Confessions; he regards the denial to be outside of the tradition.[13] Whether one agrees with him or not, that would be sufficient reason to make a fuss about it. On the other hand, Ralph Janssen who stirred up the common grace pot in the CRC in the first place, used common grace to defend levels of historical criticism of Scripture. And Hoeksema and Danhof's main antagonist in the conflict, Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen, believed firmly that denying common grace was tantamount to Anabaptism and world-flight. Complicating matters even more, Prof. Hanko distinguishes common grace convictions of the Secession

12 Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 94-5; This is a formulation used by Hoeksema himself and reflects his concern that the reference to the Holy Spirit retraining evil in the Second Point yields moral determinism because the Holy Spirit is thus said to compel a man "to do good works contrary to the intents of his own heart...the moral character of man is destroyed, his responsibility is denied, and a theory of moral determinism is presented as Reformed doctrine" (Herman Hoeksema, *Ready to Give an Answer*, 133).

13 Louis Berkhof, *De drie punten in alle deelen Gereformeerd* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1925). In his introduction (p. 3), Berkhof says this: "In general, our Reformed people simply regard [the Three Points] as an expression of what they have always believed on the grounds of Scripture and our Confessions."

leaders, which centered on the so-called well-meant gospel offer, from those of the Kuyperians who were more concerned with restraint of sin and civic good. I would add to that a further distinction among Kuyperians between classical neo-Calvinists who wanted to maintain the antithesis and advocated separate Christian institutions and organizations on the one hand, and progressive, Americanizing Kuyperians who affirmed common grace as a reason to engage in cooperative social and political activity with all people, on the other. It is important to note that with respect to the former Kuyperian emphasis Hoeksema was in full agreement with pro-common grace men such as Louis Berkhof: He categorically repudiated the accusation of Jan Karel Van Baalen that opposing common grace meant world flight, using language that would warm the heart of any antithetical Kuyperian:

> The brother must know that this simply is not our perspective at all. In fact we hold to exactly the opposite view. We precisely do not want to escape from the world. Rather it is exactly our goal not to forsake any terrain of life. We instead call on God's people to be engaged in all of life. We only desire that God's people, his covenant people, neither forsake nor deny God in any area. In every sphere God's people are called to live by grace, out of the single grace by which they are ingrafted into Christ and love God by keeping his commandments.[14]

That is straightforward Kuyper, the Kuyper of the antithesis. So which of these motives dominated the floor of the Kalamazoo Synod? Can we even find a primary motive?

Why did the 1924 Synod Insist on the Three Points?

The record in the *1924 Acts of Synod* is insufficient for this purpose because, apart from dogmatically declaring the Three Points to be the clear teaching of Scripture, Synod did not really engage Hoeksema and Danhof's objections as they had expressed them in their book *Van Zonde en Genade* (1923; ET: *Sin and Grace*[15]). The material on

14 H. Hoeksema and H. Danhof, *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., n.d. [1922]), 67-68.

15 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, ed. Herman Hanko, trans. Cornelius Hanko (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 2003).

Synod's *Agenda* in 1924 included four classical overtures[16] and an additional twenty-three "communications" which were back-and-forth protests against actions of individuals, consistories, and classes with respect to concerns about Danhof and Hoeksema's book.[17] These protests and overtures were obviously the *occasion* for the synodical action but since neither the *Agenda* nor the *1924 Acts of Synod* include the *content* of the protests, we do not get a clear picture of the "why?" except that many people believed the brothers to be un-Reformed. After going back and forth on the question of appointing a study committee, Synod declared itself not quite ready to address all the questions raised by the controversy but then, nonetheless, concluded that it should speak out definitively on three points:

> There are however three points on which, in the judgment of the committee, Synod should declare itself specifically, namely (1) The favorable disposition of God toward all men, and not alone toward the elect. Your committee judges that this point is of central importance in this question which at present has caused so much unrest in the church. The two following points are intimately interwoven with the first point and are more or less comprehended in it. (2) The restraint of sin in the individual person and in society. (3) The doing of so-called righteousness by the unregenerate.

And here is why:

> Our committee judges that it is necessary for Synod to declare itself on these points. a) Because we are dealing here with points in which the Brothers Danhof and Hoeksema have chosen to take positions with theses for which they have taken responsibility and which they have defended. b) Because the confessions make clear declarations concerning these points. c) Because it is imperatively necessary that for the rest in the churches Synod take a firm standpoint.[18]

16 From Classes Hackensack, Hudson, Muskegon, and Sioux Center (*1924 CRC Acts of Synod,* 120).

17 The list is found in the *1924 CRC Acts of Synod*, 114-15; the disposition of these items is given on pages 116-19.

18 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod,* 124; I would agree that these are three valid grounds for a synodical statement. My quarrel, then, is with the haste with which the Three Points were drawn up; a synod is not the place to do full

I should note here that these are three valid reasons for synod to deal with the doctrine of common grace more broadly but in a proper, careful manner. That would have required a study committee. Instead, synod chose in summary fashion to state only these three points. In dealing with these Three Points, Synod's method was to directly quote a substantive passage from Hoeksema and Danhof's writings—notably *Sin and Grace* and *Niet Doopersch maar Gereformeerd* [*Not Anabaptist but Reformed*], declare them "to be in conflict with the Holy Scriptures and the confessions," and then, *without any analysis*, simply list texts from Scripture, the Confessions, along with material from Reformed writers such as Calvin, Ursinus, and Van Mastricht.[19] When I took a close look at the synodical record again this year, I was struck by two things: 1. Synod's reading and interpretation of Hoeksema's and Danhof's writing is strikingly unsympathetic. There are passages that I know I would not have written in precisely the same way that Hoeksema and Danhof did and yet know that the issue they raised was valid and needed to be taken seriously. To take but one example, Synod cites the following passage from page 244 of *Van Zonde en Genade*:

> Grace does not reside in things, but purely in the good favor of God. And no more are gold and silver, rain and sunshine, gifts and talents, grace in and by themselves. It is possible for grace to work in all these things, but it always remains particular and is given only to His people.[20]

Further explication is also given from page 252:

study committee work. The evidence I now present shows that the Three Points needed more thorough grounding and argumentation than they received at the Kalamazoo synod. The impression given by the actual declaration of synod is that for some a prior decision against Hoeksema and Danhof had already been made.

19 It is this unusual presentation of texts and citations without any narrative frame of argument that underscores the impression that synod did not really deliberate on the matter but simply listed sources in defense of a previously determined position. This is the sort of procedure that gave "proof-texting" such a bad name.

20 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod,* 125.

> Not that grace itself overflows. How would we be able to teach this [on the basis of] our position, and at the same time teach that the ungodly simply receive no grace?... No, the intent was nothing more than that the outward gifts which God in His grace grants to His people also fall upon the unrighteous, however, to them simply without grace.[21]

It seems obvious to me that honest engagement with these passages should have included paying serious attention to terminology. Hoeksema and Danhof use the word "grace" in a restrictive soteriological way and from that perspective what they say is absolutely correct, a point emphasized by all theologians who defend common grace when they insist that common grace does not save anyone. Grace does not reside in "things." Any fair reading of Hoeksema and Danhof's statements cited above would have to conclude that this is exactly the point that they are making.

The second thing that struck me is the weakness of the synodical response in each case. I find it unconvincing today because much of it is not exactly to the point. Sticking with the same example, the Scripture passages cited include Acts 14:16-17[22] and Romans 2:4.[23] In my judgment, these two texts actually buttress Hoeksema and Danhof's point because they are *missiological* passages that point to God's goodness *in order to call people to repentance*. The texts do not speak of a general, indiscriminate *grace* to all people but to a providential *favor* of God that is revelation or testimony to all people and renders then without excuse. In other words, "common grace" here (better "general revelation") is not really "grace," understood as saving grace. At the very least, much more nuanced treatment of the passage is called for. The waters of clarity are really muddied when the so-called "well-meant offer of the Gospel" is introduced as evidence for common or non-saving grace.

21 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod,* 125.

22 "In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (All Bible references are from the NIV.)

23 "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"

I am led to wonder if the only rationale and purpose that was agreed upon by the delegates of the 1924 Synod was the common conviction that the anti-common grace sentiment in the church had to be stopped. Common grace was regarded as a confessional matter and the unrest in the churches had to be addressed by a strong affirmation of the doctrine without really addressing the many issues that the "unrest" had legitimately unearthed.[24]

In truth, Synod did not want to explore the issues any further at the time. Not only did it decide not to appoint a study committee on common grace, it also—and for this you will need to hold your breath—officially decided this:

> That Synod make no declaration at present concerning the position of the Church regarding the doctrine of Common Grace and all its ramifications. Such a declaration would assume that this matter has been thought through in detail and has been fully developed, which certainly is not the case. A required preliminary study is entirely lacking. As a result there is no *communis opinio* [common opinion] in the Reformed churches on this matter.[25]

24 As I indicated earlier, these are valid concerns and sufficient ground for a declaration from synod. But, even if many were already convinced in advance that common grace needed to be affirmed, this does not justify the haste shown by synod and its failure to spend the time needed to formulate a full, warranted, well-argued statement. After all, the Remonstrant heresy was also apparent to a good number of theologians before the Synod of Dort but it still took the delegates 154 meetings from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619 to complete their work. Ironically, such haste leaves the impression that the subject is not really all that important. I can't help wondering if that impression, even more so than the content of the declaration itself, may have been the most damaging to the Christian Reformed Church's subsequent history. Never, at the peril of falsifying the gospel, speak about God's grace in such a manner that there is confusion about the particularity of saving grace. If it was deemed important to the delegates of the 1924 Synod that the Christian Reformed Church affirm the providential presence and restraining power of God over against a (wrongly) perceived tendency toward Anabaptism among those who rejected common grace, then it was all the more important to repudiate all forms of universalism as Kuyper himself had done in his attack on the *Christus pro omnibus* slogan of his day. (On that last point see my "Herman Hoeksema was Right (On the Three Points that Really Matter)," 297–304.

25 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod,* 125.

Really? What then was the fuss all about? If there truly was "no common opinion on the matter" should synod then not have refrained from its dogmatic assertion of the Three Points, especially since the delegates knew that these Three Points would be disputed? And then there is the awkward Pastoral Letter to the churches that accompanied the Three Points and warned against "all one-sided [pursuits to] drive this matter to the extreme and thus abuse the doctrine of common grace." The statement goes on to quote Herman Bavinck's warnings against worldliness and challenge to retain the "spiritual-moral antithesis." "Do not be conformed to this world!"[26] Why should a constructive statement on a doctrine about which Synod was convinced "that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view" have to be accompanied with a warning not to misunderstand or misuse the doctrine. Ordinarily, constructive doctrinal statements that supposedly are clearly taught in Scripture and widely attested to in the Reformed Confessions are not treated like cigarettes with an accompanying warning that the doctrine in question may be dangerous to your spiritual health. We do not need an advanced degree in psychology to wonder if the mind of synod was not completely comfortable with its own words.

The Inadequacies of the 1924 Decision: An Alternative

The best we can say, therefore, is that Kalamazoo 1924 represents a united front, likely by people with varied motives and reasons, only at one level, namely to silence the anti-common grace voice in the CRC. The narrative frame for 1924 is: "We *must* affirm common grace." By hurriedly adopting the Three Points without really listening carefully to a thoughtful and rich critique of the doctrine, the synod of the CRC, I judge, failed the church and did a disservice to Rev. Hoeksema. As I took another look at the synodical record of 1925, it struck me that the Synod of Dort took the Remonstrants more seriously and treated their ideas with more honorable attention than Hoeksema received at Kalamazoo.[27] Hoeksema's critique of common grace deserved better, and careful, honest listening and engaging could have resulted in affirming what was important about the Three Points while preserving

26 *1924 Acts of Synod*, 135.

27 See note 24 above.

the church from its mistakes. I have already proposed a rewording of the first and third points that, I have good reason to believe, would have met with Hoeksema's approval. In a bit I will wrestle with the second point. Please note that I have no proprietary claim on these formulations and know that they can be improved upon. But, and this is my important point, if I can do this, in my spare time, I remain convinced that smart Reformed Christians of good will working together in honest theological labor could have done it in 1924.

To sum up at this point, the old and essentially defensive framework—opposition to common grace is a virus from which the CRC needs to be cured—is in my judgment completely inadequate for constructing good doctrine for the church. Furthermore, Hoeksema himself suggested an alternative narrative frame for the issues addressed by common grace, namely God's providence. Repeatedly he affirms the reality of God's restraint of sin and the reality of civil righteousness *in providential terms.* For example, consider what he says about civil righteousness:

> And what then is civil righteousness? According to our view, the natural man discerns the relationships, laws, rules of life and fellowship, etc., as they are ordained by God. He sees their propriety and utility. And he adapts himself to them for his own sake. If in this attempt he succeeds the result is an act that shows an outward and formal resemblance to the laws of God. Then we have civil righteousness, a regard for virtue and external deportment.[28]

28 *Ready to Give an Answer*, 128. In fairness to Hoeksema the remaining qualification in this quotation also must be mentioned:

> And if in this attempt he fails, as is frequently the case, civil righteousness disappears, and the result is exactly the opposite. His fundamental error, however, is that he does not seek after God, nor aim at Him and His glory, even in this regard for virtue and external deportment. On the contrary, he seeks himself, both individually and in fellowship with other sinners and with the whole world, and it is his purpose to maintain himself even in his sin over against God. And this is sin. And in reality his work also has evil effects upon himself and his fellow creatures. For, his actions with relation to men and his fellow creatures are performed according to the same rule and with similar results. And thus it happens that sin develops constantly and corruption increases, while still there remains a formal adaptation to the laws ordained of God for the present life. Yet the natural man never attains to any ethical good. That is our view.

Hoeksema is citing himself here: (*Langs Zuivere Banen*, 72-3)

I am, therefore, in full agreement with Hoekema's conclusion when, in his discussion of the Second Point, he says "as is usually done with the exponents of the theory of common grace, synod confused grace and providence."[29]

I do not think we can move ahead by looking at the disparate motives within the CRC for affirming common grace, nor is it particularly helpful to look at what some judge to be the bad consequences of the Three Points. It is too easy to look at a specific post-1924 development in the CRC and attribute it to the decisions of the Kalamazoo Synod. But historical causality is never that simple. From a strictly historical perspective the best one can do is observe that *some* developments in the CRC are consistent with and understandable as *a consequence of one particular motivation* for affirming common grace but not others. One example will suffice. Among the "streams" within the CRC that strongly affirmed common grace I identified a "progressive, Americanizing" form of Calvinism that advocated greater involvement in the cultural, social, and political affairs and institutions of the American mainstream. The Rev. Johannes Groen, for example, who immediately preceded Rev. Hoeksema as the pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC, encouraged his congregation to join secular labor unions and preached in favor of women's suffrage, among other things. For Kuyperian antithetical Calvinists this was a betrayal of a Reformed principle that insisted on separate Christian labor associations. But, note, both affirmed common grace. When one looks at the CRC today and notices that its leadership is heavily invested in the ecumenical project of "participating in God's mission in the world," then one can, I believe, point to the 1924 decision as a reason, *but* that appeal is not simple; some careful nuances need to be observed and finer distinctions need to be made. It is not the doctrine of common grace as such, but a progressive reading of the doctrine that is the culprit here.

Three or More Objections to the Three Points

For the purposes of this essay I believe it will be most constructive for me to spell out *my* objections to the 1924 common grace decision and explain why I believe that it left far too many matters unfinished. First, I am convinced that the *term* is badly chosen, results in multiple

29 *Ready to Give an Answer*, 115.

misunderstandings, and potentially leads to moral missteps such as excusing worldliness among Christians. Klaas Schilder once argued that the term "common grace" (*algemeene genade*) was scientifically irresponsible. "It is," he noted, "a catastrophic misjudgment to conclude from the preserving activity of God's love, or the limitation of his wrath, a general love and thus, in a culturally optimistic myopia, to exclude the reality of God's wrath."[30] I quite agree, and this is why I consider especially the first of Kalamazoo's Three Points to be such a disaster. The point at issue is not whether God providentially continues to uphold His creation after the fall. Nor is there a quarrel with the expectation that we proclaim the gospel "promiscuously" to all people. The Canons of Dort tell us we should. But to mix this *providential* blessing with a *gracious* well-meant gospel offer to all people confuses *our* obligation to preach the gospel with the mysteries of God's providence. The church is then tempted to look outside the church and the proclamation of the gospel for indicators of God's *redemptive* work, for what in ecumenical circles is now called the *missio dei*, and call God's people to join God in this work. We must participate, so we are told, in God's mission of building His kingdom in bringing about justice, alleviating poverty, and similar activities. The distinction between the church and the world is lost; this is not the same task that our Lord gave to His church in the Great Commission.[31]

Second, not only is the term "common grace" less than helpful because it risks mixing together God's providence and His redemptive love; proponents often forget that Calvin's point in speaking about God's universal bestowal of non-saving gifts is that *believers* remember to be *grateful* to God for all his gifts. All too often the doctrine is invoked to direct our attention to that which is deemed good, noble, true, and beautiful in this world and to celebrate the gifts rather than the Giver. Augustine, in a wonderful sermon on I John 2: 14—"let us

30 *Is de term "Algemeene Genade" wetenschappelijk verantwoord?* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1947), 68-9.

31 Incidentally, that is why I agree with the basic thesis of Prof. D. Engelsma's pamphlet, *The Coming of the Kingdom: Christianizing the World,* (Redlands, CA: Hope Protestant Reformed Church, [2013]), that the kingdom of God is a *spiritual* reality and not to be confused with this-worldly efforts by Christians (or, for that matter, even unbelievers) to improve this world.

not love the world, neither the things of this world"—pleads with his hearers to "love what God has made" but, citing Romans 1:25—"They adored and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is praised forever."—he warns them against any love that is inordinate and intemperate. "God doesn't forbid you to love those things, but you mustn't love them in the expectation of blessedness. Rather, you must favor and praise them in such a way that you love the Creator." He follows this up with an extended metaphor of a bride and bridegroom and asks what we would think of a bride who was more interested in the ring than the man. "Who wouldn't convict her of an adulterous mind? You love gold instead of the man, you love a ring instead of your bridegroom." In the same way that a ring is given as pledge of love that the bridegroom "himself may be loved in his pledge," so God gives us "these things that we might love him." When we appeal to the doctrine of common grace in such a way as to orient our hearts to the concrete gifts of culture rather than to God in gratitude for His gifts, we risk turning our desire for the "goods" of this world into an idol. When we focus only or primarily on elements in unbelieving pagan and secular culture that seem "good" to us, we internalize for ourselves and send out a message that "the world is not as bad as all that."[32] The doctrine of common grace, we must always remember, is not intended to give us permission to bless and use unbelieving culture but to lift our hearts to the Giver of "every good and perfect gift."[33]

In the third place, common grace diverts our attention from the particularity of God's gracious work in Christ to redeem His own and opens the door potentially to a variety of universalisms. In this objection we have Abraham Kuyper on our side. It is an enormous mistake to overlook the fact that Kuyper's long series of articles on common grace were the third series after the first one on *Particular*

32 This was the burden of Schilder's concern; common grace led Christians to conclude: "de wereld valt mee."

33 The parallel here is with the misuse of general revelation when it is understood to be a "book" that gives us (scientific) knowledge about the world. See my "Getting the 'two books' straight: with a little help from Herman Bavinck and John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 46/2 (2011): 315-32.

Grace[34] and a second one on the covenant.[35] The series on particular grace begins with a section that has the title *Geen Christus pro omnibus* ("No Christ for All"). After spelling out the importance of covenant as the necessary, organic context for particular grace, Kuyper wants to remind his readers that salvation history, God working out His decree of election and reprobation, takes place within a creation that God continues to uphold by His power. "Neither our election nor our attachment to the *community* of saints negates our common humanity, nor removes our participation in the life of family, homeland, or world."[36] To speak metaphysically, creation is prior to redemption and the stage on which the drama of redemption takes place. Undoubtedly, that is what was also intended by those who expressed themselves in the first of Kalamazoo's Three Points. One additional point should be added here. If creation is prior to redemption, and grace is God's restorative and healing response to the brokenness caused by human rebellion, then the creation itself needs to be taken into account as eschatologically important. The groaning creation too awaits deliverance. In the end, and only then, can we speak of a proper, biblical, *Christus pro omnibus*.

Fourth and finally, a one-sided emphasis on common grace fails to take into account common wrath and judgment. I learned this first from Schilder and recognized it again in Hoeksema's emphasis on the organic character and development of sin. Once my eyes were opened to being on the lookout for this notion, I found it as clearly in Herman Bavinck. In the final published Stone Lecture, "Revelation and the Future," not actually delivered at Princeton, Bavinck quotes, with approval, Dutch poet Isaac da Costa's comments about the invention of printing, "that it was a gigantic step to heaven and to hell." Bavinck then adds that the same "may be applied to all scientific and

34 Abraham Kuyper, *Uit het Woord,* Tweede Series, Eerste Bundel, *Dat de Genade Particulier Is* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1884); ET by Marvin Kamps, *Particular Grace: A Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001).

35 Abraham Kuyper, *Uit het Woord,* Tweede Series, Tweede Deel, *De Leer der Verbonden* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1885).

36 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace*, vol. 1, part 1, edited by Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: CLP Academic, 2013), 9.

technical aspects of culture."[37] I could dwell on Bavinck's remarkable prescience in this essay—foreseeing the rise of German nationalism and notions of Aryan racial supremacy, for example—but for our purposes I want to highlight a fascinating difference between Bavinck's final Stone lecture and Kuyper's ten years earlier. Both have "and the future" in the title. Bavinck's is "*revelation* and the future"; Kuyper's is "*Calvinism* and the future." A telling difference! Bavinck provides ample warning against the growing, technocratic, managerial, secular society that he saw coming; while Kuyper's lecture includes some similar warnings, the overall narrative of the *Lectures of Calvinism* is based on the heliotropic myth of the advancing progress of *Calvinism* from Europe to America to Asia. In fairness to Kuyper, his last major writing project, the four-volume *Van de Voleinding* (*About the Consummation*) also sounds prophetic warnings against the spirit that would dominate the twentieth century, but Bavinck's voice, I believe, was more consistently clear and definite.

So, let me summarize my difficulties with 1924 this way: Thanks to sloppy terminology that failed to make important distinctions clear, the doctrine of common grace no longer primarily directed members of the Christian Reformed Church to gratitude to God for His gifts but encouraged them to devote themselves to this-worldly gifts for their own sake and potentially directed their attention away from the church and its preaching to "what God is doing in the world." Common grace was proclaimed without calling attention to common judgment. The result is that we risked leaving people in their lostness and ending up being satisfied when we have dug wells to quench their bodily thirst without giving them living water.

In a nutshell, that is my difficulty with 1924. Note well that I am not saying that all this was intended by those who formulated the Three Points; in fact, most would probably be horrified by the kinds of developments I portrayed. My only claim here is that *1924 does not protect the church from such views.* That is the tragedy of its hasty reaction; much more careful thought should have entered into the CRC's deliberations and a properly constituted study committee would have needed to take Hoeksema's and Danhof's objections

37 Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953), 300.

much more seriously. That is the first half of what I consider 1924's unfinished business.

The Other Unfinished Business of 1924:
Reading the Three Points Sympathetically

My guess is that not only have you the reader been following me so far but that I still have your sympathy for my assessment of 1924. The second part of my lecture might be more challenging. Exposing inadequate and poorly formulated statements are the first item of unfinished business. But we need to do more than simply react against the past and deconstruct it. The other unfinished part of 1924 is constructive. That requires a sympathetic reading of the 1924 documents as well. Is there content in the Three Points that needs to be affirmed using improved language? Or, perhaps, better said, "Is there a germ *in* each of Three Points, or a deeper truth lying *behind* the Three Points, that is important to Reformed theology and needs to be affirmed? I am convinced that there is and that we need to find ways of stating those truths which avoid the pitfalls of 1924. Initially, I am going to use the word "grace" tentatively and somewhat promiscuously and ask the reader not to respond with immediate rejection but to hear me out. In the end, I will return to a very restrictive use of the word that I trust will satisfy. In the meantime, bear with me as I try to work out some important theological issues.[38] I am offering them, not as final declarations from the top of some Reformed Mt. Sinai but as conversation starters. I am eager to get responses to what I am proposing.

God created the world good and without sin. However, we live in a fallen world and we are, by virtue of our common humanity in Adam, sinners. Moreover, God continues to uphold this fallen creation and, as human beings, we experience much that can be called

38 I was led to the insights and conclusions that follow by having to reflect on Max Stackhouse's notion of "four graces": creation, providence, salvation, and the eschaton. See Max L. Stackhouse, *God and Globalization: Globalization and Grace, Volume 4* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 2007). In the end, Stackhouse's formulations are not my own but the *issues* he raises in his discussion of the "four graces" are theologically important and need to be dealt with. I acknowledge here what I have learned from a paper by a former student at CTS, Jessica Driesenga, who is now a Ph. D. student at Fuller Theological Seminary.

creationally good. Our first theological reflection on this must come to terms with the fact that this continuation of creation is itself *gratuitous* on God's part. After the fall, creation did not *need* to continue; God was not *required* to let it continue. God would have been perfectly just in withholding His sustaining and preserving power from the universe and letting it disappear into *das Nichtige.* That He did not but continued to sustain His creation is an act of His benevolence or, if you will, "grace." I use the word here knowing full well what the objections are, but I want the reader for now simply to recognize that we need to find words by which we can affirm that the continuation of creation is radically contingent upon God's good pleasure. The continuation of creation is a *gift*, and any gift from God is grace. And let us go back a step farther to creation itself. There are all kinds of problems with speaking about creation as an act of God's grace, but, once again, creation itself is not necessary, it was created *ex nihilo* by God's sovereign good pleasure. Creation does not exist necessarily; its existence is pure gift. I have come to speak, therefore, of a "double contingency" and "giftedness" with respect to creation: First, creation as a whole is a gift, dependent on God's creative act and providential upholding of all things; that which is *need not be.* This is the first contingency. But, in addition, God's continuing to uphold all things by His power after the fall is a g*racious* upholding; His *mercy* is the second contingency. It is this *gift character* of creation and providence that lies behind some of the concerns of common grace proponents and it is an affirmation we must make. Perhaps we can satisfy this by speaking simply of a "double contingency"; what cannot be overlooked is the need to find language by which we can affirm the *mercy* of God's good pleasure in continuing to uphold a fallen creation. Please note that it would be a serious misunderstanding of my claim here to posit some form of ἀποκαταστάσις or universal redemption of the cosmos. I want to maintain that God's decree of election and reprobation stands.

In addition, we need to find the right kind of language by which we affirm God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, including those He bestows upon the just and the unjust. And this brings me back to the Second Point of Kalamazoo. We all agree, I trust, that God providentially restrains sin. I have therefore also prepared what

I think would be an acceptable revision of the Second Point simply by retaining the first sentence of the original, shifting the focus to God's fatherly care and the comfort of believers, and re-writing the confessional ground:

> Concerning the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession, there is such a restraint of sin. This is great comfort to believers who trust in their heavenly Father's care, "being persuaded that he so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without his will and permission, they cannot hurt us" (Belgic Confession, Art. 13). God uses civil authorities as his servants to restrain lawlessness and promote good civil order (Belgic Confession, Art. 36).

You will notice that I also removed the reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in the original. I did it to forestall all misunderstanding and objection, not because I think that the claim is altogether wrong. On the contrary—and here I do have Calvin on my side—I want to affirm the Holy Spirit as the source of all life, all gifts, and yes, as the One who bestows gifts that do not save. I believe I am on biblical ground here in using some of the examples Calvin himself used: the Spirit of God bestowing gift of craftsmanship on tabernacle artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab; Old Testament judges such as Samson on whom the *ruach YHWH* descended, clearly without sanctifying him; Cyrus as the Lord's "anointed," etc.

The matter of gifts, restraint of sin, and, in fact, all three points, however, does need a new framework. So my question for the 1924 controversy is this: What would happen if we argued for the basic *providential content* of the Three Points—we must preach the gospel promiscuously; God providentially restrains sin; there is a providential non-saving, external civil righteousness among people—and emphasized the importance of the church's calling to express *gratitude* to God for these His good gifts. Providence and gratitude; that is *my* narrative frame.

Now, we do not know the mind of God, and much of God's governance of human history is hidden to our eyes and may even lead us to lament: "How long O Lord; Maranatha, Lord Jesus, come quickly." As we live between the times, we do have to find language, so it seems

to me, to speak affirmatively about those human deeds that *externally* are in keeping with God's law. That is our appropriate *public* witness. In a world where the moral capital of the Christian gospel has been squandered and cannot be appealed to as a guide for public life, Christians *as citizens* need to affirm whatever acts externally conform to God's law and encourage our fellow citizens to live that way.

Here then is my proposal—*my* Three Points:

1. We reserve the word "grace" for God's redemptive and particular love in Christ whereby He decreed to save His elect and bring glory to His own name.
2. We speak openly about God who out of His good pleasure created the world, upholds and preserves it by His Fatherly hand so that our gratitude to God for all his gifts will be obvious to everyone.
3. We affirm all human conduct that externally conforms to God's law.

In sum, whatever germs of truth can be distilled from the convictions of those who formulated the Three Points, they must be framed by a narrative that accents *providence* and *gratitude.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, echoing the alleged signature words of President Richard Nixon, but now I trust with purer motive and honest intent: "Let me be perfectly clear!" I am truly grateful for the privilege of speaking at the Protestant Reformed Theological School and for publishing my lecture in your *Theological Journal. But,* this lecture is *not* an audition for a teaching post at the Protestant Reformed Theological School. I am not exactly on the same page as Herman Hoeksema. Nonetheless, I admire and respect his gifted theological mind, am embarrassed by the way he was treated in 1924, and deeply regret the condescending and dismissive manner in which some important people in the CRC came to speak of him. I consider him a most worthy and valuable theological conversation partner. I know I would have relished the opportunity to do so in person. My own teacher and predecessor at CTS, Dr. Fred Klooster, told me that he did. Hoeksema's ouster from the CRC was our loss, his voice a needed corrective to the CRC's drive toward progressive Americanization. Part of my vocation for the past thirty years has been to insert, here

and there, an occasional note from that voice as part of a discordant chord in the grand ninth symphony of CRC progressivism. ●

Appendix
A Reformulation of Kalamazoo's Three Points

The working premise of my previous three articles on the Christian Reformed Church's common grace controversy in the 1920s was that the Synod of Kalamazoo acted with haste and produced flawed statements whose insufficient clarity not only led to an unnecessary church schism but also left confusion and uncertainty in the CRC. The preceding lecture/essay, my fourth, expands on that conclusion by paying closer attention to the actual wording and grounding of the Synod's three contentious points. Since I had proposed a revision of the Third Point in my second essay[39] and did the same for the First Point in the third essay,[40] I completed the trifecta by proposing a revised Second Point in this essay.[41] In this Appendix I am placing the three revisions side-by-side with the originals from the 1924 Synod so that readers can make a close comparison. The lettered notes that have been inserted into the text point the reader to more extended commentary on the revisions following each point.

39 John Bolt, "Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good," *CTJ* 35 (2000):233.

40 John Bolt, "Herman Hoeksema was Right," 303.

41 See page 28.

In gratitude to God for his providential[a] care, Synod declares:

1924 Synod's Wording of the First Point

Concerning the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect, Synod declares that it is certain, on the ground of Scripture and the Confessions, that there is, besides the saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen unto eternal life, also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to all His creatures. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages[g] and from the Canons of Dordt II, 5, and III and IV, 8 and 9 where the general offer of the Gospel is discussed;[h] while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.

A Proposed Re-Wording of the First Point

Concerning the doctrine of grace, Synod declares that God's saving grace is always particular, to the elect.[b] The promise of the gospel "that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal Life...together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel"[c] (Canons of Dordt, II. 5). In addition to this saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen to eternal life,[d] there is also a favor[e] of God shown to all creatures, whereby he providentially upholds all things, preserves life, and governs the world by his Fatherly hand (Lord's Day 10). Whatever "light of nature" remains in man only serves to make him inexcusable.[f] (Canons III/IV. 4)

Commentary:

a. Framing the material in terms of *gratitude* and *providence* strikes me as essential. Gratitude reminds us to focus on the Giver and not the gift; it helps keep believers from diverting their attention away from God to his world and the gifts he provides in it. Placing God's general favor to creation within the arena of providence (rather than soteriology) helps us avoid succumbing to the temptation of any

number of universalisms. This favor of God is *not* unto salvation.

b. Changing the opening sentence of point one to a positive declaration on the particularity of grace (borrowed from Abraham Kuyper!) makes it clear that whatever follows about God's providential mercy and favor to all people will not be confused with salvation.

c. Incorporating the actual words from the Canons of Dordt and the Heidelberg Catechism as integral to the statement gives it a confessional *gravitas* that is absent in the thrice-repeated reference to the "quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology" and the vague allusion to "Reformed fathers from of old."

d. It seemed to me important—especially today!—explicitly to repudiate all forms of soteriological universalism.

e. "Favor" is intentionally chosen to distinguish it from (soteriological) "grace." This distinction parallels the one that Abraham Kuyper also made in his articles on common grace between "genade" (saving grace) and "gratie" (favor), though Kuyper's own usage is not entirely consistent.

f. The point that God's general revelation and universal, providential favor in fact serve to defend the justice of God's wrath by rendering all people *inexcusable* (Rom. 1: 27) is almost always overlooked or forgotten by defenders of common grace.

g. The revision actually quotes the relevant text of the confession rather than pointing to "the quoted Scripture passages," which are then not given. The original is stylistically awkward and leaves too many questions: "What are these 'quoted' Scripture passages?"

h. The reference to the "general offer of the gospel" is included in the revision but as part of the gospel mandate to preach the gospel of grace and not as a ground for the doctrine of common grace. In my view, it is here that the first point opens up occasion for great confusion by blurring the distinction between soteriology and providence.

1924 Synod's Wording of the Second Point	A Proposed Re-Wording of the Second Point
Concerning the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession, there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Belgic Confession, Art. 13s and 36 where it is taught that God through the general operations of His Spirit,[k] without renewing the heart, restrains sin in its unhindered breaking forth, as a result of which human society has remained possible; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.	Concerning the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession, there is such a restraint of sin. This is a great comfort to believers who trust in their Heavenly Father's care, "being persuaded that he so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without his will and permission, they cannot hurt us" (Belgic Confession, Art. 13.)[i] God uses civil authorities as his servants to restrain lawlessness and promote good civil order(Belgic Confession, Art. 36).[j]

Commentary:

i. The revision is an attempt to reorient the emphasis on God's restraint of sin for the comfort of believers and their gratitude. Pointing to restraint as a social *good* should be secondary.

j. Quoting the Belgic Confession directly not only adds weight to the statement but it also reminds us that the real issue here is *restraint of lawlessness* as necessary for good civil order and not appreciation of the civil order on its own as a fruit of common grace.

k. As I indicated in my essay, I do not quarrel with the reference to the Holy Spirit in Kalamazoo's Second Point. I left it out of the revision to avoid unnecessary controversy; the Second Point does not need it.

Furthermore, on the face of it, Kalamazoo's claim is clearly incorrect: There is not even an allusion to the Holy Spirit in either

Article 13 or 36 of the Belgic Confession. My revision tries to make it clear that the restraint of sin does not enter the arena of soteriology or the spiritual kingdom of Christ but belongs in the realm of God's providence and is both a source of comfort to believers and grounds for gratitude. The active agent on God's behalf in restraining sin in Article 36 is the civil magistrate not the Holy Spirit. The Belgic Confession is clearly working with a strong doctrine of two kingdoms, as is evident in the Article (35) immediately preceding the one on civil government. In explaining the Lord's Supper, the Belgic Confession points to the analogy with and the distinction from ordinary meals that are necessary for physical life. Notice also how this article hardly points to our daily (physical) bread as something universally redemptive; that is reserved for the elect:

> Now those who are born again have two lives in them. The one is physical and temporal—they have it from the moment of their first birth, and it is common to all. The other is spiritual and heavenly, and is given them in their second birth—it comes through the Word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is common to God's elect only. Thus, to support the physical and earthly life God has prescribed for us an appropriate earthly and material bread, which is as common to all people as life itself. But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life that belongs to believers, God has sent a living bread that came down from heaven: namely Jesus Christ, who nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers when eaten—that is, when appropriated and received spiritually by faith."

If one is still inclined to speak of this restraint as "common grace," then one is at least confessionally obligated to make it crystal clear that this is *not* something that belongs to the spiritual kingdom and is salvific.

1924 Synod's Wording of the Third Point	A Proposed Re-Wording of the Third Point
Concerning the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession the unregenerate, though incapable of any saving good (Canons of Dordt, III/IV, 4) can perform such civic good. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dordt, III and IV, 4, and the Belgic Confession, where it is taught that God, without renewing the heart, exercises such influence upon man that he is enabled to perform civic good; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.	Concerning the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate, the Synod declares that the unregenerate are incapable of any saving good (Canons of Dort, III/ IV, 3).[l] We do acknowledge that God in his providence does maintain all people as his image bearers[m] who continue to keep glimmerings of natural light, whereby they retain some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discover some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining orderly external deportment." (Canons of Dort, III/ IV, 4). These deeds of outward conformity to God's ordinances do not make unbelievers inwardly virtuous or good before God; they render unbelievers inexcusable (Romans 1: 20; Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4).[n] At the same time God's providential governing and sustaining creation and humanity within the bounds of external order is his universal gift to all people. Though under judgment, life in this world is not hell. Christ is King![o]

Commentary:

i. A simple declarative that uses confessional language seems to me preferable than the concessive structure ("though incapable...can...")

of Kalamazoo which seems to be taking back with the left hand what it offered in the right. In my revision of the third point I tried to let the actual language of the confessions do the heavy lifting.

m. Placing the emphasis on human beings retaining the image of God once again directs us to the doctrines of creation and providence as the arenas where the discussion of civic righteousness needs to take place.

n. Because the point is so important, the reference to inexcusability is repeated here. See above, note f.

o. The concluding affirmation of Christ's Lordship over the whole cosmos is an important frame for the church's confession about God's providential care. While it is unfair to even attempt to read the minds and hearts of the delegates to the 1924 CRC synod, I judge that this final confession meets the concerns of defenders of common grace while at the same time it directs us to God the Provider and Sustainer rather than to the gifts of His gracious care by themselves. ●

The Fulfillment of God's Covenant in our Union with the Triune God, as Explained in the Upper Room Discourse and in the High Priestly Prayer (John 13 - 17)

Jürgen-Burkhard Klautke

1. The term "covenant" in the New Testament

If we look for the term "covenant" in the Holy Scriptures, it soon becomes obvious that "covenant" is not used many times in the New Testament. In the Old Testament we find the term "covenant" approximately ten times as often as in the New Testament.

When we look at the passages, where the term "covenant" is used in the New Testament, many of these passages speak about the contrast between the covenant of mount Sinai and the covenant established in Christ.

For example, this is the case in the epistle to the Hebrews. Of all the books of the New Testament it is in the letter to the Hebrews that the term "covenant" is used most frequently. The Christians addressed in this epistle were in danger of returning to Judaism. They were confronted with the spectacular ceremonies in the Jewish temple. Being in the temple area was an exciting experience, especially on the Day of Atonement. There were crowds of people. The High Priest went into the Most Holy with a basin full of blood. Then he came out and blessed the people. It was an impressive event. Eventually this became a trial for the Christians. Their worship was simple and unspectacular. Although they did not have impressive visible services, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews declares to those Christians that we have a much better High Priest. Our High Priest did not go into the holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself. He has passed through the heavens and always makes intercession for us before the Father. This interceding before God shows that the covenant made in Christ is much better than the old covenant from Mount Sinai (Heb. 7:22; 8:6).

We also read about the covenant in the third chapter of the second

epistle to the Corinthians, where the old covenant from Sinai, whose "glory was to be done away" is compared with the New Covenant "whose glory will remain" (II Cor. 3:7-8).[1]

When we study the use of the term "covenant" in the New Testament further, we realize that "covenant" is not only used to show the contrast between mount Sinai and the coming of Christ. It is often used for events from the Old Testament. For example, Paul uses the term "covenant" in connection with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament:

> For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, *and the covenants,* and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises (Rom. 9:3, 4, emphasis added).

Zacharias takes the same perspective. The father of John the Baptist proclaimed:

> By the mouth of his holy prophets he spake…, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to *remember his holy covenant* (Luke 1:70-72, emphasis added).

Zacharias prophesied that the events at hand are going to show that God remembers His covenant. The direction of his sight about the covenant is back to the past: God *remembers*.

In a similar way, Peter used the term "covenant." After healing the lame man who lay at the gate of the temple, he said:

1 In 2 Corinthians 3 the term "covenant" is used when referring to that portion of the Bible we refer to as the "Old Testament." In 2 Corinthians 3:14 this term is translated in the KJV with "testament." "But their minds were blinded [the mind of the Jews]: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament, which veil is done away in Christ." Probably the translation "testament" is taken from Hebrews 9:17-18. In my home country (Germany) people said in earlier times that the Bible contains the books of the old covenant and of the new covenant. In light of 2 Corinthians 3:14 this is entirely appropriate.

> All the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, *and of the covenant which God made with our fathers,* saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed (Acts 3:24, 25, emphasis added).

That means: What you see now is the fulfillment of the covenant of God made with Abraham. Here again, the direction of sight goes to the past.[2]

On the other hand it is worth noticing that the term "covenant"—I am talking about the *term*, not about the *reality*—is nowhere used for the relationships among the three persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nor do we find a statement in which the relationship between God or Christ and His church is called a "covenant." For example, we do not find the terms "head of the covenant" or "people of the covenant" in the New Testament.

2. The New Covenant in the blood of Christ

If this were all that the New Testament said about the covenant, one wonders if the covenant would be of any importance in the New Testament at all. Yet there is one important event that is recorded in the New Testament in four places. The term "covenant" plays a central role in this event. A few hours before our Lord Jesus went to the cross, He was with His disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper:

> And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins." But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:27-29).[3]

When instituting the New Covenant, the Lord was probably referring to Exodus 24:6-8:

> And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the

2 See also Stephen in Acts 7:8.

3 See also Mark 14:23-25; Luke 22:20. The apostle Paul also mentions this event. We read of that in 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25.

> blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people, and they said: All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

Speaking about the "New Covenant," Jesus was also referring to the promise which God had given through His prophet Jeremiah. Shortly before the city of Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians (Jer. 32) we read:

> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the *covenant* that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my *covenant* they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the *covenant* that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34, emphasis added).

The institution of the New Covenant in the blood of Christ was undoubtedly a very significant event. Luke tells us that Jesus, after instituting the Lord's Supper, admonished His disciples to love each other and to serve each other. Prior to this they had once again discussed who was the greatest among them (Luke 22:24-30).

In the Gospel of John the institution of the Lord's Supper is not recorded. This should not surprise us because there are many events that we find in the other gospels but not in the Gospel of John.[4] The fourth gospel adds to what we read in the other gospels. So John does not mention the institution of the Lord's Supper. But—and this is my key point—everything John describes in the chapters

4 We could think of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Together with his brother James and with Peter, John was sitting not far away from the place where Jesus prayed.

concerning the events of this last night before the crucifixion is directly connected to the covenant of God. Even though we do not find the term "covenant" anywhere in John 13-17, Jesus explains the covenant to His disciples in these chapters, so that they and all of us might understand it in the right way and live according to it.

If we only had the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, we would have to come to the conclusion that we do not get any information about the question *who* established the covenant. In the first three gospels we only read: "This is my blood in [of] the new testament [covenant]." (Luke: "This cup is the new testament in my blood"). But who established the covenant? Of course, it is God. We can deduce that from Jeremiah 31:31, and we can derive it especially from Exodus 24:8. But the point is: The first three Evangelists do not tell us explicitly that Jesus identified *who* established the covenant. The question, *for whom* the covenant is established would remain vague as well, if we had only the first three gospels. There we read that the *"cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you"* (Luke 22:19, 20, emphasis added), or "*shed for many"* (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24, emphasis added). The question remains: What is meant by "to you" and "for many"? Was this covenant given only to the disciples? Was it also given to Judas? These questions and many more are answered in the chapters of John's Gospel that follow the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus' speech in the upper room ends in John 14:31. At that point, the Lord suddenly says:

> Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence (John 14:30, 31).

Obviously, Jesus got up after that and walked to the Mount of Olives with His disciples. During this walk He continued to teach them. We read that in John 15 and 16. It was probably when they passed the temple that Jesus prayed to His Father, a prayer recorded in John 17.

In His High Priestly Prayer the Lord prayed for Himself (John 17:1-5), and then for His eleven disciples. (John 17:6-19). Finally

we read: "I do not ask in behalf of these alone," [i.e., for the eleven, the apostles], but he prayed for *all future believers*, *who were to believe through the word of the apostles* (John 17:20). What Jesus said here shows His omniscience. He already knew those who would believe in Him by the word of the apostles. But it is more than omniscience. Consider verse 24: "Father I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Those people would believe in Christ, because the Father had given them to the Son.

What was the aim of Jesus' prayer? The answer is:

> That they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one (John 17:21, 22).

The central point is obviously the unity of the believers "even as we are one." Properly speaking, the Son of God is praying that the union between the Father and the Son be expanded to all who believe in Christ, that is to those, whom the Father had given to the Son.

The question is: What does the Lord mean when He expands the union of the Father and the Son to us? What exactly is the union between the Father and the Son? What is the meaning of the verse: "…that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21)? What does the Lord want to teach us in His prayer, when He asked "that the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22)? What is the meaning of His prayer: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23)?

3. Selected answers given during the history of the church

We are not the first ones to think about the meaning of the union of God the Father and the Son with us. In fact, since the beginning of church history Christians have thought about this issue. For many realized that this theme is a very central truth. Yet there was much confusion about what it actually meant. Therefore, it makes sense to introduce some ideas that were supposed to explain the union between the Triune God and the Christian.

First, we look at one theologian from the early church. After that, we look at one who has had a decisive influence in the Greek Orthodox Church until today. Thirdly, we will deal with the position of a mystic in the late Middle Ages. Finally, we want to examine the understanding of union with Christ that dominates modern Western thinking to this day.

3.1. Athanasius

First, let us begin with a theologian from the fourth century. His name is Athanasius, and he came from the city of Alexandria. We can summarize his view on union with Christ in one sentence: "Christ became man, so that we might become divine."[5]

In this context, he spoke about *deification*. By that, he wanted to say that a Christian can obtain a kind of immortality already in this life. Athanasius believed that the Christian's substance is transformed in his earthly life. Important for the reasoning of Athanasius is the statement of the apostle Peter, that "we might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4).[6]

This raises a question: Did the Lord intend this, when He prayed that the union of God the Father with Christ would be extended to His

5 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 54 [*Oratio de incarnatione Verbi* 54] (SC 199, 458,13ff.).

6 See also the article by A.L. Kolp, *Partakers of the Divine Nature. The Use of II Peter 1:4* by Athanasius. In *Studia Patristica* 17, 2 (1982), 1018-1023. For the history of the exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4, see: M.L. Christenson; J.A. Wittung [eds.], *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). See for further study about this issue: D.G. Powers, *Salvation through Participation. An Examination of the Notion of the Believers' Corporate Unity with Christ in Early Christian Soteriology*. (Leuven, 2001). Reformed theologians should be aware of R. Letham's approach. He interprets the Greek Orthodox understanding of deification (*theosis*) in the sense of Reformation Theology. Although he rightly criticizes Adolf von Harnack on this issue, one wonders whether Letham understands the position of the early church (and of Greek Orthodox theologians of later days) in the correct way. It seems that his interpretation is largely based on modern Greek Orthodox positions. R. Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History and Theology. (*Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), passim, especially 95ff.

elect? Indeed transformation is an important aspect of the Christian life (2 Cor. 3:18). We become sons and daughters of God. Nevertheless, the Holy Scripture nowhere teaches that a Christian is substantially transformed during his earthly life. Christians have the same diseases as other people; they have to die in the same way; and they are still able to commit sin. However, there is a significant difference between Christians and unbelievers. Christians have received the Holy Spirit and unbelievers have not. Yet, the Spirit of God is given to Christians as a firstfruit of the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23-27). In other words, the redemption of our body is not a gradual progression during our earthly life. It will be an immediate redemption at our resurrection. Then this corruptible body will put on incorruption and this mortal body will put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Cor. 5:1-5). In addition, Athanasius probably laid too much emphasis on our mortality as the main problem of man. Our main problem is not death but sin. It is the hostility of the human heart against God and against his neighbor. Death is only the wages of this sin.

3.2. Gregory Palamas

In the Greek Orthodox Church, deification soon became the central dogma of their soteriology. Let us consider the theologian who has had the greatest influence on the Eastern Church up until today, Gregory Palamas (Gregorios Palamas, 1296-1359).[7] This man was a Greek monk. In his days, it was popular among the monks to be enlightened by visions. They longed for that. The monks called that enlightening "tabor light." If this "tabor light" enlightened someone, he was, according to their opinion, unified with God. The man who is in ecstasy is filled with energies and thus, means to be united to God and deified at the same time. Palamas did not want to overcome human mortality and corruption (as Athanasius). His aim was the exaltation of human nature by deification.

7 See the basic work about Gregory Palamas: J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*. (Paris, 1959). See also: A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union—Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); H.T. Kamppuri, "*Theosis in der Theologie des Gregorios Palamas*." In *Luther und Theosis*. (Erlangen, 1990), 49-60; R. Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther—Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*. (Göttingen, 1997).

If we ask, "Why are these ideas from the Byzantine Middle Ages important for us?", the answer is that many people today (being influenced by postmodernism) are fascinated by similar ideas. Palamas' question was "How can we experience the uncreated God in this created world?" This is also a very current question for many people today. For instance, in the Pentecostal or Charismatic movement of today. Of course, there are differences between Palamas and these movements. The idea of experiencing God is more emotional, superficial, and orientated toward worldly happiness in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement than in the Byzantine Middle Ages. Palamas longed to experience God through an ascetic lifestyle. But the longing to experience God exists in both movements.

What is the answer to Palamas' view on union with Christ according to the Scriptures? In 2 Corinthians 3 we do not read about a "tabor light," but about light shining on Moses' face (Ex. 34:29-35). The apostle Paul transfers this to Christians (2 Cor. 3:12, 13). Yet in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul's intention for us was not to take part in anonymous, impersonal energies. The glory which the New Testament talks about is not a general kind of illumination, but is always connected to the person of Jesus Christ. It is an illumination through the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6). This illumination is given through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal energy—He is a personal Being. He is a "Comforter" (John 16:7). He "glorifies Jesus" (John 16:14). Through Him we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit we do not fall into ecstasy—but we have a personal relationship with God. Through the Spirit of sonship we cry, "Abba, Father!"

If we ask the New Testament, How can we get this illumination?, the answer is that the Christian does not yet walk by sight or by vision, but by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1). And this faith is nourished not by ecstatic experiences, but by the hearing and reading of the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 3:14-18; 2 Cor. 4:3-6). In other words, we must reject the opinion of Palamas.[8]

8 It is evident that Gregory Palamas speaks very rarely about Christ in his writings. In his theology the doctrine of Christ is more the background for the deification of man. The coming of God in His energies is more important for him, than the coming of the Son in the incarnation. This position is likely

3.3. Meister Eckhart

There were also different opinions about unity with God and Christ within the Western church. I will present a position from the late Middle Ages. During that time there was a strong tendency to abandon the dry theology of scholasticism. This was also the desire of a man called Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), who was a mystic.[9] What did this man teach? He taught that "the birth of God" must take place deep in the soul of man. How can this happen? His answer was, not by ecstatic illuminations or by visions. In fact, union with God is only possible if a person empties himself in his soul. He must cut himself off from everything that is worldly or external. He is not allowed to desire (want) anything. Even if he strives to do God's will, this is proof that he still is not poor and empty enough to be united to God. Only if man has become a "nothing" can God be born in him. If he reaches this condition, it will be possible for him to become one with God experientially.

Meister Eckhart explained that the question of how this "birth of God" in the soul of man happens cannot be answered. He said that it is good that it cannot be answered, for if anyone knew, he would try to produce this union with God by himself, which is not allowed. The passive waiting of not knowing, not being able to do anything, is the prerequisite for "the birth of God" deep in the soul.

Opinions like this spread in the time before the Reformation. These ideas became very popular because people wanted to leave dull scholasticism. We find these ideas, for example, in the Netherlands

connected to the denial of the *filioque* by the Eastern Churches. This led to a view that saw the Spirit as (in fact) superior to the Son. Palamas emphasized the spiritual energies more than the relationship of man with God through Christ. Palamas also ignores most of redemptive history. In fact, the view of Palamas is not biblical, but platonic structured.

9 It is difficult to find literature about Meister Eckhart in English. But see for example: *Meister Eckhart, The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*. Translated and edited by Bernard McGinn and Edmund Colledge. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981). (Re-published in paperback without notes and a foreword by J. O'Donohue as *Meister Eckhart, Selections from His Essential Writings.* (New York, 2005). For an introduction to his thinking, see: *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation.* (New York, 1980).

in the writings of Thomas á Kempis (1380-1471) or in Germany in Pietism. Of course, there were many variations of it.

How do we judge these opinions about union with God in the light of the Holy Scriptures? It is true that the poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3). They who flee from sin and impurity, the "pure in heart," shall see God (Matt. 5:8). We are called as Christians to crucify our egoism—the Bible calls it our "flesh" (Gal. 5:13)—and to put to death the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13). But the Bible also says no to sin, not to creation. We have to deny our egoism, not our created being. To walk in the Spirit does not mean to live apart from our neighbors. Let us remember that the firstfruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:13). In other words, to walk in the Spirit is the opposite of a life apart from other people as the mystics imagined it; we are called to live in relationships. Let us remember the last verse of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer: "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

3.4. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Finally, we mention an opinion about union with God that is very relevant today: union with God as the philosopher Hegel understood it.

Hegel lived from 1770 to 1831.[10] This was the time when the French Revolution took place (1789). This Revolution went under the motto: "No God and No King." On the altar of the Cathedral Notre Dame in Paris a statue of the Goddess of Reason was erected. People came to adore her. The ideas of human rights were advanced—the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

In the year 1788, one year before the French Revolution started, Hegel began to study in Tübingen, a small city in southern Germany. He studied philosophy and classical languages. However, Hegel was

10 We can find this thinking in all of Hegel's works. It emerges already in *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* (1798) (*The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*). Specifically, we find it in: G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). *Phenomenology of Spirit,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), translated by A.V. Miller with analysis of the text and foreword by J.N. Findlay. Another translation of the same work is called: *Phenomenology of Mind.* (London: Harper & Row, 1967), translated by J.B. Baillie.

living in a house where basically only theology students lived. Thus, he was virtually surrounded by theologians and theology.

When the people in Europe heard about the cruel terror in France, they were filled with horror. Not so Hegel. The young student Hegel was fascinated by what he heard from France. To be sure, he also had heard about the murders and the terror. But all of this was not an issue for him. Much more important to him were the *ideas* of the French Revolution, the *thoughts* about liberty, equality, and fraternity. To him they seemed to be good ideas; they seemed to be Christian ideas. Instead of being horrified by the terror in France, Hegel required the French Revolution to be interpreted as a more or less Christian revolution—understood in a dialectical manner. Should the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity be left to the non-Christians? Hegel said, "No." This is good, and we should be glad that values, which up to this point were only taught within the church, were now realized in the world, according to Hegel.

Hegel came to this conclusion: in our days God can be experienced in the world through these ideals. Therefore, Christians should think positively about the French Revolution. Until then, Christians had locked up the Spirit of God in the church. They had forgotten, according to Hegel, that the Spirit of God is a Spirit of humanity. The realization of human rights is a duty for Christians. Consequently, he saw the French Revolution and its ideas, which were soon spread over all of Europe by Napoleon Bonaparte, as the working of the Triune God. For Hegel, the unity of man and God is manifested in carrying out the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity in this world.

About revelation Hegel said the following: God does not reveal Himself through the Holy Scriptures, but through a cultural progression that encompasses all of history. And if one wants to be united to God, he/she must fight for the realization of the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity in this world. We cannot find the truth (only) by reading the Bible. To grasp the truth means to participate actively in the progression of liberation which takes place in history, in Hegel's view.

From the perspective of this progression of liberation, Hegel began to interpret the whole Bible. He taught that the kingdom of God began when the Jews were liberated from the slavery in Egypt. They

conquered a land in which milk and honey were flowing. Step by step they moved toward liberty. This progression towards liberation continued and finally led to the coming of Christ, and then to the Reformation, to the French Revolution, and so on.

Hegel worked out this concept and illustrated it with passages from the gospel according to John. We cannot discuss the details, but we share one example: In the Gospel according to John, Jesus said that he would leave and then send the Holy Spirit. Hegel interpreted this in the following way: When Jesus lived on this earth, His disciples were totally dependent on Him. But now, after the coming of the Spirit, this world is continually being changed, according to the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

It is obvious Hegel did not want to be unchristian with his system. The opposite is the case: His philosophy centers on union with God. For him, this union with God and with Christ is not something static; it is a dynamic progression. It is a dialectic progression which will lead the whole world to liberty, equality, and fraternity, and by this eventually to God.

In Liberation Theology, we find the same basic ideas. Not the reading of the Bible is important in order to know the triune God, but to understand and to grasp the progression of world history. And by participation in this progression man takes part in God and in His love. Hegel did not speak about God's common grace in the world, but about God's common love.

In this progression which encompasses the whole world, the church no longer plays an important role. Also, whether you are a Christian or not is not essential, because every man has a mind and a spirit. And by this human spirit everybody can comprehend God, the Spirit of God, and grasps His love in this world by liberty, equality, and fraternity (or today, sisterhood).

Some Christians, who are oriented to the Reformation might ask why theologians, who do not believe in the Bible any more, call themselves Christians. How can they know what is right and what is wrong? These theologians would give the following answer: We try to find God in the historical progression of liberation because in this progression we become one with God (or with God's Spirit).[11]

11 For instance, G. Kaufman writes that our conceptions of God should

How are we to judge these ideas? It is right that God is not only working in His church. He is the Creator and Lord of the whole world. Nothing happens without His will. This is also true for the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. We read for example in Psalm 104:30: "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth." But we must keep in mind that this is the providential work of the Triune God. He is not spreading His kingdom by this. The spreading of God's kingdom did not happen by being involved in a worldwide progression of liberation, but by preaching the Gospel of Christ. Through this the Spirit of God creates liberation—from sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks explicitly about the distinction between the world and His elect: "I pray not for the world, but for them, which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9; compare John 14:17). Immediately after that He prays: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). And a little bit further: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy Word is truth" (John 17:17).

In light of the Holy Scriptures it is impossible to look for truth in a historical progression. We find truth only in God's infallible, inerrant Word. In this world the Spirit of God is not the Liberator in the sense of the French Revolution. He is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). He "reproves the world of sin [from its greatest bondage], because they believe not on him," and "of righteousness" [in Christ], because "Christ went to his Father, and they see him no more," and "of judgment, because the prince of this world [the greatest tyrant] is judged." From this truth our freedom results, and this will be fulfilled in the glory, in the resurrection, when we will get new

not be guided by "biblical or traditional images" but by a universally accessible ethic of humanization: "The only God we should worship today—the only God we can afford to worship—is the God who will further our humanization, the God who will help to make possible the creation of a universal und humane community." G. Kaufman, *God, Mystery, Diversity—Christian Theology in a pluralistic World*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 29. See also for this concept, S. Mc Fague, *Metaphorical Theology—Models of God in Religious Language*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), passim. Mc Fague, *Models of God—Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), passim.

bodies. This freedom the Triune God has revealed to us in His Word. It is freedom from a life under sin (John 8:32.47; II Cor. 3:17).

4. Some aspects of the covenant in Christ's blood, according to John 13 - 17

Let us now come back to the upper room discourse. What does our Lord say when He prays that the union of Him and the Father shall extend to the believers, whom the Father has given to the Son? Let us remember that everything John has written in this passage is proclaimed just after the institution of the Lord's Supper, which is the fulfillment of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31. In John 13:2 we read: "And supper being ended…." What happened then? The Lord washed the feet of His disciples. By this act, Jesus does not only want to admonish the disciples to love one another. It is not only a repetition of the commandment to love your neighbor (Lev. 19:18). Look at the words with which the passage is introduced:

> Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. […]Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded (John 13:1-3).

That which we read here shows us how the Lord, who is God, comes down from the glory of heaven to do the work of a slave for His own.

A little later the Lord tells the disciples that He has given an example by doing this (John 13:13-15). The love-command already existed in the Old Testament. But here the Lord is speaking about a *new* command. It is *new* because now Christ has come down and has humbled Himself for our salvation (John 13:34.35). In other words, in the hands of Jesus, with which He washed His disciples' feet, we can already see the nails that pierced them on the cross. That is what is *new* about this love.

When Peter refuses to be washed, Jesus says, "*If* I wash thee not,

thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8). We only have a part with Jesus and with His sacrifice of love through His humbling death on the cross. This is the new covenant by which we have a part with Jesus. We only have a part with Him by the gift of His reconciliatory work of love on Calvary.

The way to have a part with this work of salvation is *faith* in Jesus Christ: "Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). Some years later Peter would write that "we might be partakers of the divine nature." And how does this happen? The answer is: "By his great and precious promises" (II Pet. 1:4). This does not mean to be illuminated by godly energies, and it does not mean to experience nothingness in a mystical sense, so that God can be born within us. It also does not mean to be part of a universal progression of history through revolutionary ambitions. Rather, salvation is only through faith, which is rooted in His holy Word. It is faith in God the Father and in God the Son: "This goes beyond fellowship to communion (or participation) and is strictly a union, a joining together that is unbreakable."[12] In this world we experience this union with God the Father and with His Son and with one another through love. In God's covenant the union of God the Father and the Son is extended to us.

Father and Son are of one being, but they never melt together into one person. God the Father and the Son are not identical. There is a distinction between them. However in their being, in their holiness and in their love to one another, they are one. This is what the Lord wants to explain here: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20).[13] The apostle Paul writes: "In him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." In the next verse he adds: "And ye are complete in him" (Col. 2:9.10).

It is important to understand that Christians always remain creatures. They are different from God. God and man are never melded together. Also the term *perichoresis* as a description for our union with God may not be overemphasized (to say it carefully).

12 Quotation from: R. Letham, *Union with Christ in Scripture, History and Theology.* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), 97.

13 See about this issue elaborately, D. Engelsma, *Trinity and Covenant. God as Holy Family*. (Jenison: RFPA, 2006), passim.

The union is an asymmetric one: God the Father extends His union to us, not the other way around. Calvin never used this term for our union with Christ.[14] Yet Calvin teaches that "we pass from our own to his nature."[15]

This is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. His work is seen in doing the will of God and in love to the Father: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that

14 See J. McLean, *Perichoresis, Theosis and Union with Christ in the Thought of John Calvin*. In: *Reformed, Theological Review* 68:2 (2009), 130-141; M.S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation, Union with Christ.* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 276.

15 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Romans 6:5.* [*In eius naturam ex nostra demigramus"* Calvin, CStA 5.1, 308,3f.]. See also: J. Calvin's Commentary on I Corinthians 12:12: "The name of Christ is used here instead of the Church […] inasmuch as he calls the Church *Christ;* for Christ confers upon us this honor—that he is willing to be esteemed and recognised, not in himself merely, but also in his members. ["Christi nomen in locum ecclesiae substituitur...ecclesiam vocat Christum: hoc enim honore nos dignatur Christus, ut nolit tantum in se, sed etiam in membris suis censeri et recognosci" CO 49, 501 = CR 77, 501.] Calvin writes in his *Institutes*: "For we await salvation from him not because he appears to us afar off, but because he makes us, ingrafted into his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself." (*Institutes,*3.2.24).

In his (commendable) defrayal of N.T. Wright's ideas, Michael S. Horton makes the statement that in the thought of Calvin justification has priority ahead of union with Christ "that the forensic declaration is the basis for the transformative effects of this union." Michael S. Horton, "*Calvin's Theology of Union with Christ and the Double Grace. Modern Reception and Contemporary Possibilities*." In: J. Todd Billings & I. John Hesselink (eds.), *Calvin's Theology and Its Reception. Disputes, Developments and New Possibilities.* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 72-94, quoted from 90. See also Horton's *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ.* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), passim, specially 104, 105. Horton's interpretation of Calvin is identical with his own conviction. (See: Michael S: Horton, *The Christian Faith. A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 597. In this writer's view this should be reviewed, because in Calvin's theology justification has (logical) priority to sanctification. But both justification and sanctification are rooted in union with Christ.

loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21; 15:10).

After the Lord got up (John 14:31) and walked with His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane, He instructed His disciples in what it means to live in God's covenant in this world. He taught them how to abide in Him. And if a man abides not in him, he is cast forth as a branch (John 15:1-7).[16] Christ teaches that we abide in Him through His Word: "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3.4).[17]

It is obvious Christ does not speak about mystics or energies, but about faith and obedience to His infallible, inerrant Word. In this context the Lord calls His disciples His friends:

> Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you (John 15:14-16).

To abide in Christ in this world is not easy, for Jesus spoke about persecutions and troubles (John 15:18 - 16:4). Later, Paul says that they received the gift "*in the behalf of Christ,* are given not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29, emphasis added).[18] Nevertheless, Jesus promised that in this world of tribulation we will not remain alone but will receive the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 16:5-33).

16 Referring to this passage, H. Hanko speaks about the "organic sense" of the covenant. *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace*. (Grand Rapids: RFPA, 1988), 117.

17 It seems that the term *abide* for the relationship between God and His people is already used (prophesied) in the Septuagint. For instance in Isaiah 30:18. The beautitude "blessed are all they that wait for him" is translated in the LXX in the following way: "Blessed are those, who abide in him" (μακάριοι οἱ ἐμμένοντες ἐν αὐτῳ). See also Is. 8:17 (LXX). Confer also the negative use of *abide* in Jer. 38 (31):32 (LXX): ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου.

18 See also 2 Corinthians 4:10.

Summary

At the outset, we made the observation that the term "covenant" is rarely used in the New Testament. We asked, "What is the reason that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the New Testament, did not speak about the covenant very often?"

We cannot give a definite answer. Maybe the reason is that during the first century the term "covenant" was often associated with the Jewish people. The term "covenant" indicated too much of a national limitation. The term "covenant" was widespread among the Jews of this time. A national limitation was, of course, abolished for the church of the New Testament.

Whatever the reason for the rare use of the *term* "covenant" is, the *reality* of the covenant is found everywhere in the New Testament. Let us remember the statement that describes the meaning of the covenant in the Old Testament. We find the same statement in the New Testament: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." When we read this statement, for example, in 2 Corinthians 6:16, we see that the apostle is now using this expression together with union with God: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*" (emphasis added).

"Ye are the temple of God, and I will dwell in them and walk in them...." This statement (see Lev. 26:11, 12) refers to the statement in which the Lord explains the essence of the covenant in the upper room discourse: "I am in my Father, und you in me and I in you" (John 14:20; 17:21). Now we are temples of God.

The same statement, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," we find also in the last book of the Bible, Revelation. There we read: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). Here is the covenant of God fulfilled in glory.[19]

19 Generally it seems more appropriate not to use the term "eschatology" but to speak about "regeneration" or "fulfillment in glory" or "consummation" of the covenant. The term "eschatology" emerged for the first time in the seventeenth century, as used by the Lutheran theologian Abraham Calov.

When our Lord instituted the Lord's Supper and spoke about the new covenant, this has enormous weight for the whole New Testament. If we pay attention to the explanation of this covenant established in Christ's blood, the Lord describes this covenant as "union with God," "to be one with God the Father and with His Son." Later the apostles would use the phrases "to be in Christ" and "Christ in you."

What all these phrases mean and how His elect can experience this covenant our Lord explains in the upper room discourse. It becomes obvious that by God's covenant established in Christ Christians will not be substantially deified. They will not be enlightened by visions of light or receive godly energies. They will not become mystics and empty their soul for the birth of God in their souls. And they will not find the union with God by participating in a historic progression and achieving liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Instead, in the covenant that Christ has established through His own blood His elect are brought into union with God the Father and the Son through faith in His work on Calvary, through hope in His unbreakable promises, and through serving each other in love. Our covenant relationship to God the Father and to God the Son is not (only) related to something in the past. Much more, it contains our life now by faith, hope, and love to the "living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). Let us not forget that Christ's explanation of His covenant begins with the washing of the feet of His disciples. And it ends with the last request in the prayer of our Lord before He crossed the Brook Kidron, which is about love: "And I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

God's eternal love is the fulfillment of the covenant, which the Father has with the Son and which our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ has established through His blood in order to extend that union to us, to those whom the Father has given to His only begotten Son. ●

Before that theologians used the term *de Novissimis* (literally "on the new things; on the renewal").

John Calvin Research Bibliography

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#3: Calvin's Doctrine of Revelation, Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Exposition.

Related Topics: God's revelation in creation
God's revelation in sacred Scripture
Calvin's doctrine of Scripture
Ecclesiastical tradition
Man's receptivity to the knowledge of God
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Review Article

Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology. Ed. Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. Pp. 261, $32.00 (paper). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

Those Reformed preachers, theologians, and laymen with a philosophical bent—and there are some—will enjoy this book immensely.

Those without training in and inclination towards philosophy will profit from plowing through this sometimes dense and difficult work.

The subject is the freedom of the will, especially of the fallen, unregenerated sinner, according to early, post-Reformation Reformed theology. The book examines the philosophical and theological thinking on the subject of Zanchi, Junius, Gomarus, Voetius, Turretin, and de Moor. Of great interest and value are the extensive quotations of these significant Reformed theologians on the topic of the freedom and bondage of the will.

A Certain Freedom of the Will

The purpose of the book, as it was also the concern of the early Reformed theologians, is to demonstrate that Reformed theology does not deny, or even weaken, a certain fundamentally important sense of the freedom of the human will. This freedom is not gainsaid by Reformed theology's doctrines of predestination, providence, and the inability of the will of the unregenerated sinner to choose the good.

The book, thus, defends the Reformed faith against the charge of "determinism" lodged against it by Rome and the Arminians. At the same time, the book proves that full human responsibility, especially for the sin of unbelief, or choosing against God and His Christ, is orthodox Reformed doctrine.

From the treatment of the disputed issue by the six prominent representatives of Reformed Christianity mentioned above, the book demonstrates that the Reformed faith has always maintained the freedom of the human will, including the will of the unregenerated sinner, in one important, indeed essential respect. The sinner chooses against

God and for iniquity freely, that is, without *coercion* on the part of God. The sinner is not forced, against his will, to reject God and to choose his life of lawlessness.

Neither is the elect sinner forced, against his will, to believe on God and to choose a life of obedience to the law. The spontaneous freedom of the will of the elect sinner that God has liberated from the bondage of sin is beautifully confessed by the Canons of Dordt:

> When God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he…infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions (Canons, III/IV.11).

Article 12 of Canons, III/IV adds:

> Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but, in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore, also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received.

No hint of coercion here!

Coercion is neither the meaning nor the implication of Reformed theology's confession of the sovereignty of God.

Zanchi called this freedom the sinner's "natural freedom" (67). He explained: "freedom from coercion is proper to the human will and inseparable from it" (70). Zanchi's definition of "free choice" was Reformed orthodoxy on the subject:

> Free choice is the faculty of the soul, free from all coercion, called "will" which, following the judgment of the intellect, out of itself either longs for or rejects all things proposed to it, both the desirable and the rejectable (73).

Turretin agreed. The choice of the sinner, as the choice of the human in every possible state, whether that of unfallen Adam, or of the regenerated child of God, who still has a depraved nature, or of

the perfected saint in glory, is characterized by "an immunity from coercion and physical necessity" (185).

de Moor described this freedom of the human will after the fall as "rational spontaneity" (208). de Moor affirmed this freedom in the context of the Reformed confession of fallen man's total depravity. Thus, the Reformed theologian indicated both that total depravity does not imply coercion and that this affirmation of a certain freedom of the will does not weaken the doctrine of total depravity:

> Although man in [his]fallen state is so sold to evil, that he cannot not sin, still he does not stop sinning most freely and with the greatest willingness…which is sufficient to speak of freedom. It can thus be affirmed in truth, that every man always has free choice, also in the fallen state (209).

Not to be overlooked, as indeed the most important element of the controversy over the freedom of the will, is what de Moor added immediately: "Nevertheless, with respect to the spiritual good it can be affirmed that free choice is wounded and lost, while willing that good is not free for the sinner" (209).

Unintended Testimony to the Genuine Reformed Faith

The purpose of the editors of the book is to prove that Reformed theology in its earliest proponents did not deny this carefully defined, and restricted, freedom of the human will, despite their confession of divine sovereignty in predestination and providence and despite their confession also of total depravity. Nevertheless, the book is every bit as significant on account of its demonstration that early Reformed theology confessed God's sovereignty in providence regarding all human actions, including sinful actions; God's sovereignty in predestination regarding salvation and damnation; and the total inability of the unregenerated sinner to choose or do the good.

The freedom of choice that Reformed theology has always insisted upon is no weakening of the confession of divine sovereignty or of the confession of total depravity.

This unintended message of the book is as important for Reformed churches and theologians today as is the intended message that the fallen sinner sins without coercion. Indeed, in view of the weakening

of the confession of divine sovereignty and of the confession of total depravity in Reformed churches today, the unintended message is more important.

Zanchi spoke for all the Reformed theologians cited in the book when he stated that

> although they [our wills] can be coerced by nobody to will something involuntarily…still because they depend on God, there is nothing they can will or not will but what by God's eternal decree was determined that they would will or not will; nothing they can will or not will, unless when by the hidden action and hand of God they are bent and moved towards willing or rejecting it (64, 65).

Junius affirmed that God "ordained [the fall of Adam]…according to his eternal decree and counsel" (104).

As they all confessed the sovereignty of God with regard to all human willing, so also did all of these representative Reformed theologians confess total depravity as the condition of the fallen sinner. This total depravity renders the fallen, unregenerated sinner utterly incapable of choosing the good and enslaves him to the willing of the evil.

Zanchi declared that the unregenerated sinner "cannot act otherwise than to sin." Acting includes willing. Man "after the Fall…is made…slave of sin" (67).

Likewise, Gomarus taught the spiritual and moral necessity of the unregenerated human to sin: "the unregenerate are not able to do anything but sin" (132).

That the sinner sins freely, that is, without coercion, in no wise, for Turretin, derogates from the truth that "the sinner is so enslaved by evil that he cannot but sin" (180). Indeed, adds Turretin, man's choice, particularly his choice of evil, "is determined by God and… is always under subjection to him. For this freedom [that is essential to human nature] is not absolute and independent or uncontrolled… which belongs to God alone, but it is limited and dependent" (180).

de Moor denied that the sinner's will is characterized by "absolute indifference," that is, that it is not determined either by God or by its own depravity, but is sovereignly free, to choose the good or the evil, as the sinner himself decides. Such a doctrine of the will—"absolute

indifference"—is that of Pelagius, Roman Catholicism, and Arminians (206).

According to de Moor, the fallen sinner's "rational willingness," that is, freedom from coercion, does not rule out "the necessity of dependence on the divine will," or the "moral necessity to sin," that is, the total depravity of his nature, which makes him a slave to sin (208, 209).

From the very beginning, in its earliest representatives, Reformed theology has rejected the doctrine that freedom of choice "consists in absolute independence from God": "The freedom of man is not so absolute as to make him independent of God" (218).

Implicit Repudiation of Common Grace

What the editors of the book never notice, much less call attention to, is that the earliest representatives of Reformed orthodoxy, who evidently are acknowledged authorities for the right understanding of the Reformed faith, repudiate the contemporary doctrine of common grace as it has been adopted by the Christian Reformed Church and as it is widely heralded by many Reformed churches and theologians as a bright and shining jewel adorning the crown of Reformed doctrine.

The Reformed orthodoxy of this book utterly repudiates common grace in the two, main features of this contemporary heresy.

First, the Reformed orthodoxy of Zanchi, Junius, and the others condemns the teaching that the fallen, unregenerated sinner is able to perform good works. Reformed orthodoxy, as cited and analyzed in the book, clearly and emphatically judges that the unregenerated sinner is a slave to sin, is incapable of any good, and necessarily sins, with a "moral necessity," in all that he thinks, wills, and performs.

Zanchi does not allow for any good on the part of the unregenerated: "The impious…cannot act otherwise than to sin" (67).

Junius states that the effect of the disobedience of Adam upon the human race is that "the image of God was totally obliterated and was followed and replaced by an incredible disorder and corruption of human nature." The effect upon fallen, unregenerated mankind is a "necessity towards the bad" (104). The depraved condition of every human who is not regenerated is such that "the unregenerate necessarily sins, not even being able to will or to do anything [else] until by the

grace of regeneration he does something that is not polluted by some fault" (105).

With appeal to Romans 14:23 ("whatsoever is not of faith is sin"), Junius judges that they "err who grant to natural man some time, in which he is able not to sin" (105).

The editors correctly explain Junius' judgment that the unregenerate can only sin: "All that he [the unregenerated sinner—DJE] does—though freely chosen—is not directed to God" (122). Only regeneration enables and empowers the elect sinner to will and to do what is good (123ff.)

Gomarus was one with his colleagues concerning the total depravity of the unregenerated sinner, as surprises no one who is familiar with the third and fourth heads of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt. In an academic thesis expressing his doctrine, Gomarus confessed the following:

> Since before the Fall original justice was the source and principle of every spiritual and truly good act, this [source] being taken away, no acts flow from there anymore—unless somebody would dare to claim that an effect can exist without a cause. And since a contrary habit succeeded it, there is no doubt that whatever corrupted human being does without grace, it is hostile and adverse to God. Because "the mind of the flesh…is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Rom. 8:7; "every imagination and the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Gen. 6:5; "The natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. 2:14. In Eph. 2:1 and Col. 2:13, the Holy Spirit declares that all human beings are *dead by nature*, and as there is in a dead man no potency to act unto life, so neither is in the unregenerate a natural potency to perform any good spiritual work, unless that which is above its nature fashions a new intellect and heart (132).

Against the contemporary cavil of the defender of common grace, that by speaking of "*spiritual* work" Gomarus implies that the unregenerated sinner is able to perform a truly good work of another kind, for instance, good in the realm of civil society, the response is that by "good *spiritual* work" Gomarus refers to any and every work that is

truly good, in the judgment of God, whether the work is performed in the realm of the church or in the sphere of civil society. The contrast is not between a good work in the realm of the spiritual and a good work in the realm of civil society. But the contrast is between a work that is truly good, because it is spiritual, and a work that is not good, because it is not spiritual, but carnal, even though in the sphere of everyday life the work meets with the approval of humans.

The Christian's giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty in Christ's name is a "good spiritual work." An unbelieving philanthropist's giving thousands, or even millions, of dollars to charity with no regard for Jesus Christ, whether out of an ignoble desire for glory or from a noble, natural human feeling of pity for the needy, is not a "good spiritual work." The act of love towards needy humans on the part of the philanthropist is not a good work because it is not spiritual.

Gomarus himself applies the truth of total depravity, that he has just confessed, to the seeming good works of the "noble heathen." This is the very example appealed to by the defenders in our day of the performance of genuine, if inferior, good works by virtue of a common grace of God.

> Since good works follow justification and presuppose an infused faith and love, it is clear how the glorious deeds (as they are commonly entitled) of Scipio [a 'noble' Roman pagan—DJE] and other heathens must be judged. For they lack the pure source…namely, faith…and their goal…namely the honor of God (132, 133).

Anticipating the objection to this confession of total depravity, particularly regarding the seeming good works of the "noble heathen," that is, in fact, the objection of the Christian Reformed Church of the common grace synod of 1924, Gomarus then immediately adds this challenge: "How can anyone dignify these [works], I ask, to call them good?" (133)

This question, not of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the twenty-first century but *of Gomarus* in the seventeenth century, the Christian Reformed Church and all other advocates of the theory that, without justification and sanctification, the ungodly perform good works, answer at their leisure, that is, never.

Turrettin too denied that the fallen, unregenerated sinner has any

ability whatever to desire or do what is good: "no powers to do the good are left," that is, in the unregenerated sinner (199).

Bernardinus de Moor, the last of the orthodox, early Reformed theologians surveyed in the book is, if anything, more vehement than the others in confessing total depravity as the utter inability of the unregenerated sinner to perform good works: "Man in fallen state is so sold to evil, that he cannot not sin" (209).

Implicit Rejection of the "Well-meant Offer"

The second prominent feature of the modern doctrine of common grace enthusiastically espoused by almost all Reformed and Presbyterian churches and theologians that the book unintentionally exposes as contrary to the Reformed tradition is the notion of the dependence of the gospel upon the will of the sinner. This notion is the necessary, inescapable implication of the "well-meant offer." The idea of the "well-meant offer" is an essential aspect of the theory of common grace as the theory is held by most Reformed churches in the twenty-first century. Most boldly proclaim and stoutly defend the offer. The defense is mostly the slander that those who reject the doctrine of a "well-meant offer" are "hyper-Calvinists."

But if God is gracious in the gospel to all hearers alike, sincerely desiring the salvation of all, and, in this grace, well-meaningly offers salvation to all, the efficacy of salvation is the will, or choice, of the sinner. And all sinners must posses the ability to accept the offer, as also the ability to reject it. This is precisely the heresy of the supposed "absolute indifference" of the will of the fallen sinner, which all the early Reformed theologians cited in the book reject and condemn as the false doctrine of Pelagius and Arminius.

Concerning this alleged ability of the will of the fallen sinner to choose Christ and salvation, Zanchi taught, according to the editors themselves, "By the one decisive choice for sin by Adam, the possibility to choose the good was lost once and for all. Man as a sinner is considered a slave of sin." "After the Fall man is only able to choose the bad out of himself." Carefully to be observed is what Zanchi added, in concluding the preceding sentence: "…and to choose the good only due to the renewing work of God" (91). The only power that enables and effects the sinner's choosing of Christ and salvation

is God's "renewing" work, that is, regeneration—the particular, saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Junius "states that man in the state of corruption cannot do but evil, because the source of his deeds is not good." In fallen mankind, there is no capability for choosing the good "because only things done with a will directed to God are ultimately good." Only regeneration restores to the human will the ability to choose what is good (125).

Two important truths are evident in the theology of these representatives of the earliest Reformed orthodoxy. First, the unregenerated sinner has no ability to choose what is good. This good is God, His Christ, and salvation. Second, only regenerating grace bestows the ability to choose the good. And such is the nature of this grace that it effectually causes the fallen, but now regenerated, sinner to choose the good. Grace does not merely put the sinner in the position of being able to choose for or against God.

It is incontrovertibly evident to all that here is no room whatever, not only for any natural ability of the fallen sinner to choose the good, but also for the restoration of the ability to choose the good by any power other than regenerating grace. Nor is there any room for the teaching that God's restoration of the ability of the will to choose the good is a grace that merely enables the sinner to choose between the good—God—and the evil—Satan—as the sinner himself sovereignly pleases and decides.

As for the theology of Gomarus on the issue in question, the editors acknowledge that Gomarus taught that after the fall "regarding free choice in spiritual matters [and the alleged choice of the 'well-meant offer' is surely concerning a 'spiritual matter'—DJE] nothing at all is left." "No free choice is left at all concerning spiritual matters" (140, 141). "Free choice," for Gomarus, "is only an idle name" (141). Therefore, "Gomarus is very clear about the inability of a human being to free himself from being a sinner" (142).

Turretin wrote that "although human free choice is always in man as an essential property, no powers to do the good are left" (199). "Free choice," in Turretin, is freedom from coercion. And *doing* the good includes *choosing* the good. In fallen mankind, according to Turretin, is absolutely no power to choose the good, that is, God and anything and everything else for God's sake. According to the editors,

in these views Turretin "is a true representative of the Golden Age of Reformed scholasticism" (200).

The doctrine of de Moor was that "morally and especially with regard to spiritual goods he [fallen man—DJE] is a slave, and he sins necessarily" (209). de Moor wrote that "in the state of sin, man is morally bound to doing evil" (228).

Summing up the theology of all the early Reformed theologians studied in this book, the editors declare:

> after the Fall…man can no longer do the good or love God…The Reformed authors treated in this volume take pains [to confess]…the disastrous slavery of sin by which man's will is bound (accounting for the factual impossibility of doing the good, since we can only do the good by loving and obeying God) (235).

The Reformed tradition, as set forth in this book, has also this against the theory of the "well-meant offer" of the gospel: The theory of the "well-meant offer" has God willing two contradictory things. In His decree of predestination, He wills the damnation of some sinful humans; by His sincere desire of common grace, He wills the salvation of these same sinful humans. The will of God is contradictory.

Reformed theology in its "golden age" rejected the doctrine that God's will is contradictory. According to Junius, as expounded by the editors of the book, "God is not free to will contradictory things at the same moment. (For example, he cannot will that at the same time I am sick and I am healthy)." The example could just as well have been, "he cannot will that at the same time I am saved and I am lost."

In a daring statement, exposing themselves to the ferocious charge by the contemporary Reformed community of theologians that they are "rationalists," the editors immediately add, "From a logical point of view it is impossible to will two [contradictory] things at once" (119).

Logical?

Does the Reformed tradition actually hold that the revelation of God in the Bible is logical?

The Reformed *tradition*?

The Reformed Tradition regarding Common Grace

The conclusion is that the rejection of a common grace of God, which both weakens the condition of the total depravity of fallen mankind and empowers the unregenerated sinner to accept a "well-meant offer" at the sinner's sovereign pleasure, is the Reformed tradition. The *rejection* of this common grace is the Reformed tradition. This rejection of a common grace of God is not only biblical and creedal. It is also the tradition of Zanchi, Junius, Gomarus, Voetius, Turretin, and de Moor.

When the Christian Reformed Church in its synod of 1924 grounded its novel doctrine of common grace in the Reformed tradition "of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology," "from ancient times," and "our Reformed Fathers from ancient times," the synod lied.

When today, Reformed churches, institutions, and theologians haughtily dismiss the Protestant Reformed objection to the theology of common grace by an appeal to the Reformed tradition in the time of its "golden age," they either show their ignorance, or demonstrate that they are the legitimate offspring of their prevaricating fathers.

By the same token, in their defense of the doctrine of particular, sovereign grace and of the total depravity of the unregenerated sinner (which very much includes the utter inability to will the good that is supposedly presented in a "well-meant offer of the gospel"), the Protestant Reformed Churches may, and should, add to their claim to be biblical and creedal the words, "while it also appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology that our Reformed writers from the past favored this view."

That is, what the Protestant Reformed Churches confess is the Reformed tradition, going back to the "golden age" of Reformed theology.

Weaknesses of the Book

Valuable as the work is, for the reasons indicated above, and honest as the editors are in acknowledging that the Reformed tradition denies the ability of the fallen sinner in his unregenerated condition to choose the good, who is God, nevertheless the editors display and promote serious weaknesses. For one thing, they are

critical of Martin Luther's great work, *The Bondage of the Will*. Regardless that they seem to countenance Luther's "religious motivation," directing their criticism against Luther's insistence on God's sovereignty regarding the human will, such are the gospel-truth and the surpassing worth of Luther's grand book that all such criticism is both mistaken and eventually fatal to the essential truths, that the will of the sinner is morally and spiritually a slave of Satan and sin, and that the will of the sinner is dependent upon the sovereignty of God in predestination.

The editors lead the churches of the Reformation seriously astray when they state, "on theological grounds it is not recommendable, therefore, to take Luther's polemic against Erasmus as a norm for proper Reformation theology" (236).

Such was the significance of this book for the Reformation and such was, and is, the importance of the truth it defends and proclaims for the Reformation's gospel of grace that the criticism of it by the editors of *Reformed Thought on Freedom* is an attack on the Reformation itself and a fatal concession to Rome and its gospel of salvation by the will of man.

In connection with their criticism of Luther, the editors err also by positing a significant difference between Luther and Calvin on the issue of the bondage of the will.

The fundamental truths regarding the human will are, first, that it is completely dependent upon the sovereignty of God in predestination, whether the decree of election that the will shall be liberated by grace to believe in Jesus Christ, or the decree of reprobation that the will, enslaved in sin by the ordination of God, shall remain in the slavery of sin and indeed be ever more deeply enmeshed in this slavery. The second fundamental truth regarding the human will is that the will of every unregenerated child of Adam is a slave of Satan and in bondage to sin, incapable of choosing God and the good.

In these two fundamental truths concerning the human will, Luther and Calvin were one, as Calvin himself, who should have known, acknowledged more than once.

To their credit, despite their having warned that it is "necessary to distinguish between Luther and Calvin on this matter," namely, the matter of the bondage of the will, the editors nevertheless acknowledge

the oneness of the Reformers regarding at least one of the fundamental truths concerning the human will.

> Luther and Calvin combated the idea that man is free to work out his own salvation, although with divine help. The moral and spiritual consequences of sin are at stake, and in this respect the Reformers rightly teach the total corruption of man (236).

A third criticism of the editors is their analysis of the teaching of the Reformed tradition regarding the will as allowing for, indeed propounding, "contingency" (241, 242). "Contingency" is conditionality. "Contingency" is some dependency of God upon the will of man. In the sphere of salvation, which is the subject of the book, contingency affirms a dependence of God upon the will of the sinner in the matter of salvation.

Reformed theology denies contingency. Reformed theology denies contingency not only in the matter of salvation, but also with regard to the entirety of the relationship of God and humans. The writers quoted and analyzed in this book reject contingency.

It is one thing to affirm that God's sovereignty does not only not negate human responsibility, but also exercises itself in such a (mysterious) manner as to establish and maintain man's full responsibility.

It is another, entirely different, thing to affirm that divine sovereignty is contingent upon man's will and action. A contingent sovereignty is not sovereignty at all. If God's will is contingent, man's will is sovereign.

Reformed theology affirms the former. The book establishes, explains, and defends this affirmation.

Reformed theology denies the latter.

It always has. ●

Book Reviews

Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014. Pp. 560, $44.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.]

When I read a book intended for written review, I aim to receive some personal benefit from reading the book, and to find reasons why to recommend it to my audience. To do this, I begin with every intention of reading the book from cover to cover.

Occasionally I find that neither of these goals will be achieved. In the case of the volume under review, by the time I was half finished, I decided that to continue reading would be to take time away from more profitable tasks, so I laid it aside.

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The title, *Ancient Israel's History*, catches the eye of anyone interested in Old Testament history. Put me in that category. When I selected this book to review, and began reading it, I did so eagerly. But the subtitle *An Introduction to Issues and Sources* is intended to inform the reader that this book is not a *study of the history* of ancient Israel, but a *study of the study of the history* of ancient Israel.

The editors' goal is "to provide a current state of research on issues relative to the history of ancient Israel" (v). The book is a "portal into the study of ancient Israel's history" in which is set forth the "major sources relevant to ancient Israel's history" and an evaluation of "key issues of interpretation required of a critical study of that history" (4). In other words, each chapter faces these questions: what are scholars saying about Israel's history? On what basis, or from what sources, are they saying these things? And is what they are saying reasonable and relevant, in light of evidence that we have today?

Why the history of *ancient Israel*? One could hope the reason would be that this history is the *church's* history, *redemptive* history, *covenantal* history. Rather, "it is the essential starting point for discerning more than two thousand years of human culture and history, for perceiving what remains today that is most important, and for preserving what we

dare not forget as we prepare...for the future" (4). Because both Judaism and Christianity find their roots in ancient Israel, its history is foundational to Western history and thought, society and culture.

Fourteen contributors lead the reader through different eras of Israel's history, from the beginning of biblical history as recorded in the book of Genesis through the intertestamentary period. Some chapters treat material that covers centuries - such as chapter 1, "The Genesis Narratives," chapter 2, "The Exodus and Wilderness Narratives," and chapter 5, "The Judges and the Early Iron Age." Others treat a smaller historical timeframe; chapters 10-12 each treat periods of no more than a century. And others, such as chapter 3 ("Covenant and Treaty in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East") treat a topic rather than a historical era.

As the reader would imagine, each contributor has "demonstrated expertise on the subject matter of that chapter." The contributors are all professors in seminaries such as Asbury, Ashland, Denver, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminaries, or in colleges such as the University of Paris, Colorado Christian University, Point Loma Nazarene University, Northwestern College, and Wheaton College.

One who wants to know what scholars are saying about the history of ancient Israel, and are interested about this history because it is foundational to Western thought, will find this to be a scholarly tome that achieves its intended purpose.

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For two basic reasons this book has no value to me, and I judge it will have no value to the readers of the *PRTJ*.

First, the intended purpose of the book is not relevant to me.

I do enjoy and profit from the study of the Old Testament and intertestamentary period. Such study requires one both to read the Scriptures, and to read the writings of other men who have studied the Old Testament and intertestamentary period.

But to study what men are saying as they study the Old Testament, and what difficulties they encounter in that study, is not my interest. In my judgment, the editors and contributors of this book approach the study of Israel's history as a purely academic matter, rather than a sacred matter. Their interest is not in *redemptive* history.

Second, I reject several presumptions which underlie the

scholarship reflected in this book. These presumptions are not incidental to the book's purpose; they are its foundation. To engage in the kind of scholarship that this book reflects requires one to make these presumptions. I do not charge every contributor with making these presumptions personally, because that would be to say more than I can demonstrate. However, the scholarship about which every contributor writes rests on these presumptions. These presumptions give rise to the "key issues of interpretation required of a critical study of that history" (4).

The first presumption is that higher criticism of the Scriptures is legitimate. Among other things, this means that one must not assume that the events recorded in Scripture actually happened as Scripture indicates. If one cannot prove by archeological evidence and the historical documents of the nations surrounding Israel that Scripture's presentation is accurate, one's skepticism is justified (in the mind of the higher critic). As a result, the historicity of Genesis 1-11 is undermined (30-35); the flood of Noah's day is said to have been a localized flood in southern Mesopotamia (33); the quest for the historical Abraham continues (39); that Israel's settlement in Canaan was indeed due to a conquest is denied (127-128); the destruction of Jericho's walled fortress by an unskilled army is explained by odd theories (possibly erosion of the walls; after all, Jordan was flooding its banks, 143ff.); and it is asserted that Saul and David were tribal chiefs rather than national kings (190), and that David used devious means to take the kingdom from Saul (201).

I am uninterested in this. The Old Testament Scriptures are not myth; they are not merely historical in the sense that they give insights into Jewish culture and thought at the time. They are divinely inspired history, part of the inerrant and infallible Word of God, which must be taken seriously.

The second presumption that I reject is that God has covenant*s*. Chapter 3 uses the plural, thus denying that God has one covenant. Furthermore, I reject the idea that God's one covenant is a divinely negotiated treaty with humans that so resembles the agreements made by men with men, and the treaties ratified by nations with nations, that we can study those agreements to understand God's covenant.

The third presumption regards the manner of dating historical events. Today, "BCE" is the politically correct way to date Old Testament events. But through the history of ancient Israel God is preparing the way for Jesus to come as the Messiah. Why can we not use the traditional "BC" in a book like this? And I have no use for a dating system that includes a Late Bronze Age, a Middle Bronze Age, an Early Iron Age, and a later Iron Age, all of which presuppose that the world evolved. This dating system is not incidental to the book; it underlies the archeological evidence that the scholars are studying (cf. 143ff. as one example).

Those who approach the Scriptures as the divinely inspired record of God's redemption of His covenant people have more profitable things to do than read this book. ●

Federal Vision: A Canadian Reformed Pastor's Perspective, by Wes Bredenhof. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2014. Pp. 43, $4.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

This booklet is a vain and misleading attempt by a Canadian Reformed minister to dissociate his churches and "liberated" Reformed theology in general from the contemporary heresy of the Federal Vision. "Vain" and "misleading" are euphemisms.

The attempt is vain for several reasons. First, the leading proponents of the covenant theology that calls itself "federal," that is, covenant, "vision" themselves inform the Reformed churches that their covenant theology is simply the development of the covenant theology of the "liberated" Reformed theologians, Klaas Schilder, Benne Holwerda, C. Veenhof, and others; of the Canadian Reformed Churches; and of the "liberated" Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the world.

Second, critics of the Federal Vision, who themselves share the covenant theology of the "liberated" and the Federal Vision and, therefore, are favorably disposed towards the Federal Vision recognize and publicly acknowledge that the heart of the Federal Vision is the covenant theology of Klaas Schilder and the "liberated."

Such a friendly critic is Carl Robbins. At a high-powered conference—the "Knox Colloquium"—the purpose of which was the examination of the Federal Vision, Robbins announced:

> I've finally grasped that he [John Barach, a leading advocate of the Federal Vision—DJE] is simply re-stating the distinctive [covenant theology] of the "Liberated" Reformed Churches. Therefore, it must fairly be pointed out that Pastor Barach cannot be charged with "theological novelty," for his views were first propounded by Klaas Schilder in the 1940s and (before him) Calvin Seminary Professor William W. Heyns from the early 1900s. In fact, Pastor Barach has simply and faithfully re-stated those covenantal understandings (*The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*, Knox Theological Seminary, 2004, 31, 32).

Third, a scholarly examination of the Federal Vision reveals that the fundamental theology of the Federal Vision is its doctrine of the covenant and that the Federal Vision's doctrine of the covenant is essentially that of the "liberated."

What the Federal Vision does that makes such "liberated" theologians as Wes Bredenhof anxious before the world of Reformed churches is *develop* "liberated" covenant theology to its logical conclusion, which conclusion was always clearly implied; bring out, with honesty, into the open what "liberated" covenant theology in the past liked to obscure, namely, that "liberated" covenant theology is inherently the denial of all the doctrines of grace confessed by the Canons of Dordt *with regard specifically to salvation by and in the covenant*; and express the inescapable implications of "liberated" theology's denial that election applies to and governs the covenant and its salvation.

The Federal Vision is the right, necessary, inevitable development of the covenant theology of the "liberated" Reformed. The Federal Vision is a doctrine of the *covenant*—not fundamentally a doctrine of theonomy; of postmillennialism; or even of justification, but of the covenant, as the name of the distinctive theology informs everyone. "Federal" means 'covenant." The theology that Bredenhof is supposed to critique in his booklet is a certain, definite doctrine of the *covenant*. Any legitimate, worthwhile,

honest critique of the Federal Vision must examine and judge its doctrine of the covenant.

Such a critique of the Federal Vision will recognize that the covenant doctrine of the Federal Vision is that of the "liberated" Reformed in its thoroughly developed form. The Federal Vision is a doctrine of the covenant that cuts the covenant, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation loose from God's eternal decree of election. The Federal Vision is a covenant doctrine that has God graciously promising His covenant and its salvation to all baptized children of believers alike and establishing His covenant of grace, in some manner of other, whether "externally" or "legally," with all the children alike. The Federal Vision is a covenant doctrine that makes the covenant, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation *conditional*, that is, dependent upon the child's faith, *as a condition that he must fulfill*.

All of this is distinctive "liberated" covenant theology, developed by Klaas Schilder and other Reformed theologians in the Netherlands against, not only Abraham Kuyper, but also the prevailing covenant doctrine of the Reformed churches of the Secession of 1834. All of this is distinctively "liberated" covenant theology as refined and defended in controversy, first by the heretical preachers, Pieters and Kreulen, in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the 1800s, then by the "liberated" in the Netherlands in the early 1940s, and finally by the proponents of "liberated" covenant theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1950s, resulting in schism in these churches.

According to the "liberated," in baptism God graciously promises His covenant and its salvation to all the infants alike. But the realization of the promise is conditioned upon the child's faith. In baptism, there is a beginning of the establishment of the covenant with, and, in some sense, a beginning of the gracious gift of covenant salvation to, all the children alike. Different "liberated" theologians have exhausted both the Dutch and English languages to express *how* the sacrament of baptism is a beginning of covenant salvation, while maintaining a semblance of Reformed orthodoxy, which orthodoxy limits saving grace to the elect, whether in the covenant or on the mission field. But all agree, are *compelled* by their doctrine of covenant

grace that is universal in the sphere of the covenant to agree, that baptism is in some sense the beginning of covenant salvation for all the children alike.

Where the Federal Vision develops and advances this basic "liberated" theology is the open acknowledgment that the establishment, at baptism, of the covenant with all the infants alike definitely means the beginning of the salvation of all the children alike in the bestowal upon and within the children of such benefits as union with Christ, the gift of faith, and the blessing of justification. Where the Federal Vision develops "liberated" theology is the Federal Vision's frank, honest admission that "liberated" covenant theology means the loss of salvation and the falling away to perdition of some, of *many*, who once shared in the saving benefits that baptism signifies. Where the Federal Vision develops "liberated" covenant doctrine is the Federal Vision's bold proclamation that this covenant doctrine includes the heresy of justification by faith and by works, the chief work being faith.

Wes Bredenhof loves the covenant root and essence of Federal Vision doctrine. He is not so happy with the Federal Vision fruit. Therefore, he exerts himself to dissociate himself, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and "liberated" theology from the Federal Vision.

His effort in this booklet is not only vain. It is also misleading. "Misleading" is a judgment of charity on my part.

The effort is misleading, because there is no thorough comparison of the *covenant* doctrine of the Federal Vision with the *covenant* theology of the "liberated," as the subject of the booklet demands, indeed cries out for, and, in fact, promises.

There is not even a chapter with the heading, "The Covenant Doctrine of the Federal Vision." Other issues that Bredenhof supposes are germane to his study are stated bluntly in the chapter headings, for example, "Paedocommunion." But not the issue of the covenant, which is *the* issue.

The chapter in which Bredenhof does take some vague and unsubstantial notice of the doctrine of the covenant is strangely and blandly titled, "Continuities and Discontinuities with Klaas Schilder & Co." (5). Not: "A Conditional Covenant with All the Baptized Children Alike." Not: "The Covenant of Saving Grace Divorced from Election."

Not: "A Covenant Dependent upon the Children's Fulfilling the Condition of Faith."

Incredibly, in discussing the fundamental doctrine of the Federal Vision—the doctrine of the covenant—Bredenhof manages never even to *mention* the issue of the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant and its promise and never even to *mention* the word, "election," much less treat the issue of the relation, or non-relation, of covenant and election. If the word, "election," even occurs in the first and most important chapter, I missed it.

One accomplishes such feats only if he is determined not to address the very heart of the Federal Vision, because doing so would identify the covenant doctrine of the Federal Vision with that of Wes Bredenhof and the "liberated." To say nothing of requiring reference to the covenant doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as a matter of scholarly integrity, if nothing more.

Bredenhof does have the grace, at the very end, to omit (though without explanation) from the "points of difference" between the Federal Vision and the "liberated" the doctrine of the covenant.

The bulk of the booklet is mere window-dressing. Bredenhof can distinguish several other tenets of the Federal Vision from the theology of the "liberated," thus distancing the "liberated" from the Federal Vision—theonomy; justification (even though the federal vision theologians contend, rightly, that their denial of justification by faith alone is implied in the doctrine of a conditional covenant); the active obedience of Christ, paedocommunion; and postmillennialism (to which Bredenhof is open).

As a polemic against the Federal Vision and as a defense of his churches from this popular and spreading heresy, the booklet is an utter failure. The issue before the Reformed house at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a conditional covenant, graciously promised to all baptized children alike, but cut loose from election and, therefore, dependent upon the child's fulfilling the condition of faith. This is the issue of Arminianism applied to covenant theology. This issue, Bredenhof studiously avoids, for reasons that are obvious to all readers, friendly and critical alike. His booklet is as if the Synod of Dordt had subjected the Arminian theology to critical examination, while completely ignoring the doctrine of free will and its relation, or non-relation, to election.

As a critique of a contempo-

rary, grievous doctrinal threat to the Reformed faith and Reformed churches—the most serious threat in recent times—the booklet is a case-study in the ignoble arts of glossing over doctrinal error and obfuscation in the treatment of doctrinal error, in the interests of keeping the peace, where there is not, and ought not be, peace and, probably, of ecumenicity, falsely conceived. ●

Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs, Ergun M. Caner and Emir F. Caner. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012. Pp. 251 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Martyn McGeown.]

The Caner brothers are former Muslims, who are now Arminian Southern Baptists. In this book, they provide a simple guide to Islam for the layperson. One of their chief concerns with this work is to help Christians avoid inadvertently offending Muslims by transgressing certain cultural or social norms:

> A guy quotes Scripture at the top of his lungs in the stands of a football game. At a dinner party a man casually tells his wealthy host that he is going to hell, loud enough that every person at the party hears it. A Christian visits a Jewish household and brings a baked ham for a meal. An urban missionary inadvertently wears warring gang colors to a prison. We've all heard of these tales wherein a Christian, motivated to share the gospel with a certain people group or culture, negates his or her witness by somehow offending the culture, heritage or practices of that group. Although the person is well-intentioned, he or she ruins the opportunity by some oversight or misstatement and must begin again by apologizing and rebuilding trust (223).

For example, do not offer the left hand in greeting (it is used for personal hygiene); do not offer a Muslim pork, shellfish, or alcohol; do not speak to a Muslim woman without the permission of her husband or other male relative; avoid arguing about politics or defending a patriotic position; do not try to defend the Crusades; and avoid confusing theological terminology such as "ask Jesus into your heart"—which we would never say anyway, because it is grossly unbiblical and Arminian.

The bulk of the book is an explanation of the origins and beliefs of Islam, as well as an

explanation of the modern threat of Islamic *jihad*. A few chapter headings will give a flavour of the book: "Muhammad: The Militant Messenger" (chapter 2); "The Story of Islam: A Trail of Blood" (chapter 3); "The Qur'an: 'Mother of Books'" (chapter 4); "Sunnah and Hadith: The Other Books" (chapter 5); "Allah: Names of Terror, Names of Glory" (chapter 6); "The Bloodshed of Jihad" (chapter 13); "Clash of Cultures: Christianity Through the Eyes of a Typical Muslim" (chapter 14) and "Jesus According to the Qur'an" (chapter 15).

I have read the Qur'an, which is something that I advise Christians to do. Books like *Unveiling Islam* offer some help in understanding the Qur'an. For example, the book provides a list of helpful examples of where the Qur'an contradicts the Bible, where it contradicts itself, and where it simply contains *bizarre* teachings (89-93). The most helpful chapters for the Christian desiring to understand the basic theology of Islam are chapter 7 ("Fundamentals: The Five Pillars"), chapter 9 ("Salvation: Mathematical Righteousness") and chapter 15 ("Jesus According to the Qur'an").

Islam is a legalistic, graceless religion without any concept of redemption from sin:

> In Islam sin is not paid for; it is weighed on a balance scale. Islam has no understanding that a truly holy and just God cannot simply measure the sin and throw it aside without any punishment (150).

Islam has a completely skewed view of the Trinity. Muslims (rightly) reject the teaching that the Trinity consists of Allah, Jesus, and Mary, and Muslims also (rightly) reject the notion that Jesus is the Son of Allah from a carnal relationship with a consort (wife). Of course, no one in the church has ever taught that! Terms such as "only begotten Son of God" are confusing for the Muslim, and need to be explained carefully. The straw man arguments of the Qur'an are all the more inexcusable, because the Qur'an was allegedly given to Mohammed (who supposedly received revelations from Gabriel between c. 610-632 AD) *after* all the major Trinitarian and Christological battles of the early church had been fought (AD 325; AD 381; AD 451). How could the "omniscient" Allah have gotten the teaching of the Christians on the Godhead so wrong?

In addition, Muslims have

been taught that Christianity is a corruption of Islam, and that the Bible (especially the New Testament) has been corrupted over time. However, the Qur'an itself commands Muslims to honour the *Injil* (Gospel), but if the Gospel was already corrupted in Mohammed's day, how could anyone obey that command? In fact, the church possesses manuscripts of the New Testament (not to mention the Old Testament) that predate Mohammed and the Qur'an. We can demonstrate that the New Testament has *not* been corrupted, both from manuscript evidence and patristic sources (the church fathers quoted extensively from the Greek New Testament). In contrast, after Mohammed's death, his followers gathered up all the fragments of the Qur'an they could find, made one "official" copy, and burned all other extant manuscripts!

Unveiling Islam is not the most useful book on Islam. It devotes too much time to Islamic terrorism—an important subject in its own right, but not a subject one needs to discuss when witnessing to a Muslim—and it is permeated by Arminian theology, which may be off-putting to some Reformed readers. In my estimation, a much better book on the subject is James R. White's *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an* (Bethany House Publishers, 2013). ●

The Message of Daniel: the Kingdom Cannot Fail, Dale Ralph Davis. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013. Pp.169 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Martyn McGeown.]

I enjoy the Old Testament commentaries of Dale Ralph Davis. He has written quite a number, mostly on Old Testament narrative texts (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings). He has also written on the prophets Micah and Daniel, all of which commentaries I have read.

This new commentary on Daniel does not disappoint. It is vintage Davis.

Davis interacts—only when necessary—with the higher critics in order to defend the inspiration and authority of the Word of God. As he writes in the introduction, "we have to face it because others have made a big deal of it" (15). The fundamental problem with critics is not their scholarly acumen. It is their unbelief:

> The main problem with predictive prophecy is not

> theological or practical but presuppositional, a built-in antipathy to the very possibility of predictive prophecy. The last thing people—including some biblical scholars—want is a real God running around loose and having the chutzpah to order history ahead of time (22).

Davis' style is quite "quirky," which sometimes makes for humorous reading. That comes out in some of the chapter headings: "Saints in the hands of a saving God" (chapter 3); "The strut stops here" (chapter 5); "The case of Mr Hyde and Mr Hyde" (chapter 13). A quirky writing style also makes a writer quotable. And I like quotes for the bulletin.

The book expounds the prophecy of Daniel—both its historical narrative and apocalyptic prophecy—very skilfully, and Davis has the knack of making the history come alive by throwing in intriguing and searching illustrations, while he carefully analyses the Hebrew and the structure of the passages (but without becoming too technical). Davis excels at literary analysis without ever becoming boring.

Davis is Presbyterian and amillennial. His amillennialism is especially crucial for a proper interpretation of the apocalyptic portion of the prophecy, chapters 7-12. For example, Davis writes about the little horn of Daniel 7: "[He is] the one Paul calls the 'man of lawlessness' in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and whom John would call the Antichrist (1 John 2:18)" (104). On the difficult and controversial seventy weeks (Dan. 9), Davis rejects the literalistic, dispensationalist view: "Time to bit the bullet. I have decided, against my natural preference, that I cannot take the 'weeks' as weeks of years. I suppose that means that I do not take the 'weeks' literally; instead, I take them schematically" (134). While I do not agree with every detail of Davis' exposition of the seventy weeks—it is a very challenging portion of God's Word for the exegete—I agree with his conclusion: "You are called to a long obedience; your people will be sustained even in distressing times; and the great hater of God's people sits in the Lord's crosshairs with the date of his demise clearly marked on God's calendar. You may have wished for more than that, but that's mostly what Daniel 9:24-27 is about. And that's not bad" (138).

The main theme of Daniel is the triumph of God's kingdom over all the kingdoms of men.

Davis develops, illustrates and applies that theme to the comfort of God's people. "What has not changed even though we have been carted off to Babylon? And the text of Daniel 1 answers: God. God has not changed" (27). "Babylon, the hairy-chested macho brute of the world, has dropped with a thud into the mausoleum of history;…the servants of God will simply out-endure the kingdoms of this age" (37). "He rules the kingdom of men: smelly, sinful, selfish, scheming men. There's nothing more 'down to dirt' than that. In our darker moments, we may lose sight of this comforting assurance" (65).

Many other quotes could be offered, but read the book for yourself.

As Davis says, "You can walk into the future with a God like that" (45). ●

Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy, by Paul C. Gutjahr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xl + 477, $41.95 (paper). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

In his day, which was more an age (a comparison which Hodge would appreciate)—much of the nineteenth century—Charles Hodge was a towering figure in the Presbyterian Church in America. He was the influential professor of thousands of aspiring Presbyterian ministers and missionaries. Especially by virtue of his large, thorough, and mainly sound three-volume *Systematic Theology*—the publication of his class lectures, his several commentaries on New Testament books of the Bible, and his editorship of an influential theological journal, Hodge was the dominant theologian of the Church.

Hodge was also a prominent, powerful churchman, who took a leading role in the debates at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. In these debates and by his writings, as well as by strategic public lectures, Hodge was a vigorous controversialist regarding important doctrinal issues that arose in the Presbyterian Church. These issues included the conflict of Calvinism with Arminianism in various forms and the attack on the Christian doctrine of creation by Darwinian evolutionary theory, which surfaced during Hodge's career.

` In his lifetime, Hodge was dubiously honored as the "pope of Presbyterianism" (p. 3).

This biography, therefore, is

of both interest and importance, not only for conservative Presbyterians but also for all who love the Reformed faith and have a regard for its history, especially in North America.

Gutjahr's biography of Hodge is only the second of the renowned Presbyterian to be published. It is the first to be published in more than one hundred thirty years. It is far and away the more thorough.

Hodge devoted his entire ministerial career to teaching theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. He taught for some fifty-eight years, from 1820 until his death in 1878. During that time, Hodge took a two-year sabbatical to study theology in France and Germany. In Germany, he studied under such theological luminaries as Tholuck, Hengstenberg, and Neander.

Upon his return to Princeton, Hodge was a younger colleague of Princeton's famous founders, Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller.

Unlike most seminary professors, Hodge never served as a pastor. By all accounts, including his own, he was not a gifted preacher.

Of special interest and of great significance for Presbyterians and Presbyterianism still today is the book's recounting of Hodge's controversies both within the Presbyterian Church and against enemies of the truth without the Church. Hence, the book's subtitle.

Prominent in Hodge's ministry was his battle against Arminianism as this heresy appeared early and often in Hodge's own Church. Such was the battle in the conflict known as the "Old School/New School" controversy. The Old School, to which Hodge belonged, of which he was the leading representative, and for which he was the most aggressive contender, confessed the Calvinism of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The New School embraced and promoted within the Presbyterian Church the theology of Arminianism. The New School was influenced by the emotional revivalist movements of the day, of which Charles Finney was the foremost proponent and practitioner.

An influential advocate of the Arminianism of the New School within the Presbyterian Church was Albert Barnes, a pastor of a prominent Presbyterian congregation. This is the Barnes of the commentaries bearing his name that are still found in some Reformed households. Barnes spread his Pelagian and Arminian

theology in a series of popular New Testament commentaries. Especially Barnes' commentary on Romans was influential in seducing Presbyterians. This commentary occasioned Hodge's own commentary on Romans as an antidote to Barnes' heretical theology, particularly with regard to the explanation of Romans 5.

In 1837, finding themselves, somewhat unexpectedly, in the majority at the General Assembly of the denomination, the delegates adhering to the Old School purged from the Church large numbers, including entire synods, holding the revivalist, Arminian tenets of the New School. The Old School "cleaned house" by tactics that were ecclesiastically high-handed, stretching the Presbyterian church order to its furthest limits.

By 1869, the mood of the Presbyterian Church in the north had changed. Ecumenicity trumped doctrinal orthodoxy, as is a perennial danger. The northern church decided on reunion with the New School Presbyterians, regardless of the advanced, avowed Arminianism of the New School. To his credit, Hodge opposed the reunion on the floor of the General Assembly, but to no avail.

Upon the accomplishment of the reunion, however, Hodge displayed serious weakness regarding the merger. Not only did he submit to the deadly decision without protest, but he also supported the decision and promoted the fellowship of the churches.

The result of the reunion, although the author does not note this, was the steady, rapid decline of the Presbyterian Church into sheer liberalism. Inevitably, Arminianism leads to outright unbelief, or, what is the same thing, theological modernism. Indeed, Arminianism inherently *is* theological modernism. If the God of Holy Scripture is not the sovereign God in the salvation of sinners, He is not God. And if the god preached and taught by a church is not God, nothing of the Christian religion remains as undoubted truth.

By the time of the death in the early 1920s of B. B. Warfield, the last in the succession of conservative Presbyterian theologians who founded and maintained Princeton Seminary as a sound "school of the prophets," Princeton had become, as Warfield gloomily pronounced on his deathbed to J. Gresham Machen, "dead wood," which it is impossible even to split.

Although he abandoned Princeton and founded Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia to be the spiritual

continuation of the Princeton of Alexander, Hodge, and Warfield, neither did J. Gresham Machen appreciate the seriousness of Arminianism as gospel-denying heresy. In his *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen judged Arminianism lightly, as merely a tolerable deviation from the gospel of Reformed Christianity, and, therefore, a potential ally in Machen's war against liberalism, or theological modernism.

Although the difference between Reformed theology and Arminianism is, according to Machen, not an "unimportant matter," it is, in the end, merely "difference of opinion." Therefore, "true evangelical fellowship is possible between those who hold" the Reformed faith and those who hold the theology of Arminianism (*Christianity and Liberalism*, New York: Macmillan, 1924, 51, 52).

The weakness of Hodge, Machen, and the old Princeton Seminary generally with regard to Arminianism goes far to explain Westminster's present-day, ardent defense of the theory of the "well-meant gospel-offer"—a saving grace of God for all humans, desiring the salvation of all and in this desire making salvation available to all, but a grace dependent for its efficacy on the sinner's acceptance of the offer. The doctrine of a universal saving grace of God, well-meaningly offered by God to all alike, and, therefore, necessarily dependent for its saving effect upon the will of the sinner himself, is fundamental Arminian theology, in starkest contrast to the Reformed, or Calvinistic, doctrine of particular, efficacious saving grace, efficaciously given (not merely inefficaciously offered) to the elect alone. According to the "well-meant gospel-offer," the saving grace of God is eminently *resistible*—an explicit contradiction of one of the "five points of Calvinism," which even little children know to be fundamental to the Reformed faith.

Presbyterianism's weakness regarding Arminianism also helps to explain Westminster Seminary's tolerance of the contemporary heresy of the Federal (covenant) Vision, as openly taught at Westminster for many years by Professor Norman Shepherd.

Hodge himself taught that God establishes His covenant of (saving) grace with all baptized infants of believers alike, so that all are saved until about the age of twelve. At this age, each must (in the language now of the Federal Vision) fulfill the condition of believing. Failure to believe

results in the loss of salvation. Hodge taught that "children of true believers enjoyed the same grace as their parents until they come of age to make their own faith decision. (Hodge agreed with many others of his day that the age of religious accountability was twelve)" (285).

In such a covenant doctrine, the "five points of Calvinism" are compromised. In the sphere of the covenant—among the children of believers—election does not govern the gift of saving grace, or salvation itself; the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ is successfully resisted by many children at the age of twelve; and many saved, holy children of believers do not persevere in their salvation, but lose it and perish everlastingly. Implied is that the atonement of the cross is universal with regard to the physical offspring of believers, atonement for Esau as well as for Jacob, at least to the age of twelve, although unavailing regarding final salvation in the case of many.

As for Princeton Theological Seminary today, Arminianism having wreaked its havoc upon that seminary, the school is totally and thoroughly liberal, that is, unbelieving and ungodly. Nothing of the Calvinism of Alexander, Miller, Hodge, and Warfield remains. Nothing of *Christianity* is to be found there. With the name that it *lives*—the seminary of Hodge and Warfield—it is, in fact, spiritually dead. This is the incontrovertible judgment upon Princeton Theological Seminary on its bicentennial (in AD 2012), which publicists supposed the biography of Hodge would help to celebrate.

It is worthy of note that Hodge opposed an ecumenical vision, and proposal, that were similar to those of W. Robert Godfrey a few years ago concerning the union of Reformed churches. On behalf of "a Federal Union of all Evangelical denominations," ministers, including Presbyterians, in Hodge's day envisioned "that each member of the Union might be able to retain its own distinctive character and spiritual institutions, but in a United Nations-type fashion members would also submit all questions arising from conflicting interests to a supreme panel representing the Union as a whole" (336, 337).

Rightly, Hodge's contrasting conception of ecumenicity was that Presbyterian churches unite on the basis of unqualified adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith, that is, oneness in the uncorrupted Reformed faith. "To have true unity, Presbyterians

had to acknowledge the importance of a common vision when it came to central issues of doctrine" (338).

Yet another important controversy in which Hodge engaged was that over Darwinian evolutionary theory. Hodge's defense of the Christian doctrine of creation was pathetically weak. Attempting to bring Genesis 1 into harmony with the apparent findings of science that the world is billions of years old, Hodge proposed the "day/age" theory of interpretation of the opening chapter of the Bible (here note the opening sentence of this review) and its inspired account of the origin of the world. Every biblical day in Genesis 1 is, in fact, according to Hodge, an age of millions or billions of years. In the end, Hodge opened "the door to the adoption of the increasingly popular view of theistic evolution" (371). The author is correct in observing that many have "walked through" this door. But this door opens upon the abyss of *atheistic* evolution.

A fundamental flaw in Hodge's apologetics, or defense of the faith, was his commitment to a philosophy known as Scottish Common Sense Realism. Basically, this philosophy was the idea that all humans have a knowledge of the truth of God and of His works and also the ability, if not the predilection, to affirm the truth when it is capably presented to them in argument on behalf of the Christian religion. On the foundation of this agreement of the unbeliever to certain basics of the Christian faith, as revealed in nature, the defender of the faith can build in the soul of the unbeliever more substantial elements of the faith and thus lead the unbeliever to embrace the Christian religion in its fullness.

In defense of the truth of the Christian faith, therefore, particularly in controversy with unbelievers, one should appeal, not to Scripture, but to the unbeliever's natural knowledge of, and ability to affirm, the truth. This natural knowledge of, and even susceptibility to, the truth was proposed by Scottish Common Sense Realism as God's "natural revelation."

The author remarks

> the inherent tensions between Scottish Common Sense Realism's notion of a moral sense and Calvinism's doctrine of the Holy Spirit…Scottish Realism put a tremendous emphasis on humanity's moral intuition and its ability to detect and be moved by truth. Calvinism, with its doctrine of

> total depravity, held a much lower view of human moral ability. In its eyes, humans had no hope of detecting truth unless first touched and regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Gutjahr then observes that "in his own writings, Hodge vacillated between these two positions depending on the setting and the purpose of his work" (203).

The effect of this denial of total depravity by such advocates and practitioners of Scottish Common Sense Realism as Charles Hodge was a readiness to accommodate the truth to the unbiblical judgment of the unbeliever. Six-day creation, for Hodge, could be, and was, accommodated to Darwinian evolution by the "day/age" theory. Creation could be, and was, accommodated to evolutionary theory by the theory of theistic evolution.

The effect, in short, was compromise, compromise that is fatal to basic doctrines of the Christian religion.

One does not defend the faith against pagans and heretics by appeal to, or argument on the basis of, the unbeliever's supposed knowledge of, and ability to agree with, a natural revelation of God, common to believer and unbeliever alike. One contends for the truth of the Christian religion, and defends it, on the basis of the inspired testimony of Holy Scripture, which only the believer knows and submits to, and against which the unbeliever is, and is recognized as being, opposed, because of the perverse rebellion of his depraved nature.

Even the "common sense" of the unbeliever is totally corrupted by sin. It affords no starting point for development unto faith. It is not the agreed-upon basis of doctrinal controversy. It is no judge of the biblical witness to the truth. It does not have the authority to change the "day" of one evening and one morning in Genesis 1 into an "age" of millions of evenings and mornings.

If his "common sense" could incline the unbeliever toward any biblical truth at all, that truth would be that this ordered, marvelous world of the heaven and the earth, including especially the human creature with his amazing physical and mental intricacies and powers, is not the accidental effect of the blind workings of evolutionary processes, but is the handiwork of the all-wise, omnipotent Creator-God. "Common sense" does not, indeed *cannot*, perceive this, at least not in such a way as to acknowledge this, because "common sense" is

senseless by virtue of the corrupting power of sin, under the just judgment of God.

With regard to its erroneous doctrinal nature, its mistaken apologetical purpose, and its deleterious practical effects, Scottish Common Sense Realism bears an uncanny resemblance to the popular theory of common grace in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. Although they will not, present-day proponents and believers of common grace ought to study Hodge's Scottish Common Sense Realism and its effects upon the Presbyterian Church very carefully.

Hodge's debate with the outstanding southerner, James Henley Thornwell, on the proper government of the church and on the relation of politics and religion, against the background of the looming war between the states, in 1860, was a monumental event. For eight days, these two theological titans debated on the floor of the General Assembly. The author describes the debate as "one of the greatest confrontations to occur in the General Assembly since the split [of Old School and New School] of 1837" (288).

On the issue of the government of the church, Thornwell was certainly right and Hodge was seriously wrong. Thornwell contended that "God had indeed set down the form of the church, and scripture made it clear that form was Presbyterian" (288). Even though Thornwell's application, that the biblical form of the church prohibited "boards of governance," was mistaken, if such boards or committees are strictly and truly subservient to the authority of the General Assembly, or Synod, his warning that such bodies pose "a great threat to Presbyterian purity and autonomy" ought to be taken seriously by all Reformed churches at all times (288). With reason, a later Reformed theologian, on purely practical grounds, exclaimed, "kill the boards."

One would gladly have traveled hundreds of miles on horseback, and paid a substantial entrance fee, to have witnessed the debate between Hodge and Thornwell.

Charles Hodge was a theologian—a theologian's theologian. He was also a man. After a nine-year romance, extended so that Hodge could complete his theological education, Hodge married the beautiful Sarah Bache in 1822, when Hodge was twenty five. Charles and Sarah had eight children. To his children, Hodge was an exemplary Christian father, the

fruit of which, under the blessing of God, was the godliness of his many children and grandchildren.

No doubt, his deep love of his own children strengthened Hodge's covenant conviction that the children of believers ought to be taught in Christian day schools. Already in the early 1800s, Hodge saw that the nation's "common [public] school system is rapidly assuming not a mere negative, but a positively anti-Christian character" (224). Hodge urged that Presbyterian, Christian schools be "developed alongside every Presbyterian church in the country" (224). With regard to this cause and calling, Hodge was disappointed. To this day, regardless that the state schools aggressively show themselves "the great gates of hell," even conservative Presbyterians are generally derelict in the calling of believing parents to rear their children in good, Christian schools. Their distinctively Reformed brothers and sisters, whose roots are in the Dutch Reformed covenant theology of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and others, put them to shame and show them the right way of the covenant.

A child of his times, Hodge owned a couple of slaves for much of his life. He refused to ally himself with the radical abolitionists of the North, who were enthusiastic for a civil war.

Charles Hodge is an informative biography of an important Presbyterian theologian. It is also a history of a significant Presbyterian Church, especially its seminary, and of a crucial time of Presbyterianism in America. A fascinating bonus is sixteen pages of the pictures of persons, mainly theologians, who figured significantly in Hodge's life and ministry. Each picture is identified by a brief biographical sketch. An instance:

> Charles Finney (1792-1875) was one of the most famous revivalist preachers of his day. He later became a faculty member at Oberlin College in Ohio. Hodge strongly disagreed with his mechanist approach to revivalism and Arminian-inflected theological stances. ●

Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism, by Michael J. McVicar. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Pp. xiii + 309, $34.95 (paper). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

On behalf of full disclosure, I acknowledge that this book about Christian Reconstruction and Rousas J. Rushdoony is of special interest to me.

My first, personal encounter with Rousas Rushdoony was influential, if not decisive, in turning me against the man, his theology, and his movement. As a young pastor in Loveland, Colorado, just beginning his ministry, with a number of small children, and without an extra dime to his financial account, much less gold bullion and silver coins, or even the remotest prospect of them, in the middle or late 1960s I attended a public lecture by Rushdoony in nearby Ft. Collins. The topic of the speech was the present state of the world, particularly the society of North America, and the calling of the Christian church in light of this wretched state.

Rushdoony painted a dark picture of the world. At hand, he prophesied, were hard times for the church and her members. To all of this, a Reformed amillennialist such as myself could, and did, respond with a hearty "Amen." Towards the end of the lecture, Rushdoony raised the vital, if not burning, question, what the calling of the Reformed Christian was in view of the ominous developments in our society.

Not yet having read much of Rushdoony, and being a committed amillennialist, as the Reformed creeds require, I anticipated a stirring call to prepare for the coming persecution of the church by grounding ourselves on the Word of God and by a lively hope for the second coming of Christ and the glorious inheritance of the new world in which righteousness shall dwell.

How jarring was Rushdooony's answer to his question! "Save your gold and silver! Stockpile weapons!" His thinking, as everyone familiar with Christian Reconstruction knows, and as this book confirms, was that gold, silver, and guns will enable their possessors to survive the coming collapse of Western civilization and to emerge capable of exercising earthly power, so as to establish postmillennialism's carnal kingdom in this present world upon the ruins of our present godless society.

Then and there, Rousas Rushdoony exposed himself to me as a false prophet. Then and there, I rejected the kingdom that he and his Christian Reconstruction movement were promoting. Then and there, Christian Reconstruction became as obnoxious to me as the delusions of dispensational premillennialism.

Whoever preaches the coming of the kingdom of heaven by the quite unheavenly means of gold, silver, and guns is a false prophet. The book echoes that speech by Rushdoony. Rushdoony warned of the collapse of civilization: "riots; mass killings; government-sponsored torture; food shortages;" and more. His purportedly Christian advice to his Christian audience? "Rushdoony advised readers to buy silver and gold, carefully selected parcels of land capable of supporting crops and livestock, and other goods with inherent value, such as guns, alcohol, and tobacco" (104, 105).

Later, as editor of the *Standard Bearer*, I had exchanges with Rushdoony's disciples and colleagues over the nature of the kingdom, whether the postmillennial dream of earthly peace, prosperity, and power of Christian Reconstruction or the amillennial reality of the spiritual kingdom of Scripture and creedal Reformed Christianity.

One of those with whom I crossed swords was Rushdoony's son-in-law, Gary North. The last I heard of this bold warrior on behalf of postmillennialism's carnal kingdom, he was hunkered down in some remote southern hideaway, to which he had fled in fear of the collapse of Western civilization at the terrifying threat of Y2K. If the reader asks, "What in the world was this terrifying Y2K," the answer is, "nothing."

I came to this book, therefore, both with lively interest and a definitely formed judgment of Rushdoony and Christian Reconstruction.

Nothing in the book changes or softens the judgment.

Everything in the book, which is not an attack on Christian Reconstruction, but an attempt to be as objective an examination as possible, confirms and hardens the judgment.

The book is a well-researched examination of the movement that calls itself "Christian Reconstruction." This movement intends to reconstruct the culture of the entire world, beginning with the United States, as Christian. "Christian Reconstructionism called for capturing entire social and cultural systems for Christ"

(181). The power to accomplish this ambitious—"hopeful," the Christian Reconstructionist would say—goal is the imposition upon the way of life, first of the United States and then of the world, of the law of God. This reconstructing law of God for Rushdoony and his disciples is by no means only the ten commandments. It is also the entire body of Old Testament laws, including those that the Reformed faith considers to have so been fulfilled by Jesus Christ as no longer to be binding upon New Testament Christians—those classified as civil and ceremonial, in distinction from the moral law. "We believe that the ceremonies and figures of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished, so that the use of them must be abolished amongst Christians…" (Belgic Confession, Art. 25).

The fundamental error of the movement, however, is not its resuscitating and re-imposition of Old Testament laws that have been fulfilled by Christ "so that the use of them must be abolished amongst Christians," grievous an error as this is. The fundamental errors of Christian Reconstruction are three. So fundamental are they that they expose Christian Reconstruction as un-Reformed, heretical, and schismatic. First, the power of destroying the kingdom of Satan that now dominates earthly life, particularly in the West, and of establishing and promoting the kingdom of Christ is not the law, not even the moral law of God, but the gospel.

One practical implication of this truth is that Rousas Rushdoony erred greatly when he abandoned his office of preacher of the gospel to become teacher of, lecturer upon, and proponent of the law. Only the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ destroys the foundations of the kingdom of darkness and establishes and advances the kingdom of light. Wielding the law as his weapon against the kingdom of Satan, Rushdoony made himself impotent with regard to the coming of the kingdom of Christ.

The second fundamental error of Christian Reconstruction is its postmillennialism. Christian Reconstruction operates on the belief that God purposes to perfect the kingdom of Christ, not at Christ's coming, but during a future millennium of earthly history prior to the second coming of Christ. Christian Reconstruction is postmillennial, through and through. One implication of this gross eschatological error is that on the throne of power and glory during

the time of the grandest realization of the kingdom of God will be, not Jesus Christ, but Rousas J. Rushdoony, or, depending on the success of the revolution that is sure to follow the coronation of King Rush, Gary North, or Gary De Mar, or James Jordan, or one of the other leading Christian Reconstructionists.

I write, "the revolution that is sure to follow," for good reason. As the history of the movement of Christian Reconstruction demonstrates, specifically, the warfare between the Vallecito, CA and the Tyler, TX camps and the self-devouring and self-destructive debacle of the Tyler, TX group (all of which the book exposes), if Christian Reconstruction comes to power in a future millennium, the internal strife of that kingdom will make the War of the Roses in Great Britain, the French Revolution, and the Civil War of the United States look like Sunday School picnics. Law and lust for power make for a heady brew of revolution.

If postmillennialism—the second main error of Christian Reconstruction—is false—a "Jewish dream," as I once publicly described it, to the rage of the proponents of Christian Reconstruction, and as it is—Christian Reconstruction is thereby refuted. And, third, in closest connection with its error of postmillennialism, Christian Reconstruction conceives the kingdom of Christ as material and earthly, that is, carnal. In truth, the kingdom of Christ is spiritual. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in Q. 123, the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus that comes throughout history, especially the history of the new dispensation, and that will be perfected at the coming of Christ is Christ's rule by His word and Spirit. It is not Christian Reconstruction's rule by police and guns. The effect of Christ's rule by His word and Spirit in history is not that the culture of earthly nations is reconstructed physically, but that elect believers submit to God. Their "culture," or way of life, in a wicked world is radically changed spiritually. Their lives are governed by the law of the ten commandments, as also by the abiding "truth and substance" of the Old Testament laws that have been so fulfilled in Jesus Christ that the use of them is abolished among Christians (see Belgic Confession, Art. 25).

It belongs to the truth of the spirituality of the kingdom of God that this kingdom does not displace, or even disparage, the church—the church *institute*—as is the impression left both by the

life and teaching of R. J. Rushdoony. (I include the life of the man because for years he himself showed little, or no, interest in or faithfulness to the church.) On the contrary, the kingdom of Christ takes form in the era of the New Testament as the true, *instituted* church. The church *is* the kingdom, as is the official doctrine of the Reformed churches in Q. 123 of the Heidelberg Catechism and in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession. The latter teaches that "Christ is an eternal King" of the "*church*." To dismiss the church as the glorious kingdom of God in New Testament history in favor of the "Jewish dream" of the carnal culture of a world of nations dominated by mainly Old Testament law is as radical an attack on the genuine kingdom of God as is imaginable.

Nor does the full perfection of the kingdom take place in a millennium of earthly history prior to the coming of Christ. Rather, the kingdom will be perfected when God is "all in all," that is, at the second coming of Jesus Christ (Q. 123 of the Heid. Cat.; I Cor. 15:24-28).

Nevertheless, the influence of Christian Reconstruction upon many reputedly conservative, evangelical Christians and upon many conservative movements and organizations in the United States has been considerable. Included are the home-school movement; John Wayne Whitehead and his Rutherford Institute; David C. Gibbs and his movement of opposition by legal means to compulsory education in the state schools; Franky Schaeffer and his efforts to Christianize American culture, and many more. Some of these men and movements were reluctant to acknowledge their indebtedness to Rushdoony and his movement of Christian Reconstruction. This did not endear them to Rushdoony.

Appropriately, if not necessarily, this study of the movement of Christian Reconstruction centers on the life and work of Rousas Rushdoony. The book approximates a biography of the influential founder of the movement. As it outlines the life of Rushdoony, the book sheds light also on a number of his most notable disciples and co-workers, including Gary North, Greg Bahnsen, David Chilton, James B. Jordan, Ray Sutton, Gary De Mar, and others. The light is by no means always flattering.

Although informative and significant, the accounts of the dissensions and splits in Christian Reconstruction ranks are sordid. First, there was the angry division

between that part of the kingdom whose base of operations was Vallecito, CA, with patriarch Rushdoony as the leading figure, and the break-away faction in Tyler, TX, including North, Jordan, Chilton, Sutton, and others. The hostilities between these two groups were fierce.

Then there was the self-destruction of the Tyler, TX faction. Years ago, there came into my hands a tape on which David Chilton, participant in the action, frankly exposed the ungodly goings-on in Tyler, TX as the princes of the Christian Reconstruction movement went about to establish and expand their earthly kingdom of God. Although he is not as detailed, McVicar substantiates Chilton's chilling account (182ff.). The Christian Reconstruction leaders could not reconstruct their own small kingdom in and around the church in Tyler. With a disgraceful abuse of the key of Christian discipline, these power-hungry men fell upon each other, deconstructing and destroying.

This internecine warfare was not a judgment only upon the men themselves, all of whom as self-proclaimed lords of their kingdom aspired to the highest seat in their earthly kingdom. But it was also divine judgment upon their movement at its very foundation. Law, exercised as the power to build the kingdom of God, divides and scatters; only the gospel of grace builds the kingdom of God, and unites its citizens, including its princes.

One irony looms large both in the life of Rushdoony and in the Christian Reconstruction movement more broadly. The author of the book notes the fact, but not the irony of the fact. Fundamental to the social and cultural philosophy of Rousas Rushdoony, ostensibly his theology, is the importance of the family. Family is the fundamental agent of the dominion that Christian Reconstruction intends to exercise over all the world. "The relationship between biblical law, dominion, and the family led Rushdoony to an important conclusion: the family is the 'most powerful institution in society'…Biblical law… establishes the family as the productive institution responsible for ushering in the future Kingdom of God" (134). Rushdoony "worked to convince Christians—especially theologically conservative, fundamentalist, and evangelical Protestants—that they needed to rethink their political activism and refocus it on creating a proper Christian family" (93).

But Rushdoony himself was

a divorced and remarried man. He remarried a woman who was herself divorced, with a living first husband (44, 57). Divorce was prominent and accepted among the leadership of Christian Reconstruction. Not only did none of the leaders condemn Rushdoony's remarriage after divorce, but also others in or closely associated with the movement were divorced. Greg Bahnsen, widely regarded as the leading theologian of the movement, was divorced. Doug Phillips, who, with his Vision Forum ministry, was closely allied with Christian Reconstruction, was exposed as unfaithful to his wife. "Phillips—husband of Beall Phillips, father of eight children, and son of Rushdoony's close friend and political confidante, Howard Phillips—ran the popular patriarchal ministry until the fall of 2013, when he publicly acknowledged an inappropriate relationship with a woman other than his wife" (223).

The Rev. Ray Sutton, one of the most glittering satellites revolving about Rushdoony, at least, for awhile, and pastor of the church of the Tyler, TX faction of Christian Reconstruction, wrote what has the dubious distinction of being the most lawless book on marriage, divorce, and remarriage ever written under the auspices of Christianity in all the long history of despicable, nominally Christian concession to the adulterous lusts of the unregenerate heart, or of the old man of a Christian. The book is *Second Chance: Biblical Principles of Divorce and Remarriage*. The title page of this licentious work accurately gives as the book's sub-title, *Biblical Blueprints for Divorce and Remarriage* (for my expose of the book, see my *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and the Church*, 3rd ed., 224-228). For Christian Reconstruction, Christian marriage is a "chance," like the lottery. If the "chance" proves disappointing, and the odds, I suppose, are 50/50, Sutton offers "*blueprints*" for divorce and remarriage. Not blueprints for *marriage*! But for *divorce and remarriage*! *Blueprints*!

No Christian Reconstructionist has repudiated Sutton's enthusiastic promotion of sheer antinomism with regard to the seventh commandment and with regard to the family.

Surely, Christian Reconstruction recognizes the importance of marriage for family and, therefore, according to Christian Reconstruction, for the reconstruction of society by means of family.

How its aggressive assault

on marriage, in both theory and practice, serves to promote the family, which is fundamental to its world-changing mission, Christian Reconstruction has yet to explain. ●

Galatians: A Mentor Commentary, by David B. McWilliams. Rossshire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2009. Pp. 240, $24.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

Presbyterian pastor and theologian, David B. McWilliams, helps the Reformed preacher with a sound, incisive, concise commentary on a book of the Bible that is both fundamental to the Protestant understanding of the gospel of grace and at the center of theological debate in our day—as it has been since the sixteenth-century Reformation.

As the New Testament book that proclaims and defends the doctrine of justification by faith, Galatians has always been, and is still today, with the book of Romans, outstanding as the revelation of God's gracious salvation of guilty sinners.

As the content of the book was crucial in the Reformation's controversy with Rome in the sixteenth century, so is it again today in the conflict of Protestant and Reformed orthodoxy with the theology of the New Perspective on Paul and of the Federal Vision.

In view of the importance of the message of the book and in view of the determined attacks on that message in every age, McWilliams justifies his commentary with an apt quotation of Luther, himself the author of a magnificent commentary on the book, "this doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough" (11).

The worth of a commentary consists of its spiritual and doctrinal insight into the text, its soundness, and its application of the Word of God in a particular book to the life and calling of both church and believer. On all these accounts, McWilliams' *Galatians* is a worthy commentary.

What makes this commentary of exceptional worth to both the preacher for his sermons on the book and the layman reading for edification is the book's concision. The commentary is only 223 pages of explanation. The commentator strikes to the heart of the verse or passage and discloses that heart in a few, well-chosen words.

The method of the author throughout the exposition of Galatians also lends itself to the use of the commentary by both the preacher and the layman. There is, first, McWilliams' own, fresh, clear translation of the text or passage. A succinct summary of the teaching of the text, or passage, follows. Then comes the more detailed "comment" on the text, or passage.

The flow of the exposition is not disturbed by numerous, controversial interactions with other commentators. Quotations are usually for the purpose of right explanation of the text by another, clarification or support of McWilliams' explanation of a controversial passage, or rejection of an explanation threatening the truth of the passage.

Most quotations are relegated to footnotes.

The soundness of the commentary may be illustrated by McWilliams' comment on the crucial third chapter of the book, specifically verses 15-25. "The law cannot provide righteousness; the law shows the need for righteousness" (122). "…the unconditional character of the promise" (125).

Indicating doctrinal insight, theological soundness, and practical power is the comment on the apostle's "Abba, Father" in Galatians 4:6: "…In this context in which redemption from sin and the law is the theme, that cry can be nothing less than one of exultant joy. God is not distant or remote, but the Spirit of the living Lord indwells us and exults in God's redemption" (157, 158).

Often, the phrasing of both the fresh translation and the commentary is vigorous, and memorable. Explaining Paul's sharp words in Galatians 5:12, that he willed that the heretics troubling the Galatian Christians were "cut off," McWilliams writes, "He [Paul] is so concerned over those who agitate the Galatians that he wishes the knife [of circumcision] would slip!" (185) McWilliams' translation of the text is: "I wish those agitating you would emasculate themselves!" (183)

My one criticism is that McWilliams does not bring the Federal Vision and its advocates under the hammer of his, and the apostle's, condemnation. The book of Galatians is a polemical book, demanding polemics of preacher, believer, and, especially, commentator. McWilliams does not avoid polemics, including controversy with certain contemporary forms of the Galatian heresy. Denying that the main message of Galatians is ecclesi-

astical and insisting that the book is soteriological, McWilliams names and exposes N. T. Wright (77, 78).

But there is not a word about the Federal Vision, a contemporary heresy as much a threat to the gospel of justification by faith alone as is the teaching of N. T. Wright. And this heresy bedevils the conservative Presbyterian churches in which McWilliams is a minister and among which he moves—the PCA and the OPC.

Increasing the unease over this omission is McWilliams' frequent and always favorable citation of Dr. Richard B. Gaffin. Gaffin is the impenitent defender and supporter of arch-Federal Vision heretic Norman Shepherd. In addition, Gaffin has written that Romans 2:13, a critically important text in the attack by the Federal Vision upon the Protestant and Reformed gospel of justification by faith *alone*, likely teaches justification by the doing of the law—blatant contradiction of the gospel of Galatians. And Gaffin has proposed and defended this heretical interpretation of Romans 2:13 in the very book from which McWilliams extracts favorable citations of Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight* (188).

If the theology of Norman Shepherd, the Federal Vision, and Richard B. Gaffin is right—orthodox—the theology of David McWilliams' commentary, and of the apostle Paul in Galatians, is wrong—heterodox.

In truth, the apostle's sharp condemnation of the heretics troubling the Galatian churches applies to Norman Shepherd, all the proponents of the Federal Vision, and Richard B. Gaffin, who are troubling the churches of Jesus Christ in the 21st century, and, as was the case with the Galatian heretics, with some success: "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." ●

Faithful Witness: A Sesquicentennial History of Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan, 1865-2015, Robert P. Swierenga. (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2015). Pp. xx + 526, $20.00 (paper). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

Ordinarily, a 500-page book celebrating the 150th anniversary of a particular congregation is of little interest to anyone except a member of the congregation, or of the denomination to which the

congregation belongs, even if the congregation is Reformed.

Faithful Witness may be the exception. This is the case for two reasons. One is the author, the noted, prolific, gifted Reformed church historian, Robert P. Swierenga. Swierenga has written other interesting, instructive books of the doings and developments of Dutch Reformed churches and church members, including the fascinating *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Regarding *Dutch Chicago*, perhaps only a Dutchman appreciates the typical Dutch humor in this exchange between two Dutch scavengers in the Chicago area: "`How's business?' Dirk asked Siert. 'Picking up,' replied the proverbial Chicago scavenger" (576). But surely, others besides Dutch who have lived for years in the vicinity of Chicago thrill to the victory of the tough Dutch garbagemen over the mob, who tried, unsuccessfully, to take over the Chicago garbage business from the Hollanders by threats and violence. As Swierenga concludes his account of the garbage war, "The Chicago mob had met their match in the Dutch garbagemen; David had slain Goliath" (618).

And surely, others besides the Protestant Reformed reader will despise the worldly, cowardly betrayal by a prominent Christian Reformed minister of the Dutch Reformed garbagemen in their struggle against the Teamsters Union, every bit as godless and violent as the mob, when the Teamsters Union was attempting to take over the garbage business in Chicago. In the midst of a campaign of intimidation of the Dutch Reformed garbagemen, who were resisting the union on grounds of principle, as well as of practice, the Rev. John Van Lonkhuyzen, pastor of a Chicago Christian Reformed Church, proclaimed the righteousness, if not the spiritual necessity, of labor union membership, that is, surrendering to the Teamsters. Thus, Van Lonkhuyzen and his common grace allies cut the legs of the Christian opponents of the union out from under them.

Swierenga notes that this Christian Reformed minister was an ardent disciple of the Abraham Kuyper of common grace and that his defense of union membership was supposedly an implementing of Kuyper's theory, with a view to the "Christianizing" of the thoroughly worldly Teamsters Union. In fact, Van Lonkhuyzen's betrayal of the Reformed, Christian life into the clutches of the godless Teamsters Union

was a concrete instance of the general truth that common grace has never "Christianized," is not now "Christianizing," and never will "Christianize" the world. Rather, common grace always, and necessarily, makes the church worldly.

This conflict with the labor union was raging in the early 1900s and likely influenced Herman Hoeksema, who lived in Chicago during these years, as a lively member of the Christian Reformed Church in that city, to condemn the unions and to teach that membership in the unions is incompatible with the Reformed, Christian life. This stand, the Protestant Reformed Churches maintain to this day, fighting the good fight without craven surrender, willing to suffer, if need be, in the warfare of the kingdom of Christ against the kingdom of Satan.

Faithful Witness makes known that, despite the weakness of Van Lonkhuyzen and his ministerial ilk, Central Ave. Christian Reformed Church was opposing membership in labor unions as late as the 1940s. The stand of the church was that "Christians should not be 'unequally yoked' to unbelievers" (170).

The acceptance of labor union membership after the 1940s was a symptom and instance of the gradual departure of the Central Ave. church from its original orthodoxy, with orthodoxy's attendant godliness of life, a slippage that is also evident in other developments that the book records. A change that indicates the church's weakening was the decision in the early 1980s to move from close communion to open communion.

And this already leads into the second reason why *Faithful Witness* is of interest to Reformed Christians who are not members of Central Ave. or of the Christian Reformed denomination: the history itself of the congregation, beginning in the new world already about the time of the end of the Civil War.

Central Ave. Christian Reformed Church was the first Christian Reformed congregation in Holland, Michigan. The church was founded in 1865. At its largest, in 1910, it had some 1,800 members. It is the mother church of many, if not most, of the Christian Reformed churches in the Holland area. A visitor to Holland, perhaps at Tulip Time, cannot miss the impressive church building in the heart of the city, facing Centennial Park.

The origin of the congregation was the separation of several Dutch immigrant churches from

the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in 1857 to form the True Holland Reformed Church, now the Christian Reformed Church. The Central Ave. congregation itself was organized in 1865 by a gathering of fourteen men. The original members of the congregation came mainly, whether physically, or spiritually, or both, from the north of the Netherlands, where what Swierenga calls the "stern orthodoxy" of De Cock and Van Velzen was the norm. This "stern orthodoxy" continued in the congregation for many years and manifested itself repeatedly in recent times in the controversy of the church, such as it was, with the apostatizing Christian Reformed denomination, of which the congregation is a member church.

The "stern," glorious orthodoxy of De Cock, Van Velzen, and the Secession of 1834 generally came to expression within a year of Central Ave.'s organization. Elders of the congregation brought objection to a meeting of classis in 1866 against a visiting minister's assertion that God is glorified only in Christ, that is, only in the salvation of the church by Christ, and not in the "destruction of the ungodly." Central Ave.'s elders affirmed that God is glorified also in the damnation of the wicked. Classis upheld the objection of the elders of Central Ave.

Through the years, to almost the present day, the Council of Central Ave. has raised objection, formally and informally, to false doctrines and unbiblical practices appearing in and tolerated, if not approved, by the Christian Reformed Church. The Council sent letters of objection to various Christian Reformed and Calvin College authorities against the teaching of evolution; the denial of the historicity of Genesis 1-11; Howard Van Til's heretical book, *The Fourth Day*; women in church office; children partaking of the sacrament of the Supper; the reducing of Q. 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism to an unauthoritative footnote in the interests of brotherly relations with the Roman Catholic Church; and more.

What Central Ave. Christian Reformed Church has not done, however, is officially and forcefully protest these false teachings and evil practices to synod and support, much less effect, or even encourage, separation from a denomination increasingly losing the marks of a true church of Christ and displaying the marks of the false church.

Swierenga notes the weakness of one such protest, that

of the minister of Central Ave. in 1988 against "the teachings of [Howard] Van Til and two colleagues for advocating evolution." "This toothless overture was the classic way for church bodies to deflect hot issues for years and let emotions cool" (295).

This failure, indeed refusal, to protest vigorously and to carry through on the protest by separating from a denomination showing the marks of the false church ought to be the occasion of a serious call to the church to remember its roots—its origins—in separation in 1834 and again in 1857, for the sake of God and His truth, from denominations guilty of the very same apostasy that now characterizes the Christian Reformed Church.

What a sorry and foreboding state of affairs that before a congregation can proceed with calling a minister, *within its own fellowship*, a committee of the consistory must obtain from possible candidates their views on women in office; abortion; the historicity of the Bible, especially creation, the fall, and Adam and Eve; and the pastor's role in family visiting (279).

For all its commendable concern for the truth, Central Ave. apparently is ignorant of the reality that membership in an apostatizing denomination renders every congregation and every member responsible for the denomination's transgressions. The result will be that, in time, every congregation must also suffer the judgment that a holy God inflicts on a departing denomination. This judgment includes God's giving the entire denomination over to heresy and ungodliness of life. Central Ave.'s future generations, the children and grandchildren of the adult membership of the congregation, will have no heart for the "stern orthodoxy" of De Cock, Van Velzen, and the founding fathers and mothers of Central Ave. Christian Reformed Church.

Of particular interest to the Protestant Reformed reader is Swierenga's observation that the Rev. Geert (Gerrit) Hoeksema, pastor of the Central Ave. Church from 1879-1881, was accused of preaching "universal redemption." Although classis acquitted him, rejecting the accusation that Hoeksema did indeed preach universal redemption, it is worthy of note that the issue of a universal, saving grace of God in Jesus Christ arose very early in the history of the Christian Reformed Church. The reader may be pardoned for suspecting that there was always a

strain of sympathy in the Christian Reformed Church for the universality of saving grace before the decision of the synod of 1924 and for universal atonement before the public teaching of Prof. H. Dekker in the 1960s.

By no means is the sole interest of the Reformed Christian the book's accounts of doctrinal controversy. By meticulous research into and thorough study of the minutes of the consistory meetings and other records, Swierenga opens up, sympathetically, the ordinary, and sometimes extraordinary, life and workings of a conservative Reformed church, including its activities in a Reformed denomination, over the course of 150 years, from its beginning in 1865. This life and these workings include the pastors, their families, and the defining characteristics of their ministry; the disciplinary labors of the elders (firmer in the earlier times than later), including the censure of a married couple who sold moonshine during Prohibition; the help bestowed upon the destitute by deacons; the promotion by the church of Christian schools (Central Ave. shines in this regard); music in the church, including organists and choirs, as well as the lusty singing by the congregation (in the beginning, only the psalms); witness to the community; and much, much more.

Appendices list all the church's officebearers throughout the church's long history, elders and deacons, as well as ministers.

A worthwhile addition to the record of the history of the church, and an interesting, rewarding work for all who esteem, *and participate in*, the existence, ministry, and struggles of the Reformed church in the world. ●

The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology, Jeremy R. Treat, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014. Pp. 304 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Martyn McGeown.]

Since the cross is the whole of our salvation, there are depths to the work of Christ that cannot be expressed in one simple theological phrase. In the church, there have been two main "theories" of the atonement vying for supremacy. The one we hold dear, the one that we emphasize, and the one that procures our salvation from

sin is penal substitution. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ bore the penalty (penal) for our sins in our place (substitution). Another popular theory of the atonement is one developed and popularised by Gustaf Aulén (1879-1977), a Swedish bishop, who in 1930 published a work called *Christus Victor*. The *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement presents Christ as the victor or conqueror, who has defeated the powers of darkness by His death on the cross. By that cross, Jesus delivers man from the power of Satan, *but not by satisfying God's justice against sin*.

One view, the preference of theological liberals, emphasizes the "kingdom," and downplays personal guilt and sin, decrying substitutionary atonement as "blood theology." The other view, the preference of evangelicals, emphasises the "cross," and perhaps neglects the kingdom and Christ's victory over Satan and the powers of darkness. Both are true, as passages such as Colossians 2:15 teach us.

Jeremy Treat aims to integrate these two theories, by integrating the cross and the kingdom, or by relating the cross to the kingdom. It is true that by the cross Christ defeats Satan, but how? How is the cross a defeat for the devil and a victory for Christ? It is true that by the cross Christ satisfies God's justice with respect to our sins, but how does this relate to the kingdom?

Treat's contention is that these concepts have been inadequately related in the past. Much has been written on the atonement, and much as been written on the kingdom, but seldom have the two concepts been integrated. Treat identifies theological reasons for this.

First, while it is true that the Mediator undergoes two states, the state of humiliation (His birth to His death/burial, including His descent into hell, which occurred before His physical death), and the state of exaltation (His resurrection, ascension, session, and His return as judge), this has led to the erroneous notion that prior to His exaltation Jesus was only "king in waiting" and not yet "king in reality." Therefore, the cross, as part of His humiliation, was only preparatory to His becoming king, not part of His work as king. "The kingship of Christ on the cross has been downplayed by the overcategorization often used in the doctrine of the two states," warns Treat (149). In other words, we must believe that

Jesus *was* king throughout His life of suffering, not merely the suffering servant who would be king *only after* He rose from the dead. "Jesus' way to the cross was a royal procession" (106). "Jesus reveals his kingdom not by coming down from the cross to save himself, but by staying on the cross to save others. Jesus reigns by saving, and he saves by giving his life" (107). "To Mark, the empty tomb represents not Christ's resurrection *in order to be* king, but the resurrection *of* the king" (110). "Jesus' baptism is his anointing to kingship, and his crucifixion is his enthronement over the new creation" (151). Or as Michael Horton writes in the foreword, "Jesus Christ embraced his cross as a monarch grasps a sceptre" (18).

Second, some evangelical and Reformed theologians have overemphasized the distinction between the different aspects of Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest and king, with the result that Christ is *only a prophet* in His public ministry, *only a priest* on the cross, and *only a king* in His exaltation, when, in reality, He exercises His prophetic, priestly and kingly throughout His ministry, and especially on the cross. These traditional presentations of the threefold office and the two states of Christ have led to a separation between the atonement and the kingdom or between the cross and the king. Is this even true in the Heidelberg Catechism LD 12? Treat argues, rather, that Christ is king *on* the cross, and that Christ rules *from* the cross.

Treat divides his material into two parts: biblical theology, where he presents an exegetical development of the two themes of kingdom and cross (victory through sacrifice; the kingdom established by the cross); and systematic theology, which is a theological development of important Christological themes of the threefold office of Christ, the two states of Christ, the cross and the kingdom (the "cruciform reign of God") and a "reconciliation" of *Christus Victor* and penal substitution.

Treat's integration of *Christus Victor* and penal substitution is important, for traditionally liberal theologians have emphasized Christ's triumph over Satan (*Christus Victor*) while downplaying or denying penal substitution. The idea that the Son of God should pay the penalty for sin—"blood theology"—is often repugnant to theological liberals. On the other hand, evangelical

theologians have gloried in the cross as payment for sin, as propitiation and redemption (substitutionary atonement), while neglecting the Bible's teaching that by the cross Christ has conquered Satan and his kingdom of darkness. Both are true—Christ has conquered Satan *by atoning for sin*. Criticizing his own evangelical and Reformed tradition, Treat writes, "In spite of Scripture's insistence that Jesus Christ came to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8), systematic theologians of the Reformed tradition have largely ignored that aspect of Christ's work" (189). Liberals have swung the pendulum the other way: "The eager acceptance of all the biblical metaphors has often strangely paired with the rejection of penal substitution" (182). Treat offers an intriguing metaphor:

> If penal substitution is the *heart* of the atonement, pumping life into the other aspects, then perhaps Christus Victor is the *heel*, crushing the head of the serpent and reversing the curse barring humanity from the Edenic kingdom. But let us not forget that we need a heart *and* a heel. A heart without a heel stands no chance in battle. But a heel without a heart has no power to conquer (223).

In the first half of the book, Treat exegetes passages such as Genesis 3:15, the covenant passages in Genesis (his definition of covenant as "a binding agreement between a suzerain king and subordinate vassal kings [servant kings] that is sealed by a sacrifice" [60-61] leaves much to be desired!), passages on the suffering and reign of David, passages from the psalms and the suffering servant passages from Isaiah. This is followed by a more detailed treatment of the suffering servant in Isaiah, of the Gospel according to Mark, and passages from the Epistles and Revelation. Treat's summary is that the kingdom is established *by the cross*.

In the second half of the book, Treat examines systematic theology. To understand the cross, one needs to understand the power of Satan. How and why does Satan have power over man, to enslave him in his kingdom of darkness. And, related to that, what is necessary to deliver man from the dominion of Satan into the kingdom of God's Son? (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:12-14; 2:14-15). The power of Satan is sin, and if we are delivered from sin, we are at the same time delivered from the devil.

"The reign of Satan is parasitic to the reign of sin" (197). Man's sin gave Satan an occasion or a foothold. "Humans are in bondage to Satan *because* they have rejected God as king; they are in the kingdom of Satan *because* they have been banished from the kingdom of God" (199). Since Satan rules by sin, no *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement, which denies the satisfaction of God's justice for sin, can explain how Christ is victorious in the cross, and no such theory can explain how we, who are sinners, can be citizens of the kingdom of God and partakers of the kingdom's privileges. "Christ destroys the devil by depriving him of his power through his sacrificial death" (205). "His accusatory word is rendered ineffective by Christ's substitutionary death" (211). "If our sins have not been dealt with, the coming of God's kingdom is *not* good news. Christ's victory over Satan, demons and death is a glorious accomplishment, but if our sins have not been atoned for, we remain under God's wrath and outside his kingdom…. Even with Satan defeated and shackles broken, only those whose penalty has been paid can enter the kingdom of God as citizens" (225). "If you lose penal substitution, you lose the kingdom" (226).

In summary, Treat writes:

> God's kingdom was present in Jesus' life, proclaimed in his preaching, glimpsed in his miracles/exorcisms, established by his death, and inaugurated through the resurrection. It is now being advanced by the Holy Spirit and will be consummated in Christ's return (250).

This is a well written, thought-provoking book. ●

The Gospel's Power and Message, Paul Washer. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012. Pp. 288, $20.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.]

Many professing Christians today are ignorant of the most basic gospel truths; many churches are activity driven rather than Christ-centered; many who are engaged in evangelism and missions aim to be culturally relevant rather than to present the scandalous message of the gospel; and consequently, too often God does

not receive the glory that He is due from people who profess to be His.

None of this is lost on Paul Washer, who rises in defense of God's glory by insisting that Christian pastors make the gospel central in their preaching and teaching, and that Christian laymen ascribe due honor to the gospel. In his three-volume series entitled "Recovering the Gospel," he puts in printed form the substance of sermons he preached that deal with themes central to the gospel. This review treats the first volume; the others are entitled *The Gospel's Call and True Conversion* (RHB, 2013) and *Gospel Assurance and Warnings* (RHB, 2014). Each is available for a discounted price on RHB's website, and is also available in ebook format.

Summary

This first volume is divided into three sections. The first five chapters expound 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Washer emphasizes that the gospel is the message that we must hear from pulpits; quaint stories, moral antidotes, and personal reflections have no place there. At length he treats what it is to *receive* this gospel—that is, what characterizes a proper response. Noting that many lack passion for the gospel today because they have heard watered down versions of the gospel, or heard many sermons that contained no gospel instruction, or have a low view of that gospel, Washer emphasizes that this gospel *saves*, and therefore, is paramount. The church is called to hand the gospel down; it can do this only when it understands the necessity, importance, and value of the gospel.

Chapters 6-9 treat the power of the gospel, taking Romans 1:16 as their text. That the gospel of which Paul speaks is the one gospel that Christ taught, that it contains a message that the fallen world will find offensive, that it is the *only* word of salvation, and that its proclamation is the *means* that God has prepared to save all believers, Washer emphasizes.

Part three (chapters 10-26) is entitled "The Acropolis of the Christian Faith." Based on various passages, Romans 3:23-27 being the heart of them, Washer treats the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Washer devotes five chapters to the reality of sin, and sin's effect on the human race and our relationship with God. Two chapters contain a commendable treatment of God's righteous

indignation, anger, and hatred directed toward men, and the war that He declares against sinners. Five chapters treat the qualifications of Jesus as Mediator, His work on the cross, and God's gracious justification of sinners; two treat Christ's resurrection; and three deal with His ascension into heaven as High Priest of His people and as Lord and Judge of all.

Commendable precision

Washer is precise and distinctive in presenting the fundamental truths of the gospel. He gives a satisfactory explanation of "salvation" (61), provides solid explanations of God's holiness (87) and righteousness (88), and carefully explains sin as transgression, rebellion, insubordination, lawlessness, hostility, treachery, and abomination (chapter 12). Washer is not embarrassed by references to God's hatred in the Scriptures. He sees correctly that "the love of God is the very reason for His hatred" (135), and that "God's hatred exists in perfect harmony with His other attributes" (136). The doctrine of justification is nicely developed (147ff.), and Washer connects it with biblical terms such as redemption (154), propitiation (163), and imputation (174), noting that in manifesting His love God cannot simply deny His justice, because "there are no contradictions in His character" (163). He notes the distinction between Christ's active and passive obedience (173). He takes issue with those who suggest that, when Christ hung on the cross, the Father could not stomach seeing the sufferings which wicked men inflicted on Christ, and emphasizes rather that God turned His face from Christ because Christ bore our sins (188), and that Christ suffered God's wrath for us (189).

This effort to be precise and distinctive is underscored by a careful explanation at crucial points of a Greek word or phrase, and by dozens of footnotes in every chapter, few of which are scholarly, and almost all of which are references to Bible passages. Washer treats the Scriptures with the respect it deserves.

To read a book intended for a wide Christian audience, in which book substantive theological terms are used without apology, I found refreshing. One sign of the doctrinal apathy of our day is the desire of many to do away with theological terms as being too precise.

Though Washer did all this well, at times he did not go far

enough. Washer explained God's holiness as being His transcendence over creation, and as being His transcendence over the moral corruption of creation (87). But the other aspect of holiness - that He is devoted to Himself as the highest good—did not receive much attention. In explaining God's love, Washer moved too quickly to speak of God's mercy, grace, compassion, and longsuffering. Certainly he did nothing wrong by relating these attributes to God's love; but he said much about *how* God's love is shown, almost nothing about *what* God's love is, and left the reader wondering whether God's love is for the world in an organic sense (creation, at the heart of which is the elect in Christ), or for every man and creature head for head. When treating justification, Washer emphasized God's grace (152), but earlier when dealing with God's attributes, He did not explain the concept grace.

Perhaps I am making too much of this; Washer clearly was not intending to write a systematic theology. Yet I wish he had developed the sections on the attributes of God more thoroughly.

Inconsistent on the doctrines of grace

At significant points Washer shows that his doctrine and terminology are not consistent with the doctrines of sovereign grace. In a book entitled *The Gospel's Power and Message*, in which the author defends the necessity and richness of the gospel over against the low view of the gospel so common today, an inconsistent presentation of the doctrines of grace and a wrong view of those doctrines at key points is no small weakness.

Washer is familiar with the doctrines of sovereign grace. At length he treats the doctrine of total depravity, defending it against misrepresentations. He calls the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints "one of the most precious truths to the believer who understands it" (20). This is enough evidence for me to say that he is familiar with these doctrines.

One could wish that his inconsistencies were limited to his view of the proclamation of the gospel as a "free offer" (71, 258) and his view of "common grace" (110, 258). Anyone who heartily disagrees with him on these points, and maintains that these views undermine the gospel of grace, should still expect such terminology in a book published by Reformation Heritage Books.

More serious are his errors

regarding total depravity. Washer asserts that "total depravity does not mean that the image of God in man was totally lost in the fall" (116), and concludes by explaining total depravity as meaning "that man *cannot* submit himself to God because he *will not*, and he will not because of his own hostility toward God" (italics Washers, 117). So emphatic is Washer on this last point, that he repeats it two pages later. As to man's will, it is free but not good, so that man can choose what he pleases but is pleased to choose evil (120). At this point the reader has a question that Washer does not answer: if man cannot submit because he will not, and if his will is free, is man inherently capable of changing his will? For, as Washer presents it, if man would *will* to submit, then he *could* submit!

That God testifies of His existence to every human by creation no Reformed believer denies. However, Washer understands Romans 1:19 to teach that every man's inherent knowledge of God is due to man "being made in the image of God" (265). Then he misquotes Romans 2:15, which says that "the work of the law" is written in the hearts of the heathen Gentiles, making it teach that "the law of God has been written upon the hearts of every man and serves as a moral guide..." (266). If the law itself was written upon the hearts of every man to serve as a moral guide, and if man retains the image of God, does man not have the inherent ability to keep the law? But Romans 2:15 does not teach that God writes His law in every man's heart (that is a saving grace!), but that even heathen unbelievers can distinguish between good and evil and understand that God loves those who do good and curses evildoers. This is not the same as saying that the law is a moral guide to them; the unregenerate have no power to keep that law.

Two issues Washer never faced head on.

One is the question of the extent of Christ's atonement. Clearly, Washer does not suppose that every human will be in heaven, and he makes plain that Christ is the High Priest of "his people" (chapter 24). At the same time, he is ready to "declare without reservation that Christ's atoning work has benefited the entire universe, and that even those who refuse His offer of salvation have already benefited from it far more than words can tell" (258). That the "offer" of the gospel, with its call and promise, is universal,

"should be enough to secure the allegiance of all men" (258). I understand that to mean that man has the capacity in himself, if he will but humble himself, to accept this "offer." The clear implication is that Christ's atonement was not limited in its benefits to the elect, but is for each and every human.

The other is the matter of irresistible grace. Although not facing this head on, his presentation of man's total depravity leaves the reader who loves the doctrines of grace as confessionally summed in the Canons of Dordt wondering about Washer's position on this point.

I mention the Canons of Dordt. Of course, Scripture is my touchstone; but every confessing Reformed believer views the Canons as a faithful summary of Scripture on the doctrines of sovereign grace. Nowhere does Washer claim that he personally subscribes to the Canons, or even that he is Reformed or Presbyterian in his convictions. But I think the editors at RHB could have insisted on more accuracy here.

Much of what Washer writes about the gospel is right; much of the book is a solid defense of the gospel's power and message. But where Washer goes wrong, he undermines the very message of the gospel he is trying to defend.

A Wide Audience

Washer intends the book for preachers and laymen alike, and well he ought. To the extent that this book defends the power and message of the gospel, all in the church need to take heed.

Laymen need to take heed. They, led by their sessions and consistories, must insist that the true gospel be preached, and that the preaching of that gospel be substantive, meaty, and distinctive.

Missionaries need to take heed. As a former missionary in Peru, and founder of the Heart-Cry Missionary Society, Washer himself understands this. How is the Christian missionary who presents a culturally relevant "gospel" of man's ability to help himself improve his lot in life any better from a Hindu or Buddhist missionary? Let our missionaries set forth the gospel of grace distinctively!

And pastors need to take heed. Apt is Washer's reminder to us who are called to preach the gospel that "we must also discard the idea that there is some way to preach the gospel without scandal or offense" (272); that if we preach the gospel as Christ would

have us do, "we will be a sign of division among our peoples" and so must prepare ourselves "for great opposition" (272).

Doctrinal errors notwithstanding, I do recommend this book. I found it best not to read it quickly, but a chapter or two at a time. In fact, I read two or three chapters each week as a Sunday devotional, and found it served the purpose well: to remind me of what I was to preach, and encourage me to preach the gospel to God's glory. ●

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