Editor's Notes

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) and the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary have throughout their history opposed the teaching that the gospel is a well-meaning offer of salvation to all who hear the preaching. This is the popular conception of the preaching of the gospel that is defended and practiced by most Reformed and Presbyterian churches, preachers, and theologians today. The PRCA have always insisted that this is a mutilation of the gospel and is contrary to Scripture and to the Reformed creeds. You will find a number of articles and book reviews in the April 2018 issue of *PRTJ* addressing this issue. The writers also point out the inevitable despoiling of the Reformed faith in fundamental respects, for which they who defend the well-meant offer are responsible—denial of the extent and efficacy of the atonement, denial of the total depravity of the natural man, embrace of the teaching of free will, and more. We plead with defenders of the well-meant offer of the gospel to take stock of the teaching. We urge them rigorously and honestly to evaluate it in light of Scripture and the confessions. And we add, take note of the devastating results of the teaching wherever it has won the day.

Prof. Russell Dykstra concludes his series on the teaching of God's covenant in the Psalms. He has shown in his series how rich the Psalms are in their teaching concerning the covenant of grace. The comfort and assurance of belonging to God's covenant is a theme that runs through the book of Psalms. This last article brings the series to a fitting conclusion.

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, contributes an article full of biblical and practical advice for pastors and elders counseling members of God's church who suffer from depression. Officebearers will find a great deal of encouragement to minister to the needs of these anguished members of Christ's flock. The greatest help is to bring these saints the Word of God. Appended to his article is the outline of a sermon based on portions of Psalms 42 and 43 that applies the Word of God to the matter of depression.

Besides his several book reviews, emeritus Prof. David J. Engelsma contributes a review article on the recently published book

by David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review*. This work is being touted as the new "go to" book in support for unlimited atonement and refutation of limited atonement. Engelsma evaluates the book in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions and finds it seriously wanting. One important argument in defense of his contention that the atonement of Christ's cross is unlimited is Allen's appeal to the teaching of the well-meant (free) offer of the gospel. And indeed, as the PRCA have always pointed out, if the well-meant offer of the gospel is true, the death of Jesus Christ, at least in its intention, could not have been limited to some men only. The well-meant gospel offer demands that the value of the death of Jesus Christ is wider than the elect alone.

Pastor Martyn McGeown, missionary in Limerick, Ireland on behalf of the sister church of the PRCA, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland, responds to a recent article published in the *Puritan Reformed Journal*, the journal of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. The article, by David B. McWilliams, defends the free offer of the gospel. McGeown takes issue with the contents and the conclusion of this article. And once again, we plead for an honest and thorough re-evaluation of the teaching that reduces the call of the gospel—power of God unto salvation—to a helpless, ineffectual, pathetic offer.

And then there are the book reviews—summaries and critiques of recently published works that we bring to the attention of our readers. Some we recommend; others not. But in either case, the reviews are a reminder that officebearers, and especially pastors, must be readers. They must find the time and be given the time, even in busy pastorates, to read.

Now, read and enjoy!

Soli Deo Gloria!

—RLC ●

God's Covenant of Grace in the Psalms (4): A Communal Relationship

Russell J. Dykstra

The covenant of God is a deeply personal relationship between God and His people. God loves and chooses each member of His covenant eternally in Christ. In time God establishes a bond of love with each one, adopting His chosen as His own child. This truly astounding nature of the covenant makes it a living relationship that affects every area of the believer's life.

However, there is more to covenant life than simply the personal relationship between the believer and God. The covenant is not merely a relationship between God and a believer and his children. Rather, it is a covenant established with a multitude of people, so many that they cannot be counted. God's covenant people are as innumerable as the stars in the heavens and as the sand of the seashore. And, amazing to consider, in God's work of establishing His covenant, all those members are knit together. The Bible describes them in various ways, as children in one family, as members of a universal church, and as members of one body.

Psalm 122 teaches us about our place in the church, what our feelings should be toward the church, as well as what our responsibilities are toward the church. Psalm 122 is a song of joy and a song of love for the church of God. The inspired psalmist sings of the gladness in his soul when he hears his friends say, "Let us go into the house of the LORD" (v. 1). He goes on to describes the thrill when his feet stand within Jerusalem's gates. The Jerusalem he loves is beautiful to look at, a "city compact and fair." Jerusalem is so precious because the house of God is there, and the throne of the house of David, pointing to the promised Messiah. Then the psalmist turns with heartfelt earnestness to us, fellow believers. He exhorts us, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (v. 6). He concludes with the vow to "seek [her] good" (v. 9).

Psalm 122 is a song that all believers must make their own. This kind of zeal, this devotion and love for the church, is sorely needed in

an age when the church is by and large neglected, if not despised. Even for many church members, the church is not vital for their lives. The authority of the church to direct the lives of members is casually brushed aside. The church, once the center of the life of Reformed believers, rarely holds such an important place today. People fit the church in where they can, but if they cannot, that seems to be no great loss.

A zeal for the church and for the peace of Zion is always needed, even when there is relative peace in a congregation. Peace is a precious gift from God, and it can so easily be taken away. The peace of the congregation can be disrupted by gross public sins that require Christian discipline. Disagreement can surface over decisions of the elders, or the actions of some in the congregation, and the peace is marred. The Bible and the history of the church warn that peace is shattered when preachers introduce false doctrine. Congregations became battlefields. In the war, there are many casualties. One casualty is the peace of Jerusalem.

Peace is precious, and when lost, it is not easily restored. At the same time, love for the church can fill the believer with the same joy expressed in Psalm 122. This is a tremendous incentive for all God's people to pray for the church. And since the church is the body of the elect, believers pray for the people of God as a community.

The three aspects of this covenant as a communal relationship that will be explored are, first, a genuine love for the church; second, the care for fellow saints that the covenant demands; and third, the life of covenant consciousness that is expected for God's covenant people.

A Love for the Church

The Psalms, expressing as they do the spiritual life of believers, make plain that in those whom God brings into His covenant He works a love for His church. In the Psalms the church is usually referred to as Zion or Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the most important city in Old Testament Israel. If we could have seen it in its glory days, no doubt we would have grasped why it was a city so precious and beloved to the Israelites. First, Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel. It was called the city of David because David had established it as the capital. The whole life of the nation revolved around Jerusalem. In the days of Solomon, when God blessed Israel with peace and prosperity,

Jerusalem was a magnificent city. In addition, Solomon's renowned wisdom made the throne in Jerusalem one of justice and power.

Jerusalem was a beautiful city. Built on mountains, it was visible for miles high above the plains. At the same time, the city was compact, well planned and laid out. Jerusalem was also a well defended city. It had natural defenses, surrounded by mountains and situated atop sheer cliffs measuring some 600 feet that were virtually impossible to scale. In addition, the city was fortified with walls on all sides, and with watch towers. It was a city nearly impregnable. When all the land was overrun by enemy armies, Jerusalem stood unscathed.

Most of all, Jerusalem's importance lay in the truth that she was the city of God. God had chosen to place His name there. There in Jerusalem was the temple. There were held the daily sacrifices and the offering of incense. The people came to Jerusalem for the solemn feasts. In a real sense, God was there. If all of Canaan was in that day the holy land of promise, Jerusalem was the center of the land.

This beautiful, well defended city was a type of the church. What resemblances can be seen between the two? In at least five ways, Jerusalem pictured the church.

First, as Jerusalem was the center of Israel's life, so is the church for God's people. The church ought to be that. Not family, friends, or sports, not job or school, nor entertainment, but the church should be the center of the believer's life.

Second, the church is beautiful. The church is the joy of saints. The house of God, the worship services, the life of the church, fellow saints—in these the believers find their delight. The beauty of the church is due to God's work. God planned the church and all the members of it, and knits together the members of the church into one body, one beautiful whole.

Third, like Jerusalem, the church is defensed. God set His church high on the Rock, which is Christ Jesus. The church is lifted up far above her enemies. And as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His church (Ps. 125). Additionally, God surrounds His church with a wall of defense against attack, which is His truth. Every doctrine in the creeds is another stone cemented into this wall. Not only that, but the church has appointed watchmen on her towers, namely, elders. (One of the names for elder is overseer.)

God appoints elders. Their oversight is crucial for the church and for her spiritual life because the church can be overcome by the attacks of the world. These God-given defenses, on the one hand, prevent the enemy from overwhelming the church, and on the other, preserve her members from scattering.

Fourth, God loves His church. Psalm 87:2 speaks of this divine love: "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."

Most of all, Jerusalem pictures the church in that God is in the midst of her. God was in Jerusalem typically in His dwelling place, the temple. Now God dwells in His church by His Spirit and Word. He is in her in the special offices—elder, deacon, and minister. And God is in every believer anointed by the Spirit of Christ. Because of His presence, the church is the center of worship. It is true that in a certain sense believers can and do worship God in all their lives. But worship in the church is special. It is the official and corporate worship of God. God comes to His people, and through the preaching of the Word, He speaks to His people. The saints gather to sing, call on God, and bow in obedience to His Word.

Truly the church is the focus of the believer's life. The heart of every spiritually-minded believer echoes the joy of Psalm 122:1, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD."

Believers sing (in Psalm 122 and elsewhere) of their love for Jerusalem. What does this mean, and what exactly makes them love the church? This is worth considering because there are wrong motives for loving the church. For some it may be little more than sentimentality. Their attitude is: This is my church. This is where I grew up, and I have fond memories of my church. Or, my family is here, and I love my family. They will never leave, so I will stay here too. Or, my friends are here; I love my friends.

These expressions of love are not the believer's joy in the church as expressed in Psalm 122. The prayer arises out of a genuine love for God's church. The church is not only to be understood as the church universal, but also as she is manifest in the local congregation. The love for this church is very strong. It is not a mere 'like,' or merely being comfortable with the members of the church. This love causes the believer to breathe after the church, desire her, delight in the church,

and seek her good with all his heart. Every believer ought to face the question squarely, Do I love Jerusalem, the church of Jesus Christ as manifest concretely here on the earth?

This love for the church is rooted in the believer's love for God and His covenant. The church belongs to God and God is in the midst of her, as Jerusalem was the city of God and for that reason was beloved by Israel. Similarly, the church is God's dwelling place.

The New Testament, using figures, teaches us more about the church. She is called the body of Christ, and elsewhere, His bride. The latter figure is found already in the Psalms. The Messianic Psalm 45 speaks of the glory of the coming King, but then turns to His bride: "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him…. The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold" (vv. 11, 13). As noted already, one who loves God will love the church because he will see God there in Jesus Christ. Christ is in Jerusalem (the church) on the throne "of judgment," the throne "of the house of David" (Ps. 122:5).

The believer also loves the church because God loves her. And how He does! That is evident already in the Old Testament from the divine favor bestowed on Jerusalem. No place in all earth was so favored. Jerusalem was chosen and precious, God's heritage. Likewise the church was eternally chosen in Christ (in love) and redeemed by His precious blood. Never was love so brilliantly displayed as in the cross. God poured out His infinite wrath on His own Son for the love that He had for His *church*. Consider the practical significance of this. Fellow Christians, whom we might belittle and shun, have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Son of God. An officebearer whom we might consider inept, perhaps not worth listening to, was specially chosen by Christ and qualified for the work out of Christ's loving care for His church. We ought to love them because God does.

We love the church also because our life is there. God has established His covenant with His church. Psalm 122:9 indicates that: "Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek her good." When David wrote those inspired words, the "house of the LORD" was not yet built in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, the house points to the covenant—God dwelling with His people in covenant fellowship. God is life. To live apart from God is death. And that life with God is

possible only in the church. In the church we come to know Him, love Him, and experience covenant life. There we receive the blessings of the covenant flowing from the cross, starting with justification—the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's eternal righteousness.

Not only that, but the church is our spiritual mother. She cares for us and feeds us spiritually. We are nourished from childhood in the loving care of the church. She comforts, guards, and admonishes us, directing our feet in the paths of life. Clearly, we must love her. We will not easily forsake her. Only when a spiritual mother no longer feeds with the pure milk of the Word, when she gives stones for bread, when she forsakes her Husband (Christ) and seeks other lovers, then believers must leave that congregation. She is no longer the church of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 122 expresses the saints' love for Jerusalem, the church. But this is hardly the only Psalm that does so. In fact, the psalmist often breaks out with admiration and love for the church. He sings, "For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof" (Ps. 102:14). He asks that if he does not hold Jerusalem to be his chief joy, that God will cause his "right hand to forget her cunning," and his "tongue [to] cleave to the roof of [his] mouth" (Ps. 137:5-6). Perhaps rounding the last mountain that obscured Jerusalem, now viewing God's city, he bursts into praise, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Ps. 48:2). Clearly, it is love that motivates the petition, "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem" (Ps. 51:18). In the deep pit of depression, the psalmist recalls how he "had gone with the multitude" and how he "went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday" (Ps. 42:4). That is the cause of his joy, namely, God's house, God's dwelling, which is in Jerusalem.

A Care for the Saints

A love for the church will manifest itself in several ways, but the most obvious is in a love for the members of God's church. Each of these members is united to Christ by the living bond of faith. Each one possesses all the blessings of the covenant, which is salvation—forgiveness of sins, the life of Christ, the grace to live unto God, and

the love of God in his heart. Each member also has specific gifts in a proportion unique to him or her. This is true, first, from the point of view of creation. God forms each of His children with specific physical and intellectual gifts. As a result, each member of the church has a unique personality and possesses strengths and weaknesses.

In addition, the Spirit gives special spiritual gifts. Psalm 133 employs a lovely figure to teach this, describing Aaron's anointing for the office of high priest. The Spirit is pictured as "the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Ps. 133:2). Christ is the Head of the church and the Spirit is given Him "above [His] fellows" (Ps. 45:7). The body also received the Spirit, as the oil flowed down even "to the skirts of his garments." Psalm 133 continues, "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3).

Accordingly, in the members the Spirit works spiritual gifts such as strength of faith, so that this member is rock-solid and unwavering in his convictions. Another has a special measure of wisdom, and many members seek this one out for help and advice. Another has courage to stand fast in the battles of faith. Another is given deeper understanding of the truth, and the ability to explain it clearly. All believers share in these gifts from the Holy Spirit, but all have them in different measure. God has determined this diversity in the body, even as there is diversity in the physical human body.

Within this God-ordained diversity, there is unity. All the members of the body have Christ, His Spirit, and all His benefits. This common partaking of Christ draws them together. They delight in the saints because they see God's work in them (Ps. 16:3).

Love for the members of God's covenant is manifest in giving. Believers serve their fellow members. They seek fellowship in the love that gives of self, as Christ gave Himself for His own.

One specific manifestation of this love is found in the church's care for the children of the church. First, members teach their children by word and example to seek the church and to live out of her. In addition, love for the church seeks to provide faithful training in the truth for the children. For the sake of the future church, members are

zealous to instruct children, and whenever possible they band together to establish Christian schools for all the children of the congregation.

As Psalm 122 makes plain, love for the church also leads to fervent prayers for the peace of Jerusalem. This prayer is for all of Jerusalem, the church, not merely one's own congregation. Believers never rejoice over the troubles of another part of the church. Believers pray for the peace and wellbeing of the congregation, the denomination, and the church universal. Obviously, this is never a prayer for peace at the cost of the truth. The truth may never be compromised. True unity is found only in the truth of God.

This, then, will be the proof of your love for the church. It is easy for one to say that he or she loves the church. But are you also on your knees before God, praying for the peace, prosperity, and spiritual good health of the church? If you love the church, you will.

With the God-ordained diversity in the body, believers are able to serve other members. They must recognize that whatever gifts they possess are from God. There is no room for pride. It must be acknowledged that the gifts are not simply for the profit of the recipient, so that the individual stands out in the church. Nor are the gifts given so that believers make a name for themselves in the world, that they are recognized and honored in school or the work place.

On the contrary, God gives to all His people gifts for the sake of the *body*, that they might all serve their fellow saints. The strengths of one member equip him to serve and assist other saints who have weaknesses in that area. Every member ought to look about the church asking the question, How can I serve the church here in this place? To what member of the church can I give assistance? Who is suffering? Who is dealing with troubles? Who has overwhelming heartaches? Who in the church needs a helping hand or an encouraging word? Whose needs ought I be bringing to God in prayer?

Obviously, wisdom and care are needed in this, for members must not be busybodies, poking their noses into everyone else's life. Nonetheless, all should be looking for opportunities to serve others. Why? Because of one's love for the church and all her members.

What a tremendous blessing is the communion of saints! Out of love, all the members seek to build up and encourage one another in

the faith, strengthening the weak hands that hang down and the feeble knees (Heb. 12:12)!

When God establishes His covenant with His people in Jesus Christ, the result is that the covenant people are united in their love for God and their love for the saints. They delight to serve fellow members. This activity of love stands against the pressures of society, government, school, and business. These latter are powerful pressures that demand our time, abilities, and possessions. God's people rather see that they are here on the earth first and foremost to serve God, and that is done concretely by serving the church.

Covenant-Conscious Living

God's covenant is not a matter of small significance. It should be obvious that when the Creator of heaven and earth, the infinite and transcendent God, makes a covenant with an insignificant creature, namely, with man, that this covenant dominates the entire existence of the creature. It shapes and molds him, and determines his goals, attitudes, and lifestyle.

We will not discuss all the effects of the covenant on the lives of believers, but we wish to examine one specific aspect of their lives, namely, the matter of family. It will be the burden of this section to demonstrate from the Psalms that covenant people must strive for a covenant-conscious life, the kind of life described in Psalm 128, which begins, "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways." The Psalm continues to describe the covenant blessings that the believing man experiences in his wife and children, in his grandchildren, and in the church.

Men of the covenant need to face these questions squarely: What is your goal in life? Is it to get a good education and then a well-paying job? Is it to buy a nice place to live, get a car, and perhaps be able to travel? Will you then be happy? Or is your goal to possess the happiness of Psalm 128?

The same question can be put to the women in the church: What is your goal in life? Is it your driving motivation to be a woman with a good education, and then an important job that will earn a good salary and give you some prestige in the world? Or is your goal that which is set forth in Psalm 128?

In both cases, if the goals are the former, then we are being earthly minded. We may have a comfortable life and enjoy some earthly happiness. But when we die, all our hopes and joys will also perish.

The Bible sets before us true happiness in Psalm 128. "Blessed," that is, "happy" is the man who fears God and walks in God's law. As a father, he must reflect the love that God has towards His adopted children. This is the tender love of a father, full of pity for the troubles and sorrows of his children (Ps. 103:13).

He experiences true blessedness in the covenant family, starting with a wife who is like a vine on the sides of the house. The idea is not that the covenant wife is a trophy wife—simply chosen for her physical beauty or abilities to adorn the home of the man. Rather, the words "by the sides of" (בְּיַרְכְּתֵי) indicate the innermost part of the home. It is the word used in I Samuel 24:3 where Saul came into a cave and "David and his men remained in the sides of the cave." David and his men were deep in the cave. The same word is used in Jonah 1:5—"But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." Jonah was not on the outside of the ship, but deep in the heart of it. Likewise, the covenant wife is the heart of the covenant home. By God's grace she is a joyful mother of children (Ps. 113:9). She devotes her life to the care—physical and spiritual—of the family. She is blessed there and is an inexpressible blessing to the family.

In this covenant home, the children are like olive plants. Olive trees were extremely important for the Israelites in Bible days. They provided oil for cooking, lighting, and moistening skin in the arid climate. Covenant children, like olive plants, are important. Their tremendous value is revealed in the truth that they are Jehovah's heritage (Ps. 127:3). That the children are called olive plants also brings out that they are living creatures, requiring nurture and care. They are also a delight to have around the table—pointing to mealtime and the covenant fellowship that is enjoyed there. The family gatherings at the table are not to be times when each one is locked into his own world on the smartphone. Rather, it is to be an occasion for talking, laughing, sharing, crying, and encouraging each other.

In the covenant home, parents love their children, even when they are not so lovable. They instruct them diligently, causing them

to know "the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done" (Ps. 78:4). They insist that they "keep his commandments" (78:7). And the children love their parents, honoring and obeying them for the Lord's sake, even though their parents are imperfect. The covenant home reflects God's covenant of friendship.

Concerning this man in his covenant family, the psalmist declares, "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD" (v. 4).

But the psalmist is not finished. The blessings continue in godfearing grandchildren—"Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children" (v. 6). And, such a man will "see the good of Jerusalem all the days of [his] life…and peace upon Israel" (vv. 5, 6). The promise of God is: "The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion" (v. 5). The covenant blessings in a godfearing man's family are reflected in the church around him—the covenant community.

Such a covenant home ought to be the goal and desire of covenant youth. If it is, it will greatly affect their important decisions from an early age. Covenant youth must think covenantally. This involves their ideas of dating and marriage. Young people who think covenantally will be serious in seeking the blessings of a covenant home.

Such a biblical mindset runs contrary to the standards and goals of modern society in the twenty-first century. It is considered quite legitimate for a young man to live a carefree life though his twenties. He can have his fun, purchase the things he wants, get established, and then think about marriage at about age thirty.

It is obvious that no rules can be set regarding when members of the church ought to marry. However, a young man who is living in the consciousness of the covenant will be serious about the pursuit of a covenant home long before age thirty. He will be preparing himself to be a godly husband and father, able to give good leadership, demonstrating rock-solid dependability. He will be reading, studying, and praying concerning the role of a husband and father. And his lifestyle will indicate his desires. His money is not for living a life of ease and pleasure. It is saved with a view to the covenant home he desires. He will be seeking a godly wife, one who is a believer. He would never consider dating an unbeliever and risk forfeiting a blessed, covenant home. He desires a wife with whom he can be in

unison both in doctrine and in walk of life. He is fully conscious that she will be teaching the children that the Lord may be pleased to give them.

Young ladies likewise must set before themselves the goal of the home described in Psalm 128. Education is a good thing. But if it has as its goal a career and thus putting off marriage and children until the career is established, that is not thinking covenantally. A godly young woman prepares herself to be a godly wife and mother. She prays for and seeks a husband that fits the biblical requirements. She will be satisfied with nothing less. She likewise will date only believers, and especially those with whom she is united in the faith. And in marriage, she understands the biblical perspective on covenant children and the heritage of Jehovah. She shuns the unbiblical standards of the world on children, which limits them to a very few.

These are the biblical goals of serious-minded covenant young men and women. And God promises that this is the way of blessedness. This governs their lives. A man who sees that a job will require too much of his time and make it virtually impossible to be a proper father will look for another job. A promotion that gives much more money, but makes home-destroying demands, is passed by. Thinking covenantally means the family and the church are first, and a career is a distant second. A job is a means to the end of supporting the family and the causes of God's covenant.

The importance of, and the blessings from such a covenant-conscious life, are easily illustrated. Two believers who marry in their early twenties and are given a number of children, and whose children also live conscious of the covenant, will, by God's grace, have many baptized grandchildren in the church by the time they are sixty—easily twenty or more. On the other hand, if they put off marriage until they are thirty, and their children do the same, then at age sixty they will have no grandchildren. The impact on the covenant is obvious: over twenty baptized grandchildren, or zero. Since God gathers His covenant seed from the children of believers, this has a significant effect on the covenant in their generations.

Those who live in the consciousness of God's covenant will have the goal of establishing a covenant home. They will do so out of a love for the church and a love for the covenant of God. God will

bless that. The blessings will not be according to the standards and thinking of society, but rather according to the promises of Psalm 128.

Conclusion:

What a glorious gift God gives His chosen people—a place in His covenant—a covenant established eternally in Christ and, therefore, with all who are in Christ, friendship with God. In this life, now already, they live in fellowship with God. And this is preparation for eternally living with God in friendship—ever growing in their knowledge of Him and in the blessed experience of His love.

There is, therefore, every incentive to live for this personal, intimate covenant life with God, and to let that covenant govern one's life. That means loving and seeking the good of the church, and it demands living in our homes in such a way that God's covenant life is reflected there. God promises His people that they shall prosper who love His church (Ps. 122:6). And He promises the blessedness of a covenant home to those that fear Him and walk in His commandments (Ps. 128). ●

"O my soul"— The Competency of Pastors and Elders to Counsel Depressed Souls

Barrett L. Gritters

(with a sermon on Psalm 42:5, 11 and Psalm 43:5 appended: "The Downcast Believer Looking Up to God")

More and more in Christ's church, pastors and elders are needed to help the people of God in the darkness of depression. Some pastors and elders will face this need more than others, especially those in larger congregations. But at one time or another, most pastors and elders will meet sheep who are downcast. They will, that is, if they show themselves to be approachable and sympathetic.

Perhaps more of the downcast will be women. A body of research says that women are more inclined to depression by two to one, partly because of the menstrual cycle, hormonal and endocrine factors.[1] Reasons may also include that women are more sensitive by nature—for which men can be thankful—or that women, generally, are less reluctant to ask for help. But some certainly will be men. During my own pastoral ministry of twenty years, I counseled very few depressed men, but in the fifteen years since then, I have met with and heard about as many men in the darkness as women.

Among these numbers of depressed Christians, the youth must not be forgotten. Increasingly, Christian young people are sinking into this darkness. This is the testimony of Christian pastors. Statistics from secular organizations bear the same testimony, many of these attributing the reality to the increased use of technology, especially social media and its effects. Christians must not be naïve, however, as to *other* factors that weigh down the youth. I have in mind especially family disunity and abuse.

1 Archibald D. Hart, *Counseling the Depressed* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 37.

I repeat, pastors and elders increasingly will meet sheep who are almost, if not altogether, overwhelmed by depression.[2]

Thus, this article, the purpose of which is threefold.

First, it is to instruct and encourage officebearers that, when they find a depressed Christian at their door, they may know themselves to be qualified—and able to become *more* qualified—to help these sheep. Indeed, pastors and elders may need *assistance* from others—trained and experienced professionals or medical doctors. But officebearers in the church must recognize that God equips them for this aspect of soul-care also. This article aims at assisting them to be equipped.

A second purpose of the article—it appears in a theological journal, after all—is to propose a more careful analysis of the relationship between depression and sin than is often given. Most Reformed and Christian writers discuss the relation between depression and sin. Some of these writers relate depression and sin in an entirely and emphatically negative form, exclaiming with authority: "Do not make direct connection between depression and sin!" This error must be corrected. Other Reformed Christians do make a connection between *some* depression and sin. Usually their description is better than the emphatic negative, but too often theirs suffers from the weakness of making the connection with a sort of concession: "We recognize that *some* depression comes from unconfessed sin, but we don't want to be misunderstood." Thus, they contend something to this effect: "In the first place, we must not fall into the old simplistic approach—confess sin and depression will disappear. But, secondly, *most* depression is not related to sin." This admission that *some* depression is related to sin must be examined more carefully. First, I will attempt to show *how* sin and depression are related. Usually, "guilt" is mentioned, but not explained. This must be explored further. Second, I attempt to show that more depression *may* have sin-links than pastors and elders might suppose. I show this, not to increase guilt and shame, but to lead the depressed person more and more to Christ, their help. If, truly, there is a sin-link, and the sin is not explored and then addressed with the

2 Archibald Hart argues that an aging population, increased stress on account of the pace of life in Western society, and a loss of hope from our tumultuous society that has lost Christian principles, all will lead to an increase of depression in the decades to come. *Counseling the Depressed*, 38.

gospel of justification and sanctification, an important aspect of healing is overlooked. Gentle and loving counsel may help depressed Christians see sins that they had not seen before. The depressed Christian, then, is not sternly rebuked and quickly called to repent. Rather, with kind and patient counsel he is transformed by the renewing of his mind (Rom. 12:2, Eph. 4:23).

Third, and related to the connection between depression and sin, the article's purpose is to re-examine the common assertion that Jesus Christ may have been downcast, but certainly not because of sin, for He had no sin. Spurgeon is most commonly quoted in support of this view. "No sin is necessarily connected with sorrow of heart, for Jesus Christ our Lord once said, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.' There was no sin in Him, and consequently not in His deep depression."[3] Thus, the elder and minister who will bring most comfort to the depressed Christians under their care are those who will bring them the message of Christ—cast down, depressed, Christ.

Thus, the article's goal is as much comforting as it is intended to be instructive, as much hortatory as didactic. The exhortation and comfort are this: Elders and pastors, you have a competency to counsel the depressed. Indeed, the reality of depression is intimidating. Ministering to a depressed person is difficult. But God gives His servants a level of ability to minister to every depressed child of God. The instruction will include further explanation, as I indicated above, of the relationship between depression and sin.

The Importance of Officebearers Understanding Depression

For officebearers in the church, the importance of understanding depression begins with *Scripture's recognition* of it as a problem. Scripture describes the reality of the downcast soul because depression is a reality in every age. The inspired Word describes men and women (although the great majority are men) who manifested symptoms of depression. No doubt, Scripture does not use the technical terms we use today, or speak of every manifestation of depression, or indicate always how long the affliction lasted. Nevertheless, it is helpful in at least three respects: 1) it gives helpful and frequent *descriptions* of

3 Quoted in Edward T. Welch, *Depression: Looking up from the Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011), 19, 20.

depression; 2) sometimes it hints at and other times clearly identifies *causes* of depression; 3) especially important, it gives clear instruction as to the *remedies* God's people can employ to endure and even overcome depression.

Without trying to identify the occasion for each of the biblical personalities who seemed to be depressed, I mention a number of them to make us think of how many were cast down. Elders can profitably use these examples to show downcast believers that other *Christians* have walked the same path in which depressed children of God are walking today. In itself, reading and explaining these passages to believers can be a means of grace for them.

In this list, notice that both believer and unbeliever are included. It would be worth reflecting on what were the circumstances of each: Cain (Gen. 4:1-8); Job (6:2, 3, 14; 7:11); Moses (Num. 11:14); Hannah (I Sam. 1:7, 16); Saul (I Sam. 18:10, 11); Elijah (I Kings 19:4); Ahab (I Kings 21:4); David (Ps. 32); other psalmists (42, 77, 88);[4] Jeremiah (20:14-18; Lam. 1:12); Timothy (II Tim. 1:7).[5] Solomon alludes to depression in Proverbs 18:14: "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?"[6]

Second, the importance of officebearers understanding something about depression is that depression *always bears on the Christian's spiritual life*, on the *souls* and spirits of God's people. Elders and pastors are physicians of *souls*.

Of course, saying that "depression always bears on the Christian's spiritual life" is not to say that depression always *originates* in the soul; nor is it to say that the *cure* for depression is only addressing the

4 Steven and Robyn Bloem say, "The Psalms treat depression more realistically than many of today's popular books on Christianity and psychology. David and other psalmists often found themselves deeply depressed for various reasons." *Broken Minds: Hope for Healing When You Feel Like You're 'Losing It'* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 204.

5 In his *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure,* Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes Timothy's depression as "fear of the future." "We are going to consider the case of those who are suffering from spiritual depression because they are afraid of the future—fear of the future." (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, repr., 1982), 93ff.

6 The other translations that have "broken," "crushed," or "stricken," where the AV has "wounded" are helpful to understand the Hebrew נָכֶא.

soul by reading the Bible and prayer. But it is to say that depression is "within" the child of God, in his or her own "soul," as the psalmist emphasizes in Psalm 42, and that elders and ministers have the calling and the ability to minister to these downcast souls.

The pendulum of opinion about depression swings from the extreme notion on the left (that all depression is only chemically-related and the cure is found in pills), to the extreme notion on the right (that all depression is only sin-caused and the remedy found in repentance). Some elders may be inclined to adopt one of these extremes. Others of them, although they realize this to be an error, still despair to know much of anything about depression. But the wise among them will conclude that the truth is not in either extreme, and that they truly can learn how to care for downcast souls.

Third, the importance of understanding depression includes what appears to be an *increasing frequency* of it.

Almost all the literature on depression attempts to give the most up-to-date statistics of depression. I refrain from citing this at any length, and from putting too much stock in the numbers, recognizing the wisdom of the wit who said, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." Nevertheless, I repeat some of the recent estimates that come from sociologists in Western society: One in five persons experience depression and one in ten endure panic attacks in some stage of life. Ten to twelve million adults in the USA are victims of depression every year. Six percent of men and ten percent of women have a depressive episode in any given year. The World Health Organization estimates that ten percent of the world's population suffers from some neuropsychiatric condition. More suffering is from depression than from any other single disease affecting human beings. Suicide, which is often the end result of unresolved depression, is the leading cause of violent death in the world: almost 50% of all violent deaths are suicides. All these numbers allegedly are far higher than a generation ago.[7]

7 Edward Welch says, "…it is a commonly accepted observation that depression has significantly increased over the last three generations." And, "The incidence rate of depression for those born after 1950 is as much as twenty times higher than the incidence rate for those born before 1910." *Depression,* 98.

My own conversations with church members as I preach in the churches in West Michigan, especially after I preach about depression, make me believe that, although depression is not a new phenomenon, the statistics are believable that show depression's prevalence and rise. At the very least, these conversations are reminders to pastors and elders alike that, when given the opportunity, God's people will speak about their downcast soul, or that of their loved one.

Fourth, the importance of understanding depression lies in the dire *consequences of mistreating* it, considered by some to be the most painful of all emotional disorders. Discussion of proper and improper handling of depression awaits the latter part of this article. Here we only note that Scripture warns of the reality of mistreatment. "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart" (Prov. 25:20). The old Dutch translation *treurig*, meaning "sad" or "mournful" captures the idea; a heavy heart is a sad heart. The general truth offered by Proverbs' wisdom is that there is a way to do more damage to a person who already suffers from a troubled heart. Singing songs to a depressed person may be as damaging (to say nothing of foolish) *spiritually* and *emotionally* as taking away someone's coat in a snow-storm would be *physically*. That this proverb is included in inspired Scripture indicates that God's people are not always so wise as to avoid damaging mistakes in their attempts to help depressed friends or family. Added to this warning from Proverbs comes the warning from its neighbor Job, in which book Job's three friends had a great deal to say about Job's affliction, which sounded orthodox, but for which God's wrath was kindled against them (42:7) and Job described them as "miserable comforters" (16:2). These warnings are not intended to intimidate officebearers in their work, but to caution them to carefulness and humble dependence on God.

Fifth, that *depression is misunderstood* accentuates the importance of elders today educating themselves. Even though it is commonly known that depression is the "common cold" of psychological difficulties, one author said, "Depression ranks highest among the misunderstood emotions."[8] The stigma attached to mental illness because of the misunderstanding makes the sufferers all the more oppressed in

8 Hart, *Counseling the Depressed,* 17.

their suffering. Some misunderstanding is understandable for, unlike afflictions that are purely physical, there is no blood test or CT scan to identify depression, nor surgical procedures to excise it.

In addition, our society has come to expect quick fixes for all maladies; and when this malaise lasts or resists initial remedies, impatience often appears. Worse yet, there are pastors and other members of the church who are so spiritually and mentally strong (so they imagine) that they have little sympathy for those who suffer depression. "I don't have time to be depressed" was one very uninformed and hurtful response by an otherwise good Christian mother to the reality of depression in a fellow church member.

Then, because the *oft*-depressed person comes more often under scrutiny by those who want to help them, the weaknesses of their natures become more visible than the weaknesses of other Christians who are not thus scrutinized; and the depression may be attributed to these weaknesses. Thus, at the outset here, this aspect of my own convictions must be made clear: although *some* depression is caused by specific, easily-identifiable, unconfessed sins and gross spiritual weaknesses, that is likely not often the case. Later in this article I will explain how carefully to examine whether sin is part of the root of some depression, even more than we have realized or admitted in the past.

All Christians can suffer depression. He that thinketh he standeth (in this sphere, too) must take heed lest he fall.

A Twofold Caution in our Approach[9]

First, elders and pastors who counsel depressed members must realize that, because depression's causes are so varied, and the life-circumstances of the people of God are so different and difficult to understand, they must not be too quickly confident of either the causes or the full remedy needed in any particular case. That is, this is a call to caution and humility.

Both in exploring *causes* and explaining *remedies*, especially the youthful counselor who has read a little bit about depression may be

9 For the two main ideas in this section, see David Murray, *Christians Get Depressed Too* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 14-22.

too quickly a know-it-all. This is a real danger in the counseling field, especially when the Reformed counselor uses his primary counseling tool, the Word of God.

Of course, where a root cause is obvious and the Scripture is unambiguously clear as it addresses this root cause, being confident is not only helpful, it is necessary. Speak God's Word clearly and with authority: Thus saith the Lord. Where the root cause, however, is not obvious—and it rarely will be—we must be careful, cautious, humble. Even in this case, there is a great difference between confidently expressing *hope* for the depressed, confidently addressing *comfort* to the cast down Christian, confidently and authoritatively declaring the *love* of God for disquieted believers—all of which is necessary—and, on the other hand, confidently and authoritatively expressing what is the source of the depression and therefore what is the cure.

The Christian literature on depression from the last generation gives us this warning. In the early history of the biblical counseling movement (generally, in the early 1970s), the restoration of Scripture to its proper place in counseling fostered a tendency to give black and white answers to very complex questions. The result was damage to those suffering depression, as well as damage to the reputation of the biblical counseling movement.

The danger of unwarranted and too quickly gained confidence is especially acute when those called to give counsel are preachers—accustomed to being dogmatic on the pulpit and other forums where they teach. In many settings, King Jesus' ambassadors must give no uncertain sound in their blast of the gospel trumpet. But they now find themselves bringing that authoritative Word of God in very difficult circumstances where many things are uncertain. What is the problem's source? What word should be read and explained? And how ought it be applied? Certainly, at the beginning of giving counsel to depressed believers, the minister or elder must proceed with humility and a willingness to listen.

Second, there is a ditch to avoid on two sides when assessing the cause of depression.

One ditch, as I indicated earlier, is the position that all depression is physical in origin, explained by an imbalance in chemicals in the brain, to be remedied, then, by medicine that corrects the imbalance.

This is called the "medical model" or the "drug-treatment model" for depression. For many years, this has been the foundational presupposition of non-Christian doctors and psycho-therapists.

Some of the 'evidence' for this view includes studies, for example, that found that serotonin levels in suicides were all lower than in the general population. Some secular scientists in this field will admit that it is legitimate to ask whether the serotonin levels are instead the *effect* of depression rather than its *cause*. Others will concede that a 'cure' for the chemical imbalance is sometimes found by using placebos, or through counseling. Nevertheless, the medical model remains the model of choice in the secular field.

This view I judge to be in error, at least highly dubious, for it does not take into account the dramatic increase in depression over the last two generations.[10]

Some Christians are tempted to adopt this "all physical" or "mostly physical" position as a reaction to the "all spiritual" model of the biblical counseling movement. But it is a mistake to over-react to one error, only to fall into the other ditch.

That ditch and other extreme—*all depression has its source in the soul, and likely on account of sin*—is more difficult to address, and requires more care. How much *does* or *could* sin play a part? Can the devil dig his spiritual claws into God's people's souls and, if so, to what extent?

We will not conclude that depression is explained by demons *within* a Christian, possessing them. We will not conclude that devils are *always* the *cause* of depression—even dismissing the matter of 'possession.' But this is not an uncommon view. In one case of which I am aware personally, a dear Christian lady was so traumatized and debilitated by depression for so many years that her Pentecostal neighbor convinced her to attempt an exorcism. Of course, this was not the solution for her.

At the same time, sober Christians will not discount the place of the devil in depression. There very well may be a significant role that the deceiver plays in our darkness. Luther's opposition to the devil is usually raised only to illustrate how foolish it is to throw an ink-well at the devil, and how unwise to attribute overhead creaking

10 See Welch, *Depression*, 98.

floors at midnight to the devil. But Luther was no fool, even if he did give too much credit to this foe. Christians today ought not discount the place of the devil in depression by saying, "Do you not know that the church formerly thought the devil was the cause of epilepsy, too?!" Depression is in the domain of the soul after all, and there is no territory that the evil one is more interested in than the territory of the Christian's soul.

Second, in that same 'ditch' is the view that all depression is caused by specific, known, or easily-identifiable, unconfessed sin; and that rebuke, confession, and repentance are the cure. This, too, is error.

Rejecting that viewpoint does not mean that we fail to see the necessary corrective it wants to give to the humanistic and purely physical approach to mental problems—that bad behavior is to be explained by bad genes, and bad feelings by one's chemical and biological makeup. This viewpoint rightly reminds us that there is always a *spirit-soul* component to depression that must not be overlooked. Christian pastors and elders, therefore, have a vital role in helping depressed Christians. But whether sin in the soul is 'root' or 'fruit' is the million-dollar question, and answering it makes all the difference in the world how the pastor or elder ministers to his sheep.

A General Description of Depression

This article does not deal with the two far 'ends' of depression's spectrum—on the mild end, those who have minor and very short-lived 'blues,' or the more severe end, those whose depression debilitates them or puts them out of touch with reality.[11] Those who have minor blues usually do not come to the pastor or elder for care and often emerge from the darkness after a relatively short while. Those who are debilitated need professional help and those who have psychotic episodes must receive medical care quickly.

Although we will admit that there is no sharp divide between mild and moderate, or between moderate and severe, I attempt to describe the problems of those whose darkness is deep enough that they need pastoral care, but not severe enough to require hospital-

11 The technical word for being out of touch with reality is *psychosis*; one suffers hallucinations, has delusional thinking, is significantly out of touch with reality.

ization. A pastor or elder may judge that some need professional counsel and medicine, which then he can supplement with his own pastoral counsel.

What does depression in its moderate forms look like?

Generally, it is a vague sense of feeling bad that gradually leads to being overwhelmed by those bad feelings. Soon, the few negative thoughts give way to exclusively negative thoughts that cannot be put away. The depressed person has a prevailing sense of worthlessness, sometimes of guilt, that together make it very difficult to think about anything else, and soon make it difficult to accomplish work. Their low feelings, negative thoughts, and fearful spirit take over and drag them down into a dark hole. Sometimes the troubles lead them to a nervous breakdown, even to suicidal thoughts. (Again, in these cases, professional help ought to be sought out immediately.)

To use the language of Scripture in Psalm 42, their soul is "downcast"—bowed down under a heavy weight under which it cannot hold up, and which it cannot shrug off. Their soul is "disquieted"—troubled with a confused mixture of thoughts and worries that seem to cause them to drown in the depths of a roiling sea. There is no peace and quiet for their soul.

A Brief Specific Description of Depression

It is possible to categorize the symptoms of depression into four main groups. The officebearer will understand that this grouping is somewhat artificial, may not cover all symptoms, and must not be taken to mean that all depressed people have all these symptoms all the time. In order to diagnose the severity of depression, some doctors ask patients to fill in what is called the "PHQ-9" (Patient Health Questionnaire, number 9), easily found on the Internet. Elders would do well to familiarize themselves with the questionnaire and discuss it with their pastor if they are assisting a church member who is depressed.

Thoughts

Usually one has a distorted view of reality: false conclusions, generalizations, a focus on the negative, concentrating on what others think of them or may do to them. Pessimism will increase. Remember

that Elijah's cast down spirit said, "I, even I only, am left." In reality, there were seven thousand who were God-fearing. The depressed will judge themselves harshly and blame themselves for problems in their life or family: "I am good for nothing, have never accomplished anything worthwhile, and never will." Unchecked, these negative thoughts soon lead to inability to concentrate on work, to read, to make decisions, even at times to speak. Their mind and thoughts are often a confused mix. Their soul, that is, everything that is "within them" is "disquieted" (Psalm 42:5,11).

Mood: Emotions and Feelings

The sense that dominates is a deep sense of sadness. It is a sense that they have failed themselves and everyone else in their life. An overestimation of their troubles and an underestimation of God's grace produce a magnified sense of worry. As they look to the future—near or distant—they have no confidence of change for good. Unreasonable fears of the future lead to anxiety.[12] There is a deep feeling of hopelessness. As to the present, very little gives them joy. Interest in hobbies or recreation often wanes and disappears. Once I asked a dear Christian lady why she and her husband were not enjoying their ordinary recreation. In her depression, which I regret I did not recognize at the time, she responded, "Nothing is fun anymore."

Especially two things the elder or pastor must be alert to. First is an unshakable conviction that God has abandoned them, does not love them, and therefore they are destined for eternal ruin. What they said about themselves in the past—I am a Christian—is in their mind no longer true today. Psalms 77 and 88 both address this deepest of distresses (77:3, 7-9; 88:7, 14, 16). The Heidelberg Catechism lists this fear among our "greatest temptations." We fear that our destiny is hell (Lord's Day 16, Q&A 44). This is a most horrible struggle for Christians, where the devil finds his greatest success, but where the officebearer has the clearest opening to help.

Second, elders must beware of the sheep who may contemplate suicide. If one loses all hope, if the end of the tunnel is dark and

12 Anxiety is sometimes considered a separate category, including fears, tension, uncertainty and indecisiveness.

only dark, even the believer can be tempted to want to end his own life, and even attempt it. Scripture indicates that these dark thoughts are not unknown to believers (see Num. 11:15, I Kings 19:4, etc.). These thoughts must be addressed and suppressed, but they certainly are not infallible signs of reprobation, which the depressed Christian fears. The thoughts are sinful, but not unforgivable. If an officebearer learns of suicidal inclinations, he must immediately get professional assistance. In no case may he wait to address this until the morrow.

Physical Symptoms

The common physical symptoms relate to sleep (inability to sleep or sleeping too much); appetite (loss of appetite or eating too much); sickness (headaches, backaches, etc.); and crying, without an understanding of why they weep. Tiredness is common. Feeling lethargic or, on the opposite side, fidgety or restless, is common. Psalms 42 and 77 both indicate that a downcast spirit influences both sleeping and appetite—too little or too much of either.

It is worth emphasizing here that man's emotional and physical dimensions are so closely related that, in life on earth, they are inseparable. The Old Testament hints strongly at this connection. Proverbs 17:22: "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones." Psalm 32:3, 4 are David's poetic description of the utter physical misery he experienced when he lived for a year in impenitence. What *panic* does to one's *body*, and what *pain* does to one's *soul*, are simple illustrations of this. God created His children a mysterious *unity*, an inseparable combination (until death) of body and soul, the complexity and inter-relatedness of which make us marvel and exclaim: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!"

This close connection between our bodies and souls is a very important reason that when officebearers assist struggling believers in depression they must not overlook the importance of caring for and ministering to the physical dimension. If Jesus redeemed His people both *body* and soul, and thus loves them in *body* and soul, pastors and elders must address the needs of the body of those who are cast down. Also physical problems can be either the root or the fruit of depression.

Behavior and Conduct

Finally, alert caregivers may notice changes in conduct. Lack of energy is common; sluggishness even in movements is common. Social isolation (from church attendance as well), cessation of hobbies, and inability to get work done are possible indicators of depression. Sometimes the depressed seeks relief through destructive behavior—overuse of alcohol, misuse of drugs (legal or illegal), gambling, spending, sexual misconduct, cutting, and so forth.

This conduct—some sinful and some not—may be very closely tied to depression, and careful elders and pastors will respond to it with wisdom, neither ignoring what is sin, nor too quickly judging what the connection between the sin and depression may or may not be—root or fruit. And this leads us to ask what causes a soul to be downcast.

Causes of Depression

Introduction

The body of Christian literature that addresses the causes of depression is extensive. In this article, where my purposes are limited to helping elders and pastors, and concentrating on depression's possible connection to *sin*, I address only a narrow segment of the Christian literature and, more narrowly, mostly that of Reformed writers. I list five, in order to interact with their arguments, as well as to recommend them to officebearers.

David Murray's *Christians Get Depressed Too*[13] is the shortest on my recommended list. For that reason it is useful for the elder, although not only for its brevity. Murray served as a Presbyterian pastor, is now a seminary professor of practical theology and Reformed pastor, and speaks from long experience. His counsel is helpful. Although I will express some differences with its analysis of sin's place in depression, Reformed elders and pastors will be greatly aided in their work by reading it.

Archibald D. Hart's *Counseling the Depressed* aims at the layman. Its introduction asks, "Are highly trained professionals the only ones equipped to help depressed people? Definitely not! While the more serious forms of the disorder *must* be referred to a trained specialist

13 Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010.

for evaluation and treatment, help can and must be provided at many levels."[14] Hart's training, experience, and Christian approach, as well as his treatment of various types of age-related depression and his chapter on counseling the suicidal, put the book on my list. The layman will need to wade through some technical language in the early part of the book, and may also be perplexed by his too-frequent dismissive attitude towards sin as a cause and, at other times, his claim that depression originates in sin; but the work of reading will be rewarded with good insights.

Edward T. Welch's *Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness*[15] would be on my list if only because of the other worthwhile works Welch has written. But Welch's book is also included because his approach is not only Christian, but Reformed. Welch is a licensed psychologist with experience, and teaches for the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. David Murray is somewhat critical of the nouthetic counseling 'movement' of which Welch is a part, claiming that the movement's spokespersons still put too much emphasis on sin's connection to depression. Nevertheless, Murray mentions Welch as an exception to this weakness. I suggest that, for the pastor or elder who will roll up his sleeves and work long-term with depressed people, this book is most helpful for its balanced, spiritual, biblical approach.

Overcoming Spiritual Depression, by Arie Elshout[16] is a unique help in that it uses the history of Elijah's 'depression' after Carmel, as well as Elshout's own depression, as the template to give good counsel to depressed believers. Elshout treats the kind of depression called, in Christian circles, the "Elijah syndrome." A great deal of helpful advice is found here, although I judge too strong an emphasis is given to over-work, or physical over-exertion, as cause for depression. So Elijah is said to have single-handedly killed the 450 prophets of Baal, after which he was exhausted and thus depressed. In spite of some (in my estimation) strained exegesis, I include Elshout's on my list of those from which elders and pastors can profit. The exegetical errors are readily overlooked for the mostly good counsel the brother offers

14 Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987, 17.

15 Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2011.

16 Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006, tr. Bartel Elshout.

when he exhorts, for example: "…instead of anxiously focusing on the 'why' of our circumstances, we should be much more in prayer about the purpose of our circumstances. I know too well that this is far from being simple, but also that it is more than worth the effort."[17] Elshout also has a realistic viewpoint on Christians and suicide.[18]

Finally, I mention D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' classic, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cures.*[19] Different from other works on depression, *Spiritual Depression* is a series of twenty-one sermons by the "Doctor," a "topical series" of sermons. Each chapter, vintage Lloyd-Jones, reads easily and might be read and discussed with those who more frequently come into darkness.

Each of these works wades into the question of depression's *causes*.

All of these works are balanced in their beginnings when they assert that most depressions have no single cause, but a combination of factors that result in depression.[20]

Because of this almost universally held approach in Reformed circles, Welch's wise counsel, repeated throughout his book, is that the counselor should not try to determine causes too soon in his visits with the depressed, but should wait to make judgments until later. Early on, he advises, "There is no reason to cast your vote for these causes yet." And, "Remain among the undecided." Later, even when addressing sin as a possible factor: "You should be undecided about spiritual causes, too. By this I mean that you can't immediately say that there is one core sin that has caused your depression."[21]

Even where there is little consensus among Christian counselors, these five agree that some depression has roots in biological sources, some in psychological sources, and much in a combination of the two.

17 *Overcoming Spiritual Depression,* 50.

18 *Overcoming Spiritual Depression,* 52.

19 Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965.

20 For example, Murray: "often a combination of various factors" (*Christians Get Depressed Too*, 53). Welch: "multiple causes and combinations of these" (*Depression,* 94). Even Elshout, whose emphasis is the Elijah syndrome, says, "A state of depression, whether or not of a clinical nature, can rarely be attributed to a single cause" (*Overcoming Spiritual Depression,* 9).

21 Welch, *Depression,* 18, 19.

Here also is wisdom. A simplistic view of depression is more hurtful than helpful in that it will look for one cause and fail to see another.

Hart judges that less than one third of depression has its source in biological causes. What is called "reactive depression" is "the most common and important of all from a counselor's perspective. The majority of depressions suffered by normal people are of this sort. They are called *reactive depressions* for two reasons: 1. They are a 'response' to something going on in a person's life. 2. They are purely psychologically triggered."[22]

But whatever the percentages may be of reactive versus biological depression, the Christian pastor and elder need to be frequently reminded of three important realities as he faces church members who are depressed: First, as we just saw, depression often has multiple causes. Second, *severe* depression must be referred to professionals for their advice. Third, even in the cases of severe depression, the people of God need the comfort of the gospel of grace.

For the purposes of this article, however, we are interested especially in the connection between depression and sin, and the view of these authors on that question. In the present article, we make a beginning at observing the views of these authors. Next issue we will begin, the Lord willing, to make an assessment of these views and present our own.

What I find in most Christian authors who want not only to be conservative and biblical but also to be realistic and balanced, is that their treatment of the relationship between depression and sin is either inconsistent or insufficient or both. By *inconsistent* I mean that, although some will deny that sin is at the root of many cases of depression, their explanation of causes will include many things that ought to be labeled as sin. Thus, their denial that sin is a contributing cause of much depression is contradicted, or even somewhat undermined, by their calling sinful actions or thoughts something other than sinful. By *insufficient* I mean that, although they will admit that sin may be part of the root of some depression, little is said as to what the connection actually is.

22 *Counseling*, 53.

Inconsistent

Elshout has Elijah's depression "connected with exhaustion rather than guilt," by which he leads us away from sin as cause. But he attributes Elijah's exhaustion to an inferiority complex, taking on more work than one is able to handle, or refusal to delegate work to others, resulting in "making unreasonable and impossible demands on themselves." This, because the man is too proud or too ambitious.[23] A rose by any other name is still a rose; and sin by any other name is still sin. If, indeed, Elijah's depression rooted in overwork on account of pride and refusal to delegate (which is doubtful to this writer), the solution to his depression is partly in confession of those sins and a determination to live in humility in the future. Some form of sin is at the origin of this depression. It must be called sin.

While Welch is quite balanced in his approach to sin's relation to depression, it is possible to misunderstand his caution, "…don't think that this means that your sin is causing your depression. It is true that you will find sin… But this does not automatically mean that sin is the cause of your depression."[24] Of course, "automatically" is the key qualifier in Welch's statement, but the impression may be left that a counselor or depressed Christian is to look away from sin as cause. Immediately, however, Welch's subsequent chapters masterfully and biblically expose the many sins that are precipitating causes of depression. Beginning with chapter 14's call to unveil the heart, Welch examines in the following chapters *fear* (which he calls "unbelief"), *anger, hopelessness* (Welch describes this as reluctance to trust God), *failure* and *shame* (Welch calls some of this 'idolatry'), and the twin evils of *guilt* and *legalism*. Thus, cautioning against "automatically" making sin a cause of depression, Welch actually makes strong and quite direct connections in these chapters.

The same applies to Hart, but less so. Hart lists "Depression is the result of sin" as one of the "erroneous ideas" about depression, but immediately and carefully qualifies this by saying, "But is there any truth to this idea? Yes there is…." Then, he immediately qualifies that by saying, "But sin is *not* the only cause of depression, nor is all depression the consequence of sinful acts." Each of what he judges

23 *Overcoming Spiritual Depression,* 13.

24 *Overcoming Spiritual Depression*, 115.

to be an "erroneous idea" about depression is qualified away by an admission that the erroneous idea in fact has merit. In the end, his section "The Relationship between Depression and Sin"[25] rescues an otherwise difficult to understand chapter. And the rest of his work shows clearly that sin is at the root of most reactive depression, for Hart's thesis is that reactive depression is almost always an improper response to loss. Christians must call any improper response to loss 'sin.'

Murray's worthwhile *Christians Get Depressed Too* cautions against the "tendency to locate the cause of our mental suffering in our spiritual life, in our relationship with God" and asks us not to conclude that it "is necessarily…caused by problems in our spiritual life." He assures Christians suffering from depression that "most often their damaged spiritual relationships and feelings are not the cause of their depression, but the consequence of it," and that we should "assume the same default position with someone suffering from depression as with someone who has shortsightedness, diabetes, heart disease, or a broken leg." What is that default position? Both physical ailments and mental ailments are "the result of living as a fallen creature in a fallen world." The wrong default position is to "assume that the person has caused his suffering by his personal sin." "…just as it is usually wrong to think that there is a spiritual cause for cancer, it is also wrong to think of depression this way."[26] Then, when he comes to the chapter on the causes of depression, the outstanding causes he lists are sins by other names: unhelpful thought patterns, unbalanced lifestyles, latent false thinking patterns, core beliefs, etc. The clearest example of this inconsistency is the statement: "…blaming depression on our sin…also makes depressed Christians seek a spiritual solution to a problem that may actually originate in…lifestyle, or unhelpful thought patterns." Christian counselors, however, must label lifestyles that must be changed and improper thought patterns as sin.

The connection between depression and sin must be made consistently and fully. The path on which the Christian walks, that is the path of joy and hope, is the path of careful obedience to the will of God, growing every day in understanding what that will is, and finding

25 Hart, *Counseling,* 34.

26 Murray, *Christians,* 5, 8, 27, 58.

full and gracious forgiveness in the presence of a merciful God, in whose presence are pleasures forevermore.

Sin is not the *only* cause of depression. But the Christian pastor and elder must help the people of God identify what sins may well be contributing causes, even if those sins are not even recognized as sins.

I will come back to this next time.

Homiletical and Exegetical Helps

Appendix: A Sermon on Psalm 42:5, 11; Psalm 43:5

Notes:

1. The following is a full manuscript outline of a recently made sermon on Psalm 42. The preacher who sees it will immediately realize what this seminary professor will readily admit: most preachers in busy pastorates do not have the time to construct such a detailed outline for two sermons each week. If I were still making two sermons for each Lord's Day, week after week, I would not be able to do so either. Those who make two edifying sermons each week I commend; for them, I am thankful. Nevertheless, I submit the sermon in the present form, partly so that the downcast believer may find hope in the explanation of this beautiful Psalm, but also with the humble desire that a few young preachers may find in its form and content some instruction for sermon-making—the most important part of a preacher's calling.

2. I have wanted to preach Psalm 42 for many years, especially interested in the concept "face," which is used both in connection with the *downcast* face of the psalmist (vs. 11) and the *help-giving* face of God (v. 5). It must be noted that the authorized King James Version (AV) of Psalm 42 has two significant differences from most modern versions. The AV ends verse 5, "for the help of his countenance," referring to the countenance, or face, of God Himself. That is, God's face will be the help (or "health" or "salvation") of the psalmist. The AV ends verse 11, "who is the health of my countenance...." So, whereas in verse 5, God's face was in view, in verse 11, *my* face is the subject. In many modern translations, both verse 5 and 11 are translated in the

same way, and with no reference to "face" at all. The NIV has, for example, "my savior and my God," in both verse 5 and 11, without any reference to "face." Even in the NIV's note, where the editors admit that most Hebrew manuscripts differ from the one the NIV uses, there is no mention of "face." The ESV, similarly, translates both verses in the same way, "my salvation and my God." Even in the ESV's note ("Hebrew, 'the salvation of my face'"), no mention is made that there is a difference in the Hebrew between verse 5 and 11. The explanation is 'corrections' that were made in the Hebrew. The science of Hebrew textual criticism is complicated. It seems to me, however, that such a significant difference in pronominal suffixes as "my" or "his" ought to be noted in a modern version. Even more significant is the sad failure of both these modern translations even to use the significant concept "face" in the translation. Why, simply, "my salvation," and not, "the salvation of my face"? The sermon, below, depends upon both: 1) the concept "face" is central to the text, and 2) there is an important relationship between God's face and mine. This is the "stuff" of exegesis to which preachers must pay attention.

"The Downcast Believer Looking Up to God" January 5, 2018

Text: Psalm 42:5,11; Psalm 43:5

Psalter #s: 73 (sing all, note stanza 6); 121 (sing all, note stanza 2); 116 (sing all); 120 (sing 1, 2, 4)

Introduction

A. THREE THINGS BEFORE READING SCRIPTURE:

1. This is a Psalm for (or by) the sons of Korah, as the heading indicates.
   a. Not a Psalm of David, which many of Psalms 1-41 are, but of (or for) Korah's sons.
   b. Korah, as you know, was a Levite, a servant of the tabernacle, who perished with Dathan and Abiram and 250 others—and their families—when they rebelled against the authority of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). The *family* of Korah, however, was spared (Num. 26). And these generations of this wicked man—whose name becomes almost symbolic of

revolution—became gate-keepers and singers at the house of God. For the sons of Korah!

c. A minor application later in the sermon depends on this knowledge.

2. Ps 42 and 43 certainly belong together. Is it possible that, originally, they were one?

a. Evidence:

1) 1st, no heading for 43 (which is unusual), might indicate that it belongs with 42.

2) 2nd, the refrain in 42:5 & 11 repeated at the end of 43, also indicates possible unity.

3) 3rd, the structure of this kind of Psalm seems to be incomplete without adding 43 to 42. "Prayer Psalms," as this is, usually begin with lament, continue with petition, and conclude with praise. The first 2 of these are found in 42, the third in 43.

b. Thus, whether formally one or two, I take them together, focusing on 42:5,11 and 43:5.

3. While I read the Scripture, note the small difference between the "chorus" found in 42:5 and 11, ("his countenance" vs. "my countenance").

B. INTRODUCTION (after Scripture reading)

1. What wisdom and goodness of God to address *all* the states and conditions of our souls—especially in the Psalms.

a. Is there an emotion or feeling of man <u>*not*</u> found in the Psalms?

b. Is there any cry of joy or expression of grief that cannot be heard in this book?

2. This Psalm is one of the classic Psalms that expresses some of the deepest sorrows of the child of God—of *depression*.

a. One might call it a 'textbook' case of a Christian depressed, although that would be wrong, for the Scripture is not a textbook of psychology (any more than it is a textbook of geology or even theology).

That is, it does not treat the science of soul-study like a college textbook—with 'normal psychology' followed by 'abnormal,' at which point all the troubles of men's souls are put in proper categories and under logical headings, where depression is treated with formal definitions, its various stages, followed by case studies, etc. Of course the Scripture is not a textbook on psychology.

b. Yet, what wisdom of God to give us His infallible word that so accurately—and so movingly—describes the troubles of God's people, not analytically or clinically, but with the inspired cries—agonizing cries, at times—of his own dear children.

3. Notice one thing unique about this Psalm:
   a. Often, in the Psalms, the psalmist struggles with *God* (found in this Psalm, too); other times contends with his *enemies* (also here).
   b. But in this Psalm, he does battle with himself, remonstrates with his own soul. "O my soul, why? Why are you cast down? Why disquieted?" And then rebukes his soul…
4. You may, or may not, recognize these cries of the psalmist.
   a. You may be very familiar with them, having uttered them personally and found them to speak to your own cast down soul.
   b. Or you may recognize them as you have heard them from a loved one, but are not able to relate to them personally.
   c. Whatever the case, hear the word of God that calls the downcast believer to look up to God.

"The Downcast Believer Looking up to God"

I. His Downcast Soul

II. His Sure Relief

III. His Rich Hope

I. His Downcast Soul

A. THE DESCRIPTION: "Oh my soul!" What preacher can properly 'voice' in a sermon what the psalmist must have sounded like when he cried, "Oh my soul!!"

1. His depression was a pain *within*—his soul was downcast.

a. Soul:

1) The psalmist speaks of his soul! Not his body, but his soul! Although often the body is *affected* by depression, may sometimes even be the *origin* of depression, he is not speaking to or about his body but his soul.

2) Proof: verses 1, 2, 5, 6. That is, everything that is "within me" (v. 11; v. 5: "in me").

3) And note that the psalmist is not distinguishing soul from spirit, as the New Testament sometimes does, where 'soul' is a reference to the internal aspect of man that relates to this *earth*, and 'spirit' a reference also to my life within but what relates to *heaven*… Soul, here, refers to the *entire* inner life of man—his mind and thinking, his will and heart, his desires, emotions and feelings—both that which relates to this earth and above. "O my *soul*!"

b. "Downcast and disquieted."

1) Downcast: If you could see his soul, you would see it walking stooped, as it were.

2) Disquieted: If you could hear it—and you can—it gives out sighs and groans. It was dejected. There wasn't any peace or quiet in his soul. His mind was busy, a turmoil of thoughts, mixed and confused. His will felt numb and confused. His ability to make decisions probably was very weak. His mood was dark (not angry, but discouraged, even despondent), as the word "mourned" in verse 9 means in its root. (*qadar* = dark)

2. **Outwardly manifested** (though troubled within, his trouble was *outwardly manifested*)
   a. Crying continually
      1) Verse 3: "my tears have been my meat, day and night."
      2) Often, a depressed person just cries, and maybe doesn't know why.
      3) And don't overlook the fact that this was a *man* crying (set this up in order to come back to the man, Jesus, later). Medical doctors tell me that men don't usually cry as quickly as women, but sooner or later, if the depression does not subside, they do, too.
   b. Re appetite:
      1) With the crying, he isn't hungry, so he doesn't eat. Verse 3: his *tears* were his 'meat.'
      2) Although sometimes depression leads to eating too much, that was not the case for this man.
   c. Nor could he sleep.
      1) "Day and night" means that he cried not only during the day, but at night.
      2) At times, depression makes one want to sleep, and sleep, and sleep—he wants to sleep to forget the sorrows. Other times, and that's more troubling, one lies awake and cannot sleep.
   d. Face! (one of the 2 key concepts in the text.) Depression manifested itself in his face.
      1) Ah, his face! Everyone could see it on his face! Haggard-looking and tired, his eyes and everything else about his face showed it.
      2) Proof: 42:11, 43:5: "the health (or 'help' or 'salvation') of my *countenance*…" Children, listen: Countenance = face. And the psalmist's face showed his trouble, because his face reflected his soul. It was not, of course, his

face that needed "health" or "help" or "salvation." But his troubled face represented his troubled soul, and his soul needed help and salvation.

3) Further explanation. God created our faces as marvelous aspects of our being—a manifestation of what is in our souls. (a) This is true even in the animal world. I remember seeing, in a zoo, the eyes and face of a gorilla, in which were obvious hostility. And before you pet a dog, you better read its face and eyes, lest you risk being bitten. (b) But this is especially true of people—the pinnacle of God's creation. You can read their souls by looking at their faces! The reality of a "poker-face"—an ability *not* to let on what's in a man's heart—does not contradict, but exactly establishes this truth; for it is a difficult, learned, and unnatural ability to hide what's in one's soul. What is natural is to show it. Sad is the poker face of the poor child who learns to adopt it because his safety in an abusive family depends on it. (c) Natural is that our faces reflect our souls. I know my wife, and my wife knows me, our moods and thoughts; and the slightest change in expression on our faces can tell us something about the other. There is a pleased look, a worried look, a relieved look, questioning look, a hurt look—a thousand looks that reflect what's in our souls. (d) Thus, you have dozens and dozens of emoticons (or emojis) on computer programs and phones to add to the text of a message, exactly because written words alone are very difficult to judge; so we add a wink or a smile to let the reader know we're not too serious, or not angry; and there are doz-

ens and dozens of others that will never do justice to the complexity of facial expressions to reflect the soul's complex emotions. (e) When the psalmist cries out for health for his *face*, he cries out for health for his wounded and broken *soul*.

B. GREAT DIFFICULTY, "WHY!!?" (What explains? What is the cause, occasion involved? What lies behind?)

1. Introduction: Many factors are involved. So we ask:
   a. Is it physical or spiritual? Nature or nurture? Is sin involved? Can the devil play a part?
   b. So many possibilities that it usually becomes a complicated, tangled mess.
2. **Text suggests four difficulties** (not all *always* involved in all depression; but how familiar!)
   a. The mockery or misunderstanding of others
      1) Proof: 42:3, 10; 43:1, 2. He speaks of the taunts of wicked men; dealings with unjust and deceitful men and the oppression of his enemies.
      2) First application: 'Why has God not delivered you? If God were your friend, He would not allow you so to be downcast.' These sharp barbs of men may well pierce your heart. Our enemy, the devil, is certainly interested in speaking such lies.
      3) Second: Others may *misunderstand* the condition of a depressed person's soul; and because he cannot understand it, may deny the reality or difficulty of it. Luther and Spurgeon both were depressed; both taught the reality and difficulty of it. Spurgeon: "This affliction may be in the 'imagination,' but I assure you, it is not imaginary!"
      4) Third: Taunts, perhaps, because of name and ancestry! "You are sons of *Korah*!? Unbelieving, rebellious, reprobate *Korah*!? How could you imagine you have a rightful place in God's church

with that ancestry?" People of God, the identity of your father or mother, or grandparents—with evil reputation—does not determine your ability to be a child of God and useful member of the church. Whether such was the case in *this* Psalm or not, I do wonder whether God willed these Psalms to be labeled "For the sons of Korah" (Korah! of all people) for just that reason.

b. The memories of better days can aggravate depression.
   1) Proof: "When I remember…going with the multitude…" (v. 4).
   2) Application: Often memories of better days in the past will aggravate the sorrows of the present.
   3) Was the Christian poet of the Middle Ages thinking of Psalm 42:4 when he said, "There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in misery, the time we were happy"?

c. The (sometimes) ongoing, unending trouble of depression.
   1) Proof: verse 3: "continually," verse 3: "day and night," verse 10: "daily," and *3 times:* "why?"
   2) Application: Depression isn't like the flu, even pneumonia, which are usually fairly predictable how long they will last. Depression sometimes goes on, and on, and on.

d. His depression was also related to the inability to worship.
   1) Proof: verse 2: "when shall I come and appear before God?" verse 4: He "went with a multitude that kept holyday." 43:3, 4: He wants to go to the holy hill, the tabernacle, and the altar of God… again!
   2) Applications: We'll come back to 'God's house' later in the sermon, but here just notice that depression relates to 'church' in that Psalmist was unable to worship. He wanted to, but could not.

Depression for the child of God often relates to church and worship: a) At times depression comes, as did the Psalmists, because one cannot be in the house of God—think of the old saints, confined to their homes and unable, as in the past, to join with the multitude. This is our call to remember, and visit them. b) Other times, depression makes one feel like he *cannot* be in the house of God, *should* not be in the house of God, and then does not attend.

3. The *great* difficulty: He sees God in his trouble, is convinced that God has rejected him.

a. Proof: The psalmist is thinking about God.
   1) Verse 9: "God has forgotten him."
   2) Verse 10: And his enemies have confirmed it. Where is your God?

b. Explanation:
   1) He concludes he is not a child of God. God has rejected him, forgotten him; formerly was kind to him, but no longer is or shall be.
   2) The greatest temptation of the child of God (Lord's Day 16) is that the devil persuades him that he is destined for hell.
   3) God is against him for evil.

c. This explains everything about his depression.
   1) Why his face is fallen; he cannot sleep; he continues to cry.
   2) Why his soul has no peace and his mood is dark and troubled.
   3) He is convinced that *God's* waves & billows (of anger & rejection) are going over him.
   4) He is ready to die; he feels like he is dying.

4. So he feels *hopeless*, absolutely, utterly hopeless.

a. Hopeless: (Second of two key concepts in the text. 1) *face*; now, 2) *hope*)
   1) One of the greatest blessings of the child of God has is hope. Elements in hope: a) future-looking;

b) seeing *good* in future; c) *confident* of it; d) when "succor is delayed" (Psalter #73:6) we *wait* patiently for the good.

2) Proof: Each of the "stanzas" has, at its heart: "HOPE!!!!" The psalmist cries out, exhorting himself: Have hope!! He tries to convince himself, "Have hope!"
3) But he exhorts himself to hope because he *has* none.

b. And that's how the depressed person feels.
1) As such: He looks ahead and sees only darkness. He considers the days ahead and cannot believe that anything will ever change for the good. And when anyone says anything to him about change, he will not believe anything can or will be any different. (expects) He looks to the future and sees no good. (certainty) He thinks about tomorrow and has no confidence that tomorrow will bring anything different. He wants things to be better, but is convinced that they simply cannot be. (patience) And when 'succor is delayed,' he's not willing/able to wait for the good either.
2) If depression's darkness can be explained by anything, it's that there seems to be, at the end of this tunnel, no light. There is little worse than being without hope.
3) Which at times brings the child of God, when gets to his lowest, to the great temptation to consider ending his life. Suicide. Why should I continue to live? Very difficult subject—suicide—even to mention; but it must be named, for some Christians face that very real temptation to end their lives—so dark is their hopelessness.
4) But they must not, not simply because to do so is sin, the sin of self-murder; but because there is, indeed, a way out. There is, indeed, hope for the downcast believer.

II. His Sure Relief

A. NEGATIVELY: There are some things that ought to be said that are *not* the relief for us:

1. Not seeking, *at all costs,* to know the causes…(proof: the text gives no clear cause)

a. It is true: there *are* times we ***can*** know:

1) There are *distressing circumstances* in our lives that occasion depression:

a) Medical conditions can cause depression: post-partum depression, chronic pain, other illnesses. A loss in death; a wayward child; even poverty, with no end in sight. Even lack of work (the Psalmist was far from the temple where he was called to occupy himself, where he was and felt to be *useful*. Lack of work because of retirement or injury can contribute to depression. Application: often, an aspect of the advice a depressed man or woman needs is: Work! Be productive, be fruitful!

b) In these cases when the cause is fairly clear, we bring the Word of God to bear with regard to the particular circumstance and pray that we are able to receive these painful realities and bear up under them.

2) Once in a while, *sin* is the cause. The chastening hand of God comes down upon us

a) *Known, impenitent sin*: E.g., King David knew, at times, what the cause of his being cast down was. He made that plain in Psalm 32 when he admitted that for a year he was so depressed he didn't know where to turn… UNTIL he confessed transgressions, and God forgave him and delivered him from his misery. There are times that our hopelessness is rooted in sin—known, unconfessed sin. The remedy for this is easy, when the sins we are very much aware of.

b) *Sin, but unknown, difficult to find*. At other times the sinful patterns of life that bring a believer low were developed in our youth, in response to, say, child abuse…. Repentance and confession in this case are far more difficult. So a wise, patient pastor or Christian counselor, through a long process….

b. But sometimes we simply *cannot* know why.
   1) I have counseled people of God in these circumstances—prayed and studied Scripture and asked careful questions, weekly. And never determined a cause or an occasion for the depression. They simply were delivered from it after six months or a year—in our minds, mysteriously.
   2) Thus, sometimes God's providence brings depression into our lives simply to mature our faith, which may prepare me to serve Him in a way I never could have done if I had never been cast down.

2. Second caution: Do not to look at your *circumstances*, and by them determine God's attitude towards you.
   a. That is a very strong temptation, and easy to do!!
      1) We see all our troubles and conclude from them that God is displeased with me.
      2) The psalmist could have done that, too—miserable circumstances, perhaps carried away by enemies…
   b. But:
      1) God's attitude toward us is not determined by circumstances.
      2) Else a man dying of cancer or a woman whose husband just passed away, or the parents of wayward children… would have to conclude God was displeased with them
      3) "Many are the afflictions of the righteous…" (Ps. 34:19).

3. **Third, be careful not to judge reality on the basis of *feelings*** (most importantly!!!)
    a. The psalmist's *feelings* were low, very low.
        1) He did not let them govern his life, determine his conclusions about his spiritual state….
        2) He knew that they were bad, but did not nurse them or approve them….
        3) He fought against them!
    b. Application: Be very careful about your feelings, your emotions….
        1) If, in your depression, you focus on your feelings, you may be tempted to rely too quickly or even exclusively, on whatever will change your feelings. Drugs—legitimate and illegitimate—may well change your feelings from bad to good!
        2) But the change of feelings is not the main thing you must focus on!! In fact, it may be counter-productive to use medication to change your feelings: (a) The pain of your depression may be important for a time; and (b) more importantly, it may be that God wills that something else be the instrument to change the way you feel. And, in fact, usually He does; and the text teaches us this.

B. POSITIVELY: "HOPE IN GOD!!!!" This is the heart of the remedy for the disquieted believer!
    1. Qualifications:
        a. When I explain now the remedy the Word of God gives, I must not leave the impression that depression is easy to resolve; that, if only one follows a prescribed formula, does all the right things, he will be delivered from his affliction soon. It's rarely the case that the people of God find relief quickly.
        b. Nor am I saying that medicine as a part of the help and relief is improper. It may well be that the child of God finds that some medication is essential; and he uses it with the advice of his pastor and doctor

without regret or shame. But no remedy is a full and real remedy except we see the hope and help we have in God.

2. Generally:

a. First, the psalmist takes hold of himself…. He *contends*, fights, takes action!

1) Negatively: He does not passively allow his feelings to take control. He does not give in his sorrows! If he had not contended against his sorrows, he would have yielded to the very temptations the devil wanted him to yield to!

2) Positively: He fought! He took himself in hand, and in a long and bitter battle he labored before he gained the victory. We must not be discouraged, beloved, if the battle goes long and hard!! If, after weeks and months there is

b. Second, he contends by *speaking*!!!

1) Although he does not <u>feel</u> how help may come and certainly does not *see* the help at hand, he *speaks* what he knows is truth. His emotions and feelings do not do the speaking; but he—his new man in Jesus Christ—takes control and with the word of God speaks to himself. And, speaking to himself, he rebukes himself.

2) Talk to yourselves, people of God. Address your soul. Take yourself in hand. If necessary, in a Christian way (not berating, belittling self), rebuke your soul.

c. Third, he may even make public his distresses.

1) As such: The psalmist does not hide it! He isn't ashamed to admit it! Where does our modern stance come from that it's wrong to cry in front of anyone, and especially for a man to cry!? The psalmist wrote for the people of God. Thus, they *knew* his depression, and were able to learn from it.

2) Applications: a) in depression, the last thing we *want* may well be one of the more important parts

of our healing and restoration—that the people of God know and therefore can pray, lift me up.
b) pastors and elders must not be too quick to promise or encourage confidentiality….

3. **Materially:** (Though we must take ourselves in hand, even rebuke ourselves when we speak to ourselves, the remedy is not in ourselves, but in God.) And now we put the two important concepts together—'hope' and 'face.'
   a. First, hope in God.
      1) Reminder: Hope is…(a) Desiring good in the future; (b) expecting good in the days to come; (c) being confident of good; (d) waiting patiently for it ("though succor be delayed…"). Reaching out to the future and believe that there is good for you.
      2) But our hope is in *God*.
         a) God is the object of our hope! Not the 'future' or 'better days' or 'something is going to change'; these are not the objects of our hope; these are not what we must reach out to cling to. But we reach out and cling to God!
         b) I put my hope in God who has always cared for His people, who makes promises He always keeps. One of them is *not*: I will deliver you from all troubles, or from this one soon. But include: I will never let you perish; I will always use trials to do you good.
   b. Second, look at *His face*…. (If you ask, Where do I find Him? See Him? Where look?)
      1) Proof: Text emphasizes God's face. a) 42:5: my help is in "his countenance" b) Even 42:2: "when shall I come and *appear before God*" is literally: "see his face"!
      2) (Thus, the serious deficiency of some Bible trans-

lations here. Most of the Psalter versifications also do not mention God's face.)

3) When you see His face, you will know the attitude of His heart towards you. As does ours, also *God's* face accurately reflects what is within Him. That's why Moses wanted so badly to see His face—so that he could 'confirm' the words that he had heard God speak.

c. Third, we see God's face *in the face of His Son*.

1) What God did not show Moses ("no man can see my face and live") He does show us, in the face of His Son. You can see God's face in the face of Jesus. Thus Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen my father" (John 14:9). (Cf. also II Cor. 4:6.)

2) Jesus is the very face of God. In His person and works and all His attributes, He reveals what is in the heart of God. Do you see Him? Consider His literal face, what others saw of Him in His earthly life and ministry. He must have revealed a burdened heart. He was a 'man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.' At the end, He cried with strong crying and tears. Finally, He was forsaken; God *did* turn His face from Him. For you. Look…at…His…face….. And then hear Him cry: Why? Not, "why are you cast down?" but "why have you forsaken me?" Because God did forsake Him, for the salvation of your and my souls.

3) All God's love and mercy, grace and peace, lovingkindness and tender mercies are seen in the face of Jesus Christ. God loves His people…

d. Fourth: And where can you behold that face? In His Word and in His house

1) Proof: 42:2, 4; 43:3, 4: "holy hill…tabernacle…altar." Altar!!! Where Christ was slain….

2) Application: the last thing a depressed child of

God must do is stay away from God's house, where we see His face and hear His voice.

III. His Rich Hope

A. MY FACE SHALL BE CHANGED (the last time we consider 'face')

1. ***His* face is the salvation of *my* face!** Now compare 42:5 and 42:11.
   a. Verse 11: "my face." Verse 5: "his face." "The salvation (*yeshua*) of His face."
   b. When I see His face, my face will change. That is, when I know what's in His heart….
2. **So, hope in God; and be sure that your face will change.**
   a. Looking to the days to come, you may be confident that your face will reflect your soul that has been lifted up to see God.
   b. His face will heal your face.

B. SECOND, I SHALL PRAISE HIM AGAIN (but most important is not my feelings, but God's praise)

1. I may not be able, very well, to praise Him now.
   a. I may struggle to get out of bed and be ready for worship on a Sabbath morning
   b. When I get here, at times I can hardly choke out the words of praise.

2. But I shall yet, again…("I shall *yet* praise him")
   a. I will do so in worship, both public and private
   b. And I will tell you, praising God for my deliverance, what He has done for my soul.

C. THIRD, I EAGERLY (patiently) AWAIT THE DAY I SHALL SEE HIM FACE TO FACE…

1. In heaven:
   a. I will see His face perfectly, with a clarity I did not imagine possible
   b. The Queen of Sheba's 'The half not told me' refers to this, if to anything! For this—the face of God—makes heaven beautiful with a beauty unimagined by sinful, earthly men. Heaven's joy and beauty

will not be, first, that I see the wonder of the renewed creation, or that I am reunited with my loved ones (both important aspects of glory), but that I see the face of my God in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ.

c. My face will radiate His glory and reflect my own heart of perfect joy and sublime peace
d. And without end, I will praise Him…

2. So, beloved, live in hope:
   a. Anticipate, eagerly, with confidence and patience….
   b. Good, and only good, in the days and eternity to come. Where will be
      1) no tears as your meat, no crying, wicked taunts or wondering doubts,
      2) but joy, and only joy, to His glory. AMEN

(Before pronouncing the closing benediction, pause and ask the people to listen in a way they have not heard this word before: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his **face** shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his **countenance** upon thee, and give thee peace." Amen.

A Response to "The Free Offer of the Gospel" in the *Puritan Reformed Journal*

Martyn McGeown

Introduction

In a recent issue of the *Puritan Reformed Journal*, the journal of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, David B. McWilliams, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church of Lakeland, FL, defends the "free offer" or "well meant offer" of the gospel against some unnamed critics.[1]

Frustrating about his article, however, is the failure (apart from one footnote on Herman Hoeksema) to interact with the critics of the offer. Surely if, in 2018, one wants to defend the offer, one should attempt to refute the writings of the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sisters, who, whether one agrees with them or not, have contributed much to the debate! Instead, McWilliams repeats many of the arguments of John Murray (1898-1975), Thomas Boston (1676-1732) and the "Marrow Men," and Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898). While it is good in a scholarly article to discuss the views of such learned worthies, again I ask, why not interact with *contemporary critics* of the offer? In the third edition of his *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, Prof D. Engelsma asks, "As for the avowed adversaries, is it too much to ask that rather than condemning the book out of hand you attempt to refute it?"[2] By not referencing the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sisters, the leading ecclesiastical opponents of

1 David B. McWilliams, "The Free Offer of the Gospel," *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 10:1 (January 2018), 57-90. Page numbers in parentheses are from this article.

2 David. J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (RFPA: Jenison, MI, repr. 2013), xvi. In his famous and influential article, "A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism," Phillip R. Johnson directly criticises Engelsma's book and writes, "The best known American hyper-Calvinists are the Protestant Reformed Churches," a charge that I refute in a seven-part editorial in the British Reformed Journal. The whole series can be accessed on the CPRCNI website, http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/hypercalvinist.html#.WmcS8q2cacw.

"Free Offer" theology, McWilliams fails properly to define the terms of the debate (offer, invitation, promise, etc.), and he fails properly to present the position that he claims to refute.

In communication—and especially in theological debate—it is vital to define one's terms. If this is not done, two people can find themselves talking at cross purposes, assuming erroneously that they are in agreement, or alternatively believing wrongly that they disagree with one another. What is an offer or invitation? What is hyper-Calvinism? What is a "warrant" to believe? What is a promise? These fundamental questions are unfortunately not answered in McWilliams's article. In addition, McWilliams does not make any meaningful distinction between the offer and common grace/love/mercy/pity, which, although they are related, are two separate debates.

A Non-Saving Love and Desire and A Non-Destructive Hatred

The first major issue addressed by McWilliams is the extent of God's love—does God love everybody or only the elect? Related to that question is the issue of the nature of God's love, for is a general, non-saving, temporal, and changeable love really *God's* love? And does God show such love in the preaching of the gospel, so that He offers His love to all hearers, a love which is displayed in the cross? Besides that, how can a non-saving, non-redeeming love be displayed in the cross?

The first theologian cited is Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) who taught a general love of God in addition to a "particular, special, saving love that God has for His elect," the latter including "a purpose to save," which the other form of "love" lacks or "of which all other forms fall short" (58). According to Vos, God loves the reprobate with a sincere love *without purposing their salvation* (but while actually purposing their damnation!). What kind of love is that? It certainly is not biblical love, for love is three things in the Bible: (1) deep affection for an object, which the lover treasures as precious and dear; (2) a desire for the good of that object; (3) a determination to establish a bond of fellowship with that object.

To the objection that God *hates* the reprobate (and therefore cannot love them), John Murray (1898-1975) responded, "It is in the sense of detestation that God hates, not in the sense of desiring to destroy

or take revenge. God loathes them [the reprobate] for their rebellion, but at the same time loves and wishes for their repentance" (60). But this does not fit with the biblical presentation of God's hatred: (1) God hated Esau before he was born and before he had done anything good or evil (Rom. 9:11-13), that is, unconditionally, for reprobation (like election) is unconditional; (2) God's hatred issues in the destruction of the reprobate, for in His hatred for Edom God "laid his mountains and his heritage waste" (Mal. 1:3), even smashing Edom after she attempted to rebuild (v. 4) and declaring indignation against her forever (v. 4). In His hatred for the wicked in Psalms 5 and 11 God, the righteous Lord, destroys and abhors them (5:5-6), and rains upon them "snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest," which shall be "the portion of their cup" (11:6). Such hatred certainly includes a desire to destroy, without, however, any hint of injustice, for God cannot be unjust (Deut. 32:4; Rom. 9:14). God's hatred of the reprobate issues in the lake of fire—where, ironically, the "non-saving" love of God also issues, for the reprobate perish, any "non-saving" love of God for them notwithstanding. This creates insurmountable problems—how can the child of God, who trusts in God's love, derive any comfort from it, if, in fact, God loves everybody? How can the Christian know that God loves him with more than the "love" with which He supposedly loves the reprobate?

Chiding the so-called, but unnamed, "hyper-Calvinist" McWilliams writes,

> The Arminian might argue that if God has pity toward the sinner we must believe that God has exercised all of the power available to Him to save those sinners. The "hyper-Calvinist" argues, on the other hand, that since God is omnipotent He can have no pity toward the reprobate. If God had pity on the non-elect He certainly would exercise His omnipotence to save them. Both are incorrect (60).

Advocates of the "free offer" teach that God sincerely, earnestly, even passionately, desires the salvation of the reprobate, but they also concede that He does not do anything for their salvation: He does not elect them, He does not give Christ to die for their sins, He does not regenerate them—He merely pleads with them to accept the gospel

while He tenderly offers them salvation, even promising them salvation *if they are willing to accept it*.

However, the Bible is clear: if the omnipotent God loves someone, He saves him. How could He not? What kind of love permits one's beloved to perish, when it is in his power to save him? If God does not exercise His omnipotence to save the reprobate, how can it be claimed that He *desires* their salvation? The pity or mercy that God displays and exercises is an omnipotent mercy—God's mercy is always omnipotent, for it is *divine* mercy. While as creatures we might desire to have mercy upon a miserable person, such as a beloved child, we are often powerless to alleviate his misery, but that cannot be said of the omnipotent God and His almighty mercy. If a king had great power, but did not do everything in his power to deliver a servant out of misery, while claiming to desire to save him, we would not call that sincere love, but hypocrisy. It will not do to hide behind "apparent paradox" (64). If the omnipotent God does not save the miserable creature, we cannot say that He truly desires to save him.

God's will, says McWilliams, is one, but it "sometimes appears to be twofold" (84). In support of this assertion, McWilliams recommends an article by Robert L. Dabney entitled "God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy," an article to which John Piper has also appealed and which I have addressed elsewhere.[3] According to Dabney, God's dealings with reprobate sinners are analogous to George Washington's dealings with a British spy, Major Andre, toward whom Washington "exuded genuine compassion," although he "signed his death warrant with spontaneous decision" (84-85). According to Dabney, Piper, and now McWilliams, God genuinely pities the reprobate and genuinely desires their salvation, but God restrains His own compassion out of other, equally important, concerns, such as the desire for justice, just as Washington, who genuinely pitied Andre, executed him by *mastering his pity* "by means of wisdom, justice, and patriotism" (86).

3 See John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god), and the editorial "A Double-Minded God Unstable In All His Ways" in *British Reformed Journal* (issues 57-58), available on the CPRCNI website, http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/double-mindedgod.html#.WmeLLa2cacw.

God someone masters his pity toward the reprobate, so that although he desires, but does not purpose and certainly does not accomplish, their salvation, he ultimately destroys them in his just wrath. Are we to imagine in the perfect heart of God a struggle between justice and mercy (genuine pity and compassion), in which justice, and not mercy, prevails? This is what Dabney, Piper, and now McWilliams, want us to imagine.

McWilliams concludes:

> Dabney well sustained in these pages the concept that, while God has but one will, it is entirely consistent for God to show compassion where he has no purpose to save even though the purpose of this approach is hidden in his own wisdom. Dabney's line of reasoning presents a strong case *contra* the reasoning of "hyper-Calvinists." The issue at stake ultimately is whether a theologian is willing to read the data fairly and leave to God those matters that are hidden in his own wisdom (87).

McWilliams includes in a footnote Dabney's remarks on John 3:16: "Dabney observed that 'so loved the world' does not refer to the decree of election, 'but a propension of benevolence not matured into the volition to redeem, of which Christ's mission is a sincere manifestation to all sinners" (87). But Dabney's exegesis is not only wrong; it is absurd and unworthy of a Reformed theologian. John 3:16 concerns God's *redemptive* love, for the text speaks of God's *giving* his Son. Of course, God's love is His volition (will) to redeem! Verse 17 even teaches, "For God sent *not* his Son into the world to *condemn* the world; but that the world through him might be *saved*" (my italics). God's purpose in sending His Son (*giving* his Son to the cross) is the salvation of the world, which world does not include the reprobate, whose salvation God has not purposed. God does not have "a propension of benevolence not matured into the volition to redeem"!

If that is the meaning of God's will expressed in the "offer"—"a propension of benevolence not matured into the volition to redeem"—how is such an offer preached? I have never heard anyone preach the offer as it has just been described. I have never heard anyone preach the offer with these words: "God loves you, but perhaps He loves you only with a propension of benevolence not matured into the volition to redeem you. God loves you in the sense that He pities you and desires

your salvation, but He may perhaps not have purposed your salvation." Instead of preaching that way, the "free offer" preachers that I have encountered preach thus: "God loves you, and Christ is willing to save you if you will only believe," which sounds almost exactly, if not exactly, like what an Arminian preacher would say. McWilliams's objections notwithstanding, "free offer" preaching *is* Arminianism and the preaching of those, such as the Protestant Reformed Churches and her sisters, who reject the "free offer" is *not* hyper-Calvinism. It is consistent, biblical Calvinism.

An Offer/Invitation or A Command/Call

McWilliams, like many advocates of the "free offer," confuses the command to believe, which pertains to all hearers of the gospel, with a supposedly well-meant or sincere offer. The Bible is clear that all men who hear the gospel, whether elect or reprobate, are *commanded* to believe it. With that we have no quarrel, for we are not hyper-Calvinists. Hyper-Calvinism is the teaching that the reprobate are *not commanded* to believe the gospel—only "sensible sinners" (or sensitive sinners, those whom God has awakened and regenerated) are commanded to believe the gospel. Herman Hanko writes:

> To claim that the *preaching* of the promise is for the elect only is not and never was orthodox Calvinism. That the *promise* of God is for the elect only is the traditional view of the church and her theologians from the time of Calvin. The Reformed have also insisted that the particular promise of God must be promiscuously preached so that all who hear may know that promise. In the preaching God promises salvation only to those who believe, for God will not promise salvation to those he does not intend to save. But the promiscuous *preaching* of that particular promise is accompanied by the command to all men to repent and believe in Christ, in whom alone is found salvation.[4]

With other statements of McWilliams we have no quarrel:

> The gospel directs sinners to Christ as the object of all true faith.

4 Herman C. Hanko and Mark H. Hoeksema, *Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016), 103.

> The only sufficient Saviour to meet the needs of sinners is Christ (63).
>
> To say to sinners that they can only be justified by faith in Christ is to call them to put their trust in Christ (63).
>
> To preach the gospel is not just to present Christ. To preach the gospel is to love sinners to whom we preach, to implore them to respond to the gospel, and to urge them *as if we were Christ Himself* to receive the gospel message. To conceive of preaching the gospel as a mere proclamation eviscerates the gospel of its urgency and makes its proclamation fall far short of the gospel's essence (76, McWilliams's italics).
>
> The Scripture teaches us to call sinners as sinners to Christ. They [sic] also teach the particular nature of the atonement. Faithfulness requires that the ministers of the word bow before the authority of the Bible and call sinners to Christ…. the minister of the word is called to address sinners who stand in need of a Saviour that Christ is sufficient unto that need (81).
>
> There is in Christ's atonement no lack of sufficiency to save the vilest sinner nor is there lack of sufficiency to save an infinite number of worlds. Therefore, the sinner is called to Christ as a sufficient Saviour for whoever believes (82).

None of those statements requires the theology of the offer to be true. The Protestant Reformed Churches and their sisters can, and do, preach Christ to sinners in this way without teaching the free offer of the gospel. That we call men to believe in Christ, proclaiming Him to be the perfect Saviour, does not imply an offer, nor does it imply that God desires the salvation of all those to whom we preach the gospel. An offer is a presentation of something to someone *with the desire that the presentation will be accepted*, or an offer is *an expression of readiness* to do or give something to someone. If I offer someone a drink, for example, I expect and desire that my offer will be accepted. God does *not* offer Christ or the benefits of salvation in that way. In addition, an offer implies some kind of receptivity and ability in the one to whom the offer is made—one does not offer a cup of coffee to a corpse! One does not offer salvation to a sinner! We preach to dead

sinners not because we believe that they can respond, although they are obligated to respond, but because we believe that God can raise the spiritually dead and cause them to believe in Christ. It makes sense to preach to the spiritually dead, therefore, only if one believes in sovereign regeneration, that is, if one is a Calvinist.

Many advocates of the "free offer," such as McWilliams, express the gospel in terms of an "invitation." An invitation is a polite, formal or friendly request to go somewhere or to do something. When we make invitations to one another, we do so with the desire that the invitee comes, but to refuse our invitation rarely, if ever, has serious consequences. The Bible does not present the gospel as a friendly invitation from God to sinners to do something. In the gospel, God *calls* (He does not invite). A call is an authoritative address to a person summoning him to come, which has consequences for the person if he does *not* come. A judge, for example, calls a witness to appear in court—if he refuses to come, the judge will compel him to come and penalize him for not coming.

The word "call" appears, for example, in Christ's parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14, a passage to which McWilliams appeals. In that text, Matthew uses the Greek verb *kaleo* (call), translated variously as "bid" or "call" (vv. 3, 4, 8, 9, 14). The king's call is not a friendly request, nor merely an entreaty, but a serious, authoritative command with a threat to the one who does not obey the call: refuse this "wedding invitation" and God will cast you into hell, for by refusing the call you dishonor both the Father and the Son! McWilliams acknowledges this: "Both refusal to come and coming without the garment call down the king's wrath" (71).

A Warrant to Believe

Some theologians, notably among them the so-called "Marrow Men," unsatisfied with God's bare command, which is a sufficient reason to do anything, have sought to find a *warrant* for the sinner to believe. McWilliams, clearly enamoured with the "Marrow Men" and their theology, argues from this warrant for the free offer of the gospel. However, he does not define what a warrant is. In legal terms, a warrant is a legal document usually signed by a judge or magistrate that allows someone to do something. For example, an arrest warrant

authorizes the police to arrest a suspect, while a search warrant gives permission to the police to initiate a search of a suspect's house or even his computer files. Without such legal authorization, the police would not have the right to carry out the arrest or the search. Supposedly, sinners need a warrant to believe in Jesus Christ in the gospel—the *command,* "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," is not enough. The sinner needs a warrant to believe, argues McWilliams, because he needs to be assured—*before* he comes to Jesus—that God *desires* his salvation and that God will receive him. Complaining about hyper-Calvinists, McWilliams writes:

> To some…[t]he Bible does not teach a free offer of the gospel and the command to repent does not imply a warrant to come to Christ. To those with this view the doctrines of election and particular redemption make it impossible to believe that God *desires* that reprobate sinners come to Christ by response to the gospel (64, McWilliams's italics).

We would agree with that—God does not desire that reprobate sinners come to Christ, for He has not decreed that they come. Instead of giving them the power to come, by working faith in their hearts, or by drawing them (John 6:44), He leaves them in the blindness and depravity of their flesh, and even hardens them in their sins.[5] Nevertheless, God still commands them to come to Christ, which command is not a warrant. A warrant is not necessary—God's command is enough to obligate all sinners, whether elect or reprobate, to believe in Christ.[6]

5 Reprobation is, according to Canons I. 15, God's decree to "leave [the reprobate] in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and *not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion*; but leaving them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of his justice, to condemn and punish them forever" (italics added).

6 The Heidelberg Catechism answers an objection here: "Doth not God then do injustice to man by requiring from him in His law that which he cannot perform? Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it, but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts" (Lord's Day 4, Q&A 9).

McWilliams quotes A.A. Hodge (1823-1886) with approval: "we must acknowledge that the purpose expressed in the gospel declaration is that 'it is God's purpose to receive and save all that believe on his Son, *elect or not*'" (61, italics added). Nevertheless, Hodge's claim is erroneous, for it is not God's purpose to receive reprobate sinners who believe on His Son for the simple reason that reprobate sinners *do not*, *cannot*, and *will not* believe on His Son! It is God's purpose to save *elect* sinners who believe on His Son, who believe in Jesus because God works faith in their hearts; while it is the purpose of God to harden reprobates who do not believe and to render them without excuse for their unbelief. The preaching of Christ is "the savour of death unto death" to them (II Cor. 2:16).

Thomas Boston (1676-1732), again approvingly cited, writes,

> The reprobate have as good and fair a revealed warrant to believe and take hold of the covenant of grace as the elect have, else they could not be condemned for unbelief, and not taking hold of the covenant. Be what you will, since you are certainly a sinner of mankind, your warrant is uncontestable, according to the word (63).

What do the reprobate have a warrant to believe? Surely not that God loves them (He does not); nor that Christ died for them (He did not); nor that God desires their salvation (He does not). Notwithstanding, the reprobate are commanded to turn from their sins in repentance, to believe in Jesus Christ, and to trust in Him as the perfect, all sufficient Savior who saves to the uttermost all those who come to him (Heb. 7:25).

The Bible does not teach a "warrant" to believe, but it does teach a command to believe. That command to believe comes to everyone, elect or reprobate, who hears the gospel. At the same time, the Bible includes a promise, not to everyone, not to every hearer, but to *every believer*. And since only the elect are believers, it is tantamount to saying that the promise comes *unconditionally* to the elect. The reprobate hear the promise—it is proclaimed in their hearing, but the promise is not for them; it is for believers only, and no reprobate ever becomes a believer.

The closest that McWilliams comes to defining promise is "a

promise, on the other hand, is sure and certain" (60), although it is unclear whether that is his definition or the definition of his unnamed critics. Let me give a definition: the promise of God is His sure and certain word to give salvation and all the blessings of Christ to His people. Or to state it differently, the promise of God is His sure and certain word to give salvation and all the blessings of Christ to believers or to whomsoever believeth. Or to express it even more clearly, it is His sure and certain word to give salvation and all the blessings of salvation to the elect. God does not promise—even conditionally—to give salvation to the reprobate. If He did, His promise would prove to be false. Men's promises might prove to be false. Men might even make sincere promises without foreseeing the difficulty that might arise so that they fail to keep their sincere promises. The promise of Almighty God cannot fail, for He is wise, holy, righteous, and good—nothing can annul His word or overturn His promise, not even the unbelief or unfaithfulness of His people, for by the power of His promise He works faith in their hearts.

In his brief treatment of the Canons of Dordt, McWilliams confuses the promise with an offer, something the Canons never teach. In Head II. 5 the Canons state: "the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life." The promise is to believers, not to all hearers. What is to be published with the promise to all hearers, continue the Canons, is "the command to repent and believe." *All* are commanded to believe; *believers* are promised salvation. In addition, in Heads III/IV. 9 the Canons state, "[God] moreover seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him." Again, the promise is to all believers, not to all hearers. To this McWilliams responds: "The 'promise' spoken of in II. 5 cannot be particular rather than general since it is followed by the statement of II. 6 that many called by the gospel do not believe but perish in their sins." But this does not follow at all—many are called (commanded) to believe in Christ, but this does not imply any promise of God to them. The call (command or proclamation) is promiscuous, while the promise is particular. There is no "free offer" in the Canons.

But one might ask, what about the "unfeigned" call of Canons III/IV. 9? Although McWilliams does not appeal to that language (he merely quotes the article), the implication is that McWilliams believes

that the Canons teach that God desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere, three phrases in the article are derived from the same Latin word *serio*: the hearers of the gospel are "unfeignedly (*serio*) called;" God has "earnestly (*serio*) shown;" and God "seriously (*serio*) promises" to all believers.[7] That God *seriously* calls men to believe and is even pleased with faith and repentance does not mean that He desires, earnestly desires, or passionately desires the salvation of all hearers of the gospel. God's seriousness underlines the responsibility of sinners and the great guilt incurred by unbelievers who refuse to believe the gospel. God is so serious that He threatens with damnation, and actually damns, all those who do not believe: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). In short, God does not express in the gospel what He has decreed, nor what He desires, but what is pleasing to Him. Repentance and faith are pleasing to Him, although impossible for the reprobate. Unbelief and impenitence are displeasing to Him.

The Need for "Gospel Passion"

McWilliams is concerned that without the offer there could be a lack of passion in the preaching of the gospel. I agree with him that the preaching of the gospel is much more than the mere presentation of the facts of Christ crucified and risen—the gospel demands a response, as Engelsma explains:

> The message proclaimed in the gospel is not something that may ever merely be received for information, nor does it ever leave anyone with the impression that God is satisfied with that. The message of the gospel is the message of God's Son in our flesh, crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The gospel must be believed, and the Christ presented in the gospel must be believed on—*today*. Nothing else will do. Therefore, the gospel *calls* those who hear the

7 See the seven-part editorial, "Hypercalvinist" or "An Answer to Phil Johnson's 'Primer' on Hyper-Calvinism," in the *British Reformed Journal*, which can be accessed on the CPRCNI website, http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/hypercalvinist.html#.WmcS8q2cacw.

> good news.... For the sake of the elect, God has the church call all who hear the preaching; lest it call a reprobate, hyper-Calvinism tends to call no one.[8]

The gospel demands a response from the elect and reprobate alike. Whether the hearers are *able* to respond positively to the gospel is secondary: God *requires* a response and will judge the hearers on their response. But an offer is not required to create passion in the preacher. The preacher must be passionate, for he brings the greatest message that the world can ever hear, and he brings it with the authority of Almighty God, whose gospel it is. The gospel is urgent, whether an unbeliever hears it for the first time, or a child of God in the pew hears it for the one-hundredth time. McWilliams writes:

> What does the free offer of the gospel mean? It means what the gospel itself means—that God does not call upon any man to look upon him for salvation apart from the gospel, but to look at him only through Jesus Christ and to receive him by faith! For Christ comes, as Calvin loved often to say, clothed in the garments of the gospel. I am observing, however, that many men, and especially young Calvinist ministers, seem to be hesitant to call men to Christ with freedom and passion (87).

This might surprise McWilliams, but if he substituted the word "gospel call" for "free offer of the gospel," the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sisters would agree with him. We call men to look to God for salvation only through faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel. We call our members—including our covenant children—to faith in Jesus Christ preached in the gospel. We preach this gospel call on the mission field to the unconverted. We do so with passion and urgency out of love for perishing souls and for the glory of God. We do not need an offer to motivate us to preach the gospel. The offer does not energize or enliven the gospel.

Neither does our rejection of the "free offer" make us hyper-Calvinists. Engelsma, warning against hyper-Calvinist tendencies even among Reformed people, writes:

8 Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 23-24

> Another betrayal of the spirit of hyper-Calvinism is embarrassment and hesitation, that is, fear, over giving the call, "Repent! Believe!" and over declaring the promise "Whosoever believes shall not perish, but have everlasting life!" This language is not suspect. It is not the language of Arminian free-willism. It is pure, sound, biblical language…. If the fruit of the preaching of the gospel is that men, pricked in their hearts, cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" or that a Philippian jailor says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" it is not in place, nor is it typically Reformed, to launch into a fierce polemic against free will or to give a nervous admonition against supposing that one can do anything toward his own salvation. The answer to such questions, the Reformed answer, is "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" and "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 2:38; 16:31).[9]

McWilliams concludes with a long quotation from John Owen and these remarks:

> Owen is a stellar example of a host of Calvinist preachers from his era who sounded forth the call of the gospel universally without in any way misleading the hearers into free will assumptions, decisional regeneration, or universal atonement. If preachers fail to stress the urgency of the gospel and the need for conversion, a cold chill will blow over the church that may in time open the door to all manner of heresy as it has in the past. May the Lord fill His church with passionate preachers who love the lost and who emulate Owen both in his defence of particular redemption and in the freeness of his gospel proclamation (90).

Again, we can say "Amen" to that—we too sound forth the call (not the offer) of the gospel universally; we too stress the urgency of the gospel without misleading our hearers with Arminian assumptions; and we too pray for passionate preachers to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. But for that we do not *need* the "free offer" of the gospel.

An Appeal to Scripture

We do not have the time or space to address all of McWilliams's

9 Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 193, 194.

appeals to Scripture. Surprisingly, he does not appeal to I Timothy 2:4 or II Peter 3:9, but he treats half-a-dozen passages from the prophets, four from the gospels, one from Acts, and two from the epistles.

For example, in Isaiah 55:1 the prophet addresses "every one that thirsteth" (not every sinner is thirsty—many do not have any sense of their urgent need for salvation; many detest the bread of life, which is loathsome to them). Through the prophet, God promises life, the everlasting covenant, and the sure mercies of David not to everyone, but to them who hear and come to Him (v. 3). This does not mean that we preach only to the thirsty, for we do not know who they are—we preach to all, but *God promises salvation only to the thirsty*, whom He makes thirsty by the power of His grace, a thirst that He also graciously satisfies (Matt. 5:6).

McWilliams places a lot of emphasis on the texts in Ezekiel that speak of God having "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 18: 23, 32; 33:11). But *which* wicked does God have in mind here? Not all wicked everywhere, but the wicked of the house of Israel! Moreover, within the house of Israel, addressed as one organic whole, God does not even have all wicked people in mind. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked who *turn*: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: *and not that he should return from his ways, and live*?" "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; *but that the wicked turn from his way and live*." God says nothing here about any pleasure or displeasure that He might have in the death of wicked people *who do not turn*. And God delights in the life of the turning wicked exactly because He purposes the salvation of the turning wicked, for He grants repentance to His elect people, so that they turn to Him.

McWilliams quotes Murray: "It is absolutely and universally true that God does not delight in or desire the death of a wicked person. It is likewise absolutely and universally true that he delights in the repentance of that wicked person" (68). But this is not true of the reprobate. The text does not teach that God desires the salvation of all reprobate people.

Positively, the text means this: there is salvation and life for the wicked who *turns*—no matter how wicked he may be. The people of God in Ezekiel's audience needed that encouragement. Their companions were telling them that there was no point in turning, and the devil

wanted them to despair so that they would never repent. God answered the fear of His own people who were sorry for their sins, but were afraid to repent. God swears that there *is* life for the one who turns. Essentially what God says is this, "As I live, if I have no life for the wicked who turns, then I am not God. If the wicked turns to Me from sin and finds no life in Me, I am not the living God." Behind that solemn promise stands the cross where life was purchased for all turning sinners.

In fact, there are some wicked in whose death God *does* delight, whose death *does* please God. I Samuel 2:25, speaking of the reprobate sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, teaches that "they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, *because the Lord would slay them*." Literally, I Samuel 2:25 says, "because the Lord delighted, took pleasure in and willed to cause them to die" (Hebrew: *chapez*). God *did* take pleasure in the death of these two non-turning, wicked, reprobate men. Hophni and Phinehas, although Israelites and sons of the high priest, were never the object of God's favor or love. God never had compassion on them. God never desired to save them.

In Matthew 11:28 (similar to Isaiah 55:1) Jesus does not give a general invitation—He calls the laboring and heavy laden (the burdened) to come. While the command is universal, for all must come whether they feel the burden or not, the promise "I will give you rest" and "ye shall find rest unto your souls" (v. 29) is only for the ones who are burdened and who, therefore, come. Indeed, Jesus prefaces His call in verse 28 with a declaration of God's will or desire—God wills to or desires to reveal His Son to only some, while He hides the truth from others (vv. 25-27).

McWilliams misinterprets Mathew 23:37:

> Jesus expresses with great pathos his longing to gather Jerusalem's children under his wings. Jesus longs to—but they have been unwilling! The unwillingness is not on Jesus's part but on the part of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This unwillingness speaks of the depth of sin, the obstinacy of rebels against God and his gospel. The text, however, confirms the desire of Jesus that sinners respond to his invitation (71).[10]

10 What does McWilliams mean by "*they* have been unwilling" (italics added)? Is "they" a reference to Jerusalem or to Jerusalem's children—if McWilliams means that Jerusalem's children have been unwilling, he not only misinterprets the text, but he also misquotes it.

First, there is no pathos in Matthew 23—there is *anger*. Verse 37 comes at the end of a long denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Second, Jesus makes a distinction between Jerusalem's children whom He would gather and Jerusalem who did not desire—and who therefore sought to hinder—that gathering. Jerusalem is a reference to the leaders of Jerusalem, while Jerusalem's children are the elect within the nation. Third, Jerusalem's sin was her deliberate opposition to Jesus' ministry, which opposition culminated in Christ's crucifixion, but despite (and even through) that opposition Jesus gathered the church: "he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:52). There is no free offer or ineffectual desire of Christ in Matthew 23:37.[11]

One final passage, which according to McWilliams is "perhaps the strongest and most moving passage that demonstrates a free offer of the gospel" (74), is II Corinthians 5. While it is true that "Paul does not simply present the gospel. The entire passage is bracketed with a sense of urgency" (74), this in no way requires a "free offer." McWilliams dismisses as inadequate the interpretation that "the apostle is saying to the Corinthians that due to their obstinacy they *as*

11 A whole list of theologians, whose quotes have been compiled on the CPRCNI's website, agree with our exegesis of Matthew 23:37, http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/matthew23v37.htm#.WoP7Zq2cacw. In connection with this text, McWilliams quotes a comment of Herman Hoeksema from his booklet "Calvin, Berkhof, and H. J. Kuiper: A Comparison" (pub. 1930), the only quotation from a Protestant Reformed author in McWilliams's essay. This booklet has been edited and republished in the more recent work, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn* (ed. David Engelsma; Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015). Bypassing the exegesis of Augustine and Calvin cited by Hoeksema in the booklet, McWilliams quotes one stray comment from Hoeksema, "I always contended that when Jesus lamented over Jerusalem he spoke according to his human nature" (331). Engelsma in an editorial note writes, "To differ with this notion, that according to his human nature Jesus desired to gather all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, does not at all detract from Hoeksema's main point: the genuine children of Jerusalem were the elect among the inhabitants of the city. These Jesus desired to gather. These he *did* gather, despite Jerusalem's opposition. Jesus spoke in the text as the Messiah, whose will, or desire, is the will of God who sent him. The will of God was the gathering not of all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but only of Jerusalem's genuine children, that is, the elect" (332).

Christians should be reconciled to God" (74) an interpretation advocated by John Calvin.[12] Even if we concede the point that all hearers, whether believers or unbelievers, elect or reprobate, are addressed in II Corinthians 5:20, the text still does not teach the "free offer." With McWilliams's words, again, we do not disagree:

> The apostle as preacher of the gospel is *ambassador*. His speech represents the mind and heart of Christ. When Paul speaks, Christ speaks! What does Christ say through his ambassador as the gospel is preached? He commands men (it is an imperative) to "be ye reconciled to God" [sic] (76).

What the text does not teach is that Christ pleads with sinners to be saved—the preacher might do that, and he often does. However, Christ, the sovereign Lord, never pleads with sinners, and the text does not teach that He does: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ (Greek: *huper Christou*), *as though* God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead (Greek: *huper Christou*), be ye reconciled to God." To prove the free offer, someone would have to demonstrate that God desires the salvation of the hearers and that He sincerely offers salvation to all of them (including to all the reprobate), which McWilliams does not do.

In conclusion, McWilliams does not prove the "free offer." Instead, he proves that all men everywhere are commanded to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, which is not the gospel offer, but the gospel call. And that is something with which the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sisters wholeheartedly agree and which we practice. ●

12 John Calvin, "It is to be observed that Paul is here addressing himself to believers. He declares that he brings to them every day this embassy. Christ therefore, did not suffer, merely that he might once expiate our sins, nor was the gospel appointed merely with a view to the pardon of those sins which we committed previously to baptism, but that, as we daily sin, so we might, also, by a daily remission, be received by God into his favour. For this is a continued embassy, which must be assiduously sounded forth in the Church, till the end of the world; and the gospel cannot be preached, unless remission of sins is promised" (*Commentary on First and Second Corinthian*s, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, repr. 2009], 240).

Review Article on *The Extent of the Atonement*

David J. Engelsma

The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review, by David L. Allen. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016. Pp. xxviii + 820. $59.99 hard. [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

The book is massive. It is more than ten inches in height and more than seven inches in width. The spine is a full two inches across. The book numbers more than 800 pages. It weighs almost four pounds. Holding it in reading, one develops muscles in the arms.

The subject likewise is heavy: the extent of the atonement of the cross and death of Jesus Christ, that is, the question, for whom did Christ die? with the inseparably related question, what was the nature of the death of Christ? A weightier question can hardly be imagined.

A Defense of Universal Atonement

All the formidable size of the book, as well as the extraordinary, impressive historical research that is much of the content of the book, is for nothing, indeed less than nothing. For the book is devoted to the false doctrine that Christ died for all humans without exception. All the elements of the volume, history of doctrine, exegesis, and critical analysis of the contrary theology, are bent to this purpose: defense of universal atonement.

The book contends that Christ died for all, not in the usual and Arminian sense that He merely made forgiveness possible for all, but in the sense that He actually made atonement for all, truly satisfying for the sins of all the members of the human race. The author states his purpose at the outset: "to demonstrate…universal atonement[:] Christ's satisfaction on the cross for the sins of all humanity" (xviii). "Christ's death paid the penalty for the sin of all people" (286). Allen approves saying "to every human being, 'The death of Christ was a sacrifice for all the sins you ever committed'" (340).

He makes one exception to "all the sins." Christ's death was

not a sacrifice for the sin of unbelief. If it were, all humans must necessarily be saved. For in the theology of David Allen there would be no longer any ground in the sinner himself for God's demanding of him the fulfilling of faith as a condition to the application of the atonement, or any ground for God's condemning some sinners. The death of Christ, therefore, neither atoned for unbelief nor merited faith for anyone. Allen denies that "faith is a gift purchased for the elect… Salvation is purchased, but never faith" (722).

Denial that Christ died for the sin of unbelief and that Christ by His death earned faith all by itself exposes the atonement in Allen's theology as a worthless failure. Allen's gospel of the cross is empty and vain. All other sins arise out of unbelief, and all of the actual deliverance of the sinner has faith as its source. To tout the death of Christ as glorious, in comparison with particular redemption (which accomplishes the salvation of all for whom Christ died), because He died for all, when His death did not save from unbelief and did not earn faith for anyone, is like praising a medicine for assuring the healing of a sick man from all his ailments except the cancer that is ravaging his body and for earning the resurrection of the dead man except for the life that accomplishes his resurrection. Allen's gospel of the cross is empty noise.

According to Allen, Christ did not merely make atonement possible for all. But He actually and truly satisfied for all the sins of the entire human race, specifically including Judas Iscariot (227). Christ's death for all, however, does not assure the salvation of all. Indeed, the death itself did not assure the salvation of anyone. For the salvation of sinners depends upon the application of the atonement to them. In this important sense, in Allen's theology the cross was sufficient for all, but efficient only for believers. Application of the atonement renders the cross efficient in the actual saving of the sinner. And the application is conditioned upon the faith of the sinner. Thus, the cross itself and its salvation are conditioned by the faith of the sinner.

A Conditional Atonement

Conditional atonement and the conditional salvation that follows from conditional atonement are basic to Allen's hypothetical universalism. The condition is the sinner's faith, which is the sinner's own activity in that Christ did not merit this faith for sinners. Speaking

through another, whom he quotes approvingly, Allen asserts that "Christ redeemed all men…The benefits of Christ's death…[are] general and designed in such a way that all conditionally (John 3:16) may be saved if they perform the condition" (195). The condition, of course, is the sinner's faith. "Redemption is not obtained absolutely but upon a condition, and what is obtained upon condition only becomes actually applied on fulfillment of that condition" (207). With reference explicitly to Judas Iscariot, Allen argues, through another whom he quotes favorably, that "Christ's death…is conditional. That is, the benefits of Christ's death are only conditionally applied. The condition being faith" (228).

Hypothetical universalists like David Allen are compelled for the time being to ward off sheer universalism, that is, the teaching that all humans will be saved. This would be too much even for their congregations and audiences. They accomplish this by denying "the argument that all people will be saved because Christ ransomed all mankind." They do not "deny this by rejecting the premise that Christ ransomed all mankind; rather…[they argue] that the new covenant of grace is conditional: only those who believe will obtain salvation" (239). The universal grace of God revealed in the universal atonement and the universal atonement itself might lead one to conclude [as it would indeed!] that there will be a universal salvation. But this would be a mistake, because "possibility and actuality [of salvation by the cross of Christ—DJE] are separated by conditions, and it is only when the conditions of repentance and faith are met that salvation becomes a reality for any individual" (360).

Such is the centrality of the cross in all the message of salvation that if the atonement of the cross is conditional, all of salvation is conditional, that is, dependent upon the sinner's act of believing. Allen does not hesitate to draw out the implication. "Salvation is conditioned upon faith. No one receives the covenant blessings unless he believes. God himself conditions the reception of salvation on faith" (739). Also "election" is subjected to conditional salvation (739). Showing his full hand at the very end, Allen makes biblical predestination conditional. God loves and wills to save all humans. But the realization of this love, "application," Allen calls it, is conditional. The condition is the sinner's free choice of faith. This full and frank disclosure at the end of the book of the nature of every form

of universal atonement comes in a section titled, "The Love of God and the Extent of the Atonement" (779-784).

The hypothetical universalism on behalf of which the book argues is that theory of the atonement of Christ that maintains that Christ atoned for all the sins (except unbelief) of all humans. But the atonement is merely hypothetical in that its efficacy, its actual accomplishment of the salvation of sinners, is not assured by the atonement itself. The accomplishment of a sinner's salvation is the application of the cross, and this application is conditioned by the sinner's act of believing. It is not the death of Christ, the atoning act, what Allen refers to as its "sufficiency," that is hypothetical, but the application of the cross to the sinner, so that he is saved by the cross. In the application, which is conditioned by the sinner's faith, the cross becomes efficacious. "For all Hypothetical Universalists, the atonement is not hypothetical for the non-elect, it is actual. What is hypothetical is the conditionality of faith" (722).

Argument from Church History

Much of the book is devoted to the demonstration that hypothetical universalism was a prominent, if not the main, theology of the cross in the history of the church. Only Gottschalk in pre-Reformation times taught limited, or particular, redemption. Allen honors the martyr, as also a few contemporary Reformed theologians, by recognizing Gottschalk's clear, firm teaching that Christ died only for the elect: teaching that "God does not desire the salvation of all people and Christ died only for the elect" (24, 25). Employing the slander that by now has, in fact, become the indisputable badge of orthodoxy, Allen ventures that Gottschalk was a "proto-hyper-Calvinist" (25).

After the Reformation, it was Beza who introduced the doctrine of limited atonement into the Reformed churches. "With Beza, something of a corner is turned in Reformed theology" (105). If this is the case, which is dubious in light of the doctrine of Calvin, it was time for the corner to be turned. Allen indicates why in his analysis of Beza's doctrine and its motivation: "Beza considered it 'blasphemous' for one 'to say that those whose sins have been expiated through the death of Christ, or for whom Christ has satisfied, can be condemned'" (103).

How accurate Allen may be in his analysis of the history of the dogma of the atonement is for others to judge. His co-opting of Calvin for the heresy of universal atonement is dubious, not so much because of explicit statements of Calvin that Christ died only for the elect, although there are such statements, as because of Calvin's doctrine that the cross of Christ did actually save those for whom He died. It was efficacious, not merely "sufficient" in Allen's sense of sufficiency. Allen's reading of Calvin is suspicious also in light of the relation in Calvin of election and atonement, a relation that Allen rejects.

"Sufficiency/Efficiency"

Important for Allen's defense of hypothetical universalism is the theological distinction of "sufficiency/efficiency." The distinction is common in theology. It occurs in the Canons of Dordt II. 3. Allen's explanation of the distinction, which is important for his theology of the cross, is that Christ's death was sufficient for the redemption of all humans in that He did actually die for all, atoning for the sins of all and satisfying the justice of God on behalf of the sins of all (always excepting unbelief). Efficiency then for Allen has to do with the application of the saving benefits of the cross to humans (on the condition of faith). The meaning of the distinction for Allen is that although the cross was sufficient in having been atonement for all humans, it was not efficient in actually accomplishing the salvation of any.

One need not argue with Allen with regard to the question whether all, or nearly all, theologians before Beza understood the distinction, "sufficiency/efficiency," in this way. This is by no means to concede that all, or nearly all, did in fact understand the distinction, particularly with regard to sufficiency, as Allen alleges. It is on its very face unusual that Christian theologians, who were also sharp thinkers, would explain sufficiency as the actual blotting out of all sins. Were one to say that he had a machine that was sufficient to cut down all the trees in a forest, no one with an average intelligence would understand this sufficiency as meaning that the machine did in actuality cut down all the trees, or that the speaker intended to say so. "Sufficiency," especially in close relation with "efficiency," refers to the capability of accomplishing a certain work. "Efficiency" denotes the power of actually accomplishing the work. If, then, theologians pressed the

distinction, "sufficient/efficient," into the usage that Allen ascribes to it, the thinking of these theologians left something to be desired.

But Allen's attempt to foist his understanding of the distinction on the Canons of Dordt is an obvious, utter failure. Dordt speaks of the sufficiency of the death of Christ for the expiation of the sins of the world in II. 3: "The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world" (Schaff, *Creeds*, II. 3). By no means does Dordt mean by sufficiency that the death of Christ was in fact atonement for the sins of the whole world. Dordt does not derive sufficiency from Christ's having died for the sins of all humans. Rather, the Reformed creed finds sufficiency in the nature of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It is because of who Christ is who died that His death is of infinite worth and value. Article 4 states this explicitly: "This death derives its infinite value and dignity from these considerations; because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only-begotten Son of God…and because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin" (Schaff, *Creeds*, II. 4). If Allen's notion of sufficiency, which he imposes on Dordt, were correct, the Canons would read: "This death derives its infinite value and dignity from the fact that Jesus did actually atone for all humans." There is not so much as a hint in Canons, II. 3, 4 of the sufficiency's deriving from, or meaning, that Christ died for all in any respect whatever.

That Christ died for the elect, and for the elect alone, is immediately confessed in Canons, II. 8. For the Canons of Dordt, official, authoritative creed of the Reformed faith, sufficiency is the inherent worth of the death of Christ as the death of the eternal Son of God in human flesh. Its worth is infinite, so that if God had willed, the death of Christ could have expiated all the sins of the whole world of all humans, and all the sins of a thousand similar worlds besides. Efficiency is the actual atoning, satisfying, and redeeming nature and effect of the death of Christ in the place of, and on behalf of, those, and those only, for whom Christ died as the substitute according to the will of God. Capable of atoning for all humans, had God willed it, as to its inherent worth and value, Christ's death effectively atoned for the

elect only, according to the will of God. Sufficiency is hypothetical. Efficiency is the reality of the cross.

That Christ died (efficiently) for the elect, and for the elect only, in any sense whatever is spelled out in Canons, II. 8:

> This was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father…(Schaff, *Creeds*, II. 8).

Canons, II. 8 is the death-knell upon hypothetical universalism, at least for all who confess the Reformed faith, and that in several respects. First, the Canons ascribes "efficiency" to the death of Christ: "saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son," whereas hypothetical universalism denies that the cross as cross inherently has efficacy. For hypothetical universalism the death of Christ was a death for many who are not saved by it. The cross was inefficacious. As Beza observed, to say so is "blasphemous." David Allen ought to take warning.

Second, for the Canons the cross itself, as the death of Christ, *did* something, *accomplished* something: it "confirmed the new covenant" and "effectually" redeemed the elect. The certain effect of the cross is that it fully and finally saves all for whom Christ died: "should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever." The effect of the effectual death of Christ is the efficacious application" of the atoning, satisfying, and redeeming cross to every one for whom Christ died. According to Allen's hypothetical universalism, the cross of Christ lacks the efficacy to save those for whom Christ died. As Beza observed, to say so is blasphemous. David Allen ought to take warning.

Third, the cross confessed by the Canons of Dordt purchased faith for those humans for whom Christ died. It is of fundamental importance to hypothetical universalism that the death of Christ did

not earn and purchase faith for those for whom Christ died. Allen repeatedly denies that the cross merited faith for any. For the cross to have purchased faith would limit the death to some only—the elect. In addition, the truth that the cross purchased faith for some would nullify Allen's and hypothetical universalism's teaching that faith is the condition that humans must fulfill in order to make the cross efficacious on their behalf. If faith was earned for some, it cannot be a condition that sinners must fulfill to apply the cross to themselves for their salvation. Allen denies "the notion of the purchase of faith, which is at the heart of the necessary salvation of the elect" (211).

But the Canons confess that Christ purchased faith for those for whom He died, that is, for the elect: "…faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he [Christ] purchased for them by his death…" (Canons, II. 8, in Schaff, *Creeds*).

Whatever can be said of Allen's gigantic project, it shatters on the second head of the Canons of Dordt, as do all other forms of the heresy of universal atonement. Whatever credentials hypothetical universalism may have of antiquity and popularity, it is not creedally Reformed, but heretical, according to the official judgment of the Reformed churches and their confession.

Two Bases

Allen grounds his doctrine on two main bases. One is his church historical claim that virtually all theologians before Beza, including Calvin, held universal atonement, which atonement is made particular only by the condition of faith. Church historians may and do dispute this claim, especially with regard to Calvin. Regardless of the soundness of the claim, it is not conclusive in the controversy. There has been development of the truth in church history. In this development, doctrinal error has prevailed for a time in large sections of the church and among many theologians. Think only of the doctrine of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This development of sound doctrine against error has been especially noticeable regarding the pure gospel of grace. How late in coming in the history of the church was the clear understanding of the truth of justification by faith alone. How prominent for a long time was the heresy of justification by works with all its attendant evils. No orthodox Protestant would be swayed

by the careful selection of many quotations of theologians prior to Luther in defense of justification by works.

The second basis of Allen's hypothetical universalism is his contention that the Bible knows nothing of limited, or particular, atonement. According to Allen, it plainly teaches universalism. This contention is deeply flawed by the highly subjective and high-handed biases with which Allen burdens the battle of the texts. Whatever biblical passage teaches a death of Christ for the "world" and for "all" must necessarily refer to every human without exception, and cannot refer to all classes of humans or to the world of Gentiles as well as Jews. There is no possibility, therefore, of contending against Allen that "world" in John 3:16 does not mean every human without exception, but rather the world of Gentiles as well as Jews, regardless that a leading theme in John's gospel is the extension of salvation to the world of the Gentiles; regardless that the immediately preceding context restricts the loving, saving purpose of God in the cross of Christ to those who believe (vv. 14, 15); and regardless that John elsewhere definitely limits the extent of the atonement of Christ to the elect (John 10:11, 15).

A second presupposition of Allen, which he makes a law of interpretation, thus settling the controversy in favor of hypothetical universalism from the outset, is that every passage that limits the atonement, for example, to the sheep, or to many, or to those whom the Father has given to Christ, must be understood as allowing for the extension of the atonement more widely. When, for example, Jesus teaches that He gives His life "for the sheep" and that He lays down His life "for the sheep" (John 10:11 15), Allen insists that the meaning is that He died for the sheep *and, in addition, for all other humans*. Allen has recourse to a little known logical fallacy with which to dismiss all explanations that do justice to biblical passages plainly limiting the death of Jesus to some, and some only. All such explanations are guilty of the "negative inference fallacy" (663, and elsewhere, often). What this fallacy amounts to is limiting to a certain class what is intended to apply to a class as representative of others. In the case of John 10:11, 15, the Holy Spirit did not intend to limit the atonement of the cross to the sheep, but merely to mention the sheep as representative of the larger category of all humans without

exception. When, therefore, Jesus Himself taught that He would die for the sheep, He intended to teach that He would die for the sheep, the non-sheep, and the goats, that is, for all humans without exception.

Similarly, Allen would no doubt dismiss Jesus' own limitation of His atoning death in Mark 10:45: "The Son of man came…to give his life a ransom for many." "Many" forsooth becomes "all without exception." But how this arbitrary application of the "negative inference fallacy" entails perversion of the very nature of the death of Christ! For Christ calls His death a "ransom." A ransom is the payment of a price for the deliverance of those ransomed. If Christ's death was a ransom for all humans without exception, all humans without exception must be delivered from Satan, sin, and death, unless the ransom, that is, the cross of Christ was unavailing. Exactly this is the abominable doctrine of David Allen. In addition, Mark 10:45 is even stronger than the English translation would indicate. The preposition in the text is literally, "in the stead of": "…a ransom *in the stead of many*" (Greek: *anti*). The text teaches the substitutionary nature of the death of Christ. He died as the substitute for many. If now, as David Allen teaches, many for whom Christ died as the substitute will yet themselves eternally die as slaves of Satan and sin, that is, perish in hell, Christ could not have been the substitute for sinners. Thus, the very nature of the death of Christ, as taught by the Savior Himself, is denied.

In truth, Mark 10:45 is clear, convincing testimony to the limited, or particular, extent of the atonement of Christ: "[effectual] ransom in the stead of many [all of whom are efficaciously ransomed and saved, unless the ransom was no ransom at all]."

No doubt, Allen is a master of the logic of wielding his "negative inference fallacy" against all appeals to biblical passages that plainly limit the atonement to the elect, and on strategic behalf of universal atonement. But he is not even a novice in biblical logic. As a result, he is an utterly unreliable expositor of Holy Scripture. A schoolboy is more adept and reliable regarding the logic of the Bible than is David Allen. When in the context of His teaching that some humans are His sheep in distinction from others who are not His sheep, and this by divine reprobation (v. 26: "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep"), Jesus declares that He gives His life for the sheep, biblical

logic clearly and incontrovertibly demands that Jesus died for some humans, in distinction from other humans, for whom He did not give His life. Thus, by this passage alone, the controversy over the extent of the atonement is settled: Jesus died for His sheep, according to eternal election; He did not die for humans who are not His sheep, according to divine reprobation.

It would seem evident that even everyday, non-biblical logic rejects the tactic of dismissing all exclusionary statements by appeal to a "negative inference fallacy." When I say about a certain female that she is my wife, in distinction from myriads of females who are not my wife, and that I live *with her*, sound logic would seem to require that I live with her, and with her *alone*, in the marital relationship. Sound, everyday logic would not allow David Allen to explain that, in fact, I mean that I live with all females. Nor would the logic of the woman who alone is my wife.

The Real Issue

Regardless of the two proposed bases for hypothetical universalism as defended by David Allen, what actually drives his defense is the theory of the well-meant gospel offer. Allen is passionately committed to the theory that God offers salvation to all humans in His (saving) love for all and with the ardent desire to save them all. But Allen rightly understands that this explanation of the call of the gospel cannot be maintained unless Jesus died for all, as hypothetical universalism teaches. This argument on behalf of Christ's sufficient atonement for all runs throughout the book, from beginning to end. It is no exaggeration to say that the appeal to the well-meant gospel-offer is for Allen the leading argument on behalf of his hypothetical universalism, as also the chief motivation for the writing of the book. "Universal atonement guarantees the genuineness of the offer of salvation made to all people through the preaching of the gospel" (178). "A universal atonement [lays] the foundation for a genuine gospel offer to all" (235). "The universal extent of the atonement [is] the necessary ground for the free offer of the gospel to all" (265). "A sincere offer of the gospel that invites all people to partake of its blessings necessitates an unlimited atonement. The gospel invitation declares that there is salvation provided and available for all, not just some. Without an

unlimited atonement, such a universal offer is untrue, and such an invitation is a mere mockery" (305). "Limitarian language with respect to the extent of the atonement can[not] ground the sincere offer of the gospel to all people" (343). "Universal proclamation of the gospel cannot be genuine on the part of God or his messengers if there is no atonement for all people" (416). Many of these quotations are Allen's quotations of others. But they express Allen's own conviction, and a main argument on behalf of the hypothetical universalism defended in the book. Summing up, Allen expresses his own thinking concerning universal atonement and the well-meant offer of salvation.

> All who affirm limited atonement face the problem of the free offer of the gospel…My argument is simple:…If no atonement exists for some, how is it possible that the gospel can be *offered* to those people for whom no atonement exists…One cannot offer salvation in any consistent way to someone for whom no atonement exists…Universal atonement grounds the free offer of the gospel to all people (776).

On Allen's and many others' understanding of the call of the gospel as a well-meant offer to all, Allen's logic, deficient as it is in other respects, is rock-solid. No one can gainsay it. If the call of the gospel to all and sundry is a well-meant offer, expressing the saving love of God and His sincere desire to save, the atonement of the cross cannot have been limited only to some, but must have been universal. For the cross is the ground of the saving love and sincere desire to save expressed in the gospel. What Allen carefully acknowledges at the very end of the book is that such a conception of the gospel-call also demands a doctrine of conditional election, and the rejection of the doctrine of reprobation.

For all its weakness with regard to the truth of the cross, the book does serve the important purpose of warning the entire Reformed and Presbyterian community that the popular doctrine of the well-meant offer necessarily and invariably leads to the heresy of universal atonement. In fact, the theory of the well-meant offer *implies* universal atonement. Allen calls attention to the historical realization of this implication of the well-meant offer in the Christian Reformed Church. Allen appeals to the open advocacy of universal atonement, on the basis of the Christian Reformed Church's doctrine of the well-meant

offer, by Prof. Harold Dekker, and quotes Dekker to this effect (409, 410, 624, 625, 699, 700).

All churches and theologians who espouse the well-meant offer are thereby necessarily committed, willy/nilly, to universal atonement. Not only does logic, biblical as well as "natural" demonstrate this, but also church history does. Every church and every theologian that desire to remain Reformed by honoring the cross of Christ do well, *exceedingly* well, to heed the warning of the *Extent of the Atonement*.

The book, therefore, calls the careful attention of all Reformed and Presbyterian churches to the stand regarding the call of the gospel of the Protestant Reformed Churches. God has graciously led these churches to the doctrine of the gospel-call that does justice to the calling of the church to preach the gospel to all and sundry, including exhorting all to repent and believe, while promising all who do believe that they shall be saved while repudiating the grievous error of the well-meant offer. To the reprobate unbeliever, the call, "Repent and believe!," is not a well-meant offer on the part of God, but a serious demand that does indeed open up to him in his own consciousness the way of salvation, thus leaving him without excuse, but that God intends shall harden him in his unbelief. With the "external call" to the reprobate, God has no desire for his salvation, just as He has not willed the death of Christ for him. God has mercy in the preaching on whom He wills to have mercy; whom He wills He hardens (Romans 9:18). This is in accord with limited atonement and with double predestination And this is good, biblical logic, which word "logic" does not send the Protestant Reformed Churches into spasms of terror.

Allen takes note of the Protestant Reformed Churches and their spokesmen. To their immense credit, he classifies them as "hyper-Calvinists," which classification, though intended pejoratively, identifies them as staunch defenders of the truth of limited atonement. Their confession of limited atonement is not adulterated by a belief of the well-meant offer.

Allen calls the book by the writer of this review, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, an "important work on Calvinism and the free offer of the gospel." He acknowledges that the book denies the charge that the Protestant Reformed Churches are hyper-Calvinists. He references the book's controversy with Harold Dekker, whose

theology of the death of Christ Allen recognizes as an outstanding instance of the development of the theory of preaching as a well-meant offer into the doctrine of universal atonement. He acknowledges that the Protestant Reformed Churches teach "a general call of the gospel to the non-elect," which, however, "is not an expression of God's love for them, nor does it imply that Christ died for their sins." The author of the book—*Hyper-Calvinism*—"cannot be any clearer on the subject: 'Paul…did not believe, nor did he ever preach, that God loved all men, was gracious to all men, and desired the salvation of all men, i.e., he did not believe or teach the well-meant offer of the gospel'" (409, 410).

This doctrine of the preaching must needs be dismissed as hyper-Calvinism by an advocate of universal atonement! And virtually the entire world of Reformed and Presbyterian churches solemnly nods its head in agreement, or stands silently by, thus, in fact, committing itself to the doctrine of universal atonement implied by the doctrine of the well-meant offer, and the only alternative to this doctrine of preaching. As the big book proves!

It is the shame of the Christian Reformed Church that the author of *The Extent* can adduce a number of her theologians on behalf of hypothetical, or other, universalism. Not one is privileged to be ranked as "hyper-Calvinist," that is, defender of particular atonement.

Another benefit of *The Extent of the Atonement* is its proof that many Puritans were advocates and defenders of universalism. This corrects a popular impression that some like to leave with Reformed churches, as though the Puritans were sound on the atonement of Christ. The danger is that Reformed people uncritically open themselves up to the influence of the Puritans, who in other important respects also were unsound. "It is often falsely assumed that all English Puritans (including those who came to America and their subsequent generations) held to limited atonement" (173, 174). "Many of the Puritans…opposed the doctrine of limited atonement and affirmed a form of universal atonement." Allen names names, including "Charnock, Preston, Howe, and Henry." He faults Joel Beeke for leaving the contrary impression: "Beeke engages in…misleading generalizations and broadbrushing…when he said the 'Puritans also opposed the views of the Amyraldians and their hypothetical universalism'" (237, 238).

Jonathan Edwards "affirmed unlimited atonement" (268). "Edwards believed in unlimited atonement" (274). Allen proves this judgment with copious quotations (268-277). The quotations also abundantly prove, if not that what now is known as the well-meant offer led Edwards into the heresy of universal atonement, then that a passionate commitment to the well-meant offer accompanied unlimited atonement in Edward's theology. Allen quotes Edwards:

> Although God the Father invites and importunes them, they'll not accept of it, though the Son of God himself knocks and calls at their door till his head is wet with the dew, and his locks with the drops of the night, arguing and pleading with them to accept of him for their own sakes, though he makes so many glorious promises, though he holds forth so many precious benefits to tempt them to happiness, perhaps for many years together, yet they obstinately refuse all… What would you have God do for you, that you may accept of it?... Don't God offer you his Son, and what could God offer more? Yea, we may say God himself has not a greater gift to offer. Did not the Son of God do enough for you, that you won't accept of him; did he [not] die, and what could he do more?...Do you refuse because you want to be invited and wooed? You may hear him, from day to day, inviting of you, if you will but hearken (271).

This loving, gracious offering of Christ to all humans, with a desire of God to save all, which is the contemporary well-meant offer of the gospel, necessitated for Edwards an atonement that is universal. Edwards preached to all humans in his audience:

> All the persons of the Trinity are now seeking your salvation. God the Father hath sent his Son, who hath made way for your salvation, and removed all difficulties, except those which are with your own heart. And he is waiting to be gracious to you; the door of his mercy stands open to you; he hath set a fountain open for you to wash in from sin and uncleanness. Christ is calling, inviting, and wooing you; and the Holy Ghost is striving with you by his internal motions and influences (713).

The inescapable implication of this theology of a universal (saving) love of God, of a universal atonement, and of the preaching of the

gospel as a well-meant offer to all is that the salvation of the sinner depends on the sinner's acceptance of the love of God expressed in the atonement by his own will. So far did Edwards' theology drive him in expressly stating this implication that he taught that "people have the natural ability to believe in Christ" (294). He added that they lack the "moral ability." But this was too little, too late. Rather than allowing for any kind of ability to believe in Christ, a sound preacher of the gospel of grace emphatically denies all ability of the sinner to come to Jesus and his utter dependency regarding coming upon the drawing of the Father: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). The churches and theologians influenced by Edwards soon apostatized entirely from the Reformed gospel of grace. This is the sorry history of the church in New England.

Denial of the Cross

The damning criticism of the hypothetical universalism advocated and defended by David Allen, and apparently proclaimed by many others, is that it is the denial of the cross of Jesus Christ. According to hypothetical universalism, the cross of Christ lacked efficacy, that is, power, worth, and effect to save anyone. Granted, it acquires efficacy when it is applied to sinners—*by their fulfilling the condition of believing*, which implies that the efficacy even then is not in the cross but in the will of the sinner. But the cross as cross does not itself possess the efficacy to accomplish salvation, for many of those for whom Christ died perish. If the cross were efficacious, no one for whom Jesus died would perish. Allen approves the statement, "The atonement in and of itself saves no one" (371). In the cross of Christ, Allen and his hypothetical cohorts do not glory.

Glorying in the cross consists of proclaiming, "In and of itself, by its own inherent efficacy, the cross of Jesus Christ saves everyone for whom Jesus died." It does not become efficacious only when a sinner fulfills the condition of believing, which attributes the efficacy of salvation to the sinner. The cross does not even become efficacious when the Holy Ghost applies the salvation of the cross to the sinner. But the Holy Ghost applies the cross to the actual salvation of sinners by the efficacy of the cross itself. The cross efficaciously saves the

sinner, exerting its inherent power by the Holy Ghost. When an elect sinner is born again, when an elect sinner believes, when an elect sinner obeys the law, when an elect sinner repents of his sin, when an elect sinner is raised from the dead in the likeness of the glorious body of Jesus, when an elect sinner is publicly justified in the final judgment, all is the working and benefit of the cross of Jesus. The cross accomplishes all of this salvation in and by its own efficacy. "With his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). "By whose stripes ye were healed" (I Pet. 2:24).

That the cross of Jesus is the efficacy and power of all salvation is the meaning of Paul's declaration in I Corinthians 2:2: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." All of salvation depends upon, has its source in, and derives efficaciously from the cross. Preaching the cross, therefore, is the preaching of all the salvation of sinners and, deriving its efficacy from the cross, the preaching of salvation efficaciously.

The only other message that could conceivably challenge the message of the cross as the message of the gospel is the message of Jesus's resurrection. But the resurrection also was due to the efficacious cross of Christ. By His atoning death, which satisfied the justice of God with regard to all the elect for whom He died, Christ earned the right to be raised in the new, immortal body. The cross effected the resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 4:25; I Tim. 3:16).

The apostolic preaching of the cross, therefore, is radically different from preaching hypothetical universalism's "sufficiency" of the cross, which is a denial of its efficacy. It is the vehement condemnation of preaching that suspends the "efficacy" of the cross on the sinner's fulfillment of conditions. The apostolic preaching of the cross exposes hypothetical universalism as heresy, as shaming the cross, as holding the cross in contempt.

But this shaming of the death of the Son of God by the theory of universal atonement, with its intimately related theory of the well-meant offer, is far and away the most popular doctrine of the cross today—among those who call themselves evangelical, Presbyterian, and Reformed. The big book proves this, to its own satisfaction and to the sorrow of those who glory in the cross, and weep to see it shamed. Apart from all their compromise with the heresy by all

kinds of cowardly assertions that Christ in some sense did die for the atonement of all humans, very few forthrightly confess that Christ died for the elect and for the elect only. The result is that Allen is able to place only very few in the category of "hyper-Calvinist," which is in fact the one category of those who unashamedly confess that Jesus died efficaciously for the elect, and for the elect only, without any compromise of this confession by the teaching of a well-meant offer (766).

The False Assumption

It remains to repudiate an important assumption of Allen's hypothetical universalism. This is the assumption that one cannot preach to all, especially call all hearers to repentance and faith, unless one can say to all that Christ died for them. Allen argues that the preacher cannot proclaim to every hearer that God desires his salvation unless Christ died for every human. This is to argue that the well-meant offer requires universal atonement. This argument is sound. For this reason, every church and every theologian that teaches and employs the well-meant offer are, in fact, committed to universal atonement. The error of the assumption is the notion that churches and preachers are commissioned by the Word of God to announce to every hearer that God loves him and sincerely desires his salvation with a love and a desire that gave Christ to die for him. The assumption is false. Nowhere in the New Testament is found a commission by Christ to evangelists or missionaries to announce to all and sundry that God loves them and sincerely desires their salvation. Nowhere is found the example of the apostles addressing crowds of humans in a mission situation, "God loves you, Christ died for you, and God sincerely desires to save you, one and all."

Nor is such a (lying) message necessary for evangelism and missions.

The preacher of the gospel of sovereign, particular grace is able to bring the gospel to all and to call all hearers to Christ and salvation. The truth of sovereign grace does not hamper, much less make impossible, promiscuous preaching. It certainly is not the case that preaching the gospel, specifically in missions, requires the preacher to corrupt the gospel of grace with lies, as, for example, the affirmations

that God loves all humans, desires the salvation of all humans, and gave Christ as the ransom for all humans.

Biblical mission proceeds as follows. The missionary sets forth Jesus as the Savior from sin and death, in the context of exposing the audience as guilty, depraved sinners, under the punitive wrath of God, in time and in eternity, if they do not repent. He then calls, urgently, all in the audience to repent and believe on Jesus Christ, promising in God's name that every one who does repent and believe will be forgiven and saved. All who do believe will know God's love for him or her, which love has provided the Savior and also worked repentance and faith. Knowledge of the love of God for one is always, and for any, a reality only in the way of faith in Jesus Christ. The missionary warns that all who remain unbelieving will perish everlastingly under the wrath of God.

This was the apostolic method of preaching on the mission field. This leaves nothing to be desired regarding the "addressability" of the gospel to all. This harmonizes perfectly with the particular love of election and with the particularity of the atonement. And this does not tell great and grace-denying lies. When the gospel is preached in this way, as many as were ordained to eternal life will believe (Acts 13:48). The rest will be sent away with the warning that they are unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46).

The charge, or fear, that lively, urgent, promiscuous preaching, especially in missions, requires belief of universal atonement is false.

The gargantuan book, therefore, is a huge effort on behalf of a weak and unworthy message: the cross of Christ as an ineffectual failure. ●

George Martin Ophoff: A Bibliography (2)

Douglas J. Kuiper

In the last issue of the *PRTJ* I began a bibliography of the writings of George M. Ophoff (1891-1962; former PRC pastor and Seminary professor). In that article, I included secondary sources (writings *about* Ophoff) and primary sources (writings *by* Ophoff). The primary sources were those published outside the *Standard Bearer*. In this article I begin treating his writings that were published in the *Standard Bearer* (rfpa.org).

Ophoff's *Standard Bearer* contributions are found in volumes 1-35, covering the years 1924-1959. His last contribution, entitled "Ishmael," ends with the words, "(To be continued.)" The article was published in the January 15, 1959 issue (35.8.191).[1] Presumably, Ophoff wrote it before July 1958, when he suffered a serious stroke, which effectively ended his labors.[2]

In the first 35 volumes of the *Standard Bearer,* one finds 1,187 articles, book reviews, and responses to letters from the pen of Ophoff. The figure of 1,187 is only as exact as my fallible ability to count, and some of the articles, as I will note again below, are duplicates of earlier ones. However, to say that Ophoff wrote over 1,100 articles is defensible. This works out to over 32 articles per year on average, or about 1.5 articles per issue.[3] Often these articles are lengthy; a five-page article was not uncommon.

1 I reference *Standard Bearer* articles by their volume, issue, and page; 35.8.191 refers to volume 35, issue 8, page 191. The *Standard Bearer* has been published continuously since October 1, 1924. To give the reader a time-frame reference, volume 1 includes all issues from October 1924 to September 1925. With the October 1 issue every year, a new volume begins.

2 Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1999), 418.

3 The average of 1.5 article per issue assumes 21 issues per year, as is the current practice. However, volume 1 had 12 issues; volume 2 had 17 issues; volumes 3-8 had 24 issues; volumes 9-28 had 22 issues per year, omitting an issue of July 15 and August 15; and volumes 29-35 had 21 issues, omitting also the issue of June 15. The practice of having 21 issues remains the practice of the *Standard Bearer* today.

With few exceptions, Ophoff's articles were written in English. Ophoff himself was born and raised in the United States, so English was his primary language. That he could also speak and write in Dutch is apparent. During his years as pastor of Hope CRC and Hope PRC (1922-1929), he preached in Dutch.[4] Some of his *Standard Bearer* articles have Dutch words in their titles,[5] others include quotes of Dutch paragraphs with Ophoff's English translation,[6] and others are translations of the Dutch in their entirety.[7] Two *Standard Bearer* articles are the most obvious exception to the rule that Ophoff wrote in English. One is written entirely in Dutch ("De Middelaar, Christus Jezus" ["The Mediator, Christ Jesus"], 12.18.418). Another is his response to a brother who wrote a question in Dutch, in which response Ophoff cycles four times between writing in Dutch and in English ("Ingezonden," 9.4.94).

I classify Ophoff's articles into six subject headings: Old Testament Biblical Studies, New Testament Biblical Studies, Church History, Church Polity, Doctrinal/Polemical, and Miscellaneous. About 50% of his *Standard Bearer* contributions fall into the Old Testament category, another 25% fall into the Doctrinal/Polemical and Miscellaneous category, and the remaining 25% are distributed approximately evenly in the categories of New Testament, Church History, and Church Polity. The bibliographical entries in this issue of the *Journal* cover the last 25% of his articles. I divide this article into the three categories, and will introduce each section with more comments specific to articles in that category.

New Testament

Of the articles that belong in this category, four do not treat a

4 Calvin Kalsbeek notes that Hope PRC had at least one Dutch service per Sunday until February 1931. Ophoff left Hope in September 1929. See Calvin Kalsbeek, *A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016), 40.

5 Cf. "A Remarkable Example of 'Inlegkunde'" (14.22.527), and "Loopers" (16.3.72, 16.4.94).

6 One example is "The Fathers Regarding Conditions," 25.19.466. Reading his articles, one finds other examples as well.

7 See "The Emeritus Minister of the Gospel," 12.10.233 and 12.11.250, which is Ophoff's English translation of a report adopted by Classis.

specific text. Each treats the scriptural doctrine of the death of Christ. After including these four articles, I categorize Ophoff's New Testament writings by text, following the order in which the texts appear in Scripture. Those who desire to read an exposition of a certain text will find this categorization useful. Ophoff did not always indicate which text he was treating; an * after the textual reference indicates that I provided the textual reference, after skimming the contents of the article.

Sometimes Ophoff indicates why he wrote on a particular text. A few of Ophoff's articles are the published form of a speech or sermon. Others, particularly from John's gospel account, were written as Sunday School lessons. Others appear to have been written with a polemic in mind, addressing current matters of controversy. Particularly, in the first several years some of Ophoff's New Testament writings rebut the error of common grace. However, the reason why he chose to write on most of the texts at that particular time is not clear.

A dozen or so of the articles in the New Testament category are republications, either in whole or part, of a previous article. The partial republications often occur at the end of an issue, giving the appearance of being "filler." The reader should bear in mind that these republications reflect Ophoff's heavy work load, that they represent no more than 2% of his *Standard Bearer* contributions, and that they occur in his New Testament writings more than in any other category.

Reading these articles, one realizes that Ophoff was a student of the Holy Scriptures. One could profitably study them with a view to personal edification and growth in understanding Scripture. One could also study them with a view to finding and illustrating Ophoff's hermeneutical method (his approach to interpreting Scripture) and exegetical method (the actual practice of interpreting Scripture). Bear in mind, however, that Ophoff was professor of Old Testament studies, in which area he excelled. In other words, while a study of his New Testament writings can be profitable, it should not come at the expense of a study of his Old Testament writings.

"The Death of Christ," 5.13.292, 5.14.319. These are not strictly exegetical articles. They treat the circumstances, mode, physical cause, and spiritual significance of Christ's death.

1 and 2 Peter, "The Epistles of Peter on the Death of Christ," 6.18.420, 6.19.449.

Matthew 2:1-12, "The Visit of the Magi," 5.6.127.
Matthew 5:14-16, "The Parable of the Candlestick," 3.12.277. Ophoff responds to Dr. A. Kuyper's view of common grace.
Matthew 5:14-16, "Ye Are the Light of the World," 3.14.325, 3.17.394, 3.21.490. Ophoff responds to Dr. A. Kuyper's and Rev. H. J. Kuiper's view of common grace.
Matthew 5:16, "Let Thy Light So Shine,"16.15.354.
Matthew 5:23, 24, "First Be Reconciled to Thy Brother," 15.2.45. Submitted in connection with articles regarding the Mosaic law and sacrifice.
Matthew 5:44, "Loving Our Enemies," 10.19.455.
Matthew 6:22-23, "The Great Darkness," 9.5.119.
Matthew 6:23b, "The Great Darkness," 32.18.431. This article is three paragraphs long. Although one recognizes in it ideas from the article in 9.5.119, it is not a repetition.
Matthew 8:2-3*, "The Leper," 5.20.464.
Matthew 12:30, "Gathering with Christ or Scattering," 3.11.259; "For Or Against Christ," 7.14.327 (republication); "Gathering with Christ or Scattering," 13.6.139 (republication).
Matthew 14:13-21 and parallels*, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," 5.21.498.
Matthew 19:16-22 and Mark 10:17-22*, "The Young Ruler," 5.9.213, 16.19.454 (republication).
Matthew 20:17-34, "The Request of the Sons of Zebedee," 5.10.223.
Matthew 21:42*, "The Corner Stone," 5.19.456.
Matthew 27:39-43, "The Crucified Christ Mocked," 10.12.285.
Matthew 27:39-43, "And They That Passed by Reviled Him," 16.11.260.
Mark 2:3-5*, "The Paralytic," 5.21.490.
Mark 6:41, "And When He Had Taken the Five Loaves," 16.12.286.
Mark 10:35*, "Sons of Zebedee," 17.5.119.
Luke 1:26-56, "Mary and Elizabeth," 5.1.17.
Luke 2:46-49*, "Christ among the Doctors," 5.4.79, 16.17.402 (republication).

Luke 6:44, "The Tree and Its Fruit," 4.8.190.
Luke 7:36-50, "The Woman Who Was a Sinner," 5.5.103.
Luke 12:6-9, "The Barren Fig Tree," 9.16.381.
Luke 12:6-9, "Seeking Fruit and Finding None," 15.1.16. This article is a revised and shortened version of the previous. It is essentially the same, but not an exact republication.
Luke 15:4, "The Shepherd and His Sheep," 8.16.383.
Luke 23:39-43, "Lord, Remember Me," 16.13.307.
Luke 24:26, "The Disputings of Two of Them," 16.13.311, 16.14.335.
Luke 24:26, "Ought Not the Christ to Have Suffered These Things, and to Enter into His Glory?" 4.17.397.
John 1:1-18, "The Reception of the Word by Mankind," 13.7.163 (Sunday School Lesson).
John 2:12-21, Matthew 21:10-17, "The Cleansing of the Temple," 5.7.148.
John 2:13-21, "And He Drove Them All out of the Temple," 16.15.357. This is a republication of the previous.
John 3:1-7, "Christ Instructs Nicodemus," 13.7.166 (Sunday School Lesson).
John 3:1-21, "Nicodemus with Christ," 4.24.560.
John 3:1-21, "There Was a Man of the Pharisees," 17.4.94. This is a republication of the first part of the previous article.
John 3:16, "A Problem Faced and a Solution Offered," 3.8.191. Ophoff opposes the interpretation of the word "world" that Dr. Albertus Pieters gives in his book *The Facts and Mysteries of the Christian Faith*.
John 4*, "The Samaritan Woman", 5.17.392.
John 4:7-26, "Jesus, the Water of Life," 13.8.185 (Sunday School Lesson).
John 4:13-14, "Living Water," 7.22.503.
John 5:1-9*, "The Pool of Bethesda," 5.3.55.
John 5:2-9, 6:8-15, "The Miracles," 13.8.187 (Sunday School Lesson).
John 6:53-55, "Eating Christ's Flesh," 16.1.23.
John 8:12, 3; 9:1-11, "Jesus the Light of the World," 13.9.212 (Sunday School Lesson).
John 8:12*, "Jesus The Light of the World," 6.6.137.
John 9*, "The Cure of the Blind Beggar," 5.22.524; "The Man Who

Was Born Blind, Restored," 16.21.501; "The Cure of the Blind Beggar," 17.8.191. The latter two exactly reproduce the first part of the original article, but the articles end when the issue is full.

John 10, "Jesus, the Good Shepherd," 13.9.214 (not explicitly identified as a Sunday School Lesson, but probably intended as such).

John 10:11, 14*, "The Good Shepherd," 6.10.239.

John 11:1-12:11, "The Raising of Lazarus," 13.10.237 (Sunday School Lesson).

John 11* The Raising of Lazarus (John 11*), 5.18.416.

John 11*, "The Miracle [of the raising of Lazarus] and the Enemies of Jesus," 5.18.430.

John 12:1-8, "The Anointing at Bethany," 5.8.185.

John 12:3-8, "Against the Day of My Burying," 16.16.377 (a republication of the previous).

John 12:20, 21, "We Would See Jesus," 16.5.119.

John 12:20-33, 13:34-35, "The New Commandment," 13.10.239 (Sunday School Lesson).

John 13:1-5, "Jesus Washeth the Feet of His Disciples, 9.15.346; "He Washeth Their Feet," 15.11.263; "Christ Washes the Feet of His Disciples," 32.18.430. The latter two are not exactly republications of the original, but are obviously an editing and shortening of it.

John 14:1-15, "Jesus Comforts His Disciples," 13.11.258 (Sunday School Lesson).

John 15:1-7, "Christ, the True Vine," 9.18.430, continued in "The Vine and Its Branches," 9.19.455.

John 16:5-7, 17:14-26, "Jesus Prays for His Disciples," 13.11.261 (Sunday School Lesson).

John 17:3, "Eternal Life," 16.5.116.

John 18:9-23*, "Jesus Before Caiaphas," 5.12.272.

John 19:4-9, 14-18, "Jesus Before Pilate," 13.12.282 (Sunday School Lesson).

John 20:21, "Peace Be unto You," 14.17.406.

John 20:24-29*, "The Unbelief of Thomas," 4.19.449.

John 21:15-19*, "Peter and John," 5.16.376.

Acts 2:14, 16, "But This is That Which Was Spoken by the Prophet," 14.18.426.

Acts 2:17, "God's Doings in the Last Days," 11.18.431.

Acts 2:37, "Men and Brethren, What Shall We Do?" 14.18.431.
Romans 1:16-17, "The Gospel the Power of God unto Salvation," 16.18.424. This is the written version of Ophoff's speech at the graduation of Candidate John Heys.
Romans 1:18ff*, "The Development of Sin," 12.2.39.
Romans 8:35, 37, "Christ's Love and the Believers, Ever Intact," 11.2.42.
1 Corinthians 9:24-27, "I So Run," 10.18.426; republished in 16.16.380.
1 Corinthians 13:12, "Now and Then," 15.2.46.
1 Corinthians 13:12, "Seeing Face to Face," 22.22.517. This appears under the rubric "The Day of Shadows." It is not a reprinting of the previous.
1 Corinthians 15:54-58, "Victory over the Grave," 6.1.4, republished in 16.14.332.
Galatians 3:13, "Christ Was Made a Curse for Us," 15.13.311.
Philippians 1:9-10, "Love More and More Abounding," 14.14.335.
Philippians 4:6-7, "Be Careful for Nothing," 17.19.452.
Colossians 3:1, "Risen with Christ," 15.18.436.
Hebrews 4:11, "Labor to Enter the Rest," 7.9.214; continued in "God or Figs," 7.10.235.
Hebrews 7:25, "Christ Able to Save to the Uttermost," 15.10.239.
Hebrews 10:19-21, "Liberty to Enter the Holiest," 5.18.419.
Hebrews 11:17-19, "Abraham's Faith," 15.3.67. Submitted in connection with articles regarding the burnt offering.
Hebrews 13:10, "We Have an Altar..." 15.1.22. Submitted in connection with articles regarding the Mosaic law and sacrifice.
1 John 3:1, "The Love of God," 3.5.100. This is a short article, at the end of which is a note that the article will be continued, but no obvious continuation is found.
1 John 1:3, "Fellowship with God," 6.8.192.
1 John 3:1-3, "We Shall Be Like Him," 28.11.262.
Revelation 3:7-8, "The Church of Little Strength," 16.8.190.
Revelation 3:7-12, "The Church with the Open Door," 8.20.465.

Church History

Ophoff wrote many articles that are of value to the history of the

Protestant Reformed Churches, even though they do not treat historical events. These I will include in a future issue under the heading "Doctrinal/Polemical." The articles that I include here treat the history of the church of Christ throughout the New Testament. Most were published under the *Standard Bearer's* rubric theme "Through the Ages."

When I prepare my church history courses in the next few years, I intend to study these articles more fully. For now I point out two series that indicate that Ophoff, having rejected common grace, explained the significance of particular historical events in a different way than did many others.

The first series, "The Fulness of Time," found in volume 8 of the *Standard Bearer*, sets forth foundational principles for understanding history. The theme is taken from Galatians 4:4, raising the question whether this series belongs in the category of church history or of New Testament studies. I include them here because they are not an exegetical exposition of the entire verse, but concentrate on the idea of the phrase "the fulness of time." In doing so, they lay the foundation for understanding the times in which Christ was born, and, by implication, the foundation for a Christian view of subsequent history. The articles oppose the common idea that Christ was born when the pagan nations were spiritually ready to embrace Him and His gospel of peace. Ophoff shows that, rather than being ready for Christ, both the Jews as an ethnic group and the Greco-Roman world were morally corrupt and opposed to the Christ whom God sent.

The articles "The Reformation and the Renaissance," in volume 18 of the *Standard Bearer*, regard the relationship of these two movements. Historians commonly view these as related events–the Renaissance was to learning what the Reformation was to the church and to theology. Further, the Reformation developed out of the Renaissance. Ophoff's thesis is different: "Of it [Renaissance] the Reformation was no product. The two movements differed. They differed as to the time which each occupied. Each movement had its own forerunners. They differed further as to essence, nature, and aim" (18.5.110).

Reference to these two series underscores that all of Ophoff's church history writings deserve further study. For many, the doctrine of common grace still serves today as a foundation for evaluating history and historical events. Studying Ophoff's church history writings in

more detail will help lay a good foundation for constructing a view of history that clearly distinguishes between church and world.

The articles that treat historical events appear according to the chronology of the events that are treated in the articles.

Foundations for a right view of history

"The Fulness of Time," 8.3.70, 8.4.91, 8.5.116, 8.7.167, 8.9.203.

"The Wisdom of the World–Foolishness," 8.10.235. The article begins with the phrase, "In our previous article under the above caption." Although Ophoff has changed the title of the article from the previous, his point is that he is continuing the discussion of "The fulness of time."

"The Stoic and Stoicism," 8.11.251. Again, a continuation of the previous.

"The Fulness of Time," 19.2.36. This article is not part of the earlier series that is found in volume 8. It treats the same idea more succinctly.

Early and Medieval Church History

"The Coming of the Blessings of Abraham on the Gentiles (The Spread of the Gospel in the First Three centuries)," 19.5.108.

"Martyrdom under the Several Roman Emperors," 19.6.130, 19.7.155, 19.8.178.

"The Gainsayers (The Literary Contest of Christianity in the First Three Centuries)," 19.10.235, 19.11.249, 19.12.273, 19.14.323.

"The Change under Constantine," 19.19.437.

"The Beginning of the Papacy," 19.21.482.

"The Fathers on Catholic Unity," 20.3.55.

"Christian Morality against the Background of Pagan Corruption," 20.4.83.

"Asceticism in the Early Church," 20.14.306.

"Christianity and Paganism after Constantine," 20.17.388.

"The Downfall of Heathenism in the Roman Empire," 21.7.157.

"The Catacombs," 21.9.202.

"Montanism," 21.10.230.

"Public Worship in the Church," 21.11.249.

"The Doctrine of the Early Church," 21.19.439, 21.20.460, 21.21.481.

"Monasticism," 21.22.504, 22.2.37.
"The Change in Public Worship in the Nicene Age," 22.3.58.
"Pope Leo, The Great," 22.4.82.
"Pope Gregory, or The Great," 22.5.106.
"The Papacy and Charles the Great," 22.6.133.
"The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals," 22.7.154.
"The First Degradation of Papacy," 22.8.182.
"The Second Degradation of Papacy of the Reform Popes," 22.9.204.
"Gregory VII," 22.10.226.
"Canossa," 22.11.250.
"The Concordat of Worms," 22.12.274.
"The Peace of Venice," 22.13.301.
"St. Thomas of Canterbury," 22.14.325.
"Innocent III," 22.15.349.
"Innocent's Transaction with the King John of England," 22.16.374.
"The War of Innocent III against the Cathari," 22.17.394.
"Frederick II and the Papacy," 23.1.13, 23.2.38.
"The Empire and the Papacy at Peace," 23.3.60.
"King Philip IV of France and Pope Boniface VIII," 23.4.86.
"The Transfer of the Papacy to Avignon," 23.5.109.
"The Avignon Popes," 23.6.133.
"The Papal Schism," 23.8.183.
"The Papal Schism, Continued," 23.9.206.
"The Healing of the Papal Schism," 23.10.227.
"The Renaissance Popes," 1431-1521 23.11.254, 23.12.277, 24.7.158.
"Renaissance Popes–Innocent VIII," 24.8.182.
"Renaissance Popes–Julius II, the Warrior Pope," 24.9.206.
"Renaissance Popes–Leo X," 24.10.228.
"The Reformation Popes," 24.12.277.
"The Papacy during the Period of the Reformation–Adrian IV," 24.13.300, 24.14.327.

Reformation

"John Huss and the Reformation,"18.3.58.
"The Reformation and the Renaissance," 18.5.110, 18.6.130.
"Melanchton and the Reformation," 18.9.202.
"Luther's Defense before the Diet of Worms," 18.22.501.
"What Had Calvin to Do with the Death of Servetus?" 15.12.286.

"Calvin and the Burning of Servetus," 18.20.458.
"John Calvin and the Reformation in Geneva," 27.19.446, 27.20.470.
"The Reformation in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Revolt," 27.21.491.
"The Arminian Reaction," 27.21.494, 27.22.518.
"The Arminian or Remonstrant Struggle after the Death of Arminius, 1609," 27.22.519.
"The Arminian or Remonstrant Struggle," 28.1.21, 28.2.38, 28.3.62, 28.4.88, 28.5.112, 28.6.136, 9.15.348.
"Puritanism in England," 16.9.212, 16.10.239, 16.11.257, 16.12.283, 16.13.310.
"The Pretention of the Apostate," 11.4.81. (This address was delivered on the occasion of the PRC commemoration of the *Afscheiding* of 1834).
"The *Reveil* in the Netherlands," 13.1.13.

Church Polity

The following list of articles does not give a full picture of Ophoff's contributions to church polity. The PRC began in early 1925[8] with three pastors: Revs. H. Danhof, H. Hoeksema, and G. Ophoff. In June 1927, when the first meeting of Classis was held, the denomination had ten churches,[9] served by two ministers, for Rev. Danhof had left the denomination earlier that year. In the Fall of 1927, W. Verhil and G. Vos began their pastoral labors in Hull and Sioux Center, IA, respectively; however, they had not yet finished their seminary training, and returned in 1929 to complete it. That same year six men (A. Cammenga, J. DeJong, C. Hanko, B. Kok, R.

8 I give 1925 as the date, rather than 1924, because Danhof and Ophoff were not deposed by Classis Grand Rapids West until January 1925.

9 Cf. the minutes of the meeting of the Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches, June 1927. (From June 1927 until September 1939, the PRC had one classis, which was the broadest assembly of the denomination). These minutes, entitled "Notulen van de Vergadering van de Classis der Protestantsche Gereformeerde Kerk," are published in Dutch as a supplement to the September 15, 1927 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Article 3 lists the churches that sent delegates: Byron Center, MI; Doon, IA; Fuller Ave (First, GR), MI; Hope (Walker), MI; Hull, IA; Munster, IN; Hudsonville, MI; Roosevelt Ave, MI; Sioux Center, IA; Waupun, WI.

Veldman, and L. Vermeer) graduated from the Theological School and began their pastorates. Of these six, only B. Kok stayed in the West Michigan area. This means that Hoeksema and Ophoff were the only PRC ministers in the West Michigan area until 1929, and for several more years were the only experienced ministers in the fledgling denomination. These two, with capable elders, guided the denomination through the church political issues that arose in her early years.

Ophoff was entrusted with teaching church polity in the Theological School. In that capacity, he became the church polity "expert," which is not to suggest that Hoeksema was in any way deficient in this area.

As the following list indicates, Ophoff's church polity writings fall into two categories: first, those that deal with church political issues that pertained to the denomination (perhaps we could call this "church political polemics," a defense of right applications of church polity over against wrong applications), and second, those that sought to instruct the readership of the *Standard Bearer* regarding the Protestant Reformed Church Order. Especially regarding the latter, two points are worth noting. First, Ophoff's class notes on the entire Church Order have been published.[10] These class notes are much briefer than his *Standard Bearer* articles. Second, Ophoff's commentary on the Church Order ended with Article 24 of the Church Order, halfway through volume 12 of the *Standard Bearer*, in early 1936. Why he discontinued his commentary is not apparent. His Sunday School lessons on passages from John's gospel account and from Genesis begin to appear in volume 13, but I am not ready to conclude that this alone is the reason for his discontinuing his Church Order commentary.

I present these articles with a general, not detailed, knowledge of their content. The articles also merit further study in order to see how Ophoff developed the PRCA's understanding of the Church Order of Dordt, and the application of church polity to our day. One obvious instance of development is found in the first section below, regarding

10 As noted in my previous installment of Ophoff's bibliography, the Protestant Reformed Theological School has published his class notes under the name "Church Right," and they continue in his "Poimenics" notes.

the (lack of) authority of the broader assemblies to depose officebearers in particular congregations.

The Institution of Christ's Church

These articles emphasize that the offices are found in the local congregation, and that broader assemblies have no authority to depose whole consistories, or consistory members. In order to make that point clear, Ophoff developed in these articles the idea of the church institute.

"Can a Classis (Synod) Depose a Consistory? Or, The Plain Truth about the Institution of Christ's Church," 4.8.179, 4.9.199, 4.10.225, 4.11.250, 4.12.273, 4.13.299, 4.14.327.
"The Institution of Christ's Church," 4.17.390, 4.18.417.
"The Institution of the New Testament Church," 4.19.441.
"The Constituency of the Church as Institution," 4.23.535.
"The Institution of Christ's Church: The Office of All Believers," 5.1.9.
"The Church as Institution: The Component Parts of the Institution," 5.4.85.
"The Peculiar Office," 5.5.114, 5.6.136, 5.7.156, 5.8.176, 5.9.199.
"The Privileges of the Believer," 5.10.228.
"Type and Antitype," 5.14.324 (comparing OT Israel's rule by Christ to the NT church's rule by Christ, he lays the foundation for Reformed church government).

Treatment of the Church Order

These articles appeared in the years 1932-1936. The words "Our Church Order" appeared as the title of every article, sometimes accompanied by a subtitle. Where no other information is given in the title itself, I put in parenthesis what that article treated.

"Our Church Order," 8.8.190, 8.11.262 (Introductory matters).
"Our Church Order," 8.18.429 (Article 1).
"Our Church Order," 8.19.440 (Article 2).
"Our Church Order," 8.20.477, 8.21.501 (Article 3).
"Our Church Order," 8.22.516, 8.23.533, 8.24.544 (Article 4).
"The Examination of Prospective Ministers of the Gospel," 9.2.32 (Article 4).

"The Lawful Calling to the Office," 9.3.56 (Article 5).
"Some Matters in Connection with Art. 5 of Our Church Order," 9.5.116.
"Our Church Order" 9.7.167 (Article 6).
"Our Church Order," 9.8.176 (Articles 6 and 7).
"Men with Exceptional Gifts (Article 8, Church Order)," 9.9.197, 9.10.234 (Article 8).
"Our Church Order," 9.11.248 (Article 9).
"Our Church Order," 9.12.275, 9.13.307 (Article 10).
"Our Church Order," 9.14.324 (Article 11).
"Our Church Order (The Budget System and Other Matters), 9.16.368 (Article 11).
"Our Church Order: The Lesson of History," 9.17.392, 9.18.417 (Article 11; deals with the history of the church supporting her ministers).
"Our Church Order," 9.20.464 (Article 11).
"Our Church Order," 9.21.487 (Article 12).
"Our Church Order: The Emeriti-Ministers" 9.22.512, 10.1.21, 10.2.29 (Article 13).
"Our Church Order: Leave of Absence," 10.3.56 (Article 14).
"Our Church Order," 10.4.95, 10.5.103 (Article 15).
"Our Church Order: The Office of the Minister," 10.6.128.
"Our Church Order: The Office of Minister of the Gospel," 10.8.176, 10.9.200 (Article 16).
"Our Church Order: The Minister of the Gospel Also an Elder," 10.10.224 (Article 16).
"Our Church Order," 10.12.273 (Article 16).
"Our Church Order," 10.13.306 (Article 17).
"The Office of Professors," 10.14.332 (Article 18).
"The Office of Professors of Theology," 11.1.18 (Article 18).
"The Support of Needy Students," 11.2.46 (Article 19).
"The Speaking a Word of Edification in the Meetings for Public Worship by the Students," 11.5.102 (Article 20).
"The School," 11.9.210 (Article 21).
"Our Church Order: The Christian School," 11.17.406 (Article 21; treats the task and aim of the Christian school).

"The School," 11.18.426 (Article 21; treats the relationship of the Christian school to home and church).

"The Election of Elders," 11.19.452 (Article 22).

"The Office of Elders," 12.4.89, 12.5.109, 12.6.137 (Article 23).

"The Deacons," 12.12.272 (Article 24).

"The Diaconate," 12.13.304. An examination of the history of the diaconate, following from the previous article.

Other Articles Relating to Church Political Issues

"The Emeritus Minister of the Gospel," 12.10.233, 12.11.250. A translation from Dutch of a report that the Classis adopted, and that paved the way for our own Emeritus Committee Constitution.

"The Fundamental Principle of Reformed Church Polity," 22.20.468, 22.21.490, 22.22.514. Because these articles appeared under the church history rubric "Through the Ages," I have referenced them above. Their content is clearly church political, but Ophoff's starting point is that John Calvin is the father of church polity. In the third article he treats the matter of the binding power of classical and synodical decisions (Church Order, Article 31), and opposes the view of a Rev. G. Hoeksema that a classis may depose a consistory.

"Handopening," 13.19.453. An article explaining and evaluating the practice by the Dutch Reformed churches in the Netherlands of requesting the government's permission to call a minister of the gospel. Classis had entrusted him with the task of investigating the matter; this article is his response to the Classis of June 3, 1937.

"The Status of the Deacon," 7.24.550, 8.2.44. A consistory asked Ophoff to explain the relationship of the deacon to the consistory. He argues in these articles that a deacon may not function as an elder. As a side note, Ophoff also submitted a report to the Classis meeting on January 9, 1935, in which he defended the right of a deacon to be delegated to Classis.

Debates and Questions

The following articles were written as a response to questions, or in taking part in a debate.

"Our Offerings," 13.19.451, 13.21.503, 13.22.524, 14.1.20, 14.2.41. These articles are a response to a questioner who contended that the General Fund offerings were to be freewill offerings, and a consistory should not have a General Fund budget and assess each

family a certain amount. Ophoff opposes the questioner on that point. A lengthy stream of correspondence from numerous men followed, appearing under the following titles:

- "Communication," 14.3.70.
- "Reply to J. H. Kortering," 14.4.89.
- "Communication from H. J. Hoekstra," 14.4.91, and "Reply," 14.4.92.
- "Communication from H. J. Hoekstra," 14.6.138, and "Reply," 14.6.139.
- "Communication from J. D. of Hudsonville, MI," 14.6.142, and "Reply" 14.6.143.
- "Reply to Rev. G. M. Ophoff," 14.8.187, and "Reply," 14.8.189.

"Debate: Resolved that a local consistory has the right to act contrary to our Church Order," 20.6.122. This was a debate, in which Rev. B. Kok argued in favor of the proposition, and Rev. Ophoff argued against it. The discussion is continued in 20.7.148, 20.7.159, and in "A Final Word from the Disputants," 20.8.180. Ophoff presents "Joh. Jansen's View" in 20.7.152. Jansen was a Dutch authority on the Church Order.

"Ingezonden," ("Question,"), 9.4.94. Ophoff answers a question from a reader regarding the examination of prospective ministers as required in Article 4 of the Church Order.

"Questions on Church Polity," 23.8.182. This dealt with a question regarding Church Order Article 27, especially regarding lifelong eldership as opposed to term eldership.

"Questions on Church Polity," 23.7.157, 23.9.207, 23.10.228, 23.11.250, 23.12.274. These articles answer questions regarding Church Order Articles 36 (regarding the character of the jurisdiction of the broader assemblies), 68 (regarding the word "ordinarily"), and 79 (regarding the question who deposes officebearers, and how that relates to the autonomy of the local congregation). The discussion continues in the following articles:

- "Church Polity," 23.13.298.
- "Dr Ridderbos and Article 79," 23.14.322.
- "Dr. J. Ridderbos and the 800 Zeros," 23.15.348.
- "Dr Ridderbos and Article 79 Once More," 23.16.370.
- "Dr. Ridderbos and Article 31," 23.17.394, 23.18.418, 23.19.441.

Book Reviews

Knowing God and Ourselves: Reading Calvin's Institutes Devotionally, by David B. Calhoun. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016. Pp. xii + 341. $27.00 (hard). [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

David Calhoun has done all lovers of John Calvin a great service in his new book, *Knowing God and Ourselves: Reading Calvin's Institutes Devotionally*. A fine contribution to Calvinalia, Calhoun accomplishes his twofold purpose of faithfully summarizing the contents of Calvin's magnum opus, and doing so in a devotional manner. On the one hand, throughout the book he treats the grand subjects that occupied Calvin's attention in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—the first great systematic theology of the Reformation—in such a way that he demonstrates, out of Calvin's own mouth ordinarily, the practical significance of the truth for the Christian life. At the same time, he echoes Calvin's sentiment that more than anything else the truth aims at exalting the glory of God. Anyone who is appreciative of Calvin will have his appreciation deepened by reading *Knowing God and Ourselves*.

Calhoun is an internationally recognized Calvin scholar and Emeritus Professor of Church History at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. It's worth quoting Calhoun's testimonial on the back of the book's dust jacket.

> I did not read Calvin's *Institutes* until I was in my doctoral studies at Princeton theological Seminary. I have been reading this book ever since, along with other writings by Calvin and books about Calvin. For twenty-five years, I taught a course in the *Institutes* at Covenant Theological Seminary. I do not idolize Calvin, but my respect for him as a teacher and pastor has grown through the years. Facing the daily task of living, with its many demands and pressures, struggling with incurable cancer, and trying to find a way to understand the chaos and grimness of world events unfolding around me,

> I have found Calvin a source of solidarity and strength. Enjoying the gift of life, the blessing of love of family and friends, the joy of food and drink, the beauty of nature, and the wonder of it all, I have discovered in Calvin a fellow pilgrim whose words often reflected and focused my feelings and helped me to fix my eyes on heaven and to give thanks. Calvin also challenges me, rebukes me, and leads me on, gently but firmly, toward greater love for God and obedience to his word. I pray that your study of Calvin's *Institutes* will bring you great blessing also.

Even the structure of the book is praiseworthy. In twenty-six chapters Calhoun covers all the main topics of the *Institutes*, from the knowledge of God in creation to Calvin's view of civil government and the calling of the Reformed Christian towards the magistracy. Each of the chapter titles includes a memorable designation of the truth covered in that chapter in the words of Calvin himself. For example, the first chapter is entitled "Knowing God in Creation—'The Mirror of Divinity.'" Chapter 5 is "Providence—'God's Ever-Present Hand.'" Chapter 13 is "Faith—'A Palm Tree.'" Chapter 16 is "Justification—'The Main Hinge.'" Chapter 17 is "Prayer—'The Chief Exercise of Faith.'" Chapter 20 is "The Church—'Mother and School.'" Chapter 22 is "The Roman Catholic Church—'A Half-Demolished Building.'" And chapter 26 is "Civil Government—'Another Help.'"

But it is not only the chapter titles that make use of Calvin's own expressions and terminology. The chapters themselves are replete with quotations from the *Institutes*, as well as from Calvin's commentaries, correspondence, and various treatises. Besides the wealth of memorable Calvin quotes, there is also a good mix of references to and quotations from secondary sources. Other Calvin scholars are often cited: Battles, Helm, Leith, McKee, McNeill, Oberman, Parker, Selderhuis, Wallace, Warfield, and Wendel.

Each of the chapters is structured similarly. That structure is a quotation from Calvin, a quotation from a secondary source, a suggested reading assignment from the *Institutes*, an appropriate Scripture text, a notable Calvin quote, a suitable prayer of Calvin, and last the body of the exposition, which is treated under logically arranged subheadings.

I found this to be a very suitable arrangement and appreciated the flow of the book's chapters. Almost always I found the quotations to be apropos and especially appreciated the selection of Calvin's prayers.

Apart from the attempt to find in Calvin support for common grace and the theology of the well-meant gospel offer (83), the exposition of the *Institutes* is honest to Calvin himself. There was no twisting of Calvin in the interests of the author's own agenda, as has indeed been done by some in the past. Instead, there was a very honest working with what Calvin himself taught. Gratifying was the author's obvious sympathy with and support of Calvin's theology, which is the foundation for the Reformed tradition that has sprung up after Calvin.

Among the chapters that I especially appreciated was the chapter on Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of creation and of the fall, including endorsement of Calvin's teaching of the far-reaching consequences of Adam's fall. Calhoun is in complete agreement with Calvin in his teaching that fallen man does not retain a free will and is altogether dependent on the grace of God in salvation (84-8). In his treatment of Calvin's teaching on free will, as his teaching generally, Calhoun excels in demonstrating Calvin's conscious dependence on the early church fathers, especially Augustine. He also emphasizes the solid, biblical exegesis that underlies all that Calvin taught. He summarizes Calvin's teaching on the human condition by saying that "[w]e are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners" (80). And further, in distinction with the Roman Catholic Church of his day, "Calvin insists that fallen humanity is not merely deprived, but also depraved" (81).

Calhoun expressly rejects the attempt of McNeill and Battles to disavow Calvin's endorsement of the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture. Those of our readers familiar with the edition of Calvin's *Institutes* that is most widely in use today, the McNeill-Battles edition, are likely aware of the two rather infamous footnotes in this edition in volume 2, pages 1155-7. In footnote 7, on pages 1155-6 they say that Calvin "discount[s] any doctrine of exact verbal inspiration [of Scripture]. The context [of this footnote in the *Institutes*] has reference to teaching, not words merely, showing that Calvin's point is not verbal inerrancy, but the au-

thoritative message of Scripture." Then, on the very next page, in footnote 9, the footnote attached to Calvin's statement that the apostolic writers "were sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God," they say that "[t]his passage has been held to support the view that Calvin's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture was one of verbal inerrancy. Yet he has no explicit support of such a view anywhere else, and here he immediately makes it clear that his interest is in the teaching rather than in the form of expression." McNeill and Battles to the contrary notwithstanding, Calhoun rejects the deliberate distortion of Calvin's teaching and demonstrates not only that "Calvin does not deny verbal inspiration of the Bible" (283), but that he has a "high view of biblical infallibility" (56).

Calhoun applauds Calvin's understanding of the law in relationship to the gospel, and therefore also of the Old Testament (Covenant) to the New Testament (Covenant). He writes:

> The Old Testament law is not merely a collection of commands; it is part of the ongoing revelation of God set in the larger context of the gospel. Moses was not the founder of a religion of law but the prophet of God's covenant of grace. The chief thing about the law is that it is an expression of the gospel. The gospel tells us that we ought "to seek redemption in Christ," and the law preaches the same message. The law was not given 'to lead the chosen people away from Christ, but rather to hold their minds in readiness until his coming' (II.7.1). Of course, the word "law" is sometimes used in the Bible "in a narrow sense," such as Paul did in Galatians when he spoke of the law torn from the context of grace. Misused and misapplied, the law is no longer gospel (92).

This perspective leads into Calhoun's treatment of the Ten Commandments in chapter 8 under the title "The Ten Commandments—'The Law of Grace.'"

Calhoun's treatment of the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Mediator focuses on His person and His work. Both His person and His work are highlighted in Calvin's view of Christ's cross work as "penal substitution." "Calvin," says Calhoun, "presents a 'penal substitutionary' view of the atonement, that Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins"

(137). He then quotes Calvin's comments on John 12:23: "The chief thing to consider in his death is his expiation, by which he appeased the wrath and curse of God. But he could not have done that without transferring to himself our guilt" (137).

Calhoun's forthright treatment of Calvin's view of double predestination, including his avowal both of sovereign election and sovereign reprobation, is commendable. Calhoun clearly endorses Calvin's teaching in this regard.

> Calvin understands the Scriptures to teach that predestination is sovereign, particular, and includes both the elect and the reprobate. "Experience teaches" what Scripture clearly proclaims—God "does not indiscriminately adopt all unto the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others" (III.21.1)" (225).

To his credit Calhoun takes issue with those who "have argued that Calvin's doctrine of reprobation is based more on logic than on Scripture" (227). He does not discredit Calvin's appeal to logic, especially the logic that since election is the election of some particular persons only, reprobation is implied. Indeed, "election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation" (227). But he argues that Calvin's teaching of reprobation does not rest *exclusively* on human logic, but on the express teaching of holy Scripture:

> Calvin's treatment of this doctrine is saturated with Scripture, especially III.21.5-7. He ends III.21 with a summary survey of the doctrine of election that begins with the words, "As Scripture, then clearly shows…" (III.21.7) and adds another chapter with the title "Confirmation of this Doctrine from Scriptural Testimonies." Calvin rests his doctrine of predestination on Scripture, but declares it is also consonant with observation and experience (227).

In his treatment of reprobation, as in his exposition of election, Calhoun expresses agreement with Calvin's insistence on the absolute sovereignty of God as the cause of both election and reprobation. Both election and reprobation, therefore, are unconditional. Of reprobation, in particular, he concurs with Calvin's view that "God's decree of reprobation does not rest on sinful works nor on foreseen sinful works" (229).

The treatment of the doctrine of the sacraments, chapters 23-25, underscores the distinctive view that Calvin had of the sacraments as positive means of grace. Calvin's view is to be distinguished from the Roman Catholic view that the sacraments themselves are grace. And his view is to be distinguished from the view of Zwingli and the Anabaptists that the sacraments were bare signs, mere memorials, thus denying that they were actual means of grace to the elect. The sacraments are not grace, but effective means of grace under the blessing of the Holy Spirit to strengthen and confirm faith. "The church and the sacraments," thus, "are not means by which we get grace but means by which God gives grace to us" (259). He adds:

> The preaching of the gospel is the ordinary means by which God "invites us" into "the society of Christ." Preaching, the sacraments, and church discipline are the means by which God "hold us therein." God does not raise us to perfection in a moment but makes us grow "little by little under the nurture of the church" (IV.1.3)" (259-60).

The book concludes with a "Bibliography: list of books referred to in the text," though from my observation not every book cited in *Knowing God and Ourselves* was included. My only recommendation is that a future edition include an index, which would certainly enhance the book's usefulness.

It is plain that *Knowing God and Ourselves* was a labor of love under trying circumstances. It deserves to be widely read. Highly recommended.

Called by Triune Grace: Divine Rhetoric and the Effectual Call, by Jonathan Hoglund. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2016. Pp. xiv + 263. $35.00 (soft). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Even in conservative circles, contemporary theology is off-puttingly unintelligible, even for the theologian. It is well-nigh impossible to grasp even when it treats of fundamental Reformed

doctrine, for example, the call of the gospel and its resistible, or irresistible, nature. One has the impression that the writers, although treating of traditional Christian doctrines, deliberately abandon the classic Reformed and even Christian terminology and categories for novel contemporary verbiage and conceptions, much of which is apparently philosophical, rather than theological. The result is that a reviewer, although fairly conversant with Christian and Reformed doctrines, has often not the slightest notion of what the book is saying.

An example of this weakness is *Called by Triune Grace*. Purportedly, the book is a treatment and defense of the effectual call of the gospel, as the sub-title indicates. The author's claim on behalf of the book and its orthodoxy is attractive: "This book addresses how Scripture ought to inform the doctrine of effectual calling specifically in conversation with the Reformed tradition" (16). Seemingly, Hoglund takes issue with the Arminian doctrine of an ineffectual call to all humans, which call depends for its efficacy on the acceptance of it by the free will of the sinner (52-59). Even here, however, he fails to use the clear language of the Reformed creeds and tradition, namely, that the saving (internal) call of the gospel is particular and sovereign, determined by the decree of election.

In the development of the fundamental Reformed doctrine of the effectual call, whatever must one make of the following?

> The hermeneutic process of coming to understanding is middle-voiced. It presupposes the effort of bringing the *Sache* in language, and yet it recognizes a distance between this reality and its expression in language. The Spirit, as presenter of Christ, leaps the gap (161).

Or, of this:

> A dialogical effectual call has made general hermeneutics the magisterial director of the special event of converting change, in much the same way that it has been charged that a Thomistic premotionism makes converting change the application of a general theory of action (161).

And what light does Dostoevsky shed on the biblical, Reformed doctrine of the internal, saving call of God in that he "develops his hero dialogically

by introducing additional characters or voices that confront and interrogate the hero, showing the hero's true colors or developing the hero' character" (37)?

One emerges from these murky literary and philosophical waters, if he does not drown in them, with little more benefit than suspicion concerning Hogland's doctrine of the saving (in distinction from the "external") call. According to Hogland, the saving call of the gospel is a "dialogue" between God and the called sinner. God and the sinner speak to each other. This dialogue is the conversion of the sinner.

A dialogue is a conversation between two parties. This is not the nature of the effectual, saving call of God by the gospel. The saving call is a monologue. God speaks. God alone speaks to the elect sinner. God speaks as "monologically" in conversion as once He did in the act of creation. Light did not come into existence in a dialogue. God's speech in the conversion of the elect sinner is, "Unbelieving sinner, arise from the dead; rebel against me, bow to Me in faith!" By virtue of the effectual, "monologic" call, the sinner responds, "Thou art my God." But this response does not make conversion a divine/human "dialogue." In fact, presenting conversion as a dialogue is another form of the Arminian heresy that conversion is cooperation between God and the sinner.

What is at first a weak suspicion, because of the unfamiliar terminology, soon becomes grave suspicion. This grave suspicion is aroused when Hogland does, more or less clearly, state his doctrine of the call in the language of Reformed theology. The content of Hogland's effectual call is the announcement to all and sundry, "Jesus is your saving Lord": "I propose that 'Jesus is your saving Lord' fits better as the basic semantic content of calling" (62). The preacher is to declare this to every hearer in his audience: "Preachers may in good conscience announce that Jesus is [your saving] Lord to everyone they encounter" (76).

The conception of the saving call as an announcement to all that "Jesus is your saving Lord" suffers on at least three counts. First, it is not a call. A call is not a statement of fact, but a summons. Second, the announcement is falsehood. Jesus is not the saving Lord of all humans indiscriminately. He is not this in fact; he is not this in intention. He is the saving Lord only of

some humans, the elect, or all that the Father gave Him. Third, this announcement is the heresy of the ineffectual call—a call dependent upon the acceptance ("dialogue"?) by the sinner. For Hogland's "call" proclaims Jesus to be the saving Lord of many of whom He fails to be the saving Lord.

The fundamental error of Hogland's ineffectual, non-saving call is that his call is not determined by, and particular according to, eternal predestination. Whereas Paul taught, "whom he did predestinate, them he also called" (Romans 8:30), Hogland proposes, "who dialogued with him, God also called."

In an outburst of clarity, Hogland identifies his doctrine of the "effectual" call as the theology of the "well-meant offer," which it is (76). Implied is the doctrine of a conditional promise, that is, a divine promise of salvation that depends upon the acceptance of the sinner. "I propose that the effective word contains an irreducibly conditional character. The gospel, although an announcement of good news, carries with it an implied condition—accept the judgment of God on your sin and appeal to him for mercy" (66).

The "dialogic" call means for Hogland that the dead sinner is active in his regeneration: with regard to the "first moment of new spiritual life…no living person is passive in every sense" (164).

As becomes increasingly common today, Hogland attempts to frighten defenders of a truly effectual, particular, saving call by the specter of "hyper-Calvinism." As is also common today, he redefines "hyper-Calvinism" to suit his ignoble purpose: "It would seem accurate to describe the content of the effectual call in hyper-Calvinism as a statement of fact, 'You are one of my elect.' The effectual call is a private invitation with your name stamped on it" (70).

But this is not an accurate description of hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism is not a wax nose that every theologian may twist to his heretical purpose of combatting the doctrines of sovereign, particular grace. It is an error that is as strictly defined as Calvinism is strictly defined as Reformed orthodoxy. Hyper-Calvinism is the false doctrine that teaches that the church may call to Christ only those who know themselves as elect. It denies that the church may call, or summon, all and sundry to repent and believe, adding the promise, heard

by all, that all who do believe will be saved. It rejects what orthodox Reformed theology, as defined by the Canons of Dordt, III/IV. 8, 9, refers to as the "external call of the gospel."

Such is Hogland's confusion regarding hyper-Calvinism that his quotation of an alleged hyper-Calvinist, John Gill, to illustrate hyper-Calvinism does no such thing. The quotation is a perfectly orthodox statement. The quotation teaches that the saving call of the gospel includes God's making a soul "sensible of its lost state and condition, and of its need of a Saviour… [and] acquainted with Christ, as the alone Saviour." "Such a one ought to believe, and none but such an one, that Christ died for it" (69). Gill does not here deny that others also have the duty to believe. And it is surely true that only the one whom Gill describes can and may believe that "Christ died for it." Although in the context of his criticism Hogland likes to give the impression that Gill here makes "assurance of one's eternal election [a] warrant for faith" (70), in the quotation Gill does no such thing. Rather, he describes the effectual, saving call as the internal working of the Spirit that gives the sinner the conviction of his lost estate, of his need of salvation, and of the Savior, Jesus.

Hogland's criticism of Gill raises the question, "Does Hogland differ with Gill that only some souls ought to, and may, believe that Christ died for them?" Does Hogland embrace the heresy of universal atonement? Hogland's contention that the call of the gospel states to every soul, "Jesus is your saving Lord," renders this question legitimate. How can Jesus be the saving Lord of every human without having died for every human?

The reason for the confusion regarding hyper-Calvinism is Hogland's heresy that the gospel is the declaration of a saving love of God for all: "Jesus is your saving Lord." Against this heresy, hyper-Calvinism understandably, but wrongly, reacted. ●

He Died for Me: Limited Atonement & the Universal Gospel, by Jeffrey D. Johnson. Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2017. Pp. 201. $11.99 (soft). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

As *The Extent of the Atonement*, also reviewed in this issue of the journal, is massive, so is this book small. Although 200 pages in length, it can fit into the pocket of a sport coat.

But the content of both is the same: the death of Christ for all humans, that is, universal atonement.

The problem that occasions, and bedevils, both books is the same also: how can would-be Calvinistic theologians and churches maintain the truth of the particular, or limited, efficacious atonement of the cross of Christ—the third of the five points of Calvinism—while holding the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel?

Both *The Extent* and *He Died for Me* show that the answer is that the thing is impossible. Embrace of the well-meant offer is the loss, or rejection, of the particular, efficacious suffering and death of Christ. The well-meant offer implies universal atonement. If God loves all with the saving love of the gospel and sincerely desires the salvation of all humans, Christ died for all. This, both books freely acknowledge.

It is the purpose of the book *He Died for Me* to argue that "the universal and well-meant offer of the gospel…[is not] in opposition to the doctrine of limited atonement" (24). Johnson states his basic concern differently in these words: "If the death of Christ secured redemption for only the elect, how can the gospel be indiscriminately preached to all?" (43) By "indiscriminately preached," Johnson means the offering of Christ to all by God Himself in a love for all humans and with a sincere desire to save them all.

In an extraordinarily revealing paragraph, Johnson indicates both the thrust of his book, his conception of the gospel-call as a conditional offer, and his theology of a death of Christ for all humans:

> But seeing that the universal call of the gospel is a conditional promise of forgiveness, how can we truthfully call all people to gospel of Christ [*sic*] if Christ did not die for all people? If Christ did not die for the non-elect, are we lying when we command

> them to believe in the death of Christ for the salvation of their souls? (135)

A sign that Johnson's self-imposed dilemma will result in a denial of limited atonement is his analysis of his dilemma as a "paradox." Johnson quotes the Christian Reformed theologian, R. B. Kuiper, approvingly: "these two truths [limited atonement and the well-meant offer—DJE]… [are] paradoxical…The Calvinist here faces a paradox" (146, 147). Johnson enlists Joel Beeke on behalf of the paradox: "We cannot fully grasp with our finite minds how to reconcile a definite, limited atonement with Christ's all-sufficient blood and a universal gospel." Beeke's "universal gospel" in this defense of paradox is the well-meant offer to all (145, 146).

Appeal to "paradox" is mistaken and deceptive. A paradox is an *apparent* contradiction, not a real contradiction. A paradox can be harmonized and understood. A real contradiction is stark opposition between propositions that are inherently irreconcilable. That 2+2=4 and that 2+2=5 is a contradiction. No one, not even God, can harmonize the propositions. They throw all of mathematics into confusion. The magnificent order of mathematics is shattered by them. No one can understand the two propositions, or, now, all of mathematics. Although the contradiction may seem harmless, in fact it denies that God is a God of order in His creation, including the mind of man. The notion that contradiction is valid mocks the mind of man. A world of contradiction is an unintelligible world—a world of confusion, chaos, and nonsense, a kind of "Alice-in-wonderland" world.

Such a Creator, God is not. He is not the God of absurdity. Neither in creation nor in theology does He mock our mind. Rather, He is the God of revelation. The reason why the ungodly hold the truth under in unrighteousness is not that revelation is contradictory and nonsensical, that is, unknowable, but that their mind is darkened with rebellious unbelief.

In the realm of theology, that God is one and three is a paradox. The affirmation seems to be contradictory, but is not. It can be, and is, explained: God is one and three in two different respects. He is one in being and three in persons. There is no real contradiction. This is essential for the revelation of God as knowable to the enlightened mind of the believer. He Himself reveals to

us that the "contradiction" is only apparent.

Another example of paradox is Luther's well known assertion that the believer is at the same time righteous and a sinner. This is not a contradiction. The two descriptions of the believer are only apparently contradictory. They harmonize. For the believer is righteous by the divine declaration imputing to him the obedience of Christ. He remains a sinner in that he retains a sinful nature.

However, that God (savingly) loves only the elect, gave His Son for them, and extends His promise of salvation to the elect for their salvation and at the same time savingly ("savingly," because the well-meant offer concerns salvation) loves all humans, gave His Son to die in some sense for all humans, and graciously promises salvation also to all humans, in a sincere desire to save them all, is sheer, stark, irreconcilable contradiction, not a paradox.

Similarly, that God has reprobated some humans in hatred for them, ordaining that they will be damned on account of their unbelief and other sins, while loving them, giving Christ to die for them, sincerely desiring their salvation, and graciously promising to save them is absurdity, theological nonsense, not paradox.

No one can harmonize these theological assertions, neither the learned theologians who propose them, nor God Himself. The propositions throw the gospel into confusion. They render the gospel message nonsensical. To the god of the well-meant offer, I impatiently cry out, "Make up your mind! Do you desire to save the elect, or all humans? Did you send your Son to redeem every human, or those only whom you elected unto salvation? Is your gospel your power unto salvation for the elect or a powerless effort to save all, dependent in the end upon the sinner's decision? What must I believe? What am I to preach? Or, are you, and, therefore, I, constrained to halt between two opinions?"

But the contradiction of Christ's both dying for the elect and dying for all humans is even worse than rendering biblical revelation incomprehensible at its very heart—the *cross*. It is heresy, that necessarily corrupts the gospel of salvation by grace alone. Even if the false doctrine of the universal aspect of Christ's death does not gain the upper hand in the theology and preaching of the

paradoxical theologians, such as Johnson, as it invariably does, so that the particularity of the cross is silenced, the preaching that Christ died for all corrupts the gospel of the cross. If He died for all, whereas all are not saved, the efficacy of the cross is denied. And the salvation of some by that cross necessarily implies that the redemption of the cross depends, not upon the grace of God in that cross, but upon the acceptance of it by the will of the sinner, who fulfills the "condition" of faith. No longer does the theology of the paradoxical theologians glory in the cross, but in the sinner's will, or act of believing.

There is no possibility of proclaiming universal atonement while preserving the truth that the cross effectually redeemed, unless all humans are saved.

Like the author of *The Extent*, Johnson thinks to find the basis of his paradoxical doctrine of the death of Christ in the distinction in the Christian tradition, especially in the Canons of Dordt, of "sufficient/effectual." The distinction teaches that Christ's death was sufficient to save all, but effectual in saving only the elect. One of Johnson's gross and inexcusable errors is to understand sufficiency as Christ's actually having died for all humans. Quoting another approvingly, Johnson explains sufficiency as meaning that "Christ actually die[d] for the salvation of all" in that "'every legal obstacle to their salvation' was removed by the death of Christ" (105). This appalling statement makes God unjust in not saving many for whom "every legal obstacle to their salvation was removed." The implication, of course, is that despite God's removal of every legal obstacle, the saving benefit of the death of Christ depends upon the sinner's performance of the condition of faith. It is not the cross that saves, but the will of the sinner. Sufficiency, for Johnson, means that "Christ died for all" (112).

In reality, the meaning of "sufficient" in the valid distinction between the cross being sufficient and the cross being effectual is not at all, or in any sense, that Christ died for all humans. That this is not the meaning, at least, for creedal Reformed Christianity, is put beyond all doubt and all question by Articles 3 and 4 of Head II of the Canons of Dordt. The Canons confesses that the "death of the Son of God…is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the

sins of the whole world." But the explanation of this sufficiency is not that Christ did in any respect whatever die for the whole world (of all humans without exception), which is evident to every mind that is not determined to introduce universal atonement into Calvinistic circles. (In fact, sufficiency does not mean actual accomplishment, in any language, or among any people, or in any sphere of discourse.) The very next article explains the Canons' use of sufficiency regarding the death of Christ:

> This death derives its infinite value and dignity from these considerations; because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only the only-begotten Son of God…and because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin (Canons, II.4).

Can it possibly be unclear to any human, to say nothing of a theological human, that the sufficiency of the death of Christ derives from Him whose sufferings they were, rather than from the extent of the atonement? Can anyone fail to discern that sufficiency for the Canons does not mean that Christ died for all men in any sense whatever?

Regarding the issue for whom Christ died—the extent of the atonement—in any and every respect, Article 8 of Head II of the Canons settles the issue for all Calvinists:

> For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the *elect*, for bestowing *upon them alone* the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, *and those only*, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father, etc. (Canons, II.8; emphasis added).

It is, therefore, an egregious error (to be charitable) for Johnson repeatedly to appeal to the Canons of Dordt in support of his heretical notion of sufficiency, that is, that Christ did die in some

important respect for all humans (24; 50; 101). Amusingly, Johnson's erroneous conception of the sufficiency/efficiency distinction has him describing Dordt as merely a "Moderate Calvinism" (24). Merely a *moderately* Calvinist assembly! Episcopius and his Arminian colleagues would have begged to differ, as they trudged out of the meeting at Bogerman's angry command and later read that their doctrine was the Pelagian heresy out of hell. Gomarus would have been insulted. But then, even the Arminians are graded as "Low Calvinists" (17). Low *Calvinists*! One wonders whether Johnson has ever read the Canons of Dordt, especially the "Rejection of Errors" section.

Johnson is consistent in that he applies the inherent contradiction of Reformed orthodoxy by the well-meant offer to every aspect of the Reformed faith of the creeds. God has both elected some only and given Christ to die for all. As God, Christ Himself wills the salvation of some only and as incarnate wills the salvation of all (171-188). Now Jesus Christ Himself is at loggerheads with Himself!

Once again, in a book promoting universal atonement, Herman Hoeksema is unintentionally honored as a "Hyper-Calvinist," that is, as a theologian who uncompromisingly confessed that Christ died for the elect, and the elect only, with a death that effectually redeemed all in whose stead he died (21). Nor did he compromise this confession by affirming the contradiction of a well-meant offer.

The book suffers throughout, and misleads, by ambiguity concerning the gospel call. Whether deliberately or ignorantly, the author confuses the gospel call with a well-meant offer. There is a fundamental difference. The call of the gospel is God's serious exhortation, or command, to all hearers to repent and believe on Jesus, with the promise that everyone who heeds the call will be accepted by God and saved. Contrary to Johnson's facile assumption, this gracious promise is not to all hearers, but to those in the audience who heed the call to believe.

In contrast to the call of the gospel, the well-meant offer is supposedly God's gracious invitation, out of His (obviously) saving love to all without exception, and with the sincere desire that all hearers comply with the invitation. Implied necessarily is that the repentance and faith of

some hearers, in distinction from the obstinate impenitence and unbelief of others in the audience, are their own act of fulfilling the condition upon which salvation depends. In the language of Romans 9:16, the well-meant offer implies that salvation is of him who wills, rather than of God who shows mercy.

As Johnson rightly argues, the well-meant offer necessarily requires a universal atonement. Johnson's error is in supposing that the gospel-call is a well-meant offer.

Herman Hoeksema did not reject the promiscuous call of the gospel, as Johnson mistakenly charges. He rejected the well-meant offer.

In addition, the book misconceives the nature of the call of the gospel to all and sundry. It is not a summons to an audience of the unconverted to believe that God loves them and that Christ died for them. No one can know that God loves him and that Christ died for him apart from faith in Jesus Christ. The call is to believe on Jesus Christ crucified and risen, God's ordained Savior from sin and death (cf. Acts 13:49; Acts 16:31). This (external) call goes out to all, although the full, internal call, which works through the external call, is restricted to the elect in the audience, as Romans 8:29, 30 teaches: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called…" "*Them, them, them*, and them *only*—the predestinated, or elect—God calls with the sincere desire to save, out of His love for them, not all in an audience. When one believes, and in the way of believing, he will know that God loves him and that Christ died for him. The call is a summons to believe on Christ for salvation, including the assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation is not prior to faith, as though the call of the gospel to the unconverted is the plea to believe that Christ died for them. But assurance is an aspect of faith, as though the call to the unconverted is the summons to believe on Christ as the Savior and by this faith to be assured that Christ died for one.

Contrary to Johnson's fear or false accusation, the staunchest defender of limited atonement—for example, Herman Hoeksema—can without any logical or theological difficulty issue the fervent call of the gospel to all hearers and to any audience. "Jesus Christ died to redeem guilty, lost sinners; believe on Him, and you, the one who believes,

everyone who believes, will find pardon and eternal life, including assurance that Christ died for you personally!" What is lacking in this gospel-call? It is perfectly in harmony with limited atonement.

To the question someone in the audience might ask, "Did he die for me?" the answer would be, "Believe on him! Only by believing does one know that Jesus died for him; believing is the only way of knowing; salvation, including salvation's *assurance,* is *by faith*." Freely, the warning could also be given, "He did not die for everyone," as He Himself taught in John 10:15: "I lay down my life for the sheep." "Beware, lest you despise the Son of God in human flesh in unbelief! And perish!" (cf. Acts 13:40, 41) With his theory that universal atonement is basic to the gospel-call, which Johnson misconceives as a well-meant offer, Johnson would never give this warning.

The Protestant Reformed reader comes away from this book, as also *The Extent of the Atonement*, with two convictions. The first is that nominal Calvinists are increasingly nervous about their doctrine of the well-meant offer. They cannot escape the judgment of God that the well-meant offer compromises the doctrine of the (particular, limited) atonement, that is, the truth of the cross of Christ. The favorite, contemporary escape from this judgment is seeking refuge in a completely mistaken notion of the sufficiency of the death of Christ. Canons, II.3, 4, and 8 renders this escape futile.

Second, the dire, prophetic warning of Herman Hoeksema is being realized in our day. Wonderful to relate, Johnson himself, one who is indicted in the warning, quotes that warning: "Those that preach a well-meaning offer of God to all men, must and will ultimately embrace the doctrine of universal atonement" (78).

Johnson quotes this warning.

He does not heed it. ●

Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind, by Michael Massing. New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2018. Pp. xvi + 987. $45.00 (hard). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Just when one supposes that the last word has been written on Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, there appears a book that delightfully shatters the supposition. Such is the book, hot off the press, *Fatal Discord*.

The discord is between Luther and his contemporary ecclesiastical and religious antagonist, Desiderius Erasmus, the learned, cosmopolitan Dutchman—Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Luther and Erasmus famously and significantly clashed in their doctrinal controversy over the will of the unsaved sinner, whether in bondage to sin (Luther) or somewhat free (Erasmus).

But they clashed also in their conception of the Christian religion. Not only did Erasmus condition salvation upon man's choice by his alleged free will, but he also viewed Christianity as essentially a peaceful imitation of Christ, the supreme example for sinful humans; as a life of the performance of good works; and as the avoidance as much as possible of doctrinal controversy. Luther, on the other hand, proclaimed Christianity as salvation from sin by the sovereign grace of God in Christ apart from the works of the sinner; as chiefly faith in Jesus Christ; and as continual, fierce warfare with doctrinal errors, regardless of the divisions this warfare occasioned (including division between Lutherans and Calvinists, it may be noted).

Both practiced what they preached.

Therein the discord between Erasmus, the peace-loving "Christian humanist," and Luther, the militant, doctrinal Christian.

The discord proved to be fatal. Although the two men began their relationship seemingly cooperating in conflict with the apostate, decadent Roman Catholic Church, it soon became apparent that the oneness was illusory. Erasmus was content to mock and satirize the corruption of the Roman hierarchy. His satire on Pope Julius II's vain attempt to enter heaven on the basis of his impressive popedom was devastating (292). Luther, however, raged against the doctrinal heresy of Rome, especially Rome's doctrine of the freedom of the will, which compromised the gospel

of salvation by grace: "The will alone is always a whore and has all the qualities of a whore" (303).

The two men exchanged vitriolic writings on this issue. Luther's book was *The Bondage of the Will*, the greatest work of the prolific author, as Massing acknowledges. In it, Luther not only exposed Erasmus'—and Rome's—heresy of the freedom of the will, but also excoriated the Dutch humanist for his cavalier attitude towards sound doctrine.

This exchange revealed the spiritual difference between the two prominent figures at the time of the Reformation. It also finalized the breach between them. Massing does justice to the significance of Luther's *Bondage*, at the same time showing Massing's humanist bias:

> With the *Bondage of the Will*, Luther was finalizing his break from not only Erasmus but also Christian humanism in general, with its emphasis on autonomy, pluralism, and rationalism. With it, one can see the Reformation parting ways with the Renaissance. Viewed more broadly, Luther was creating a new religious model in Western Christendom—that of the Bible-quoting militant who considers Scripture the unchallengeable Word of God and who in asserting it is ready to cause tumult, strife, and bloodshed (676).

The quotation shows that the personal conflict was by no means the whole of the discord that the book establishes. The author argues, and demonstrates, that the Dutchman and the German fathered two distinct and warring spirits of religion down the ages to the present day. The Erasmian spirit is that of theological and ecclesiastical modernism in the Protestant churches. What matters to modernism is a life of love, man's love. It is tolerant of all beliefs. It strives for ecumenicity, regardless of theological divisions. Like Erasmus, it eschews doctrinal warfare. And what gospel it does proclaim is that of man's saving himself by his choice and by his good works.

Luther's spirit, on the other hand, is at home in genuinely "evangelical" churches and theologians ("evangelical" was Luther's preferred name for the churches that confessed the gospel of justification by faith alone, not "Protestant" and certainly not "Lutheran"). "Evangelical" means gospel, or faithful to the gospel (of grace.) All-important

to Luther was sound doctrine, especially justification by faith alone, having its source in predestination. The Luther-spirit is fiercely intolerant of false doctrine. It engages in theological warfare with all compromise of the doctrine of grace. It forms, and is found only in, truly "evangelical" churches.

Typical of Luther's polemics against adversaries of the gospel, as of his disregard of the earthly standing of the adversary, was his response to King Henry VIII of England, who suffered the misjudgment of entering into the lists with Luther over grace and the bound will:

> Since with malice aforethought this damnable and rotten worm has lied against my king in heaven, it is right for me to bespatter this English monarch with his own filth and trample his blasphemous crown under feet (551).

Fatal Discord makes the important case regarding the influence of Erasmus and Luther long after their deaths. Making this case, the book gives the reader a thorough account of the life and work of both Erasmus and Luther, with pungent, revelatory quotations of the two men. In addition, there are brief accounts of the theologians who played a role in the forming of the thinking of Erasmus and Luther, including Jerome and Augustine, and a thorough account of the history leading up to and including the Reformation. These accounts and this history are instructive and fascinating. Contributing to the readiness of Europe to hear the ridicule of the church by Erasmus and the searing condemnation of the church by Luther was the incredible corruption of the Renaissance popes and their coterie. The book is unsparing in its exposure of those monsters of depravity. The description of Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms is superbly, and in some respects uniquely, detailed and powerful.

Those interested in Luther and the Reformation, as well as in European history at a fateful time, will not want to ignore this well-written, thoroughly researched book. Those evangelicals today who wonder what it truly means to be an evangelical Christian will help themselves spiritually by reading the volume. Many will discover, to their chagrin and sorrow, that they are really Erasmian humanists. ●

How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology, by Andrew David Naselli. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017. Pp xxx + 384. $39.99 (hard). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

A Crash Course In Exegesis

This volume is a crash course on hermeneutics (principles of Bible interpretation) and exegesis (the practice of interpreting a particular Bible passage with a view to constructing a sermon on it). The author states his purpose: "This book explains how to interpret and apply the Bible" (xxvii). Its layout reinforces that it is a teaching tool: the book is well organized and well outlined, provides good examples to help the reader understand the point, and ends each chapter by restating key words and concepts, providing questions for further reflection, and resources for further study. In fact, the book is the printed form of a course which Naselli taught in New Testament exegesis (xxv).

Emphatically, it is a *crash* course: each of the book's twelve chapters covers topics to which the Protestant Reformed Theological school devotes entire semester-long courses, or at least a significant part of a semester-long course. In chapters 1-3 Naselli addresses hermeneutical matters to which the Bible scholar must attend before turning to exegesis proper: determine the genre of the passage in order to apply principles of interpretation which are specific to that genre (chapter one), establish the original wording of a passage by using principles of textual criticism (chapter two), and understanding the text in light of the philosophy of translation which our Bible version uses (i.e. formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence, chapter three).

Chapters 4-8 treat exegesis proper. Naselli insists that one must study the text in the Greek language, which requires him to know the details of Greek grammar (chapter four). He must then understand how the various words or phrases of the text relate to each other (chapter five), understand the historical-cultural context as well as the literary context of the passage (chapters six and seven), and do a careful word study in order to understand the key words and concepts (chapter eight).

The last part of the book reminds the Bible scholar of the need to study the text in the light

of all scriptural revelation ("Biblical Theology," chapter nine), with an awareness of how the church and influential theologians have interpreted the text in the past ("Historical Theology," chapter ten), of how the text relates theologically to all Bible teaching ("Systematic Theology," chapter eleven), and how to apply the text (Practical Theology," chapter twelve). Knowing that some will consider these last four chapters out of place, Naselli justifies their inclusion twice—in his introduction (5-8), and at the beginning of chapter 9 (230-231).

As a crash course, the book is far too brief to be used as a textbook for any seminary course. Seminarians and pastors who have already learned solid principles of interpreting the New Testament will find the book handy as a reference guide, or as a checklist to be sure that they have not omitted a crucial step. For laypeople the book will give some insight into the work which a pastor must do in preparing a sermon. None who read it should conclude that it alone has prepared them for the work of exegesis.

Good Principles and Reminders

The book's value is that Naselli's principles of Bible interpretation are generally sound. He reminds us that the exegete must pray before opening up the Scriptures (8, 16), must use Scripture to interpret Scripture (16), and must be ready to meditate on the passage and submit to it in faith and obedience (17).

The book does not use the term "grammatical-historical-redemptive" to describe its approach to Bible interpretation (the approach that the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary teaches), but it does promote that approach. Chapters four through eight clearly set forth the grammatical-historical aspect of interpretation, and the redemptive aspect is implied in the ninth chapter. Following from the grammatical aspect, Naselli underscores the importance of knowing the relationships of the various parts of the text to each other, and knowing the function of the text in the broader context. His illustration of Greek prepositions by using worms (85) is classic and helpful. He gives sound exegetical advice on many points, including that one must determine the main point of a parable so as not to get sidetracked by details (26-29), and that the purpose of background studies of the text

(author, date, place, audience, purpose for writing) is to illuminate the text, and should not be the reason for a preacher to get sidetracked from it (162-165).

Even his chapters regarding historical and systematic theology are helpful in this regard. Of course, at first they appear out of place; systematic theology is a different discipline than exegesis. More surprisingly, in *two chapters* Naselli covers material to which the PRTS devotes *fourteen semester-length required classes*. Yet his inclusion of these chapters underscores that we do, and must, interpret Scripture with presuppositions which are based not on our own independent thinking, but on that of the church of the past; "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20).

These positive points are reason enough for me to recommend the book as a reference guide to pastors and Bible scholars, and a brief introduction for lay people.

We Differ

One area of weakness in the book does not regard the book's main thrust, but regards comments Naselli makes or examples he uses to illustrate his point. Here my comments reflect views which are dear to the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Regarding doctrinal and ethical matters, we disagree with Naselli that the extent of Christ's atonement is a "non-essential issue," and that the Arminian view of unlimited atonement is as orthodox as the limited atonement view (268-269, 289-290). While we do agree with him that some issues in the Christian life are matters of indifference, and while we desire to guard against legalism in the keeping of the fourth commandment, we would still judge as disregard for the Sabbath some matters which he considers indifferent (296). We would also disagree with his view of covenant as the way by which God saves, rather than the goal of His saving work (191, 193, 237).

Regarding exegetical matters, we take exception to his translation of *monogenes* (John 3:16, "only-begotten," KJV) as "unique one" or "the one and only" (82), because this ignores the etymological meaning of *genes*: "begotten." We would say he missed an important point in his failure to distinguish the two Greek verbs for love in John 21:15-17 (214).

Beware Its Brevity

My main criticism of the

book, however, is that its brevity and simplicity—in many ways its strength—becomes its weakness. In trying to give a brief but comprehensive overview of the work of hermeneutics and exegesis, Naselli is not always able to give the reader the full picture of the subject. Of this criticism I give three instances, all from chapters 2 and 3.

The first regards his chapter on textual criticism (chapter 2), particularly his advice to "weigh manuscripts rather than to merely count them" (40). This advice presupposes that the Majority Text of the Greek manuscripts is not the text in which God preserved the New Testament Scriptures, and the reader who does not understand the issues involved in textual criticism will probably consider Naselli's advice reasonable. The problem is that the principles and practice of textual criticism are far too complex to be summarized well in ten pages. Perhaps I can say it better this way: Naselli summarizes one particular approach to textual criticism, but he fails to tell the reader that his approach is not the only possible approach. Let the reader beware: before using every particular part of Naselli's textual critical method, study the subject well. The uninformed reader will not realize that two other matters flow out of Naselli's view of textual criticism: his argument that Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 are not really the word of God, but later scribal additions (39), and his negative assessment of the use of the KJV for both personal Bible study and for teaching and preaching (54).

The same criticism can also be made of his chapter on Bible translations. Although Naselli makes many good points in the chapter, he writes with unstated presuppositions, and the reader who is not thoroughly schooled in this area will not notice these presuppositions. Naselli asserts that the "main goal of a Bible translation is to accurately reproduce the *meaning* (not the *form*) of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek writings" (50-51), and then proves his point by giving a word-for-word translation of John 3:16. The problem is that what he calls "word-for-word" is actually "word order-for-word order"; his illustration gives the impression that "word-for-word" translations ignore principles of English syntax. By presenting the matter this way, he can recommend translations which focus on accurately representing the

phrases, sentences, and thought of the original language, rather than accurately representing the individual words. To represent the words, or the broader units, are two quite different matters, and cannot be presented so easily in a brief and simple summary. The reader must understand all these issues *before* reading Naselli's book, if the book is to be truly helpful.

The third instance in which the simplicity of Naselli's book is not necessarily helpful regards his comments on gender-accuracy in translation (72-75). That Naselli raises the issue is fair enough, but in his approach to the issue he never faces this question (with the result that the reader might not face it either): should we translate with gender-inclusiveness in mind? Regardless of why the Holy Spirit through Paul addresses a congregation as "brothers," should we not translate "brothers," because that is the word the Holy Spirit used? Did not the early New Testament church understand that the omission of the word "sisters" did not mean to exclude women? And are Christians today unable to understand what the Holy Spirit knew Christians in that day could understand?

The book is a crash course. It touches only the tip of the iceberg. For that reason it cannot be read as an introduction to exegesis, but only as a succinct reminder of all that the exegete must do. ●

Does God Desire All to be Saved? by John Piper. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013. Pp. 62. $9.99 (soft). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Does God indeed desire all to be saved?

"No," taught John Calvin: "Eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others" (*Institutes*, 3.21.5).

"No," is the creedal answer of the Canons of Dordt: "Not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God…hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion… at last…to condemn and punish them forever…" Canons, I.15).

"No," is likewise the creedal answer of the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth…to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 3.7).

"Yes," is the answer of one John Piper: "God wills for all to be saved" (*Does God Desire…?* 39). Such is the strength and extension of this desire, according to Piper, that it compromises the eternal decree of predestination. Even reprobation "does not necessarily imply the absence of compassion," that is, a sincere desire to save all (*Does God Desire...?* 48). Thus, Piper butts his "yes" squarely against God's own declaration that He has mercy, not on all, but on whom He will have mercy (Rom. 9:18). Thus also, Piper (logically, and inevitably) applies the illogic of common grace (a "well-meant offer" to all) to predestination (God eternally has compassion on all, desiring to save all in His counsel of predestination).

Taking all of the above into consideration, the astounding conclusion of most Reformed churches and theologians in AD 2018 is that one John Piper is the model Calvinist. Calvin, Dordt, and Westminster (with all the churches and theologians faithful to them, which is not the same as those who noisily claim them and, regarding the creeds, those who are bound by them) are disreputable "hyper-Calvinists."

Read the "model Calvinist"—one John Piper—and weep—over the present state of "Calvinism," and, most of all, over the "model Calvinist's" conflicted, powerless, pitiful god. ●

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