Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* is the first issue of volume fifty. That, certainly, is a milestone! For fifty years, without interruption, the Lord has made it possible for the Protestant Reformed Seminary to publish two issues per year of its theological journal. Founded in 1966, at a time when the seminary was housed in the basement of the First Protestant Reformed Church, located on the corner of Fuller Avenue and Franklin Street, the first issues were a "testing of the waters" to determine whether there was sufficient interest to warrant continued publication. From the enthusiastic reception of those first issues to the present day, the PRTJ continues to occupy a place on the shelves and in the hearts of those who love the heritage of the Reformed faith. After fifty years, PRTJ continues to publish scholarly theological articles that set forth and defend the Reformed faith, as that faith has been delivered to the Protestant Reformed Churches and preserved and developed in her seminary. And after fifty years, we continue to be one of the only theological journals that does not charge its subscribers an annual subscription fee. The costs of publication and mailing are covered by the generous donations of the PRCA and our readership. To you who regularly contribute, we express our thanks.

You will find this issue to be similar in content to previous issues. We include a slate of articles, two by members of the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, one by a fourth-year seminary student, and one by a recent guest speaker. That guest speaker was the Reverend Thomas Reid, librarian and occasional lecturer at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. This past spring, Mr. Reid gave two outstanding lectures to the faculty and student body of the Protestant Reformed Seminary on the history and struggles of the French Reformed church. We judged the lectures to be worthy of wider distribution and he has kindly consented to prepare them for publication. For a number of reasons, brother Reid has a special interest in the French Reformed church, including the fact that his wife Geneviève traces her roots to the French Reformed. The first of those two lectures, "The Battles of the French Reformed Tradition,"

is included in this issue of PRTJ. His second lecture focused on one of the important recent theologians of the French Reformed church, Auguste Lecerf. Look for that lecture to be included in the April 2017 issue of PRTJ.

Included in this issue is also the translation of the sermon preached by the Reverend Simon Van Velzen on the Lord's Day following the death of Reverend Hendrik De Cock, the father of the Dutch Reformed reformation movement known as the *Afscheiding*. The sermon text was Revelation 14:13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." The sermon is a sound, moving, exegetical work, full of practical application—exemplary in so many respects. The sermon was translated by the late Marvin Kamps. He was so captivated by the sermon that he translated it and submitted it for publication in our journal, convinced of its value for as wide an audience as possible. We agree. To our knowledge, it has never before been translated from the Dutch in which it was originally preached and transcribed.

And, of course, included in this issue of PRTJ are a number of book reviews. These are books that will be of value to seminary students, ministers, and professors of theology, not only, but to the informed Reformed believer who desires to stay abreast of the latest publications promoting—at least, hopefully—the Reformed faith and worldview. This is always a worthwhile section of our journal, and I am sure you will find it so in this issue as well.

Read and enjoy!

Soli Deo Gloria!

—RLC

The Reformation, Common Grace, and the Growing Apostasy of the Church (1)

Ronald L. Cammenga

This year marks the 499th anniversary of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, or, rather, God's great work in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Next year the church will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Already plans are being made to commemorate this milestone with conferences and special events. The Protestant Reformed Seminary is laying plans for a two-day conference in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area, a conference that will call attention to a number of different, enduring contributions of the Reformation. We intend to include in our celebration speakers from abroad, particularly speakers from our sister churches. And then, the following year, there will be another significant anniversary celebration: the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt. The seminary is also laying plans for the commemoration of the convening of the "Great Synod." Stay tuned for the announcement of further details relating to that conference.

But our present concern is the commemoration of the Reformation. What was the Reformation? How best can we characterize the Reformation? In simplest terms, the Reformation was the revival and renewal of Christ's church that took place in the early part of the sixteenth century. The one great church of that day was the Roman Catholic Church. That church, in process of time, had become thoroughly corrupt and apostate. Errors of doctrine and of life characterized both clergy and laity. From top to bottom the church was shot through with immorality and unbelief. The people were worldly and superstitious, carnal and ignorant. Among the clergy there was

the love of money, the love of honor, the love of pleasure, the love of the praise of men. There was widespread drunkenness and adultery, simony and greed. They were pleasure-mad and power-hungry. Although the clergy took vows of celibacy, many lived openly in sexual relations outside of marriage, often fathering a number of children. Although they assumed vows of poverty, many lived luxurious and extravagant lives.

And false doctrine abounded! The church taught and the people believed the errors of works righteousness, free will, the papacy, purgatory, the invocation of the saints—especially the virgin Mary, purgatory, indulgences, the authority of tradition above the Word of God, and many other false doctrines. Martin Luther, in his last letter to Pope Leo X, in the preface of his treatise on "The Freedom of a Christian," wrote: "[T]he Roman church, once the holiest of all, has become the most licentious den of thieves [Matt. 21:13], the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell. It is so bad that even Antichrist himself, if he should come, could think of nothing to add to its wickedness."[1]

In a work entitled "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther lamented:

> [H]ow wretchedly and desperately all the activities of the church have been confused, hindered, ensnared and subjected to danger through the pestilent, ignorant, and wicked ordinances of men, so that there is no hope of betterment unless we abolish at one stroke all the laws of men, and having restored the gospel of liberty we follow it in judging and regulating all things.[2]

Indeed, this is what happened in the Reformation. Through the Reformation, "the pestilent, ignorant, and wicked ordinances of men" were abolished. And through the Reformation, God "restored the gospel of liberty" to the church.

1 Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Luther's Works*, *The Career of the Reformer: I*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 336.

2 Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Luther's Works, Word and Sacrament: II*, vol. 36, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, gen ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 102-3.

Commemoration of the Reformation, however, must not only take the form of praise and thanksgiving to God for what He has given His church in the Reformation. It must also take the form of warning and admonition against those who would once again ensnare the church in error. There are real and menacing dangers that threaten to undo so much of what the Reformation accomplished. Very really the push is on to return the church to the darkness and ignorance of Rome.

In this article, I address myself to one of these errors—an error that is so far-reaching that it affects nearly every aspect of the gospel that the Reformation recovered. The Reformation restored to the church the great truths of Scripture; this danger threatens compromise and denial of those great truths. The Reformation restored to the church the Bible; this danger threatens to take the Bible once again out of the hands of the people of God. The Reformation restored to the church holiness of life; this danger threatens the church with unholiness. The Reformation restored to the church the gospel of grace, the sovereign, particular, efficacious grace of God; this danger threatens the church with the denial of the gospel of grace, making the grace of God universal, resistible, and ineffectual. The Reformation restored to the church the pure worship of God; this danger threatens to corrupt the pure worship of God with the leaven of freewill and will-worship.

What is the danger that poses such a serious threat to the church today, the very churches that were birthed by the Reformation? It is the danger of heresy and false doctrine, and there is no danger more threatening to the church and no danger that the church must take as seriously as the danger of heresy.

Specifically, the danger that threatens the gospel of the Reformation is the false doctrine of common grace. It is the teaching of a grace of God—supposedly a non-saving grace of God—that extends beyond the elect in Christ. It is a grace of God that includes all men. It is a universal, resistible, grace or favor of God that embraces believer and unbeliever, elect and reprobate alike.

In so many respects the teaching of common grace contradicts and compromises the gospel of grace restored to the church through the Reformation. And, as the history of the Reformed churches since the early part of the twentieth century demonstrates, the adoption of this false teaching has had the most disastrous consequences for the

churches that have approved this error. At the same time, I hope to demonstrate that the doctrines of the Reformation rightly understood oppose the teaching of common grace. Anyone who loves the doctrines of the Reformation, the doctrine that Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and the others recovered and restored to the church, cannot but detest and reject the teaching of common grace. Friend of the Reformation, enemy of common grace! By the same token, friend of common grace, necessarily no friend of but an opponent of the Reformation.

In fact, by our day common grace has passed the tipping point and is the explanation for the slide into apostasy in those churches that some decades ago approved of this false doctrine. There has been development, development in a negative direction, development under the judgment of God. Like dandelions in one's lawn, like a germ or virus in one's body, like a wildfire in a dry forest, or an epidemic in a city, common grace has multiplied and is fairly out of control. It threatens the very life and wellbeing of these churches, despite the fact that they will not often admit this. Common grace has led to the introduction of one error after another in these churches, each more serious than the one before, until the very life of these churches is threatened.

Hopefully, the reader will find the documentation that is presented sufficient, if not exhaustive. Hopefully the proof is adequate and stimulates the reader to pursue the subject further on his or her own. I will present an overview of sorts and indicate how I believe the *solas*—as they are called—of the Reformation are under attack by the error of common grace. I leave to the reader to judge whether and to what extent I am successful in this attempt.

The Sole Authority of Scripture

The Reformation restored to the church the sole authority of Holy Scripture. The watchword of the Reformation was *sola scriptura*, that is, Scripture alone. This was the great significance of Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms in April of 1521. And this was the significant development in Luther's theology from the time that he nailed the Ninety-Five Theses on the chapel door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517 and his stand at Worms three-and-a-half years later. Although many had attempted to dissuade Luther from going to Worms, fearful

that the same thing would happen to him as had happened to John Hus, Luther was determined to go: "I shall go to Worms, though there were as many devils there as tiles on the roofs."[3]

At Worms, Luther rested his case exclusively on Holy Scripture. In the presence of the world's civil and ecclesiastical authorities, Luther said:

> Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.[4]

Luther rested on Holy Scripture. Scripture alone is the final and ultimate authority. No one and nothing is above Scripture or even alongside of Scripture. Rather, Scripture is over all. Not the pope, not church councils, not tradition, not the apocrypha, but Scripture is decisive. "At the Diet of Worms," says Erwin Lutzer in his newly published book on the history of the Reformation, "Luther pointedly affirmed that he did not accept the decrees of popes or traditions because they often contradicted each other. The conviction that the Bible alone was the basis for doctrine and practice now consumed him."[5]

Scripture alone is the authority in and over the church, both the institute and the individual members. Scripture is over doctrine and over life. Scripture is over the church's worship, as well as her witness. Scripture is over officebearers, as well as laity. Scripture

3 Quoted in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VII, Modern Christianity: The German Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, repr. 1974), 298.

4 Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 185. There are various "versions" of what Luther said before the Diet of Worms. It is doubtful that we will be able to recover the exact words that he spoke. The various "versions" are not substantially different.

5 Erwin W. Lutzer, *Rescuing The Gospel: The Story and Significance of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 118.

is over consistory, classis, and synod, over session, presbytery, and general assembly. This is often referred to as the formal principle of the Reformation: *sola scriptura*.

The sole authority of Scripture rests on three fundamental truths. First, Scripture is the sole authority in the church because Scripture is the Word of God. Only God has ultimate authority. Only if Scripture is the Word of God, infallible, inerrant, and divinely inspired can it be the authority in the church. This was the unanimous conviction of the Reformers. Luther regarded Scripture as "the most holy Word of God."[6] He wrote that "the promises of God belong to the New Testament. Indeed, they are the New Testament." Further, "[s]ince these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free, and peaceful words, full of goodness," so also by extension are the Holy Scriptures, to which the soul of the child of God "clings…with a firm faith," with the result that the believer is "so closely united with them and altogether absorbed by them that [he] not only will share in all their power but will be saturated and intoxicated by them."[7] In his new book, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, Robert Kolb quotes Luther on Scripture:

> The Holy Scripture is God's Word, written and (in my way of speaking) spelled out, put down in letters. Just as Christ is God's eternal Word wrapped in humanity, and just as people touched and had transactions with Christ in the world, so it is with the written Word of God.[8]

Clearly, Martin Luther viewed Scripture as the Word of God, the infallible, inerrant, holy Word of God.

Calvin was in full agreement with Luther. Although there are contemporary Reformed theologians who contend that Calvin did not hold a strict inerrantist view of Scripture, his writings make plain that this was in fact his view. Calvin writes in his *Institutes:*

6 Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," in *Luther's Works, Volume 31, Career of the Reformer: I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed. Helmust T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 345.

7 Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 349.

8 Quoted in Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 77.

> It is utterly vain then to pretend that the power of judging Scripture so lies with the church that its certainty depends upon churchly assent. Thus, while the church receives and gives its seal of approval to the Scriptures, it does not thereby render authentic what is otherwise doubtful or controversial. But because the church recognizes Scripture to be the truth of its own God, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture. As to their question [thinking here of the Roman Catholic doctrines]—How can we be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church?—it is as if someone asked: Whence will we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.[9]

And a little later he says:

> [H]ence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning…we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God…. We seek no proofs, nor marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it [i.e., Scripture] as to a thing far beyond any guesswork![10]

Because Scripture is the Word of God, Scripture is authoritative. And because Scripture is authoritative, "all spirits are to be tested…at the bar of Scripture."[11]

The sole authority of Scripture rests, secondly, on the sufficiency of Scripture. Since Scripture is sufficient, altogether sufficient, setting forth all that is necessary for us to know concerning God, ourselves, and the world around us, altogether sufficient for doctrine and for life,

9 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 1.7.2, 1:76.

10 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.5, 1:80.

11 Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will, Luther's Works, Volume 33, Career of the Reformer: III*, ed. Philip S. Watsdon, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 91.

altogether sufficient for salvation and for the thankful life of those who have been saved, the church has no need of another authority alongside of and in addition to Scripture. Nothing need be added to Scripture and nothing can be added to Scripture. Scripture alone! "For it ought above all to be settled and established among Christians," says Luther, "that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter than the sun itself, especially in things that are necessary in salvation."[12] In another place, in the course of lecturing on Psalm 45, Luther says that "the church does not, like the heretics who teach their own doctrine, have independent breasts with which she feeds milk to the weak, but she is captive to the authority of Scripture and does not teach anything but the Word of God."[13] Nothing but Scripture because Scripture is sufficient.

And the authority of Scripture rests, thirdly, on its perspicuity or clarity. Scripture is clear; it is understandable. If Scripture was not clear, but on the contrary obscure, unintelligible, deep, dark, and mysterious, it would not be able to function by itself as the authority in the church. Someone would need to interpret Scripture; it would be necessary for the teaching of Scripture to be determined for the members of the church and they be informed of the meaning of Scripture. This was exactly the view of Scripture held by the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. The ordinary members of the church were not equipped to interpret the Scriptures. This was the task of the clergy and the professional theologians in the church. Scripture was taken out of the hands of the ordinary members of the church lest they come to a wrong understanding of Scripture. Against this situation in the church the Reformers reacted, beginning with Luther.

Over against Erasmus who denied the perspicuity of Scripture, Luther wrote:

> I admit, of course, that there are many texts in the Scripture that are obscure and abstruse, not because of the majesty of their subject matter, but because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar; but these texts in no way hinder a knowledge of all the subject matter

12 Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 91.

13 Martin Luther, "First Lectures on the Psalms: Psalms 1-75," *Luther's Works, Volume 10*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), 219.

> of Scripture…. The subject matter of the Scriptures, therefore, is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms. Truly it is stupid and impious, when we know that the subject matter of Scripture has all been placed in the clearest light, to call it obscure on account of a few obscure words. If the words are obscure in one place, yet they are plain in another…. Who will say that a public fountain is not in the light because those who are in a narrow side street do not see it, whereas all who are in the marketplace do see it?[14]

Later in this same work, Luther speaks of his controversy with the papacy over the clarity of Scripture.

> It is on this account also that I have hitherto attacked the pope, in whose kingdom nothing is more commonly stated or more generally accepted than the idea that the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, so that the spirit to interpret them must be sought from the Apostolic See of Rome. Nothing more pernicious could be said than this, for it has led ungodly men to set themselves above the Scriptures and to fabricate whatever they pleased, until the Scriptures have been completely trampled down and we have been believing and teaching nothing but the dreams of madmen. In a word, that saying is no human invention, but a virus sent into the world by the incredible malice of the prince of all demons himself.[15]

Luther concludes by comparing the Word of God and the laws of earthly kingdoms.

> [I]f laws are ambiguous and uncertain, not only would no disputes be decided, but neither would there be any certain norms of conduct; for laws are made in order that conduct may be regulated according to a certain pattern, and questions of dispute thus settled . That which is the standard and measure of other things, therefore, as the law is, ought to be the clearest and most certain of all. And if this light and certainty in laws is necessary, and is granted freely to the whole world by the bounty of God, in profane societies which have to do with temporal things, how is it conceivable that he should not give his Christians,

14 Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 25-6.

15 Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 90.

> his elect, laws and rules of much greater lights and certainty by which they might direct themselves and settle all their disputes, seeing that he wishes temporal things to be despised by those who are his? ….the Psalmist celebrates its clarity thus: 'A lamp to my feet and a light to my path' [Ps. 119:105].[16]

The outstanding proof of Scripture's perspicuity, in the thinking of the Reformers, is that Scripture is addressed, not to the clergy, not to the professionals, not to the scholars, but to the ordinary believer. Scripture is addressed to "all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7), to "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), to "the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia" (2 Cor. 1:1), "unto the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "to the saints which are at Ephesus" (Eph. 1:1), and to "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi" (Phil. 1:1). And what does Paul say to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15? "And that *from a child* thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation…." The fact that from a child Timothy knew the Scriptures, that he was able to learn and understand what they taught, as a child, certainly indicates Scripture's clarity. The Scripture's clarity is evident to all covenant parents from the fact that their young children are able to comprehend the content of Scripture, both its history and its doctrine. Because it is clear, Scripture can and does serve as the authority over the church.

In the church today the sole authority of Scripture is denied and set aside. It is being denied and set aside in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. It is being denied and set aside in churches and among folks who are heirs of the Reformation, children of the Reformation. And it is being denied *on the basis of common grace*. With an appeal to common grace, Scripture's sole authority in matters of doctrine and practice is set aside. Not only is it set aside, but with an appeal to common grace another and equal authority is recognized in the church: general revelation—or better, men's interpretation of general revelation. What men determine to be God's revelation in the creation, in fact, what *unbelieving* men teach is God's revelation in creation is as determinative and as binding as the Word of God in

16 Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 91-2.

Scripture. Because of God's common grace, the conclusions reached by the unbelieving Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and the self-avowed agnostic Thomas Huxley (1825-1895)—"Darwin's bulldog"—are to be received as truth. They have something to contribute to the Christian's understanding of the universe, the existence of man, and even the truth concerning God—whether He is the Creator and the means by which He created all things. By virtue of the favor that God shows to all men, unregenerate as well as regenerate, non-Christian as well as Christian, all men are able to do good and make positive contributions to the development of thought and man's understanding of the world.

Already in the early years of the twentieth century, the Christian Reformed Church in North America was confronted with this assault on the inspiration and authority of Scripture in the teaching of one of the professors in the denomination's seminary, Dr. Ralph Janssen. Janssen taught that God had revealed His truth to the heathen as well as to Israel. Israel had developed its monotheistic religion by borrowing from the heathen nations around her. Israel's religion was a synthesis religion. It was a religion built in part on God's common grace in general revelation and in part on God's saving grace in special revelation to Israel. Further, he taught that Scripture itself was partly human and partly divine. There was a "human element" in Scripture and a "divine element." Many of the miracles had purely natural explanations. What was human and what was divine had to be sorted out.[17]

Even though Janssen's views were condemned by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1922, the doctrine on which he based his views was not: common grace. And because it was not, common grace became a reason and justification for taking a critical view of Scripture. On the basis of common grace, the truth of the infallible inspiration and full authority of Scripture came increasingly under attack. By our

17 Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 37-42. For a more sympathetic understanding of the views of Janssen, the interested reader is referred to David E. Holwerda, "Hermeneutical Issues Then and Now: The Janssen Case Revisited," *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 7-34.

day common grace's denial of the Bible's inspiration and authority is widespread throughout the Reformed and Presbyterian church world.

Biblical Account of the Creation

This is no more clearly evident today than in the denial of the opening chapters of Genesis. On the basis of general revelation, which has its source in God's common grace, we are told that we must accept the prevailing scientific consensus that the earth is millions, even billions of years old. The scientific consensus places the age of the earth at approximately 4.5 billion years. On this same basis, we must accept the evolutionary origin of life and the evolutionary origin of man. All life forms have evolved from a common, original life-form; living creatures, including human beings, have evolved from non-living, inorganic matter. Some pre-human, ape-like creature gradually developed into man, and somewhere along the way God may or may not have implanted a soul into this creature, so that from that point forward it became distinct from other of its species that did not have a soul. Further, death was present in the creation from the beginning. Death, in fact, is inherent in the evolutionary process, as one life-form gives way to another, more advanced life-form. Death is part and parcel of the evolutionary process and took place throughout the extended period of time during which man evolved.

One thing that was necessary for the theistic evolutionists to do in order to introduce their false teaching into the church was to reinterpret the "days" of Genesis 1. Obviously, the evolutionary process takes place over time, huge chunks of time, millions and millions of years. For evolution to be true, the "days" of Genesis could not have been, as had been the consensus throughout the history of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, literal, twenty-four-hour, successive days.[18] Something had to be done with the days. And no matter

18 I cannot refrain at this point from offering the basics of the argument that contends that the "days" of Genesis 1 were literal, twenty-four hour, successive days. The grounds are: 1) The noun "day" (יוֹם) as it is used in Genesis 1 is a singular noun, not used in a compound grammatical construction; 2) Each "day" of the creation week is qualified by "evening and morning"; 3) When "day" in the Bible is not a literal twenty-four-hour day something in the text or its context, not something outside of the text of Scripture, indicates that it is not to be understood as a literal day; 4) In

what the specific view that competed with the historic view, whether theistic evolution, progressive creationism, old earth creationism, or the framework hypothesis, the days of Genesis 1 were reinterpreted. For the most part, the days were interpreted as symbolic or were made periods of time, eras that were not ordinary days of twenty-four hours in length. No one can dispute the fact that it was the position of the Protestant Reformers that the days of Genesis 1 were literal, twenty-four-hour days and, therefore, the view that they intended to be incorporated into the Reformed confessions that they and their contemporaries authored.

What has happened here? What is the end result of this shift in thought in Reformed and Presbyterian churches regarding the doctrine of creation? What has happened is that just as Rome prior to the Reformation was responsible for taking the Bible out of the hands of the common people, so common grace is responsible, or rather the evolutionary scientists and theologians who make appeal to common grace are responsible for taking the Bible out of the hands of the ordinary members of the church, and placing it in the hands of an elite few. With an appeal to common grace, on the basis of the findings of evolutionary scientists who were the objects of God's common grace, the clarity and perspicuity of Scripture are denied. The Bible's clarity was not denied outright, but it was denied by virtue of the contention that the Bible does not mean what it says. It does not mean what the young children having Genesis 1 read to them would conclude that it teaches, or what someone on the mission field who read the opening chapter of the Bible for the first time would undoubtedly conclude, that God created all things in the space of six, literal, successive, twenty-four-hour days simply by speaking His almighty, irresistible word. That would be a mistake, a wrong and really absurd conclusion. In the end, what Scripture teaches about the origin of all things is not sufficient to establish the Christian's beliefs in this whole area.

---

every instance in the Bible in which an ordinal number (first, second, etc.) precedes the word "day," it always refers to a literal, twenty-four-hour day; 5) The rest of Scripture recognizes the days of Genesis 1 as ordinary days of twenty-four hours. I also invite the interested reader to listen to a public lecture on theistic evolution that I gave that is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s62tZ8B6Tmk.

He needs something more, something besides the clear teaching of Scripture, something that really corrects Scripture. What he needs is science and the alleged findings of science. What he needs is God's supposed general revelation in the findings of science, which trumps what Genesis 1 is apparently teaching in favor of a quite different view.

This is what leading theistic evolutionary scientists and the theologians who supported them said in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, in the Reformed churches and Reformed institutions for higher learning both in the Netherlands and in our country. In the college of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College, this was the teaching of three of her leading scientists at the time: Howard Van Til, Davis Young, and Clarence Menninga. They co-authored a book in which they set forth their evolutionary views, *Science Held Hostage: What's Wrong With Creation Science and Evolution*.[19] Van Til authored his own controversial book entitled, *The Fourth Day: What the Bible and the Heavens Are Telling Us about the Creation*. In an effort to understand the material world and the origin of all things, Van Til recommends that the Christian should be guided by four important principles.

> I recommend the following as four particularly important principles: (1) we must recognize the diversity of questions that we can ask regarding the material world, and we must carefully categorize those questions; (2) we must recognize two principal sources for answers to those questions: the Bible and the Creation itself; (3) we must direct to each source only those questions that are appropriate to it; and (4) we must respect the integrity and credibility of the answers provided by each source to appropriate questions.[20]

Note well, the insistence on two equally ultimate sources of authority with respect to the doctrine of origins: "the Bible and the Creation itself." The authority is not Scripture alone, and the witness

19 Howard Van Til, David Young, and Clarence Menninga, *Science Held Hostage: What's Wrong With Creation Science and Evolution* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

20 Howard J. Van Til, *The Fourth Day: What the Bible and the Heavens Are Telling Us about the Creation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 194.

of the creation as it is seen (interpreted) through the spectacles of Holy Scripture. But the creation, that is, the scientist's understanding of the creation, becomes an authority alongside of Holy Scripture.

This was the view that was incorporated into "Report 28: Committee on Creation and Science," the study-committee report that was presented to the 1991 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. That report and its recommendations rely extensively on the doctrine of common grace and the common grace view of general revelation. The report quotes approvingly from Herman Bavinck's article, "Common Grace."

> There is thus a rich revelation of God even among the heathen—not only in nature but also in their heart and conscience, in their life and history, among their statesmen and artists, their philosophers and reformers. There exists no reason at all to denigrate or diminish this divine revelation.[21]

Common grace, in Bavinck's view, enabled ungodly philosophers and scientists to make positive contributions to the discussion of origins. Their findings and their interpretations of general revelation were accorded a hearing alongside of Scripture on the basis of common grace. On that basis, a distinction must be made

> between the working of the Spirit in all creation and the work of sanctification that belongs only to those who believe. God did not leave sin alone to do its destructive work. He had and, after the fall, continued to have a purpose for his creation; he interposed common grace between sin and the creation—a grace that, while it does not inwardly renew, nevertheless restrains and compels. All that is good and true has its origin in this grace, including the good we see in fallen man. The light still shines in the darkness. The Spirit of God makes its home and works in all the creation. Consequently, traces of the image of God continue in mankind. Understanding and reason remain, and he possesses all sorts of natural gifts.[22]

21 Quoted in "Report 28: Committee on Creation and Science" in the *Agenda for Synod 1991, Christian Reformed Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1991), 377.

22 Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 51.

Report 28 goes on assert that there is no conflict between "a faithful reading of the Scriptures" and an evolutionary interpretation of the opening chapters of the Bible.

> Consequently, the estimated age of the universe given by contemporary science (15 billion years) or even the possibly evolutionary development of the universe (Big Bang theory) is not viewed as a threat to the biblical doctrine of creation. While the Bible clearly teaches that God created the universe and that he made the stars also, its description of how God did this and the time it took is not a scientific portrayal of the processes involved.[23]

In this last sentence, the report throws a "red herring" into the discussion. No one disputes the fact that the Bible's description of God's creation of the universe is "not a scientific portrayal of the processes involved." No creationist would contend this. What is disputed is whether the biblical account of God's creation of the universe is to be taken literally or not. That is the issue. Creationists insist that the account of Genesis 1 is a historical, factual account of God's creation of all things in the beginning. Theistic evolutionists of every stripe deny that this is so.

What the report makes plain is that the recommendations of the Committee on Creation and Science are dependent on the teaching of common grace. The basis for the concessions that the report makes to theistic evolution is found in a certain view of general revelation. And that view of general revelation—the nature of general revelation, the value of general revelation, the authority of general revelation—is grounded in turn in the teaching of common grace.

Recent Development of the Error

By our day the error of theistic evolution, still buttressed by an appeal to common grace, has advanced—significantly. Now it comes to it that scientists and theologians who support the work and views of the theistic evolutionists who have preceded them, openly challenge

23 "Report 28: Committee on Creation and Science," 398. Nota bene: The estimate age of the universe given by evolutionary scientists is approximately 15 billion years, whereas the estimated age of the earth is 4.5 billion years.

cardinal doctrines, not just of the Reformed faith, but of the Christian religion itself.

One such theologian is Dr. John R. Schneider, who at the time when he first noised abroad his views taught in the Religion Department of Calvin College.[24] On the basis of the teaching of theistic evolution, Schneider raised doubts concerning the historic and confessional doctrines of Adam and Eve as the original parents of the entire human race, as well as the doctrine of original sin and Adam's headship of the entire human race in the fall into sin. He publicized his concerns in an article entitled "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam': Original Fragility and Supralapsarian Purpose."[25] In the article, Schneider criticizes those who make essentials of the Christian faith the doctrine of "the 'inerrancy' of the Bible, the doctrine of a young earth, or the miraculous creation of human beings. These doctrines," he contends, "and some others, are often the sources of glaring conflict with evolutionary science, and unless the adherents give up those doctrines, it is hard to see how the conflicts could ever be resolved."[26] He objects to "[t]hat version" of Adam's creation and fall that "descends mainly from Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), and it is our main subject of criticism."[27] Schneider charges that the Augustinian view of man's creation and fall, with its attendant doctrine of original sin, makes God the author of sin. Since from Augustine's perspective, and the Western church following Augustine, God sovereignly predestinated all things, on the one hand, and by His own creative word miraculously brought Adam into existence, and brought him into existence as a "fragile creature," capable of falling, the Augustinian doctrine simply cannot, in his judgment, escape the charge that it makes God the author of sin. Says Schneider:

24 Under heavy fire by constituents, Calvin College began an "internal exploration" in Dr. Schneider's views, but he chose to request retirement before the investigation could be concluded.

25 References in this article are to an electronic version of this article that was published in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47, no. 4 (December 2012). The article is available on the internet at: https://www.academia.edu/3524758/The_Fall_of_Augustinian_Adam_Problems_of_Original_Fragility_and_Supralapsarian_Purpose.

26 "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam,'" 3.

27 "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam,'" 4.

> For Christians to make the existence of sin God's "fault" would of course be theologically wrongheaded and a religiously irreverent thing to do. Only a very misguided or perverse Christian would knowingly do it, we suppose. Unfortunately, trying to use the Augustinian script and character of Adam in order to thwart the impropriety in defense of God's goodness only makes things worse.[28]

Thus, right-thinking Christians ought to reconsider the classic doctrine of fiat creation and original sin. And what provides further reason for such reconsideration is the fact that no scientific or geological evidence exists to support either doctrine.

> One reason [on account of which the biblical account is implausible] is that no evidence exists anywhere in the geological or genomic record to support believing that there ever were super-human beings like this [Adam and Eve] on the planet. One could claim that the Genesis story in the Bible counts as 'evidence,' but that is not just unacceptably parochial, limiting the last word on the science of origins to the Christian. Even as a Christian territorial claim, it is presumptuous….[29]

Besides the lack of scientific and archeological evidence to support the traditional Christian doctrine of creation and the fall, such a view, in Schneider's judgment results in making God effectively the author of sin. If the "first human beings had to have been [made] spiritually fragile in some key respect," and if "along the lines of [Augustine's] mature theology of predestination, that God created them in the fragile (albeit good) condition, knowing that they would fall, and that this would create a whole population of humans worthy of damnation," God is made the author of sin. The end result that cannot be avoided is that "the logic of the Augustinian story leads to making God the 'author of evil,'…which of course defeats the entire religious and apologetic point of the plot in the first place…."[30]

To this faulty theological perspective that ends in making God the author of sin, Schneider proposes an alternative, "an alternative

28 "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam,'" 11-12.
29 "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam,'" 16-17.
30 "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam,'" 17-18.

in orthodoxy to the Augustinian character of Adam and the story of Paradise Lost." That alternative is the evolutionary alternative. In theistic evolution is to be found the solution to the insuperable problems that Schneider is convinced exist with the Augustinian doctrine of creation, the fall, and original sin. The proper view of origins and the present imperfect condition of the world "fits remarkably well into the larger narrative of a Darwinian World and Darwinian Adam." Schneider goes on to issue the challenge that "[i]f we are prepared to make these [evolutionary] improvements in our theology of human personhood, it may be that peace can break out between Christianity and Darwin, after all." Can Christianity find itself in "the wild Darwinian World, and can [it] adapt to the part of a Darwinian Adam"? Recommends Schneider: "[I]t would be a wise and good thing to let 'him' [this Darwinian Adam] take the stage."[31] Indeed, this would certainly bring about peace between Christianity and Darwin. But peace at what price?

… to be continued. ●

31 "The Fall of 'Augustinian Adam,'" 25.

Is Puritan Preparatory Grace Reformed?

An Analysis of the Arguments Alleged in Support of This Doctrine in the Recent Publication *Prepared by Grace, for Grace*.

Justin Smidstra

Introduction: Why the Topic of Preparatory Grace?

For many Reformed Christians the doctrine of preparatory grace is an unfamiliar doctrine. Understandably this is so. For the most part this doctrine has not found a lasting home in the continental Reformed tradition. Preparatory grace, or as it is sometimes pejoratively called, "preparationism," is a doctrine that was developed by the English Puritans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Described very succinctly, the doctrine of preparatory grace teaches that God graciously operates by His Holy Spirit on the hearts of unconverted sinners using the means of the Word to convict them of sin and prepare their hearts for faith in Jesus Christ. Preparatory grace is a work of grace antecedent to regeneration (in the narrow sense) and the exercise of saving faith. Preparatory grace is premised on the reality that God has an ordinary way of working to convert sinners. This way of conversion is not instantaneous. The way of conversion is a process.[1] The beginning of this process is the inward preparation of the heart. God progressively overcomes obstacles to faith in the dead and totally depraved sinner's heart and mind, awakening in the sinner a sense of guilt for his sin and his need for Christ.[2] By this operation of preparatory grace the dead sinner is prepared for saving grace.

The occasion for taking up this topic is the fact that recent years have witnessed increased interest in and discussion about preparatory grace within the Reformed community. There continues to be

1 Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 1-2.

2 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace,* 17-18.

debate over the merits and demerits of this doctrine and the question of whether it deserves a place in Reformed soteriology. Is preparatory grace Reformed? Is it exegetically grounded, theologically sound, creedally orthodox, and pastorally helpful? A significant contribution to the ongoing debate over this doctrine is made in the recent work *Prepared by Grace for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ*, co-authored by Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley and published by Reformation Heritage Books. Overall, this book is an excellent piece of scholarship. The authors deal extensively and adeptly with the primary sources and succeed at correcting many mistaken readings of the Puritans that scholars have promulgated. We agree with a previous reviewer in concluding that those interested in historical theology will find *Prepared by Grace, for Grace* a worthwhile and profitable read. [3]

Prepared by Grace, for Grace advances two main lines of argumentation which can be summarized as follows. First, the authors advance a historical argument. They contend that the Puritans and their doctrine of preparatory grace have been misunderstood and misrepresented in much of the scholarly work published on the subject. Beeke and Smalley are critical of the conclusions of past scholars, such as Perry Miller, Norman Pettit, and R. T. Kendall. These scholars advocated the so-called "Calvin-versus-the-Preparationists" thesis.[4] In brief, this thesis contends that the Puritans in developing the doctrine of preparatory grace severely undercut divine sovereignty and thereby departed from the Reformed faith. Regardless of whether one considers preparatory grace to be orthodox or not, the authors persuasively demonstrate that the Puritans have been read unfairly. The Puritans were not "crypto-Arminians" trying subtly to smuggle the Arminian conception of salvation into Reformed soteriology.[5] Beeke and Smalley argue that the reason past scholars have misrepresented the Puritan preparationists is found in the fact that these scholars did not fully understand Reformed theology. They did not fully grasp the nuances of the Reformed understanding of the concord between divine

3 Martyn McGeown, review of *Prepared by Grace, for Grace*, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 49, no. 2 (April 2016), 89.

4 Beeke and Smalley*, Prepared by Grace,* 244-50.

5 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 248.

sovereignty and human responsibility. Nor did they fully understand the crucially important truth that God sovereignly accomplishes His work of salvation through the use of means.[6] This is why Miller, Pettit, and Kendall have misread the Puritans.

To be clear, it is not our purpose in this paper to challenge this first line of argumentation. Many of the Puritans who advocated the doctrine of preparatory grace were exemplary Reformed theologians. To dismiss them as crypto-Arminians is to do them great injustice. Rather, our purpose in this paper is to challenge the second main line of argumentation advanced in *Prepared by Grace, for Grace*. This second argument, woven throughout the book, contends that the doctrine of preparatory grace is Reformed and ought to have a place in Reformed soteriology, preaching, and piety. Acknowledging that preparatory grace is open to certain abuses, the authors make clear at the outset of their study that this is their view:

> We authors believe that the doctrine of preparation generally received among the Puritans is biblical, evangelical, and Reformed (though we will point out cases where some individual Puritans have carried certain aspects of this doctrine beyond biblical boundaries). Neglecting to preach law and judgment to lost sinners is one reason (though not the only one) why many churches are unhealthy today. Too many of their members are self-righteous, self-satisfied Christians in name only, whose spiritual pride has never been broken by the Spirit of Christ working through the Word of God. They have never come to see their true plight as sinners abiding under God's wrath, who merit nothing but condemnation and punishment, with no one to turn for help other than Jesus Christ. A shallow view of sin must inevitably produce a shallow kind of faith. Feeling little need for grace, they want very little from God or from Christ apart from what they think they are entitled to.[7]

The authors' diagnosis of the spiritual illness afflicting many of today's Christians and churches is quite accurate, but we disagree that preparatory grace is part of the cure. Rather than it being of help in pricking the hearts of complacent Christians and deepening the piety of

6 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace,* 247.

7 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 7.

the faithful, we are convinced that the preaching of preparatory grace will produce a spiritual malaise of another sort, namely, a restless lack of assurance of salvation. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the doctrine of preparatory grace is not Reformed according to Scripture or the creeds, and consequently ought not to be preached from Reformed pulpits.

This paper will proceed in three sections. First, we will very briefly identify the main features of the doctrine of preparatory grace by examining a sample of Puritan theologians. We will confine ourselves to a few writings of the most sober and orthodox of the Puritan divines. This serves not only the goal of brevity but also the goal of showing that the doctrine of preparatory grace is inherently problematic even in the form articulated and promoted by its more restrained advocates. Our judgment of preparatory grace should not merely be based upon statements made by its more extreme adherents (e.g. some of the New England Puritans). Second, we will evaluate preparatory grace according to the Reformed creeds: the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. Third and finally, we will set forth a number of theological and scriptural arguments that demonstrate the error of preparatory grace and the danger in embracing it.

A Sample of Puritan Writers

A. William Perkins

The doctrine of preparatory grace originated with the Puritans. Already in the latter half of the sixteenth century we find writers of Reformed persuasion setting forth and developing the doctrine of preparatory grace. One of these early proponents of preparatory grace was William Perkins (1558-1602). Perkins was an orthodox Reformed theologian of exceptional ability whose work did much to shape the thinking of English Puritanism. Perkins is noteworthy for his unabashed defense of double predestination and the other doctrines of grace.[8] He was also a moderate Puritan who opposed the often sectarian inclinations of the more radical Puritans of non-conformist persuasion. The doctrine of preparatory grace would evolve and develop quite extensively throughout the seventeenth century. However, the central ideas that undergird the later, more fully developed

8 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 41.

notion of preparatory grace can be found in Perkins' writings. Thus, it is fair to say that he was one of the theologians who laid the ground work for this doctrine's subsequent development. Perkins' prestige no doubt aided the acceptance of this doctrine.

In his work *The Cases of Conscience*, Perkins maintains that natural man, dead as he is in sin, is not thereby rendered incapable of moral, rational, and volitional activity. Total depravity does not reduce man to the level of a brute beast. Man remains the kind of creature God created him to be. Understood aright, there is nothing amiss with such an affirmation. However, as Perkins turns to consider the question of what a man must do in order to enter the favor of God and be saved, he argues that prior to receiving saving grace, God performs preparatory works in the heart of natural man, works that affect and prepare his faculties for saving grace. Here we have the seed of the doctrine of preparatory grace.

In the opening section of the fifth chapter of the first book of *The Cases of Conscience,* Perkins sets forth an "anatomy of salvation." He discusses the component parts of God's salvation from the very beginning to the very end of that work. Here Perkins argues that there are "two special actions of God" in the process of saving a man, namely, "the giving of the first grace, and after that, the giving of the second."[9] The first grace referred to by Perkins is a non-saving preparatory grace that comes before the sinner's reception of the second, saving grace. The function of this first preparatory grace, Perkins says, is twofold, the first being that "God gives to man the outward means of salvation, specially the ministry of the word; and with it, He sends some outward or inward cross, to break and subdue the stubbornness of our nature, that it may be made pliable to the will of God."[10] The second operation of this "first grace" is that:

> God brings the mind of man to consideration of the Law, and therein generally to see what is good, and what is evil, what is sin, and what is not sin. Upon serious consideration of the Law, He makes man particularly to see and know, his own peculiar and proper sins, whereby he offends God. Upon sight of sin, He smites his heart with a legal fear,

9 William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of the Conscience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1606), 50.

10 Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 50-1.

> whereby when man sees his sins, He makes him to fear punishment and hell, and to despair of salvation, in regard to anything in himself.[11]

Perkins' explanation sets before us the effects of preparatory grace on the unregenerated sinner. First, God causes the law to be impressed upon the heart and mind of the sinner through the external means of grace, which, in the case of the unregenerated sinner, function as purveyors of preparatory grace. This preaching of the law batters the hard-hearted sinner until finally his stubbornness is broken and he becomes "pliable," that is, his will becomes, to some degree, agreeable and susceptible to the Word of God. The preaching of the law then drives the now softened and quasi-compliant sinner to consider more deeply the demands of the law. By such rumination the sinner is led to see his own sins; and the sight of his sins terrifies him. More and more vexed by a sense of dread, the unregenerate sinner begins to seek salvation by attempting unsuccessfully to amend his life and outwardly conform to the demands of God's law. All of these things are accomplished by preparatory grace before God performs His initial work of sovereign saving grace in the heart of the unbelieving sinner. For that reason, all of these effects can equally take place in the hearts of both the elect and the reprobate. Says Perkins "[n]ow these four actions, are indeed no fruits of grace, for a reprobate may go thus far; but they are only *works of preparation*, going before grace…."[12] Thus, elect and reprobate alike, when they are brought under the external ministration of the gospel, may both experience the works of preparatory grace. Under this ministration, God makes the sinner *capable of receiving saving grace and coming to faith*.[13] That capacity is then employed by God if and when He deigns to administer saving grace to the sinner, provided of course, that he is an elect sinner.

Perkins justified his presentation of preparatory grace by appealing mainly to two passages of Scripture. In *The Cases of Conscience* Perkins briefly cites Acts 2:37 in support of his argument, pointing to the fact that Peter's audience was pricked in their hearts when they heard the preached Word and responded with the convicted question,

11 Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 51.
12 Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 51.
13 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared for Grace*, 42.

"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Of course, Perkins' incorrect assumption is that these men were yet unregenerate. Making this assumption, he regards their conviction of sin and earnest inquiry after a remedy to be evidence of the operations of the preparatory grace preparing their hearts for the regenerating grace of God.

Likewise, in his commentary on Galatians 3:24, Perkins asserts that the law of God functions as the *unbeliever's* schoolmaster during the time that he is being prepared for faith by God's preparatory grace. Commenting on verse 24, Perkins states: "In this verse, Paul lets down the manner and way of our salvation, which is on this manner; first, the law prepares us by humbling us: then comes the gospel and it stirs up faith."[14] The law he says "urges and compels men to go to Christ." The law "shows us our sins, and that without remedy: it shows us the damnation that is due unto us: and by this means, it makes us despair of salvation in respect to ourselves, and thus it forces us to seek for help out of ourselves in Christ."[15] Now, there is a lot of truth in what Perkins says, if it is understood aright. However, Perkins speaks of the law as the schoolmaster of the unregenerate unbeliever. The law beats the unregenerate unbeliever with many stripes, compelling him to run to Christ. This is what Perkins considered the *preparative function of God's law*. Perkins, following Calvin, insisted that the law's primary function was positive. The law is the Christian's guide for thankful living. However, Perkins departed from Calvin and the Reformed tradition when he expanded that positive function of the law to include the unregenerate and reprobate wicked.

In sum, we find in Perkins' writings the main features of preparatory grace. There is a non-saving grace that God gives indiscriminately to those who hear the preaching of the gospel. This grace operates in the hearts of unregenerate sinners and produces certain effects. By means of the law, this grace causes dead sinners to recognize their sin, begin to despise it, and begin to see their need for salvation. In this way, the unregenerate sinner is "prepared" for saving grace.

14 William Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 200.

15 Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 200.

B. William Ames

Another one of the significant early fathers of Puritanism is William Ames (1576-1633). Ames studied under William Perkins at Christ College Cambridge, during which time he absorbed much of his teacher's theology. His doctrine of preparatory grace is similar to that of Perkins. Ames briefly sets forth this theory of preparation in his widely-respected dogmatics *The Marrow of Theology*. In the context of his discussion of the outward preaching of the gospel and the presentation of the promises of God in the call, Ames asserts: "But so that men may be prepared to receive the promises, the application of the law usually precedes, in order to uncover sin and lead to ἀναπολογια, a sense of guilt, and humiliation in the sinner. Rom. 7:7, *I knew not sin except by the law.*"[16] By means of the preaching of the gospel the unregenerate sinner is prepared to receive the promise of Christ by faith. Like Perkins, Ames insists that the first and positive use of the law applies to the unregenerate as well as to the regenerate. He argues that the Spirit works in the heart of the unregenerate man to expose to the sinner his sin, to arouse in him a sense of guilt, to humble him, and to impel him to seek pardon. All of this happens prior to regeneration.[17] Ames goes on to state that this preparatory grace brings a kind of "spiritual enlightenment, whereby the promises are presented to the hearts of men, as it were, by an inner word."[18] From this it is clear that Ames attributes to the preparatory work of the law a certain power to impart spiritual understanding to the unregenerate man's heart so that he, to a limited degree, is able to recognize his sin, feel guilty for it, and be convicted to the point of humiliation. This preparatory "illumination," Ames adds, is given by God not only to the elect, but is also "…in a certain way granted to those who are not elected."[19] Reprobate and elect may alike receive the convicting and illuminating works of preparatory grace. Ames viewed preparatory grace as a "supernatural work of grace" and the "usual work of the

16 William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1968), 158.

17 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 56.

18 Ames, *Marrow of Theology,* 158.

19 Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 158.

Spirit upon men who are as yet dead in sin."[20] Ames considered preparatory grace to be a kind of non-saving sovereign grace wrought by God alone. He was not hesitant to attribute great power to it. At the end of the twenty-sixth chapter of the first book of *The Marrow of Theology*, Ames goes so far as to say that preparatory grace enables the unregenerate man to express a measure of repentance for his sins. Ames writes:

> Repentance, so far as it comprises the care, anxiety, and terror connected with the law, precedes faith in order of nature, as a preparing and disposing cause, and is even found in the unregenerate; but insofar as it turns man away effectively and genuinely from sin, by which God is offended, it follows faith and depends upon it as an effect upon its cause and so belongs to those who have faith.[21]

The supernatural work of preparatory grace is powerful enough to bring the unregenerate sinner to a degree of precursory repentance—not true saving repentance, Ames is quick to add, but repentance that is real nonetheless. In this way, God prepares and disposes the heart for saving grace, so that the sinner is capable of truly repenting and fully turning from sin after regeneration. Precisely how a dead sinner can repent of his sin without genuinely repenting and in that way be fitted for the reception of saving grace Ames does not explain in the *Marrow of Theology*. For a fuller exposition of his teaching we must turn to another of Ames' works.

A more focused development of Ames' thought on preparation is found in his *Theological Disputation on Preparation*. *Prepared for Grace, by Grace* includes a translation of this work as an appendix. This short work is an important source on Puritan preparation. It was highly regarded by Puritans of later years and was frequently quoted. In this disputation Ames presents twelve theses that set forth his teaching on preparation. These theses are followed by answers to five objections that were raised against preparatory grace in Ames' day.[22] Ames' doctrine of preparatory grace was not received without controversy.

20 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 56.

21 Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 160.

22 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace,* 59.

Ames states in his third thesis that he "does not hesitate to assert that in the converting and regenerating of every sinner after the use of means, in succession, certain dispositions tending to that precede, although in unequal degree according to the wisdom of the divine dispensation."[23] A couple of points must be noted. First, Ames asserts that preparatory grace creates in the unregenerate sinner "*dispositions that tend to conversion and regeneration*."

The second is that Ames asserts that those dispositions tending to conversion and regeneration *precede* regeneration. These two assertions are really quite astonishing, considering the fact that Reformed orthodoxy has always maintained that unregenerate man is wholly inclined to evil. For example, the Heidelberg Catechism explicitly teaches that natural man is "wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil…*except* we are *regenerated* by the Spirit of God."[24] According to the Catechism, the only way that a man can have any disposition tending toward conversion is that he is already regenerated. It is difficult to see how Ames' view can be reconciled with that of the Catechism. Indeed, as we shall see later, it cannot. Ames hastens to explain in theses four and six that these dispositions tending to conversion do not arise in man because of any natural quality inherent in man himself. Rather, they are solely the handiwork of the Holy Spirit. Preparatory grace—though non-saving—is still sovereign grace. God is the one who prepares man. Man does not prepare himself. While this may protect Ames from the charge of rank Arminianism (which he vehemently opposed), he does not escape the charge that his doctrine of preparation is at irreconcilable odds with the total depravity of man.

Having defined preparatory grace as a kind of sovereign non-saving grace of God that precedes regeneration and that creates in the unregenerate sinner certain dispositions tending toward regeneration and conversion, Ames' *Disputation* then moves to give content to these "dispositions." In his fifth thesis, Ames describes the fruits borne by preparatory grace:

23 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 264.

24 Found in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), LD 3. All quotations from the Three Forms of Unity hereafter are taken from this book. Emphasis added.

> [T]here are certain internal effects [of preparatory grace] leading unto conversion and regeneration, which are stirred by the power of the word, and of the Spirit, in the hearts of those not yet justified; of which sort is an acquaintance with the divine will, a sense of sin, a fear of punishment, a consideration of redemption, and some hope of pardon. For just as in the natural generation of man there are many dispositions going before, so also in the spiritual generation....[25]

In the same vein, Ames goes on to say in his seventh thesis:

> Now, this is accomplished through those preparations, partly to the extent that through them various impediments (at least partly) are removed; just as formation in the truth removes ignorance, sorrow over sins removes the pleasures felt from it, fear removes audacity of sinning; and partly to the extent that they confer something, the use of which is great in conversion, like illumination, the horror of sin, the shame of its indecency, a desire (although confused) for redemption....[26]

Ames' argument in these theses is similar to the argument that he presented more briefly in his *Marrow of Theology*. There are a number of astounding claims made in the passages above. First, Ames claims that preparatory grace produces in unregenerate sinners many of the very same fruits that are produced by saving grace in the lives of regenerated believers. Ames says that the unregenerate man can come to know the will of God, sense his sin and guilt, fear the punishment for that sin, contemplate redemption in Christ, and even hope for pardon. Going yet further, Ames asserts that preparatory grace removes impediments to salvation in the sinner. Preparatory grace forms man in the truth and imparts to him knowledge in the place of ignorance. Preparatory grace works sorrow for sin in the unregenerate man so that he ceases to find pleasure in sin. Preparatory grace inculcates fear of God in the unconverted sinner so that he ceases to sin with the same obstinacy and audacity that he once did. Preparatory grace illuminates the unregenerate, makes him shudder at the horror of his sins, flushes him with shame, and drives him to desire to be redeemed.

25 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared for Grace*, 264-5.

26 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared for Grace*, 265.

The culmination of it all is Ames' statement that in the way of producing all these dispositions in the unregenerate sinner, preparatory grace confers something "the use of which is great in conversion."[27] Beeke and Smalley summarize Ames' view of preparation in this way:

> …preparation is like drying the wood before putting it in the fire, which makes it more receptive to the flame. Preparation makes a person more receptive to the Word, Ames said, by removing or reducing obstacles to conversion and producing qualities useful for conversion. It diminishes ignorance, unrestrained delight in sin, and audacity in sinning, then through illumination, increases shame and horror over sin, as well as desires for salvation.[28]

In other words, preparatory grace so affects unregenerate man's nature that it removes obstacles to conversion, introduces new qualities in man's nature, and reforms man's faculties so that they become more serviceable instruments of God's grace. Unregenerate man, therefore, becomes in some way inclined toward regeneration. There is no way to avoid coming to the conclusion that Ames' view of preparatory grace (regardless of his intentions) so affects the nature of natural man that his nature ceases to be *totally* depraved, but becomes *partially renovated*. Ames would vehemently reject such a charge. He would bristle at any suggestion that his theology was Arminian. We do not make that charge. Ames was a staunch opponent of Arminianism. Nevertheless, we have to grapple with the implications of his statements.

C. Thomas Goodwin

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) was an English independent minister and participant in the Westminster Assembly. Goodwin sets forth his doctrine of preparatory grace in his book *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*. As the title indicates, Goodwin regarded preparatory grace as being a proper work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies preparatory grace to the heart of the sinner in order to fit his heart for the Spirit's later, saving work. Preparatory grace is the groundwork of salvation.

Goodwin's conception of preparatory grace is simpler than that

27 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared for Grace*, 265.

28 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared for Grace*, 61.

of other Puritan theologians. Whereas other Puritan writers drew up detailed multi-staged patterns of the preparation/conversion process, Goodwin was satisfied to describe preparation in three important stages modeled after the Heidelberg Catechism's threefold division: guilt, grace, and gratitude. Goodwin states that the order of preparation for faith and conversion consists in the following:

> 1. The Spirit will "convince of sin," that is, of that miserable and sinful estate which men live in by nature, so long as they are out of Christ, and which, without belief in him, will prove a matter of condemnation to them, so that the Spirit will humble them, "because they believe not Christ."
>
> 2. He will convince them of "righteousness, because I go to my Father," says Christ; that is, the Spirit shall by faith reveal unto them the righteousness of me, who am to ascend up to heaven to be the only true means to be justified and saved by. He names his ascension (which includes his resurrection) because that declared his righteousness to be the true righteousness of God, else (had he been an impostor) God would never have suffered him to come to heaven.
>
> 3. He will convince of "judgment, because the prince of this world is judged," the meaning of which phrase that which is in John 12:31 evidently explains: Christ there in speaking of the fruit and efficacy of his death, as it were triumphing, says "now is the judgment of this world; and the prince of this world shall be cast out."[29]

Although Goodwin's morphology of preparation differs from most of his fellows' patterns, nevertheless the same essential elements are present in it. The idea that the Holy Spirit convicts unregenerate sinners by means of the preaching of the law figures large in Goodwin's thought. The main feature of Goodwin's doctrine of preparation is the humiliation of man. Man must be humbled before he receives the saving grace of regeneration. The humiliation of man is the principal work of the Spirit in applying preparatory grace to the sinner's heart. The unregenerate man must be abased, the strongholds of his pride, arrogance, and rebellion stormed and captured by the law of God. In short, the miserable unregenerate sinner must be made cognizant of

29 Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Our Salvation,* in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (1861-1866; reprinted, Eureka: Tanski Publications, 1996), 6:361.

his misery and wretchedness before the face of a holy and just God.[30] It is no small thing to attribute to the dead sinner the capacity to be humiliated before God and to come to a degree of brokenness over sin. After all, Reformed theology usually identified humiliation as a sign of regeneration! Goodwin, like his colleagues, perilously blurs the lines between preparation and regeneration.

D. John Owen

Finally, we turn to the influential pastor and Cambridge professor, John Owen (1616-1683). Owen was a theological giant. He was an excellent Reformed theologian worthy of respect. Sadly, however, he was also another proponent of the doctrine of preparatory grace. He provides a clear exposition of his doctrine of preparatory grace in his work *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. Like Goodwin, Owen treats preparatory grace in connection with pneumatology, since he considers preparatory grace to be the proper work of the Holy Spirit. Owen makes the point that the treatment of preparatory grace naturally precedes treatment of regeneration. Owen writes,

> First, in reference unto the work of regeneration itself, *positively* considered, we may observe, that ordinarily there are certain *previous* and preparatory works, or workings in and upon the souls of men, that are antecedent and *dispositive* unto it. But yet regeneration doth not consist in them, nor can it be educed out of them.[31]

Here Owen expresses the same opinion as Perkins, Ames, Norton, and Goodwin. There are preparatory operations of the Spirit that *dispose* an unregenerate sinner to the saving work of regeneration. As we have noted, this runs contrary to the doctrine of total depravity. Owen, astute theologian that he was, realized this fact. Thus, he attempted to avoid this necessary conclusion by multiplying distinctions. He writes:

> But to return; I speak in this position only of them that are adult, and not converted until they have made use of the means of grace in and

30 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared for Grace*, 161-2.

31 John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen,* ed. William H. Goold, vol. 3 (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 158.

> by their own reasons and understandings; and the dispositions I intend are only materially so, not such as contain grace of the same nature as is regeneration itself. A material disposition is that which disposeth and some way maketh a subject fit for the reception of that which shall be communicated, added, or infused into it as its form. So wood by dryness and a due composure is made fit and ready to admit of firing, or continual fire. A formal disposition is where one degree of the same kind disposeth the subject unto farther degrees of it; as morning light, which is of the same kind, disposeth the air to the reception of the full light of the sun. The former we allow here, not the latter. Thus, in natural generation there are sundry dispositions of the matter before the form is introduced. So the body of Adam was formed before the rational soul was breathed into it; and Ezekiel's bones came together with a noise and shaking before the breath of life entered into them.[32]

Owen appeals to the distinction between a material disposition and a formal disposition in order to justify the doctrine of preparatory grace. In simple language, the formation of a material disposition brings about in a man the capacity to receive something new; in this case, saving grace. In this way man is fitted to the reception of a different kind of grace. A formal disposition adapts a man to receive a heightened degree of something he already possesses. This Owen rejects. Preparatory grace is categorically different from saving grace. Preparatory grace is not a "dose of saving grace" that disposes one to receive yet more saving grace. That is the Semi-Pelagian and Roman Catholic view of prevenient grace. By making this distinction Owen believes he avoids compromising the doctrines of grace.

Owen proceeds to discuss what he considers to be the visible outworking of preparatory grace in the life of a man, i.e., the "internal spiritual effects" of preparatory grace.[33] In agreement with other Puritan divines, Owen insisted that the Holy Spirit works preparatory grace by the external ministry of the Word, and that therefore "these things [outward attendance to the word and intension of mind to receive it] are required of us in order unto our regeneration, and it is in the power of our own wills to comply with them."[34] The operation

32 Owen, *Discourse,* 229.

33 Owen, *Discourse,* 231.

34 Owen, *Discourse*, 230.

of preparatory grace through these means produces a variety of fruits in the unbeliever's life, fruits that adapt him to salvation. Owen categorizes the fruits of preparatory grace under three heads: illumination, conviction, and reformation.[35] Illumination, Owen states, is the material disposition of the mind toward regeneration. This is the first operation of preparatory grace: the Spirit's act of turning the mind toward Christ. This spiritual illumination of the unregenerate mind takes place in a couple of stages. The first is spiritual and intellectual, arising from the "industrious application of the *rational faculties* of our souls to know, perceive, and understand the doctrines of truth as revealed to us; for hereby much knowledge of divine truth may be obtained…"[36] This knowledge, Owen asserts, is "a light superadded to the innate conceptions of men's minds, and beyond what of themselves they can extend unto,—because it is concerning such things that the heart of man could never of itself conceive, but there very knowledge of them is communicated by revelation (I Cor. 2:9,11)."[37] The important point to see here is that Owen attributes to preparatory grace the power to open the eyes of the spiritually blind so that they are able to discern spiritual things. This is an astonishing statement that stands in stark contradiction to the apostle Paul's statement in I Corinthians 2:14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Second, this initial effect of intellectual and spiritual illumination is followed by another work of the Spirit that deepens the unregenerate man's spiritual understanding and clarifies for him the truth of the gospel. This light makes "the things discerned in it more clear and perspicuous to the mind" so that the sinner knows the way of righteousness.[38] Likewise, in this second stage of illumination, the Spirit works in the man "a greater *assent* unto the truth of the things revealed than mere natural reason can rise up unto. Hence those thus illuminated are frequently said to 'believe,' their faith being only the

35 Owen, *Discourse*, 231.
36 Owen, *Discourse,* 231.
37 Owen, *Discourse,* 231.
38 Owen, *Discourse,* 232.

naked assent of their minds unto the truth revealed to them."[39] From reception of this greater spiritual illumination, the yet unregenerate sinner experiences a heightened degree of joy in the gospel.

The second main operation of preparatory grace is conviction of sin. Having illuminated the heart of the sinner and imparted to him spiritual vision, the Spirit then, by means of the preaching of the Word, causes the sinner to grow in consciousness of his sins and the guilt that he bears for those sins. Here, too, Owen elaborates on a number of steps through which a sinner passes as preparatory grace deepens his conviction of sin. First, he is disquieted by a persistent sense of guilt, aggravated by the law of God and the threats of judgment expressed therein.[40] Disquietude grows into sorrow. The Holy Spirit causes the sinner to begin to grieve over his sins. This sorrow, Owen maintains, is not true evangelical sorrow but a legal sorrow that arises mostly out of fear of punishment.[41] As the Spirit continues to apply preparatory grace to the heart of the sinner, the sinner's sorrow is deepened, and consequently, the sinner begins to be humiliated before God. He begins to confess his sins, fast, pray, and engage in spiritual disciplines in an attempt to remedy the despair that is eating away at his heart.[42]

Having been brought to the depths of humiliation, the third operation of preparatory grace ensues. The Holy Spirit then causes the yet unregenerate sinner to engage in a "*great reformation of life* and a change in affections.…"[43] By preparatory grace, the Spirit leads the unregenerate man to begin to turn away from his sins and to live according to God's law. An outward reformation of life is effected.

We see here the tremendous power that the Puritans ascribed to preparatory grace! Almost everything that Orthodox Reformed theology ascribes to the process of conversion after regeneration, Owen, like the rest of the Puritans, ascribed to the work of preparatory grace prior to regeneration. On this view of preparatory grace, the unregenerate sinner comes to the point where he behaves, at least outwardly, no differently from a regenerate child of God. Again we

39 Owen, *Discourse,* 232.
40 Owen, *Discourse,* 233.
41 Owen, *Discourse,* 233.
42 Owen, *Discourse,* 234.
43 Owen, *Discourse,* 234.

see how the lines between the unregenerate state and the regenerate state are blurred. The lines are blurred so much that it is difficult to distinguish a man who is merely the object of preparatory grace from a man who is the object of saving grace.

In summary, we have shown from the writings of a number of important Puritan divines what the doctrine of preparatory grace is. Boiled down, preparatory grace is a proper work of the Holy Spirit through the use of the external preaching of the gospel, and especially the law of God, whereby non-saving, non-efficacious grace is applied to the heart of the unregenerate sinner in order to create in that sinner a disposition toward regeneration and adapt him to the reception of saving grace, with the result that he is convicted of sin, pricked by sorrow for sin, humbled before God, and desires to find salvation in Christ. With this doctrine clearly defined from the writings of its main proponents, we are now able to evaluate this doctrine and answer the important question: Is the doctrine of preparatory grace Reformed?

Evaluation on the Basis of the Reformed Creeds

The doctrine of preparatory grace was taught by many Puritan pastors and theologians, many of whom were staunchly Reformed. However, that does not settle the question of whether or not the doctrine of preparatory grace is indeed Reformed and a legitimate development of the Reformed tradition. *Prepared by Grace, for Grace* endeavors to convince its readers that the Puritan doctrine of preparatory grace is Reformed and represents a natural development of the theology of the Reformation. To settle that question we must turn to the *authoritative standards* for Reformed orthodoxy: the Reformed confessions. The Reformed creeds, as the authoritative interpretation of Holy Scripture and the definitive declarations of the Reformed faith, must function as the final arbiters of this question. The creeds! Neither theologians nor schools of the theologians may decide what is and what is not Reformed. The creeds!

The Westminster Confession of Faith

Turning now to the Reformed confessions, we shall first examine the Westminster Standards. The Westminster Standards loom large in the discussion over preparatory grace. This is because the Westminster

Standards, drawn up in 1646, were composed at the apex of English Puritanism. More than that, a number of the divines who participated in this august assembly were Puritans. Therefore, provided the significant place preparatory grace occupied in Puritan theology, it is quite reasonable to expect that the doctrine of preparatory grace would have found a place in this masterful exposition of the Reformed faith. However, the Westminster Standards do not devote a single article in explanation of this doctrine. The authors of *Prepared by Grace, for Grace* acknowledge this fact:

> [N]o chapter, section, or question and answer in the Westminster Standards is specifically devoted to preparation for saving faith. Furthermore, the several references to "preparing" in the standards most often speak not of preparing for faith but of preparing for a Christian duty such as hearing the Word or receiving the Lord's Supper.[44]

Of all the major creed-composing assemblies of Reformed churchmen, the Westminster assembly had the greatest potential to be influenced by Puritan thinking. Indeed, the assembly was so influenced in a number of areas. If preparatory grace was a doctrine widely accepted as Orthodox and Reformed in the post-Reformation age, why does it make no appearance in the great Reformation creeds that were penned by many of its alleged adherents? An argument from absence, of course, is not necessarily evidence of absence. Nonetheless, the Westminster Confession's demurring to give any positive treatment of preparatory grace seems tacitly to militate against the argument that it is. The case against preparatory grace does not depend on this argument from absence, however. The Westminster Standards contain a number of negative statements that condemn the notion of preparatory grace.

In the middle of chapter nine of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the chapter that deals with free will, we find a statement that so strongly contradicts preparatory grace that one must wonder whether the Westminster divines did actually intend to speak to the issue of preparatory grace in the article. This third article reads thus:

> Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will

44 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace,* 130.

> to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether adverse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself*, or to prepare himself thereunto*.[45]

It is significant that the subject of this article is the freedom of the will. Chapter nine of the confession is dedicated to refuting the notion that fallen man has a free will by which he is able to exercise himself toward the good and make choices in accordance with God's will apart from the power of sovereign grace. The Westminster clearly teaches that man's will can make no motion toward God apart from *saving grace* because man's will is *bound and wholly inclined to all evil*. Because man's will is bound, the article asserts that man can do nothing to convert himself or even to prepare himself for conversion. This rules out the doctrine of preparatory grace. Preparatory grace insists that the Holy Spirit causes man to exercise his will toward God while his will is yet bound, which is utterly impossible. The Puritans wanted to hold the total bondage of fallen man's will together with preparatory grace. But to do this, we are required to believe that the bound will of an unregenerate sinner can do that which is impossible for it to do apart from saving grace. The bound will must perform this impossible task in order to become more fit to receive the saving grace that will liberate it from its bondage. This is absurd. The doctrine of preparatory grace cannot be squared with this article of the Westminster Confession.

Prepared by Grace, for Grace, however, argues that the Westminster Standards can be read in a way that permits the Puritan conception of preparatory grace. Strange it would be, the authors contend, for Westminster divines wholly to abandon the "preparation doctrine of their forefathers."[46] Instead, they argue that the above quotation from the Westminster Confession was composed to refute the synergistic doctrine of preparation taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church taught that man could prepare himself for more grace by doing good works. By doing that which was in him (*quod in se*), a man could merit a further dispensation of grace from

45 Westminster Confession of Faith, (1646; reprint, Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003), 9.3. Emphasis added.

46 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 130.

God. It is this notion of preparatory grace, not the doctrine of the Puritans, that the Westminster Confession refutes. The Westminster divines were interested in refuting Roman preparationism. Their silence on Puritan preparationism may be read as tacit agreement.[47]

But this argument is tenuous even when we look at Westminster 9.3 all by itself. To assert that the Confession only has the Roman doctrine of preparation in mind when it says that man "is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself*, or to prepare himself thereunto*" is unduly to restrict the scope of this article. It is true, the Puritans argued that man did not prepare himself but was prepared by God. It was not a man's works that prepared him for saving grace, but the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart applying preparatory grace to him that prepared him for saving grace. However, in effect, that is precisely what Puritan preparationism does. By the Spirit's application of preparatory grace, the unregenerate man is convicted of sin, made to sorrow for it, and made to desire Christ. It is all of those activities—activities performed by the sinner himself—that prepare the sinner for regeneration. The Westminster Confession does not leave wiggle room for any kind of preparationism, Roman Catholic or Puritan.

This becomes all the more clear when we examine other statements of the Westminster. Chapter 6, Article 2 teaches that on account of Adam and Eve's fall into sin, the human race became "dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body."[48] All of natural man's faculties are vitiated by sin. Nothing can be done to improve them apart from the saving and regenerating grace of God. Of special significance is chapter 10, Article 4: "[O]thers, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved…."[49] The important thing in this article is the idea of the "common operations" of the Holy Spirit. This article makes no mention of preparatory grace, which according to the Puritans, is the primary operation of the Spirit that elect and reprobate have in common. Instead, the Westminster

47 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace,* 130-1.

48 Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.2.

49 Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.4.

seems to be speaking about such common operations as restraining sin and bridling the depravity of natural man's nature. Again, the Westminster's silence on preparatory grace at those junctures where it would be most appropriate to treat it speaks volumes.

Another significant passage from the Westminster Confession is chapter 16, Article 7, which reads:

> Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make man meet to receive grace from God.[50]

Here again we have a statement that appears to rule out any notion of preparatory grace. The article is speaking about unregenerate men and their seemingly good works. The Confession acknowledges that outwardly many things that unregenerate men do conform to the law of God. However, because of their debased motives, manner, and end, even those works that outwardly conform to the standard of God's law are sinful and detestable in God's sight. No such work can make a man meet, that is, fit to receive God's grace. It is hard to reconcile this with the teaching of preparatory grace that man is made fit for salvation by the Spirit's operations, producing in the unregenerate a pliable will and external conformity to God's law. There is nothing in an unregenerate man that can make him more fit for salvation or cause him to tend to regeneration and faith in Christ.

The cumulative case against preparatory grace is strong. The Westminster completely avoids any positive treatment of preparatory grace. The Westminster Confession avoids mentioning preparation in all of the articles where it would have been most appropriate to treat it. But more importantly, the Westminster makes a number of statements that cannot be reconciled with preparatory grace. The conclusion can be safely drawn that the doctrine of preparatory grace is not Reformed according to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

50 Westminster Confession of Faith, 16.7.

The Three Forms of Unity

The Three Forms of Unity are even less favorable toward the doctrine of preparatory grace than the Westminster Confession. As to the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity, there is no room for debate. The Three Forms of Unity rule out the notion of preparatory grace. Since both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith were written before the emergence of Puritanism as a distinct theological tradition, they do not address the doctrine of preparatory grace. Notwithstanding, appeals have been made to the Three Forms of Unity in order to support preparatory grace. *Prepared by Grace, for Grace* appeals both to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt and argues that these creeds agree with preparationism.

We begin with the Heidelberg Catechism. Beeke and Smalley dedicate part of the thirteenth chapter of their book to the Heidelberg Catechism. Their comments are brief because the Catechism has nothing explicit to say on the topic. Nevertheless, they contend that the Catechism permits the idea of preparatory grace, and even go so far as to suggest that an incipient doctrine of preparatory grace is found in the Catechism. To substantiate their claims, the authors appeal to those sections of the Catechism that treat the law of God and its use, namely Lord's Days 2 and 32-44. Evidently, it is here that they see an opening for preparatory grace in the Catechism.

One of the main contentions of Puritan preparationism is that the law of God has a positive function in the lives of unregenerate and ungodly men. That function is to raise awareness of sin, convict the sinner of his sin, elicit a kind of sorrow for that sin, and in this way prepare the heart of the unregenerate man to receive the grace of regeneration.

The argument is put forward that the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism implies openness to preparatory grace. Knowledge of sin and guilt comes first. It is only by having our sins first exposed and our misery revealed to us that we can be saved. This arrangement, however, does not support preparatory grace. Rather, the arrangement of the Catechism seems to undermine the doctrine of preparatory grace. The Lord's Days that treat the law fall under the heading "The Third Part—of Thankfulness." This heading refutes the suggestion that incipient preparationism can be found in these Lord's Days. How

so? For this reason: the Catechism places the positive use of the law *in the context of the Christian's life of thankfulness and gratitude*. The Christian's life of gratitude is the fruit of saving grace in the believer's heart. In other words, the Catechism treats the law of God in connection with the Christian's *life of regeneration*. The Catechism is not talking about the law's preparation of the unregenerate sinner, the Catechism is talking about the law's important function in the life of the regenerated sinner who is both converted and continuously being more and more converted.

Prepared by Grace, for Grace also gives attention to the Canons of Dordt. The authors maintain that although "[t]he Canons of Dort do not directly address the question of preparation, yet its doctrine appears to be compatible with mainstream Puritan preparation."[51] However, the Canons abound with statements that leave the reader with the strong impression that they are no friend of preparatory grace. The Canons are not silent on the question of preparatory grace. The same salvo that they fire at the theological edifice of the Arminians also blows holes in the Puritan doctrine of preparatory grace. The passages of the Canons that touch upon the topic of preparatory grace are found in the third and fourth heads of the Canons. The third article of the third and fourth heads reads thus:

> Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor dispose themselves to reformation.[52]

The rejection of errors section under the same head makes a similar statement. The condemnation of error four reads:

> Error 4: Who teach that the unregenerate man is not really or utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God.

51 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace,* 231.

52 Canons, III/IV.3.

> Rejection: For these are contrary to the express testimony of Scripture. *Ye were dead through trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5); and: *Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21).[53]

This article affirms the doctrine of total depravity, that man is enslaved to sin, wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil. Then the article states that "apart from regenerating grace, it is impossible for a man to return to God, reform the depravity of his nature, or dispose himself to reformation." This last clause of the article rejects preparatory grace in its entirety. Preparatory grace insists that apart from God's regenerating grace, the very things the Canons insist are impossible are in fact possible. By preparatory grace, the unregenerate man is enabled to approach God. By preparatory grace, the nature of the unregenerate man is to a degree reformed. And most significantly, the Puritans all insisted, in direct contradiction to the Canons, that preparatory grace *disposes an unregenerate sinner to the saving grace of God*. After all, that is the very purpose of preparatory grace—to prepare a man for salvation by creating in him a new capacity or disposition toward God's regenerating grace. The language of "disposition" and "reformation" is precisely the language that Ames and Owen both used to describe preparatory grace. Although the Canons are aiming at the Arminians here, the fact is that they equally condemn the doctrine of preparatory grace.

Another passage from the Canons is heads three and four, article eleven:

> But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable;

53 Canons III/IV, B.4

> actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.[54]

This article clearly contradicts the doctrine of preparatory grace. Here the Canons attribute to the operation of saving grace all of the works and effects that the Puritans attributed to the operation of preparatory grace. The Puritans asserted that by preparatory grace God illuminates the mind of the unregenerate man, softens his heart, produces new dispositions in him, makes his will pliable, and fits him for saving grace. However, all of these actions the Canons here restrict *solely to saving grace*. The Canons teach that these acts of God are not acts of preparatory grace preceding regeneration, rather they are acts of saving grace that follow regeneration.

Of the Three Forms of Unity, the Canons add the most nails to preparationism's coffin. There is simply no way to reconcile the doctrine of preparatory grace with the strong statements of the Canons concerning the inability of the unregenerate man to make any motions toward God. Having shown that preparatory grace is incompatible with the Reformed confessions, both the Westminster and the Three Forms of Unity, the conclusion we must come to is that the doctrine of preparatory grace is not Reformed.

Theological Arguments against Preparatory Grace

In this final section of the paper we will present six major theological criticisms of the Puritan doctrine of preparatory grace. Although our demonstration from the Reformed creeds that preparatory grace is not Reformed is sufficient to warrant its rejection, the theological objections presented here will show precisely why the attempt to rehabilitate Puritan preparationism is a misconceived mission that should be abandoned. The doctrine of preparatory grace is fatally flawed. To introduce it into Reformed theology would be to introduce a destructive virus into Reformed theology.

A. The main and most important theological criticism that must be brought to bear against the doctrine of preparatory grace is the fact that *preparatory grace confuses the* ordo salutis *and removes regeneration from its proper place at the very beginning of salvation*. Let us

54 Canons III/IV.11

explain by first briefly discussing the correct doctrine of regeneration. Regeneration, in its narrowest and most basic sense, is the very first work of salvation (apart from the mystical union). At regeneration, the Holy Spirit implants the resurrection life of Jesus Christ into the elect child of God. Every other aspect of salvation follows from this first act of regeneration. Indeed, this is the way it has to be. Man by nature is dead in sin. Because he is dead, a spiritual corpse, man cannot do anything or will anything good except first he be resurrected from the dead. That is what is accomplished in regeneration. Man is spiritually resurrected and brought by God's sovereign grace into newness of life. He is made a new creation and given the new man in Jesus Christ. Only then can a man make any motions toward God. Only then, out of the power of God's grace in him, can the new man be convicted of sin, sorrow for sin, turn from sin, repent of sin, and yearn after the healing mercies of Christ. All of these actions on the part of a sinner do not precede regeneration, they follow regeneration as the fruits of regeneration. Regeneration is the first principle from which all the other benefits of salvation flow.

This brings us to the main problem with preparatory grace. The doctrine of preparatory grace takes the fruits of regeneration—blessings like illumination, conviction of sin, sorrow for sin, repentance, reformation, longing after Christ—and places these benefits before regeneration takes place in the heart of the sinner. The Puritans insist over and over again in their writings that God does not save a person without convicting him of his sin, leading him to repentance, and awakening in him a desire for Christ. That is absolutely true. But it is impossible for those affections to be awakened in a dead sinner. Those affections are only possible for a sinner who has been made alive by the regenerating grace of God. Only a spiritually living soul can feel convicted of sin, have his heart pricked, genuinely confess his sin, and truly desire Jesus Christ.

Thus, the heart of the Puritans' confusion is this: *they confuse the sinner's subjective experience of coming to consciousness of his regeneration with the work of preparatory grace*. Put another way, the Puritans mistakenly identify as preparatory grace what is really the process by which God leads a regenerated sinner consciously to know and live out of the life planted in him at regeneration. Put

yet another way, what the Puritans identify as preparatory grace is in reality nothing else than God's work of bringing the seed of regeneration to fruition and causing it to blossom and bear fruit. The error of preparatory grace comes down to a misunderstanding of the *ordo salutis* and where the different benefits of salvation are placed in that order.

For this reason, most of the appeals to Scripture that the Puritans make to substantiate their doctrine of preparatory grace are easily refuted with this simple argument. The Puritans bring the assumption to many texts that conviction of sin, and other acts, precede regeneration. Thus, whenever they find a passage that speaks of the fact that someone is convicted of sin, repents, or turns to Christ, they frequently think they have found a text that supports preparatory grace. But in the vast majority of these instances, they are making the unwarranted assumption that the person in the text was not already regenerated. For example, the Puritans repeatedly cite Acts 2:37 as decisive proof of their doctrine of preparatory grace. Acts 2:37 reads: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Both Perkins and Ames, and the Puritan divines that followed them, wrongly interpret this text because they assume that the Jews who responded to Peter's sermon were unregenerate. They assume that these men are being prepared by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word to receive saving grace. But if we remember the lesson of John 3, that regeneration, "new birth," precedes everything, indeed that a man cannot even see the kingdom except he be born again, then we will come to this text with the proper understanding of how God always works salvation. That the Jews who heard Peter's sermon were pricked in their hearts and moved to inquire of Peter what they should do is not the fruit of preparatory grace, but the fruit of regeneration. Already these men had been given new life. Under Peter's preaching God was already at work in them, by sovereign efficacious saving grace, to cultivate that life of regeneration and cause it to bear the fruits of conviction, repentance, and conversion. That is the proper understanding of the ordinary way by which God leads His people to Christ. If this is understood, the debate over preparatory grace is largely resolved.

B. A second major criticism of preparatory grace is that this Puritan doctrine is incompatible with the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. We have touched on this fact already. Total depravity means that natural man apart from the saving grace of God—that is, apart from regeneration—is completely debased and wicked in every part of his being. His heart, mind, and will are totally enslaved to sin and the devil. He is prone to all evil and inclined to all wickedness. He cannot do anything but sin. In short, he is dead in transgressions and sins.

The problem with preparatory grace is that it makes man less than totally depraved. By preparatory grace, new qualities or dispositions are created in the dead sinner. These new dispositions incline the man toward God and His will rather than to sin. In other words, preparatory grace operates upon the dead unregenerate sinner so that he is no longer wholly prone to all evil. The result is that there *are dead sinners disposed to God and His will*. Preparatory grace makes dead sinners less prone to evil and more inclined to good. This is a blatant compromise of the Reformed teaching of total depravity.

C. In close connection to the previous argument, another criticism of preparatory grace is that this doctrine creates an intermediate state between man's natural spiritual death and the spiritual life of regeneration. This intermediate state is created by the new dispositions that preparatory grace creates in the unregenerate sinner. Apart from God's saving grace man is dead in sin and wholly inclined to all evil. When man receives God's saving grace and is regenerated, he is no longer totally depraved and inclined to all evil. But preparatory grace creates a third state of man between spiritual death and spiritual life. The man who receives only God's preparatory grace but not His saving grace remains dead in sin, yet he is no longer prone to all evil. He receives a new capacity to exercise his faculties and move his will in the direction of God and the good. Clearly, this change of disposition sufficiently differentiates the recipient of preparatory grace from both the natural man and the regenerated man. He occupies a third intermediate stage that shares qualities both of the natural man and the regenerated man.

This is deeply problematic. Already in Ames' day, there were many objections voiced against preparatory grace precisely for this

reason: it creates a third state of man, a state between spiritual death and spiritual life. Ames expends considerable effort trying to refute this charge in his *Theological Disputation on Preparation*. One of the main ways that Ames tries to deflect this criticism is by asserting that preparatory grace does not substantially change the unregenerate man. He insists that while preparatory grace may change the disposition of the unregenerate man, it does not change his state. To support his contention, Ames employs two illustrations. Ames likens the work of preparatory grace to the act of drying wood before burning it and to the act of the dry bones being gathered, conjoined, and enfleshed before being revivified.[55] These illustrations are important because subsequent Puritans received them and employed them to defend their doctrine. They were regarded as strong defenses against the charge that preparatory grace created an intermediate state between death and life. However, we contend that these illustrations are flawed and do not support the doctrine of preparatory grace.

Aside from the fact that they are somewhat fanciful (especially the one based on Ezekiel 37), the main problem with Ames' illustrations is the lack of similarity between dead wood and bones and the dead sinner. Ames' illustrations are false analogies. Dead wood and bones are inanimate objects, dead sinners are not. The drying of wood to make it more susceptible to fire and the gathering of bones to make them capable of revivification does not involve any conscious, volitional action on the part of the wood and the bones. Drying does not enable wood to seek the fire or yearn to be put into the fire. Gathering the bones does not cause the bones to look for revivification. The same cannot be said about the operation of preparatory grace upon the dead sinner—preparatory grace enables the dead sinner to do something. In this case, preparatory grace affects the moral-rational faculties of the dead sinner and enables his will to move in the direction of God. This is a substantial change in the dead sinner's orientation! Preparatory grace reorients the dead sinner toward life! To a degree, it loosens his bondage to sin and imparts to his bound will a measure of power that it did not have before. This new disposition that inclines the sinner to God differentiates him from the man that is totally enslaved to sin and wholly prone to all evil. In reality, this intermediate state of spiritual

55 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 268.

"half-life" between the spiritual death of total depravity and the spiritual life of salvation in Christ can be identified as *a state of partial depravity*. Preparatory grace, therefore, departs from Reformed truth by positing what amounts to an intermediate state that is wholly at odds with Scripture, the creeds, and tradition of the Reformed churches.

D. A fourth criticism of the doctrine of preparatory grace is that preparatory grace is a kind of *common, resistible, and inefficacious grace*. The Puritans maintained that preparatory grace was entirely distinct from saving grace, a second kind of grace qualitatively different from the grace of regeneration. Whereas saving grace is given only to the elect, preparatory grace is given to all who hear the preaching of the gospel and its call to come to faith in Christ. Whereas saving grace is efficacious and always accomplishes the saving purpose for which it is administered, preparatory grace is ineffectual. Preparatory grace may begin a work in a man, but that work might not reach perfection. Preparatory grace does not infallibly prepare the heart of a sinner for the reception of saving grace, nor does it necessarily lead to the reception of saving grace. Preparatory grace is resistible. The sinner can resist this grace as it comes to him in the preaching, harden his heart, and prevent the Spirit from operating in his heart by it.

That preparatory grace is resistible and inefficacious is the necessary consequence of its being common, given both to elect and reprobate alike. Preparatory grace is given to all and sundry who hear the preaching of the gospel and the alleged free offer of Christ contained therein. Beeke and Smalley draw attention to this very point in their discussion of John Norton's doctrine of preparatory grace:

> It [preparatory grace] is not saving grace, nor a saving qualification. But it is a capacity for faith in Christ that is formed in the soul by preparatory common grace. Though the soul does not yet have the grace to exercise faith, it now has the capacity to receive such grace, if God should be pleased to bestow it as the next step in His ordinary way of saving sinners through the preaching of the Word.[56]

The common effect that the Spirit works in the hearts of elect and reprobate alike is the heightened capacity for faith in Christ, the

56 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 155-6.

new disposition toward God and the life of regeneration. This new disposition is given in common to all in whom the Spirit works this grace. Consequently, there are reprobates who are given by God a greater capacity to believe and a disposition toward God, even while they remain unregenerate and dead in sins. This notion of a common preparatory grace that is resistible and ineffectual is wholly opposed to the Reformed tradition, which has always maintained that God's grace is only ever sovereign, particular, efficacious, and irresistible. There are not different kinds of graces. There is only one grace, saving grace, grace that without fail perfects the work that it begins (Phil. 1:6).

E. A fifth criticism of preparatory grace is that it rests upon the error of the well-meant offer of the gospel. Indeed, preparatory grace cannot exist apart from the well-meant offer of the gospel. In commenting on the Puritan William Guthrie's understanding of preparatory grace, Beeke and Smalley write the following:

> Embedded in Guthrie's view of preparation is the free offer of the gospel; indeed, he believed that one aspect of such preparation was convincing sinners of that free offer…. Thus the free offer of the gospel and preparation go together: the free offer reveals God's willingness to save, and preparation makes men willing to heed the offer, and be saved.[57]

That is exactly why preparatory grace and the free offer of the gospel go hand in hand. Preparatory grace, as a common grace given to all men, requires a common proffering of Christ to all men. The preached gospel presents Jesus Christ to the sinner. It offers Christ and salvation to all who will believe on Him and repent of their sins. This offer comes to all who hear the gospel. The Spirit works in the hearts of the unregenerate to respond to this offer, to make their wills pliable and open to receiving it.

F. Our final theological criticism of preparatory grace is a practical one: *preparatory grace is a pastorally disastrous doctrine*. This doctrine creates problems in the hearts of the faithful—it does not alleviate them. The main reason that preparatory grace is pastorally disastrous is that it undermines the believer's assurance of

57 Beeke and Smalley, *Prepared by Grace*, 141-2.

salvation. Indeed, it undermines assurance so severely that it causes faithful Christians to question whether they are even believers at all. Why is this the case? The reason for this is the criticism we made of preparatory grace at the very beginning of this section: *preparatory grace blurs the lines between preparation and regeneration. It often blurs the lines so much that one cannot distinguish where preparation ends and where regeneration begins*. Practically then, in the life of the ordinary Christian, the believer is not able to distinguish whether the fruits of grace that he observes in his life are actually the fruits of saving grace or whether they are merely the fruits of preparatory grace. He might very well be unregenerate and outside of Christ. This consigns the believer to an endless succession of questions and doubts that often spiral downward into despair. Because the fruits of preparation and the fruits of regeneration overlap, preparatory grace leads the believer to morbid introspection. It drives the believer to scrutinize his own soul in search of every evidence of regeneration, conversion, and faith. Preparatory grace drives the believer to run after the ever-elusive phantom of assurance of salvation. By driving the believer to introspection and perpetual self-examination, preparatory grace generates a mass of questions that the believer must answer in order to find assurance of salvation: "Am I convicted of sin? Do I believe in Christ? Am I sorry for my sins? Do I desire Christ?" But since the mere presence of conviction, sorrow, and desire may just be the signs of preparatory grace, the believer has to answer yet more penetrating questions: "Am I convicted *enough*? How do I know that I *really* believe in Christ? Am I *really* sorry for my sins? How do I know my sorrow and contrition are *deep enough*? Do I *truly* desire Christ or am I just trying to escape punishment?"

Thus, in effect, preparatory grace condemns faithful Christians to the interminable vexation of countless unanswerable questions. Preparatory grace turns the believer away from the objective reality of what Christ has done for him and turns him inward upon himself. It leads the believer's eyes away from the cross and redirects them to his own soul. In this way, preparatory grace not only makes assurance elusive, it makes assurance, when obtained, to rest not on Christ's cross but in one's own experiences. This is a cruel and vicious doctrine. Instead of giving comfort to downcast Christians, preparatory grace

effectively hands the devil a weapon with which to torment the saints. Satan is always looking for ways to undermine the confidence and assurance of God's people. Preparatory grace makes it quite easy for him to do that.

In sum, the doctrine of preparatory grace is pastorally disastrous and spiritually ruinous because it breeds unassured and fearful Christians. This doctrine produces doubt and insecurity instead of consoling the believer with the comforts of the gospel. Preparatory grace is bondage not liberty. This doctrine is far more likely to generate pastoral problems in the church than it is to lead people to their God and Savior. And looking at the history of how this doctrine impacted the lives of ordinary believers, that is precisely what has happened. Preparatory grace does not belong in the Reformed churches. Let preparatory grace remain merely the object of historical interest. It does not need to be rehabilitated for the church's faith and life. In fact, it is positively destructive to the comfort and assurance of the Christian. ●

Bibliography

Ames, William. *The Marrow of Theology*. Translated by John Dykstra Eusden. Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1968.

Beeke, Joel and Paul Smalley. *Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ.* Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2013.

Goodwin, Thomas. *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Our Salvation*. Vol. 6 of *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*. 1861-1866. Reprint, Eureka: Tanski Publications, 1996.

McGeown, Martyn. Review of *Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ,* by Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 49, no. 2 (April 2016).

Owen, John. *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. Vol. 3 of *The Works of John Owen.* Edited by William H. Goold. Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1968.

Perkins, William. *Commentary on Galatians*. Edited by Gerald T. Sheppard. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989.

_____. *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of the Conscience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1606.

Protestant Reformed Churches. *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches.* Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches, 2005.

Westminster Confession of Faith. 1646. Reprint. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003.

God's Covenant of Grace in the Psalms (2)

God's Eternal Relationship with His Chosen

Russell Dykstra

The Psalms are the inspired songs of God's church. They give expression to every emotion found in the believer's soul. Being God-breathed, the Psalms are fitting words to be offered as prayers to Jehovah as, indeed, God intended. As such, these songs express the life that the believer has with God. That life is the covenant of grace. These articles are founded on the premise that the entire doctrine of God's covenant of grace can be drawn from the Psalms, especially from the perspective of the believer's experience of the life of the covenant.

The first installment established the nature of the covenant of grace. The covenant is not an agreement, not a business contract or treaty, not even merely and essentially a promise. Rather, God's covenant is a relationship of love and fellowship. The Psalms throughout breathe that essential nature of God's covenant relationship. The essence of that relationship is friendship. That determines everything about the covenant.

Closely related to that essential nature of the covenant is God's purpose for establishing His covenant of grace. It is quite prevalent among Reformed theologians to maintain that the purpose of the covenant is simply to serve as a means to an end. This is particularly true of those who teach that the covenant is conditional.[1] The thinking is that after Adam fell into sin, God determined a way to save some of the fallen race. Accordingly, God established a covenant with a certain group, in order to save some of the group. More specifically,

1 Two notable examples are William Heyns (see *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*, pp. 123-147) and Klass Schilder (see *The Main Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant*. See also Sybrand Albertus Strauss "'Everything or nothing'—K. Schilder on the covenant" p. 84, translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman.)

it is maintained that God established His covenant with believing parents and *all* their natural children. God calls these children "His own" children. He gives the promises of salvation to all the children of believers. At the same time, God lays down demands or conditions that these children must fulfill in order to receive the content of His promises. By fulfilling the conditions (often, faith and obedience) these children are brought to salvation. Clearly, when this life is over, there is no need for the covenant any longer. It has served its purpose.[2]

The Scriptures, as a whole, do not support that teaching on God's covenant. This conceives of the covenant of grace as a stopgap measure in response to Adam's fall. That teaching on the covenant is completely wrong, for God is sovereign and omniscient. Eternally He knew that Adam would fall, because God determined Adam's fall into sin. Besides, this understanding of the covenant limits its function and existence to time. It became merely a means to an end.

The goal of this article is to demonstrate that the Psalms, being a microcosm of the whole Bible, presents a very different view of the covenant. The Psalms indicate that God's covenant is eternal, because God established His covenant with Christ, and with the elect in Christ. Therefore, the covenant exists from eternity, through all of time, and into eternity. The covenant has no end. As the Psalms also reveal,

2 Even those Reformed theologians who affirm that God establishes His covenant only with the elect can make the covenant a means to an end. Herman Bavinck, insists that the covenant is with the elect, but then also teaches that "the covenant of grace describes the road by which these elect people will attain their destiny. The covenant of grace is the channel by which the stream of election flows toward eternity." *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. III, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 229. GerhardusVos defines the covenant of grace as "the gracious pact between the offended God and the offending sinner, in which God promises eternal life in the way of faith in Christ and the sinner accepts this believingly." And Abraham Kuyper defines the covenant as an alliance between God and His people over against Satan. For these latter two theologians and a more complete discussion of this view, see Herman Hoeksema, "An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 27," *The Standard Bearer*, vol. 26, 78-82.

such an understanding of the covenant is inseparably connected with the reality that the covenant is with the elect.

Second, the Psalms teach clearly that God establishes His covenant with believers and their seed. In this way, the covenant is perpetuated. God does not ordinarily gather one individual here and another there to form a covenant people. Rather, God draws His covenant people primarily in the line of generations. Here, too, election determines the members of the covenant.

Third, the Psalms indicate that this eternal nature of God's covenant is reflected in believers' marriages and families. An eternal covenant that God forms is, necessarily, unbreakable. This has significant implications for marriage, the most noteworthy picture of the covenant relationship between God and His people.

Finally, the beloved Psalms indicate that the goal of God's covenant is that His people live with God in friendship eternally. The covenant is God's goal, and that for the glory of His own name.

Established with Christ Eternally

The starting point for setting forth the eternality of the covenant is Psalm 89. The human writer of this beautiful Psalm is Ethan the Ezrahite. The only other scriptural reference to this man is I Kings 4:31. In that passage, Scripture is extolling the wisdom of Solomon, how "Solomon's wisdom exceedeth the wisdom of all the children of the east county, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (v. 30). Then verse 31 records, "For he was wiser than all men" and the first in the list of wise men is "Ethan the Ezrahite." From this brief reference, as well as from Psalm 89, it is plain that Ethan lived in the days of Solomon. He beheld the glory of Solomon's kingdom, its power and riches, and the wisdom of king Solomon. Ethan wrote Psalm 89 after Solomon died. Rehoboam had come to the throne, and soon after, Jeroboam had led ten tribes away. The glorious kingdom was divided. Psalm 89:38 indicates that the division has occurred—"But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed."

In verses 1-17, the main topic is the covenant that God established with David. Ethan sings God's praises for the covenant. He goes on in the Psalm to speak of the blessings of the covenant. And he concludes the Psalm calling on God to remember His covenant (vv. 49-51),

ending with this doxology to Jehovah, the covenant God, "Blessed be the LORD for ever more. Amen, and Amen."

Verses 1-37 set forth the theology of the covenant as an eternal relationship that God established with His Son, the Messiah.

Surrounded by all the manifestations of the sad state of Israel's demise, the inspired psalmist begins singing of the LORD's mercies. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever." Notice that he uses God's covenant name—Jehovah, the I AM, always faithful to His word—and sings of His mercies. God's mercy is His pity for sufferers, as well as His power to lift up out of suffering. The reason Ethan gives for singing is "thy faithfulness" (both in verses 1 and 2).

Then the speaker changes—God speaks in verse 3. This is significant. It is not Ethan writing about what God said or did; rather God Himself tells us, "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant." Three important points should be noted. The first is that God makes a covenant with the elect, His chosen. This is the ordinary word for the elect (בָּחִר) used to describe God's elect people, the "children of Jacob his chosen" (Ps. 105:6). Here God makes a covenant with David, but it is with more than merely David. For in the second place, God makes this covenant with David "my servant." This same David is the one whom God anointed with holy oil (v. 20). As God's servant, David was appointed by God to an office, namely the office of king of God's people. King David was the ruler and representative head of the people of Israel—God's chosen. Therefore, when God established His covenant with David, it was also with the people.

Third, the parallel statement to"I have made a covenant" is "I have sworn." When God swears, He indicates the certainty of the covenant promises. God made the covenant promises to David, His chosen servant, head of Israel, the "children of Jacob his chosen" (Ps. 105:6). As Calvin notes, "If, therefore, the cause or origin of this covenant is sought for, we must necessarily fall back upon the Divine election."[3]

That this covenant was not merely with one individual, namely David, becomes plain from the next verse. Verse 4 speaks of David's throne being built up "to all generations." Although this points to

3 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms,* trans. James Anderson. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 3:421.

Solomon and David's royal line after him, ultimately, this is realized only in Christ, who is King forever ("to all generations"). Ultimately, therefore, God's "servant" is Christ. God established His covenant with Christ, His chosen servant (see also Is. 42:1). And, notes Calvin, God's covenant with His chosen is made not "with David individually, but [God] had an eye to the whole body of the Church, which would exist from age to age."[4]

In response to God's speech, the inspired psalmist breaks forth in praise to God (vv. 5-18). This is fitting, because God reveals His power, wisdom, and glory in His covenant. That the psalmist Ethan is praising God for His covenant is evident from the fact that he uses God's covenant name (Jehovah) throughout (vv. 5, 6, 8, 15, 18).

Following this doxology, the psalmist returns to the covenant with David. Initially, the emphasis is on the truth that David was specially appointed by God (v. 19). "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people." The "holy one" to whom God spoke in vision is Samuel. God instructed Samuel to anoint David. David was sovereignly chosen by God, taken from his lowly position among the people. He is "mighty" because God endowed David with strength—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—to equip David to be the king of Israel. Him God anointed (v. 20), a picture of the Spirit of God who entered David at his anointing with oil, equipping David to be king. As God continues to express how He established David, it becomes clear that these words will only be fully realized in Christ. God speaks:

> With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers (Ps. 89:21-25).

That the ultimate reference here is not David but Christ is clearly demonstrated in the subsequent verses where God again speaks: "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my

4 Calvin, *Psalms,* 3:421.

salvation" (v. 26). And then, "Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (v. 27). The Mediator Jesus Christ is God's firstborn, made so by decree according to Psalm 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Jesus Christ is the one "higher than the kings of the earth"—King of kings and Lord of lords. The language and the promises found in Psalm 89 are strikingly similar to God's promises to David in II Samuel 7:13-16, when God informed David that David's son would build God's house. That prophecy, likewise, is not and cannot be fully realized in Solomon, but rather in Christ alone.

Then, with the promised Messiah from David's line the obvious subject, God returns to His covenant. "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him" (v. 28). God established His covenant with Jesus Christ. That covenant relationship is unchanging and eternal, for God promises, "His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven" (v. 29).

However, that eternal covenant that God makes with the Mediator is not merely with Him, it is with those chosen in Him. For God continues, "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes" (vv. 30-32). It is plain that the "his" in these verses refers to Christ. That being the case, who are "his children"? These are the people eternally loved by God and given to Jesus Christ. They are His children. He is their legal and representative head. When God made a covenant with Christ, He made the covenant with those chosen in Christ. The verses make it plain that these children are included in the covenant. They are under the obligation of keeping God's law, judgments, statutes, and commandments. This is the covenant people, as they are addressed in the ten commandments: "I am the LORD thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2).

Yet they are a sinful people, and if the covenant depended on them, they would surely be cut off. If God required the covenant people to fulfill the condition of obedience in order to maintain the covenant, He would surely cast them out of His covenant. But the beautiful promise of God is—He will not do that. He will chasten them, visiting

"their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes" (v. 32). But God will not cut them off. Why not? Have they not broken God's covenant by transgressing His commandments?

The answer is in verses 33 and 34: "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." God promises that He will never break His covenant. But the reason why the perfectly righteous God can say that, in spite of the sinfulness of the covenant people is this: God's covenant is with the Mediator, Jesus Christ. God will chasten the people, but He will not take His lovingkindness from Christ! The covenant people are in Christ. Their transgressions will be paid for by Christ their Head. For this reason, God will have mercy[5] on Christ, the Head of the covenant people, not cutting off Christ or the people. And here it becomes obvious why the psalmist sings of God's mercy in this song about the covenant, verses 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, and 49. Mercy is God's pity on His people in their suffering, and His will to lift them up out of their suffering and to bless them.

It should be obvious that the reason that God will never break His covenant with Christ is that Christ will never be unfaithful as Mediator of the covenant. Adam fell, and broke God's covenant. Christ never will transgress the covenant. It is sure with Him.

God concludes His word of grace and mercy to David, and ultimately, to Christ, and therefore to all the elect in Christ: "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven" (vv. 35-37).

To sum up these marvelous truths, God establishes His covenant with David, but David is a type of Christ, and the promises of Psalm 89 cannot be fulfilled in anyone but Christ. God promises that His covenant will stand fast. Christ was made King by decree (Ps. 2:7, and God's decrees are in eternity, before time) and, therefore, He will be the King forever. God will never remove His mercy from Christ. And God will never break His covenant with Christ, as Mediator and Head of the covenant. Psalm 89 clearly teaches that the covenant of

5 The word translated lovingkindness in the KJV is mercy, חֶסֶד.

grace is eternal and unbreakable, because God established His covenant eternally with Christ. Christ is God's anointed (as both Messiah and Christ literally indicate). Christ is God's chosen servant, in His appointed office, representing God. He is King of all God's people. And as such Christ is their Head, representing all God's people.

Psalm 89, as well as other Psalms, teaches that God's eternal covenant of love and fellowship is with Christ. It starts with Christ, and to Christ God gives His chosen people. Psalm 89:3 speaks of election. Psalm 132:11-14 echoes this truth:

> The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

Notice again how God's covenant promises address David as king, and then turn to the reason, namely, "For the LORD hath chosen Zion." Zion is another type of the church.[6] Jehovah (again, the covenant name) desires to dwell with His people. Those whom He eternally knew, eternally loved, and eternally desired to live with in covenant fellowship—they are chosen in Christ. And when God made the covenant with Christ, the Head and King, God made His covenant with every member of the body of Christ, which is to say, all the elect.

God's covenant with the elect is from everlasting. The covenant was not formed in time; it was not a change of God's plans, a response to Adam's fall into sin. God did not invent a covenant in order to save His elect.

On the contrary, God saves His elect people and in this way brings them into His covenant! The Psalms sing of God remembering His covenant. Psalm 105 begins, "O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon

6 "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24).

his name: make known his deeds among the people." The psalmist then enumerates the deeds of God, including His faithfulness to His covenant:

> He is the LORD our God: his judgments are in all the earth. [Notice the covenant name, "Jehovah," RJD.] He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance (Ps. 105:7-11).

Notice that the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed is an everlasting covenant, not a relationship limited to time, not one that might end. The same confidence is expressed in Psalm 11:5, "He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he *will ever be mindful of his covenant*." God, "ever mindful," will never forget, never drop, never terminate His covenant.

This, then, is the covenant that God made with Christ the Head and Mediator of that covenant. Christ would ratify the covenant by His death, redeeming God's chosen people from sin. In this, the Mediator earned a righteousness for the covenant people, necessary for them to live with God. God gives to His people the life of Christ, and recreates them in the image of God. They are His spiritual sons and daughters.

A Covenant with Believers and their Seed

The well-known and beloved Reformed Baptism Form stresses that the covenant is with believers and their seed (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; Mark 10). The Psalms speak the same language, as already noted in Psalm 105:8-10. Psalm 78 sings of the believer's commitment to instruct the children:

> We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation

> to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (vv. 4-7).

Covenant children must know God if they are to live with Him; they must know and observe His commandments to live in harmony with their God. Accordingly, the believer requests of God, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children" (Ps. 90:16). Knowing that God's covenant is with believers' children in their generations, he confesses, "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Ps. 103:17). God delights to dwell with His covenant people, and thus their children are Jehovah's inheritance (Ps. 127:3). And the significant blessings of "the man that feareth the LORD" include "children like olive plants round about his table," as well as the promise that he would see his "children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Ps. 128:1, 3, 6).

God establishes His covenant in the line of generations—with believers and their children and their grandchildren.

But that covenant is not with every single child born to believers. Here we are confronted with a conflict that rages in the church world yet today, namely, the place of children in the covenant. Essentially, there are but three positions. The first is that the children of believers are not in the covenant. They are unbelievers, in need of mission work. This is the position of the Baptists. However, many Psalms have been quoted that indicate that God establishes His covenant with believers in their generations. And Psalm 127:3 describes these children as Jehovah's inheritance.

The second position is found in Reformed churches, as noted earlier, that God establishes His covenant with *all* the natural children of believers. According to this view, God comes to *each and every* child at baptism with these promises: "I establish My covenant with you. You belong to Me. I promise to be your Father. I promise that your sins will be forgiven in the blood of Christ. I promise that the Spirit will dwell with you." These promises are spoken by God to each child at baptism. With this condition: *If you will* ***believe*** *my promises!*

The figure often used to illustrate this is a bank check. It is said that at baptism it is as if God gives to each child a check. The check is written out to the child personally, for the "amount" of eternal life, and signed by Jehovah God. The child could do one of three things with that check. First, he might frame it and hang it on the wall—it is his baptism certificate. He might point to it with confidence—I am a baptized member, and I have all the promises of salvation from Jehovah Himself. However, if he dies without endorsing and cashing the check, the check is worth nothing and the man perishes, not having received the eternal life that it promised.

Second, he could tear up the check and throw it away. Such an activity indicates that the baptized individual rejects the promises of God. He despises God and His Word. He will perish. Such is described as a covenant-breaker.

Finally, the child can endorse the check and cash it. He does so by his act of faith—believing the promises of God. In this way he receives all the blessing of salvation subjectively. He is saved. Faith (and perhaps obedience—continuing to believe unto the end of his life) is the condition that God requires him to fulfill.

The Reformed believer sees many problems with this explanation of the place of children in the covenant, of which four will be noted. First, the essence of the covenant is friendship. If God establishes His covenant with every baptized child, then God became friends with Esau, Absalom, and Judas Iscariot. God said of Esau (representing all reprobate), "Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13). God cannot change. He cannot enter into a covenant of love and friendship with one whom He hates eternally.

Second, Psalm 89 teaches emphatically and clearly that God's covenant is eternal and unbreakable. If God establishes His covenant with all baptized children, then all baptized children are and will be eternally in God's covenant of grace. But this flies in the face of the reality that the reprobate perish in hell.

Third, the covenant is with Christ, and then also with those who are chosen in Christ. If God's covenant were established with all the children of believers, then they would all be elected in Christ. But Esau is not, nor ever was, in Christ.

Finally, this leaves the covenant, and salvation, in the power of

man. Ostensibly, God gives the promises to all the baptized children, *conditionally*. If a child does his part, fulfilling the condition, the covenant is ratified, and the promised covenant blessings are his. He is saved. This is the conditional salvation of the Arminians, rejected by the Canons of Dordt. It is Arminianism brought into the covenant.

What then is the position of the children of believers? With whom does God establish His covenant? The answer is, with Christ and the chosen in Christ. Therefore, it necessarily follows that God establishes His covenant with believers and their *elect* children only.

What then must be said of the rest of the children—Esau, Absalom, Judas Iscariot, and any (unknown to men) reprobate child born to believers? What is their place in the covenant? The answer of Scripture is that they are organically (by birth) part of the *tree* of Israel, the church. But they are rejected branches of the tree. Physically, they are children of the flesh and blood of the parents. Outwardly, no one can know with certainty whether these children are truly in Christ, or only united to the tree. God knows, obviously. And the Psalms demonstrate God's discriminating attitude towards the two different kinds of seed.

God speaks to His people this reassuring word in Psalm 50. "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (vv. 14-15). There follows immediately a very different word to the ungodly reprobate in Israel: "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" (v. 16). The psalmist also notes that the spiritual difference between the two seeds is manifest in their lives. God points out what He observes of the wicked: "Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers…" (vv. 17, 18).

In Psalm 55, David speaks of another non-elect in Israel, Ahithophel, and his terrible crimes. "He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (vv. 20, 21). In the face of such treachery and danger, the inspired psalmist

reassures God's people: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (v. 22). And then, "But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days" (v. 23). God has no friendship with the reprobate in Israel.

Or again, consider the harsh judgments of Psalm 78:8-10:

> And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law.

All the history of Israel demonstrates that they could not keep any "conditions" in order to maintain the covenant of God. David confesses his lamentable sins of adultery and murder (Psalms 32 and 38). Solomon took 1,000 wives, many of them heathen, who turned his heart from the Lord. Israel as a people rebelled and forsook God's commandments in the wilderness and later in Canaan. The history of her sad departure from the Lord is found in such Psalms as 78 and 105-107. In the latter, the constant refrain is, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31).

If the covenant is established with every child of believers, on the condition of faith and obedience, all are lost. Man cannot keep or fulfill any conditions.

But that is not how the Psalms present God's covenant with His people. Rather, God powerfully establishes His eternal, unbreakable covenant of grace with believers and their elect children. And the rest have no inheritance, no hope, and no promises spoken to them. They are outside of Christ, the Mediator and Head of the covenant.

Implications for Marriage and the Family

This eternal, unbreakable covenant is reflected in the God-ordained institutions of marriage and the family.

God instituted marriage as a part of the creation of the earth in the first week. God intends marriage to be a beautiful picture of the

covenant relationship between God and His people. Christ is the Husband, and the church is His chosen bride. Scripture makes this very plain in the Song of Solomon, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ephesians 5. In harmony with His covenant of grace, God determined that marriage is to be for life, and the bond cannot be broken, except by God Himself, through death. The Psalms pointed ahead to this reality. One would not expect that the clear teaching of the New Testament would be set forth in the Psalms explicitly, for the Psalms speak of these matters as the believers experience the truth. Thus, it is found in the Psalms in that form—the blessedness of the marriage relationship.

In Psalm 48, Zion, representing the church, is spoken of as a woman. There God speaks of His desire to dwell in Zion. The psalmist sings, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge" (vv. 2, 3). Beautiful, even the most beautiful, is Zion, and the only one in which God dwells. There is none else for Him. The psalmist concludes this Psalm with another description of the remarkable character of Zion, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following" (vv. 12, 13). And the church confesses that this God (husband) "is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (v. 14). Forever He is our God; our Guide unto death. Faithful, absolutely trustworthy, is Jehovah God, the church's Husband.

Another Psalm that captures this relationship beautifully is the forty-fifth. Verse one speaks of the king, which is Solomon, and who is a picture of Christ. The Psalm extols His beauty, power, and majesty: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (vv. 6-7, which Hebrews 1 ascribes to Christ). Then verse 9 introduces a queen, "And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift" (v. 12). She is a king's daughter, and therefore of royal blood (v. 13). The psalmist's further description of her brings out her beauty and her purity: "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought

unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee" (vv. 13, 14).

In addition, the Psalms bring out the blessedness of marriage. Psalm 128 speaks of the blessedness of the man that fears the LORD, and one aspect is that "his wife shall be like a fruitful vine" and the living, spiritual fruit-bearing core of his home—"on the sides"—the very inside—of his house. This is not surprising, since the beautiful and blessed relationship of marriage must reflect the relationship of God and His people—the covenant relationship.

The God-fearing husband delights in his wife. He sees God's work in her and rejoices. He honors her as his glorious bride. The wife likewise loves her husband, honors him as her head, and lives her life unto him, as the church to Christ. Husband and wife are knit together in love. They grow more and more in love, and nothing can separate them. Marriage is for life—they know that, and they live gladly out of that expectation. If differences arise, divorce is not an option. They cannot forsake each other any more than God could forsake Zion, or Zion her God. This knowledge builds trust in the marriage relationship and enables them to grow in love and intimacy.

One practical implication for today is that Reformed young people in their dating must seek a godly spouse. The godly young man seeks a wife that reflects the spiritual beauty that the church has. The believing young woman desires a husband that mirrors the spiritual strength of Christ. They would never consider dating an unbeliever. They are not satisfied to find someone that is "generally Christian." They desire unity in the home, which unity begins with faith in Christ and conviction concerning the Reformed faith. Which God will we serve? One who loves all men, desires to save all, but fails? Or the God who loves His chosen alone and saves them infallibly?

Another requirement in marriage that reflects God's covenant of grace is that divorce is not an option—except in the case of adultery—the one ground, even as God would—for a time—thrust Israel away from Him for her spiritual adultery with idols. But even divorce is not the breaking (that is, severing or dissolving) of the marriage bond. It is a living apart. Reconciliation is possible and desired, as when God took His people back from captivity after seventy years.

Marriage is for life, and only God, through death, severs the bond

that unites husband and wife. A conditional covenant will allow divorce and remarriage, for the conditional covenant is breakable and temporary. But the unconditional covenant that God establishes with His people in Christ, eternal and unbreakable, that covenant will not allow remarriage so long as the spouse is alive. Obviously, the Psalms, due to the nature of the Psalms—poetry expressing the heartfelt emotions and desires of the believer—do not set forth these matters so clearly as the New Testament gospels and epistles. But the Psalms, on the one hand, affirm the permanence of marriage through the deep expressions of love that the church and the individual believer have for God: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25). And on the other hand, Jehovah constantly expresses His unfailing love and commitment to the Zion that He loves well. The psalmist, speaking in typical language, teaches that there is but one wife for Jehovah: "Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved" (Ps. 78:67-68).

The covenant of grace also has many applications to the homes and families of believers, for the covenant home is another picture of God's covenant relationship with His people. So too, the friendships of believers and their antithetical relationship to the world of the ungodly are molded by God's covenant of grace. The whole of the believer's life, reflected in the Psalms, is determined by his covenant relationship to God, which covenant is an unending, holy relationship of love. These things we only mention in passing without developing them from the Psalms.

A Covenant into Eternity

Because the covenant is eternal, our covenant life does not end with the joys of the covenant in this life only. For the goal of God is not merely that this relationship should exist so long as His church is on earth, and thus limited to time. The covenant is not, as already noted, merely a means to an end, namely, to provide salvation. Rather, the covenant is the *goal*. God determines to live with His people forever. He will bring them into His eternal dwelling place and cause them to see Him face to face in Jesus Christ. The saints will walk and talk with

God, fellowship with Him, and worship Him perfectly. Now in this life God speaks to us by His Word—written and preached. And we speak to Him by means of prayer. But the day comes when we will enjoy fellowship in His presence. Of this certain hope the believer sings: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Ps. 17:15). The psalmist is confident of this even though troubles and sorrow afflict him in this life. He sings, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.… My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:24, 26).

This is eternal life—to know God, but without sin, pain or sorrow, death or even separation. One of the marvelous joys of heaven will be seeing children and grandchildren in heaven gathered about the throne. In vision, the psalmist sings, "God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham" (Ps. 47:8-9).

The believer faces death with confidence in the eternal, unbreakable covenant of grace, as expressed in Psalm 16:9-11.

> Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

All this is ours, because God has established His covenant of friendship with Christ. That makes the covenant eternal, unbreakable, and sure. And the simple faith of the little child who lisps the words of the twenty-third Psalm, become the confident confession of the believer throughout life: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Ps. 23:6). ●

The Battles of the French Reformed Tradition

Thomas Reid

Introduction

When John Calvin died in 1564, the condition of the Reformed churches in his native France gave solid reasons for optimism about their future. In over two thousand places, Reformed worship according to the Scriptures was conducted each Sabbath; churches were especially numerous in the southwest and south central regions. The total number associated with these congregations approached two million souls, almost a fifth of the total population.[1] French Calvinists were found in all strata of society, from the numerous peasants through the burgeoning middle classes, on to the nobility and even to the royal family. The Psalms had been paraphrased into singable, metrical French by Clément Marot (1495-1544) and others, and had attained a popularity in one generation that is truly remarkable. In 1559, the national synod adopted one of the first clearly Calvinistic creeds, the Gallican or French Confession, the first draft of which had been authored by Calvin himself. This Synod also adopted a Rule of Discipline to guide the organization of the churches. The churches were organized into regional synods and a national synod, which met regularly. Reformed books were being printed in the language of the people, a language whose grammar and orthography had been greatly influenced by Calvin in his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Chris-*

1 At the time, France had not attained its now familiar hexagonal shape, since areas in the southeast adjoining Italy only became French during the Second Empire in the 1860s, and Alsace and Lorraine, and some adjoining areas, did not adhere to the French state until the nineteenth or even twentieth centuries. France had about twelve million inhabitants within its contemporary borders at the time, the third largest nation in the world in population, after China and India.

tian Religion.[2] Professor Pierre Courthial writes, "The Reformed faith …manifested itself in every area of human existence—in theology and philosophy, in the sciences and the arts, in town and country, in family and professional life[,] as well as in politics. And it appeared in all social classes…."[3] The Peace of Amboise of 1563 had brought a welcome relief from civil conflict. And by this time, French Protestants had acquired a nickname, Huguenots, an appellation first mentioned by Théodore de Bèze in a letter in 1560, but still a word of uncertain derivation.

The early years of the French Reformed churches had not proven to be easy ones, and, after Calvin's death, the same situation prevailed. The young French Reformed churches were unable to build on their initial burst of growth, for they soon faced the first of six major battles which have confronted them in the past 450 years.

First, the Battle with Political Romanism

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic usurpation of the Christian religion in the western portion of the former Roman Empire had been closely associated with political intrigues to extend and reinforce the authority of the papacy over the emerging nations there. The patchwork quilt of these nations, which developed following the demise of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476, made the task of the political papacy all that easier, especially after the aggrandizing pontificate of Gregory "the Great" (A.D. 540-604, reigned 590-604). France was the first of what would become the major nations of western Europe to be established and quickly became both the largest in extent and population, but also greatest in its association with the papacy. It was "good" King Louis IX (born 1214; reigned 1226-1270) of France who championed the seventh and eighth of the tragic crusades to reconquer the so-called Holy Land for Christendom. And it is no wonder that the papacy moved to Avignon in southern France from 1308 to 1378, its only period based outside Rome in history. The kings of France

2 The first French edition of the *Institutes* appeared in 1541, the last in 1560.

3 Pierre Courthial, "The Golden Age of Calvinism in France, 1533-1633," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World,* ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 76.

and the popes in Rome enjoyed a symbiotic relationship that furthered the aims of each side; France was sometimes dubbed as "the elder daughter of the Church" and certainly thought of herself as such.

When the Protestant Reformation broke out, however, the cozy medieval consensus was severely compromised. In France, the nobility,[4] chafing for centuries under the harsh hegemony of the kings, saw an opening to extend its authority and increase its wealth. Many nobles sided with the Reformers, some sincerely, many not, while almost all the noble families maneuvered to take advantage of the way the Reformation had broken the Medieval consensus for their own gain. The situation degenerated into what was essentially a civil war, usually termed the "Wars of Religion," lasting from 1567 to 1593, in various phases.

The most spectacular event of these Wars was the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 23, 1572, which actually continued for several succeeding days. At this time, the leader of the Protestants was Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (born 1517). Like many other Protestants and Catholics from the provinces, he was in Paris for the marriage of Henry III of Navarre (1553-1610) with Margaret of Valois (1553-1615), a union which further solidified the power of the French crown. At the behest of the queen, Catherine de Medici (1519-1589), Romanists attacked Protestants in their beds, slaughtering thousands in a blind fury that turned the Seine River red. De Coligny was stabbed and tossed from the window of his bedroom, dying on the street below.[5]

The Wars of Religion came to an end only a few years before

4 Noble families in France are distinguished from other families by some form of "de" at the beginning of their names. Reformed theologians Théodore de Bèze and Pierre du Moulin were from noble backgrounds, although the latter, especially, did not benefit financially from the family heritage. The most famous modern example is Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), although more recently, another president of France was of noble birth, Valérie Giscard-d'Estaing (b. 1926).

5 Another prominent victim of the Massacre was Pierre de la Ramée or Ramus (b. 1515), the well-known philosopher and mathematician, whose Reformed convictions were compromised by a rationalistic tendency. See Courthial, "The Golden Age of Calvinism in France," 86-87.

Henry, a Protestant, came to the throne in 1598 as Henry IV, and the relative peace lasted through the reign of Louis XIII, from 1610 to 1643. Henry converted to Romanism before his accession, however, arguing that "Paris was worth a mass." His cavalier attitude toward the truth was all too typical of the French Protestant nobility. Henry IV signed the Edict of Nantes, named for the large city near the mouth of the Loire River, where he was residing in the castle during a tour of his domains, at the time the edict was ready to receive his signature. The Edict proclaimed freedom of worship, so that the national government now protected both true Reformed worship and the false worship of the Romanist mass. France was tired of civil strife, and so, as one early twentieth-century scholar has put it, "Religious toleration became a fashionable philosophy under Henry IV."[6] Nevertheless, at this point, a striking thing happened: French Protestantism stopped growing, never to be restored to its size and strength to this day.

When confronted with an armed foe, French Calvinists had taken up the sword to protect themselves, their property, their churches, and their faith. They did not opt for the pacifism of the so-called Radical Reformation. Because they were not under a Protestant ruler, they could not enjoy his protection, as did so many Lutherans in the German states and Scandinavia. But once a Christian movement determines to use violence to protect and even advance its cause, that movement creates a situation in which the furtherance of the gospel becomes more complicated and difficult. And that leads to the second battle of the French Reformed tradition.

Second, the Battle with Hypothetical Universalism

Following the death of Calvin, theological leadership within the Reformed world devolved upon Théodore de Bèze (1519-1605), also a Frenchman, born in Vézelay in Burgundy.[7] By the time de Bèze died, his position as chief theologian for the French Reformed movement

6 Donald Culross Beattie, *Vence: Immortal Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 126.

7 For many years, the standard work in English on de Bèze has been: Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519-1605* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), originally published in 1899.

had been assumed by Pierre du Moulin (1568-1658).[8] As a child, du Moulin survived the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre hidden by his family's Roman Catholic maid under straw and blankets. After studies in Cambridge with William Whitaker (1548-1595), du Moulin served as professor of philosophy at Leiden from 1592 to 1598, where he taught the notable Remonstrant, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). In 1599, Du Moulin became a pastor in Paris. In 1621, du Moulin began teaching at one of the two theological seminaries of the French Reformed Churches, in the independent city-state of Sedan, near the Belgian border. Jean Cadier has described du Moulin as "a vigorous controversialist."[9] Moreover, though "occasionally harsh as a controversialist, du Moulin was an outstanding shepherd of souls."[10] He was delegated to the Synod of Dordt in 1618, but the French government forbade any French representatives from attending that conclave, so he remained at home. The national synod in Alès in 1620 adopted the Canons of Dordt; du Moulin served as moderator of the synod.[11] It was likely this decision that set off the chain of events to which attention must now be paid.

Strong opposition to the consistent Calvinism of Dordt surfaced at the other French Reformed seminary, situated in Saumur along the Loire River in central France. The first professor there to question the doctrine of double predestination was Paul Testard of Blois (1596?-1670), in his work, *Eirenicon seu synopsis doctrinae de natura et gratia,* published in 1633.[12] But the dominant figure in Saumur was Moise

8 Not much has appeared in print about du Moulin in English. In French, consult Lucien Rimbault, *Pierre du Moulin, 1568-1658: Un pasteur classique à l'âge classique* [Pierre Moulin: A Classic Pastor in the Classic Age] (Paris: J. Vrin, 1966).

9 Jean Cadier, "Pierre du Moulin," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity,* ed. Edwin H. Palmer (Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), 4:469.

10 Cadier, 4:470.

11 John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata: On the Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of Those Famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France* (London: T. Parkhurst and John Robinson, 1692), 2:37-38.

12 Pierre Courthial believed that "the golden age of Calvinism in France"

Amyraut (1596-1664), born near Saumur, who taught from 1626 until his death. Theologically, Roger Nicole observes that Amyraut was "particularly deeply influenced by John Cameron,"[13] the English theologian noted for his rejection of Calvinistic theology and Amyraut's own theological professor. Furthermore, David Sabean maintains that "Amyraut was a rationalist[,] in the sense that he submitted all truths to the test of reason."[14] The promiscuous proclamation of a definite atonement must, therefore, be jettisoned, and Amyraut believed that he had found the way to do it.

Amyraut's controversial career developed in three phases. The first phase, from 1633 until 1641, particularly concerned his work, *A Brief Treatise on Predestination and the Principal Things Which Depend Thereon,* published in 1634.[15] In this work, Amyraut maintained that Jesus Christ died equally for all mankind, on the condition of faith, a sort of "hypothetical universalism" which cut out the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election and decimated its doctrine of definite atonement. Theologians in Holland[16] and Geneva[17] wrote against this

came to an end with the publication of Testard's book, because "this was the first work of a theologian of the Reformed churches in France to undermine," even if only "in a covert way, the faith of these churches as declared in their Confession of 1559 and the Canons of Dordrecht accepted and ratified by their National Synod at Alès." "The Golden Age of Calvinism in France," 75.

13 Roger Nicole, "Amyraldianism," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity,* ed. Edwin H. Palmer (Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), 1:185. Cameron lived from 1579 to 1625.

14 David Sabean, "The Theological Rationalism of Moise Amyraut," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 55, no. 2 (1964): 204.

15 Moise Amyraut, *Brief traitté de la prédestination et de ses principales dépendances* (Saumur: Lesnier & Desbordes, 1634).

16 The Theological Faculty in Leiden wrote a letter to the Synod against Amyraut's formulations. "Furthermore[,] the Synod received the *Synopsis* of Rivet[,] together with the expression of approval of it[,] rendered by the Theological Faculties of Leiden, Franeker, and Groningen." Roger Nicole, *Moyse Amyraut (1596-1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace: First Phase, 1634-1637* (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1966), 107, n5.

17 "From Geneva came a lengthy and very pompous letter indicating the concern of the church in the destinies of the Reformed people in France.

heresy, as did du Moulin and André Rivet (1572-1651) in France. Du Moulin and Rivet appealed against Amyraut's doctrines to the French Reformed Synod, which determined, at its meeting in Alençon in 1637, that: first, Amyraut and Testard were guilty of dissimulation in trying to mask the unacceptable nature of their doctrine; second, that they deserved censure for the language they used in expressing their ideas; and third, following the suggestion of the Swiss, that further discussion of the matter was prohibited. The last decision could not be enforced, since writers residing outside of France were under no obligation to heed the authority of a French Synod. In 1641, Amyraut published a work defending reprobation in an attack on Samuel Hoard's (1599-1658) book *God's Love to Mankind*.[18] Amyraut's thinly disguised effort to pose as an orthodox Reformed theologian to deflect criticism from his own views should have been apparent to everyone.

The second phase of the Amyraldian controversy ran from 1644 to 1649. Frederic Spanheim (1600-1649), a German who had become professor of theology at Leiden in the Netherlands, prepared some theses against universal grace and had a student publicly read them on May 25, 1644.[19] Amyraut believed, accurately, that he was the object

---

It encouraged the National Synod to deal firmly with any heresy that might develop that would run counter to the Reformed Confessions, and specifically[,] to the Synod of Dort. The main solution that was suggested for the present difficulties was to impose 'un profond silence' to all parties that were eager to explore the secrets of God's counsels. The letter also contained a complaint to the effect that both the Swiss cantons and Geneva were displeased at the use made of the names and writings of certain Reformers of the previous century to support views of universal grace that they not hold. The letter was signed by J. Diodati and T. Tronchin, who had been Geneva's delegates to Dort, and three others." Nicole, n6.

18 Samuel Hoard, *God's Love to Mankind* (London: no publisher stated, 1633). John Davenant (1570-1641) and the more orthodox William Twisse (1578?-1646) also wrote against the theology of the same volume.

19 Apparently, professors used their students to make statements in this way. The theses were published later in Friedrich Spanheim, *Exercitationes de gratia universali* (Lugduni Batavorum: Maire, 1646), 1-20, and still later in Friedrich Spanheim, *Disputationum theologicarum miscellanearum pars prima et secunda* (Genevae: Petri Chouet, 1652), 230-236. See: F. P. van Stam, *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur, 1635-1650: Disrupting*

of the attack, and responded with *Dissertationes Quatuor* in 1645,[20] followed by a second edition in 1660.[21] Spanheim wrote *Exertationes de gratia universali,* a mere 2,600 pages in three volumes, in response to the first edition.[22] Amyraut wrote haughtily to Spanheim, in order to gain sympathy as supposedly the undeserving objects of the attacks of ecclesiastical bullies. Du Moulin and Rivet and others also published works against Amyraut. The Acte de Thouars of 1649 brought public polemics largely to a close. But a distinguishable "Saumur School" had emerged, in which Amyraut and Testard had been joined by two other theologians antagonistic to Reformed orthodoxy: Louis Cappel (1585-1658) and Josué de la Place (1596-1655).[23]

The third and final phase of the Amyraldian controversy lasted from 1655 to 1661. Two Parisian pastors, David Blondel (1590-1655) and the more famous Jean Daillé (1594-1670), published works defending Amyraut's doctrines. Even du Moulin's son Louis (1606-1680), professor of history at Oxford University in England, got involved in the polemics against Blondel and Daillé. Amyraut himself chose to remain silent. At the Synod of Loudun in 1659, Daillé was elected moderator, and he and Amyraut were recognized as orthodox. Loudun was the last French National Synod until 1872, for reasons which will be mentioned later.

The popularity of Amyraut's doctrines in France kept increasing during his lifetime, for several reasons. First, Amyraut trained more and more of the French Reformed pastors at the seminary in Saumur, effectively buying their loyalty to their professor's heresy. Second, many of his abler opponents died off: Spanheim in 1649, Rivet in 1651, and du Moulin in 1658, when he was ninety. Third, some of Amyraut's opponents concluded that the differences they had with him stemmed merely from differing language or methodology, and they sinfully fell silent. Fourth, some Huguenots were seduced by Amyraut's argument that his recasting of Calvinism would, by soft-

Debates among the Huguenots in Complicated Circumstances (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1988), 190-195.

20 Saumur: Isaacum Desbordes.

21 Saumur: Isaacum Desbordes.

22 Leiden: J. Maire, 1646.

23 Courthial, "The Golden Age of Calvinism in France," 76.

ening its hard edges, promote union with the Lutherans and lessen the danger of Calvinists abjuring their faith and turning or returning to Romanism. Fifth, many Huguenots believed that the whole controversy was a personal spat that had developed between the aging theological giant Du Moulin and the upstart theologian Amyraut.[24] Sixth, many thought that the orthodox Calvinists of Sedan and the cutting-edge revisionists of Saumur were conducting an institutional fight rather than a theological one. And seventh, many French Reformed pastors and elders feared a schism, which they believed would disastrously weaken the Protestant movement during a period when its persecution by the French government was increasing year by year under Louis XIV.

The results of the Amyraldian heresy were as stark as they were foreseeable and preventable. First, the confessional integrity of the French Reformed churches was lessened, encouraging further dismantling of the attainments of the Calvinistic Reformation. For instance, Claude Pajon (1626-1685) was soon able to get away with denying "that there is any direct[,] internal operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration."[25]

Second, the French Reformed churches became weaker against the renewed onslaught of political Romanism as the seventeenth century progressed, rather than stronger, culminating in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by King Louis XIV (1638-1715) in 1685.

Third, as Roger Nicole observes, "as far as can be seen," Amyraldianism "did not in fact help to promote any basic union with the Lutherans, nor did it materially assist in preventing abjurations to the Roman Catholic faith."[26] The practical advantages envisioned by the recast Calvinism of Amyraut failed to materialize.

Fourth, Nicole, who studied Amyraut for his doctoral dissertation,[27]

24 Such an excuse may have been in many minds in minimizing the important theological differences involved in other, later theological controversies within the Reformed Churches, such as Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) supposedly being challenged by Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) or Klaas Schilder (1890-1952) being perhaps usurped by G. C. Berkouwer (1903-1996).

25 Nicole, "Amyraldianism," 191.

26 Nicole, "Amyraldianism," 192.

27 Much of the bulk of the dissertation is devoted to the first major at-

continues by observing sadly that, despite the desires of its supporters, the theology of Amyraldianism "did provide a bridge toward Arminianism and perhaps toward the Semi-Pelagian tendencies of the Church of Rome. The advantages which Amyraut had envisioned failed to materialize, and the dangers against which his opponents had warned did in fact eventuate."[28] Confronted with the historical record of a theologian who worked so hard for so long to obfuscate his teachings, one wonders if that bridge toward Arminianism was not Amyraut's intention all along.

When the church speaks with a divided voice, it fails to rally its troops to the cause of Christ. Such was the situation of the French Reformed churches in the mid-seventeenth century, and they were therefore weakened as they entered into their next battle.

Third, the Battle with Hysterical Subjectivism

As the pace of governmental regulation and persecution increased during the seventeenth century, many French Protestants emigrated. King Louis XIV, one of the most despicable despots of human history, came to spend one-third of the gross national product of France on his precious Versailles domain. Cut off from his own people, who were starving so that he could prance through life surrounded by sycophants of various pathologies attracted to him like a moth to light, he was led to believe that the brilliance of his nation's Roman Catholic leaders had led every single one of his subjects into the fold of Rome. Thus, Louis XIV signed the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 because he erroneously thought that its protections were unnecessary. Yet if so, why did the Revocation make it a capital crime to remain a Protestant within France or to flee the country for religious freedom as a Protestant elsewhere? Hundreds of thousands of Huguenots fled anyway, mostly to the Germanic states, the Low Countries, and the British Isles, but some to more distant locales like South Africa, South Carolina, and even St. Helena Island. Since Protestants were over-represented in the productive middle class, the French economy was devastated, leading to the rapid decline of French power throughout the world, includ-

tempt at a complete bibliography of Amyraut, including locations in libraries worldwide.

28 Nicole, "Amyraldianism," 192.

ing the loss of the enormous North American colonies of France in 1763.[29] At the time of the tercentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, French President François Mitterand (1916-1996) spoke at the official recognition of the anniversary and openly admitted as much.[30] The health of the Reformed Churches can very much effect the destiny of nations, for both good and ill.

Those Protestants who remained in France responded in several different ways to the new reality. In certain localities, local nobles provided protection from the worst effects of the persecution, such as in the Poitou in west central France. The irregular terrain in the Cevennes Mountains of south central France, full of natural caves and isolated gullies, protected other Huguenots. To this day, these two areas are the historic heartlands of French Protestantism.[31] Family worship was conducted clandestinely by the remnant, since public worship was all but impossible. Sadly, by the hundreds of thousands, other French Protestants recanted and returned to Rome, although a goodly number no doubt maintained their Protestant beliefs privately. It is fascinating to compare the experience of the French Huguenots with that of the Scottish Covenanters. During the 1680s, the former were entering into the worse persecution they would ever experience, while the latter were leaving their Killing Times, although the Covenanters could not know it until around 1689.

Virtually all the Protestant church buildings, called temples, were torn down as a final indignity; only a dozen or so still exist from

29 This defeat cemented France's ceding of world domination to Great Britain, with enormous repercussions, including the domination of the English language.

30 "Allocution de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, aux cérémonies du tricentenaire de la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes, sur la tolérance en matière politique et religieuse et l'histoire du protestantisme en France, Paris, Palais de l'UNESCO, vendredi 11 octobre 1985" [Speech of Mr. François Mitterand, President of the Republic, at the Ceremonies concerning the Tricentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, about Toleration in the Matters of Politics and Religion and on the History of French Protestantism, Paris, Palace of UNESCO, Friday October 11, 1985.]

31 Although the later acquisition of Alsace added a third area of Protestant strength, albeit one historically speaking Alsatian, a German, not French, dialect.

before 1685, having been maintained for other purposes.[32] Pastors worked underground at great personal danger; when discovered, they were tried, convicted, and stripped and publicly executed, usually by being tied to a wheel and slowly beaten to death with metal rods.[33] For decades, no regional meetings of church judicatories could meet, leading to further theological and practical decline among the remnant French Protestants. These times were truly the wilderness years for French Reformed Protestantism.

In the Cevennes Mountains, some of the Protestants took up arms to protect themselves and their families. For several years, these men held the forces of the most powerful king on earth at bay, disappearing along mountain paths into the caves and crevices where the army hesitated to follow them. These fighters were nicknamed Camisards, after the French word for the white shirts they wore into battle.[34] Their leader, Pierre Laporte (1680-1704), took as his *nom de guerre* Roland; his family home in Mialet has been used, since the nineteenth century, for the most important historical museum of French Protestantism. Today its grounds are used for an annual conference that attracts over ten thousand Huguenots each September.

The Revolt of the Camisards embarrassed Louis XIV sufficiently that he replaced his generals and ordered the demolition of all the villages in the High Cevennes, even if they were inhabited by Romanists; about twenty thousand people were thus displaced, and considerable opprobrium fell upon the aging dictator. Through various intrigues, the Revolt was finally ended.

But, the resort to arms of the French Huguenots occurred not only because of those who were driven to respond in kind to the intense persecution of which they were the objects. The Camisards were encouraged to fight by the testimonies of many Protestants who maintained that they were modern prophets and, especially, prophetesses, able to envision the result of the armed opposition to the King and his

32 Yves Krumenacker, "Les temples protestants français, XVIe – XVII siècles" [Protestant Church Buildings, 16th and 17th Centuries], *Chrétiens et sociétés* num. sp. 1 (2011), note 2.

33 One of the most prominent Reformed pastors, Claude Brousson (1647-1698), suffered such a gruesome end at Montpellier.

34 Modern women may wear a "cami" or "camisole," which is from the same French root.

forces, which Alan Clifford describes accurately as "a desperate but deceptive remedy for the oppressed."[35] The prominence of certain women among the sorely persecuted Huguenots helped to open up the French Reformed churches in succeeding centuries to the ecclesiastical leadership of women, rather than seeing in these dreamers a warning of what not to do.

One woman who defied the king, but in a more appropriate fashion, Marie Durand (1711-1776),[36] has entered into the French consciousness. She was incarcerated in the Tower of Constance in Aigues Mortes for thirty-eight years (1730-1768), surviving the experience by a few years. At any time, she could have been released from custody if she had embraced the pope's false religion. She refused, laboriously chiseling into the stone floor of her dungeon one word: *resistez* [resist]. People still flock to the Tower of Constance to gaze at this intrepid woman's testimony down the centuries.

Another more wholesome response to the excesses of the Camisards and the visionaries was the establishment of a theological seminary for French Reformed pastors in Lausanne, Switzerland, headed by Antoine Court (1696-1760).[37] The seminary was established in 1730 and lasted until 1812. Court intended to inculcate a Reformed theological vision into the young men who studied under him, so that they could take that message to those who were increasingly being guided by emotion rather than Scripture and the Reformed confessions. While the level of persecution began to ebb after the death of Louis XIV in 1715, a death that was celebrated throughout France and its empire, the seminary was nicknamed the "School of the Martyrs." Most of its graduates did end their ministries executed by their own government for their religion.

35 Alan C. Clifford, *Sons of Calvin: Three Huguenot Pastors* (Norwich, England: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1999), 53.

36 D. Benoit, *Marie Durand, prisonnière à la tour de Constance, 1715-1768: Son temps, sa famille, ses compagnes de captivité* [Marie Durand: Prisoner in the Tower of Constance, 1715-1768: Her Times, Her Family, Her Companions in Captivity] (Dieulefit, Drôme: Nouvelle société d'éditions de Toulouse, 1935). For a recent biography, written in English for the young, consult Simonetta Carr, *Marie Durand* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

37 Clifford, *Sons of Calvin,* 54-62.

The official end of the persecution occurred in 1787, under King Louis XVI (1754-1793), with a Declaration of Toleration. But it was too little, too late. Two years later, the King had to call the Parliament into session in order to fund his government, with unforeseen repercussions. The French Reformed churches had eked out an existence in certain locations, but the damage had been done. First, they were a fraction of the size they once had been. Second, they were beset by theological error, both Amyraldianism and Emotionalism. Third, they had few ministers and elders to lead them. Fourth, they had lost all their institutions and buildings. And fifth, they were a despised minority, subject to the whims of the Roman Catholic majority in unsettled times. All these factors left them greatly weakened in the face of the next battle that they were to face.

Fourth, the Battle with Growing Secularism

The French Revolution proclaimed the rights of man without recourse to the God of the Bible in order to establish them. The revolutionaries enshrined the motto of *liberté, egalité, fraternité* [liberty, equality, fraternity], as the essence of the ethos of the French nation. Simply put, France replaced an authoritarian man with an authoritarian ideology, secularism. While French Protestants did not suffer the same depredations as did Roman Catholics,[38] it was only after 1815, when Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) definitively left the leadership of the nation, that Protestants began to emerge from their long period in the wilderness.

The French Reformed churches have been hobbled, however, by an enduring legacy of the Napoleonic Age, his legal code, which remains largely intact to this day in France. Two features loomed particularly important. First, all churches are defined legally as "associations," like the garden club or a literary society. The government decrees that anyone who pays a nominal amount annually, an amount set by the government of the day, can be a member of the association, even be eligible for leadership posts within the association. The French Reformed churches have accepted these standards; they were far too

38 Many priests and nuns were killed (usually guillotined), and Roman properties were seized and redistributed to those favored by whoever led the current regime.

weak to oppose them at the time they were adopted. As a result, the membership of the churches has become too nominal, ecclesiastical discipline has proved almost impossible, and little effective ruling eldership has developed.

Second, the Reformed Churches were recognized, along with Roman Catholicism, as state churches. Ministers were paid by the government, and church buildings were erected where there were sufficient numbers of Protestants to justify doing so. From one end of France to another, rectangular buildings, often in prominent places, were erected. The benches centered on a high pulpit under a sounding board, with a communion table on the floor in front of the pulpit. The French Reformed churches became financially, and psychologically, dependent upon the State.

This semi-Erastian system lasted for about a century. In the 1890s, France was convulsed by a controversy connected to the conviction of a Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935) for treason with France's arch-enemy, Germany. Roman Catholic leaders looked upon the Dreyfus Affair as a God-given opportunity to reassert their declining influence on secularizing French culture and to marginalize Protestants as well as Jews. Mass protests from one end of France to the other viciously attacked both groups, judging them as traitors to the nation.[39] After years of controversy, it became clear that Dreyfus had been framed by his military superiors, only because of his religious beliefs, in the rush to identify the traitor. The secularists in turn saw their opportunity against the discredited Roman Catholic faith, and, coming to dominate the government, cut off all religious groups from its financial subsidies in 1905. French Roman Catholics survived the shock pretty well, but French Protestants did not. Their national system of schools closed down, ministers' salaries were slashed, and the plethora of Protestant institutions erected in the nineteenth century were largely abandoned.[40]

39 Prof. Pierre Birnbaum, in *The Anti-Semitic Moment: A Tour of France in 1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), has described in great detail such incidents focused on just one year, 1898.

40 For the Universal Exposition in Chicago in 1893, Frank Puaux prepared a large volume to describe them: *Les œuvres du protestantisme français au XIXe siècle* [The Activities of French Protestantism in the 19th Century] (Paris: Comité Protestant Français, 1893).

The rise of the secularists had won a decisive battle in favor of their doctrine of *laicité* (laicism).

The pairing of Jews with Protestants, so evident in the Dreyfus controversy, highlighted a real affinity between the two religious traditions, for so long despised minorities in a rough sea of bigoted Roman Catholicism. During the German occupation of France during the Second World War, twelve Reformed villages in the northern Cevennes Mountains centered on Chambon-sur-Lignon successfully hid thousands of Jews, mostly children, from the Germans, as well as members of other groups threatened by the collaborationist Vichy Regime of Marechal Philip Petain (1856-1951).[41] But both groups, Jews and Huguenots, have largely succumbed to the siren song of secularism, becoming largely indistinguishable from the secularists around them, since another battle had engulfed them.

Fifth, the Battle with Post-Kantian Liberalism

The rise of the destructive criticism of the Bible and the resulting development of anti-biblical and anti-confessional theology in the nineteenth century did not leave French Protestants unscathed.[42] In the chaos that followed France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and the end of the Third Empire of Napoleon III,[43] a national synod was able to convene without government interference. This synod adopted a "Declaration of Faith" that the liberals rejected,

41 Philip Hallie brought world-wide renown to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, in his 1979 book, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Numerous books, articles, and even films have added further light to this remarkable story; see Patrick Henry, "Le Chambon-sur-Lignon: 1979-2015," *The French Review* 89, no. 3 (March 2016): 83-96.

42 "Ses représentants en France ont pour nom [Timothée] Colani [1824-1888], [Félix] Pécaud [1828-1898], [Edmond Henri Adolphe] Scherer [1815-1889], [Athanase Josué] Coquerel [1820-1875]." Maurice Longeiret, *Églises réformées évangéliques: Les leçons de l'histoire* [Reformed Evangelical Churches: Lessons from History] (Nîmes, France: Éditions "Lumière des Hommes," 1997), 4.

43 A nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, born in 1808, he became president in 1848, ruled as emperor 1852-1870, and died in 1873.

leading them to form a national synod separate from the "conservatives" or "evangelicals". The latter had been training ministers in a seminary in Montauban, in southwestern France. The liberals had been training their pastors in the theological faculty of the University of Strasbourg in the region of Alsace, now cut off from France by the German victory. Thus, the French liberals cooperated with the French Lutherans in creating a new seminary in Paris in 1877, where imposing facilities were built for the seminary two years later.[44]

In October 1906, an effort was made by some church leaders to mend the split, calling for a joint synod to meet in the small town of Jarnac, in the Charente Department of western France.[45] Jarnac proved to be a double failure: not only was the breach not healed, but a third synod emerged from it, although this Jarnac Synod merged with the liberal synod in 1912.[46] By 1938, weakened by liberalism within and the ravages of World War I without, particularly on the Reformed Churches located in the battlefield areas of northern France, the Liberal Reformed Church, most of the Evangelical Reformed Churches and Methodist Churches, and some of the Free Churches, merged to form *l'Église Réformée de France* (the Reformed Church of France). The doctrinal agreement that permitted this union is vague—and non-binding anyway.[47] By 1948, the united church had begun ordaining women to the ministry. Eventually, the Reformed Church in France merged with the much smaller Lutheran Church to form the United Protestant Church of France in May 2013.

44 The Seminary is located in the 14th Arrondissement in southern Paris on the Left Bank of the Seine River near the university quarter.

45 Wilfred Monod (1867-1943), a member of a prominent French Protestant family, championed this effort.

46 Daniel Langlois-Berthelot, "Documents: de l'Assemblée de Jarnac (1906) à 'l'Union des Églises réformées de France' (1912)" [Documents: From the Assembly at Jarnac (1906) to the Union of the Reformed Churches of France (1912)] *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 140, no. 2 (avril-juin 1994): 285-291.

47 The theological statement of the 1872 synod was not as strong, but was required of ministers. The 1938 statement (written in 1936) was optional for them. How is that progress?

The theological liberalism of the Reformed churches prompted liturgical experiments that moved the churches far from their Genevan roots. First, musical instruments, usually harmoniums, were introduced into worship, to replace the a cappella singing in worship inherited from Calvin three centuries earlier. Second, with the development of a French hymnody during the nineteenth century,[48] the Psalms were gradually supplanted as the text for singing the praises of the Lord. Third, liturgical elaboration bloomed, destroying the simple, spiritual, dialogical worship of the Reformed tradition. Late in the century, the Reformed Church of the Spirit in western Paris, developed a highly liturgical form of worship, with homilies replacing sermons, extemporaneous prayers giving way to read prayers, and the authoritative reading of Scripture transformed into responsive readings.[49] The churches, even the evangelical ones, gradually embraced these changes. The liberals found the detailed liturgy very useful, as it permitted them to mouth orthodox formulations while personally disbelieving the normal sense of the words. The effects of this liturgical revolution were devastating: pastors became tied to their liturgical books; worship became overly formal; liberalism advanced through subterfuge; and the people stopped attending the boring ceremonies. The average French Reformed church today has an attendance of about ten percent of its overall membership.

The neo-modernism of Karl Barth (1886-1968), swept into France beginning in the mid-1920s,[50] and had become the most popular form of theological liberalism by the time of the eruption of World War II in September 1939. Jean Baubérot explains its popularity as follows: "By closely mixing orthodoxy and dialectic, [Barthianism] gave to the members of the middle class of Protestant intellectuals (and especially

48 Some hymns were written from a liberal perspective, others from an evangelical one (see the next battle).

49 A later iteration of this liturgy has been helpfully translated into English as: *The Sunday Service of the French Reformed Church* (London: French Protestant Industrial Mission, circa 1950).

50 The first work of Barth to appear in the French language appears to have been *Parole de Dieu et parole humaine* (Paris: Librairie Protestante, 1924); translated into English as *The Word of God and the Word of Man. L'Epître aux Philippiens [The Epistle to the Philippians]* followed in 1926, published by Labor et Fides in Geneva.

the new generation) a possibility to master secularization and to move towards…ecumenical dialogue."[51] As in other countries, Barthianism became passé in the tumultuous 1960s and has been replaced by more radical theologies. The most prominent late twentieth-century theologian at the Paris Seminary was Georges Casalis (1917-1987), whose motto was: "A conclusion is a prison."

Theological liberalism became closely associated with socialist politics by the end of the nineteenth century, in part as a reaction to the perceived Romanism of the more conservative parties. In May 1968, the famous student revolts against the French system began among students at the Paris Protestant Seminary. These students even managed to have Dr. Frank Michaeli (1907-1977) removed from the chair of Old Testament; as a Barthian, he was considered a reactionary, and they, as fascists, felt free to put him in the unemployment queue. Meanwhile, another battle was being fought by the French Reformed churches.

Sixth, the Battle with Pragmatic Evangelicalism

The French Reformed churches had hardly emerged from centuries of persecution when they faced a new challenge from the evangelical movement. Spawned in the Great Awakenings of the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Anglo-American world, this challenge spread to other countries.

The evangelical revival entered France via Switzerland, where a pair of remarkable Scottish brothers spearheaded the effort. Robert Haldane (1764-1842) and James Haldane (1768-1851) centered their work in the city of Geneva.[52] Their most important convert was César Malan (1787-1864), pastor of St. Peter's Church in Geneva,

51 "L'émergence d'une orthodoxie nouvelle au XXe siècle: Les causes de l'apparition du mouvement barthien en France" [The Emergence of a New Orthodoxy in the Twentieth Century: The Causes for the Emergence of the Barthian Movement in France], *Études théologiques et religieuses* 66, no. 3 (1991): 397.

52 See Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert and James Haldane* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), and, more broadly, Kenneth J. Stewart, *Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicalism and the Francophone "Réveil", 1816-1849* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006).

the congregation served earlier by John Calvin himself.[53] Malan was removed from the pulpit when he continued to preach election and related biblical doctrines, despite the Geneva Consistory's instruction to the contrary. Malan became an itinerant preacher throughout Switzerland and France and even beyond. Today, Malan is best known as the "French Isaac Watts," because he wrote a large number of hymns in order to replace the Psalms of Scripture in the worship of God. Other leaders of the revival work were Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné (1794-1872), an important church historian, and Louis Gaussen (1790-1863), a theologian who wrote an often-republished work on the inspiration of Scripture, *Theopneustia,* as well as an important work on *The Canon of the Holy Scriptures from the Double Point of View of Science and Faith.*[54]

The closest the French Reformed churches came to a Reformed theologian in the nineteenth century was Professor Emile Doumergue (1844-1937) of the Protestant Seminary in Montauban, author of the monumental, seven volume set, *Jean Calvin: les hommes et les choses de son temps.*[55] However, Prof. Doumergue's interest in Calvin was more antiquarian than theological. This Seminary moved in 1919 to the university city of Montpellier in south central France and was paired with the Protestant Seminary in Paris into an Institute of Protestant Theology in the 1970s.

But the early emphasis on election in the evangelical movement should not obscure the fact that many of the evangelicals were at best Amyraldian in their theology. And, as already noted, the revivalists embraced changes in the Reformed liturgy that had originated among the theological liberals.

The Reformed Churches were hobbled in their response to these tendencies by the refusal of successive governments, of widely-differing political tendencies, to permit a national synod to meet. But, the

53 Solomon Caesar Malan, *The Life, Labours, and Writings of Caesar Malan* (London: James Nisbet, 1869), and often reprinted.

54 Both of these books are available used or in pdf form online at: reformedbooksonline.com.

55 *John Calvin: The Men and the Events of His Time,* published by G. Bridel in Lausanne between 1899 and 1927, but never translated into English. [This is the author's translation of the French title—Ed.]

Churches were sufficiently Reformed to prompt frustrated evangelical believers to secede. The Free Churches left in 1849,[56] followed by the Baptists a year later, and the Methodists in 1868. While inevitable in many ways, and even desirable, these secessions removed some of the most dynamic and anti-liberal members and leaders from the Reformed Churches at a critical time in their battle against Post-Kantian Liberalism.

The Pentecostal Movement came to France in the early twentieth century and created the usual unrest within all the churches, including the French Reformed church, before and after 1938. The French Assemblies of God, organized in 1932, had become the largest non-Romanist denomination in France by the late 1970s, in terms of actual attendance at Sabbath worship.

During the 1920s, a revival movement swept through many of the Reformed parishes in the Alps, particularly in the Department of the Drôme; the movement was nicknamed "The Brigade of the Drôme." Quasi-Calvinists, they experienced, as is usually the case, rapid decline after the initial enthusiasm of the revival wore off. Their most important leader was Jean Cadier (1898-1981), author of *The Man God Mastered: John Calvin,*[57] and later a professor at the seminary in Montpellier.

Following World War II, a wave of missionaries from the burgeoning Evangelical movement in North America and the British Isles came to France, establishing congregations in the cities and producing a large number of denominations and a few institutions.[58] Already, evangelicals under the leadership of Ruben Saillens (1855-1942), had established a Bible college at Nogent-sur-Marne, east of Paris,

56 Frédéric Monod (1794-1863) led the Free Churches out of the Reformed Churches; the denomination continues today. *L'union des Églises évangéliques libres de France: Ses origines, son histoire, son œuvre* [The Union of Free Evangelical Churches of France: Its Origins, Its History, Its Work] (Paris: Chapelle Taitbout, 1899). Claude Baty, *Les églises évangéliques libres, 1849-1999* [TheFree Evangelical Churches, 1948-1999] (Valence: Édition spéciale L.L.B., 1999).

57 Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960.

58 Allen V. Koop, *American Evangelical Missionaries in France, 1945-1975* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986). Missionaries from the British Isles and other parts of Europe also came to France.

in 1921.[59] Later evangelicals created a seminary in Vaux-sur-Seine in 1965; its most prominent leader has been Henri Blocher (1937-), a Reformed Baptist from a distinguished French evangelical family, who is now retired.

The Charismatic movement emerged in the post-war period and has influenced the worship of the French Reformed churches towards a greater informalism and emotionalism. With the surge of African and Caribbean evangelical immigrants into the Reformed churches in recent decades, such tendencies have been amplified and imitated.

The growth of evangelical churches in France in recent years has been so obvious that *Christianity Today* devoted a cover story to the phenomenon in 2005.[60] The temptation for Reformed believers and churches is to mimic the theology and practices of evangelicals in order to experience similar growth, failing to recognize that this growth has come largely by transfer from the flood of evangelical immigrants joining established French congregations or founding their own churches. As a result, a certain pragmatism has been affecting the French Reformed churches.

Conclusion

The French Reformed churches have fought these six major battles since the mid-sixteenth century. And where do these battles leave these churches today? They are confused (when not contradictory) in their theology and practice, uncertain of the goals for their cash-strapped ministries, divided in their vision for future witness, and withdrawn into themselves with little impact upon the highly-secular society around them.[61] The sad reality is that the French Reformed churches

59 Almost two thousand students have graduated from Nogent during nearly a century of instruction there. The standard biography of Saillens was written by one of his daughters, Marguerite Wargenau-Saillens: *Ruben et Jeanne Saillens, évangélistes* [Ruben and Jeanne Saillens, Evangelists] (Paris: Les bons semeurs, 1947), reprinted in 2014 by Éditions Ampelos. Despite the title, it is almost totally focused on Ruben Saillens.

60 Agnieszka Tennent, "The French Reconnection: Europe's Most Secular Country Rediscovers Its Christian Roots," *Christianity Today* 49, no. 3 (March 2005): 28-35.

61 Nonetheless, "Protestants" have been found in many prominent positions since the nineteenth century, especially in business and the military,

have abandoned much of what is good in their tradition as a result of their responses to the six great battles that they have faced over the past four and a half centuries. The only bright spot is a certain Calvinistic reform movement that has, in the past century, taken shape and advanced, but remains too much an abstract idea rather than an ecclesiastical reality. A future address will consider this movement's founder, Auguste Lecerf (1872-1943), as well as the movement itself. ●

although some have also been found in politics. The Protestant Peugeot family created one of the major French automobile manufacturers; after they sold their interest in the company, they watched helplessly as the quality of the cars that were produced in their name declined. Three prime ministers of the Fifth Republic (established in 1958) have been Protestants in religious background, although not in personal belief and practice: Maurice Couve de Murville (1907-1999, served 1968-1969); Michel Rocard (born 1930, served 1988-1991); and Lionel Jospin (born 1937; served 1997-2002).

The Blessedness of the Dead

Sermon at the occasion of the decease of
The Reverend Hendrik DeCock
In life, preacher in the Christian Secession (Faithfully Reformed)
Church in Groningen, etc.

by
S. VanVelzen

Preacher in the Christian Secession (Faithfully Reformed) Church
in Amsterdam

Translated by Marvin Kamps

Published at 's Granvenhage
By J. Van Golverdinge
1842

Ecclesiastically Approved

The immediately following sermon, as far as concerns specifically its major elements, was preached by the undersigned on the day of the Lord, after the report was sent to me that the venerable and learned Rev. Hendrik DeCock, Christian Secession Reformed pastor and preacher at Groningen, had died on the 14th of this month.

While contemplating the facts presented by this death, I was, indeed, encouraged regarding this great loss for the church. The chief reason, however, why I decided to publish this sermon, is the admonition of the apostle Paul: "Remember them…who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7).

May the Lord grant His blessing to the same and, therefore, may this effort serve to help us remember thankfully the righteous.

Simon VanVelzen
Amsterdam,
The 28th of November 1842.

Introduction

"But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). With these words of the prophet Habakkuk, all men are commanded to submit reverently to the holy will of God. "Be silent," says the prophet, "let the whole earth be silent in the presence of God." This, indeed, happens when we acknowledge that God's doing is always an act of majesty and glory. Then we do not accede any longer to the proud imaginations of our flesh. Then we do not find fault any longer with the Lord's way. We do not continue then to argue with our Maker. But if we are silent, then we are humble in our souls before God, submissive to His holy good-pleasure, while we acknowledge the justice of His judgments.

We all have weighty reasons to assume such an attitude of mind. The Lord is, after all, in His holy temple, heaven, the secure place of His dwelling. Heaven is the holy and glorious palace of Jehovah. On earth the luster of His majesty is hidden, but in heaven God reveals His magnificence. There the hosts of angels surround His throne and there He is known and worshiped by the souls of those made perfectly righteous. From there as well He rules all things according to the counsel of His will. And because Jehovah is so infinitely, highly exalted above us poor and short-sighted mortals, how foolish and audacious is it to desire to censure His ways! On the contrary, how emphatically are we not obligated to acknowledge with reverence and adoration everything that He executes and permits to occur, even when we cannot perceive its good. The majority of people do not rightly know God's majesty, therefore, they sense no need for the mediator. Therefore, too, they minimize their sin even though each sin is committed against God. Therefore, they are also dissatisfied with the circumstances that in God's providence they encounter.

It is always fitting for us, beloved,[1] to be submissive to God's holy will. In particular, however, are we called to the exercise of this virtue when the Lord's ways impact us and appear threatening. He is, of course, wise; He is sovereign. God is great and we do not understand Him.

1 I substituted the commonly used expression "beloved" for the direct address of VanVelze, which was written in the abbreviated form M.H. for "Mijn Heeren," or "My Lords" (M.K.).

Especially now it is appropriate for us to be submissive humbly to the Lord's will. It has pleased Him to take from His vineyard a dear laborer. The man who was esteemed as the most prominent pillar among us, the dearly loved and valuable shepherd and pastor, our beloved brother DeCock, has been delivered from the battle. This is a painful loss for us, and for the whole church. But the Lord is in His holy temple, be silent before Him all the earth!

May the Lord teach us to be silent; and may He teach us that what appears for the church to be a matter of sorrow will be used for our instruction and advantage. We urge you, therefore, to come to Him who dwells in His holy temple.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

For all of us it is surely appropriate to think often of our death, for who is there now living who will not see death; who is there who will free his soul from the strength of the grave? Every moment could be for us our last. If the Lord takes our breath from us, then we die. Yet, then as well our lot is irrevocably decided; then the time wherein God presents His grace is past. Whoever, therefore, has not completely abandoned his eternal welfare, will pray with David: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom' (Ps. 90:12). We must be prepared in time for that significant moment in which the soul will leave the body.

Because all men must die and no man knows when death shall knock, therefore, the examination whether we can expect to die as the *blessed* of the Lord is of extreme significance. Do you have this expectation, beloved? Many people would respond by saying, "We hope that it is true of us." Many, when a relative is taken from this life, comfort themselves with the thought that the deceased has entered into the regions of the blessed. But on what basis does that hope rest? What is the ground for thinking that? How foolish, really, do people deal with a matter that is of such importance, when they treat it so superficially! A groundless hope will be put to shame.

Beloved, we must not proceed in this matter on the basis of an

unfounded hope and on the basis of some statements of mere men. Only what God declares is eternally true; we cannot fall if we have His testimony. I have read aloud for you this witness: "I heard," said the apostle John, "a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write" (Rev. 14:13). God spoke to the apostle John from heaven; and what He had said, that had to be written out. The church must have perfect certainty throughout all the ages of the testimony that God wills to give. As a firm, sure promise it must be preserved, heard, and read for the encouragement for aye of all believers. "Write," the voice said, "Blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord from henceforth" (Rev. 14:13).[2] And this witness is also confirmed by the Holy Spirit: "Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). Recognize in this text, therefore, a careful description of those for whom death is blessedness. While we consider this text, let us pay attention first, to the indispensable requirement to die as blessed; second, to the blessedness itself; finally, to the truth that their works do follow them.

The Indispensable Requirement to Die as Blessed

The Lord, in whom the blessed are said to have died, is Jesus Christ the Son of God. He was able to say truthfully of Himself: "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). He is the incomparable, almighty Lord, to whom all power has been given in heaven and on earth. He holds the keys of hell and death. When the heavenly creatures boast of His glory, then they say with loud voices: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Then they fall down on their faces and worship him, saying: "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou has taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned" (Rev. 11:17). As the Lord, He has revealed Himself in the salvation of His people; therefore, the blessed say again: "Thou…hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9). He has paid

2 This "henceforth" is an old English rendering of the Greek; the Dutch Bible renders it "from now on," *van nu aan.* VanVelzen will come back to this element of the promise (M.K.).

for all their sins; not one of their sins remains on their account to be paid by them. He gave a dear price for them; it was not [the price] of gold or silver but [the price of] His own blood, the blood of the Son of God. He had left the state of glory. He took upon Himself our flesh and blood. He gave His soul a ransom for many. He allowed His body to be nailed to the cross. So He, who knew no sin nor did any sin, was made by God to be sin for us; yes, He became a curse for us, so that we would become the justified of God in Him. We caused by our sins that humiliation and that burdensome labor for Him! As the Lord, He liberated His people from the domination of Satan, of sin, and of the world. Therefore, He became partaker of our flesh and blood, so that through His death He might destroy that one who had the power of death, namely the devil, and so that He should save all those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. He made them subject to Himself. They know themselves to be wholly dependent upon Him. They learn to obey Him. He does not allow them to walk according to their own desires and opinions. Others are able without a care to live in their own lusts; however, the redeemed of Christ become, as concerns their own desires, self-denying. But Christ has also committed Himself, though it be of grace, to care for them in love, to preserve, and protect them. Therefore, as well, they have no need of their own power, or wisdom, or virtue, or anything of such a kind; because He—we confess with the apostle— "of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30). In Him we have everything.

This identification, "Lord," already makes known to us, therefore, a previous relationship that His own have in Him. In our text that relation is even more strongly indicated, when it is said of believers that they die "in the Lord." We need not here think only of those who have merited the crown of martyrdom. All upright believers, when also they are lowered into the grave in times of peace and though spared external persecution, die in the Lord. They, of course, are in Christ. "He that abideth in me," Jesus says, "and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John 15:5). Paul says about that: "We have become one plant with him;" and again: "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Rom. 6:5; Col. 3:3). In another text we read: "I am

crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).[3]

The spiritual oneness with Jesus, which is indicated by these texts, is a matter of utmost importance. Whoever, beloved, is and remains hardened concerning this reality, lacks now the true spiritual life; and he will afterwards be without eternal life. And although you now boast of gifts, knowledge, religiousness, experience—yes, even of faith, if you do not become united with Christ, then all that you boast of will be of no benefit to you, not your faith either. If anyone is in Christ, the Bible says, he is a new creature. And again, Scripture testifies: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (II Cor. 5:17; John 6:53-56).

The ground of this union has been laid from all eternity. Even as, after all, all men are reckoned in the first Adam, so too God has reckoned the elect in the second Adam, as the Head of the covenant of grace.[4] In His righteousness they in time would be justified. Paul says, therefore, "He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (cf. Rom. 5:1; I Cor. 15:22; Eph. 1:10, 11). By the Spirit of the Lord is this union actually accomplished in this life. The Spirit with which Christ was anointed, comes to dwell in them. By that they receive a new principle, become regenerated and alive. By that Spirit they exercise faith unto unity, in order to become conscious of their oneness with Christ and with God. Then, as a result, they come every day with prayers, longings, and confidence to Christ and seek in Him all that is necessary to their salvation. Ordinarily, however, their faith is yet weak in the beginning. They have, indeed, a heartfelt sorrow for sin; they sense that by their sin they have angered God and they condemn themselves. But the way of deliverance, the glory of

3 I call to your attention that the quotation from Romans 6:5 is the translation of the Staten Bible's rendering of this passage. VanVelzen's point is clearly made by this text; but would be obscured somewhat if we had used the KJV, which is our usual practice.

4 It is of great significance that VanVelzen identifies Christ as "Head of the covenant of grace." With this designation, VanVelzen makes plain that the covenant of grace includes only the elect, that is, only those of whom Christ is the Head—Ed.

God in Christ, and the infinite love of Jesus is not clearly known by them; therefore, they do not find any rest for their souls. Knowledge, godliness, prayers, experience, and such like matters are for them an insufficient foundation on which they can build for eternity. All their righteousness they view as a disposable, worthless rag. But then, when the eternally blessed Emmanuel, the only consummate Guarantor, reveals Himself to their hearts in the glory of His person, in the all-sufficiency of His merit and in the excellence of His love; and when they, having become courageous through His grace, receive and take Him in faith, then they find the true rest, that is, peace with God that transcends all understanding. For these believers it is pleasant to live close to God. They have no ground for their confidence of justification in their activities and find no value or merit in their faith. The righteousness of Christ is the only ground of their hope. In themselves they are and *remain* dead, but Christ lives in them. All wisdom, power, and comfort they receive from Him as the branch receives its sap from the vine; in this way they obtain from Christ food for their souls. Without Him, they can do nothing; but with Him, they are able to do all things. They believe that they are not their own, but that they, with all that they have, are the Lord's, to whom they have become submissive with their whole heart.

For them, consequently, to live is Christ, but death is also their gain, for if they die, they die by way of the oneness of faith with Jesus. Many of them have oftentimes testified of their longing to be released from this life and to be with Christ. Many rejoice when death draws near, which is a king of terror for all the unconverted. And also they, who frequently earlier had looked up in terror against that significant hour of the dissolution of the body, were released from all fear and became indifferent to the comforts of this life. Surely, everyone of the upright in faith have reasons for it. Their hope, after all, rests on a sure foundation, not on their love but on God's eternal love, not on their merits but on the guaranteed righteousness of Christ, which is imputed for nothing (freely) to the ungodly, and not on their faithfulness but on God's unchangeable resolve. How can it be any other way than when viewing in faith these certainties, when the heart burns with responsive love through the love of Jesus, when the curtains of eternity as it were are lifted, so that the soul through faith sees within the heavenly Ca-

naan; then they await with joy the Lord's salvation; then they long so earnestly, as did Job, that their reins are consumed within them.[5]

Yet, beloved, even though this joy is not tasted, nonetheless, the blessed die in the Lord. The oneness wrought by the Holy Spirit and by an upright faith, is never again broken. No one can snatch the Lord's sheep out of His hand. They are preserved in the power of God unto salvation.

The Blessedness Itself

Blessed are, therefore, *those dead.* That which is for the world the most awful reality (for he who is of the world will give everything he has for his life), that same reality is for the believer, blessed. Also in this life they are incomparably favored. Blessed is he, indeed, whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile. Not one of them, no matter how small their faith may be, would want to trade with the unconverted, however prominent he may be. For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul, or what will a man give to deliver his soul? The service of the Lord, even though the foolish despise it, is a delightful service. "How I love," says the holy poet therefore, "How love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:24, 77, 92, 97, 143).

Nevertheless, beloved, no one in this life should expect perfect rest. The leaders of this world, indeed, speak of peace, peace and no danger—but a hasty destruction will befall them. Some of them, who have an appearance of godliness, do not want to know of any battle, or hear of any complaining because of sin and distress. These persons view themselves as extraordinarily far advanced in faith. They know how to lift themselves over the mountains and obstacles; and the longer they live in the confidence that everything, indeed, will go well with them, so much greater do they esteem their faith.

5 VanVelzen refers to Job 19:27, which in the Staten Bible reads: *"... mijn nieren verlangen zeer in mijn schoot."* Job longed to see God in the life to come so earnestly that inwardly he severely ached. We have a picture of that in the longed-for, sweet presence of one's wife, who has been absent for far too long a time. That longing can cause physical pain. So, too, is this true spiritually. That is VanVelzen's observation on the basis of Job 19 (M.K.).

But whoever possesses a faith without battle, without activity, and without distress concerning sin, such a one does not have true faith. He possesses only a vain knowledge; and although he presents himself as at rest here, yet living this way, he will experience eternal sorrow in the end.

The Holy Spirit says of the upright believer that he may rest from his works. When? Is it possible now already, here on earth? O, no! Only then, first, when they die in the Lord; that perfect rest is not found earlier. Here on earth there is only a struggle of faith for all. The Bible admonishes them to enter the battle. As long as they are on earth, this word stands: Only acknowledge thy iniquities that thou hast transgressed against the Lord your God; and everyone lament because of his sin. Being still in the flesh, David had to cry out: "I will be sorry for my sin." Paul had to acknowledge: "But I am carnal, sold under sin"; and again: "without were fightings, within were fears." And when, therefore, you do not want to acknowledge this distress and these laments, oh my dear man, how much then do you not differ from the heroes of faith? You do not belong among those who by the Lord are declared to be blessed; for He says, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (cf. Jer. 3:13; I Tim. 6:12; Lam. 3:39; Ps. 38:18; Rom. 7:14; II Cor. 7:5; and Matt. 5:4, 6).

Only in death is perfect rest attained, but then they are also perfectly delivered from all unrest and labor. Not only are they delivered from the labor that is caused by their calling and external adversities, but also from labors that the flesh occasions, from sin, from temptations, and from unbelief. In these instances they often lament: "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" In these moments the battle against the powers of darkness occasions fearful hours of dread for many. As long as the devout is here on earth, he finds it necessary, as did Lot, to vex his righteous soul in regard to the abominations that are all around him. But in death, his laments are transformed into a dance of joy. He is then delivered from the violence of hell. He is separated forever from a crooked and perverse generation. All sorrow, pain, lack, distress, anxieties, and conflict then come to an end. They will hunger no more, nor thirst;

the sun will not light upon them or any hear; and God will wipe away all their tears (Rev. 7:16, 17).

Not only are they in death delivered from every evil, but then they will become partakers immediately of perfect blessedness as to the soul. Whoever is taken away from this life must indeed forsake his earthly friends and relationships, yet he leaves them to God's care. And as relating to those with whom he was one through faith by the grace of God, he is at once, through death, suddenly reunited with them never again to be separated from them. Immediately through death he comes to the many thousands of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn that are written in heaven, where there is no strife or estrangement. Everyone there in the heaven of heavens will have a purpose and a work; God's glory they will extol and praise. Their knowledge of God and of spiritual things will then be by observation, direct and complete. They will know God in His perfections to the extent permitted by their finite understanding. Him, whose marvelous love moved them in time to a responsive love; Him, who purchased them by His blood; Him, who is life; Him, they will then see; Jesus, as He is. Then, the blessed spiritual marriage will be celebrated. They will have Him undisturbed to themselves eternally. The Triune One will give Himself to them to be enjoyed and to fill them with His blessedness. And that blessedness will never have an end: "…in thy presence," David says, "is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

This incomparable favor is, however, increased by this that this blessedness of the world is immediately, through death, their possession. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord *from now on.* It will not be first theirs after they will have endured a place of purification or a period of refinement, as some dream is true; but immediately through death they enjoy heavenly blessedness. Their fellowship with Christ includes this. If they vacate the flesh, then they necessarily will lodge with the Lord.[6] We know, Paul says, therefore, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building

6 The Reformed have always argued that when believers die they enjoy immediate bliss and glory on the basis of God's everlasting covenant. Since the covenant is everlasting, and since, on that basis, fellowship with Christ can never be interrupted, the teaching of soul-sleep is impossible—Ed.

of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Cor. 5:1, 8). What a sudden, blessed change! He who lives in the Lord, dies in the Lord and is also suddenly with the Lord. The last moment of this earthly life, filled with difficulties, is the first moment of the blessed life in heaven. There is not the least split second between them. Whoever understands and believes that has, indeed, reason to desire with outstretched arms the dissolution of his body.

However, men find not a few, redeemed people of God—perhaps they are among us as well—who often contemplate their death with a secret terror of heart. Beloved, this is not the result of the fact that they do not wish to be with Jesus. Oh, no! All acknowledge with the whole heart the gracious nearness of the Lord as the highest privilege. It is the desire of all of them that Jesus will reveal Himself to them. But they sense that they are inadequately prepared to meet Him, the Holy One. We read of the disciples, after Jesus' resurrection, that they for joy did not believe (Luke 24:41). There are still many individuals who properly acknowledge their sin and misery and who are taken captive in this way through disbelief and doubts, when they hear of the great good that the Lord has laid away for those who fear Him. Many think: "Would this great blessedness be appointed for me? That is impossible to believe."

Consider, however, beloved, that we are first prepared but then definitely so, when we die in the Lord. Through spiritual union with Him we are prepared, for Jesus is the only source of blessedness. In our text God gives the most powerful assurance of that fact. John did not only hear the voice from heaven that commanded him to write this testimony: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," but also the Holy Spirit confirms the same: "Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors." And what have these privileged persons to thank for their blessedness? Is it not exclusively the fact that they died in the Lord? Jesus has merited the blessedness for us. The Father attests it and the Holy spirit confirms the same. Each of the three persons of the holy, adorable Trinity reveals Himself as testifying to this fact.

And indeed you, who condemn yourself but seek life and comfort exclusively in fellowship with Jesus, must acknowledge that this blessedness is ineffably great, far above praying and meditation.[7]

7 VanVelzen's point here is that in prayer and meditation the child of God

Nonetheless, He will bestow the same, not on your account, but of grace for Jesus' sake. Yes, the Spirit says that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.

The Truth that Their Works Do Follow Them

"Their works do follow them." But how must we understand this? Beloved, this declaration should, indeed, be observed by all the ungodly to their terror, whereas on the contrary, it is to the comfort of all the godly.

You who here live unconverted, you who love the world, you who live in sin, in jealousy, hatred, discord, and hostility against God and His people, you as well who live not for God but for yourselves, who pursue your own praise and honor, your own satisfaction, and intend to provide for your own lusts, your works follow after you. As long as anyone is not united to Christ through faith but lives his life disapproving of Christ's fellowship, such a man in fact does only evil works. Does an evil tree bring forth also good fruit? All that which is not of faith is sin. Whatever has not its source in love toward God is unrighteousness. You shall love Him with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. Everything, consequently, that is not done out of love to God is condemned by Him. And your works follow you! Dreadful thought, indeed! Everything that you have done is condemned by God's law and cursed and after your death the judgment. The Lord will come to judge the living and the dead. He will reward each one according to his works. Before Him, the Almighty, nothing is hidden. Whatever you have done in the darkness of night or in the light of day, in solitude and in the company of others, in your youth or adolescence or adulthood—everything is known to Him, nothing will be missed by Him. And He, the Omnipotent, is your Judge, who will reward each one according to his works. Then they that have sown to their own flesh will of the flesh reap destruction. Then the Judge will bring down an unmerciful judgment upon those who have shown no mercy.

But while eternal wrath will be the reward given to every soul of

enjoys in this life unique fellowship with Jesus Christ. But the fellowship that the believer enjoys after death will be greater and more intimate because it will be face to face—Ed.

mankind that works evil, nevertheless, your works will not cease to follow you. Eternally they will follow you in your conscience. In all this horror, these works will eternally remind you how heinously you have sinned by them against God and men and against yourself. That will be the worm that does not die and that always gnaws. How awful! How enormously will the terrors of the unconverted be multiplied! So long as man lives here on earth, he is, as it were, in a deep sleep. When sleeping, men do not think about the things that have happened. If we are extraordinarily affected by some matter, then sleep is disturbed by restless dreams. Sins that we had committed earlier, even years before, and which we had not thought about any more, suddenly come to mind sometimes. Many who in sin continue sleeping[8] are plagued now and then by such nightmares. Oh, indeed, the ungodly have no peace, no matter to what extent, from an external viewpoint, their condition may appear attractive. They are also profoundly troubled by anxious cares and are fearful of the future. Yet it is as in a dream, for they do not even earnestly use the means to escape the danger; they continue sleeping. After the sleep of your conscience, after the false or careless rest wherein you have lived here on earth, an awakening comes, however, in which one never sleeps again. Then every sin, to the very least of them, will be remembered by you, for all your works will follow you. And everything that was not the fruit of faith, was not out of love, is sin. Do you imagine that you will even then in hell consider these things, as if you were in a dream or with self satisfaction? Oh, not at all, for when but one sin is really remembered, then the man is plagued and tortured. How much would many give, if only they could banish remorseful thoughts forever to the past. Cain, suffocating under the weight of a guilty conscience, whined in despair: "My iniquity is greater, than that they will be forgiven.[9] I shall be a

8 VanVelzen in the context characterizes the life of the unconverted as "sleeping." Hence his use of "continued sleep" is metaphorical in nature. He is speaking of their daily activity that from a spiritual perspective is "sleeping" (M.K.).

9 The Staten Bible, Genesis 4:13-14, is the source of VanVelzen's quotation. However, the KJV, which I would quote, gives a somewhat different rendering of the original of the statement in verse 13. Therefore, when translating, I accepted the Dutch rendering in order to preserve VanVelzen's reasoning (M.K.).

fugitive and a vagabond in the earth. And it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me." Judas, the betrayer, being tortured by the remembrance of his iniquity, cried out: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." That acknowledgment could not still his terror. In order to be delivered from it, he hung himself. It would have been good for him, thus Jesus judged, if that man had not been born. A man can deprive himself of life, but is not able to free himself from the remembrance of his iniquity. That worm never dies; he gnaws eternally.

Also in regard to the God-fearing, this declaration of our text holds, and that indeed expressly for them: "and their works do follow them." What! Perhaps one thinks to himself who is troubled by his sins: "My works? What have I to look forward to then?" Though I know not your name, the Lord Jesus promises such persons who are burdened and heavy laden with their sins when coming to Him that He will give them rest. He says to them: "I, even I, am he that *blotteth* out thy transgressions for mine own sake, *and will not remember thy sins"* (Is. 43:25; 44:22). They are wholly released from the guilt and punishment of sin, and the dominion of sin is also broken. But these sins still continue to cause many to stumble. As long as they live here on the earth, they are not yet delivered from the indwelling corruption. Therefore, they all declare in agreement with the apostle John: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). Therefore, as well, they confess that also their best works are tainted with sin (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24).

But in what sense then do their works follow them? Evil works, the sins, do not follow them, for God will not even ponder them. They have been blotted out by the blood of the Lamb. And although they now still complain: "That which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I," nonetheless, Paul says: "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Behold, the Lord has liberated them from the service of sin. But sin as a foreign queen seeks continually to subject them to herself again. They, however, fight, watch, lament, and pray against it. They do not really do those evil works, but sin that dwells in them. And in death they are delivered from all the power of sin (Rom. 7:15, 17).

Nevertheless, the text says that their works do follow them. Cer-

tainly! All those works are referred to that issued forth from union with Jesus, for the living members remain in Him and bear much fruit. By means of that oneness, they are active in love. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." And, "we love Him, because He first loved us." And, "if any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (John 15:5; I John 4:8, 19, 20). It is impossible that they who have been engrafted into Christ by a true faith would not produce fruits of thankfulness. Those works, although they absolutely do not come into account with regard to their justification, do come into consideration with God after the death of the saints. Then God will crown His own work. And whereas unbelievers will be rewarded according to the merit of their works, believers, who, out of pure grace, are saved because of Christ's merits, will also receive the reward of grace for the battle of faith. God will not forget the work and labor of love that has been rendered in recognition of His name (I Cor. 3:8; Heb. 6:10).

Now, however, some perhaps will still ask: "When did I do such works?" Then you should know, beloved, love is not inflated. It does not seek itself. This is an attribute of the true saints that they, through humility, do not attach any worth to their works, even less do they exalt themselves regarding them. From this viewpoint they forget them. But God will bring the same into remembrance. In that great day when the Son of Man will come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then the King will say to those on His right hand: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom, which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison and you visited me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in. Or, naked, and clothed thee. Or, when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?"

Through humility the saints lift up these works so little, therefore, that everything that gives them much honor they did not notice, even though they still did them. For the King will answer them: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of

these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:31-40). And the righteous will go into life eternal. Blessed, therefore, are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. Yes, saith the Spirit, in order that they may rest from their labors and their works do follow them.

When we, consequently, consider this incomparable privilege of the blessed, then we have reason as regards them to rejoice while faced with their death. We have, therefore, also reason as regards our beloved brother, the now deceased shepherd and pastor DeCock, to call him blessed, who has been released from the battle, who has found his deliverance from guilt and punishment in the imputed righteousness of Christ. To the end of his life, even as his sorrowing wife wrote to me, he was privileged to look to Christ, who now has cleansed His servant from the stain of sin. "Remember them," according to the admonition of the apostle, "which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." For him, Rev. H. DeCock, this change is inexpressibly blessed; but we suffer a great loss.

Not only were we privileged a few times to hear him preach the gospel of grace from this pulpit, but you will also remember how he combined genuine simplicity with profound earnestness in his preaching. You remember how he, without ostentation but with strong words, preached this necessary element of faith. However, he not only labored in that part of the country where the Lord had specifically placed him where he was active in many congregations,[10] but he was used as the leader for the entire Secession church in our country. He was the first pastor, who publicly, and without any duplicity, exposed, reproved, rejected, and resisted the evil that had acquired dominance in the church. He was the first who was faithful, who joined the battle, not only in words but also in deeds, for the truth and for the rights of truly Reformed believers, and who remained faithful and demonstrated that he had abandoned all self-interests for this cause. He was the first who, after

10 Reverend H. DeCock residing in Groningen, took up the ministry not only in the congregation of that city, but also labored in so many congregations throughout the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe that each congregation was visited by him hardly once in six months. This was the case even though he traveled constantly whenever his health made this possible and even though he preached not only on Sundays but also on the other days of the week when the circumstances of the congregation permitted it.

exhausting every avenue for the restoration of the true Reformed church, at last rejected that rule of the church that had trampled underfoot the rights of Reformed believers. But he did so only after having witnessed the failure of every attempt at restoration because of the obstinacy of the enemies of the truth and the pure worship of God. And he was the first to forsake that fellowship which he could no longer acknowledge as the true Reformed church, as the church of Christ.[11]

The zeal that began with him inspired many. God used him as the most prominent pillar. Through his leadership this work quickly prospered. Courageously, he fought the battle against unbelief and the world to the very end. He worked tirelessly for the building up of Zion. He showed himself prepared to suffer for it. He was defamed, summoned before the judgment seats, cast into prison, robbed of his possessions, his life was threatened, yet he remained steadfast and always pleasant. Departure from pure doctrine and the proven paths of our fathers he did not view indifferently. On the contrary, he was always ready to defend the truth and our fathers' walk of faith. But when division and arguments arose among brothers, he was always busy attempting to work reconciliation.

We must say of him: "By faith…choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:25, 26). He fought the good fight and kept the faith. Of him we have to say that he labored more than all the others. If such a servant of God is taken to heaven, and, indeed, at the specific moment when the church is besieged in so many different ways, then we have reason, following the example of King Joash to cry out at his departure: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"[12]

11 It is historically incontrovertible that the now deceased pastor and preacher Hendrik DeCock was the first servant of the Lord who effected the secession from the existing Reformed (*Hervormde*) Church fellowship and the rebuilding on the old proven foundations of the Reformed (*Gereformeerde)* Church. The Act of Secession or Return was signed by the Ulrum Church's consistory, in the presence of the now deceased pastor, on October 13, 1834. With aforethought I make mention of this fact, because this must be observed for the correct evaluation of the secession.

12 The metaphor of "chariots" and "horsemen" of Israel is meant to

However, God's doing is majestic. He dwells in His holy temple. It is fitting, therefore, that we be silent before Him. If we consider, beloved, that our life is but a handbreadth, before we expected it, we may have reached the boundary marker between life and death. Blessed are the dead then who die in the Lord, but those who have slandered him will be lightly esteemed. Value then the means of grace that the Lord still confers upon you, not with scant appreciation, for the Lord could soon take it all from you. Therefore, use them, but in such a way that when the means of grace are no more for you and you must leave them, that that separation may be your gain. That will be the way it is for all of you for whom to live is Christ. No matter how dark your way and how dark the affairs of the church may be, nevertheless, Jesus lives. He says: "I will not leave you, nor forsake you. When you will have finished your journey, then you will receive the crown of righteousness and, not only you, but all will receive it who love his appearing." Amen. ●

Closing Song: Psalm 37:19[13]

Mark thou the upright day by day,
Behold the perfect in his way:
His journey ends in peace.
Destroyed at once shall rebels be;
Cut off from all posterity,
Their very name shall cease.

Salvation is from God alone,
Whom as their covert saints have known
When by sore troubles tried;
The Lord Who helped in troubles past
Will save them to the very last,
For they in Him confide.

express that the prophet Elisha in his task of bringing the word of God was the strength and protection of Israel (cf. II Kings 2:12) (M.K.).

13 VanVelzen asked his congregation in 1842 to sing the 19th stanza of Psalm 37. But I have substituted Psalter number 99, stanzas 4 and 5, which is our versification of Psalm 37. If I knew but a little about poetry, I would be tempted to try my hand at a translation of the Dutch text, but I feel now that it would be ill-advised (M.K.).

Book Reviews

Bavinck on the Christian Life, by John Bolt. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015. Pp. 266. $19.99 (soft). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

Bavinck on the Christian Life is the latest in a series of works on their doctrine concerning the Christian life by notable theologians. The series includes Augustine, Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Edwards, Luther, Packer, Warfield, and others. Herman Bavinck certainly belongs in the list. The Dutch Reformed theologian was an outstanding theologian, for whom the life in the world of both Christian and church, that is, the ethical aspect of Christianity, was not merely a matter of implication but a matter of emphasis.

The chief benefit of this book is especially its indication of Reformed principles of the Christian life, according to Bavinck. Demonstration of principles for the Christian life is of great importance. For instance, concerning marriage and family, Bavinck sets forth the fundamental principle that they are analogous to the Trinity of God, which is their divine archetype.

This observation is profound. A lonely God of one person could not have thought of marriage and family, much less created humanity in this marvelous relationship. To quote Bavinck, as Bolt does, "The history of the human race begins with a wedding" (147). Only the triune God could think, decree, and create humanity in its fundamental structure and relation of marriage and, with marriage, of family. In this relation, there is a reflection of the threeness and oneness, that is, plurality in unity, of the being and blessed life of God Himself. The one fatherly being is three persons. Three persons subsist as family—Father and Son in the Holy Ghost—in the one being who is God.

Bavinck applied the truth of God's fellowship within Himself among the three persons, as reflected in marriage, to the reality of His covenant with His people: "The sacredness of marriage comes to fullest expression in that it serves as an image of the covenant of fidelity between God and his people" (152). Here the debt of the Protestant Reformed Churches, regarding both the cov-

enant as fellowship and the truth of marriage as an unbreakable, lifelong bond, to the theology of Bavinck appears.

Bavinck drew the practical, ethical conclusion from this principle concerning the permanency of marriage, involving the prohibition of divorce and remarriage. For, according to Bolt, Bavinck taught that "the very nature of marriage is that it must be monogamous" (150). Quoting Bavinck, Bolt continues, "[marriage is] an essential bond between one man and one woman, and therefore also a *lifelong covenant, indissoluble by human authority*" (150) (emphasis added). Again, obviously, the Protestant Reformed Churches are good disciples of Herman Bavinck, or to speak more accurately, of Jesus Christ and His apostles as faithfully followed in the ethical theology of Bavinck. In their doctrine of the covenant as communion of life (rather than a cold, conditional contract), deriving from the life itself of the Triune being of God, and in their ethical practice of marriage as an unbreakable bond for life (rather than a cold, conditional, fragile contract), based on and reflective of the Trinity of God, the Protestant Reformed Churches have not created a theology and an ethical practice *de novo*. Rather, they carry on, defend, and develop—*and develop*—essential teachings that are at the very heart of the Reformed tradition and that have been transmitted by the very best in that tradition.

In light of the prevalence, and even approval, of divorce and remarriage in the Reformed churches worldwide that claim to be disciples of Bavinck, one could wish for an express and extended exposure of the evil and for some advocacy of the unbreakable bond of marriage in light of Bavinck's principle and application of the truth of marriage. Rampant divorce and remarriage in evangelical Christianity, including the Reformed churches, make a mockery of the fidelity of the covenant of which Bavinck spoke, and ultimately of the faithful fellowship of the triune God Himself that is reflected in marriage. Surely, the lifelong, indissoluble character of the marriage bond, and with this the stability of the family, is one of the main ethical issues in Western society, and even in the churches, today. Does one dare to suggest that it even challenges concern for the environment in importance?

This lack of pointed ap-

plication of biblical principle concerning sex and marriage to contemporary wickedness in Western society is egregious in the book's treatment of homosexuality. It may well be unfair to criticize Bavinck for failing to condemn this abomination in light of God's clear and authoritative will, revealed not only in Scripture, but also in nature itself, that sex be enjoyed in the marital relation between a male and a female. Bavinck limited himself to a positive explanation of the will of God for sex in the marriage of a male and a female and to a defense of the goodness of sex in this relationship. Bavinck did not live in the twenty-first century. Wickedness had not yet developed in Bavinck's time to the degree that it has in our day.

In this case, the author of the book must bear the responsibility for the book's soft and compromising treatment of homosexuality and homosexual behavior. The book is critical of Bavinck for his insistence that sex is lawful, by God's design, between a man and a woman—a *biological* man and a *biological* woman, to be redundant, as is necessary in our foolish age—in marriage. Bavinck failed to "address the manifold complications that arise from people's actual experience as sinful sexual beings: homosexual or bisexual desire, transgender emotional conflicts, and so forth" (149). The church today must be more "sensitive and compassionate" than was Bavinck toward homosexuality (149). Concerning the alleged failure of Bavinck and the church in the past with regard to homosexuality, the church has much to "learn" and much "of which to repent" (149).

It is some consolation to us—the true church of today that condemns homosexuality as explicitly as Bavinck did implicitly—that as we pour forth our *mea culpas* regarding our condemnation of homosexuality and practicing homosexuals we find the apostle Paul of Romans 1:18ff. on his knees next to us and, with him and us, the Holy Ghost, who inspired the passage, as well as I Corinthians 6:9, 10, I Timothy 1:10, and other passages that clearly and bluntly condemn homosexuality.

In this connection, it is high time that Reformed orthodoxy raises a vehement objection to the increasingly popular tactic of weakening judgment upon sinful behavior, particularly homosexuality—nature and behavior—by describing it as merely

"brokenness." In its discussion of Bavinck's alleged lack of sensitivity to and compassion for homosexuality, the book is guilty of this tactic: "[homosexuals are persons] whose experiences of sexual identity are broken"; "[sexually] we are all broken to some degree or other" (149).

Homosexuals are not persons whose "experiences of sexual identity are broken." Similarly, if it is indeed true, as the book alleges, that all of us are sexually corrupted, the truth about this corruption of us all is not that "we are all broken to some degree."

Like all other sinners, homosexuals are not "broken," but depraved. Homosexuality is not a condition of brokenness, but of depravity.

"Brokenness" may be regretted, although increasingly even regret is less and less the case; depravity must be confessed. "Brokenness" can be fixed; depravity requires salvation. "Brokenness" is a condition for which one gets sympathy; depravity is a condition of guilt and shame. "Brokenness" permits the broken one to stagger on as best he can; depravity demands repentance—today. "Brokenness" suggests that the fault is the Creator's, or that there is no fault at all; depravity condemns, and puts the blame squarely on the depraved creature. "Brokenness" implies that deliverance, to what extent the "broken" one desires deliverance, is looked for in the broken one himself, if only he will apply himself, or in some psychologist or other; depravity casts the sinner only upon the crucified and risen Savior from sin, and upon the gospel. "Brokenness" may be excused; depravity will be punished. "Brokenness" is a human's plight, perhaps because of a careless creator, who unfortunately dropped this creature in the process of creating him or her; depravity is fundamentally rebellion—and a *fundamental* rebellion, rebellion regarding the basic creation order of male and female—against the wise and good creator.

"Marriage and family," interesting and important as the subject is, is only one chapter. The three main sections of the book are "Foundations for Christian Living," "The Shaper of Christian Discipleship," and "The Practice of Christian Discipleship." Each section is divided into two, three, or four chapters. The section in which "Marriage and Family" is a chapter includes also "Work and Vocation," "Culture and Education," and "Civil Society."

Concluding the work is a powerful sermon by Bavinck on "The World-Conquering Power of Faith." The sermon is a specimen of Reformed preaching at its best.

> Outside of Christ, who dares to glory in God's love? Does not all of nature, does not our own heart and conscience proclaim to us that God's favor does not rest upon his creatures, that God has a quarrel with what he has made, that all creatures perish by his wrath and are terrified by his anger? Is this not a terrible situation?...By nature we are all children of wrath, without God, without Christ, without hope in the world…. Oh, wretched people that we are, who shall deliver us from the power of this world?.... Faith, the victory over the world! (242).

Overall, the book proposes and in large part delivers the deep, rich nature of the distinctively Reformed theology of the Christian life. The reader will come to know Bavinck. He will also become familiar with Reformed ethics, especially regarding the origin and nature of Christian ethics in the holy God.

One may dissent from Bavinck's, and evidently Bolt's, conviction that the church has "the new task of reforming and renewing the world in accord with Christian principles" (116). Bavinck himself acknowledged that this monumental task is "new." "The early church did not set out intentionally to transform the Roman world—its culture, social order, and politics" (116). Renewing the world is, indeed, a "new task" for the church (116), a task that was foreign to the early church, for good reason. God does not give the church this task in the Bible. This novel, exotic, dangerous, and impossible task was invented by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck for Reformed churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Christian Reformed Church harshly imposed it upon some of its ministers, at the peril of their ecclesiastical life, in the common grace decisions and in the cruel church discipline of 1924. Almost all Reformed churches worldwide have supinely accepted this burden ever since, without any noticeable effects of renewal and "Christianizing" in nations anywhere. Much less is the *world* of the twenty-first century noticeably renewed and "Christianized."

Of no little interest to the

Protestant Reformed reader is that, whereas for Bavinck basic to Christian ethics is the renewing and reforming of the world (116; "Christianizing" was the term that Bavinck preferred) by a common grace of God, Bolt judges the term "common grace" to be "badly chosen." One good reason for this disavowal of the term, in Bolt's judgment, is that it "potentially leads to moral missteps such as excusing worldliness among Christians" (47). The history of both Bavinck's and Bolt's churches proves that "potentially," in this judgment, ought to be replaced with "certainly." Such is the advanced worldliness of the Christian Reformed Church that its Synod of 2016 is now debating whether sodomite relations are not a legitimate, sanctified, acceptable form of God's holy institution of marriage. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in its current ecclesiastical union has officially approved such relations.

Bolt's account of Bavinck's ethical posture and teaching confirms my conviction that a serious weakness of the great theologian and influential churchman was his deliberately cultivated "genial… approach to opponents" (33). And this was due, in large part, to his education at the modernist seminary at Leiden. What John Bolt and many others celebrate as a virtue in Bavinck was, in fact, a debilitating weakness in a Reformed theologian. Inevitably, it takes form in compromise with error and errorists and finally in the loss of the truth, including the truth of ethics. Witness today Bavinck's Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Free University of Amsterdam, where Bavinck taught for many years.

Regardless of his own policy and conduct of genial tolerance of error, Bavinck rightly praised a different quality, not only in the Reformed theologian, but also in the "sturdy Christian": "men of marble, with a character of steel, with a will of iron, with an insuperable power, with an extraordinary energy." Rightly, Bavinck attributed this "sturdy" nature of the Reformed Christian, not to a doctrine of a common grace of God and not to a "genial" tolerance of false doctrines and the proponents of false doctrines, but to the doctrine of "predestination": "Elected by God, he [the 'sturdy' Reformed believer] recognizes in himself and in all creatures nothing but instruments in the Divine hand…. Convicted by the sovereignty of God…" (171).

God give to the Reformed churches in the twenty-first century Bavinck's "sturdy" Reformed Christians, especially as theologians! For the sake, among other benefits, of holy, uncompromising, sharply antithetical Christian ethics! ●

Christianizing the World: Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide? by David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. 192. $19.95 (hard). [Reviewed by Robert Burford.]

In the light of the RFPA's publication of Prof. David Engelsma's new book, *Christianizing the World: Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?*, it would be easy to imagine the modern proponents of the theory of common grace exclaiming, "Another book opposing common grace? Here go the PRCA again!" Such a response would be tacit acknowledgment of Engelsma's repeated claim in this book that the Protestant Reformed Churches are the denomination best equipped by God to oppose this theory. Perhaps there may even be a few souls existing under the broad doctrinal umbrella of the PRCA, familiar with her history and with the body of literature already in print, that momentarily question the need for a new work on the theory of common grace. After recently enjoying a re-reading of Engelsma's book *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard. J. Mouw's 'He Shines in All That's Fair,'* and hearing of this new publication, I confess to having had such a brief thought. Why was a new book necessary?

It took only a reading of the first paragraph in Engelsma's preface to his new work to answer that question. The theory of common grace is finding new life and is spreading throughout the world.

We were previously warned of this danger by Engelsma. Toward the end of his above-mentioned 2003 response to Mouw's book, he told us that "Common grace is bound and determined to develop, to expand, to dominate" (93). Apparently it has. With the impending publication (in English for the first time) of Abraham Kuyper's three volumes devoted to setting forth his theory

of common grace by the Roman Catholic-influenced Acton Institute [v. 1 is now available], Engelsma has again sensed danger and taken up the pen of opposition. His new book is spawned by a 2014 lecture he gave in Grand Rapids, Michigan under Protestant Reformed auspices [cf. www.southwestprc.org]. As well as the substance of Engelsma's lecture, the book also contains a very useful (and lengthy) section devoted to giving answers to twenty-seven questions submitted by the audience after the lecture.

Let me unashamedly state my conclusion first. This book is an utterly uncompromising attack on the theory of common grace and the worldview it has spawned. Perhaps the most uncompromising ever penned. This is a book that the RFPA should promote worldwide with all its resources. It will surely polarize views one way or the other. One cannot read this book and sit on the fence.

After a first reading of this book, an impression was left on this reviewer of a new and serious sense of urgency in Engelsma's writing. He goes so far as to provoke and challenge his opponents in the Reformed community to respond to his charges against them (152). The tone of his language is regularly forthright, but characteristic of Engelsma's jealousy to defend the special, particular, saving grace of God and to uproot those errors that compromise it. The substance of much of his polemic against common grace is not just a repetition of the arguments given in his criticism of Mouw; nor is it a simple re-statement of those previously advanced by authors such as Hoeksema, Danhof, and Hanko but, as we shall see, intensive, insightful development.

No punches are pulled in the attack on what he calls the "muck" of common grace, as Engelsma charges "Kuyper's ardent disciples" with "a lack of insight and honesty" (78) and describes Kuyper himself as "desperate for a biblical basis for his common grace theory" (80), guilty of "absurdity, if not blasphemy" (131) in relation to the latter's assertion that common grace produces the Antichrist. These are not unsubstantiated allegations. They come at the conclusion of characteristic, sustained, logical arguments that draw attention to what is a lack of both a biblical and a creedal basis for the theory. Engelsma seeks to expose the theory's failure to provide a unified worldview and its destruction of the true, biblical antithesis between sin and

grace. The author's analysis of the deleterious effects of the doctrine in (both Dutch and American) history also cuts a wide and deep swathe through common grace's claim to produce Christian culture.

There are some interesting links made that grabbed my attention. I briefly mention but two.

First, in the second part of the book, which seeks to answer audience questions submitted at the end of the lecture that spawned this book, Engelsma briefly examines how a faulty doctrine of the covenant opens the door of acceptance to the theory of common grace (188-191). He uses the example of the decisions of the CRC synod of 1924 as evidence and draws attention to related, modern heresies against which he has also recently written, such as those held by the leading men of the Federal Vision. Holding to God's unconditional covenant grounded in His electing love is a mighty bulwark against the encroachment of common grace.

Second, there is also a brief but extremely interesting historical analysis (provided in Chapter 5) of the broader (liberal) theological milieu that existed in the time of Kuyper and Bavinck. Engelsma's contention is that Kuyper's theory of common grace was the result of "caving in to the modernist theological thinking of his day" and a result of "mediation between gospel and culture" (77). Such a mediation always results in a compromised gospel and a denial of the antithetical, biblical Christian worldview.

Having provided some general impressions, let me approach the rest of this review in a different way by briefly discussing two themes that I believe are genuine developments in the debate and extremely interesting to me on this side of the world [Australia]. They are worldview and education. My perspective on these is perhaps that of an "outsider".

By "outsider" I mean one who is in Australia, many thousands of miles from the nearest PRCA congregation and who has never had the opportunity physically to attend worship with the PRCA. I do not mean "outsider" in the sense of doctrinally different. That such a person has a strong desire to offer a review of this book is, I hope, not presumptuous. Rather it is meant to be a testimony to the importance of Engelsma's work, not only for readers in the PRCA but also for the wider church world.

Engelsma's emphasis

throughout the book is that the common grace debate must be concerned with worldviews. He is correct. This element has been mentioned before in PRCA literature on this topic, but now it is much more prominent. It is a major theme in Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7, indeed of the whole book. In particular, Engelsma regularly calls attention to the effect of the dualistic common-grace worldview on the task of Christian education. As this "outsider" who has spent many years laboring to promote Christian education based on a Reformed worldview, I gave the book my immediate and undivided attention.

"The soundly Reformed Christian, believes, confesses and practices a worldview" (111). Worldviews begin with (some would say are) a basic faith position. These basic beliefs take time to develop fully their cultural implications as they work their way into the status of collective confession, and to progress to (cultural) practice as people learn to interpret the world in certain ways consistent with those beliefs. Engelsma correctly identifies that in its developed form a worldview is all of these at once: belief, confession, and practice. To this I might add the word *influence*. For a worldview to survive and succeed it must gain new converts and influence them to believe, confess and practice along similar lines.

The author identifies two competing worldviews in this debate that claim the title "Christian." The worldview of common grace is identified as dualistic. It consists of salvation in Christ combined with a separate, common-grace-driven, cultural task to Christianize the world. In competition with this is the true Christian worldview driven by the one, special, particular saving grace of God in Jesus Christ (121). The former seeks to adapt itself to the world; the latter is hated by the world. That the hatred of the world towards those holding the latter worldview drives them to separate physically from the world is denied. The familiar charge of Anabaptism, often leveled at the PRCA, is again refuted in Chapter 7 and the spiritual nature of the antithesis explained.

The cultural effects of a worldview are only as consistent and strong as the basic beliefs that underlie that worldview (biblical and theological beliefs in the case of a biblical, Christian worldview). Successfully attack the foundational beliefs and the structure

that is built on them is weakened. Engelsma knows that the theory of common grace has a very weak foundation. His focused attack on the biblical basis of the theory of common grace will be familiar to many PRCA readers. He shows that the biblical and creedal basis of the common-grace worldview is an emperor without any clothes. By way of example, Engelsma defends the correct understanding of God's covenant with Noah against the Kuyperian common grace covenant and also sets forward, in opposition to Kuyper's dualistic exegesis, the more Christ-centered understanding of passages such as Colossians 1:13-20 (96, 97).

If "*Post*-Ecclesiastical Suicide" is a term that describes the aftereffects of a dualistic common-grace worldview run riot in the churches, then the term adequately explains much of my experience of Reformed Christianity in Australia. We have it in the doctrinal position of the vast majority of the so-called Reformed churches, where it has spawned (inevitably according to Engelsma) its progeny, the well-meant offer of the gospel.

In relation to this, readers may be interested to note that my first experience with the doctrine of common grace in Australia was not through the teaching of Kuyper but rather through the agency of Presbyterian theologians Charles Hodge and John Murray. It was the latter, influenced by Hodge, who went so far as to ground God's saving grace in a so-called common grace of God with statements such as "without common grace special grace would not be possible" and "special (saving) grace has its precondition and sphere of operation in common grace."[1] If one believes these statements it is only a short step to believing the well-meant gospel offer that tells us God has a desire for the salvation of all men, which Murray championed, and which is standard teaching in many Presbyterian and Reformed churches in this country, and which the PRC oppose. Engelsma is right to warn his readers, several times in the book, of the close relationship between common grace and the well-meant offer. The effects of one or both are the same: worldliness in the churches, the door opened to Ar-

1 Both quotes are from *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh, G.B: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 113.

minianism, and the antithesis lost in cultural compromise.

Nowhere are the effects of common grace more obvious than in Christian education. Engelsma continually draws attention to the plight of education, in particular drawing attention to Christian college education in America, from a Reformed perspective, under the teachings of common grace. He mentions the demise of the truly Reformed perspective in institutions such as Calvin College (in which he himself studied with a degree of thankfulness) and others, often injecting a note of personal concern for the future of the college education of believers' children. He laments the concessions, using Calvin College as an example, made to homosexuality and the theory of evolution. The Protestant Reformed young person is warned to be on guard against a "loving Christianity" where the term is a euphemism for "the craven, compromising, compromised, and corrupted Christianity of our day" (175). This "outsider" is very much aware of the Christian schools associated with the PRCA that stand as a bulwark against the encroaching spread of the common-grace worldview. Long may they do so. In Australia it is a vastly different story.

In parent-controlled Christian education in Australia (much of which began with Christian Reformed Church-associated, parent-controlled schools) we have seen in microcosm an example of the effects of the church's adoption of common grace. The doctrinal position of the Reformed school is usually one or more of the Reformed Creeds[2] which, as Engelsma shows convincingly, do not support common grace and, in fact, oppose it. He states that to the advocates of common grace "Reformed confessions are a hindrance to their cultural mission" (20). They are thus forced to ignore the Reformed creeds and the role they should play in forming the life of the school. They are hidden, soon forgotten and ignored. Being hidden, their influence on educational philosophy and practice in the school wanes and eventually becomes negligible. Enrollment policies are changed; children of the world are enrolled. Some of the teachers, curriculum, programs, and prac-

2 Engelsma states," the Reformed creeds are the foundation of all the life of Reformed Christians, including their educational life and labor." (143)

tices of the ungodly government schools are borrowed. And yes, we are told that this cooperation and fertilization is good because of our common cultural pursuit! Protestant Reformed schools and parents, be warned!

From the strong words "*Ecclesiastical Suicide*"[3] in the title and the photograph of a run-down church building on the cover, through to the end of the book, Reformed readers all over the world may find that this work speaks uncannily to their own situation as it did to mine. Like me, they may find themselves almost quietly cheering an allies' brave polemic, in places where allies are difficult to find, against the encroachment of the common-grace worldview.

The main section of the book concludes with a warning to maintain the antithesis (122-123), which is world-*view* and not world-*flight!* This should be mandatory reading for every Protestant Reformed young person who will carry the burden of the denomination's stand and warnings against common grace, by God's particular grace, into the future.

Engelsma asks rhetorically "where are such warnings today"? One need not look very far if this book holds its deservedly prominent position in the library of the Christian home. ●

3 Engelsma attributes the term *"Ecclesiastical Suicide"* to Herman Hoeksema and even applies it to him in regard to his post-1924 relationship with the CRC as a denomination.

Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messenger, by T. David Gordon. Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing, 2009. Pp. 108. $9.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.]

One might expect that *Why Johnny Can't Preach* would be most useful for, if not exclusively written for, preachers and seminary professors. In fact, it is a book as much for school teachers, parents, and elders as for preachers and professors. Titled after the *Why Johnny Can't Read (*1966) and *Why Johnny Can't Write* (1990) books written for a secular audience, *Why Johnny Can't Preach* is written for a Christian and specifically a Reformed Christian audience. And, although it blames some preach-

ers for being lazy and others, especially, for being defensive, it attributes the failures in modern Reformed preaching not to seminaries or even to preachers but to the kind of education modern seminary students have received by the time they enter seminary. Thus, the usefulness of the book for the Christian school teacher and for everyone responsible for children's education.

I cannot imagine a preacher who would not want to read this important work. Every seminary professor also will profit from being informed as to the description of most students who enter seminary today as compared to forty years ago. But after the preachers and professors read the book, they ought to pass it on to all the Christian school administrators they know and then to the teachers of the covenant children. Day-school teachers will be fascinated by the book, and those who have bought fully into the idea that a laptop and iPad for every student are essential for good education will have some things to ponder and, likely, provoke them. Gordon is passionate, if even a bit opinionated, about how young people learn to think, how and what they read, and therefore how they are (un)able to communicate ideas clearly in a unified and well-composed sermon. Gordon aims at good preaching.

Elders, as well, who supervise preachers, who serve on Theological School Committees, and who themselves must listen to sermons every week, ought to read the book, if only to hear Gordon's plea for annual reviews of minister's preaching. But not only for that.

The subtitle, *The Media Have Shaped the Messenger*, might make one suppose that Gordon has an ax to grind mainly with modern electronic communications. Though he has plenty to say about electronic media—he also teaches "media ecology" at the college level—Gordon's concerns are more far reaching than this. The book promotes a quality liberal arts education, most likely beginning in grade-school already as most useful for preachers who will preach well (Gordon recommends a major in English literature, even though he now teaches in his college's religion department). Preachers must learn to read critically, compose logically, communicate face-to-face, and distinguish the important from the unimportant. These themes run through the book.

The book divides into four main sections. First, Gordon shows *that* Johnny can't preach. He demonstrates this in simple ways. Ask, he suggests, a few days after Sunday, a cross-section of pew-sitters three simple questions: What was the main point of the sermon? Was this point adequately established in the text? Were the applications legitimate applications of the main point? (As a teacher of homiletics I love these questions. My students will recognize in them my mantra, "State your point, prove your point, explain your point, and apply your point.") Gordon complains: "Frequently, indeed more commonly than not, I have heard sermons about which my family cannot even answer the first question. And even when we can, it is very rare to find the point adequately established from the passage. Further, the applications suggested almost never have anything to do with the text" (19).

Why Johnny Can't Preach also appeals to Robert Lewis Dabney's "seven cardinal requisites of preaching" found in his *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric,* (required reading in the Protestant Reformed Seminary), and claims that these are "manifestly absent" in most Reformed sermons today (23).

But Gordon's proof *that* Johnny can't preach, the one *most* painful for preachers to hear, is the "almost universal desire for briefer sermons." Intriguingly, his conclusion of this point is that "…sermon length is not measured in minutes; it is measured in *minutes-beyond-interest*, in the amount of time the minister continues to preach after he has lost the interest of his hearers (assuming he ever kindled it in the first place)" (emphasis added; 31).

Next, Gordon explains *why* Johnny can't preach, attributing the inability first to Johnny's inability to read texts. It is not that ministers do not read and have not read, but they do not read and have not read in the right *way* (slowly and thoughtfully) and for the right *reasons* (they read only for *information*). Here is where Gordon's interest in "media ecology" shines. Although perhaps somewhat of a caricature, his description of the modern preacher who has immersed himself in electronic media gives pause to the thoughtful reader, especially for its conclusion:

> What kinds of ministers does

> such a culture produce? Ministers who are not at home with what is significant; ministers whose attention span is less than that of a four-year-old in the 1940s, who race around like the rest of us, constantly distracted by sounds and images of inconsequential trivialities, and out of touch with what is weighty. It is not surprising that their sermons, and the alleged worship that surrounds them, are often trifling, thoughtless, uninspiring, and mundane…. It is also not surprising that their sermons tend to be moralistic, sentimentalistic, or slavishly drafted into the so-called culture wars. The great seriousness of the reality of being human, the dreadful seriousness of the coming judgment of God, the sheer insignificance of the present in light of eternity—realities that once were the subtext of virtually every sermon—have now disappeared, and have been replaced by one triviality after another (58, 59).

Johnny can't preach also because Johnny cannot *write*. And Johnny cannot write because (at least partly because) Johnny learned to write on a keyboard. He did not learn the discipline of outlining his presentation thoughtfully before he began to write, and when he began to write did not carefully craft each sentence as did an earlier generation who put *pen* to *paper* and (therefore!) first pondered carefully how that sentence ought to read.

The book ends with a helpful, as well as encouraging, chapter 5 entitled "Teaching Johnny to Preach." Here Gordon shows that even the seasoned preacher is able to "cultivate those pre-homiletical sensibilities that are necessary to preach well" (96). There is hope.

But before the end, Gordon writes "A Few Thoughts About Content," which happens to be the longest chapter in this too-short a book. This is a useful chapter because it both exposes four errors in Reformed preaching and reveals the Reformed stuff the author himself is made of. As he promotes Christ-centered preaching, Gordon gives sharp criticism to "four failures" (78ff.). Moralistic and "how-to" sermons come under fire. But his most important criticism, in my estimation and in our day, is against the "culture-war" preachers who believe that "it is better to have a public display of commitment to Christianity that is the result of coercion than to have a decline in the public display

of commitment to Christianity" (88), and against the neo-Puritan preachers who "have apparently determined that the purpose and essence of Christian preaching is to persuade people that they do not, in fact, believe" (83).

The book comes, as now has become plain, with my high recommendation. As another recommendation puts it, with hyperbole, "Adds more to the homiletical conversation than ten books twice its length."

T. David Gordon has taught in Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and now teaches religion and Greek at Grove City College just north of Pittsburgh. He has also written *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal.* ●

Communion with the Triune God, by John Owen. Ed. Kelley M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007. Pp. 445. $28.00 (soft). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The English Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) is not as well known by us as he ought to be. Perhaps, by the efforts of J. I. Packer we are acquainted with Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. But we have read little more.

Owen himself may be partly responsible for his not being better read. His style was prolix. His exposition of his theme was detailed and complex, if not complicated. Like many other Puritans, he never used ten words when he could use a hundred.

Nevertheless, he rewards the effort of reading him. The reward is profound insight into the truths of Scripture; warm, moving application of these truths to the experiential knowledge and trust of the believing reader; wide knowledge of the doctrine of the church fathers and of the men of the Reformation on any topic Owen addresses; and strong defense of Reformed orthodoxy.

A good book with which to begin is Owen's *Communion with the Triune God*. First published in 1657, *Communion* has recently been re-published in an edited format for the benefit of the modern reader. The editing does not affect the content of the book, only certain aspects of its form.

Covenant Theme

The theme of the book is grand. The essence of salvation, from the Father, in the Son, and by the Holy Ghost, is communion with God. And this communion is the reality of the covenant of grace. Owen grounds this doctrine of the covenant and its salvation in the biblical promise, "I will be your God": "The Lord wraps up the whole covenant of grace in *one* promise, signifying no less [than constituting and assuring salvation]: 'I will be your God.' In the covenant, God becomes our God, and we are his people" (199).

Reformed and Presbyterian theologians who describe the covenant as a conditional contract and as merely the means to the end of salvation do not get their poor doctrine of the covenant from John Owen.

Describing the book's content as a covenantal doctrine of communion with God, is, however, like describing the physical make-up of a human in terms only of the skeleton of bones. Essential as this skeleton is, for a human to be fully human physically he must have flesh and blood, skin and muscles, nerves, and harmony of form. Owen provides all the spiritual equivalents pertaining to the covenant of these important physical elements of a human, while remaining faithful to his fundamental theme of communion with God.

Without any compromise of the oneness of God's being, Owen works out in rich and elaborate detail communion with the Father, communion with the Son, and communion with the Holy Ghost. With respect to the particular, distinctive communion with each of the three persons, Owen begins with the active communion of each of the persons on His part with the elect believer and concludes with the consequent communion of the believer with each of the persons of the Godhead.

Throughout, the Puritan theologian instructs concerning our experience of God's communion with us and exhorts and admonishes concerning our active communion with each of the persons of the Godhead.

The book is replete with pertinent interpretation of Scripture. Especially in the treatment of our communion with Jesus Christ, the Son, Owen gives extensive, and often moving, explanation of the Song of Solomon, a book too often overlooked or deliberately neglected by us.

Polemical Development

John Owen was a staunch, polemical defender of Reformed orthodoxy. Often, some three hundred years beforehand, he exposed and condemned errors that plague Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the twenty-first century. Jesus Christ was not for Owen the sweet, loving, but helpless Savior of all humans, desirous of saving all, but frustrated by the contrary will of many—the Jesus of the well-meant offer and of the invitation system.

> And what power over them [all things] has our Beloved? "All power in heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18). As for men, he has power given him "over all flesh" (John 17:2). And in what glory does he exercise this power? He gives eternal life to his elect ruling them in the power of God (Mic. 5:4), until he brings them to himself: and for his enemies, his arrows are sharp in their hearts (Ps. 45:5); he dips his vesture in their blood (Is. 63:3 [cf. Rev. 19:13]). Oh, how glorious is he in his authority over his enemies! (172).

Contrary to the contemporary heresy of the Federal Vision, Owen insisted on the active obedience of Christ as a fundamental element of the righteousness imputed to the believer. Owen rejected as false the teaching that "the active obedience of Christ [was only] that he might be fitted for his death and oblation" (278). Rather, "this obedience was performed by Christ not for himself, but for us, and in our stead…. This perfect, complete obedience of Christ to the law is reckoned unto us" (280-81).

For Owen, both justification and sanctification are by faith alone, and not by the working and striving of the believer himself. Even the good works of the regenerated, believing child of God are excluded from his justification. "Even the works we do after believing—those unto which we are created in Christ Jesus, those that God has ordained that believers 'should walk in them'—as to justification and acceptance with God…are excluded." Owen observed how determined Satan is to corrupt the gospel of grace in the matter of justification by faith alone.

> It is marvelous to see how hard it is to keep some professors to any faithfulness with Christ in this thing [justification by faith alone, without the good works of the sinner]—how

> many disputes have been managed, how many distinctions invented, how many shifts and evasions studied, to keep up something, in some place or other, to some purpose or other, that they may dally with (263).

Owen does justice to the experiential nature of justification.

> This is their voice and language, when once the righteousness of God in Christ is made known unto them [the sinner justified by faith alone—DJE]: "Here is righteousness indeed; here have I rest for my soul. Like the merchant man in the gospel that finds the pearl of price (Matt. 13:45-46), I had been searching up and down; I looked this and that way for help, but it was far away; I spent my strength for that which was not bread: here is that, indeed, which makes me rich forever!" (312).

With regard to the equally divine and sovereign work of sanctification, Owen contended that it too, like justification, is the saving work of Jesus Christ, received by faith alone, warning at the same time against the notion that sanctification is the accomplishment of the sinner himself by his own, often hard, working.

> Persons who know not Christ, nor the fellowship of his sufferings, would spin a holiness out of their own bowels; they would work it out in their own strength…. The saints of God [on the contrary]…look to him [Christ]…and thereupon by faith derive from him an increase of that whereof they stand in need [holiness]. Thus, I say, have the saints communion with Christ, as to their *sanctification* and holiness…. This is the way, the only way, to obtain full, effectual manifestations of the Spirit's dwelling in us; to have our hearts purified, our consciences purged, our sins mortified, our graces increased, our souls made humble, holy zealous, believing…. Let us herein abide, eyeing Christ by faith, to attain that measure of conformity to him which is allotted unto us in this world… (333).

Particular Grace

Evidently, the contemporary, self-styled disciples of the Puritans have no support for their theology of common grace in John Owen. Owen rejected the doctrine of a well-meant desire of God for the salvation

of all humans, specifically all who hear the preaching of the gospel. Owen taught that the promiscuous preaching of the gospel serves God's purpose of particular grace, originating in and governed by the decree of election.

> It is true; the word is preached to all the world, to gather in the children of God's purpose that are scattered up and down in the world (John 11:52) and to leave the rest inexcusable; but the prime end and aim of the Lord Christ thereby is to gather in those heirs of salvation unto the enjoyment of that feast of fat things which he has prepared for them in his house (346).

Particular grace in the gospel is grounded in the basic truth that "the full manifestation as well as the exercise of this mercy [is]…in Christ only" (188). Owen's convincing, biblical argument is this, in question form: How can the grace of God to humans be wider than Jesus Christ, in whom and in whom alone are all the mercy and grace of God? The alternatives to particular grace, between which most of evangelicalism and the larger part of Reformed Christianity must choose today, are either that God's grace is wider than Christ or that in Christ is universal grace, that is, universalism.

For Owen, the love of God the Father, source and foundation of grace and salvation, is "*distinguishing*…`Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated' (Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13)" (125).

As he taught that the preaching of the gospel is governed by election, so, to the consternation of much of Reformed Christianity today, including many churches that are loud in their profession of adherence to Owen, did Owen hold that the covenant of grace is governed by election.

> [The mediatorship of Jesus roots] in the sovereign grant, appointment, and design of the Father, giving and delivering the elect to Jesus Christ in this covenant, to be redeemed and reconciled to himself. "Yours they were, and you gave them me" (John 17:6). They were God's by eternal designation and election, and he gave them to Christ to be redeemed. Hence, before their calling or believing, he calls them his "sheep" (John 10:15-16), laying down his life for them as such; and hence are we said to be "chosen in Christ" (Eph. 1:4), or designed to obtain all the

> fruits of the love of God by Christ, and committed into his hand for that end and purpose (299).

Owen condemned that aspect of the theory of common grace that consists of extending the saving grace of God more widely than the elect in Christ. He also repudiated the notion that, in His grace for them, God blesses the reprobate, unbelieving wicked in things natural and earthly, for example, health and riches. Some of the most forceful language of Owen in the entire book demolishes this error of the theory of a common grace of God. Only believers have a right to "the things of this world." The ungodly are "usurpers" in the creation. "Unbelievers…have no true right unto any thing" (350).

The book concludes with such a blistering exposure of the notion that the earthly prosperity of the wicked signifies God's gracious blessing of the wicked that, had it been written by a Protestant Reformed theologian, evangelicals and purported disciples of Puritanism today would rise up in [un]holy horror, one outdoing the other in damning the author as a dreadful hyper-Calvinist and his book as outrageous hyper-Calvinism—the main threat to Reformed orthodoxy in all the world.

> I shall shut up this whole discourse with some considerations of the sad estate and condition of men not interested in this promise of the Spirit, nor made partakers of his consolation:…They have no *true consolation* or comfort, be their estate and condition what it will…. So is with them in trouble [miserable—DJE]. Is it any better with them in their prosperity? This, indeed, is often great, and is marvelously described in Scripture, as to their lives, and oftentimes quiet, peaceable end. But have they any true consolation all their days? They eat, drink, sleep, and make merry, and perhaps heap up to themselves; but how little do these things make them to differ from the beasts that perish!... "They are all vanity and vexation of spirit." This is their consolation: a crackling of thorns under the pot, a sudden flash and blaze, that begins but to perish. So that both adversity and prosperity slays them; and whether they are laughing or crying, they are still dying. They have no peace…. They have no joy and hope…. Unless the Spirit

> of Christ be in us, we are dead, we are reprobates—we are none of Christ's (424-26).

The wisdom of the world, that so fascinates the devotees of common grace, Owen utterly discounts.

> Who knows not the profound inquiries, the subtle disputations, the acute reasonings, the admirable discoveries of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and others? What, as to the purpose in hand, did they attain by all their studies and endeavors?...says the apostle—"They became fools" (223).

With reference to Socrates, the Greek philosopher of whom the advocates of common grace are most enamored, Owen observes that he "died like a fool, sacrificing a cock to Aesculapius" (223).

But enough of Owen against the theory of common grace. The foes of common grace need no further evidence from John Owen; the friends of common grace would maintain the doctrine were an angel to come down from heaven declaring against it.

Necessity of God's Righteousness

Against a wretched doctrine recently advanced by a prominent, reputedly conservative Presbyterian theologian in Great Britain and defended by an allegedly orthodox general assembly of Presbyterian churches, Owen affirmed the necessity of God's attribute of righteousness. The righteousness of God is not merely the effect of His will, but the necessity of His being. Owen applied this truth particularly to the necessity of the satisfaction of His righteousness by the suffering of Christ for the salvation of sinners.

> In him [Jesus Christ—DJE] God has manifested the *naturalness* of this righteousness unto him, in that it was impossible that it should be diverted from sinners without the interposing of a propitiation. Those who lay the necessity of satisfaction merely upon the account of a free act and determination of the will of God, leave…no just and indispensable foundation for the death of Christ, but lay it upon a supposition of that which might have been otherwise. But plainly, God, in that he spared not his only Son, but made his soul an offering for sin, and would admit of no atonement but in his blood, has

> abundantly manifested that it is of necessity to him (his holiness and righteousness requiring it) to render indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish unto sin. And the knowledge of this *naturalness* of vindictive justice, with the *necessity* of its execution on supposition of sin, is the only true and useful knowledge of it. To look upon it as that which God may exercise or forbear, makes his justice not a property of his nature, but a free act of his *will*; and a *will to punish* where one may do otherwise without injustice, is rather ill-will than justice [emphasis is Owen's—DJE] (189).

What Owen states concerning the necessity of God's righteousness in punishing sin in Jesus Christ applies as well to the necessity of God's not sinning. If God could not, by virtue of the righteousness of His being, save sinners apart from the satisfying of His justice in the death of Christ, so also is He, by virtue of His righteousness, unable to sin. Not sinning for God is the necessity of His own being, not merely the act of His will. Similarly, if God's righteousness in regard to His not sinning is the free act of His will, so also the satisfying of the justice of God in the cross of Christ was not the necessity of God's righteous being, but merely the decision of His will. Conceivably, then, God might have redeemed sinners apart from the cross.

That the righteousness of God, specifically in demanding the satisfaction of His justice in the atonement of the cross, was the necessity of the divine being, and not only the free decision of His will, is the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Question 40: "Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer death? Because, by reason of the justice [German: *Gerechtigkeit:* righteousness] and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise than by the death of the Son of God." The same righteousness of the being of God that made the cross "necessary" makes it necessary that God not sin, that is, makes it impossible that God sin.

Owen's treatment of the righteousness of God includes an account of the sufferings of Christ as the revelation of the justice of God.

> He required that the law be fulfilled, his justice satisfied, his wrath atoned for sin; and nothing less than all this would bring it about. If the debt of sin might have been

> compounded for at a cheaper rate, it had never been held up at the price of the blood of Christ (203).

The awful suffering of Jesus Christ at the hands of His righteous Father is, and ought to be, the most convincing testimony to us concerning the dreadfulness—the sinfulness—of our sins:

> Would you, then, see the true demerit of sin?—take the measure of it from the mediation of Christ, especially his cross. It brought him who was the Son God, equal unto God, God blessed forever, into the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), who had not where to lay his head. It pursued him all his life with afflictions and persecutions; and lastly brought him under the rod of God; there [it] bruised him and brake him—slew the Lord of life (I Cor. 2:7)…. Hence is deep humiliation for it, upon the account of him whom we have pierced (Zech. 12:10) (204).

Weaknesses

Candor demands the acknowledgment that the typical layman will find the book hard going, rewarding of his labor, but hard going. Such is the elaborate, detailed breakdown of many subjects; so exhaustive, the investigation of the topics; so determined is Owen to suck the last drops of doctrinal and practical juice from every doctrine, that even the minister with his theological training may find the going tedious on occasion.

Only rarely, and then quite cautiously, does the characteristic Puritan fault of depriving believers of their assurance of salvation surface. Concerning the Spirit's bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, that is, the assurance of salvation, Owen wrote that "sometimes the dispute hangs long—the cause is pleading many years. The law seems sometimes to prevail, sin and Satan to rejoice; and the poor soul is filled with dread about its inheritance" (379).

If the Owen of *Communion with the Triune God* is the exemplar, I am more Puritan than I have supposed, and more Puritan than I have supposed myself willing to be. ●

Historic Christianity and the Federal Vision: A Theological Analysis and Practical Evaluation, Dewey Roberts. East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, 2016. Pp. 410. $24.99 (hard). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

The strength of the book is its width. It critiques the Federal Vision broadly, from its doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which can be lost, to its doctrine of the final judgment, which will be based on man's works. With appropriate appeal to Scripture and the Reformed creeds, as well as to the Christian tradition, the book demonstrates, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the egregious heresy of the theology of the Federal Vision. The Federal Vision is un-Reformed and un-Christian. The author charges semi-Pelagianism, and proves the charge.

In addition, Roberts exposes the tactics of deceit on the part of the men of the Federal Vision. In order to preserve their Presbyterian and Reformed credentials and, in some instances, their position in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches, they lie.

The weakness of the book is its depth. The critique of the Federal Vision is shallow in that it treats the fundamental error of the Federal Vision merely as just another error of the movement among all the rest. The book fails to call attention to the main error of the theology of the Federal Vision. Inevitably, it then fails to explore this error in depth. It does not demonstrate that all the other false doctrines are implications and outgrowths of this central error. In fact, the book expressly denies that what is, in fact, the main error of the federal error *is* the main error, and proposes another error instead.

Failing to identify the main error, and to expose it in light of Scripture and the creeds, the book does not, indeed *cannot,* launch the fatal blow to the theology of the Federal Vision. It is as though a medical doctor were to call attention to a number of cancerous growths on a human body, in order to treat them, however effectively, all the while failing to detect the source of these excrescences deep in the body, and to set himself the task of destroying that cancerous source of all the cancerous growths.

The source of all the doctrinally cancerous errors of the Federal Vision, which errors Roberts correctly detects and for

the most part exposes as heresies, is the Federal Vision's doctrine of the covenant. This erroneous doctrine of the covenant is not merely one of the many errors of the theology of the Federal Vision. It is the mother of all the rest. All of the other errors are semi-Pelagian, or Arminian, in nature, as Roberts contends. The cause of them is a semi-Pelagian, or Arminian, doctrine of the covenant. The name of the theology expresses its essence: "*Federal*" Vision. "Federal" means covenant. The covenant doctrine of the Federal Vision is a conditional covenant, especially the covenant established with the baptized children of believing parents.

This doctrine holds that God graciously establishes His covenant with all the infants alike, graciously promises salvation to all alike, and even begins to realize covenant salvation with all alike. But the covenant is conditional. For its continuance with a child and especially for its fulfillment in a child's everlasting salvation, the child himself must perform the conditions of believing and continued obedience. Faith and persevering obedience are not covenant gifts on God's part, but activities of the child upon which the covenant promise and the covenant itself depend. The covenant promise, the covenant itself, and covenant salvation, that is, the covenant God Himself, can and often do fail, because of a child's failure to perform the conditions upon which all depends.

All the other errors that Roberts rightly exposes are implications of this covenant doctrine. According to this covenant doctrine, all the children, an Esau as well as the Jacobs, are elect—*conditionally*. The election of many baptized children, therefore, becomes reprobation. According to this covenant doctrine, covenant salvation is begun in all the children by the sacrament of baptism, but can be lost if a child does not perform the conditions. The salvation of many baptized children, therefore, is lost. According to this covenant doctrine, justification in the sphere of the covenant is by faith and works, the works being the child's performance of the conditions of faith and lifelong obedience. No one, therefore, can be sure of his or her justification and salvation. According to this covenant doctrine, Christ died for all the baptized children, but the efficacy of the cross depends upon the children's performance of the condition of believing. Many, therefore, for

whom Christ died perish nonetheless. According to this covenant doctrine, a favorable verdict in the final judgment will depend, not on the work of Christ for the sinner, but on the sinner's own works of faithful obedience to the law of God. Therefore, all can only face the prospect of the final judgment with terror.

Adding to the serious mistake of Roberts in not identifying the Federal Vision's covenant doctrine as the root of the heresy and the mother of all its false doctrines is his explicit denial that the Federal Vision's doctrine of the covenant has this central place in its theology. So insistent is Roberts that he suggests giving the heresy a different name.

> The Federal Vision is a misnomer. It is not a vision for covenant theology. It is a vision for sacramental theology. It is a view of the sacraments which is nearly identical to the false views of the Roman Catholic Church. It would be more accurate to call this new theology the Sacramental Vision (79).

Roberts' failure, or refusal, to identify and condemn the fundamental error of the Federal Vision—the doctrine of a conditional, gracious covenant and covenant promise, that are not governed by election—is widespread in "conservative" Reformed and Presbyterian Christianity. Very likely, this is the reason why the Federal Vision has found fertile soil in these churches for sprouting and growing. This is also the reason why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America (to which denomination Dewey Roberts belongs), and the United Reformed Churches have been unwilling and unable to deliver a killing blow upon the Federal Vision and some of its leading advocates. On the contrary, the assemblies of some of these denominations have exonerated the Federal Vision heretics or connived at their escaping discipline. The doctrine of a conditional covenant is the reigning doctrine of the covenant in these churches. In any case, these churches and others have refused to identify and condemn the fundamental doctrine of the Federal Vision: the conditional, gracious covenant and covenant promise, particularly with regard to the baptized babies of believing parents.

The value of Roberts' book, therefore, will be especially twofold. First, it exposes the Federal

Vision as wholesale corruption of the creedal Reformed faith, indeed as a semi-Pelagian corruption of the historic Christian faith.

Second, it may inspire some Reformed ministers, theologians, and concerned laymen to inquire what it is about the theology of the Federal Vision that results in the total, gross corruption of every tenet of the Reformed faith of the creeds. They will discover that the root of the theology of the Federal Vision is the conditional covenant theology of the "liberated" Reformed churches—the GKNV in The Netherlands and the Canadian and American Reformed Churches in North America—as the men of the Federal Vision themselves openly declare and as the theology of the Federal Vision itself clearly shows. ●

Minutes of the Christian Reformed Church: Classical Assembly 1857-1870; General Assembly 1867-1879; and Synodical Assembly 1880. (Edited and annotated by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, transcribed by Hendrick K. Harms, translated by Richard H. Harms, for the Historical Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.) Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013. Pp. i-xxxiv + 1-634. $69.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.]

Reading minutes of the broader assemblies (classis and synod) of the Christian Reformed Church in its beginnings (1857-1880) may sound about as interesting as reading an encyclopedia. But in truth, anyone interested in the church of Jesus Christ, especially its history, will be fascinated by these old records now put into good form by capable translators and editors. The minutes are also annotated by editor Janet Sheeres, so that references to strange events, theological anomalies, or antiquated practices are explained in footnotes. There is even a 110-page supplement containing biographical data on all the persons mentioned in the minutes. Editor Sheeres and the Harms have done the churches commendable service in this work.

As the lengthy "sub-title" indicates, the book was produced for the Historical Committee of

the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The book is number 82 in the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*, which denomination works in cooperation with Heritage Hall of the CRCNA. So the book is of special interest and value to members of the CRC, but also to the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and any other denomination that has its roots in or connections to the CRCNA.

The book is comprised of the minutes of forty regular classical assemblies, from 1857 to 1870, and three "special" classical gatherings in that time period. Then appear the minutes of fourteen "general assemblies" (what we would call synods) from 1867 to 1880.

In addition to the biographical data, the appendixes include two important letters to their "mother church," the *Christelijke Afgescheiden Gemeenten* (the *Afscheiding* churches in the Netherlands), dated 1857 and 1860. In these letters, the four original CRCNA congregations pleaded with their mother to recognize them as true churches, to support them with counsel and ministers, and even to unite with them formally. Because the request of 1857 was rejected, the 1860 letter repeated the argument and plea: Our recent separation from the Dutch Reformed Church in America (the RCA) was justified; that denomination teaches a "multitude of fundamental heresies" (464), including universal atonement and universal salvation; and though we tried to join another small secession group in the eastern states, we cannot join them either because they "hold that regeneration is the ground for the acceptance of members and of baptism" (470). Throughout the minutes there is record of the church in the Netherlands requesting them to offer defense of their split (211, 212, 223). These two letters are that *apologia*.

My original reading of these minutes began by following the important subjects listed in the Index: Adoption, Adultery, Annual Day of Prayer, Antichrist, Antinomianism, Bankruptcy, Baptism (a multitude of sub-topics), Calling of a professor, Capital punishment, Catechetical instruction, Christian schools, Christmas (see Feast days), Church Order of Dordt, Church visitors, Civil Unions (see Marriage), Clergy garb, Death penalty…. Going only that far in the index gives indication of the important subjects treated by our mother in her early

days. But reading that way led me to so many distractions in the minutes that eventually I resorted simply to reading from front to back, taking notes as I went.

Lest this review become impossibly long, I mention, in no particular order, some of the more significant subjects and decisions that are instructive, controversial, sometimes humorous, but almost always very serious.

In 1858 the little classis heard a case of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The woman who remarried had left a very difficult marriage, from an abusive husband. In the second marriage she bore two children. When the classis heard their case, the assembly demanded that the couple separate or be excommunicated (6). Because the two children of the new marriage were not yet baptized, classis approved baptism but assigned the grandfather as witness and (presumably) the one responsible for the vows made at the baptism. Also about baptism, classis in 1870 refused membership to a woman, now separated from her husband for "excessive cruelty," but permitted her child to be baptized if her parents would present the baby (252). The young denomination faced the question of divorce and remarriage more than a few times. Once, when the elders from Niekerk asked if a woman may remarry after she divorced her husband, twice the classis said "No," and appealed to Mark 10:13 and I Corinthians 7:10, 11 (261).

In 1865, classis declared that having fire insurance was sin and instructed four elders who had insurance policies to cancel (132). Later that same year, classis raised the issue again because some considered it unfair to require this of elders but not for members. The conclusion: "these people will not be allowed [to serve] on the church council; however not to deny them access to the Lord's Supper, provided there are no other [negative] comments about them" (138).

Although "parish boundaries" were never established, classis gave permission for consistories to admonish members to join the congregation closest to their residence, but "not to the point of giving offence" (182). One gets the impression that two churches were struggling over which would end up with some trouble-maker (232). Nevertheless, they were serious about the calling to join the church in the denomination closest to one's residence.

Many assembly records give

insight into seminary student examinations and candidates for the ministry. The young men were required to sign the Formula of Subscription. They always swore an oath against simony. In addition to knowledge of the "theology of the covenant of grace" and the "gift of the covenant of grace," the students were required to manifest competency in "pastoral work," "general history," "rhetorical analysis," and "geography," the reference in the latter not to biblical but world geography. And they always were required to give testimony about their conversion and their call to the ministry (190, 206, 216, 247, 331, etc.). One classis declined a young man's request to study for the ministry with no reason given (255); one student was sent home because he was too timid and was told to return after he practiced speaking in public more often (273); yet a third was rejected because of reports that said applicant "might not be totally in his right mind" (374). Needy students were supported via church offerings. Without a formal seminary, the students were trained by Rev. VanderWerp, who was given a stipend of $50 per year. Even when Rev. VanderWerp complained that this took away from his ability to care for his own congregation, synod decided to ask him to continue (296).

Of interest especially to (some) ministers is the 1869 decision that, if Christmas fell on a weekend, permission was given not to preach one of the extra services. Perhaps this is not quite the precedent that some would wish since, in these days, Christmas was celebrated with two services on Christmas day and one service of worship on the following day (209).

Elders were faithful in their oversight of catechism instruction. They determined what books were permitted in the curriculum (212), and that "no other books" were allowed (321). The "compendium" (the abbreviation of the Heidelberg Catechism) was part of it (283), a tool the churches have lost and could reconsider, since it has always been judged that the Heidelberg Catechism is often too difficult for most young children.

In discipline, the young churches were strong. Discipline took a large part of the early assemblies' time. Public reconciliation was required for public sin (251). Interesting details of discipline imposed for stealing—fishing nets full of fish, wheat and

iron pilfered from a foundered steamboat in Grand Haven harbor (258), for violating the fourth commandment by selling milk on Sunday (253). Classis gave Niekerk congregation permission to excommunicate a man for beating his wife (232). Discipline was exercised for doctrinal error as well. In 1869, Classis (!) deposed from office an elder for the heresies of antinomianism, Darbyism, and mysticism. Classis also placed him under the first step of personal discipline (234). Already prior to 1924, the *broader assemblies* exercised discipline, a practice the PRCA has objected to as contrary to the Church Order. Of course, these churches who seceded because of doctrinal deviations in the Dutch Reformed Church would be alert to doctrinal errors. So it is unsurprising that Classis of October 1865, after hearing reports of a minister's writings in a church magazine, required him to make public retraction of his argument that the pope was not the Antichrist. The minister agreed to do so (137).

Christian education was high on the priority list of these immigrants. Recorded in 1870 was the moving declaration that "… the entire assembly is unilaterally convinced that the school is the place for the cultivation of, and support for the Church, and that, therefore, it must be the obligation of each congregation to see to it that they acquire free schools" ("free" meaning free from governmental support). Already in 1870, struggling to survive as churches, our forefathers maintained the obligation of the people of God to have good Christian education for their children: "The assembly recommends this most emphatically to each church council and congregation" (297).

And it was a struggle to survive. Churches were pressed to pay their minister's salary. Congregations struggled to pay travel expense for their ministers attending classis. Grand Haven congregation once protested the requirement that they pay for stabling of the horses of the classical delegates (246). One of the first ministers was almost never paid the entire salary promised to him. After coming to the assembly repeatedly to ask for what he was promised, classis advised him to take a call to a neighboring church that could support him and, if necessary, to "preach out" in order to earn more money (xxxiii). In the end, he had to work his farm to support himself and his family. Noordeloos once

was reprimanded for not sending delegates to classis, even though they could not afford to come (246). Other incidents also reveal the difficulties of the small group of churches which, had they not seceded from an apostatizing denomination, could have been well-off materially. Faithfulness for them was costly. Eventually they instituted a system of support for needy churches (303).

Troubles also plagued the young denomination, the devil always sowing discord and working diligently to destroy efforts of reform. One consistory "roughed up" a classical committee commissioned to help them in their troubles (217). Another congregation was on "the verge of destruction" (224), until the Lord healed the breach. One "Rev. Koopman" severed his relationship with his congregation, the result of which was that classis expressed the hope "that the congregation will remain intact" (224). Troubles in yet another congregation were so severe that the whole consistory resigned and the congregation elected an entirely new council (262).

Already early in their history the fledgling CRC was determined to engage in missions and, at one point, advertised in the church magazine for young men interested in training for missions. The approval of parents or guardian was required if the applicant was a minor (329). Already then our forefathers realized the need for special training if one desired to engage in missions.

Though one might not agree with all the decisions of these assemblies, these minutes are filled with precedents that should not be ignored.

Time would fail me to tell of all the subjects of great interest. But let me recommend the book to interested readers who will learn of men (and women) who shaped the PRCA's mother church, of faithful men (and women), of shady characters here and there, but mostly of devoted men of God whom God used to establish a denomination committed to the Reformed faith. The minutes warn the people of God of the risks of following strong but opinionated men, teach the vital importance of keeping good records in the assemblies (some recorded here are a negative example of this) of proper order in God's church, and so much more. Especially the reader will come away with the sense that God was pleased to use the weak efforts of a small group of Dutch immigrants to establish a

true church of Christ in the United States and Canada.

The book is so interesting and profitable that the editors can be forgiven for the various misspellings ("adultary" for "adultery" for example, in the index), incorrect dates (1936 and 1937 for 1836 and 1837, for example, on xviii), and a few more.

Can the PRCA produce something similar? Indexes for synods are updated annually, so that research is possible for this assembly. What of the classis meetings? ●

The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary, by B. Wielenga. Tr. Annemie Godbehere. Ed. David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. xx + 425. $39.95 (hard). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The liturgical form most often read in a Reformed church is, undoubtedly, the Form for the Administration of Baptism. This judgment excludes the Heidelberg Catechism, a major Reformed confession that is never read in a worship service of the congregation in its entirety.

No Reformed man or woman tires of the Form, at least not when he or she is living in the consciousness of faith and certainly not when the Form is read over his or her own infant child. The content of the Baptism Form is Reformed Christianity at its most glorious; the Form is poetic and moving; the occasion is gripping—most often in a Reformed church the baptism of an infant of believing parents. More than once in his dogmatics class, Herman Hoeksema exclaimed, involuntarily, over the richness and beauty of the Form. His exclamation used superlatives.

At the same time, the Form is controversial in the sphere of Reformed Christianity. Of course, the so-called "Calvinistic Baptists" reject the Form altogether for its extension of the covenant grace and salvation of God to the infants of believers. But the Form is controversial also among those Reformed churches that confess the covenant of God with the children of believers and that practice infant baptism. Some, under the

influence of the Puritans, deny infant regeneration and salvation. All that the baptism of infants means for them is that the baptized children are put in a position in which it becomes more likely that they will be saved when they grow up and are no longer infants. Usually, these churches demand a dramatic conversion "experience" as the nature, and proof, of the salvation of these infants—in their old age.

A practical consequence of this rejection of infant salvation is often the black despair and uncomforted grief of members of these churches at the death of an infant child. They know nothing of the covenant comfort of Article 17 of the first head of the Canons of Dordt: "Godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy." They stand wailing uncontrollably in the funeral parlor, hopeless, unbelieving—and displaying in themselves the severe judgment of God upon those who deny His covenant mercy.

Other Reformed churches explain infant baptism as a kind of preliminary salvation of all the infants without exception. Their baptism assures that in some sense, usually described as "legal," God saves them all, or assures that He on His part wills to save them all. But their salvation is conditional. Their salvation depends upon their believing and obeying when they mature, and are no longer infants. Neither, then, according to this explanation of infant baptism are the infant children of believers truly, wholly, and decisively saved in their infancy.

In contrast to these, admittedly popular, doctrines of infant baptism, the Protestant Reformed Churches teach and confess that infant baptism means and seals the salvation *in their infancy* of the infants who are baptized. But this holds true of the elect children of believers—the genuine, spiritual children of believers—not of all. Basic to the doctrine of infant baptism, and of the covenant of grace, is the truth that election governs the covenant and its salvation.

Against this background both of the importance of the Baptism Form and of the controversial nature of the significance of infant baptism, the worth of the just published *The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary* is evident.

The book is a commentary on the Baptism Form by a noted,

able Reformed minister in the Netherlands, Dr. Bastiaan Wielenga. Wielenga lived from 1873 to 1949. Wielenga devoted his entire, long ministry to the pastorate, declining, in 1912, appointment to the office of professor of theology at the Reformed Seminary in Kampen. A student of the outstanding Dutch Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck, Wielenga stood squarely in the grand, orthodox, Reformed tradition of the *Doleantie,* the *Afscheiding*, and the Reformed Reformation shaped and promoted by John Calvin. The book gives a short "biographical sketch" of the author of the commentary.

The commentary was first published in 1906. A second printing, delayed by World War I, took place in 1920. This translation into English worked with the second printing. According to Wielenga himself, the changes in the second printing of the commentary were few and of no significance.

Although he was fully aware of all the controversies surrounding the Form, Wielenga set himself the task strictly of explaining the language itself of the Baptism Form. He refused to promote a certain theological agenda. With the rare exception, the commentary faithfully and convincingly elucidates the doctrine of the Form itself.

> My main goal was not to provide a polemical treatise… Nobody is impartial, but I have insisted on open-mindedness, which is necessary for proper exegesis. The question I continually asked myself was, what does the form say? How did the Reformed fathers account for their view of baptism in this act of the Reformation?...It is not my idea of baptism… that I have tried to represent here, but a valuable liturgical heritage from the century of the Reformation (xvi).

This is not to suggest that, in the course of explaining the Form, Wielenga does not settle the controversies still troubling the Reformed churches, particularly, that of infant salvation and that of the relation of covenant and election. In fact, it was Wielenga's hope that "a truthful explanation of the Form could assist in the sorely needed tempering of the still-continuing tremors of unrest" concerning infant baptism in the Reformed churches (xv).

Deliberately, the Dutch theologian wrote for the common

people—the man, the woman, the young person in the pew of the church—not for the educated clergy. Although the commentary will be of enormous benefit to all Reformed ministers, especially with regard to the sermons they preach on the occasion of the administration of baptism (I keenly regret that I did not have access to the commentary in the earliest days of my ministry), the Reformed believer, without theological training, will profit greatly from the riches of the distinctively Reformed doctrine and practice of the covenant of grace uncovered in the Baptism Form by this commentary. Nor will the profit be only knowledge of the riches of the grace of God to his or her infant children. But the Reformed believer will know more deeply the riches of the grace of God sealed to him or her in his or her own baptism.

Wielenga assured the reader that "my endeavor was not first, not even most importantly, to provide material for an elevated theoretical, dogmatic view of baptism." Rather,

> the ardent desire of my heart is that by the publication of this writing many people reading this work learn to regard baptism more purely, appreciate it more warmly, and more zealously plead the covenantal promises on behalf of believers and their children, before the throne of him who calls himself I Am That I Am (xvii).

How moving, how spiritually moving, is the commentary's explanation and application of the Form! Explaining the line in the Form concerning the spiritual condition of the infant children by nature, "we with our children are conceived and born in sin," Wielenga wrote:

> We know that this tiny, fragile babe is born with inborn filthy sins, thus making him hideous before a holy God. That he is born to die and to suffer grief. That at the end of the narrow, bumpy path of life that begins at the infant's crib stands a coffin and awaits a yawning grave, and behind it, a mocking abyss. Behold, this should make the parents' heart tremble even more and in distress implore the great Judge to have mercy on this child (27-28).

How precious to the parents and to the entire congregation thinking such thoughts, as the Baptism Form impresses upon

them, is the blood of Jesus represented by the water of baptism applied to the infant, in stark contrast to such trivial matters as "how pretty a baptism gown the child is wearing," or "how nice that the child did not cry when the water was applied."

By no means does the explanation of the sacrament of baptism restrict itself to the doctrine. It is also practical. For example, it answers the question whether in the ceremony of baptism the officiating minister should apply the water only once, or three times. Wielenga's answer will surprise some. More importantly, Wielenga answers the question, how should we view our children, in the rearing of them, and how should we instruct them to view themselves—as unregenerated "little vipers," or as born again, sanctified members of Jesus Christ?

The book commends itself to many worldwide. It is an excellent—and rare—commentary on a precious Reformed (secondary) confession. It is the first translation into English of the commentary, originally written in Dutch. It is the only thorough commentary on the Baptism Form, now in the English language. All Reformed ministers, theologians, and church members who use the Reformed Baptism Form and who can read English will benefit enormously from the commentary, and enjoy reading it.

Also the history of the Baptism Form itself commends the commentary to the Reformed churches today. With this history, the commentary begins. Indirectly, the Baptism Form originates with John Calvin: "Calvin stamped the mark of his marvelous spirit…also on our Reformed baptism form, although indirectly" (8). As early as 1574, merely some fifty-odd years after the Protestant Reformation, the provincial Synod of Dordt worked at giving the official version of the Baptism Form to the Reformed churches. The Synod of Dordt of 1618/1619 adopted the official text of the Baptism Form. It is a significant feature of Wielenga's commentary that it begins with the official text of the Form, providing as well notes that bear on the official text and on certain changes that have found their way into the Form as used by the churches today. Some of these textual matters are of interest and importance, for example, whether the official text has "two parts" or "two parties" in the covenant.

The book even relates some

utterly fascinating historical events occasioned by the phrase in the Form, "taught here in this Christian church," at the time of the great struggle of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands with the Arminian heresy and heretics.

This is a publication of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) that can, and should, find ready, if not eager, acceptance, not only in the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sister churches, but also far beyond the circles that the RFPA's publications—unfortunately—usually reach.

The translator was a godly, linguistically gifted, Reformed woman in France, Annemie Godbehere. Stricken with cancer while finishing the translation, she died before the book was published. She has her reward, nonetheless. To her, unofficially, the book is dedicated. ●

Contributors for this issue are:

Robert Burford, a Presbyterian living near Melbourne, Australia. He has long been active in the work of Christian education in that area. RFPA publications have been of great spiritual help to him for many years.

Ronald L. Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Russell J. Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

David J. Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Barrett L. Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Thomas G. Reid, Jr., librarian of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and ordained minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

Justin C. Smidstra, fourth-year student in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.