Editor's Notes

This is the second and last issue of the fiftieth volume of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. We welcome our readers to its pages. Included are several articles. The Rev. Thomas Reid favors us with the transcript of the second of two speeches that he gave last spring before the faculty, student body, and area Protestant Reformed ministers. The article highlights the labors and contributions of a recent French Reformed theologian, Auguste Lecerf. PRCA pastor, Rev. Thomas C. Miersma, contributes an article on the special offices and gifts in the New Testament church. He asks whether these gifts and offices continue in the church today, and if not, why not? The undersigned has two contributions to the issue. The first is the second part of my examination of the teaching of common grace in light of the five *solas* of the Reformation. The contention of the series is that the doctrine of common grace vitiates the five *solas* that constitute the Reformation's enduring contribution to the New Testament church. The second contribution is another installment of the "John Calvin Research Bibliography." A number of our readers have expressed appreciation for the bibliography as a useful tool for doing research into all the main areas of Calvin's theology. The bibliography arose out of my work in crafting a special interim course on the theology of John Calvin. The course is scheduled to be taught once again as the winter interim between the two semesters of the 2017-18 school year.

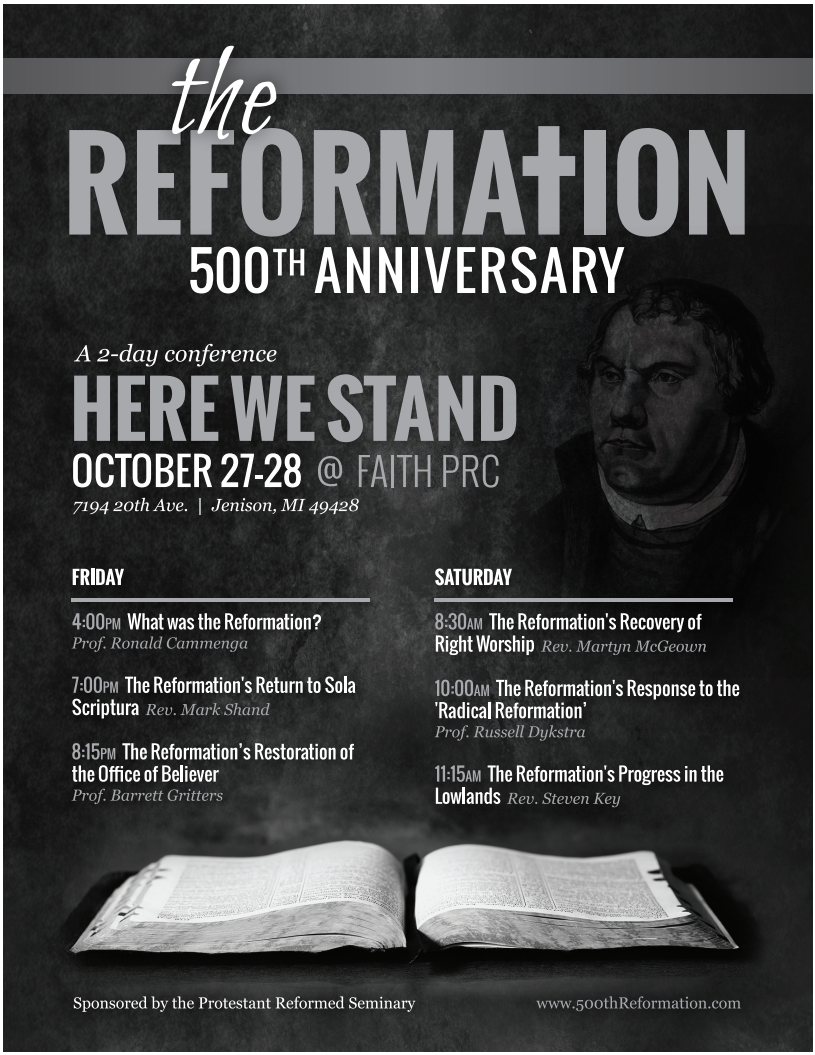
Included in this issue is what we hope will be a regular feature from the seminary's librarian, Mr. Charles Terpstra. Mr. Terpstra highlights the significant recent additions to the seminary library. We include this not merely for the information of our readers. But we invite our readers to make use of our library for study and research. We are even open to loaning our books to our constituency and friends.

And, of course, we have our section of book reviews—a goodly number of reviews in this issue. We want to do what we can to inform our readers of new books of special interest that are being published.

Read and enjoy!

Soli Deo Gloria!

—RLC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FRIDAY
4:00PM What was the Reformation?
Prof. Ronald Cammenga
7:00PM The Reformation's Return to Sola Scriptura Rev. Mark Shand
8:15PM The Reformation's Restoration of the Office of Believer
Prof. Barrett Gritters
SATURDAY
8:30AM The Reformation's Recovery of Right Worship Rev. Martyn McGeown
10:00AM The Reformation's Response to the 'Radical Reformation'
Prof. Russell Dykstra
11:15AM The Reformation's Progress in the Lowlands Rev. Steven Key
Sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Seminary
www.500thReformation.com

The Reformation, Common Grace, and the Growing Apostasy of the Church (2)

by Ronald Cammenga

This year Reformed churches worldwide are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. A number of conferences have been held and many more are planned as those who are the heirs of the Reformation commemorate the great event that changed everything. Everything! Absolutely everything was affected by the Reformation—and everyone. Although the Reformation primarily impacted the church, there were also political, social, economic and educational effects that resulted from the movement. From the lowliest member of the church to the bishops, cardinals, and the pope in Rome, the Reformation was a movement that had to be reckoned with. Kings and princes, but also peasants, day laborers, and artisans were affected by the Reformation. It was a movement that concerned them all, for the church at that time was at the center of all of life. Everything on the planet revolved around the church. And the result of the Reformation was that it stirred up winds of change that blew with gale force across Europe and beyond. After the Reformation, Europe's landscape was permanently altered.

Our concern in this series of articles is to identify one serious threat to the accomplishments of the Reformation. It was a threat that arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the Reformed churches themselves. It has proved to be a menacing threat and a burgeoning threat. It is a serious threat, and a threat that must be taken seriously by all who are concerned to preserve what the Reformation restored to the church. That ought to belong to the proper motive of those celebrating the Reformation's 500th anniversary. The motive for celebrating ought not to be purely historical, paying tribute to an event that took place long ago that has enduring signifi-

cance. It ought not to be a celebration aimed at promoting ethnic pride among those whose ancestors had a hand in the Reformation. But our celebration ought to be motivated by thankfulness and ought to include a firm resolution to preserve for future generations—children and grandchildren—all the good, spiritual fruit that the Reformation produced. In dependence upon God and by His grace, here we shall also stand!

The threat that this series of articles is concerned to identify is the teaching of common grace. As we have shown and intend further to demonstrate, the error of common grace, both from a doctrinal and from a practical (walk of life) point of view, is not merely a threat to the Reformation. The teaching is in fact the undoing of all the major positive contributions of the Reformation. Where the teaching of common grace has become accepted, there the cardinal truths that were the hallmark of the Reformation have been seriously compromised and, in a number of instances, rejected outright. In the previous installment in this series, we demonstrated the truth of that assertion in connection with the first *sola* of the sixteenth-century Reformation, *sola scriptura*, the sole authority of Scripture. If you have not yet read that introductory article, I would encourage you to do so. It documents the common grace assault on the sole authority of Scripture, and its return to the Roman Catholic practice of exalting other authorities alongside of and above the authority of sacred Scripture. In the article, we highlighted one specific error the acceptance of which has resulted in denial of the sole authority of Scripture. With appeal to common grace, the teaching of theistic evolution has become widely accepted in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. But this teaching has become widely accepted at the expense of compromise and denial of the sole authority of the Word of God.

In this article we proceed to consider the second *sola* of the Reformation, *sola fide*, faith alone. The Reformation taught that we are justified by faith alone. A church's acceptance of the teaching of common grace, as history bears out, invariably impacts in a negative way its confession of the great gospel truth of justification by faith alone. Wherever common grace has been embraced and is being promoted, there the witness to *sola fide* has become garbled, and in some cases altogether muted.

Justification by Faith Alone

The formal principle of the Reformation was the sole authority of the Bible. The material principle of the Reformation was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Along with *sola scriptura*, one of the watchwords of the Reformation was *sola fide*, faith alone.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone was the great doctrine recovered by Martin Luther as a result of his own spiritual struggles, particularly the struggle for his own personal assurance of salvation. Luther's struggle is really the struggle of every child of God. It is the struggle to possess the assurance, the undoubted assurance, assurance in life and in death that you are a child of God. It is the struggle to possess the assurance that God is your God and that you may call upon Him as your God. It is the struggle to possess the assurance that God loves you with an undying love. It is the struggle to know God, not only as the sovereign Lord over and Judge of all men, but as your loving and benevolent Heavenly Father. It is the assurance that Christ, the Son of God, has died for you and paid for all your sins. It is the assurance that He hung on Calvary's cross for you, in your place, as your substitute. It is the assurance of faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ and of God. It is the assurance, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54 that "I am and forever shall remain, a living member" of Christ's church.[1] It is the assurance of everlasting life, heaven, and glory after this life. It is the assurance of membership in the covenant and kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is such an assurance as gives joy and peace, and produces patience and hope.

The church of Luther's day answered his soul-searching question, "How can I have the assurance of my salvation, the assurance that God is my God and that Jesus Christ is my Savior?" by instructing him to work. Salvation and the assurance of salvation are merited; they must be earned, at least in part. For this reason, Luther entered the monastery at Wittenberg and became a monk. For this reason, as a monk Luther lived the most austere life of self-denial and deprivation. He prayed and he fasted; he denied himself and worked himself to a

1 *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 104.

frazzle. He even beat himself until his body was bruised and bleeding. Cheerfully he performed the most menial of tasks around the monastery. He ate very little food until he wasted away and looked like a walking skeleton. In his room, called a "cell," even in the middle of the winter he had no heat and slept with no covers on a mat on the cold floor. About his life as a monk, Luther later said,

> I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, readings, and other works.[2]

But try as he might, in the way of attempting to earn his own salvation, Luther could never come to the assurance of his salvation. Work as much as he did, he stood still in constant terror of the wrath of a holy God. He was always fearful that he had not done enough. And he was fearful that what he had done was tainted by sin. In Luther's own words:

> My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him.[3]

It was only when Luther came to understand the great gospel truth of justification by faith alone that he finally enjoyed the peace and assurance of his salvation. Faith looks away from one's self, and from one's own works and merits. Faith rests alone for righteousness before God in the cross work of Jesus Christ—His doing and His dying. That is the only ground for assurance! The wonderful Reformation truth of justification by faith alone, apart from our works, was the key that opened for Luther the door to the assurance of salvation. In his *Table Talks*, Luther says:

2 Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 45.

3 Quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 65.

> Nothing is more sure than this: that he that does not take hold on Christ by faith, and comfort himself herein, that Christ is made a curse for him, remains under the curse. The more we labor by works to obtain grace, the less we know how to take hold on Christ; for where he is not known and comprehended by faith, there is not to be expected either assurance, help, or comfort, though we torment ourselves to death.[4]

Luther came to the understanding of the truth of justification by faith alone, apart from works, through his study of the Scriptures, especially Paul's epistle to the Romans. This is his teaching in Romans 3:19-22: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God, without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." The apostle teaches that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified before God. Further, he teaches that the righteousness of God, that is, man's righteousness before God, is "without the law," that is, apart from our works of obedience to the law. Rather, the righteousness of God is "by faith of Jesus Christ," that is, faith that believes in Jesus Christ, faith that has Jesus Christ as its object. It is, further, a righteousness that is "unto all and upon all them that believe," that is, only upon those who trust in Jesus Christ and who do not trust in their own works. In verse 24 and the first part of verse 25, the apostle continues: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood…." Sinners are justified "freely" before God "by his grace." That they are justified "freely" and "by God's grace" means that they are justified apart from any works that they contribute and that might possibly merit their righteousness with God. The apostle ends the chapter by reiterating the great gospel truth that he has defended throughout the book: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith *without the deeds of the law*," verse 28. Faith rules out works;

4 Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, ed. Thomas S. Kepler (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 repr.), 114.

believing rules out meriting. "By faith" implies "without the deeds of the law." Clearly, the apostle teaches that a man is justified by faith *alone.* And just as clearly he repudiates our own works as the whole or part of our righteousness before God.

Calvin was in complete agreement with Luther on the matter of justification by faith alone apart from works. Writing in the *Institutes* he says:

> Since we see that every particle of our salvation stands thus outside of us, why is it that we still trust or glory in works? The most avowed enemies of the divine grace cannot stir up any controversy with us concerning either the efficient or the final cause, unless they would deny the whole of Scripture. They falsely represent the material and the formal cause, as if our works held half the place along with faith and Christ's righteousness. But Scripture cries out against this also, simply affirming that Christ is for us both righteousness and life, and that this benefit of righteousness is possessed by faith alone.[5]

For Luther the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the article of a standing or falling church. Similarly, for Calvin it was the great hinge upon which all else turned. Clearly, for both it was the heart of the gospel and the comfort of sin-stricken sinners.

For Good Reason Works are Excluded

There are at least four reasons on account of which man cannot be justified before God on the basis of his own works. The Reformers saw these reasons clearly set forth in Scripture.

First, no man can merit with God. There is no possibility of man's earning his standing before God on the basis of what he does. Not only is it reprehensible, but it is impossible—absurd really. How can man, who is a mere creature, merit with God? How can he merit with God when perfection is required of him by the God who made him in His own image, upright, and capable of doing all that He demanded of him? As Jesus said to His disciples, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We

5 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.14.17; 1:784.

are unprofitable servants: we have done what which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

Second, altogether apart from the possibility of meriting with God, man does not have within himself the ability to perform good works that might merit with God. Behind the teaching of meritorious good works in the Roman Catholic Church of Luther's day was the mistaken notion that fallen man still possesses the ability to do that which is good, truly good, works that God accounts as good. At the very least, the church taught that man could desire to do that which is good, right, and pleasing to God. The ability was compromised, but at least the desire was still present in fallen man. This was the teaching of free will that Luther and Calvin so vigorously opposed. Both wrote books on the bondage of the will of fallen man. At the beginning of his book, Luther congratulated Erasmus, a leading Roman Catholic theologian who was a contemporary of Luther and who, although he had many things to say critical of the Roman Catholic Church of his day, defended vigorously the teaching of man's free will. Luther congratulated him because, although he disagreed with him, Erasmus at least identified the critical issue that divided Rome and the Reformers. Luther said to Erasmus:

> Moreover, I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account—that you alone, in contrast with all others, have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue. You have not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like—trifles, rather than issues—in respect of which almost all to date have sought my blood (though without success); you, and you alone, have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot. For this I heartily thank you.[6]

The Roman Catholic Church taught that man could be justified before God on the basis of his own works because she maintained the natural ability of man to do that which is good. That was the ability of free will. This is a capability that all men have; a capability that man has as man. That was Rome's teaching at the time of the Reformation and that is still Rome's teaching today.

6 Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will,* tr. James I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (repr., Grand Rapids: Revell, a division of Baker Book House, 1993), 319.

Third, the impossibility of meriting in whole or in part our salvation by our good works is that even the best works of the child of God are marred by sin. How can our good works be the basis of our claim to righteousness before God when "even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of" the new and heavenly obedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 114)?[7] How can we suppose that our works are the basis for our justification before God when "my conscience accuse[s] me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60, the very Q&A that sets forth the truth of justification by faith alone)?[8] How can we suppose that our works earn anything before God, when daily we pray to God for the forgiveness of our sins, that God would be pleased "not to impute to us poor sinners, our transgressions, nor that depravity, which always cleaves to us" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 126)?[9] Calvin says, "But I do not commend the works of my hands, for I fear lest, when thou lookest upon them, thou mayest find more sins than merits."[10]

It was the consciousness of his own imperfection, the imperfection of his best works, that brought Luther to despair of the assurance of his righteousness before God. It was not only the nagging question whether he had done enough, but also the awareness of how flawed his good works were. Relying upon his own works, Luther could never possess the assurance of his justification with God. Assurance, peace, and joy eluded him. Instead, he experienced doubt, fear, and despair. It was only when he turned away from himself and reliance upon his own works, and by faith rested exclusively in the perfect work of Christ that Luther experienced the assurance that dispelled all his fears. Now he enjoyed the peace that trusting in his own works he did not and could not possess.

And last, our good works cannot be in whole or in part the ground of our justification because in the deepest sense our good works are not our own, but are God's gift to us and His work in us. The prophet Isaiah teaches this in Isaiah 26:12, where he says that God has

7 *Confessions and Church Order*, 133.
8 *Confessions and Church Order*, 106.
9 *Confessions and Church Order*, 139.
10 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.20; 1:787.

"wrought all our works in us." This is not to deny that the good works performed by the child of God are indeed *his* good works, and that they are accounted such by God. They certainly are. The Christian consciously and willingly performs good works. But the truth of the matter is that our good works are the fruit of God's work in us. We have been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works," says the apostle in Ephesians 2:10, which good works "God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." In time, Christ redeemed us unto good works, as the apostle teaches in Titus 2:14: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And the Holy Spirit has regenerated us and is sanctifying us, thus enabling us to perform good works. We are sanctified by the Spirit "unto obedience," the apostle teaches in I Peter 1:2. Paul's teaching in Philippians 2:13 is that "[i]t is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." In the end, it is a matter of grace that God should account our good works as good works, should be pleased with them, and even glorified by them. But exactly because the good works of the child of God are the fruit of God's work within us, it is impossible that those good works could ever merit with God. How could that which comes from God, originates in God, and is due to God's grace, ever merit with God? To ask the question is to answer it. Calvin writes:

> We now see that the saints have not a confidence in works that either attributes anything to their merit, since they regard them solely as gifts of God from which they may recognize his goodness and as signs of the calling by which they realize their election, or in any degree diminishes the free righteousness that we attain in Christ, since it depends upon this and does not subsist without it.[11]

The Common Grace Assault on Justification by Faith Alone

Yet another aspect of the grievous error of common grace is its assault on the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, and its attendant denial of free will. This assault takes the form of the error of the teaching of the free or well-meant offer of the gospel. Joined to the teaching of common grace, wherever and whenever the doctrine of common grace became entrenched, was the teaching that

11 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.20; 1:786.

the gospel is a well-meant offer of salvation to all who come under the preaching of the gospel. According to this teaching, in the preaching of the gospel God expresses His love for all men and His fervent desire that all men—in the sense of every man—would be saved. The basis for this desire of God is that the death of Jesus Christ, in some sense, was for all men. At the same time, according to the advocates of this teaching, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of all who hear the preaching of the gospel to make possible their acceptance of God's well-meant offer. This work of the Spirit belongs, it is alleged, to the general and non-saving (common grace) works of the Holy Spirit in all men generally. In the preaching, therefore, God promises to save all who hear the gospel, on the condition that they accept God's gracious offer—"close" with God's offer, as some have said in the past.

Among Reformed and Presbyterian churches, this view of the preaching that reduces it to an offer is the official teaching of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Both of these denominations officially subscribe to the doctrine of the well-meant gospel offer. Although not necessarily an officially adopted position, this is the view of the preaching of the gospel to which most Reformed and Presbyterian churches are committed today.[12]

When in 1924 the CRC adopted the Three Points of Common Grace, appended to the First Point, as a proof of the contention that the love of God extends beyond only the elect and includes all men, an appeal was made to the well-meant offer of the gospel.

12 The interested reader is referred to a new book by Herman Hanko that traces the history of the well-meant gospel offer from its earliest developments to its full flowering forth in our day. The book is *Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer* (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016). Notable exceptions to the widespread acceptance of the teaching of the well-meant gospel offer, besides the Protestant Reformed Churches and their full sister churches, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore and the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland, are the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, a denomination in a corresponding relationship with the PRCA, and the Gereformeerde Kerk Namibia, a denomination with whom the PRCA have more recently come into contact.

> Concerning the first point, with regard to the favorable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect, Synod declares that according to the Scripture and the confessions it is determined that besides the saving grace of God, shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is a certain kind of favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evidenced by the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort 2.5 and 3-4.8-9, which deals with the general offer of the Gospel; whereas the quoted declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology also give evidence that our Reformed fathers from of old have advocated these opinions….[13]

Indeed, this is powerful—in the end incontrovertible—proof of the love of God for all men. For, if there is such a thing as the well-meant offer of the gospel, if God does sincerely desire the salvation of all men, at least all who come under the preaching of the gospel, God's love must extend to all men. The well-meant offer of the gospel demands a love of God for all men, at least a love of God that extends beyond the elect in Christ.

At the same time, the well-meant offer of the gospel presupposes free will. For if God desires the salvation of all men, and yet all men are not saved, what explains the difference between men? If God wills the salvation of all who come under the preaching of the gospel, what explains the fact that not all who hear the preaching of the gospel are brought to faith and to salvation? The explanation cannot be the love of God, for God loves them all and desires the salvation of them all. Why are not all men saved in spite of the fact that God loves them all and desires the salvation of them all? The explanation is and must be in man himself. Some men accept the offer of the gospel and others do not. Some accept the offer of the gospel with the ability that all alike have but do not all exercise. By virtue of the common operations of the Holy Spirit, all men have the ability to choose for God and for Christ, for salvation and eternal life. Free will and man's exercise of his free will—that is the explanation for the difference among men. Thus, common grace is responsible for "bring[ing] again out of hell the Pelagian error" of free will.[14] This is the Synod of Dordt's judgment

13 *1924 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church*, 145.

14 Canons of Dordt, II. B. 3, says about those who teach free will, which

of the teaching of free will, that it is "altogether Pelagian and contrary to the whole Scripture."[15]

And Rome triumphs! For, as we have seen, this was precisely the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. Rome prevails over the churches of the Reformation, and Erasmus carries the day over against Luther. And the great hinge of the church is broken and the church no longer stands, but begins to fall.

Denial of Total Depravity

That brings up yet another aspect of the bad fruit in the church of the doctrine of common grace: the denial of man's natural (total) depravity. Closely connected to the five *solas* of the Reformation was a deep-seated conviction of the Reformers regarding the total depravity of the natural man.

The Reformers to a man taught the total depravity of the natural man. Man as he is in himself and apart from the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit is a sinner. Man IS a sinner. It is not so much that he commits sinful deeds, speaks sinful words, or entertains sinful thoughts; but the natural man IS sinful, sinful in his nature. His sinfulness extends beyond his deeds, words, and thoughts to his nature—who and what he is. The Reformers were committed to Augustine's view of the radical sinfulness of the natural man. Erasmus, as a good son of the Roman Catholic Church, defended the position that the natural man is not incapable of spiritual good. At the very least, natural (fallen) man can desire the good, God, Christ, and salvation. And he can exercise his will to choose that which is good. Over against Erasmus and the teaching of the church of their day, the Reformers emphasized man's sinfulness. They taught original sin, which original sin did not merely consist in the lack of something good, but is a positive evil and is a complete corruption of human nature. The prevailing view among the Reformers was that the fall of Adam into sin rendered all his descendants totally depraved. The Reformers viewed natural man as unable to do any good and completely dependent on the grace of God in salvation.

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is what the Arminians were doing at the time of the Synod of Dordt, that they "bring again out of hell the Pelagian error." *Confessions and Church Order,* 165.

15 Canons of Dordt, III/IV. B. 7, *Confessions and Church Order*, 172.

Calvin treats the fall of man and its consequences at the beginning of Book 2 of the *Institutes*. In agreement with Augustine, Calvin says that as a result of the fall man's nature is a "vitiated nature" that is "depraved and faulty." "We are all by nature children of wrath," says Calvin, as the apostle teaches in Ephesians 2:3. That we are children of wrath is not due to God's creation of us, "[f]or Ecclesiastes says: 'This I know, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices.'" Therefore, it is true that "this deadly wound clings to [our] nature," but it is not due to our natural condition. The explanation is "original sin," the consequence of the first sin, the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. Says Calvin: "Yet it is evident that the wound was inflicted through sin. We have, therefore, no reason to complain except against ourselves."[16]

Later in Book 2, Calvin gives extended consideration to the biblical support for the doctrine of total depravity. After examining the apostle's description of fallen man in Romans 3, as well as the many Old Testament passages that he cites here, Calvin concludes: "Let this then be agreed: that men are as they are here described not merely by the defect of depraved custom, but also by depravity of nature."[17] Calvin concludes his consideration of Paul's third chapter of Romans by saying:

> If these are the hereditary endowments of the human race, it is futile to seek anything good in our nature. Indeed, I grant that not all these wicked traits appear in every man: yet one cannot deny that this hydra lurks in the breast of each. For as the body, so long as it nourishes in itself the cause and matter of disease (even though pain does not yet rage), will not be called healthy, so also will the soul not be considered healthy while it abounds with so many fevers of vice. This comparison, however, does not fit in every detail. For in the diseased body some vigor of life yet remains; although the soul, plunged into this deadly abyss, is not only burdened with vices, but is utterly devoid of all good.[18]

In another passage, Calvin says that

16 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.10-11; 1:254.
17 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.2; 1:291.
18 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.2; 1:291-2.

> man as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature [now] that he can be moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the necessity of sinning.[19]

Calvin applied man's depravity to his will. Inasmuch as his depravity is total, man's will is also included. Since *man* is fallen and since *man* is depraved, so also is the will of man fallen and depraved. Calvin was at pains to repudiate the prevailing opinion of the theologians of the Roman Catholic Church of his day that fallen man still possesses the ability to desire the good and choose the good. This Calvin vehemently denied. In agreement with the apostle Paul and Augustine, Calvin maintained "the bondage of man's will," considering it an altogether "false notion of freedom" put forward by those who contended that fallen man has the ability to choose that which is spiritually good. Calvin further affirms that "it is not from creation but from corruption of nature that men are bound to sin and can will nothing but evil."[20]

If the will of fallen man is depraved and sinful, so that man is incapable of exercising his will aright, it follows that the proper exercise of the will is due to grace. That man wills the good, desires that which is pleasing to God, and chooses Christ and the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, is and can only ever be a fruit of grace. Referencing the apostle's teaching in Philippians 2:13 that it is God who works in the child of God both to will and to do God's good pleasure, Calvin says that Paul affirms "that God not only assists the weak will or corrects the depraved will, but [actually] works in us to will."[21] Thus, "the direction of the human will toward good, and after direction its continuation in good, depend solely upon God's will…and whatever it can do it is able to do only through grace."[22] Calvin's conclusion: "Therefore simply to will is of man; to will ill, of a corrupt nature; to will well, of grace."[23]

19 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5; 1:295-6.
20 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.5.1; 1:317.
21 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6; 1:297-8.
22 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.4.14; 1:308-9.
23 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5; 1:295.

Calvin was in complete agreement with his senior colleague and fellow Reformer, Dr. Luther of Wittenberg. The two spoke with one voice in their rejection of the Roman Catholic teaching that some good or at least a capacity for good existed in fallen man. They were one in their teaching of man's total depravity and inability to do or even to desire to do that which is good. And they were united in their repudiation of the damnable doctrine of free will. If ever there was a doctrine of devils, it was in Luther's view, the doctrine of free will. And in regard to the whole matter of the freedom of the will, the devil shows himself to be ever the deceiver. He deceives fallen men, who as fallen are in bondage to sin and death, into supposing that they are alive and free—the ultimate delusion of the devil. Says Luther:

> Scripture… represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well and alive.[24]

What exceeding folly! With regard to the vaunted power of free will, Luther says:

> Let all the 'free-will' in the world do all it can with all its strength; it will never give rise to a single instance of ability to avoid being hardened if God does not give the Spirit, or of meriting mercy if it is left to its own strength."[25]

Luther concludes his work on the bondage of the will thus:

> So, if we believe that Satan is the prince of this world, ever ensnaring and opposing the kingdom of Christ with all his strength, and that he does not let his prisoners go unless he is driven out by the power of the Divine Spirit, it is again apparent that there can be no 'free-will.'

24 Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969), 193.

25 Luther, *Bondage of the Will,* 202.

> So, if we believe that original sin has ruined us to such an extent that even in the godly who are led by the Spirit, it causes abundance of trouble by striving against good, it is clear that in a man who lacks the Spirit nothing is left that can turn itself to good, but only to evil.[26]

The teaching of common grace and the free or well-meant offer of the gospel have always been closely associated. The latter has more often than not been advanced as the proof of the former. The teaching of the well-meant offer has ever been viewed by the proponents of common grace, as clear evidence that the grace of God extends beyond the elect only. At the same time, the teaching of the well-meant gospel offer demands the teaching of free will, for without the ability in man capable of accepting the offer, the very notion of a well-meant gospel offer is ludicrous. But the teaching of free will flatly contradicts the gospel of the Reformation. It contradicts the Reformation's doctrine of man's natural and total depravity. And it contradicts the Reformation's insistence on *sola fide* by attributing man's salvation to his own desire and work, at the very least his work of accepting God's offer of salvation.

Rome's Insane Good Works

The Reformation's insistence on salvation by faith alone included the rejection of free will and the merit of good works. At the same time, the rejection of meritorious good works was joined to the teaching of the proper place of good works in the life of the Christian, both the proper motive for good works and the God-glorifying purpose of good works. This was no small part of the positive fruit, under the blessing of God, of the Reformation's teaching of *sola fide*. The rejection of good works as the basis for salvation led to a clearer understanding of the proper role of good works, both in the life of the individual child of God and in the life of the church. This was an invaluable contribution of the Reformation. The Reformers put the Christian life back on its proper, biblical foundation. The Reformation restored to the church godly living—holiness. There could hardly have been a more valuable contribution of the Reformation than this.

The church prior to the Reformation was shot through with immo-

26 Luther, *Bondage of the Will,* 317.

rality and ungodliness. Men and women lived in open disobedience to God's commandments. There was drunkenness, and fornication, and greed, and the love of money and pleasure. Men did not live for the glory of God and the wellbeing of their neighbor, especially their neighbor in the church, and the neighbor in their own family, their spouse and their children. But they lived for themselves and their own advancement in the kingdom of this world. Very often their membership in the church was only outward and formal. They were not living, spiritual members of the church of Christ. They attended church when it suited them, as many do today. Their membership in the church and their worship in the church were not motivated by the love of God and an interest in the glory of God, but was often a matter of custom and habit.

And the clergy, the officebearers, were the worst of all. They lived, very often, in open sin, particularly the sin of fornication. They lived wickedly and worldly. They coveted riches and the praise of men. Standing in the world, recognition among men, and the exercise of earthly power were more important to them than shepherding the souls of God's people, faithfulness to the Word of God, and the service of Christ and His blood-bought people.

What good works were especially promoted in the church were the insane good works of leaving your family and going off to live in a monastery or a nunnery, or living atop a pole in the desert or in a cave in the mountains, in seclusion from ordinary, day-to-day contact with other human beings. There were pilgrimages and fasts, crusades and indulgences.

One particular insane good work that was promoted at the time of the Reformation was the veneration of relics. For the churches that housed these relics, and for the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, this became one of the crassest money-making schemes invented in the sad history of ecclesiastical money-making schemes. There was the veneration of such relics as a sliver of wood from the cross of Christ, or a ring, comb, or girdle of the Virgin Mary, or a hair, tooth, bone, or sandal from one of the apostles. There was a branch held by Jesus, manna that had been preserved from Israel's wilderness wanderings, the towel with which Jesus had wiped the disciples' feet, the nails with which Jesus was affixed to His cross, the purple robe with which the Roman soldiers

arrayed Jesus in order to mock Him, the crown of thorns pressed into His brow, some of the pieces of money given to Judas Iscariot by the leaders of the Jews at the time that he betrayed the Lord Jesus into their hands, and thousands upon thousands of more such relics.

But beyond the ludicrous, there were also what should have been regarded as highly offensive relics, such as the foreskin of Jesus, which had been miraculously preserved after His circumcision, recorded in Luke 2:21, which was kept by the monks of Charroux, France. Actually, at the time that Calvin wrote his treatise on relics, in 1548, he had just received word of a third foreskin that was being promoted as the foreskin of Jesus. Besides remnants of the swaddling clothes that had been wrapped about the baby Jesus, and the cradle in which he had slept as a baby, throughout Europe there were vials of milk from the breasts of the Virgin Mary. Calvin quipped: "But had the breasts of the most Holy Virgin yielded a more copious supply than is given by a cow, or had she continued to nurse during her whole lifetime, she scarcely could have furnished the quantity which is exhibited" in the churches. And he adds for good measure: "I would fain know how that milk, which is at present almost everywhere exhibited, was collected, so as to be preserved until our time."[27] I must say that I, in distinction from Calvin, do not want to know how all that mother's milk was collected.

The church taught that God honors such relics by working miracles through them and in their presence. At the very sight of them, people were healed of the most serious diseases and recovered from deadly afflictions. In justification for the veneration of relics and attributing miraculous power to relics, appeal was made to the Scriptures. The incident recorded in the Old Testament of the Israelites who were in the process of burying a man and, after suddenly spotting a band of marauding Moabite raiders, threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb and fled. The dead man, after coming into contact with Elisha's bones, revived and stood on his feet, and walked away whole, according to 2 Kings 13:20, 21. Appeal was made to the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed of "an issue of blood" with

27 John Calvin, "An Admonition, Showing the Advantages which Christendom might Derive from an Inventory of Relics," in *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters, Volume 1: Tracts, Part 1*, ed. and trans. by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 2009), 317.

which she had been afflicted for twelve years, according to Mark 5:25-34. Simply by the virtue that flowed forth from Jesus' garment, the woman was healed. Appeal was made to the account of Peter's shadow that fell on certain sick folk and they were healed, as is recorded in Acts 5:15, 16. And according to Acts 19:12, "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul," so that even "handkerchiefs or aprons" that Paul had touched were brought to the sick "and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." But between these biblical accounts and the fables and falsities of Roman Catholic relics there is a great gulf fixed that cannot be bridged.

All of the Reformers opposed the cult of relics, disclaiming the alleged miracles that were attributed to the relics and inveighed against the evil of venerating relics. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin, following the lead of John Wycliffe and John Hus before them, condemned as evil what the Roman Catholic Church of their day lauded as a great good work. The veneration of relics was both folly and false worship, they contended. It falls under the condemnation of the first commandment of God's law, which calls men to worship God and God alone. The first and second commandments taken together call the people of God to the worship of God that is spiritual and by faith. Calvin was convinced that "if all the relics of Christendom were described, it would be manifest that all men have hitherto been blind, that great darkness has brooded over the whole globe, and the greatest stupidity been universally displayed."[28] He further claimed that

> if all the pieces [of Jesus' cross] which could be found were collected into a heap, they would form a good ship-load, though the gospel testifies, that a single individual was able to carry it. What effrontery, then, thus to fill the whole world with fragments, which it would take more than three hundred men to carry…. I leave it to all men to consider what certainty can be had as to the genuineness of all the pieces of wood which are worshipped in all the different places as the true cross…. And not contented with imposing on the rude and ignorant, by displaying a piece of common wood as the wood of the cross, they have declared it every way worthy of adoration. The doctrine is altogether devilish, and [we ought to] condemn it as heathen superstition.[29]

28 John Calvin, "Inventory of Relics," 295.

29 Calvin, "Inventory of Relics," 302.

Calvin compared the competition between those in the church who promoted their own relics and decried the genuineness of the relics of others to the Midianites, who blindly "set about slaughtering one another."[30] And in the end, all this "warring among themselves, and charging each other with falsehood" ultimately makes no difference, for whether the relics are genuine or counterfeits and frauds, the worship of them is "execrable idolatry."[31]

***Sola Fide* and Good Works**

The Reformation reacted against this worldliness and immorality, as well as Rome's promotion of its insane good works. And the Reformers called the people of God, and especially the clergy, to holy living. They rejected Rome's insane good works as works that were not founded on the Word of God, but on the traditions of men. They called the people back to the performance of those works which God Himself identifies as good works, such as being a godly father or mother, a faithful and loving spouse, a sympathetic church member who reaches out in love to serve a fellow church member who is hurting or otherwise in need, or a young person who keeps himself or herself pure before God in body and in soul.

Rome's oft-repeated slander against the Reformation's teaching of *sola fide* was that it destroyed the possibility of the Christian life. Rome's argument was that if we are not saved on account of our works, at least in part, then there exists no motivation to do good works. If our good works do not contribute at least in some measure to our standing before God, there is no compelling reason for the Christian to do good works. The Reformation's doctrine of justification by faith alone, Rome alleged, cuts the legs from under the Christian life.

It ought to have been obvious, of course, that the opposite was the case. Even a superficial examination of the life of the church at the time of the Reformation ought to have given reason for pause on the part of those who made such malicious accusations against the Reformation. "Physician, heal thyself," is the saying that comes to mind. For the fact of the matter is that Rome's false teaching concerning good works, the reason for good works and the nature of good works, resulted in a

30 Calvin, "Inventory of Relics," 338.

31 Calvin, "Inventory of Relics," 338.

cesspool of iniquity that made the church at the time of the Reformation resemble a whore rather than the holy bride of Christ. This was not only the natural outworking of the development of evil within the Roman Catholic Church. But this was due to the judgment of God. It was God's judgment on those who refused to live to the glory of His name and in obedience to His Word. It was God's judgment on those who were self-willed and who were guilty of will-worship, rather than the worship of God as He reveals it is His will that He be worshiped.

The Reformation's doctrine of *sola fide* put the Christian life on a solid footing—the only solid footing. It called the people of God to the performance of good works for the right reason. The reason is not to earn salvation, but to express gratitude to God for the gift of salvation already received. The Reformation promoted good works, not in order to merit, but out of love and praise of God because He has saved us. The Christian does not do good works in order to earn his salvation, but because God has graciously saved him. The child of God who is saved by faith, apart from works

> is not therefore to be lazy or loose. Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works. A bishop is not a bishop because he consecrates a church, but he consecrates a church because he is a bishop. Unless a man is already a believer and a Christian, his works have no value at all. They are foolish, idle, damnable sins, because when good works are brought forward as ground for justification, they are no longer good.[32]

The works that the Christian does that please God are works of gratitude.

> When God in his sheer mercy and without any merit of mine has given me such unspeakable riches, shall I not then freely, joyously, wholeheartedly, unprompted do everything that I know will please him? I will give myself as a sort of Christ to my neighbor as Christ gave himself for me.[33]

32 Martin Luther, from his treatise "On the Freedom of the Christian Man," as quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 230.

33 Martin Luther, from his treatise "On the Freedom of the Christian Man," as quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 231.

The Heidelberg Catechism reflects the Reformation's view of the reason for good works in the life of the Christian. It is well known that the Catechism treats good works and the law of God, which is the standard for good works, in the section that is entitled "Thankfulness." The whole of the Christian life, and good works in particular, belong to the thankful life of the saved Christian. The first reason that the Heidelberg Catechism gives for doing good works in the 86th Answer is: "that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings."[34] The Heidelberg Catechism, in Q&A 91 sets forth succinctly the Reformed view of what constitutes a good work: "Q. 91. But what are good works? A. Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory, and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men."[35] Good works are performed to the glory of God, not in order to earn from God.

Common Grace, Good Works, and the Antithesis

At the same time, the Reformers called the members of the church to live antithetically in the world. From a spiritual point of view, they were to come out from among the children of this world and live spiritually separate lives. This, in a way, was the outstanding good work to which they were called. The Reformers repudiated the "other worldliness" of the Anabaptists. That is not the nature of the Christian life, the Reformers taught. The Anabaptists, as their modern-day descendants, the Amish, advocate world flight. That is ever a temptation, the temptation not to be in the world, as well as not to be of the world. In the end, it is much easier to remove oneself and one's family from the world, than to live in the world, but remain spiritually separate from the world. World flight is in many ways the easy way out. The great challenge of the Christian life is to live in the world, but to live in the world unto God, in devotion to Him, in the keeping His good commandments.

And all of this with a view to the coming of the everlasting kingdom of Christ and the new heavens and earth in which righteousness will dwell. The Reformers did not focus the expectation of the people

34 *Confessions and Church Order*, 120.

35 *Confessions and Church Order*, 122.

of God on this earth. They did not direct the members of the church to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ in and upon this earth. They did not teach, but rather condemned as foolishness and as "Jewish dreams" an earthly millennium and earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity.

> Moreover, we condemn the Jewish dreams, that before the day of judgment there shall be a golden age in the earth, and that the godly shall possess the kingdoms of the world, their wicked enemies being trodden under foot; for the evangelical truth (Matt. xxiv. and xxv., Luke xxi.), and the apostolic doctrine (in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians ii., and the Second Epistle to Timothy iii. and iv.) are found to teach far otherwise.[36]

All this is being undone by the contemporary proponents of common grace. Contemporary proponents of common grace are advancing the doctrine of common grace as the impetus for culture, cultural development, the development of a culture, by means of the cooperation between believer and unbeliever, a God-glorifying culture. Special grace, it is said, accomplishes the salvation of sinners and results in the right worship of God by the church. But in distinction from special, saving grace, common grace serves the advancement of culture. Common grace achieves good science, beautiful art, politics and government that truly benefit the citizens, advances in agriculture that are a boon to the teeming masses, developments in industry and commerce that result in new inventions and modern technology in the service of mankind, science and medicine that are responsible for breakthroughs and cures of dread diseases that extend man's lifespan, and even social and ethical advances that promote high moral standards in the world outside of the church.

This was the great goal of the father of common grace, Dr. Abraham Kuyper, Dutch Reformed Neo-Calvinist theologian and politician, and one-time prime minister of the Netherlands.[37] Kuyper's goal was

36 Second Helvetic Confession, Article 11, as found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, Volume III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1905), 853.

37 Abraham Kuyper served as prime minister of the Netherlands from 1901-1905.

culture, the production of genuine, God-glorifying culture. Common grace must serve, in Kuyper's view, the Christianizing of the world. In his view, common grace is to be the foundation upon which the building of special grace is erected.

In the first volume of his large three-volume work on common grace, which has now been translated into English, Kuyper begins his consideration of common grace by faulting the church for so long neglecting the doctrine of common grace. His whole motivation in writing his *magnum opus* is "in order that the doctrine of common grace, which has so sadly sunk into obscurity, would regain acceptance and again exert its influence on our thought and life…."[38] Kuyper contends that understanding common grace is of "vital importance" for understanding "the remaining aspects of … revelation." Apart from an understanding of common grace, the rest of God's revelation is unintelligible. "The mind must live in it [that is, common grace], must be at home in it, must stand firm in it."[39] Kuyper had a bit earlier expressed his view that common grace is "all encompassing, governing all of history, decisive for our situation, and extending into the farthest future. This common grace must be gratefully accepted. Our confession must take account of common grace, and our perspective of life and of the entire situation of the world must be formed on the basis of common grace."[40]

On the basis of common grace, its proponents are promoting, not the antithesis, but cooperation between believer and unbeliever, Reformed Christian and Roman Catholic, Christian and non-Christian, including even Jew and Muslim. And the goal of this cooperative endeavor is to bring about the culture that common grace envisions. This is the sort of cooperation in which Kuyper himself was involved at the time that he became prime minister of the Netherlands. His political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, formed an alliance with the Roman Catholics in order to bring about a coalition government,

38 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gift to a Fallen World, Volume 1: The Historical Section,* ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, tr. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 1:125.

39 Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 1:125.

40 Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 1:116.

with himself as prime minister. And this is today what contemporary Reformed theologians are advocating on the basis of common grace: cooperation between the churches and between the different religions, as men together fight the culture wars and seek to establish a culture that glorifies God. Significantly, the translation of Kuyper's three-volume work on common grace is a joint endeavor of the Acton Institute of Grand Rapids, Michigan and a number of prominent Reformed men and Reformed institutions, which are deeply involved in translating, publishing, and funding the project. The Acton Institute is a distinguished Roman Catholic think tank. The translating and publishing of Kuyper's *Common Grace* is exactly the sort of cooperative venture between Reformed and non-Reformed that the doctrine of common grace envisions.

Recently, in an article in the *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal*, Dr. William Edgar faults Kuyper and faults common grace for its compromise and denial of the antithesis. Edgar writes:

> Nevertheless, great as he was, I consider Kuyper's movement to be a dead end for American Reformed Christians for both theological and political reasons. Politically, Kuyper worked within the bounds of a small continental European nation, with a homogeneous society and a political tradition that have little in common with the American Empire, an offspring of the British Empire. Theologically, Kuyper's movement used a flawed concept of 'common grace' as the basis for cooperation between believers and non-believers in the public arena, a concept that continues to bear bad fruit both in the Netherlands and in churches of Dutch descent in this country because it has been used to blur the antithesis between believer and unbeliever, and between revelation and human efforts to grope for the truth.[41]

We could not agree more. Dr. Edgar's perceptive remarks expose the bad fruit of common grace and the havoc that the doctrine is wrecking throughout Reformed and Presbyterian Protestantism. And the matter is deadly serious. For the loss of the antithesis is not merely the loss of one doctrine of the Reformed faith, but is the loss of the Reformed

41 William Edgar, "Reformed Systematic Theology Textbooks: Hand Maiden to the Enlightenment Privatization of Faith," *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* 2.2 (Spring 2016): 8.

faith. To the prophets in the church today who are promoting the doctrine of common grace and the alliance of the Reformed faith with the Ahab-like world of our day, comes the word of the faithful prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:2).

This whole common grace project of Christianizing the world, has turned the church away from her proper calling in the world.[42] The Great Commission is replaced by the Cultural Commission. Not the preaching of the gospel is the main task of the church, the one and only calling really that the church of Jesus Christ in the world has. But instead, the church is called to influence the culture in order that it adopt the Christian viewpoint and goals. But as has always been true down through history, the church does not win over the culture; rather, the culture corrupts the church. Whenever the church has cooperated with the world, formed alliances with the world, made common cause with the false and apostate church, not the world is influenced for good, but the church is influenced for bad. The warning of James to Christians in every age applies: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

The common grace enterprise on behalf of a godly culture not only destroys the Christian life, but it takes away the proper motivation upon which that life is built. Why does the Christian do good works? Why does the Christian husband and father labor faithfully day in and day out, probably at a job that he does not much like, taking home less pay than he would desire? Why does the Christian wife and mother labor faithfully day in and day out taking care of her household, performing the most tedious tasks, while providing for the needs of her children and husband, who very likely do not appreciate her as they ought and seldom thank her? Why does the Christian man or woman live faithful to the spouse that God has given them, sometimes living in a marriage that is not what they could wish it was? Why do they

42 To the reader who is interested in pursuing this subject, I highly recommend my colleague, David J. Engelsma's book, *Christianizing the World: Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?* (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016).

resist the temptations to unfaithfulness that beckon them on every hand? And why does the Christian young person not run with the children of this world, but live in holiness and obedience to God's good commandments, even though they suffer for it? Is the motivation the advancement of culture, earthly, this-worldly culture? Or is the motivation, the only motivation, praise and gratitude to God for His great salvation of us? To ask the question is to answer it. This is the unique contribution of the Reformed faith. This is the Reformed view of ethics and this at the heart of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. This is the Christian life.

And what about the Christian's expectation for the future? Is the Reformed expectation that the world is going to be brought forth that is impacted in a positive way by Christian culture? Is it the hope of the Reformed Christian in North America that Reformed principles will pervade every aspect of the life of the citizens of the United States and Canada? Is that what happened in the Netherlands as a result of Abraham Kuyper's common grace project? Or is our expectation for the future, on the basis of the teaching of Scripture, that the world is going to develop in sin as the end approaches? Is it the expectation that iniquity is going to abound and that the world is going to become worse and worse, as it fills up its cup of iniquity in preparation for the return of Christ? Is our expectation for the future, on the basis of the Word of God, not the development of a Christian culture, but the development of the culture and kingdom of Antichrist? Is that what the future holds? That is exactly what the future holds, according to the Word of God. The development of the culture and kingdom of Antichrist, it might be added, in which the false church is going to play a leading role.

This, in fact, is one of the most puzzling—sometimes I wonder whether consistent outworking of his doctrine of common grace, or the wildest inconsistency—that common grace is going to bring about the antichristian kingdom and Antichrist himself. That, in fact, was Abraham Kuyper's teaching. Common grace brings forth the Antichrist! And this is the doctrine so long neglected that needs to be resuscitated in Reformed churches! Indeed!

And yet, Kuyper is undoubtedly closer to the truth than he might have realized. For the teaching of God's Word is that Antichrist rises

to power and exercises his rule over those who love not the truth. That is the apostle's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 10: "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

But what of all the gifts—extraordinary gifts—that God gives to unbelieving men? Are they not the evidence of God's love for those who are the recipients of those gifts? The Protestant Reformed Churches have never denied that God gives good gifts to the ungodly. Often more gifts, and from a purely human standpoint, better gifts than He gives to the godly. In Psalm 73 the psalmist speaks of the "prosperity of the wicked" (v. 3). In verse 7 he says that very often "[t]heir eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish." According to verse 12, they "prosper in the world; they increase in riches." And all this, although "they are corrupt, and speak wickedly" against God and God's people (v. 8).

What was the psalmist brought by God to see? Did he have the right viewpoint? Should he have envied the wicked and considered his own life and the sacrifices that he made in living that life vain? Of course not! For you see, it is not a question of gifts, and whether the ungodly receive good gifts from God. They do, indeed! But the question is, "What is God's attitude in giving those good gifts?" That is the question. Does God give these good gifts to the ungodly as a token of His love for them? Are His gifts to be considered grace? And the psalmist's resounding answer is: No! A thousand times, no! For in giving His good gifts to the ungodly, the psalmist came to see that God was "setting them in slippery places" and preparing "to cast them down to destruction" (v. 17). He is using these good gifts to aggravate their guilt as he prepares to "bring them into desolation" and "utterly to consume them with terrors," (v. 19). And the conclusion of the matter? It is just this: "Lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works" (vv. 27, 28).

The Reformation restored to the church faith, faith as God's gift and God's work. Common grace and its attendant doctrine of the

well-meant offer of the gospel, are an assault on faith. Especially by its teaching of the well-meant offer of the gospel, the advocates of common grace are responsible for "bringing again out of hell the Pelagian error" of free will. And free will is the death of free grace.

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A RECENT FRENCH REFORMED THEOLOGIAN: AUGUSTE LECERF[1]

Thomas Reid

Introduction

Around 1930, Auguste Lecerf opened the door of his apartment on the Left Bank of Paris to find a female professor standing before him. She was interested in talking with someone about Calvinism, and a friend had suggested that she seek out Lecerf, whom the friend termed "the last of the French Calvinists."[2] But strikingly, Lecerf has proved to be, not the last of the French Calvinists, but the first of the modern French Calvinists.

Lecerf's Life

Ironically, Auguste Lecerf was born, not in France or in a French colony, but in London, England, and did not have a drop of French blood in his veins. His mother, Elisa Romenetti, had a British and Italian ancestry. His father was a Scottish nobleman, with whom his mother had an affair while she and her husband took refuge in England after they participated in the ill-fated Paris Commune of 1871. Lecerf

1 Lecerf's personal papers are housed at the Library of La Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence, France, having been given by his widow to Pierre Marcel (1910-1992), who arranged before his own death that the papers be preserved there. For more about Lecerf, see: Thomas Reid, "Auguste Lecerf: An Historical Study of 'the First of the Modern French Calvinists'" (Th.M. thesis, La Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée, Aix-en-Provence, France, 1979), which contains a bibliography of Lecerf's works in all languages, including the unpublished ones, and was researched in part through correspondence or interviews with some of his then-surviving students; also, an issue of *La revue réformée* devoted to Lecerf on the fiftieth anniversary of his death: "Auguste Lecerf, 1872-1943: Cinquantenaire de sa mort," *La revue réformée* 45, no. 1/2 (janvier 1994).

2 While this story is included in several studies about Lecerf, I have not been able to establish an authoritative source for it, nor its date or the identity of the female professor.

was born on September 18, 1872, and his mother's husband, René Lecerf, permitted Auguste to use his name.

Auguste Lecerf's parents were not simply irreligious; they were consciously anti-clerical and atheistic. To their dismay, they discovered that Auguste was plagued by religious questions. "Why", he would ask, "do the church bells ring?" When they could not answer his question, Auguste would burst into tears.[3]

The Lecerf family took advantage of an amnesty and returned to Paris. There, Auguste's religious interest took a serious turn. At the age of twelve, he passed a Protestant Sunday School in session. Entering, Auguste was challenged by the message of the teacher. Later, Auguste purchased a Bible, and began to read it.[4] Years later, he was to confess that it was on reading Romans 9 through 11 that we was converted to Christ,[5] which is not so surprising when one considers that his father's family was Jewish.

As a teenager, Auguste Lecerf was browsing along the banks of the Seine River in Paris, when he spotted a worn copy of Calvin's magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion.* Perusing the book, he felt drawn to its clear teaching on divine sovereignty, just what had struck him several years before in reading Romans.[6] Lecerf's theological identity had now been established: he was a Calvinist.

Falling seriously sick when he was seventeen, Lecerf beseeched God to heal him, with the promise to consecrate his life to God's service if God responded to his prayer with healing. Auguste recovered, and, searching for an avenue of service, he spent a short time at a Roman Catholic school near Angers, in the Loire River Valley southwest of Paris. Dissatisfied there, he returned to Paris, and was baptized and admitted as a communicant member of the Reformed Church of the [Holy] Spirit.

Believing that the Lord was leading him into the ministry, Lecerf entered the Preparatory Theological School at Batignolles in the Paris

3 Thomas Reid, Interview with Pierre Marcel, 7 June 1978.

4 Auguste Lecerf, *Études calvinistes* (Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1949), 6.

5 "Le renouveau calviniste," *Bulletin de la Faculté libre de théologie protestante de Paris* 3, no. 9 (janvier 1937): 1.

6 "Auguste Lecerf," *Rapport annuel sur l'année scolaire 1942-1943* (Paris: [La Faculté libre de théologie protestante?], 1944), 11.

region, despite strong parental opposition.[7] Immediately following, he studied at the Protestant Theological Faculty (or Seminary) of Paris from 1891 to 1895, where "[h]e was noted both for his exceptional gifts for grammar and philology and by his passion for questions about dogmatics."[8] In order to more fully discuss theological questions, Lecerf formed a small study group in 1893—the so-called "Calvinistic Trinity"—with two other students.[9] The Faculty, established by and for theological liberals, was hardly a happy place for the young Calvinist. Yet, to earn his baccalaureate degree in theology, Lecerf presented a distinctively Calvinistic thesis on "Determinism and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology".[10] The quality of the work both theologically and technically is striking.

The Seminary refused to permit Lecerf to continue on to his doctorate, due especially to his rejection of evolutionary theory.[11] Already married (in 1893) and father of a son Jean (in 1894), Lecerf entered the pastoral ministry. Three daughters were later born to his marriage to Andrea Elisabeth Céré: Renée (1896), Esther (1897), and Jeanne (1899).[12] Following Mrs. Lecerf's death in 1953, one of Lecerf's disciples, Jean G. H. Hoffmann (1906-1987) bore this witness to her important role: "The person of Madame Lecerf is inseparable from that of her husband, with whom she shared the struggles to manifest in all its purity a theological viewpoint to which the whole atmosphere of the century was excluded from the outset." But Mrs. Lecerf was no more an unpleasant ideologue than was her husband. Hoffmann goes on in his eulogy to ask, "How many times have we not found from her understanding and true sympathy?"[13]

Although Lecerf was closer theologically to the Evangelical

7 Lecerf, *Etudes Calvinistes,* 6.

8 "Auguste Lecerf," *Rapport annuel,* 11.

9 *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 87, no. 2 (avril-juin 1938): 226-227. The translation from French into English is the author's, here and throughout the paper.

10 The thesis was published, as was expected at the time: *Le déterminisme et la responsabilité dans le système de Calvin* (Paris: Henri Jouve, 1895).

11 Interview with Marcel.

12 Renée and Jeanne died rather young of tuberculosis.

13 "Madame August Lecerf," *La Revue Réformée* 4, no. 2 (1953): 48.

Reformed Churches than to the Liberal Reformed Churches, the former denomination refused him entry, while the second received him, since their largeness of spirit permitted each pastor to preach and minister as he chose best. In that context and time, liberals were "liberals"! Lecerf was ordained on February 2, 1896 in his home congregation, the Reformed Church of the Spirit in Paris. He served as auxiliary pastor for one year, 1895-1896, in Elbeuf in the Department of Seine-Maritime. Next, Lecerf was named full pastor at St. Lô-Le Chefresne, in the Department of the Manche, where he ministered from 1896 to 1902. Despite the fact that these two churches were in the liberal camp, and despite three liberal pastors having served before him, Lecerf discovered to his astonishment that both parishes were filled with people who were Trinitarian in their beliefs. Those wily liberals had mouthed enough orthodox words that the faithful had naively taken them in their Biblical sense and thus remained orthodox. During Lecerf's next pastorate, at Courseulles-sur-Mer in the Department of Calvados (1902-1908),[14] the state and the church were separated in 1905. He and his Courseulles Church associated with the churches in the third French Reformed synod, the Jarnac Synod, before returning to the Liberal Reformed Synod in 1912 with the rest of the Jarnac Synod. In Normandy, one the local priests was saying black masses; twice, Lecerf calmed a lynch mob searching to kill the priest.[15] His next pastorate took him to Lunéville in the Department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, from 1908 until 1914.

Despite his intellectual bent, Lecerf was an excellent pastor, although not a great orator.[16] Years later, he urged his students to engage in the following routine: arise at five in the morning, study Hebrew for one hour, study Greek for one hour, and pray for one hour. He modestly admitted that he had only followed his own counsel about half the time.[17]

14 On D-Day in 1944, Canadian troops came ashore near Courseulles on Juno Beach. Both St. Lô and Courseulles were devastated in the intense fighting following the Allied invasion.

15 Madame Auguste Lecerf, "Mon mari," *La revue réformée* 45, no. 1/2 (janvier 1994): 16-18; Letter of René Muller, 22 July 1978, 1.

16 Interview with Marcel.

17 Letter of Roger Belmont, August 11, 1978, 1.

At the outbreak of World War I, Lecerf was called up as a chaplain, never to return to the pastorate. At the close of the War, he moved with his family to Paris, where his hope of devoting himself to theological studies was limited by financial woes, necessitating that Lecerf take up several jobs. He served three institutions as part-time Protestant chaplain. In 1922, Lecerf began work as an "agent" of the Protestant Bible Society of Paris, where his linguistic gifts were put to work on its mammoth project to prepare a *Centennial Bible* in honor of the Society's one hundred years of ministry.[18] Ironically, throughout his tenure at the Bible Society, Lecerf opposed the Society's liberal translation policies.

From 1922 on, Lecerf taught at his alma mater, the Protestant Seminary of Paris, which described itself as "a Faculty which has the honor to incorporate within its bosom representatives of all the currents of Protestant thought."[19] Lecerf began by teaching Greek and English, but he later provided instruction also in Hebrew and Latin; he could speak fluently in English, and read Dutch and German as well. Several students requested a more regular instruction in dogmatics from a Reformed perspective. Thus were born the weekly "free" lectures in Reformed theology which Lecerf gave to large audiences until 1936. Lecerf earned his Th.M. and Ph.D. degrees at the Seminary in 1931 and 1938. In the former case, the candidate, before the public defense of his thesis, presented a public lecture on a theological subject given to him on short notice. Pierre Marcel reports,

> Dean H[enri] Monnier chose the subject of the public lecture…. He gave Lecerf intentionally the most difficult question in Reformed theology: prevenient grace. Auguste Lecerf, with his usual aplomb, having suspected the intentions of his friend, confided to us a week before he had been given the subject, "I suspect Henri Monnier wants to give me the subject of prevenient grace. It is the most difficult question. There is nothing about it in the Reformed bibliography."[20]

18 Completed only in 1947, twenty-nine years after the centenary.

19 "Le renouveau calviniste," *Bulletin de la Faculté de Théologie Protestante* 3, no. 9 (janvier 1937): 1.

20 Pierre Marcel, "Le baptême: Sacrament de l'alliance de grace," *La Revue Réformée* 1, no. 2/3 (octobre 1950): 176.

Despite the difficulty of the task before him, Lecerf lectured, according to one eyewitness, "brilliantly" on "common grace", even granting with a big grin that God worked even in Arminians.[21]

Such a talent even the Paris Faculty could not suppress forever. So, in 1936, at the age of sixty-four, Lecerf became Professor of Reformed Dogmatics. He thus entered a period of public notice and acceptance beyond anything he had hitherto enjoyed. Students reported later that Lecerf's theological lectures were spiced with memorable comments like, "Men, when you preach, you do not know what you are accomplishing," and "Men, never doubt the power of the Holy Spirit."[22] Pierre Marcel writes of his favorite Lecerf quotation:

> In a formula both striking and accurate, without the slightest contradiction, both on the theological and psychological planes as well as the philosophical, professor Lecerf loved to repeat, "We believe in a God sufficiently powerful—because He is all-powerful—to realize freely concerning creatures what he wills necessarily concerning Himself."[23]

Marcel adds, "Voila the all-powerful God, the Scriptural God. There is no other."[24]

Lecerf supported the move toward organic unity among the divided Protestant denominations in France, leading to the formation of the Reformed Church in France in 1938. He argued that the unity of the church should take priority over its purity, the latter being "something eschatological."[25] Lecerf served as a member of the united denomination's Commission on Female Ministries. Lecerf prepared a report on such ministries in the New Testament, observing that, "Women can speak in reunions which do not have the character of an official convocation of the people of faith…. It seems to us that one can take from the preceding texts applicable directives for female ministries of

21 His address was printed in *La revue réformée* 11, no. 3 (1960): 27-33.

22 Interview with Marcel.

23 Pierre Ch. Marcel, Review of *Calvin directeur d'ames,* by Jean-Daniel Benoit, in *La revue réformée* 1, no. 1 (avril 1950), 44.

24 Marcel, 44.

25 *Le Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 84, no. 2 (avril-juin 1935): 83.

charity and even teaching in the contexts of evangelization, missions, and catechism."[26]

Lecerf attended the First International Conference of Calvinists in London in 1932, where he spoke on "The History of the Reformed Faith in France." Lecerf was present at the Second Congress in The Netherlands, in October, 1934, where he considered the subject, "The Sovereignty of God according to Calvinism."[27] Lecerf co-directed the Calvinistic Theology Congress in Geneva in 1936, where he addressed the subject of "Election and Sacrament."[28] Lecerf traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland, in July, 1938, for the final Calvinistic Conference before the outbreak of World War Two, bringing greetings from "the members of the Calvinist Society of France [and] of the Calvinistic probationers and students of the Faculty of Paris…[and] in the name of congregations and also of isolated believers who share our faith."[29]

Lecerf received two honorary doctorates, the first in 1937 from St. Mary's College, the theological faculty of the University of St. Andrew's in Scotland, and the second the following year, from the University of Debreczen, Hungary, of the Reformed Churches in Hungary, although he was unable to travel there to receive the award in person, due to tensions in Europe.

Lecerf was a fervent patriot and, burdened by the French defeat of 1940 and weakened by the privations of the German occupation, he died rather suddenly in Paris on September 1,1943, aged seventy.

Lecerf's Writings

Auguste Lecerf's first published work, as already noticed, was his undergraduate thesis. Observing all of his writings, one must conclude

26 Auguste Lecerf, "Les ministères féminins d'après le Nouveau Testament," 2, among his unpublished papers.

27 *Deuxième congrès international calviniste, Amsterdam 23-26 octobre 1934: Comptes-rendus* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1935), 25-29.

28 "L'élection et le sacrament," *De l'élection éternelle de Dieu: Actes du Congrès international de théologie calviniste, Genève, 15-18 juin 1936* (Genève: Éditions Labor, 1936), 252-262.

29 Auguste Lecerf, untitled discourse, *Proceedings of the Fourth Calvinistic Congress, Held in Edinburgh, 6th to 11th July 1938* (Edinburgh: Congress Executive, 1938), 97.

that, "the theological corpus of Lecerf represents a remarkable unity,"[30] as had the work of John Calvin four centuries earlier.

In his undergraduate thesis, Lecerf intended to defend Calvin's concept of both "absolute determinism" and "complete responsibility", the expressions which Lecerf chose to describe Calvin's thinking.[31] Lecerf contrasts Calvin's view with the slightly divergent positions of fellow Reformers Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Martin Luther (1483-1546), and Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), but especially with the opposing viewpoint of the Dutch theologian Albert Pighius (1490-1542), with whom Calvin had conducted a debate by pamphlet.

Most of the Protestant Reformers begin their reference to God's predestination and man's responsibility with reference to God's omniscience.[32] Calvin prefers to start with man's sense of dependence upon God.[33] Because men believe, salvation is all of grace; because not all believe, predestination must be true.[34]

God's providence is His absolute will, "but this action, purely regulatory, does not carry any moral transformation in the world."[35] But such a transformation of man is vitally necessary, as God left man free to fall into sin, and man, represented in Adam, did so.[36] "Original sin makes us truly worthy of the wrath of God and is indeed the pivot of man's responsibility."[37] Nevertheless, God can accomplish much in man short of regeneration, but only irresistible grace transforms a person into what pleases God.

Having described Calvin's method and system, Lecerf proceeds to defend Calvin's view against five major attacks. First, to those who argue that predestination leads to lawlessness, Lecerf critiques the false assumption that to struggle against sin is useless, if one is elect. Doing so forgets that election has its goal in the believer's sanctification.[38]

Second, to those who maintain that predestination requires that

30 "Auguste Lecerf," *Rapport annuel,* 11.
31 Lecerf, *Le déterminisme et la responsabilité, 56.*
32 Lecerf, 13-16.
33 Lecerf, 17.
34 Lecerf, 20.
35 Lecerf, 30, 33, 34.
36 Lecerf, 38-42.
37 Lecerf, 42.
38 Lecerf, 69.

God either defend evil or He is a hypocrite, Lecerf has recourse to distinguishing the two wills of God, the revealed will and the secret will, while insisting that, because God is One, "the will of God is simple and one."[39]

Third, to those who ask how people can be punished for sin if they are predestined, Lecerf explains, "God does not create evil in us; he finds it…. This voluntary perversity, it is we."[40]

Fourth, to those who observe than man has a sense of being free, undercutting if not contradicting predestination, Lecerf responds: Just because one does not feel determined does mean that one is not.[41]

And fifth, to those who argue that, if God is sovereign in predestination, then we should blame Him and not the sinner for sin, Lecerf replies and concludes his work: "To believe in predestination in the Calvinistic sense is to believe in the justice of God, despite all appearances[,] and to affirm thus His right to be our legislator and our judge."[42]

Auguste Lecerf published only a few articles before he settled in Paris. During his quarter of a century there, he wrote many articles for virtually all the French Protestant magazines, usually in defense of the Calvinistic position on some theological question. He also penned a few articles of biblical exposition and some concerning current affairs. His few book reviews were almost exclusively concerned with philosophical tomes. Lecerf's output may have been relatively modest, but he wrote in an easy style that was understandable to the average church member.

The only other books which Lecerf published during his lifetime were the two volumes of his *Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics* in French.[43] The English translation by André Schlemmer was published posthumously in London by Lutterworth Press in

39 Lecerf, 72.

40 Lecerf, 88.

41 Lecerf, 78.

42 Lecerf, 121.

43 *Introduction à la dogmatique réformé: Principes et methods, Premier cahier: De la nature de la connaissance religieuse* (Paris: Éditions "Je sers," 1932), and *Introduction à la dogmatique réformée: Second cahier, Du fondement de la specification de la connaissance religieuse* (Paris: Éditions "Je sers," 1938).

1949 in one volume. The first French volume represents the thesis he submitted in 1931 to the Paris Faculty for the equivalent of the Th.M. degree, the second for his doctorate in 1938. Together, the two volumes represent a monumental effort to found the Christian religion on such a basis that it will appeal to modern, post-Kantian thinkers. These volumes show their author to have been widely read in both modern theology and philosophy, for only such a scholar could have attempted such a work. Indeed, Lecerf was part of the active philosophical scene in Paris between the Wars, being a good friend of Jacques Maritain (1882-1973),[44] among many others.

The *Introduction* is not easy reading. Prof. John Murray (1898-1975) of Westminster Seminary, hardly a master of light prose himself, made this observation in his review of the English translation of the *Introduction*.[45] Here is a list of the most important difficulties. First, the structure is not always clear, with Lecerf providing extended book reviews of often obscure volumes. Second, the language is very sophisticated, both theologically and philosophically. Third, the subject matter demanded that Lecerf introduce several substantive ideas from English or Dutch into French nomenclature. Nonetheless, Lawrence Gilmore, writing in the *Westminster Theological Journal* of the two French volumes, opines: "Lecerf's work on dogmatics is a gain for the Reformed theology. Like other real Calvinism of the present day[,] it is less showy than the dialectical writings, but it represents genuine progress."[46]

As its name implies, the *Introduction* is not truly a Dogmatics, for it was concerned with the prolegomena issues of systematic theology. In the face of the long-entrenched French rationalistic tradition, Lecerf tries to establish the possibility of religious knowledge. In the face of rationalism's infiltration of Christian theology, Lecerf attempts to show Calvinism to be the only true and biblical religious knowledge.

44 Born into a Protestant family, the famous French philosopher converted to Roman Catholicism.

45 John Murray, "Review of Auguste Lecerf, *Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics,*" *Westminster Theological Journal* 12, no. 2 (May 1950): 184.

46 "The Present State, Progress, and Prospects of the Reformed Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (May 1939): 86.

Thus, his work might be better characterized as a philosophy of religion rather than as a Dogmatics as such.[47]

The first volume of the *Introduction* is particularly characterized by an apologetical concern. In it, Lecerf attempts to determine whether religious knowledge is even possible. This question he answers affirmatively by the use of what has been called a "moderate critical realism."[48] Gustave Lagny describes this concept as follows:

> *Realism*: for faith is considered as the organ of true knowledge and not only ethical experience. *Moderate*: because the knowledge of faith is not only analogical; it is only the relative knowledge of mysteries. *Critical*: (Lecerf sometimes says *transcendental*): for, because of total depravity, religious knowledge is acquired exclusively by faith, soli fide.[49]

The second volume of the *Introduction* is easier reading than the first. Lecerf begins by setting out his methodology and his apologetic stance. In the second part of the volume, he contrasts theism, deism, and pantheism, the three sole possibilities, as he sees it, for Christian thought. Next, he dismisses the agnostic and atheistic pretensions of possessing the truth. Lecerf then deals with the problem of determinism and indeterminism. He concludes that the sovereignty of God frees man from the horns of this dilemma: "the problem of evil," for instance, has been transformed into "the mystery of evil."[50]

Lecerf maintains that Dogmatics must be "orthodox," that is, it must be in agreement with the main lines of Christian belief as set out in the creeds of the early church. And Dogmatics must be "Protestant," for Scripture alone is our authority.[51]

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47 Pierre Bergelin made this observation about the first volume in "Le christianisme et la philosophie," *Foi et vie* 33, no. 41 (septembre 1932): 661.

48 Lecerf, *Introduction I,* 120-139.

49 Gustave Lagny, "L'œuvre théologique d'Auguste Lecerf," *Le christianisme au vingtième siècle* 63, no. 5 (4 février 1944): 27.

50 Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 123.

51 Lecerf devotes several chapters to the subject of Scripture, considering its inspiration and authority, the canon of both Testaments, and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, which convinces man that the Bible is the Word of God.

Lecerf weakens his argument in four ways. First, he is not content with B. B. Warfield's classic formulation of the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible.[52] For instance, he quotes approvingly Jan Ridderbos (1879-1960), who wrote, "Human languages…are…imperfect vehicles for the transmission of human thoughts and, a fortiori, divine thoughts."[53]

Second, Lecerf was obviously moving from the semi-rationalist apologetics of nineteenth century Calvinism to the presuppositional apologetics of the twentieth.[54] However, Lecerf continues to give man's reason the formal possibility of discovering the truth, undercutting the fact of man's total depravity.[55] Indeed, volume 2 is better than volume 1 in this regard, showing progress in Lecerf's thought in the six intervening years.

Third, Lecerf seems to have too much ignored the growing threat to Reformed orthodoxy from Karl Barth (1886-1968).[56] While it is true that Lecerf could read Barth in the original German, it is also true that, "the influence of German or American theologians in French Protestantism is in direct relation with the moment of their translation."[57] Since Barth was not substantially translated into French until well into the 1930s, Lecerf believed that he could forego publicly criticizing Barth.[58] Lecerf was privately critical of Barth,[59] and told his classes in the early 1930s that "it is necessary to listen

52 See especially his *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).

53 Lecerf, *Introduction I,* 246.

54 Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) and Gordon H. Clark (1902-1985) pioneered this apologetical stance, following Lecerf by a generation.

55 See especially: Lecerf, *Introduction I,* 33, 116-117; Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 47.

56 As late as 1938, Lecerf makes a soft remark about Barth as "the genial one restoring reforming theology." Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 22.

57 *Histoire des protestants en France* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1977), 327.

58 Lecerf was succeeded as Professor of Reformed Dogmatics at the Protestant Seminary of Paris by the Barthian Pierre Maury (1890-1956). But even Barthianism ran out of steam in French Protestantism by the late 1950s, to be replaced by more radical dialectical theologies. *Histoire,* 326.

59 Letter of Marcel, 4.

to Barth more as a 'prophet' than as a 'dogmatician.'"[60] Overall, in Lecerf's extant writings, he is more critical of Puritanism than he is of Barthianism.

Fourth, Lecerf uncritically accepted Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of "common grace."[61] Lecerf freely admitted the influence of the Dutch Reformed tradition on his thinking, including as well Valentin Hepp (1879-1950) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921),[62] and many other Dutch Reformed names appear in Lecerf's writings from the flourishing period in this tradition at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.[63] French philosopher Alain Probst observes about Dutch neo-Calvinism, "Auguste Lecerf was very influenced by this current of confessional dogmatics."[64] Lecerf's commitment to common grace is most obvious in his lectures, published posthumously, on "Sin and Grace."[65] In this long article, Lecerf teaches that Calvinists do not distinguish between the "pagan" and the "sacred", but rather make the distinction between "particular grace" and "common grace."[66] Sin makes both kinds of "grace" necessary, since, where sin abounds, grace must abound even more (Rom. 5:20), even if it is not salvific.[67] Lecerf writes:

60 Pierre Courthial, "Karl Barth et quelques points des confessions de foi réformée," *La revue réformée* 9, no. 1 (1958): 2.

61 Kuyper developed his thinking in the mammoth three-volume set, *De gemeene gratie* (Leiden: Donner, 1902-1904), never translated into French.

62 Lecerf, *Introduction I,* 11; Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 104.

63 Specifically: G. Ch. Aalders (1880-1961), Douwe Johannes de Groot (1898-1959), Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), Cornelis van Gelderen (1872-1945), H.-E. Gravemeijer (1813-1890), Frederik Willem Grosheide (1881-1972), Jacobus A. C. van Leeuwen (1870-1930), Jan Ridderbos, Johannes Severijn (1883-1966), and Theodor Vollenhoven (1892-1978).

64 A. Probst, "Abraham Kuyper," *Le christianisme au vingtième siècle* 107, no. 33 (4 septembre 1978): 11. See also Gilmore, "The Present State," 71, and F. F. Bruce, Review of Auguste Lecerf, *Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics, Evangelical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (January 1950), 70.

65 Auguste Lecerf, "Le péché et la grace," *La revue réformée* 11, no. 3 (1960): 1-33.

66 Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 56.

67 Lecerf, "Le péché et la grace," 11-12.

> "Common grace" has for its field of action the temporal domain, and has for its goal to maintain or restore in sinful man the image of God in the large sense…the religious and moral instincts. This grace engages the personal responsibility of the sinner when it puts him in the presence of the law and the Gospel…because [this grace] formally brings to him the power, the ability, to obey. [Such grace] is resistible.[68]

The indebtedness of Lecerf to Kuyper is obvious here; this concept does not come from classic Calvinism, which has refrained from using the word "grace" (or its related terms) in any but a salvific sense and confessionally limits God's favor to the elect.

The *Introduction* was intended to be just that. Lecerf prepared several chapters on various subjects within the theological encyclopedia, but he did not finish much of the project before his death. John Murray wrote, "We cannot but regret that the author [of the *Introduction]* had not furnished us with the fruit of his labors in the various loci of systematic theology."[69] Yet, the *Introduction* had its impact: Bassam Madany (1928-), Arabic language broadcaster for decades on the Christian Reformed Church's Back to God Hour, has written that, "The Lord used this book, as well as a study of Calvin's correspondence, to bring me to a complete conversion to the Reformed faith."[70] Lecerf's son Jean, late in his life, became a financial supporter of Madany's work.[71]

Some of the unpublished chapters in the Dogmatics were published posthumously, although Lecerf had prohibited their publication. Mrs. Lecerf gave permission for those he had prepared for publication to thus see the light of day. A number of Lecerf's more significant published articles were gathered together by André Schlemmer (1890-1972) under the title *Études Calvinistes (Calvinistic Studies)*[72] and published in 1949. A few of Lecerf's articles were translated

68 Auguste Lecerf, "Des moyens de la grâce: La parole, le baptême, la sainte-cène," *La revue réformée* 6, no. 2 (1955): 3.

69 Murray, "Review of Auguste Lecerf," 184.

70 Bassam M. Madany, "Being Converted to the Reformed Faith," *Missionary Monthly* (September 1975): 21.

71 Madany, 26.

72 Neuchatel: Niestlé, 1949.

into English and published in *The Evangelical Quarterly* and other journals.[73]

Following the publication of the English translation of the *Introduction,* both F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) and John Murray lamented in their reviews of that volume that Lecerf had not been sufficiently appreciated during his lifetime.[74] More than seventy years later, the same can be said, especially outside the Francophone world.

Lecerf's Influence

An anonymous reviewer in the *Bulletin of the French Protestant Historical Society* observed of Auguste Lecerf in 1932: "Does it not seem strange, and humiliating, in the homeland of Calvin, that pure[,] Calvinistic theology has not had a representative in a long time, since, can it be, Pierre du Moulin? There now exists an absolutely authentic one."[75] Du Moulin had died in 1658! But would Lecerf prove to be "the last of the Calvinists"?

For decades, Auguste Lecerf's only open supporter in the French Reformed Churches had been his seminary friend Marcel Cadix (1874-1951?), who presided at Lecerf's internment. André Jundt (1877-1947), who taught alongside Lecerf at the Protestant Seminary, wrote in 1938 that Lecerf "defended this cause [Calvinism] for many years, during which he was almost its sole defender."[76]

With his work in Paris among students from several institutions and especially from the Protestant Seminary, Lecerf's influence in the lives of many of the future leaders of the French Reformed Churches

73 The earliest such article seems to be "The Reformed Faith in France: An Historical Survey," published in 1932 in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (October 1932): 391-397, after Lecerf delivered it at the International Reformed Conference. *The Reformed Faith Commonly Called Calvinism: Report of the International Conference Held in May 1932* (London: Sovereign Grace Union), 45-53.

74 Bruce, "Review," 69-70; Murray, "Review," 184.

75 Anonymous reviewer, *Le Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 81, no. 4 (octobre-décembre 1932): 430.

76 André Jundt, "Soutenance de la thèse de doctorat de. M. Lecerf," *Le Bulletin de la faculté protestante de Paris* 4, no. 14 (mai 1938): 10. Lecerf is described as "long isolated" in *Histoire des protestants en France,* 310.

grew into an identifiable movement. A periodic evening for theological discussion that the Lecerfs sponsored in their apartment developed into the French Calvinistic Society. The formal founding of the Society occurred on 10 December 1926, at the Library of the French Protestant Historical Society. Lecerf served as President, and Emile Doumergue was elected Honorary President. The Second Article of its statutes outlined these two goals for the Society: "To study and to propagate Calvinism, considered to be a strong and progressive element in Christian thought; to make known the person and works of Calvin and Calvinistic religious literature."[77] Article 3 committed the Society to working within the existing church structures, no matter what might happen, or had happened, to the church's confession of faith.

The Society planned to work by means of conferences and publications of Calvin, Calviniana, and classic Reformed writers (Article 4). And so it republished, in modernized French, Calvin's Catechism (with the Confession of La Rochelle and the Belgic Confession) in 1934,[78] Calvin's *Thoughts on the Holy Spirit* in 1936,[79] and Calvin's *Institutes* in four volumes from 1936 to 1939.[80]

The Society desired to have close contact with similar Reformed organizations in other countries, with a view to establishing a worldwide Reformed association (Art. 5). The four Calvinistic conferences, held at London (1932), the Hague (1934), Geneva (1936), and Edinburgh (1938), were the first fruits of Lecerf's and others' dreams of such an organization. These Calvinists were to succeed only after World War II, with the founding of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action in 1955.[81]

77 "Société Calviniste de France," *Le Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 125, no. 4 (octobre-décembre 1926): 535.

78 Jean Calvin, *Le catéchisme de Genève en français modern* (Paris: Éditions "Je sers," 1934).

79 Jean Calvin, *Pensées sur le Saint-Esprit* (Paris: Éditions calviniennes, 1936).

80 Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne* (Paris: Société Les belles lettres, 1936-1939).

81 The Association seems to have disappeared during the 1980s (its *International Reformed Bulletin* ceased in 1981), not having survived into the second generation of its supporters.

The French Calvinistic Society almost immediately began publication of a *Bulletin,* with Lecerf as editor. He served in this capacity until his death; the *Bulletin* continued to be printed until 1946. It was published irregularly, especially during the War years.

Regular conferences, sponsored by the Society were held until the outbreak of World War II. The membership grew gradually from forty-four in July, 1927, to a peak of three hundred, as Lecerf's Calvinistic movement progressed.[82]

The most prominent of Lecerf's disciples for many years was Pierre Marcel, who should have succeeded Lecerf as Professor of Reformed Dogmatics at the Protestant Seminary, but was snubbed by the liberals. Lecerf had arranged for Marcel to study in the Netherlands with Herman Dooyeweerd at the Free University of Amsterdam, with that very goal in mind. Marcel remained in the pastorate for his entire life of ministry, much of it in St-Germain-en-Laye, west of Paris. Following the demise of the *Bulletin* of the French Calvinistic Society, he established *La revue réformée* in 1950, which has appeared four or five times yearly ever since. Within its pages, Marcel published the works of Lecerf which were essentially ready for the press before his death. Marcel also published translations of significant Reformed works from Dutch and English, such as by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and John Murray, as well as translations of important creedal documents such as the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Canons of Dordt in modern French. Finally, Marcel encouraged a generation of French Reformed writers to think and to write, by giving them a platform for their literary productions in the years before French language Reformed book publishers began to emerge. Three of Marcel's own books were so significant that they have appeared in English translation: *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism;*[83] *The Relevance of Preaching;*[84] and *In God's School: Foundations for Christian Life.*[85]

A little younger among the disciples of Lecerf was Pierre Courthial (1914-2009), who served as a pastor in the Ardeche Department,

82 The Society seems to have faded away in the 1970s as its first generation of leaders passed away.

83 London: James Clarke, 1953.

84 Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963.

85 Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008.

Lyon, and Paris, in which last congregation his parishioners included members of the Peugeot family of car manufacturers. In 1974, Courthial left his prominent position in Paris to serve as dean of a new Reformed Seminary in Aix-en-Provence. Following the reunion of so much of French Protestantism in 1938, a small remnant of the Evangelical Reformed Churches of France remained outside the united denomination. Two years later, they established a seminary in the university city of Aix-en-Provence. After functioning for a quarter of a century, the Seminary closed down, having never found a clear Reformed voice.[86]

But the Evangelical Reformed Churches did not give up on theological education. The Seminary was reopened in 1974 with a new name declaring its Reformed theological convictions: The Free Reformed Faculty of Theology.[87] Help from the United States through President Edmund Clowney (1917-2005) of Westminster Theological Seminary, and from the British Isles, the Netherlands, and French-speaking Switzerland, permitted the institution to survive and, in French terms, flourish. Before his death, Pierre Marcel transferred *La revue réformée* to the Reformed Seminary in Aix, which still publishes it. Over time, *La revue réformée* has become more distinctively French in the source of the majority of its articles, as more Reformed writers have become available to write for it. The Seminary established a publishing house, Éditions Kerygma, which has been very active in expanding the Reformed bibliography in the French language, particularly of modern language versions of Calvin's commentaries.

Pierre Courthial not only wrote for *La revue réformée*, but also served on the editorial team of a monthly magazine *Ichthus,* which did much to popularize Calvinism in the French speaking world between 1970 and 1996. A number of books came from his pen during his

86 The Seminary did graduate Aaron Kayayan (1928-2008), who, during pastoral service in France, became the preacher for the French language Back to God Hour of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, eventually moving to the Chicago area. He produced a significant corpus of Reformed works, written and recorded.

87 In 2011, the name was changed to *La Faculté Jean Calvin,* the "John Calvin Faculty."

decade of service in Aix-en-Provence and during the early years of his retirement.[88]

Some other publishers have also arisen to meet the need for French Reformed books, one related to Evangelical Press in England led by Jean-Claude Souillot, and Excelsis, in the Drôme Department, which, however, mostly publishes non-Reformed literature.

But there remains no Reformed denomination in France today, although several have some desire to be so, including the remnant Evangelical Reformed Churches and *La Mission Timothée* (The Timothy Mission), which is Reformed Baptist in its theological orientation.

It is clear that Lecerf's reformational movement has experienced very mixed results, which prompts the following question: is there anything in Lecerf's theology and conduct which has inhibited the growth of the influence of Calvinism in France and the Francophone world?

One possibility is Lecerf's view of Scripture. In his zeal to avoid what he considered a mechanistic concept of the inspiration of the Bible among some seventeenth century Reformed theologians, Lecerf all but admits that there are errors in the Bible, though what he terms "small ones."[89] Such admissions could do nothing but weaken the movement against the continuing frontal attacks on Scripture which French Calvinists have endured.

Second, Lecerf did not distinguish clearly enough between his own theology and that of Karl Barth, until so late that Barth's expanding influence quickly surpassed his own. As late as 1936, Lecerf viewed the Barthians as co-belligerents with him and his Calvinistic associates against the reigning liberal establishment.

88 Some of his more significant works are: *La Confession de foi de La Rochelle: Commentaire [The Confession of Faith of La Rochelle: Commentary]* (Paris: Les cahiers de "Tant qu'il fait jour" et Société des compagnons pour l'évangile, 1979); *Fondements pour l'avenir [Foundations for the Future]* (Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Kerygma, 1981); and *Le jour des petits recommencements: Essai sur l'actualité de la parole (évangile-loi) de Dieu [The Day of Small, New Beginnings: An Essay on the Relevance of the Word (Gospel-Law) of God]* (Lausanne: Édition L'age d'homme, 1996).

89 Lecerf, "Inspiration et grammaire d'après les théologiens protestants du 17e siècle," *Études calvinistes*, 135-148, especially in light of Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 168.

Third, Lecerf was too polite to his non-Calvinistic theological foes, making it seem as if the issues which divided them were simple ones of little importance. Lecerf claimed in 1935, "We do not judge heretics, neither the modernists; we do not say that they do not have the Holy Spirit."[90] However, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) had trenchantly pointed out more than a decade earlier in his book *Christianity and Liberalism* that the two viewpoints constituted two different religions.[91]

Fourth, Lecerf did not have a clear ecclesiology, which would lead to the formation of a truly Reformed Church in France. For instance, he interpreted the Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:31-43) as if the loaf is anything that claims to be a church, the yeast is the Calvinist.[92] Jesus Himself interpreted this parable to express the idea that the Christian serves like yeast in the context of the world, not the church. Related to this weakness is Lecerf's embrace of Kuyper's "common grace" idea, which tends to break down the delineation between the church and the world.

Fifth, Lecerf simply did not write and speak enough. Buried in the pastoral activities of successive, remote parishes and effectively silenced by the church authorities for decades, Lecerf did not have the time to see his movement firmly established before the onslaught of World War II rendered him largely silent under the German occupation. For instance, had he completed his intended Reformed Dogmatics, the movement that he worked to establish would have been greatly strengthened.

But Lecerf did leave behind a legacy, perhaps more precious than many books. He left behind people, French men and women, who had been searching for biblical Christianity and had found it through his works, something that has continued in the past seventy years through the legacy of Lecerf. We are now well into the third generation of those whom Lecerf has influenced. Much remains to

90 *Le Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 84, no. 2 (avril-juin 1935): 189.

91 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923). I have found no references to Machen in Lecerf's papers, although many to Machen's professor B. B. Warfield (1851-1921).

92 Lecerf, *Introduction II,* 218.

be done; indeed, much can be done, as the sovereign God of Lecerf blesses such efforts.

Pierre Marcel was once asked why Lecerf had enjoyed such an impact in so many lives in such difficult circumstances. He replied, "Auguste Lecerf incarnated his message."[93] Not too shabby an epitaph! ●

93 Interview with Marcel.

Temporary Offices in the Church and Temporary Gifts of the Spirit

Thomas Miersma

Preface

The Christian church, in every branch of it today, is in various ways confronted with a serious corruption of the Word of God. One subject has become, time and again, a subject of much fascination, that is the subject of the gifts of the Spirit. This is especially true of those gifts which are special or striking, such as tongues and miracles of healing. At the same time, one subject has almost been completely ignored or corrupted in the modern Christian church, and that subject is the offices in the church and the special place of apostles and prophets.

Christ instituted a church having a certain form. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, gives gifts to His people. This subject is therefore not only one concerning the Spirit, or the structure of the church but is rooted in a true knowledge of Christ as Savior and Lord. He is the head of the body and it is the Holy Spirit given Him and poured out on the church (Acts 2:33). It is the Spirit of Christ who gives gifts, "as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11).

Introduction: Offices and Gifts

The Word of God and Christ Himself by the apostles ordained a certain institutional form and order for His church. This is plainly set before us in such passages as 1 Timothy 3. God has given two vital offices or functions: that of elder or bishop (literally "overseer") which is one of government (1 Thess. 5:12, 13) and that of deacon which is one of ministering to the poor and afflicted (Acts 6). I Timothy 3 gives qualifications for these offices to the church, as they are set in the body of the church, and men are called and sent to this work by the church (Acts 6:3). The office of elder is one of government. The term elder, drawn from the Old Testament, and the term bishop refer to the same office, as is clear from Acts 20, where Paul sent to Ephesus and "called the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17). It is these elders whom he then addresses as "overseers" (Acts 20:28). It is the establishment of this office of elder in the body of Christ or in

congregations gathered through missions, which work formed mission fields into instituted churches. We read, therefore, that Paul having preached in Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium and Lystra returned to these mission fields, confirming the souls and ordaining "elders in every church" (Acts 14:21-23). For the same reason, Titus is left in Crete to "ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). The church instituted by Christ is to be governed by a body of elders.

Within that office of elder or government, the Word of God also makes a certain distinction. There are those called of God not only to rule in the life of the church but to preach. We read, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17). While all the elders are to be honored, the apostle distinguishes between those who rule, and those who "labour in the word and doctrine," that is, those who preach, who, he explains, must be supported by the church (1 Tim. 5:18). It is in connection with this calling to preach, that the Word of God speaks of a number of preaching offices: apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor and teacher (Eph 4:11). The latter, "pastor and teacher," is the abiding office of the ministry of the Word in the church. The preachers, also the apostles, were elders, as Peter indicates in I Peter 5:1, declaring that he also is an elder. At the same time, it is clear from the New Testament that the body of the elders, was broader than the pastors alone. There is even a distinct gift of "government" (1 Cor. 12:28), and ruling with diligence is mentioned as the exercise of a spiritual gift given to the church (Rom. 12:6, 8).

The church instituted by Christ, therefore, is composed of ministers of the Word or teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons. To exercise these offices God gives gifts to the church as the body of Christ. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 12:6-8. He describes theses gifts from the viewpoint of their exercise. They include gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, ruling, giving. While it is clear that these gifts are given to the church as the body of Christ, it is also clear from the very nature of the offices set down in Scripture and the exercise of these gifts, that they belong to the qualifications for those offices and are exercised by them. The same principle is found in 1 Corinthians 12: 28-3 where the apostle speaks of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, governments, and

tongues. Apostles, prophets, and teachers are preaching offices. Helps and governments involve the exercise of authority which is found in the offices in the church. When "governments" is mentioned, for example, the reference is certainly to a spiritual gift, but the idea of it is also that one does not exercise it by a self-willed lording it over others. There is an office of elder in the church.

There is an important point, therefore, which must be noted in considering this matter, namely, that the Word of God points us to: 1) gifts, 2) the exercise of those gifts, and 3) offices in the church. These three elements are joined together. All three are set in the body, the church, by the Spirit, as He will. We may not separate them from one another. We may not individualize them. We may not take one or two of them and speak of them as if everyone in the church has them or should have them. The apostle Paul asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" (1 Cor. 12:29, 30). The answer to his question is plainly, "No!" To teach, therefore, that all should have the gift of tongues as a kind of second blessing is plainly contrary to the express testimony of Scripture, and those who teach such things err. The Holy Spirit works spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, for the welfare of the body, the service of the gospel, not the aggrandizement of men. He works them, moreover, sovereignly "as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11). It is in the light of this principle that we may turn to the specific concern of this article, of special offices and special gifts, both of which were temporary.

Temporary Offices in the Church and Temporary Gifts of the Spirit

The Word of God sets forth in the New Testament certain special gifts which were found in the church, including miracles, tongues, and special gifts of knowledge and revelation. One of the issues or questions that occurs in connection with these gifts is their place and intention. Do they continue today? If not, why not? Now there is a Scriptural answer to these questions which is important. To understand that answer, the subject must be treated in a certain context. That context is the historical situation of the New Testament church and the offices which were given in the church. Scripture consistently connects the gifts of the Spirit with the offices in the church. The special or

exceptional gifts of the Spirit are connected with the temporary offices of apostle and New Testament prophet.

I. The Office of Apostle

In treating the office of apostle there is an important distinction which needs to be kept in mind between that which was unique to that specific office and that aspect or function of it which continues in the New Testament form of the church institute. The word apostle refers to one who is called and sent and has a broader idea. When we speak of the office of apostle, however, we are speaking of a unique office.

Three qualifications were specific to the unique character of the office of apostle.

1. The apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection, having seen the risen Lord.
2. They were called directly by Christ, personally, to that office.
3. They were directly and personally trained for their labor and office by the Lord Himself.

All the elements were necessary. Let us examine these qualifications more closely.

1. Eyewitnesses

There were many others who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. He appeared to above five hundred at once on a mountain in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:5-8). In Paul's case this plainly occurred on the road to Damascus, and it is this to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:8. Being an eyewitness was necessary. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:1, "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"

2. Personal and direct call

The personal call of Christ to that office was necessary also. The term apostle itself means "one sent" and the idea of it is that of one called and sent by Christ. The principle or function of that calling and sending still abides in the church in this respect: Christ, by His Spirit in the heart, calls men to seek office in the church, subjectively. He also calls and sends men to the labor of the ministry of the Word, and to be elders and deacons, objectively, by an external call to office through the church (Acts 6:3; Acts 13:2; Rom. 10:15; see also the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 31). This includes ordination to office in the case of the ministers of the Word by the laying on of the

hands of the presbytery (eldership), as was the case with Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14), and it includes gifts to perform that office (2 Tim. 1:6). Both the subjective and objective aspects of this one call to office are necessary, which is why spiritual qualifications for office are set down in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1:6 ff.).

In the case of the apostles, this calling to office was a direct, immediate, and a personal-physical call by Christ Himself as head of the church. They were called to be "fishers of men," as Jesus showed in the miracle of the draught of fishes. Paul also was a "chosen vessel" for the same purpose (Acts 9:15). Paul must be understood as having seen Christ directly in heaven in such away that the barrier between heaven and earth was opened in his call.

The apostles, together with the prophets, had also a unique task to perform: laying the foundation of the New Testament form of the church institute. Paul indicates this in Ephesians 2:20, when he says that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." of which Christ Himself is the Chief Cornerstone.

3. Instructed by Christ

Included in this call is also that the apostles were personally and directly instructed by Christ for their calling and office and trained by Him. This is reflected in Jesus' promise in the upper room to the eleven (Judas having already left), that is, that He would give His Spirit Who would "...teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). In the case of Paul, who had not walked with Jesus those three years, Jesus gave that instruction also directly, probably during his sojourn in Arabia. He repeatedly emphasizes that he did not learn his doctrine from any other disciple and describes that experience in 2 Corinthians 12. That he is referring to himself in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 is plain from verse 7. This is why Paul repeatedly quotes from that direct instruction, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you..." (1 Cor. 11:23; 1 Cor. 7:10).

Offices Set in the Body, the Church

As to the place of that office, there are a couple of other elements which need to be considered to rightly understand the gifts of that office. The church is a body, a living organism, in which the members are bound and united together, as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 12.

The offices, all of them, are set in the body. They do not exist independently of it. Hence, the normal order is calling by Christ through the church. The apostolic office, while laying the foundation of the church and having a calling made directly by Christ, was nevertheless set in the body (Eph. 4:11, 12). The principle in Ephesians 4:12 makes it clear that by the offices set in the body, it is, properly speaking, the body itself which preaches. The body is not simply edified or built up by the preaching (Eph. 4:12), but is edifying or building itself up (Eph. 4:16), "edifying itself in love." This is true of the apostolic office also, which is why Paul, though an apostle, is called and sent to do mission work by Christ through the church (Acts 13:2).

The second element is that there is a sequence to how Christ gave the offices, particularly that of the ministry of the Word, to the church. This is found not only in Ephesians 4:11, apostles...prophets... evangelists...pastors and teachers, it is also found in 1 Corinthians 12:28, "first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues...." The office of the ministry was unfolded in the life of the church in harmony with the need to lay the foundation and then build upon it. The role of New Testament prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher must be seen in this light. There is a certain development that was going on in the church, in its New Testament institutional form. (More on this below.)

"The Signs of an Apostle"

It is in the context of that organic unfolding and development, as the church grew into its full New Testament form and institution, that God gave both certain temporary offices and temporary gifts that were necessary to lay the foundation of the New Testament church. The word preached, that Christ was the fulfillment of the promises, the true promised Messiah or Christ, had to be confirmed specifically for believers by signs and wonders. There were also special gifts needed for the work, of which divine inspiration in the giving of the Scriptures was one. This was also the case with miracles and gifts of healing (which Paul evidently distinguishes in 1 Cor. 12:28). These gifts belong to the apostles, in the life of the body or church, and were found in connection with their labors, also among their co-laborers.

They were gifts given to the church, but centrally residing in the office of apostle.

Mark 16

In the latter part of Mark 16, Christ is speaking to the "eleven" (Mark 16:14). It is to them, and in them, to the church, that Christ gives the commission to go and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15, see also Matt. 28: 19, 20). With this commission, Christ also gave the promise of a twofold fruit upon the labor (faith and unbelief in Mark 16:16). He also promised the disciples that certain gifts and powers would accompany their preaching labors among those that believe (Mark 16:17-18).

What is often overlooked in this discussion, however, is the purpose of these signs: "...The Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following..." (Mark 16:20), that is, their function was to confirm the apostolic Word. They were not intended for just any purpose.

Secondly, the language of Mark is also overlooked. It is speaking of the apostles when he says, "so then after the Lord had spoken unto them...(the eleven of v. 14).... And they (the apostles) went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them..." (Mark 16:19, 20). That this included the co-labors of men like Philip and other office bearers, in the light of the organic reality of the church as a body, does not lessen the fact that Mark is speaking specifically of the apostles.

Thirdly, it should also be noted that Mark speaks of the matter as a promise made which was fulfilled. "And these signs shall follow..." (Mark 16:17). "And they went (past tense) forth...with signs following" (Mark 16:20). The viewpoint of Mark is that Jesus promised it, it happened as promised, and it is now fulfilled and done. He speaks of something accomplished, not something continuing in the church. There is nothing in the text that suggests or intends to speak of something perpetual in the special gifts of the apostles in the church.

The gospel having been declared, confirmed, and set down in the Scriptures, the function of these signs is, in fact, fulfilled. They served the laying of the foundation of the church. That does not mean there is no abiding element, as both the commission to preach the gospel abides, and the miracles confirming the gospel are recorded in

Scripture. The miracles, which are intended to confirm the faith of believers, are now recorded in Scripture, and they are sufficient for our faith. The Scriptures were written by eyewitnesses of these things. To require miracles today is to declare that the Bible is insufficient for faith.

Hebrews 2:3, 4

In connection with the discussion of Mark 16 and the concept of apostolic gifts to confirm the Word (Heb. 2:3, 4) also needs to be considered. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:3, 4).

The point of the text in Hebrews 2:3, 4 is that the gospel was first preached by Christ Himself and then by the apostles, and that God bore them witness and confirmed their words with wonders, miracles, and gifts. The point of the text is that these extraordinary gifts were signs given of God to confirm the word of the apostles in their preaching. They pointed to Christ confirming the gospel of Christ. That was their function by the hand of the apostles.

Moreover, God was Himself by them bearing witness to the truth that Jesus was indeed the promised Christ. This was the function of healings and other wonders to confirm the Word. The text also speaks of this as something past and now accomplished. It is clearly implied that God bore them witness, and that witness having been established, the need for it has also ceased. It is something past. It is also not something ongoing in the church or among those to whom he is writing. They, the Hebrews, are not themselves doing wonders, miracles, and so on, which is what Pentecostalism requires.

2 Corinthians 12:12

It is in that connection that the statement of the apostle Paul also has significance. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12). The statement, "signs of an apostle," is rather clear. The miracles Paul did were a proof of his apostolic office and his

preaching, which is what Paul is defending throughout much of 2 Corinthians.

Exactly, however, in that they were marks of his office, they were bound to that office. When the apostles passed away, these signs of their office also ceased. This is both scriptural and an historical fact. It is the testimony of the early church that the extraordinary gifts of tongues, miracles, healings, and others, all passed away with the death of the apostles. When teachers have come in the history of the church, claiming their restoration, they have been condemned as heretics. This was the case of Montanus (about AD 150-200), who claimed he was the promised Paraclete or comforter, together with his women prophetesses.

To this must be added the explicit statement of Paul that certain of the gifts found in the church were temporary and would cease: "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (1 Cor. 13:8). The apostle says that they shall cease and they did.

II. Prophetic Office and Gifts Connected with it

To put this matter in its proper perspective, it is also necessary to say something about the other temporary office of prophet and its character.

New Testament prophets

New Testament prophets were added to the apostles as the second office of preaching and teaching in the church. The word prophet must be carefully understood. It means literally to "tell forth." The idea of it is that one is given to tell forth God's Word. This is not only something respecting the future as in predictive prophecy. Predicting the coming famine or Paul's imprisonment, as was done by Agabus, is only one aspect of the prophetic office and a very minor one.

To tell forth the Word includes the special gifts of expounding the Scriptures, when as yet the New Testament was not written. The church at first had only the Old Testament as written Scripture. They did not yet have either the gospels or epistles. They needed special gifts of the Spirit to expound that Old Testament, without being able

to compare Scripture with Scripture. It is this to which the apostle refers in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33.

There were special preaching gifts including special revelations of knowledge. Revelations of the gospel were also given by means of tongues. The prophets, under the influence of these gifts, would come with a psalm or a doctrine which they would expound in preaching. The reference to psalms must be taken in the ordinary sense of the New Testament, that is, as a reference to the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament. Likewise, the reference to doctrine or teaching is a reference to the consistent declaration of the Scriptures on a certain point and Jesus' own instruction which was given to the church by revelation. This is true also of the purpose of speaking in tongues, which was to tell forth "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11). It is under this work of the Spirit that New Testament worship was originally conducted, the prophets speaking by turn (1 Cor. 14:29). While women also were partakers of this gift, in that they also were able to know the Scriptures for themselves and confess the wonderful works of God in Acts 2 and elsewhere, they were forbidden to exercise this gift in the public worship of the church and forbidden to preach (1 Cor. 14:34, 35).

Special gifts for preaching

It is specifically this special gift serving the preaching, that is, of tongues and knowledge in its special character as involving in some measure direct revelation, that the apostle Paul says will cease or fail and pass away in the church. It was temporary, served a specific purpose but was not intended to continue. Its principle function was not future prediction but the giving of the New Testament Scriptures under divine inspiration by men like Luke, Mark, James, and Jude, along with the apostles. The spiritual principle of it continues in the church in connection with the Scriptures, in that all believers are anointed with the Spirit and have the "unction of the Holy One" to know and understand the Word of God in the Scriptures for themselves (1 John 2:13, 14, 21, 27). This is the office of believer. Moreover, the function of telling forth the Word in an official way now abides in the third office of the ministry and that of teacher (1 Cor. 12:28).

Role of tongues

It is in that light that the gift of tongues must be understood. It was a gift given to serve the preaching of the gospel, to enable the apostles and prophets to tell forth the wonderful works of God.

As given on Pentecost, the point of it was twofold: it was a sign that the gospel was going to the nations and that Gentiles as Gentiles would be gathered into the people of God, and it was a sign of warning to the unbelieving Jews of Judea that the gospel was being taken from them.

Until Pentecost the promises of Christ by the types and shadows of the Old Testament and the Scriptures had been given in one language, that of the Jews, namely, Hebrew. With the coming of the Spirit, the gospel is preached in "other tongues" (other than Hebrew, Acts 2:4, 11). The Jews in Jerusalem who could not understand those other tongues heard only the noise of a drunkard (Acts 2:13), while the Jews from other countries heard an amazing wonder: the gospel preached in their own native tongue of the land in which they were born.

It is for this reason that the apostle says that tongues are a "sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Cor. 14:22). It is also the reason he makes the point that prophesying is more useful and profitable, as it edified all. The trouble in Corinth is that they approached these special gifts, not in harmony with their divine purpose, but out of sinful pride in having them. For the same reason he points out that speaking in an unknown tongue when there is none to interpret or when one does not know what one is saying is unprofitable both for the speaker and hearer.

It is also clear that all of these special gifts were not universal, not given to everyone in the church, nor intended for everyone, nor were the offices in the church for everyone (1 Cor. 12:29-30). As with the telling forth of God's Word, (prophecy) the principle remains in the church, though the special gift has failed and passed away. The same thing is still true of tongues. The special gifts of tongues have ceased. In 1 Corinthians 13:8 the term is literally "cease of themselves." The gospel is still proclaimed in other tongues to those who have never heard the gospel. The principle and the commission to go into all the world and preach remains. It is only the special character of the gift which has ceased. The Pentecostals, with their

second blessing idea, totally miss the point, intention, and purpose of tongues.

1 Corinthians 13:8

The point with much of this is that it confirms what the apostle says also in 1 Corinthians 13:8. Concerning this passage, there is, in a sense, a certain organic unfolding of what is said. Verse 8 emphasizes that the extraordinary gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge shall fail, cease of themselves, and pass away. It is all incomplete and partial (v. 9). A better perfection is coming (v. 10). These gifts belong to childhood (v. 11). The New Testament church is in its infancy; it must be brought to adulthood. When that adulthood comes, these childish things will cease, fail, and pass away.

Does that mean prophecy, in the sense of telling forth God's Word by preaching out of the finished Scriptures, preaching the gospel to the nations (the real purpose of other tongues) and knowledge by the Spirit ceases? No, but doing so by extraordinary gifts (miraculously) ceases. This is adulthood as opposed to being a child.

But that adulthood is still not perfection. Even under the preaching of the gospel and the ordinary gift of the Spirit to know God's Word, we are still seeing through a glass darkly. We do not yet see face to face. Full adulthood and perfection can only come at Christ's return. The apostle looks at this matter as having certain phases of development to it: from special gifts, to their ordinary use in the church, to perfection at Christ's coming.

III. The Office of Evangelist

There is one other temporary office that needs to be mentioned, as those holding it also partook in some measure of the special gifts of the Spirit. In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul also mentions the office or function of evangelist, which is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. What this function or office was is not difficult to determine. The word itself means "to gospelize." Timothy is told to do the "work of an evangelist." Philip is also called an evangelist. The evangelists were co-laborers with the apostles. Peter, John, Paul, and the others could not be everywhere at once. The apostles had with them co-laborers who assisted them in the work, particularly of missions. This work was not independent from that of the apostles. Philip, for example,

preached to the Samaritans. When a group was formed, Peter and John were sent to that work (Acts 8:12-17). In like manner, Titus is left in Crete by the apostle Paul to finish the work there (Tit. 1:5) and set things in order. In the same way, Paul remains in Athens while Silas and Timothy remain in Macedonia to finish the work there (Acts 17:14, 15).

Insofar as there was a distinct office of evangelist, as is suggested by Ephesians 4:11, it was that of a coworker/assistant to the apostles in their missionary labors. An evangelist emphatically was not someone who went to those who were already Christians, or where the gospel had been preached, with a view to stirring them up by some kind of religious pep rally. It was always in connection with mission work where the gospel had never gone before and always in connection with forming and establishing churches. Titus was to ordain elders in Crete. The distinction is somewhat between that of a ground-breaker, Paul, and one who finishes and lays the foundation upon that plowed ground. It is for this reason that Paul, while he labored extensively in Corinth, says that he did not baptize many there and was not sent to baptize (1 Cor. 1:13-17). The work of teaching and baptism, following it, was evidently conducted by his co-laborers, since we know that a large church was formed in Corinth and that Paul labored there for an extended period of time.

Again, while the distinct character of this function as a co-worker with the apostles has ceased, the principle of it abides in the present office of the ministry of the Word, which is not only that of pastor and teacher but also that of an evangelist. Timothy, manifestly, as Paul's life was drawing to a close, was laboring as the pastor of the church in Ephesus (2 Tim.). It is particularly the function of missionaries sent by Christ through the church to do the work of an evangelist, though every preacher is engaged in gospelizing those who hear. Moreover, none of these men simply roamed around at will. They certainly were not unsupervised. They were under the apostles' direct supervision and instruction as to their work. Hence we have an epistle like Titus. Their work was always among the unchurched, where the gospel had not yet gone. The purpose of it was always to establish in good scriptural order, churches. They were not laymen, but ordained officebearers, called to that labor as were Barnabas (Acts 13:2) and Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14).

The Warnings against False Miracles and Gifts

It is in the light of these principles that historic Christianity has always maintained that these gifts, also of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues were apostolic gifts belonging to the laying of the foundation of the church. They ceased with the death of the apostles.

The Scriptures also warn us against false teachers and false prophets (2 Pet. 2:1). They warn us against false miracles and signs and wonders which belong to the spirit of antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9). The fact is that false miracles of healing, tongues, and more are found in Hindu temples to this very day. Moreover, these pagan phenomena have a common characteristic with the Pentecostals: they are uncontrolled phenomena which seize the worshiper. This is what Paul means when he says the Corinthians were "carried away" unto dumb idols (1 Cor. 12:2). They were out of control. Order, not chaos, is the work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:32, 40).

To claim, as the Pentecostals do, that God has now restored these special gifts is without Scriptural foundation. False references to the latter rain in the land of Canaan taken from the Old Testament prophets are just that, false references that twist the Scriptures. To maintain that these gifts have either continued or been restored in the church opens one up to all the medieval nonsense of Rome, to miracles of Mary, weeping statues, and the apocryphal stories of the medieval saints. It also opens the door to the lies of the Mormons and other cults which teach additional revelation along with Scripture.

Historic Christianity has always rejected such claims as deceitful delusions. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was in part about removing these abuses and superstitions from the church, which is one of the reasons Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers also opposed the false visions and prophets associated with many Anabaptist groups.

Conclusion

The Word of God warns of "false prophets" who come with false signs and wonders, "that if it were possible, [which it is not] they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:23). Try the spirits whether they are of God. Search and evaluate them in the light of the Word of Truth. The standard is not what we think we see, nor what we feel, but the Scriptures. The church has a calling to preach the Word. Seeking

today after "signs" in the place of preaching is a mark of unbelief (1 Cor. 1:22). It is the labor of preaching by the offices in the church that abides. By that preaching Christ calls, gathers, and builds His church. ●

John Calvin Research Bibliography

Compiled by Ronald Cammenga

#7: Calvin's Doctrine of the Fall of Man into Sin and Its Consequences

Related Topics:

Man's original good creation by God
Adam's abuse of the freedom of his will and disobedience against God
The nature of sin made plain by the first sin
The doctrine of original sin
Fallen man deprived of freedom of choice; rejection of the teaching of free will and man's inability to will the good
Natural man's total depravity
Calvin's appeal to and dependence on Augustine

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#8: Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant

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The nature of the covenant
The decree of the covenant
The covenant of works
The covenant of grace
The covenant perfected
The unity of the covenant
The covenant and election
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#9: Calvin's Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the Covenant

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Christ the fulfillment of the Old Testament
The relationship between the testaments
The necessity of the incarnation
The offices of the Mediator
Christ's meritorious work on behalf of the elect
Christ the only Savior
The Extra Calvinisticum
Christ and election

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#10: Calvin's Doctrine of Union to Christ, Faith, and Justification

Related Topics:

The Spirit as the bond that unites the elect believer to Christ

Faith as the gift and work of the Spirit

Definition and properties of faith

a. Christ as the object of faith

b. Faith as knowledge

c. Faith rests on God's Word

d. Faith as certainty (assurance)

True and false faith distinguished

Justification (righteousness imputed—*Institutes,* 2.7.2)

Justification by faith alone: "the main hinge on which religion turns" (*Institutes,* 3.11.1)

Justification apart from works: "Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of Him, we principally receive a double grace, namely that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a judge, a gracious Father, and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life" (*Institutes,* 3.11.1)

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Book Reviews

Why Should I Believe Christianity?, by James N. Anderson. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2016. Pp. 230. $12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

We live in a post-Christian society, especially we who live in Europe and North America. It is increasingly difficult to engage a secular world in conversation about Christianity. What we need is a short, accessible, engaging work on apologetics.

Apologetics aims to give a reasoned defense of the faith. Sometimes we are at a loss—where do you even begin with an atheist? Where do our young people begin on campus with their fellow students who know next to nothing about Christianity and who have never opened a Bible?

A very good place to start would be with this book.

Anderson does not set out to *prove* that Christianity is true. Instead, he aims to show that Christianity is *reasonable*—indeed, he aims to show that in a world of competing ideas and beliefs Christianity is the *only reasonable* worldview.

The key word in this book is "worldview": "My overarching goal is to explain, with minimal philosophical mumbo jumbo, what it means to say that Christianity is a worldview and why we should believe that it's the correct worldview" (26). "If we're going to consider whether Christianity should be believed—whether Christianity is true and reasonable—we need to judge it as a whole, on its own terms, in its own context. As with so many things, Christianity is far more than the sum of its individual parts" (31).

Anderson argues that a good worldview needs to pass four tests, the consistency test, the coherence test, the explanation test, and the evidence test. A worldview must be able to make good sense of the world. Anderson explains why only Christianity passes these four tests and why other worldviews (especially naturalism) fall short.

The chapters of the book give a good idea of the general structure of Anderson's arguments—The Big Picture (what a worldview is), Christianity as a Worldview (God, Trinity, creation, man, the fall, revelation,

salvation, Jesus Christ, and the end), God is There (arguments for the existence of God—existence, values, morality, reason, mind, and science), God is not Silent (arguments for the Bible as the Word of God), God With Us (Jesus, the Incarnation, and the atonement), Defying Death (arguments for the resurrection), and What Now? (a summary and a challenge to the reader).

Anderson throws down the gauntlet to the atheist:

> Only belief in God makes sense in the end. When atheists and agnostics live as though the universe is a rational, orderly place, as though there are objective moral standards, as though their fellow humans have real dignity and worth, and as though their lives have genuine significance, they betray their debt to a biblical worldview and unwittingly confirm their dependence on God (137-138).

Anderson does not believe, of course, that he can *reason* an atheist into the kingdom of God. Several times in the book, he shows the reader that only supernatural regeneration can open the eyes of the blinded unbeliever. Nevertheless, an apologetic work like this one not only challenges the atheistic worldview, it also gives the Christian confidence to witness to unbelievers around him.

Highly recommended for the young people especially. ●

"I Will Be Your God": An Easy Introduction to the Covenant of Grace, by Wes Bredenhof. Fergus, Ontario, Canada: Inter-League Publication Board, 2015. Pp. 78. $7.00 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The title on the cover of this book on the covenant is deceptive. The content of the book shows that the title ought to be *"I Will Be Your God, If…"* *"If..."*! The book contends that the covenant promise of God, and the covenant salvation that is promised, are *conditional*. The conditions are the faith and obedience of the children of believers. To every one of them God extends the covenant promise. To every one of them God desires to give covenant salvation. Every one of them God loves with His saving

love in Christ Jesus. Whether the promise is fulfilled, whether the desire is consummated, whether the love achieves salvation depend upon the children, when they become old enough to fulfill the conditions.

Wes Bredenhof is a Canadian Reformed theologian and, therefore, a proponent of the covenant theology of Klaas Schilder and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). The small book is a brief, simplified explanation of the Liberated doctrine of the covenant, especially the Liberated doctrine of the covenant with the children of believers. A benefit of this succinct explanation is that it makes clear to the Reformed or Presbyterian reader who is not Canadian Reformed or Liberated, beyond any doubt, exactly what the Liberated doctrine of the covenant is. It is not Reformed according to the confessions.

At the baptism of every child of believing parents, God promises to save the child. This promise expresses God's love for every child and His wish, or will, to save every child, as is implied by the promise itself. No one, least of all God, promises something to someone without a desire to bestow what is promised. Nor does anyone, least of all God, promise a great, good thing to anyone without love for the person to whom the promise is given.

> Now I want to emphasize as clearly as I can that all of that [the complete salvation that is in Jesus Christ, "perfect blessedness in the life everlasting"] is promised to *every single person* in the covenant of grace. There are *no* exceptions. These promises come to all believers and their children, head for head. The covenantal gospel promises are widely distributed to one and all in this relationship (23, 24; emphasis is Bredenhof's).

When Bredenhof then writes that "the covenant of grace shows us a God who loves us *and* our children" (emphasis is Bredenhof's), the meaning is that God loves all our baptized children, "head for head" (56). The love is the saving love expressed by the promise of the covenant of grace. How this harmonizes with the hatred of God for Esau before he was born, and when he was circumcised with the sign of the covenant, Bredenhof does not inform his readers (see Romans 9). Nor does he take any note of the creedal doctrine of predestination, election and reprobation. This

silence concerning the Reformed confession in the Canons of Dordt is significant. No orthodox Reformed treatment of the covenant may ignore the Canons.

There is the same disregard of the Canons in Bredenhof's consideration of Jesus Christ as the mediator of the covenant. He recognizes "that the covenant of grace…with believers *and* their children" depends on "a Mediator in the covenant of grace" (17). This mediatorship of Jesus Christ certainly includes His mediatorial death. Inasmuch as for Bredenhof and the Liberated the covenant is with all the children "head for head," Christ is the mediator of all the children, "head for head," including, indeed especially, His mediatorial death. This is a form of universal atonement, implying that the death of Christ was not effectual, inasmuch as some of the children of believers are not saved by Christ's death and mediatorship, but perish everlastingly. The doctrine of the covenant of Bredenhof and the Liberated denies the truth of the cross, as confessed in Bredenhof's creed, the Canons of Dordt, II.8.

The inescapable question to Bredenhof's doctrine of the covenant is, "Why, if God loves them all, desires the salvation of them all, and promises salvation to them all, are not all the children of believers saved?" The ready answer of Bredenhof and the Liberated is: "Because the covenant and its promise are *conditional*." The covenant depends for its realization in the salvation of the children upon the child's faith and obedience. Bredenhof makes this view of the dependence of God's promise upon the work of the child starkly plain by an example. God's promise to every child is like one's giving someone a check for $10,000. If the person does not cash the check, he loses the money, despite the gift and good intentions of the party who made the check out to him. At baptism, God gives every child the check of salvation. Whether a child actually receives the covenant salvation that is promised, however, depends upon his cashing the check by believing and obeying (24, 25). This doctrine is Arminianism—the *baldest* Arminianism—applied to the doctrine of the covenant.

Himself apparently troubled by the assault on the gospel of grace that this doctrine of a conditional covenant is, Bredenhof prefers to speak of the works of the child upon which the covenant depends as "obligations," rather

than as "conditions." But the fundamental issue is not merely a matter of terminology. The issue is that the covenant of God depends on works that the child must perform, rather than on the sovereign, covenant grace of God, having its origin in eternal election. "Obligations" upon which the promise of the covenant depends are, in reality, conditions, call them what one will. In the end Bredenhof evidently felt the need honestly to admit that his "obligations" are, in fact, "conditions": "We distinguish between promises and obligations in the covenant of grace. God gives promises and imposes obligations (or conditions) in this relationship" (74).

Contrary to Bredenhof's claim, therefore, the covenant in his theology is not "essentially a relationship between God and his people" (12). It is a contract—a cold, business-like contract: "I (God) will do this, if you (baptized infant) do that." Like all contracts, the covenant is tenuous and breakable, as breakable and tenuous as the child is weak and undependable in fulfilling his end of the conditional contract.

Neither does Bredenhof deliver the Liberated doctrine of the covenant from its grievous offense against the gospel of grace by an emphatic rejection of merit (25, 26). Liberated conditionality and Roman Catholic merit are essentially the same, regardless that the terminology differs. Both attribute his salvation to the sinner himself; both have the sinner cooperating with God in his salvation; both make salvation dependent upon the sinner himself; and both indebt God to the sinner in the matter of the sinner's salvation. And both avoid any mention of, much more any emphasis upon, predestination in their treatment of the salvation of covenant children. The gospel of grace repudiates both merit and conditionality in the great matter of salvation. In the covenant as on the mission field, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). And Romans 9 has salvation in the covenant of grace, indeed the salvation of elect infants, especially in view: "[Unborn] Jacob have I loved, but [unborn] Esau[, son of believing parents] have I hated" (Rom. 9:13).

No such grossly false doctrine as that of Bredenhof and the Liberated can leave other important aspects of the doctrine of the covenant unaffected. "Sanctified

in Christ" in the first question to the parents in the Baptism Form cannot for Bredenhof mean the saving, regenerating work of the Spirit in the heart of the children. For Bredenhof and the Liberated, who must apply the words to all the children, "head for head," this would mean the falling away of saints in the case of some of the children, who grow up showing themselves unbelieving. Therefore, "sanctified in Christ" means merely that formally the children "have a standing in God's covenant of grace, but it does not mean that they will necessarily relate to God with faith and come under all the blessings and eternal life in the covenant of grace" (49). "Sanctified in Christ" is merely "covenant status" (50). It is not covenant salvation.

Inasmuch as now there cannot be infant salvation, since the infants cannot fulfill the conditions upon which salvation depends, hope for the salvation of infants who die in infancy consists of the salvation of the infants by the faith of their parents. "God views that child through the parents…For covenant children who die in infancy, it is the faith of their parents that makes the difference" (56). In reality, this makes the salvation of the infants impossible. Without actual, personal sanctification in Christ, by regeneration, no one will be saved: "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Canons, 1.17 makes the election (about which Bredenhof is silent, the mention of election in relation to the covenant being anathema to the Canadian Reformed and Liberated) and the salvation of the children (not the salvation of the children's parents) the confidence of the parents at the death of their infant children. This salvation of the infants is their being "sanctified in Christ," in the language of the Baptism Form.

In light of this doctrine of the covenant, Bredenhof's attempt to differentiate his covenant theology from that of the "Federal Vision" (7), although understandable, is vain. It is Canadian Reformed, Liberated covenant theology that has produced the bolder, more developed heresy of the Federal Vision. Indeed, essentially, the Canadian Reformed, Liberated doctrine of the covenant *is* the covenant theology of the Federal Vision. The Federal Vision theologians declare this to the world. The mild critics of the Federal Vision openly acknowledge this. Demonstrating this in our day of the appearance of the

heresy of the Federal Vision in virtually all the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, including the OPC, the PCA, and the URC, is the main benefit of *"I Will Be Your God, [If…]."* ●

The Rock Whence We Are Hewn, by Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema. Edited by David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. xii + 544. $43.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

This outstanding book is vitally important to members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. I urge everyone to obtain a copy and delve into it with haste and interest.

Using the important admonition of Isaiah 51:1 as its title, the book gives in one volume the most important documents concerning the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Some documents have previously appeared in English, but others have not. Now they are available to those interested in the truth of the everlasting gospel of grace.

The documents are called "foundational," and truly they are. A careful reading of them will reveal the historical and doctrinal reasons for the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches as a separate denomination, will inspire the members of these churches to maintain their distinctive place in the catholic church of Christ, and will impress upon the members that, if they love the church of Christ, they must maintain these doctrinal foundation strong and sure and not let them be eroded by neglect, heresy, and doctrinal indifference.

The first document, "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace," is the text of a lecture Henry Danhof delivered to Christian Reformed ministers in 1919. Danhof was later deposed from the ministry in that church and was one of the founding ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the lecture Danhof set before his colleagues the basic ideas of God's everlasting covenant of grace. He plowed new ground and clearly maintained that God's covenant is rooted in and is the revelation of God's trinitarian life; that the

covenant's essential character is a bond of life, love, and friendship between God and his people in Christ; that the covenant's development is organic; and that the covenant's establishment results in an antithetical life in the world for its members. This writing was one of the earliest and is the most fundamental. Especially two words appear in it and throughout all the writings: *organic* and *antithesis*.

The second contribution is "On the Theory of Common Grace," the text of a speech delivered by Hoeksema shortly after he was ordained a minister of the gospel in the Christian Reformed Church. He spoke at a meeting of Christian Reformed ministers. Common grace was a subject extensively discussed at that time, and the paper is a clear exegetical study of the texts that many used to prove common grace.

Not only in the heat of the battle over common grace, but also through the decades that followed, Rev. Hoeksema carefully and exegetically showed how the scriptural texts used to support common grace were no proof at all and that many other texts clearly militated against the doctrine. In one place in the book, Hoeksema gives no less than eight pages of texts that militate against common grace. The defenders of common grace were guilty of betraying the truth of God's word by their refusal to answer from Scripture the biblical texts that Hoeksema explained. Christian Reformed theologians repeatedly quoted texts at random, but never explained them or showed how they supported common grace. Names have been hurled against the Reformed and confessional defenders of the truths of sovereign and particular grace: "Anabaptists" and "Hyper-Calvinists," among the most common then and today; but never much from Scripture.

I did not know this paper existed until recently; it is an important addition to the book.

Early in the debate J. K. Van Baalen leveled the charge of "Anabaptism" at Hoeksema and Danhof. In a way it was the opening shot in the official battle over common grace. The charge was a blatantly false accusation that anyone who denied common grace was guilty of world-flight. Yet Van Baalen's pamphlet "Denial of Common Grace, Reformed or Anabaptistic?" where the charge first appeared, was widely acclaimed by the defenders of common grace. Danhof and

Hoeksema answered this serious charge in their pamphlet, "Not Anabaptist but Reformed," the third chapter in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn.*

Their answer makes clear that Van Baalen's charge was rooted in a denial of the antithesis, and that instead of defending his heresy on scriptural grounds he made a clumsy attempt to defeat the deniers of common grace by name-calling. In other words, a defense of the soundly Reformed doctrine of the antithesis, which explains the calling of God's covenantal people in the world and is highly esteemed by Reformed theologians, resulted in the scurrilous name-calling—"Anabaptists"—by the defenders of common grace.

Why? The answer to this is a story woven through the nine works the book. It is the story of Abraham Kuyper's development of common grace and the ongoing defense of Kuyper's heretical doctrine by Dr. Ralph Janssen, who was expelled from Calvin Theological Seminary for teaching higher criticism of Scripture, which he defended on the basis of Kuyperian common grace. The story that emerges is sad, for it tells how defenders of Janssen vowed to get Hoeksema and Danhof out of the Christian Reformed Church, how friends betrayed their friends, and reveals the evil motives that underlay the expulsion of three faithful ministers from their office. But above all, it is the story of how the CRC is today flooded with false doctrine and worldliness. This important writing is a crucial document to understand how important the antithesis is, how the antithesis is rooted in the truth of God's covenant, and how God's people are to live in a wicked world by sharing with the wicked everything in this world except God's grace.

"Along Pure Paths" is translated in *The Rock* for the first time. "Three main issues" are discussed (158). Is God gracious to the reprobate ungodly? Can the natural (unregenerated) human do good works? Does Scripture teach a restraint of sin by a working of grace in the hearts of unregenerated humans? The work is important enough for editor, David Engelsma, to say, "Compelling in *Along Pure Paths* is the authors' treatment of scripture. They refute all the alleged biblical evidence for common grace put forward, necessarily weakly, by the advocates of common grace. They advance the overwhelming,

and conclusive, testimony of scripture everywhere against the theory of common grace" (159). And then, with sadness, the editor adds, "Haunting is the lament over former friends and coworkers in the ministry of the CRC, who once shared the deep concern of Danhof and Hoeksema, but then, under pressure, turned on them, in league with the bitter enemies of the two witnesses to particular grace, total depravity, and the antithesis" (159).

"For the Sake of Justice and Truth," also translated for the first time from the Dutch, is a plea of Danhof and Hoeksema made between the CRC Synod of 1924 and the classes that ultimately deposed the faithful ministers. They asked for open discussion in the churches on the issue of common grace. In its final decision on common grace, the synod had asked for such a discussion, but the enemies of the truth were so bent on ousting faithful ministers that no one paid any attention to that plea in the hasty determination to rid the church of faithful men.

When the editors of the church papers refused to publish Danhof's and Hoeksema's responses to men who opposed them, Hoeksema and Danhof wrote, "Such occurrences make it unpleasant and impossible to write in our church papers. It is offensive to write for a magazine when the editors have the right to censor what we write! Whatever we write we sign and we are responsible for what we write." Shortly thereafter a group of faithful men formed the Reformed Free Publishing Association with the intent of publishing genuine Reformed material and giving a forum for writers to defend the truth and to answer the men who denied it. The *Standard Bearer* was born out of a desire for a free paper and the determination to defend the truth. The magazine was promoted as one that would follow Scripture and be sharply antithetical.

"Calvin, Berkhof, and H. J. Kuiper" answered those who appealed to John Calvin in support of the gracious and well-meant offer of the gospel. The writing deals exclusively with this heresy, which was almost as an afterthought included in the first point of common grace adopted by the CRC synod of Kalamazoo in 1924. It proved to be as destructive of the truth as any of the other errors adopted by the CRC. Perhaps it was really *more* destructive than the other errors.

It opened the door for the errors of universal atonement, a universal love of God for to all men, and a denial of reprobation and election and of Paul's insistence that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

The pamphlet is such a powerful defense of Calvin's repudiation of a gracious offer of salvation in the gospel that one wonders how it is possible that the professor of theology in Calvin Theological Seminary (Berkhof) and Kuiper, the editor of the *Banner*, could possibly come up with the almost silly notion that Calvin agreed with them. Anyone reading the pamphlet and having even a passing acquaintance with Calvinism must conclude that the motives of those responsible for the appeals to Calvin were other than an honest pursuit of the truth.

The pamphlet also makes clear what Van Baalen had openly admitted: he supported a "two-track" theology—the track of sovereign and particular grace, rooted in election and reprobation, and the track of God's universal love and desire to save all men as expressed in the gracious offer of salvation to everyone who heard the gospel and its consequent support of Arminian free-willism. The epithet "apparent contradiction" was invented to explain why Reformed theology can have two opposing tracks.

"A Triple Breach in the Foundation of the Reformed Truth" is a thorough and devastating refutation of all the subdoctrines involved in common grace, an answer to those who tried, without success, to find confessional and scriptural support for the heresies, and a compelling defense of the truth of God's sovereign and particular grace.

An interesting sidelight is brought up in this work: although Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff were required to sign the Three Points—which if they refused would lead to their deposition and ouster from the denomination—many members and leaders in the church were also at least suspicious that the three points contained errors. However, they were permitted to remain members and were even elected into offices. At the very least, it gives evidence that the CRC was embarrassed by the three points and would have preferred them to be forgotten and consigned to oblivion. But, as the pamphlet points out, God would not permit that to happen. So even though today most of the members of

the CRC have no knowledge of common grace, the church is full of Arminianism and Pelagianism, and worldliness runs rampant in its circles. The gracious and well-meant gospel offer to all and Kuyperian common grace opened the floodgates of error and godlessness. For this reason alone, concerned members of the CRC ought to read this book, for it will demonstrate convincingly why these evils in the church today can be traced back to 1924 (358–73).

"The Reunion of Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches" is unique chiefly because of its historical origin. It is the text of a speech Hoeksema gave at a conference of Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed ministers held in March 1939. The Dutch theologian, Dr. Klaas Schilder, was also in attendance. He had traveled to the United States to bring about the reunion of the two American denominations. Dutch theologians in general thought the controversy over common grace was a squabble between two parties over something not worth fighting about.

Hoeksema came to the meeting thoroughly prepared; no one else had anything prepared, much less did anyone show any real interest in the proceedings. Leading men were present, but no one made any effort to defend the three points or even to engage in any discussion of them with the representatives from the PRC. Two good things emerged from the meeting: Hoeksema's paper, which clearly and concisely sets forth the basic arguments against the error of common grace, became public; and it was a vivid demonstration of the total unwillingness of the CRC theologians even to discuss the idea of reunion.

The final document is the text of a speech entitled "The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel." It is a stunning work that shakes one engaged in preaching to the depths of his soul. It reminds me of an incident in my life when I was studying for a Master's degree in Calvin Seminary. In an exegesis class I was assigned to exegete John 12:27–41, which is one of the sharpest scriptural teachings on the doctrine of reprobation. After I had exegeted the passage, there was deathly silence in the class, until one classmate remarked in astonishment, but with genuine concern (I think) for his calling as a preacher, "How are we to preach on this passage?" The

professor immediately called for a recess, and the class never returned to the passage. Although the question was *not* answered in that class, it *is* answered in this concluding writing. Hoeksema not only explains how to preach the doctrine of reprobation, but he also maintains that it is the Word of God that must be preached, for it is part of the truth of election.

In the debate over the meaning of 1 Timothy 4:10, Hoeksema insists that "especially" in the verse can and does mean "that is." I studied Greek with Dr. Ralph Stob who did not like the PRC and was fond of needling his Protestant Reformed students. When Stob interpreted 1 Timothy 4:10, he could not resist poking fun of Hoeksema and emphatically repudiating Hoeksema's interpretation. Stob wrote an article entitled "'Especially' Erroneous," in which he delighted in what he perceived was his outwitting of Hoeksema. He never wearied of reminding his students of his coup.

The value of *The Rock* is increased by several introductions by the editor. Each document is preceded by a short introduction that explains its historical background and summarizes its contents. The value of the introductions is their glimpse into the actual events that took place in the CRC at that time. They are short history lessons on the origin of the PRC. Editorial footnotes explain certain sentences that without the footnotes would be somewhat unintelligible. The Afterword is almost worth the price of the book. It is a trumpet call to God's people to test the spirits, especially those afoot when the PRC began; an unforgettable reminder of the importance for all Protestant Reformed people to know what the churches believe over against damnable heresies and why they insist on separate denominational existence; and a moving description of what our spiritual fathers endured for the sake of the glory of God. It is, very really, a summons to "the battle of the ages" in the defense of God's glorious truths of sovereign and particular grace.

It is striking that throughout all the writings, the authors never attacked the persons of their adversaries, even though Hoeksema and Danhof were the objects of vicious slander and evil accusations. They dealt with the issues and made it clear that they were interested only in the truth of God's word. This does not mean

that they were not deeply hurt, as the editor notes in his introduction to "Calvin, Berkhof and H. J. Kuiper."

> In writing of Berkhof, Hoeksema could not refrain from sounding a personal note. To the end of his life, Hoeksema felt the wound of the turning on him by the Christian Reformed theologian. Berkhof was his respected professor in the seminary. Berkhof officiated at Hoeksema's wedding. Prior to 1924 Berkhof had freely spoken to Hoeksema of the need to address the spread of Arminian theology in the Christian Reformed Church. When the efforts of Berkhof and the other three professors in the seminary to condemn the higher critical views of Ralph Janssen were foundering, it was Hoeksema who came to the rescue, thus making himself the object of hatred on the part of Janssen's many and powerful defenders in the Christian Reformed ministry.
>
> Addressing Berkhof, Hoeksema wrote, "For the same teachings contained in *Calvin's Calvinism* you have persecuted Danhof and myself, and you did not rest until we were expelled from the communion of your church. At the time you became friends even of your enemies to unite them in expelling those who were your friends and brethren in the faith. You are responsible before God, before whose judgment seat we will have to appear together." (293)

Throughout the book one comes across the word *antithesis*, which was almost the lodestar of the 1924 reformation of the church. The word is prominent in Hoeksema's and Danhof's writings, especially in connection with the doctrine of the covenant and in their stern prophecy that the adoption of Kuyperian common grace would result in a total loss of the antithesis.

While these men restored this honored word to the vocabulary of the church, it seems to receive less and less emphasis today, even in Protestant Reformed circles. By this word our spiritual fathers expressed what God told Israel, "Israel shall dwell in safety alone" (Deut. 33:28). The emphasis in all their writings was not loneliness that drove them out of God's creation (as Van Baalen wrongly charged), but spiritual loneliness in the walk of the elect people of God as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The antithesis is also in

doctrine, and to be faithful to our covenantal God, it is obligatory of God's people to stand apart from all heretical teachings, to suffer persecution when they call to repentance those who stray from the truth, and to consider the great glory of their sovereign God the one most important part of their lives and callings.

Buy the book and read it. Give a copy to your children. It will give you the reasons and the courage to be Protestant Reformed and to find safety in dwelling alone—but with God!

The Presbyterian Philosopher: The Authorized Biography of Gordon H. Clark, by Douglas J. Douma. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016. Pp. xxv + 292. $37.00 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

"Oh, the damnable politics in the church of Jesus Christ," someone has exclaimed, and rightly. No church is free of the evil. Ministers cripple or destroy their fellow ministers out of jealousy, or out of fear for their own prominent position in the church. The sin of the politics is not only the injury that is invariably done to one's brother and colleague. But it is also the damage that is done to Christ's church. Politics deprives the church of the gifts of the minister who is marginalized, or even driven out of the church. It is not unusual that the direct effect of the sinful mistreatment of a minister is the church's decline, even apostasy, if the mistreated man is a forceful defender of the faith. The falling away continues and increases long after the minister thus cruelly treated and his persecutors are dead.

These miserable realities are a prominent part of the biography of Gordon H. Clark. Three of the thirteen chapters are devoted to the reprehensible treatment of Clark by his colleagues in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Tremors of the mistreatment reverberate throughout the book.

Gordon H. Clark was a Presbyterian philosopher/theologian. Wholeheartedly committed to

the Westminster Standards, both in his theology and in his philosophy, he was the unabashedly sound and outspoken Presbyterian thinker and teacher that Reformed academia and Presbyterian churches always sorely need and often sorely lack.

The OPC rejected him and virtually expelled him from its fellowship. It did this, despite the fact that, with Machen, Clark played a leading role in the formation of the OPC, as a reformation of the apostate Presbyterian churches in the early twentieth century. It was Clark who nominated J. Gresham Machen as moderator of the first General Assembly of the newly formed Presbyterian Church of America, soon to be renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The OPC drove Clark out in spite of Clark's sterling orthodoxy and recognized gifts. Clark distinguished himself, not only in the church but also at Wheaton College, where he worked for some time as a professor, as basing all his thinking, philosophical as well as theological, firmly upon the Bible as summarized in the Westminster Standards. As for his gifts, the man was brilliant, as the content of his cornucopia of books and other writings witnesses.

A presbytery of the OPC approved Clark's ordination into the ministry of the OPC, in the face of vehement opposition. Against a complaint, the general assembly of the OPC upheld the decision to ordain Clark. But the faculty of Westminster Seminary, the authors of the complaint against the ordination of Clark, made known that they would persist in their campaign to deny Clark entrance into the ministry in the OPC. Under this heavy pressure and foreseeing that the heavyweights in the OPC would never give up their determined opposition to him, by fair means or foul, Clark left the OPC for another Presbyterian denomination. He spent the rest of his life teaching philosophy (and theology) at Butler University in Indiana and writing significant books, especially of theology.

Late in Clark's career, an ardent disciple of Clark, John Robbins, created Trinity Foundation, to publish Clark's books. The books are still available from the Foundation.

What makes the concerted opposition to Clark of special interest to the Protestant Reformed reader is that the attack was led by three theologians at Westminster Seminary, C. VanTil, N.

Stonehouse, and R. B. Kuiper. All three were Christian Reformed in origin and theological thinking. As Herman Hoeksema suggested in his analysis of the controversy over Clark, it is likely (I would judge, virtually certain) that the theological objection raised against Clark was essentially the Christian Reformed objection against Hoeksema. The Orthodox Presbyterian professors of theology objected that Clark taught that God is truly knowable; that Clark taught that the truth of Scripture is not contradictory ("paradoxical") and, therefore, is understandable; that Clark taught that God's sovereignty and man's responsibility can be, and must be, harmonized by the believing, Presbyterian mind (without compromising sovereignty and without comprehension); and that Clark taught that the notion of a "well-meant," or "free," offer of the gospel, as the teaching of a loving desire of God for the salvation of all humans, logically contradicts the Presbyterian doctrine of predestination and is, therefore, false.

The three Christian Reformed theologians at Westminster, who led the campaign to drive Clark out of the church, recognized the theology of Clark as essentially the same as that which the Christian Reformed Church had condemned in the common grace controversy of 1924. Clark affirmed the sovereignty of God, without "paradoxical," that is, contradictory, confusion and weakening by the teaching of universal grace in the preaching of the gospel. Clark's theology was guilty of the appalling sin of being logical, so that the revelation of God is knowable to the believing mind. The three doctrinally Christian Reformed professors at Westminster led the charge in condemning Clark's theology and harassing him out of the OPC. They charged Clark with "rationalism." Evidently, they had not yet thought of the slander of "hyper-Calvinism."

Douma's account of the controversy is fascinating, if disheartening, and his analysis of the issues is perceptive and instructive.

Understandably, Herman Hoeksema took an interest in the Presbyterian controversy at the time—the 1940s. He wrote on it in the *Standard Bearer*. John Robbins published Hoeksema's articles as a book, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*. Douma mentions Hoeksema's involvement in the controversy, and recommends his book.

Clark's leaving the OPC did not pacify his foes. They turned on his defenders in the denomination, particularly the missionary Floyd Hamilton. Their vindictive treatment of him drove Hamilton out of the OPC also. Many others left the OPC at that time.

In 2017 one can discern the further adverse consequences of the OPC's decisions and actions in the matter of Gordon Clark. The OPC committed itself to "paradoxical" theology, abandoning, if not condemning, logical thinking (in fact, this is an abandonment of thinking; illogical thinking is an oxymoron; if it is still thinking at all, it is thinking that is unintelligible). A leading instance was the OPC's virtual adoption of the theology of a common grace of God, consisting of a desire of God for the salvation of all humans, at least all who hear the gospel (cf. Murray and Stonehouse, "The Free Offer of the Gospel"). The contradiction of this universal grace by the doctrine of predestination, reprobation as well as election, which is creedal for Presbyterians in the Westminster Confession, is not for the OPC an argument against universal (saving) grace. Rather, the contradiction is accepted and defended as an aspect of the "paradoxical" nature of doctrinal truth. Over the years, since the 1940s, this honoring of universal (saving) grace as a glory of its "paradoxical" theology has weakened the OPC's testimony to all the doctrines of (particular) grace. Invariably, indeed necessarily, the truth being, in fact, rigorously logical, the doctrine of universal, ineffectual grace in the "paradox" drives out the doctrine of particular, sovereign grace.

Recently, its "paradoxical" theology has opened up the OPC to the covenant theology of the Federal Vision. In the just judgment of God, this grievous departure from the gospel of (covenant) grace has had its origin at Westminster Seminary, with Prof. Norman Shepherd, vigorously supported by Prof. Richard Gaffin. Expelling Gordon Clark largely by the efforts of Westminster Seminary, at Westminster Seminary the OPC received Norman Shepherd. Under the influence of Westminster Seminary, the OPC has approved a covenant theology that expressly denies all the doctrines of grace of the Westminster Standards, including justification by faith alone, with special reference to the children of believers. Such is the theology of the Federal Vision.

When confronted by this theology's contradiction of the doctrines of the Reformed faith in the Westminster Standards, the Westminster professors and their supporters in the OPC argue that truth is "paradoxical." The logic of biblical revelation finds no favor in the OPC. Therefore, the illogic of heresy gains entrance.

The Gordon Clark case is unfinished business in the OPC.

Significant, and, if one can stifle his indignation, interesting as the Westminster Seminary/ Clark case was, it was not all of Clark's life. Both at Wheaton College prior to the conflict with the OPC and at Butler University after the conflict, Clark taught biblical, Presbyterian philosophy for many years. The effect of this distinctive teaching upon his many students, only God knows. Especially at Wheaton, Clark had many students who, by his instruction, became influential men in evangelicalism, including Edward Carnell, Edmund Clowney (later president of Westminster Seminary), Paul Jewett, Carl F. H. Henry (longtime editor of *Christianity Today)* and Harold Lindsell. Even Billy Graham took a medieval philosophy course with Clark, although obviously the course helped Graham neither philosophically nor theologically.

Some of "Clark's boys" united as professors at Fuller Seminary in California. Carnell became president of the seminary. Carnell was among those of Clark's students who later rejected the infallibility of Scripture and identified themselves as "neo-evangelicals," to Clark's sorrow.

In a fascinating vignette, Douma relates the account of Carnell and Clark's conduct at the well-known gathering of theologians at the University of Chicago in 1962 to meet and question Karl Barth. Carnell had the honor of questioning the famed German/ Swiss theologian. Answering a question by Carnell concerning Barth's view of Scripture, Barth frankly responded that there are "contradictions and errors" in the Bible. The majority of the five hundred theologians at the gathering applauded Barth's answer. Carnell did not press the issue further. According to the ubiquitous Richard Mouw, who also attended the gathering, Carnell responded to Barth by murmuring, "This is a problem for me too." Clark, who was sitting next to Carnell, and evidently near Mouw, muttered, in response to Carnell, "betrayal" (208, 209).

The authorities at Wheaton pressured Clark out of the school because of his strong, unyielding Calvinism.

One weakness of the Presbyterian philosopher was his relatively mild judgment of Arminianism. There was no place for it in his own theology. He condemned schools and magazines that taught it. But his judgment of it was that it was a defective form of Christianity, rather than a gospel-denying heresy. Clark was critical of a magazine that "referred to Arminianism and modernism as 'equally dangerous'" (154). The reason for his restrained condemnation was that Clark's controversy was with outright modernism in the mainstream Presbyterian churches of his day. The same was true of Machen, as is evident in his *Christianity and Liberalism*. Fighting modernism, with its denial of the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Jesus, and the resurrection of Christ, both Clark and Machen tended to underestimate the evil of Arminianism, which does pay lip service to the fundamental truths of the Christian religion that modernism denied outrightly.

> Clark…believed that although "Arminianism misinterprets Scripture on some important points," it still accepts the Bible, and that "sincere Arminians are predestinated, all persevere in grace, and are perfectly sanctified in heaven." Modernism, on the other hand, Clark wrote, is dangerous because "it denies the infallibility of the Bible," it "denies the vicarious atonement of Christ," and ultimately "leads to hell" (154).

A man of principle, Clark lived what he believed and taught. One such consistency strikes this reviewer as extreme. Clark taught two, and only two, faculties of the human soul: intellect and will. He denied that emotion is a third faculty. In keeping with this philosophical view, the night of the death of his beloved wife Clark played chess with a friend, lest the sorrow of his loss betray him (229).

To his credit, Clark worked, teaching at various colleges and writing numerous books, almost to his dying day, past his 80th birthday.

He died in 1985 and was buried near the Sangre de Christo Seminary, which carries on his legacy, deep in the Colorado Rockies.

The Reformed man or woman will read Clark's biography, and

his books, with profit, especially the student of Presbyterian theology and of Presbyterian church history. ●

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

This book is the transcript of an outstanding lecture by Prof. David Engelsma recently given at an event sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville, Michigan. After giving the lecture, Engelsma greatly expanded on its content. The second part of the book consists of carefully worded answers to questions from the audience present at the lecture and from those listening online. These answers were also revised and expanded.

Reading the title of the book may make one wonder about the subject. Many would have the opinion that the church does indeed have the calling to 'Christianize the world' in which we are living, and would be shocked that anyone would question this.

The idea of such Christianizing the world has been expressed using other terms such as 'cultural renewal' or 'the redeeming of society.' Perhaps the reader has heard such terminology used.

The concept of 'Christianizing the world' which the writer gives a bold and sharp critique of, is based on a very commonly held and popular doctrine promoted especially in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. This is the doctrine of "common grace." Those who espouse this doctrine believe that God has two kinds of grace. God has a grace which is sovereign and particular, which He bestows on His elect people whom He loves. This grace is an effectual saving grace. This grace operates through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The preaching declares that the gospel is the only power of God unto salvation to those who believe. It is the grace that flows from the cross of Jesus Christ. It is the

grace that finally causes His people to become the glorious heirs of His everlasting kingdom in the new heavens and new earth. We believe that this is the only grace of God there is. This grace is absolutely sovereign and particular to God's people.

God also has, according to some, a "common grace" that is His general favor to all men even the wicked ungodly reprobate. This grace does not save those who are its objects. According to those who teach this doctrine, this grace restrains sin in the heart of the natural man so that he is not as totally depraved as he otherwise would be. This grace enables the natural man to do a certain civic good, good which though it is not saving, is nevertheless commendable and is praise worthy in the sight of God. It gains for the natural man an earthly reward and enables the unregenerated man to realize a glorious culture on earth.

The project of 'Christianizing' the world which is critiqued by the speech, envisions that the church and the world must join together to accomplish great things in this world. This project envisions only improvement of this present world. The church and the world can and with great and glorious results accomplish worldwide change, cultural renewal and accomplish great humanitarian good, by relieving the world of poverty, promoting justice and equality among men, tolerance of almost everyone no matter their confession or life style. It looks for the day of brotherhood and peace among all men.

The common grace basis for promoting such a seemingly glorious endeavor was first proposed by the famous Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper. His theory was used as a basis for the seeking political common ground between Reformed people and Roman Catholics in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The theory of common grace later became the philosophical basis of the Free University in Amsterdam.

The philosophy of common grace greatly influenced especially the beliefs and practices of the Christian Reformed Church in America and Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids. It is promoted today in a number of Reformed and Presbyterian schools in our land and beyond.

Recently, the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan—which has many Roman Catholic members, and is encouraged and supported by well-known leaders

in Reformed Churches—has embarked on translating Abraham Kuyper's major three-volume work on common grace. This work will now appear for the first time in the English language. This project has stirred up renewed excitement among many for the philosophy of common grace that will be the hope for Christianizing our society and, hopefully, even the world. Little has ever been done to present a carefully worked out biblical and confessional defense of the doctrine of common grace, though weak attempts have been made.

In his book Engelsma presents a bold critique of common grace philosophy. He demonstrates that this concept is flawed in its proposed biblical basis. The theory is not consistent with the historic Reformed confessions. It departs from Calvin's system of biblical doctrine even though those who promote common grace present it as being a contemporary development of foundational principles set forth by the great Reformer John Calvin. Engelsma maintains that common grace philosophy is a major departure from important doctrines of true Calvinism.

Engelsma demonstrates the seriousness of the errors that follow from the false teaching of common grace. This teaching clearly denies the biblical truth of the total depravity of the natural man. It is a serious compromise of the biblical calling we have as Christians to live antithetically in the world. It foolishly imagines that there can be friendship and common cause between the Christian and the world. In truth, God's Word repeatedly states that this fallen world is at enmity against God. The teachers of common grace imagine that the unregenerated natural man will accept the ideals and philosophy and morality that Christians teach. According to the Word of God the world considers Christianity foolishness.

Engelsma emphatically maintains that the Christianizing of the world project is in fact an impossible task because the world hates God and His Christ. No mere human philosophy will change this.

In his penetrating analysis of common grace philosophy, Engelsma demonstrates the wrong of maintaining that God has a good temporal purpose for world improvement and cultural development that is accomplished in history alongside of God's sovereign gracious, saving purpose for His church.

Even Abraham Kuyper failed

to show the connection between the cross of Jesus Christ and this supposed purpose of common grace in the world. The cross, according to Scripture, is all about the salvation of God's people. It is not about improving this ungodly world.

Engelsma gives a good summary of the correct exegesis of Colossians 1 and other biblical passages that have played a major role in the controversy over whether God indeed has a common grace purpose for this ungodly world. The writer explains what Colossians 1 means when it speaks of the reconciliation of the world by Christ. The right understanding of the reconciliation of the world is not what the teachers of common grace maintain.

The seriousness of the 'Christianizing of culture' movement as judged by the author is that it ends up leading the church to commit 'ecclesiastical suicide.' This happens because the church does not succeed in changing the world as it imagines it can, but rather the world causes the church to become completely worldly. The movement imagines that the church can apply the teaching of Christ to cultural and world renewal, but in fact ends up finally promoting a non-saving, Christless, worldly culture—even an antichristian world view. Engelsma's work cites an interesting quotation from Abraham Kuyper himself in this regard that those interested must read.

Engelsma is bold to ask whether those who so enthusiastically have promoted a common grace culture have succeeded over the years in accomplishing their noble purposes. Do the present-day cultures where the philosophy of common grace has been promoted most zealously demonstrate that its noble purposes have in any measure actually been realized? The Netherlands and Grand Rapids, which once were bastions of Reformed religion, have become centers where Reformed churches have gone in the way of grievous apostasy. Many Reformed Churches in these places are departing from foundational biblical doctrines. Theories of higher criticism destroyed adherence to the truth of the infallibility of Scripture and have thrown out the truth of biblical creationism. In some places the historicity of the miracles revealed in the Bible, including in some cases the wonder of the resurrection of Christ, are openly denied. Leaders of Reformed Churches in these places are

promoting the most abominable worldly lifestyles, such as immorality, the corruption of marriage, and the total and open acceptance of the homosexual agenda.

I strongly encourage everyone to read this book. Most Reformed and Presbyterian colleges in America are enthusiastically promoting the ideas and hope of Christianizing the world on the basis of common grace. Our young people are being trained in these colleges. The publications of these institutions constantly boast of their graduates being 'agents of cultural renewal' in the world.

Those who are critical of the philosophy of common grace renewal or Christianizing of the world are commonly branded with the odious judgment of being Anabaptist. The Anabaptists taught world flight, and an isolationist's perspective of Christianity. The Anabaptist perspective is condemned for lacking in genuine concern for the world, which true Christians must have.

Engelsma demonstrates in his book that the opposite of common grace Christianizing the world is not Anabaptistism. He gives a defense of the biblical world-and-life perspective that ought to characterize every Christian, one that is in no way Anabaptist. The promoters of 'common grace Christianizing' often leave the impression that if you are not on board with this endeavor of cultural renewal and world improvement you are 'a do nothing Christian.' One does not really become faithful to the principles of the kingdom of Christ unless one is an agent of cultural renewal as espoused by the promoters of this philosophy. Often the promotion of this endeavor eclipses the calling that God gives to His church to preach the gospel of the cross of Christ, the only power whereby God saves His people from this wicked world and brings them to everlasting glory.

Engelsma ends his book by earnestly exhorting Christians to live in holiness, according to the moral ethics of the law of God. By doing this they reveal themselves to be the true citizens of the kingdom of Christ and show forth the glory of His name.

When the Christian lives faithfully in this ungodly world, he cannot be the friend of the world. He must expect that the world will hate and persecute him. This is clearly the teaching of the Word of God everywhere.

The Christian must be zealously engaged in his calling while

still on earth and as a member of the church. Every inch of his life (Kuyper's language) must be consecrated to the service of Christ. The calling of the Christian is to be a faithful member of the true church of Jesus Christ and heartily support her in her commission to preach the gospel and stand courageously for the truth of this gospel even unto death. When the Christian is faithful to his true calling in the world and trusts in the sovereign grace of God for his salvation, he will inherit an eternal, glorious, and heavenly reward. This reward far transcends any earthly glory hoped for by the advocates of the 'common grace Christianizing' of this present world. Obtain and read this excellent book! ●

The Murderous History of Bible Translations: Power, Conflict, and the Quest for Meaning, by Harry Freedman. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016. Pp. 248. $28.00 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The Murderous History is a gripping account of the physical danger for translators and publishers and of the political uproar among nations that have attended the translation of the Bible into the various language of peoples.

The translation of the Bible of that time, the Latin Vulgate, into their own language by the Cathars in southern France was the reason, in large part, for a crusade by the Roman Catholic Church, with the cooperation of the civil authorities, that killed hundreds of thousands of the Cathars in the early 1200s.

At the instigation of the pope, Czech authorities burned Jan Michalov of Husinec, otherwise known as Jan Hus, at the stake in 1415 for his role in translating the Bible into Czech. The result was a civil war in Bohemia that lasted for years. Thousands died.

Henry VIII of England had William Tyndale burned in 1536 for translating the Bible into English from the original languages.

Although the translators of the King James Version did not die for their labors, the political power was very much involved in their work. King James of England detested the Geneva Bible, the English translation of the

time, for its perceived distaste for monarchic rule. For this reason, the king supported the English translation that, unfortunately, bears his name to this day.

These are only a few of the instances either of martyrdom, or of civil upheaval, or of political involvement in the matter of the translation of the Bible into the languages of the peoples. The Word of God has been a mighty, often disruptive power in the nations, even in the matter of translation.

Fascinating as the precise theme of the book is, its account of the history of Bible translation in general is equally fascinating. The author warns that the book "does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of the translated Bible" (3). Nevertheless, the book gives a great deal of the history, and that in the lively, interesting style that many a history lacks. The account of translation begins with the Septuagint, or Seventy, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek that was in use among Greek speaking people in the time of Jesus and the apostles. This people included many of the Jews, who no longer could read the Hebrew Old Testament. Freedman relates the myths that soon sprang up concerning the supposedly miraculous features of this translation.

Jerome's Vulgate, the translation of the Bible into Latin, became the authoritative version of the church for hundreds of years in the Middle Ages. The Roman Catholic Church legitimized the Vulgate as more authoritative than the Hebrew and Greek originals of the Bible. One of the delightful aspects of the story of the Vulgate in the book is Jerome's mistaken translation of Exodus 34:29. In reality, the text states that Moses descended from Mr. Sinai with a beaming face, having been in the presence of the radiating glory of God. The Authorized Version rightly has, "the skin of his face shone." Since the Hebrew word can also refer to something that projects (like a ray of light), Jerome translated by a word that literally means "horned." The Vulgate, therefore, had Moses coming down from the mountain "horned," in Latin. This was the translation of the text by an Old English translation of the Vulgate: Moses descended "horned." Subsequent paintings of Moses represented Moses with horns. The horned Moses became a feature of popular thinking.

At Luther's death, some half a million copies of his German

Bible had been sold. Booksellers became rich on the sales. Luther received not a *pfennig*. Nor did he mind. His sole concern was the spread among the people of the Word of God.

One edition of the King James Bible omitted the negative in the commandment forbidding adultery. This edition promptly became known as the "Wicked Bible." In the horror of that religious age, the authorities fined the printers 300 pounds and revoked their license to print Bibles. Strenuous effort was made to locate and destroy every copy of the "Wicked Bible." A few copies survived and are for sale today at the cost of $100,000 per copy. Who knew?

The King James Bible formed the English language and played a "pivotal role in shaping the American language" (158). The King James Version is heavily indebted to Tyndale. "As much as 94 per cent of the New Testament translation in King James comes directly from Tyndale" (149). Tyndale's martyrdom, therefore, means a great deal still today for us who use the King James Version.

Regarding modern translations, the Revised Standard Version of 1952 had a "young woman" conceive and bear a son, Immanuel, rather than a "virgin," in Isaiah 7:14. That a young woman bore a son is not much of a "sign." Indicating that Bible translations cause political storm still in modern times, Senator Joseph McCarthy's committee investigated the translators of the Revised Standard Version for Communist sympathies. An ecclesiastical synod might better have investigated the translators for religiously modernist sympathies.

About the New English Bible, the poet T. S. Eliot caustically remarked:

> We are…entitled to expect from a panel chosen from among the most distinguished scholars of our day at least a work of dignified mediocrity. When we find that we are offered something far below that modest level, something which astonishes in its combination of the vulgar, the trivial, and the pedantic, we ask in alarm: "What is happening to the English language?" (195)

In contrast to this judgment of the literary style of the modern English translations, the author, himself not likely an advocate of the King James Bible or even a

user of it, praises the majesty, dignity, and beauty of this English translation (213).

After opposing translations of the Bible into the language of the people for hundreds of years, as part of its policy of keeping its people in ignorance, the Roman Catholic Church finally yielded to the inevitable. In 1966 Rome produced The Jerusalem Bible, an English translation indebted to an earlier French version. Consulted for the style of the English version was *Lord of the Rings* author, J. R. R. Tolkien.

Those of us who insist yet today on the King James Bible for its scrupulous faithfulness in translating the original languages, for its use of the authentic text of the Greek New Testament, and for the majesty and beauty of its language find additional support in the practice today of deliberate mistranslation into English of the Bible on behalf of various corrupt cultural agendas.

The book points out that the feminist movement lays unholy hands on Bible translation.

One, admittedly extreme, example of the contemporary translation of the Bible into English in the service of a corrupt cultural agenda is "The *Queen* James Version." The anonymous publishers themselves named their "translation." Every passage of Scripture that condemns homosexuality is translated in such a way as to void the condemnation. One wonders whether the translators and publishers also changed or omitted Revelation 22:19: "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

On behalf of revenue from the Muslims, the Wycliffe Bible Translators produced a New Testament for Muslim readers. This required a translation that did away with such descriptions of Jesus as the "Son of God" and such descriptions of God as "God the Father." In translation, Wycliffe falsified the Bible for the sake of the Muslims, and the dollar. In response to the outcries of condemnation by outraged conservative Protestants, Wycliffe modified its falsification somewhat.

God's extraordinary providence has preserved the original manuscripts of His Word in Hebrew and Greek and has governed both the translation itself and its continuing existence in history so that in the King James Version the English-speaking church and be-

liever have God's Holy Scripture in the English language.

Not without struggle!

Not without struggle still today!

As this book demonstrates!

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Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer, by Herman Hanko and Mark H. Hoeksema. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. xiii + 272. $24.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.]

History is instructive. George Santayana was right: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

No less instructive is the history of the development of a particular doctrine. The history of the development of a doctrine which is truly based on Scripture is the record of the Holy Spirit's work of guiding the church into her understanding of that particular truth (John 16:13). When a doctrine corrupts God's Word, the history of its development exposes the doctrine as either a departure from the truth, or as false already in its root.

A history of the development of the doctrine of the well-meant offer (WMO), then, is most instructive. May all who embrace the doctrine of the WMO read this history and be warned. May all who reject the doctrine of the WMO read and be confirmed in their stand.

The volume under review is the history of the development of the doctrine of the WMO. Coauthoring this history are Prof. Herman Hanko, who wrote chapters 1-10 and 13-14, and Mark Hoeksema, who penned chapters 11-12. Rev. Angus Stewart penned a helpful "Select Annotated Bibliography." The book concludes with indices of names, Scripture passages, and creeds.

Demonstrating the Error of the WMO From Its History

The book is unique in setting forth a history of the doctrine of the WMO. I am aware of no other book-length treatment of this history. This in itself justifies the book's existence.

Adding to its value is that, by tracing the historical development of the doctrine back to its root

(which was *after* the time of Calvin), the book exposes the error of the WMO.

Had an advocate of the WMO written this history, one would expect him to defend and promote the WMO as being biblical, Reformed, and confessional. He would likely argue that Calvin and the fathers of the Synod of Dordt, in their use of the word "offer," meant by it the WMO. Such an author would probably contend that the "declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology" (to borrow the wording of the CRC's statement of the first point of common grace) prove that the WMO was widely accepted from the time of the Reformation.

Hanko's purpose is the exact opposite: his doctrinal survey demonstrates that the doctrine is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. Hanko correctly notes that we must determine from Scripture alone, and not from the historical development of a doctrine, whether a doctrine is true or false (xi). Yet when the historical root of a doctrine is another doctrine which the church has rejected as incompatible with the teachings of Scripture, the present day flowering of that doctrine is immediately suspect, and can be refuted with the same Scriptures.

Hanko finds the root in the teachings of John Cameron and Moise Amyraut (chapter 4). In the late 1500s and into the 1600s, John Cameron taught that God established an absolute, unconditional covenant and a hypothetical, conditional covenant. Moise Amyraut taught that God has a particular, unconditional will as well as a general, conditional will. The gospel expresses God's general will to save all men; this salvation God offers. This is the beginning of the WMO.

Though finding the root of the WMO in the 1600s, Hanko covers the "pre-history" of the WMO in the first three chapters. He finds in Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism, if not the root, then the fertile soil which later produced the WMO. His opening sentence states it well:

> Although the term *well-meant offer* came into use only after the Reformation, and although the doctrine was not discussed until the post-Reformation history of the church, the issues involved in the doctrine were on the agenda of the church already at the beginning of the fifth century. (1)

These issues were predestination, the freedom of man's will, and the extent and nature of God's grace and love. This pre-history includes the time of Calvin and the fathers of the Synod of Dordt, who used the word "offer" in reference to the preaching of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Hanko demonstrates by quotes from Calvin and the Canons that these did not mean by the word "offer" what today's advocates of the WMO mean (24-33, 51-55).

After exposing the WMO as rooted in Amyraldism, Hanko treats the later development of the doctrine in the Marrow Controversy in Scotland (chap. 6). During this controversy, the use of the word "offer" shifted from that of declaring or presenting Christ as Savior, to that of inviting the hearers to receive this Christ. The promotion of the WMO by Presbyterians in the 1800s, its written development and defense by John Murray in the 1900s, and its official sanction by various Presbyterian and Reformed denominations is the subject of chapter 7.

Did the Westminster Assembly give creedal expression to the WMO? Hanko acknowledges the influence of Amyraldism on some members of the Assembly, but says that the Westminster Confession does not promote the WMO (chap. 5). What of Dutch theologians in the 1700s? Though using the word "offer," they too did not use it in the sense in which the WMO advocates do (chap. 8). How it entered the thinking of Dutch theologians later is the subject of chapter 9. That it loomed large in the 1924 common grace controversy is shown in chapter 10. Chapters 11 and 12, written by Hoeksema, show how the doctrine related to the 1953 controversy regarding a conditional covenant, and how it bore fruit in CRC's Dekker case of 1962. Many in the CRC, though defending common grace and the WMO, opposed the notion that Christ indeed died for each and every human. Harold Dekker, in clearly stating his position that Christ's atonement was universal rather than limited, simply brought the WMO to its logical conclusion. Chapter 13 concludes the history by noting that in the Reformed and Presbyterian church world at present, the WMO is so widely accepted that those who reject it are considered hyper-Calvinists.

Explaining the Biblical Passages at Issue

In the process of providing the doctrinal history of the WMO,

Hanko addresses the biblical passages to which the WMO adherents appeal in support of their doctrine. Primarily, these passages are Ezekiel 33:11, Matthew 23:37, Romans 2:4, 1 Timothy 2:4, and 2 Peter 3:9.

In chapter 14, Hanko gives a proper and Reformed explanation of three of these passages. Earlier, by lengthy quotes from Augustine (chap. 1) and Luther and Calvin (chap. 2), Hanko had shown that this proper and Reformed explanation was theirs as well. This was their explanation, not specifically to address or oppose the WMO, but to address and oppose the semi-Pelagians and Arminians, whose explanation of these texts was similar, if not identical, to that of the WMO advocates.

Scripture alone determines whether a doctrine is true or false. But by demonstrating that the WMO advocates interpret specific passages in the same way as semi-Pelgianism and Arminianism, Hanko again exposed the doctrine's error historically.

Noting the History of Opposition to the WMO

A distinct value of the book is that it takes note of the history of the *opposition* to the WMO by faithful men and church bodies. This opposition runs on a track parallel to the history of the WMO. The opposition to the WMO is not only recent. Considering the history of the opposition to the WMO, every opponent must realize that he stands not alone, but is in good company.

Individual *men* opposed the WMO: not only Augustine and Calvin, but also Pierre du Moulin (68-72), Francis Turretin (72-76), John Owen (94-96), Robert Kennedy with others (117-120), Herman Witsius (146), Aegidius Francken (147-148), Peter Nahuys (148-151), and later Herman Hoeksema. The list is not exhaustive. Hanko not only refers to these men, but also quotes extensively from their writings to demonstrate that they opposed the WMO.

Church bodies also have opposed and do oppose the WMO. The Synod of Dordt and the Westminster Assembly opposed the essence of the WMO. Obviously, today the PRCA and the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (202) oppose it. But Hanko recognizes one church body that faced the matter of the WMO head on and came to its own proper stand regarding the WMO. I refer to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Although Hanko

does not treat the history of the EPCA's opposition to the WMO, he does quote several times from the 1997 reprint of its official position paper, *Universalism and the Reformed Churches: A Defense of Calvin's Calvinism*. The reader should bear in mind that the paper was originally written long before 1997, in fact, before the EPCA and PRCA had contact. The EPCA came to its position on the WMO independently of the PRCA. In our battle against the WMO, the PRCA find in the EPCA a true and committed ally. Not infrequently, the Spirit of truth leads two or more bodies of believers to the same conclusion regarding a doctrinal point, though giving them different incentives to develop the doctrine, and leading them down different paths historically. Rarely does one denomination develop truth all by itself.

This history of the opposition to the WMO is implicit assurance that opposing the WMO does not make one worthy of the label "hyper-Calvinist" (103, 199, 207). We reject the charge of hyper-Calvinism, but if others insist on so labeling us, the history of the WMO must lead them to admit in all honesty that we are "hyper-Calvinists" after the stripe of the fathers of Dordt, many other "Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology," Calvin himself, and Augustine. Again, we are in good company.

Regrettable Weaknesses

The values of this book make it worthwhile reading. Those who read the *PRTJ* could read this book easily: its chapters are not overly long, and Hanko's style is easy to follow.

Regrettably, the book has its weaknesses.

Although the book contains a few scattered statements as to what the WMO is and on what assumptions it rests (xii-xiii, 62, and others), nowhere does the book devote a section to a brief but comprehensive statement regarding these points. I suppose this omission is due to the fact that this book is the developed version of a course that Prof. Hanko taught in the Protestant Reformed Seminary to seminarians who were familiar with the WMO. Perhaps also this omission implies that most readers of the book will know something of the WMO.

However, this omission is regrettable. We ought to know what that doctrine is, of which a history is here given. Many in conservative Reformed and

Presbyterian circles, lacking the fuller knowledge expected of seminarians, would benefit from an introduction or first chapter that explains the WMO.

A second weakness is that Hanko, who is generally very clear, at times contradicts himself, or gives with his left hand what he took away with his right.

Hanko quotes A.A. Hodge, who said of the external call of the gospel: "God intends that its benefits shall actually accrue to every one who accepts it" (122). This Hanko declares to be an "astounding and unwarranted statement," and in the next sentence says "With some effort even this quotation could be interpreted as being biblical." Hanko is not suggesting here that WMO advocates would interpret it as biblical; that they would do so goes without saying. He is saying that WMO opponents could interpret it as biblical, "with some effort." But if it is unwarranted, must it not be unbiblical? If it is interpreted as being biblical, could it not then be warranted?

He also judges the Westminster Confession as being weak both "in failing to exclude certain views promoted by the Davenant men" and "in failing to define clearly its idea of the well-meant offer" (90). He then says in the next paragraph: "Any form of Arminianism—also such as represented by Amyraut and Davenant—and the whole notion of the well-meant offer were excluded from the formulation of this great assembly" (91). These two statements leave one puzzled. Did, or did not, the Westminster exclude these ideas?

Its weaknesses notwithstanding, this book is substantive, solid, and Reformed. For exposing the WMO as heretical in its root, it does the Reformed cause a great service. ●

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150 Questions About the Psalter: What You Need to Know About the Songs God Wrote, by Bradley Johnston. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2014. Pp. 107. (Paper). [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

Any book that promotes Psalm singing among Christians is welcome. Any short, attractive, and not overly scholarly book that promotes Psalm singing to a hymn-singing Christendom

is doubly welcome. The main body of the book, which consists of a mere 64 pages (the rest is appendices and endnotes), does just that.

Johnston arranges the material into 150 questions (I assume that he did that because there are 150 Psalms) divided into five sections (there are also five sections in the biblical book of the Psalms): Introducing the Psalter; Christ in the Psalter; the Arrangement of the Psalter; the Content of the Psalter; Singing the Psalter; and the Majesty of the Psalter. The book itself reads somewhat like the Westminster Shorter Catechism in its Q&A style.

Johnston packs a large amount of information into his 150 Q&As, and his main goal is simple—sing the Psalms! Do not merely read them, study them, and admire them—sing them! Sing them because they are God-breathed songs. Sing them because they are infinitely superior to the man-made ditties used in many evangelical churches. Sing them because your soul will be blessed and your worship of God will be enriched. Sing them because you will find Christ in them. At the end of each of the five sections of his "psalter catechism," Johnson includes a selection of stanzas to sing from *The Book of Psalms for Worship* (but the reader can use a Psalter of his or her choice).

Section two on "Christ in the Psalter" is especially rich:

> How do we learn to see Jesus Christ in the Psalter? We learn to see Jesus Christ in the Psalter by carefully studying each psalm, by seeing the Psalter's use in the New Testament, by connecting the Psalter's divine and human titles to Jesus, and by thinking of Jesus praying or singing a particular psalm (Q&A 21).

> What important truths did Jesus teach from the Psalter? Jesus taught important truths from the Psalter about his divinity, his physical descent from David, his superiority to David, his identity as the Son of man, God's judgment on those who reject the Messiah, the infallibility of Scripture in his betrayal, and his trust in the Father even in his death on the cross (Q&A 27).

If you want to convince someone to sing the Psalms, placing this little work in their hands would be a great place to begin, but with this (the author's) caveat:

Books extolling the Psalter are like books extolling classic art. I know few people who fell in love with such artwork by endless descriptions of the art or pleas from the experts to adore it. Rather, people are taken with a piece of artwork by beholding and pondering the art itself in its original glory and genius. In the same way, books—and catechisms—about the Psalter are of small value compared to the divine songbook itself. Its beauties and wisdom will surely grip the hearts of believers intent on knowing and loving Jesus Christ by his Word.

So by all means, read this book—and pick up the Psalter, and sing! ●

A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend, Cal Kalsbeek, ed. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. xxii +728. $44.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Bruce Koole.]

Hope Protestant Reformed Church has set the standard for church memoirs with their book entitled *A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend*. This is a book well worth spending all the time it takes to digest its 750 pages of material, so much so that even those who attended the various anniversary celebrations should not see this book as redundant. Hope's anniversary committee deserves *summa cum laude* for the vast amount of organization and labor put forth in the publication of this book.

The title *A Spiritual House Preserved* is very apropos. By the undersigned's personal count, Hope has toiled without a minister for nearly twenty-five years of her century of existence (131-132). Further, during her first two decades of existence she had a minister for just under seven years. Jehovah tells Zerubbabel, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech. 4:6) and, "For who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven" (Zech. 4:10). Such is the grand story of Hope Church: though annually bereft of an impressive financial portfolio in her early agrarian beginnings; though very small

in membership numbers; though lacking for long periods of time a very key element needed to hear Christ's voice speak salvation, she has been rewarded for her faithfulness. Hope's early years of preaching were replete with the patchwork preaching of seminary students, visiting ministers, neighboring moderators, elders, and (gasp!) summer catechism (24-26).

The story of Hope and any other true church follows the preaching. Very appropriately, the book begins with Rev. David Overway's concise meditation on 1 Peter 2:4-5 about a spiritual house built on the rejected cornerstone, Christ crucified (xi-xiv). Without that foundation there would be no true Hope Protestant Reformed Church. The book ends with an edited version of a 2014 sermon on that same passage (708-720). Both are very instructive. This text had been the inaugural sermon preached by Rev. John R. Brink, whose memoirs of Hope are included as Appendix 1 (679-680), when Hope humbly began at the river's bend in the winter of January 1916.

This work of history has about every writing type and historical style possible. Comprehensive is an understatement. There is her early history; a brief history of her twelve ministers (seventy-five years of which were related by Richard Bloem); an architectural history; a recalling of Hope's experiences in the searing 1924 and 1953 doctrinal controversies; perspectives and autobiographical retrospectives of her twelve ministers; a selective opening of Hope's consistorial minute book; thirteen very dazzling oral histories; and the memories of those in the 1956 summer tornado. There is the doctrinal section on the pastor's labors; the council's jobs; the church worship elements; the member's responsibilities; the life of the various societies; the sons who have entered the gospel ministry, one of whom was my father; daughter congregations; mission work; covenantal education (637-651); Young People's Convention memories (653-676); and thirteen appendices with graphs, statistics, and charts. There is a list of organists (700-701); themes and texts used in family visitation; a description of the card-making work of that guileless dove, Anne Buiter (498-499); a description of the struggles faced by wheelchair-bound Kris Moelker (98-100); the decades-long difficulties of the Kooienga family after Rog's car accident (222-224);

and a brief mention of the great grief when Mrs. Kalsbeek died prematurely (to speak in earthly terms) in a tragic car accident (220-221). Hope's missionary labors have taken place in Lansing, Michigan; Christchurch, New Zealand; Victoria, Canada; Singapore; and Yangon, Myanmar. The book is chock-full of maps, diagrams, and pictures of past and present members and buildings. After reading, a man says with the psalmist Asaph, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Ps. 73:1).

Related in a very enriching manner is the 1924 history of Hope as shaped by Rev. George Ophoff. He felt that Classis Grand Rapids East confronted him with the hypothetical choice of either having a gun placed to his head or needing to sign the "Three Points of Common Grace"; thus, 'Ophoff prefers death' (104-116). Scriptural faithfulness required that choice. Additionally, such faithfulness required five years later that Ophoff take his catechumens to the neighboring CRC pastor, who had been wrongly recruiting the PRC kids to take catechism at the CRC church, and chastise said CRC pastor in front of the children that such conduct was egregiously erroneous (116-119).

Much could be written about the many labors of the pastors. The book does that very admirably. Of those pastors who have gone to their eternal reward, the work of Rev. John Heys deserves mention. He shepherded Hope for 13 years, setting their record for length, during the momentous events of World War II and the 1953 Schism. Rev. Heys faithfully counseled the young soldier boys making sure to feed them spiritually, while also making sure neither to politic nor to gossip to them about the great doctrinal struggle of 1953. Rev. Heys preached polemically about the covenant, pricking the consciences of those set out to destroy the unconditional, unilateral covenant of grace. Rev. Heys also faithfully preached covenantal education, being a keystone in getting Hope PR Christian School started. The Consistory wrote a letter on Rev. Heys' retirement, thanking him for his prodigious labors (42-49, 143-151, 290, 295-296). We can give prayerful thanks that God provides His church with men resembling the calm, peace-causing Holy Spirit.

In a similar vein Herman Hoeksema's actions at Hope during the fiery years of the 1953 Reformation show the heart of a comfort-giving shepherd. Hoeksema came to Hope with

a powerfully polemicized sermon meant to distinguish clearly between the lie of a conditional covenant of works and the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace. Seeing the large number of children present, he flipped his sermon text on a moment's notice and preached a sermon, instead, wherein he led the sheep to the Good Shepherd of John 10. Hoeksema's actions destroyed the following two specious defamations oft uttered so wrongly: his former colleagues from his mother denomination misleadingly warned their parishioners not to step foot in 'Pope Herman's cathedral'; and, his former students fraudulently fibbed that the 1953 covenant controversy was not so much about doctrine as it was about an argumentative, domineering personality. Hoeksema showed the dove-like qualities of the Holy Spirit (238-239, 312, 457-458).

Following the budgetary struggles from her early years through both the economic difficulties of the Great Depression and the loss of members in '24 and '53, Hope's frugality, like many of our churches, played a prominent role in her church life past and present. Permit me to elaborate on the sunglasses' example mentioned by Professor Russell Dykstra (565-567). This story found its way into some *Standard Bearers*. One of my ancestors helped shape this story.

Ken G. Vink explained in the *Standard Bearer* rubric "News From Our Churches" that during divine worship services the sanctuary architecture was designed in such a way that for five minutes or so of every sermon the setting sun's luminescence would blind the preacher. Hope debated getting a drapery and made a motion declaring such at a special congregation meeting.[1] In the course of debate my paternal grandfather stood up and declared with absolute certainty that it was a waste of money to buy curtains. What they should do instead was buy sunglasses for the pastor. My grandfather would go so far as to pay for them himself. Say what you will, this argument proved conclusive to those present. Vink related that a drapery purchase was approved.

A few issues later, Vink reported that someone had instead donated the drapery. He concluded, "The [building] committee further reported that 'sunglasses

1 Ken G. Vink, "News From Our Churches," *Standard Bearer,* vol. 53, no. 19 (August 1, 1977).

were available for emergency conditions, but they were never used.'"[2] Even at the late date of 1977, Hope Church was still guided by the extreme financial paucity of her 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s existence (5-42, 132-150, 679-680). But such a Corinthian attitude towards building fiduciary is not unfamiliar in many of our other churches. Many other enchanting stories dealing with poverty, budgets, and architectures are included in the book (77-102).

With all the highlights of the two keys of the kingdom—that is the preaching and the administration of the sacraments (383, 391-392, 466-469)—the third key, discipline, is not left out. It is dealt with mercifully. There was the shocking departure of a prominent member (253, 304-305). There was a minister who had to read the Form of Excommunication even as the unrepentant member thrust a microphone and tape recorder in his pastor's face (163). There were the children misbehaving in church (185, 226) and the consistorial motion that only the believing parent may stand for baptism (193). Then there were the continual consistorial labors in making sure that church members faithfully attended worship services (491-498). Did you know that the later-deposed Hubert De Wolf (41-42, 142-143, 217-218, etc.) pastored Hope for five years? Read and see. Finally, there was the interesting case of the father who left the PRC because of his own issues with the consistory, but then intriguingly and emphatically commanded his son not to leave the Protestant Reformed Churches (283-292).

The true church always has the lines of election and reprobation cutting through the line of the covenant. Space fails here to give proper due to the various members and their great-grandchildren who have attended Hope for generations since its inception; Jehovah is a faithful, covenant God and the records that matter are written in the Lamb's book of life. I offer a personal prayer of thanksgiving for my parents, paternal grandparents, and maternal grandparents who worshiped at Hope for many decades (561-563). Rev. Ronald VanOverloop married my parents during his pastorate (57-61, 165-167), though this event is understandably not mentioned. While the history of this church has elements of hagiography, the history

2 Ken G. Vink, "News From Our Churches," *Standard Bearer,* vol. 53, no. 21 (September 15, 1977).

of each of us is hagiographical by the moment. We are each covered in Christ's blood, without whose justifying death for our sins, we could neither pray in the throne room of Almighty Jehovah nor have any hope of salvation. Thus, mercy is the watchword.

Something of note is that Hope Church's setup today in the modern, suburbanized world is providentially similar to her founding in the twentieth-century agricultural era of horse and buggy (5-23). Hope's members can walk to church, societies, catechism, grade school, and high school. In the age of the automobile, plane travel, space journeys, and instantaneous computer technology, the families and children who walk slow still run the show. What is the old adage? The more things change, the more things stay the same. Or, does not the unchanging Jehovah still show us a bit of Himself and have the last laugh?

Editor Calvin Kalsbeek deserves boundless praise for keeping a very readable style throughout the book. With the large number of different authors, the book seemed to have only one writer. There is certainly a repetition of various information about persons and their activities, but by no means was any of it peripatetic. Credit the editor and the anniversary committee.

Three minor errors I did notice, which did not detract in any major way from the flow of the narrative. The section on the church's early history notes that on January 23, 1916, Hope's first church service, the United States was mid-way through World War I (78). Technically, America's official involvement in WWI started on April 3, 1917 and ended on November 11, 1918, and the halfway point would have been early February 1918. It was more accurately Europe at the mid-way point through WWI.

Second, Professor Herman Hanko notes that Hope's official role with the 1953 controversy happened only through the work of that hero of faith, Elder Richard Newhouse. Elder Newhouse was a delegate and co-author of the adopted May, 1953 Classis East minority report that called Rev. Hubert DeWolf's statements heretical *per se* (125-129, 691-693).

However, Hope was also involved in December 1950 when the consistory sent Synod a letter signed by Rev. John Heys and Elder Dewey Engelsma that dealt with the Declaration of Principles. This letter did three things: first,

it approved in the main the doctrines explained in the Declaration of Principles; second, it suggested a few other improvements and additional creedal quotes; and, third, it requested that a section on man's responsibility be added with creedal quotes to combat the calumnies lobbed at the PRCA (185-186, 687-690). Many enemies of the PRCA had lodged the old, deliberate misrepresentation that the doctrine of an unconditional covenant would make men careless and profane. Hope's request was one of many that led the 1951 Synod not only to adopt a section on man's responsibility, but also eventually led to the memorable and edifying 1953 seminary graduation speech by Herman Hoeksema, entitled "Man's Freedom and Responsibility."[3] Hope loved the orthodox covenant doctrine as preached by Rev. John Heys (42-49, 143-151).

Third, and this is an omission in my view rather than an error, it would have been nice to include as Appendix 13 the church and school history reports from Gertrude Hoeksema's 1975 book *God's Covenant Faithfulness: The 50th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, (16-17, 26, 40, 45-46; Hope PRCS: 647-649). This would have provided another helpful perspective on the challenging labor of getting a school started in the face of many earthly difficulties: surviving during the Great Depression; gathering extras from the World War II rations; and overcoming strong opposition from many who propagandized for a conditional covenant of works.

I conclude with a request: perhaps the committee could consider including in the second edition a necrology, a list of the deceased. Grounds: the church militant becomes the church triumphant at death. Also in a very concise manner, probably 3-5 pages, this list would take a poignant look at the great sorrow of death and the comfort contained therein when hope of salvation is grounded in Christ's blood. Churches provide that comfort through the preaching, praying, and charitable acts of the saints and catering committee (543-546).

The book was not at all a "monstrosity" (editor's self-deprecating words) but rather scintillating, enlightening, and com-

3 Herman Hoeksema, "Man's Freedom and Responsibility," *Standard Bearer,* vol. 29, no. 18 (July 1, 1953).

forting. I continually returned to mine it for new information, and discovered such things as the benefit of classical music in junior high (648-650), the successes of the church's fast-pitch softball team (307-308, 313), and memorable church-picnic softball (309-312). I hope that other of our churches produce similar works very soon, so that, as Editor Kalsbeek mentions in the epilogue, both Hope Church and all of us can review our histories (Ps. 105). Along with the editor I pray that our covenant God through preaching, Scripture, and the creeds preserves Hope PRC and His worldwide church until His Son returns (677-678). Most highly recommended. ●

A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized, ed. Michael J. Kruger. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. Pp. 656. $50.00 (cloth). [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper].

"Introduction." "Overview." "Survey." Words such as these are found in the titles of books that introduce the various books of the Bible. Such books answer questions such as: who penned a particular book of Scripture? When? To whom? In what historical context? With what purpose? How can the book best be outlined? How can we be sure the book belongs in the canon of Scripture?

Not all such introductions are worth the price of the book. Some approach the Scriptures from the viewpoint of higher criticism, rather than the viewpoint of infallible, divine inspiration. For instance, they might question whether Paul really was the author of an epistle that bears his name; or suggest that prophesies in the various books of the Bible were written *after* their fulfillment, because no man can predict the future; or present the first five books of the Bible as an editorial collection of writings of various men, denying that Moses wrote them all. People with such a low view of Scripture would help faithful believers best by not writing introductions at all.

At the same time, many good introductions exist—more than any pastor or believer has time to consult, unless he is doing indepth research into the matters that introductions treat. To own a few good ones is ideal.

The introduction to the New Testament that I review here is recommended. It should adorn the shelf of every Reformed pastor. Others, too, could profitably read the book: when the father, in leading family devotions, comes to the next book of the Bible; when a group of believers begin a new study on a book of the New Testament; or when anyone desires background information regarding any of the inspired writings in the New Testament. I would not doubt that the same is true of the companion volume, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament,* edited by Michael VanPelt. You will find a review of that volume in the next issue of the *PRTJ*.

A Reliable Introduction

In matters that one would expect an introduction to treat, this book is reliable.

The heart of the book contains 25 chapters—one per book of the New Testament. Wait... that doesn't add up. In fact, the 27 New Testament books are treated in 24 chapters. Chapter 7 treats both 1 and 2 Corinthians, and chapter 23 treats 1-3 John. Chapter 14 is an introduction to the pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), treating matters common to those epistles.

Each chapter has the same five divisions: Introduction, Background Issues, Structure and Outline, Message and Theology, and Select Bibliography. The section on "Background Issues" usually treats the author, audience, date, purpose, and canonicity, though each of the nine contributors to the volume might omit one of those topics or add another.

In its treatment of these background matters, and its presentation of the structure of the various books of the Bible, I judge the book to be reliable.

To say it is "reliable" does not mean that I completely agree with everything written. Particularly, one might think that a book of the New Testament is to be outlined differently than another thinks. Robert Cara implicitly acknowledges this by presenting several outlines for the book of Acts (145-148). I have seen other outlines of the book of Revelation that struck me as more helpful than

Charles Hill's (527-529). This illustrates that several introductions on one's shelf are beneficial. However, the book is reliable in that its background information is generally correct. And if the outline of the book is different from what I thought it should be, I could still see why this outline was suggested.

Only once in the matters of introduction did I think that a contributor completely dropped the ball. That was when Bruce Lowe mentioned that Paul could have written the epistle to the Philippians in either Ephesus, Caesarea, Rome, or Corinth (because clearly the epistle was written while Paul was in prison, and he was imprisoned in each of those cities), and concluded: "In the end, however, location and date change little in how we interpret Philippians" (291). The issue is not whether we need to know where the epistle was written in order to interpret it; rather, the issue is whether Philippians itself answers the question, "where?" Lowe recognizes that a correct understanding of Philippians 1:13 and 4:23 is important in determining where the epistle was written. Most scholars are confident, on the basis of 1:13 and 4:23, that Paul was in Rome when he wrote the epistle. If Lowe has compelling reasons to think otherwise, I would have benefited from knowing them.

One topic that this book does not treat is that of canonical significance, which aims to answer the question: how does this book contribute to the revelation of God in Christ in a way in which no other inspired writing contributes? This question is different from that regarding canonicity (the history of the church recognizing the book as canonical) or purpose (the purpose for which Paul wrote an epistle to a specific church might, but does not necessarily give us clues as to the canonical significance of the book).

Although the book itself does not consistently contain a section regarding canonical significance, some of the contributors do comment regarding the canonical significance of the book they are treating. Simon Kistemaker does with 2 Peter (472), and Charles Hill does with 2 John (499); Hill also hints in that direction in setting forth the purpose of the book of Revelation (518). Perhaps others do as well. These comments I appreciated.

In all fairness, I know of only one book that does contain a section on the canonical signifi-

cance, that being Louis Berkhof's *Introduction to the New Testament*. So, apparently, writers of introductions are not expected to face this question. Too bad.

A High View of Scripture

Basic to the book's reliability is its high view of Scripture. In his introduction, editor Kruger draws attention to this point: "... the contributors to this volume... have a high view of the authority of Scripture" (25). This comes out, Kruger notes, in that the contributors "affirm and uphold the traditional authorship of these books" (25).

So important is this high view of Scripture that, if the book did not manifest it, I would not recommend it even though it was correct on matters of introduction.

This high view of Scripture comes out not only in the overview of the various New Testament books, but also in the five appendices to the book.

The fifth appendix is simply a list of different English Bible versions which are cited in the book. Implicitly (that is, this is not the editor's purpose in including it) the appendix underscores the low view of Scripture that is common today. Seventeen different Bible versions are cited (does the English speaking church really need that many? Why?). And notice the copyright dates. Some have none (ASV, KJV), and others only one (NAB, NJB, NKJV, NRSV, TEV). I have no issue with that as such. But the numerous copyright dates by other versions, including the NIV and NIV 2011, indicates that these versions are always changing. Why? Why, in light of the fact that the Word of God does not change? Why, bearing in mind that the English language has not changed so drastically in ten years time or less? The frequent changes to individual Bible versions betray a low view of Scripture by many today. The volume under review, however, does not promote that low view.

In Appendix A, Kruger treats the history of the church's recognition that the New Testament books are canonical. Kruger not only gives an interesting history lesson, but also develops the same arguments as those found in Belgic Confession, Article 5—although he does not explicitly refer to the Belgic Confession itself.

In Appendix B, Charles Hill gives an introduction to the practice of textual criticism of the New Testament. "Textual criticism" is the practice of evaluating many different copies of the same Bible

passage, noting the differences between them, and trying to conclude which reading is the wording of the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers. Properly done, textual criticism proceeds from the doctrine of verbal inspiration (teaching that every word is inspired). Not only does Hill survey the history of textual criticism, but he also devotes several pages to a helpful refresher course in the practice of textual criticism. One caveat here, for those who have their mind wrapped around the matter of textual criticism: Hill is of the opinion that the reading of a majority of manuscripts "may not be as significant as" the reading of an earlier manuscript (575). "May not be" is fair enough. Still, we who appreciate the Majority Text (the manuscripts on the basis of which the King James Version was written) might differ with him in concrete instances of textual difference. But I have gone into an area that scholars and ministers will be familiar with; let me get back to my general readership.

Guy Prentiss Waters discusses "The Synoptic Problem" in Appendix C. This treats the question of how the church came to have three relatively similar accounts of Jesus' life in the gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke (John's gospel is sufficiently different from the other three, that it is not included in the "synoptics"). On the basis of differences in these accounts, higher critics argue that the Scriptures have errors in them. Waters' presentation of the matter proceeds from a high view of Scripture: the gospel accounts are "inerrant" (582, 590), and "we may rejoice that the God of providence minutely ordered, governed, and directed that process" by which all three came into being (590).

Finally, Appendix D is an interesting essay on "The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: Trusting the New Testament's Hermeneutics."

I enjoyed reading the appendices as much as, if not more than, reading the rest of the book. The same was true when I came to other "digressions" in the chapters, such as when Robert Cara, introducing Luke, took the trouble to give hints for interpreting parables, 111-112.

A Reformed Approach to Introduction

This is not the first introduction to the New Testament written by Reformed men. However, the Reformed emphasis of this introduction is striking, and sets it apart from most others. Again,

this was done intentionally. Editor Kruger says: "In addition to spending less time on historical background issues, this volume is consciously committed to spending (comparably) more time on theological and doctrinal issues.... [A] higher priority is placed on exploring the *message* of each New Testament book" (22).

To ensure this Reformed approach, the nine men who were asked to contribute to this work are "all current or past professors of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary" (25).

Indeed, the section on "Message and Theology" is usually the longest section in each chapter. Often it serves as a mini-commentary on the book from a Reformed perspective, adding to its value as a resource. I appreciated, for instance, the explanations given to difficult passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 Peter 3:21.

It falls to this reviewer, then, to tell you how faithfully Reformed the book is. And the answer is: fairly faithful. One finds in it the faithful Reformed position on unconditional, double predestination (199, 277, 332); regeneration as the wonder work of God (162); justification by faith alone (181, 185) including opposition to the New Perspective on Paul teachings (252ff.); and an amillennial approach to eschatology (331, and the chapter on Revelation). The book opposes the Pentecostal notion that tongue speaking is normative for today (161, 239); opposes the idea that "all" and "world" refer to each and every human, head for head (364, 493); and views correctly the place of women in the church (not having authority, 365), as well as of the church offices in general (366-369). Do not get the impression that the book *develops* the Reformed teaching on these matters; that is not the book's purpose. But it does *reflect* the Reformed position on them.

At times I wished for more clarity. Indeed, God restored His image to fallen man, but that the fall "*marred* the first couple's capacity to rule" (301; italics mine, DJK) is an understatement at best. Was the word "marred" used to suggest that some remnants of the image of God remained in fallen man? I could not be sure. Other times I certainly disagreed with an interpretation given, such as Waters' explanation of 1 Corinthians 7:15 as teaching that when a believing spouse is deserted by an unbelieving spouse, the believer is free to remarry. Just as the book does not develop Reformed teach-

ing, so it does not develop these points which one might question. It states them in a sentence.

Then, at times I wished that the contributor said more in his section on "Message and Theology." In his treatment of 2 Thessalonians, Robert Cara rightly notes the spiritual war which Christ is fighting on our behalf, and the assurance we have of victory. In that connection, he refers to the Antichrist. But I was disappointed that Cara did not treat more prominently the phenomenon of Antichrist as such. This short epistle is in the canon primarily to warn the church about the coming of Antichrist, and to describe his spiritual character.

Twice I was truly disappointed. In both instances, the matter regarded the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Let me be clear that this volume as a whole defends the doctrine, and that the two disappointing passages in the book do not compromise that doctrine. They did fail to defend and develop it as fully or clearly as they could have. In comparing my notes, I also observed that the author of both passages was Bruce Lowe. I have no explanation for why both of the passages that disappointed me were written by him. I had never heard of him before reading this book, know nothing more about him, and am drawing no conclusion with regard to him.

The first passage is his explanation of Philippians 3 (297-298). Lowe begins by asking whether Paul, in speaking of the righteousness of God, refers to God's legal judgment (the historic and Reformed explanation of the passage) or to covenant faithfulness (the New Perspectives on Paul explanation). The question is fair enough. A clear answer is critically important. But rather than taking time to defend the Reformed position, Lowe refers the reader to other books for that purpose, and adds some observations about how Greek and Roman pagans might have understood Paul (297). On the next page he explains the concept of imputation in a way that a pagan might have understood it.

Why we needed to know how pagans might have understood Paul's epistle to the Philippians mystifies me. Paul's *preaching* was directed toward unbelievers, including pagans; but Paul's *epistles* were written for the benefit of believers. Specifically, the epistle to the Philippians was not written as a mission tool, but was written to an existing congregation of be-

lievers and their seed, to confirm them in their faith. Rather than comments such as these, Lowe could have demonstrated that Paul is teaching the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The volume as a whole intends to be a helpful and pastoral resource to pastors and students of the Scripture. This section did not fit with that broader purpose, to my mind.

The second passage was his explanation of James 2:14-26 ("Paul, Faith, and Works," 446-449). Noting that Paul and James appear to be discussing the same subject, but from different viewpoints, Lowe repeatedly says that James is not correcting or contradicting Paul, then adds that James is "qualifying Paul" (448), addressing a point that might be misinterpreted in Paul. That James is in fact making a significantly different point than Paul, though using the same terminology, Lowe seems not to recognize. While Paul sets forth justification by faith alone, James sets forth sanctification by faith alone, and the inevitability of sanctification by faith alone.

To be fair, the reader who is *consciously* looking for Lowe to say that James teaches that the same faith that justifies also inevitably sanctifies will find a couple of statements that seem to get to the point. One is: "Thus in 2:14-26 James must challenge his readers to understand that they (and we) are all "doers" and that *the great advantage of this is that it proves the genuineness of faith*" (448; italics Lowe's). But then Lowe suggests that James' practical purpose in this section is his desire that his readers have the assurance of faith, which comes by observing its fruits. Rather, James is telling his readers either to live in accordance with their faith, or to stop pretending they are believers.

I would have spent less time treating these two disappointing sections in the book, if they did not regard the matter of justification by faith...*alone*. But two disappointing sections in a book that has over 600 pages, do not make the book bad.

In fact, the book is not bad; it is good. Recommended. ●

The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church, by Peter J. Leithart. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016. Pp. x + 225. $21.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

If ever a book by a Presbyterian theologian besought an end that is both utterly hopeless and patently evil, this is the book.

Postmillennial, Christian Reconstructionist Peter Leithart beseeches the institutional unity of all the churches in the world. He calls the goal of his quest "Reformational Catholicism." Inasmuch as this unified, ecclesiastical institution is to include the Roman Catholic Church, which will have abandoned its present institutional form, particularly the papacy, in order to take on a new form with a renewed (resurrected, in Leithart's thinking) Protestantism and a renewed Orthodoxy, Leithhart's goal is utterly hopeless. The false church of Rome will never submit to its "dying" (Leithart's terminology), in order to be "reborn" (again, Leithart's conception) as something other than the Roman Catholic Church, lacking its antichrist, the papacy. Still less is this dying and rebirth of Rome even the remotest possibility, if this dying and rebirth must involve the abandonment of the worship of Mary or the slightest tweaking of Rome's heresy of justification by faith and works, as Leithart suggests would be the case. Sooner will pigs fly.

One might as well suppose that Satan would consent to give up some of his more devilish characteristics in order to take on even the slightest quality of a holy angel. The analogy is deliberately chosen.

Inasmuch as Leithart's proposal calls for Reformed Protestant churches to jettison their creeds, ignore the controversy between the Reformed faith of sovereign grace as confessed by the Canons of Dordt and Arminianism, take on the mysticism of the charismatic movement, accept the voodoo of African churches, and allow themselves to be "reborn" looking suspiciously like a Roman Catholic progenitor, Leithart's end with the book is evil. It is church union at the expense of the gospel of grace.

Peter Leithart envisions a united, instituted, visible church in the future. This union is to be accomplished, not by the usual negotiations and compromises

of the ecumenical movement, although the concrete suggestions as to the implementation of the union very much resemble the usual ecumenical politicking. But in a typical Leithartian fantasy, all churches will actively "die." Then, all will somehow be "reborn" in one gigantic unified federation. Out of the death of the churches will arise one church. Protestant churches, the Roman Church, and the Orthodox Church will have vanished. They will have vanished into the new church. The new institute will be the "Reformational Catholic Church."

The biblical model of this transformation of all churches is the dying and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What fails in this model is that the risen, holy Jesus is not the transformation of several former persons, some of whom were false and corrupt.

The biblical basis of the admonition to the churches to die and be reborn as one organization, in Leithart's theology, is the will of Jesus that His church be one (see John 17). The existence of many denominations is contrary to the will of Jesus, and sinful.

What Leithart neglects to observe is that the sin of denominationalism is that of the institutes that adopt and proclaim false doctrine, that profane the sacraments, and that discipline those who confess the gospel and rebuke the apostatizing institutes for their errors (see the Belgic Confession, Art. 29). It is the sin of Rome that the Protestant churches of the Reformation had to form. It is the sin of the Lutheran churches that the Protestant churches had to take the distinct form of the Reformed churches. It is the sin of the Arminians that the Reformed churches holding the Canons of Dordt had to exist separately from the Arminian churches.

The Christian way of dealing with the divisions caused by heresy is the confession of their gross sin of corrupting the gospel by the churches that were responsible, and their return to the old paths of the truth.

To be specific, the Roman Catholic Church is guilty of the grievous sins that necessitated the Protestant Reformation, and the Protestant, particularly, Reformed, churches. The only biblical way of reunion is Rome's confession of her sins and wholehearted embrace of the gospel of grace.

The way of church union is not an ignoring of the apostasy

of Rome in the interests of an amalgamation of Rome and Protestantism on some basis other than that of oneness in the truth.

If Peter Leithart needs biblical basis for this way of union, let him consider that for churches as for individuals the way of reconciliation with God is repentance, including public confession of public sin and conversion in doctrine and life.

For all its insistence that the vision of Leithart is not a plea for union by compromise of the truth, this, in fact, is what the book is. Rome and Protestantism are to be "reborn" as one church in the way of Protestantism's giving up its confession of justification by faith alone. Protestantism must abandon its creedal affirmation of justification by faith alone, with its rejection of justification by faith and works, and work out, somehow, a compromise with Rome's doctrine of justification by faith and works. Protestantism will be able to do this, according to Leithart, by allowing James 2 to qualify the doctrine of justification in Romans 3-5.

> The stark differences between these two understandings of justification [that is, Rome's and the Reformation's—DJE] can be moderated somewhat…Catholics and Protestants must stop caricaturing one another's theology [as if this is what Protestantism has done—DJE]…Protestants should gladly concede the Catholic apologist's point that "faith alone" appears only once in the Bible, when James says that "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24). Trying to skirt that verse—trying to minimize the Letter of James, for that matter—is dishonest and undermines the Protestant boast that our faith is rooted in Scripture alone…It may be possible that *neither* side has really grasped the depth of the biblical teaching on justification. It may be that Paul was addressing some other set of questions entirely, and that each side has grasped some fragments of a total picture that still eludes both. Instead of Catholics trying to persuade Protestants and vice versa, both may have to admit that we had it partly wrong (174, 175).

This is a call for the compromise of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. Such a compromise of justification will leave the "reborn" church, not only looking very much like the Roman Catholic Church, but also

with Roman Catholic doctrine in its bloodstream.

Similarly, the Leithartian church of the future will have a Roman Catholic theology of the sacraments. It will teach baptismal regeneration: "There are passages in the New Testament that sound suspiciously like baptismal regeneration" (177). It will be open to the Roman Catholic heresy of the real, physical presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper: "There are larger frameworks for understanding Communion that might encompass the opposed positions of traditional debates [that is, the positions of the Reformed and of Rome]" (176, 177). The Reformational Catholic Church will certainly not damn the Roman doctrine and practice of the Supper as a denial of the one sacrifice of Chris and an accursed idolatry, as do all the Reformed churches that hold the Heidelberg Catechism (see Q. 80).

Leithart's attempted murder of creedal, Reformed Protestantism (it must "die") is the natural, necessary expression of his postmillennial, Christian Reconstruction theology. As a Christian Reconstructionist, Leithart believes, and works for, a "Christianized" world. This is hardly possible without a unified Christian church. A unified Christian church will be a powerful force to create one, unified, Christian world of nations and peoples.

Although Leithart does not make his postmillennial, "Jewish dream" explicit, he lets slip the postmillennial, Christian Reconstructionist driver of this proposal of the union of all churches. The problem with denominationalism that really troubles Peter Leithart is its impotence to influence the world *culturally*: "American denominationalism…makes the church impotent to challenge the world" (89). Leithart longs for a renewed "Christendom," that is, the domination of all of culture in all the world by Christianity (187).

The End of Protestantism is an ecclesiology motivated and shaped by postmillennial eschatology. No doubt, it will commend itself to many Protestants who are seduced by the siren song of the "Christianizing" of America and then the world, whether the singers are attuned to postmillennialism or to the theory of common grace.

To a Reformed church and a Reformed believer, the book is the admonition to maintain the eschatology of amillennialism and the ecclesiology of Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession.

●

Called to Watch for Christ's Return, by Martyn McGeown. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. 304. $14.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Ryan Barnhill.]

Called to Watch for Christ's Return began as a series of sermons preached by the author on the Olivet Discourse, a speech in which "Jesus proclaims his second coming, an event with which history will come to a dramatic and sudden close" (ix). These sermons covered Matthew 24:1-31, dealing with the signs of Christ's coming—deceivers, the preaching of the gospel, the great tribulation, and more. These sermons also dealt with Matthew 24:32-25:46, treating the subject of watching for Christ's return—the unknown time of his return, Christ's coming as in the days of Noah, parables associated with his coming, and more. These sermons comprise the content of the book. We are thankful that these fine sermons have reached a wider audience through their publication in book form.

McGeown's work is a needed and timely contribution to the study of eschatology (the end times), for two reasons. First, there are so many today teaching unbiblical ideas about the end of the world. *Called to Watch for Christ's Return* interacts with these systems of thought, dismantles them, and plainly sets forth the biblical, Reformed, amillennial position. Second, we live in the last days, and that alone makes this book important. We must know what to expect in these last and evil days, we must be admonished to watch for the coming of our Lord, and we must be comforted.

The main strength of *Called to Watch for Christ's Return* is its exegetical precision and richness. The material is always mined from the text. Concepts are carefully defined and developed, and difficult passages are lucidly explained. Especially does this clarity of exegesis become important in passages that deal with such matters as the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15-20) and the unknown time of Christ's return (Matt. 24:36). These passages are often misinterpreted, leading to a host of errors. Thus, proper, sober interpretation is critical in these kinds of difficult passages

and that is what one finds in this book.

McGeown's work is necessarily polemical. That is, it is a work that exposes and refutes the errors. Advocates of both postmillennialism and premillennial dispensationalism seek to find evidence for their views in Matthew 24 and 25. Postmillennialism teaches that the Olivet Discourse (at least *some* of it, if not *all* of it) is a reference exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. This interpretation is fundamental to the postmillennial position, lest the events of which Jesus speaks interfere with postmillennialism's future golden age. In contrast, premillennial dispensationalists claim that the Olivet Discourse refers exclusively to the future—not to AD 70, but to a future Jerusalem and a future temple. Negatively, the author exposes these errors, and demonstrates how a sober interpretation of Jesus' teaching pulls the rug out from under these millennial systems. Positively, McGeown sees Matthew 24 and 25 as a *blending* of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, on the one hand, and Jesus' second coming, on the other hand. The destruction of Jerusalem is a *type* or *picture* of Jesus' second coming. This view, the amillennial view, and this view alone, does justice to Jesus' words.

In a book about watching for Christ's return, one would expect not only polemics, but also pointed instruction and warning for believers. After all, we are all prone to spiritual slumber instead of watching for Christ's return. The command of Scripture to watch for our Lord's coming is a weighty command, and the author conveys it well: "Watch! Christ is coming. Let us not be found sleeping when he returns, but looking for his return. Let that watchfulness begin today if it has not been our habit before, so whether he comes on the clouds or calls us in death, we will be ready to meet him" (214). *Called to Watch for Christ's Return* is a stirring call to stay vigilant in these last and evil days.

The book is also comforting and warm, an approach that arises from the author's pastoral heart for God's people who live in the perilous days prior to Jesus' coming. This warm tone characterizes the entirety of the book, and climaxes in the last chapter; any reader's heart will *thrill* in reading this last chapter, which explains, in part, the glories of the new heavens and the new

earth. Read and meditate upon this breathtaking description of heaven:

> Death, sin, and the curse will be absent—forever banished from the new creation. We will enjoy spiritual joy and satisfaction in abundance, for we will enter into the fullness of our inheritance. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit! That is life, eternal life, life that lasts forever and has no end. Life with Christ. Life in the presence of God, fellowshipping with him. That is blessedness and joy! That is worth waiting for! Do not fear the judgment day. Do not be weary with watching and waiting. But pray, even for that great day" (280).

Our Lord is coming. Watch. Watch—by *reading*. *Called to Watch for Christ's Return*, as a faithful exposition of Jesus' words, will instruct you, arm you against the errors, comfort you, and quicken your hope. "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly." ●

Heaven, by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. Pp. 287. $18.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

All Christians, I dare say, would love to learn more about heaven. However, the Bible does not satisfy our curiosity about that wonderful place, and neither does this book. That might disappoint some readers, but we need to heed the caution not to speculate about things that God has not revealed. Editor Peterson reminds us of this in the first chapter: "We human beings show an incorrigible tendency not to be satisfied with Holy Scripture" (20).

The book consists of a series of chapters by different scholars. Most of the chapters examine the Bible's teaching on heaven from the perspective of different books of the Bible. There are chapters on the Old Testament, the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, Paul's Epistles, the General Epistles, and the Gospel according to John and Revelation, plus a few more thematic chapters (Pictures of Heaven, the History of Heaven, Angels and Heaven, Heaven for

Persecuted Saints, and the Hope of Heaven).

Heaven, that is, the intermediate state of the soul of the believers, is not the main focus of the book. Instead, the writers focus on the final state of the New Heavens and the New Earth or the New Creation. One contributor writes, "When the Bible writers speak of the blessedness of heaven, they speak sparingly of the state of the separate soul; but when they describe the resurrection they seem to be enraptured" (258).

There was not much in the book with which I disagreed, except for a few minor exegetical points here and there. Overall, the book is sound in its exegesis and theology. It is a useful book if you would like to study the subject of heaven in Scripture, for it avoids speculation and "mawkish sentimentality" (187), and reminds us that, "biblical teaching about heaven is always meant to encourage and spur us on to faith and obedience in our present lives" (83).

May the reader study it to that end! ●

Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World, by Richard J. Mouw. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. Pp. 187. $15.94 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Uncommon Decency is a winsome, one might say uncommonly decent, plea for civility in discourse, particularly the discourse of Christian conversation concerning erroneous theologies and conduct. The author is the apostle of civility, Richard J. Mouw. The book is the revised and expanded version of the original edition of 1992.

Mouw is convinced that that a major weakness among Christians, including also, if not especially, orthodox Reformed Christians, is incivility. By civility, the former Fuller Seminary president means "public politeness. It means that we display tact, moderation, refinement and good manners toward people who are different from us" (14). Elsewhere Mouw describes civility as being "kind and gentle" (16). At its root, civility is kindness and gentleness especially towards those with whom one disagrees. This root flourishes in the soil of

the recognition that all humans, even the most heretical and unholy, were created in, and yet, according to Mouw, bear, the image of God their creator. Civility, therefore, is not merely human decency. It is a Christian virtue.

One is tempted to understand Mouw's civility as tolerance of all and everything. But tolerance, as one has remarked, is the dubious virtue of one who believes nothing. Mouw is well aware of the danger. And he believes something. He informs his readers that he is a Calvinist and that his favorite theologian is John Calvin (whose doctrinal foes would have had difficulty in judging his polemics with them as civil). Mouw, therefore, promotes a "*convicted* civility"—the civility of one who is convicted of the truth of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, indeed, of the truth of Christ as confessed by the Reformed faith. "The real challenge," according to Mouw, "is to come up with a *convicted civility*" (14; the emphasis is Mouw's).

Civility is far reaching. It extends to defenders and practitioners of abortion; to the ordained clergy of the Roman Catholic Church; to the servants of Allah in their proclamation of the false religion of Islam, including those spokesmen of Islam who were slow and cautious in their (mild) condemnation of the dastardly deed of 9/11; to the sodomites and lesbians; to Mormons; to the antichristian philosopher Nietzsche, and to others no less unsavory.

With Hitler, Mouw draws the line. "I want Hitler to be cut off from the possibility of mercy" (156).

A justified question is whether this civility reckons more with the happiness of the ungodly sinners to whom civility is shown than with the glory of God, which is defended by vigorous defense of the truth and sharp condemnation of the lie. In explanation of his motive in his civil dealings with a fornicating young woman, who boldly defended her impenitent violation of the seventh commandment of the law of God and her apostasy from the Christian faith, Mouw writes:

> My problem with promiscuous people is not that I think they're having too much fun. Instead, I worry that they must be very unhappy. I want them to flourish as human beings, but they are caught up in a way of life that keeps them from flourishing (105).

Mouw practices what he preaches with remarkable aplomb. In a civil manner, he has addressed both a church full of Protestant Reformed Christians in Grand Rapids, Michigan and a crowd of Mormons in their Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah. In neither case was he stoned or even booed from the platform.

Nevertheless, before Richard Mouw convinces this reviewer of the Christian character of his civility in theological controversy, he must answer the question whether the following instances pass his muster: Elijah's mockery and then killing of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18); the Lord's laughter at the enemies of His Son (Ps. 2); Isaiah's ridicule of all those who worship other gods (Is. 44); Jesus' vehement condemnation of the teachers of works-righteousness (Matt. 23); Paul's blistering exposure of the heretics who proclaim and pursue righteousness by good works (Gal. 5:12)—today's Roman Catholic theologians, monks, and (attractive) nuns, who do not, in fact, point "to the reality of the kingdom of God," but to the wicked fantasy of the kingdom of darkness (130); Martin Luther's excoriation of those who espouse salvation by the alleged freedom of the natural human will (*The Bondage of the Will*); John Calvin's satirical exposure of the Roman Catholic worship of relics ("An Admonition, Showing the Advantages which Christendom Might Derive from an Inventory of Relics") and unsparing refutation of the Roman Catholic dignitaries at the Council of Trent ("Antidote to the Council of Trent"); and Dordt's judgment of Arminian theologians that they "bring again out of hell the Pelagian error" (Canons of Dordt, II, Rejection of Errors: 3).

If Mouw cannot find room for these apparently quite uncivil polemics in his Christian civility, I and every Reformed Christian must dissent from his proposal. And he himself ought to re-think it. ●

Kept by Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches About Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security, by Sam Storms. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Pp. 203. $15.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

In this short work, Storms examines the main theological concepts and texts that undergird the Calvinistic and Reformed doctrine of "Eternal Security." We prefer the term "Perseverance of the Saints. Storms provides careful exegesis of the main "preservation," "perseverance," and "security" texts, as well as a helpful explanation of the so-called "problematic apostasy texts."

Storms begins with an imaginary Christian called Charley, who makes a profession of faith in Christ, and then renounces the truth and returns to the wicked world and to the way of sin. He sets forth the three responses to Charley's departure from the truth, the Arminian, the Antinomian, and the Calvinist response:

> The Arminian says that Charley was truly saved, apostatized from the faith, and is now lost. The antinomian says that Charley was truly saved, is still truly saved, but will suffer the loss of rewards in the age to come because of his disobedient lifestyle. The Calvinist says that Charley may have been truly saved, and if so, he will come under the discipline of the Lord, who will either restore him to his walk with Jesus or take him home to heaven prematurely. Alternatively, says the Calvinist, Charley was never truly saved, and his failure to persevere in a life of obedience is evidence that his profession of faith was just that, a verbal profession, and not the genuine faith that possesses forgiveness of sins (14-15)

Storms devotes the rest of the book to demonstrating that the Calvinist position is the biblical one. He does so by examining positively the truth of God's preservation of His people (from passages such as John 6, 10 and Rom. 8), and by interacting with other texts (such as Matt. 7, 12, 13 and John 15; Rom. 11; Heb. 6 and 10) that seems to teach a "falling away of true saints." Often, Storms presents a difficult text, sets forth the various interpretations offered, and then explains in some detail his reasons for choos-

ing the Calvinistic interpretation.

In most cases, Storms' exegesis is helpful. For example, his explanation of the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" and the "unpardonable sin" is pastorally helpful. It would be useful for pastors to read this chapter who counsel church members who are terrified that they are guilty of such sins:

> Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is wilful, wide-eyed, persistent, unrepentant slandering of the work of the Spirit, attributing to the devil what is undeniably divine (35).
>
> This was not a one-time, momentary slip or inadvertent mistake in judgment. This was persistent, lifelong rebellion in the face of inescapable and undeniable truth. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not a careless act committed only once in a moment of rage or rebellion but a calloused attitude over time, a persistent defiance that hardens the heart (36).
>
> A sin from which one may repent is not the unpardonable sin. Therefore, those who are most worried that they may have committed the unpardonable sin have not. An unforgivable sin is one for which there is no concern, no conviction, no anxiety, and thus no repentance. Such a sin is so hard-hearted and wilful and persistent and defiant that the one committing it couldn't care less that he or she is committing it (37).

With the fruitless branches in John 15 and Romans 11, Storms adopts the organic approach, although he does not use such terminology: "The fruitless branches [are] so-called disciples who experience only an external, superficial connection with Jesus" (47).

> Jesus is making the point that fruitfulness is a necessary and infallible mark of true Christianity. He uses the picture of a vine to drive home this truth. Where else could a branch be located if not in some way connected to the vine? Jesus could hardly make his point by directing [the disciples'] attention to a bunch of disconnected and isolated branches scattered about on the ground. Jesus is saying that no branch that fails to bear fruit can be thought of as united to him (55).

There are a few, infrequent

irregularities in the book about which I have criticisms.

First, in an effort to avoid teaching that human beings are worthless to God, Storms writes that "all men and women have value simply by virtue of the fact that they were created in God's image. The image of God in mankind has most assuredly not been altogether erased or destroyed by the fall" and "Even Satan has value and worth in the sense that he is a product of God's creative genius" (63). This teaching is inconsistent with the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity.

Second, Storms seems to believe that God sometimes disciplines His impenitent children by taking them prematurely to heaven. He appeals to Ananias and Sapphira who are "disciplined into heaven through premature physical death because of their lying to the Holy Spirit" (98). However, we must remember that God does not end the lives of His children before He brings them to repentance. Samson, David, Peter and many others testify to that truth. Ananias and Sapphira were reprobate hypocrites whom God slew in His wrath, not erring children whom God "called home early."

Finally, Storms struggles with the exegesis of 1 John 5:16-17 and the question of the sin unto death. After looking at the various possibilities, Storms concludes, "I find myself a bit reluctant to conclude anything about this passage" (187). Storms would have been helped if he had consulted the Canons of Dordt, which no book on the perseverance of the saints should neglect:

> The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those who teach: That true believers and regenerate can sin the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit. Since the same Apostle John, after having spoken in the fifth chapter of his first epistle, verses 16 and 17, of those who sin unto death and having forbidden to pray for them, immediately adds to this in verse 18: "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not (meaning a sin of that character), but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not" (Canons, V, Rejection of Errors 4). ●

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