Editor's Notes

Preaching is fundamental to what the church is called to be and is called to do. It is at the heart of worship. It is the chief means of grace. It is the means for the salvation of the elect, both in the generations of believers and from the nations through missions. It is the means to work faith, to strengthen faith, and to preserve in faith. It is the means for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven and the gathering of her citizens.

Preachers are what we aim to train for the church of Jesus Christ in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. We aim to produce pastors who are preachers—chiefly preachers. As preaching is the chief, from a certain point of view the only task of the minister, so does all the instruction in PRTS have as its goal the development of sound, capable preachers of the gospel.

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America sponsored an officebearers' conference prior to its September 2014 meeting. The speeches presented at this conference make up the main contents of this issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Domestic missionary of the PRCA, the Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, gave the keynote address: "The Minister's Development of His Preaching after Seminary." In his speech Rev. Bruinsma not only emphasized the need for the minister's development as a preacher after graduation from seminary and once in the active ministry, but also gave a number of concrete suggestions with a view to this development. The remaining speeches were given by the faculty of PRTS: "The Elders' Supervision of the Preaching," "Developing God-Honoring, Faithful, and Effective Preaching," and "Application in Preaching." We hope that our readers, especially ministers and seminary students, will find these articles to be worthwhile.

Besides the conference speeches that have been put into print, readers should take note of the two review articles that are included in this issue. Past issues of *PRTJ* have contained reviews of the individual volumes of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr., as they were published. Recently the fourth and last volume of this very worthwhile

set was released. With the completion of the set, Rev. Angus Stewart, minister in the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland has submitted a review article. You will definitely want to read what he has to say. Another significant book that has recently been published by B & H Publishing Group (formerly Broadman and Holman Publishers) is entitled *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views*. Emeritus Professor of Dogmatics at PRTS, Prof. David Engelsma, offers readers an insightful analysis of this new book. At the same time, his review article is a passionate call to Reformed churches and officebearers to defend the biblical and confessional truth concerning the redemption of the cross of Christ. That cross, an offense and stumbling block to so many today—also in the church—is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24).

And then there are the book reviews. Notable among recently published books is the publication of *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*. This new study Bible is the first of its kind—a *Reformed* King James Version study Bible. Up until now Arminians and Dispensationalists have held the field among KJV study Bibles. At long last a King James Version study Bible whose notes and articles are written from a distinctively Reformed perspective. Reformed believers who treasure the King James Version of the Bible—among them the members of the PRCA and her sister churches—should welcome this new study Bible.

Now read and enjoy.

Soli Deo Gloria!
—RLC

The Minister's Development of His Preaching After Seminary

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Protestant Reformed Churches have much for which to be thankful in God's provision of a theological school in which students for the ministry are trained. The education received in this seminary is thorough and spiritual. It is evident from the oral examinations before the PRC synods and classes that the ministers who come out of this seminary are well-prepared to enter into the gospel ministry. That does not mean, of course, that there is never room for improvement and development in the curriculum and instruction provided there. And the professors themselves and the Theological School Committee are always reviewing that matter. At the same time, a minister needs to develop in his preaching beyond seminary. He may never be so proud that he thinks he does not need to improve in his preaching.

A student is taught the basics of preaching in seminary, the proper mechanics of preparing and delivering a sermon. He is given the necessary courses that will launch him into his ministry. He is taught the proper means by which he can preach a theocentric and cross-centered sermon. He receives thorough training in the Scriptures, the confessions, Old and New Testament history, and the history of the church. He is taught how rightly to divide the Word of truth. He is taught how to organize his sermon in order that it might be a logical explanation of the passage he has studied. He is taught the proper techniques of delivery so that his sermons will be lively and interesting. He is even taught the proper spiritual exercises that will keep him humble, gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, and meek.

But, after all is said and done, the preacher must continue to develop in every one of these areas, in order that his preaching might continue to be fresh, zealous, and applicable to the lives of God's people. It is true that talents and abilities vary from one individual to the next. Students and eventually ministers are given by God their own peculiar strengths as pastors and teachers. But every minister

must also humbly recognize his own weaknesses and the need to overcome them by continuing to develop after leaving seminary.

It is on this basis that the subject of developing our preaching beyond seminary is indeed worthy of consideration.

I. The Need

During the first five years of my ministry, three professors sat on the back of my study chair staring over my shoulders as I prepared my sermons. They did not say much about my delivery, but they said a lot when it came to the content of my sermons. Every sermon prepared, it seemed, was meant to satisfy my professors. Was the truth I presented solidly Reformed according to their standards? Did I explain the truth in a way that would meet with their approval and expectations? Was my application biblical? Or, was I too easily satisfied? I am assured that those sermons accomplished God's purpose and mine as a pastor. But I could not imagine spending an entire lifetime in the ministry with the pressure of those three professors examining every sermon I made!

It was not until I landed on the shores of Jamaica and had to preach to a people of very simple knowledge and faith that I learned for myself a very important truth. It was not a profound truth. It was simple. I was called by God as a pastor *to feed God's sheep*! My preaching had to be shaped and molded in such a way that God's people on the island were fed. I shortened the length of my sermons, since their attention span would not carry them beyond half an hour. I made chalkboards for every church and used illustrations in my sermons. I realized that they had little or no knowledge of Reformed terminology so I could assume nothing. The sermons were simple and drove home one point. With those adjustments, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that I was indeed feeding God's sheep and causing them to grow in their knowledge of God's Word.

Three times on the shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus commanded Peter to feed His sheep or lambs. One of these times (John 21:16) the word Jesus used for feed was to *shepherd* the flock. This term implies all the work of a shepherd. It contains the idea of oversight, protection, and nurturing through admonition. Already in this word we find the care that a pastor unselfishly imparts on the members of

his congregation. His chief concern is not to impress his members with his knowledge or to rule over them with a rod of iron. He loves the members of his church and he will expend himself in his care over them.

Two times (John 21:15 and 17) Jesus also commanded Peter to *pasture* His sheep. The idea behind this term is that of nourishing or feeding God's people. This ought to be our focus as pastors when we preach and teach. We must be able to provide God's sheep with the richest pastures—wholesome, green grass. We must not attempt to prove our impressive intellectual abilities. We must not attempt to prove how dynamic our delivery can be. We must not attempt to prove ourselves to be professors of theology. We are the under-shepherds of our Lord Jesus Christ who receive the command from our Chief Shepherd: make sure My people are fed with My Word! As ministers we need to know our sheep, love our sheep, understand their needs, and each Sunday provide God's people with the nourishing meal of God's Word.

When a young man finally walks through the seminary doors with diploma in hand, and his calling as a minister is sealed by means of an objective call into a congregation, he is equipped with a deep well of theological knowledge. But he ought to understand that for God's people to be nourished, they must understand what the preacher is saying. It is not difficult for a pastor to preach a sermon so deep and intellectual or philosophical that it goes beyond the understanding of God's people. On the other hand, a young minister might attempt to overcompensate in the other direction and preach a sermon so shallow, that the sheep are given straw and stubble for grass. When I returned from Jamaica and took up my labors in the Protestant Reformed Churches again, I have always strove to keep this truth before my mind: I must constantly examine my preaching—the content, the presentation, and the delivery—to see to it that God's sheep are fed, fattened, satiated with the Word of God through the lively preaching of the gospel.

The PRC seminary equips a man to do that. That is indeed the goal of the education men receive in seminary. I am sure this truth of feeding God's sheep is emphasized in seminary over and over again. But until that is written upon the heart and soul of a preacher, his

preaching may be formally sound, yet lacking in purpose and zeal. Our ministers well know from their seminary days that with practice preaching exercises comes constructive criticism in the areas of both content and delivery. Both are important. Not only is it essential to bring the Word in all its beauty and depth, but it is necessary to bring it clearly and in a lively manner. For some, both come naturally. For others, one comes more naturally than the other. Some can develop a sermon with pith, but it takes more work delivering that sermon in a lively manner. Still others are natural when it comes to delivery but need to work hard at developing the concepts in an understandable way. Training in the PRC seminary teaches men to use the talents and gifts God has given them in order that they might overcome their weaknesses and turn them into strengths. And it does an excellent job in doing this. We can thank God for our seminary training.

But though this is true, nevertheless, once a man is out of seminary it is easy for him slowly to drift back into some of his former weaknesses. He might be too philosophical, too dogmatic, dry, and abstract. He might be too shallow, skipping over the doctrinal basis for the people's practical living. He might tell too many stories. He might be prone to preach his exegesis. When we as pastors graduate from seminary, we ought not think that we have attained—that there is no more room for improvement. We have not attained. We must continue to develop in our preaching.

We must do this as far as content is concerned. We need to grow in our development of the concepts of Scripture. We may learn how to develop a concept of the Bible such as grace, for example. We may know the error of common grace backward and forward. We may understand the beauty of God's sovereign, particular grace, but if we bring it to God's people in exactly the same way each time without developing it further, our preaching is going to become stale and repetitious. Likewise, we need to develop in how we bring God's Word. When I look back to the beginning of my ministry, I think I might have been one who fell asleep under my own preaching. I thank God for patient and understanding elders and congregation. The point is: there is a need to develop in our preaching beyond seminary.

II. The Reasons

Let us examine a number of reasons for our need to develop. Two of the reasons relate to our own personal benefit as preachers.

In the first place, there is a need soon after seminary to develop our own style. I realize there are some students who already begin to do this in seminary. But that is not true for most. And even for those who do begin to develop this already in seminary, they must be aware of their need to continue to develop their style after they have begun their ministry. This is true from the point of view of one's *delivery.* Students who have graduated from seminary often mimic the stance, facial expressions, and even the voice inflections of one or another of their professors. This is not a bad thing, of course. But there is a need to develop in our delivery in order to reveal to God's saints who *we* are. The same is true of the *content* of our preaching. Different ministers have different ways of presenting the truth. And that is a good thing. Each of us has our own personality and characteristics. The beauty and wonder of the preaching is that every minister of the gospel leaves the imprint of his own personality and study on what he proclaims. This needs to be evident in our preaching. This does not mean that a minister may stray from the clear meaning of the Word of God he preaches in order to be unique in his presentation of the gospel. The Word of God is the objective standard of truth. The meaning of God's Word does not vary from one person to the next. Nevertheless, the unique quality that is ours in delivering the Word of God must shine forth through our preaching. That is the beauty of God's use of many different men to expound his Word.

I remember the instruction one of our professors gave us in class about this while I was in seminary. He told us of the time he was a student attending Calvin College. One of his professors there found out he was studying to be a minister in our churches. Our professor passed on to us the sage advice of his professor to him: "You know, you may have a little Hoeksema in you when you preach. That's all right. You may have a little Ophoff in you too. But, by all means, make sure your preaching reveals Herman Hanko."

Also for our personal benefit, a second reason for developing in our preaching beyond seminary is that we do not become stale. We may not be too quick "to turn over the pile" (of sermons we have writ-

ten)! This was another piece of advice passed on by our professors in seminary. The temptation confronts us as ministers, especially after we have preached the Heidelberg Catechism a few times, that we save ourselves a little time and "turn over the pile." But preaching needs to be fresh. This will be true only when we continue making new sermons, *and* developing in the way we present the various truths of Scripture. We are faced over and over again with the same truths. In seminary we are taught the doctrines and various concepts of Scripture. But when a student becomes a preacher he may not simply repeat over and over again what he was taught. He must push himself to develop the truth of God's Word. He must develop a fresh approach in order to keep his preaching lively and instructive.

These are two personal reasons we must always continue developing beyond seminary.

There are two additional reasons to develop in our preaching beyond seminary. These will be of benefit to *the sheep.*

Number one is this: both the needs and the spiritual level of a particular congregation vary from one to the next. I already referred to this earlier in connection with my preaching in Jamaica. I have also run into this when preaching on the home mission field. And, although the difference in spiritual maturity is more subtle when changing from one of our congregations to another, it is there also. We must be able to adapt our preaching to meet the maturity level of the congregation to which we are called. Though it is true that the spiritual needs of God's people are always the same, and though it is true that the same sins are prevalent everywhere, we will find that each congregation has its own unique personality—strengths and weaknesses. This is evident from Christ's letters to the seven churches in Asia in Revelation 2 and 3. Ephesus was strong doctrinally but had lost her first love. Smyrna was persecuted. Laodicea was spiritually lukewarm and proud in riches. And so the list goes on. A pastor must be able to adapt his preaching to the particular needs and weaknesses of that congregation to which he is called. He has to nurture in himself a spiritual understanding, a certain perception needed to address wisely and patiently in his preaching the needs of his flock of sheep. If a pastor does not develop, he will not be able to address those needs as they arise. He will be stuck in a holding pattern.

The other reason for ministers to develop, from the point of view of the congregations to which they minister, is the need always to remain fresh in our application. Both the culture and the circumstances in the lives of God's people change as time goes on. The church world at large becomes more apostate. Our political leaders change. Social issues change. We ought not to be stuck pounding on the same old issues year after year, when those issues have little relevance to God's people anymore. We need to accommodate the way we apply God's Word, in order to expose the new errors and temptations that Satan casts before God's sheep to lure them away from the fold.

III. The Means

There are a few practical methods that ministers can use to develop in their preaching. The first means is one that is pounded into the head of every seminary student: read! Obviously, when a pastor reads, he is exposed in his reading to different ideas and different styles of conveying the Word. Depending on what books we are reading—and we need to read a wide variety of books—we can learn how to improve both the delivery and content of sermons. Doctrinal books will help improve our understanding of the doctrinal issues afloat in our present church world. Books of a practical nature will help us develop in our ministry at large, but also in our ability to feed the sheep. There are pastoral books, books on missions, books on church history, church polity, doctrine, social issues, and so the list can go on. We need to read. That is a must in our development as preachers.

The ability to read varies from one pastor to another. Some can zip through a book swiftly and effortlessly, while others take more time to read a book. The retention of some is beyond that of others. Even in this area talents vary. Some can read a book in hours; for others it may take a few days. But that ought never deter the pastor from reading. Reading is the chief means of development in our preaching.

But there are also other means. The use of these means, however, takes humility. We need to listen to people. We need to listen to the elders. But we need to listen to the members of the church. They too, after all, fill the office of all believer. What they say ought to be of importance to the minister. As we have noticed, ministers have their weaknesses. Sometimes the flaw that may characterize a man's

preaching is a little one. Other times there are more serious weaknesses that may characterize him. A short time can be devoted on family visitation to the question: are you being fed by the preaching? I do not believe that a lengthy period of time ought to be spent on this question since the occasion of family visitation is to determine the spiritual welfare within the home and family. But the pastor and the elders need to listen to the sheep concerning the preaching too. If there is a common complaint, the pastor ought to consider that complaint seriously in order to change and develop positively. And certainly, the pastor needs to listen to the elders if he is going to develop properly in his preaching. The pastor needs to understand that he and the elders are on the same side. They both have the spiritual health of God's sheep in mind.

One last means the preacher must use to develop in his preaching beyond seminary: he must make himself a part of the church. We will not be effective preachers if we sit in our ivory palaces and do not enter into the life of the sheep. They must be able to see us as one with them. They must see us as a friend. Not just a *dominie* (lord), but a friend. They must hear us speak of our need for Christ and the joy we receive in our salvation. They must see in us a humble admission that we too are sinners. We are no different than they are. When we become a part of the life of the church, then we will see firsthand the needs of God's sheep. We will be able to take God's Word and bring it to them as one that they know is applying that Word to himself just as well as he is applying it to them.

May God by His grace work in the hearts of pastors and teachers in the church that they might see their need to develop in their preaching once in the active pastorate. May God's name be glorified by means of their preaching. May God's sheep be fed and His flock gathered. ●

The Elders' Supervision of the Preaching

Ronald L. Cammenga

Important Underlying Principles

The focus of this article is on the elders' supervision of the preaching. Many elders have questions about this calling. They wonder about what constitutes the calling. And they wonder how practically to implement the calling. Often they have questions about putting into place some regular type of review of the preaching that gives the elders opportunity to offer constructive (helpful) criticism of the preaching, including suggestions for improvement.

I want to begin by taking the time to lay the groundwork for this calling. In laying the groundwork, I want to call attention to some important principles of Reformed church government that are related to the calling of the elders to supervise the preaching of their minister. In establishing the calling of the elders to supervise the preaching, I want to begin by establishing more generally the calling of the elders to supervise the life and work of the minister. If the elders are called to supervise the life and work of their minister, then included in that calling is also the calling to supervise the preaching specifically.

One of the important principles that comes into play is the principle of the parity of officebearers. The parity of officebearers refers to the equality of officebearers. This principle distinguishes Reformed church polity and Reformed church government from all hierarchical views of church government. Fundamental to all hierarchical systems of church government is the distinction between superior and inferior church officers. The most extreme form of hierarchical church government is the government of the Roman Catholic Church. It is literally ruled from the top down. The head of the church on earth, the one officebearer over all other officebearers, is the pope. The present pope—the first Jesuit to become a pope—is Francis. In principle, every officebearer is subject to him. Technically, all the other office-

bearers are subject to this one officebearer. Technically, all the other officebearers in the Roman Catholic Church are under the supervision of this one officebearer, who rules supreme over the church on earth, that is, over every visible congregation and the officebearers in every congregation.

The Reformers rejected hierarchy; they rejected hierarchy as a fundamental denial of the headship of Christ in the church. The church has one Head and that one Head is the resurrected, exalted, reigning Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:18, "And he [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." In I Peter 2:25 the apostle Peter calls Christ "the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." Christ is *the* Bishop or Elder in the church. Every other officebearer in the church is subject to him and holds office from him.

It also follows from the fact that Christ is the supreme Ruler in the church that beneath Him all earthly officebearers are of equal authority. The Reformed churches rejected hierarchy and confessed the parity of officebearers in what was the first article in the old Dutch Reformed church orders, the article that was referred to as "the anti-hierarchical article." It is now nearly the last article in Reformed church orders. In the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches it is Article 84 of eighty-six articles: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches [as does the Church of Rome], no minister over other ministers [as does the pope], no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons."[1] The Articles of Wezel, adopted at the Convent of Wezel, 1568, the first gathering of church leaders of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, in chapter 4, Article 7 warned elders that they "not lay claim to any authority nor to any liberty to lord it over the ministers (of the Word) nor over the church…."[2] In chapter 4, Article 9 the Convent warned that the elders "ought to be fully aware of the

1 *Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 403.

2 P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuiper, *Ecclesiastical Manual, Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches*, trans. Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), 31.

fact that it in no way pertains to their office to establish rules or to exercise authority, be it over the ministers of the Word, their fellow officebearers, or over the church" as they please.[3] In other words, their rule is not an absolute and arbitrary rule. Chapter 8, Article 14 warns every minister against "seeking to lord it over the church or his colleagues." And Article 15 mentions the sins that call for reprimand and censure in the ministers, among which is "striving to command and to lord it over the church and their colleagues."[4]

The parity or equality of officebearers has two aspects to it. There is the parity among officebearers holding different offices—parity of offices. There is equality of the ministers in relation to the elders and deacons. Theirs is not a superior office. There is also equality of the elders in relation to ministers and deacons. And there is equality of deacons in relation to the ministers and elders. One office is not above or over the other offices; but there is equality among officebearers who are given authority in their own sphere. As they carry out the duties peculiar to their own office and calling, the work of preaching, or ruling, or collecting and distributing the alms, there is equality among the three offices in the church.

The second aspect of parity of officebearers concerns equality among officebearers functioning in the same office. No minister is over the other ministers. No elder is over the other elders. No deacon is over the other deacons. The practical manifestation of this aspect of the parity of officebearers is in voting. In voting at council, consistory, and deacons meetings, as is also the case at classis and synod meetings, the rule is one man one vote. The ministers are not given a greater voice at classis or synod than the elder delegates. Neither is one minister given a greater voice than another minister, one elder than another elder. This principle does not, of course, rule out deference shown to those who are older, wiser, and more experienced. It does not rule out *primus inter pares*, that is, "first or chief among equals." But it does establish the fundamental parity of officebearers. The Reformers and our Dutch Reformed forebearers fought tenaciously for the biblical principle of parity of officebearers over against every form of hierarchy.

3 P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuiper, *Ecclesiastical Manual*, 32.

4 P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuiper, *Ecclesiastical Manual*, 40.

Closely related to the parity of officebearers is the principle of the autonomy of the local church. Every local congregation is self-governing. It is not ruled over by officials outside of the local church, who impose their will on the local church. But every congregation is ruled over by those who have been elected by the members of the congregation, out of the membership of the congregation. These two principles always go hand in hand. They are really two sides of the same coin. Whenever the autonomy of the local congregation is violated, whenever its right to govern itself is taken away, and men or assemblies usurp the prerogatives of the local officebearers, there the parity of officebearers is denied on a practical level. Then the rule is taken away from the local officebearers. And rather than to rule, they are ruled over by others outside the local congregation.

Even though there is parity of officebearers, this parity does not preclude supervision, any and all supervision of the officebearers in the local congregation. It does not preclude mutual supervision. And it does not preclude supervision by the elders, the *body of elders*, in the local congregation. What is rejected is rule by one man or by a very few. The Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons speaks of this. It speaks of the government of the church being placed in the hands of a number of men "to the end, that thereby all tyranny and lording may be kept out of the church of God, which may sooner creep in, when the government is placed in the hands of one alone, or of a very few."[5] But parity of officebearers does not preclude rule by a plurality of elders in the local congregation, elders who have been chosen by the congregation and from within the congregation.

Neither does parity of offices preclude the supervision of the minister by the body of local elders. No one elder may usurp authority over the minister, not actually and not practically. No, indeed! But the elders together, the elders as a body, are called to supervise the life and work of the minister. The elders may not usurp the duties of the minister: preaching and the administration of the sacraments.[6] But

5 *Confessions and Church Order*, 291.

6 This is the explanation in the Reformed tradition for "reading sermons." In the Reformed tradition, ruling elders were not permitted to make their own sermons, but were permitted to read the sermons that had been

without usurping the office of the minister, the elders may and must supervise the minister's carrying out of the duties of his office.

Demonstration of the Elders' Calling to Supervise the Life and Work of the Minister

But can it be demonstrated that it is the calling of the elders to supervise the life and work of the minister? Without question, this can be demonstrated. That the elders have this calling is evident from the Church Order, Article 23, which describes the calling peculiar to the elders.

> The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders, and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion.[7]

This article in its present form was first adopted by the Synod of the Hague in 1586. The first thing that Article 23 mentions as the office peculiar to the elders "is to take heed" to the ministers. In commenting on this article of the Church Order, Van Dellen and Monsma state in *The Church Order Commentary*:

> The Elders should give particular heed to the Ministers of the gospel. It is of prime importance that these preach and teach correctly and effectively, and that their labors are performed in all faithfulness.[8]

Herman Hanko, emeritus professor of the Protestant Reformed

prepared for that purpose by ministers of the Word. In the Presbyterian tradition, which emphasizes that the ruling and teaching elder occupy basically the same office, it was usually permitted ruling elders to make and preach their own sermons in the absence of a minister.

7 *Confessions and Church Order*, 388.

8 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), 108.

Theological Seminary, commenting on Article 23 in his *Notes on the Church Order*, says:

> The minister is also under the supervision of the elders. He, too, is subject to their rule. This is true as far as his personal life is concerned. He is not above the consistory in any way. His doctrine and conversation are subject to the scrutiny of the consistory."[9]

Canadian Reformed theologian W. W. J. Van Oene, in his commentary on the Church Order entitled *With Common Consent* writes:

> We also mention as belonging to the specific duties of the office of elder that they have supervision of their fellow office-bearers…. What they in particular should pay attention to is the purity of doctrine and the sanctity of conduct of the ministers of the Word.[10]

G. Van Rongen and K. Deddens conclude that this article of the Church Order calls upon the elders "to supervise [the minister's] doctrine and conduct."[11] And J. L. Schaver, in the first volume of *The Polity of the Churches*, states:

> In presbyterial polity the Consistory or Session exercises a greater control over the minister than is exercised by any group within independent or episcopal congregations. But this control lays upon the eldership of presbyterially-governed churches the solemn obligation to use it judiciously.[12]

That it is the calling of the elders to supervise the minister is made plain by the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons. The Form begins by discussing the institution of the office of elder, proceeding then to "the office of elders," that is, the duties of their office. The

9 Herman Hanko, *Notes on the Church Order* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, N.D.), 44.

10 W. W. J. Van Oene, *With Common Consent* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1990), 107.

11 G. Van Rongen and K. Deddens, *Decently and in Good Order* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1986), 49.

12 J. L. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, vol. 1 (Oak Lawn, IL: Church Polity Press, 1947), 1:163-4.

Form identifies three main duties. First, the elders are called to exercise oversight over the congregation, that is, over the members of the congregation generally. Second, it is their calling to see to it that "all things are done decently and in order amongst Christians" in the life and particularly in the worship of the congregation. And, third,

> [i]t is also the[ir] duty particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church; and that no strange doctrine be taught…."[13]

The calling of the elders to supervise the life and work of the minister is also evident from the Questions for Church Visitation, which are used in the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sister churches at the time that the annual church visitation is conducted. Six questions are put to the elders and deacons in the absence of the minister. These questions focus on the calling of the minister, to be sure. But they also include his life and work more generally. Among these questions, the very first question asks: "Does the minister…do his work faithfully according to the Word of God, the Forms of Unity, and the Church Order?" The fourth question is: "Does the minister reveal himself as a worthy example?" And the fifth question is: "Is he devoted as much as possible to the exercise of his office?"[14]

The calling of the elders to supervise the minister is also implied in the Reformed practice of *censura morem* (Latin for "censure of morals" or "censure of conduct"), as prescribed by the Church Order, Article 81. The article reads:

> The ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons shall before the celebration of the Lord's Supper exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office.[15]

13 *Confessions and Church Order*, 146.

14 *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2010 edition), 134-5.

15 *Confessions and Church Order*, 403.

The article calls for *mutual* supervision, to be sure; but included in that mutual supervision is also the calling of the elders as elders to supervise the minister's discharge of his office.

The fact that the elders, along with the deacons, compose the trios from which ministers are called, as well as issue and sign the ministerial call letter, also implies their duty to supervise the work of the minister. Their involvement in the process of calling a minister and their oversight of the process from beginning to end, implies that the minister who has been called, should he accept the call, is subject to the supervision of the elders.

The calling that the elders have to supervise the life and work of the minister is grounded in Scripture. This is reflected in the New Testament practice of "laying on of hands," the significance of which ceremony in part is that the elders bestow the right on the minister to exercise his office in the church. Paul exhorts the young pastor Timothy not to neglect the gift that is in him, "which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14). This stands behind the apostle's warning in the very next chapter (1 Tim. 5:22), that the elders "[l]ay hands suddenly on no man." In 1 Corinthians 14:32, the apostle warns that "the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets." No prophet is on his own to do and teach as he pleases; but every prophet is subject to his fellow prophets. In New Testament terms, every teaching elder is subject to his fellow elders in the church, the ruling elders. In Colossians 4:17 Paul admonishes the members of the Colossian congregation to "say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."[16] That they are to "say" to Archippus that he is to take heed to fulfill his ministry simply means that they are to call and encourage him to fulfill all the different aspects of the calling that God had given him. If the church as a whole is to exhort Archippus to take heed to his ministry, how much more are not the elders of the church called to do this. And if the elders must exhort

16 Archippus is also mentioned in Philemon 2 where Paul refers to him as "our fellow soldier" and where he is mentioned along with Apphia and seems to be a member of Philemon's household, as well as "the church that is in thy [Philemon's] house." Archippus appears to have been a Greek convert; his name means "chief of the horse."

Archippus to carry out the duties of his ministry, it is certainly implied that they have the calling to oversee Archippus' work in the ministry. Both his life and his work as a minister of the gospel are subject to the elders, the very elders who called him to labor in the Colossian congregation and laid their hands upon him when he began his labors.

The Elders' Supervision of the Preaching

As they have the calling to supervise the life and work of the minister generally, so do the elders also have the calling to supervise the minister's preaching. I am fully aware that this is a very sensitive subject. It is a sensitive matter for the minister whose preaching the elders are called to scrutinize. From his point of view, his sermons are very personal. Perhaps only a minister can fully understand the fact that the minister pours himself into the sermons that he makes. To have his sermons critiqued, though necessary, can be a very painful thing. The elders need to remember that, too, in their criticism of their minister's preaching. They must be sure that their criticism and the way in which they critique their minister's sermons reflects an awareness of this reality.

But the elders' supervision of the preaching is also a sensitive subject as far as the elders are concerned. They often feel that they are inadequate to evaluate their minister's sermons. At times the minister is not a young, recently ordained seminary graduate, but an experienced man. That can add to the elders' sense of inadequacy. They may even be somewhat intimidated. If things are right in the relationship between the elders and the minister, then the elders love the man who God has sent to be their pastor, and they certainly do not want to hurt their brother. That can certainly contribute to a hesitancy to criticize the minister's preaching. At times, they recognize a difficulty or deficiency in the preaching, but struggle to "get a handle" on the real cause of the problem and are uncertain what the solution to the problem may be.

As sensitive as the subject is, I believe that it is a critically important aspect of the calling of the elders in every congregation. As elders they are called not only to supervise the life and work of the minister generally; but they are also called specifically to supervise his preaching. I believe that there can be no question that this belongs to

the work that God gives to elders. From a certain point of view, this is not merely one of the duties of the elders, but is the *most important* calling that the elders have. Their supervision of the congregation begins, must begin with their supervision of the minster's preaching. If the main calling that the church has is the calling to preach the gospel, if this is the main task that the minister of the gospel has, it is crucially important that the elders supervise the preaching. At the same time, the elders' supervision of the preaching, properly carried out, will pay rich dividends. It will pay rich dividends for the minister who will grow, develop, and mature under the watchful care of his elders. It will also pay rich dividends in the congregation, which will in turn benefit from the development and growth of the minister.

That the elders have the calling to supervise the preaching of the minister can easily be established. That the elders have this calling is evident from the Church Order, Article 23, which describes the calling peculiar to the elders. The article begins:

> The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers…faithfully discharge their office…."[17]

We have already taken note that the first thing that Article 23 mentions as the "office of the elders" is the oversight of the minister. And if the main calling of the minister is the preaching of the gospel, and it is, it follows that the main duty of the elders is the oversight of the preaching of the minister.

In commenting on Church Order, Article 23, Van Dellen and Monsma say:

> The Elders should give particular heed to the Ministers of the Gospel. It is of prime importance that these preach and teach correctly and effectively, and that their labors are performed in all faithfulness.[18]

The elders are to see to it that the ministers "preach and teach correctly and effectively." In his *Notes on the Church Order*, Herman Hanko, after pointing out that the minister "is also under the supervision of

17 *Confessions and Church Order*, 388.

18 Van Dellen and Monsma, *Church Order Commentary*, 108.

the elders," and that this supervision involves the "scrutiny of the consistory" of "[h]is doctrine and conversation," adds that "especially his preaching is under their supervision."[19] W. W. J. Van Oene also calls for the elders to take special care to supervise the preaching of the minister.

> Many a time it happened that under the cloak of pious terms and Scripturally-sounding expressions errors and heresies were introduced by way of the pulpit and the Catechism classes. Therefore the elders should not only listen attentively and discerningly when the Word is being proclaimed, but they also ought to visit and attend catechism classes unannounced. This is no proof of distrust or suspicion, but belongs to their duty to exercise supervision of the minister of the Word.[20]

Van Rongen and Deddens recommend that as part of the elders' supervision of the minister's preaching, it will be useful that there be "discussion of the minister's preaching every now and then arranged at a consistory meeting."[21]

Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster begin chapter 12 of their very worthwhile book on the office of elder, *The Elders Handbook,* by stating: "The primary task of the Church is the preaching of the Word of God. The primary task of the elder, therefore, is oversight of the preaching."[22] After pointing out the importance of the involvement of the elders in the calling, training, examination, and ordination of those who occupy the preaching office in the church, they go on to point out the importance of the elders' ongoing responsibility to supervise the preaching of the minister.

> Still more deeply involved, however, is each elder in the local consistory which is responsible for what is said from the pulpit. To fulfill this high obligation, the most important in the Church, the elder must

19 Hanko, *Notes on the Church Order*, 44.

20 Van Oene, *With Common Consent*, 170.

21 Van Rongen and Deddens, *Decently and in Good Order*, 49.

22 Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster, *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 1979), 153.

> acquaint himself with what preaching should be, and how it can be evaluated.[23]

That it is the calling of the elders to supervise the preaching is made plain by the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons. The Form begins by discussing the institution of the office of elder, proceeding then to "the office of elders," that is, the duties of their office. As we have already seen, the Form identified three main duties. First, the elders are called to exercise oversight over the individual members of the congregation. Second, it is their calling to see to it that "all things are done decently and in order amongst Christians" in the congregation. And, third,

> [i]t is also the[ir] duty particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church; and that no strange doctrine be taught….[24]

The calling of the elders to supervise the preaching is also evident from the questions that are asked at the annual church visitation. These questions have already been referred to in order to establish the calling of the elders generally to supervise the life and doctrine of the minister. But these questions can also be appealed to in order to establish the calling of the elders to supervise the minister's preaching. Six questions are put to the elders and deacons in the absence of the minister. As already indicated, these questions focus on the calling of the minister, and especially his main calling to preach the Word. Some of the questions specifically concern the minister's preaching. Among those questions, the very first question is: "Does the minister *in the preaching* and in the administration of the sacraments do his work faithfully according to the Word of God, the Forms of Unity, and the Church Order?" The second question is: "Does the minister *faithfully explain God's Word* so that the congregation is built up through his *preaching*?" There are really two questions in this latter question, two closely related but distinct questions. "Does the minister faithfully explain God's Word…." That is one question; that is the first

23 Berghoef and De Koster, *Elders Handbook*, 153.

24 *Confessions and Church Order*, 291.

question. That is the main thing that the elders are called to judge and to have regard to. That is the main thing, but it is not the only thing; this too: "so that the congregation is built up through the preaching?" "Is the preaching the truth," as important as that question is, is not the only question. Some suppose that it is. They are mistaken, seriously mistaken. "Does the minister preach the truth *in an edifying way*?" That is also something that the elders are called upon to judge. That too belongs to the supervision of the preaching. As one elder recently said to me, to take the position that the only thing that the elders must be concerned for is that the minister preach the truth is to set the bar too low. Van Dellen and Monsma underscore this same truth when they say that the elders must "give particular heed to the Ministers" in order that "these preach and teach correctly and effectively."[25] The ministers must preach and teach "correctly," to be sure. But they must also preach and teach "effectively." The elders must judge not only the correctness of the preaching—the minister's orthodoxy. But they must also judge his effectiveness—whether his preaching is building up the congregation.

That question must not be confused with the question, "Is the congregation growing numerically?" That question may also be rightly asked. To be sure, it is often asked wrongly. But it may be asked rightly. We may desire numerical growth; we may pray for numerical growth; we may even expect numerical growth. We may expect normal internal growth in the congregation, as God uses the preaching of the Word to gather elect believers in the line of their generations. We may expect growth from without, as God uses the preaching of the gospel to gather the elect into the church, all "such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). But the minister's preaching may be edifying, edifying in itself, while at the same time members are leaving and the church is shrinking numerically. That needs to happen sometimes, and there are times when God uses the preaching to accomplish that negative, sifting purpose. The minister must not be discouraged over that. And neither must the elders be discouraged over that. They certainly must not jump to the conclusion that there is something wrong with the minister's preaching. Together minister and elders, as well as the members of the congregation must humbly

25 Van Dellen and Monsma, *Church Order Commentary*, 108.

submit to the will of God who accomplishes His sovereign purpose in the preaching of the gospel, even when the preaching functions as a means of hardening and a savor of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:15, 16). The fifth question for church visitation is, "Is [the minister] devoted as much as possible to the exercise of his office?" The elders are required to make a judgment concerning this. Implied, clearly, is the calling of the elders to supervise the preaching of their pastor. That is especially "his office"[26] and the unique calling to which the minister is to devote himself.

The calling of the elders to supervise the preaching also is implied in the Reformed practice of *censura morem*, according to Article 81 of the Church Order. This practice has already been referred to in connection with the calling of the elders to supervise the minister's life and doctrine in general. But the practice also underscores the calling of the elders particularly to supervise the minister's preaching. If *censura morem* concerns the minister's "discharge of his office," which office is primarily the preaching office in the church, then clearly the elders are called to exercise supervision over the preaching. In the "discharge of his office," the minister is not a law unto himself, but is under authority, the authority of his ruling elders.

The calling that the elders have to supervise the preaching of the minister is grounded in Scripture. This is reflected in the New Testament practice of the "laying on of hands," the significance of which ceremony is partly that the elders bestow the right and authority on the one upon whom hands are laid to exercise the office of the ministry in the church. Paul exhorts the young pastor Timothy not to neglect "the gift" that is in him, "which [gift] was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14). If Timothy possessed "the gift" of preaching by means of the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, or, elders, it follows that the elders ought to supervise the use of this gift. This calling of the elders stands behind the apostle's warning in the very next chapter (1 Tim. 5:22), that the elders "lay hands suddenly on no man." Caution is to be exercised by the elders in ordaining men into the preaching office in the church.

The calling of the elders faithfully to supervise the preaching is

26 *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 134-5. Emphasis added.

clearly implied in a passage such as Acts 20:28-31, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." The elders must take heed to themselves and to all the flock, which certainly includes the minister. They are to have a special care to the "feed[ing] of the church of God," which feeding takes place primarily through the preaching of the gospel. By means of the preaching, the sheep and flock of God are led into the green pastures of God's truth and Word. The elders are to take heed to the flock in order to guard against the "grievous wolves" who desire to scatter and destroy the flock. Those "grievous wolves" are especially false teachers. The apostle's admonition to the elders is an admonition that primarily concerns their calling, therefore, to supervise and safeguard the preaching in the congregation.

In 1 Corinthians 14:32, the apostle warns that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." That clearly implies, not only mutual supervision, but the supervision of the elders over the minister's preaching. That supervision is to be exercised in such a way that the teaching of the prophet/minister is to be in harmony with the collective teaching of the prophets recorded in sacred Scripture. But that judgment as to whether or not the prophet/minister's preaching is in harmony with the revealed Word of God is the judgment that is to be made by the elders.

With regard to this whole matter of the supervision of the preaching by the elders, the example of the apostle Paul is instructive. The apostle, along with Barnabas, was initially sent out by the congregation of Antioch, through the elders of that congregation who laid their hands on the apostle and Barnabas. At the conclusion of the apostle's missionary journeys, he consistently reported to the elders of Antioch concerning what had been accomplished on the journey (cf. Acts 14:27; 18:22). We may assume that Paul would also have reported to them after the third missionary journey, as he had done at

the conclusion of the first and second journeys, but before he could do so he was captured in Jerusalem (Acts 21). Paul's reporting to the elders of the church at Antioch, his "calling church," indicates that he acknowledged their rightful supervision of his missionary preaching, and not only acknowledged it, but gladly submitted to it. Even though he was an apostle, directly called by the ascended Lord Jesus Christ, he yet submitted his preaching to the supervision of the elders.

The elders' supervision of the minister's preaching was symbolized in the past by a practice that was common in the Dutch Reformed churches, a practice not very widespread any longer. I am referring to the practice of shaking the minister's hand not only at the end of his sermon, but at the beginning of the worship service as well. The practice was (is) that by turn one of the elders led the consistory and the minister into the sanctuary. At the foot of the pulpit he turned and shook the minister's hand, thus signifying that the consistory opened the pulpit to him and his preaching. And then, at the conclusion of the service, a second handshake symbolized the consistory's approval of the sermon that had been preached. Especially that first handshake symbolized the elders' supervision over the preaching. The authority of the elders extended to the minister and the minister's preaching. In opening to him the pulpit, the elders were granting the minister permission to preach. If they granted permission to the minister to preach, they certainly exercised supervision over what was preached.

Two Threats to the Elders' Supervision of the Preaching

It is worthwhile to call attention to two dangers that threaten the elders' calling to supervise the preaching. These are real threats that the elders and ministers must be on their guard against.

First, the threat exists that the minister resists the supervision of his preaching by the elders. Sadly, it is the case that some ministers resent the supervision of their preaching by the elders. At the very least, rather than to invite such supervision, they in every way discourage it. Rather than to open themselves up to the scrutiny of the elders, they make it very plain, if not by their words, by their body language, by their response to what the elders do bring up, and by their general demeanor that they resent any discussion and evaluation of their preaching by the elders. Arrogantly—there can be no other

explanation—they suppose that their preaching is above the inspection and criticism of the elders. They, after all, are the one with the seminary training. They have the advanced degree. And besides, they fancy themselves to be gifted pulpiteers who really could not be helped by the counsel of lowly elders.

We need to judge this attitude for what it is. It is pride, nothing but pride—the very worst sin that a minister can be guilty of. What this points out is that it takes humility, humility on the part of the minister that is born of the awareness that he is Christ's servant and the servant of His blood-bought people. Humility that has its source in the consciousness that God is always pleased to use weakest means to fulfill His will, in order that the glory for the salvation of sinners may belong to Him alone. Humility that arises out of the awareness that no man deserves the high calling of the office of the ministry of the Word. Humility that includes the sense on the part of the minister of the profound privilege that is his to serve in the office of Christ, as His spokesman and His representative. Humility that is born of grace—amazing grace.

And for the minister to resist elders' supervision of his preaching is foolishness—the height of folly! Generally, the elders in a congregation are older, wiser, more experienced men. They may not have the seminary training, but they have generally listened to sermons for decades, sermons by many different ministers. They may not know all the technical homiletical and exegetical jargon, but they know what a good sermon is. They know what kind of sermon edifies a congregation, what kind of sermon addresses the needs of the congregation, and what kind of sermon honors Christ and His cross, what kind of sermon humbles man and glorifies God. They can help the minister, especially the young minister. They can help the young minister *who listens to his elders*. They will guide the young minister and aid in his development. They will assist him in increasing his effectiveness in the congregation. He has everything to gain from opening himself up to the elders' evaluation of his sermons. And he will see that by doing so, he will strengthen his relationship to his elders. They will appreciate his humble spirit. And the outcome will be the cementing of a minister's relationship to his elders, something crucial to a long and happy ministry in any congregation.

The second threat to the calling of the elders properly to supervise the preaching of their pastor is abuse of the calling. As always, there are two ditches on either side of the road. The one ditch is neglect of the calling; failure altogether to carry it out. The other ditch is abuse of the calling. As far as this abuse is concerned, it may be perpetrated sometimes by well-meaning elders who simply do not carry out the calling in the best way, or wait for years to carry out the calling until abruptly, often when things have reached a crisis point in the congregation, they insist on their calling to supervise the minister's preaching. When things do reach a crisis point in a congregation, the elders often need help. And they ought to get help. The best place for them to go for help is to the church visitors. Over the years, many ministers and congregations have been helped by the careful, wise counsel of the church visitors.

But there is also the abuse perpetrated by elders who intend not to help the minister, but to break the minister. They are not motivated, not really, by love for Christ's representative in their congregation. They do not have the proper regard for the office, the high and holy office of the ministry of the gospel. They often have an agenda; they want to control the minister so that he promotes their agenda, sometimes even the countenancing of a false doctrine, like the conditional covenant view or antinomianism. They fancy themselves to be expert sermon critics and have a preconceived mold into which they insist every sermon must fit. They are looking for the minister to say certain things in nearly every sermon. And usually, they are not just critical, but hyper-critical. The minister can do no good and no matter how hard he tries and no matter what he says, they find fault. They are part of the reason, I think, that Paul advises Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim. 5:23). They are determined to make life miserable for the minister, either to send him packing at the next call that he receives, or to send him out of the ministry altogether.

Sadly, this has happened in the history of the church—in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. And it is ugly and shameful and an abuse of the rightful calling that the elders have. It is something that ought never to characterize the elders in their supervision of the preaching.

What the Elders Ought to Evaluate in the Sermons

Extremes and abuses aside, there is a good and beneficial place for the proper oversight of the preaching by the elders—what can be said with regard to what the elders ought to evaluate in the minister's sermons. I want to present guidelines and I want to touch on the main aspects of the elders' supervision of the preaching. Other things could be mentioned than will be, and more could be said about those things that I will mention. But hopefully what I present will provide a basic structure for the elders as they strive to carry out their calling to supervise the preaching of their pastor.

First, as far as the main concern of the elders in evaluating the preaching of their minister, they ought to focus on the *content* of the sermons. That ought to be the main thing that they evaluate in the sermons. This is not to say that the elders ought never to say anything to their pastor about his delivery. Delivery stands in the service of the content. Especially certain bad habits can become obstacles to receiving the content, as solid as that content may be: too rapid or too slow a delivery; a delivery in which the minister nearly continually shouts the Word at the congregation; poor eye contact; note-boundedness; a lack of correct pronunciation and clear enunciation of words; sermons delivered in a monotone, without any variety in pitch or volume; a lack of illustrations and examples. Especially younger ministers ought to have these things pointed out to them so that they do not become entrenched in these bad habits, lest over the years it becomes nearly impossible for them to correct these deficiencies in delivery.

But the main focus of the elders ought to be on the *content* of the sermons, the substance of the messages. In the case of a sermon based on a text of Scripture, is the sermon expository, that is, does it faithfully set forth the text? Does the minister really say the same thing as the text, expanded, developed, and applied? But does he nevertheless say basically the same thing as the text? Does what he says arise out of the text, as the fruit of faithful exegesis, that is, interpretation of the text? Are all the main parts of the sermon (certainly the main divisions—what are often referred to as "the three points"), part of the text? Are the main parts of the text, the main "concepts" within the text, developed in the sermon? The only question is not,

"Is what the minister says the truth?" But the question is, "Is what the minister says the truth *as* set forth specifically in the text?" That is the all-important question. Can straight lines be drawn from what the minister says in his sermon back to his text?

In the case of a Heidelberg Catechism sermon, is the sermon a faithful setting forth of the Lord's Day or of the Question and Answer that are the basis for the sermon? Is the main doctrine of the Lord's Day set forth in the sermon? And are the phrases and the language of the Catechism sufficiently explained? Every Catechism sermon is not going to say everything that can possibly be said on the basis of the Lord's Day; but is the sermon a faithful reflection of the content of the Lord's Day?

In the second place, the elders ought to ask themselves whether the sermons develop a main theme, the main theme of the text. The goal of the sermon ought to be to present the one Word of God that is unique to the sermon's text. The sermon must come down to one main thought; a single message. This is the importance in our tradition of the sermon theme, a theme that encapsulates the theme of the text. Our Reformed fathers recognized the importance of this. The sermon must present a unified message, not merely a collection of ideas. The individual points of the sermon must develop *the* point of the sermon. The people of God should go home with one Word of God ringing in their ears and they should be able to identify what that one word of God is.

Third, the elders ought to ask themselves whether the sermons are properly and sufficiently *practical*, practical in the good sense of the word. This has to do with application. This is often one of the most difficult aspects of sermon-making. But at the same time, this is one of the most necessary aspects of preaching the Word of God. Those ministers are wrong who respond to a plea for a greater amount of application in the sermons, "I preach the truth and leave application to the Holy Spirit." That often overly-defensive viewpoint is mistaken. The minister in his preaching is called to make application of the Word that he is preaching. The Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word used in the Protestant Reformed Churches, a form that goes far back into the Dutch Reformed tradition, calls attention to the importance of application in the preaching. The very first duty of the ministers is

> [t]hat they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord, revealed in the writings of the prophets and the apostles; *and apply the same* as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproving, according to every one's need….[27]

In application the minister must move from the text of Scripture written several thousand years ago to the life and calling of God's people living in the first part of the twenty-first century. The applications ought to be natural and arise out of the text, and not be forced. The minster ought to demonstrate convincingly how the applications arise from his text. Neither should the applications be reserved for the "last point," a kind of appendix to the sermon. The applications should be sprinkled throughout the sermon. In his applications, the minister must be careful to include himself. At the same time, the applications ought to be personal, warmly personal. And the applications ought to range throughout the congregation, including all the different ages and groups: the children and young people, the singles and the married, the young and the old, men and women, officebearers and those in the office of all believer.

A word of caution is in order. While the sermons must contain application, the minister can never make *every* application and he must not attempt to make every application. The members must not expect the minister to make every application. Instead, what he must aim at is making applications in such a way that his applications are more suggestive than exhaustive. The goal must be to send God's people home applying the Word themselves to their own life, to their own circumstances, to their own weaknesses and sins.

Fourth, the elders ought also to ask themselves whether the sermons are generally easy to follow, and therefore also generally easy to recall. A sermon may be the truth; it may even be the truth arising out of the specific text. But if it is presented in a convoluted and confusing way, the people are going to be lost, and are going to stop listening. Those who take notes are going to begin to doodle and eventually close their notebooks. The children and the young people are going to become restless. The minister must present the Word clearly and

27 *Confessions and Church Order*, 285. Emphasis added.

logically. He must make things clear, which is necessary for the edification of elect believers, but is also necessary for the hardening of the reprobate wicked. If the people cannot see the logic and follow the logical flow of the sermon, the sermon is seriously flawed.

In this connection, the minister must be sure that he uses understandable language. He ought to avoid flowery speech and showy rhetoric. He ought to speak plainly and directly. In the sermons, he ought to aim even for the older children to grasp most of what he says. That does not mean that he ought to avoid theological terms, like predestination, satisfaction, Trinity, regeneration, and so many other of the terms that are part of our Christian and Reformed heritage. He ought to use the more difficult theological terms in his preaching, but he ought to explain them. He must educate the people.

Fifth, the minister must preach *the cross*. The cross must permeate the sermons, and from the distinct point of view of the text, the cross must be proclaimed in every sermon. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:2 that he is determined to know nothing among the Corinthians, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And in Galatians 6:14 he says that God forbid that he should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sermons ought to proclaim every aspect of the cross. They ought to proclaim our need of the cross in our sin and misery. They ought to proclaim the cross itself in which is all our salvation—the satisfaction of the cross, the redemption of the cross, the cross as the outworking of the electing grace of God in eternity. The sermons ought to proclaim the thankful service to which we are called on account of the cross. You will recognize here the threefold division of the Heidelberg Catechism: sin, salvation, and service.

The cross must be preached, but a warning is in order. That warning is that the cross must be preached from the viewpoint of the specific text on which the sermon is based. The nature of the text must always be taken into consideration. The prominence of the cross *in the text* is going to determine its prominence *in the sermon*. It will be very prominent in a text in which the cross is mentioned explicitly, or the text is one of the narratives of Jesus' passion and death. But if the text is an exhortation, a rebuke, or a warning, the cross will naturally not be as prominent. The main thought of the text must be preached and it must be preached in the form in which it appears in the text.

Even then, it must be shown to the people of God that the exhortation, warning, or rebuke arises out of the cross and is grounded in the cross. This will inspire the gratitude to heed the exhortation, submit to the rebuke, and follow the warning.

Sixth, do the sermons exhibit hard work and are the elders convinced that the minister is a hard-working man who takes his calling seriously, and gives himself over to his calling? Do the sermons give evidence that the minister is diligent? Elders and members alike will overlook weaknesses here and there, and sermons from time to time that do not quite measure up, if they are convinced that their minister is not lazy. If they observe him working hard, they will be understanding and longsuffering. In this connection, the minister should not be afraid to ask the consistory for relief, especially if unexpected pastoral situations arise that demand his attention. Better to get relief than to go to the pulpit without proper preparation.

Seventh, does the minister deliver his sermons with passion and conviction? Is it plain that the Word arises out of his own heart and soul? Is it evident that the Word lives within the minister himself? Conviction and liveliness can be feigned, of course. That must never be! But the minister ought to be gripped by the Word that he brings to others. He must have the same conviction and exhibit the same passion as the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:16, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Or, his attitude ought to be that of the Puritan preacher Richard Baxter (1615-1691), who once said: "I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

Eighth, are the sermons antithetical and polemical? Are the errors and errorists pointed out and in the light of the text condemned? Are the people of God equipped to fight sin within and without, in the world about them, as well as in their own sinful flesh? Are the errors that are exposed not only those of the past—these, too—but also the errors of the new day? Are the contemporary threats that are a temptation to the people of God pointed out and warned against? Are the sins that threaten the congregation exposed? Or, is the impression left, if not expressly stated, that the sins mentioned in the sermons are the sins of all the other churches around us, but not the sins that are a real threat to us?

In addition, do the sermons instruct God's people in the distinctives

of the Reformed faith and life, and the distinctive history, doctrines, and practices of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America? Are the distinctives referenced, explained, and properly promoted in the preaching? Is this a matter of the heritage that we are determined to hand down to the up-and-coming generation?

And are the sermons of proper length, neither overly long, nor too short? Sermons that are too long are especially taxing on the very young—and those who must sit next to them—and the older members of the church. Especially younger ministers need to be warned against too long sermons. The elders must insist that the minister is cognizant of the time that has elapsed in the worship service and the length of his sermon. They must insist that the minister generally stays within the 40-50 minute range for the length of his sermons. It is striking how many of the early Dutch Reformed classes and synods addressed themselves to this issue and repeatedly warned against sermons that were overly long. Even good ministers, who preach good sermons, can hurt themselves in this way.

And then, are the worship services generally conducted with dignity, simplicity, and appropriateness? Do the *Psalter* numbers fit the text or the Lord's Day that is the basis for the sermon? Are the Holy Scriptures read accurately, in a dignified manner, and with appropriate expression? Are the congregational prayers of appropriate length and content? Is the language fresh and varied? Do they exhibit careful preparation? Do the prayers express praise, thanksgiving, and general and specific petitions, as well as confession of sin? Are the texts for the sermons varied in type and biblical genre, fairly evenly divided between the Old Testament and the New Testament texts and series? Are the series well-thought out in advance and before they are preached does the minister consult the elders for their input and advice?

How Should the Elders Exercise Their Supervision?

What about the *how* of the elders' supervision of the minister's preaching? How should this evaluation and supervision be carried out?

First, it should be done regularly and it should be done at the beginning of a new minister's tenure in the congregation, and should not be postponed until a crisis situation arises in a congregation. If

this is not presently a regular practice in your consistory, you ought to work at convincing your fellow elders of the importance and necessity of it. I recommend that it be done at a minimum of twice a year. It may be done quarterly. It may even be done on a monthly basis, as a regular item on the monthly agenda of the consistory. In the last two congregations in which I served, I was able to convince the elders of the importance of a twice-annual evaluation of the preaching. Both consistories did this in connection with the two rounds of family visitation, in the spring and in the fall of each year. The elders took an evening or part of an evening to evaluate the preaching after the meeting at which the last written reports of family visitation were received. In connection with the family visitation reports any criticisms of the preaching were noted by the elders in their reports and were discussed in connection with the elders' evaluation of the preaching.

Though in a way a different subject, I am strongly of the conviction that the elders and minister ought to ask in the visits to the families whether the family is edified under the preaching. Rev. Herman Hoeksema indicates that this was his practice in the course of a speech that was published under the title "Our Controversy in the Light of the Struggle of the Church of all the Ages."[28] I know that the purpose of the visits is the spiritual inspection of the families. But the spiritual condition of the family is closely and necessarily related to the preaching of the Word. Everything in a home depends on the preaching, derives from the preaching, flows out of the preaching. If the preaching is suffering, the individual or family will also suffer. If the preaching is what it should be, but the attitude of the individual or the parents towards the preaching is not what it should be, the family will also suffer. Because they occupy the office of all believer, the mature members of the family have the right to express themselves with regard to the preaching, following the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 who "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things [preached by the apostles] were so." Members may very well bring to light legitimate concerns with regard to the preaching, concerns that the elders will want to address for the good of the congregation and for the

28 This speech was published by the Oaklawn Protestant Reformed Church in Oaklawn, Illinois. Confer p. 8 of the speech where Hoeksema indicates what was his practice on family visitation.

good of the minister himself. Or, conversely, if the member's criticism of the preaching exposes a weakness, a lack of right understanding, or even a serious fault in the member, the elders will want to address this with the member and hopefully correct it. A caution is in order that the elders not allow the members to commandeer the meeting, or allow family visitation to become a "gripe session." If numerous or serious concerns over the preaching are raised, especially if there are younger children present in the family, the elders must bring the discussion of the preaching to an end with the promise that a committee of elders from the consistory will return to discuss the whole matter of the member's difficulty with the preaching in a separate meeting, a meeting with the member and his spouse alone.

At the meeting of the consistory, then, let the elders respond to and express themselves on what the members may have raised. Let the elders make their own careful evaluations. Let them add to what the members may have brought up, feeling free to disagree with the criticism of a member or members. Let all the elders speak by turn and let there be a thorough discussion, with the minister also given the opportunity to express himself. This also assures agreement among the elders, a consensus of the elders, a majority opinion, at the very least, not just the individual judgment of one or two elders.

In these meetings, it is of the utmost importance that the elders are charitable in their remarks. They must not lambast the minister. They must not bring into question his fitness to serve in the office of the ministry. They must not undermine his confidence in his calling by Christ. And that is what the minister himself must fall back on: I have been called; the churches have recognized that I am called; I have had the hands of the presbytery laid on me. And whom Christ calls, He also qualifies and equips. The elders ought to be careful what they say and how they say it. What they say certainly needs to be said, but it needs to be said in the right way, especially if the elders are concerned that the minister responds properly to the criticism and grows through the whole experience.

The elders must guard against being only negative, all negative and critical in these meetings with the minister. Be positive! Be encouraging and appreciative of the dedicated labors of your pastor. And be supportive, supportive of the office, supportive of the man,

and supportive of his labors. Look at the big picture, the overall performance of the minister. Do not only zero in on one sermon; even good ministers preach bad sermons. But look at the preaching more generally and broadly. Look at the big picture! In spite of their criticisms, elders must accept and they must encourage the members of the congregation to accept the man whom God has called and sent to be their minister.

Let it be emphasized that the place for sermon evaluation is in the *official meetings* of the consistory. Let this be underscored. There must not be secret meetings of a couple of elders in the coffee shop. There must not be meetings of the elders unofficially and behind the minister's back. Occasionally it may be wise and necessary for the elders to meet apart from the minister so that they may have greater freedom in expressing themselves. But these are not secret meetings of which the minister has no knowledge. These are planned, official meetings.

Apart from family visitation, elders must be very careful about receiving complaints from members regarding the preaching. Ordinarily, the elders must instruct the members to go to the minister with their concerns. Or, the elders must tell them to come to the consistory meeting with their concerns.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the elders must be patient in dealing with criticisms of the minister's preaching. Give your minister time and space to develop and to respond to any criticisms. Give the minister room to work. Do not make him feel like the elders are constantly looking over his shoulder. But give him the confidence that you trust him to do his work and to do it well. And give him time to change, to improve, and to respond to criticisms that you have made. It is going to take time; change is not going to come overnight. Sanctification takes time and is gradual, and so does improvement in a minister's sermon-making and preaching. Be patient and look for gradual improvement, evidence that the minister is listening to and responding to the criticisms of the elders. The elders must be especially patient with a young minister, a newly-ordained minister. It takes wise elders to mold a young minister fresh out of seminary. A lot of patience is required in elders in those first few years. The elders must understand how important it is that the young minister be

given the time to develop and to mature, time to grow into the office, time to grow as an exegete, a sermon-maker, and preacher. Go easy on the young men so that they do not become discouraged.

And pray for your pastor and with your pastor. No member of the congregation has the right to criticize the minister who does not pray for him daily. That applies doubly to elders. Let your minister hear your fervent supplications on his behalf; pray for him in his hearing. That will go a long way to convincing him that you have his best interests in view.

To the ministers I counsel, receive the criticisms, the lawful and loving criticisms of your elders. Respect the right and calling that they have to supervise your preaching. Do not resent their criticisms, but welcome them and profit from them. Do not ever leave the impression that you are above criticism; no minister is! Ministers must judge the intentions of their elders charitably. Judge that they have the best interests of the congregation in view. And judge that they have the minister's (your own) best interests in view.

If the minister receives the criticisms of his elders with a good spirit, he will grow. He will develop as a preacher and he will be of greater service to the church. As the minister develops in his preaching, the church will benefit. There will be growth in grace and in knowledge of the Word of God in the congregation. The members will be the better equipped to live as God's people in the world. God will use the preaching to save sinners and to give the assurance of salvation. The church will be built up and God's covenant extended in the generations of believers. And God will use the preaching to gather into the church those who are outside of the church, by means of the preaching adding to the church "such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

I want to conclude by quoting from Berghoef and De Koster's *The Elders Handbook*, from a section entitled "Serving the Ministry." In this section the authors list thirteen suggestions by means of which the elders ought to serve the ministry. Among these suggestions are the following:

> 2. Serve the minister by ruling well, including the oversight of his faith and life.
> 3. Dedicate yourselves to helping the minister to grow. Let him re-

spond by recognizing the need all men have of continuing willingness to develop and learn.

4. Stand firmly at the minister's side when criticism comes, even if you then must advise him against some fault of his own. Make the eldership the place where the minister can come for support, for honest discussion, for free admission of error and mistake. Yours must be a solidarity in continual search for livelier obedience to the Word.

5. Don't peddle tales out of school and don't lend an open ear to rumor. Keep secrets a secret, and keep controversy open and above board….

7. Protect [the minister's] time for sermon preparation and study. Assume until shown mistaken that he knows how to use time, and will constructively do so. If this is indeed mistaken, guide him in better use of time and talent. Be patient, but firm. Preaching well is his first obligation.[29] ●

29 Berghoef and De Koster, *Elders Handbook*, 160-1.

Developing God-Honoring, Faithful, and Effective Preaching

Russell J. Dykstra

Week after week, all around the world, every faithful preacher prepares sermons with the humbling realization—my sermons can and ought to be better than they are. He acknowledges this, on the one hand, out of the awareness of the infinitely glorious message that must be proclaimed. God is pleased through preaching to display His glory to mere specks of dust. If that were not enough to impress a man with the importance of the task, then consider also that God is pleased to save His people by means of preaching. On the other hand, every preacher realizes that he is but a speck of dust himself. He is a man with many limitations, and a horrible sinner besides, prone by nature to hate the very knowledge of God he is called to proclaim. At best, the preacher is but a clay pot filled with the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ, in order that the light of that glory might shine through him.

Obviously, there is always room for development, and every faithful preacher desires to grow in the ability to construct solid sermons and to preach the Word powerfully and effectively. This article is intended to help pastors. It must of necessity be brief, and more of a reminder, than it is a complete explanation. Of the writing of books *on preaching* there is no end, to quote "the preacher" (Eccl. 12:12). Many of these books will be far more complete on the manner of constructing good sermons.

The purpose of this article is to set forth three aspects of good, Reformed sermons. First, every preacher must have the correct theology of preaching. In brief, all preaching must be the preaching that sets forth Christ. Second, since the sermon is intended to feed the people, it must have good content. The meat of the sermon is found in the concepts of the text. Developing the concepts is the second aspect of preaching to be discussed. And third, the truth must be clear and understandable. What does a good teacher use to make the truth clear—from the kindergarten teacher to the Lord Himself?

Illustrations. These three elements are essential for sermons that are God-honoring, edifying, and effective.

Preaching Christ Crucified and Risen

Preaching Christ is setting forth the truth of the text in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A preacher must grasp the significance of the truth in the text as it contributes to the revelation of God in Christ. The faithful preacher sets forth the power of the cross, the fruit of the cross, and the saving work of Christ as it comes into focus in the particular text.

This is what Paul insisted he had done in his preaching. He admonished the Galatian saints for not adhering to what he had preached: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1). More literally, the text reads: "to whose eyes, Jesus Christ crucified has been written before." Paul preached Christ crucified in Galatia.

Paul wrote the same to the saints in Corinth: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (I Cor. 1:23). And again, Paul made this amazing assertion to the Corinthians: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:1-2).

Paul understood clearly his calling as a preacher. He followed the pattern of the risen Lord. This is what Jesus did for the two travelers to Emmaus who were perplexed at the death of Jesus, and the subsequent reports of His resurrection. First, Jesus rebuked them: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Then He admonished these believers: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" There is the cross and the resurrection of the Lord. And then He instructed them: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). Notice that Jesus not only demonstrated that the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to *Him*, but also that they pointed to His *cross and resurrection*! Jesus testified elsewhere of the same—"Search the scriptures; for in them

ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

Biblical preaching sets forth Christ crucified and risen. This is required of all biblical (and that is Reformed) preaching because that is the nature of the Bible itself. God has determined to reveal Himself in and through Jesus. Paul testified in 2 Corinthians 4:6—"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Accordingly, Christ is the Word who became "flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-14). In fact, God can be known only through Jesus, for "no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Accordingly, Jesus' testimony in this regard was, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). And, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Only Jesus can give the perfect and accurate knowledge of God because Jesus is Himself God. He is "the brightness of his [God's] glory, and the express image of his [God's] person" (Heb. 1:3), and "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). Since Jesus is the full, perfect, and accurate revelation of God, any preaching that will give the truth about God must preach Jesus Christ. And preaching Jesus (Jehovah salvation) demands that the very heart of the saving work be set forth in the preaching, which is to say, the cross.

A second reason why Christ must be preached is that only in Christ is there salvation. All men are born dead in sin. After Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he only came to them with the preaching of Christ crucified, he told them why—"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

And what is that power that saves? It is the power of the risen Lord who by His truth sets His people free (John 8:30-32). He gives the true knowledge of Jehovah God, which knowledge of God through Jesus *is* eternal life (John 17:3).

But how is this to be done—preaching Christ and His cross every week, every sermon without fail? Sermons come from such different inspired material: biblical history, poetry, prophecy, and epistles. How can Christ be preached in sermons based on this variety? In general, preachers must keep in mind what was noted earlier about the Bible—it is the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Since every text in the Bible is part of that infallible record, every text is a small part of the full revelation of God in Christ.

Exegesis of the text is directed to finding the main thought of the text. That includes searching for how this text reveals God in the face of Jesus Christ. And, determining how this text develops the truth of the power of the cross in salvation.

Sometimes a text points directly to Christ crucified, even in the Old Testament, as for example, in the sacrifices, which point to Christ's atoning death. The sacrifices point ahead to Christ taking upon Himself the guilt of His people, removing their curse, and enduring the punishment of God's infinite and eternal wrath.

Sometimes a text points to the fruits of the cross in the lives of the elect, redeemed sinners. It teaches forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Some texts reveal the love of God in their lives—in their love for God and for each other. Or, it may speak of the thanksgiving and joy in their salvation. None of these blessed fruits would be in the lives of God's people without the cross.

Sometimes the text sets forth the power of the cross in the daily lives of the believers. The power to fight sin, to mortify the old man of sin; the power of living in obedience—even the small beginning of the new obedience; the power that upholds the believer in trials. All that is the power of God's grace flowing out of the cross—Christ earned it; Christ bestows it.

Sometimes the text reveals the culmination of the cross—the judgment of the wicked, the return of Christ, and eternal glory.

The faithful preacher recognizes that every sermon must set forth Christ crucified. If he has not seen Christ and His cross in the text, then he has not grasped how this text fits into the full revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That is how it must be done in general terms. However, concretely and specifically, this must be done through the proper explanation of the concepts of the text.

Developing Concepts

Concepts are the substance of the text. Concepts are the ideas, the thoughts, and the doctrines of the text. A few of the concepts found in the Bible include the love of God, the forgiveness of sins, the hope of glory, our high priest—merciful and faithful, eternal life, justification by faith.

The main message of the text arises out of the central concepts. For this reason, the exegesis gives much attention to concepts, is very careful in explaining them, and works hard at clear definitions and explanations of them. The main element for exegesis is accurately *defining* and then carefully *explaining* the concepts. This is what it means to "develop the concepts" of the text.

The manner of developing concepts depends on the exegete's view of Scripture. The Reformed preacher firmly believes in the perfection of Scripture. The Bible is the infallible word of God—God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). He believes in organic inspiration, namely, that the Holy Spirit moved men to write *His words* (2 Pet. 1:21). The result is plenary inspiration—the individual words that the human writers wrote are the very words that the Spirit wanted written down. Thus the Bible is the complete and perfect revelation of God.

The significance of this doctrine of Scripture for exegesis is that the Spirit determines the meaning of each word in the Bible, and thus, He determines the meaning of the concepts. The preacher does not go to Webster's dictionary to determine the meaning of "love." He does not go to the Greek philosophers or Hebrew rabbis to discover the meaning of eternal life or how they used the term. Rather, he goes to the Bible itself.

True, the basic underlying meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word can be discovered by learning its use in other Hebrew or Greek works. But the Spirit uses the basic Hebrew or Greek word and often elevates it to a higher meaning. The Spirit can even change the meaning of the word to one degree or another. Thus, the basic rule of interpretation is *Scripture interprets Scripture*. And that demands that the preacher discerns how the Bible defines and uses a word.

In concrete terms, the preacher engages in "word study" to understand how the Bible uses a given word. How does the Bible explain the word? What are the various elements that are part of the concept?

The exegete then brings together all the various elements that the Bible gives a concept, and sets forth a clear (biblical) definition.

This method of developing concepts from Scripture is the connection to the discussion on preaching Christ—every concept leads back to Jesus Christ! Christ crucified! Christ risen and exalted! The exegete cannot be confident that he has captured the meaning of the concept until he is able to explain how this concept is related to Christ crucified, and how it reveals Christ crucified.

To understand what this means concretely, consider the concept "love of God" found in many places in Scripture. A study of the concept in the Bible will bring out that Christ is the revelation of the love of God. God's love is revealed in Christ's sacrifice of His life for those loved by God eternally and given to Jesus. This is the plain teaching of 1 John 4:9, 10: "In this was manifested the *love of God* toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that *he loved us*, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (emphasis added). In addition, Jesus taught that His death was a manifestation of His love for us—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"Forgiveness of sins" is another biblical concept. Clearly, that concept is related to the cross in that it is earned in the redemption that Jesus accomplished on the cross. Forgiveness is enjoyed only by faith in the Savior. This forgiveness will be publicly announced in the great day of judgment as Jesus ushers His redeemed people into the eternal joy, based only on His atoning death.

Every believer has the "hope of glory," another concept found in Scripture. This hope of the believer was earned in the cross—our deliverance from hell and certainty of heaven. It is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection and sealed by the Spirit of Christ within the believer. And this hope is certain because Christ, our Head, is already there in glory; we shall be united to Him and share in His glory.

These concepts are fairly easy to explain in their relation to Christ crucified. With other concepts, the relationship may not be so readily apparent. Nonetheless, this is the proper way to develop biblical concepts, namely, by showing their full meaning in Jesus Christ.

Exegesis involves, first, defining and explaining the concepts.

The second part of exegesis is setting forth the relationship between the various concepts. Each concept individually points to Christ. Together, the concepts give the theme, the main message of the text. That theme will show the way that the text reveals God in the face of Christ crucified and exalted.

And, because the preacher wants that truth of God to be displayed as clearly as he can make it, and wants to impress that truth on the mind and soul of the hearer, he will also seek to *illustrate* that truth effectively.

Illustrations in Preaching

What is it to illustrate? The word comes from the Latin *in* (in, into or within) + *lustare* (to make bright). Literally, it means "to make something bright within." The older meaning of the word is "to enlighten." From this it is clear that to illustrate is "to make clear or intelligible by examples or analogies."

From publications on sermons and preaching, one can easily gather that the art of illustration has increased in importance considerably over the years. A 1990 Baker publication entitled *Inside the Sermon* has the subtitle *Thirteen Preachers Discuss Their Methods of Preparing Messages*. Of the thirteen, eleven discuss illustrations in their sermons. Today, there are countless books of sermon illustrations, and more recently, numerous web sites devoted to providing illustrations for sermons. One does not find the same emphasis in books on preaching written in an earlier age by the likes of Dabney[1] or Alexander[2].

Nor will you find much in Martyn Lloyd-Jones's *Preachers and Preaching*. In fact, this well-known preacher has some timely warnings about illustrations in his masterful work on preaching. First, he expresses the concern that a story or illustration can become too important. These, he writes, "should never be an end in and of themselves. A too free use of them also panders to the carnality of the people who are listening."[3]

And that is not the only danger in using illustrations. There is

1 Dabney, Robert L., *Sacred Rhetoric*. First published in 1870.

2 Alexander, James W., *Thoughts on Preaching*. First published in 1864.

3 Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *Preachers and Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971, 232.

the danger that the people remember the illustration, but not the truth it was intended to illuminate. Once again, Lloyd-Jones is pointed in his observations.

> Stories and illustrations are only meant to illustrate truth, not to call attention to themselves. This whole business of illustrations and story-telling has been a particular curse during the last hundred years. I believe it is one of the factors that accounts for the decline in preaching because it helped to give the impression that preaching was an art, an end in itself. There have undoubtedly been many who really prepared a sermon simply in order to be able to use a great illustration that had occurred to them or which they had read somewhere. The illustration had become the first thing; you then find a text which is likely to cover this. In other words the heart of the matter had become the illustration. But that is the wrong order. The illustration is meant to illustrate truth, not to show itself, not to call attention to itself; it is a means of leading and helping people to see the truth that you are enunciating and proclaiming still more clearly. The rule therefore should always be that the truth must be pre-eminent and have great prominence, and illustrations must be used sparsely and carefully to that end alone. Our business is not to entertain people. People like stories, they like illustrations.[4]

Another temptation for the preacher in the use of illustrations is drawing attention to himself with examples from his personal life or history. People like to know about their minister's past as well as his daily experiences. They will quickly focus on those kinds of stories even when their mind may well have been drifting. Again, Lloyd-Jones is to the point.

> That is the thing certain people like, and that is actually what some preachers do; and you can well see how it can pander to that which is lowest and worst in many members of the congregation. It is sheer carnality, a kind of lust and desire to know personal details about people.[5]

And there is still another risk in the use of illustrations, namely,

4 Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers*, 232-3.

5 Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers*, 233.

that they can break the *tension* of the message. The sermon must carry the hearers along, keep them focused on the message. A skilled preacher knows that he must give the people opportunities to relax at various points in the sermon. He cannot keep a high level of tension throughout the entire message for he will in this way lose their attention. Illustrations give that moment of release, and yet keep the hearers' attention. However, too many illustrations are not good. Out of his broad experience, Lloyd-Jones wisely warns preachers against the excessive use of illustrations.

> As the result of listening to preachers for many years, preaching myself, and discussing these matters, and considering them constantly, I am prepared to go so far as to say that if you use too many illustrations in your sermon your preaching will be ineffective. To do so always means loss of tension. There is the type of preacher who after saying a few words says, 'I remember'—then out comes the story. Then after a few more remarks again, 'I remember.' This means that the theme, the thrust of the Truth, is constantly being interrupted; it becomes staccato, and in the end you feel that you have been listening to a kind of after-dinner speaker or entertainer and not to a man proclaiming a grand and glorious Truth. If such preachers become popular, and they frequently do, they are popular only in a bad sense, because they are really nothing but popular entertainers.[6]

Though illustrations, and especially stories, are easily overdone, the reality is that some preachers are extremely skilled in employing figures of speech and illustrations that make the truth live. Charles Spurgeon was a man capable of turning a phrase in illuminating the text. He also has some helpful instruction in his *Lectures to My Students*, the third series of which is devoted to "The Art of Illustration." The first lecture is a delightful discussion of illustrations by his working out an illustration, "for," he notes, "there is no better way of teaching the art of pottery than by making a pot."[7] Spurgeon proceeds to devel-

6 Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers*, 234.

7 Spurgeon, Charles H., *Lectures to My Students*, Lynchburg, Virginia: The Old-Time Gospel Hour. (No date given. Reprinted from editions published in England as early as 1875.) Vol. 3, 2. Sad to say, while the first thirteen pages are delightful, the rest of the lectures on this topic have little

op the metaphor of a house and the importance of the windows to let in light (since "illustrate" has the literal sense of making bright with light). He quotes Thomas Fuller as saying "reasons are the pillars of the fabric of a sermon; but similitudes are the windows that give the best light."[8]

Today, many preachers advocate gathering, filing, and cataloging illustrations for future use in sermons. Once again, the proven and effective preacher, Martyn Lloyd Jones, severely criticizes that activity.

> "To me, that kind of thing is not only professionalism at its worst, it is, as I say, the art of the harlot, because it pays too much attention to, and is too much concerned about, enticing people. What is even worse, of course, is when preachers repeat other preachers' stories and illustrations without acknowledgment; and even yet worse when they buy books of sermons mainly in order to find such stories."[9]

In spite of all the warning, the dangers, and the real hazards, the effective Reformed preacher will still use illustrations. Illustrations must be servants, not masters. They can and ought to be employed to make the truth clear, vivid, and memorable.

Before turning to the manner of illustrating truth in sermons, we may consider the question, What is included in illustrations? As far as this article is concerned, three things are *excluded.* First, extended stories. These ought to be avoided ordinarily because of the great potential they have to destroy the tension in the message, as well as to draw inordinate attention to the story and, thus, away from the truth being illustrated.

Second, quotations are to be avoided for two reasons. For one thing, the message of the sermon is to be derived from the text and the whole of Scripture. Biblical preaching is the Word of God to His people. The preacher never wants to convey the sense that his message is from the writings of men. In addition, the Bible, because it is the Word of God, is authoritative. It does not need a human "authority" to bolster the teaching of the Bible or to substantiate it.

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value. In these Surgeon demonstrates other of his abilities, namely allegorizing the Scriptures and story telling.

8 Spurgeon, *Lectures*, Vol. 3, 2.

9 Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers*, 232.

Third, the preacher ought not purchase a book of sermon illustrations or search the Internet sites for the same. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' warnings above should be enough to deter any preacher in that regard.[10]

Yet, the preacher ought to illustrate his sermons. And we can provide five ways to do so effectively and for the profit of God's people.

First, use lively, vivid imagery in the sermons. Similes and metaphors can illustrate the truth without any need to pull the hearers off to the side with a "Let me illustrate that…." The Bible is full of such imagery intended to make the truth real and concrete for God's people. Notice the simile and then the metaphor in Psalm 36:6: "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep." Or the commonly used metaphor, "Christ is the lion of the tribe of Judah." Or the majestic and comforting, "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Ps. 103:11). Look for biblical imagery and use it in sermons.

Second, take notice that many words in the original languages are themselves pictures that are natural illustrations. The Hebrew word for love (אָהַב) is "to breath after." The main Greek verb for sin [ἁμαρτάνω] is literally "to miss the mark." The Greek word translated "compassion" [σπλάγχνον] is literally "bowel." Jesus is the *author* and *finisher* of our faith (Heb. 12:2). The point is, the original languages provide the preacher with an unceasing source of illustrations in the very words. This is one reason why Martin Luther commented:

> Although faith and the gospel may indeed be proclaimed by simple preachers without a knowledge of [the Greek and Hebrew] languages, such preaching is flat and tame; people finally become weary and bored with it, and it falls to the ground. But where the preacher is versed in the languages, there is always a freshness and vigor in his preaching, Scripture is treated in its entirety, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and illustrations.[11]

10 The one exception to that is the work by Charles Little, *10,000 Illustrations From The Bible,* a book currently out of print. The copy I have was printed by Baker in 1991. It has also been printed with the title *Biblical Lights and Side-Lights: 10,000 Illustrations of the Bible.* It is not a book of illustrations as commonly printed today. It is akin to *Nave's Topical Bible,* but more exhaustive than *Nave's.* This book is highly recommended.

11 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and

Third, follow the example of Scripture and use concrete figures to illustrate abstract concepts. Paul wrote of an arena, a race, the armor of God, boxing (beating the air), crowns (literally wreaths of the victor of an athletic contest), and the elect church of God as His temple. Jesus likewise used parables—describing heavenly and spiritual truths by means of concrete material things on the earth. God has created the earthly as a picture of the heavenly, and the Bible leads the way. A preacher is certainly entitled to follow the teaching methods of Jesus and the writers of the Scriptures.

Fourth, the preacher must use examples or illustrations that are appropriate to the hearers. The examples must be appropriate to the language, culture, and lifestyle of the people he is addressing. A country preacher who grew up in suburbia or the inner city must needs work hard at making illustrations and applications appropriate to his congregation. Even greater is the challenge for the missionary in a foreign land. Illustrations that will shed "much light" on a biblical truth to a congregation in Chicago, will not likely be illuminating to people in the Philippines, nor vice versa.

Jesus surely did this effectively. His illustrations were drawn from the life of the people—fishing, sowing seeds, sheep and shepherds, grains of mustard seed, publicans and Pharisees. The people could understand and relate to all these illustrations.

Fifth, the preacher ought to strive to use examples drawn from the Bible itself to illustrate the truth. Using examples drawn from daily life or history run the risk of sending the minds of many in the congregation down memory paths from their own experiences, or off into excursions of the imagination. The preacher then struggles to bring their minds back to the text and the sermon. Biblical examples at least keep them in the sphere of God's Word. Another advantage of doing so is that such illustrations bring out truths in the stories of Scripture that some may not have considered before.

There are dangers there, too, however. The preacher must be so very careful that the story does in fact illustrate the truth he is preaching. He must not inject into the story or example what is not there.

Maintain Christian Schools" (1524) in *Luther's Works,* vol. 45, "The Christian in Society," II. Ed. By Walther I. Brandt. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 365.

There are also dangers of allegorizing and/or spiritualizing stories. Careful exegesis and wise use of illustration should shield the preacher from these dangers.

But he must by all means use examples from the Bible. Point to Joseph to demonstrate for the youth steadfastness against temptation. Cite Daniel's willingness to die rather than to stop praying before the window, and thus deny that Jehovah is God. Point to Jeremiah's willingness to be thrown into a pit (and willingness to die) rather than to stop his mouth from speaking God's judgments. Illustrate the deadly consequences of friendship with the unbeliever using Jehoshaphat's alliance with wicked Ahab.

The list could go on and on. The consequences of sin—also sin forgiven—is plain from the sword that never departed from the house of David. Jacob's failure to be faithful to *one* wife resulted in marital and family troubles for generations. Sin begets sin, as Solomon demonstrated in taking heathen wives, leading to his subsequent fall into idolatry! The horrible destruction of pride is seen in Peter's bold insistence that *he* would never deny the Lord.

And as these biblical examples are used in the preaching, the preacher can apply the catechism lessons he has recently taught the children. Here is the perfect opportunity to draw the children into the preaching—reminding them what they had learned in a previous lesson.

Such illustrations have power, being themselves from God's Word. They make the truth real and concrete. They give true evidence of the power of sin and its dreadful consequences. And these biblical examples demonstrate the power of the cross—to save from the depths, and to sanctify and empower to godly living.

What a glorious calling God has given to His servants, the preachers! Preach Christ—crucified and exalted—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Give the people of God food for their souls—the spiritual meat found in developing the concepts of the text, and bringing each concept in relation to Christ. And make that truth clear, memorable, and powerful, with illustrations. God's Word is worthy of our best. ●

Application in Preaching

Barry L. Gritters

Introduction

For any preacher to speak to a group of preachers about preaching is a little bit dangerous, and not a little intimidating. But to have a *seminary professor* talk to a group of preachers about applications in preaching might seem rather *odd.* At least it may have seemed odd to the fathers gathered at the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s. Recently, when I assigned to the Church Polity students to read the Presbyterial Form of Church Government, it was more than academic for me to be reminded that these Presbyterian fathers judged that the clergy who excelled in *exposition* more than in *application* should be made "teachers and doctors" (seminary professors). The implication of this decision is that the preachers in the *pastorates* are the experts in application. Yet you have asked a seminary professor to speak on "Application in Preaching."

I present the case today, hoping that the argument does not need to be made against too much opposition, that *applications are to sermons what assurance is to faith*. I mean by that: as assurance is of the essence of faith, application is of the essence of a good sermon. There can be a true sermon without illustration, but not without application. A Reformed preacher ought to be able to say that without fear of contradiction.

The Latin origin of the word *apply* ("to knit to") helps explain what we mean by application. Sermons so address the heart and conscience of the people of God as to knit the text to their heart and conscience. Of course, *actually* to knit the truth to their heart and conscience is the work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the preacher preaches in such a way that he *addresses* the heart and conscience, speaks in such a way that he *appeals* to their heart and conscience. To use a slightly different figure, application is a *pressing* of the Word onto the heart and conscience of the people of God. This pressing is essential for every sermon. If the purpose of every sermon is to edify, and edification is more than intellectual upbuilding, every sermon must be applied.

That Sermons Must Have Application

In case any may doubt the necessity of application, let me establish that first.

Some have denied that sermons must have application. The denials

come from some surprising and perhaps strange places. Karl Barth denied the necessity of application, even of the possibility of application, suggesting that a minister cannot make application because application is the domain of the Holy Spirit. According to Barth, preaching must be limited to scholarly *explanation* of what the text says.

Now, we might give little weight to Barth's opinions, except that a Protestant Reformed preacher once told me that Herman Hoeksema himself said, "I will just explain the Word; application is the work of the Holy Spirit," which sounds a great deal like Barth. So Hoeksema is now called on in defense of the position that Protestant Reformed preachers are not to apply the text in their sermons.

As I will show, this was emphatically not the view of Herman Hoeksema. But if there is such a sentiment among us, I think the origins may be in these areas. If, by application, one imagines some petty or legalistic appendages to a sermon, probably hardly connected to the exegesis of the text, it can be safely said that Hoeksema was not "for" applications, nor should we be. Indeed, petty and legalistic appendages to sermons may be a danger. If you read books on homiletics, many of them define application so very narrowly as "telling people what to do," or "what not to do," or rebuking them for "doing" or "not doing." Now, a call to "do" or "not do" is certainly *part* of application, but such a small part as to do terrible injustice to the breadth of application in a good sermon. In my estimation, although Jay E. Adams has some very good material on preaching, he would err on the side of defining applications too narrowly, and in this direction.

Or if, by "application," one means the actual *putting of the word into a man's heart spiritually*, of course a minister does not apply the word. I am convinced that is what Barth intended in his objections. But that is not our main concern here.

But more serious is the misunderstanding of some in the churches that if a sermon has *application*, it must not be *doctrinal*. So doctrine is pitted against what is called "practical preaching," practical preaching being an unending list of "dos" and "don'ts" or of exhortations of the how-to-live sort. But we must have nothing of a fight between doctrinal preaching and applicatory preaching. If there is such a fight, either one defines *doctrinal* improperly (although usually no definition is given, but assumed), or one misunderstands what *application* is.

No Reformed preacher should ever be caught defending a sermon

that does not have good, exegetically-based applications. The danger is that preaching without application is not only unbiblical but that, being unbiblical, it leads to a dead orthodoxy—and dead congregations.

Let us be reminded of our history and the Reformed tradition, so that we can help the people of God who might misunderstand what a Reformed sermon is. The Protestant Reformed Churches, both officially and unofficially, have recognized the need and have stressed the importance of applications, properly understood.

Confessions and history

Each time a minister is ordained into office, or installed in his next charge, the Reformed "Form for Ordination of Ministers" reminds the minister of his duties, which include *applying* his text to the congregation. Notice what duties are given first. "First, that they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of God…and *apply* (emphasis mine) the same as well in general as in particular, to the edification of the hearers; instructing, admonishing, comforting and reproving according to everyone's needs; preaching repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ…."[1] Explanation may not be given without application.

The Canons reinforce this duty when they remind preachers that "grace is conferred by means of admonitions…" (III/IV:17), and that God "preserves, continues, and perfects [faith] by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the *exhortations, threatenings, and promises*" (V:17). That is, preaching is not properly preaching unless it includes the elements of exhortation, promises, and sometimes even threats.

The Form for Installation of Seminary Professors calls them to "explain (to the aspiring ministers) how they not alone as *teachers* of the word are to *instruct*, but also as *pastors* are to *shepherd*…."

Reading the PRC Seminary's Homiletics syllabus (written originally by Herman Hoeksema, but revised and enlarged by his son, Homer Hoeksema), makes clear what our forefathers taught.[2] I will give a few quotations from that syllabus, although one must re-read

1 *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1927), 2002 PRCA edition, 101.

2 Hoeksema, Homer C., *Homiletics* (Grandville, MI: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1975). Reprint 1993.

the entire syllabus to see how often and how emphatically the matter of application comes up. The Hoeksemas say, "…the sermon must make the proper…application of the text, whether it be to the specific needs of the congregation or to the spiritual condition and needs of God's people in general" (21). Herman Hoeksema's original syllabus said: "We must also emphasize that both the subjective and objective elements must be given their proper place in a good sermon…" (11). Application was in view even in the matter of *arranging* the material of the sermon. "…[W]e mean such a disposition of the material of the sermon that it can be *applied* to the consciousness and life of the congregation. This *practical* purpose must always be kept in view. The preacher is not simply delivering a discourse on a dogmatic subject, nor is he delivering a class lecture in a school. But he is called to deliver the gospel to the congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. His message, therefore, must be arranged with a view to the practical, spiritual needs of the congregation and with a view to the faith and life of the people of God" (51, emphasis mine).

With these sentiments in the seminary's Homiletics text, it should not be surprising that the seminary's "Sermon Evaluation Form" for practice preaching includes item #10: "Is the sermon properly applied, and is the application exegetically based?" Then, "Is there *sufficient* application?"

That application is necessary in a good Reformed sermon was the conviction of our fathers from the Reformation times. At one of the first assemblies of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, meeting in Wesel in 1568, the fathers said, "It is beyond doubt that the office of the ministers…consists predominately of proclaiming *and applying* God's word correctly, in public as well as private…."[3]

3 In P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual: Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches*, trans., Richard R. DeRidder, 1982. 25, 27. That ministers would apply the word is reinforced by Wesel when, in a subsequent article, the "office of prophet" is described as one that strictly and exclusively *expounds* the word in the company of the pastors. Most significantly, however, is Wesel's Article 23: "But the preacher must always relate everything to these two most important parts of the Gospel, namely faith and conversion. With the one he keeps the knowledge of God in view, and with the other the true mortification and quickening of life. And he shall

And be reminded of the Westminster divines who wanted preachers in the pastoral ministry who were experts in *application*. In Westminster's "Form of Church-Government" under "Pastors," his duties are "to feed the flock, by preaching of the word, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort." In Westminster's Larger Catechism the divines said:

> The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation" (Q.155).[4]

Calvin spoke of applications in his *Sermons on Timothy and Titus*:

> And again Saint Paul shows, that it is not enough to preach the Law of God, and the promises, and what else so ever is contained in the holy scripture, as though a man should teach in a school: but we must *improve, threaten, and exhort.* As if he said, if we leave it to men's choice to follow that which is taught them, they will never move one foot. Therefore the doctrine of itself can profit nothing at all, unless it be confirmed by exhortations, and by threats; unless there be spurs to prick men withal; for beasts that are so wild and fierce, if they should be let alone to lie groveling in their slothfulness, it will be hard to make them profit in the end, and to go on in the way of salvation."[5]

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try, as much as possible, to expose all the recesses and hidden wrappings of the human heart by reprimanding wrong opinions and heresies as well as bad morals. He shall not only take action against the gross examples of mischief and public scandal, but also endeavor to bring to light the hidden hypocrisy of the soul, and to expose the hotbed of godlessness, pride and ingratitude, which appear even among the best of men, and to root these things out in the best possible manner" (27).

4 *Westminster Confession of Faith (*Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publication, 2009), 247-8.

5 Calvin, John, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 947.

Then Calvin goes on to remind the preacher that the exhortations, etc., must be built on doctrine, lest they be built on "aire." A regular dose of reading Calvin's sermons would be a good remedy for one who has the sermons-need-no-application affliction.

It makes sense, then, that every Protestant Reformed writer I could find who has written about preaching and application has expressed the strong conviction of the necessity of application.[6]

Scripture

Scripture is the basis for this Reformed and Protestant Reformed conviction. The whole of Scripture makes this point plain. To borrow the approach of the Belgic Confession when it proves the Trinity, we say with regard to application, "the Scripture texts are not so necessary to enumerate as to choose them out with discretion and judgment…." Then, consider not only the texts that directly *call* preachers to apply the word, or texts that say the Scripture *is* applicable, but the whole of the Word of God which *is* one extended *application of truth expounded*.

According to 2 Timothy 3:16,17, the first purpose of Scripture is for "teaching." But the end and goal of this teaching is that the "man of God may be perfect" (i.e., complete, adequate). Complete in what way? That he may be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The aim of all the instruction is the thorough furnishing of the people of God unto a life of good.

Combining Ephesians 2:10 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13, it is plain that the purpose of God's salvation of His people is that they live in the holiness of good works. We are chosen to salvation through belief of the *truth and sanctification* of the Spirit.

Paul teaches his protégé Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2) that the minister exhorts *with doctrine*. That is, doctrine or teaching is the "servant" of exhortation—exhortation being specific kind of application.

1 Timothy 6:1-3 is a striking example of this "exhorting with doctrine."

> Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not

6 The *Standard Bearer* 47:139, 186 (R. Decker); 60:441 (R. Cammenga); 66:371 (J. Kortering); 67:205 (C. Haak); are only a few of the examples.

> blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness….

The doctrine here is the biblical teaching of the relationship of Christian servants and their (perhaps unbelieving) masters. There is a doctrine of authority and submission. This Timothy must "teach." And on the heels of that teaching, the servants must be exhorted to conform their lives to this teaching. Included in the exhortation may be sharp warnings and admonitions: if they do not comply with the calling to live in "godliness," God's name and doctrine will be blasphemed. These warnings be so sharp, according to Paul's "homiletics instruction," they may even sound offensive: if any does not obey this doctrine according to godliness, "He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness" (vv. 3-5).

Jesus' entire ministry was "truth applied." It was divine teaching applied to the hearts and lives of the people of God: marriage, divorce, humility, peace, joy, forgiveness, kindness, neighborly conduct, honoring authority, prayer, alms, hypocrisy, pride, etc. Then, Jesus' "Great Commission" shows that, even though we do not *limit* applications to the call to "do," this call is not excluded: "Go into all the world, preaching, baptizing, and teaching them to observe…what I have taught you."

Of course, there is the danger that J. Gresham Machen warned against in his day, when he lamented that so much emphasis was placed on "Christianity applied" that there was no Christianity to apply. This is the threat that Calvin warned against: applications "built on aire." But there is no question that the Christian truth must be applied.

The Purpose of Application

Seeing the purpose of application will help establish how applications are to be made.

First, application serves the purpose of calling the people of God to "repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ." The Reformed Form for Ordination of Ministers uses this expression, twice, as it explains what "explaining" and "applying" the Word is. The phrase comes from Acts 20 where Paul is reviewing his labors in Ephesus. Both to Jews and Greeks he had preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Act 20:21).

But this "repentance…and faith…" must not be misunderstood.

Really, it is simply a call to "come to Christ," turning from idols and self, to find all of salvation in Him.

It is not to be reduced to warnings about sinful conduct, and then probably three or four main sins; although this is a part of preaching. Nor is applicatory preaching narrow exhortation to certain outward conduct—"hortatory preaching that consists of little more than fervid exhortations to duty," as Dabney put it somewhere; although such exhortation is part of application.

But repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ consist of the whole of the Christian life in the world—our faith and life—the life of our heart and mind and soul and body. It is the whole of the Christian life of turning from sin, of embracing Jesus Christ as the fullness of our salvation and, in response to that gracious salvation, loving God and loving the neighbor—with mind and heart and soul, as well as body.

Let me spell that out a little more. Repentance is a change of mind, how one thinks, a "meta-*noia*." This is tremendous in its implications for applicatory preaching. A sermon on Romans 12:1, 2, for example, would spell out expansively what a "renewing of the *mind*" would be, how that relates to loving God with all our *minds*, and how the entire life of the child of God begins with how he *thinks* about God, himself, sin, and the world. So before anyone concludes that preaching "repentance" starts with actions, let him remember the mind. Good, applicatory preaching addresses man *within.* Then and only then can come a change *without*, a turning from idols to the living God.

Nor may a preacher narrow down faith to acceptance of and acquiescence to truth. Indeed, start there. Start with the *first* part of Lord's Day 7. Knowledge is first, as the Form for Ordination and 2 Timothy 3:17 indicate. But do not end there. For faith is "embracing Christ and all his benefits." His justification and sanctification of us, with all

that those imply. His comfort of us in our many troubles. His hope for us as we peer into the uncertain future. Faith embraces Christ as the fullness of our salvation.

But application also serves the more basic purpose of *edification*.

The goal and aim of all our preaching is the upbuilding of God's people. After the Form for Ordination calls us to explain and apply the word, it continues, "to the edification of the hearers." We explain and apply *with a view to* edification. So Herman Hoeksema concludes a section of his homiletics by saying, "all these aspects of the…sermon…stand inseparably connected to the purpose of the preaching, namely, the *up-building* of the body of Christ. The congregation must *grow* in grace…."[7] Paul taught the Ephesian elders that "the word of his grace…is able to build you up," (where "build up" is the Greek *ep-oiko-domew,* Acts 20:32). "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3).

Application aims at edification.

If we preachers would reflect on what people say to us after we preach, we would probably all prefer that the saints say, "That sermon was edifying," rather than "That was a good sermon." But even then, what did they mean by that?

It would be interesting to take a poll of the members of your church for a definition of *edifying*. If someone said, "That sermon was edifying," would *you know* what they meant? It may depend on the person—young or old, man or woman. If the response was, "That sermon was *not* edifying," what did they intend to convey was missing?

Without taking a great deal of time to demonstrate my definition of "edification," let me give the definition with the request that you test it by your own knowledge of Scripture. Edification is the spiritual upbuilding of the people of God in every aspect of their life—their minds as well as their hearts, their emotions and their wills. It is the building up of them in their love for God and love for their neighbor, their joy in Christ and their sorrow for sin, their strength to bear burdens and live contentedly in difficult circumstances, and a dozen other graces and virtues. If we can work with that general idea of edification, you will understand why I give the "templates" that I do for thinking about how to apply God's Word.

7 Hoeksema, Homer C., *Homiletics,*13-14.

Before the templates, one more point should be made.

Applying Important Truth

We ministers must start out with a basic assumption: every sermon we preach must be an important truth. The more I read what Hoeksema said in his Homiletics syllabus—that the text chosen must be "important"—the more I am impressed by it. A few years ago one of our ministers wrote to me some helpful things about applications. What he said was precisely Hoeksema's point, though he may not have said it conscious of his debt to Hoeksema. "What I've been doing lately, especially in my catechism sermons, is stating in the introduction the 'importance' of the subject matter of the sermon. Sometimes I'll give two or three reasons why it is important for us to pay attention and learn. Mostly this is done from a practical point of view, and then I can come back to it later in the sermon, or at the end." In essence, this is Hoeksema's advice in his homiletics syllabus. In Part Three, "Material Homiletics," after an introductory paragraph, he said:

> It is of utmost importance that the material which the minister treats and which he wants to bring to the congregation in the form of a message should be important. The minister must have something to say. When he goes to the pulpit, he must do so in the conviction that he has a real and important message to bring. There is nothing more paralyzing for the preacher than the contrary feeling. There is nothing more crippling than the feeling that he must deliver a message of some 4,000 to 5,000 words, but that he really has nothing to preach which is of significance, of real, practical importance…for the faith and life of the congregation…. He enters the pulpit with the feeling that…there is no element of stimulation, comfort, encouragement, or exhortation in the message which he shall bring. This is paralyzing.[8]

If I am not convinced that my sermon is important for the people of God, it will spell disaster for me. If I ever get on the pulpit without that conviction, I need to confess that sin before God and pray that my work in the coming week will bring me to see what I failed to see the week before. Yes, I myself must be "first partaker" of the fruits of the Word; must put myself in the shoes of the people of God; must speak to them as a man who understands them; must come before them

8 Hoeksema, Homer C., *Homiletics,* 25.

with the fervent love and desire for their good that Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3 and Galatians 4:19. But I cannot do any of that if I am not convinced that the message I bring is of greatest importance to them.

Two templates

To our students I suggest two "templates" for preaching that help me think broadly about how sermons should be *applied*, as I think of how they must *edify*. I believe that every aspect of how sermons ought to be applied unto edification can be covered by these two templates, whether it is "reprove, rebuke, exhort…" or "instructing, admonishing, comforting and reproving according to everyone's needs; preaching repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ…." As I look at my sermon, as I do my exegesis, as I think of how the sermon ought to be applied, I want to think broadly about these two areas, believing that both give me a very biblical perspective of what the Lord wants for His sheep.

First Template: Edification in "faith, hope, and love"

As a pastor of God's sheep, I want to ask whether my sermons are building up the people of God in that very familiar trio of graces: faith, hope, and love (see 1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8). They must be strengthened in their faith, quickened in their hopes, and increased in love.

I give only the briefest outline of these, now, reminding us not to be too narrow in our understanding of any of these three.

Faith. 1) Faith is knowledge, as the HC says, of everything the Bible reveals, summed up in the ancient Apostolic Creed. So preaching instructs. Start there. But we do not end there. 2) Polemics in preaching comes in here because truth must be defended from the lie. 3) True faith is knowledge in the heart, the knowledge of love! 4) Faith is assurance (Lord's Day 7). Here, doubts must be addressed, and how one comes to be assured. 5) Faith is necessary to be delivered from my sins and misery, so sins must be exposed. 6) Faith embraces Christ, so show the people Jesus Christ. 7) Then, men and women must be *called* to faith. 8) Believers must be shown that the gates of the kingdom are open to them. Unbelievers (as well as *unbelief*) must be addressed, as Lord's Day 31, Q&A 84 teaches. Faith is the first

of the trio I want to think about, and faith considered *very broadly*. That is not too difficult for a Reformed preacher, mainly because the Heidelberg Catechism has such a thorough, multi-dimensional, treatment of faith.

Hope: Hope, stretching out into the future, is joyful, eager, confident anticipation of good in the days to come. 1) The *future* is such an important aspect of our Christian life. I am saved by hope (Rom. 8:24), begotten again unto a lively hope (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ, not things present nor *things to come* (Rom. 8:38). All things are mine, whether Paul or Apollos or… things present, or *things to come*…(1 Cor. 3:21, 22). The Catechism teaches me that believing providence profits me, not only because it works patience in adversity and gratitude in prosperity, but because it enables me to place my trust in God with regard to all things that *shall hereafter befall me* (10:28). 2) Think of the distant future of heaven, the future of tomorrow, and everything in between. 3) Worry can be addressed. 4) Do I preach eschatology? 5) Hope leads to holiness (1 John 3:3). It gives strength for trials. Properly understood, it is the antidote for materialism. Hope!

Love: 1) The greatest of these! 2) God's love for me. Go deep here! This is the heart of the gospel. How He loves His people. This is the covenant. 3) I love Him. Love is a desire to be with Him. 4) Obedience to the commandments, both tables, is the expression of our love. 5) There is call to sanctification and good works here. 6) Always motivated by God's love for me and expressions of my love for God. 7) Reason for humility—I do not love as I have been loved.

To say more than this would risk losing sight of the main thing: This trio of graces—faith, hope, and love—can be kept in mind as I ask myself how (and if!) my sermons are building up the people of God.

Second Template: The image of God—true knowledge, righteousness, holiness

About this I will be even more brief. God's salvation of His people is His restoration of them in the image of His Son. The biblical and confessional definition of the image's content is true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. The preaching, therefore, as God's means to save, aims at building up the saints in these three. As I reflect on

my sermons, and as I exegete the Scripture, I keep in mind also this "template," and ask myself: "In what specific way(s) does this Word of God conform the people of God to His Son's image? Is the emphasis on true knowledge? righteousness? (imputed?) holiness?"

Advising you to use these two templates is not advice to force your sermons on to some Procrustean bed. Rather, it is intended to help us as preachers to think of the breadth and depth of how the people of God must be edified.

How the Text is to Be Applied—Generally

First, the stance of the minister must be understood carefully.[9] He does not stand on the pulpit as a distant spectator, aloof from the congregation. This kind of man refuses to be identified with the congregation. His sermons probably use almost exclusively the "third person": he, she, they, them.

The other extreme has the minister stand merely as another "recipient" of the Word. This kind of stance is concerned more with application than the spectator-stance. But he over-corrects. He never says "you," but always "we." He wants to come across as one of the congregation. He does not want to present himself as an authority, somehow "over" the congregation. But he misses an important point, the point Luther makes when he says, "You must distinctly separate the two, the office and the person. When he administers his office, a man is different. A man is not a preacher by virtue of personal authority, but by authority vested in him by God."[10]

Thus, the minister stands consciously as a herald. He is neither a disinterested spectator, nor "merely" one of the congregation, but a man sent from God with authority to declare—even in application! He must not speak with authority in the explanation, and then back off as though the application is now somehow his own word, or in any way comes with lesser authority. So, two important points are in order here: 1) He must guard against coming across as a "know-it-all" or

9 Especially for this idea, but for others in this paper, recognition must be given to Rev. Jason Kortering, emeritus pastor in the PRC, whose work in producing a curriculum for the Asian Reformed Theological School was edifying to me. His preaching was also exemplary in so many respects, not least of which was "edifying."

10 I cannot find the source of this quotation.

"holier than thou" kind of man who stands above any application. He assures the congregation in many ways that he understands his own weaknesses and needs all the applications that they do. 2) But he is not afraid to apply with the word in the second person: "You…" I tell students that I will not criticize their sermon when the applications are not exclusively in the first person, "We…"

Second, let us do our exegesis with application in mind. Walk with the text all week long, asking, "What does the Spirit have in this text that will edify the saints? What do the people of God need?" Not only, "What do they need to learn? And how can I make this clear?" But, "How can this edify the saints?"

This was what Hoeksema meant when he said that the exegesis could be written out only after the "practical importance" of the text has been determined.

Thus, the seminary student who was criticized for *leading* with his applications, and was told that applications are consequent, not initial, must understand that carefully. Exegesis is done in a couple of stages, according to Hoeksema: 1) The main idea of the text must be determined first—of course, after careful thought and meditation; 2) the practical importance of the text must be determined—which is the realm of application; 3) then the exegesis is spelled out more carefully and fully. No application is done apart from the exegesis; but exegesis may not be done apart from the question: what is the "practical importance"?

Third, remember that all texts are able to be, indeed must be, applied. Not just the "practical texts" that have exhortations or commands in them. But the doctrinal texts, and perhaps those more richly: Trinity (fellowship with God, among the saints, in marriage); the two natures of Christ; the Being of God as personal and spiritual; the attributes of God (apply this all in catechism, especially).

Fourth, make applications with care and wisdom. Mistakes can be made here especially. Thus, make applications prayerfully, pastorally, as a father to his dear children. Sometimes I recommend to students to imagine that you are making application to your mother, or grandmother.

Fifth, do not forget that application (the final and real *knitting* the Word to their hearts) is the Spirit's work. You know that with regard to

preaching, generally; now remember that with regard to its application specifically.

How the text is to be applied—specifically

First, make the applications specific and concrete. The Form for Ordination says, "generally as well as specifically…." We must not "make a few suggestions," for vague, general applications are seldom effective. But make application concretely and with intimate knowledge of the people. This is why we must live among them, get to know them, especially the young people.

Second, let the applications be exegetically based. The "Evaluation Form for Sermons" makes that point. The danger is that the minister tries to make any application that comes to him in his study, rather than on the basis of exegetical study. The text must determine the specific point of application and the nature of the application. It is true, the older a man becomes, and the better he knows his congregation, the more applications he will be able to make. But always the applications come from the Word of God.

Make application throughout the sermon, not just at the end. The Puritans and some of their spiritual descendants are good at that. One denomination I know has the practice of preaching the majority of the sermon, interrupting the sermon with an "in-between-song," and concluding the sermon with all the application at the end. I am guessing that some PRC preachers have done that. In some way I may be guilty of that, or of leaving that impression, that application belongs at the end, because a few times in my ministry I have been criticized for a short third point, because "that short-changes applications." Now, much application *can* be made in the third point; often the third point is reserved for a *final* heart-directed comfort or exhortation; but application must not be reserved for then only.

Finally, think of all the different kinds of people in the congregation. Do not fail any: young people, children; old, young; married, single; widow, widower; laborers, business-owners; special needs members and those who care for them; the schools but also and especially the homes. The distressed need to be comforted and the comfortable distressed. Some have grown up in the faith, others are young Christians. Some are too fearful of the end, others do not think

past tomorrow. But remember that you preach to the people of God who are needy, hungry, thirsty, weary, sinful, guilty, ashamed, weak, afraid, hopeful, joyful…. Speak to them in their needs. Sit among them (in your mind) when you prepare your sermons. Ask yourself what you need.

One old elder in my first charge probably never realized the exhortation he gave me—young pastor that I was—or how long his action stood before my conscience as a kind but unmistakable admonition. His admonition came in the form of a recommendation he made for the little window above the pulpit in the newly-built sanctuary. His recommendation was adopted.

In that window, still today, are the words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people."

The Voice of our Fathers

The (Dutch/German) "Synod" of Wesel 1568: "For it is beyond doubt that the office of ministers…consists predominately of proclaiming and applying God's Word correctly, in public as well as in private, unto teaching, admonition, and comfort…" (Art. 13). Then, after a sharp warning against "idle display[s] of grandiloquence" rather than seeking "edification," the assembly at Wesel continued:

> But the preacher must always relate everything to these two most important parts of the Gospel, namely faith and conversion. With the one he keeps the knowledge of God in view, and with the other the true mortification and quickening of life. And he shall try, as much as possible, to expose all the recesses and hidden wrappings of the human heart by reprimanding wrong opinions and heresies as well as bad morals. He shall not only take action against the gross examples of mischief and public scandal, but also endeavor to bring to light the hidden hypocrisy of the soul, and to expose the hotbed of godlessness, pride and ingratitude, which appear even among the best of men, and to root these things out in the best possible manner (Art. 23).

Finally, these Reformed fathers felt the need to add the following, interesting paragraph: "He must be careful not to burden the listener's

memory with too elaborate sermons and thus stifle one's zeal, and (as it were) generate disgust in one's stomach…. Therefore, he shall do his best to limit his speech to one hour."[11] (in P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuiper, *Ecclesiastical Manual: Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods*…. Translated by Richard R. DeRidder, 1982, 27).

"There is nothing more crippling than the feeling that he must deliver a message of 4,000 to 5,000 words, but that he really has nothing to preach which is of significance, or real, practical importance…for the faith and life of the congregation…. He enters the pulpit with the feeling that…there is no element of stimulation, comfort, encouragement, or exhortation in the message…. This is paralyzing." "…It is necessary that after he has once chosen a text, the minister diligently and prayerfully work with that text until he finds what is of genuine importance to the congregation in the text." "…the sermon must make the proper spiritual-psychological application of the text, whether it be to the specific needs of the congregation or to the spiritual condition and needs of God's people in general…." "Finally, a sermon-text must be practically fruitful for the congregation, that is, it must be fruitful for the practical, spiritual life of the church. …the minister…must not too easily come to the conclusion that a certain portion of Scripture does not meet this requirement of practical fruitfulness." "He must consider that central thought of the text from a logical point of view, but also from a practical, spiritual point of view, with an eye to the needs of the congregation." "Only after the minister has thus….viewed the text in the light of the practical, spiritual needs of the church—only then is he ready to arrange and formulate his sermon." "…such a disposition of the material that it can be applied to the consciousness and life of the congregation…. The preacher is not simply delivering a discourse in a dogmatical subject, nor is he delivering a class lecture in a school. But he is called to deliver the gospel to the congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. His message, therefore, must be arranged with a view to the practical, spiritual needs of the congregation and with a view to the faith and life of the people of God" (and many more similar statements throughout Herman Hoeksema's *Homiletics* syllabus). ●

11 P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual,* 25, 27.

A Review Article

Reformed Confessions: Four Magnificent Volumes and a Recently Uncovered Jewel

Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, 4 Vols. *(1523-1693),* James T. Dennison, Jr. (ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008-2014. 3,348 pages, Hard cover. [Reviewed by Rev. Angus Stewart.]

I. Four Magnificent Volumes

Introduction

These four magnificent volumes, compiled and introduced by James Dennison, Jr., contain 127 confessional documents in the 171 years from the Sixty-Seven Articles of Huldrych Zwingli (1523) to the Baptist Catechism (1693)—on average, one every sixteen months! Surpassing all previous compilations of Reformed confessions, including those contained in the second and third parts of volume 3 of Philip Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom*, this is now the definitive, and by far the most complete, compilation in English of Reformed creeds from the foundational period of the Reformed churches. This attractively produced set is a treasure chest of confessional resources, including one beautiful jewel which has been long buried and will be discussed in the second part of this review.

The definition of "confessions" used in these four volumes is broader than usual, encompassing not only creeds, catechisms and canons, but also some church orders, theses for disputations, and even theological treatises. "Reformed" in the title of these books embraces Zwinglians and Calvinists; Waldensians, Bohemian Brethren and Huguenots; Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and even (Calvinistic) Baptists. Some confessions were drafted in concert with Lutherans, and even the Remonstrance (1610) of the Arminians is included, since this heretical document arose within the Dutch Reformed churches and was refuted by the Counter Remonstrance (1611) and the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619). For the purposes of this review,

the words "Reformed" and "confessions" will be used as in the four volumes, as just explained.

Geography

Almost all of these 127 confessions were produced in the European Reformed world of the British Isles and continental Europe, excluding Scandinavia in the north (Lutheran), Russia in the east (Eastern Orthodox), most of the south-east (Islamic and Eastern Orthodox) and most of the south (Roman Catholic). Thus, we are speaking of the creeds of the Reformed communities in Ireland, Scotland, England (and Wales), the Lowlands (roughly Belgium and the Netherlands), France, Switzerland, Germany, Bohemia, Poland and Lithuania, and Hungary and Romania (Transylvania), as well as the Waldensians in southern France and northern Italy. This area stretches from Antwerp to Aigle and Aix-en-Provence, from Bentheim to Basel and Berlin, from Dublin to Dordrecht and Debrecen, from Edinburgh to Emden and Enyedi, from Glastonbury to Graubünden and Gönc, from La Rochelle to Lausanne and Leipzig, from the (English) Midlands to Mühlhausen and Mérindol, from Nassau to Neuchâtel and Nagyvárad, from Poissy to Prague and Piotrków, from Somerset to Stafforts and Sandomierz, from Turin to Tábor and Thorn, and from Valenciennes to Vásárhelyi and Vilnius.

Because of persecution and flight, two French and Walloon documents were drafted in England (*Vallerandus* Poullain's Confession of the Glastonbury Congregation of 1551) and Germany (the Frankfort Confession of 1554); a Walloon creed was written in Germany (the Walloon Confession of Wesel of 1544/1545); three Dutch or German confessions in England (the London Confession of John à Lasco of 1551, the Large Emden Catechism of the Strangers' Church, London of 1551 and the Emden Examination of Faith of 1553); and four English creeds, with two in Switzerland (the Confession of the English Congregation at Geneva of 1556 and the Confession of Faith in the Geneva Bible of 1560) and two in the Lowlands (the Second Confession of the London-Amsterdam Church of 1596 and the Seven Articles of the Church of Leiden of 1617).

The four volumes also include three Spanish confessions, written in Germany (Juan Diaz's Sum of the Christian Religion of 1546),

Italy (Valdés' Catechism of 1549) and England (the Confession of the Spanish Congregation of London of 1560/1561), and two Italian creeds produced in Switzerland (the Confession of the Italian Church of Geneva of 1558 and Lattanzio Ragnoni's Formulario of 1559), as well as the Confession of Cyril Lukaris (1629), a creed produced in Constantinople (now Istanbul in Turkey), the origins of which are as fascinating as they are sadly little known.

Only two of the 127 creeds were produced outside of Europe: one in South America and the other in North America. The first, the Guanabara Confession (1558), was penned by some French Huguenots who immigrated to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Whereas Cyril Lukaris was strangled by the orders of the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV and later dumped in the Bosphorus, most of the signatories to the Guanabara Confession were drowned by the French Roman Catholics. The second, the Cambridge Platform (1648), is the church polity of the English Congregationalists who left old England for freedom of religion in New England (USA).

Over half of the confessions in volume 1 (1523-1552) are Swiss Reformed. Volume 2 (1552-1566) is the most diverse geographically with almost all the European Reformed countries included (except Bohemia and Ireland), as well as Italian, Spanish and Brazilian creeds. The eastern part of the Reformed world (Hungary and Romania, Poland and Lithuania, Germany and Bohemia) provides eighteen of the twenty-three documents in volume 3 (1567-1599). England is the country with most creeds in volume 4 (1600-1693). If documents from English-speaking churches in Ireland, Scotland, New England and the Netherlands are added, English-language creeds constitute half of the confessions in the last volume.

Geneva

Two cities stand out in connection with these confessional documents, with the first being Geneva. No less than thirteen creeds (over 10% of the whole!) were written in this little republic (as it was then), including two by English and two by Italian expatriates.

John Calvin, the great Genevan Reformer, also had a major hand in drafting the French Confession (1559), which provided the basis for the Waldensian Confession (1560) and it was also used as a sort

of template by Guido de Brès, a friend of the Genevan Reformer, for the Belgic Confession (1561). Zacharius Ursinus and Casper Olevianus, the two main authors of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), were students of the great Frenchman, as was Franciscus Junius, who may have written the Antwerp Confession (1566). John Knox, who laboured with Calvin in Geneva and famously called that city the most perfect school of Christ on earth since the days of the apostles, was the leading figure among the six Johns who produced the Scottish Confession (1560).

Another of Calvin's Genevan associates wrote Theodore Beza's Confession at Poissy (1561) and Beza chaired the Seventh National Synod of the Reformed Churches of France which adopted the Confession of La Rochelle (1571), a development of the French Confession (1559). Theodore Beza's Confession (1560) was the basis of the Confession of Torcal (1562) and Torda (1563) in Hungary.

The Venerable Company of Pastors in Geneva suggested that Antoine Léger go to Constantinople as chaplain to the Dutch embassy. There the Genevan influenced the Patriarch who produced the Confession of Cyril Lukaris (1629). Before his death in 1661, Léger wrote the preface to the Waldensian Confession (1662). Among Calvin's later successors at Geneva, Francis Turretin was one of the three main figures behind the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675).

Almighty God used Geneva's confessional documents especially in the development of the truth of absolute predestination (for example, the Consensus Genevensis of 1552 and the Geneva Theses of 1649)—on which more later—and the Lord's Supper (for example, the Consensus Tigurinus of 1549). Many of the anti-Trinitarian heretics who, by their presence and/or writings vexed especially the eastern Reformed churches of Poland and Lithuania, and Hungary and Romania, had earlier troubled Geneva. One thinks here of the Spaniard Michael Servetus and the Italian George Blandrata, one of the heretics against whom the Confession of the Italian Church of Geneva (1558) was written.

As well as through its confessions, some of which were very widely used, such as Calvin's Catechism (1545), Geneva greatly influenced all parts of the Reformed world, particularly in the West, in many ways, some more obvious and others less direct and quanti-

fiable. Here one should mention not only Geneva's noted theologians and their much-circulated writings, but also its famous academy and its numerous students, its busy publishing houses, its many refugees who stayed there briefly or permanently, and its missionaries.

London

One city, however, surpasses even Geneva in the number of creeds in Dennison's compilation. Twenty-two of its 127 confessions are from London, which means that more than one out of every six documents listed were produced in the British capital.

Volumes 1-3 contain five Anglican documents (Lambeth is in London) and four confessions or catechisms by Dutch or German (three) and Spanish (one) refugees (London is a port). But it is the last volume, which covers the seventeenth century, that marks London's rise to confessional prominence. Now the main groups that were no longer content with the half-reform of the Church of England produced a flurry of authoritative documents, and London was the center for the Presbyterians (Westminster Abbey with six confessions), the Congregationalists (the Savoy Palace) with their two, and the Baptists with five. Whereas Geneva's confessional fecundity declined through the volumes, London became the center of creedal productivity through the deep and serious intra-Protestant debates in seventeenth-century Britain which focused on the capital.

Here again creedal borrowing is evident. British Presbyterianism's Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) utilized Anglicanism's Irish Articles (1615), which had incorporated the English Lambeth Articles (1595), only for the Westminster Confession to be modified by Congregationalism's Savoy Declaration (1658), especially as regards church polity. The latter was then adapted by the London Baptist Confession (1677) according to its anti-paedobaptist distinctives. Likewise, the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) is the basis of the Baptist Catechism (1693), with alterations especially regarding the first sacrament, obviously enough.

Diversity

But these four volumes are more than a tale of two cities (Geneva and London). As one would expect of confessional documents from

many different Reformed communities spread over seventeen decades from half a continent and beyond, there are differences in style and tone (for example, the literary style of William Farel's Summary of 1529 is abrupt and irregular), and not all of them agree on all things. Especially in the British Isles, there are differences regarding church polity and baptism. In the continental Reformed world, the strongest creeds are from Geneva and the weakest from Poland.

Here are confessional documents drawn up by anywhere from one or two, to dozens to hundreds. Some were penned by theologians, or ministers, or martyrs, or even artisans—the Guanabara Confession (1558) provides an example of the last two categories—while others were produced by an elector (the Confession of Frederick III of 1577) or a patriarch (the Confession of Cyril Lukaris of 1629). Some confessions were written by individuals or consistories, or colloquys, or convocations, or assemblies, or (regional or national) synods.

The confessions in Dennison's four volumes vary greatly in length. Some are very short, like the Ten Theses of Bern (1528) and the Lausanne Articles (1536), both of which are just over a page. Even less than a page are the nine superb statements of the Lambeth Articles (1595) on double predestination and the Seven Articles of the Church of Leiden (1617) by English Congregationalists in the Netherlands before their departure on the Mayflower for America in 1620. However, the Documents of the Debrecen Synod (1567) come in at a hefty 145 pages.

Some creeds were especially to be presented to emperors, or kings, or electors, or princes, or dukes, or counts, or parliaments, or city councils, while one was drafted as a witness to his Roman Catholic father: Theodore Beza's Confession (1560). Others were written particularly for children (for example, Valdés' Catechism of 1549 and the Emden Catechism of 1554), or adult church members (for example, the Antwerp Confession of 1566), or those seeking admission to the Lord's Supper (for example, the Brief Confession of the Westminster Assembly of 1645), or students (for example, the Geneva Students Confession of 1559), or pastors (for example, the Confession of the East Friesland Preachers of 1528 and the Geneva Theses of 1649), or church visitation (for example, the Bentheim Confession of 1613/1617), or even inclusion in a Bible translation

(for example, the Confession of Faith in the Geneva Bible of 1560). Still others were drafted to list first principles which must be held by churches in order for them to be tolerated in a Christian commonwealth (for example, the Principles of Faith of 1652 and a New Confession of Faith of 1654).

Some confessions especially polemicized against the heresies of various groups: Roman Catholics (for example, the King's Confession of 1581), Anabaptists (for example, the Walloon Confession of Wesel of 1544/1545), anti-Trinitarians (for example, the Synod of Torda of 1566 and the Confession of the Synod of Cassov of 1568), Arminians (for example, the Counter Remonstrance of 1611, the Bentheim Confession of 1613/1617 and the Canons of Dordt of 1618-1619), or Amyraldians (for example, the Geneva Theses of 1649 and the Formula Consensus Helvetica of 1675). Reformed confessions that contradict Lutheran views tend to be less polemical (for example, the Nassau Confession of 1578, the Bremen Consensus of 1595 and the Stafforts Book of 1599).

Particular concerns are evident in some of the creeds of different Reformed bodies befitting their diverse histories and their opponents and/or oppressors. To oversimplify, one could say that for the Dutch it was sovereign grace, for the Germans it was the Lord's Supper, for the Hungarians it was the Holy Trinity, for the Polish it was (forced) ecumenism, and for the British it was church polity, whereas the Waldensians were repeatedly forced to explain why they ought not be persecuted by the Romanists.

There was and is a big difference in the usage of these documents. The Confession of Frederick III (1577) was a personal profession only published after the Elector's death. The Confession of the Glastonbury Congregation (1551) first served that French-speaking refugee congregation when its adult members numbered just twenty. Some creeds have served millions and are still maintained in faithful Reformed churches today, such as the documents in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), etc.—roughly, the main Reformed creeds found in the middle of volume 3 of Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom*. Other creeds were superseded by later revisions. Thus, the Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1552/1553) became the Thirty-Nine Articles

(1562/1563) and the Bohemian Confession of 1573 is much longer and more Reformed than the Bohemian Confession of 1535.

Significance

The four volumes of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries* teach many lessons vitally necessary for our day. First, Reformed churches are not some new thing lately sprung up. We are rooted in a centuries-long tradition of faith, worship and life drawn from the sacred Scriptures. Second, the Reformed faith and Reformed churches are not merely parochial. We are international and truly catholic. Third, true Reformed churches are not creedless or anti-creedal (like Liberalism or Fundamentalism); nor are they content merely with short or ecumenical creeds (like Evangelicalism). We hold to lengthy, developed and detailed creeds, the full-blooded confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fourth, faithful creedal Reformed churches are not dry or dying or dead. Loving, knowing, preaching, witnessing to and suffering for the biblical truth of our creeds reveals that we live unto the triune God by the grace of the incarnate Son who died and rose again for us.

On the contrary, it is shallow, trendy Evangelicalism, with its faddish, modern worship, its fascination with spurious charismata, its openness to Roman Catholic doctrine, and its lack of the knowledge of God, that is the "new kid on the block" ecclesiastically. Without historical and creedal roots, it is blown about with every wind of doctrine. It would be unrecognizable to the strong Reformed churches of the past, except that it bears uncanny resemblances to elements of the Anabaptist movement that they strenuously opposed! May the Lord be pleased to bring many individuals, families, and churches from superficial Christianity back to the old paths of the biblical and Reformed confessions!

What else should we say about this largest-ever collection in English of the Reformed confessions from all the Reformed family in all the Reformed world in its foundational two centuries? It would serve well as the core text in seminary courses on the Reformed creeds. These volumes are a vital resource for Reformed ministers and any who want to learn more about our creedal heritage. From this compilation of Reformed confessions, one can trace the growth of the Reformed

creeds, which is of great value in understanding the development of Reformed theology. Along with the very helpful, brief introductions to each of the confessions, this will provide a fascinating perspective on Reformed church history. This set would also serve to better acquaint western Reformed believers with the eastern Reformed churches of Hungary and Romania, Poland and Lithuania, and Bohemia, which produced twenty-five of the 127 confessions, about twenty percent of the total.

II. A Recently Uncovered Jewel

Geneva Theses

Among the many Reformed confessions appearing in English for the first time in these four volumes, there is one highly significant document only available in English before now in a 1971 Th.D. thesis for a Canadian university. This "recently uncovered jewel," as this article's title puts it, is the Geneva Theses (1649). It is contained in volume 4 of Dennison's work (413-422), which includes his introduction (413-415), his transcription of the Latin primary document (pp. 415-418), and his revised English translation (418-422).

The Geneva Theses were written to oppose the theology of the Academy of Saumur in western France, promoted especially by the heretic Moise Amyraut (1596-1664), its most famous student and professor (hence Amyraldianism). At the heart of Amyraut's doctrine of hypothetical universal grace, in both hypothetical universal election and hypothetical universal atonement, is the notion that God desires to save everybody head for head, including the reprobate—today called the free offer or the well-meant offer.

The Geneva Theses were written by Théodore Tronchin (1582-1657) and Antoine Léger. We have already spoken of Léger's role in Waldensian and Constantinopolitan confessions. Tronchin studied theology at Geneva, Basel, Heidelberg, Franeker and Leiden. Along with Giovanni Diodati, whom he later succeeded as a theological professor, Tronchin was a Genevan delegate to the great Synod of Dordt that condemned Arminianism. Thirty years later, he wrote the Geneva Theses in the same tradition of sovereign grace as the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), over against the more subtle enemy of Amyraldianism, with the later confession being more explicitly, antithetically, and emphatically against the free offer, a more subtle enemy than even

Amyraldianism. This is noteworthy given that Tronchin was widely reckoned to be a more irenic theologian.

The five heads of the Geneva Theses are entitled "I. Concerning Original Sin" (against mediate imputation especially taught by Saumur's Josué de la Place), "II. Concerning Predestination," "III. Concerning Redemption," "IV. Concerning the Disposition of Man to Grace" and "V. Concerning Promises Made to Believers and Their Prerogatives." Like the more famous five heads of the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), from which we have the Five Points of Calvinism (and which the heads of the Geneva Theses sought to safe-guard), this much shorter creed consists of both positive statements (ranging from two to four articles) and rejections of errors (from one to four articles).

Anti-Free-Offer Articles

It is highly significant that in theses II, III and IV (the ones dealing with predestination, redemption, and the disposition of man to grace), seven of the seventeen articles, consisting of one of the ten positive statements and an amazingly high six of the seven rejections of errors, clearly oppose all the main tenets of well-meant offer theology! These are the anti-free-offer articles:

> II:R. Rejection of the error of those:
> 1. Who teach that in God there is granted, under the condition of faith and repentance, some good will of saving those who perish.
> 2. Who, using economy for an excuse, ascribe to God the inclination or volition or disposition or affection or less ardent love or power or intention or desire or will or counsel or decree or covenant or necessary or universal conditional loving kindness, by which He wills each and every man to be saved if they believe in Christ.
> 3. Who assign to God a design previous to election in which He determined to be merciful to the whole human race without limit.
> 4. Who attribute to God a twofold loving-kindness, one clear or first and universal by which He willed each and every person to be saved: the other more clear, second, and particular towards the elect (419-420).
>
> III:R. Rejection of the error of those:
> 1. Who teach that Christ died for each and every one sufficiently, not merely by reason of worth, but also by reason of intention; or for

> all conditionally, if they were to believe; or who assert that Scripture teaches that Christ died for all men universally; and most especially the places of Scripture (Ezek. 18:21 etc. and 33:11; John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) ought to be extended to each and every man and by these the universality of love and grace ought to be proved (421).[1]
>
> IV. 1. Since the requisite conditions for salvation are impossible to the reprobate, God does not intend the salvation of them conditionally if they believe and repent unless it is supposed that there is an empty, deceptive, and useless intention and will of God (421).
>
> IV:R. Rejection of the error of those:
> 2. Who teach that by His revealed disposition, God wills the salvation of each and every one (421).

God's Will

In opposition to the well-meant offer that posits a will of the Almighty to save everyone, as the last article cited above states, the Geneva Theses reject "the error of those: Who teach that by His revealed disposition, God wills the salvation of each and every one" (IV:R:2). Of the four rejections of error in "II. Concerning Predestination," three spurn the free-offer view of God's will. This creed from Calvin's Geneva rejects the views of those who

> (1) teach that in God there is…some good will of saving those who perish (II:R:1);
> (2) ascribe to God the inclination or volition or disposition or affection or less ardent love or power or intention or desire or will or counsel or decree or covenant or necessary or universal conditional loving kindness, by which He wills each and every man to be saved if they believe in Christ (II:R:2); and
> (3) attribute to God a…universal [desire] by which He willed each and every person to be saved (II:R:4).

Let us analyze the various components of the errors that the Geneva Theses sharply oppose. First, the issue is the will of God, both

1 Instead of Ezekiel 31:11 in the English translation (421), I have changed the reference to Ezekiel 33:11, which is the verse clearly intended, as indicated by the Latin original (417).

as a verb: He "wills" or "willed" (II:R:2, 4; IV:R:2) and as a noun: His "will" (II:R:1, 2; IV:1). Jehovah's will is spoken of as His "disposition" (II:R:2), even His "revealed disposition" (IV:R:2). Besides Jehovah's "will" and "disposition," article II:R:2's list includes God's "inclination" or "volition" or "desire," as well as eight other terms!

Second, this will of God (according to the error being rejected) is "universal" (II:R:2), concerning "each and every one" (IV:R:2), "each and every person" (II:R:4), "each and every man" (II:R:2) and "the whole human race without limit" (II:R:3), including "those who perish" (II:R:1) who are "the reprobate" (IV:1).

Third, this view of the will of God concerning each and every reprobate human being is that He desires their "salvation" (IV:1; IV:R:2) or "saving" (II:R:1) or being "saved" (II:R:2, 4).

Fourth, in rejecting the views of those who "ascribe" (II:R:2) or "attribute" (II:R:4) to God, or "teach" (II:R:1; IV:R:2) that He has, a will to save the reprobate, the seventeenth-century Geneva Theses are clearly rejecting what in our day is meant by, and called, the free offer. How often in our day do we not hear professed Calvinists "teach that by His revealed disposition, God wills the salvation of each and every one" (IV:R:2). But this Reformed creed calls this an "error" and pronounces its "rejection" of it!

Since, by definition, the salvation of the reprobate is "impossible," the Geneva Theses repudiate the well-meant offer because it, like Amyraldianism, postulates "an empty, deceptive, and useless intention and will of God" (IV:1)!

First, the free offer is "empty" as opposed to the full, rich and eternal will, desire, volition and revealed disposition of the blessed triune God which manifests the wisdom, power and glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the salvation of all the elect (Eph. 1:3-14), "a certain number of men who make up His [i.e., Christ's] mystical body" (III:2, 420). How "empty" the foolish speculations of Saumur and the well-meant offer appear when set in the light of our Saviour's thanksgiving to His Father for the revelation of God's will in election and reprobation in the divinely ordained results of gospel preaching:

> I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All

> things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him (Matt. 11:25-27).

Second, the well-meant offer is "deceptive," since it is not honest or sincere to claim as gospel that the God of truth desires to save each and every reprobate person when He has not taken any of the necessary steps to deliver them from sin and destruction, and bring them to the bliss of covenant fellowship with the living God (Westminster Confession 3:3-7). Jehovah has not elected or redeemed any of them, and He never regenerates, calls, justifies, adopts, sanctifies, preserves, or glorifies any of the reprobate. Instead, He hates and hardens them as "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction" (Rom. 9:10-24).

Third, the free offer is utterly "useless," as the Geneva Theses point out, for it has not saved, it does not save and it will not save, a single reprobate in all the history of the world. Why? Because, by definition, it cannot save any one. Over against the impotent god of the well-meant offer, we confess, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). For, unlike the god of Saumur and much of modern evangelicalism, the true God proclaims, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do *all* my pleasure" (Is. 46:10)!

Any deity with an "empty, deceptive and useless" will is an "empty, deceptive and useless" god. Instead of the "empty, deceptive and useless" divine will and god of the free offer, this Genevan creed speaks repeatedly about God's eternal decree, counsel, good pleasure, predestination, and election. Concerning Jehovah's predestination, it confesses, "Those whom God *elected* in Christ out of His *good pleasure alone*, and those *only*, He *decreed* to give to the Son, and to give them faith in order that they would be *brought all the way to eternal life*" (II:3; p. 419; emphasis mine). Concerning Christ's purpose to redeem only those whom the Father has given Him, we read, "For these, Christ Himself, *perfectly conscious of His vocation*, *willed* and *resolved* to die and to add to the infinite value of His death, the *most efficacious and singular purpose of His will*" (III:3; 420; italics mine). No wonder the Geneva Theses have no place or toleration for the free-offer travesty regarding God's will!

God's Love

Both Amyraldianism and free-offer theology teach false views of both God's will and God's love. In rejecting the doctrine of Moise Amyraut on God's love, the Geneva Theses also repudiate the views of Louis Berkhof, John McArthur, Phil Johnson, John Piper, and others.

First, these men attribute to the Almighty a universal "love" (II:R:2; III:R:1), "lovingkindness" (II:R:2, 4), "affection" (II:R:2), mercy (II:R:3), and "grace" (III:R:1) for "the whole human race without limit" (II:R:3). They "teach that in God there is granted…some good will of saving those who perish" (II:R:1). This "good will" is a favourable or gracious attitude or disposition to the reprobate.

Second, along with the extent of God's love, there is the issue of the "number" of the divine love. Saumur, like the Christian Reformed Church's Synod of 1924 and all free-offer advocates, taught a "twofold" grace or mercy of God. This "twofold loving-kindness" consists of "one clear or first and universal by which He willed each and every person to be saved: the other more clear, second, and particular towards the elect" (II:R:4).

Third, what about the degree or power of this secondary and universal divine affection? Again Amyraldianism and the well-meant offer agree: it is a "less ardent love" (II:R:2), a love without the necessary power to save. Hence, this alleged divine love of the free-offer falls under the condemnation of this Genevan creed as "empty, deceptive, and useless" (IV:1). The correspondences are uncanny!

The attentive reader will notice from the letter "R" in all the round brackets in the three paragraphs above, that these Amyraldian and well-meant offer views of a secondary, lesser divine love, grace, lovingkindness, mercy, or affection toward the reprobate are classified, not as confessional or Reformed or biblical, but as *errors* which are *rejected* by the Geneva Theses!

This beautiful creed only knows of one love of God for some people: "His eternal love toward the elect" (II:2; p. 419). The singular "matchless love and mercy of God" is extolled in these comforting words about our gracious salvation in Jesus Christ, for it is sure and certain from beginning to end:

> The matchless love and mercy of God is the sole cause both of the

> sending of the Son and of the satisfaction appointed beforehand through Him, even the conferring of faith and application of merit through it: which benefits should not be objects of separation or be torn asunder from themselves (II:4; 419).

Key Texts

Not only does the free offer involve two intrinsically related false doctrines concerning God (regarding His will and His love for the salvation of the reprobate), but it also invariably appeals (wrongly) to certain texts of Scripture as if they support these errors. This 1649 confession states,

> Rejection of the error of those: Who teach that...most especially the places of Scripture (Ezek. 18:21 etc. and 33:11; John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) ought to be extended to each and every man and by these the universality of love and grace ought to be proved (III:R:1).[2]

How often free-offer advocates in our day claim that the "world" in John 3:16 includes those who are never saved! Thus, they end up with a resistible love of God for the reprobate, contrary to Head IV of the Canons of Dordt, as well as some form of a universal atonement. These professed Calvinists do not seem to be bothered that the latter follows necessarily from the former; yea, some even state this explicitly, as if the Canons of Dordt did not teach the scriptural truth

2 Francis Turretin (1623-1687) asks, "Can there be attributed to God any *conditional will*, or *universal purpose of pitying the whole human race fallen in sin*, of destinating Christ as Mediator to each and all, and of calling them all to a saving participation of his benefits?" and responds with a firm negative: "We deny" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992], vol. 1, 395; italics mine). Then follow ten pages of solid arguments from Scripture and the Canons of Dordt (III/IV:8) rejecting the free-offer views of the Lutherans, the Arminians, and the Amyraldians (395-404). Turretin's next nine pages contain a thorough refutation from God's Word, Augustine, Calvin, and Beza of a flawed interpretation of four biblical passages alleged in support of a failed desire of God to save the reprobate (405-413). Interestingly, these are the very four listed in Geneva Theses III:R:1: John 3:16, Ezekiel 33:11, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9! Turretin was a Genevan who signed and supported the Theses.

of the Lord's cross as particular and effectual, and for the elect alone (II:8-9)![3]

Little has changed in the 350-plus years since the Geneva Theses. Besides John 3:16, the texts scraped up in defense of the well-meant offer in our day are still the Ezekiel passages, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9.[4] The only surprise is that Matthew 23:37 is not mentioned.[5] Indeed, the four texts mentioned in Geneva Theses III:R:1 are those appealed to by the enemies of God's sovereign grace in the early church, in the Middle Ages, at the Reformation, in the post-Reformation church, and in our own times.

It is rare that a Reformed creed mentions the erroneous exegesis of specific passages of the Word of God. It is highly revealing that the Geneva Theses do exactly this, and that the Bible verses it mentions are the very verses appealed to by advocates of the free offer today in support of a universal divine "love and grace" that is "extended to each and every man" and desires to save everybody! These are also "most especially the places of Scripture" (III:R:1) cited by the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Roman Catholics, Anabaptists and Arminians, as well as the Amyraldians and well-meant offer men.[6]

Extra-Confessional Binding?

It is significant that (1) this anti-free offer confession is infralapsarian (II:1, 419), so that its opposition to the well-meant offer cannot be dismissed merely as supralapsarian "extremism;" (2) it was approved

3 For faithful Reformed exegesis of John 3:16 online, see Homer C. Hoeksema, "God So Loved the World (John 3:16)," which also includes the sound interpretations of Francis Turretin, Abraham Kuyper and A. W. Pink (www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/godsolovedtheworld.htm).

4 Many orthodox quotes on Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 33:11, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, have been collected on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/quotes.htm#desire).

5 Many orthodox quotes on Matthew 23:37 have been collected on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/matthew2337quotes.htm).

6 For a Reformed work against an Anabaptist advocate of the free offer, including the well-meant offer interpretation of the standard biblical texts, see this superb book by John Knox (c. 1514-1572): *On Predestination, in Answer to the Cavillations by an Anabaptist* (1560), in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (USA: Banner, 2014), vol. 5, 7-468.

by all the Venerable Company of Pastors of Calvin's Geneva and "signed on their behalf by the moderator, Joannes Jacobus Sartorius (1619-1690)" (414), so that it can hardly be misrepresented and then derided as hyper-Calvinism; (3) it is an official church confession and not merely a sermon or a commentary on Scripture or a theological writing, so that it does not merely present the personal sentiments of a minister or a professor; (4) its title contains the word "theses," indicating that these theological propositions are to be steadfastly maintained against all opposition and gainsayers; and (5) Genevan professors and ministers, and those trained at the Genevan Academy to be appointed elsewhere, for example, in France and in the Lowlands, had to subscribe to it (414).

One wonders if Klaas Schilder would have accused Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors of "extra-confessional binding."[7] Would Schilder have asked them, "Are not the Canons of Dordt enough for the church in Geneva?" Unlike the "Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches" (1951), which, among other truths, teaches God's unconditional covenant and effectual desire to save all the elect, excluding an ineffectual divine desire to save the reprobate, and consists almost entirely of quotations from the Three Forms of Unity, the Geneva Theses do not even use excerpts from Geneva's earlier confessional documents, for example, the Geneva Confession (1536/37), Calvin's Catechism (1545), or the Consensus Genevensis (1552)![8]

"Is Amyraldianism with its well-meant offer theology a 'big deal'? Is it really that bad? Why must you continually oppose it?" Some made these criticisms of the Genevan church in the seventeenth century, as they do against those today who antithetically maintain God's absolute sovereignty. Well, the Venerable Company of Pastors even wrote a new and binding confession against it: the Geneva Theses! A

7 "Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger," Schilder's charge against Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches, is contained in Jelle Faber and Klaas Schilder, *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism & Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger* (Neerlandia, AB and Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 55-167.

8 The "Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches" is found in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (USA: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 410-431.

quarter of a century later, Geneva and the Swiss Reformed churches produced and adopted another creed against Saumur and the free offer: the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675), which shall be considered later.

Calvin's Consensus Genevensis

Théodore Tronchin, Antoine Léger, and the Geneva Theses stand solidly in the line of John Calvin (1509-1564), the great Reformer of Geneva. The following lengthy quote from Calvin's Consensus Genevensis (1552) shows that he maintained the scriptural truth of the absolute sovereignty of God along with the Geneva Theses and Augustine, over against the Pelagians and the Roman Catholics with their free offer and false exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:4.

> *Now* let Pighius boast, if he can, that God willeth all *men* to be saved! The above arguments, founded on the Scriptures, prove that even the external preaching of the doctrine of salvation, which is very far inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, was not made of God common to *all men.* This passage of the apostle (1 Tim. ii. 4) was long ago brought forward by the Pelagians, and handled against us with all their might. What Augustine advanced in reply to them in many parts of his works, I think it unnecessary to bring forward on the present occasion. I will only adduce one passage, which clearly and briefly proves how unconcernedly he despised their objection now in question. "When our Lord complains (says he) that though He wished to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but she would not [Matt. 23:37], are we to consider that the will of God was overpowered by a number of weak men, so that He who was Almighty God could not do what He wished or willed to do? If so, what is to become of that omnipotence by which He did 'whatsoever pleased Him in heaven and in earth' [Ps. 135:6]? Moreover, who will be found so profanely mad as to say that God cannot convert the evil wills of men, *which* He pleases, *when* He pleases, and *as* He pleases, to good? Now, when He does this, He does it *in mercy;* and when He doeth it not, *in judgment* He doeth it not...." The true meaning of Paul, however, in the passage now under consideration [I Tim. 2:4] is perfectly clear and intelligible to every one who is not determined on contention. The apostle is exhorting that all solemn "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: for

> kings and for all that are in authority." And because there were, in that age, so many and such wrathful and bitter enemies of the Church, Paul, to prevent despair from hindering the prayers of the faithful, hastens to meet their distresses by earnestly entreating them to be instant in prayer "for all men," and especially "for all those in authority." "*For* (saith the apostle) God will have *all men* to be saved." Who does not see that the apostle is here speaking of *orders of men* rather than of individuals? Indeed, that distinction which commentators here make is not without great reason and point; that *nations* of individuals, not *individuals* of nations, are here intended by Paul (vol. 1, 758-759; italics those in the book).

Theodore Beza's Confession

The Geneva Theses are in a stream of anti-free-offer Genevan confessional literature that includes not only Calvin's Consensus Genevensis (1552) but also Theodore Beza's Confession (1560), written eight years later.

Interestingly, Théodore Tronchin was named after his maternal grandfather, Théodore Beza (1519-1605), and his mother, Théodora, who was the adopted daughter of the great Beza! Like the Geneva Theses almost ninety years later (III:R:1), Beza expressed creedally that those to whom God is "longsuffering" and whom He is "not willing that any should perish" are the elect and not the reprobate (2 Peter 3:9). Thus we read in Theodore Beza's Confession (1560):

> Finally, we believe according to the Word of God that in the time ordained of God (Acts 3:21; 1 Peter 4:7), which time the very angels do not know (Matt. 24:36; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:1-2), Jesus Christ *seeing the number of his elect fulfilled and accomplished* (Rev. 6:11; 2 Peter 3:9) will come from heaven bodily with His divine majesty (Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:30), this old world being consumed by fire (2 Peter 3:10) (vol. 2, p. 333; italics mine).

This is also the anti-free-offer interpretation of 2 Peter 3:9 in the Confession of Tarcal (1562) and Torda (1563), a Hungarian Reformed creed drafted by Péter Melius Juhász (1532-1572) who appears to have used Theodore Beza's Confession (1560) with some modifications:

> We believe, from the Word of God, that the day is to come at a certain

> time which even the angels do not know, when, *after the number of the elect is fulfilled* and the world has been purged by fire, Jesus Christ will come from heaven in His visible and true human form (but clothed in divine majesty), that all men that have existed from the beginning of the world may appear before Him (Acts 3:21; 1 Peter 4:7; Matt. 24:13, 36; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 6:11; 2 Peter 3:9, 12; Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:30) (vol. 2, 751; emphasis mine).

Turretin and the Formula Consensus Helvetica

Tronchin was succeeded in his chair of theology at the Genevan Academy by no less than Francis Turretin (1623-1687), who signed and strenuously defended the Geneva Theses. Along with John Henry Heidegger of Zurich and Lucas Gernler of Basel, Francis Turretin of Geneva was one of the three worthies who produced and promoted the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675), which, as its extended title states, was "designed to condemn and exclude that modified form of Calvinism" that "emanated from the theological school at Saumur" (vol. 4, 518) so that it would not "infect our churches" (vol. 4, 419). According to the "Preface," this "especially" included "the doctrine that concerns the extent of divine grace," for it held to a form of "universal grace" (vol. 4, 519; cf. 518), like the free offer.

Here we quote just one key article:

> Canon VI: Wherefore, we can not agree with the opinion of those who teach: 1) that God, moved by philanthropy, or a kind of special love for the fallen of the human race, did, in a kind of conditioned willing, first moving of pity, as they call it, or inefficacious desire, determine the salvation of all, conditionally, i.e., if they would believe, 2) that he appointed Christ Mediator for all and each of the fallen; and 3) that, at length, certain ones whom he regarded, not simply as sinners in the first Adam, but as redeemed in the second Adam, he elected, that is, he determined graciously to bestow on these, in time, the saving gift of faith; and in this sole act election properly so called is complete. For these and all other similar teachings are in no way insignificant deviations from the proper teaching concerning divine election; because the Scriptures do not extend unto all and each God's purpose of showing mercy to man, but restrict it to the elect alone, the reprobate being excluded even by name, as Esau, whom God hated with an eternal hatred (Rom. 9:13). The same Holy Scriptures testify that

> the counsel and will of God do not change, but stand immovable, and God in the heavens does whatsoever he will (Ps. 115:3; Isa. 46:10); for God is infinitely removed from all that human imperfection which characterizes inefficacious affections and desires, rashness, repentance, and change of purpose. The appointment, also, of Christ, as Mediator, equally with the salvation of those who were given to him for a possession and an inheritance that can not be taken away, proceeds from one and the same election, and does not form the basis of election (vol. 4, 521-522).[9]

Amyraldianism is seen to include what is now called the well-meant offer in that both hold to a certain divine "philanthropy" or "love" or "pity" for all men absolutely that wills their salvation with an "inefficacious desire." Heidegger, Gernler, and Turretin contend that "these and all other similar teachings are in no way insignificant deviations from the proper teaching concerning divine election" for "the Scriptures do not extend unto all and each God's purpose of showing mercy to man, but restrict it to the elect alone, the reprobate being excluded even by name, as Esau, whom God hated with an eternal hatred (Rom. 9:13)." The Formula Consensus Helvetica faithfully declares that "God is infinitely removed from all that human imperfection which characterizes inefficacious affections and desires" for "God in the heavens does whatsoever he will (Ps. 115:3)."[10] In citing this biblical text, this Reformed creed echoes many worthies who quoted Psalm 115:3 (and Psalm 135:6, which is similar), such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533) and Gottschalk of Orbais (c. 808–c.867), in their opposition to an "inefficacious desire" in God to save the reprobate taught by the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians.[11]

9 I have corrected two of the three Scripture texts cited, changing Romans 9:11 to Romans 9:13, and Isaiah 47:10 to Isaiah 46:10.

10 Other articles in the Formula Consensus Helvetica that oppose the free offer are Canons XIX and XX (vol. 4, 526-527).

11 See, e.g., Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, ed. Henry Paolucci, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1961), xciv-ciii; Francis X. Gumerlock, *Fulgentius of Ruspe on the Saving Will of God: The Development of a Sixth-Century African Bishop's Interpretation of I Timothy 2:4 During the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin

A perennially fresh stream of Genevan confessional literature that advocates God's effectual saving desire and rejects a divine will to save the reprobate runs from Calvin's Consensus Genevensis (1552) to Theodore Beza's Confession (1560) to Théodore Tronchin and Antoine Léger's Geneva Theses (1649) and Francis Turretin and the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675). When Geneva turned from the truth of the absolute sovereignty of the God who is "the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns," the "broken cisterns" of Amyraldianism, free-offer theology, and other errors, "that can hold no water," it departed from its creeds and apostatized (Jer. 2:13).[12]

Of all the Reformed confessional literature, including the four creeds mentioned above, as well as, for example, the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619) and the "Declaration of Principles" (1951), the Geneva Theses stand out as being the shortest, while yet tackling all the main aspects of the free-offer (its views of God's will and love, and its alleged scriptural proof) and doing so antithetically in its rejection of errors sections, presenting the well-meant offer as contrary to God's absolute predestination (II, 419-420), Christ's particular redemption (III, 420-421) and the Spirit's effectual call (IV, 421). Hopefully, in God's sovereign purpose, this "recently uncovered jewel" will attract widespread attention and come to be admired and prized for the beautiful, little gem that it is.

James Dennison, we salute you! We commend you for your vision and perseverance in this grand project. For this, along with your work as editor of Francis Turretin's monumental three-volume *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, the Reformed church owes you a large debt. Thank you! ●

Mellen Press, 2009); Victor Genke and Francis X. Gumerlock (eds. & trans.), *Gottschalk and a Medieval Predestination Controversy: Texts Translated From the Latin* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010).

12 Cf. James T. Dennison, Jr., "The Life and Career of Francis Turretin," in Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), vol. 3, 639-658; James T. Dennison, Jr., "The Twilight of Scholasticism: Francis Turretin at the Dawn of the Enlightenment," in Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (eds.), *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Great Britain: Paternoster, 1999), 244-255.

A Review Article

Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Mark A Snoeberger (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2015). Pp. xiv – 242, (paper). $24.99. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The subject of this book is fundamental Christian doctrine: for whom Jesus Christ died—the extent of the atonement. The subject is fundamental simply because of what the cross is in the gospel of salvation. It is fundamental also because of the implications for all of Christian doctrine of one's teaching concerning the extent of the atonement. Predestination, the natural condition of the sinner, sovereign grace, and the preservation of saints, to say nothing of the oneness of purpose of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost regarding the cross of Christ—all of the "five points of Calvinism," or better, all of the doctrines of salvation by sovereign grace as confessed by the Canons of Dordt and by the Westminster Standards—are at stake in the truth of the extent of the atonement.

Innate Weakness of the Nature of the Book

The nature of the book is the increasingly popular theological tactic of presenting several differing, indeed contradictory, opposing views of an essential Christian doctrine as legitimate options for Christian readers. The options in this volume, misleadingly called "perspectives" in the book's title, are, first, the Reformed doctrine of "limited atonement," or, as the defender of the doctrine prefers, "definite atonement," or "particular atonement." The second option ("perspective") is the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement.

The third option ("perspective") is the confusing defense of a doctrine of the atonement that the author calls the "multiple-intentions view of the atonement." As though there can be a third position between definite atonement and universal atonement, or as though there can be some sort of compromise between the two opposing positions, this third view attempts to combine the Reformed and the Arminian theologies of the cross. On the one hand, Christ died for all humans

without exception. On the other hand, Christ died only for some, namely, the elect.

Like all such compromises of biblical truth with egregious error, this one mocks the Christian, human mind; demolishes the divine logic of biblical revelation; makes knowledge of the fundamental Christian gospel of the cross impossible (who can know a doctrine of the atonement that is, at one and the same time and in one and the same sense, both universal and limited?). And, in fact, such compromises not only opens wide the way both to the Arminian heresy and to the sheer modernism in which Arminian theology always ends, but also *approves*, in its essential error, the Arminian heresy: Christ died to atone for the sins of all humans without exception, but many of those for whom He died perish nevertheless.

This nature of the book, as a friendly dialogue among theologians who, although differing fundamentally on essential Christian doctrine, respect each other's confession, are at pains to find elements of each other's theology which they can affirm and praise, and deliberately, explicitly refuse to condemn the doctrine defended by the others as damnable heresy, makes the book a real and urgent threat to the Reformed, Christian faith concerning the atonement of the cross.

Were the Presbyterian defender of definite atonement perfectly sound in his doctrine of the cross, his apology on behalf of definite atonement would be, not merely weak, but, in fact, the fatal surrender of the gospel of the cross to the Arminian heretic and his cross-denying heresy. For the Presbyterian defender of the truth refuses to condemn the Arminian, or Remonstrant, doctrine of the atonement as blatant, sinful, gospel-destroying heresy. Rather, the Arminian doctrine is merely a differing "perspective" on the atonement. The Presbyterian acknowledges powerful grounds in biblical teaching for the Arminian "perspective" of universal atonement.

This and the spate of similar theological volumes blur the boundaries between the truth and the lie, open wide the way into orthodox Reformed churches for heretics and heresies, and encourage ecclesiastical ecumenicity between churches whose histories and creeds have separated them.

This volume is open and bold with regard to these spiritually illicit and doctrinally destructive ends. The editors describe the book

as an "irenic exchange of ideas" (xiv). Having briefly described the views set forth in the book, the editors call on the readers to choose for themselves the view that appeals to them, while warning against denying "Christian recognition to those" who choose differently (17).

Contrary to the assertion of one of the authors of the book, the controversy between the Reformed faith and Arminianism, specifically regarding the extent of the atonement, is not an "`in-house' fight between members of the same family" (145). Over the issue of the atonement and related doctrines, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century deposed Arminian ministers, and excommunicated them and their followers from the church. Indeed, with the help of the state, they expelled the Arminians from the country.

Contemporary Reformed Christians, particularly officebearers, are not required to attempt to remove Arminians from the nation. But they are required, by the Formula of Subscription, to condemn Arminianism as heresy and to discipline Arminian teachers and preachers. Arminians are not members of the Reformed family.

One of the editors, identifying himself as a teacher in the seminary of John Piper (Bethlehem College and Seminary, Minneapolis MN), warns against "unhealthy schism over the extent of the atonement" (217). He denies that the doctrine of universal atonement is heresy, honoring it with the Reformed doctrine of definite atonement as "evangelical views" (218). Contending for the truth of limited atonement as essential Christian doctrine, which implies condemnation of the doctrine of universal atonement, is strident, divisive, and arrogant. It smacks of "sinful pride" (226).

This editor has either never read or takes issue with the second head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt.

In this disparagement of the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement, the editor evidently shows himself a good student of John Piper. The ardent Arminian advocate of universal atonement in the book appeals to Piper as teaching that God, in addition to and in contradiction of His will for the salvation of the elect, has a will for the salvation of all humans without exception, a will that necessarily expressed itself in the cross of Jesus Christ (108, 111, 114).

Piper is regarded by many nominal Calvinists today as a preemi-

nent champion of Calvinism (as a Baptist, he is certainly not a champion of the [covenantal] Reformed faith). Fact is, that with friends like Piper, Calvinism does not need enemies.

Presbyterian Defender of Definite Atonement

The proponent and defender in the book of the Reformed and Presbyterian doctrine of definite atonement is the highly esteemed Westminster East Seminary (Philadelphia) professor, Dr. Carl R. Trueman. Trueman's explanation of the cross of Jesus Christ is sound. Much of his criticism of the Arminian theory of universal atonement is incisive.

It is in his defense of Reformed orthodoxy concerning the cross against the Arminian attack upon it and in his fatal concessions to universal atonement that Trueman goes abysmally wrong, sacrificing the truth of the atonement of Jesus Christ on the altar of compromise with heresy.

Among the glaring weaknesses in Trueman's defense of definite atonement are the following. First, Trueman declines to refute the explanation of the biblical texts commonly appealed to by the advocates of universal atonement, for example, Ezekiel 18:22, on the ground of the limitations of human knowledge (31). This concedes the legitimacy of the universalist interpretation and, thus, the legitimacy of universalist theology.

Second, Trueman grants the universalist explanation of the crucially important text, I John 2:2, but refers the application of the cross to the non-elect to the "common grace" benefits of the cross (39). Such an interpretation of I John 2:2 cannot stand. The text speaks of Christ's death as "propitiation for…sins," not as acquiring health and wealth, rain and sunshine. If, as Carl Trueman is ready to grant, the text has every human in view when it speaks of the "whole world," it teaches universal atonement.

Third, Trueman thinks to deflect the Arminian attack on the Reformed faith by means of a list of biblical texts teaching a love of God for the "world" and a desire of God for the salvation of "all" by appealing to the distinction between God's hidden will (the will of His decree) and God's revealed will. But Trueman understands this distinction as meaning that with His hidden will God loves and desires

to save only some (the elect), whereas with His revealed will God loves and desires to save all humans without exception (30, 31, 75).

But this understanding of the distinction in the will of God is utterly and fatally erroneous. The sound and important distinction does not have God both loving and hating the same persons, or desiring and not desiring the salvation of the same persons. Rather, by the distinction Reformed theology recognizes the biblical teaching that even though God has in hatred for them decreed the damnation of some sinners, for instance Pharaoh (the "hidden" will of God's decree), He commands them to believe the gospel and obey His commands, for example, "let my people go" (the "revealed" will of God's precept).

Not only is Trueman's understanding of the distinction erroneous, but it also posits two contradictory wills in God with regard to the salvation of sinners. With one will, God decrees the perishing of certain sinners; with another, He desires the salvation of these same sinners. The result is that God Himself does not know His own mind and purpose in the salvation of sinners. Knowledge of His will in the all-important matter of salvation is certainly impossible for us.

Still more, Trueman's explanation of the "revealed will" of God grants the fundamental Arminian doctrine of universal atonement, the doctrine at issue in the book. In an important respect, according to Trueman, the atonement was, in fact, universal. God did really intend the cross to atone for all. There is still, alas, the matter of the "hidden will," casting a shadow over the gospel of the "revealed will." A Presbyterian minister may have to allude to a "hidden will" once in a while. But in time the popular doctrine of the "revealed will" (in the theology of Trueman, the doctrine of the well-meant offer of salvation) is certain to drive out of the preaching and out of the confession of the Presbyterian churches the contradictory doctrine of the "hidden will," that is, predestination.

If Presbyterian Trueman's defense of definite atonement is weak, his concessions to universal atonement are bold to the point of being astounding. He has "appreciation" for the Arminian doctrine of the atonement. It "desire[s] to do justice to the love of God and also provide a solid foundation for preaching and evangelism" (61). He approves telling "an audience of unbelievers, 'Christ died for your sins'" (60). This proclamation of universal atonement is based on

Trueman's understanding of John 3:16 as teaching a love of God for all humans without exception and is an aspect of Trueman's conception of the "gospel offer" (59, 60).

Trueman refuses to call Arminianism, as it centers on universal atonement, Pelagian. Indeed, he is open to regarding Arminianism as "semi-Augustinianism" (127).

The Arminian Defender of Universal Atonement

Grant R. Osborne's defense of his Arminian doctrine of universal, or general, atonement is clear, sharp, vigorous, and uncompromising. Christ died for all humans with the purpose of the salvation of all and made atonement available in the same respect and equally to all. God now offers salvation to all on the basis of the (non-atoning) atonement. Whether the atonement actually saves anyone depends upon his decision (will) to accept the well-meant offer. All are capable of accepting the offer, because God gives prevenient grace to all, freeing their will from slavery to sin and enabling the will of all to choose for Christ and salvation. But this grace is resistible: "God's prevenient grace is the source of all decisions. But this grace is resistible" (122).

There is an election of some unto eternal life, but this election depends upon one's choice of Christ. Election, like all of salvation, is conditional.

> God loves the world "so much" (John 3:16) that his salvific will extends to all humankind, and therefore "all" the "world" is the focus of Jesus' atoning death…People for whom Christ died and made atonement can suffer eternal damnation, meaning that Christ did atone for unbelievers…The gracious offer of salvation comes to all, and the prevenient grace by which the Spirit's convicting presence draws all to Christ makes free choice possible. This means atonement is universally open to all (123, 124).

This is classic Arminian theology, particularly, classic Arminian theology of the atonement. It is the doctrine exposed and condemned by the Canons of the Synod of Dordt.

It is not, however, a legitimate "perspective" on the atonement. The Arminian doctrine of the atonement is rank heresy. First and foremost, it is blatant denial of the atonement of the cross. Christ's

death did not actually atone. It did not atone for anyone. It merely, somehow, made atonement *possible*—possible if and when a sinner chooses Christ with his free will. In keeping with this denial of the cross as actual atonement (or satisfaction, or redemption, or propitiation), it is conceivable, in Arminian Osborne's theology of the cross, that the cross might have accomplished the salvation of no one at all. All might have rejected it in unbelief.

In Arminian theology, it is not the cross and death of Jesus Christ that atoned (in the past, on a hill outside Jerusalem), but the will of the sinner (today) that in some absurd, inexplicable manner (merely by choosing Christ) accomplishes atonement. The will of sinners makes the atonement of the cross effectual. The will of sinners accomplishes atonement.

In Arminian theology, the cross was a failure. It failed to redeem and save multitudes for whom it was intended to be the salvation. It might have failed to save any. Even with regard to those who are saved by a decision of their free will concerning the cross, it is not the cross that saves them, but their free will.

Whereas the Reformed believer exults with the apostle, "I… glory…in the cross of…Christ" (Gal. 6:14), the Arminian theology demands the sorry, indeed blasphemous, admission, "Of the cross, I am ashamed," and the equally blasphemous declaration, "In my own will, I glory." Never mind that the apostle summarizes the gospel of Scripture thus: "…not of him that willeth…but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

In harmony with this denial of the cross, *all* the gospel of grace is lost, indeed, turned on its head. As the cross depends on the will of the sinner, so also does election. Further, no sinner is totally depraved, because all enjoy prevenient grace. Finally, although none of the participants in the friendly dialogue recognizes this aspect of the Arminian position, the atonement and its salvation can be lost, even by those who begin to enjoy them. The same free will that permitted the atonement to become a saving reality for some sinner can later reject the atonement that once he accepted, so that the once saved sinner perishes in the end. In this terror must every Arminian, including Grant Osborne, live and die. Dreadful as this is, the falling away of saints is not the worst. The worst is that the atonement cannot even

assure the final salvation of one who has begun to enjoy its redeeming effect.

The Arminian gospel is the corruption of the gospel of salvation by grace in its entirety. It is this corruption of the gospel by virtue of its denial of the cross, the heart of the gospel. For Arminianism, it is not God who saves by an effectual atonement of the cross, but man himself who saves himself by his free will, thus somehow allowing the inefficacious atonement to become effectual in his case. In the Arminian gospel, God is not sovereign in salvation. God is completely dependent on the sinner. Man is sovereign, from election in eternity past to final salvation in eternity future.

Whose then is the glory of the salvation of the sinner?

Both the weak defense of definite atonement by the Presbyterian and the strong advocacy of universal atonement by the Arminian highlight certain issues for the Reformed reader, especially the Reformed preacher and theologian. Basic both to the weakness of the Presbyterian defender of definite atonement and to the strength of the Arminian proponent of universal atonement is the conception of the preaching of the gospel as a gracious offer to all. With this understanding of promiscuous preaching, the Presbyterian cannot ward off the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement. If God sincerely desires all humans to be saved and, in the gospel, offers salvation to all in love for them that desires their salvation, the atonement of the cross must be universal. By the admission of the gracious offer to all, which is often described as the theory of a well-meant offer of salvation, Presbyterianism and Reformed churches have fatally compromised the biblical gospel of salvation by sovereign grace. Reformed theologians *must* reexamine the popular theory of preaching as a gracious offer of salvation to all.

Contending for universal atonement, as he shows his Arminian face (he also has a Calvinistic one), John S. Hammett argues that the doctrine of definite, or limited, atonement "is inconsistent with a universal offer of the gospel" (167). Only the doctrine of universal atonement grounds the preaching of the gospel to all. "Limited atonement 'provides an insufficient ground for evangelism by undercutting the well-meant gospel offer'" (167). Wrong as Hammett's argument for universal atonement is here (as though a doctrine of definite atonement makes promiscuous preaching and the calling of all and sundry

to believe on Jesus Christ impossible), the argument does indicate the relation between the doctrine of a well-meant, gracious offer to all and the doctrine of universal atonement. The former is based on, implies, and demands the latter.

In this connection, Hammett inexcusably misrepresents the Protestant Reformed rejection of the well-meant offer as the denial that the gospel should be preached to all (167; see also the reference to representatives of the Protestant Reformed Churches [one of whom is non-existent] in footnote 43, p. 15).

Hammett is mistaken. Denial of universal atonement in no way limits the preaching of the gospel, particularly the (external) call to all hearers to believe on Jesus Christ presented in the gospel with the promise that every one who does so believe (by the efficacious work of the Spirit, who gives faith to the elect in the audience) will be saved. The mistake of this "half-Arminian" is inexcusable. The Reformed confession that condemns the doctrine of universal atonement, in the very section in which the confession considers the Arminian theory of universal atonement—the Canons of Dordt, second head—calls the church that confesses limited atonement to preach the gospel to all and sundry.

> Moreover the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, *ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction*, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel (Canons, 2.5, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds*, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966, 586; emphasis added).

The Reformed faith, which the Protestant Reformed Churches confess and practice, calls the church to preach the gospel to all without distinction, including the call to all to repent and believe. It does not, however, view or present this preaching to all as grace to all, based on a universal atonement, originating in a conditional election of all, and potentially effectual to all because of a prevenient grace in all. The grace of God in the preaching of the gospel, like this grace in election, the atonement, and the regeneration and faith of sinners, is particular—for the elect alone. Therefore, when some in an audi-

ence of the preaching believe, the Protestant Reformed explanation is not that these made the prevenient grace that had been bestowed on all effective for themselves by their free will. But the Protestant Reformed explanation is that "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

The doctrine of limited atonement in no way restricts or hampers the carrying out of Jesus' mandate to His church to preach the gospel to every creature. It does expose the doctrine of the preaching as a gracious, well-meant offer to all as an aspect of the heresy of universal atonement.

The second issue highlighted by the book is the deadly effect on the gospel of grace of the theory of a common grace of God. Again and again, the Presbyterian's defense of definite atonement in the face of the Arminian appeal to texts that the Arminian views as teaching a love and grace of God for all humans is the explanation of these texts as referring to God's common grace, that is, a grace that merely wishes earthly happiness for all humans and that gives all humans earthly goods. But these texts obviously speak of a saving love and grace of God. Admitting the universal reference of such passages, the Presbyterian is, in reality, conceding the Arminian doctrine of a universal saving love and grace of God.

Invariably and necessarily, the theology of a common grace of God morphs into a theology of universal saving grace. No Orthodox Presbyterian theologian, or Presbyterian theologian of any stripe teaching at Westminster Seminary, including Carl Trueman, is ignorant of the development of the doctrine of common grace in the Christian Reformed Church in the 1960s. Prof. Harold Dekker of Calvin Theological Seminary worked up the Christian Reformed doctrine of common grace into a dogma of universal atonement.

Third, the very heart of the Arminian gospel is resistible grace. In the end, the fundamental issue in the controversy between the Reformed faith and Arminianism is the irresistibility, or sovereignty, of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Osborne confesses the atonement of the cross, an eternal election, total depravity of the sinner by nature, and, in general, salvation by grace. But this grace is resistible. And every aspect of salvation depends upon the sinner's not resisting, but accepting, this resistible grace. Christ's atonement, God's election, and

the Holy Spirit's salvation are conditioned by the sinner's acceptance or rejection of the grace of God. *The* issue between the true gospel of the Reformed faith and the false gospel of Arminianism, therefore, comes down to this basic question, "Is the saving grace of God sovereign and effectual, or is it dependent on the will of the sinner?"

Viewing the issue in the light of the Canons of Dordt, the basic issue in the controversy between Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism is that which is treated, *and settled*, in heads three and four of the Canons: grace is irresistible, both with regard to grace as the attitude and will (desire) of God and with regard to grace as a saving power.

This implies for Reformed churches and theologians today that they reexamine their theory of the "well-meant offer" of the gospel. This theory extends the saving grace of God to all who hear the gospel. As is obvious, this (saving) grace of the offer is resistible, for many to whom God extends this grace, supposedly in the gracious desire to save them all, reject it and perish. In view of the fundamental importance of the truth of the sovereignty of grace, as becomes evident in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement*, Reformed churches and theologians ought to consider whether by their adoption of the theory of the well-meant offer they have not opened up their churches to the false gospel of Arminianism.

Fourth, neither the Arminian defender of universal atonement nor the Presbyterian critic of universal atonement truly grasps the essence of the cross of Christ or appreciates the Reformed church's confession of that essence. The Presbyterian theologian expresses some appreciation for Osborne's refusal to allow his theory of universal atonement to drive him into universalism, that is, the doctrine that all humans will be saved. The Armininian thinks to evade what he supposes would be a devastating criticism of his theory of the atonement by denying that his theory demands the salvation of all humans without exception.

The truth is that it is exactly the denial of universalism by the Arminian defender of universal atonement that constitutes the most grievous sin of the theory of universal atonement. According to the Arminian, although Christ died for all, many are not saved by and because of that death. Therefore, the death of Christ—the death of *the Son of God in human flesh under the wrath of His beloved Father*, the event that has God in the flesh crying out, "My God, my God, why

hast thou forsaken me?"—fails to save many for whom Christ died.

It is this about universal atonement that is most objectionable to the Reformed believer, as it ought to be to everyone who is a Christian. Not that Christ died for every human without exception. But that a death for all without exception does not save all without exception. Universal atonement does not accomplish universal salvation!

For myself, the day that I should be misled into believing universal atonement, on that day I would become as convinced, bold, and outspoken a universalist as the world of theology has ever seen. One truth about the cross stands, must stand, and will stand: Every one for whom Christ died will be saved. If Christ did, in fact, die for all without exception, as the Arminian and the "half-Arminian" proclaim, all humans without exception will be saved, including Cain, Esau, Absalom, Herod, Judas Iscariot, Hitler, Elvis, and the Antichrist. The death of Christ is not, and cannot be, a failure. "It is finished."

And then a question: Why will not Carl R. Trueman, highly respected Presbyterian theologian at one of the most prestigious conservative Presbyterian seminaries in the world, judge the doctrine of universal atonement as does the authoritative Reformed creed, the Canons of Dordt? With specific regard to the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement, the Canons, describing the Arminian doctrine in almost the very words used by Grant Osborne, condemn the doctrine as "bring[ing] again out of hell the Pelagian error" (Canons, 2. Rejection of Errors/3).

Some day a publisher might enlist a full-blooded, unapologetic, uncompromising, God-intoxicated son of Dordt to set forth and defend some aspect of the gospel of salvation by grace against its foes in a volume of the nature of *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement*. Don't hold your breath. ●

Book Reviews

Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible, ed. Joel R. Beeke, Michael P. V. Barrett, and Gerald M. Bilkes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014). Pp. xix + 2234 (hard cover), $40.00. [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

Reformation Heritage Books is to be commended for one of their most recent publications, *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*. This new study Bible promises to be the leading study Bible of English-speaking Reformed Christians who treasure the King James Version.

The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible holds the honor of being the first King James Version study Bible written from a distinctively Reformed perspective. There have been other King James Version study Bibles, but these study Bibles have been written from Arminian or Dispensational perspectives; the outstanding example that comes to mind is the Scofield study Bible. Now at long last there is a KJV study Bible whose editors are committed Reformed theologians. All of the editors are on the faculty of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They all embrace the historic confessional doctrine of the divine, verbal inspiration of Scripture, and they all regard the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God. General Editor Joel R. Beeke expresses this conviction in his "Welcome to the Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible." He begins his "Welcome" by saying: "God has spoken, and His written Word is the Bible. In an age of uncertainty, this is good news. His Word is light in our darkness. You can know God and hear His voice today by reading the pages of His Book. Here is pure truth—truth you can trust…. These are the very words of God, breathed out by Him (II Tim. 3:16), given to us through the prophets and apostles as they were infallibly moved by the Spirit (II Pet. 1:21), and faithfully translated into English. All they say is true" (ix).

A good study Bible must do two things; *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* does both of them well. First, a good study Bible must aid its readers in *understanding* the Word of God. It must help its readers to know

the meaning of what they have read. What is the meaning of the text, the verse, and the chapter? What is its meaning in its immediate context, and what is its meaning in the context of the rest of the Bible? The question that Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch was, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" (Acts 8:30). The eunuch's response was, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31). That is the purpose of a study Bible—to guide its readers into a proper understanding of what they have read.

But besides assisting its readers in understanding what they have read, a good study Bible ought also to assist its readers in *applying* the Word of God. Its purpose must be to indicate how a particular truth, how a certain doctrine, how this history or that event applies to Christians who are called to live for the Lord in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Not only the hearers (readers) of the Word, but the doers of the Word are blessed by God, according to James 1:22. A good study Bible ought to assist its readers in making the jump from the text to today. It ought to help in the movement from the Word in its first application to those to whom the Word was addressed to the Word as it applies to contemporary Christians facing the issues of our day. It ought to aid in bridging the gap between the first disciples of Christ living in Palestine under the rule of the Roman Caesars at the beginning of the New Testament and Christ's disciples living in our technologically advanced but morally degenerate age. As I said, *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* does both of these things well.

The text of this study Bible is the King James or Authorized Version of 1611. This, to begin with, is laudable in this new study Bible. We are convinced that the Authorized Version of 1611 remains the best version available to English-speaking and English-reading Christians. Not only is it the most faithful translation, but it is based on the best manuscripts. After more than four hundred years, this version deserves still to be the preferred English version of the Bible, both for public worship and for personal and family devotions.

As a study Bible, *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* is filled with all sorts of valuable aids. Those aids include more than fifty "In-Text Articles."

These articles are divided into seven main categories: The Doctrine of God, The Doctrine of Creation, The Doctrine of Sin, The Doctrine of Christ, The Doctrine of Salvation, The Doctrine of the Church, and The Doctrine of the Last Things. Included in these "In-Text Articles" are articles entitled: "The Only True God," "God's Foreknowledge," "Creation and God's Glory," ""Angels," "The Image of God," "The Soul," "The Fall of Man," "Total Depravity," "Human Responsibility," "The Evil World," "God's Covenants," "The Angel of the Lord," "Christ's Satisfaction of God's Justice," "Election," "The Uses of the Moral Law," "Justification by Faith Alone," "Experiential Knowledge," "Assurance of Salvation," Perseverance of the Saints," "Worship by the Word," "World Missions," "The Day of the Lord," "Hell," and "Heaven."

Included in the front matter of the new study Bible is an article entitled "The King James Version: Its Tradition, Text, and Translation." This article traces the history of the KJV, its tradition, and its text. The article includes not only a defense of the inspiration of the original manuscripts of Scripture, but also the work of God through His Spirit to preserve the text of Scripture throughout history both through copying and translation. This article also includes a good response to those who object to the use of the KJV because its language (vocabulary and syntax patterns) has become archaic. And this article defends the text upon which the KJV was based, as well as the accuracy and beauty of the translation.

Following the front matter is the text of the study Bible itself. Every book of the Bible contains an introduction, which identifies the human writer(s) and date of the book, its theme and purpose, issues relating to translation, a synopsis of the book, and a general outline of the book. The study notes are at the bottom of every page. Every chapter begins with a chapter summary. The notes follow the chapter summaries, and although not every verse has notes connected to it, the vast majority of verses do. The notes are helpful, full of useful information. Sometimes the notes explain the meaning of words in the original Hebrew or Greek. At other times they reflect on the meaning of the text, or relate a text to its context. Cross-references are often given. Old Testament prophecies fulfilled or New Testament fulfillments are noted. And many

other things besides make up the content of the study notes.

One praiseworthy feature of *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* in this reviewer's opinion is the use in all the articles, notes, and introductions of capital letters on the personal pronouns that refer to deity: "He," "Him," and "His," including the personal reflexive pronoun, "Himself." Reformation Heritage is not the only major Christian publisher that retains this mark of deference when referring to deity; there are others. But, sadly, some publishers are allowing the *Chicago Manual of Style* the last word in Christian publishing, and the conventions that are accepted in the world's publications are made determinative in Christian publishing. These publishers are conforming, rather than transforming and reforming on this issue. Much like the use of "Thee," "Thou," and "Thine" in prayer, this is one way when using the written word that we can show special respect towards God; for that very reason, it ought to be retained. I would encourage readers to write their favorite publisher(s) on this matter and express this viewpoint, especially if they are one of the publishers that has recently abandoned this practice. Let them know how you, their readers (customers), feel on this issue.

Of significance as a distinctive feature of *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* are the "Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship" at the conclusion of every chapter of the Bible. The fact that these thoughts and questions are designed for personal and *family worship* underscores an important use of Scripture in the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions. At the same time, it calls attention to a very important calling that Christian parents have, a calling that arises out of God's gracious covenant with believers and the children of believers. It is a neglected calling in our day. That calling is to lead their families and children in the worship of God. It is the calling to rear up a family altar in the home, at which daily worship is brought to the Lord God. These thoughts and questions are designed to assist parents in making their daily family devotions profitable and God-glorifying. This is an altogether unique feature of this new study Bible, and something that sets it apart from other study Bibles. It may be hoped that this will facilitate parents in carrying out this important calling.

The text of the study Bible proper is followed by a significant section of back matter. Included, first of all, in this back matter is a section made up of thirty-six one-page articles under the heading "How to Live as a Christian." Among these are articles entitled "Coming to Christ," "Experiencing Justification and Adoption," "Growing in Sanctification," "Assured and Persevering," "Reading the Scriptures," "Why and How We Pray," "Worship and the Means of Grace," "How We Regard Ourselves," "The Fear of God," "Living by the Ten Commandments," "Godly Contentment," "Self-Denial," "How We Kill Pride," "Coping with Criticism," "Fighting Against Backsliding," "Family Worship," "Being A Christ-Like Husband," "Being A Godly Wife," "Raising Children in the Lord," "Being a Christian Grand Parent," "Serving God at Work," "Using Leisure Time Well," "Witnessing for Christ," "Defending our Faith," "Facing Sickness and Death," "Living Positively," and "Living for God's Glory."

"How to Live as a Christian" is followed by "Twenty Centuries of Church History." One page is devoted to the history of each century of the New Testament from "First Century: Apostolic Foundations" through "The Sixteenth Century: Luther, Calvin, and the Reformation" to "The Twentieth Century: The Age of Paradoxes." There is no question about it that there is in the church today widespread ignorance of the history of the church. There is little awareness of "the rock whence we are hewn," and little understanding of the significant doctrinal controversies through which God has led the church of the past. And along with that, little appreciation for the development in doctrine that has been the result of these controversies. For more than one reason the church of the present needs to have a good understanding of the church of the past.

Included next in the back matter of *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* is a section entitled "Creeds and Confessions." The creeds and confessions that are included are, first of all, the ancient creeds: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed. The ancient creeds are followed by the main Reformation creeds, in their two main families: the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards

(Westminster Confession, Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms). The creeds, too, are underappreciated in our day. This is a study Bible aimed at Reformed Christians. Among Reformed Christians the Reformed creeds are authoritative. Reformed Christians regard the Reformed confessions as faithful summaries of the truths of the Word of God. We read the Scriptures from the perspective of the Reformed standards. If the Reformed confessions are to function in the church as they ought, they must be known. Regular reading of Scripture portions ought to be followed by the reading of an article (paragraph) out of one of the Reformed confessions.

The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible's back matter concludes with Robert Murray M'Cheyne's (1813-1843) famous *Calendar for Reading Through the Word of God in a Year*. When I was in the active pastorate, I often handed out this schedule or other similar schedules to my congregation at the beginning of a new year. Having a plan to follow both facilitates and serves as an incentive, I have found, to accomplish the goal of reading through the entire Bible in a year's time. Following the schedule for reading through the Bible in a year, *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* includes a list of biblical weights and measures, biblical currency and a "Concordance to the Old and New Testaments." The new study Bible concludes with several color maps of the Near East and the Holy Land throughout the eras covered by the history of the Bible. In addition, those who purchase a *Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* are given a special code, which gives them Internet access to still more study aids.

Here and there this writer found things with which he did not agree, or improvements that could be made. The article entitled "God's Covenants" (83) is somewhat confusing and flawed. The Old Testament *berith* does not mean "agreement." That is not its root meaning and that is not its use. The article, and several notes throughout the Bible, articulates the erroneous position that includes more than only the elect in the covenant of grace. The articles and notes also make plain the commitment of the editors to the erroneous theology of the well-meant gospel offer. In addition, any church history article that surveys the nineteenth century and makes no mention

of the Afscheiding of 1834 and the Doleantie of 1886 is guilty of serious oversights, especially in a Bible that is published by a group that has its roots in the Dutch Reformed tradition. Also, it is my conviction that the "Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship" could be greatly improved. For one thing, they involve ordinarily a too lengthy introduction to the question or observation that is going to be made. For another, the thoughts and questions are over the heads of the younger children in the family. It is especially from parents with younger children that I hear of the struggles to make family devotions profitable. The questions overall could be simplified, and the younger children should be targeted in many more of the questions than they are. And there are a few other criticisms of varying importance that could be made.

But I do not want too severely to criticize, lest my criticisms detract from my overwhelming support for the new *Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible.* This ought to be the study Bible used in our homes, the study Bible used for our personal and family devotions. We have used it in our family devotions for the last several months, ever since it first became available. And my wife and I are both of the opinion that it is the best that we have yet seen. I would like to encourage the pastors to give this Bible as a wedding gift to the couples at whose marriages they officiate. It is a wonderful gift for any occasion, including high school and college graduation. Let us encourage its use in any way that we can.

What helps to encourage its use is that it is eminently affordable. Reformation Heritage Books is obviously doing everything it can to place this Bible in the hands of the people. It is to be commended for that. The cost of this new study Bible varies, depending on the binding. From the basic hardcover, which serves well as a family Bible, for only $40.00—usually on sale for $30.00—to the fine, soft Black Montana Cowhide for $180.00—usually on sale for under $140.00—and many other styles and bindings in between, the Bible is reasonably priced. The publisher has made sure that no one will be able to say that they are not using the new study Bible because it is out of their price range.

The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible is available directly from Reformation Heritage

Books. The interested reader can consult their website and order directly from the publisher. In the Grand Rapids area, the new study Bible is available at Reformed Book Outlet, the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary bookstore, and the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary bookstore, as well as Christian bookstores throughout the city.

The bottom line? I highly recommend the new *Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible!*

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Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography, by Jan de Bruijn. Tr. Dagmare Houniet. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. Pp. x + 418, (hard cover). $40.00. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

One who has read this book and James D. Bratt's *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* will know the great man's life and labors accurately, fully, and, in certain respects unfortunately, profoundly.

The thorough, honest analysis of Kuyper's theology remains to be written. This analysis will not pretend that the books on common grace were Kuyper's only doctrinal statement on the grace of God. Nor will it suppose that the doctrine of common grace is the lens through which all of Kuyper's theology must be viewed. A thorough, honest analysis of Kuyper's theology will recognize that he wrote the book, *Dat de Genade Particuliер is* [*That Grace is Particular*] and the significance that Kuyper himself attributed to this volume and its content. The reader should not hold his breath for the writing of such a volume by a theologian outside the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The unique nature of this biography is that it follows and describes Kuyper's tumultuous life and multifaceted career (one would be inclined to say "careers," were it not that Kuyper blended, and intended to blend, his manifold endeavors, any one of which would have exhausted the average human, into one gigantic mission) by means of pictures. Every page, or at least one of every two facing pages, contains a picture of Kuyper, or

of others who played some role in his life, or a photo of some building, document, book, or other artifact that featured significantly in Kuyper's life.

Under each picture is a succinct statement explaining the picture and how it played a role in Kuyper's life and work. For example, on page 51 is a picture of the woman, Pietje Baltus, who was instrumental in turning Kuyper as a young modernist minister into a converted, Reformed man and theologian. The explanatory paragraphs quote Kuyper's own acknowledgment of God's use of the woman for his spiritual development.

Among the most amusing (though not to Kuyper himself), and likely revelatory, pictures are the sometimes savage cartoons, especially by the Dutch cartoonist, Albert Hahn. On page 331 appears the familiar cartoon of Kuyper as "*Abraham de Geweldige*" ("Abraham the Terrible"). So vicious was one cartoon that Kuyper threatened legal action against the cartoonist and the paper that published the cartoon. But Kuyper opened himself up to these devastating representations of his character and conduct by his involvement in politics. In the political realm, he was himself, by all accounts, guilty of "the worst possible misuse of invectives and uncharitable expressions" (viii).

Involving himself thus in politics, Kuyper discovered what an American humorist once expressed: "Politics ain't beanbag."

The worst, however, was not that Kuyper himself suffered abuse in the political arena. In fact, there he gave as good as he got. But the worst was that his work as a minister of the gospel and as a reformer of the church necessarily suffered. For one thing, his political activity—and ambition—necessitated his resignation from the ministry of the gospel. Yet another ill effect of his political career had to have been that his reputation as a Reformed theologian suffered. With this, the reputation of the churches he founded suffered also.

It is doubtful that any minister of the gospel can engage in politics and emerge unscathed. In addition to the fierce criticism Kuyper received from friend and foe alike for his domineering, polemical, abrasive speech and conduct, his reputation was besmirched by the kind of scandal that is virtually impossible to avoid in the political sphere. Charges were made against Kuyper that, as prime minister of

the Netherlands, he had conferred royal honors on a wealthy Dutchman in exchange for large contributions to Kuyper's political party. Involved was an attractive young woman of dubious morals and shady reputation (334-349).

Even though Kuyper was innocent, as he undoubtedly was, at least with regard to the charming female, the public scandal tainted Kuyper, not only as a politician, but also as a prominent churchman and theologian.

In addition, Kuyper's hot political battles alienated, not only his political rivals, but also his ecclesiastical and doctrinal allies and friends.

In the providence of God, Kuyper's prime ministership, exalted, powerful post that it was, did little or nothing to make the Netherlands a Christian nation, as Kuyper dreamed—and as his disciples in that and other nations have dreamed ever since, and are still dreaming today. Indeed, Kuyper's holding of the office of prime minister was not especially effective in any respect. And after one term of four years, Kuyper was voted out of office, never again to attain political power. The defeat left him an embittered man.

The book, which is by no means unsympathetic towards Kuyper, makes plain that his was a domineering personality. Working with him was a challenge for his friends and allies.

Indeed, her relationship with Kuyper was difficult for his young fiancée, the future Mrs. Kuyper. She was younger than Kuyper. At age 21, Kuyper, who by that time was a university graduate and seminary student, became engaged to the 16-year old Johanna Schaay. During the engagement, the learned Kuyper sent his bride-to-be "hundreds of letters…full of admonitions and advice." Included was pointed criticism of "all the grammatical mistakes" she made in her letters to him. He faulted her for her preference for some run-of-the-mill author over Shakespeare, about whom she had the misfortune to express dislike. When Johanna replied that Kuyper had hurt her feelings, he rebuked her for failing to take to heart that Kuyper's intention with all his criticism was to "elevate" her (28).

It is a testimony to the future Mrs. Kuyper's longsuffering that she did not dump her "elevator," but endured his criticism of her shortcomings, *as a 16-year old girl*, and married him, in spite of it.

If this was how he treated the woman he loved, his rough handling of ecclesiastical and political foes is not surprising. A pastor in the state church, who was doctrinally orthodox and, therefore, sympathetic to Kuyper's theology, nevertheless in a sermon "commemorated the destruction of Spanish (1588), French (1688), and Kuyperian (1888) power in the same breath" (176).

A political rival described Kuyper as "imperious, a vulgar demagogue, an impudent fanatic, a mishmash of vanity and inconsistency, a boaster, an actor, an irresponsible party booster, and a diva" (343).

If one can ignore Kuyper's abrasive personality and political ambitions and campaigns, in order to concentrate on his ecclesiastical activities and theological writings, the pictorial biography presents a hero of the Reformed faith and church. Kuyper wrote a library of Reformed, Christian literature, including essential controversy, warm devotional works, commentaries on the Heidelberg Catechism and on biblical books, including Revelation, and solid theology. He began a Reformed university, which included a soundly Reformed seminary, under the most adverse circumstances and in the face of a barrage of criticism and ridicule. He took the lead in the always painful work of reforming an apostate church. Then he brought about an ecumenical union of his Reformed churches with another denomination of Reformed churches. His public addresses on behalf of his promotion of the Reformed faith and in criticism of prevailing unreformed movements and teachings were thoroughly developed masterpieces of oratory and principled thought. Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of Netherlanders, foes as well as friends, flocked to his speeches and hung on his every word. In the papers of which he was editor-in-chief for many years, he applied Calvinism to modern life. All of these labors are represented in the book by pertinent pictures, accompanied by explanation.

Kuyper was a man of conviction and courage, and a tireless, prodigious worker. He worked, especially writing, almost to the day of his death in 1920 at age 83. The word "retirement" was not in his vocabulary. If it was in his vocabulary, it was not in his system.

Exercising the judgment of charity with regard to Kuyper's political activities, including his

aggressive advance and defense of his political agenda, one might explain them as the implementation of his conviction that the Netherlands was, and ought to be, a Christian, indeed Reformed, nation. Promoting and defending the Netherlands as an earthly, Old Testament-like kingdom of Jesus Christ excused, if they did not justify, ends achieved by questionable means, the exercise of typically worldly pressures, the verbal and tactical slaughter of adversaries, and even lying. I add "lying" because the book is compelling in portraying Kuyper as a practitioner of Winston Churchill's later, cynical aphorism that truth in the political realm is so precious that it needs to be protected by a tissue of lies.

This readiness to lie on behalf of cultural and political ends may help explain Kuyper's elaborate, fanciful, and altogether unbiblical and anti-creedal advocacy and defense of a common grace of God that can unite Reformed Christians and the ungodly in the Kuyperian venture of Christianizing a nation and then all the world, quite apart from the gospel of the word of God and the Holy Spirit of saving grace. ●

A Treatise on True Theology with the Life of Franciscus Junius by Franciscus Junius. Tr. David C. Noe. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014. Pp. lii + 247 (hard cover). $30.00. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is Reformed theology at its least attractive: philosophical, abstruse, abstract, dense, and for the most part devoid of biblical exposition. Granted, the bulk of the work is introduction to dogmatics, or prolegomena, but also Reformed introduction can be and ought to be biblical.

The book is strictly for the theologian and, even then, for the theologian with the determination and self-discipline to work hard at grasping doctrinal truths couched always in philosophical terminology and presented in philosophical concepts.

The weakness of the book is clearly indicated by Dutch Reformed theologian Willem J. van Asselt's attempt to deny the weakness, in his introductory essay.

Junius's use of Aristotelian

> aetiology raises the issue of the Protestant scholastic use of causal language. The popular response has been that this language is symptomatic of an excessive Aristotelianism and, in the case of the Reformed orthodox, is evidence of a betrayal of the more biblical approaches to theology as given by the Reformers (xxxv).

van Asselt's praise of Junius does nothing to encourage confidence in the content of Junius' theology. According to van Asselt, Junius advocated compromise of the Reformed faith in the interests of peace with Roman Catholic theologians and with the Roman Catholic Church. Junius was a "representative of…Reformed irenicism…Junius called for ecclesiastical peace" with Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Remonstrants. In the thinking of Junius, all confessions "were forms of Christianity with a common belief in the same Savior; likewise, those who professed Christ were all Christians." All could "unite as members of a church that was catholic in the original meaning of the word: a universal church" (xxi).

Junius proposed that the conflicts over theology among Roman Catholics, Arminians, and the Reformed were due, not to the heresies of Rome and of Arminius, but merely to the failure of all theologies, including the Reformed, fully to grasp the truths of God's revelation in nature and Scripture—the "inadequacy of theological thinking" (xxiii).

It is, therefore, not surprising that Junius' son had Remonstrant, or Arminian, sympathies (xiv).

It is also understandable that Junius declined an invitation to teach in Geneva because of his differences with Theodore Beza (xiv).

Junius' compromising spirit, viewed by van Asselt as a love of peace, is much to the liking of van Asselt. Especially does it please van Asselt, as also a large, prominent element of the Reformed churches both in the Netherlands and in the United States for which van Asselt is the eloquent spokesman, that Junius' theology is not governed by a "decretal system" (read: consistent confession of predestination, election necessarily involving reprobation) (xlvii). van Asselt exposes himself, as evidently also Junius, by dismissing this "decretal system" as "rationalistic" and "deterministic" (xlvii).

Of the greatest significance is van Asselt's analysis of Junius' minimizing of decretal theology as a doctrinal tactic on behalf

of a theology of covenant: "the Reformed orthodox envisaged the triune God, or *Deus foederatus in Christo* [God federated, or covenanted, in Christ—DJE], as the object of theology" (xlvi). Thus, van Asselt calls attention to, and promotes, one of the most significant developments in contemporary Reformed theology: the use of covenant theology to minimize and, in the end, abolish the doctrine of predestination. Predestination does not govern covenant. Predestination is not even compatible with covenant. But it is either/or. And covenant drives out predestination.

Franciscus Junius (1545-1602) was a Reformed pastor and theologian in the earliest days of the Reformation. Born in France, he studied theology in Geneva in the last days of John Calvin. He pastored Reformed churches in Belgium and Germany. He served as professor of theology in Germany and in the Netherlands. In Germany, he was a colleague of Zacharias Ursinus. In the Netherlands, at Leiden, Junius worked with Gomarus. Gomarus conducted the funeral service for Junius in 1602.

The autobiography of Junius that forms the first part of the book (1-78; full title: "The Life of the Noble and Learned Franciscus Junius, Doctor of Sacred Theology and Distinguished Professor at Leiden University") is the story of admirable dedication and self-sacrifice and of the courageous endurance of persecution, risking death, on behalf of the gospel in those early days of the Reformation in Europe.

The concluding section of the life of Junius is an excerpt from Gomarus' funeral oration upon Junius' death (72ff.). On his death-bed, according to Gomarus' testimony, Junius confessed that he was "resting entirely on the grace of God. God will make perfect whatever belongs to my salvation" (77). At the last, then, a complete repudiation of the false gospel, that is no gospel, of Rome and of Arminius, and a dying in the hope that is worked only by the gospel of the Reformed faith.

But why wait until one's last breath to make this confession?

And why does making the confession of salvation only by sovereign grace on one's death-bed meet with the approval of contemporary Reformed theologians, whereas making it throughout one's lifetime and entire ministry brings upon one the scorn and wrath of the Reformed establishment? ●

The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, ed. Martin I. Klauber (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014). Pp. 414 (paper). $25.00. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

If reading a good book is a feast for the mind, reading *this* book is like eating at a good smorgasbord. So many entrees of all different kinds! They all looked delicious, and none of them left me completely disappointed!

The book is a collection of essays about the history and theology of the French Reformed Churches in the 1500s and 1600s. Six chapters comprise part one, "The Historical Background." Part two, "Theology and Theologians in the French Reformed Churches," includes nine chapters - one each on John Cameron, Moïse Amyraut, Pierre du Moulin, Jean Daillé, Andreas Rivetus (also known as Rivet), Charles Drelincourt, Claude Pajon, Jean Claude, and Pierre Jurieu. Appendix A contains excerpts of the Edict of Nantes (1598), which gave the Huguenots some rights as well as some reprieve from persecution. Appendix B contains excerpts from the Edict of Fontainebleu (1685), which revoked the Edict of Nantes. A selected bibliography, list of contributors, and subject index closes out the book.

Who are these nine men featured in the second half of the book? The names of Cameron and Amyraut are infamous: Cameron taught a hypothetical universal grace, and his disciple, Amyraut, developed it into the heresy of Amyraldianism. Daillé, Claude, and Pajon were sympathetic to Amyraldianism, while du Moulin, Rivet, Drelincourt and Jurieu opposed it. Two men in each camp—Du Moulin, Drelincourt, Daillé, and Claude - were pastors in the Huguenot church in Paris, though not always concurrently. Du Moulin and Rivet were part of the French delegation to the Synod of Dordt, forbidden by the king at the last moment to attend.

Although the book is logically divided into two main sections, the reader finds that the historical essays are as diverse as the theologians. These two main categories include plenty of interesting subjects.

Appetizers:
French Reformed Church History

The history of the French Reformed churches is noteworthy for several reasons.

One is the close relationship between the French and Geneva. William Farel, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and other men who played significant roles in the Reformation were born *Frenchmen*. Although they eventually left France for Geneva, they did not forget the plight of the French churches; when peace finally reigned in Geneva in the middle 1500s, the Genevans sent pastors and books to the French. And, when the French Reformed were persecuted, Geneva was their closest place of refuge.

Another reason is the price that many French Reformed believers paid for their faith. Eight religious wars raged in the second half of the 1500s, the fourth beginning with the infamous St. Bartholomews' Day Massacre in 1572. Many of the Huguenots could say with Paul: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 6:17).

A third reason, which was a factor in the persecution, was the relationship of the French royalty to the Romish church on the one hand, and to the Reformed churches on the other. This relationship was fluid and not stable; for brief periods of time it favored the Huguenots, but often it did not. Two years before the Belgic Confession and its thirty-sixth Article were written, the French Confession of Faith embodied similar statements regarding the church's view of civil magistrates in its thirty-ninth and fortieth Articles. These articles were not written in a vacuum; the king's persecution of the French Reformed, prior to Henri IV's accession to the throne, gave rise to them. Henri IV was Reformed when he began his reign and during the time of the religious wars. To restore peace and order in France, he converted to Catholicism, but gave the Huguenots some freedoms by declaring the Edict of Nantes. Within a hundred years, the crown would take away these freedoms.

Bearing all this in mind, the reader will eagerly devour the appetizers - the history of the French Reformed, as set forth in chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6.

In chapter one, Jeanine Olson gives a historical overview of the French Reformed churches in the 1500s—before and during the time of Calvin up to the Edict of Nantes. In chapter two, Scott Manetsch gives a thirty-plus page biography of Theodore Beza, who

labored for the good of Reformed churches everywhere, but particularly in France, and who was often in contact with Henri IV on behalf of the Reformed churches there.

Chapters 5 and 6 treat the history of the French Reformed in the 1600s, from the time of Henri IV's death to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Desiring to avoid war with the Huguenots at all costs, King Louis XIII "was determined to undermine their power through economic and ideological persuasion" (147). This latter was the impetus for his *raison d'état*—his conviction that the wellbeing and unity of the French state was the highest goal, which permitted him to act unjustly toward individuals or groups of people (Huguenots) who seemed a threat to this wellbeing. When Cardinal Richelieu came to power with Louis XIII, the state's "wellbeing" soon involved the suppression of all anti-Catholic "heresy."

Chapter 6 describes the last stages in the history of the French Reformed. One can imagine he is reading a documentary of how Satan, through men, always attacks the church: first using peaceful, legal tactics, presenting the Reformed as those who misunderstood Catholicism, who were schismatics for "destroying the perpetuity of the Catholic Church" (158). Then, from 1679 on, the Edict of Nantes was used *against* the Huguenots, whose rights were increasingly limited; whose colleges, churches, and schools were forced to close; who were later forced to house French soldiers, then arrested, until finally the Edict of Nantes was revoked, and Huguenots had two legal options, in the eyes of French law: convert, or die. A third option, fleeing, was prohibited - though often used.

Dessert: French Reformed Church Polity

At a buffet, one is free to eat dessert before the main entrees and side dishes. So in this book. I considered chapter 3 to be the dessert—and a tasty treat it was.

The chapter is entitled "The French Reformed Synods of the Seventeenth Century." In the first twenty pages, Theodore Van Raalte convincingly defends his position that while the French Reformed "consistorial model had strong ties to Geneva (though without members from the city council), their synodical system was the first of its kind for a national Reformed church" (97). Here we find the beginning of our system of broader assem-

blies. Van Raalte shows that the French Reformed consciously avoided both a hierarchical and an independent form of church government. As France was staunchly Catholic, the state church was not an option, as it was in England, Germany, and the Netherlands. The French Reformed church polity was in harmony with the French Confession of 1559 (again, articles 30-32 of our Belgic Confession betray a dependence on the French Confession). Van Raalte discusses the nature of the authority of the synod, emphasizing that church authority is given to consistories, and that the authority of broader assemblies is derived from the churches who agree to work together. The second half of the chapter gives instances of various kinds of items treated by the fifteen synods—matters relating to theological schools, professors, and students; to doctrine and writings; to appeals; to matters of worship; to relations with foreign churches. These same issues Reformed synods have treated ever since.

If in one respect our synodical system is (and must be) different from that of the French, it is that we do not seek nor await the government's permission to hold a synod. The French needed the king's permission, which was usually accompanied by paying the synod's expenses. But the French also tasted that the king's apparent goodwill was really a cruel tender mercy.

Entree 1: The French Reformed Churches and Arminianism

The first main entree comes up in chapter 4, which treats the relationship of the French Reformed churches to the Synod of Dordt, and chapter 9, which focuses on the life and work of Pierre du Moulin.

God raised up du Moulin to lead the way in the French rebuttal of Arminianism and approval of the work of Dordt. Informed that some perceived him to be tolerant of Arminianism, du Moulin publicly distanced himself from that heresy in at least two ways. First, he sent a letter to the Synod of Dordt that was read publicly on the floor of Synod, but after the Canons were adopted. Second, he published a significant rebuttal of Arminianism, *The Anatomy of Arminianism*. Du Moulin also presided at the Synod of Alias (1620), which adopted the Canons as an official standard of the French Reformed churches.

In chapter 9, Klauber not only treats du Moulin's polemics

against Arminianism and Amyrauldianism, but also gives us a flavor of his personality. In one word—Klauber's word—it was "fiesty." During his lifetime du Moulin was accused of being a "Protestant pope"; since his death, his polemical nature has continued to earn him the scorn of many. We can appreciate Klauber's defense of him: not only did the heresies against which he wrote require forceful opposition, but also he was motivated by pastoral love for the sheep of the flock of Christ. Still today, some of the most valiant defenders of the truth over against heresy are considered some of the worst troublers of the church, when in fact they are seeking true peace.

Another connection between the French Reformed and Dordt, this time an unhappy one, were the writings of Daniel Tilenus criticizing the Canons. In five articles Tilenus summarized the five heads of the Canons. His summary was not accurate; it was biased against the Canons, and therefore misrepresented them. Yet for two hundred years the English translation of this summary was what the English speaking church understood the Canons to teach. Thomas Scott undertook to demonstrate otherwise in his book *The Articles of the Synod of Dordt* (republished in 1993 by Sprinkle Publications). A worthy book in its own right, Scott's book contains Tilenus' summary.

Entree 2: Amyraldianism (Hypothetical Universalism)

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on Cameron and Amyraut. Running the risk of oversimplifying, let me say that Cameron taught that God's eternal good pleasure included both a desire for the salvation of all on the condition of man's believing, and a desire for the salvation of the elect, for whose salvation He sent Christ. The heresy was not so much that of suggesting that man has a free will and can believe in his own power, but that of suggesting that in some sense God desired the salvation of all. This universalism was hypothetical—that is, God understood that not all, finally, would be saved, and did not send Christ for all. Often, when professors teach false doctrine, their students develop that false teaching. Such did Amyraut, who was Cameron's student at Saumur.

Richard A. Muller, who wrote the chapter of Amyraut, also gives his assessment of Amyraudianism. Let us, sticking with the analogy of a buffet, call Muller's

assessment (not his presentation) the most disagreeable dish on the spread. Acknowledging that some accused Amyraut of heresy, Muller points out that "there is no synodical decision or confessional document that confirmed the accusation," and therefore that Amyraldianism ought not "be interpreted as a heresy and set outside of the bounds of the orthodoxy of the era.... In short, Amyraldianism was a form of Reformed orthodoxy that other orthodox Reformed writers pointedly opposed and censured..." (208). Muller is not ignorant that the Geneva Theses (1649) and the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675) were responses to Amyraldianism; he acknowledges that the latter "censured" Amyraldianism, but says that it "never declared [it] heretical" (200). And, notwithstanding the Canons of Dordt's rejection of the Remonstrants' conditional predestination, "Amyraut's doctrine... arguably fell within confessional boundaries set by the Canons of Dordt" (198).

Muller is mistaken, in my opinion, that Amyraldianism is compatible with the Canons of Dordt. I emphasize that Muller used the word "arguably" in this connection, and I argue the opposite. The Canons make clear that in no respect was God's predestination conditional, and that in no sense did God will the salvation of each and every human. Muller seems to suggest that to be considered a heresy, a doctrine must be formally condemned by a synod and/or confessional document *after* that particular teaching *bloomed*. However, it is not novel to suggest that when the church has declared a heresy to be a heresy, every subsequent adaptation of that heresy is also heresy. A doctrine is heretical, not because of its *bloom* but because of its *root.* Because Amyrauldianism was an attempt to synthesize Dordt and Arminianism, its root was bad; it was a weed from the start. Using Muller's line of argument, one might say today that the Federal Vision is not a heresy. But do not the Canons of Dordt also condemn that teaching in principle, even though it was not developed into its particular form until hundreds of years after Dordt?

Entree 3: Roman Catholicism

Chapter 10 presents Jean Daillé as one who defended the Reformed faith against Rome—a necessary defense, in Catholic France. His unique contribution

was to oppose the Romish view of tradition and set a firm foundation for Reformed polemicists to use the church fathers to our advantage.

In his preaching and pastoral work, Drelincourt (chapter 12) also opposed Rome's errors, not to mention those of Arminius and Amyraut. This opposition to Rome included writing his famous *Consolations*, a two-volume work explaining the comfort that the Reformed believer can have, and that the confessor of Romish heresy cannot have, in the face of death. And this opposition to Rome meant that he particularly resisted efforts to reunite French Catholics and Protestants.

Side dishes

The side dishes of this buffet arc chapters 13-15, treating Pajon, Claude, and Jurieu; and perhaps also chapters 11-12, treating Rivet and Drelincourt. They are side dishes, not because the men or their contributions were insignificant, but because the chapters focus on narrower aspects of the writings and thought of these men. Certainly, the last two chapters are the shortest.

Rivet became professor at Leiden and later court preacher at The Hague; therefore he is presented as an international diplomat of the French with the Dutch. Drelincourt is presented as a faithful and diligent pastor, whose polemics served the purpose of clearly setting forth the pure gospel to his congregation.

Claude Pajon denied immediate grace, arguing that "in order to bring a person to conversion, the Holy Spirit does not work immediately on either will or intellect" (303). The word "immediate" is not used to suggest a period of time, but means "without means." Pajon maintained this view, even though his exegesis of Romans 8:7 underwent a significant change. That text reads, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

The fourteenth chapter looks at Jean Claude's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, using as its almost exclusive basis one sermon on Ephesians 4:30. And the last chapter uses one treatise of Pierre Jurieu as the basis to make comments about his devotional theology, which was presented as typical of that of the Huguenots, especially in the latter part of the seventeenth century when the Edict of Nantes was revoked.

By all means, if this review

has whet your appetite, read this book, and *eet smakelijk*. ●

Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012). Pp. 224 (paper). $20.00. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

IVP's Spectrum Multiview series features books in which several writers present different viewpoints on a certain topic, and respond to the essays of the other contributors. Reviewing another book in this series some time back, I wrote: "The value of such books is twofold: first, in a concise way the reader learns the position of different branches of Christendom regarding that particular topic; and second, the reader sees how that doctrine is being developed, for good or bad, in the churches today."[1]

Though I have not changed my mind about the value of these books in general, I have read enough books of this sort (published also by Zondervan, by Broadman and Holman, and perhaps by others) to know that I will disagree with much that is in them. For one thing, I am Reformed, while contributors include Lutherans, Baptists, Anglicans, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and more. For another, the spirit of a false ecumenism often prevails in these writings.

Still, I choose to read books of this sort when the subject interests me. The subject of biblical hermeneutics interests me, because many doctrinal and ethical differences are rooted in different approaches to and different interpretations of Scripture. A right hermeneutic is foundational; a wrong hermeneutic means disaster!

Overview

Introducing the subject, the editors state the book's goal: to set forth "what hermeneutics is specifically as it applies to biblical interpretation" (10). The rest of the introduction contains a brief history of the development of biblical hermeneutics, a statement of seven main questions to face

1 See my review of *The Lord's Supper: Five Views*, ed. Gordon T. Smith (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2008) in the April 2009 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* (vol. 42, number 2, 149).

when developing hermeneutical principles, and an introduction to the five views which the book presents.

In the body of the book, each contributor first gives an overview of his hermeneutical view, then applies it to Matthew 2:7-15. This is the inspired record of Herod's "desire" to "worship" the Christ-child, his instruction to the wise men to let him know where Christ can be found, their departure by another way, and Joseph's flight into Egypt with Mary and Jesus. The selection of this passage is most interesting, for three reasons. First, Christ's rejection by humans, especially earthly nobility, is a fundamental theme in redemptive history, begging the question: how will the various hermeneutical views explain the rejection of the Messiah? Second, it speaks of the star which guided the wise men, making one wonder: how will the various hermeneutical views explain miracles and supernatural phenomena? Finally, it includes the quotation from Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," piquing our curiosity: how will the various hermeneutical views deal with quotations of the Old Testament Scriptures in the New?

Treated in the first five chapters are the historical-critical/grammatical view (Craig Blomberg), the literary/postmodern view (F. Scott Spencer), the philosophical/theological view (Merold Westphal), the redemptive/historical view (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.), and the canonical view (Robert W. Wall). Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary), F. Scott Spencer (Baptist Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA), and Robert Wall (Seattle Pacific University) are professors of New Testament studies. Richard Gaffin, Jr., is emeritus professor of biblical and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadephia. Merold Westphal is emeritus professor of philosophy at New York City's Fordham University.

Chapters 6-10 contain the response of each contributor to the essays and positions of the other four. The editors conclude with a synthesis of the five views. Name, subject, and Scripture indices finish out the volume.

The Five Views

The *historical-critical/grammatical* view "analyzes the *historical* setting in which a given communicative act occurs" and subjects every aspect of the text to

critical methods - "source, form, redaction and tradition criticism" (33). This view also promotes a careful study of the grammar and syntax of the text.

The *literary/postmodern* view focuses primarily on how the text developed into its final form, and on the reader's response to it. To do this, one must study the text's plots, co-plots, cotext (literary context), and context (historical, geographical, social contexts). Then one must consider what others have said about the text, because, after all, it is an "open text" (54; open to the independent interpretation of every reader). This textual focus is a purely literary study, not to be confused with a grammatical study of the text. It is based on the assumption that "we do not know for sure who wrote the first Gospel or what he intended" (48), though we can conclude about that author that he was "an intelligent, careful, and purposeful writer" (49).

I challenge any other reader to determine from Westphal's essay what the *philosophical/theological* view *is*. Westphal was explicit about what it is *not*: it is neither "just about interpreting the Bible," nor "restricted to interpreting texts," nor "a method or strategy for interpretation" (70, 71). He tells us what conclusion we draw from it: "we need not flee the relativity of interpretation and the plurality that it entails..." (83). Two points gradually emerge from this general lack of clarity. First, according to this view, the meaning of a text *then* (original author, original audience) and *now* (God's "word" to us) are not necessarily one and the same. Second, the proponents of this view include Frederick Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Immanuel Kant—which only increases my concern about this view.

Richard Gaffin indicates that the *redemptive-historical view* is based on the truths that God has revealed Himself historically, that Scripture is written revelation, that Christ and redemption are the focus of Scripture, that the interpreter must use Scripture to interpret Scripture, and that what the writers were conveying to their original audience *is* what God is teaching us today. The essay makes excellent points about the foundational assumptions of this view. It says little about how the exegete actually uses this view to interpret Scripture.

Finally, Robert Wall explains that the *canonical view* leads one to approach Scripture as a human

text, a sacred text, a single text, a shaped text, and the church's text. Scripture is sacred inasmuch as it is "a sanctified book that serves holy ends" (114). From all of this it follows that the task of exegesis is not so much to determine what David or Paul meant, and what the Holy Spirit meant then (the text's "normative meaning," 113), but to help the church know how a passage has formed the church's faith in the past, and how it must still form our faith today.

Three Wrong Views

The book underscores, though this is not its purpose, that one does not gain a proper Reformed-Christian understanding of Scripture by using any available hermeneutical approach. Each essayist made comments about Matthew 2:7-15; not all seemed to understand it well enough to edify God's people. To understand Scripture rightly, we must use the right hermeneutical approach. That is the same thing as saying, to get to a certain city from my house, I cannot take just any road; I must take the right road. The right road *begins* rightly. So a hermeneutical approach is right, not because of where it *ends* but because of where it *begins*—with a right view of Scripture as the divinely inspired Word of God, inspired word for word, being the same word of God to the people who heard it first, as it is to the people who hear it today.

In this light, I judge three of the views set forth in this book to be wrong approaches to Bible interpretation.

In fact, that the editors included one of them—the *philosophical/theological* view—simply baffles me. I remind the reader that the book's stated goal is to set forth "what hermeneutics is specifically as it applies to biblical interpretation" (10). But, though Westphal was not clear on much, he was clear that philosophical hermeneutics "is not just about interpreting the Bible" (70), "is not restricted to interpreting texts" (71), and even "is not a method or strategy for interpreting" (71). Hoping finally to learn how this view works from Westphal's case study on Matthew 2:7-15, I was disappointed to read Westphal's conclusion: "It will long since have been evident that there can be no such thing as an interpretation of Matthew 2:7-15 or any other biblical passage in the light of philosophical hermeneutics" (84).

Not only was inclusion of this view unhelpful to attaining

the goal of the book, but the view itself is very dangerous.

It proceeds from the principles of relativism—that every reader can decide for himself what a passage means *for him*, and what it means *for him* can be quite different from what it means *for me*. Westphal admits that this view leads to relativism: "The conclusion of philosophical hermeneutics is that we need not flee the relativity of interpretation and the plurality it entails,..." (83). Embrace it! This relativity is good!

This view promotes postmodernism. Again, Westphal admits this: "Philosophical hermeneutics takes us, philosophically speaking, from the modern to the postmodern world," but immediately assures the reader that "that is not as scary as it might sound to some" (87). I, for one, am scared.

I reject this view as a proper interpretation of Scripture. It is a denial of the divinely, verbally, infallibly inspired and authoritative Word of God.

The *literary/postmodern* view is certainly a common approach to biblical interpretation. Although it has a place in the book, it must also be rejected as a heretical method. I go so far as to say that the approach of faith—true, saving faith—will reject it.

First, the literary/postmodern view approaches the Bible as literature. Even though this particular literature consists of the expressions of godly men concerning their faith, it is still nothing more than literature. One can study the Bible as literature without believing it to be the verbally inspired Word of God, the aim of which is to make us wise unto salvation.

Second, even if this view says much about Jesus as the Jews' Christ, it leaves plenty of room for the interpreter to say nothing about the gospel. The case study of Matthew 2:7-15 was a detailed analysis of the story. In the book's margin I penned a question, the answer to which I never found in the essay: "What is God's purpose in all of this?" It was just a story—nothing more.

I conclude that this form of interpretation leads to preaching which is nothing more than story telling—a conveying of information which might be interesting, but has little point.

The name of the third wrong view—*canonical*—might give the reader hope that at last we have come to a valid view of hermeneutics. All hope is dashed by realizing that this is the view

of Brevard Childs. According to this view, the Scripture is a canon, not because it is the final form of those inspired writings in which God historically and progressively revealed His Word to His people, but because it is an anthology of various writings, gathered by the church, which formed the faith of people in the past, and therefore must form our faith today as well. Wall praises the Holy Spirit for guiding the church as she formed this canon, but does not so much as hint that He divinely inspired the various writers. Again, because this view proceeds from a wrong view of Scripture, one cannot hope to come to a proper interpretation of Scripture. In the case study on Matthew 2:7-15, the reader is told various ways in which the interpreter will approach the text, but is given no firm idea as to what conclusions the interpreter will reach.

Two Views Half Right

The other two views—the historical-critical/grammatical view and the redemptive-historical view—certainly commend themselves.

In fact, the *redemptive-historical* view is *the* view which most evidently begins at the right starting point. It is the only essay in the book to proceed from the view that Scripture records the history of redemption. Although it is really the *right* view, I call Gaffin's portrayal of it "half right" for two reasons.

First, Gaffin says not a word about the grammatical aspect of hermeneutics and exegesis. Perhaps the editors asked him not to touch on that, because Blomberg did; perhaps he assumed that the reader who was familiar with hermeneutics would understand the need to study the grammar. I cannot fault Gaffin for omitting this without knowing why he did not include it. Yet the omission is significant.

Second, one crucial statement that Gaffin makes is fundamentally wrong. Adding the caveat that he cannot develop this thought at length, he says that special revelation is "within the context of" general revelation, and then says: "Apart from general revelation and a biblical understanding of creation and general revelation, redemptive special revelation is basically unintelligible" (91). In other words, creation is the spectacles through which we see Scripture rightly. John Calvin put it the other way around. In this one respect, Gaffin's starting point is wrong.

That which makes Blomberg's *historical-critical/grammatical* view "half right" is his pointing out that grammatical analysis of a text is crucial to understanding its meaning. And Blomberg's case study of Matthew 2:7-15 was the best explanation of the text to this point. He did not merely show how the interpreter would approach the text; he gave his interpretation of the text.

Making it half wrong is that it emphasizes the need not only for *lower* criticism (textual criticism) but also for *higher* criticism ("source, form, redaction and tradition criticism," 33).

Conclusion

Naively, I thought that *this* book would not be ecumenical. Are not hermeneutical views as distinct from each other as horses from giraffes and cows from tigers? As I read the various views presented in this book, I surely understood them to be different! They lead to different conclusions about Matthew 2:7-15!

But Blomberg argues for the "logical priority" of his view over the others, even though not defending it as "the sole legitimate approach" (41). Early in his essay, he says: "Readers, then, who are looking for a polemical 'either-or-or-or-or' approach from me...will be disappointed. What they will discover instead is an appreciative 'both-and-and-and-and' position" (28).

Spencer concludes his essay by saying: "I make no claim, however, that these points can only be discovered through literary/postmodern methods, and I anticipate that scholars from other viewpoints (such as those in this volume!) will provide confirmation and critique" (69).

Wall lets us know that his approach does not offer "a distinctive interpretive strategy" (130); its goal is simply to help us know how a passage has formed the church's faith in the past, and how it must still form our faith today.

Westphal could not even provide an interpretation of Matthew 2:7-15!

Starting with the presupposition that any hermeneutical view is valid, it is no wonder that many use the Bible to make it mean anything they desire it to mean!

The use of the proper hermeneutical view begins with the doctrine of divine, verbal inspiration; it proceeds carefully and prayerfully, relying on the Holy Spirit to open the reader's eyes; and it ends in awe of God who revealed His Word to sinners.

No doubt this proper hermeneutical view is known by various names. One of them is the "grammatical-historical-theological view"—a combination of Blomberg's and Gaffin's views. It is set forth well in the book *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* by Louis Berkhof, which was my textbook in seminary. Berkhof's is a good book to read.

The main value of the volume under review is that it underscores the reason on account of which we see a prevalence of shoddy Scripture interpretation: the prevalence of wrong views about what Scripture is, and about what are the goals and methods of Scripture interpretation. ●

God of Friendship: Herman Hoeksema's Unconditional Covenant Conception

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A Thesis Submitted to the
Faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary
in Candidacy for the Degree
Master of Theology
May 2014

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