Editor's Notes

You have in hand the April 2014 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Allow me to introduce you to its contents.

The first three articles are the substance of the last three of six addresses that were delivered at the Protestant Reformed Seminary's celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism in October of 2013. What a celebration it was! Large crowds; excellent speeches; wonderful fellowship; thankful rejoicing before the Lord for the rich heritage He has given the Reformed churches, including the Protestant Reformed Churches, in the Heidelberg Catechism. And a clarion call to preserve what we have been given. As one of the speakers put it: "Preach the Catechism; preach the Catechism well, and the people will come. They will *want* to come." On the basis of my own experience in the pastoral ministry, I add a resounding "Amen."

Besides the transcription of the speeches on the Heidelberg Catechism, the librarian of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Mr. Charles Terpstra, has put together an annotated bibliography of the Catechism. The bibliography is intended especially to serve as an aid to ministers who still take seriously the requirement of the Church Order of Dordt that each Sunday they shall "explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism" (Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Article 68). Reading something new (different) each time through the Catechism will help to keep the minster's sermons fresh, and thus also serve to keep the interest of the congregation.

My retired colleague Prof. David Engelsma continues to write for the *Journal.* We are always grateful for his contributions. In addition to the book reviews from his pen that are included in this issue, our readers will also find a lengthier review article. The review article calls the attention of our readers to the recently published book by Matthew Barrett entitled *Salvation By Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration*. The book contains the latest vicious slander against Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches on account of his and their denial of the well-meant gospel offer. That slander, if our readers could not guess, is "hyper-Calvinism." Suffering this slander for the gospel's sake we can endure, and will likely

be forced to continue to endure so long as we remain faithful to the biblical and confessional truth concerning the call of the gospel. But involved in the slander is the blasphemy that denies the sovereignty of God's grace, the particularity of His grace, and the irresistibility of His grace. This we cannot endure. We heartily recommend Prof. Engelsma's review article to our readers, which gives testimony to the entire Reformed and Presbyterian church world, and especially a testimony to its theologians who by-and-large promote this heresy. For heresy it is, in light of the clear testimony of Scripture and the Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19.

Besides the array of articles in this issue, you will also find a good number of book reviews. We are aware of the value of this part of the *Journal* to our readers and do what we can to have in each issue a handful of reviews of recently published books. Some of the books are heartily recommended. Some are recommended with qualifications. Others, although they should be read by theologians, ministers, seminary students, and all who are interested in the Reformed faith, have serious flaws. Such are a number of the books reviewed in this issue. Some of the books promote the heresy of the Federal Vision and the conditional covenant. Others promote outright liberalism, which always denies the infallibility and authority of the sacred Scriptures. We all must be readers. Let us help you in purchasing the books you ought to be reading. Most of these books will also be available in the seminary's library. Our readers can always check whether the seminary has a particular book because the library is now online. Go to the seminary's webpage and find the link to the library under the "support staff" tab near the top.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *PRTJ* and profit from it.

Soli Deo Gloria!

— RLC

Preach The Catechism! The Great Blessing of This Long-Standing Practice

(OR: "Preach the Catechism! God's People Will Come!")

Barrett Gritters

There is another Frederick in the story of the Heidelberg Catechism (hereafter, HC), that is, besides the Fredericks that preceded Frederick III. This other Frederick ought to be as infamous among us as Frederick III is famous, as dishonored as Frederick the Pious is respected.

This other Frederick is the Dutchman *Frederici,* (1582-1625). Among those who love the HC, the name Isaac Frederici ought to be as *black* as the name Jake Harmsen, also known as, Arminius. And the name Arminius among the Reformed is a dirty word. I was reminded of that recently when my wife accompanied a high school class on a field trip to Chicago. When one of the young students spotted an Armenian restaurant, she said, somewhat alarmed, "I didn't know they had their own restaurants!" *They*, obviously, being the Arminians. Of course she was not aware that the ethnic group called Arm<u>e</u>nians (with an "e") has nothing to do with the heretical teaching of Arm<u>i</u>nius (with an "i"), but she was certainly aware that Arminius was her foe. Oh, that the name *Frederici* would have such opprobrium attached to it.

Isaac Frederici attended the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) as one of the representatives of the Remonstrants, that is, the Arminians.[1] A synodical delegate from Utrecht, Frederici's unique distinction is the assignment given him to offer the Remonstrants' objections to preaching the HC. As we know, the Great Synod was unmoved by his objections, and quickly reinforced the mandate to preach weekly from the beautiful confession of Reformed churches.

1 Willem Jan op 't Hof, "The Heidelberg Catechism in Preaching and Teaching," in *The Church's Book of Comfort*, Willem van 't Spyker, ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009. 188

Frederici is representative of a long line of objectors to the preaching of the HC. Many since have repeated his objections. I thank God that the objectors to HC preaching I heard from in the early years of my ministry have largely gone silent.

The HC must be preached and preach it we will. We pray that our conference and its papers accomplish the purpose of promoting, among all the people of God, young and old, a lively *appreciation for* and a heartfelt *use* of the HC in the worship services of Reformed churches.

THE MANDATE

A Long-Standing Mandate

The Church Orders of almost all Reformed churches (not Presbyterian) mandate the preaching of the HC.[2]

The Church Orders (mostly in alphabetical order)

Article 68 of the Church Order of the PRC is representative: "The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the HC, so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the catechism itself for that purpose."[3]

The Canadian and American Reformed Churches, Article 52: "The consistory shall call the congregation together for worship twice on the Lord's Day. The consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed."[4]

The Christian Reformed Church, Article 54b: "At one of the ser-

2 A striking exception is the RCUS—Reformed Church United States—one of the oldest Reformed churches in America, also known as the German Reformed. The HC is one of the official creeds of the RCUS, but a mandate to preach the HC is not found in their directory of worship or in their introduction to their translation of the HC on their denominational web-site, accessed 10/18/13, http://www.rcus.org.

3 *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches,* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 399.

4 Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches,accessed 10/4/13, http://www.canrc.org.

vices each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism, following its sequence."[5]

Free Reformed Churches of North America, Article 68: "At one of the services each Lord's Dy, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the HC, following its sequence."[6]

Heritage Reformed Churches (and Netherlands Reformed), Article 68: "The ministers everywhere shall briefly explain on Sunday, ordinarily in the afternoon sermon, the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in Catechism which at present is accepted in the Netherlands churches, so that it may be completed every year in accordance with the division of the Catechism itself made for the purpose."[7]

United Reformed Churches in North America: Article 40: "At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, with special attention given to the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence."[8]

Reformed Church in America (RCA): "The points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism shall be explained by the minister at regular services of worship on the Lord's Day, so that the exposition of them is completed within a period of four years."[9]

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5 CRC, accessed 10/21/13, http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/2012_churchorder.pdf. In 1973, the CRC Synod encouraged also the use of the other creeds in the preaching. See *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government,* David H. Engelhard and Leonard J. Hofman, ed., 2001 revision, 310.

6 FRCNA 2010 Church Order, accessed 10/4/13, http://frcna.org.

7 HRC, accessed 10/21/13, http://hnrc.org. Although not identical, the wording here is most similar to Dordt's original church order.

8 URC, accessed 10/4/2013, http://www.urcna.org. The mandate is somewhat ambiguous, but appears to say that, although preference is given to the HC, preachers are mandated to preach also the other two of the Three Forms of Unity.

9 RCA, accessed 10/4/13, https://www.rca.org/bco. The quotation is from the Book of Church Order, Part 1, Art 2, 11.f. See also the BOCO, Part II, Art. 7. Gordon Girod, minister of Seventh Reformed Church in Grand Rapids when it was still part of the RCA, in a pamphlet defending HC preaching, said that this was the requirement of the RCA even in his days (ca 1970s): "…the constitution of the Reformed Church requires us to complete

The particular wording of these various Church Orders could profitably be examined in order to compare it with the old mandates. Some of the wording appears to give wiggle room to neglect preaching the HC. Some Church Orders hint at engaging in the practice by merely preaching the topic contained in each Lord's Day, whereas the traditional and original understanding was that the catechism itself was to be explained.[10] In some of the churches the mandate is not enforced. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that almost all Reformed churches of Dutch extraction include the mandate in their books of church government.

Questions for Church Visitation

In many denominations, this mandate of the Church Order is reinforced (or *enforced*) by the annual visitation of the churches by representatives of their classis.

In the PRC, the churches hold each other accountable in their ecclesiastical lives by asking each other: "Is the HC regularly explained in the services for divine worship, so that no doctrine is left unexplained?" Strikingly, this is the *second* question asked of the full

the preaching of the catechism…within a four year period." *A Defense of HC Preaching,* page 2; n.d., "Preaching the Bible: The Pulpit: Seventh Reformed Church, Volume III, Number II. One of the reasons given by the CRC for breaking with the RCA in 1857 was the RCA's "neglect of HC preaching" (see John Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy,* Baker, 1949, 34ff). Seventh Reformed no longer belongs to the RCA, but is an independent Reformed church, and has no mandate to preach the HC. In fact, in its statement of core values Seventh's consistory offers a slightly veiled criticism of HC preaching. "This core value ought not to be read as a rejection of the importance and value of teaching the historic standards of the Reformed faith. We merely suggest that as resources for teaching they are more suitable in church settings other than public worship." That is, they deem the HC unsuitable for use in public worship.

10 The proper manner of preaching the HC lies outside the scope of this article. One of the most thorough testimonies that the traditional method was using the *catechism itself* as the sermon text was made by an opponent of this method. See Paul C. Zandstra's, *A Preferred Method for Preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism: The Advantages of the Biblical-Text Method over the Catechism-Text Method* (ThM thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1985.)

consistory, after the *fundamental* question, "Is the word administered at least twice on the Lord's Day?" It is more than incidental to note the relation between these questions. After the consistory affirms that the "Word" is administered at least twice on the Lord's Day, the consistory says that one of these administrations *of the Word of God* is in the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism. The clearly implied confession is that the preaching of the Heidelberg is the administration of God's Word.

According to J.L. Schaver[11] one of the original questions for Church Visitation was more pointed: "Does his [the minister's] work give evidence of diligent study, particularly his preaching of the HC?" That formulation would have gained my attention had it been asked when I was in the pastorate making HC sermons weekly.

In 1902, the CRC took a significant decision because already then there was laxity in preaching the HC: "With a view to the dangers from without that threaten sound doctrine, and in consideration of the great need of, and the very meager interest in, the regular development of dogmatical truths, Synod emphasizes the time-honored custom of Catechism preaching, and the Classes are urged to give proper attention to this matter, that the regular consideration of the Catechism may be observed."[12]

But the tradition of the churches' mutual oversight concerning HC preaching roots back to the Netherlands already in the first century of HC preaching. In 1667 the Friesian Classis of Woodster lamented, "Our Frisian people will perish like the Jewish people for lack of knowledge." Thus, three years later at Synod Friesland of 1670, Classis Dokkum proposed that at every classis and synod meeting each church would be asked, one by one, "Do you preach the Heidelberg Catechism?"[13]

A Longer-Standing Christian Practice

Behind this official mandate is a long-standing practice of cat-

11 *Polity of the Churches*, Sixth Edition, Revised. Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1961. II:255.

12 Quoted in *The Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church As adopted by the Synod of 1920*, W. Stuart and G. Hoeksema, Grand Rapids: Smitter Book Company, 65.

13 Willem Jan op 't Hof, 189.

echism preaching in the Christian church, before the writing of the Heidelberg. That is, there is a history of preaching catechisms before the preaching of the Heidelberg. If this history were more well known, it would help Reformed Christians explain to their Christian neighbors the good and beneficial practice of preaching the Heidelberg. "Why," they ask, "would your church preach from a man-made document? Why, each week, from this 450 year-old catechism? Why would you preach from anything other than the Scripture?" The appropriate answer, though not limited to this, will certainly include: "This is the history of Reformed churches from their beginnings." If speaking to a Reformed Christian, his answer may even include: "This was the practice of your denomination until recently. Still today it is the mandate in your church's rules of order." But speaking to *any* Christian, the Reformed Christian can say with good confidence, "Catechism preaching was the history of the Christian church far before the publication of the Heidelberg."

I find this to be a very powerful part of our defense of this practice. The reasoning runs like this: All these Reformed denominations mandate Heidelberg Catechism preaching. That mandate to preach the *Heidelberg* Catechism has been in existence since the time of the Reformation, almost 500 years ago. But the Reformed fathers mandated *catechism* preaching because they were restoring what had been the practice of the Christian church as far back as history records post-apostolic church practices.

This is not so well known among Reformed Christians.

Post-1563 Catechism Preaching

Among Reformed Christians of Dutch origin, it is relatively well known that the *Heidelberg* Catechism was preached from the date of its publication (thus, the "*post*-1563" heading). That history may be found in many works on the HC. The forefathers in the Netherlands preached the HC from the time of its publication. I sketch that history here only in the briefest way.[14]

In the Palatinate of Germany, the 1563 Church Order, adopted on November 15 (just 11 months after the HC itself received official

14 For a thorough treatment of this history, see N.H. Gootjes, "Catechetical Preaching," in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches*, Zwolle, 1993, 136-166.

approval), preaching of the HC was mandated, and even a specific *method* of preaching was called for. Preaching this document was no afterthought for the churches, for Ursinus himself urged the preaching of it "from the pulpit to the common people."

> Further, a catechism sermon shall be held every Sunday afternoon at the hour established in every locality in this way: first, after the song, the minister shall pray the Lord's Prayer and call upon the Lord for a right understanding of His word; after which he shall read the Ten Commandments before the people distinctly. Thereupon he shall instruct those in attendance who can hear with learning, (and) to whom the questions will be so preached, first for a time upon the text, thereafter also by degrees upon the (chosen) question part. After this he will allow several of the youth to recite a particular number of the questions in the Catechism that they have learned in the school or at home (as we will for this reason divide it by Sundays) as it will be expounded in the future, and especially on the next Sunday. And when these have been recited in the presence of the Congregation, the Minister shall explain several following questions in a simple and brief manner, so that he shall preach through the Catechism at least once a year.[15]

In the Netherlands, the name Peter Gabriel is remembered as the first minister whose preaching of the HC was documented. Soon, several Dutch synods encouraged the preaching of the HC, after which the 1586 Synod of the Hague made it mandatory. Dordt's 1578 Synod asked that it be preached in the afternoon service. Synod Middleburg 1581 commissioned an exposition of it to help young ministers preach from it. And the Great Synod (Dordt, 1618/1619) codified the practice in its venerable Church Order, which Church Order (slightly modified) the PRC have today.

Pre-1563 Catechism Preaching

But the history of catechism preaching *before* the Reformation must be remembered.

15 This is a rough, literal translation given by an RCUS pastor, from old e-mail correspondence. For a more formal English translation, see John Payne, *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ, vol. 2, Reformation Roots,* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1977) 359-76.

Too often, the historical defense of preaching the HC has stopped after reaching back to the Reformation. Important as the Reformation tradition is, the practice of preaching a catechism is the *Christian* tradition.

Let me make that clear. Reading Reformation history, what one must notice is that, when synods mandated that ministers preach the HC, almost no one questioned the practice. Of course, Arminians like Frederici at the Synod of Dordt had objections to preaching the Heidelberg; but in those objections was not so much opposition to preaching a *catechism*, but an aversion to the doctrines of sovereign grace that the Heidelberg Catechism propounded. At the time of the Reformation, no one objected to the proposition that ministers preach catechisms. Ministers preaching catechisms was expected.

I offer some examples of that, starting at the Reformation and working backwards.

In Luther's Germany only 10 years after his 95 theses were posted on the church door—thus, of course, prior to the Heidelberg's writing—Luther went out on a kind of "church visitation" and found appalling ignorance, especially in the rural areas. So Luther revised a series of sermons he had preached on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. In 1529 he published these sermon summaries under the title "Larger Catechism," and offered them as preaching models for the young and relatively untrained ministers. Catechism preaching was Luther's answer to the faltering of the Reformation movement on account of ignorance.

In Calvin's Geneva, they did the same. Calvin wrote two catechisms, the second—in question and answer form—in a division of 52 parts, to be explained in public worship on the Lord's Day. The Church Order of Geneva in 1541 prescribed three services on the Lord's Day, the middle one, at noon, was the "Catechism" service.

Why would they do this? And why would no one object to this "catechism" preaching? Because this was the practice of the church since the very beginning: there was a preaching norm in which, at one of the meetings of the gathered believers, the fundamental doctrines were systematically explained. First, the ancient Apostles' Creed article by article; then the sacraments were expounded for the strengthening of the faith; finally, the people were taught the Ten

Commandments as the rule of gratitude and the Lord's Prayer as the model for their life of communion with God. That is the content of catechisms from the beginning of the Christian Church.

It is also the essence of the Heidelberg Catechism. After a few important introductory Lord's Days establishing the Christian's *need* for salvation, the HC launches immediately into the Apostles' Creed as that which a man must believe in order to *be* saved; turns then to the sacraments, which further explain how God *works* and *confirms* faith (unto salvation); and concludes with exposition of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer as the two main ways in which the Christian expresses gratitude for his free salvation. For almost 2000 years, the Christian church has been preaching these doctrines to the people of God.

This explains why Ursinus, author of the Catechism, in a letter *before* the HC was adopted, complained that he had too much work to do if he was also required to take the "catechism sermon." And, in the preface to the *first* edition of the Heidelberg Catechism, but before anyone mandated its use for preaching, Elector Frederick III urged preachers to inculcate it into "the common man from the pulpit."

> We do herewith affectionately admonish and enjoin upon every one of you, that you do, for the honour of God and our subjects, and also for the sake of your own soul's profit and welfare, thankfully accept this proffered Catechism or course of instruction, and that you do diligently and faithfully represent and explain the same according to its true import, to the youth in our schools and churches, and also from the pulpit to the common people, that you teach, and act, and live in accordance with it, in the assured hope, that if our youth in early life are earnestly instructed and educated in the word of God, it will please Almighty God also to grant reformation of public and private morals, and temporal and eternal welfare"[16]

The Reformers knew that catechism preaching was the Christian tradition.

Although Luther was exaggerating, he once said, reflecting on his catechism preaching: "We have not had catechism preaching for one thousand years!" Or: "We have the catechism on the pulpit,

16 Fred Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism: Origin and History*, Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1981, 152.

something that did not happen for a thousand years!"[17] Luther exaggerated, for there had been catechism preaching more recently than a thousand years prior. But he understood that preaching a catechism was a restoration of an ancient tradition of the Christian church nearly a thousand years prior to his day.

The evidence of Luther's exaggeration is that in the Middle Ages—the centuries prior to the Reformation—the church called for systematic, regular exposition of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the sacraments (of course, all seven of them According To Roman Catholic tradition!), and the Ten Commandments.

But catechism preaching even pre-dates the Middle Ages. According to the historian Hughs Oliphant Old:

> The catechetical sermons of Ambrose [AD 340-397, and contemporary of Augustine: AD 354-430] claim our special attention. Each year before Easter he prepared those to be baptized by preaching to them daily, carefully explaining the basic teaching of the Christian faith. He would always treat in turn the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and give a detailed explanation of the sacraments of baptism and communion. This procedure remained the schema for classical catechetical preaching for generations. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century *revived* this same design when they wrote their catechisms and preached their catechetical sermons. Indeed one might even regard Ambrose as the father of catechetical preaching.[18]

"Catechism, as the instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian religion, is as old as Christianity. Already at the time of the Church

17 Quoted in Gootjes, *Proceedings,* 142.

18 *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship that is Reformed According to Scripture*, John Knox Press. Atlanta: 1984, 64,65. See also Wilbert M. VanDyk: "Reflecting on those early confessional responses in his *Catechetical Lectures*, Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 350) reported that 'since all cannot read the Scriptures, some being hindered from knowing them by lack of education, others by want of leisure, we comprise the whole doctrine of the faith in a few lines.' Those few lines were often repeated in the liturgy of the worship service, and they became the subject of the bishop's homilies." "Preaching the Creeds and Confessions of the Church: The Case for Theological Literacy," *Calvin Theological Journal,* 47, no. 2 (2012): 224-236.

Fathers one of the means of catechetical instruction was catechism preaching."[19]

The Reformers were not innovators, but restorers of biblical tradition, the old and good traditions. So they re-established a preaching norm in which, at one of the meetings of the gathered believers on the Lord's Day, the fundamental Christian doctrines were systematically explained.

Christianity's Topical Preaching

As a side-note in a seminary journal, it may be worth pointing out that this is the Christian tradition of "topical preaching." This may sound surprising in a Reformed theological journal, because in the past 100 years or so conservative and especially Reformed churches have frowned hard on topical preaching because of its terrible abuse—liberal ministers riding their hobby horses and spouting their social and political agendas under the pretense of preaching. These topical "sermons" were the screeds of men masquerading as Christian ministers. But topical sermons would allow the ministers to say what they wanted to say without being bound by Scripture and the requirement to explain and apply the biblical text before them. In response to that abuse, there has been a proper emphasis on the need to preach textually. What may have been forgotten, however, is that there has always been one exception to that norm: the topical preaching of preaching catechisms.

This Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones does not acknowledge when he politely but clearly rejects the practice of preaching catechisms in his otherwise useful book, *Preaching and Preachers.*[20] Lloyd-Jones alleges that preaching a man-made document like a catechism "produces a theoretical attitude to the Truth, an over-intellectual attitude to the Truth."

The "Doctor" is first guilty of a simple logical fallacy. He fails to

19 Gootjes, *Proceedings,* 145.

20 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 187,188. The assault of Lloyd-Jones continues because the text has become a classic. I still require the book for my students in the beginning preaching course. The recent reprinting of the work in a 40th Anniversary Edition (Zondervan, 2012), which includes essays from six well-known preachers, assures the repetition of the criticisms.

see that it is the improper *manner* of preaching catechisms that leads to these errors.[21] Nor does he recognize that preaching catechisms has a long and honorable history with blessed fruits. More seriously, the "Doctor" fails to acknowledge that the "man-made" document that is the Heidelberg Catechism is more than a made-by-two-men document. A creed ought not be slandered by branding it a mere "document." Rather than demeaning the "document" as produced by men who "were concerned to emphasise certain things," a promoter of good preaching should speak of the confession as the product of the church of Jesus Christ, made and officially approved under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ. It is also very significant that when men and women join themselves to these churches where the Heidelberg Catechism is preached, they make a public confession, saying, almost literally, "The doctrines taught in the Heidelberg Catechism are the true, biblical doctrines of salvation." Thus, when the minister is preaching this man-made document, he is preaching the topics that the church has asked him to preach, explained with the precise language that the church has determined to be biblical. The church members have said to their minister, "Explain this, our biblical confession, to us. Help us *make* this confession of truth."

There is a good tradition of topical preaching: the catechism sermon.

But to return to the main topic: The fathers were convinced of the good tradition of catechism preaching.

The Early Struggles

Although the fathers were convinced of the legitimacy of the tradition, it was no easy task to defend and maintain this newly restored practice.

In some areas of the Netherlands, Reformed ministers were in such short supply that one minister served three or four scattered

21 The proper manner of preaching the Catechism is not the subject of this article. Wilbert VanDyk's succinct analysis of the improper manner is apropos: "Preachers whose sermons have turned the warmth and pastoral sensitivities of the Heidelberg Catechism into doctrinal lectures bear a large measure of responsibility for the confessional lethargy that so easily leads to theological illiteracy." "Preaching the Creeds and Confessions of the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal,* 47, no. 2 (2012): 229.

churches. They came to each of the churches only once every few weeks, and because the HC sermon was to be in the second service and these churches assembled only when the minister was present, there was no HC sermon. In other places, even though the church had its own minister, there was no second service for a variety of reasons: farm duties took priority, or the herring fleet departed Sunday afternoons.

So the Reformed churches in the Netherlands held occasional meetings to encourage each other in the importance of maintaining the tradition. I am intrigued by the story of one of those meetings at which ministers from Switzerland were present. The Swiss brethren wanted to encourage their Dutch colleagues to maintain the HC, and did so by reporting how they emphasized its importance in Switzerland. If a young couple in the Swiss Reformed churches asked to be married, the couple was quickly examined as to their level of knowledge of the HC. If their knowledge was deficient, the wedding was postponed until they could show more familiarity with it![22]

Would to God that the HC were as important to us today. Important, not because of love for old documents, but because of love for the beautiful truth of the Word of God, and truth is the greatest blessing a church can receive.

When Frederick III was summoned to the Diet of Augsburg in 1566 to explain and defend his catechism to the Emperor and other church leaders, he said,

> This catechism has on its pages such abundant proof from Holy Scripture that it will remain unrefuted by men and will also remain my irrefutable belief.… I comfort myself in this, that my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has promised me and all His believers that whatever we lose for His name's sake here on earth shall be restored to us an hundredfold in the life to come. And with this I submit myself to the gracious consideration of your Imperial Majesty.[23]

22 Richard DeRidder, *Survey of the Sources of Reformed Church Polity and the Form of Government of the Christian Reformed Church in America* (syllabus). Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1983, 78.

23 Reformed Church in the U.S., "Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism," accessed 10/10/13, http://www.rcus.org.

THE GREAT BLESSINGS

HC preaching has been a blessing to the church, is today a blessing to Reformed churches, and by the grace of God will be until the Lord Jesus returns.

Those who in their generations have lost catechism preaching rue the day it was lost. And those who have been able to maintain HC preaching, attribute their preservation as Reformed churches in large part to the faithful preaching of the truth as it is found in this creed.

So, rather than defend this practice against its critics, let me explain what would have motivated our fathers to defend this practice, and what motivates us, to continue to preach the HC. I am not interested in isolating the objections to HC preaching, and answering those objections, although that may be profitable in some settings. Instead, I prefer to highlight and celebrate the great blessings for the churches who maintain this practice of preaching the Catechism of Heidelberg.

First, good HC preaching grounds the people of God in the doctrines of Scripture

To put it in the way others have stated this point: good HC preaching assures theological literacy in the churches.[24] The people of God love God with all their hearts, but also with all their minds. They understand that to know God in Jesus Christ is life eternal (John 17:3). The word of God is doctrinal; that is, it teaches truth, propositional truth. The faith of the church is doctrinal. Still today peoples (churches and generations) are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). Churches need the kind of preaching Paul offered in the synagogue at Thessalonica: he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, opening and alleging, explaining truth and defending it against errors (Acts 17:2,3).

Already seventy years ago, two Christian Reformed preachers wrote, "Catechism preaching, to be sure, is doctrinal preaching. We need doctrinal preaching. Every believer should be a well-informed

24 See, for example, Wilbert VanDyke, "Preaching the Creeds and Confessions of the Church." The subtitle of VanDyk's article is, "The Case for Theological Literacy."

Christian. One who is not well informed as to the main teachings of Holy Writ cannot be a strong Christian."[25]

Nor may the benefit for the preacher—especially the young preacher—be forgotten. By preaching through the fifty-two Lord's Days of the HC, the youthful minister himself becomes fully grounded in the Reformed faith in all its beautiful balance and tone.

And consider what happened in those denominations that abandoned HC preaching. The faithful preachers in their midst now admit that abandoning HC preaching was a great disaster. Listen to RCA pastor Kevin DeYoung, a lonely voice in the wilderness of the RCA, trying to reestablish the practice that was long ago forsaken in his churches.[26]

Know the truth, and the truth shall set you free!

Second, good HC preaching anchors the church in history and tradition

If there is one thing the new generation needs to "get," especially in our day of post-modern opposition to anything old, it is a sense of history—a deep and abiding sense that their faith and practices are the good old tradition, that blazing new trails is not what the church should be known for.

The good practice of HC preaching instills in the people of God that sense: they stand on the shoulders of others before them. They have not come to the knowledge of this truth on their own. They are standing in the paths, asking for the old ways (Jer 6:16); holding the traditions that Paul taught us to take possession of (II Thess. 2:15); maintaining the ancient landmarks which the fathers have set (Prov. 22:28). When we preach the HC, we align ourselves with the church of the past, show ourselves to be one with Reformed Christianity and in the camp of the true church of ancient times.

This sense of history is a *sine qua non* for maturity in Reformed people.

These mature members, then, know that the mature expression of

25 Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary,* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951. 277.

26 Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.

the church's faith brings to maturity the next generation of believers. On the other hand, "the church without confessional standards has no assurance that what its members hear from its pulpit has been matured by thoughtful, Spirit-led, and corporate study of the Bible."[27]

Third, good HC preaching gives the people of God theological and biblical balance

The practice of preaching the Heidelberg forces the minister to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), not that particular aspect of it that "floats his boat."

If I may put this in terms of what I pray for the families of my children, I pray that they are not exposed to the personal desires and judgments of any one man. I fear for them if they are exposed to the whims of each new preacher that comes their church's way, or to proclivities of the same preacher decade after decade, who mounts the same few hobby horses year after year. This would not be unlike their mother preparing lasagna every night for dinner. If she would justify this by claiming that it is a different recipe each night, the children would agree that it is still lasagna. The children may even like lasagna; but a family needs variety and balance.

With one minister it might be all justification and no sanctification. With the next it might be all ethics and morals with no theology. One minister may love controversy and preach primarily polemical sermons. Another will abominate polemics and sinfully avoid issues when he ought to tackle them head-on.

The HC gives balance. In it, all the fundamental truths of the Bible are there for annual explanation, so that nothing is left out. The church hears about baptism—infants must be baptized. The Lord's Supper, justification by faith, the Holy Spirit, the Christian life, and prayer are regularly explained. The church hears the truth—the whole counsel of God—which she has been fed for 2000 years! Good HC preaching exposes the congregation to the full breadth of apostolic teaching.

> It is true that apart from Catechism preaching a Minister might indoctrinate his congregation according to God's revelations. But

27 VanDyk, "Preaching the Creeds and Confessions of the Church," 230.

> catechism preaching assures us that all ministers will preach the whole truth of God, and that not according to their personal conceptions, but according to the common conception of all the Churches. We are safe in saying that if it were not for Catechism preaching, certain truths of God's word would be seldom touched upon in our sermons. All ministers are but men, and all men are apt to be one-sided and forgetful. The preaching of God's Word according to the summary of that Word found in the Catechism safeguards the churches against the danger of partial and one-sided preaching.[28]

Fourth, good HC preaching promotes unity, continuity, stability in the churches

The fundamental basis for church unity is agreement in the cardinal doctrines of the Word of God, as Paul makes plain in Ephesians 4. HC preaching creates and maintains such unity.

HC preaching promotes *generational* unity. This "up and coming" generation embraces the same thing as the previous generation. How important for parents and grandparents in the churches! I am rarely as encouraged as when I see my own children and grandchildren in the church, hearing the same unchanging truth that I heard when I was young, and that my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents heard and believed.

HC preaching promotes *denominational* unity. This congregation hears the same truths preached as that congregation, so that we have no fears of joining "that" congregation when moving residence requires me to join another congregation in the denomination.

> For preachers to ignore these doctrinal statements (the creeds) is to show an arrogant disregard for the denominational fellowship…. Within denominational structures, ministers are not theological entrepreneurs. Ordained by the church, they are expected to preach and teach the theology of the church.[29]

HC preaching even takes the lead in the promotion *ecumenical* unity. This opens the door to healthy discussions with other churches, smooths the way for fellowship, whether formal or informal. I remember well when we traveled to South Africa and Namibia a few

28 VanDellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary,* 277.

29 VanDyk, "Preaching the Creeds and Confessions of the Church," 231.

summers ago, there we found, to our great joy, a real spiritual connection with the saints because of our common love for and familiarity with the HC (as well as the Church Order of Dordt).

It was unity that Frederick III was interested in when he commissioned the writing of his catechism. He saw the proliferation of catechisms and the divisions among his people, and said: "We must be united in the unity of truth!"

Fifth, HC preaching gives a church a confessional identity

Who are we? What do we believe? What identifies us?

This or that man does not identify us. A healthy church does not want to be formed by one minister's personality or preferences. A church must not be known as "Rob Bell's church" or "Hoeksema's church."

A church must be known by the creedal banners she flies, and what better way to fly them than by their use in public worship. This is who we are: a confessional church whose esteem of the confessions is so high that we preach one of them unashamedly.

Sixth, HC preaching assures that the people of God hear the gospel[30]

Comfort! Hope! Grace! Friendship with God! And all in Jesus Christ! The HC is centered in the gospel. I am comforted in Jesus Christ as I know my sin and misery. It is good news to see how I am delivered from this condition of sin. It is especially gospel to know that the Christian life of obedience and prayer is not to merit salvation, but to express gratitude for an altogether gracious deliverance.

This is the good news of Scripture! The theme of this beautiful document is the biblical truth of Isaiah 53, II Corinthians 1, and Genesis 3.

That is why I love to teach the HC to students in catechism[31] and why I unashamedly seek opportunities to take this work for congregations without their own pastor. And when I do, over and over I repeat the refrain, using the language of the Catechism: "How bad is it with you? It's bad with me, pastor, the evil of my depraved nature

30 This is the subject of another speech, so I only mention it here.

31 How we managed to plan a major conference on the HC without a speech on *teaching* HC to children I am still puzzled over!

and my inclination to hate God…. But can you be delivered from your misery? By a saving faith in Jesus Christ alone. And how do you show your deepest gratitude for such great deliverance? I obey and I pray." This is good news that never gets old.

Seventh, good HC preaching will help preacher and congregation alike to remember their calling to live antithetically

Another (Rev. A Stewart, *PRT Journal,* vol. 47, no. 1,) is writing about both the irenic and polemical character of the HC, so I will not belabor this point here either.

It is worth mentioning, however, that when a man preaches the Catechism, and not merely the topic mentioned in the Catechism (another aspect of the proper *manner* of preaching the HC), he will be compelled to deal with controversy. He will not be able to avoid facing heresy and refuting it. Certainly, he will find some of the controversies grown cold (even then he will not forget them). But even in these instances, he will be reminded that the Catechism's approach itself is a model for a faithful preacher: error must be exposed and refuted for the safety of the people of God.

The antithetical and polemical nature of the catechism appears more than one might realize. The very first, and beautiful, Q&A 1 has us confess: "*not* my own!!!" In Lord's Day 2: "Can you keep the law perfectly?" Why such a question? Right under the surface of the question itself is the heresy of perfectionism: "I *can* keep all these things perfectly," a heresy that must be refuted for the spiritual well-being of the people of God. Almost every question implies an error that is being exposed. Examining the HC in that way, it is plain to see that, although it is marvelous in its peaceful notes, it is bold in its polemics.

Eighth, good HC preaching maintains a proper subjective element in the preaching

The HC's approach is experiential. It is personal and experiential.

Among all creeds, the HC is unique in this respect, and thus is eminently useful for preaching that must speak to the hearts of God's people.

The HC is personal. The first person personal pronouns "I" and "we" are used.

It is also experiential, addressing the God-willed experiences of the people of God. At the very beginning the HC lays all the cards on the table and proclaims its intentions openly: "Our goal is to comfort you." It proclaims, "In your great *temptations* our purpose is to help you." It deals not only with what we ought to love and what we are forbidden to love, but rather must *hate* and flee from, starting deep within our hearts. It speaks about Christian joys—how lofty! and Christian sorrows—how deep! It tells me about the excruciatingly painful experience of mortifying my old man, and the profound joy of quickening the new. The HC gives me hope—beautiful gift of God!—as I peer out into the uncertain future. It urges me to use all my gifts for the advantage and salvation of my neighbor. It teaches me what is true love—for my Savior God, and for my neighbor. The Catechism is brimming with the life and biblical experience of the Christian.

In that respect too it is honest and faithful to Scripture; Scripture always speaks to our hearts.

This is why, I believe, the church did not (and should not) ask preachers to preach the Belgic Confession or the Canons of Dordt (or the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith). Beautiful as they are as confessions of truth, they are not suited as the HC is to preach. For preaching must address and explain the experiences—the deep and important experiences—of the people of God.

Here is highlighted the need to say once more: the *catechism* must be preached. If a man merely preaches the topics suggested by the catechism, and fails to pay careful attention to the very language and tone of catechism, he does injustice not only to the churches' mandate, but likely also to the calling pastors have to preach experientially—with the *church's* own official definition of "experiential."

Final Note to Preachers: Preach Faithfully

When in the early history of HC preaching the fathers in the Netherlands struggled to maintain the practice and heard reports from churches that members refused to attend the "catechism service," the assemblies never rebuked the people for not attending church. They always admonished the preachers.

In essence, the synods said, "Preach well, and God's people will come." ●

Gratitude! The Catechism's View of the Christian Life

I Chronicles 29: 11-14
(Lord's Day 32; Q&A 86)

Carl Haak

For four and half centuries the biblical teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism has molded the spiritual lives of Reformed believers. The apostle Paul confesses that it was grace alone, by the revelation of the Word alone, and though the Spirit of God alone, that made him to be what he was (I Cor. 15:10; I Tim. 1:14). And all who have been blessed under the rearing of the Catechism paraphrase Paul's confession: "I am what I am by the grace of God, and that grace was exceeding abundant towards me through the instrumentality of the preaching, memorizing, catechizing, and reciting of the Heidelberg Catechism."

Among the Reformed Creeds the Heidelberg Catechism stands as queen. Just as a godly mother shapes the life and faith of her children by her love, faith and presence, so the Heidelberg Catechism has formed the spiritual life of Reformed believers for over four centuries. To use the words of the prophet Isaiah (66:10-14) as he speaks of the blessing of being nurtured in the church, so we also give testimony to the nurture we have received from the Catechism: "We have been satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; we milk out and are delighted with the abundance of her glory; we have been borne upon her side and bounced on her knees as one whom his mother comforteth. And our bones have flourished as an herb and we have known that the hand of the Lord is toward his servants."

The Catechism has identified clearly for us what is the only possible comfort in this life and in the hour of death; namely, belonging to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ who satisfied for all our sins. The Catechism has verbalized for us our Christian experience, that is, supplied the words which describe what it means to be embraced by the God of the covenant. The Heidelberger has unfolded for us the treasures of the truth of salvation as they live in our hearts by a God-given faith. Our trusted instructor has taught us the sinfulness of sin, the righteous

and holy character of God, the only way out of our prison of sin, the identity of our Mediator, the elements of a true faith, the hands of God's providence holding us, and so on. Every Lord's Day has imparted rich truths to our souls in a personal and experiential way. In short, the Heidelberg Catechism has inculcated to generations of believers the Reformed world-and-life view of living in rock-solid comfort to God's glory in a world of spiritual darkness and emptiness.

If that were not enough, we owe our spiritual vocabulary to the Heidelberg Catechism. For four and a half centuries it has been the Catechism's vocabulary from which we have given expression to our faith before each other and the world. Her questions and answers have shaped how we give utterance to the experience of being brought out of darkness into His marvelous light. Our spiritual language, how we give expression to our hope, our consciousness of sin, our love for Christ, and much more is all taken from the Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism has shaped how we speak, how we see ourselves, how we express our hope, how we pray, how we view the world; in short, our entire spiritual life has been tenderly molded by the sure hands of God through the truth of our only comfort in life and in death.

Surely this is no small thing!

The best days are yet ahead

The 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg is cause for deep and heartfelt gratitude to God. God has done great things for us, for which we are glad (Ps. 126). We raise our Ebenezer, "Hitherto has the Lord helped us." But the Catechism's glory and influence is not merely a thing of the past. Her best days are yet to come! This is not to say that we expect her to be resurrected in the churches where she once had an honored place and has now been ignored, forgotten, discarded, and spurned. A terrible judgment awaits the church which sells the birthright blessing of the Catechism. The Catechism's beauty and strength will be taken from those who set her aside and will be given to another. No, that her best days are ahead does not mean that we hold out the belief (though we would pray for it) that we expect the Heidelberg Catechism to experience a resurgence of popularity in Christendom (though, let us see the need to take the Catechism with us in the work of both foreign and domestic missions). The church being called out of the world and into existence will latch on to her

and drink in her milk as a newborn baby). We weep for the church of God, which once had the Heidelberg Catechism and now "no longer knoweth the things that pertain to her peace." Be warned of God, for the same apostasy, over which we grieve in other churches, abides within our own nature. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

When I make bold to say that the best days of the Heidelberg Catechism are ahead for her, I mean that the Heidelberg Catechism is suited for and up to the task of forming the faith of the church as she enters the last days that shall come upon this earth. She is the creed for the twenty-first century! Her best days are ahead not in terms of the number who will hold her dear, but in terms of the work that God yet has for her on the earth. The Heidelberg Catechism is exactly the creed which fits the need of the church of God as she enters the last days of this world. She is fit for the task of molding our spiritual lives and the faith lives of our children as we are called to stand in the final day which will try men's souls.

For the past 450 years the truths of Holy Scripture as summed in our Heidelberg Catechism have preserved believers from the jaws of the Great Dragon. These truths have rescued believers from the despair of death; have upheld them in persecution, fire, trial, sickness, and temptations of every sort. In her beginning days she was the faith which sent our Dutch forefathers to the stake to be burnt alive for the sake of the Reformed faith. The Catechism was the little creed taken along when believers had to leave all and flee, and she was the book of instruction clasped close to the heart of those who endured the loss of all for Christ's sake. The same summary of Christian doctrine found in the Heidelberg Catechism, which kept our fathers in their hour of temptation, will also keep the church that is yet to be born when the great persecution arises against the bride of Christ. When Apollyon rears his head and breaths out his threatening against the faithful and there is but a remnant on the earth who will not receive the mark of the beast nor bow before him, it will be the truth contained in the Catechism which fuels their faith, makes them strong, and keeps them from denying His name.

The Heidelberg Catechism's greatest task is before her! Her finest hour is yet to come!

Our Catechism is suited to be a mighty power in preserving the church in the last hour because her truth is the unchanging truth of the

living God. Being a faithful, simple, beautiful testimony to the truth, she is eminently qualified and seasoned to stand by the side of the church at the end of the ages. Added to this is the fact that because she teaches the truth warmly, personally, and pointedly, she is able to make the truth stick to the heart when the forces of sin try to tear the truth away. In these days—in these last days—the church does not need a new creed. We need to hold fast to the one we have; the one tested, tried, and able to equip us for what is foretold to come against us.

In the day when the church is called to look into the eyes of the Antichrist, and in that day when the Man of sin appears to have his hands around the neck of the Bride of Jesus Christ, the truths found in the Heidelberg Catechism will preserve us. Her testimony is our testimony now and it will be the testimony of the confessing church to the end.

The third part of comfort: Gratitude

We look now at the Heidelberg Catechism's view of the Christian life from the perspective of gratitude. The threefold division of the Catechism is understood not as three steps, each one an advance from the previous and leaving the previous behind, but the division expresses a "triple knowledge," i.e., one knowledge containing three parts. The personal knowledge of my sin, my deliverance, and my gratitude is the knowledge of my only comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ. Each feeds the other; all three are inseparable. Yet, the prevailing spirit of the life of the believer delivered from sin will be gratitude. The Christian's experience is in one word: *thankfulness;* thankfulness to God so great and gracious. It is a thankfulness woven into the warp and woof of their lives.

I will develop three ideas. The first is that the Catechism teaches us that the sole motivation for the Christian's life of good works is gratitude. Secondly, that it is through gratitude that we become a people pleasing to God. Finally, the Catechism will show us that the Christian's experience of gratitude is abundantly fruitful.

Gratitude: The only motive

Gratitude to God, the Catechism instructs us, is the sole motive for Christian living. Specifically, thankfulness to God can be the only motive for living a life of good works before God. This is the point of the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism beginning in Lord's Day

32. This Lord's Day opens the door to the sanctuary of the thankful life. Q.&A. 86 first reviews the first thirty-one Lord's Days: "Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours...." It then searches for the motive for obedience: "Why must we still do good works?" Why do we need good works if we are saved by grace? The answer:

> Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit, after His own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us.

Understand that the Catechism is saying far more than that an element of gratitude must be present in our life. The Catechism is making the point that thankfulness to God must drive the whole of our conduct—our very life and being! The point being established is that there is no other driving force behind the obedience of the child of God than gratitude. This is the Reformed, biblical view of the Christian life. The Christian life is a life of never-ceasing thanks! Thanks always! Thanks in everything! Thanks for grace! And thus gratitude and thankfulness, not murmuring and complaining, is the life to which grace has called us.

The Heidelberg Catechism has taught us that there are three basic parts to our experience of belonging to Jesus Christ. To belong to Jesus Christ is daily to know my guilt, His grace, and my gratitude. These three parts: sin, deliverance, and thankfulness are not merely an intellectual insight, but the knowledge of faith which continually leans upon the testimony of the Holy Scripture. Romans 7:24 contains this three-part experience of comfort: "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We see guilt: "Oh wretched man!"; grace: "who shall deliver me?"; and gratitude: "I thank God." We do not see in this verse three stages of the Christian life in which one graduates from guilt to grace and then to gratitude (a life of perfectionism, joy, and victory). Paul did not say, "Oh wretched man that I *was,*" but "*I am.*" Lord's Day 2 does not say, "I need to know how great my sins and miseries *were*." It says, "how great they *are.*" But these three—guilt, grace, and gratitude—interwoven and interdependent, show our

Christian experience. And the first two—guilt and grace—become the source of our gratitude to God.

The Catechism tells us that gratitude is the echo of praise reverberating in the chambers of a renewed heart which has come to know its deliverance from guilt by grace alone. It reverberates through the heart of the redeemed and the renewed child of God, who deeply knows his sin and the wonder of Christ's grace. Yet the Catechism is teaching us even more. The Catechism is teaching us that thankfulness has now become the sole motivation for a life of good works.

"Why must we still do good works?" What is the impulse, the motive to live a Christian life? "Give me," says the Catechism, "one good reason why I should do good works! Why should I obey God? Why must I walk in holiness? Why must I be sexually pure? Why must I be honest? Why must I be clean-mouthed? Motivate me to do these things." We are being asked for the motive for obedience, for doing good, for forsaking sin, etc. Why do you want to live a Christian life? Why don't you just give up? Why do you go through all the trials and struggles? Why do you endure sacrifice and ridicule in following Christ? Why do you want to live as a Christian? The only answer which will suffice and provide the strength to keep on keeping on is: gratitude! Gratitude directed solely to God. A gratitude that "constrains us" (II Cor. 5:13), compels, takes hold of all our willing and thinking and being. "I cannot do otherwise. My life now flows out of the abundance of gratitude in my heart." The driving force, the impulse of the Christian life is thankfulness to God. Listen as this point is expressed in Psalm 116, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all of His benefits to me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord; I will offer to the Lord the sacrifice of thanksgiving, now in the presence of all His saints." We want the whole of our conduct to testify of our gratitude to God.

There are other views of the Christian life which oppose this truth. Roman Catholicism requires its members to keep the commandments of God and to do good works out of the motivation of reward and earned merit. They follow a long list of things to do and perform. They are taught to inspect their outward acts as providing their acceptance with God. But when all these are accomplished, a humble soul must wonder if they have done enough and must be left with the feeling of doubt and absence of peace.

The teaching of the Federal Vision, a heresy none who love the Catechism can bear for a second, teaches that a believer does good works because he is justified by faith in Christ and by the good works Christ performs in him—justification by faith and by works. This teaching was marked as a Christ-dishonoring heresy long ago by the writers of the Catechism (see Lord's Day 23 and 24), and a teaching that robs believers of every shred of the comfort of their acceptance with God based alone in the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Still more, there is the teaching of conditional theology, so enamored by many who pledge allegiance to the Catechism. This too is an enemy of Christian gratitude. Making our faith the condition to receive the covenant promise, and not the fruit of the promise, the adherents of conditional theology erase thankfulness from the church. A true advocate of such a teaching ought not be bashful, if such is their conviction, and ought then to thank God and themselves for possessing the promise of salvation. But to say such a thing, even to hint at it, immediately exposes the horror of such a thought to any believer! Thank God and *myself*? Surely every believer repudiates with all within them such a thought or anything that would attempt to give legitimacy to it. Paul's words apply, "what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). Each of these views teaches that the motivation for the Christian life is to accumulate merit with God. We then become wage-earners. We live the Christian life so that God becomes indebted to us! These ideas are not only totally foreign to the experience of grace, but they are a blasphemous affront to God Himself.

People who come to God, relying to any extent on the basis of their doing and willing, are proud people. And proud people do not give thanks.

The must of good works

The Heidelberg Catechism never leaves the truth in abstract form, but always presses the issue upon our hearts and souls. Since we are saved by grace alone, "why must we still do good works?" Why should we desire to do good works and live the Christian life? Do we do it because we think God is now obligated to us, and we can somehow chip away at our debt? Do we do it to call attention to ourselves, so

that others will think well of us? Do we obey simply because it's expected of us; do we do it robotically? If this is the motivation for our Christian life, then all of our good works are an abomination to God. We confess only one reason for good works: gratitude for so great a salvation. The Christian life is an offering of thanks by the whole of our conduct.

This *"must"* is the Holy Spirit creating a new impulse in the child of God to express thankfulness to God. It says, "I desire to do Thy will!"

That leads us to understand Lord's Day 32's use of the word "must": "Why *must* we still do good works?" This "must" is not an external force of compulsion and threat. It is the internal renewal of the believer's heart after the image of Christ. Because Christ has redeemed me and delivered me by His blood, He renews me by the Holy Spirit after His own image. I have a new impulse to thank Him. That is what the work of grace does.

As an example, think about the power of steam. God has created the molecular structure of water (H_20) so that when it is heated the elements expand and the molecules through heat begin to interact at incredible speed. This will cause vapor and pressure to be formed. If you put water in a two inch thick iron drum and weld the cover shut with no release valve, and then light a fire under that drum, the water would break the barrel and burst forth!

So also you cannot keep the lid on the thanks that a renewed and redeemed heart seeks to express to God. The Catechism is saying to us that there is a divine chemistry at work in God's grace. The Holy Spirit, by grace, convicts us of our sin and depravity, of our worthiness of damnation. Within our hearts is lit the fire of gratitude for Christ's finished work, a work that makes us totally acceptable with God. We are saved by grace. We come to taste this by the Holy Spirit and thanksgiving boils over! It must boil over! If there is no feeling of a compulsion to give God thanks, then we are just cold water.

The Scriptures say that there will now be within the believer the beginning of this new obedience, and that this new obedience is a beginning of that desire to thank God with the whole of his conduct. The child of God is distinct. He operates by totally different principles. What he does, he does solely as an expression of thanks to the God who has so loved him.

Do we feel this motivation and impulse? Remember what the apostle Paul says in II Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ constrains us." It constrains us that we "will not live unto ourselves, but unto him who died and rose for us. In the context, the apostle Paul is accused of fanaticism. Some believed that he was in a mental frenzy and said to him, "Paul, you are beside yourself!" Paul's answer was: "For the love of Christ constrains us." It gets hold of us because we judge within our hearts. Our faith does some reckoning. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Cor. 5: 14, 15).

Our inward thoughts

We will reason within our souls that in light of such grace we can do nothing other than bow in wonder and adore with thanks our gracious God! From this moment on we will live only in thankfulness unto Him who died for us. The Christian life, therefore, according to the Reformed faith and the Catechism, does not ask, "Well, tell me how much I have to do? Give me the bottom line. What can I get by with in my life?" Do we not see how dishonorable and displeasing this is to God? The Catechism teaches us that the Christian life arises out of the new man in Christ which is not concerned with filling quotas and measuring costs, but is sold out to express thanks in everything.

Living before our holy God and covenant Friend is not about contracts, conditions, bonuses, and incentives. Living with God is all about free grace and abounding gratitude. This is why the Catechism, in this third section on gratitude, has us confessing, "We have only a small beginning of this new obedience." The Scriptures and Catechism teach that our thankfulness is infinitesimally small in light of grace received and always needs prodding! We are most ashamed of this fact. We have not expressed the thanks that is due to our glorious Lord Jesus to whom we belong by grace. In the *Third Part: on Gratitude,* we are gaining a deeper insight into our sin and guilt. It becomes clear that our besetting sin is pride. It is plain now that if we are to live a thankful life of praise to God we depend upon God's grace to create the fire and cause it to flame in our hearts.

Gratitude is the echo of praise reverberating in the chambers of the heart that knows its redemption and renewal by grace. This gratitude that we have is only in its beginning. Daily, through humility, our gratitude must be re-lit by the Spirit. This is our experience.

Consider in yourself the spontaneity and intensity of your emotions. Imagine how they arise when someone insults, inconveniences, or interrupts you. Compare those emotions with the intensity with which you would respond when Christ and His name is slandered, when God's commandments are broken, and when men put themselves in front of Him. Think about your joy and excitement for getting a raise or a tax break or a compliment, and then compare the intensity of your emotions when you contemplate what Christ has done for you! Our flesh is alive and responsive and full of emotions toward material pleasures and our own ego, but we find it so dull and dry toward God.

The Catechism knows us. It testifies that we are renewed through the work of the Holy Spirit, and that our gratitude is not self-made or self-perpetuating. We pray for the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit's grace, not only for redemption, but also for gratitude. Gratitude is the work of Christ in and through believers—a work He performs by the Holy Spirit, whereby they begin in this life to live in thankfulness to God.

Gratitude: pleasing to God

The grace of gratitude seen in the Christian's entire life is pleasing to God. It is gratitude that makes our worship pleasing to God, because worship can only proceed from a thankful heart. In Psalm 116 we read, "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord." The word "sacrifice" that the psalmist uses may be taken for "worship." In this verse the sacrifice in mind is not a reference to an atonement for sin. This word in the Scriptures often refers to an expression of worship. The heart of sacrifice is simply "to bring." We will come before God, but what can we bring to God that will please Him? God says, "The blood of bulls and goats will not please me. Mere outward acts will not please me. A long face will not please me." Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Is God pleased with the worship that we bring? The Catechism is going to teach us that what we need for true worship on Sunday is not "liturgical renewal" but a life of gratitude to God every day of the week.

We cannot worship God if our hearts say, "Do I have to be there? How long do I have to be there?" Then worship is defeated before it began. Our worship is only acceptable to God when it arises out of thanksgiving. We must not come to God's house with any other motive than this. Thankfulness to God makes our good works and acts of obedience pleasing to God. Thankfulness to God is the power unto a godly life.

In *The Third Part: on Gratitude* the Heidelberg Catechism chooses to expound the Ten Commandments. With each commandment the Catechism points out with precision what love will do and will not do. The basis of the Catechism's instruction is that obedience to God is not merely the outward act seen of men, but that it proceeds from the heart of gratitude. The Catechism teaches in the Ten Commandments that the power unto godliness is exactly gratitude. We cannot mortify sin; we cannot forsake addictive sins; we cannot withstand the power of sin, if we do not have the motive of thankfulness to God. The power of holiness only emerges from the daily understanding of what Christ has done, of what Christ is doing, and of what Christ will do. Only the dawning light of His marvelous grace melts the power of sin that would hold us. The power of holiness is gratitude to God.

Thanksgiving to God is pleasing to Him because it is the confession that He is the source of all good. Gratitude to God is so crucial because it is the confession that "of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever" (Rom. 11:36).

Thankfulness is the testimony that the church has indeed experienced God's grace. Gratitude is the testimony that God is infinitely marvelous. Thanksgiving tells the truth about God; that He is infinitely gracious, powerful, good, the source of all blessings! It is only a thankful heart that can proclaim the truth about God and all that He has done. He has created and redeemed His own out of the corruption of depravity and the condemnation of hell. He has saved and loves and holds and keeps those who had no claim on Him and deserved nothing good from Him. God *is known* in the praise of His people. The truth about God comes out in the believer's life of gratitude. What kind of a god is he whose worshipers grumble, find the first adversity they face as an occasion to question him, and can't for the life of them point to anything he has done for them lately? Gratitude alone testifies to the truth and greatness of the God of our salvation.

Our thanksgiving to God is never complete, for who can praise God as he ought? The Scriptures tell us that God's glory excels all praises. If all the praises of all the saints and angels could be eternally exhausted, God's glory would be still above them! We will never reach the end of gratitude to God. We will never bring the last word of praise. We will never sing the last doxology. Let us rejoice that we are given to bring just the beginning of eternal joy to praise Him! That is what is standing behind our lives of gratitude. It is thanksgiving, therefore, that unites our life and gives us our purpose: that we may testify by the whole of our conduct our thankfulness to God.

The Catechism is putting before us the test of spirituality: Are we more and more amazed, more amazed than ever before, at the grace of God to us? Let me put it this way: How great is your thankfulness? How much space is reserved in your life to store up all your gratitude? We reserve space in our lives for our hobbies. We build barns and sheds to fill with all our treasures. We find time to squeeze into a busy life the things that we enjoy. And those possessions being valuable to us, we build a place to house them.

How large a room would you need to contain your thanks to God for His grace and faithfulness? Could you keep your gratitude in the back of your closet? Could you store it in a little drawer in the kitchen? Is your life too busy to stop and express thanks? Or do you say, "Tear down my rooms for greed and my spaces for grudges and lust! I will put up larger rooms and provide more space in my life to store up the thanks I owe to Him! The whole world does not contain the space to express my praise and the thanks of my soul for what God has done for me!"?

This is the Christian life. As we grow older our gratitude to God in Christ grows greater and greater until every part of our lives begins to overflow in thanks. This is the power by which the Reformed believer lives his entire life. In sunshine and clouds, health and sickness, gain and loss; in everything he gives thanks to God.

Gratitude: A fruitful life

An ungrateful life will reap bitter fruits. The soul shrivels that does not return praise to God. We see that the world experiences bitter fruit. Grief consumes and lusts dominate it. The life of the world is both shallow and unfruitful. Why? The answer from Scripture in

Romans 1:21, "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither *were [they] thankful."* Without grace there can be no thankfulness to God. Without thankfulness to God the heart turns in upon itself and is either infected with the pus of pride or hardened by the crust of resentment. The thankless soul becomes inflated in pride or shriveled in grudge and bitterness.

The life of the child of God brings forth not bitter but sweet fruit. In Job 1:20 we read, "Then Job arose...and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped." In the midst of his crushing pain and distress, he gave thanks for what God had done for him—acknowledging God's goodness. Job is later vindicated by Jehovah and receives the sweet fruits of salvation.

One fruit of a grateful life is the assurance of faith. Lord's Day 32 says, "Also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof." This does not mean that the ground of our assurance is something of ourselves or our works. The ground of our assurance is only the finished work of Jesus Christ. When Christ has redeemed us and renewed us by the Holy Spirit, He will work in our hearts this impulse to give thanks to God, and in the presence of that impulse we find the assurance of our salvation. How could such a desire be in us fallen sinners if God, the Author of all good, had not planted it there? The tree is known by its fruits.

The Catechism gives us the second fruit of thankfulness: "...And that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ." A thankful life is used by God to show the difference that He has made with us as His friend-servants. And that difference becomes the occasion for others to see Christ in us and ask of the hope within our hearts. It goes like this. Crushing news comes to you, unexpected and overwhelming in its force. But we will not speak against God or charge Him foolishly. Rather, beneath the cross of Jesus as we contemplate His grace, we will speak well of our God in all that He does! The world is examining our lives and they must see that we are not plagued with its discontentment or consumed with its resentment and pettiness. The world takes note that you are different—that you sing praises in the midst of trouble. Thanksgiving is antithetical to the fallen world. There is no true thanksgiving to God in the world. The believer's life of thankfulness proclaims God and the news of the gospel.

Islam converts people to be a Muslim by terror and fear. The cults convert by preying on insecurities. Atheism advances with pride, cynicism, and unbelief. But Christianity is advanced by the gratitude of God's children. In a world of sin and bitter hatred the light of the church is seen when she joins to sing: "Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices…." God's grace has done marvelous things for His covenant friends, and the magnitude of what he has done is seen in the exuberant and ceaseless thankfulness that they bring Him (cf. Psalm 69:30). Thus they proclaim Him to be God and glorious! Thankfulness makes the church stand out.

Gratitude to the end

The Antichrist will not tolerate thankfulness to God. It hurts men's ears to hear God being thanked as the Giver of all and Source of all good. Living by grace producing gratitude identifies the church and brings the hatred of the world. Holding to the truth of the Heidelberg Catechism will bring the fury of the Antichrist upon you. But at the same time, holding to the truths contained in the Heidelberg Catechism will grant you strength to endure his fury. There is one thing Antichrist cannot overthrow, root out, and obliterate from the earth by his fury. It is the God-given faith that confesses in life and in death; "I am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." Satan and his dominion by their reign of darkness cannot extinguish the light of thanks that is seen glowing in the church, a light grace has lit and grace fuels.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us the essence of the Christian life. This is the life that glorifies God; the life that will testify against the world; the life of gratitude to God that we possess even in small beginnings. We have confidence that there is a "perfection proposed to us in a life to come" (L.D. 44, Q&A 115). There we will praise God eternally. There we will spend endless joyful days paying the never-ending debt of thanks.

May our gratitude to God for the Heidelberg Catechism be deep and genuine, and may God preserve this Queen of the Creeds in us and our generations, even to the end. Imagine…when He cometh Jesus shall find a thankful people awaiting him; a thankful people nurtured in no little way by the Heidelberg Catechism. ●

The Heidelberg Catechism—A Covenantal Confession

Russell Dykstra

One of the distinct and distinguishing doctrines of Reformed theology is the truth of God's everlasting covenant of grace.[1] The biblical significance of this truth is obvious on the face of it—even the two parts of the Bible are given the names Old Testament (or covenant) and New Testament (or covenant). Throughout the entire new dispensation, theologians discussed the truth of the covenant, though usually it was in expositions of Scripture where the covenant was mentioned. In the plan of God, the doctrine of the covenant would not be explicitly developed until the Reformation. The Swiss theologians especially were forced to explain this doctrine over against the error of the Anabaptists in their cities.

It ought to be recognized also that the Reformed doctrine of the covenant distinguishes Reformed theology from Presbyterian theology. The term "Reformed" refers to the Calvinistic Reformation as it developed in Germany and the Netherlands. Presbyterianism, on the other hand, is the Calvinistic Reformation as it was established in the British Isles. Reformed theology is not merely Calvinism. It is rather Calvinism brought into focus in the doctrine of God's everlasting covenant of grace.

It is true that theologians both in the Netherlands and in Great Britain wrote much on the covenant. However, the development of the doctrine took a different track in both. Presbyterian covenant theology was shaped by the national covenants of Scotland. These

1 Many books have been published not only on the doctrine of the covenant, but also on the history of this doctrine. A classic, brief history of the covenant is "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology" in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos,* Richard B. Gaffin Jr., ed. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing,1980.

covenants were agreements made by the church, and also her rulers, amounting to commitment to maintain the Presbyterian faith and church government over against Roman Catholicism. The influence of such thinking is evident from the fact that the idea of agreement was strong in Presbyterian covenantal theology.

On the other hand, the Reformed theologians emphasized the concept of friendship. They emphasized that the covenant is a relationship of friendship between God and His people. This doctrine of the covenant shapes the entire theology of the Reformed churches.

It should not be a surprise, then, that the Reformed churches in Germany and the Netherlands would have a confession that reflects love for the covenant, written by two men who had a great zeal for God's everlasting covenant of grace—Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus.

The Heidelberg Catechism is a covenantal confession. That might not be immediately obvious on the surface. Objections might point to the fact that the Heidelberg Catechism nowhere defines the doctrine of the covenant of grace. In fact, the Catechism does not ever discuss the covenant as a separate doctrine. And even more, the catechism only refers to the covenant in a very few places.

Although all that is true, the intent of this article is to demonstrate that the Heidelberg Catechism is a covenantal confession. It is not that in the sense that it explicitly discusses the covenant. Rather, the doctrine of the covenant is woven through the entire Catechism. In the Heidelberg Catechism the truth of God's everlasting covenant of grace is *assumed*. The Catechism views the truth of Scripture through the lens of the covenant.

All the instruction of the Catechism is given under the presupposition that God determined a covenant of grace with His people. Consider that the Catechism proceeds under the assumption that God determined not only a covenant Mediator but also a covenant people, the elect. Additionally, God determined the blessings of the covenant. And, God determined to save His covenant people and to live with them forever. Accordingly, God sent His Son (the Mediator) into the flesh to die for His covenant people. God leads His people through this life and receives them to glory. The entire theology of the Heidelberg Catechism is taught with these covenantal assumptions.

That the doctrine of the covenant underlies the whole catechism is evident first from the primary authors of the Heidelberg Catechism—Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. Both of these men were covenant theologians. Prior to their coming to Heidelberg, both had circulated in Reformed centers and interacted with such Reformed theologians as J. Calvin, T. Beza, H. Bullinger, and J. Oecolampadius. Their training and their interest in the doctrine of the covenant is evident from their writings.

Caspar Olevianus wrote a treatise on the covenant entitled *The Nature of the covenant of grace between God and the Elect*. Although it was not published until 1585, some twenty years after the Heidelberg Catechism, it indicates his desire to develop the doctrine of the covenant. Extracts of his catechism sermons on the Apostles' Creed were also published under the title *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed. In which the chief points of the gracious eternal covenant between God and believers is briefly and clearly handled.*[2] These sermons are replete with references to God's covenant because he examines the Apostles' Creed in light of the covenant.

A couple examples will illustrate this covenantal emphasis. In these sermons at one point Olevianus discusses the theme "What the Kingdom of Christ is, and that the new covenant is administered therein."[3] Later he expounds the idea that "After that Christ the King and Priest of his Church has engendered in those whom he calls, the study of reconciling themselves unto God, he offers, and gives also unto them that same reconciliation and that in the form of a covenant, the sum whereof is contained in the articles of the faith."[4] In these sermons, Olevianus expands considerably on the topic "That the covenant between God and us is free and undeserved, and stands only in faith: through which after that he has put out the remembrance of sins, he renews the believers in his own image."[5]

Even more significant is the catechism that Zacharias Ursinus

2 This has been retranslated by Lyle D. Bierma and published by Reformation Heritage Books, 2009.

3 This and subsequent references to this work are from the 1581 edition, *Early English Books Online*. This heading is from page 45.

4 Olevianus, *Nature of the Covenant*, 52.

5 Olevianus, *Nature of the Covenant*, 54.

wrote for use in the classroom in his theology classes in Heidelberg.[6] This Larger Catechism contains many questions and answers strikingly similar to those found in the Heidelberg Catechism. Although the Heidelberg Catechism has almost no references to the covenant, Ursinus' Larger Catechism contains some sixty-one references to "covenant" and another eleven to "testament." It begins with a familiar question: "What firm comfort do you have in life and in death?" But the answer is quite different from that of the Heidelberg Catechism. It reads:

> A. That I was created by God in his image for eternal life; and after I willfully lost this in Adam, God, out of infinite and free mercy, *took me into his covenant of grace* that he might give me by faith, righteousness and eternal life because of the obedience and death of his Son who was sent in the flesh. And that he *sealed his covenant in my heart* by his Spirit, who renews me in the image of God and cries out in me, "Abba," Father, by his Word and the *visible signs of this covenant* [emphasis added].[7]

Q. & A. 2 continues the theme of the covenant: "How do you know that God has established such a covenant with you? A. Because I am a true Christian."

In this catechism, Ursinus offers a definition of the covenant (Q. 31) and goes on to describe the content of the gospel in terms of the covenant.

> Q. 35 What does the gospel teach?
>
> A. It teaches what God promises us in the covenant of his grace, how we are received into it, and how we know we are in it; that is, how we are set free from sin and death and how we are certain of this deliverance.

6 This is his "Larger Catechism" in distinction from the "Smaller Catechism" intended for instruction of the children.

7 Taken from the online edition, *Large and Small Catechisms with the Heidelberg Catechism,* by Zacharias Ursinus. Translated by Fred H. Klooster and John Medendorp. All subsequent quotations are from this work. The translations of these catechisms of Ursinus may also be found in the work *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology,* by Lyle D. Bierma (Baker Academic, 2005).

This Larger Catechism's focus on the covenant is evident from Q. & A. 71. The question is asked: "Why was it necessary that Christ be true God and true man?" Anyone familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism expects an answer similar to that given in answers 16 and 17 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

> Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned, should likewise make satisfaction for sin….

And,

> That he might, by the power of his Godhead sustain in his human nature, the burden of God's wrath; and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life.

But, the Larger Catechism rather answers: "Because otherwise he could not be the mediator between God and men."

In harmony with that emphasis, Ursinus' Larger Catechism explains that the work of the Mediator is "to restore the covenant between God and men who rebelled against him" (Q. & A. 72). The final example, though many more could be cited, is in the eighty-seventh question and answer, which connects the atoning work of Christ with the covenant:

> Q. What benefits come to us from the suffering and death of Christ?
>
> A. It is the one sacrifice by which he has earned our admission into the covenant of divine grace, that is, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, righteousness, and eternal life.

Ursinus and Olevianus were Reformed theologians who were developing the doctrine of the covenant in their theological writings. They wrote the Heidelberg Catechism with the covenant as the theological foundation.

The question begs to be asked, Why does the covenant appear so little in the Heidelberg Catechism when both these men wrote so freely of it in other documents? Although neither the authors nor Frederick III ever publicly addressed that question, several reasons can be given.

First, the theologians of that day recognized that God's covenant of grace belonged to the *Reformed* body of theology. Although he

wrote of it in his commentaries on the Bible in the appropriate places, Martin Luther did not develop this doctrine in any of his theological works. The scholastic theologians had badly mangled the doctrine to fit their semi-Pelagian theology of salvation. They taught a conditional covenant that God made with all (or all the baptized) in which if a man would simply "do what was in him," he would earn grace from God. Luther had been taught that, and rightly rejected it for being contrary to Scripture's teaching on total depravity and saving grace. As noted earlier, the doctrine of the covenant would be developed by the Swiss Reformed men such as Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bullinger, and Calvin, especially over against the Anabaptists and their view of the place of children in the covenant.

That the covenant was a *Reformed* doctrine had significant political implications in the seventeenth century. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) determined that the ruler of a given province could determine the religion of his province. However, the choices were either Lutheran or Roman Catholic; Reformed was not an option. Any ruler who opted to have his people follow the Reformed teaching would not be covered by the agreement. Consequently, if the Heidelberg Catechism had come out explicitly as a *Reformed* catechism, it could well have led to the German princes—both Lutheran and Roman Catholic—uniting in a military attack on Frederick III and the Palatinate. As it was, Frederick was called before the Emperor to give answer to that very question in 1566 at the Diet of Augsburg. Frederick was in danger of losing his position as an elector. The Heidelberg Catechism is very careful in its polemics, not to make explicit that it was Reformed, rather than Lutheran. Hence, not developing the doctrine of the covenant was in keeping with that purpose.

A second probable reason why the covenant receives scant explicit attention in the Heidelberg Catechism is that the doctrine of the covenant was still developing in 1560. Ursinus and Olevianus understood that while they were free to lecture and even preach on this doctrine, at the time the Catechism was written it was not wise to give this doctrine a prominent place in a catechism intended to instruct the youth in the basics of the Christian religion.

Third, the Heidelberg Catechism was destined to become a Reformed *confession*. Confessions are the fruit of the Spirit of Christ (the

Spirit of truth) guiding the church into the truth. Confessional doctrinal statements are refined through controversy. However, there had been no controversy over the doctrine of the covenant. The theologians of the day were not yet equipped to write out confessional statements on the covenant. Reformed believers can be thankful that many of the things that Ursinus and Olevianus wrote in other published works did not make it into the Heidelberg Catechism. The Spirit led the church in that day to formulate the Heidelberg Catechism with a minimum of discussion of the covenant and in this way also kept out of the creed incomplete teaching, and possibly serious error, on this doctrine.

Thus we have seen that the primary authors of the Heidelberg Catechism were covenantal theologians, and they clearly wrote the Catechism assuming the reality of the covenant. The other clear indication that the Catechism is a covenantal confession is in the catechism itself. To that we turn. However, it will be helpful first to understand the nature of the covenant to which these men held.

Conditional or Unconditional?

What kind of covenant theology lies behind the Heidelberg Catechism—conditional or unconditional? The importance of this is that the covenant of grace ties together all of Reformed theology, especially soteriology. The doctrine of the covenant must be in harmony with the doctrine of salvation. The nature of the covenant will determine the teaching on all aspects of doctrine. This can be demonstrated.

If the covenant is conditional, then God comes to man with a proposal that God will grant certain blessings, if man fulfills certain conditions. Perhaps God promises salvation from sin and offers the gift of eternal life on the stipulation that man must fulfill the condition of faith in order to obtain these. Or, possibly God comes to men with a covenant arrangement, where God gives the promises of salvation, but in order to ratify the covenant, man must believe and be obedient, that is, must produce and maintain faith and faithfulness to the covenant to the end of his life. Those are possible forms of a conditional covenant, all of which depend on man fulfilling some stipulations in order to establish, ratify, or maintain the covenant.

If that is the nature of the covenant, then we must be looking in the Catechism for conditions to be met by two parties, or, for agreements

to be made between God and men. We will expect the Catechism to present conditional promises and threats to the covenant people, and testify that the covenant people could lose all the promises if they fail to be faithful to the end of their lives. Not only that, but we expect the Catechism to call Christ the "Mediator," but emphasize that He is not the Head of His covenant people.

I rejoice that Ursinus and Olevianus did not hold to that kind of covenant, for none of these things is found in the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Covenant of the Catechism: Unconditional Friendship

On the other hand, if the covenant is a relationship of friendship (as Reformed theologians then and now maintain that it is), and a friendship that God establishes with His chosen people in Christ, and that in the line of continued generations, that is, with believers and their seed, we expect quite different language in the Catechism.

Because the Heidelberg Catechism does not treat the covenant explicitly, it does not specifically identify God's covenant as conditional or unconditional; as being with the elect only; or as being eternal. And yet, it can be demonstrated that the Heidelberg Catechism is in harmony with the covenant concept that is unconditional, eternal, one sided, and with the elect.

What then does the Heidelberg Catechism teach that touches on the doctrine of the covenant?

First, over against the Anabaptists, the Catechism insists that children are included in the church and covenant of God. Consider question and answer 74.

> Q. Are infants also to be baptized?
>
> A. Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.[8]

8 All quotations from the Heidelberg Catechism are from *The Confes-*

Here the Catechism plainly teaches that the covenant is established with believers and their seed, not merely with believers. In addition, the question can only be understood to teach that God establishes His covenant with the *elect* seed of believers, and not all their natural children. This is plain from the fact that to each of the children is promised (in the words of the Catechism) "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith." If these are promised to the children by the God who cannot lie, it is a promise God can and will make only to His people chosen in Christ, not to all the baptized children. Redemption from sin is salvation, given only to God's people. The same is true of the Holy Spirit. He is not promised to all, but to God's people alone. The children included in the church and covenant of God, then, are the elect children of believers. All the rest are organically a part of the covenant, as children of believers, but the promise of eternal life is not to each baptized child.

Not only in that Lord's Day, but in others also it is obvious that the Catechism understands the blessings of salvation, which are the blessings of the covenant, to belong to the elect alone. That Olevianus maintained that the covenant is with the elect is evident from the title of his treatise on the covenant (*The Covenant of God with the Elect*).

That Ursinus maintained the same is evident from his Larger Catechism in the thirty-third question and answer.

> Q. What is the difference between the Old and the New Testament?
>
> A. It is the same testament or covenant of God with all the elect from the first promise given in Paradise, concerning the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, to the end of the world…. [9]

The Heidelberg Catechism does not state explicitly that the covenant is with the elect. How could it, when it does not treat the doctrine directly? However, it does have the usual Reformed emphasis on Christ as Mediator (of the covenant) who died to save His people,

sions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).

9 Ursinus, *Large and Small Catechisms* (online edition).

and also emphasizes Christ as Head (Q. & A. 49, 50, 51, and 57) who saves the members of His church. The implication is that the covenant is made with the elect alone.

In addition, the Catechism does teach that the church is "chosen to everlasting life" (Q. & A. 54). The church and covenant are virtually identified in Q. & A. 74, where it says that children "are included in the *covenant and church* of God." And, these children of believers "must therefore by baptism, as a *sign of the covenant*, be also *admitted into the Christian church*…" (emphasis added). The logical implication of this identification of covenant people with the church is that since the church is chosen by God, the covenant people, who are one and the same people, are also chosen by God.

Consider also the consequences of holding to a conditional or unconditional covenant as regards the first Lord's Day. Q. & A. 1—What is your comfort? I belong to Jesus. Who are those that belong to Jesus? The teaching of the conditional covenant is that all baptized children belong to God, and thus to Jesus. However, in that theology, some of those baptized children who belong to Jesus will perish eternally in hell because they did not fulfill the conditions, namely, faith, or, faith and obedience.

Is that the comfort of A. 1? I belong to Jesus, but I might still be lost if I do not fulfill my end of the agreement, the condition?

Not according to the texts that the Synod of Dordrecht adopted with the Catechism to substantiate the answer:

> John 6:39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.
>
> John 10:28, 29 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Both of these passages indicate the certainty of salvation for those who belong to Jesus. There is no condition to be fulfilled that could result in failure to obtain eternal life. No, the comfort for those who belong to Jesus is eternal life, because it does not depend in any way on the elect believer.

This first question and answer of the Heidelberger corresponds well with the first question of Ursinus' Larger Catechism. Recall the earlier references to God's covenant (see pp. 40, 41). The essence of that answer as to why one has comfort is, God "took me into His covenant of grace." An illusory comfort it is if the establishment, ratification, or maintenance of that covenant depends on man fulfilling a condition.

As noted earlier, for good reason the Heidelberg Catechism does not state whether the covenant is conditional or unconditional. However, its teaching on the covenant and on election are perfectly in harmony with the expressed convictions of Ursinus and Olevianus, namely, that God's covenant is with the elect.

The Heidelberg Catechism contains still other strong indications that its underlying covenant theology is not conditional. First, that the covenant cannot be conditional is plain from the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching that infants are included in the covenant (Q. & A. 74). Infants can in no way fulfill a condition in order to enter the covenant.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism is in complete harmony with a covenant that is *not conditioned on faith*. This is evident from the treatment of faith in Lord's Day 7. Question 20 indicates that the only ones who are saved by Christ are those who are "ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith." Faith is there presented as a spiritual bond that connects one to Christ. Through that bond, one receives all the benefits of the cross of Christ, including forgiveness of sins, sanctification, and eternal life. But such faith cannot be a condition for anyone to fulfill, for none can graft himself into Christ. None can establish that spiritual bond that links him to Jesus. Only God can do that. And when that it accomplished, that individual *is* saved. Salvation by faith and the covenant are both unconditional.

And, we might add, no one can *maintain* that spiritual bond of faith. God alone can and does. No conditions need to be met to get into the covenant; and there is no condition to *maintain* the covenant. The individual united to Christ by faith simply lives out of that work of God, and faith becomes active and conscious.

Lord's Day 25 confirms the truth that faith cannot be a condition:

> Q. 65. Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?
>
> Answer. From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.

The Holy Spirit works that faith in our hearts—faith is not a condition we can or must fulfill.

Nor does the covenant depend on our *faithfulness*, i.e., the good works that a believer does. The Heidelberg Catechism has the clearest and strongest confessional statement on justification by faith alone, without works (Lord's Day 23, Q. & A. 59-64). Justification by faith and works is the by-product of a conditional covenant. The Catechism will have none of it:

> Q. 59. But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?
> A. That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.
> Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?
> A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; …God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ.
> Q. 61. Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only?
>
> A. Not that I am acceptable to God, on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.

Lord's Day 24 continues to emphasize that our justification before God in no way includes our works:

> Q. 62. But why cannot our good works be the whole, or part of our righteousness before God?
>
> A. Because, that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.
>
> Q. 63. What! do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?
>
> A. This reward is not of merit, but of grace.
>
> Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?
>
> A. By no means; for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the covenant theology upon which the Heidelberg Catechism is founded is an *unconditional* covenant of grace. All the language and teaching of the Catechism is in harmony with such a covenant doctrine, and it plainly rejects the errors connected with the doctrine of the conditional covenant.

The biblical and Reformed doctrine is defined in terms not of a contract or conditional agreement but rather of a relationship of friendship, as it has been done by Reformed theologians from Ursinus and Olevianus to the present time. So much of the Heidelberg Catechism is perfectly in harmony with that doctrine.

The Heidelberg Catechism has still other elements of the covenant of grace embedded in it.

Personal and Experiential

First, then, the covenant of grace involves living with God in love and friendship. The Catechism captures that with teaching that is experiential. It is intensely personal as is evident from the personal pronouns used throughout. "What is *thy* only comfort…?" (1) "Whence knowest *thou thy* misery?" (3) (emphasis added).

Closely connected with that, the catechism does not merely teach the doctrines. It presents the truth in terms of how the believer *experiences* those truths. Consider Q. 28. "*What advantage is it to know* that God has created, and by his providence doth still uphold all things?" Or, Q. 43—"*What further benefit do we receive* from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?" Again, Q. 45, "What doth the resurrection of Christ *profit us*?" (emphasis added). This personal, experiential presentation of the truth meshes well with the doctrine of the covenant.

Defining Relationships

The covenant of grace is a *relationship* between God and His covenant people. The Bible often presents the relationship with these words: "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12, et al.). Or, again, God is our Father, and we are His children (Ex. 4:22; Lord's Prayer). And again, the Bible teaches that God is our husband, and the church is His bride (Jer. 31:32; Eph. 5:23ff.).

The Heidelberg Catechism indicates its covenantal foundation as it sets forth the relationships between God and His people. Jehovah is our God (Q. & A. 4—the Lord *thy* God) who is also our Creator (Q.

& A. 6, 24, 26). He is our Father for Christ's sake (Q. & A. 26 and 120), and that Father preserves His own so that apart from His will, not a hair can fall from their heads (Q. & A. 1). We are His children, not naturally, but by adoption (Q. & A. 33).

The Catechism also sets forth our relationship to Jesus. He is our Mediator (Q. & A. 36), who is also our Savior (Q. & A. 29), and our Head (Q. & A. 49, 50, 51, and 57). By implication, He is Lord over His brethren as the first born in the family of God (Q. & A. 34). He is also our chief Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest, and our eternal King (Q. & A. 31).

The Spirit is the agent of the covenant, who makes the covenant to be a reality with us and in us as He regenerates (Q. & A. 8) and sanctifies (Q. & A. 24). As the agent of the covenant the Spirit creates faith in us, thus grafting us into Christ by the spiritual bond of faith (Q. & A. 20, 21). He is the earnest of our salvation (Q. & A. 49) who renews us in the image of Jesus Christ (Q. & A. 86), and preserves and strengthens us that we cannot be destroyed by the Devil himself (Q. & A. 128).

The covenant is a *relationship.* The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth the triune (covenant) God's relationship to His covenant people.

Two Parts of the Covenant

The covenant of God, according to the Baptism Form has two parts, namely, what God does for His covenant people, and what God requires of His covenant people—in the covenant. The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth both parts of the covenant.

Every part of salvation God accomplishes in His covenant. Already in the first Q. & A. the Catechism testifies of God's saving work: redemption from sin, deliverance from the power of the devil, preservation, and eternal life—all given us by God. God also provides the Mediator and Savior. God accomplishes the whole of salvation. God grafts us into Christ with the living bond of faith. God promises "not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (Q. & A. 21).

And of His people He expects obedience and worship rooted in gratitude. That is the other part of the covenant. Already in Q. & A.

4 the Catechism gives the demands of the covenant: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." He commands us to trust Him and rely on Him entirely (Q. & A. 26); to be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity (Q. & A. 28).

As anointed with Christ, the believer is expected to confess His name, present himself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, and to fight against sin and Satan in this life (Q. & A. 32).

Indeed, the whole of the law is our calling before God in two tables (Q. & A. 92); the first of which teaches us *how we must behave towards God*; the second, what *duties we owe to our neighbor* (emphasis added). And prayer is the chief part of thankfulness that God requires of us (Q. & A. 116).

Other Covenantal Teaching

Much more evidence exists in the catechism itself of its covenantal underpinnings, to which we make only brief reference. The beautiful description of the covenant relationship Adam and Eve had with God before the fall into sin is in harmony with the position that Adam was created not only *for* a covenant relationship with God, but also created *in* a covenant relationship. In order for a relationship of friendship to exist between God and a creature, man had to be created in God's image and likeness. Thus "God created man…in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him" (Q. & A. 6).

After recounting how Adam broke the covenant, the Catechism in the next few Lord's Days describes the necessity and manner of reconciliation to God in and through the Mediator. Reconciliation is covenant language— two who were friends, but estranged by sin, are reconciled again. And the Mediator, supplied by God alone, accomplishes the reconciliation in His atoning death that removes the guilt and the offence that caused the enmity.

The sacraments are correctly presented as visible signs and seals of God's covenant of grace. They may rightly be compared to a wedding ring that a husband gives his wife, a pledge of his faithfulness. The sacraments signify *and seal* that covenant promise of God to His people.

Consider how covenantal is the blessed fellowship believers have as children with their heavenly Father in and through prayer (Q. & A. 120). God blesses His people with salvation (covenant blessings), and gives to His own the right and privilege of calling on Him to express their thanks.

That the covenant is an *eternal* relationship is perfectly in harmony with the Catechism's emphasis on eternal life and living with God. This begins already in Q. & A. 1—Jesus by His Spirit "…assures me of eternal life…." Christ has not only redeemed us from sin, but obtained "for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life" (Q. & A. 37). Our death is "a passage into eternal life" (Q. & A. 42). And consider the believer's confession in Q. & A. 58.

> Q. What comfort takest thou from the article of "life everlasting"?
>
> A. That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life, I shall inherit perfect salvation, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" to conceive, and that, to praise God therein for ever.

It is no wonder that Reformed believers love the Heidelberg Catechism—it breathes the doctrine of the covenant. God's unconditional, eternal covenant of grace with believers and their seed is embedded in it. May God continue to give Reformed people the world over a love for His covenant, and for this covenantal confession. ●

Annotated Bibliography of Old and New Titles on the Heidelberg Catechism and Recently added to the PRC Seminary Library (2012-2014)

Compiled by
Charles J.Terpstra, Librarian

A. Editions/Versions of the Heidelberg Catechism

1. Collins, Hercules. *An Orthodox Catechism: Being the Sum of Christian Religion, Contained in the Law and Gospel*. Edited by Michael A.G. Haykin and G.Stephen Weaver, Jr. Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014.

Hercules Collins, a leading pastor among the seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists, understood the potential benefits of the Heidelberg Catechism for the people under his pastoral care. In order to provide them with an accessible version within his own system of church practice, he edited the Heidelberg and published it in 1680 under the title *An Orthodox Catechism* (Foreword).

2. De Ronde, Lambertus. *A System, Containing, the Principles of the Christian Religion, Suitable to the Heidelberg Catechism; By Plain Questions and Answers: Useful for the Information of All Persons in the True Confession of Faith; and necessary towards their Preparation for that awful and solemn ordinance, The Lord's Supper. To which is prefixed, A particular address to Parents in general…, And… An Application upon the whole System….* New York: Bible & Crown, 1763. Reprint by Sabin Americana, 2012.

3. Fisher, Samuel R. *Exercises on the Heidelberg Catechism: Adapted to the Use of Families, Sabbath-Schools, and Catechetical Classes.* Chambersburg: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1854 (Reprinted by Forgotten Books, 2012).

4. *Heidelberg Catechism, The, or Short Instruction in Christian*

Doctrine, as it is conducted in the Churches and Schools of the Palatinate and Elsewhere, Explained and Confirmed with Proofs from the Holy Scriptures, the whole adapted to the use of catechetical classes, Sabbath schools, and family instruction. Translated from the German by Jeremiah H.Good and Henry Harbaugh. Chambersburg: M.Kieffer & Co, 1849. Reprint by Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 2010.

5. *Heidelberg Catechism, The, With Proper Texts Annexed to Each Answer; Used for the Instruction of Children and Grown Persons in Holland. And on which the Ministers are obliged to preach in Turn every Sabbath. All orthodox Divines allow this Catechism to contain the True Doctrine of Protestants.* London: 1773. Reprint by Gale Ecco, 2010.

6. *Heidelberg Catechism, The: A New Translation for the 21st Century*. Translated by Lee C. Barrett, III. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007.

7. *Heidelberg Catechism*: *450th Anniversary Edition*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013.

8. Miller, Allen O. Ed. *The Heidelberg Catechism with Commentary: 400th Anniversary Edition, 1563-1963.* Translated by Allen O. Miller and M.Eugene Osterhaven. New York; Pilgrim Press, c.1962, 1963 (Fourth printing, 1979).

9. Mosser, H. *The Heidelberg Catechism and the Catechist's Assistant (1888)*. Reading: Daniel Miller, 1895. Reprint by Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 2012.

This little volume, first published in 1888, is a printing of the HC in English (looks to be the translation we use and are familiar with in the PRC), plus the author's own little catechism (Hence "the catechist's assistant") in which he expands on doctrinal and practical points in the HC for the catechism student's profit.

The author was a Reformed Church in the US (German Reformed) pastor.

Includes an appendix which has prayers (for pastor and catechumen), a litany, a preparation for confirmation (confession of faith and access to the Lord's Supper), and Bible History catechism.

10. Pronk, Cornelis. *The Heidelberg catechism in Simplified Questions & Answers*. Calgary, AB: Free Reformed Publications, 2013.

11. Reformed Church in the U.S. *Heidelberg Catechism: A Short*

History of the Heidelberg Catechism, Introduction, Tercentenary Text, Selected Bible Passages, Suitable Hymns and Selections from the Scriptures. St.Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1907?

12. Reformed Church in the U.S. *Heidelberg Catechism:Modern English Version, 450th Anniversary Edition)*. Reformed Church in the U.S., 2013.

B. Works on the History, Nature and Theology of the HC

1. Apperloo-Boersma, Karla and Herman J. Selderhuis, Ed. (on behalf of Refo500). *Power of Faith: 450 Years of the Heidelberg Catechism*. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013.

This beautiful, lavishly illustrated commemorative book for the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism is edited on behalf of Refo500 by Karla Apperloo-Boersma and Herman Selderhuis, in co-operation with F.Hepp and Karin Tebbe (Kurpfalzisches Musuem der Stadt Heidelberg), W.Wiese and Petra Pechacek (Staatilche Sclosser und Garten Baden-Wurttemberg), J.ter Molen and Paul Rems (Paleis Het Loo Nationaal Museum). It is the accompanying book to the exhibitions "Power of Faith"; "450 Years of the Heidelberg Catechism in Heidelberg" and "The House of Orange and religion." Exhibition within the context of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563-2013 in Apeldoorn. It is available in Dutch, German, and English.

The book is divided into four (4) main parts:

a. Papers (including on the history and theology of the HC by L.Bierma, *et al*, and on the HC in the Palatinate and in the Netherlands)

b. Power of Faith. 450 Years of the Heidelberg Catechism (works exhibited in the Kurpfalzische Musuem der Statdt Heidelberg)

c. The House of Orange and religion: Exhibition within the context of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563-2013 (works exhibited at Paleis Het Loo Nationaal Musuem)

d. Appendices

2. Bierma, Lyle D. *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005. In "Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought", Ed. By Richard A.Muller.

3. ——. *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Ref-*

ormation Synthesis. In "Columbia Series in Reformed Theology". Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

4. Nevin, John W. *History and Genius of the Heidelberg Catechism (1847)*. Chambersburg, PA: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1847. (Reprint by Kessinger Legacy, 2012.

The author was professor of theology in the German Reformed Seminary, Mercersburg, PA. This title was originally penned to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the German Reformed Church in this country. It is also available free from Google Books.

5. Payne, Jon D. and Sebastian Heck, ed. *A Faith Worth Teaching: The Heidelberg Catechism's Enduring Heritage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013.

> In A Faith Worth Teaching, an array of faithful pastor-scholars celebrates the Heidelberg Catechism on its 450th anniversary with a collection of essays on its dynamic history, rich theology, and fruit-bearing practice that will be an encouragement to pastors and laypersons alike (Publisher's description).

6. Reformed Church in the United States, General Convention (John W. Nevin, Pres.). *Tercentenary Monument in Commemoration of the Three Hundreth Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism*. Chambersburg, PA: M.Kieffer & Co., 1863 (Reprint by Forgotten Books, 2012).

> The Essays contained in this volume, having been specially prepared for the purpose by Reformed theologians of Germany, Holland, and America, in pursuance of arrangements previously made by the highest judicatories of the German Reformed Church in the United States, were read before a General Convention of the Church, in honor of the Three Hundreth Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. A full account of this Tercentenary Commemoration will be found in the History of the Convention which forms the introductory part of the book… (Preface).

7. Thompson, Bard. *Essays on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1963 (paperback, 192 pp.).

> Most of the essays… were delivered as lectures at the Annual Convocation of Lancaster Theological Seminary in January, 1963. (Foreword —in connection with the 400th anniversary of the HC)

8. Van 't Spijker, Willem, Ed. *The Church's Book of Comfort*. Translated by Gerrit Bilkes. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009.

In The Church's Book of Comfort, Willem van't Spijker and his team of scholars present an introductory investigation into the history, theology, and impact of the Heidelberg Catechism. The authors give careful attention to the background of the Reformation in Germany, the production of the Catechism, and the lives of those involved in making the Catechism. (Publisher's description)

9. Von Alpen, Heinrich Simon. *The History and Literature of the Heidelberg Catechism, and of Its Introduction into the Netherlands*. Translated from the German of Von Alpen by J.F. Berg, D.D., Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology in the Seminary of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, New Brunswick, N.J. Philadelphia: William S. & Alfred Martien, 1963 (Reprint by HardPress, 2013).

This was translated and published in the U.S. at the time of the 300th anniversary of the HC.

10. Walker, Frank H. *Theological Sources of the Heidelberg Catechism*. CreateSpace Independent Publ., 2010.
Author is ordained in the RCUS and teaches historical theology at City Seminary of Sacramento, CA.

C. Commentaries/Study Guides/Sermons on the HC

1. Barnes, M.Craig. *Body & Soul: Reclaiming the Heidelberg Catechism*. Grand Rapids; Louisville: Faith Alive Christian Resources and Congregational Ministries Publishing, 2012.

The author is a pastor, a professor, and president of Princeton Seminary. "In this groundbreaking book, theologian, pastor, and popular author M. Craig Barnes reveals the Heidelberg Catechism's true identity. It's not a list of doctrinal questions and answers. It's not a cut-and-dried summary of what Christians believe. It's a deeply personal statement of faith and a surprisingly contemporary guide for everyday life. You'll find that this 450-year-old confession is a reliable and inspiring companion in a world where faith and doubt coexist. You'll also find comfort in belonging, body and soul, to the triune God" (back cover).

2. Beeke, Joel R. *Heidelberg Catechism Sermons* (Volumes 1 and 2). Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002.

3. DeYoung, Kevin. *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Discovering the Gospel in a a16th Century Catechism*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.

4. Hoezee, Scott. *Speaking of Comfort: A Look at the Heidelberg Catechism*. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1998.

5. Jones, Norman L. *Study Helps on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Pierre: Reformed Church in the U.S., 2011 (revised, 2nd ed.).

We had the previous edition of this helpful title (in spiral form), but added this revised 2nd edition to our library.

6. Kersten, G.H. *The Heidelberg Catechism in Fifty-Two Sermons*. Sioux Center, IA: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing, 1992 (2nd English ed.)

7. Kuyvenhoven, Andrew. *Comfort & Joy: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism*. Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1988.

8. Meade, Starr. *Comforting Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013.

9. Praamsma, Louis. *Before the Face of God: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism* (In two volumes: 1-24 and 25-52). Translated by James C. van Oosterom. Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1987.

10. Tunderman, J.W. *'T Beginsel Der Eeuwige Vreugde*. Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1949 (2 volmes).

This title consists of fifty-two catechism sermons by this GKN minister. The title is taken from Q&A 58 on the article of our faith on "the life everlasting", quoting the line "the beginning of eternal joy" (translation mine).

11. Veldkamp, Herman. *Children of the Lord's Day: Notes on the Heidelberg Catechism,* Volumes 1 and 2). Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002.

This edition is none other than the one typed up by Mrs. Judi Doezema and printed by the PR Theological Seminary, as the title page indicates. It is translated by Dr. Harry Kwantes from the 8th printing (1990) of H.Veldkamp's *Zondag's Kinderen,* which we have in two volumes in our library. This edition is two volumes in one.

12. Vis, Jean. *We are the Lord's*. Grand Rapids: Society for Reformed Publications, 1955.

The author was a minister in the Reformed Church of America (RCA). This is a very basic summary of the HC's teachings, with comments on each Q&A. It includes the author's own Q&As at the end of each section.

13. Vonk. Cornelis. *Living and Dying in Joy: A Devotional Guide to the Heidelberg Catechism*. Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman. Ed. By Jordan J. Ballor. Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press/ Paideia Press, 2013.

Nota bene: This list is not intended to be exhaustive of what the PR Seminary library has for resources on the HC. We have many others, and you are encouraged to make use of the library's online catalog to see the rest of these materials (www.prca.org).

Hyper-Calvinism, the Well-Meant Offer, and Matthew Barrett

David J. Engelsma

Matthew Barrett, ***Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration*** (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2013). Pp. xxix + 388. $24.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David Engelsma.]

Introduction

Strictly speaking, and not even so strictly speaking, this is not a review. It is rather an exposure—an exposure of a book that purports to be, and is praised as being, a defense of the Reformed doctrine of salvation by grace alone, indeed salvation by sovereign, efficacious grace, but is not. In addition, this review, which is not really a review, exposes a slander, that is, the bearing of false witness in witting or unwitting disobedience to the ninth commandment of the law of God, of Herman Hoeksema and, by evil and necessary consequence, of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

The Heidelberg Catechism rightly explains the ninth commandment as God's demand that the Christian

> bear false witness against no one; wrest no one's words; be no backbiter or slanderer; join in condemning no one unheard and rashly: but that I avoid, on pain of God's heavy wrath, all lying and deceit, as being the proper works of the devil…confess the truth; and, so far as I can, defend and promote my neighbor's good name (Q&A 112, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966], 348).

This article could more accurately be described as a "book *exposure*." Since this is not an accepted category in Reformed, theological academia, the article must be allowed to see the light of day under the rubric of a "review."

Ostensibly a Defense of Calvinism against Arminianism

The book under discussion is intended to be, and in appearance *is*, a defense of the grand, fundamental, gospel truth that salvation is by the grace of God, which grace is sovereign and efficacious. Deliberately, it contends with the Arminian heresy that teaches that grace is merely offered to all humans alike with the divine desire to save all alike, so that the salvation of sinners is suspended upon their own will. This means that salvation, in the end, is the accomplishment of the sinner himself.

The opening statement of the book confronts the reader with "sovereign grace" and "how important" this truth is. According to the author, "irresistible grace or effectual calling is the hinge of the Calvinistic soteriology…monergistic regeneration is the *sine qua non* of salvation." Sovereign grace, is nothing less than the "shibboleth for deciding whether or not one is a Calvinist or an Arminian" (xix).

The book is not purely academic. It is written to combat a resurgence of Arminianism in evangelical circles. This resurgence is especially dangerous because it claims to honor salvation by grace, even "monergistic" (sovereign) grace, while in fact it is nothing but a modern variation of the Arminian heresy. The new kind of Arminianism is synergistic in its doctrine of salvation, that is, it teaches that salvation is a cooperative work of God and the sinner, with the sinner playing the decisive role. His will determines his salvation. Barrett describes the theology that his book opposes as rejecting the effectual call of the gospel, teaching instead that "God's call is universal." This modern, and really not so subtle, form of Arminianism goes on to teach that "God's grace is resistible, man's freedom is libertarian, and conversion [by the will of the sinner—DJE] is logically prior to regeneration" (xxv).

One of the theologians dressing up for contemporary display and modern seduction of this ancient heresy, which was condemned by the Synod of Dordt as the resurrection of the Pelagian heresy out of hell, is quoted as affirming that "God alone can be called the author of salvation." Thus, he blows Calvinistic smoke in the eyes of the gullible. His purpose with the Calvinistic smoke is to blind the reader to the Arminian "gospel" he is intent on promoting. For the dishonest theologian continues, in the same sentence, "he [God] is not thwarted

in his intention to save *as long as* man 'refrains from resisting'" (xxv; emphasis is that of the theologian being quoted). If the sinner does not refrain from resisting, God is "thwarted."

This is Arminianism. Between the more frank presentation of the heresy that avows that God's universal grace actually saves only those who are willing and the less candid presentation of the same heresy that holds that God's universal grace saves only those who do not resist God's impotent blandishments, there is not the proverbial dime's worth of difference. Indeed, not a penny's worth of difference. In fact, no difference at all. Whether God's will, or desire, to save a person depends upon that person's willing to be saved, or upon that person's not willing to resist being saved, makes not the slightest difference. In both cases, God's saving will depends for its accomplishment upon the will of the sinner himself.

The smoke of beginning this defense of the Arminian theology of salvation dependent upon the will of the sinner by affirming that "God alone can be called the author of salvation" is merely a ploy. It is intended to blind the reader to the lie that follows in the next line of the writer, that is, the proposition that salvation depends upon the sinner's not resisting. Since resistance is a matter of the will, the proposition is that the salvation of the sinner depends upon the sinner's will.

The ploy reveals that the agent of the ploy is a deliberate liar. In addition, the ploy plays the reader, or hearer, for a fool. These are not qualities that commend the Arminian theology to the public. If a theology must rely on deception and ploys to advance and defend itself, there must be something seriously wrong, something dreadfully unchristian, about that theology.

The response of the Reformed faith (Calvinism) to the Arminian heresy in both its expressions—universal grace depends upon the sinner's willing, and universal grace depends upon the sinner's not resisting—is that the sinner is spiritually dead and a slave of Satan. As such, his will is bound—bound by and to the mighty power of sin. The sinner cannot respond to pleading offers of salvation on the part of God by willing to accept the offers. Neither can the sinner respond by not resisting. He cannot will to accept an offered salvation because he is *dead* in sin (Eph. 2:1). For him to accept an offered salvation is

as impossible as it is for a corpse in the cemetery to accept my offer to it of a cup of coffee, or of a million dollars, or of salvation. The sinner cannot respond by not resisting an offered salvation because his will, like every other aspect of his being, is thoroughly corrupted by sin and absolutely controlled by Satan. The enslaved sinner cannot refrain from resisting. With regard to a positive outcome of the divine offer considered by itself and with regard to the possibilities residing in the sinner's will, one could as well offer salvation to Satan as to the enslaved sinner.

This response to the Arminian heresy that the book combats is, in fact, the response of the Reformed faith, not merely that of this reviewer, or better, book exposer. The Canons of Dordt have made this response to the Arminian heresy.

> All men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good [which accepting to an offer of salvation surely would be—DJE], prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit they are *neither able nor willing to return to God,* to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation (Canons of Dordt, 3&4.3, emphasis added, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 588).

Showing that his later condemnation of these very truths as "hyper-Calvinism" cannot be excused as mere ignorance, which would be serious enough in a theologian who writes his doctoral dissertation and then launches himself into print on these truths, Barrett recognizes, seemingly approvingly, that Calvin denied "universal, prevenient grace" and contended that grace is "discriminate, particular, and efficacious" (19). A little later in his dissertation/book, Barrett will condemn these very teachings as "hyper-Calvinism."

Indeed, Barrett is not ignorant of Dordt's rejection of a universal grace contingent upon the will of man: "Dort rejects a universal grace that is contingent upon the will of man" (footnote, 29). This rejection by the Reformed synod, Barrett will later consign to the disreputable category of "hyper-Calvinism."

Fatal Compromise of Calvin, Dordt, and the Bible

This fatal compromise of Dordt's, Calvin's, and the Bible's gospel

of salvation by sovereign, efficacious grace alone, contradicting everything Barrett has seemingly been advocating in previous chapters of his book, occurs in the chapter on "The Scriptural Affirmation of Effectual Calling" (69-123). The importance of the content of this chapter is evident from the sub-title of the book itself: *The Case for Effectual Calling*.... In this chapter, Barrett comes to the heart of the matter of his book.

Barrett vigorously proposes and vehemently defends the doctrine that God in the preaching of the gospel is gracious to all who hear, those who perish in unbelief as well as those who believe, sincerely desiring the salvation of all who hear the gospel. "God is outrageously gracious to [all] sinners," that is, in the preaching of the gospel, particularly the call of the gospel (71). This "outrageous" grace (the adjective is fitting: a universal, impotent, conditional, saving grace of God is "outrageous") includes "God's Desire…for All to Believe" (74; capitalization is Barrett's).

Barrett affirms the "well-meant offer" of the gospel, meaning by this phrase that God has the gospel come to all humans in His grace toward them, which grace desires, that is, wills, their salvation: "The Well-meant Offer of the Gospel. The preaching of the gospel to all people comes out of a real, genuine desire [on the part of God] to see all people repent and be saved" (76). In this context, the deliberate use of the word "offer," and the insistence on referring to the call of the gospel as an "invitation" (72, 73), convey to the reader, and are intended to convey to the reader, that the salvation which the gospel "offers" and to which the gospel "invites" depends upon the decision (will) of the sinner to whom the offer is made and the invitation extended.

I call attention to the fact that in that passage in Scripture which as much as any and more than most passages of Scripture addresses the issue of the external call of the gospel to all who hear, Matthew 22:1-14—Barrett's subject at this point in his book—Jesus did not speak of an "offer" or of an "invitation," but of a *call*, a *summons*. The king sent forth his servants to "*call* them that were bidden" (v. 3). Throughout the passage, the word translated "bid" and "bidden" is consistently, in fact, the Greek word meaning 'call' and 'called.' In addition, Jesus' own authoritative explanation of the parable is the truth that "many are *called*, but few are chosen" (v. 14).

The call to the many who disobeyed the summons to the wedding dinner was not a well-meant offer that ignored, indeed contradicted, God's eternal decree of choosing, that is, election, as is the case with Barrett's theology of a desire, that is, gracious will, on the part of God for the salvation of those who reject the summons. On the contrary, the summons—the "call," the "bidding"—is strictly controlled by and serves election.

What this means is that the general summons, the serious summons, to all who hear the gospel message is motivated by God's sincere desire and gracious will for the salvation of the elect among them only. This desire is realized in every case. Controlled as it is by the decree of election, the universal summons, or call, in its external aspect is not the expression of a desire on the part of God for the salvation of all who hear the summons. In the preaching of the gospel, God does not desire the salvation of all hearers. According to Jesus, in Matthew 22:14, God calls many in the gospel whom He has not chosen, that is, towards whom He is not graciously inclined and whose salvation He does not desire. He calls many whom He has eternally reprobated.

In the judgment of Matthew Barrett, the Jesus of Matthew 22:1-14 is, therefore, a "hyper-Calvinist." Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches, then, for all their alleged faults, find themselves in good company. By disassociating himself from the Jesus of Matthew 22, in the matter of the external call, or summons, Barrett finds himself outside this company. He should be uncomfortable there.

Significantly, in support of his contention that God well-meaningly offers salvation to all humans alike Barrett enlists the same passages of Scripture that Pelagius appealed to against Augustine, that Erasmus used against Luther in the great debate over the freedom or bondage of the will, and that Arminius adduced against the Reformed orthodoxy established at Dordt: II Peter 2:9 (intended is II Peter *3*:9); I Timothy 2:4; Ezekiel 18:23; Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 23:37; and I Timothy 2:3, 4 (75).

All of these passages, according to Barrett, "reflect God's will of disposition…in which he not only offers salvation but desires that lost sinners repent and be saved" (75). Here, Barrett does not try to mitigate his heresy somewhat by the weaker term, "desire," but boldly speaks of God's "will": God *wills* the salvation of all lost sinners.

Whatever qualification of this divine will "disposition" is supposed to make ("will of disposition"), the fact is that "will" *is* disposition, and disposition is not only inclination, but also the act or power of disposing, that is, disposing of the salvation of sinners—a divine disposing that, according to Barrett and the well-meant offer, fails to dispose.

There is no need among Reformed Christians, to say nothing of Reformed theologians, to give the orthodox, Reformed explanation of these texts. This has been done by Augustine, by Luther, and by Calvin, as by a host of other defenders of grace, in response to the appeal to the texts by the proponents of universal, ineffectual grace. I may refer to and quote briefly Augustine's interpretation of two of the texts in order to demonstrate to the concerned reader that Barrett's slander of Herman Hoeksema as a "hyper-Calvinist" blackens Augustine as well and that Augustine's refutation of Barrett's implied understanding of the texts exposes Barrett's understanding as Pelagian.

Treating the appeal by proponents of universal grace in his day to Matthew 23:37, Jesus' statement about His willing to gather Jerusalem's children despite Jerusalem's unwillingness to have Him do so, Augustine wrote, as the right explanation of the text:

> Jerusalem was not willing that her children should be gathered together, but even though she was unwilling, He gathered together as many of her children as He wished: for He does not will some things and do them, and will others and do them not; but "He hath done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth" (Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* [Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961], 111).

Regarding another of Barrett's alleged biblical proofs for universal, ineffectual, saving grace, I Timothy 2:4, especially the phrase, "who will have all men to be saved," Augustine denied that the text means that God desires to save all humans without exception, because this explanation would "restrict the omnipotence of God." Rather, the text means that "no man is saved unless God wills his salvation: not that there is no man whose salvation He does not will [contrary to Pelagius, Arminius, and Matthew Barrett—DJE], but that no man is saved apart from His will." Not himself satisfied with this explanation of the text, Augustine offered another, and better, explanation:

> We are to understand by 'all men,' the human race in all its varieties of rank and circumstances—kings, subjects; noble, plebeian, high, low, learned and unlearned…the rich, the poor…males, females, infants, boys, youths; young, middle-aged, and old men…and whatever else there is that makes a distinction among men. For which of all these classes is there out of which God does not will that men should be saved in all nations…and therefore does save them; *for the Omnipotent cannot will in vain*, *whatsoever he may will*? (*Enchiridion*, 119-121; emphasis added for the benefit, or exposure, of all nominally Augustinian advocates of a universal desire of God for the salvation of humans—DJE).

Expressing the radical difference between himself and all advocates of a universal desire or will of God for the salvation of humans, specifically Matthew Barrett, and continuing his remarks on I Timothy 2:4, Augustine made this peculiar, powerful, concluding statement:

> And we may interpret it [I Timothy 2:4] in any other way we please, so long as we are not compelled to believe that the omnipotent God has willed anything to be done which was not done: for, setting aside all ambiguities, if "He hath done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth," as the psalmist sings of Him, He certainly did not will to do anything [namely, save all to whom the gospel is preached—DJE] that He hath not done (*Enchiridion*, 121, 122).

Any interpretation at all of I Timothy 2:4 is preferable to the interpretation that has God desiring to save all humans, according to Augustine! To Barrett and his co-defenders of the theology of the well-meant offer, the mind of Augustine is utterly foreign.

Mistaken as his understanding of II Peter 3:9, I Timothy 2:4, and the other passages to which he refers on behalf of a desire of God to save all humans is, by appealing to these passages on behalf of his doctrine of God's well-meant desire to save all, expressed by the offer of salvation, Barrett reveals his thoroughly Arminian theological convictions. On his understanding of II Peter 3:9, Barrett believes that the Lord is longsuffering to all humans; does not will the perishing of any human; wills that all humans without exception should repent and be saved, which implies that He wills that Jesus die for all without exception, for there is no repentance and salvation apart from the cross; and is presently

delaying His coming so that all humans may repent and be saved, for His will that all should repent is the reason, in the text, why the Lord does not yet return. The implication is that He will never return, for the Bible and experience show that all humans do not repent, God's will to the contrary, in the theology of Barrett, notwithstanding.

On the basis of his explanation of I Timothy 2:4, Matthew Barrett teaches that God wills that all humans without exception be saved, by coming to the knowledge of the truth. This binds him to the doctrine that the one mediator, the man Jesus Christ, gave Himself a ransom for all humans without exception, for the "all' in verse 6 ("who gave himself a ransom for all") must be the same as the "all men" in verse 4. Barrett is now committed to universal atonement. As such, he finds himself between the rock of universal salvation and the hard place of an atonement that fails to save many for whom it was made.

On Barrett's reading of Matthew 23:37, the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem were the grief of a broken-hearted failure and the sorrow of unrequited love—the failure and unrequited love of God's Messiah. According to Barrett, Jesus wanted to save all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, indeed all physical Jews everywhere, but failed to do so in the case of many, indeed the majority. Many are in hell whom Jesus desired to save, in the same grace towards them that He had for those who are saved. His incarnation, His life-long obedience, His atoning death, His glorious resurrection, His sitting at God's right hand, and His preaching of the gospel were intended for them as much as for those who are saved. For all of these acts constitute the "gathering" of sinful humans, and Barrett contends that Jesus willed ("would") the gathering of all the Jews in a desire to save them all. But the contrary will of Jerusalem and of many of Jerusalem's children prevailed against the will of Jesus, rendering Jesus' will null and void.

Some Savior!

No genuinely Reformed Christian recognizes this hapless Jesus.

And the question must arise, "What explains the salvation of those Jews who were saved by Jesus?" It cannot be the will of Jesus, for His will is impotent. It can only be the will of the Jewish sinners themselves!

This is the Arminian heresy, officially condemned by Reformed and Christian orthodoxy in the Canons of Dordt.

As for the appeal by Barrett on behalf of a sincere desire of God to save all humans without exception to Ezekiel 18 and Ezekiel 33, Barrett commits himself to the theology of a saving love of God for all humans, which saving love desires the salvation of all humans without exception and expresses itself in an offer of salvation to all humans. In this theology, salvation obviously does not depend upon the saving love of God. Neither is it assured by the saving will, or desire, of God. Neither is it accomplished by the preaching of the gospel, which for Barrett is an inefficacious offer.

The questions to Barrett, and his host of accomplices in the Reformed community are these: "Upon what then *does* salvation depend?" What *does* assure salvation?" And, "What, or who, *does* accomplish salvation?" There is one, and one only, answer to these questions from those who deny that salvation depends upon the saving love of God, is assured by the saving will of God, and is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel. This answer is: the sinner himself! the will, or acceptance, of the sinner!

This now, in the 21st century, passes for Calvinistic orthodoxy!

Objection to this novel Calvinistic orthodoxy of universal, resistible, saving grace marks one as a "hyper-Calvinist!" Outside the pale! Object of virtually universal Calvinistic condemnation, if not contempt!

The correct, orthodox explanation of Ezekiel 18:23 and of Ezekiel 33:11, however, is that God is not the kind of God who takes pleasure in death, not even the death of impenitent sinners that He justly inflicts, and that He has eternally decreed. God is the God who has delight in life, life that is given by Him in the way of the sinner's turning from sin back to God in true repentance. That God is the God who is pleased with the life of sinners in the way of repentance, and not a god who takes delight in the death of sinners, is the truth that provides needful assurance to sinners whose turning to God is hindered by the notion that God, after all, delights in the death of sinners and, therefore, will not forgive and save the sinner regardless of the sinner's turning.

The truth of Ezekiel 18 and Ezekiel 33 is not a truth that flatly contradicts predestination and sovereign grace.

Get the Issue Straight

Not only is Barrett heretical in his doctrine of salvation, but he is also confusing, and evidently confused, in his defense of his heresy. He does not even have straight the false doctrine that he is zealous to condemn. The issue between the well-meant offer, on the one hand, and the doctrine of particular, efficacious grace in the call, on the other hand, is not whether *we* desire all to whom we preach or witness to come to Christ and be saved, but whether *God* desires this. Defending his teaching that God has the gospel preached to all because He supposedly desires the salvation of all, Barrett suggests the inane ground of *our* desire that all be saved: "We are to preach the gospel to all, desiring to see all come to repentance and faith (73)."

Fact is, that even the natural desire of the preacher and church that all in the congregation or on the mission field be saved by the work of the preacher and church, in the way of repentance and faith, is consciously subjected to the sovereign will of God in predestination. Paul conducted his ministry "for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (II Timothy 2:10).

Similarly confused and confusing is Barrett's appeal to the older Reformed theologians, Wollebius and Turretin, on behalf of Barrett's doctrine of the call of the gospel as a well-meant, that is, universally gracious, offer on the part of God to all sinners. Barrett quotes Wollebius as affirming concerning the reprobate who come under the preaching that "although they are not called 'according to his purpose,' or to salvation, nevertheless they are called in earnest…Nor are they mocked…" (76, 77). Turretin is quoted to the same effect:

> For a serious call does not require that there should be an intention and purpose of drawing him, but only that there should be a constant will of commanding duty and bestowing the blessing upon him who performs it (which God most seriously wills) (77).

How these quotations support Barrett's doctrine of a desire of God to save all to whom the gospel comes is, with due deference to Winston Churchill, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. The issue at stake in the controversy over the well-meant offer is not at all that God is serious in His call to all to whom the gospel of Jesus

Christ comes, reprobate as well as elect. Of course, the call is serious, or in earnest. The sinner is seriously confronted with his lost estate and the certainty of damnation if he does not repent and believe. To the sinner is seriously presented Jesus Christ as the only Savior from sin and death. The sinner is seriously called, that is, commanded, not only by the preacher, but by God Himself, to repent of his sins and to believe on Jesus. Seriously, God promises that every one who repents, regardless of his depravity and guilt, shall be received in grace, forgiven, and saved.

With regard to the last aspect of the serious nature of the call, namely, God's serious promise that every one who obeys the call and repents shall be received and saved, Barrett goes seriously astray also. He supposes that God addresses the promise of the gospel, conditionally, with the will, desire, and intention of saving every sinner by this conditional promise, to everyone, to every sinner who comes under the preaching of the gospel. Barrett insists that rejection of this supposition of a promiscuous, gracious, conditional promise exposes one as a "hyper-Calvinist." "God promises [to everyone] that eternal life will be granted on the condition of faith" (76). In support of this aspect of his doctrine of the well-meant offer, Barrett adduces Canons, 2.5:

> 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 (Schaff, *Creeds*, 586).

With typical disregard of the carefully exact wording of the creed, Barrett explains the Canons as teaching that God promises eternal life to every hearer of the gospel on the condition of faith. And this explanation serves Barrett's theological contention that God is gracious to all sinners alike, desiring and intending their salvation.

But Canons, 2.5 states and teaches a *particular* promise of grace: "whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life." The promise applies itself to the believer: "whosoever believeth." It is *for* the believer. It is *to* the believer. The promise is not for the unbeliever remaining in his unbelief. The promise itself

excludes the unbeliever as its object. The particular promise itself implies a warning to those who do not believe: "whosoever believeth not shall perish."

Barrett seizes upon the emphasis of Canons, 2.5 that the promise must be "declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously" to prove that Reformed orthodoxy confesses a general, conditional promise. But this is egregious error, inexcusable in a theologian and fatal to his theology. The general publication of the promise is not the same as the publication of a general promise. Even the average unbeliever understands the distinction. The promise of the lottery that the person turning in the winning number 666 will receive a million dollars, although announced to the entire nation, is a particular promise: to and for the one person with the winning number. It is for no one else. Similarly, God wills, and the Reformed church practices, that the particular promise, "whosoever believes shall be saved," be published indiscriminately to all and sundry.

If a Reformed church confesses and practices the promiscuous declaration and publishing of the particular promise, it is not Arminian. Neither is this church hyper-Calvinist, inasmuch as it does not present the promiscuous publication of the promise as grace to all hearers, regardless of the slander of Matthew Barrett.

The seriousness of the external call in the preaching to all sinners and every sinner is the official confession of the Reformed faith in the Canons of Dordt:

> As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called; for God hath most earnestly and truly declared in his Word what will be acceptable to him, namely, that all who are called should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him" (Canons, 3&4. 8, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 565, 566).

In view of the penchant of many who have the name "Reformed" today to construe "invitation" as an inefficacious attempt on God's part to get sinners to come to him by their free and decisive will, it is worth noting that the Latin original of the phrase, "should comply with the invitation," is: *"ut vocati ad se veniant*." The literal translation of the phrase is: "that the called should come to Him."

The seriousness of the call, as affirmed by Wollebius and Turretin and as confessed by the Canons, does not prove Barrett's well-meant desire on the part of God for the salvation of all who are thus seriously summoned to repent and believe. If Barrett had paid any attention to the quotation of Turretin that he himself gave (quoted above), he would have noticed that Turretin denied Barrett's doctrine of the call as well-meant offer: "For a serious call does not require that there should be an intention and purpose of drawing him…"

What Barrett must prove is that God on His part, with this serious call desires, or intends, or wills the salvation of all who are summoned, because He is gracious to them, that is, has an attitude of favor towards them. The Canons certainly suggest nothing of this gracious attitude and desire for salvation on the part of God towards all men. Merely to have to state this is embarrassing. The entire church world knows the Canons as confessing particular grace, governed by predestination, expressed in a limited atonement, and effectual by the regenerating work of the Spirit within and upon the elect, and the elect only.

Can Barrett not perceive that a serious call is not a well-meant offer?

The inability of a Reformed theologian to distinguish a serious call from a well-meant offer is inexcusable, biblically, to say nothing of the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions. When Moses on God's behalf called Pharaoh to let God's people go, God was serious with the command (Exodus 5-13). In the language of Canons, 3&4. 8, God was in earnest with the command. How earnest, Pharaoh would learn from the ten plagues and from the swelling waves of the Red Sea—and then from the fires of hell.

But was this serious call to Pharaoh a well-meant offer to the reprobate king of Egypt on the part of the seriously calling God? Did it arise from a gracious attitude towards the king? Was it expressive of a sincere desire for the king's salvation in the way of his heeding the call? Was it indicative of a purpose, or will, or desire in God for the salvation of Pharaoh? Did this divine purpose with the summons, or call, depend for its accomplishment upon the will of the Egyptian monarch? Did this call even intend that the king actually permit Israel to leave Egypt?

To ask these pertinent questions is to answer them. On the very

occasion of God's charging Moses to call Pharaoh to let Israel go, before Moses ever came before the king, before the king responded with his wicked "no," God said: "But I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go" (Exodus 4:21). God hated Pharaoh. God's will was Pharaoh's just destruction and damnation. God's purpose *with the serious call* to Pharaoh was not the king's repentance and salvation, but his perdition. *By means of* the serious call to repentance, God worked out His purpose of damnation of the Egyptian king and the destruction of his ungodly, persecuting kingdom.

The serious call to Pharaoh was not motivated by God's grace towards the king.

The serious call to Pharaoh did not work grace in the king.

The serious call to Pharaoh did not accomplish a gracious outcome for the king.

"Serious" (call) is not "well-meant," that is, gracious, (offer)!

The entire, nominally Calvinistic community needs to hear, and take to heart, that "serious" (call) is not "well-meant," that is, gracious, (offer) to all. Few truths are more important for the Reformed community today. Upon taking this truth to heart depends the genuine Calvinism of the community.

Lest Barrett and his supporters respond by denying the applicability of this Old Testament reality (of the call of God to Pharaoh) to the preaching and call of the gospel in the New Testament, I remind them that the apostle applies the Old Testament reality regarding the call of Pharaoh to the New Testament reality of the call of the gospel. In illustration and biblical support of his doctrine that the mercy and compassion—*grace*—of God in His saving work by the gospel are governed by His sovereign will of predestination, Paul quotes Exodus 9:16 regarding God's will, or purpose, or intention with regard to Pharaoh: "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Romans 9:17).

What conclusion must be drawn from God's ungracious will regarding Pharaoh and from God's hardening work by His call to the king the apostle immediately shows in verse 18 of Romans 9: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom

he will he hardeneth." The preaching of the gospel with its serious call is not mercy to all hearers. It is not a well-meant offer to all. The well-meaningness (to speak barbarously), the grace, the sincere desire to save, of and in the gospel and its call, is particular and restricted. What limits the grace of the call of the gospel—its particularity—is not the will of the sinner but the eternal decree of predestination: "mercy *on whom he will have mercy…whom he will* he hardeneth."

Let Barrett demonstrate to the Reformed believer, indeed to any who regards Scripture as the infallible word of God, that "whom he will he hardeneth" is revelatory of, or even in harmony with, a "sincere desire to save" all who hear the gospel. He cannot. The thing is impossible. Who would accept, who would be inclined to suppose, that God is at work in the gospel hardening some sinners with a gracious desire to save them?

Barrett's refusal to allow Romans 9 to judge his faulty doctrine of the gospel-call and to form the right doctrine of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel is reprehensible.

His appeal to certain theologians in support of his faulty doctrine of the well-meant offer is ludicrous. Barrett appeals to the Christian Reformed theologians, Louis Berkhof and Anthony Hoekema (76, 78, 80, 81). Berkhof is the father of the doctrine of the well-meant offer in the contemporary Reformed community. He authored the teaching that God's common grace consists mainly of an attitude of favor towards all hearers of the gospel and a sincere desire to save all who hear the gospel. Berkhof made this teaching the heart of the first point of the doctrine of common grace that the Christian Reformed Church adopted in 1924, in order to destroy Herman Hoeksema and to drive the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace out of their fellowship. Anthony Hoekema was an acolyte of Berkhof. To appeal to these two men as authorities in the controversy over the preaching as a well-meant offer to all is as though an enemy of capitalism, and advocate of communistic socialism, were to appeal in support of his economic and social theory to Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin.

The Slanderous Charge of "Hyper-Calvinism"

Thus, I come, in the end, to the matter that provoked this review/

exposure: Barrett's charge that Herman Hoeksema and, by implication, the Protestant Reformed Churches are "hyper-Calvinists."

In the context of his description of the preaching of the gospel as grace to all hearers—a well-meant offer—Barrett charges that "in the twentieth century, hyper-Calvinism has shown its head yet again in the work of Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965), creating controversy both in the Netherlands and in England" (78).

Barrett does get right wherein Hoeksema's alleged "hyper-Calvinism" consists, that is, Hoeksema's theology of the call of the gospel. It consists, negatively, in Hoeksema's rejection of the "well-meant offer of the gospel, which would imply that God intends and desires the salvation of the nonelect…In fact, says Hoeksema, God does not even desire the salvation of the nonelect, nor does he act favorably toward the reprobate…Thus, grace, even in the gospel call, is never for the reprobate but only for the elect" (79).

This description of Hoeksema's theological thought, which is accurate, is significant, not only for its description of Hoeksema's theology, but also, by implication, for its exposure of the theology of Matthew Barrett.

Barrett judges "Hoeksema's view," thus outlined, as "deeply unbiblical" (79). This makes crystal clear that the theology of Barrett is that God "intends and desires the salvation of the nonelect." God, according to Barrett, "acts favorably toward the reprobate." "Grace… in the gospel call is…for the reprobate," as well as for the elect (79).

Barrett seemingly does not notice the necessary, unavoidable implication of his vehement assertion that God is gracious in the gospel to the reprobate and elect alike, intending and desiring the salvation of both alike. The implication is that what makes the difference between those who are saved and those who remain unsaved is *not* the grace of God, is *not* the gracious intention of God with regard to the two groups. What makes the difference is the response of men to the grace of God that comes to them all alike, savingly, in the gospel. Another term for "response" is "will." Not God's intention—God's will—but the will of the sinner is decisive for the salvation of those who are saved by the grace of the gospel.

Paul did not agree: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

The opening words of this apostolic condemnation of the theology of Matthew Barrett, the words, "so then," show that the declaration of salvation by the mercy of God in the text is a conclusion drawn from a truth previously affirmed. The truth previously affirmed by the apostle is the particularity of the grace of God as determined by predestination: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). Immediately preceding verse 15 is the identification of the source and determination of the mercy of God: His election of Jacob in love, accompanied by His reprobation of Esau in hatred, that is, eternal predestination (vv. 10-13).

Also evident from Barrett's charges against Hoeksema is that the grace of God in Barrett's theology is quite "un-sovereign," totally inefficacious, and completely powerless. In the theology of Barrett, the *saving* grace of God is impotent. Barrett recognizes that the grace of his well-meant offer is saving in nature. It does not *save*, but its nature is saving. It would save, if the sinner to whom it is offered permits it to do so. It is not some non-saving common grace that has to do with rain and sunshine, health and wealth. For Barrett, the grace of God in the well-meant offer "genuinely desires the conversion of the lost" (79). "Conversion of the lost" is salvation. But this saving grace fails to convert multitudes of humans for whom it is intended and to whom it is well-meaningly extended.

If Hoeksema is to be condemned as a "hyper-Calvinist" because he denied that "grace…in the gospel call is…for the reprobate as well as for the elect," Barrett's thinking and theology are that the grace of God in the gospel call is a sorry failure in innumerable instances. Since God's grace is simply the gracious God Himself savingly at work, God Himself is a sorry failure, according to Barrett.

As I indicated earlier, Augustine found the teaching that God cannot accomplish what He desires to accomplish, specifically the salvation of sinners, intolerable: "For He is not truly called Almighty if He cannot do whatsoever He pleases, or if the power of His almighty will is hindered by the will of any creature whatsoever" (*Enchiridion*, 110).

Barrett condemns Hoeksema for teaching that "grace…in the gospel call, is never for the reprobate but only for the elect." In thus

contending that God's grace in the gospel call is for the reprobate, Barrett himself is condemned, not by a pseudo-Calvinistic theologian, but by the authoritative Calvinistic creed, the Canons of Dordt. Dordt denies that the grace of God in the gospel, desiring and intending the salvation of its objects, is for all humans without exception who are confronted by the call of the gospel.

> What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of his sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion…at last…to condemn and punish them forever" (Canons, 1.15, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 584).

Dordt denies that God desires, or wills, or intends the salvation of all humans. Dordt denies that all humans alike are the objects of the grace of God—the grace of God that provides salvation. Dordt denies that the objects of the saving grace of God—which a grace that desires and intends the salvation of the objects of this grace certainly is—can fail to be saved by this grace. "Some only" are the objects of the "unmerited grace of election." Concerning "others," God's will and intention are "to leave [them] in the common misery…and not to bestow upon them…the grace of conversion."

This is the meaning of the "decree of reprobation." This decree, many nominally conservative theologians flatly and openly deny today. At least, they are candid. I can muster some respect for them, at least if they are not men who have sworn to maintain and defend the Reformed confessions.

Many others deceptively honor the decree of reprobation by their profession, while effectively gutting the doctrine (thus showing their true colors, and thus also escaping the reproach that always falls on those who confess reprobation) by insisting that God, nevertheless, is gracious to all humans with a saving grace, that is, that God has a gracious attitude that desires and intends the salvation of all humans. A gracious desire and intention to save all humans is, in reality, an

election of all humans—an election that fails to save many. Confession of a gracious will and intention of God to save all humans is the practical, everyday, popular way to deny predestination, especially the "hard" Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation.

For these nominally Reformed theologians, I can muster no respect.

Arminian Condemnation of the "Reformed" Offer

Not even the Arminian theologian has any respect for the supposedly Reformed doctrine of a well-meant offer of salvation to all humans as the expression of a sincere desire of God for the salvation of all sinners in His love for them.

Roger E. Olson is a contemporary, self-identified, noted, notable, popular Arminian theologian. In his defense of Arminianism and ferocious attack on Calvinism (the God of Calvinism is a "moral monster hardly distinguishable from the devil" and "morally loathsome"), Olson takes note of Herman Hoeksema and the controversy with him of the Christian Reformed Church over the well-meant offer of the gospel (*Against Calvinism*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011, 60, 61). Olson describes the doctrinal positions of both Hoeksema and the Christian Reformed Church accurately. For Hoeksema, "'the gospel call is never an offer' of salvation… 'God does not desire the salvation of all to whom the gospel comes; he desires the salvation only of the elect (Olson, 60).'" For the Christian Reformed Church, on the other hand, "the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of salvation, not just on the part of the preacher, but on God's part as well, to all who hear it, and…God seriously and earnestly desires the salvation of all to whom the gospel call comes" (Olson, 60, 61).

In response to the Christian Reformed attack on Hoeksema's theology as hyper-Calvinist, or "extreme Calvinism," Arminian Olson exposes the falsity of the attack and the contradictory nature, if not absurdity, of the Christian Reformed Church's affirmation of the well-meant offer while professing predestination.

> One does have to wonder what logic prevents a person who believes in TULIP [the five points of Calvinism, or doctrines of grace, confessed by the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt—DJE] from moving to Hoeksema's position. Why would God earnestly desire

> the salvation of everyone and how can the gospel call be a well-meant offer of salvation to all indiscriminately, including the nonelect, if God has decreed that only some will be saved? (Olson, 61)

Let Barrett or some other advocate of the well-meant offer answer Olson's question: Why would the God of predestination earnestly desire the salvation of everyone?

Appealing to all the texts that the defenders of the well-meant offer raise against Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches—Ezekiel 18:32, I Timothy 2:4, and II Peter 3:9—Arminian Olson overwhelms the weak, compromising Calvinism of such as the Baptist preacher John Piper. Olson then explodes the explanation of these texts by Piper and other professed Calvinists. This explanation consists of acknowledging that God "genuinely wishes that all people could be saved," that is, the theology of the well-meant offer. Rightly, Olson judges that the common grace and well-meant offer explanations of these texts by reputed Calvinists "are not convincing explanations of these important passages that reveal the heart of God. They make God double-minded" (99).

Olson's charge is irrefutable. The God of supposedly Reformed theologians and churches who has eternally and unconditionally predestined some, and some only, to eternal life, while ordaining the others to eternal death, but who, nevertheless, loves all humans with a love that is saving in nature and who sincerely desires the salvation of all humans without exception, that is, the God of the well-meant offer, is "double-minded." Thus to attribute double-mindedness to God is to deny His fundamental attributes, for example, His simplicity, His sovereignty, and His wisdom.

Such double-mindedness renders God unknowable. Such double-mindedness renders God unknowable to God Himself. God must always be asking Himself, "Do I love all humans, or do I not? Do I sincerely desire to save all humans, or do I not? Am I at work with the gospel to achieve the salvation of all who hear, or am I not?"

Exposing R. C. Sproul's duplicitous and cowardly attempt to escape the odium of teaching double predestination by noisily calling attention to, and distinguishing himself from, the horrible "hyper-Calvinists"—bogeymen (Olson, 108, 109), Arminian Olson asks, "How does Sproul's account really differ from what he calls hyper-Calvin-

ism?" (Olson, 109) Sproul's effort to make his doctrine of reprobation less offensive to Arminians such as Roger Olson consists of Sproul's explanation of the decree as merely "negative and passive" (Olson, 109). According to Sproul, reprobation consists only of God's "leaving them [the reprobate—DJE] in their own sins." This is intended by Sproul to make his theology, and himself, more acceptable to Arminian theologians and people. His theology is milder, nicer, and more palatable than the "hyper-Calvinism" of such as Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Olson will have none of this subterfuge and game-playing. He asks Sproul: "How is God's decree of reprobation to pass over certain individuals merely negative and passive if God hardens their hearts?" (Olson, 109) Aptly, Olson quotes James Daane, avowed Christian Reformed enemy of double predestination, to the effect that Sproul's purportedly softer, gentler apology for the Reformed doctrine of reprobation is mere "verbalism—a theatrical game in which words really carry no ascertainable sense" (Olson, 109).

Olson's exposure of the teaching of Piper and many other nominally Reformed theologians, including those in the Christian Reformed Church, that God has two kinds of love for humans, a "general love," that does not save, but bestows only "temporal blessings," and a particular love, that saves humans, and that God has two wills, one of which wills the salvation of all humans and the other of which wills the salvation only of some humans, is simply devastating. "In other words," says Olson, "God wills that some perish and at the same time wills that none perish." Regarding God's love for all that gives "temporal blessings" to the nonelect, Olson remarks, "Piper's view here amounts to saying that God provides the nonelect with a little bit of heaven to go to hell in" (Olson, 119).

No less searing is Olson's indictment of the effort of Calvinistic theologians and churches to mitigate the Reformed doctrine of predestination by confessing a well-meant offer of salvation. "How," asks Arminian Olson, "can the gospel call be given out as a well-meant offer to all…if some have already been chosen by God for damnation and have no chance at all of being accepted by God?" (Olson, 121) Of Piper's answer to this question, "(Predestination)…does not nullify sincere offers of salvation to everyone," Olson observes, correctly,

"this is just an assertion; it falls short of an explanation" (Olson, 121).

Piper and all his well-meant offer cohorts in nominally Calvinistic churches *can* only assert. They *cannot* explain. There is no explanation that harmonizes sovereign grace, originating in the eternal decree of the election of some only, not all, with a gracious desire, or will, or intention of God to save all humans by the gospel in a love for them all.

Similarly, in his major defense of his Arminian theology (*Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), Olson is contemptuous of the effort of some professed Calvinists to defend their Reformed theology by conceding to their Arminian opponents that "God loves all people, including the reprobate, in some ways" (Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 113). This, of course, is the concession to Arminianism of the well-meant offer, as also of the theory of common grace. Olson responds:

> This makes no sense to Arminians. In what way could God be loving toward those he has unconditionally decreed to consign to the flames of hell for eternity? To say that God loves them anyway (even if only in *some* way is to make *love* an equivocal term, emptying it of meaning (Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 113).

Olson's criticism is all the more devastating, if the love for the reprobate unbeliever invented by Calvinistic theologians is that of the well-meant offer—a would-be *saving* love.

But the worst is not that the agreement of the two diametrically opposite affirmations is inexplicable. The worst is that Reformed churches have embraced a doctrine—universal, ineffectual, saving grace—that contradicts the gospel of salvation by (sovereign) grace alone. This doctrine will, in the end, silence or drive out the preaching of salvation by sovereign, particular grace. The disciplinary actions of the Christian Reformed Church with regard to Herman Hoeksema in 1924, on account of his repudiation of the well-meant offer, are an object lesson to the entire Reformed, Presbyterian, and Calvinistic church world today. This Calvinistic world disregards the lesson at its peril.

Olson points out that there is the same contradiction of the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement by the well-meant offer, in spite

of the insistence on a well-meant offer by Calvinistic theologians, who are theoretically committed to the truth of limited atonement. Here Olson himself mentions the Christian Reformed Church as the guilty party. According to this church, "*God himself* offers salvation to all as a 'well-meant offer.'" Olson then asks the question that neither the Christian Reformed Church, nor anyone else holding the well-meant offer, can answer, because there is no answer, except the answer that rejects the well-meant offer: "Why would God, having that knowledge [who the elect and nonelect are], offer [well-meaningly, that is, in grace to all and with the desire to save all—DJE] salvation to those he intends to exclude and for whom Christ did not die?" (Olson, 151)

Olson's theology is as bad as that which he criticizes. Indeed, his full-fledged Arminian theology is virtually indistinguishable from that of the well-meant offer. The main difference is that Olson, in sharp contrast to the Reformed defenders of the well-meant offer, is aboveboard, honest, and consistent in his theology. Olson does not halt between two opinions. God loves all and wills the salvation of all. Christ died for all. God now carries out His will and the death of Christ by well-meaningly offering salvation to all. Salvation depends upon the will of the sinner. That some perish, despite God's fervent wishes, is a cause of sorrow to God.

But my purpose is not controversy with Olson and his open, admitted Arminian theology. That controversy was settled at the synod of Dordt. Olson admits as much: "Of course, if one decides quite arbitrarily (sic) that the Canons of Dort are definitive of Reformed theology, then Arminius's theology cannot be considered Reformed" (Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 54). Dordt judged Arminianism, as held and defended by Roger Olson, not only not Reformed, but, in fact, the Pelagian error brought again out of hell (Schaff, *Creeds*, 2. Rejection of Errors, 3; the Latin original, in Schaff, is: "*Pelagianum errorem ab inferis revocant*").

I note in passing that prominent, contemporary Reformed theologians disagree with Dordt's condemnation of Arminian theology. Olson informs the world that "[Michael] Horton, who teaches theology at Westminster Theological Seminary California, has changed his mind about Arminians since 1992. He now considers them evangelicals…" (Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 82). This widespread softness towards

Arminian theology in Reformed circles makes all the more necessary strong polemics against the corruption of Reformed theology—the gospel of grace—by the Arminian theory of the well-meant offer.

My controversy in this article is not with the Arminian theology of Roger Olson but with the corruption of the Reformed faith by the Arminian lie now regnant in most Reformed churches—the well-meant offer. And with this corruption's deceptive defense of itself by a bold, wicked attack on consistent Calvinism—the Calvinism of Dordt—as "hyper-Calvinism."

Weasel Words

I have already shown that the Canons of Dordt deny that God has a will or desire or intention for the salvation of all humans. With the other Reformed and Presbyterian creeds, the Canons are the confessional safeguard against the introduction of the Arminian heresy into Reformed or Calvinistic churches. In their denial that God wills and intends the salvation of all humans, the Canons obviously lean heavily on Romans 9. Verse 18 of the chapter does not read: "Therefore hath he mercy on all who hear the gospel, desiring and intending the salvation of all, but some of the objects of mercy perish, despite God's desire and intention regarding them." Rather: "therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Inasmuch as the particularity and sovereignty of the grace of God in salvation, that is, His gracious will, desire, and intention to save only some humans, while not willing, desiring, or intending to save the others, tend, according to the Canons in 1.15, "to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election" (Schaff, *Creeds*, 584), by extending the saving grace of God to all humans Barrett's doctrine tends to illustrate and recommend the power and worth of the will of the sinner. It tends to diminish and disparage the grace of election.

When he is forced to confront the sheer contradiction of his theology of salvation, namely, that the God of particular, efficacious grace, originating in election, nevertheless wills, desires, and intends the salvation of all humans, by a saving grace that fails to save, Matthew Barrett has recourse to the same nonsense—*non-sense*—to which all defenders of the well-meant offer flee in their extremity. Character-

istically, the Christian Reformed theologians, the Berkhofs and the Hoekemas, appealed to "paradox." Barrett rather speaks of "tension": "this biblical tension between God's sovereignty and the well-meant offer" (81).

Barrett's "tension" is the same as the Christian Reformed "paradox." Both are weasel words. A doctrine that holds that one and the same God at one and the same time is gracious toward one and the same human, willing, desiring, and intending his or her salvation and, at the same time, or in the same eternity, is determined in hatred for that person to condemn and damn him or her, not only withholding the grace of regeneration and faith, but also working on that person to harden him or her in unbelief, is not a paradoxical doctrine. Nor does it display "tension." It is sheer, absurd contradiction—contradiction, not only for our minds, but also for God's mind. Hoekema is right that "to our finite minds it seems impossible that both of these teachings could be true," except that he should have written that "it *is* impossible that both of these teachings could be true" (80). And he should have added, "To the infinite mind of God it is impossible, also."

Such a theology of contradiction makes knowledge of the truth impossible. Indeed, since this theology claims to be the revelation of the very mind of God, it makes knowledge of truth and reality impossible for God Himself. God Himself never knows what the truth is concerning the salvation of a particular sinner. God Himself never knows what He is up to regarding the salvation or damnation of a sinner. Is God at this time working with a sinner to achieve His gracious desire, will, and intention to save the sinner, or is He working according to His counsel of reprobation? Does He ever make up His mind about the sinner? How does He make up His mind? How *can* He make up His mind?

And if in the end the sinner goes lost, in spite of God's will and intention to save him, because the divine will of reprobation won out over the divine desire for the sinner's salvation, does God then lose His desire and intention for the salvation of the lost sinner? Can there be such a change in the unchangeable God? Does the God of a will, desire, and intention to save a certain sinner *become* the God who no longer loves that sinner and no longer has a gracious desire for the

salvation of that sinner? Or, does God everlastingly retain His desire that that lost sinner be saved? In this case, is not the frustrated God everlastingly also a sorrowful God—sorrowful that one to whom He was, and still is, graciously inclined and for whom He desires salvation nevertheless perishes in hell?

No man, no theologian, no church is able to maintain both of these contradictory doctrines and theologies—reprobation and the well-meant offer—for very long. Especially is this impossible because the two, contradictory theologies are bitterly hostile to each other. The Bible warns, and church history teaches, that where the false gospel of a universal, ineffectual, saving grace of God gains a foothold, on the pretense that it is willing peacefully to co-exist with the gospel of salvation by particular, sovereign grace in "paradox" and "tension," it is, in fact, all over for the gospel of particular, sovereign grace in that man, that theologian, that church.

In a short while!

From Louis Berkhof in the 1920s to Harold Dekker in the 1960s and Harry Boer in the 1980s, from the Christian Reformed synod of 1924 that adopted the doctrine of the well-meant offer to the Christian Reformed synods of 1967 and 1980 that approved Dekker's universal atonement and Boer's denial of predestination, was the short time of only some forty and some fifty years.

Who in the Calvinistic community, other than the Protestant Reformed Churches, pays any attention whatsoever to this appalling falling away of a Reformed church with specific regard to the teaching of a gracious desire of God for the salvation of more than the elect—the teaching that has produced the public defense of universal atonement and the open denial of predestination in the church that adopted the doctrine of the well-meant offer?

Certainly, not Matthew Barrett!

Theological Precision and Church Historical Accuracy

So far, my exposure of Matthew Barrett has concentrated on theology and biblical teaching.

But there is another important area in which Barrett exposes himself—the area of church historical and theological precision. Barrett calls Hoeksema and, by implication, the Protestant Reformed

Churches "hyper-Calvinists." The ground and explanation of the (damning) charge are the denial by these Churches that the external call of the gospel, "Repent! Believe on Jesus for salvation! Come to the Savior!," is a well-meant offer on God's part to all to whom the call is made. That is, Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches are "hyper-Calvinists" because they deny that in the preaching of the gospel, particularly the call of the gospel, God is gracious towards all to whom the call comes—willing, desiring, and intending their salvation, and, by implication, sincerely giving them the chance to be saved.

Whether one agrees with Hoeksema or disagrees with Hoeksema, church historical accuracy and theological precision demand the recognition that it is not the denial that the call of the gospel is grace to all hearers that marks one as a "hyper-Calvinist." To charge a theologian with "hyper-Calvinism" on the ground that he denies that the call is grace to all hearers, therefore, is false on the very face of the charge. Denying that the gospel call is grace to all hearers may be sound doctrine or unsound doctrine. Whatever it is, it is not historical hyper-Calvinism. The charge is either inexcusable ignorance or willful malice.

Hyper-Calvinism is a distinct, theological error that has appeared in the history of the church, especially in Calvinistic circles. It is the error of denying that the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ is to be preached promiscuously to all sinners. It is the accompanying error that denies that God in the preaching calls, *seriously* calls, all who hear the gospel, reprobate as well as elect, Esau as well as Jacob, to repent and believe. It is the error that forbids the preacher to declare to all hearers of his preaching, regardless whether they are regenerate or unregenerate, elect or reprobate (which, of course, only God knows), that God promises to save every one who repents and believes. It is the error that denies that the gospel confronts every hearer with his or her *duty* to repent and believe.

Hyper-Calvinism denies these truths on the basis, it argues, of Calvinistic tenets. The (mistaken) argument of the hyper-Calvinist is that, *because of double predestination*, *limited atonement, and particular grace for the elect alone*, the gospel of grace ought not to be *preached* to all, all should not be *called to believe*, the promise of

the gospel should not be *declared* to all, and it is not the duty of all to repent and believe.

Positively, hyper-Calvinism maintains that the preacher should preach the grace of God only to those whom he knows, or thinks he knows, are elect believers. To others, he preaches only the wrath of God. Likewise, the hyper-Calvinist preacher calls only believers to repent and believe and announces the promise of the gospel only to them.

Simply put, hyper-Calvinism is the error that supposes that particular grace forbids promiscuous preaching of grace. As I have demonstrated above, Canons, 2.5 (and 2.6 as well) expose and refute the error of hyper-Calvinism.

Usually, this erroneous element of hyper-Calvinism is accompanied by another. This is the error of denying that faith in Jesus Christ is a duty of the reprobate, unregenerated sinner. This denial bases itself on the inability of the unsaved sinner to perform the duty. Because the unsaved sinner *cannot* believe, God does not *require* him to believe. The observant reader will recognize this error as the mirror opposite of the error of Arminianism. For Arminianism, the command to all to believe implies that all are able to believe. For hyper-Calvinism, the inability of the fallen, unsaved sinner to believe implies that God does not command him to believe (in the call of the gospel).

For the orthodox Reformed faith, although the sinner is indeed incapable of repenting or believing, God, nevertheless, seriously calls him to repent and believe, and it is the solemn duty of the sinner to do so. The Heidelberg Catechism explains:

> Does not God, then, wrong man by requiring of him in his law that which he can not perform?
> No; for God so made man that he could perform it; but man, through the instigation of the devil, by willful disobedience deprived himself and all his posterity of this power (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 9, Schaff, *Creeds*, 310)

The Canons of Dordt confesses, as Reformed orthodoxy, both that the gospel calls the unregenerated unbeliever to come to Christ and be converted and that the stubborn unbeliever is blameworthy for disobeying the call, even though the unbeliever is incapable of obeying the call.

> It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel…that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted. The fault lies in themselves…" (Canons, 3&4.9, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 589).

Historical theologians recognize, and usually more or less correctly analyze, the error of hyper-Calvinism. The English theologian, Peter Toon, although no friend of the Protestant Reformed rejection of the well-meant offer, and, therefore, unable to keep his criticism of Herman Hoeksema out of his description, has basically described hyper-Calvinism correctly in his book, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (Eugene, OR: Wipt and Stock, 2011; the book was originally published in 1967) and in his treatment of the subject in the *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (ed. Donald K. McKim, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1992, 190), where Toon refers to Hoeksema.

In his book on hyper-Calvinism, Toon gives these defining characteristics of hyper-Calvinism: "minimizing the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners to God"; obscuring the central message of the apostles, "Christ and Him crucified;" "made no distinction between the secret and the revealed will of God, and tried to deduce the duty of men from what it taught concerning the secret, eternal decrees of God"; "the tendency to state that an elect man is not only passive in regeneration but also in conversion as well"; "the notion that grace must only be offered to those for whom it was intended" (*Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism*, 144, 145).

As is proved both from Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* and from his published sermons, of which his devotional commentary on the book of Romans, consisting of his series of sermons on Romans (*Righteous by Faith Alone*, Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), is representative, Hoeksema not only was not marked by any of these fundamental characteristics of hyper-Calvinism, but also rejected them as contrary to the Reformed faith of Scripture and the creeds.

This rejection extended also to the hyper-Calvinistic "notion that grace must only be offered to those for whom it was intended." For the hyper-Calvinist meant by this that the gospel of grace must not be presented, or preached, to the unconverted and that the preacher, on

behalf of God, might not seriously call the unconverted to believe the gospel of grace, promising that every one who does believe will be saved. The hyper-Calvinist thought that the gospel of grace must be preached only to the elect and that only those who show themselves elect may be called to repent and believe. Hoeksema rejected this hyper-Calvinistic notion.

Hoeksema's rejection of the "offer" was essentially different from hyper-Calvinism. Hoeksema rejected the teaching that God offers salvation to all humans, including those whom He reprobated, with a gracious attitude towards them all and a sincere desire, or will, to save them all. Hyper-Calvinism, in contrast, opposed preaching the gospel to all indiscriminately and calling all, whether elect believer or reprobate unbeliever, to repent and believe.

Far and away the main proponents of hyper-Calvinism have been certain Baptists in England and in the United States, who wrongly deduced the characteristic hyper-Calvinistic notions from the truth of salvation by sovereign grace. They have done this in reaction to the corruption of the truth of grace by nominal Calvinists, especially the corruption consisting of the well-meant offer.

It is, therefore, a dodge, a theological tactic, by Toon and others to attribute hyper-Calvinism to an over-emphasis on sovereign grace by some Reformed theologians, as though hyper-Calvinism is the unavoidable product of a consistent, emphatic, non-compromising confession of salvation by particular, sovereign grace.

Hyper-Calvinism is not the natural, virtually inevitable, but erroneous development of the sound Reformed faith. Hyper-Calvinism is not the extremist form of Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism is not a warning in the history of the church against an overly strong and thoroughly consistent confession of salvation by sovereign grace. Truth does not develop into error. Doctrinal error is not a warning to truth to soften truth's convictions and confession.

This is the impression that Peter Toon leaves in his description of hyper-Calvinism in the *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*. According to Toon, hyper-Calvinism is "an exaggerated…form of the Reformed faith…[which] emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God and God's eternal decrees." Hyper Calvinism results from "excessive emphasis on the sovereign grace of God" (*Encyclopedia*, 190).

On the contrary, hyper-Calvinism is the reaction of some, few Calvinists against the *corruption* of the truth of sovereign, particular grace by nominal, compromising Calvinists. Hyper-Calvinism is a reaction to the well-meant offer—an understandable, though inexcusable, reaction. Because nominal Calvinists were explaining the call of the gospel as grace to all hearers, expressing God's desire, will, and intention to save all hearers, though failing to accomplish God's desire and will—a well-meant offer—the hyper-Calvinists, thinking that thus they were defending Calvinism, denied that God calls all humans to repent and believe and even denied that the gospel of grace is to be promiscuously preached.

The blame for the evil of hyper-Calvinism, now and in the day of judgment, therefore, does not, and will not, fall on Herman Hoeksema, the Protestant Reformed Churches, or the Synod of Dordt.

The blame falls, and will fall, rather, on Louis Berkhof, Anthony Hoekema, Matthew Barrett, and all others who in the name of Calvinism extend the saving grace of God, His gracious desire and intention to save, and His gracious effort to save in the preaching of the gospel, to all humans without exception, thus contradicting predestination and sovereign grace.

That is, the blame for hyper-Calvinism falls on the proponents and defenders of the well-meant offer of the gospel.

By the well-meant offer, they make themselves guilty both of the Arminian heresy and of the (reactionary) error of hyper-Calvinism.

This charge is not theological slander, but sober truth, as I have demonstrated from church history, the Reformed confessions, and Holy Scripture. And this is the reason why the proponents of the well-meant offer in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches refuse to defend themselves against this charge and decline to prove it false.

According to the generally recognized, scholarly, and church historical judgment as to what constitutes hyper-Calvinism, Herman Hoeksema was no hyper-Calvinist. He certainly was no hyper-Calvinist according to the standard of the Canons of Dordt. He did not advocate preaching, or trying to preach, the gospel only to the elect; he did not object to calling every member of his large congregation or every person on the mission field to repent and believe on Jesus Christ for salvation; he had no quarrel with

declaring to all and sundry the promise of the gospel that every one who repents and believes shall be saved. On the contrary, he taught all of these truths as part and parcel of the Reformed faith. In addition, he practiced these truths both in his own congregation and denomination and in his significant work of missions and evangelism.

In his treatment of the "calling" in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, having insisted that "grace is never general, but always particular," Hoeksema wrote:

> But this does not alter the fact that the Lord God…causes men to be under the preaching of the gospel without changing their heart through regenerating and illuminating grace. Also through this calling the responsibility of man and his ethical character are maintained. God speaks to him through that gospel. In that gospel He calls him to repentance, to conversion and faith. And in a way that is very clear, and not to be denied, He presents to him the way of sin as a way that displeases God and that makes the sinner the object of God's wrath… Moreover, in that gospel He opens for him that repents a way to be reconciled to God and to return to the heart of the Father, and assures him that he will never be cast out, and promises him eternal life…All this is being preached in the gospel, and is preached without distinction to all that are under the gospel, also to the reprobate (*Reformed Dogmatics*, Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966, 470, 471).

The Declaration of Principles, which the Protestant Reformed Churches adopted in 1951 at the strong urging of Herman Hoeksema and of which he was the principal author, confesses that "the preaching comes to all; and that God seriously commands to faith and repentance; and that to all those who come and believe He promises life and peace" (*The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005, 426).

Why then do nominal Calvinists, of whom Matthew Barrett is only the latest offender, persist in slandering Hoeksema, as well as the Protestant Reformed Churches (usually behind their back), as hyper-Calvinistic?

There are several possibilities, all of them ignoble.

One is that ignorant men simply repeat what they have heard from or read in others, or find popular in their circles.

Another is that wicked men deliberately smear Hoeksema because they hate the truth of salvation by particular, sovereign grace that he boldly and uncompromisingly taught, and, therefore, hate him also.

A third possibility is that professing Calvinists today are so infected with the Arminian heresy of a love—a *saving* love—of God for all humans without exception, which expresses itself in a gracious will or desire or intention to save all humans without exception, that they do really regard a faithful, uncompromising, genuine confession of God's particular, sovereign grace, which necessarily implies reprobation, as extremism, as *hyper*-Calvinism.

It is an indication of the deplorable spiritual condition of nominally Reformed churches and theologians today that this third possibility is the most likely.

It is also an indication of the huge and exceedingly important calling that God has for the Protestant Reformed Churches today. May they have the zeal and courage to carry out their calling. ●

Book Reviews

Not of Works: Norman Shepherd and His Critics, by Ralph F. Boersema. Minneapolis, MN: NextStep Resources, 2012. Pp. xxxi + 235. $15 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The heresy of the Federal Vision is not going to disappear anytime soon. Not only do prominent, aggressive proponents of the theology remain in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. But also influential theologians continue to arise for the public defense of the teaching.

In 2011, Presbyterian theologian Ian A. Hewitson published a vigorous, book-length defense of Norman Shepherd and his theology, which is essentially the theology of the Federal Vision. The book is *Trust and Obey: Norman Shepherd & the Justification Controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary*. I critiqued this book in an appendix of my *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (RFPA, 2012).

Now, Reformed theologian Ralph F. Boersema comes out with a book defending and promoting the theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision: *Not of Works: Norman Shepherd and His Critics*.

With the publication of *Not of Works* the truth concerning the Federal Vision becomes even clearer to the conservative Reformed reading public, and more intriguing.

For Boersema is a minister and theologian in the Canadian Reformed Churches, the denomination in North America descended from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) and disciples of the covenant theologians Schilder, Holwerda, Veenhof, and others.

The Root of Shepherd's Theology

And Boersema locates the source of the theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision in the covenant doctrine of the liberated Reformed Churches, exactly where the source is. The Protestant Reformed Churches have called the attention of the Reformed churches to the root of the Federal Vision in the covenant theology of Schilder and the liberated Reformed for a long time. But the purported critics of the Federal Vision have stubbornly refused to recognize this root and to condemn the Federal Vision in terms of it.

Apart from the charge by the Protestant Reformed Churches, apart from the obvious similarity of the doctrine of the Federal Vision to the covenant theology of the liberated Reformed, and apart from the very name of the heresy ("federal" means 'covenant'), the refusal of the Reformed critics of the Federal Vision to consider the covenant root of the Federal Vision has been inexcusable. As Boersema notes, Canadian Reformed theologian Jelle Faber rose to the defense of Norman Shepherd on the pages of the Canadian Reformed magazine, *Clarion*, already when the Shepherd controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary became public in 1982 (59).

Also, liberated theologians Cornelis Van Dam and Nelson Kloosterman gave high praise to Hewitson's defense of Shepherd and his theology. Of Hewitson's book, Van Dam exclaimed on the back cover of the book, "highly recommended." On one of the opening pages of the book, Kloosterman, despite his avowed aversion to polemics ("very harmful to the truth"), recommended Hewitson's defense of Shepherd as a "compelling study."

Boersema makes it even harder, if not impossible, for would-be critics of the theology of Shepherd studiously to ignore that the theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision is the natural, inevitable development of the covenant doctrine of Schilder and the liberated Reformed.

Taking note of Shepherd's teaching that God makes His gracious covenant with all the baptized children alike, but conditionally, because the covenant is not founded on or governed by election—the very heart of the theology of the Federal Vision—Boersema states that "Shepherd has adopted" the "solution" to the issue of the relation of covenant and election of men "like S. Greijdanus and K. Schilder." This "solution" holds that God's covenant "is not only with the elect. The covenant is not unconditional." By promise to all alike, the covenant is graciously established with all the children alike. But for the continuation of the covenant, issuing in eternal salvation, there are "obligations," that is, conditions. Failure on the part of some children to perform the "obligation"/conditions results in those children's being "cut off" (84, 85).

Although Boersema's book concentrates on Shepherd's doc-

trine of justification (the sub, sub-heading is "The Justification Controversy Laid to Rest Through Understanding"), Boersema is explicit that the root of Shepherd's and the Federal Vision's theology is his and its doctrine of the covenant: "He [Shepherd] is only seeking to do justice to the dynamic of historical covenant language" (148).

Shepherd himself writes an important foreword to the book. In the foreword, he approves Boersema's analysis and defense of his theology. Shepherd also offers a brief defense of his own. Almost at once, he explains his doctrine of justification as an aspect of his theology of the biblical doctrine of the covenant (xvii-xxiii).

The theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision is a distinct doctrine of the covenant of grace. If it is not critiqued with regard to its teaching about the covenant, not only will it not be understood, but also, in the end, it will not be condemned by Reformed and Presbyterian churches even regarding its erroneous teaching on justification.

A Conditional Covenant, Cut Loose from Election

What the distinct covenant doctrine of Shepherd and the Federal Vision is, its defender—liberated theologian Ralph Boersema—and Shepherd himself, make plain. It is the doctrine of a (saving) covenant love and grace of God in Jesus Christ for all baptized children alike. (I place "saving" in parentheses, not because the covenant love and grace of Federal Vision theology actually save anyone. They do not. They are impotent. But the covenant love and grace in Federal Vision theology are saving *in nature;* they are not merely a non-saving, common love and grace.) In this (saving) love, God establishes His covenant with all the children alike.

Indeed, the covenant theology of Shepherd is the doctrine of a (saving) covenant love and grace of God in Jesus Christ for all humans alike, baptized or unbaptized. Refusing to identify the "seed" of Abraham in the covenant promise to Abraham as Christ and the elect in Him and, therefore, refusing to identify the "nations" in the covenant promise to Abraham as the elect in every nation, Shepherd explains the covenant promise to Abraham as referring to all humans without exception. If the universal covenant promise does not imply that God makes His covenant with every human, it does imply that He

desires to bless every human with the blessings of the covenant.

> The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, one by which he would bless all the families of the earth. The Good News proclaims the covenant to all nations. This is not just a manner of speaking. God really does desire all men to repent and know Christ. He does not make his covenant with all but he does lovingly offer it to all….He does pledge to all of them that he will be their God and they his people so long as they keep his covenant" (138, 139).

In His covenant love and grace, God sends out the Federal Vision evangelists, including Norman Shepherd, preaching John 3:16, telling every hearer that God loves him, that Christ died for him, and that God desires to save him.

> From the perspective of the covenant…all of the words of John 3:16 mean exactly what they say. The Reformed evangelist can and must preach to everyone on the basis of John 3:16, 'Christ died to save you.'" (87).
> John 3:16 is embedded in the covenant documents of the New Testament….John 3:16 is covenant truth. Its specific application…in the declaration, 'Christ died for you' [to every human—DJE], is a demonstration of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ opening the way to fellowship with God" (88).
> God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. This is true love for all persons (138).

Specifically now with regard to all the baptized infants of believers, the covenant grace of God toward them and the covenant bond itself are conditional. That is, they depend for their ability to continue with an infant and to bring an infant finally to eternal life upon the individual, sinful infant himself. God's (saving) covenant love and grace are contingent upon the child's performing the work of believing and upon his performing the work of lifelong obedience to the law of God.

It is possible, indeed reality in multitudes of instances, that one who is the object of covenant love and grace and truly in covenant relationship with God fails to perform the conditions, so that he frustrates the love and grace of

God, is separated from God, and perishes forever. So do Shepherd and the men of the Federal Vision emphasize the real possibility of falling away from covenant grace and of breaking the covenant, which was truly established with one that the doctrine of falling away from grace must be regarded as a favorite doctrine of theirs.

Thus, one's covenant election is resisted. Indeed, covenant election becomes reprobation.

Explaining and defending Shepherd's doctrine, Boersema denies that election governs the covenant. In a defense of this denial that staggers a Reformed Christian, Boersema argues that "if the covenant is really only with the elect, there can be no possibility of falling away" (137). To say nothing of the terror that this doctrine casts into the soul of every believer until his last breath, are Boersema and Shepherd ignorant that the Reformed churches have struggled through this issue to the comforting confession of perseverance in the fifth head of the Canons of Dordt? "God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not…suffer them [the elect] to…forfeit the state of justification…and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction" (Canons, V/6).

Boersema correctly relates what it means for Shepherd and the Federal Vision—and for Boersema and the liberated Reformed—that God makes His covenant with all the baptized babies alike, regardless of eternal predestination.

> This covenant love is that of a Father for his children and is bestowed on all members of the covenant people. It is not addressed only to the elect, nor does it merely bring a people into the pale of the Gospel. Baptism symbolizes union with God in Christ, not just the offer of union (137).

This love that is ineffectual in many children is the implication of an oath to save them all that is never fulfilled with many. God establishes His covenant by oath-bound promise. According to Shepherd and Boersema, God swears to every baptized child that He will be the child's God and that the child will be God's covenant friend. This is an oath-bound promise to save every child. "Election should…not be allowed to mute the fact that the Lord has established a legally binding bond with his people in the form of a covenant in which he really swears an oath to be a God and

Father to his people." That the oath-bound, covenant promise is addressed to every baptized child, Boersema makes plain by stating that the truth of a covenant bond formed by the promise "does not only apply to the elect" (138).

The Well-Meant Offer

Bravely (for a theologian who confesses the Canons of Dordt), picking up on a teaching of Shepherd that most of Shepherd's purported critics deliberately ignore (lest their dear doctrine of the well-meant offer be exposed), Boersema recognizes, and defends, Shepherd's doctrine that God has promised His covenant to all humans without exception, so that He loves them all, desires the salvation of them all, and graciously offers Christ to them all in the "well-meant offer."

> Salvation through Christ is sincerely offered to all people. If we look at history only from the perspective of predestination, it is illogical to think that God truly calls the reprobate to partake of Christ's love or that his love is revealed to them in Christ. However, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. This is true love for all persons…. God really does desire all men to repent and know Christ. He does not make his covenant with all, but he does lovingly offer it to all (138).

Accurately expressing Shepherd's and the Federal Vision theology, Boersema establishes the connection between the well-meant offer and the conditional covenant: "The well-meant Gospel offer is spoken to all men in the same kind of language as the covenant, language that expresses God's sincere commitment and heart's desire, without predicting the outcome" (139). The outcome cannot be predicted, of course, because the grace both of the well-meant offer and of the covenant efforts of God is conditional.

Despite some misgivings, Boersema cannot condemn Shepherd's explanation of John 3:16: "The Reformed evangelist can and must preach to everyone on the basis of John 3:16, 'Christ died to save you'" (87). This is the doctrine of universal atonement, in flagrant contradiction of Canons, II/8, which is binding on both Shepherd and Boersema. But Boersema cannot condemn universal atonement in the theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision, because Shepherd's doctrine of universal atonement is

based on Shepherd's and Boersema's covenant theology. Cut loose, like the covenant, from election, the proclamation of the gospel is "a genuine offer of grace to the whole world, not just to the elect. God's grace is good news for everyone" (88).

Boersema has enough Reformed sensibility at this point to be stricken by the awareness of the contradiction of the Reformed doctrine of reprobation. "God loves the world even as he hates Esau before he was born" (88).

Boersema's defense of the contradiction? "There is mystery here" (88).

Boersema's "mystery" is not the "mystery" of Scripture: a deep truth that had been hidden but is now revealed by divine inspiration. Boersema's "mystery" is a semantical cover-up of sheer, diametrical, irreconcilable contradiction regarding a fundamental truth of the gospel of grace. It is, therefore, also the obscuring, indeed the corruption, of the gospel of grace. If God loves Esau as well as Jacob and graciously swears His covenant of grace into existence with them both alike, the reason why Jacob is saved in distinction from his brother is not the grace of God. Rather, the reason for Jacob's salvation is that Jacob performed the conditions and made himself to differ. The glory of his covenant salvation is Jacob's, not God's.

Contrary to Boersema's insistence that Shepherd "treasures the five points of Calvinism [as confessed in the Canons—xxviii; 83), Shepherd denies the five points and rejects the Canons of Dordt as openly as any avowed Arminian *with regard to the gracious covenant, covenant grace and love, and covenant salvation*. Defending Shepherd and the theology of the Federal Vision as he does, the liberated theologian makes, or shows, himself guilty of the same evil.

Another instance of this open opposition to the Canons is Shepherd's teaching that there are "various decrees of election," one (covenant) decree of election unto grace and the way of salvation, and another (eternal) decree unto salvation and glory. Canons, I/8 flatly condemns this teaching.

> There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall b saved both under the Old and New testament; since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the divine will to be one, accord-

> ing to which he hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation and the way of salvation, which he hath ordained that we should walk therein.

The root of the heresy of Shepherd and the Federal Vision is the doctrine of a conditional covenant, which is cut loose from election.

Salvation "Contingent on What We Do"

And what this heretical root amounts to, both Shepherd and Boersema freely acknowledge.

In his foreword, Norman Shepherd describes his theology in these words: "The New Testament as well as the Old makes our eternal welfare contingent in some way and to some extent on what we do" (ix).

Having read Shepherd's description of the essence of his theology, Boersema both approves it and uses it to describe his—Boersema's—own: "Many Scripture passages…condition our eternal well-being on what we do" (187). What these passages of Scripture are, neither Shepherd nor Boersema informs the reader. Among them is not Romans 9:16: [Salvation] is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Neither is Ephesians 2:8, 9 on the list of the two defenders of a conditional covenant: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

According to Shepherd and Boersema, our eternal salvation depends on what we do.

I doubt that Jacob Arminius, indeed a Jesuit, would be so bald and bold in confessing their theologies of man saving himself.

This is the message of the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

And this is why most purported critics leave strictly alone the covenant root of the theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision. Most of them wholeheartedly share Shepherd's and Boersema's doctrine of a conditional covenant. For them to take up the issue of the conditional covenant would mean exposing themselves as committed to the teaching that, with regard to covenant salvation and well-being, our salvation and well-being "are contingent in some way and to some extent on what we do," as committed to this gross heresy as are Shepherd, the Federal Vision, and Ralph Boersema.

Purported critic Cornelis P. Venema is quoted by Boersema, at great length, as approving Shepherd's doctrine of a conditional covenant (151-158). Among "Shepherd's…evident strengths," according to Venema (as quoted by Boersema), are his insistence on the "conditionality of the covenant relationship….The covenant of grace is…conditional in its administration" (151)

According to Venema, *in a critique of Shepherd*, to view salvation "in terms of God's sovereign and unconditional electing grace" would make it impossible to do justice to "human responsibility" and to ward off "the error of antinomianism" (152).

Venema goes on to approve "Shepherd's advocacy of a covenant-evangelism approach" (152). This, as I have demonstrated from Shepherd himself, consists of saying to every human, on the basis of John 3:16, "God loves you with the (saving) love that gave His Son, desires to save you, had Christ die for you, and now graciously offers you salvation, if only you will perform the condition of accepting the offer." That is, Shepherd's approach to evangelism, warmly approved by Cornelis Venema, is the expression of the fundamental conviction that everyone's eternal welfare is contingent on what he himself does.

Not content with approving Shepherd's conditional-covenant-approach to evangelism, Venema must take a swipe at the approach to evangelism that is founded on and faithful to the decree of election. "Because the electing grace of God in Christ is unconditional, evangelism that is oriented to the decree of election also suffers…from an inordinate fear of emphasizing the gospel's condition of faith and obedience" (153).

The Arminians were right after all: predestination cannot assure; leads to antinomianism; and cannot evangelize.

Convinced as they are of the fatal and deplorable weaknesses of the Reformed faith, why do these theologians still want to identify themselves as Reformed, and why do they still make a pretense of representing this faith?

It will be interesting to observe whether a single, non-Protestant Reformed critic of Shepherd will offer any objection to Shepherd's bold statement that our eternal welfare is contingent on what we do. And if one does, it will be still more interesting to see how he reconciles his

objection with the doctrine of a conditional, that is, contingent, covenant.

Conditional Justification

Since Shepherd's and the Federal Vision's doctrine of justification is merely the effect and symptom of their doctrine of a conditional covenant, the reviewer of Boersema's book can be briefer in his analysis of this aspect of Shepherd's theology, as vigorously defended by Ralph Boersema.

Boersema does *defend* Shepherd's doctrine of justification. That aspect of the Federal Vision heresy that is too much even for some of the most devoted sympathizers with Shepherd's doctrine of a conditional covenant finds approval in the liberated theologian.

Boersema's defense of Shepherd's doctrine of justification by faith and by good works, like Shepherd's own defense, is the contention that Shepherd is only concerned that the faith that justifies be a true and living faith.

But this defense fails.

It is the doctrine of Shepherd and the Federal Vision that in justifying the believing sinner God takes the good works of the sinner himself into account. Thus, it is also Shepherd's instruction to the sinner seeking justification that, for his justification, he present his own good works to God the judge.

Shepherd, therefore, teaches justification by faith *and by (faith's) good works*, in contradiction of the apostle in Romans 3:26: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Shepherd denies that the good works excluded from justification in Romans 3:28 are all good works whatever. He insists that in Romans 3 and 4, particularly in Romans 3:28, has in view only those works that were part of the "old, Mosaic covenant," for example, circumcision, and those works that are performed with the purpose of meriting salvation. "These 'works of the law' are not any and all good works" (xii).

According to Shepherd's own explanation of the text, therefore, Romans 3:28 must be read as follows: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without any works belonging to the Old Testament, Mosaic economy and without any works performed in order to merit, but, definitely and emphatically *with* good works performed by true faith." That is, justification by faith *and by (faith's) good works*.

Because, as all agree, in Ro-

mans 3:28 the apostle is teaching justification as the forensic act of God the judge, that is, God's declaration, or verdict, changing the legal standing of the sinner from guilt to innocence by forgiving his sins and imputing to him the righteousness of Christ, Shepherd's doctrine is that justification *as a forensic act of God* is by faith and works.

That he teaches justification by faith and works, Shepherd confirms by his exegesis of Romans 2:13, "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Luther, Calvin, and the Reformation explained the text as teaching what would have to be the case if justification were by the law (which it is not, and cannot be). If justification were by the law, hearing the law would not be sufficient for justification. But one would have to do the law. Doing the law is utter impossibility. No totally depraved sinner can do the law. No regenerated, believing child of God can do the law. Doing the law consists of perfect love of God and perfect love of the neighbor every moment and regarding every thought, desire, and feeling, as well as regarding every word and every deed, all one's life long. One slip-up, one sin, in a lifetime of otherwise perfect obedience would make justification by the law impossible.

In Romans 2:13, according to the Reformation's (and the correct) interpretation, the apostle is laying the groundwork for his doctrine of gracious justification—justification by faith only—on the basis of the perfect obedience and atoning death of the substitute for elect sinners, Jesus Christ.

But Shepherd, his Federal Vision cohorts, and Ralph Boersema dissent from this Reformation exegesis (which is not only that of Luther, but also that of Calvin). For Shepherd, "the Pauline affirmation in Romans 2:13, 'the doers of the Law will be justified,' is not to be understood hypothetically in the sense that there are no persons who fall into that class, but in the sense that faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified" (198). Boersema defends Shepherd's interpretation (198-201).

What this interpretation of Romans 2:13 affirms concerning justification is that justification is by doing the law.

In harmony with this Roman Catholic, Arminian, and Judaistic, self-righteous theology is Shepherd's explanation of James 2.

In James 2, the apostle exposes a false, dead faith. This is a certain intellectual knowledge of Christian doctrine and a profession of salvation in Jesus Christ that is devoid of good works, especially works of love on behalf of the needy members of the church. Though a church member says he has faith, if his faith does not work by love, his faith is "dead, being alone" (James 2:14-17). In the context of this warning against false faith, James declares that "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

At the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic adversaries of Luther's, Calvin's, and the Reformation's doctrine of justification by faith only made James 2 the decisive passage on (forensic) justification, the chief bulwark with which to withstand the Reformation's gospel of justification by faith only and the main catapult with which to demolish the Reformation's gospel of grace.

Shepherd and the Federal Vision do the same, thus showing their colors.

The issue regarding James 2 is simply this: Does James 2 mean by "justification" the same truth as does Paul in Romans 3 and 4? Beyond all doubt and question, Paul speaks of justification as the forensic act of God the judge. That is, justification in Romans 3 and 4 is God's declaration pronouncing the sinner righteous, changing his legal standing from guilt to innocence.

In Romans 4:5, justification is God's counting, or reckoning, faith for righteousness.

According to Romans 4:6, 7, justification is the imputation of righteousness, thus forgiving iniquities.

According to Romans 4:8, justification is the non-imputation of sin.

Counting, reckoning, imputing, and forgiving are forensic terms, describing the legal declaration that effects a change in one's standing before the law and the judge.

If James 2 speaks of justification in the same sense, James contradicts Paul, with regard to a fundamental truth of the gospel. Whereas Paul teaches that justification is by faith only, apart from good works, James now teaches that justification is by faith and by good works, expressly denying that justification is by faith only.

This is impossible. Two apostles of Christ cannot contradict each other on the pages

of inspired Scripture. Scripture does not contradict itself, least of all regarding such a fundamental truth as justification.

There are only two conceivable ways of harmonizing Paul and James. One is that Paul and James have two different kinds of works in mind. James refers to genuine good works. Paul refers to ceremonial works and to works that intend to merit salvation.

According to this way of harmonizing Paul and James, justification—the forensic act—is by faith and by faith's genuine good works.

This is the explanation of Shepherd, the Federal Vision, and Ralph Boersema. "Shepherd favors the forensic justification exegesis of James 2" (168).

And, let us not forget, this is the explanation of the Roman Catholic Church, to the overthrow of the sixteenth century Reformation of the church.

The other, and correct, harmonizing of Paul and James is that the two apostles speak of justification in two different senses. "Justification" does not have the same reference in James 2 that it has in Romans 3 and 4. Paul refers to the forensic act of God, beyond dispute. James, in contrast, refers to the *demonstration* of justification. Or, to say it differently, James refers to justification as it shows itself to be genuine. Just as a faith devoid of good works shows itself to be a dead and false faith, so an alleged justification by such a dead faith is shown to be a spurious justification by the lack of good works as the fruit of justification.

This was the explanation, not only of Luther, but also of Calvin, indeed, of all the reformers.

It is significant that, eager as Shepherd, the Federal Vision, and Boersema are to support their doctrines by selected quotations of Calvin, at this critical point there is no reference to Calvin. The same is true regarding Shepherd's interpretation of Romans 2:13.

Condemned by the Creeds

If the contradiction of Calvin at the crucial points is significant, the contradiction of the Reformed creeds by Shepherd and his Federal Vision colleagues is damning.

Shepherd publicly teaches and defends justification by faith and by works in open defiance of Questions and Answers 59-64 of the Heidelberg Catechism, his own creed: "righteous only by faith" (Q. 61).

Against the teaching that is fundamental to Shepherd's and

the Federal Vision's doctrine of justification, namely that the works excluded from justification by Paul in Romans 3 and 4 are only ceremonial works and works performed with the motive of meriting, stands the clear teaching of Question and Answer 62 of the Catechism. Here, the Catechism excludes from justification *all* our good works, not only ceremonial works that a Jew might perform. "Why can not our good works be the whole of part of our righteousness before God?" The answer is not that ceremonial works have passed away, nor that the motive of works performed in order to merit is obnoxious to God. But the answer is "the righteousness which can stand before the judgment-seat of God must be perfect throughout, and wholly conformable to the divine law; whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."

Thus, the authoritative, binding doctrine of the creed is that the works excluded from consideration in justification include the good works of the believing child of God. In fact, the Catechism excludes from justification our "best works," which would include feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, that is, all the good works James 2 exhorts upon us.

Lest there be any question about the good works excluded by the Catechism, Question 63 identifies them as works which "it is God's will to reward." Surely, these are not Old Testament ceremonies, or works done to merit.

It is the creedal doctrine of the Reformed faith that justification by faith only means that all good works are excluded from consideration in the justifying act of God, "also…our best works." The reason is that even the best works of a believer, those that proceed from true faith, are "all imperfect and defiled with sin."

It is the creedal doctrine of the Reformed faith also that the denial of justification by faith only, by introducing good works into the act of justification—as Shepherd does—is, in fact, making those good works "the whole or part of our righteousness before God" (Q. 62).

It is irrelevant that Shepherd denies that the good works by which the sinner is justified are meritorious. It is irrelevant that Shepherd denies that the good works by which the sinner is justified are the ground of justification.

To introduce works into the forensic act of justification, to

read Romans 3:28 thus, "A man is justified by faith *and by the genuine good works that faith performs*," is, by virtue of the introduction of works into the act of justification, to be guilty of teaching that "our good works [are]…part of our righteousness before God" (Heid. Cat., Q. 62).

Similar is Shepherd's disregard of the creeds in his teaching that good works do not follow justification (as works of thankfulness for the forgiveness of sins), but accompany justification and even precede justification. Determined as he is to have good works a necessary aspect of justification, indeed necessary for justification, Shepherd argues at length that good works precede and accompany justification, rather than follow justification as fruit. His purpose is to establish that good works cannot be excluded from justification.

In a folksy manner, Boersema sums up Shepherd's opposition to the teaching that good works follow justification, and Shepherd's reason for opposing the teaching.

> What some people don't like is that Shepherd says that works are necessary for justification. They say that works are the fruit and evidence of faith and always follow faith, but Shepherd says more than that. For him, works are not only necessary for sanctification, but also for justification (214).

Both Shepherd and his liberated defender, Ralph Boersema, blithely ignore the doctrine of the Reformed creeds, particularly article 24 of the Belgic Confession.

> Works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace: howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, *even before we do good works, otherwise they could not be good works any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good* (emphasis added).

The theology of Norman Shepherd includes a heretical doctrine of justification. Openly, Shepherd teaches justification by faith and by the good works that true faith performs.

This doctrine of justification stands condemned by the Reformed creeds, specifically by Questions and Answers 59-64 of the Heidelberg Catechism and by Articles 22-24 of the Belgic

Confession. Shepherd's doctrine stands condemned by the Reformed creeds, regardless that Shepherd denies that the works are meritorious, and regardless that Shepherd denies that these works are the ground of the verdict. To teach (forensic) justification by faith and by works is heresy, regardless of any and all mitigating explanations.

Conclusion

Some Reformed theologians, not all, as liberated theologian Ralph Boersema evidences, take issue with this aspect of Shepherd's and the Federal Vision's theology. They criticize Shepherd's doctrine of justification by faith and works.

But their opposition to this glaring error in Shepherd's theology will not be successful to root his theology out of their own denominations, or out of the Reformed community. Nor will their opposition prevent the theology of the Federal Vision from spreading.

For, as also this latest defense of Shepherd by Boersema recognizes (with the express approval of Shepherd himself), justification by good works is only one expression of the fundamental theology of Norman Shepherd. The fundamental theology of Shepherd is the doctrine of a conditional covenant, a covenant that does not have its source in eternal election, nor is governed by election.

And the essence of this covenant theology, in Shepherd's own words, is the doctrine that our eternal welfare is contingent on what we do.

This covenant doctrine, the root of the heresy, the notable critics of Shepherd and the Federal Vision will not touch with the proverbial ten-foot pole.

The reason is that they themselves are committed to the doctrine of a conditional covenant. Therefore, they share with Shepherd the conviction that our eternal welfare is contingent on what we do, although they are less candid than is Shepherd in acknowledging this conviction.

How can a Reformed theologian who himself preaches John 3:16 as a universal love of God and a Christ proceeding from this universal love, graciously offered to all in the sincere desire of God that all accept His love and His Christ, but contingent—all of it, the love of God, Christ, and the offer—on the acceptance by the sinner engage in serious theological battle with Shepherd and the men of the Federal Vision?

The sixteenth century Reformation itself, obviously at stake in the heresy of justification by good works, is now being undone in the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches, while the theologians, ministers, and elders—appointed watchmen on the walls of Zion—either stand idly by, or, as is the case with Boersema, promote the overthrow of the Reformation.

God have mercy on the Reformed people!

And arise for the defense of the precious Reformed faith, His own gospel of grace! ●

Jeroboam's Wife, The Enduring Contribution of the Old Testament's Least Known Women. Robin Gallaher Branch. Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA: 2009. Paperback, 250 pp. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown].

"I love stories, all forms, all kinds," writes Robin Branch (xix). Her love of stories is the source of this book, in which she analyses seven obscure Old Testament female characters: Miriam, Rizpah, the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah, Jeroboam's wife, the widow of Zarephath, Naaman's Israelite slave girl and Athaliah.

Branch summarises her findings:

> Because I have studied these women and girls so carefully, I feel as if I have lived with them for years! They emerge in Scripture with distinct personalities. I believe it is possible to describe each character with terse adjectives and phrases. I found Rizpah tenacious and possessing the courage of a warrior; Athaliah isolated in her evil; the wife of Jeroboam flat, vapid, and overwhelmingly sad (probably because of domestic abuse); the sister of Moses winsomely audacious; the Israelite slave girl, a pint-sized heroine with a giant-sized faith; the widow of Zarephath feisty enough to make a prophet quail; and the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah a straightforward manager for CEOs to emulate (6).

The book is interesting enough in its story-telling charm, but it is of little value for exegesis.

Nor would I recommend it as a Bible study guide, although each chapter ends with "Questions for Further Reflection." The reader may glean some new insights into these women, but Branch does not bring Christ out of the narrative as she could and should. How do these women and their participation in biblical history reveal Christ, and how do they relate to His coming? *That* is the question in preaching and teaching! Moreover, Branch is speculative. For example, she suggests that Jeroboam's wife may have been the victim of domestic abuse by a bullying husband. And she bases this conjecture on his wife's silence! In addition, Branch is influenced by modern scholarship and, although she claims to believe that the Scriptures are God-breathed (5), she is not free from the leaven of unbelieving criticism of the Bible. Why else would she write of the "pro-Davidic editors" of the books of Samuel or "spin-doctors" at work in the chronicling of David's reign? (50, 58).

This is not a book I would recommend. ●

Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat, by James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). Pp. xxviii + 455. $30 (paper). Reviewed by David J. Engelsma

In his own biography of Abraham Kuyper, which served his purpose of introducing Kuyper "to the general reader" (*Abraham Kuyper*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), Frank Vanden Berg acknowledged the fact and expressed the confidence that "the definitive biography of Dr. Abraham Kuyper must still appear, as it undoubtedly will eventually" (301).

With the publication of James D. Bratt's *Abraham Kuyper*, the definitive biography of that great, indeed astonishing, man has appeared.

Bratt is well qualified for the demanding task. He is a highly regarded professor of history at Calvin College. Kuyper is the very atmosphere of Calvin College (that is, the Kuyper of common grace and culture; the Kuyper of particular, sovereign grace is *persona non grata* on

that campus, and has been since the ouster from the Christian Reformed Church of Herman Hoeksema in 1924). Bratt has written or edited other books on Kuyper, Kuyper's writings, and Kuyper's influence in Calvinistic circles, including *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). In addition, Bratt has written a number of articles on Kuyper and various aspects of his thought and activity in magazines and journals. One such article is "In the Shadow of Mt. Kuyper: A Survey of the Field" (*Calvin Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 [April 1996]: 51-66).

Life and Work of a Gifted, Many-Sided Man

All of this research and scholarly and literary ability, Bratt has put to use in this superb biography of one of the truly great and utterly fascinating figures in the Reformed tradition, if not in western civilization.

The book is a thorough account of the life and deeds of a many-sided man. Upon completing his schooling with a doctorate at Leiden University, Kuyper began his career as a pastor in the state church of the Netherlands. Within seven years, he became editor of a daily newspaper. Already deeply involved in Dutch politics, in 1874 Kuyper resigned the ministry for full-time political activity. "Active clergy were prohibited from taking parliamentary posts, so accepting office as politician would entail emeritation as minister. Petitions from his parishioners asked him to stay. A letter from his closest friend at university…told the truth: 'In your whole ecclesiastical bearing and history lies *much* more the statesman than the churchman… There would be something forced, against your nature, if you should decline [election to parliament]'" (62, 63). As a minister of the gospel and, thus, a servant of the church of Jesus Christ, Kuyper ought not to have taken this observation as praise, much less acted upon it.

Kuyper then founded, and himself headed for many years, an increasingly numerous and powerful political party, the Antirevolutionary Party (ARP). The name of the party expressed Kuyper's and his political adherents' rejection of the French Revolution of the 1790s and all its effects in Europe.

In 1880, Kuyper founded a

full-fledged university, the Free University, in Amsterdam. "Free" in the name indicated the freedom of the school of higher learning from the control of both state and church, something unheard of in the Netherlands prior to the founding of the Free. Kuyper then became a professor at the University. He remained at this post until 1901, when Herman Bavinck replaced him, Kuyper having become prime minister of the Netherlands.

Throughout the first half of the 1880s, Kuyper was leading a movement of reform within the state Reformed church, of which he was a member. In fact, Kuyper was an elder in the church in Amsterdam. This movement culminated in a schism in 1886. Kuyper, his allies, and many members of the state church were separated from the state church in a reformation called (by Kuyper) the "*Doleantie*." This Dutch word described Kuyper and those who followed him as "grieving," not only over their deposition (Kuyper himself was deposed from office by the synod of the state church) and ouster, but also over the apostasy in the state church.

In 1892, under Kuyper's direction, the newly formed Reformed denomination united with the existing Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the churches formed by the reformation of 1834 (the "*Afscheiding*," or Secession), to form the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN).

All the while Kuyper was active in church reformation, he was also busy in Dutch politics. Elected to the States General in 1874, when he resigned the gospel ministry, Kuyper became prime minister of the Netherlands in 1901. The victory of his political party in the election of 1901 propelled Kuyper into this lofty office (in comparison with which, however, the office of minister of the gospel is much loftier). Under the queen, it was the most powerful political office in the Netherlands. The victory of his party was possible because of Kuyper's alliance with the party of Roman Catholics.

Bratt judges Kuyper's term in office a success: "Kuyper's term mark(ed) a genuine new era in Dutch political history" (298). A news reporter, apparently unbiased, declared of Kuyper that he was "one of the greatest political figures the Netherlands has ever known" (355).

To Kuyper's chagrin, he

served only one term as political ruler of the Netherlands. The election of 1905 swept him and his party from power. His defeat nearly crushed Kuyper, mentally and emotionally. He recovered by taking a vacation-trip of almost a year on and around the Mediterranean Sea. An ordinary mortal would have been content to enjoy the scenery and historic sites. Kuyper wrote two enormous volumes of his experiences, *Om de Oude Wereldzee* [English: *Around the Old Worldsea*], 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1907). The oversized volumes are not mere descriptions of sites and scenery—a written and pictorial travelogue. But Kuyper related the history of nations and peoples on the shores of that sea of ancient civilization. He also addressed the profound and enduring problems that couched, and still couch, in that part of the world. One chapter is titled, in English translation, "The Jewish Problem." Another bears the title, "The Riddle of Islam."

Throughout his career, or careers, if one distinguishes Kuyper's ecclesiastical and theological ministry from his political efforts, Kuyper published. In addition to editing a daily newspaper, *De Standaard* (English: *The Standard*), which included regular writing for the paper, and writing weekly meditations for another paper, *De Heraut* (English: *The Herald*), Kuyper wrote books. The books were many. Some were large. The contents were varied, from devotional, to doctrinal, to biblical exposition, to historical, to political, to social.

Indeed, this amazingly gifted and disciplined man single-handedly produced a library of books. Much of the library is soundly Reformed theology and biblical exposition. It repays a Reformed minister his labor to learn the Dutch language simply that he is able to read Kuyper's theological writings. I mention only his hundreds of meditations; his book on the covenants (*De Leer der Verbonden*, Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1885); and his four-volume commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, *E Voto Dordraceno: Toelichting op den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1904-1905).

The title of the last work is touching. It is Latin, meaning, "From (in the sense of 'by reason of') the Prayer of Dordt." The Dutch subtitle is, in English: "Explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism." Kuyper himself explains

the title in the foreword to volume one of the commentary. At Dordt, after the adoption of the Canons, the delegates expressed the prayer that the godly doctrine of the Canons would be maintained and defended, uncorrupted, until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In view of the fact that in his day the gold of the Reformed confession had become dim among all nations, by his commentary on the Catechism Kuyper intended that "the full confession of God's free, boundless, and sovereign grace for all peoples [as confessed in the Canons of Dordt] should be proclaimed until the consummation of the world." Thus, the title of the commentary signifies: "In agreement with the wish that was expressed at the Synod of Dordt" (*E Voto*, vol. 1, "*Voorwoord*").

Other worthwhile books of Kuyper have been translated into English. These include *Particular Grace*, translated by Marvin Kamps (Grandville, MI: RFPA, 2001); *When Thou Sittest in Thine House*, translated by John Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929; this book is significant in that it is both a sample of the lovely meditations Kuyper wrote throughout his life and the expression of his high regard for the family); *In the Shadow of Death*, translated by John Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929; repr. Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1994; this book is a collection of Kuyper's meditations for the sick-room and at the death-bed); and another collection of Kuyper's meditations, *To Be Near Unto God*, translated by John De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1918; this book has been "adapted for contemporary Christians" by James C. Schaap under the title, *Near Unto God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997]).

The Reformed minister might profitably read Kuyper's three volumes on common grace also, *De Gemeene Gratie* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1902-1904). But the benefit is only to learn for oneself that the colossus of common grace reared up by the political Kuyper stands on no biblical or creedal foundation. Therefore, the Kuyper adored and slavishly followed by multitudes of "neo-Calvinist," that is, culture-Calvinist, disciples has feet of clay.

On his vacations, for relaxation Kuyper climbed nearly all of the highest mountains in Europe.

This daunting man, his volcanic energy, and all his manifold activities, Bratt has captured in

a "full-scale, well-rounded account of his entire life" (xiv). A particular virtue of the biography is that the author, convinced that "good biography is contextual," provides "as much context as I feasibly can" (xxi). Bratt sets Kuyper in his time, not only in the Netherlands but also in Europe and, indeed, in the world, including Kuyper's reaction to the Boer War in South Africa; examines Kuyper and his thinking in light of his tradition; and relates Kuyper's actions to his thinking.

Good but not Nice

Regarding Kuyper's person, Bratt paints the portrait of Kuyper (as Cromwell once advised an artist) "warts and all" (xxiii). Although Bratt clearly is favorably impressed by Kuyper and equally clearly approves the Kuyper of politics and culture, that is, the Kuyper of common grace (the Kuyper of particular grace, not so much), the biography is not a hagiography.

Bratt's judgment of Kuyper as a person is that Kuyper was "a great man but not a nice one" (xxii). The main criticism of Kuyper by his contemporaries, echoed by Bratt, was that Kuyper sought power and in the seeking of power treated rivals roughly. This was the case especially in the political arena. A long-time friend and ally, Alexander F. de Savornin Lohman, who fell out with Kuyper politically, and suffered for it, charged against Kuyper that "your rhetoric and maneuvers show you to be a true disciple of Robespierre" (232). Bratt observes that "there could be no greater insult in the Groenian heritage" [the reference is to Groen van Prinsterer, whose torch Kuyper was carrying in church and politics] than this lumping of Kuyper with the ruthless French revolutionary (232). It borders on the amusing that Kuyper then "formally inquired of Lohman whether he held any grievance against [Kuyper] that might preclude their taking the Lord's Supper" (236).

Once the political conflict was underway, Kuyper purged Lohman from his professorship at the Free University, completely regardless of former close personal friendship and common membership in the church.

Bratt, while noting opposite virtues in the great man, agrees with the judgment by Kuyper's contemporaries: "ambitious, who sought power"; "drove them [collaborators and disciples] away when they stepped up as equals" (xxii).

The almost worshipful Frank Vanden Berg reluctantly saw the same weaknesses in his hero, although Vanden Berg excused them with appeal to Kuyper's calling: "For the task which he was destined to execute he had to be a forceful, masterful, driving personality" (*Kuyper*, 282, 283).

I frankly confess that the Kuyper of political maneuvers and power and of the forming of worldly culture is little more attractive to me than any other politician or philosopher.

Reformed Theologian and Churchman

But the Kuyper of Reformed theology, church reformation, and biblical exposition is not only attractive, but also an important part of my (Reformed) tradition.

The profound theoretician of the presumptuous, impossible Christianizing of culture, whether in the small Netherlands or in the vast world, pales in comparison with the writer of the meditation in the *Heraut* on the occasion of the death of Kuyper's godly, beloved wife of nearly forty years at the young age of fifty seven.

> There you stood with a broken heart by the deathbed. There lay your deceased, lifeless, inanimate, for all the world as if she had been *swallowed up* by death. Swallowed up—a hard word. Devoured, as if by a beast of prey. All at once, gone: the look of the eye, the sweet words… everything, clean gone…[Yet] God's Word, without in any way discounting the harshness of that reality, turns it around for you [believers in Jesus Christ]. Totally…[For the faithful, the moment of death means that] what is mortal is swallowed up by life (282).

With the significant exception of his novel theory of common grace, Kuyper powerfully confessed, explained, and defended Reformed orthodoxy on behalf of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and to the ends of the world. His book on particular grace, rare and controversial in his day, as also in ours, is a clear and compelling blast of the trumpet concerning salvation by sovereign grace to the glory of God. The book makes plain that the development of Kuyper's theory of common grace into the doctrine of the well-meant offer by the Christian Reformed Church in the first point of its binding doctrine of common grace in 1924 has no backing in Kuyper. In fact, the teaching that in the gospel God is gracious toward all men, sin-

cerely desirous of the salvation of all, and in that universal (saving) grace offering salvation to all is not only a fundamental departure from the Kuyper of particular grace, but also a fatal assault on particular grace as confessed by Kuyper. In the Christian Reformed adoption of the well-meant offer, Kuyper's common grace swallowed up Kuyper's particular grace, as the ill favored kine of Pharaoh's dream devoured the well favored kine.

It is a sad commentary on contemporary Reformed theologians, as well as a warning concerning the evil consequences of Kuyper's invention of a common grace of God, that most Reformed theologians show themselves ignorant, or ignoring, of Kuyper's work on particular grace, whereas they fall over themselves, and each other, to recommend, praise, use, and further develop his works on common grace.

Kuyper's book on the covenants, although not without weaknesses, requiring later correction and further development of the doctrine of the covenant, would be profitable reading for Reformed ministers engaged in the contemporary controversy over the Federal Vision.

And the five, thick volumes (five volumes!) of Kuyper's *Dictaten Dogmatiek* [English: *Dictated Dogmatics*, being the lectures that Kuyper gave to his theological students at the Free University] (Kampen: J. H. Kok; Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst; Grand Rapids: B. Sevensma, 1910) are a huge gold mine of Reformed truth.

The last volume of the dogmatics includes a thorough treatment of eschatology (*Locus de Magistratu, Consummatione Saeculi* [English: *Locus concerning the Magistracy* (and) *the Consummation of the Age*], 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: B. Sevensma, n.d.). After nearly fifty pages laying the foundation of civil government in a common grace of God, Kuyper devotes four hundred pages to as full a treatment of civil government as one will find in any dogmatics. Then follow more than three hundred pages on the doctrine of the last things. Some have identified Kuyper as the Reformed theologian who first coined the term "amillennialism" to describe historic Christian and Reformed orthodox teaching concerning the last days against the fancies and fantasies of both premillennialism and postmillennialism.

Despite his fatal compromis-

ing of the truth by his theory of common grace, Kuyper made the antithesis a reality in the thinking and life of Reformed Christians in a time of unholy ecumenicity, ungodly friendship with unbelievers both in the church and in society, and the promotion of a false national and ecclesiastical oneness with everyone. With good right, another recent biographer of Kuyper has approvingly quoted the description of Kuyper as the "Incarnation of the Antithesis" (James E. McGoldrick, *Abraham Kuyper: God's Renaissance Man*, Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000, 213). An older biographer wrote that "the secret of the power of Dr. Kuyper is found exactly in that which the world condemns the most in him. He proposes the antithesis, and lets it penetrate…" (W. F. A. Winckel, *Leven en Arbeid van Dr. A. Kuyper* [English: *Life and Work of Dr. A. Kuyper*], Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1919, 312; the book is not translated; the translation of the Dutch is mine).

Bratt does justice to Kuyper's emphasis on the antithesis. Kuyper virtually introduced the concept into the thinking and practice of the Dutch Reformed churches and believers in his day.

It is ironic then that, in the judgment of a Roman Catholic observer, it was exactly Kuyper's doctrine of the antithesis that cost Kuyper re-election as prime minister in 1905. Kuyper had made the antithesis the theme of his and his party's campaign. He spoke on the hustings of the "one great contrast…between the Christian and the *modern* life-conception"—an "enormous antithesis." He called the modern life-conception "pagan." The result was an "uproar" on the part of the nominal Christians in the Netherlands, who had supported Kuyper in 1901. "However numerous the Netherlands' nominal Christians, they were allergic to being called heathen in any respect" (321, 322).

Disturbing Religious Weaknesses

Godly, Reformed man that he was, Kuyper nevertheless displayed some surprising and disturbing weaknesses in his own religious life. Early in his (gospel) ministry, but after his conversion to the Reformed faith, Kuyper fell, hook, line, and sinker, for the false doctrine and theatrical antics of Robert Pearsall Smith, the emotional outbursts of Smith's wife, Hannah Whitall, and the tenets of the then popular "holiness movement." Smith promised

perfect holiness and perfect peace in this life on the wings of the Arminian gospel of perfection dependent on the sinner's will ("full surrender to Jesus"). Kuyper even briefly touted the message of the "holiness movement" in his magazines. The gullible Kuyper was disabused of this heresy and folly only by the public scandal of Smith's re-enactment of the union of Christ and His church by Smith's sexual relations with "comely maidens," that is, adultery (97).

Hardly less disturbing is the information that after abandoning the gospel ministry for politics, Kuyper "stopped attending church on a regular basis." When he did attend, he preferred non-Calvinist preachers. Instead of attending church, Kuyper spent his time on Sunday writing his weekly devotional for the paper, *De Heraut* (129). For all his insistence on the church institute and its purity, taking form finally in a movement of reformation, Kuyper himself, evidently, was seriously remiss with regard to honoring the church as the body of Christ and the repository of the means of grace, to say nothing of disobedience to the fourth commandment of the law of God.

Kuyper did lead a movement of church reformation, that split the state church in 1886. Kuyper called this reformation the "*Doleantie*," the *grieving* movement. Noteworthy about this reformation was the emphasis on right church government and order rather than on sound doctrine, although objection to the false doctrines of the state church certainly figured in the reformatory movement. Basic to Kuyper's doctrine of the church, as spelled out in his *Tractaat van de Reformatie der Kerken* [English: *Treatise on the Reformation of the Churches*] (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Zoon, 1884), was the autonomy of the local congregation. Kuyper vigorously opposed the hierarchical power of classes and synods. He became vitriolic in his condemnation of the "administrative apparatus of synodical and classical boards" (152). Undoubtedly, it was under the influence of Kuyper's thinking that a Dutch churchman in the United States in the early 1900s would strike violently with his walking stick as at a snake and exclaim, "Kill the boards!"

Details of the unfolding of the split in the state church are fascinating. On the morning of January 6, 1886 Kuyper himself and several close allies broke

into a strategic church building in Amsterdam. The carpenter in the group sawed through a panel in the locked council room door to gain access to that center of church power and storehouse of vital records, which was, of course, why Kuyper had a carpenter (and his saw!) in the group. Thereupon, at Kuyper's direction, club-carrying students of the Free University guarded the premises the rest of the year.

The spread of the "*Doleantie*" throughout the Netherlands often involved, or threatened, physical violence. Police protection of the combatants was often necessary.

A synod of the state church upheld the deposition of Kuyper from his office of elder in the Amsterdam church.

The civil courts awarded most, if not all, of the church properties in the conflict to the state church.

In the end, only a relatively few churches and few members of the state church left for the new Reformed denomination of Kuyper. Bratt reports that only "150 out of the national church's 1, 350 congregations" and only "one in seven of Amsterdam's church members" followed Kuyper in the "*Doleantie*" (162).

Of this work of church reformation, Bratt writes that "his [Kuyper's] church reform proved to be the greatest disappointment of his life" (150).

Kuyper soon accomplished the union of his new denomination with the existing denomination formed by the Secession of 1834. The union took place in 1892. The union formed the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN—the initials of the name in Dutch). This is the denomination that recently renounced the Reformed faith altogether by its reuniting with the apostate, state Reformed church out of which Kuyper (as servant of Jesus Christ) brought the denomination in 1886.

Critique of Common Grace

The Protestant Reformed reader of the biography will be, and every Reformed reader ought to be, especially interested in Bratt's treatment of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. Bratt recognizes the dominating place of common grace, not only in Kuyper's political ambitions and actions, but also for what Kuyper proposed as a main, if not *the* main, calling of the church and its members: the redeeming of the world by the Christianizing of the nations and their culture.

Although he is by no means a critic of Kuyperian common grace (an understatement), James Bratt is a rare Christian Reformed appraiser of the theory. The typical Christian Reformed presentation of Kuyperian common grace is that that sacred cow was birthed on Mt. Sinai, if not Mt. Zion, by the Holy Spirit generating the doctrine from the inspired mind of Abraham Kuyper, out of the purest theological and religious motives, having its ancestry in the Reformed tradition in an unbroken line of holy, formidable, theological bulls going back to Calvin himself.

Bratt is an honest historian. Kuyper stressed and developed his theory of common grace precisely at that time in his life and career when he was engaged in obtaining political power. He very much needed a doctrine of common grace to ground his political alliance with the Roman Catholics and with other non-Reformed, even non-Christian, cohorts.

> The timing [of Kuyper's development of the theory of common grace] is clear enough. Although Kuyper sounded these themes from the very start of his career…he brought them into sharp focus in the decade 1887-98…just when the road to the political promised land opened up… [This decade] saw Kuyper at his most progressive, certainly at his shortest patience with conservatives in church and state (194, 195).
>
> Kuyper's work on common grace bore obvious connections with his rising political career…from September 1895, soon after he had reentered Parliament, until July 1901, when he was forming the cabinet…The reason is plain enough. Faith-based politics requires some common ground with people of fundamentally different convictions…(197, 198).

So far from being a prominent doctrine in Calvin and in the Reformed tradition, Kuyperian common grace was "a dramatic new line in Reformed theology." Although Kuyper claimed to find the "seed" of common grace "in some words of Calvin," the "'manifestation' [of a doctrine of common grace] he [Kuyper] elaborated much further than any predecessor had ever tried. It was the linchpin to his theology of culture, and the subject to which he turned his attention after long struggles over the church" (192, 193).

According to Bratt, the doctrine of common grace was one of "two key theological *innovations*" on the part of Kuyper (194; the emphasis is mine—DJE).

Of Kuyper's understanding of history in light of his theory of common grace, Bratt remarks that Kuyper's "reading of history owed more to Hegel than to Scripture" (200).

Rightly, Bratt exposes Kuyper's optimistic prophecy of "greater glories to come in the twentieth century" by virtue of the wonder-working power of common grace in nations and societies. "Bitterly ironic as those predictions seem today," writes Bratt (199). The horrors of WW I and WW II, of Nazi Germany, and of the totalitarian regimes of Stalin and Mao did not betoken an advance in the Christianizing of the world by any grace of God. Nor, for that matter, did the Netherlands become more Christian, or even more moral, in the past century. Let the devotee of common grace take a leisurely stroll through Amsterdam, the center of Kuyper's culture forming project.

On the contrary, as one staring himself blind at the developments in nations and societies through the spectacles of a common grace of God never sees, the twentieth century and now the beginning of the twenty-first century, with its cold-blooded murder of millions of unborn, partially born, and newly born and with its precipitous descent into the deepest depths of the degradation of sodomy and lesbianism, display the judgment of God upon the nations and societies—a judgment of just wrath, the very opposite of Kuyper's common grace.

If Kuyper's common grace reading of history seems speculative and, therefore, irrelevant to the life of the Reformed believer, this is definitely not the case regarding another application of Kuyper's common grace. Kuyper highly esteemed and praised brilliant pagan and antichristian thinkers as alleged beneficiaries of common grace. Bratt quotes Kuyper:

> The names of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have constantly been honored by Christian thinkers…[It is an] undeniable fact that…Kant and Darwin shone [as] stars of the first magnitude, geniuses of the highest degree, who uttered the most profound thoughts even though they were not confessing Christians (201, 202).

Inevitably, the effect of this estimation of heathen thinkers was the acceptance of their unbelieving theories, to the undermining and corrupting of biblical, Reformed truth.

At a time when one Reformed church and one Reformed school after another, enthusiasts for common grace, all, are abandoning the biblical doctrine of creation for Darwinian evolutionary theory, it is especially Kuyper's positive estimation of Charles Darwin that begs for attention. Under the influence of his own theory of common grace, Kuyper

> did not insist on literalistic readings of the relevant biblical passages, nor quail at the prospect of a very old earth and resort to fantasies [*sic*] about Flood geology. More controversially, then and now, he did not balk at the transmutation of species or at the "spontaneous unfolding of the species in organic life from the cytode or nuclear cell."

Bratt continues: "Kuyper accorded Darwinian science considerable merit in its own right" (284, 285).

With specific regard to the issue of biblical creation versus Darwinian evolutionary theory, common grace trumped the antithesis, as it always does.

I doubt that there is a single Christian school in North America, grade school, high school, or college, the thinking and staff of which are influenced by Kuyper's theory of common grace that teaches the biblical doctrine of creation. All contradict the account of Genesis 1 and 2 with Darwinian evolutionary theory. That they allow God to have begun the evolutionary process, which posits humans as developed apes, rather than made by God in His own image, does not overturn this judgment.

Bratt is obviously delighted with Kuyper's high regard for Darwin and with Kuyper's concessions to evolutionary theory. Bratt, like Kuyper himself, is evidently not impressed by "Darwin's maxim": "It early became a maxim with Darwin that those who went a little way toward his doctrine would eventually go much farther, and that those who went a great way, would eventually become converts" (William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, & Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution*, New York: Time, 1963, 174). "Converts" to the doctrine of Darwin are atheists.

Those in Reformed churches at the beginning of the twenty-first century who are troubled by the acceptance and teaching of basic elements of evolutionary theory in their circles, especially in their nominally Christian schools, will likely locate the origins of the heresies in Abraham Kuyper and the doctrine of a common grace of God.

Kuyper and the PRC

But I close this long review (which the worth of the book and the importance of its subject warrant) with a call to the Protestant Reformed Churches and their theologians (which include the ministers).

Even though the Protestant Reformed Churches reject Kuyper's theory of common grace, root and branch, these churches are deeply indebted to Abraham Kuyper. This, I am convinced, is due both to the powerful influence of Kuyper on the circles, church and other, in which Herman Hoeksema was born and raised in the Netherlands and in which he moved during his education in North America, and to his own deliberate embrace of many, though not all, of Kuyper's doctrines. I do not say that Hoeksema simply adopted Kuyper's teachings. Hoeksema was himself far too gifted and far too much his own man to do this. Many of Kuyper's teachings, he purified of weakness and error. The doctrine of the covenant is an instance. Others, Hoeksema significantly developed. But Hoeksema built on the theology of Kuyper.

I have long regretted that Hoeksema seldom indicated his debt to Kuyper, indeed his debt to anyone in the Reformed tradition. Mostly, his references to Kuyper are critical, especially, and understandably, regarding Kuyper's theory of common grace.

But the dependence of Hoeksema and, therefore, of the Protestant Reformed Churches upon Kuyper jumps off the pages of Bratt's book. To mention only some of the specific teachings of Kuyper, Kuyper strongly emphasized predestination as the source and cause of salvation. In particular, for Kuyper election governs the covenant, as the source and cause of covenant grace and salvation. "He [Kuyper] insisted that election and covenant were not separate topics at all, but two sides of the same work of God that always needed to be treated together: 'The *Covenant of Grace* is the glorious channel through

which the water of life flows to us from the depths of *election*'" (180; the quotation within the quotation is Kuyper's own statement of the relation of covenant and election).

Bratt takes note of Kuyper's emphasis on predestination, although Bratt himself has little, if any, appreciation of this emphasis. With reference to Kuyper's book, *Particular Grace*, Bratt speaks dismissively of "the speculative abstractions of decretal theology" and of the "classical conundrums of Calvinism" (180).

Despite the infralapsarian creeds, Kuyper was an avowed supralapsarian with regard to the order of the decrees.

Kuyper was the theologian of the antithesis. The truth of the antithesis, as much as any of his teachings, was the doctrine for which Kuyper was known in the Netherlands in his own time.

Kuyper vigorously taught immediate regeneration in opposition to the mediate regeneration that was dear to the hearts of many of his colleagues. So sharp did the controversy over this issue become that a synod had to address the matter—the Synod of Utrecht, in 1905.

Yet another distinctive doctrine that Kuyper advanced in his own sphere in his own time concerned, not only the theology of the church, but also practical church polity. Kuyper vehemently insisted on the autonomy of the local congregation. That the local congregation is the (instituted) church of Christ meant for Kuyper a certain, definite disparagement of the broader assemblies.

> Kuyper's core principle: the essence of the church was present fully and sufficiently in the local congregation, bound by the Word of God. Any broader bands of affiliation that the congregation wished to make were of a voluntary, federative nature…Synods and classes did not constitute the church, of which congregations were then but local chapters; just the opposite. Furthermore, only by being freed of the synodical apparatus of boards and commissions that had been superimposed upon them could the faithful be re-opened to the power of the Holy Spirit flowing from their Lord (151).

Especially in the early days of his ministry in the Christian Reformed Church and then in the newly formed Protestant Reformed Churches, Hoeksema

expressed a similar disparagement of the broader assembles and their authority. Granted, that for both Kuyper and Herman Hoeksema this disparagement of the denominational federation was due, in large part, to the struggle for church reformation in which both were engaged, as well as to the hierarchical treatment of themselves by classes and synods. Whatever weakness concerning the authority of the broader assembles there may have been in Hoeksema's thinking was corrected by the history of the schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1950s. Without the loss or compromise of the principle of the autonomy of the local congregation, there came to be a recognition of the rightful, and healthy, if strictly regulated, authority of the major assemblies.

Like Kuyper, Hoeksema was an ardent advocate of eternal justification, in a tradition that contained many notable theologians who denied eternal justification. In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Kuyper spoke of "justification, as grounded *in God's eternal counsel*…entirely independent of what we do or allow, yes, in a certain sense independent even of the sacrifice of the holy Lamb of God" (*E Voto*, vol. 1, 478).

In my reading of Kuyper's commentary on the Catechism, early in my ministry, as I made my way through the Catechism a second time (having read Hoeksema's commentary in connection with my first series on the Catechism), I was struck by the distinct similarity of Hoeksema's exposition to that of Kuyper. The similarity was never that of dishonorable plagiarism. It was the similarity of theological influence.

To specify no other teaching, Kuyper was a champion of the Christian school. For this, he was maligned by many in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands who did not share his zeal for Christian schools. Kuyper's main legislative accomplishment as prime minister was to achieve legal and academic standing for the Christian schools (and some financial support from the state).

It is likely that the name of Kuyper's paper, *De Standaard*, influenced Hoeksema's choice of the name for his magazine, the *Standard Bearer*.

It is one of the ironies of church history that the Christian Reformed Church is permitted by the Reformed community of

churches to present itself as the outstanding representative of the theology of Abraham Kuyper, as Kuyperian, despite its rejection of almost everything Kuyper taught concerning the theology of the Reformed faith, simply because it champions the one Kuyperian doctrine of common grace, which for Kuyper was not so much ecclesiastical as political and cultural. The Protestant Reformed Churches, on the other hand, are despised and rejected by the Reformed community of churches as non-Kuyperian (the preferred slander is "hyper-Calvinist") simply because they reject Kuyper's cultural doctrine of common grace, despite the fact that the Protestant Reformed zealously maintain and boldly confess virtually all of Kuyper's theology as sound, Reformed doctrine. As the current slang would put the matter: "Go figure!"

Because of Kuyper's strong influence on us Protestant Reformed, we ought to be thoroughly conversant with Kuyper's theology. This requires wide, and penetrating, reading in Kuyper—*critical* reading, but reading that is deeply appreciative of Kuyper's zeal for the glory of God in His sovereignty, especially in salvation.

The main reason why Abraham Kuyper *the theologian* is widely scorned by Reformed theologians and churches today, both in the Netherlands and in North America (and all the praise of Kuyper, and attention paid to him, today in prominent Reformed and Presbyterian circles must not blind us to the reality that these same circles detest the Reformed theology of Kuyper), is his confession of the sovereignty of the grace of God, originating in the double decree of predestination. As a renowned Dutch theologian in what was then the GKN—Kuyper's churches—superciliously remarked to me about Hoeksema at a conference in Chicago years ago, "*een beetje te decretal*" [English: "a little too decretal," by which was meant, in fact: "*much* too decretal, simply because it is decretal at all"]. The dismissive Dutch theologian was oblivious, apparently, to the fact that his criticism of Herman Hoeksema fell also on "father Abraham [Kuyper]."

It would be a mistake for the Protestant Reformed Churches simply to write Kuyper off, because of our rejection of his theory of common grace.

If one of our younger men ever has the opportunity to obtain

a doctorate, perhaps in connection with his appointment to the seminary, my advice concerning his dissertation would be the theology of Abraham Kuyper, or some prominent aspect of Kuyper's theology (emphatically, other than the doctrine of common grace).

●

Getting the Old Testament, What It Meant to Them, What It Means for Us. Steven L. Bridge. Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA: 2009. Paperback, 218 pp. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown].

A better title for this book would be *Destroying the Old Testament*. Steven Bridge, Professor of Theology at (Roman Catholic) St. Joseph's College, Maine, systematically denies the inspiration— and thus the authority—of the Creation account, the Flood account, the account of Abraham, the Torah, the prophets (especially Jonah and Daniel), Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

This book offers the old liberal scholarship of Old Testament studies dressed up in the modern garb of pop culture. He even begins with a story from the popular cartoon *The Simpsons*! Genesis, according to Bridge, was written in the Babylonian exile (18), chapters two and three of Genesis are supposedly contradictory, and the six day creation is merely a mnemonic device that "enabled the tradition to survive" (23). The author of Genesis (whoever he was, it was certainly not Moses) leaned heavily on Babylonian myths, *Enuma Elish* and the *Gilgamesh* epic (20, 45). The apostle Paul is dismissed as ignorant of modern scholarship: "The modern methods of biblical scholarship were not available to Paul in the first cent. C.E. Therefore, we ought not expect him to interpret the OT critically" (33).

Bridge calls the Flood "a deeply disturbing account of 'panicide' (the murder of all)" and contends that the character Noah was invented to be a righteous man deserving of salvation to reconcile the destroyer god with the sympathetic god—supposedly there are two different traditions which are combined rather clumsily in the Genesis account! In other words, Genesis was written by several men, whose contra-

dictory theologies were cobbled together by sloppy editors (38, 49-50).

For Bridge the history of Jonah is a myth, the book of Daniel was written after the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, whose persecutions it describes, and Job was probably written by a "northern refugee seeking to solicit compassion from the self righteous Judahites in the aftermath of Israel's destruction (177).

This is truly a dreadful and dangerous, book! Its danger lies in this: it takes some of the incredibly dull theories of unbelieving higher critical scholarship (usually buried in dusty tomes in university libraries) and makes them accessible to the youth. I would prefer that heretical books were dull. Alas, Bridge's writing style is engaging, and even fun (in service of the lie!), and I can well imagine that he is a good communicator to his students.

Remember the millstone of Luke 17:2!

Prof. Bridge has also written *Getting the Gospels: Understanding the New Testament Accounts of Jesus' Life*.

Avoid these books. ●

Reformed and Charismatic Issues and Resolutions. Ean Carlin. Scholar's Heart Press: St. George, UT: n.d. Paperback, 109 pp. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown].

Dr. Carlin makes the grandiose claim to be "a contributing author for the Next-Wave Reformation movement"(7) a movement which supposedly reconciles Reformed theology with Charismaticism. This is a movement within modern Evangelicalism which holds to the perpetuity of the Charismatic gifts in some form. If this book is an example of the caliber of scholarship from this movement, we in the Reformed Cessationist camp have nothing to fear.

While Carlin distances himself from many of the claims of modern Charismaticism, he insists that prophecy, tongues and other miracles continue to be performed by men in the post-apostolic age. He attempts to prove this point exegetically, but Carlin's exegesis is unconvincing.

Carlin's contribution to the debate concerning the (Charismatic notion) of a (post conversion) "Baptism of the Holy Spirit"

is to distinguish between baptism *by* the Holy Spirit and baptism *with* the Holy Spirit. He does this, first, because the term "baptism *of* the Holy Spirit" is both misleading and absent from Scripture. He does this, second, because of the different prepositions in English. Overlooked by Carlin, however, is the fact that there is no differentiation of prepositions in the Greek, the preposition *en* [in] being used in both cases (Matt. 3:11; I Cor. 12:13). Therefore, Carlin's contrived distinction does not provide the clarity which he promises. Carlin argues (correctly) that I Corinthians 12:13 ("For *by* one Spirit are we all baptised into one body...") describes regeneration, which is the Spirit's gift to all Christians, not an experience subsequent to conversion enjoyed by only some believers. He calls this "baptism *by* the Spirit." Carlin argues (incorrectly) that Matthew 3:11 ("he shall baptise you *with* the Holy Ghost, and with fire") is an experience subsequent to conversion enjoyed by only some believers which empowers them for ministry (19; see Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9). He further argues that this "baptism with the Spirit" is the same as being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

On that last point, we should explain that "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) is a command to all believers ("keep on being filled with the Spirit") and it refers not to extraordinary empowerment to do miracles, speak in tongues or prophesy, but to the ordinary spiritual activities of singing (v. 19), giving thanks (v. 20) and mutual submission (v. 21). The parallel passage (Col. 3:16-17) explains that being filled with the Spirit is to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." It has nothing to do with so-called Charismatic or Pentecostal gifts. It is true that some who were filled with the Spirit were emboldened to preach or even to do miracles, but the performing of miracles was limited to apostles. In fact, in the Acts of the Apostles the only miracles recorded were performed either by the apostles or by those closely associated with the apostles (see Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6; 9:17, 34, 40; 14:3, 10; 19:11; 28:5, 8-9). No wonder, Paul can speak of "the signs of an apostle" (II Cor. 12:12). If everyone in the apostolic church performed miracles, how can they have been the signs *of an apostle*? Surely they would be the signs *of a Christian*!

Carlin believes that he has refuted Cessationism in his exegesis

of I Corinthians 13:10 ("But when that which is perfect is come..."). Carlin believes that, if he can prove that "that which is perfect" is not the New Testament canon of Scripture but the perfection of heaven, the Cessationist will have to admit defeat. But Cessationism does not at all depend on the "completed canon" view of I Corinthians 13:10. There are some Cessationists who hold to the "completed canon" view and others who hold to the "perfection of heaven" view. There is freedom of exegesis here, and the issue is not decisive. Paul is simply stating a principle—the imperfect or incomplete makes way for the perfect or complete. Paul says that prophecies shall fail and tongues will cease (v. 8), but he does not state when that shall be. That must be discerned from other Scriptures. Furthermore, Carlin is incorrect in his claim that "[Paul] does specifically say that the gifts will cease at the return of Christ. What this means is that the gifts will continue in the Church until that time" (35). This is false and a misreading of Paul.

Carlin's second argument against Cessationism is from Joel 2 (Acts 2). The prophesying promised by Joel is fulfilled in the last days, a period comprising the entire New Testament age. Carlin's "inevitable" conclusion? "The perpetuity of the gifts is inextricably linked to the proclamation of the Gospel. As long as the offer of the gospel is valid, the gifts are valid" (34). However, that is (ignoring the gospel "offer" error for a moment) not at all what Peter is teaching in Acts 2. Joel was promising (using the language of Old Testament typology about prophesying, visions and dreams) that in the New Testament age the church will be a kingdom of priests and prophets from all nations (see Heb. 1:1-2; I Peter 2:9; Eph. 2:11-22, etc.). Joel contrasts the promised outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh with the trickle of the Spirit in the Old Testament, which was limited to one nation and to a few special officebearers in Israel. Peter announces that the day promised by Joel has come as evidenced by the prophesying of believers in different languages. Just as the moon turning to blood, etc. does not happen throughout the New Testament age, so the prophesying and dreams do not need to happen throughout the New Testament age for Joel's prophecy to be fulfilled.

And those are really the only arguments for Continuationism

which Carlin offers—nothing new.

Chapter 3 deals with gifts, distinguishing them from talents. "A talent is [a] skill one possesses and can be exercised without extraordinary supernatural help" (42). "A talent becomes a gift when the talent is supernaturally charged by the Spirit for a particular exercise of that talent" (43). Carlin here makes some good observations on the "greater works" of John 14:12)—conversions not miracles. Carlin's definition or explanation of gifts vs. talents, however, does not explain miracles, prophecy and tongues—surely no one has a natural talent for these things which can then be "supernaturally charged" to make the talent a gift!

In chapter 4, Carlin addresses *Sola Scriptura* vs. continuing prophecy. It is true that much of what the prophets, apostles and Jesus said was never recorded—"non-canonical" prophecy (55)—but Carlin leaps from this to non-canonical *fallible* prophecy! (55). Why must prophecy be judged (I Cor. 14:29)? Because not everything which is claimed as prophecy *is* prophecy! Even infallible apostolic prophecy is to be judged—by Scripture itself (Acts 17:11). To his credit, Carlin also recognizes the foundational, non-repeatable office of apostle means that no one can be an apostle today (59). If only he took that one step further and recognized that the gifts (prophecy, tongues, miracles, etc.) are inextricably linked to the apostolic office and therefore have passed away (II Cor. 12:12).

Chapters 5-6 address the subject of tongues. These chapters are actually quite good—and problematic for the Charismatic position. One wonders, however, after reading this chapter, what the point of tongues is. For example, Carlin rejects the notion that tongues in Scripture are a heavenly language and that tongues should be sought and expected by all Christians. He defines the gift thus: "Tongues is the ability to speak in another language (more than likely a human language) previously unlearned by the person speaking it" (95). Carlin admits that "the Bible does not give us an exhaustive explanation of the purposes of this gift" (98). Perhaps that is because the gift was meant to be a temporary bestowment on the church?

Sadly, the book is seriously marred by Carlin's writing style. This book is filled with errors, which are very irritating for the

reader. A proof reader or editor could have improved the book immensely, and probably halved its length. The time-consuming and tedious work of proofing is necessary before one sends a manuscript to the publisher. If the reader can get past those obvious flaws, he will find some decent exegetical points here and there. However, the grandiose claims, that Dr. Carlin is a contributing author for the Next-Wave Reformation movement, leave this reviewer decidedly *unimpressed*. ●

From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective, ed. David Gibson & Jonathan Gibson, foreword by J. I. Packer. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013. Pp. 703 ($50). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This huge, heavy, and handsome tome is not for the faint of heart. In size (700 pages), heft, meticulous exegesis, thorough examination of church history, and profound theology, to say nothing of the price, the book is daunting. The worth of the volume, however, amply repays the purchase, the reading, and the labor of thinking into the book's contents, not only to the theologian, but also to the pastor, indeed, to the Reformed layman who is willing to exert himself.

The book is a collection of essays explaining, defending, and applying the doctrine that Jesus Christ died for the elect alone, not for all humans without exception. The book contends that this doctrine should be known as "definite atonement," rather than as "limited atonement," regardless of the havoc this naming of the middle truth of the five points of Calvinism wreaks on the mnemonic TULIP (15, 16).

The Death of Christ for Infants Overlooked

Most of the contributors are Reformed or Presbyterian theologians. Some are Baptists, which raises questions about the thoroughness, if not the soundness, of the book's theology concerning the extent of the death of Christ. Certainly, it is fundamental to the Reformed doctrine of the atonement that Christ died, not only for the elect adults, but also for

the elect infants of believing parents. This is the clear, powerful implication of infant baptism, as the Reformed Form for the Administration of Baptism explicitly declares. In baptism, which is administered to the infants of believers, the Son seals unto the infants that He washes them in His blood from all their sins, incorporating them into the fellowship of His death and resurrection.

The prayer of the Form thanks God that "Thou hast forgiven us *and our children* [whose baptism is in view] all our sins through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ."

That the infant children of believers are included among those for whom Christ died, in their infancy, is confessional for Reformed Christians. Lord's Day 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism, in explanation of infant baptism, states that "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ…is promised to" the infants, "no less than to the adult."

Against the detestable error of the Anabaptists, that is, Baptists, Article 34 of the Belgic Confession states that "Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for adult persons."

By including Baptists among the defenders of definite atonement, as well as by the omission of any explicit, ringing defense of Christ's death for the infants of believers, signified by infant baptism, the book seriously impoverishes the Reformed doctrine of the atonement.

A Monumental Apology on behalf of a Challenged Truth

Despite this weakness, the book is a monumental apology for limited, or definite, atonement at a time when the theory of universal atonement prevails in most churches, and increasingly makes inroads into Reformed and Presbyterian churches. One needs only to think of the introduction of universal atonement into nominally Calvinistic churches by the heresy of the Federal Vision, recently, and into the Christian Reformed Church, some years ago, by one of its professors of theology on the basis of that church's adoption of the well-meant offer of the gospel.

The scope of the book's defense is broad: definite atonement in church history; in the Bible; in theological perspective; and in pastoral practice.

The positive explanation of the atoning death of Christ is rich and sound. "Atonement…was bound by covenant and election"

(234). "Covenant and election circumscribed atonement" (235).

The necessity of the atonement was the holiness of God. Sin is not a "pity." It is an offence to the holy God (254).

The atonement of the cross is not limited only at the point of its application to the sinner. It is limited by the purpose of God and by its very nature, which was substitutionary.

In such passages as the description of God's "delight" in the crushing of the Savior by God Himself, the book is moving as well as instructive and edifying (255).

The chapter on "The Atoning Work of Isaiah's Suffering Servant" by J. Alec Motyer is brilliant. Motyer asserts, and proves from Isaiah, that the atonement itself accomplishes the faith that knows and trusts in the atonement, and by which faith the elect sinner is saved by the atonement (261). This, against the Arminian heresy that the atonement depends for its efficacy on a faith that the sinner himself must, and is able to, produce.

Jonathan Gibson explains rightly the passages speaking of "all" and the "world" as objects of the atonement, passages to which advocates of universal atonement appeal (289ff.). For instance, the "all" in II Corinthians 5:14, 15 for whom Christ died are "all people without distinction—not the whole of humankind" (302, 305). Gibson demonstrates that this is the only "consistent position to take exegetically and theologically" (305).

With painstakingly careful exegesis of critically important passages of Scripture, some of which are not commonly recognized in the controversy over the extent of the atonement, Gibson shows that "Scripture testifies to the harmony of purpose within the triune Godhead" (364). The Father elected, the Son redeemed, and the Spirit regenerates and sanctifies the same persons. The heresy of universal atonement throws the apple of discord into the Trinity. According to universal atonement, the Father, in some sense or other (usually on the basis of His foreknowledge concerning those who would fulfill the condition of believing), elected only some humans unto salvation; the Son, however, redeemed all, or made redemption possible for all; and the Spirit fails to save all, but saves only some.

Garry J. Williams penetrates to the core of the controversy over

the atonement between defenders of definite atonement and advocates of universal atonement, as well as to the very heart of the gospel of definite atonement. Scripture teaches that the cross was "penal substitutionary atonement." But the cross was, and only could be, penal substitutionary atonement as *definite* atonement. "Christ bore the punishment for the specific sin and sins of particular persons" (480). This is the issue! The implication for the doctrine of universal atonement follows: "The case against an indefinite atonement can be avoided only by universalism or by sacrificing the biblical doctrine of penal substitution" (481).

By close, conclusive argumentation, Williams demonstrates that "for substitutionary suffering to be punishment, it must itself answer actual sins committed by actual people" (508). The implication, against universal atonement, is that denial of definite atonement necessarily is denial of the "truly penal character" of the cross (508). And if Christ's death was not penal, that is, punishment suffered in the place of others, it was worthless. This is the death of Christ in the theology of universal atonement.

Polemical

No small benefit of the book's defense of definite atonement, or small space in the volume, is its polemics. The book takes aim at, and demolishes, all forms of universal atonement—Arminianism, Amyraldianism, and hypothetical universalism. All these heresies have in common the teaching that Christ died for all humans without exception. Some are more deceptive than others. But all root themselves in a saving love of God for all humans. All differentiate Christ's purpose in His death (the salvation of all) and what His death accomplished (making salvation possible for all) from the effect of His death (actually saving only some, not all). All forms of universal atonement, other than that which teaches universal salvation, agree that the grace of God is conditional.

And all forms of universal atonement rave against the truth of definite, particular atonement as did Cameron, the father of universalistic Amyraldianism: "narrowness, intolerance, and despotism" (169). Those (few) Reformed churches similarly slandered today for their confession of particular grace grounded in the definite atonement of the cross may take courage from

Cameron's ravings. They find themselves in good company: "Reformed orthodoxy" (169).

Donald Macleod gives a clarifying account of Amyraut and hypothetical universalism (422ff). Against these and other forms of universal atonement, Macleod affirms that "God has one plan of salvation, in which the three divine persons agree together to save a vast multitude of named human beings." Also: "Christ came to save: not to make salvation possible…but actually to save" (434).

Against the Lutheran confession of universal atonement, as well as other forms of the heresy, Garry Williams points out that these theories of the atonement teach that men are damned for not believing in Jesus, who died for them (513). In addition to the obvious error of "double punishment," that is, the teaching that men's sins are punished twice—once in Jesus and again in themselves—universal atonement is open to the charge that Jesus did not die for the sin of unbelief (if Jesus died for the sin of unbelief, no unbeliever can justly be punished for his unbelief, unless God punishes this sin twice). This limits "the sins for which Christ died" (513).

Yet another serious error of Amyraldian and hypothetical universalism is that it denies an essential aspect of the priestly work of Christ. A priest both provides the sacrifice and applies the sacrifice to the people for whom the sacrifice was offered. But according to universal atonement, the great high priest only offered the sacrifice. He fails to *apply* the sacrifice. Therefore, His sacrifice fails to accomplish salvation. The application of the sacrifice and the accomplishment of salvation are the acts of the sinner himself. Because of the failure of the high priest to apply the sacrifice, in many instances the sacrifice itself proves to be unavailing (527).

Adding spice to the doctrine and polemics of the book are the occasional lovely quotations. Jonathan Gibson quotes Octavius Winslow: "Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy—but the Father, for love!" (341)

Deservedly receiving high praise, and repeated mention, throughout the book, is Jonathan Moore's outstanding study of hypothetical universalism, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

Dubious Defenders of the Faith: Blocher

Why Henri A. G. Blocher is included among the defenders of definite atonement is puzzling. Blocher denies the historicity of the account of the fall of the human race in Adam, as recorded in Genesis 1-3. See his book, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), especially the "Appendix: Scientific Hypotheses and the beginning of Genesis" (213-231). In his later book, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Blocher reflects on Genesis 1-4 "as a whole": "Permissible… not to identify the narrative with straightforward, ordinary history, and to look for another historical genre: that of a well-crafted, childlike drawing of the far-distant past, with illustrative and typological interests uppermost" (41). Without an actual, historical fall of a real head of the race, the disobedience of Adam as revealed in Genesis 3, the death of Jesus Christ has no significance whatever, as Romans 5:12-21 makes plain.

Blocher himself discloses his fatal weakness concerning the fundamental gospel-truth of the death of Christ for the elect only—the truth that he is supposed to be defending in the book. Blocher views the truth of the definite atonement and the controversy between definite atonement and universal atonement as merely a "secondary" matter. He advocates "Christian forbearance" regarding the heresy of universal atonement (541).

This estimation of the truth of the atonement and this judgment of the controversy between definite atonement and universal atonement render the large volume to which Blocher contributes an exercise in futility. Why expend such a massive study and so much scholarly labor on a matter that is merely "secondary"?

The Canons of Dordt do not share Blocher's estimation of the issue that is the content of *From Heaven He Came*. Exactly with reference to the doctrine of universal atonement, as taught by the Arminians, the Canons charge the "bring[ing] again out of hell the Pelagian error" (Canons, II, Rejection of Errors 3). Such was the deliberate lack of "Christian forbearance" on the part of the Dordt synod that it saw to the discipline of the teachers of universal atonement and, with the help of the government, their ouster from the country. "Christian forbear-

ance" of the heresy of universal atonement would have been then, and is today, lack of Christian love for God, the gospel, and the church.

Dubious Defenders of the Faith: the Offer-Men

Running through the entire volume like a discordant note in an otherwise beautiful symphony, for which disharmony almost all the contributors are responsible, is a fundamental weakness. The weakness consists of a fatal concession to the advocates of universal atonement. The concession is the acknowledgment of a "well-meant offer of salvation" on the part of God in Jesus Christ to all humans without exception. This concession is not simply an error. It is an Achilles heel in the otherwise impervious defense of the cardinal truth of definite atonement against the heresy of universal atonement.

Again and again, one after another, the would-be defenders of the faith of the atonement concede to the enemy a "well-meant offer of salvation" by God Himself to all humans who hear the gospel.

What is meant by the "well-meant offer" is not a universal call to all to repent and believe, with the promise that all who heed the call will be saved and will be assured that Christ died for them. This is not a "well-meant offer," but an unfeigned call, a true declaration of what pleases God, a serious command. This is biblical and Reformed orthodoxy (Matt. 22:1-14; Canons of Dordt, II, 5; III/IV, 8).

But most of the contributors concede, and even vigorously defend, that God loves all humans with the love that sent Christ to the cross; that God desires the salvation of all without exception—a salvation based on the death of Christ; and that God in the gospel well-meaningly, graciously, offers salvation to all hearers on the basis of the atonement of the cross.

This doctrine of a "well-meant offer" has led to the adoption of universal atonement by Reformed and Presbyterian theologians and churches, as all the learned contributors know very well. All know of the open advocacy of universal atonement by the Christian Reformed theologian, Harold Dekker, and of the approval of his doctrine of universal atonement by the Christian Reformed Church in the 1960s *on the basis of the "well-meant offer."*

The development of doctrine is plain. The argument is conclusive. If God loves and desires

to save all, He *had* to have given Jesus as the sacrifice for all. A love of God for all and a desire (will) of God to save all *demand* universal atonement.

The doctrine of a "well-meant offer" does not only inevitably *lead to* the denial of definite atonement. It *is* the denial of definite atonement. The saving love of God and the sincere desire for the salvation of sinners are revealed in the cross of Christ. If God's love is universal and if His desire is the salvation of all, Christ died for all.

That the doctrine of a "well-meant offer" *is*, in fact, the denial of definite atonement and that the "well-meant offer" will, inevitably, lead to the open confession of universal atonement are evident from the appeal by the advocates of the "well-meant offer," in support of this doctrine, to John 3:16. The love of God of John 3:16 and the will of God for the salvation of sinners of John 3:16 are expressed in the giving of the only begotten Son to the death of the cross: "God so loved the world, *that he gave his only begotten Son*." If the love of God of the text and the desire of God for the salvation of sinners in the text are universal, so also is the atonement of the cross universal.

The editors of the book themselves introduce into the book this fatal weakness, this Achilles heel, in their introductory essay. They deny that the love of God in John 3:16 "refers to his love for the elect." Explaining the love of God in John 3:16 in the light of their own notion of "the universal offer of Christ to all," they necessarily open the way to viewing the giving of the Son in John 3:16 as a giving for the salvation of all, that is, as universal atonement (40).

Dubious Defenders of the Faith: Schreiner and Blocher

Typical of the weakness in the matter of the "well-meant offer" that runs through the entire book are the remarks of Thomas Schreiner. "God desires [all] to be saved" (386). This is Schreiner's explanation of I Timothy 4:10. In His universal love, "God desires [all] people to be saved." This is Schreiner's explanation of I Timothy 2:3, 4 and of Ezekiel 18:32 (386). Following John Murray, Schreiner also explains II Peter 3:9 as teaching "God's desire for all without exception to be saved" (392, 393).

Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas showed more respect for the will of God than does Schreiner. With regard to I Timothy 2:4 ("who [God] will

have all men to be saved"), Aquinas argued that "what God wills, he cannot fail to accomplish… God is not weak; he does not fail." Aquinas concluded concerning this text, and others like it, "that the 'all' in this passage is referring to all kinds or types of people," not to every human without exception (quoted on pp. 94, 95).

Schreiner does not hesitate to draw out the implication of the supposed desire of God for the salvation of all, which is Schreiner's theology. He speaks of "a desire of God that is frustrated." Thinking to mitigate his heresy of a frustrated God, Schreiner adds, "in part" (393). In fact, the words, "in part," only make the heresy palpable. Schreiner's God is at odds with Himself. Like us mortals, He cannot make up His mind. Does He, or does He not, desire to save Esau? With His sovereign will of reprobation, no. With His fervent will of love and love's desire, yes.

Sacrificing the intellect, sacrificing the possibility of knowing the truth, sacrificing the intelligibility of divine revelation, sacrificing the unity of the Godhead, and sacrificing the gospel of definite atonement, Thomas Schreiner embraces the contradiction, and proposes it as Christian orthodoxy regarding the atonement.

> From eternity past God decreed that Christ's death would be effective for the elect. At the same time, sinners are indiscriminately offered full forgiveness because God desires all to be saved (394).

Against this doctrine of the death of Christ, Letham's charge against hypothetical universalism holds: "inherently incoherent" (444).

By their doctrine of a "well-meant offer," Schreiner and others identify themselves with Davenant, father of the hypothetical universalism against which the book is fighting. Fundamental to Davenant's false doctrine was his positing of two wills in Christ, one to save all, the other to save only some.

> Davenant's mature and extended deliverance on the subject [of the atonement] appeared in his posthumous "A Dissertation on the Death of Christ, as to its Extent and special Benefits." The core thesis of the "Dissertation" posits two divine wills: "There was in Christ himself a will according to which he willed that his death should

> regard all men individually; and there was also a will according to which he willed that it should pertain to the elect alone" (424, 425).

Making the stubborn defense of the "well-meant offer" by the defenders of definite atonement doubly inexcusable is the determined, powerful, overt use of the "well-meant offer" by the advocates of universal atonement on behalf of their heresy. The defenders of definite atonement are well aware of this argument.

Heretic D. Broughton Knox is quoted as contending for universal atonement on the basis of the "well-meant offer":

> Were it not so, and not true that Christ had died for all men, it would not be possible to extend a universal offer; for the offer, if it is to be a true offer, must rest on true and adequate grounds, which cannot be less than the death of Christ for those to whom the offer is being made (468).

Henri Blocher demonstrates that the advocates of universal atonement press defenders of definite atonement to the wall with the argument of a "well-meant offer": a serious offer requires telling unbelievers "Jesus Christ died for your sins" (567-569). Blocher himself caves in to the argument, recognizing that "many definite atonement defenders have accepted 'Christ died for all,' and, so, *for you*" (569). Who these many definite atonement defenders are, Blocher does not inform us.

Dubious Defenders of the Faith: Piper

Of all the acclaimed defenders of the Reformed doctrine of definite atonement in the book, the much ballyhooed Baptist John Piper is the weakest. To his defense of definite atonement against universal atonement, the Reformed reaction is, "With friends like this, definite atonement needs no enemies."

Piper teaches a love of God for all humans, a love that is revealed by John 3:16 (648).

To every human without exception, in his own words, "every person on the planet," John Piper preaches, "God loves you, and he offers you in Christ the fullest possible redemption in everlasting, all-satisfying fellowship with himself" (665).

Boldly avowing the contradiction that makes Piper's gospel, Piper's doctrine of the cross, and Piper's God unknowable—to Himself, as to us—Piper declares

that "He [Jesus] sincerely desires all to be saved, yet he does not always act to bring all to salvation." Similarly, "God desires the salvation of the lost, but he does not save all of them." Significantly, Piper appeals in support of his incoherent, heretical doctrine of a will of God for the salvation of sinners that fails to save (which implies, as none of the contributors seemingly recognizes, that the explanation of the salvation of some is not the will of God, but their own will) to John Murray's advocacy of the "well-meant offer" (662, 663).

The main reason for Piper's compromising, if not outright denial, of definite atonement is Piper's whole-hearted attachment to the "well-meant offer," particularly as proposed by the Orthodox Presbyterian theologian John Murray (656ff.). Responding to critics of the Reformed doctrine of definite atonement, who criticize the doctrine as weakening "the free, sincere offer of the gospel," Piper appeals to John Murray's doctrine of the offer.

According to Murray, "many benefits accrue to the non-elect from the redemptive work of Christ," and chief among the benefits is "the free offer of the gospel." That is, Christ died for all in certain respects, including God's making to all humans an offer of salvation that is grounded in His saving love for all; that expresses a sincere desire of God for the salvation of all; that may announce to all that Christ died for them all; and that unmistakably leaves the impression with all that the efficacy of the cross with regard to their salvation depends upon their decision to accept the offer (657).

The day I am deceived into believing this outrageous theology (outrageous in part because, sailing under the flag of the Reformed faith, it pretends that the Canons of Dordt do not exist), on that day I become one of the most fervent advocates of universal atonement the world of theology has ever seen. And, with universal atonement, universal salvation, for the cross of Christ cannot fail of achieving the loving purpose of God and of His Christ. By virtue of the saving love of God, the almighty will of God, and the very nature of the cross, this is certainty, *absolute* certainty: the cross of Christ cannot fail. Every one on whose behalf God gave His Son to the cross, every one for whom Christ died, will certainly be saved. For even one to perish in whose stead

Christ died, in the loving will of God, would be the "ungodding" of God, the exposure of Jesus Christ as a fraud and failure, and the shaming of the cross.

In reality, Piper's tortured account of God's love—the love of John 3:16!—makes a mockery of that love. In His love for all, God offers salvation to all, desiring to save all. But at the same time, God decrees not to save all, so that His universal love actually increases the punishment of many. Also, His love, and the giving of the Son to the death of the cross in this love, fail to save. The loving offer, which is Piper's corruption of the call of the gospel, proves impotent (661ff.).

A ray of light in this darkness of the affirmation of a universal love of God and a universal desire of salvation manifested in the death of Christ, *in a book devoted to the defense of definite atonement*, is the article by Raymond A. Blacketer, "Blaming Beza: The Development of Definite Atonement in the Reformed Tradition" (121ff.). Although the piece is historical, examining the thought of Calvin and Beza on the atonement, it takes issue with the notion that it is historically Reformed to believe and confess that God wills the salvation of all (with one of His two wills), that grace is universal, and that, therefore, "human choice is pivotal" in the salvation of sinners (139).

Typographical and grammatical errors in this well-edited and handsomely issued volume are rare. But "mitigate" on page 74 should be "militates." ●

A Concise New Testament Theology, I. Howard Marshall. Inter Varsity Press, USA: Downers Grove, IL: 2008. Paperback, 310 pp. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown].

This book is essentially an abridgment and simplification of the larger *New Testament Theology* (2004) by the same author. Marshall, professor of New Testament at Aberdeen University, Scotland, studies each of the New Testament books, arranging them according to human writer (the Gospels according to Mark and Matthew; Luke and Acts; the Pauline epistles; the Johannine literature; and the other [catholic] epistles). The aim of these studies is to determine a "theology of the New Testament," that is, do the

individual writers have a diverse or unified theology?

One might wonder at the value of such a question. After all, did not *one Spirit* inspire all the books of the Old and New Testaments? Therefore, is not the unity of the theology a given, indeed an article of faith, for all conservative Christians? Nevertheless, Marshall examines the different themes as they are developed by Matthew, Mark, Paul, John, etc. and comes to the conclusion that there is unity within diversity. "On the basis of this analysis, we can claim that our witnesses do bear testimony to what is palpably the same complex reality. There is a common, basic theology that can be traced in all our witnesses, but it is developed by each in their own distinctive ways" (291).

The value of the book is not in the unity of theology question, but rather in the summary which Marshall gives of each of the books of the New Testament. Marshall is a conservative scholar. However, he is clearly not fond of Calvinism, and his anti-Calvinistic bias comes out in several key places, such as his discussion of Romans 9 (127). This work could perhaps be of some use to a minster preparing a series on a particular NT book. However, I did not find it particularly interesting or inspiring. ●

Ancient Word, Changing Worlds: The Doctrine of Scripture in a Modern Age, by Stephen J. Nichols and Eric T. Brandt. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009. 176 pages. Paperback. $15.99. [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.]

That Scripture is our only authority for faith and life has two fundamental implications. The first is that the devil, trying to destroy the church's faith, will attack the church's doctrine of Scripture and use of Scripture. The second is that the Scriptures themselves, as well as the right doctrine of them, will be precious to the child of God.

This certain attack on the doctrine of Scripture, and the church's love for that doctrine, are the occasion for the church not only to *defend* the doctrine, but also to *develop* that doctrine.

In this book, Stephen Nichols

and Eric Brandt trace the attack on the doctrine of Scripture on the one hand, and the defense and development of that doctrine on the other, from the middle 1800s to the present time. The book focuses on three aspects of the doctrine of Scripture: Scripture's *inspiration*, Scripture's *inerrancy*, and Scripture's *interpretation*. The argument of the authors is that these three aspects of the doctrine of Scripture were attacked, and therefore defended and developed, in this general chronological order: first inspiration, then inerrancy, then interpretation.

To each of these three aspects, two chapters are devoted. The first of these two chapters treats the attack on and development of that doctrine, and the second contains excerpts of writings of men who either attacked or defended that doctrine.

These six chapters which make up the body of the book are preceded by an introduction, and followed by a glossary and three appendices. The first appendix is a significant contribution, for it contains doctrinal statements made by denominations and organizations in response to this attack on Scripture. Statements from the Evangelical Alliance, Fuller Theological Seminary, the International Congress on World Evangelization, the Ligonier Statement, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, and more; and lengthy quotations from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics - all make up this first appendix. The second and third appendices are brief, consisting of a list of key Scripture passages relating to the doctrine of Scripture, and a guide for further reading.

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I consider the book a valuable resource for anyone interested in the development of the doctrine of Scripture in the era of modernism and postmodernism.

The three chapters which are the real substance of the book (chapters 1, 3, and 5) set forth the main issues in the battle for and against the Scripture, and the main antagonists and protagonists.

Chapter one, dealing with the development of the doctrine of inspiration, notes that both scientific developments and higher criticism have contributed to the modern view that Scripture is irrelevant, that it "belongs to the past, not to the present" (19). Attacking the Scriptures as inspired was David Strauss, who promot-

ed "the quest for the historical Jesus." Opposing him were the Princetonians A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. An entire section of the chapter is a survey of their article "Inspiration," published in 1881 in *The Presbyterian Review*. Opposing the Princetonians was Charles Briggs. Later it was Harry Emerson Fosdick who appeared as the enemy of the truth, and J. Gresham Machen as its defender. The chapter ends with Karl Barth—a man who would have said he was defending the inspiration of Scripture, but ended up redefining the term.

Chapter three (inerrancy) tells "the story of those who . . . helped make the Bible a crucial, central, and defining feature of American evangelicalism" (65). The chapter notes that the matter of inerrancy divided denominations and seminaries. Charles Briggs taught at Union Seminary and was a member of the PCUSA; but the PCUSA opposed Briggs' reappointment to his seminary position. Consequently, "the seminary and the denomination severed ties" (66) and Briggs became an Epicopalian. Contributing to the attack on inerrancy were Daniel Fuller (son of the founder of Fuller Seminary) and Robert Gundry. Defending inerrancy was the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, out of which came the "Chicago Statement on Inerrancy," which statement receives some analysis in the chapter. The authors also mention the controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary occasioned by Peter Enns' book *Inspiration and Incarnation*.

Chapter five (interpretation) contends that postmodernism has undermined a proper interpretation of Scripture by positing that words have no objective meaning, but mean what we want them to mean. Early in the chapter, the authors set forth the three fixed principles which should govern our interpretation of Scripture, as Charles Hodge set them forth in his *Systematic Theology*: Scripture is to be interpreted in its "plain and historical sense," "Scripture cannot contradict Scripture," and Scripture must "be interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (113). None of these come as a surprise to graduates of the Protestant Reformed Theological School, or to those who sit under their preaching. Rudolph Bultmann, however, asserted that if the Bible will be relevant for today, we cannot take it literally. Near the end of the chapter, the authors evalu-

ate, negatively and positively, the effect of postmodernism on the interpretation of Scripture. Far from being sympathetic with postmodernism as such, the "positive" evaluation amounts to a reminder that we must not fail to do justice to the narratives of Scripture, that we must understand that the community plays a role in Scripture's interpretation (but then the "community" must be the faithful church of all ages), and that the interpreter must be humble in his approach to Scripture.

While not disagreeing with what is written, my response to the last part of chapter five is this: if we really needed postmodernism to remind us of these things, shame on us.

In each of these three chapters may be found another commendable feature of the book: a timeline of notable dates and events which represent development (positive or negative) in the debate on inspiration, inerrancy, and interpretation.

Not to overlook chapters two, four, and six, as well as the first appendix to which I have referred, it is valuable to have original sources. The original sources in these chapters are not ancient; they are all written within the last 150 years or so, and many within the last century. And they are all relevant documents. Without referring to each document specifically, let me list a few authors whose works are quoted. Not only does chapter 2 include writings from Charles Briggs and the Princetonians, but also from Harry Emerson Fosdick, J. Gresham Machen, Karl Barth, G. C. Berkouwer, Gordon R. Lewis, and others. Chapter 4 includes writings from J. I. Packer, Edward J. Young, John Murray, Harold Lindsell, and Carl F. H. Henry. And chapter 6 quotes from Charles Hodge, Walter C. Kaiser Jr, Vern Poythress, Brevard Childs, James Orr, and others. The lists are not exhaustive.

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For all its value, the book must be considered to be just an introduction to the subject matter, a skimming of the surface. The book is not large - 176 pages cover to cover, 5.5 inches wide, 8.5 inches tall. Its focus is on three aspects of the doctrine of Scripture, and all within the last 150 years.

The authors recognize that the battle for the Bible is being fought (or lost) in many denominations and in all of evangelicalism. They reference Baptist denominations, Lutheran denominations, and

Presbyterian denominations. But no narrowly Reformed denominations is mentioned, even in passing. Overlooked are the effect of the "new hermeneutic" on churches that have been hewn from the rock of the Great Synod of Dordt, the approach to Scripture that leads to the liberalism prevalent in other Reformed denominations today. Unreferenced is the defense of Scripture in books such as *The Doctrine of Scripture* by Homer C. Hoeksema and chapter nine of *For Thy Truth's Sake* by Herman Hanko (both of these are publications of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Jenison, MI).

These aren't necessarily weaknesses of the book itself. I don't mean to suggest that every book written out there should have references to writings from Protestant Reformed authors, and should interact with what is happening in Reformed denominations. But this is another reason why I view the book as only an introduction to its subject matter.

A good introduction. ●

Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative, Sam Storms, (Rosshire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2013). 589 pages. $29.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The subtitle of this weighty volume on eschatology is "The Amillennial Alternative." Despite its virtues, the book fails to fulfill the promise of the subtitle. The reason is the weakness of Storms' defense of amillennialism against postmillennialism. Storms' condemnation of the false doctrine concerning the last times of dispensational premillennialism is strong and uncompromising. But the confession of amillennialism specifically in opposition to postmillennialism is hesitating and concessive. This is a serious, if not fatal, flaw in a book on the end times.

Critique of Premillennialism

Much of the book is devoted to the refutation of dispensational premillennialism. The first eleven chapters, consisting of 360 pages, treat of premillennialism. All thirty of the reasons in the last chapter for embracing amillennialism are criticisms, explicit or implicit, of

premillennialism. Grounded as it is in careful, compelling interpretation of the key biblical passages, the refutation of premillennialism is devastating. Defending amillennialism against premillennialism, Storms raises the basic issues in the controversy. Old Testament Israel and its earthly circumstances were typical of the spiritual New Testament church and its blessings. The New Testament church does not "replace" Israel; it *is* Israel. "The Church…is…the continuation and maturation of… Israel" (343). With its teaching of several resurrections, indeed constant resurrections during its millennium, after Christ's bodily return to reign in Jerusalem, "premillennialism…is simply bizarre, not to mention without biblical warrant" (157).

Unlike many who profess to be Reformed, Storms is unafraid of the doctrine of election. This enables him to interpret Romans 11 correctly, particularly the phrase, "all Israel," in verse 26. Both premillennialists and postmillennialists explain the text as promising the salvation of large numbers of physical, racial Jews in the future. This salvation of many Jews is supposed by both of the millennial errors to be significant for a future millennium. The doctrine of election leads Storms to explain the text rightly: "Paul is referring to the divine promise given to Abraham of an elect remnant from among his physical seed, in fulfillment of which 'all (elect) Israel' is being saved" (333).

The Reformed Christian differs, however, with Storms regarding the Sabbath day and its continued observance in the new dispensation (24). The Heidelberg Catechism is the Reformed confession of the permanency of the fourth commandment concerning "the day of rest" (Q. 103).

Critique of Postmillennialism

To the erroneous eschatology of postmillennialism, Storms devotes only one chapter—chapter 12. The chapter is sympathetic to postmillennialism. Storms speaks only of the "weaknesses" of postmillennialism, not of its false teachings, or even errors. Invariably, a criticism of postmillennialism is followed at once by the defense by a postmillennialist of the error that was criticized. The last word in the chapter is not criticism of postmillennialism, but a defense of postmillennialism's expectation of the future salvation of a majority of the human race.

The brief treatment of post-

millennialism contains serious errors of fact. John Calvin was not a postmillennialist (375). For a professing amillennialist to say so, likely parroting the Christian Reconstructionists, is damaging to the cause of amillennialism and thus to the truth. If Calvin was a postmillennialist, not only should postmillennialism not be condemned as grave false doctrine, but also those who promote the error today are the real Calvinists, at least with regard to eschatology. But the claim is false.

For Calvin, the hope of the believer is for the resurrection of the body at the coming of Christ and heavenly life and glory, not at all the earthly pleasures and treasures of the carnal kingdom of postmillennialism (*Institutes*, 3.25.1-12). "The hope [of the godly]…rests in heaven" (*Institutes*, 3.25.1). "The chiliasts [millennialists], who limited the reign of Christ to a thousand years, [teach] a fiction [that] is too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation. And the Apocalypse [that is, Revelation 20], from which they undoubtedly drew a pretext for their error, does not support them" (*Institutes*, 3.25.5).

In his commentary on Matthew 24, Calvin begins by lamenting that many are "infatuated by that superstition of an earthly kingdom of Christ" (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, tr. William Pringle, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949, 118). This statement alone sets Calvin apart from and against postmillennialism. It also exposes the postmillennial dream: infatuation by the superstition of an earthly kingdom of Christ.

Regarding the mistaken notion that in verses 1-35 of Matthew 24 Jesus refers only to the destruction of Jerusalem, as though the prophecy of future tribulation applies only to the Jews, Calvin writes, specifically in explanation of the words in verse 14, "and then will the end come":

> This is improperly restricted by some to the destruction of the temple, and the abolition of the service of the Law; for it ought to be understood as referring to *the end* and renovation of the world. Those two things having been blended by the disciples, as if the temple could not be overthrown without the destruction of *the whole world*, Christ, in replying to the whole question which had been put to him, reminded them that a long

> and melancholy succession of calamities was at hand" (*Commentary* [on Matthew 24], 129).

In the eschatological thinking of Calvin, the tribulation of Matthew 24 "is improperly interpreted by some commentators to mean the destruction of Jerusalem." Rather, "it is a general recapitulation…of all the evils of which Christ had previously spoken." These evils fall upon the Church to the end of time: "So long as the Church shall continue its pilgrimage in the world, there will be dark and cloudy weather" (*Commentary* [on Matthew 24], 146).

The prospect of a thousand years of bright and cheery weather for the church prior to the coming of Christ is foreign to John Calvin. Calvin was not an optimistic postmillennialist. He was a hopeful amillennialist. There is a difference—a *fundamental* difference.

It is also a mistake on the part of Storms to deny that any postmillennialist teaches "salvific universalism." There are prominent defenders of postmillennialism who do teach "salvific universalism," that is, the salvation in postmillennialism's "golden age" of every living human. Warfield taught this in the past ("The Prophecies of St. Paul," in *Biblical Doctrines*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1929; "The Lamb of God," in *The Saviour of the World*," Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, repr. 1972; "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Doctrines*). Christian Reconstructionist Martin G. Selbrede does teach "eschatological universalism," or what Selbrede calls "unbounded optimism," today ("Reconstructing Postmillennialism," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction [Symposium on Eschatology]* 15 [Winter, 1998]).

Storms is mistaken also, therefore, when he asserts that "all evangelical postmillennialists believe that there yet remains one final outbreak of evil of undetermined length preceding the second coming of Christ" (380). Regardless of the clear teaching of Revelation 20:7-9 that "when the thousand years are expired" Satan will be loosed to effect a worldwide attack on the church of Jesus Christ, Benjamin B. Warfield denied that the victorious earthly kingdom of postmillennialism will be broken up by such an apostasy and rebellion ("The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Doctrines*). In the revised edition of his popular

defense of postmillennialism, Loraine Boettner followed Warfield in this denial of a future assault on Christ and His church (*The Millennium*, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, rev. ed. 1984).

More recently, the Christian Reconstructionist, Martin G. Selbrede, has rejected the teaching of a final apostasy after the millennium and before the second coming of Christ. Turning on some of his Christian Reconstructionist colleagues, who allow Revelation 20 to convince them of a final apostasy, Selbrede calls the teaching of this final apostasy and rebellion "an ultimately pessimistic postmillennialism." Selbrede appeals to the father of Christian Reconstruction, Rousas J. Rushdoony. Rushdoony called the admission of a future, final rebellion against Christ "an amillennial hangover."

Selbrede informs the reading Presbyterian and Reformed public that the Federal Visionist theologian, Norman Shepherd, is open to Warfield's "eschatological universalism," which implies the denial of a future assault on the kingdom of Christ by Satan and his hordes ("Reconstructing Postmillennialism," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction [Symposium on Eschatology]* 15 [Winter, 1998]).

Nothing, including the clear teaching of the Bible in Revelation 20:7-9, is allowed to threaten the earthly victory dreamed of by optimistic postmillennialism.

The teaching of the future salvation of all living humans and the denial of a coming final war of Satan and his children against the church are the inevitable implications of postmillennialism's "optimism" with regard to the earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ within history. The "unbounded optimism" of postmillennial eschatology cannot be bounded, or limited, even by Scripture, specifically Revelation 20:7-9.

Storms fails to expose and condemn the kingdom of postmillennialism as every bit as carnal as the kingdom of premillennialism, thus denying the spirituality of the kingdom and its blessings in history. He does not remark the anomaly that the fullest, most glorious, and final realization of the kingdom of Christ, lasting for hundreds of thousands of years (according to many postmillennialists), will be lacking the main thing: the *King*. According to postmillennialism, throughout

the duration, on earth, of His victorious kingdom, King Jesus will be absent, away in heaven, invisible. For all practical purposes, on the throne of the kingdom in the world, and receiving the glory, will be, not Christ Jesus, but His saints, no doubt mainly the power-hungry Christian Reconstructionists, which would be enough to stir me up to rebellion, if I were allowed a place in their postmillennial kingdom.

Neither does Storms question the readiness of the postmillennialists to postpone the second coming and bodily presence of Jesus Christ to the distant future (many postmillennialists expand the millennium, which, of course, must precede the second coming of Christ, to hundreds of thousands of years). Amillennial believers, in contrast, eager for the sight and presence of Jesus, pray daily, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Storms admits his eschatological weakness concerning postmillennialism: "I *want* to believe that postmillennialism is true" (384).

This desire of Storms is wholly wrong, if not sinful. No one should want a doctrine that Scripture not only does not teach but also condemns as erroneous. No believer should lust for the carnal kingdom of postmillennialism, rather than desire the spiritual kingdom of heaven, proclaimed by amillennialism. With the saints of the New Testament, Storms should want the second coming of Christ and the perfection of the saints, of the kingdom, and of creation at that coming. The "optimism" of postmillennialism concerns the earthly victory of a carnal kingdom of Christ within history. The "hope" of the church is the second coming of Christ. No Christian should "want" anything different than this hope.

Preterism

Whether this is the cause or the effect of Storms' weakness concerning the postmillennial error, Storms has fallen for the preterism of the Christian Reconstructionist postmillennialists. He is far too dependent on, and appreciative of, Gentry, De Mar, Chilton, Wilson, Rushdoony, and the other representatives of the Christian Reconstructionist movement. Although he pulls back at certain points, Storms embraces the preterism that is fundamental to postmillennialism and that withholds from the people of God truths about the last days that

they ought to know, especially the truths of apostasy, Antichrist, and the great tribulation. Preterism teaches that the biblical prophecies of apostasy, Antichrist, and the great tribulation were fulfilled in the *past*, in AD 70, upon the Jews, in the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome.

Storms "feel(s) drawn to [the] position" that almost the entire book of Revelation refers to the affliction of the Jews by Rome in and about AD 70 (413). Following the lead of the preterist Christian Reconstructionists, Storms interprets Matthew 24:1-35 as referring, exhaustively, to the days culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Jesus began to speak of His second coming only at verse 36 (229-258). Specifically, the great tribulation foretold by Jesus in Matthew 24:21 "is not a future event, but an accomplished fact of history past" (258).

Exposing the error of the preterist explanation of Matthew 24 and demanding the understanding of the passage that sees it as prophetic of the second coming of Christ at the end of history are verses 27, 29-31: cataclysmic events in the heavens; the sign of the Son of man; the coming (Greek: *parousia*, in verse 27) of the Son of man, visible to all; and the gathering of the elect by the angels with the great sound of the trumpet.

Storms explains Matthew 24:29-31 as not referring "at all to the second coming of Christ at the end of the age but rather to events associated with the fall of Jerusalem in 70" (262, 263). The coming of the Christ, which the passage prophesies, is not then Jesus' coming to earth, but His coming to the Father in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13, 14 (267). Against this explanation of the coming of Christ in Matthew 24, which can be admired for its ingenuity, stands the truth that the Messiah came to the Ancient of days, in fulfillment of Daniel 7, on the day of Jesus' ascension into heaven, about AD 33, not nearly forty years later, in AD 70 (Acts 1:9-11; Heid. Cat., Q. 50). The coming of Jesus of Matthew 24:26-31 is the personal, visible coming of Jesus to earth in His resurrected body, to judge the ungodly, savingly to gather the elect, and to be glorified before all.

Contrary to Storms, the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists, and the fundamental misconception of all postmillennialism, Matthew 24:1-34 is about the second coming of Jesus Christ

and the conditions leading up to this coming. Matthew 24 is *primarily* about the second coming of Jesus Christ. In the chapter, Jesus is not answering only the question, when the things of the destruction of the temple would take place, but also, and especially, the question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (v. 3)

Matthew 24 teaches the second coming of Jesus in part by the type of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. But the type is merely the type. It is not the reality. The reality is still future in AD 2013. And it is near! And all believers need to be forewarned about the reality, as it is presented in Matthew 24! They must not be deceived into supposing that the tribulation is over and done, a strictly Jewish matter. They must not be disappointed by the notion that the second coming of Jesus is a thousand years, if not hundreds of thousands of years, in the distant future.

Well may Storms and all others who embrace "partial preterism"—a preterism that does allow for a second coming of Christ to the earth, though so remote as to lose its appeal and comfort—ask themselves whether the exegesis and presuppositions that ground partial preterism do not in fact logically lead to complete preterism. Complete preterism, which some advocate, contends that the second coming of Christ is past, so that there is no hope of any future coming, bodily and visibly.

Practically, the Christian Reconstructionists already take the position of complete preterism. If the return of Christ will not occur until after a millennium of hundreds of thousands of years or even a million years and if the perfect realization of His kingdom will be accomplished by the saints apart from His second coming, the second coming of Christ might as well be non-existent. This practical adoption of complete preterism is evident in much of Christian Reconstruction writing about the last days. Although they acknowledge a future second coming, in a few lines, it does not have their heart, or the main space in their writings. The millennium does.

Postmillennialism is not merely the "more optimistic version" of amillennialism (374). It is a radically different eschatology than amillennialism. Postmillennialism is grave doctrinal error with regard to the truth of the last things and the Christian

hope. And the Reformed creeds condemn it (Heid. Cat., Q. 52; Belgic Confession, Art. 37).

Sam Storms is open to this false doctrine, indeed attracted to it.

Therefore, the contemporary book on the millennium has still to be written. ●

How Jesus Runs the Church. Guy Prentiss Waters. P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ : 2011. Paperback, 168 pp. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown].

Good books about ecclesiology are rare. Good books about ecclesiastical government are even rarer. Waters has written a very interesting and informative guide to church government and a defence of Presbyterian/Reformed church polity in particular. This would be a worthwhile addition to the church polity section of one's library. The book consists of five chapters on the nature, government, power, offices and courts of the church, a conclusion and an annotated bibliography on church government.

Encouraging features of this book include (1) a defense of the church's catholicity against Dispensationalism; (2) a defense of the necessity of church membership against Christian isolationism; (3) a defense of Presbyterian/Reformed church polity against Brethrenism; and (4) a defense of male only officebearers against feminism.

Waters writes for a broad evangelical audience, many of whom have never considered the Bible's teaching on church government and the decency and order such government promotes. Such a book is necessary and useful, because many evangelicals are ignorant of (and even suspicious of) church government.

The differences we might have with Waters are rather minor. He advocates the two office (elder and deacon) view of the PCA, not the three office view (pastor, elder and deacon) of the PRCA and our Church Order (Art. 2); he differs with some Reformed denominations on term limits for officebearers; and he ascribes more power to church courts that

we would, but these differences do not take away from the book's value.

There is much good material here on the various offices, their roles and qualifications, as well as the principles of church government. As Waters explains with the title, church polity is *how Jesus runs the church*. There must be a careful balance between too few and too many rules:

> The New Testament, by design, does not give us an exhaustive manual of church polity. It does not prescribe every conceivable detail relating to the government of the church.... Rather, the New Testament gives the church her government in the form of principles that need to be applied. There are many details that the New Testament purposefully does not prescribe, that Christ has not expressly legislated in his Word. Reformed writers have called these 'circumstances.' A 'circumstance,' as Thomas Peck defined it, is a 'concomitant of an action, without which it can either not be done at all, or cannot be done decency and decorum.' An example of a circumstances in public worship might be the temperature of the room...; the arrangement of the chairs (horizontal rows or a semi-circle); or the time of the service..." (49).

Ignorance of church government leads to a church not knowing what its function is, neglecting its true calling, and involving itself in projects not assigned to it by Jesus Christ:

> No officer of the church and no court of the church has any right to draft and to impose legislation on the church. By definition, officers of the church are authorised only to enforce the Word of God.... The church is not authorised to speak to matters to which Christ has not authorised her in the Word of God to speak.... She is neither authorised nor promised competence to speak to matters that fall outside what God has declared in his Word. Sadly, many American churches in the twenty-first century have departed from this principle. Many church bodies routinely vote to support or oppose pieces of legislation pending before Congress, or policies of the current presidential administration.... Throughout the New Testament, the courts and the officers of the church steadfastly refrain from ad-

> dressing the pressing political questions to the Roman Senate or to Caesar Augustus. We never see the church decrying slavery, economic inequality, imperial military actions, immigration policy, and a host of other social and political concerns" (68-69).

Would that many of the churches of our day heeded that admonition! Then the church would be the pillar and ground of the truth instead of entangling herself in worldly affairs.

Waters' final paragraph is worth repeating as a summary of the entire book: love for Christ means love for His church; and love for His church means love for the church's government and officebearers:

> To show concern for the church is to show concern for Jesus. To seek the good of the church is to seek the glory of Christ. To care about and be zealous for the government of the church is to prize and to cherish the reign of Jesus. May the Spirit of Christ work in his church increasing zeal for and attention to the government of the church until the day when Jesus 'delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power,' and God will be 'all in all' (I Cor. 15:24, 28)(151).

If you want a good book on ecclesiology, I highly recommend this one. ●

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