Editor's Notes

Some issues of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* are intentionally united by a theme. For instance, the April 2025 issue, the Lord willing, will contain written versions of the speeches given at the PRCA's 100th Anniversary Seminary Conference, entitled "'By Grace I Am What I Am': The PRCA's Rejection of Common Grace." This conference was held October 31-November 2, 2024.

Articles in other issues of the *PRTJ* are united by ideas or doctrines, but the thematic unity was not planned; it was a happy providence. Again, some issues are a mix of various articles unrelated in thought. The present issue falls into this last category.

In light of the centennial of the PRCA, we reprint the second installment of John Bolt's article, published a year ago in the *Calvin Theological Journal*. In this installment Bolt argues that the Christian Reformed Church Synod Kalamazoo 1924 did not really engage the views of Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema. He then notes the irony that Synod 1924 opened itself up to the very danger that it warned against—a compromising of the spiritual-moral antithesis. Bolt notes that the CRC Synod 1967 vindicated Danhof and Hoeksema regarding their position on the well-meant offer. See the conclusions that he draws, and his suggested rewording of the First Point of Common Grace at the end of his article.

Cory Griess submits a written version of a speech he gave a year ago, "Sexual Abuse in Calvin's Geneva: Lessons for Today's Consistory." Sexual sins, including that of sexual abuse, is not new in the church. Perhaps it was not *prevalent* in Calvin's Geneva, but it did exist. Prof. Griess offers ten lessons that consistories and congregants can learn from how the consistory in Geneva addressed sexual sins, sinners, and victims.

Nick Willborn gave two guest lectures at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in May 2024. Having earlier addressed Southern Presbyterianism (see his submissions in the April 2020 and November 2020 issues), he now turned our attention to Old Princeton, the bastion of orthodoxy in the north. God used men like Archibald Alexander,

Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen, not only to prepare men for pastoral ministry and missions, but also to defend sound doctrine against liberalism. Perhaps the reader wonders why, in a journal that promotes Dutch Reformed theology and history, we need turn our attention to Presbyterians. In part, the answer is that Presbyterian theology is Reformed. Even more, the answer (though Willborn does not explore it) has to do with the influence of Princeton in Dutch Reformed circles in the early twentieth century.

In all the PRCs in West Michigan, the undersigned preached a sermon from the graphic text, Proverbs 23:29-35, warning against drunkenness. Encouraged by one who heard the message to put it in written form, I have done so. It is, admittedly, even longer in print form than it was in spoken form. May God use it not only as an example of exegesis and homiletics, but as a pointed, loving warning to all who abuse substances, as well as an encouragement to consistories to labor with such individuals for the salvation of their souls.

Ten book reviews round out the issue. Their topics are also varied. They regard matters of doctrine (dispensationalism) pastoral ministry and worship, church historical figures (Ulrich Zwingli, J. N. Darby, Gordon Clark, and numerous French Reformed theologians), and exegesis (the Psalms and Revelation). Read the review; then, if so inclined, read the book!

Finally, do not overlook Luther's advice to the discouraged—advice that we all do well to take to heart: be sure to have plenty of fellowship with other Christian believers, and go have fun (see page 133)! Which is to say, whether eating, or drinking, or whatever you do, do it to God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

DJK

PRTJ 58,1 (2024): 3-40

The Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 Unfinished Business on Common Grace, Part 2

John Bolt

This article was first published in the November 2023 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the *Calvin Theological Journal*. The first installment was reprinted in the April 2024 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal.*

In the first installment of this article,[1] I tried to show that the statement of the 1924 CRC Synod on the doctrine of common grace, specifically its First Point, using the so-called "well-meant offer of the gospel" as a ground for God's general or common grace shown to "His creatures in general," was hastily formulated and that the synod failed to provide solid biblical or confessional theological grounds for it. Synod refused to appoint a study committee to examine the doctrine of common grace primarily because there was no common opinion in the Reformed churches on the matter. In addition, the 1924 Synod's "Pre-Advisory Committee in re Common Grace" (hereafter *PACCG*) allowed that some of the conflicts in the debate about common grace were rooted in legitimate alternative theological positions and accents (e.g., supralapsarians and infralapsarians) and said: "This phenomenon is nothing new in Reformed circles and has always been tolerated" (*1924 CRC Acts of Synod*, 123). Nonetheless, the *PACCG* recommended that synod adopt three specific points on the doctrine of common grace and the synod agreed.

The case in favor of each of the three points followed a strict template: (a) statements from pastors Henry Danhof and Herman

1 John Bolt, "The Christian Reformed Synod of 1924: Unfinished Business on Common Grace, Part 1," *Calvin Theological Journal* 57, no. 2 (2022): 271–312.

Hoeksema that in the judgment of the *PACCG* contradict the point; (b) evidence from Scripture that supports it; (c) statements from the Reformed confessions and Reformed theologians such as Calvin and Van Mastricht that support it. With respect to (b) the *PACCG* (and synod) did not engage in careful exegesis of the texts *in their context* but simply listed them and *declared* that they confirmed the point. I tried to show in part 1 that a more thorough interpretive exercise demonstrates that the texts in fact, *when interpreted as great exegetes like Calvin work on them*, vindicate Hoeksema and Danhof's understanding of grace and not that given by the 1924 Synod.[2] In addition, the *PACCG* used the statements from the confessions and Reformed theologians such as Calvin and Van Mastricht very selectively, failed to make key distinctions that were crucial to the documents, and ignored available evidence that did not support their point.[3] In this installment (part 2) I will argue that the synod failed to engage the confessional, theological, and pastoral concerns legitimately raised by Hoeksema and Danhof (section 4) and, furthermore, that this failure led to confusion in the

2 Two examples: The first passage cited by the *PACCG* was Psalm 145:9: "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." [NIV] But the following three verses (10–12) show that the purpose of this goodness is that his "faithful people" bear witness and bring all people to know and acknowledge God's kingdom. The second text was Matthew 5:44, 45 (par. Luke 6:35, 36), where Jesus instructs his disciples to "love your enemies," to be like God who "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." In his commentary on this passage, John Calvin concludes that Jesus does not want his followers to take their own vengeance, but rather "to commend their own cause to God, *until He takes vengeance on the reprobate*." Hardly a demonstration of "grace" to the ungodly! Had the *PACCG* followed its own appeal to the great writers of the Reformed past as they did in (b) they would have been forced to conclude that on these two texts Hoeksema and Danhof's position was correct (see part 1, 291–93).

3 For example, the synod's appeal to the Canons of Dort, III/IV.9 and the use of the term *offero* is understood as a defense of the idea of a "well-meant offer of the gospel" when the article as a whole repudiates such an idea. On this see Raymond C. Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Re-examination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation," *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (April 2000): 37–45.

CRC about its mission to the world (section 6).[4] I will conclude with an appendix that contains a suggested revision of the First Point.

4. Did Synod Really Engage the Opponents of Common Grace? Rev. Henry Danhof's Protest[5]

Rev. Henry Danhof was himself a delegate to the 1924 Synod in Kalamazoo from Classis Grand Rapids West. His protest has an unsettling poignancy to it, opening with this statement: "Because of a lack of time and great weariness of the body I am not in a position to fully write my protest in detail and lay it before Synod. Of necessity I must limit myself to only a few main points" (194). Ecclesiastical battles such as this one exact great personal toll; this must never be forgotten by those who are convinced that they are in the right and that their position is best for the church. Those who defend doctrine are often accused of ignoring such personal damage; those who want to move the church "forward" also need to keep it in mind. Here are Danhof's objections:

1. Danhof was frustrated with the incompleteness of the synodical discussion, concluding that "Synod was not really ready to vote on points A, B, and C[6] of the proposal re Common Grace as presented and formulated on the evening of July 7" (194). Several key points were not even considered, and many delegates were not persuaded by the grounds provided; this explains the substitute proposal to withhold action and appoint a study committee. In Danhof's judgment, no definitive (or conclusive) answer was given to "whether the Confessions prove that God is favorably disposed to the reprobate" and "why it would not be advisable that we further study the [entire] question of Common Grace more closely, and also submit the three related points to greater scrutiny" (195).

4 Here I will examine two issues in the missiology of the CRC: (1) The controversy during the 1960s concerning Professor Harold Dekker and his views on the universal love of God; (2) Current missiological discussions about the *missio Dei* and the notion of "participating in God's mission," so prevalent in contemporary missiological literature.

5 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod*, 194–99; from this point on, page references will be given in parentheses within the text.

6 Here Danhof uses the capital letters A, B, and C to refer to the Three Points.

2. Danhof's "second point of general protest" concerned the content of the three points. Specifically, the language of the three points cannot be "found literally in our Confessions" (195). Synod's general declaration that "the doctrines contained in these synodical declarations are evident from the Confessions, the Holy Scriptures, and the writing of Reformed writers" (196) fails as proof because the synod never set forth a clear case on the basis of these three. Danhof indicates what synod should have done: "In my view, Synod should formally have explained the statements in [our] Confessions first, then Synod should have established the exegesis of the quoted Scripture passages, and tested the quoted declarations of the Reformed writers, and [only] then compared the results of that work with what is being taught by the two Brothers" (196).

Danhof is correct here, I believe. Even a cursory glance at the *PACCG*'s attempt to demonstrate the truth of each point yields the startling observation that the *PACCG* only provided *lists* of texts without any exegesis, or interpretation, or framework of meaning; there is no narrative that sets forth an argument. Assuming that a list of quoted passages self-evidently sets forth a case is a hasty and careless way to proceed; it reflects badly on the men in the *PACCG*—they were capable of much better.

3. Danhof's third objection is that "Synod does not clearly establish the difference between itself and the Brothers, Danhof and Hoeksema, neither formally nor in substance" (196). Danhof then provides proof of statements that he and Hoeksema made that are comparable to statements made by the synod. He accuses the synod of failing to take these into account, adding "Synod doesn't even take note of what the Brothers teach; and (also) actually provides no proof for its position" (196). The same failure to take careful note of what "the Brothers teach" applies to statements in Point 2 about restraining sin. Noting that "the Brothers speak of 'checking the process of sin' and always in connection with the doing of good before God by the natural man; yet Synod mentions 'the restraint of sin in the individual person and in society,' through the general working of God's Spirit and that thus human society remains possible," Danhof concludes: "Also here, we don't meet each other honestly. And also here, Synod takes little note of what the Brothers are teaching, actually fails to

prove its own standpoint" (196). Once again, Danhof's complaint is valid. It was wrong to say that Danhof and Hoeksema denied the notion of divine restraint. They objected to using the soteriological term "grace" for God's *providential* sustaining of creation that made human society possible.[7] With respect to Point 3 (civil righteousness by the unregenerate), Danhof contends that "the Brothers have never denied the doing of civil good by the unregenerate," but always "deal with the deeds of the natural man in his relationship to God" (197). Synod fails, he argues, to consider the alternative explanation of civil righteousness provided by Danhof and Hoeksema (197). Here again, Danhof makes a valid point; determined to speak of civil good as an instance of "Common Grace," the 1924 Synod simply did not consider alternative explanations.

And here is Danhof's plaintive question:

> At this point the question might well be raised, was this really necessary? Why not first converse about these matters, and thus learn to understand each other well, and then afterward with true insight, if needed, with earned insight, draw up something definitive and binding. In my opinion, a committee would have served us much better than these present declarations. (197)

Why not? Indeed!

4. Danhof 's fourth issue has to do with the *content* of the three points, he says, "quite apart from what I have mentioned above."

a. Concerning point A, I am convinced that the Confessions in the cited points speak about the preaching of the Gospel and not about a favorable disposition of God toward the reprobate. Also, according to my insight, the command to preach the Gospel has nothing to do with Common Grace. Whatever the case Synod must present proof for the opposite view.[8] And the very same should be done

7 See Danhof's point 4(b) below.

8 On this point, I believe Danhof is correct; without proper explanation this reference to preaching the gospel places common grace in a soteriological context which leads to confusion. Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that Petrus van Mastricht, for one, does include "external calling to participation in Christ through the proclamation of the Word" as one of the gifts of God's "common grace" (*Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:353–54), although the

with reference to the cited Scripture passages. In the meantime it is necessary to be alert against a tendency to reject reprobation. (197–98)

b. Concerning point B, it is my conviction that Article 13 and 16 of our Confession refer to the providence of God and the institutions and means established by Him, by which He rules over all creatures, makes them serve the coming of His kingdom, and directs them to their eternal destination.[9] Here again my burdened heart asks, what is it about the position held by the Brothers concerning these matters that in any way can be deemed to conflict with one single fundamental Reformed principle? And why don't we even take note of their views? Surely, Synod would not deny that, even though civil laws give a certain substance to the life of sinful man, the process of sin is not arrested by this action; and in a negative sense, that civil authority in the hands of godless men is also a means to sin in a very special way, and thus makes the guilt greater. We thus raise the question, why did Synod choose to make a definitive statement now without conclusive proof from the Scriptures and the Confessions, which could very easily go in different directions, rather than a thorough study? About this I grieve deeply. (198)

c. With reference to point C, it is my opinion that the Confession speaks of certain works of natural man in his civil capacity in connection with natural [inborn] insights of which a small remnant remains.[10] According to my insight the Confession says that these works are sinful before God, even though in a comparative sense, society may call them good in comparison. Furthermore, the Confessions point out that natural man, by whatever natural light which still remains in him, corrupts himself more and more. In this way [by persisting] all excuse before God is taken away. (198)

In my view, Danhof is correct on all three points[11] and his protest demonstrates how far the synod was from honestly engaging his and

PACCG does not make use of this passage (see part 1, 307–11).

9 Hoeksema and Danhof did not deny that God's providential care benefitted all people in some sense; see also Danhof's next point (c). Much of the conflict could have been resolved if the doctrine of "common grace" had been taken out of its *soteriological* context and dealt with in the doctrine of God's *providence*. See the appendix to this article (302).

10 As stated in Canons of Dort, III/IV.4.

11 Taking note of the qualification in n. 9 above.

Hoeksema's views. I find it difficult to read these words accompanied by tears without a great deal of sadness about the uncommon injustice done to Danhof and Hoeksema by the 1924 CRC Synod.

5. O, the Irony!

The decade 1918–1928 represents the CRC's most intentional and intense wrestling with the issue of Americanization, a struggle shaped by four major synodical decisions: the Harry Bultema case in 1918, the dismissal of Calvin Seminary professor Ralph Janssen in 1922, the common grace decision of 1924, and the acceptance of a study committee report on "worldly amusements" in 1928.

The Rev. Harry Bultema was minister of the First Muskegon CRC when he published his dispensational, premillennial work, *Maranatha!: A Study on Unfulfilled Prophecy*.[12] The 1918 CRC Synod received four overtures[13] asking synod to "declare itself with respect to the false propositions, which are defended in *Maranatha!*." Synod clearly asserted itself by affirming two propositions that strike at the heart of the dispensational-premillennial eschatology: "(1) The unity of the Church of all ages, Israel not excluded. The Church of all ages is in essence one. (2) The Kingship of Christ. Christ is not only Head of His Church in an organic sense, but also positively King of His Church in the juridical sense of the word."[14] In the midst of the Modernist-Fundamentalist clash in American Christianity, the 1918 CRC Synod engaged and rejected the dominant American fundamentalist eschatology.

With respect to Professor Ralph Janssen, however, the CRC sided with the fundamentalists. The dismissal of Professor Janssen is complex,[15] complicated among other things by his refusal to defend himself at the 1922 Synod. Nonetheless, synod's stance signaled a firm

12 Harry Bultema, *Maranatha: Eene studie over de onvervulde profetie* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1917); ET: *Maranatha!: A Study on Unfulfilled Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1985).

13 From Classes Zeeland, Holland, Sioux Center, and Orange City (see *1918 CRC Acts of Synod*, 76).

14 *1918 CRC Acts of Synod*, 77.

15 See David H. Holwerda, "Hermeneutical Issues Then and Now: The Janssen Case Revisited," *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 7–34, for an overview of the complex issues involved.

rejection of modernist, higher-critical approaches to Holy Scripture that were gaining the ascendency in Presbyterian seminaries like Princeton and Union.

The 1928 study committee report on worldly amusements refurbishes old arguments against theater attendance, dancing, and card-playing.[16] That it was commissioned when it was and reported to the church when it did, needs to be understood as an intended prophetic critique of the Roaring Twenties with its flappers, speakeasies, the Charleston, and the growing film arts industry.

In all three instances the Christian Reformed Church was acutely aware of her environment—the ecclesiastical, social, and cultural circumstances of the American world—and she responded with appropriate specificity to what were seen as threats to the Reformed confession and the Christian conduct of her members. By contrast, the 1924 decision on common grace, undoubtedly intended to "open up" the Christian Reformed world to a more positive appreciation of its American social and cultural context, appears to be without any sense of context. In particular, the synod's common grace decision in 1924 indicates but little awareness[17] of an important issue at work in the broader Reformed/Presbyterian world of its day.

What I have in view here is not the immediate Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) that led eventually to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936, but the decision by the 1903 General Assembly of the PCUSA to add two chapters to the Westminster Confession, one on the Holy Spirit and the other on God's love.[18]

16 See *1928 CRC Agenda for Synod*, 4–56.

17 The reason for this qualification will become apparent later; CRC leaders were not altogether ignorant of the issue that I will be discussing below.

18 The two chapters are: "Chapter 34. Of the Holy Spirit" and "Chapter 35. Of the Gospel of the Love of God and Missions," Westminster Confession, Appendix B: Major Changes of the PCUSA (1788–1958); available online at http://www.bible-researcher.com/wescoappb.html. For an excellent critical examination of the nineteenth-century background for this decision, see J. V. Fesko, *The Spirit of the Age: The 19th-Century Debate over the Holy Spirit and the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage

Nineteenth-century American Presbyterian theologians, notably Charles Briggs, professor at Union Theological Seminary (New York) and church historian Philip Schaff, called for a revision of the Westminster Confession because it lacked a separate chapter on the Holy Spirit. In his coverage of this revision, John Fesko contends that the Westminster Confession's treatment of the Holy Spirit is not deficient when considered by the standards of classic Christian orthodoxy, including belief in the inspiration of Scripture; it only becomes deficient when judged by the standard of modernist, Enlightenment theology. In Briggs's own words: "The Westminster Confession is defective in that it has no chapter on the work of the Holy Spirit."[19]

To what was Briggs making the comparison? According to Fesko: "In his view, the confession was defective in comparison with 'modern progressive theology,' which laid 'great stress on the work of the Holy Spirit.'"[20] Dependent on the philosophical ideas of the nineteenth century, particularly in its German idealistic form, this emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit stressed divine immanence: the Spirit working in history.

The date of this addition is significant because it happened three years before the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 in Los Angeles, California. In other words, the theological interest in the work of the Holy Spirit that led to the PCUSA decision had nothing to do with the Pentecostal "explosion" that rocked the church in the twentieth century. Instead, it was fueled by a new evolutionary worldview with a progressive understanding of history in which scientific and philosophical developments reflected the universal Spirit of God at work. German "mediating theology"[21] sought to synthesize doctrinal orthodoxy and modern philosophy through Christology: the incarnation

Books, 2017). Also see D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, "Turning Points in American Presbyterian History—Part 8: Confessional Revision in 1903," *New Horizons*, August/September 2005; available online at https://opc.org/new_horizons/NH05/08c.html.

19 Charles A. Briggs, "Revision of the Westminster Confession," *Andover Review* 13 (1890): 63, quoted in Fesko, *Spirit of the Age*, 11.

20 Briggs, "Revision," 63, quoted in Fesko, *Spirit of the Age*, 11.

21 German: *Vermittlungstheologie*; Isaak August Dorner (1809–1884) was the most prominent theologian of this movement.

(the *idea* of the God-human union) was emphasized as the entry point for understanding the Spirit's ongoing work in the world. This "universally enlightening work of the Logos" is, according to Briggs, operative among the "pious Mohammedan, or Buddhist, or worshipper of the sacred fire, who, destitute of Bible and Church, may be earnestly seeking after God in the only way open to him, through the forms of Reason."[22] According to Fesko, the actual additions to the Westminster Confession in 1903, while somewhat tempered and more subtle, do "bear the fingerprints of Briggs's universal testimony of the Spirit."[23]

It is true that the 1903 additions to the Westminster (chapters 34 and 35) reflect the influence of a more traditional and orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and soteriology, even insisting that "there is no other way of salvation than that revealed in the gospel" (chap. 35, sec. 4). Similarly, chapter 35 points to "the mediation and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ" as the "way of life and salvation" (35, sec. 1). Therefore, this last addition states: "Christ hath commissioned his Church to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations." All this sounds perfectly orthodox and evangelical. However, a Declaratory Statement intended especially for ministers, ruling elders, and deacons to guide them in understanding their ordination vows, seems to take back with the left hand what is stated elsewhere in the Confession. It acknowledges a possible conflict between the new chapters on the Holy Spirit and the mission of the church on the one hand and what the Confession says about God's decree.[24] It does not try to resolve this conflict in a theologically satisfactory manner but instead squares the circle by simply *declaring* that the two conflicting sets of notions are in fact both true and are therefore "held in harmony" (note the passive voice in the following) with each other:

First, with reference to Chapter 3 of the Confession of Faith: that

22 Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Bible, the Church, and the Reason: The Three Great Fountains of Divine Authority*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 45, quoted in Fesko, *Spirit of the Age*, 20.

23 Fesko, *Spirit of the Age*, 33.

24 Notably chap. 35, sec. 3: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death." Westminster Confession; available online at http://www.bible-researcher.com/wescontext.html.

> concerning those who are saved in Christ, the doctrine of God's eternal decree *is held in harmony* with the doctrine of his love to all mankind, his gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and his readiness to bestow his saving grace on all who seek it; that concerning those who perish, the doctrine of God's eternal decree *is held in harmony* with the doctrine that God desires not the death of any sinner, but has provided in Christ a salvation sufficient for all, adapted to all, and freely offered in the gospel to all; that men are fully responsible for their treatment of God's gracious offer; that his decree hinders no man from accepting that offer; and that no man is condemned except on the ground of his sin. (emphasis added)

A decade later J. Gresham Machen characterized these changes and additions as "compromising amendments," "highly objectionable," a "calamity," and "a very serious lowering of the flag."[25] The changes adopted by the PCUSA in 1903 need to be placed in context.[26] In the last two decades of the nineteenth century there arose a movement in the PCUSA, spearheaded by Union Seminary professor Charles Briggs, for "confessional revision."[27] Under particular attack were the doctrines of biblical inspiration (and infallibility) and predestination. When the 1893 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church found Briggs guilty of heresy, the push for revision stalled but did not disappear. The 1900 General Assembly appointed a study committee which reported back in 1902, and the Assembly in 1903 adopted the changes we have already described.

For our purposes we need to note that the CRC's own Geerhardus Vos was very much aware of these discussions in the Presbyterian Church and, *while still a professor at the Theological School of the*

25 J. Gresham Machen, editorial, *Presbyterian Guardian*, November 28, 1936, 69–70, quoted in Westminster Confession, Appendix B: Major Changes of the PCUSA (1788–1958); available online at http://www.bible-researcher.com/wescoappb.html.

26 The details that follow are taken from Danny E. Olinger's biography of Geerhardus Vos, *Geerhardus Vos: Reformed Biblical Theologian, Confessional Presbyterian* (Philadelphia: Reformed Forum, 2018), 99–116 (chap. 6, "Confessional Revision"); also, from Hart and Muether, "Turning Points—Part 8."

27 See his *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times* (New York: Scribner, 1889).

CRC in Grand Rapids, corresponded with both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the matter, indicating his alarm about developments in the American Presbyterian world.[28] At the same time Vos was also busy translating Kuyper's own extensive commentary on "confessional revision."[29] Kuyper begins his reflection with an expression of "excited … interest" in the movement to revise the Presbyterian symbols in America, and sets forth conditions under which such revision should take place.

Vos also explicitly addressed two key issues at stake in the revision, the doctrine of preterition (God's "passing over" of the reprobate),[30] and the nature of God's love.[31] In the first, Vos expresses his concern that proponents for confessional revision were not serious in their appeal to Scripture, appealing instead to public sentiment. In the second, he argues from Scripture that neither God's "indiscriminate goodness in the sphere of nature, nor the collective love which embraces the world as an organism, nor the love of compassion which God retains for every lost sinner, should be confounded with that fourth and highest form of the divine affection which the Saviour everywhere appropriates to the disciples. This is represented under the figure of fatherhood."[32] The fatherhood of God, therefore, is not

28 Olinger, *Geerhardus Vos*, 101–5.

29 Published in 1891: Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 2, no. 7 (July 1891): 369–99; available online at Theological Commons, https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/presbyterianrefo2718warf-dmd002.

30 Geerhardus Vos, "The Biblical Importance of the Doctrine of Preterition," *The Presbyterian* 70, no. 36 (September 5, 1900): 9–10; available online at https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/vos_preterition.pdf.

31 Geerhardus Vos, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 13, no. 49 (January 1902): 1–37; available online at Theological Commons, https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/presbyterianrefo2718warf-dmd002.

32 Vos, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God," 23; the three distinct kinds of non-saving love Vos refers to—God's goodness revealed in creation, God's love of creation as an organic whole, God's compassion for lost sinners—reflect Van Mastricht's careful distinctions (see part 1, 307–11) and should have been taken into account by the *PACCG* and the

a universal notion but *soteriologically* restricted. Vos notes: "The extreme form of the modern theory, according to which all men as such, indiscriminately, are the children of God, certainly cannot claim our Lord's authority in its favor." Vos concludes by addressing "the present desire to introduce into the Confession of the Church a statement which shall authoritatively formulate the Biblical doctrine on the universal redemptive love of God." He brings forth two points in rebuttal: "In the first place, that that form of love which the Bible everywhere emphasizes and magnifies, so as to be truly called one great revelation of love, is not God's general benevolence, but His special affection for His people. *This distribution of emphasis ought to be preserved in every credal statement which professes to reflect the Biblical proportions of truth*." Vos's second point elaborates the first: "[T]he Scriptures do not leave room for the opinion that at any point, either in the eternal decree or in its historical unfolding, God's love for those intended to become His people has been undifferentiated from His love for wider groups of humanity. *Every formula which would efface or even tend to obscure this fundamental distinction ought to be at the outset rejected as unbiblical. The divine love for the elect is different not only in degree but specifically from all the other forms of love, because it involves a purpose to save, of which all the other forms fall short.*"[33]

Considering the importance of Geerhardus Vos to the CRC, including the fact that his departure for Princeton in 1893 was at least in part predicated on pleas from Princeton stalwarts such as Benjamin Warfield and W. H. Green that he was needed to help stem the flood of liberal theology in the Presbyterian Church, not to mention the

1924 Synod. In failing to incorporate these distinctions, the *PACCG* not only failed to do justice to "our Reformed fathers from of old," especially "the quoted declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology" (see part 1, 288), they also ignored the warnings of the CRC's most theologically gifted son. The distinctions would be picked up by the CRC synodical study committee mandated to respond to Professor Harold Dekker; see section 6 later in this article.

33 Vos, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God," 36, emphasis added; this was the crucial distinction that the 1924 Kalamazoo Synod's First Point blurred when it used the general offer of the gospel as a ground for common grace.

correspondence we noted between Vos and his Dutch colleagues Kuyper and Bavinck about confessional revision, is it conceivable that leaders in the CRC would have not known about this important ecclesiastical context? We should note here that Professor Louis Berkhof, for one, was clearly aware of the challenges presented by the American Social Gospel.[34] Surely CRC leaders who were aware of flappers, speakeasies, and the Charleston were aware of the controversy in the PCUSA about the Holy Spirit and the love of God in relation to missions. Did they not realize that the use of the so-called "well-meant gospel offer" in Kalamazoo's First Point to defend common grace left the CRC open to a notion of universal divine love that destroys Christian missions and led J. Gresham Machen and others to depart from the PCUSA only a decade later?[35]

In fact, there is evidence that they *were* aware. We recall here the statement of the 1924 Synod warning the members of the Christian Reformed Church about the dangers of misusing the doctrine of common grace, particularly this specific warning:

> The liberal theology of our day virtually erases the boundaries between the Church and the world. For many the major importance of the Church is increasingly sought in social issues. The awareness of a spiritual-moral antithesis is weakened increasingly in the conscience of many, replaced by a vague feeling of a universal brotherhood.[36]

So, the threat posed by modernist, immanentist theology that threatened the spiritual-moral antithesis was known to the *PACCG*. Nonetheless, they still formulated the First Point in such a way that the CRC opened itself up to that very danger. That is the first irony of Kalamazoo

34 See Louis Berkhof, *The Church and the Social Problem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1913); also see his lengthy series of articles in *De Wachter* on "Het koninkrijk Gods" [The Kingdom of God] from February 5, 1919 to September 1, 1920.

35 In fairness, we need to note Danny Olinger's comment in his biography of Geerhardus Vos: "Having lost the fight, Vos did not comment upon the revisions either in correspondence or his writings" (Olinger, *Geerhardus Vos*, 116). Nonetheless, forty years after the 1924 Synod, other CRC leaders did make use of Vos's essay to good avail (see n. 39, 51–54, below).

36 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod*, 148.

1924: The attempt to push the CRC into greater involvement with its American context did not formulate its doctrine of common grace in a manner that would guard the CRC against the dramatic theological currents changing the American Presbyterian world. To the degree that they were aware of "danger" posed by the doctrine of common grace, the CRC proceeded to focus on the relatively trivial issue of "worldly amusements." And that is the second and more tragic irony of 1924/1928: the CRC strained out the gnat and swallowed the camel (Matt. 23:24).

That failure, in retrospect, is also tragically ironic with respect to the CRC's witness to its American context, the very engagement and witness that the common grace decision was intended to initiate. The leadership of the Christian Reformed Church, incapable of reading Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof sympathetically, missed the vital relevance of their insistence to keep God's universal providential care *theologically distinct* from saving grace and the gospel mission of the church. Consequently, the CRC lost an opportunity to prepare a sturdy critique of the modernism in American mainline Christianity that obliterated the difference between the church and the world by thinking of the Holy Spirit as the immanent working of progressive forces in human history, introducing a notion of universal divine saving love. The First Point of Kalamazoo unintentionally introduced an element of modernist theology into the conservative CRC that was trying so hard to set itself against it. CRC leaders failed to see what Hoeksema and Danhof saw clearly.

6. The Consequences of 1924

Does the 1924 Synod still matter? Did it have any significant practical, ecclesiastical consequences for the Christian Reformed Church besides the tragic loss of Hoeksema and Danhof and the formation of the Protestant Reformed Church? There are two instances, both arising from mission concerns, where the inadequacy of the 1924 statement on common grace directly impacted the CRC: (a) The Harold Dekker controversy about the "Love of God"; (b) The current missiological emphasis on "Participating in God's Mission."

A. Does God Love All People?

Rev. Harold Dekker (1918–2006), associate professor of missions at Calvin Theological Seminary, in the early 1960s published a series of essays in the *Reformed Journal* expressing concern about what he judged to be inadequate and ineffective mission and evangelistic activity in the CRC and pointing to a specific doctrine as the problem: "The doctrine of limited atonement as commonly understood and observed in the Christian Reformed Church impairs the principle of the universal love of God and tends to inhibit missionary spirit and activity." In its place he proposed a "universal love of God for sinners" along with an "invitation of the gospel, sincerely extended to all without reservation or limitation." In other words, Prof. Dekker believed that in evangelistic outreach to lost people one needed to say without qualification or mental reservation, "God loves you." In addition, he argued, "… God's sincere invitation of the gospel to all involves His desire that it be accepted by all."[37] In the second installment of this essay (February 1963) he formulated his concern as follows: "In the mind of the Christian Reformed Church the distinction between common and special grace has sometimes been understood qualitatively, and thus understood it has tended to obscure the true character of the universal love of God and the Biblical realism of its implications for the witness of the gospel to all men."[38] Dekker challenged the idea of "two graces," one common and one particular,

37 Harold Dekker, "God So Loved—ALL Men!, Part 1 of 2," *Reformed Journal* 12 (December 1962): 5–7; subsequent articles: idem, "God So Loved—ALL Men!, Part 2 of 2," *Reformed Journal* 13 (February 1963): 13–16; idem, "God's Love to Sinners—One or Two?," *Reformed Journal* 13 (March 1963): 12–16; also see idem, "The Universal Love of God," *The Banner* 98 (March 1, 1963): 4–6.

38 "God So Loved—ALL Men!, Part 2 of 2," 13; this is an interesting way of stating the issue. Traditionally the Reformed tradition did insist on a *qualitative difference* between special or particular grace and common grace. The First Point of Kalamazoo *failed* to make such a distinction when it made a special grace teaching (offer of gospel) the ground for common grace. Dekker's critique, therefore, seems to provide evidence that the qualitative distinction between special and common grace remained operative in the CRC, despite 1924's confusion.

as well as the doctrine of "limited atonement."[39]

Response from conservative voices in the CRC was swift, followed by a volley of protests and requests for Professor Dekker to clarify his views. Classis Orange City sent an overture to the 1963 CRC Synod petitioning the synod to "require Prof. Dekker to give further explanation of his position, so that if Prof. Dekker's position be truly Reformed and Scriptural, Synod may clear him of suspicion, and should Synod find his position not in harmony with the Scriptures and the creeds, that Synod take appropriate action 'to preserve the uniformity and purity of doctrine' in our church and seminary."[40] Synod chose not to accede to this overture, but unrest in the churches continued to grow.[41] Acknowledging this unrest, the 1964 Synod appointed a committee to look into the doctrine of atonement in relation to the love of God and Professor Dekker's views on the matter. This committee reported to the 1966 Synod, which was not entirely satisfied with the report and recommitted it "to the Study Committee for further reflection and improvement," and also referred it to the churches "for study and evaluation."[42] The study committee's report to the Synod of 1967 was expanded but came to essentially the same conclusion and in six recommendations took issue with Professor Dekker's views:[43]

> I. In the light of Scripture and the Confessions a distinction must be maintained between God's general benevolence toward all His creatures; His love of compassion for every sinner; and His unique love for His own (the elect). It is therefore unwarranted to speak of one

39 These were the two issues highlighted by the synodical study committee; see *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*, 519.

40 *1963 CRC Acts of Synod*, 456–57.

41 See *1964 CRC Acts of Synod*, 88.

42 *1966 CRC Acts of Synod*, 69; the Report of the Doctrinal Committee can be found as Supplement 42, 436–507; the advisory committee's dissatisfaction was not with the report itself but with what it judged to be inadequate formulations of the recommendations and their grounds, both of which, in their judgment, failed to do justice to the report.

43 The report (no. 41) can be found in the *1967 CRC Agenda for Synod*, 377–470; the report/supplement was also included in the *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*, 514–607; page references that follow in the text are to the *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*.

love of God which is redemptive in nature for all men distributively. (590)

II. In the light of Scripture and the Confessions it must be maintained that, although there are certain universal and undeserved benefits accruing to all men from the death of Christ, the atonement of Christ, as expressed by the Biblical terms: obedience, expiation, satisfaction, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption, is definite and particular (limited). It is therefore unwarranted to state that "the atonement itself is inherently universal" and "there is neither need nor warrant for retaining the concept of limited atonement, as it has been traditionally used among us." (592)

III. In the light of Scripture and the Confessions it must be maintained that the atonement is efficacious and that there is no disjunction, but essential unity in the work of the Triune God concerning our salvation. What God the Father willed in sovereign love for the salvation of those elected in Christ; was effectually merited by Christ through His death on the cross; and is being savingly applied through the work of Holy Spirit. It is therefore unwarranted to state, "Redeeming efficacy lies neither in the love of God nor in the atonement as such, but rather in the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit." (593)

IV. In the light of Scripture and the Confessions it must be maintained that the particularism of redemption, historically applied in the lives of believers, is the fruit of a definite and particular (limited) atonement, since the Holy Spirit Himself, who applies that redemption, is a gift which Christ has merited for His people through His death. (595)

V. In the light of Scripture and the Confessions it must be maintained that when we preach and confront men with the Christ of the Scriptures we are not dealing with them as elect or non-elect, nor yet as those whose eternal destiny is an accomplished fact; but we are dealing with them as sinners who must be pleaded with to be reconciled to God in the way of repentance and faith. (596)

VI. In the light of Scripture and the Confessions the Church must maintain that the atoning work of Christ is the basis for the universal and well-meant offer of the gospel in missionary preaching, the heart of its message, and the guarantee of its fruitfulness. And this is an incentive to mission spirit and activity. It is, therefore, unwarranted to state that "the doctrine of limited atonement, as commonly understood and observed in the Christian Reformed Church … tends to inhibit missionary spirit and activity." (597)

The Synod of 1967 waited until its last scheduled day, Friday evening, June 23, to discuss the matter and adopted three recommendations from its advisory committee:

> 1. That Synod receive the report of the Doctrinal study committee and express its gratitude to this committee for its faithful and diligent work.
> 2. That Synod commend the report of the Doctrinal study committee to the churches for guidance and as a valuable contribution, within the Reformed tradition, to the discussion of the matters contained within the report.
> 3. That Synod refrain from adopting the recommendations contained in the report of the Doctrinal study committee. (99)

The advisory committee then reported that it was divided into a majority of seven members and a minority of six members. The study committee waived its own right to present its recommendations to synod in favor of the minority position. The minority advisory committee presented the following recommendation to synod:

> 1. That Synod declare that in the light of the Scripture and the confessions it is unwarranted to say "That God loves all men with a redemptive love." (100)

After a lengthy discussion, the synodical minutes record that "adjournment time is reached before any decision is taken" (101). On Saturday morning, June 24, in a decision that invites comparison with 1924, synod adopted a motion to recess and to reconvene synod at a later date. However, whereas the 1924 recess was for three days (Thursday evening to Monday afternoon), in 1967 it lasted more than two months, from June 25 to August 29.[44]

When synod reconvened on August 29, the advisory committee charged with reporting to synod on the Dekker case reported: "After long consideration and much discussion with Prof. Dekker, members of the Study Committee on Doctrinal Matters, and others, your advisory

44 This is the only time that an annual synod of the CRC gathered and met twice, making it the longest CRC Synod on record.

committee has not been convinced that Prof. Dekker's position is in conflict with the creeds, since Prof. Dekker has repudiated anti-creedal inferences which some have drawn from his statements, and since he affirms full agreement with the creeds" (731). Instead of presenting the strong statements produced by the study committee, the advisory committee set forth a list of Professor Dekker's affirmations of Reformed confessional teaching, indicated some statements from his writings that they judged contained "dangers" (731), and asked synod to "warn against any use of such statements" (732–33). The advisory committee also called "for further discussion on the issues raised in the writings of Prof. Dekker" (733–34). Synod heard the recommendations of the advisory committee but did not adopt them. Instead, in the face of an impasse between the recommendations of the study committee and synod's advisory committee, on Wednesday morning, August 30, 1967, another recess was called:

> Article 173
>
> The officers of Synod, having briefly absented themselves, suggest that Synod recess for a few hours in order to permit the advisory committee and the Doctrinal study committee to meet together with a view to producing a joint recommendation to Synod. The suggestion of the officers of Synod is moved and supported and adopted. (734–35)

Synod reconvened on the evening of August 30 and took up "joint recommendations" of the study committee and the advisory committee. Here is its conclusion: "After long consideration and much discussion with Professor Dekker, members of the study committee on Doctrinal Matters, and others, your advisory committee is convinced that Professor Dekker has erred in making ambiguous statements and using them in an abstract way" (735–36). The following recommendation was presented to synod and adopted: "That Synod admonish Professor Dekker for the ambiguous and abstract way in which he has expressed himself in his writing on the love of God and the atonement" (736). With that, the matter was concluded.

I have two purposes in providing the preceding exposition of the Dekker case: (1) To show that in the forty years between the synods of 1924 and 1966/67, the mood of the Christian Reformed Church with respect to doctrinal matters had changed. In particular, the CRC had

become very cautious in condemning a person's views as heterodox, and went the extra mile to affirm Professor Dekker's views as being within the bounds of the Reformed confessions. I mention this not to judge the CRC or to praise it for this change; it is simply a historical observation warranted by the evidence of the CRC's resolution of the Dekker case. (2) My main purpose is to highlight the strong connection between the Dekker case and the 1924 CRC statement on common grace, and to note a remarkable consequence of the 1967 study committee report.

Dekker and Hoeksema

Professor Dekker himself regarded his proposal as a clarification of the "ambiguity" of the First Point of 1924:

> The three points on common grace enunciated by the Christian Reformed Church (Synod of 1924) have left us a heritage of ambiguity regarding the nature of divine grace. Although the three points do not teach it, they permit the view that the general offer of the gospel belongs to common grace, for they use the general offer of the gospel as an evidence for "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general." If one holds that the general offer of the gospel is an expression of common grace, and if one also holds that common grace is generically different from special grace, then the general offer of the gospel is rooted in and expressive of non-redemptive divine love. Can non-redemptive love offer redemption? Is this not a sheer anomaly? Is it not, moreover, destructive of the very character of the gospel offer as sincere and well-meant to all men?[45]

The Study Committee on Doctrinal Matters spent considerable time on this claim by Professor Dekker, noting that it was necessary to "see

45 Dekker, "God's Love to Sinners—One or Two?," 14 (emphasis original); as an exposé of the First Point's ambiguity, leading to confusion in the church, Prof. Dekker hit the nail on the head. In one sentence he highlighted the problem that Synod 1924 left behind: "Can non-redemptive love offer redemption?" If it doesn't, is not the notion of a "well-meant offer of the gospel" a false hope? Whether one is sympathetic to Dekker's "solution" or not, his concern must be validated: How should the gospel be presented to lost people? What is our theological framework for thinking about this question?

the problems raised by the articles from the pen of our professor of missions and the reactions to them in the light of our ecclesiastical history" (521). The committee noted that Hoeksema and Danhof shared with Dekker a conviction that "God's grace is one" (522). Dekker also acknowledged this agreement, which helps explain his invitation to Hoeksema to visit his missions class at Calvin Seminary sometime between the publication of Dekker's articles in 1962/63 and Hoeksema's death in September 1965.[46]

In section 3 of my (part 1), I demonstrated that the appeal of the 1924 Synod to Scripture and the Reformed confessions (including Reformed theologians) was underwhelming, in large measure because the texts cited were simply listed without any serious exegesis or exposition. They were apparently judged self-evidently to prove the point. What strikes us when we look closely at the Dekker Study Committee's report is that the very texts appealed to by the 1924 Synod to defend "the general offer of the gospel" as a ground for "common grace"— Psalm 145:9; Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 5:44, 45; Acts 14:16, 17; 1 Timothy 2:4–6, 4:10; Canons of Dort, II.5 and III/IV.8 and 9—were thoroughly examined by the committee. The study committee thus not only completed the unfinished work of 1924, it also indirectly corrected 1924 on the First Point and vindicated Hoeksema and Danhof.

To begin with, the study committee observed that Hoeksema and Danhof on the one hand, and Professor Dekker on the other, "both meet on this point that both would maintain that God's grace is one" (522). After claiming that "our Synod of 1924 rightly repudiated [Hoeksema and Danhof's] conception of God … it soon became evident that there were still several problems left in the area of God's grace that remain unresolved" (522). Since this claim is stated generally and passively ("it soon became evident") it raises more questions than it provides answers. To *whom* did it become evident? Hoeksema and Danhof?

46 I learned this independently from personal conversation with two witnesses, Prof. David Engelsma, emeritus professor of dogmatics at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, who was a student of Hoeksema's at the time, and Dr. James De Jong, former president of Calvin Theological Seminary, who was a student at CTS at the time and recalled seeing Hoeksema come to Dekker's class. If only that class had been recorded for posterity!

That seems rather obvious and hardly deserves further mention *unless* the study committee was inclined to accept Hoeksema's critique and thus indirectly expressed dissatisfaction with the 1924 Synod.[47] That the committee members might have been so inclined is suggested when they called attention to a problem within the First Point "which Rev. Hoeksema called 'the little point of the first point' (*het puntje van het eerste punt*)" (522). The study committee concludes: "It was this point especially that became the main target of Rev. Hoeksema's attack upon 1924, and it is this same point that is also calling forth the shades of 1924 in our present controversy" (522). And *on this point* the study committee vindicates Hoeksema, stating that Hoeksema "certainly...was on solid ground, when he argued that the confessions, and particularly the Canons of Dort, never did speak of a grace of God that is offered to all men, except when they referred to the so-called 'common grace' of Arminian vintage" (523). The study committee repeats this point: "Again, Rev. Hoeksema was right, when he contended that the word 'grace,' as used in the Canons never referred to what the Synod of 1924 meant with common grace…[I]n every case [where the Canons use the word 'grace'] it always refers to what we are wont to call special grace. It is well that we realize this in order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in our discussion of our present problem" (523).

The study committee then went on to call attention to some "from the side of our church…who, in spite of contrary evidence from the confessions, did try to maintain that God *offers* grace to all men indiscriminately" (523, emphasis original).[48] Nonetheless, the study committee did not blame the 1924 synodical statement for this confusion. Instead, the committee insisted that "Synod had never spoken of an 'offer of grace'; but rather of 'the offer of salvation,' or 'the offer of the gospel'" (524). One can ask whether this is a real difference or simply "a distinction without a difference" that fails to

47 "Soon became evident …" also suggests that there might have been an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with Point 1 of Kalamazoo in the Reformed theological community quite apart from Hoeksema and Danhof and their followers. Whom did the study committee have in mind? Cornelius Van Til? The possibility hinted at by the study committee deserves further attention from historians.

48 The study committee specifically named Dr. James Daane.

absolve the 1924 Synod,[49] but the study committee insisted that it was an error to equate God's love with his grace and "to deny that there is an essential and qualitative difference between the grace which God bestows upon the elect and that which he manifests to all His creatures in general" (526).[50] It was this basic distinction that shaped the study committee's examination of the nature of God's love. The question was: Does God love all men with *redemptive* love?

The study committee examined this question in great biblical and confessional detail. We will not attempt to go in depth but do want to highlight two fascinating facts from the report. First, the primary source used by the committee was Geerhardus Vos's 1902 essay in response to the proposal of confessional revision that led to the PCUSA's addition of two chapters to the Westminster Confession on the Holy Spirit and on the Love of God.[51] Among the key takeaways of Vos's work were the following points: In the Old Testament Scriptures, God's love is always *covenantal*; a distinction must be made between God's "indiscriminate goodness in the sphere of nature"; "the collective love which embraces the world [of humanity] as an organism"; "the love of compassion which God retains for every lost sinner"; and "that fourth and highest form of divine affection which the Savior everywhere appropriates to the disciples. This is represented under the figure of fatherhood" (535).[52] The study committee also carefully examined the Reformed confessional and theological tradition in a way that Synod 1924 did not, including detailed references to several delegations appointed to the Synod of Dordt. Finally, we take note of the study committee's carefully nuanced treatment of the Atonement in which it acknowledges that there are "benefits of Christ's death which indeed have universal reference" (550). Once again referencing Geerhardus Vos, the study committee points to three universal benefits: "(1) The continued existence of the human race; (2) That, because of the sufficiency of Christ's atonement the gospel has a message which

49 For a more thorough examination of the notion of "offer," see Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed," 39–45.

50 In this regard, also see the study committee's response to James Daane, *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*, 577n106.

51 Vos, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God"; see n. 32 above.

52 The study committee quotes from Vos, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God," 23–24.

can be preached to every human being; (3) That the offer of the gospel holds out hope to every one who hears it, and that it makes an immense difference whether man's present life is spent in the consciousness of this hope or without it" (551). The study committee immediately followed this section with Vos's conclusion: "On the other hand, the love from which these universal benefits of the atonement flow should never be so defined as to obscure the fact that it falls short of the intention to bestow efficacious grace" (551).[53]

A second unnoticed feature of the report concerns the interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10: "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (ESV). Recall that the Synod of 1924 had used this as a "proof text" for common grace.[54] In its correspondence with Prof. Dekker, the study committee asked him this question: "Does the universal love of God include any intent on His part to bring about the salvation of the non-elect or to perform any redemptive act on their behalf?" Dekker's response is telling: "I would say that the universal love of God does not include any ultimate intent to bring about the eternal salvation of the non-elect. On the other hand, it remains true that Christ is the Savior of all men (1 Tim. 4:10) and that all men experience salvation in certain proximate ways, e.g. the continuation of life and wellbeing, the conquest of evils such as sickness which result from sin, social order, peace, and justice, and physical resurrection."[55] A consistent follow-through of these two

53 Quoted from Vos, "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God," 30; once again, had the *PACCG* in 1924 seriously engaged Vos's essay on this subject, they would have strengthened their own case for linking the "offer of the gospel" (i.e., gospel proclamation) to common grace. Of course, they would also have had to include Vos's statements that vindicated Hoeksema and Danhof 's objections to using the word grace to describe God's providential favor.

54 See part 1, 295–99. [*CTJ,* 57:2 (November 2022)]

55 *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*, 530; the committee added a footnote here, pointing out "that 1 Tim. 4:10 does not say that Christ is the Savior of all men, but rather, 'God, who is the Savior of all men, …'" Here Dekker also improves on the 1924 statement, strengthening the link between common grace and Christ's work of atonement. His statement is true to classic Reformed orthodoxy, notably Petrus van Mastricht, part 1, 307–11.

statements by Dekker would seem to suggest his acceptance of the doctrine of limited atonement: "the eternal salvation of the non-elect" is not intended by the universal love of God. In additional comments to the committee, responding to its question regarding what he had in mind by telling everyone "Christ died for you," Dekker seemed to say something different: "When I say, 'Christ died for you' to any man, I mean to say that Christ has actually suffered for his sins and has in that sense expiated his guilt." But Dekker had something else in mind with the term "expiate" than the way it was traditionally understood by Reformed theologians: "If, however, the word 'expiate' is intended by definition to include the idea of *effectuation*, which to my mind it need not include, I would not want to use the word *expiation* to describe what Christ has done for all men."[56] This does not seem entirely coherent; the committee pointed to "a certain vagueness that characterizes his writings on this subject."[57]

It is worth noting that Prof. Dekker raised the question about limited atonement and failure to proclaim a universal love of God as a reason for anemic missions and evangelistic zeal in the CRC. The committee shared Professor Dekker's passion for missions and insisted: "Lack of missionary zeal and activity can never be excused" (587). However, it rejected the blame Dekker had attributed to the doctrine of limited atonement in two moves: (1) It noted that good proclamation of the gospel does not start with the doctrine of predestination and particular atonement but with our Lord's commission to preach the gospel to the nations, pleading with all lost sinners: "Be ye reconciled to God" (588).[58] (2) The committee also asked the rhetorical question: "[E]ven if we accepted Prof. Dekker's assumptions that God loves all men, and Christ died for all, we might still want to blame our failures on the Holy Spirit and on the fact that the grace of God does not get through to all men" (587). In other words, Dekker's proposal does not solve the problem; anyone who wants to *rationalize* evangelistic

56 *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*, 545–46 (emphasis original).

57 *1967 CRC Acts of Synod*, 546.

58 In other words, the doctrine of predestination is further reflection on the sovereignty of grace by believers; it is not itself part of the gospel *presentation*. This point was made already by Augustine and repeated by Calvin.

failure and "exonerate himself for his lack of success in his evangelistic efforts…could still do so on Prof. Dekker's basis" (587).

What the 1967 CRC Synod Did and What It Did Not Do

1. Because the study committee carefully examined the scriptural texts used in 1924 to give grounds for the First Point, it picked up the unfinished business of the 1924 Synod and exposed the inadequacies of the 1924 Synod's statement. When the study committee stated that Hoeksema "certainly…was on solid ground, when he argued that the confessions, and particularly the Canons of Dort, never did speak of a grace of God that is offered to all men, except when they referred to the so-called 'common grace' of Arminian vintage," it vindicated Hoeksema and Danhof 's position *on the one point of using the well-meant offer of the gospel as a ground for common grace*.[59] The full significance of this judgment by the 1967 study committee, vindicating Hoeksema and Danhof on precisely the point they disputed ("the little point of the first point"), has not yet been recognized either in the Christian Reformed Church or in the Protestant Reformed Church.

2. The CRC Synod of 1967 left its own unfinished business. To begin with, the study committee did not make the inadequacies of the 1924 First Point which it clearly exposed an item for further action by the church. The First Point of 1924 was left in place even though the study committee had sided with Hoeksema and Danhof against its main affirmation. Although the study committee report clarified the relation between special grace and common grace and defended the doctrine of limited atonement, nonetheless by failing to adopt the study committee's six strong recommendations and weakening the impact of its clear affirmations, the 1967 Synod did not send a clear signal to the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church that God's general providential favor to all people should not be spoken of in the same way as God's love in Christ for his own. This failure also had repercussions in subsequent missiological discussions in the CRC.

B. Participating in God's Mission

Today, some sixty years later, Professor Dekker's concerns

59 This qualification is crucial; the study committee did not agree with Hoeksema's reasons for rejecting common grace in general.

seem dated; today's missiological discussions are of a different nature. Dekker's concern was evangelistic: How does the church communicate the gospel of God's redeeming love to a lost world? Contemporary missiology, also within the CRC, is broader and its key theme is the *missio Dei*, God's kingdom mission to renew all things. The key question is not evangelistic but about how the church "can participate in God's mission." This language goes back to the 1952 International Missionary Conference in Willingen, Germany where its final statement linked the church's mission to the intra-trinitarian "mission" of God:

> The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself.… On the foundation of this accomplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus.… We who have been chosen in Christ, reconciled to God through Him, made members of His Body, sharers in His Spirit, and heirs through hope of His Kingdom, are by these very facts committed to full participation in His redeeming mission.… "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."[60]

The South African missiologist David Bosch in his influential book, *Transforming Mission*, summarized this succinctly: "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."[61] Bosch claims that "[s]ince Willingen, the understanding of mission as *missio Dei* has been embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions" (390). The emphasis on *missio Dei* involves an important distinction between *mission* (of God) and *missions* (activity of the church); the singular word "mission" is primary and the plural term "missions" is derivative (391).[62] The implication of this development is that the mission

60 Quoted in Wolfgang Günther, "The History and Significance of World Mission Conferences in the 20th Century," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 2003): 525–26.

61 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390; page references that follow in the text are to this work.

62 Stephen Neill, in *A History of Christian Mission* (Harmondsworth,

activity of the church (*missiones ecclesiae*) is no longer grounded in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 but on the broader basis of what God's Spirit is doing to establish his kingdom in the world. Consequently, "the primary purpose of the *missiones ecclesiae* can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather, it has to be service to the *missio Dei*" (391). God's mission is larger than the mission of the church: "The *missio Dei* is God's activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate" (391).

It would take us too far afield to examine and evaluate this new missiological development further.[63] I call attention to it because of its parallels with the confessional revision movement in the PCUSA that led to chapters on the Holy Spirit and the love of God being added to the Westminster Confession in 1903. Some in the PCUSA judged the Westminster Confession deficient with respect to the Holy Spirit because it made no reference to the Spirit of God at work in the world. This passion of progressive modern theology found its way into the missiology of the twentieth century and became the dominant missiological paradigm. The issues surrounding common grace and the love of God, so effectively explored by Geerhardus Vos, are still with us. That alone is sufficient reason for the CRC to take another

UK: Penguin, 1966), 572. Bosch (391) quotes Neill: "The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun."

63 I briefly examined the notion in my "The Missional Character of the (Herman and J. H.) Bavinck Tradition," *Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 43–60; available online at https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/TBR5_03_Bolt.pdf. For a more thorough overview of the asserted connections between Trinity, mission, and missiology, see Gayle Doornbos, "Can the Trinity Save Everything? Herman Bavinck, Missional Theology, and the Dogmatic Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity," in *God of Our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church*, ed. Bradford Littlejohn (Lincoln: Davenant Press, 2018), 125–86; for a book-length treatment, see John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For the purposes of this article, broad brushstrokes must suffice; particularly absent from what follows is an acknowledgment and examination of the significant differences among a variety of "missional theologies" as found, for example, in Doornbos's essay.

studious look at the First Point of 1924.

In addition, these same issues also figure prominently in current CRC missiological discussions.[64] If one visits the CRC website (www.crcna.org) and searches for "missional," one will find numerous links to resources within the Christian Reformed orbit, including those to the CRCNA "Network," a site to connect people in the CRC who are doing ministry. Since it was launched in February 2010, The Network "has grown to be one of the most popular and active sites in the CRC."[65] Of the many references to "missional" I chose a four-part summary by Kevin Schutte of Professor George Hunsberger's last lecture (December 2, 2014) at Western Theological Seminary, "What difference does it make when you put the word missional in front of the word church?"[66] Professor Hunsberger is an influential leader in the missional church movement, also within the CRC. He identifies what it means to be a "missional church" in this way:

> Being a missional church is all about a sense of identity, shared pervasively in a congregation that knows it is caught up into *God's intent for the world*. It comes from hearing, one way o[r] the other, the still small voice that says, "You are mine. I have called you to me. I join you *to my compassionate approach to the whole world for its healing*. You are witnesses to what I have done and what I will yet do."[67]

64 I need to explain my purpose for calling attention to what follows; I am not passing judgment on the CRC, any of its agencies, or specific individuals. I only intend to illustrate the role that the notion of *missio Dei* and a "missional church" plays in current missiological discussions within the CRC.

65 About The Network, https://network.crcna.org/about.

66 All four are available at https://network.crcna.org/, and search Hunsberger to find: Part 1: "What Difference Does It Make When You Put the Word Missional in Front of the Word Church?"; Part 2: "Understanding Our Missional Identity"; Part 3: "Understanding Our Missional Focus"; Part 4: "Understanding Our Missional Vocation as Artistic Expression." I chose this four-part summary because it is thorough and sets forth the key issues clearly.

67 George R. Hunsberger, *The Story That Chooses Us: A Tapestry of Missional Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 113, quoted in "What Difference Does It Make?"; emphasis added to underscore the universal scope of mission.

"Missions" are not an activity of the church; mission is its essence. The language of "mission" is even applied to God himself; all his works are said to be "missionary"; God is a missionary:

> But the truth is that the identity of the church is rooted in the missio Dei (the mission of God) and in the understanding that the triune God is a missionary God. God's missionary character is expressed in the forming of creation, the plan of redemption through the sending of the Son, and the act of consummation in bringing creation to a new fullness. The missionary character of God has always been intended to be evident in his people.[68]

Missional thinking involves an intentional shift of attention away from the church and the salvation of individual persons toward the world:

> This leads to a third focus of the missional church: a collective turn toward the intentions and actions of God in the world. This is a shift from a church-centered (ecclesiocentric) to a God-centered (theocentric) view of mission. In this view, mission is not the recruitment of individuals to the programs of the local church; it is the church as a community engaging in God's mission of renewal and restoration. The church in any place is caught up in God's grand mission of make all things new. Mission doesn't just happen "over there" on some distant shore, and mission doesn't just happen "in here" within the walls of the church. Rather, the missional church recognizes the reign of Christ over all things, and collectively the church engages with God's ongoing mission activity in their local context. Mission involves the participation of God's people, His Church, in the shalom inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This participation challenges the individualistic, consumeristic, and ecclesiocentric expressions that the church has often been drawn toward.[69]

It seems woefully inadequate to summarize the repentance of lost sinners and their liberation from sin and newfound trust in the gospel as "the recruitment of individuals to the programs of the local church" and to name evangelistic success as "individualistic, consumeristic, and

68 "Understanding Our Missional Identity."
69 "Understanding Our Missional Focus."

ecclesiocentric." But even if, in the interests of charity and generosity, we overlook the prejudicial language, we are left with the same basic questions about how to relate the particular grace of the gospel to the common or universal providential favor of God. Is it appropriate to speak about world history, including human culture and society, using *redemptive* language? So long as the First Point of Kalamazoo on common grace stands as official Christian Reformed teaching, the denomination will face this question again and again. In the 1960s it came to expression in the "love of God" controversy; today, I have tried to show, it is present in our discussions about being a missional church. I rather doubt that anyone in the CRC would want to argue that missions are a matter of indifference to a church that wants to be faithful to its Lord. In that case, it seems vitally important that we be clear about a biblical understanding of missions. That is why it would be a profitable exercise for the CRC to revisit the issue of common grace and its relation to the grace of the gospel. Synod 1924 left the CRC with unfinished business.

7. Conclusion and Caution

From the history examined above I come to these conclusions:

1. By adopting the First Point on Common Grace and not appointing a study committee to examine the doctrine, the 1924 Synod of the CRC did a disservice to the church it was called to serve.
   a. It failed to address the modernistic heresy of God's universal love to all (and universal atonement) that had received confessional status in the PCUSA in 1903, and failed to guide CRC members toward a Reformed confessional stance against it.
   b. It opened the door to uncertainty in the CRC about the relation between the particular grace of the gospel and God's providential universal goodness, an uncertainty that remained in the CRC, having surfaced in the Dekker case on the "love of God" and present in current discussions about missional ecclesiology.
   c. The 1924 Synod used a version of Abraham Kuyper's distinction between grace (genade, which is particular) and favor (gratie, gunst) in the First Point. This distinction pointed to an unresolved ambiguity in Kuyper's thought that has occupied his commentators ever since: How does one square Kuyper's claims that Christ is Lord of all with his contention that common grace has an independence rooted in creation and providence? How does

Christ's redeeming work affect common grace? This issue touched the core of Hoeksema and Danhof's critique of Kuyper, and needed attention and resolution by a study committee before being adopted by the church. It remains unresolved.

2. By adopting the First Point on Common Grace and not appointing a study committee to examine the doctrine, the 1924 Synod of the CRC did a disservice to its ministers, Rev. Henry Danhof and Rev. Herman Hoeksema.
   a. The grounds adduced for Point 1 fail to demonstrate its truth; instead, a careful contextual examination of the scriptural and confessional/theological grounds provided lends support to the views of Danhof and Hoeksema.
   b. When the CRC synodical study committee mandated to examine the view of Professor Harold Dekker on limited atonement and the universal love of God did a careful examination of those same texts, its conclusion clearly distinguished God's providential, common-grace care of his creation and his compassionate concern for lost sinners from his saving, electing love in Christ. Without intending to do so, this conclusion of the study committee supported Hoeksema's rejection of the First Point.

Hoeksema's viewpoint *with respect to the inadequacy of 1924's grounding of common grace in particular grace* was thus vindicated by a study committee of the Christian Reformed Church.[70.]

3. From the moment the 1924 CRC Synod adopted the Three Points on Common Grace, its confident assertions were accompanied by nervousness about the practical impact of the doctrine. This nervousness is reflected in:
   a. The "Witness" of the 1924 Synod against the real "danger" of those who engage in "one-sided expounding and thus misuse the doctrine of Common Grace" (*1924 CRC Acts of Synod*, 147–48);
   b. The Synodical Report of 1928 on "Worldly Amusements."

Concern about godly conduct and warnings against worldly conduct are important, and the decade of the 1920s gave ample occasion for such warnings. At the same time, however, we noted the irony in the 1924 statement: A declaration intended, among other things, to open

70 I am unaware of any else who has taken note of this outcome.

the CRC's doors to American influences, paid inadequate attention to the very significant theological and ecclesiastical inroad of progressive immanentism in the American mainline churches, notwithstanding the clear warning given against it by her theologically most prominent son, Geerhardus Vos. To the extent that CRC leaders were aware of these developments in the PCUSA, they should have incorporated concerns about them as they warned the church about "worldliness." Specifically, those warnings should have included concerns about modernist efforts to associate progressive streams in history with the work of the Holy Spirit.

4. The Three Points of Kalamazoo are a missed opportunity. Coming as they did less than four years after Kuyper's death on November 8, 1920, it would have been prudent for synod to follow its own reason against forming a study committee on the doctrine of common grace because "there is no *communis opinio* [common opinion] in the Reformed churches on this matter"[71] and not adopt the Three Points in premature haste as it did.
5. It would be beneficial for the Christian Reformed Church to revisit its 1924 statement on common grace, particularly the First Point, in the light of its role in CRC mission theology and practice.

Grounds:

a. The First Point is ambiguously formulated and inadequately grounded.
b. The questions and concerns rightly raised by Professor Dekker have not been resolved.

My final comments in this article come in the form of a caution. My goal in this two-part study was to set forth a case that the CRC should revisit its 1924 statement on common grace, particularly the First Point. I need to add here that this needs to be done *for the right reason*, which is: *out of concern for doctrinal and historical truth*. The Synod of 1924 drafted three statements about common grace and passed judgment on two of its ministers, statements that were intended as binding guides for the Christian Reformed Church's teaching and practice. Was that judgment just and did the synod present a clear and defensible statement of biblical truth? I have tried to show that synod's

71 *1924 CRC Acts of Synod*, 134.

formulation and grounding of the First Point was inadequate; this assessment was confirmed by the 1967 synodical Study Committee on Doctrinal Matters dealing with the probing questions Professor Dekker put to the CRC. In that case the judgment on Hoeksema and Danhof was unjust. Professor Dekker's questions about the love of God and the extent of the Atonement arose from an honest concern to be faithful to the teaching of the First Point. With all of this in mind, the CRC should make every effort to state its convictions about common grace correctly and even acknowledge historical mistakes. If the Christian Reformed Church still believes that the doctrine of common grace is important, she needs to state it correctly. Doctrinal truth is important and theological precision is invaluable.

Nonetheless, we need to exercise caution in assessing the actual significance of any denominational extra-confessional doctrinal statements and their impact on Christian practice.[72] Thus, for example, I believe it is a mistake to look at the past one hundred years of CRC history and attribute all its alleged errors to the 1924 "mistake" on common grace. Ideas, including doctrines, play an important role in human history but they are not *all*-important; personal, social, cultural, and other nontheological influences also play important roles.[73]73 That is why good church history cannot be reduced to a history of doctrine(s), which in turn is also never a matter of ideas only. My plea is thus for clarity and my hope is that greater clarity might also influence practice for the better; stated differently, my hope is that clarity opens up hearts to charity. But hope is not the same as causation.

72 To put the matter in a different way: While correct doctrinal formulation and theological precision are important for their own sake, there is no automatic causal link between correct doctrine and authentic Christian discipleship. Sadly, fully orthodox Christians do not always live as Christians; and thankfully, Christians with heterodox views can live as followers of Christ who put more doctrinally correct folk to shame.

73 The same must be said about the 1924 decision itself. Was theology the all-important reason for Synod's hasty and inadequately grounded decision? Is it possible that other factors such as personal animus against Herman Hoeksema played an important role?

Appendix: A Proposed Revision of the First Point

For the sake of discussion, I offer the following suggestion for a revision of the First Point on Common Grace. My reasons for specific formulations and word choices are provided in the notes that follow.[74]

In gratitude to God for his providential[a] care, Synod declares:

1924 Synod's Wording of the First Point	A Proposed Rewording of the First Point
Concerning the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect, Synod declares that it is certain, on the ground of Scripture and the Confessions, that there is, besides the saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen unto eternal life, also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to all His creatures. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages[f] and from the Canons of Dordt II, 5, and III and IV, 8 and 9, where the general offer of the Gospel is discussed;[g] while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.	Concerning the doctrine of grace, Synod declares that God's saving grace is always particular, to the elect.[b] The promise of the gospel "that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life…together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel." (Canons of Dort, II.5)[c] In addition to this saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen to eternal life, there is also a favor[d] of God shown to all creatures, whereby he providentially upholds all things, preserves life, and governs the world by his Fatherly hand. (Lord's Day 10) Whatever "light of nature" remains "in man after the fall" only serves to make human beings "without excuse before God." (Canons III/IV. 4)[e]

74 This proposed revision is the same (with a few editorial changes) as was published in the *Protestant Reformed Journal* 49, no. 1 (2015): 28; the notes have been revised. My suggested revisions and annotations for Points Two and Three are also included in that article.

Notes

a. The twin notes of gratitude and providence capture Calvin's concerns: acknowledging God's common grace is intended to spur on believers to glorify God for his gifts, not to lead us to greater world affirmation; it is a providential gift not to be confused with any redemptive purpose.

b. This opening sentence is true to Abraham Kuyper and was affirmed by the 1967 synodical Study Committee on Doctrinal Matters; had it been clearly affirmed in 1924, much of the sad history that followed would have been avoided.

c. Instead of simply referring to the Canons of Dort without actually quoting them (giving an impression of orthodoxy that has to be checked and confirmed by the reader!) and then adding vague references to "quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology" and "our Reformed fathers from of old," the revision incorporates direct quotations from the Reformed confessions to make the point. The revision also removes the dubious expression "the general offer of the gospel," but retains what was likely originally intended by citing the actual words of the Canons. By simply placing the evangelistic mandate to "promiscuously preach the gospel" before the church but de-linking it from common grace, the revision avoids the potential confusion and conflict that surfaced later in the CRC. A formulation similar to this would also have helped Professor Dekker by affirming the importance of evangelistic proclamation.

d. This formulation retains the language of the 1924 Synod and accents Abraham Kuyper's distinction between *genade* (grace) and *gratie* (favor). The first clause explicitly repudiates all forms of soteriological universalism. Using the language of Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism to describe this "favor" gives the affirmation a confessional *gravitas* and concreteness missing in the original.

e. The important point that God's general revelation and universal, providential favor in fact serves to defend the justice of God's wrath by rendering all people inexcusable (Rom. 1:18–20) is almost always overlooked or forgotten by defenders of common grace. Common grace is too frequently seen only as a reason for

recognizing something in the world that Christians ought positively to embrace as a gift of God.

f. Not only is the wording of the original stylistically awkward, it leaves the reader asking out of curiosity: What are these quoted passages? The revision actually quotes the important confessional texts as part of the statement itself.

g. See notes c. and f. above.

A Final Note

I realize that I have the benefit of historical hindsight, but if I am able to formulate a statement such as the preceding, one that is true to the intention of the Synod's insistence on defending common grace as a distinct and universal favor of God, *and*, at the same time one that would have been quite acceptable to Hoeksema and Danhof, then a study committee of gifted and open-minded theological giants of the CRC in the 1920s could also have done it—easily! All that was needed was a willingness to try.

PRTJ 58,1 (2024): 41-60

Sexual Abuse in Calvin's Geneva: Lessons for Today's Consistory

Cory Griess

Sexual abuse is the stomach-churning occurrence of any individual episode or pattern of events in which a person with more power and/or authority inflicts serious harm upon another by sexual means. Sexual abuse is an egregious breaking of several commandments of God's Word: the seventh (adultery), fifth (wrong use of authority), and sixth (murder). For the victim, it is nearly (but for the grace of God) soul-crushing.

The reality of sexual abuse has rightly been receiving more attention in the church world broadly speaking, and in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) as well. Cases of sexual abuse that were once hidden are coming to light. A spotlight is shining on the church's handling of instances of this terrible sin. Many pastors, elders, and lay people are learning by God's grace how to handle these cases better. Yet, there remains more to learn and discuss.

Whenever we endeavor to learn more about an issue it is good to turn in multiple directions. First, it is right to turn *up* in prayer to God asking Him to help us be wise and careful, sympathetic and just, urgent and patient: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Second, we do well to turn *down* to Scripture and the creeds lying open on the table in front of us to search them, know them, and put them on as lenses. Third, with Scripture and the creeds as the lenses through which we judge everything, it is good that we also turn *left* and *right* to listen and learn from those who have suffered the pains of these crimes. Fourth, with the lenses of God's Word upon our eyes, it is good that we look *forward*, ahead of us, to others who have studied and handled this matter more than we. This requires the discernment to accept the things that are biblical and helpful and to reject the things that are unbiblical and unhelpful.

Finally, with Scripture on as lenses, we should also look *backward* to the church of the past to see what wisdom we can glean from those who have gone before us. The past is not an infallible guide, nor does it answer every question. Nevertheless, because many of the wisest of the multitude of counsellors are behind us, we ought always to let them speak to this issue as well. We might think that sexual abuse is a modern problem and that therefore we have nothing to learn from those who have gone before us. But this is not the case. There truly is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). The worthies of the past also had their faults in handling sexual abuse. Nonetheless, they can teach us valuable lessons.

This article examines the example of John Calvin's Geneva, gleaning valuable lessons on how the church today ought to handle the reality of sexual abuse. Since church elders carry out the work of disciplining those who have committed sexual abuse, this article must briefly recount God's gift of restoring church discipline at the time of the Reformation, especially through the work of Calvin.

At a time when even the growing Reformed movement was willing to hand the responsibility of church discipline over to the Christian magistrates, Calvin was convicted that the Scriptures call the church, not the state, to exercise spiritual discipline. By God's grace, Geneva became the great example of what church-enacted spiritual discipline looks like. François Wendel argues that Calvin's life-long "personal work" was his project to establish the church in Geneva with control over its own discipline through the offices of pastor and elder. The "fundamental principles" Calvin left behind in the church order there and in the practice of discipline were sent throughout the world.[1] The Dutch Reformed tradition's understanding of the offices of the church, of the calling of elders, and of church discipline are derived from what Calvin set forth doctrinally and by example in Geneva. Since that time, the church developed and deepened Calvin's fundamental principles, but the proverbial stream has its fountainhead in Geneva.

The effect of church discipline in Geneva became a thing of wonder to many. Famously, John Knox called Geneva, "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the

1 François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (Durham, N.C: Labyrinth Press, 1987), 69.

apostles."[2] Likewise, a Lutheran minister who visited Geneva said,

> When I was in Geneva I observed something great that I shall remember and desire as long as I live…. All cursing and swearing, gambling, luxury, strife, hatred, fraud, etc. are forbidden, while greater sins are hardly heard of. What a glorious ornament of the Christian religion is such a purity of morals.[3]

Friends praised God for it. Enemies ascribed it not to the work of God's Word in the church, but to the work of the devil attempting to deceive many. In either case, none could deny it.

Yet the Genevans were guilty of many sins, and sometimes great sins too. Even the sin of what we now call sexual abuse was found in Geneva. The consistory in Geneva always had a clerk who took minutes of the consistory meetings. Only in the last thirty years have the consistory minutes from Calvin's time and beyond (twenty-one volumes worth)[4] become more accessible, and thus also the cases that the consistory handled and a brief record of how it handled them. Thanks to several scholars[5] who have unearthed these treasures, we know something of the work of the consistory, including its work with some cases of sexual abuse.

This article will first explain how the consistory of Geneva did its work. Second, it will point out the kinds of cases the Genevan consistory was responsible for handling. Third, it will propose ten lessons for today from the Genevan consistory's handling of specific sexual abuse cases.

---

2 Quoted in Scott Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care? Church Discipline in Calvin's Geneva, 1542-1596," in *Calvin, Saint or Sinner*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 284.

3 Quoted in Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?" 284.

4 Robert Kingdon, ed., *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin: Volume 1: 1542-1544*, transl. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), xi. The minutes were written in very difficult French. Most have been transcribed into more modern French. Some have been translated into English.

5 Robert Kingdon, Scott Manetsch, and John Witte are the foremost of these scholars.

Church Discipline in Geneva

At the beginning of Calvin's time in Geneva, the population of the city was 10,000 people. Throughout Calvin's ministry the city doubled in size, mostly from French Reformed refugees fleeing to Geneva to escape persecution. Inside the city walls were four churches: St. Pierre (or St. Peter, where Calvin regularly preached on Sundays), Madeleine (where Calvin most often preached during the week),[6] St. Germain, and St. Gervais (where Calvin preached least). In addition, after 1540 there were eleven churches outside the city walls in the rural areas. Throughout the course of Calvin's tenure, there were between nine and twenty-two pastors in Geneva at any given time.[7]

Those pastors, along with twelve elders, made up the consistory in Geneva. The consistory oversaw all the members of all the parishes. Given the strong connection between church and city government, the region together was known as "the church of Geneva," with various places for worship. The consistory met every Thursday at noon to address spiritual issues in the lives of the members.[8] Regularly, the consistory held extra meetings to address unfinished work. Calvin, despite a demanding schedule, rarely missed a consistory meeting.

Calvin had to *fight* for the existence of this consistory and its right to oversee and exercise discipline in the lives of the church members. Calvin revealed his great concern to set up proper church discipline in Geneva in a letter he wrote to fellow Reformer Heinrich Bullinger in 1538. In it Calvin lamented:

> It does appear to me, that we shall have no lasting Church unless that ancient apostolic discipline be completely restored, which in many respects is much needed among us. We have not yet been able to obtain that the faithful and holy exercise of ecclesiastical excommunication

6 Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

7 Kingdon, *Registers of the Consistory,* xi, footnote 4. Besides the pastors and the elders, the civil magistrates hired others called *dizainers* to watch for public sins in the lives of the people and report them to the consistory; see Scott Manetsch, "Pastoral Care East of Eden," in *Church History* 75, no. 2 (June 2006), 278. Manetsch focuses in this article on Geneva shortly after Calvin's death. However, he describes what Calvin had set up in Geneva.

8 Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?" 287.

be rescued from the oblivion into which it has fallen.[9]

Calvin wrote this in 1538 just before being removed from the city by the civil magistrates. When he was asked to return in 1541, Calvin said he would return on several conditions. Among them was the condition that the church must be allowed to conduct her own discipline. The civil magistrates agreed to a church order that Calvin authored, which gave the consistory authority over spiritual correction up to a point. Even then, the exclusive right to excommunication was not granted until fourteen years later (1555).

The well-known history allows me to be brief. Berthelier, a libertine who wanted to come to the table of the Lord, was an open and unrepentant adulterer. He had been excommunicated by the consistory in 1551. But Berthelier convinced the civil magistrates to allow him to partake of the holy meal. The magistrates told Calvin that the consistory had rights over spiritual discipline only to a point, and that final authority for excommunication belonged to the magistrates. However, at the next Lord's Supper celebration, Calvin dramatically threw his arms around the sacramental bread and wine and thus around the church's right to discipline, crying, "These hands you may crush, these arms you may lop off, my life you may take, my blood is yours, you may shed it; but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profane…"[10] Berthelier and the libertine party backed away and Calvin and the churches eventually received the exclusive right to church discipline.

Why was Calvin so adamant about the church's right to spiritual discipline that he fought for over seventeen years to establish it in Geneva? Because Scripture is adamant about it. The keys of the kingdom, Calvin pointed out, are given to the apostles in Matthew 18:18 and therefore to the church, not the state. Calvin wrote, "Discipline depends…upon the power of the keys."[11] When this

9 John Calvin, "XVIII–To Henry Bullinger" dated 21st February 1538," in Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), 1:66.

10 James Aitken Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (Cassel, Petter & Galpin: 1874), 2:327.

11 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 ed., 4.12.1, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.1229.

discipline is carried out faithfully, God declares to people that their sins are either bound to them or loosed from them, a power never given by God to the state.

That does not mean Calvin neglected the calling of the state to exercise her *earthly* power in punishing evil doers. The consistory and the civil magistrates existed in close relationship in Geneva. If the matter at hand was a breaking of the law of God and of the law of the state, the consistory would first deal with the matter spiritually, and then send the matter on to the small council (the civil body that handled these things) to handle the civil trial and punishment.[12] Sometimes that process reversed, but given the fact that the entire city was Reformed, the consistory and the civil magistrate worked closely together.

Matters came to the consistory by people going the way of Matthew 18, or when public sins immediately came to the attention of the consistory. Most offenders came to the consistory willingly, although some had to be compelled by force. When called, many immediately confessed what they had done, often with groans and tears, or even falling to the ground begging for forgiveness. At other times, people would fake ignorance or even lie to the consistory.[13] The consistory asked many questions and even sought out witnesses to corroborate or to contradict the testimony of people who appeared before them. In cases where more than one person was involved, the consistory always allowed both sides the opportunity to tell their story.[14] Even so, the consistory was adept at identifying a liar and a truth-teller. A few times the consistory concluded that it could not tell whether a church member was guilty, in which case it was constrained to leave the person to "the judgment of God."[15] These cases were rare.

The consistory had three forms of spiritual correction. First, the consistory used verbal admonition. If the sin was of a private character or of lesser import (for instance, telling dirty jokes) and the congregant repented, this was the only spiritual correction given. Usually, Calvin

12 John Witte, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family Life in John Calvin's Geneva:* Vol 1*, Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 77.

13 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 278.

14 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 279.

15 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 279.

himself gave the admonition from Scripture. The correction was more like a short sermon that the consistory called "holy reproofs,"[16] leading the person through law, gospel, and law again with the goal of restoring the sinner. If the issue was an offense between two members, and the warring pair repented, the consistory would set up a kind of service for reconciliation in the consistory room, having the people confess to each other and forgive one another before the consistory.

Second, if the church members were not penitent, or if they said they were penitent but the sin was more serious, the consistory would immediately bar the sinning person from the Lord's Supper for a probationary period of at least three months and often six.[17] When the consistory received the confession and repentance of the member after three or six months, it often required a public confession of sin in the church on Sunday morning. Sometimes the confessor would get on his or her knees in the church and confess the fault to the Lord and the church. Depending on the issue, the guilty person would subsequently meet with one of the pastors for ongoing spiritual help, something akin to our pastoral counseling. Other times, the consistory deemed the repentance was not genuine and would continue barring from the table for longer than three or six months. For example, the consistory's minutes record the case of one woman who, after being barred from the Lord's Supper for three months, came to confess to the sin of fornication, but at one point laughed during her confession.[18] She was barred for another three months while the consistory worked with her.

Finally, the consistory used excommunication for stubborn impenitence. In the case of repeat offenders and especially heinous sins, the consistory immediately applied this judgment. Even so, the consistory hoped that one day God would work repentance and restoration in the person.[19]

Calvin articulated a three-fold purpose of church disciple: the restoration of the sinner, the glory of God's name in the purity of the

16 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 279.

17 Until the next Lord's Supper celebration, or in the case of six months, the second Lord's Supper celebration. Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 285.

18 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 285.

19 Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors,* 193.

church, and the prevention of others in the church being influenced by the sin.[20]

What Kinds of Cases Came Before the Consistory?

In 1546, five years after Calvin came back to Geneva, the consistory addressed 309 discipline cases. In 1552 the consistory treated 390.[21] In 1557, with full rights to church discipline, the consistory heard 566 cases.[22] Every year, somewhere between six and seven percent of the population of Geneva appeared before the consistory either to receive church discipline or to be a witness helping the consistory determine guilt or innocence in a situation.[23] Over a period of thirty-seven years the Genevan consistory suspended 7,190 people from the Lord's Supper.[24] A tiny fraction of those—two percent—the consistory eventually excommunicated.[25]

The consistory heard cases regarding fornication, adultery, marriage problems, dancing, singing wicked songs, cursing in public, denying a portion of the Genevan confession, lying, drunkenness, gambling, failure to attend the means of grace, petty theft, failure to send children to catechism, and many others.[26] Most of the cases the consistory faced were for fighting—quarreling in marriage or at work or with neighbors. These made up over twenty-five percent of the total cases the consistory addressed.[27] Fornication and adultery were the next most prominent category.[28] In 1557 over sixty percent of the cases were made up of both quarrels and sexual sins.[29]

Of those cases involving sexual sin, a small fraction were cases of sexual abuse. For example, there was one case in 1546, two in 1552, and one again in 1557.[30] While ministers in Geneva were disciplined

20 Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.12.5, 2:1232-34.
21 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 75.
22 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 76.
23 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 70.
24 Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?" 291-292.
25 Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?" 288-289.
26 Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?" 293-295.
27 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 75-76.
28 Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?" 293.
29 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 76.
30 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 75-76.

for other sins, I have not read of any minister being disciplined for sexual abuse.

Ten Lessons from the Genevan Consistory's Handling of Sexual Abuse Cases

1. Report these matters to the civil authorities.

The Genevan consistory often immediately reported cases of sexual abuse to the Small Council. To speak anachronistically, the consistory understood itself to be "mandatory reporters" in cases of sexual abuse. It is well known that Calvin distinguished between public and private sins. However, he also made a distinction between sins that are not crimes against the state and sins that are also crimes according to civil law.[31] Usually, when treating sins that were also crimes, the consistory dealt with them first and then sent them to the civil authorities. Contrastingly, sins that were "serious sexual crimes" the consistory "generally sent directly to the Small Council for criminal prosecution."[32] So far as I can tell, it did not treat these cases without the civil authority's involvement. The consistory understood both that the safety of others needed to be retained, and that the perpetrator himself would benefit from civil punishment.

How did the consistory categorize which cases were in fact "serious sexual crimes"? It defined what we call sexual abuse as "involuntary sexual contact."[33] It also understood the abuse of power—older preying upon younger and people in positions of authority preying on those under authority.

The Genevan consistory's practice of immediately reporting sexual abuse cases to the authorities is instructive for us today. Before doing anything else, consistories ought to report cases of current sexual abuse to the civil authority.[34] Granted, the civil authority is not now what it

31 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.12.4 and 4.12.6, 2:1231-35.

32 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 77. See also Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden,* 285.

33 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 73.

34 In cases involving a minor or elderly person, consistories ought to report to the civil authorities without consulting the victim (securing the safety of the individual first, of course). If the case involves an adult, or an adult who was a minor at the time of the abuse, the adult makes the ultimate decision whether to call the civil authorities. The pastor or consistory ought pastorally

was then. Today the civil government does not take up every matter that it ought. In Geneva, rightly, adultery was punished by the state.[35] One could wish that civil authorities did the same today. But for cases of sexual abuse, the civil government of today still takes up these matters, and rightly so (though with varying degrees of effectiveness). God has given the civil authority this power and right, and the church must respect the power of the sword given to civil authorities and be thankful for it.

The principle expressed in Article 71 of the Church Order of the PRCA was expressed already in Geneva: "Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities."[36] Civil authorities need to investigate these cases carefully and thoroughly. It is their responsibility before God, and we must not take away from them the calling God has given them.

Furthermore, reporting sexual abuse to the state is commended throughout Reformed history for the same two reasons. First, reporting to the state ensures the safety of others who may unwittingly become victims. Second, the guilty person himself needs the power of the sword in his life for his own spiritual well-being.

Commenting on Article 72 of the Church Order, Van Dellen

---

to urge this action while being careful not to force the issue. If the adult does not want to call the civil authorities, the consistory may appropriately file a police report without naming the victim. See Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in your Church* (Christian Focus Publications, 2021), 94-97.

35 The first offense was a prison sentence during which one lived on bread and water, and a fine.

36 *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 400. The Church Order of Dordt states virtually the same thing in Article 71: "Inasmuch as Christian discipline is spiritual [in character] and exempts no one from civil trial and punishment, so besides civil punishment ecclesiastical censure is necessarily demanded in order to remove the offense from the church of Christ." Richard R. DeRidder, ed., *The Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century Reformed Churches of the Netherlands Together with Their Social, Political, and Ecclesiastical Context,* trans. Richard R. DeRidder with the assistance of Peter H. Jonker and Rev. Leonard Verduin (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1987), 555.

and Monsma state, "Sins that are not generally known should not be revealed *unless the nature of the transgression should require such,* (for example: theft, murder, etc., being crimes against the civil institutions)."[37] In other words, the commentators acknowledge that there are exceptions to the rule of keeping secret sins secret. Some sins *due to their very nature* must be dealt with publicly even though these sins were committed privately. Because of the public danger, sexual abuse is such a sin.

The Synod of Dordt 1578 came to the same conclusion:

> In answer to the question which sins are public: A public sin is one which is committed publicly before everyone, or which is committed in a place that by its nature is public (as the lawyers say) even though there are few people, or which through the stubbornness of the sinner from being private becomes public, *or lastly, because of its grossness is deemed worthy of public punishment.* Thus, the sins of David against Uriah and of Ananias and Sapphira against the Holy Spirit were made public and punished as public sins.[38]

According to the synod, there are four possible circumstances that guide a consistory in determining whether a sin is public.

Certain sins of sexual abuse are public; they certainly fit into the fourth, italicized, category.[39]

---

37 Idzerd Van Dellen, and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 301. Emphasis added. Article 72 reads: "In case anyone errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed." *The Confessions and Church Order*, 400. The church order of Dordt is the same.

38 Cf. De Ridder, *Church Orders*, 232. Emphasis added..

39 In addition, commenting on Church Order Article 73, Van Dellen and Monsma give the article's history, and refer to an *addition* to this article that was once present by decision of the Synod of Emden 1571 (302). Emden added the idea that "secret sins, though repented of, which constitute grave danger to church or state such as treason or misleading of souls should be reported to the minister of the church, so that, his advice having been gained one might know what to do." In other words, the Synod recognized that certain sins were of such a character that they had to be reported. The rule of Matthew 18 did not apply to these sins. Notice, these sins must be reported

What would motivate a consistory to say that a sin was of such a nature that it *must be* made public even though it was committed in secret? Van Dellen and Monsma provide an answer: "his [the sinner's] best interest, and the safety of others."[40] Here explicitly, as stated above, is the motivation for reporting the matter: first, for the safety of others (Ps 82:3-4) and second, for the good of the sinner (Eph 5:11-13).[41]

At times consistories must make difficult judgments, but reporting sexual abuse to the authorities is the wise tradition of Reformed churches, beginning with Calvin's Geneva, and we ought to take heed.

2. Investigate sexual abuse cases thoroughly.

Sending a case to the civil authorities, the Genevan consistory did

---

even though they were secret and "repented of"! How to report them? Van Dellen and Monsma's advice is limited to calling the people to report the sin to the minister so that he could determine the best course of action. But following what is stated above, that course of action would certainly include the minister and consistory making the judgment whether this is a kind of sin that ought to be made public (including reporting it to the congregation and the civil authorities). Though the addition from Emden 1571 was removed and thus is not present in the Church Order adopted by Dordt 1618-19, Van Dellen and Monsma comment further: "Common sense, however, still tells us that in case a brother or sister has committed a very grievous and dangerous sin, that then it may be to his own best interest and the safety of others that at least his minister be informed" (302-303). In other words VanDellen and Monsma indicate that, while the addition to the article was removed, it is not wrong. It is common sense; it does not even need to be spelled out. The commentators agree with the Synod of Emden that reporting to the minister is the best first course of action. The minister then must decide what to do. Whether we agree that the best way to report the matter is by going to the minister rather than the consistory is inconsequential. The main principle is that certain sins, though committed privately, must be reported and dealt with as public sins.

40 Van Dellen and Monsma, *Church Order Commentary,* 302.

41 Some judge it wise that a consistory consult a neighboring consistory, or even the classis, before making a matter public by going to the authorities and/or making an announcement in church, since public announcements for discipline are made only after classis approval. This is worthy of consideration and discussion, specifically concerning cases where a consistory judges an immediate threat is likely not present.

not wash its hands of the matter. Sometimes it investigated the case to determine if it needed to go to the civil authorities. Other times it worked with the civil authorities. And still other times it had its own investigations for a spiritual purpose alongside the civil authority's investigation.

But *investigate* the consistory did. As previously stated, it called witnesses and put the witnesses under oath, asking them what they saw and heard. It weighed evidence. It examined the reliability of a testimony by following up with other witnesses. It understood the evil inherent in human nature and the pattern of recidivism, so that it understood that if a person committed one serious sexual crime, he/she likely (not always) committed more. Thus, the consistory investigated thoroughly.

In one example, a case from 1552, a married man named Hudry Rojod employed a young family maid named Michee Morar. Rojod raped the maid and she became pregnant. The consistory dealt with that issue, immediately sending it to the civil government and barring the man from the Lord's Supper. But the consistory continued to investigate. In its investigation it found that Rojod had employed a different maid earlier in his married life. Concerned for her welfare, it probed until learning that, years earlier, the man had raped that maid as well.[42]

To be sure, the consistory members did not fancy themselves detectives. Sometimes the consistory even asked the civil government to investigate the case before making made a judgment based on its own investigation.[43] Yet, regardless of the specific circumstances, the consistory did its work thoroughly.

We can learn something from this. Though it may feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar, our investigation of sexual sin must be more thorough and more invasive than it often has been. On the basis of Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 37's teaching, these detailed and intense investigations should involve the consistory putting the

42 John Witte, Jr. "Church, State, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva: Domestic Disputes and Sex Crimes in Geneva's Consistory and Council," in *Law and Disputing in the Middle Ages,* ed. Per Anderson et. al. (Copenhagen: Djoef Publishing, 2013), 271.

43 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 77.

accused, the witnesses, and sometimes even the accuser under oath when giving their accounts. In their commentary on Article 74 of the Church Order, Van Dellen and Monsma say that "when a consistory finds that a certain charge or report requires investigation it should do its utmost to carry on the investigation impartially."[44] They then call for oath-taking when investigating these urgent cases, even referring to them as "trials." Extensive consistory investigation of serious cases is not new. Elders are New Testament judges and "the judges shall make diligent inquisition" (Deut. 19:18).

3. Church members who are aware of sexual abuse must be urged to report these sins to church and state immediately.

The consistory urged those who knew of instances sexual abuse to make these cases known to the consistory without going the way of Matthew 18. Church members were even ecclesiastically chastened if the consistory discovered that people could have reported them and did not. In the case of Rojod's rape of his two maids, the consistory discovered during its investigation that Rojod's wife knew at least about the second rape and had urged the young maid to abort the child, or to bring the child to her after it was born so that she could kill it and thus keep the matter secret. The maid did not heed her mistress's instruction, but the consistory put the wife under church discipline for her advice *and* for not reporting the sin of which she was aware.

Even more telling, however, is that the consistory also discovered that a neighbor lady had known about the matter. This neighbor did many things right. She urged the maid not to abort the child as Rojod's wife advised, but rather to bring the child to the deacons of the church who, she promised, would help the maid. Thankfully, the maid took the neighbor's good advice. Notwithstanding, the consistory put the same neighbor under church discipline for a short time for not reporting the rape to the consistory.[45]

The point is that the consistory was right to urge people to report these sins. These kinds of sins may not remain privately known to family members and others for years. In the vast majority of cases, others will suffer because of the silence of the family members. Again,

44 Van Dellen and Monsma, *Church Order Commentary,* 307.

45 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 77.

the family members must report the matter for two reasons: the safety of others, and the abuser's own *spiritual* need of *civil* punishment in his life.

4. The consistory ought to question all parties involved while believing the victim if it is reasonable to do so.

Investigating a 1557 case involving a man named Michel Pointeau, the consistory learned that throughout the course of his marriage, Michel had repeatedly solicited his wife's sister and at least in one instance had wickedly fondled her. The sister rejected his advances. As the consistory investigated, it learned that Michel's behavior had begun before he and his wife were married and while the sister was yet a minor. When Michel's wife discovered her husband's behavior, she rightly informed the consistory. When the consistory pressed Michel, he said the whole thing was the sister's fault: *She* was pursuing *him* and flirting with *him* all these years. The sister denied this, and so did the wife. The consistory believed the sister, sent the case immediately to the civil authorities and put Michel under church discipline. The consistory eventually excommunicated the man and banished him from the city of Geneva.[46]

5. While a consistory ought to believe the one in the position of victim, it ought not do so blindly and without further investigation.

In a sad case after Calvin's death, a young chambermaid named Pernette accused a soldier of raping her. The consistory immediately sent this case to the civil authorities. Apparently, the Small Council and the consistory both investigated the case.[47] Pernette said that she had screamed so loudly that her mistress had come running to her, finding her on the ground in tears. However, the mistress testified that she had heard *no* screaming and had *not* run to find Pernette in tears. The consistory interviewed neighbors as well, and they also reported that they had heard no screams. The other soldiers said none of them

46 Witte, "Church, State and Family in John Calvin's Geneva," 274.

47 William Naphy, *Sex Crimes: From Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2004), 75-76. It is difficult to tell with certainty from Naphy's recounting how much the consistory was involved.

had done this, and there were no screams. Eventually the consistory discovered that the young woman had been raped by a soldier a year earlier. The one who raped her was also a cavalryman, as was the soldier she had accused. The consistory came to the indisputable conclusion that the trauma of the previous rape had led her to relive her previous experience when another cavalryman was present in the house.[48]

Though it did not have language to describe this phenomenon, the consistory understood that something like this could happen. It was not blinded by emotions but careful, wise and thorough. Its example undergirds the approach that the consistory believes the victim and continues to believe the victim until it becomes impossible to do so, while continuing to investigate.

6. The consistory must handle what comes before them without fear or favor.

People who were put under church discipline in Geneva were of all professions and social strata, including laborers, construction workers, lawyers, printers, notaries, clerks, politicians, and, at times, even members of the consistory. Though the civil government in Geneva had a statute of limitations, the consistory did not. [49] It dealt with sins of long ago if need be.

In one instance a church member who was a politician of the highest rank was refused the Lord's Supper for an instance of adultery that occurred twelve years prior.[50] Without fear or favor, the consistory served Christ the King of the church. Elders can be tempted to look the other way, reasoning that the perpetrator is a good man. May God forbid it.

7. The consistory ought carefully to urge victims of sexual abuse and their families to testify for the sake of others.

In 1577 a man sexually abused a seven-year-old girl on five different occasions. The consistory learned through investigation that the man was guilty of a string of prior abusive events involving

48 Naphy, *Sex Crimes*, 75-76.

49 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 282.

50 Manetsch, *Pastoral Care East of Eden*, 282.

both young girls and young boys. The consistory also learned that in a number of these earlier cases, the parents of the children knew what had happened. Some had responded by screaming at the man, others by beating him, but none reported him to the consistory or the civil authorities. All the parents expressed that their reason for not reporting the matter was to spare their child the further pain of having to testify about it to someone else.

Finally, the parents of the seven-year-old girl put a stop to the wicked man's abuse. Surely it was very painful for young Marie Besson to testify.[51] Yet, how many later instances of abuse would not have happened, had the matter been reported earlier and an earlier victim been encouraged to testify.

The parents' protective desire to spare their children more pain is understandable. It may be the reason many today do not report sexual abuse. Oh, the wrestling in their soul: "Do I prod my child to testify or do I not?" Certainly each case is unique, and no hard and fast rule may be dictated. Nevertheless, when victims bear the pain of testifying regarding these incidents, others may be protected from harm. Consistories ought carefully to urge such, if they see that such testimony is possible.

8. A consistory ought not quickly restore members who are guilty of serious sexual sins.

The Genevan consistory immediately barred from the Lord's Supper those whom it discovered to be guilty of sexual sin. Even after a confession of repentance, it required a probationary period during which time the sinner demonstrated his repentance. This held true for sins of adultery as well. Often in the most serious cases of sexual abuse the civil government executed the guilty party. The consistory restored some sinners who were not executed, but only after long and careful work, and observing the Spirit's sanctifying working in the person.[52]

As a pastor, I personally am somewhat rebuked by this. Regarding sexual sins broadly, and not only limited to matters of abuse, I should have recommended a probationary period and thus a longer demonstration of evidence of repentance. Article 75 of the Church

51 Naphy, *Sex Crimes*, 110.

52 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 71.

Order says,

> The reconciliation of all such sins as are of their nature of a public character, or have become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place *(upon sufficient evidence of repentance)* in such a manner as the consistory shall deem conducive to the edification of each church.[53]

"Sufficient evidence of repentance" may be judged differently in different cases. In cases of sexual abuse, a careful understanding of how true repentance manifests itself, and an observation of the sinner's repentance over a long period of time, is imperative. A perpetrator is often hardened in such a sin, having given him/herself over for years to a pattern of crafty lying and manipulation. A consistory must understand that perpetrators will likely attempt to manipulate it, often feigning repentance in an outward show.[54] The message from Geneva is loud and clear: Do not quickly and easily restore a sexual abuser to the fellowship of the church!

9. The consistory ought to require the perpetrator of sexual abuse to pay for damages that he caused as much as is reasonably possible.

This is the example of Calvin's Geneva. In the case of a married man who raped a girl who then became pregnant, the man was made to pay for the expenses both of the birth of the child and of raising the child as well.[55] A consistory today ought to consider as part of the evidence of repentance whether or not an abuser is willing to pay for help that the victim needs (especially counseling services).

10. In the words of Calvin, a consistory ought to remember that in all church discipline work, including for sexual abuse, there must the application of both "oil and vinegar."[56]

---

53 *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches,* 401.

54 Among many resources is the work of Jimmy Hinton. For example: https://jimmyhinton.org/a-safe-place-guest-post-by-pastor-gricel-medina-ryan-ashton/

55 Witte, "Church, State and Family in John Calvin's Geneva," 26.

56 John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1995), 802. The sermon text is Galatians 6:1-2.

Vinegar bites: it is justice. Oil is healing: it is mercy. Calvin did not view these as contradictory, nor was mercy the lessening of justice. Justice is to deal with things truthfully and to give them their due. In this way the guilty may be driven by bite of vinegar to put the sin away and to find the oil of mercy in Christ. Church discipline is not personal or ecclesiastical vengeance, to be sure: "Vengeance is mine," says the Lord (Deut. 32:35, 41, 43; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). However, church discipline, even as it seeks to show mercy, is firm and unbending with regard to truth and what genuine repentance looks like. Oil and vinegar. Every consistory needs to remember both of these when handling emotionally charged cases of sexual abuse.

Conclusion

In Calvin's day, the church was coming out of the Renaissance, a time of sexual looseness and deviancy. In fact, Geneva had legalized prostitution until the Reformation came to the city.[57] Calvin understood that proper church discipline would play a significant role in keeping the church from sexual evils. In Calvin's words, church discipline was the sinew that held the church together.[58]

The faithful church of Christ today has been *going into* an era of sexual looseness, possibly the greatest looseness of the modern age. Now as then, church discipline—faithful, tireless, biblical, wise, convicted church discipline—is key to God's work of preserving His church in such an age. Church discipline, no less than the purity of the gospel preaching, must be a mark that shines brightly. The evil age hammers the foundations of the church like so many waves, eroding the city on a hill until she crashes into the sea. Church discipline is the retaining wall that will keep and preserve her.

I conclude with a word to pastors and elders. Caring for the church is work—time-consuming work. Pastors and elders are soldiers on the front lines of battle and are among the medics coming in after the carnage has been unleashed. Our King knows the amount of time as well as of spiritual, physical, and emotional energy that consistories expend for the body of Christ. Do what is necessary. Do not give up. Rule well, as your brothers in Geneva did, and be counted worthy of

57 Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 73.

58 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.12.1, 2:1230.

double honor. Be wise and careful. Do not fear men's faces. Perhaps 400 years from now your consistory minutes will be uncovered for the future encouragement of the church. But even if not, may those minutes testify that you faithfully served the King of kings who will soon appear with a crown of glory that fades not away.

Old Princeton: Primary Figures and Ministerial Contributions[1]

C. N. Willborn

The College of New Jersey, now Princeton University, was founded in 1746 by Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747). Dickinson was of English descent, born in Massachusetts. He was a moderate Presbyterian of the New Side stripe within the nascent Presbyterian Church in the colonial settlements. New Side men were those more heavily influenced by the pietistic methodology of the German Pietists and the English Methodists. They were committed to an experiential, methodical approach to revival or revivalism. As such, they often had a diminished view of the institutional church. The New Siders often applauded and implemented the ways of John and Charles Wesley (1703-91 and 1707-88), George Whitefield (1714-70), and the Dutch Reformed minister, Theodore Frelinghuysen (1691-1747). Their work was largely extra-ecclesiastical and rife with controversy. I categorize Dickinson as a moderate New Side man, because he was less given to the extremes of the movement.[2] He was something of a moderating factor among the more rabid "methodistical" Presbyterians like Gilbert Tennent (1703-64).[3]

---

1 The author wishes to thank the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary for inviting me to deliver in two lectures the substance of this paper in May 2024.

2 Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

3 For a very useful biography on Dickinson, see Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and The Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997); for an historical-theological introduction to Gilbert Tennent see C. N. Willborn, "Gilbert Tennent: Pietist, Preacher, and Presbyterian," in *Colonial Presbyterianism: Old Faith In A New Land* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 157-

By the time John Witherspoon (1723-94), the Scotsman, had served as president of this little mid-Atlantic college for twenty-six years (1768-94), it was a vibrant school with much influence upon the young United States. In gaining influence through the education of politicians and legal minds for the new country, it was flagging in its role as a school for the church. So, in 1812, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) established Princeton Seminary.

The seminary was the first of its kind in the country and became something of a prototype for the seminaries that would spring up across the landscape of the United States. While the college and the seminary had their roots in the New Side Presbyterian movement, they found some moderating leaven in the influence of John Witherspoon who came from the Church of Scotland.[4] The moderating influence was especially evident in the seminary faculty as it progressed through the nineteenth century.

Princeton's Founding: Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller

The leading influence upon the new seminary was William Graham of Lexington, Virginia. Graham (1745-99) studied under Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey. He then moved into the valley of Virginia where he founded Liberty Hall Academy to educate the men of the valley after the model of Witherspoon. Liberty Hall Academy was the progenitor of Washington and Lee College. Of all Graham's accomplished students none are more decorated, perhaps, than Archibald Alexander (1772-1851).

Alexander served a number of churches after his ordination, and for nine years was president of Hampden-Sydney College, Farmville, Virginia. From Farmville he moved to Philadelphia where he was pastor of Third Street Presbyterian Church (1807-12). Upon his departure from Third (Pine Street) Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, he moved to take the lead at the newly formed seminary. At the heart of his philosophy of ministry was to inform the understanding, and to impress the heart. He learned this from William Graham, and he took it with him to the seminary.

80.

4 Gordon L. Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon: Pew, Pulpit and Public Forum* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000).

In 1812 the General Assembly elected him to begin Princeton Seminary. His move across the Delaware River from Philadelphia to Princeton, NJ was a permanent one for Alexander. He remained in Princeton until his death, almost forty years later in 1851.

In addition to his teaching load in the seminary and preaching schedule among the churches, he was always busy writing. Hardly an edition of the *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* appeared without an article from him between 1829-1850. In addition to occasional sermons and contributions to periodicals, *Outlines of the Evidences of Christianity* appeared in 1823 and was followed by many other works. Perhaps most popular was *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (1844). More academic was his *Outlines of Moral Science*, published posthumously by his son, James Waddel Alexander, in 1852. In this latter volume, notes from his course at Princeton, he was not shy to criticize Jonathan Edwards in places, especially on Edward's definition of virtue as disinterested benevolence.[5]

During his time at Princeton, he earned a reputation as an outstanding educator and became renowned for his understanding of the nature and effects of biblical piety. He set the trajectory of the seminary for the coming hundred years and greatly influenced the PCUSA. At the heart of his influence was his insistence on keeping mind and emotion or academics and piety connected. In explaining, he makes several points. First, for Alexander, to speak of theology without experience was to drive a wedge between the faculties of man, namely his intellect and emotion. All intellect or all emotion is wrong in Alexander's *pietatis*.[6] Second, speculative faith is a dead faith that "effects no moral transformation and produces no religious acts of humility, praise, and love."[7] The third assault against a purely speculative faith is simple: The first two reveal no true apprehension of Christ. Divorce of intellect and emotion and no moral transformation

5 Archibald Alexander, *Outlines of Moral Science* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), 169. Alexander goes on to say that Samuel Hopkins, an Edwards student, uses this definition as "a radical principle of his whole system" (170). Therefore, he concludes, "It will not be necessary to make any distinct remarks on President Edwards" (170).

6 See Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1981), 14.

7 *Hoffecker, Piety and the Princeton Theologians*, 14, 15.

equals no Christ.[8] Such a faith is *about* Christ without union with Christ. Or, as this author is fond of saying, such a faith is a *profession* of faith, not a *possessio*n of faith.

In 1814 Samuel Miller (1769-1850)[9] joined Alexander at the nascent seminary as professor of church history and ecclesiastical government. He would precede his colleague in death by one year. Miller brought with him twenty years of pastoral experience, ecclesiastical respect, and an academic reputation. He was author of *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (1803) and the founder of the New York Historical Society (1804). Miller was elected moderator of the PCUSA General Assembly at the ripe old age of thirty-six in 1806.

With Alexander, and Hodge later, Miller was aligned with the Old School camp within the PCUSA. While they would remain rather passive, eschewing controversy, they were clearly sympathetic with the more vocal Old Schoolers. For example, they joined Ashbel Green (1762-1848), who was as much as anyone responsible for the existence of Princeton Seminary, against the New School element within the church. In a polemical volume against the New School, *The Spruce Street Lectures,* Miller joined Charles Hodge and John Breckinridge when he published a chapter "On Ecclesiastical Polity." These lectures were delivered in 1831-32 and eventually published in 1840.[10] Miller's chapter addressed the low churchism of the New School faction.

Aside from controversial matters, Miller provided the church with numerous articles and books on the utility of confessions and creeds, the baptism of covenant infants, and the office of ruling elder.[11]

8 Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians*, 15.

9 Samuel Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller* (1869; rprt. Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 2:444.

10 Ashbel Green, ed., *The Spruce Street Lectures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1840).

11 Samuel Miller, "Adherence to Our Doctrinal Standards," in *Doctrinal Integrity: On the Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions and Adherence to Our Doctrinal Standards* (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1989), 75. This volume is comprised of *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions* (1839) and "Adherence to Our Doctrinal Standards" (1833); *The Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1843);

During the seminary's early years, its foundational document was produced, "The Charter for Ministerial Preparation." At the 1811 General Assembly of the PCUSA, the *Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* was adopted. It will be helpful for our purposes to give some summary of this seminal document. Keep in mind that Princeton was the first such theological seminary and it would be something of a model for others to follow.

Early in the document, the church established the purpose of the institution.

> It is to form men for the gospel ministry, who shall truly believe, and cordially love, and therefore endeavour to propagate and defend, in its genuineness, simplicity, and fulness, that system of religious belief and practice which is set forth in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Plan of Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church and thus to perpetuate and extend the influence of true evangelical piety, and gospel order.[12]

The Plan goes on to detail how the seminary would accomplish this great work: by providing

> for the Church an adequate supply and succession of able and faithful ministers of the New Testament, workmen that *need not to be ashamed*, being qualified *rightly to divide the word of truth*. It is to unite… religion and literature; that piety of the heart…with solid learning: believing that religion without learning, or learning without religion, in the ministers of the gospel, must ultimately prove injurious to the Church….It is to provide for the Church, men who shall be able to defend her faith against infidels, and her doctrines against heretics…. It is to furnish our congregations with enlightened, humble, zealous,

Miller on Presbyterianism and Baptism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1840). This latter volume includes *Presbyterianism the Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ* and *Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable: and Baptism by Sprinkling or Affusion the Most Suitable and Edifying Mode.*

12 *Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 2nd ed. (Elizabethtown, NJ: Isaac Kollock, Printer, 1816), 4.

> laborious pastors, who truly watch out for the good of souls…and build up their charges in holiness and peace….It is to promote harmony and unity of sentiment among the ministers of our Church….It is to lay the foundation of early and lasting friendships,…which experience shows to be conducive not only to personal happiness, but to the perfecting of inquiries, researches, and publications advantageous to religion…. It is to preserve the unity of our Church….It is to bring to the service of the church genius and talent, when united with piety…without expense to the student….It is to found a nursery for missionaries to the heathen….It is, finally, to endeavour to raise up a succession of men, at once *qualified for* and thoroughly *devoted* to the work of the Gospel ministry; who,…may all possess a portion of the spirit of the primitive propagators of the Gospel; prepared to make every sacrifice, to endure every hardship, and to render every service which the promotion of pure and undefiled religion may require.[13]

The Plan goes on at some length to detail the structure of the seminary and the curriculum. There is also a sizeable section "Of Devotion, and Improvement in Practical Piety." This betrays the founders—Ashbel Green and Archibald Alexander's—loose affinity with the New Side movement of the previous century. These two men were in some sense fond of the revivalists of the Great Awakening—Whitefield, Frelinghuysen, and others.

One last note about the Plan should be expressed. This point could be overlooked but for the curious nature of Article III, Section 12. Let me produce it for you in full:

> It shall be the duty of the professors, under the direction of the board of directors, to supply pupils of the Institution with the preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments of the Christian Church; if this supply shall not, in the judgement of the directors, be satisfactorily furnished by a Church or Churches in the place where the Institution shall be established.[14]

I say this is "curious" since it suggests, in this writer's opinion, a low ecclesiology. Had it simply said that the faculty would preach at designated times, not in conflict with the worship of the church or

13 *Plan*, 4-6.
14 *Plan*, 13.

churches in the locale, for the example and edification of students, then I would think nothing of it. But to compete with the local church, when the institution does not have elders and deacons, or possess the nature of the church, that is, again, in this author's opinion, wrongheaded altogether. Since this author is of the opinion that the most influential of the Princetonians, Charles Hodge, had weaknesses in his ecclesiology, one must wonder if the seed for it is found in Article III, Section 12.

The critical note just rendered notwithstanding, the ideal set forth by the nascent Presbyterian Church, just twenty-three years after its official founding, is an imitable plan. No wonder Princeton produced a most remarkable number of faithful and influential pastors, scholars, and leaders for the church for the next one hundred years. No doubt this was possible because of the hearts and minds of the early faculty. Alexander undoubtedly brought the *goal* of his preaching into the classroom of the seminary: to inform the understanding and to impress the heart. This is a noble and godly goal for all of us, in all our efforts as pastor-scholars.

Princeton's Furtherance: Charles Hodge

From these foundational men and principles, we move on to the furtherance of the seminary's charter. Two men are instrumental: Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) joined the faculty in its seventh year and his tenure would last for almost sixty years. He, along with his son, A. A. Hodge (1823-86), and B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), would extend the influence of the seminary for another fifty years. We consider the life of Charles Hodge first and conclude with the seminary's imprint upon the church.

Charles Hodge's tenure as a professor of theology extended almost sixty years. B. B. Warfield, who sat under Charles Hodge (1797-1878) as a student at Princeton, said that his mentor set before him "examples of perfect teaching... Every jot of that learning, consecrated to the Master's cause, was ready to be utilized in the recitation room."[15] Even his critics acknowledged Hodge to be the authority on theological matters. Robertson Smith said at one point that he "glanced over the

15 A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1881), 590-91. Hereafter, *Life*.

standard religious authority—Hodge—a few days ago."[16]

Hodge, born in Philadelphia, was the son of Christian parents. Of his mother he writes, "To our mother, my brother and myself, under God, owe absolutely everything. To us she devoted her life. For us she prayed, laboured and suffered."[17] Ashbel Green, his pastor, pressed the gospel upon his life from a young age. The result was a profession of faith in Christ in January 1815. This was Hodge's final year of college and came during a time of spiritual renewal at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton).

In 1819, after pursuing ministerial preparation at Princeton Seminary, Archibald Alexander suddenly asked him "How would you like to be a Professor in this Seminary?" A. A. Hodge, his son and biographer, says that his father often said that "this question overwhelmed him with surprise and confusion"[18] The surprise and confusion did not last long, however. He settled at Princeton as a teacher of biblical languages where he found himself delighted in academic pursuits. That year the General Assembly appointed Charles Hodge Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature.

Seven years later, Hodge embarked upon studies in Europe (1826-28). There he encountered the German discipline of biblical criticism. During his time in Germany, he began a lifelong friendship with a German scholar, August Tholuck. Tholuck was a pietist with an uncritical respect for Schleiermacher. Through Tholuck's influence Hodge relaxed his theological disposition toward the pantheistic theology of Schleiermacher. Listen to Hodge's personal notes about Schleiermacher from his *Systematic Theology*:

> When in Berlin the writer often attended Schleiermacher's church. The hymns to be sung were printed on slips of paper and distributed at the door. They were always evangelical and spiritual in an eminent degree, filled with praise and gratitude to our Redeemer. Tholuck said that Schleiermacher, when sitting in the evening with his family, would often say, "Hush, children; let us sing a hymn of praise to Christ." Can we doubt that he is singing those praises now? To whomsoever Christ

16 David Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 84.

17 A. A. Hodge, *Life*, 9.

18 A. A. Hodge, *Life*, 65.

is God, St. John assures us, Christ is a Saviour.[19]

Despite his relaxed posture toward Schleiermacher, Hodge managed to exercise some critical energy when he spurned Tholuck's attempts to justify Schleiermacher's attitude toward the holy Scriptures. Again, from his systematic theology notes, he said, "[Schleiermacher] could not receive [the Scriptures] as a supernatural revelation from God. He did not regard it as containing doctrines which we are bound to believe on the authority of the sacred writers."[20] From this point, Hodge continued to criticize Schleiermacher's Christology, his rejection of Trinitarian theology, biblical anthropology, and the plan of salvation. It is indeed hard to understand how he could see a way through all of Schleiermacher's denials to find the pantheist praising the Savior now.

Upon his return to Princeton, he began what would become the most influential literary organ in the American church, the *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review.* The material in the *Review* was characterized by "knowledge, clearness and faith... he experienced the whole Calvinistic system and would defend it at all cost as the truth of God, from loyalty to Christ, and love for human souls."[21]

Along with his contributions through the *Biblical Repertory*, Hodge began publishing commentaries on Romans, Ephesians, and the letters to the church at Corinth. His magnum opus, the *Systematic Theology*, published in 1872, became the standard theological textbook at Princeton and beyond. R. L. Dabney, no mean theologian himself, commended the textbook for "the fulness of its refutations of the materialistic and atheistic infidelity on the one hand, and of the pantheistic speculations on the other, which are the banes of the recent movements in science."[22] In general, Dabney's assessment is one of praise.

Perhaps the most neglected of Hodge's published contributions was his monumental *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.* While Hodge's mentor and

19 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (rprt., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 2:440, footnote.

20 C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:441.

21 A. A. Hodge, *Life*, 251.

22 Robert L. Dabney, "Hodge's Systematic Theology," in *Discussions* (1891; rprt., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 1:229.

colleague, Alexander, had been soft on the revivalism of the first and second awakenings, so called, Hodge was not so temperate. In his *Constitutional History* he offers *three areas of critique*. First, one must judge revival by the preaching and particularly the preaching of the doctrines of sin, regeneration, and conversion. Second, one must evaluate the experience produced by a revival. Was there conviction of sin, desire for deliverance, and absolute dependence on the person and work of Christ? Finally, he judged the effects of revival. Do the experiences last? Even in the New England context, where Edwards labored, the results were questionable and short lived. For these reasons Hodge laments from "the prima facie proof that there must have been something very wrong in the revival itself."[23]

Hodge died in June 1878 but not before seeing his family embrace Christ as Savior and Lord. At one time three Hodges taught at Princeton. Largely through the Hodges' labors, Princeton became synonymous with Calvinistic orthodoxy.

Princeton's Imprint

With the three primary men of old Princeton established, we wish to consider the imprint of Princeton upon the church. The seminary extended the idea of common sense philosophy throughout the theological and pastoral landscape of the Presbyterian Church and beyond. One example of "beyond" can be seen in the Southern Baptist theologian, and student of Hodge, James Petigru Boyce (1827-88). In Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology* one largely finds a condensed version of Hodge's larger three volume treatment of systematics. One finds essential agreement from prolegomena to eschatology. The primary differences, as one might expect, pertain to the sacraments and ecclesiology. What I want to communicate here is that Princeton's influence extended beyond the Presbyterian students into Baptist ranks. The Princeton imprint is impossible to measure, while being most significant in the American religious scene.

The preceding paragraph introduced the idea of common sense. That is a popular name for the philosophical handmaiden to much of the

23 Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1851), 2:59.

nineteenth-century theology. That is especially true in Reformed ranks. Common Sense, or, more formally, Scottish Realism, originated in the early eighteenth century as a rejoinder to David Hume's skepticism that was sweeping the British Isles and Europe. Thomas Reid (1710-96) is the father of Scottish Realism.[24] At the time, Reid's offering was more popular than even Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) idealism. Reid's realism held sway among theologians until the early quarter of the twentieth century. The general premise is that man is hard-wired as the *imago Dei*, with certain "first truths" or defining principles that give structure to man's way of knowing. Among those principles is the existence of God. Scottish Realism came into the Princeton orbit through John Witherspoon. His pupil William Graham passed it on to Archibald Alexander and through Alexander's labors to countless seminarians, including Hodge and Warfield.

Scottish Realism has had something of a renaissance in recent years through the Reformed epistemology school of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga. Reformed epistemology was so named because it represents a continuation of the sixteenth-century Reformed theology of John Calvin, who postulated a *sensus divinitatis*, an innate divine awareness of God's presence in all image bearers. Examples of Reformed epistemology are found in Wolterstorff's *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*[25] and Alvin Plantinga's *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God.*[26] A collection of related essays may be found in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* delivered in Ontario, Canada in 1981.[27] Among the contributors to this groundbreaking volume were Paul Helm, Arthur Holmes, Plantinga, and Wolterstorff. Additionally, a fine survey of Scottish Realism has been offered by

24 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

25 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason with the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

26 Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

27 Hendrik Hart, Johan Van Der Hoeven, Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, et al, *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* (Lanham, MD: University Press in America, 1983). This volume is presently available through Wipf & Stock, 2011.

Douglas McDermid.[28]

There has also been some renewed interest in individual Princetonians like Warfield, particularly in regard to his Realist commitments. Among those interacting with the Princeton's epistemological commitments is Paul Helseth. In his thoughtful *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind*,[29] Helseth makes a sound effort to divorce the Princetonian epistemology from the accusation of Enlightenment rationalism. Paul Helm commended the volume saying,

> A notable example of intellectual reclamation and recovery. Sensitively and knowledgably discusses the issues of faith and reason, particularly in relation to apologetics, and then assesses the strength of the critique of 'post-conservative orthodoxy' against the Princeton theology.[30]

Now for some general comments about contributions that came through the Princeton school. First, let us note the practical aspects which have to do with preaching and pastoral ministry. As we noted previously, the very Plan for the seminary was largely ministerial or pastoral in emphasis. It was a to be a greenhouse for producing healthy ministers to be planted throughout the nascent United States and throughout the world. Some of the early students including Alexander's sons, particularly James W. Alexander (1804-59) who would be a prominent pastor in New York City and leading figure in the 1857-59 revivals that originated in churches of the city and spread throughout the eastern seaboard. This revival, unlike the First Awakening and the Finney revivals, would have long-term positive effects in the churches of the young country.[31]

Two other ministers who gained their deep roots in the Princeton greenhouse were Charles Colcock Jones (1804-63) and Daniel Baker (1791-1857), both of Georgia. Jones would return home to the

28 Douglas McDermid, *The Rise and Fall of Scottish Common Sense Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

29 Paul Kjoss Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).

30 Paul Helm, in *"Right Reason,"* commendations.

31 For examples of the preaching associated with these revivals and that of James W. Alexander see *The New York Pulpit in the Revival of 1858* (NY: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1858).

lowcountry of Georgia and take up work among the slaves. He became known as the Apostle to the Negro Slaves.[32] His labors were imitated throughout the slave-holding regions. His publications were used widely for catechetical instruction of slaves and formation of churches. Baker[33] ministered in Virginia, Savannah, Georgia, and then traveled as an evangelist of the church throughout the deep South. He reached as far west as Texas where he established a number of churches and Austin College.

Among the many missionaries sent into foreign lands was John Bailey Adger (1810-99) of Charleston, South Carolina. While at Princeton, through the mission society of the seminary, he became convinced of his calling to the foreign field of ministry. Graduating in 1833, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Charleston Union and was sent to evangelize Armenians in modern-day Turkey. While there, he translated the Bible, Westminster Confession of Faith, and other religious texts into local languages and managed a printing press. After more than a decade in the Middle East his eyesight began to fail. He returned home to Charleston in 1846 and immediately gained his presbytery's approval to begin a work for the slaves of Charleston. That work became Zion Presbyterian Church which, under the leadership of John Lafayette Girardeau (1825-98), grew to be the largest church in Charleston with both free and slave blacks as well as white membership.[34]

Princeton's B. B. Warfield

Of course, Princeton would become known for the theology of Hodge and Warfield. Hodge's contributions are substantial, but in this writer's opinion, Warfield's are equally significant, if not more beneficial. Consider Warfield's seminal work on the doctrine of inerrancy, for example.[35] The article, co-authored with A. A. Hodge,

32 See Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1979).

33 See Douglas Kelly, *Preachers with Power* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993).

34 John Bailey Adger, *My Life and Times* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899).

35 Archibald Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, "Inspiration," in *The Presbyterian Review* 6 (April 1881): 225-60.

would be the beginning of his contributions to the topic and anchor a later volume on the doctrine of Scripture, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.[36] The work of Warfield in this area of theology provided the church an incalculable wealth of confidence in the holy Scriptures at a time when it was undergoing heavy shelling from the enemy. The pantheistic theology of Schleiermacher and the rationalistic theology of higher criticism were assaulting the necessity, veracity, and authority of the Bible. With this the Bible was left insufficient for the modern man. Warfield engaged the detractors at every turn and answered with an academic barrage that only unbelievers could miss.

Warfield also wrote massively against the soul-deceiving soteriological errors of his day and ours. From his *The Plan of Salvation* to *Perfectionism,*[37] Warfield stormed the gates of doctrinal error. In *The Plan of Salvation* Warfield surveys the various schools of soteriology and critiques them against the Scriptures. His conclusion is that all systems boil down to two systems at the end of the day—naturalistic and supernaturalistic. And, as he concludes in one of his shorter writings, supernaturalism is nothing more or less than the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.[38] While some within the Reformed academic world may disagree with his temperate assessment of Amyraldism (as a supernatural doctrine), the work is a definitive work for the objective reader.

In Warfield's articles, turned books, he tackles the aberrant view of sanctification that emanated from Wesleyan holiness. In what turned eventually into two substantial volumes, he critiqued various forms of sinless perfectionism, such as the popular Keswick

36 B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1948). This volume also appears as volume 3 in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927–32). The content is various articles published in theological journals during his lifetime.

37 B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1915) and *Perfectionism,* vols. 7 and 8 in *The Works of B. B. Warfield.* These three volumes are collected essays and articles that appeared elsewhere prior to compilation into the present works.

38 B. B. Warfield, "What is Calvinism?" in *The Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield,* John E. Meeter, ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P& R, 1970), 1:389-392.

and Oberlin schools of thought. Again, Warfield tackled the novel Pentecostal movement that originated out of the holiness movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a series of lectures delivered at Columbia (SC) Seminary, he delivered what was eventually published as *Counterfeit Miracles.*[39] The Princetonian also countered the alleged miracles defended within Roman Catholicism. This volume, like all of Warfield's works, have abiding relevance for the church. This is perhaps true at no point more than his treatment of the extraordinary gifts that were valid for the apostolic era. At this point his cessation argument links to his defense of the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for the church today. And, of course, this connects the dots to his supernaturalistic view of biblical religion, over against an anthropocentric naturalism of Wesleyan holiness.

Finally, we would be remiss to omit one of this author's favorite works by Warfield. In the *Lord of Glory,*[40] Warfield defended the deity and messianic consciousness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The assault upon Christ's person was of course in full bloom at the turn of the century and Warfield offered another definitive defense of our Lord. Warfield upheld the divinity of Christ with a thorough treatment of the New Testament corpus. He also highlighted the unique and close relationship between Christ and God, as indicated by the title "Son of God." Further he tackled Christ's messianic undertaking. Here he emphasized Christ's earthly life as a distinct part of a divine mission. Supernaturalism once again came to the fore as he delved deeply into the Synoptic Gospels' perspective of Jesus's teaching, sovereign control over demonic forces, and His dominion over death and nature.

One last contribution from Warfield warrants mention, although tangentially. Along with other Princeton men, Warfield's work set the stage for the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos. Again, counter to the biblical theology that had been largely commandeered by the liberal theology of Germany, Princeton served to bring the Bible back into biblical theology. Much of Warfield's biblical scholarship leans

39 B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918). This volume contains the Thomas Smyth Lectures for 1917-18, which were delivered at First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, SC for Columbia Theological Seminary on October 4-10, 1917.

40 B. B. Warfield, *Lord of Glory* (NY: American Tract Society, 1907).

more to biblical theology than systematic theology. Of course, his work combating higher criticism provided confidence in the Bible to contemporaries and the young Vos as he studied with Warfield and others. Princeton was in the lead on the Biblical Theology front.[41]

The End of Old Princeton: J. Gresham Machen

While much more could be said for Warfield's abiding footprint within the church, we now turn our attention to the last of old Princeton's defenders of the faith. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) was a Warfield protégé and eventual colleague. His contributions included a defense of Paul's religion as thoroughly agreeable with that of Paul's Savior,[42] the virgin birth of Christ, and biblical Christianity as incompatible with the liberal theology of the early twentieth century. In his first publication, *The Origin of Paul's Religion,* Machen offered a masterful and forthright defense of the historical truthfulness and supernaturalism of the New Testament. The latter referenced volume is taken from the James Sprunt Lectures delivered at Union (VA) Theological Seminary. *The Virgin Birth* originated from lectures delivered as the Thomas Smyth Lectures at Columbia (SC) Seminary, which were given at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina.

Hodge, Warfield, and Machen are the primary names associated with Old Princeton's influence that continues to be felt in the western church. We would consider the Princeton influence to be, by and large, a positive one. However, recent scholarship has revealed some variances in Hodge from classical Reformation and Post-Reformation scholastic thought.[43] Introducing a 2023 collection of essays, *Charles Hodge: American Reformed Theologian,* Ryan McGraw writes:

> His definition and method of theology drew from medieval and early

41 Peter J. Wallace, "The Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology: The Development of Old Testament Theology at Old Princeton, 1812–1932" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 42.

42 J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1921); *The Virgin Birth* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1930); and *Christianity and Liberalism* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1923).

43 Ryan McGraw, ed. *Charles Hodge: American Reformed Orthodox Theologian* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023).

> Reformed authors, while adjusting his evaluation of theology as a science in light of post-enlightenment definitions of science and scientific progress. His explanation of the divine attributes both built upon and altered historic Reformed orthodox ideas at key points. Hodge's treatment of the Trinity broadly retained the catholic Christian doctrine, while reflecting shifting definitions of personhood in the nineteenth century, and using "subordination" language that was relatively unusual in earlier church history. Retaining the imputation of Adam's sin as grounded in high Reformed orthodox views of the covenant of works, he redefined the nature of imputation in light of American controversies, especially related to New England theology and fears of pantheism. While Hodge's church polity had historic precedent in Presbyterianism, American debates over the nature and number of church offices, and the grounds on which he defended the validity of Roman Catholic baptism reflected some new avenues of thought. Lastly, both picking up and rejecting strands of earlier Reformed thought and melding them with the Westminster Standards, his description of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper and his debates with John Williamson Nevin were colored by his concerns with modern pantheistic theologies.[44]

Given that Hodge declared that nothing new ever came out of Princeton,[45] recent scholarship finds differently. That surprises many scholars who may not have delved deeply into Charles Hodge particularly. Still, with this honest assessment before us, we can maintain that old Princeton was an able and faithful defender of the faith. She inculcated trinitarian and covenantal theology, a high Christological theology, and supernaturalism. All this emanated from a commitment to the necessity, sole authority, perspicuity, and absolute sufficiency of the Scriptures.

As we conclude this visitation of Old Princeton, let us review. First, the theological seminary was founded to be a greenhouse for young ministers. Second, it was founded to be a cultivator of young men for the church to send into foreign lands. Third, it was founded to nurture men of and for the church in the doctrines of the church. It was first and foremost a seminary of and for the church. While it provided

44 McGraw, *Charles Hodge*, 12.

45 Hodge's claim was made in a letter to William Cunningham in 1857; see A. A. Hodge, *Life*, 430.

for some weak ecclesiology in its very Plan—to provide preaching and sacraments in chapel if the church was deemed inadequate for her task—it was in most regards faithful to its commission. From a theological perspective, Princeton did introduce some "twists" to Westminsterian theology and that of Reformed scholastic orthodoxy. Her overall contributions, right up until Machen was forced off the seminary faculty in 1929, were solid. Much good came to the church through Old Princeton pastorally, theologically, and apologetically.

PRTJ 58,1 (2024): 79-103

The Drunkard's Folly: A Sermon on Proverbs 23:29-35

Douglas J. Kuiper

Introductory Comments

Following is a sermon by my colleague, Prof. D. Kuiper. When I heard this sermon preached in my home congregation, I said to myself before walking out of church, "This warrants publication in our seminary journal." The sermon was instructive, edifying, convicting, God-glorifying, and Christ-focused. Of course, as I am a professor of homiletics, although I always pray that I listen to sermons to be edified, I cannot help but also listen with a teacher's ears: Where did the sermon get its content? How was the sermon constructed, organized, and delivered? Was it applied well? This sermon checked all my boxes, as it were. So for many reasons I judged it a good model for inclusion in our journal. You non-preachers will be blessed by reading it; we preachers can take good lessons from it in so many ways, that is, *after* we have heard and been edified by the gospel message in it.

It is evident from the sermon that Prof. Kuiper is no arm-chair theologian, but a well-seasoned pastor-turned-professor. He knows the people of God and their needs because he has lived as a pastor. He has good counsel that will benefit elders because he has labored as one. The sermon's applications are timely (marijuana, street drugs, and such), frequent, personal, direct ("Will you make that phone call now?"), and exegetically based.

Exegetically, the sermon is an example of getting its material from the text—from the original language (Hebrew); from the grammar ("these are future tense"); from poetry (the sermon explains how and how not to interpret poetry). Hermeneutically, the sermon is an illustration of how to preach the Old Testament in the light of, and enriched by, the New. Homiletically (how to construct a sermon), it is a fine sample for the seminarian or preacher to study—both broadly and in detail—to realize how many homiletical tools are available for

building sermons. Especially encouraging will be to see how Christ is preached from a text that could well be used either moralistically or (which might be the same) as a club. This is gospel preaching.

I trust you will be blessed by reading the sermon, as I was when I did for publication here. It might make you want to find it on www.sermonaudio.com so that you can listen. What can compare to the spoken word (Romans 10:17)?

Barrett L. Gritters

I present the following sermon for two practical reasons. First, it addresses a timely topic, based on a text that is both graphic and powerful. In every congregation are men and women, younger and older, who either are struggling, or have struggled, with the sin of addiction to alcohol or other substances. I pray that God will direct the printed version of this sermon into their hands, for their admonition but also their encouragement. If you know of such a person, give him or her a copy of these pages.

Second, although the main point of the sermon is not to address the elders in their work with addicts, the sermon does make some points of this nature. I mean to encourage elders to admonish these sinning members, and even exercise church discipline toward them as necessary, for the sparing of their souls.

Prior to reading the sermon, please read the entire chapter of Proverbs 23. The quotes from the text are taken from the KJV.

- DJK

A. **In Proverbs 23:29-35, the Holy Spirit warns against two great moral dangers: wine and women.**
   1. *Repeatedly in the book of Proverbs, the Holy Spirit has given this warning.*
      a. The warning against drinking excess wine is found in Proverbs 20:1, 21:17, 31:4-7, as well as in Proverbs 23:20-21.
      b. Proverbs 2, 5, 6, 7, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 27 contain warnings against strange women. While the term "strange women" can refer narrowly to women who sell sex for hire, it includes any woman to whom a man is not married.
   2. *Our text, set in its immediate context, indicates that the two dangers are related.* The one who is drunk will likely give himself over to sexual sin, and the one seeking sexual sin is unlikely to refrain from drunkenness.
      a. The Holy Spirit moves from warning against seductive women in the immediately preceding verses (Proverbs 23:27) to warning against drunkenness in our text.
      b. And in our text is a sober reminder that the one effect of drunkenness is that one's eyes will behold strange women, v. 33.

B. **It is urgent that God's covenant people take these warnings to heart.**
   1. *First, because to commit these sins is our nature.* It is easy for us to be deceived into thinking that, while wine and women are dangers, we are able to handle the dangers; we can play with fire, and not get burned.
      a. Young people are quick to suppose that a drink, maybe a few drinks, is cool, and that sex outside of marriage is nothing more than pleasure. That God forbids drunkenness and sex outside of marriage we can easily put out of our mind.
      b. Even older adults often ignore danger signs in our own lives, progressing further in our desires until, intentionally or not, we have given ourselves over to excess.
   2. *Second, because we live in a society that revels in*

intoxication and expressions of sexual desires.

a. Society considers the immoderate use of intoxicants and women to be fun, relaxing, the real meaning and purpose of life, the thing to do at the end of a day or week of work. We work and go to school (universities) with people who are of this mind.

b. If we do not sense the spiritual danger ourselves, we will quickly think the way others around us think.

3. *Third, and fundamentally because we are God's covenant people.* We are His children, redeemed by Christ, dwelling places of His Spirit, called to live in covenant friendship with Him, spiritually distinct from the world. At stake is the issue of who we are, and what we are called to be. Let us heed the warning!

C. **The wise *do heed* the warning; *fools* do not.**

1. *To say this is to set our text in the context of the book of Proverbs.*

a. The book of Proverbs is about wisdom in contrast with folly. Many of the proverbs in the book relate how the wise man lives in distinction from the foolish man. So also does our text.

b. Also, Proverbs 8 indicates that wisdom is not merely a characteristic or a spiritual power, but is a Person, Jesus Christ. The wisdom that the proverbs graphically illustrate is that which comes from Christ; the folly that is graphically illustrated is the expression of a life apart from Christ.

c. So in our text, the one who possesses wisdom will take to heart the warning; the one who lacks wisdom will not.

2. *To say this is also to find the heart of the gospel in the text.*

a. God gives wisdom to His children. To earn it for us, Christ died on the cross, being the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:1:24). To bestow it, He gave us His Spirit. The Christian life is one of growing in this wisdom.

b. So if we see that we have lacked wisdom in the

past, or do lack it now, all is not lost. God gives wisdom, on the basis of Christ's merits, by the Spirit's work. Let us pray to Him for it (James 1:5).

c. So, God's people will avoid drunkenness. Not that none of God's children ever fall into the sin; many have. But God will cause us to grow in seeing its folly, in hating the sin, and in avoiding it.

3. *To drive the point home, our text presents the folly of drunkenness at greater length, and more graphically, than any other text in the book of Proverbs*.

The Drunkard's Folly

1. The Drunkard: Filled with Wine
2. His Folly: Deceived by Wine
3. Its Effect: Admonished to Wisdom

I. The Drunkard: Filled with Wine

A. Our text speaks of a drunkard. It speaks not merely of one who drinks wine, and by implication, drinks any other alcoholic beverage; rather, it speaks of one who becomes intoxicated by such.

1. *In several ways, the text makes plain that it speaks of one who is intoxicated.*

a. First, the beverages to which it refers, wine and mixed wine (30), are intoxicating beverages that many find pleasing to the taste.

(1) In the Bible, wine refers to intoxicating beverages made from fruit, primarily from grapes. (While the text speaks specifically of wine, Scripture elsewhere uses the term "strong drink," which refers to beverages made from grains, what we would call beer and hard liquor.)

(2) Wine is often pleasing to the taste. However, at times it is sour; even if not, its taste can be improved by adding honey and spices. The term "mixed wine" refers to that. Today we would call it "mulled wine."

b. Second, the text speaks not merely of those who *drink* wine, but of those who *love* wine: "they that

tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine" (30).

(1) The text refers to one who tarries long at the wine.

(a) This is not the man or woman who, after a hard day at work, comes home to eat the evening meal, and with the meal has a glass of wine or a beer; but then, the meal being concluded, rises from the table to carry out whatever activities are planned for the evening.

(b) Rather, this is the man or woman who, when sitting down, is more interested in the beverage than in the food; does not quickly rise from the table; and refills the glass or bottle several times. Drinking *is* the plan for the evening.

(2) When the supply of alcoholic beverage dwindles, the drunkard is on the hunt.

(a) One characteristic of a drunkard is that he can never be long without his drink. The supply must be replenished. He "goes to seek" more.

(b) And the "more" that he seeks must be of the best quality. That, too, can be a sign of a drunkard: he has standards. He will drink nothing but the best. It must be *mixed* wine. He hunts until he finds, then buys, and brings home, so he can continue drinking.

c. Third, that the text is not merely speaking of one who *drinks* wine but of one who is a *drunkard* is evident from the symptoms of drunkenness of which the text speaks in verses 29, 33, and 34.

(1) For now, we limit our attention to the questions of verse 29.

(a) "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow?" The drunkard does. His drunkenness is the cause of his woe and sorrow. The Hebrew words translated "woe" and "sorrow" refer to his cries, moans, groans, and expressions

of anguish. Perhaps he has other sorrows in life and thought that wine would take them away. But drunkenness has added to them; he audibly expresses his troubles.

(b) "Who hath contentions?" The drunkard does. He is argumentative. He thinks he is a nice guy, and desires others to think it; but when drunk, he is quickly in the middle of an argument and a brawl.

(c) "Who hath babblings?" The drunkard does. The Hebrew word translated "babblings" refers to an anxiety that the drunkard manifests. Perhaps he drank to calm his anxieties; but his drinking only loosened his tongue to manifest them more.

(d) "Who hath wounds without cause?" The drunkard does. He stumbles into things, falls down, and gets hurt by others when brawling. He has bruises and broken bones. But he does not remember the cause of any of it: "it just happened."

(e) "Who hath redness of eyes?" The drunkard does. His are not the red eyes of one who is crying often, but the reddened, dull look about the eyes that indicates drunkenness.

(2) Six questions, all of which have one answer: the drunkard. These troubles are the effect of his tarrying long at the wine. Is it not striking that, while wine makes merry (Eccl. 10:19), it does that only when used in moderation; but too much has the opposite effect?

2. *Being filled with wine, the drunkard is not filled with the Spirit*. Ephesians 5:18 admonishes us, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."

a. The point of the verse is twofold.

(1) First, it contrasts wine and the Spirit.

(a) The contrast is apt because of a fundamental similarity between wine and the Spirit: both are powers that influence and control a person. Both wine and the

Holy Spirit are realities that exist outside a person, but when the person receives them in great measure, they fill the person, and the person acts accordingly.

(b) The text makes clear that one cannot be filled with both these powers at the same time. One who is filled with wine is not filled with the Spirit; one who is filled with the Spirit will not be filled with wine.

(2) Second, it admonishes the believer not to be filled with wine. In this sense it does what our text does, although more tersely. But then Ephesians 5:18 goes a step beyond our text: it points to the remedy for those who are filled with wine, and the preventative for those who are not: be filled with the Spirit! Using the means of grace, endeavoring to live a holy, sanctified life, one guards against drunkenness.

b. A clarification is necessary. To say that one who is drunk is not filled with the Spirit is *not* to say that in an absolute sense he does not possess the Spirit.

(1) Both our text and Ephesians 5:18 are written to the church and children of God, to believers in whom Christ has worked His Holy Spirit. The regenerated child of God has the Holy Spirit and cannot lose Him.

(2) Rather, the issue is whether we seek more of the Spirit's gifts, cultivate them, pray for them, and live out of His power, or whether we prefer the influence of wine.

c. But why relate our text to Ephesians 5:18? Understanding our text in light of that New Testament text helps us see even more clearly that drunkenness is sin!

(1) Either our life manifests the presence of our old man, our flesh, our nature, in which we live for ourselves, or our life manifests the presence of the new man, the life of Christ in us, grace, in which we live for God. Either we are sinning, or we are obeying.

(2) Being drunk with wine feeds the old man! To

be under the influence of any earthly substance that has the effect of reducing our ability to control our words and actions, we feed the old man! Drunkenness is sin, not first of all because of the sins to which it leads, but because it is inherently a turning from God and the power of the Holy Spirit, in an attempt to live for oneself.

(3) But children of God, for whom Christ died, whom He has regenerated and in whom He lives, and to whom He gives the Spirit of sanctification, are called to live to the praise and glory of God! We are to live as did Christ, to show He lives in us! The drunkard is not doing that and cannot do that.

3. "*To live as did Christ": these words confront us with this gospel reality*: our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who never sinned, also was never drunk.
   a. The point is worth making, because He was accused of being drunk: "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber . . ." (Matt. 11:19). The accusation was untrue; it was a lie. However, the fact that Christ did drink wine (think of His attendance at the marriage feast in Cana, John 2), the accusation was leveled against Him. Our Savior did not reject the use of wine; He used it in moderation. But He never abused it.
   b. Rather, He was filled with the Spirit; He devoted Himself to God. He was this, for He was wise. He is not only our example to follow; He is also the source of all true wisdom. This the drunkard ignores or despises; the text speaks of his folly.
   c. Underscored here is the perfect righteousness of our Savior, and therefore His ability to save us. Had He become drunk *once*, or sinned in any other way *once*; had He sought Himself, and not His Father, *once*, He could not be our Savior. But He obeyed perfectly. He is our example, and in Him is the power to follow that example.

B. **Applying this text to ourselves, we must note three points**.
   1. *The first is obvious: Drunkenness is a sin*.
      a. But we need the warning. This sin is prevalent in our society, as well as in our social and church circles.
      b. The Holy Spirit is not addressing an abstract issue, or a hypothetical. He is speaking to us about our life.
   2. *Second, the principle of the text applies more broadly to any intoxicating substance*.
      a. This includes prescription drugs, when abused. Prescription drugs are dangerous when not taken in the proper dose, and medical doctors have the skill and knowledge to tell us what that appropriate dose is. If we find that we like a certain prescription drug because of its side effects on us, and we take more of the drug than prescribed, the principle expressed in this text applies.
      b. This includes street drugs. The civil government outlaws certain drugs because it knows of their negative effect on humans, and therefore on society as a whole. A person who is high can be a person out of control, unable to be tamed.
      c. This includes street drugs that the civil government has decriminalized, such as marijuana.
         (1) In many states, marijuana is legal to raise, buy, own, and use, with restrictions. Not many years ago, it was illegal; now it has become legal. But the states legalized it, in part, because its use was so prevalent that devoting police resources to enforcing the ban was expensive. Also, the states realized that, if used with restrictions, the drug posed less of a threat to society as a whole.
         (2) Young people today will grow up in a society that has legalized marijuana. They might suppose that, because using marijuana is no longer sin against the fifth commandment of God's law, its use is permissible. But our text

indicates otherwise. To use marijuana, just like using alcohol, is to allow a foreign substance to control one's body. And marijuana will have this effect on a person more quickly than alcohol.

d. Our text is one place in Scripture, then, to which church elders can turn to warn the congregants against the use of such drugs. (Another is Galatians 5:20 and Revelation 9:21; in these verses the words "witchcraft" and "sorceries" is the translation of the Greek word "pharmakeia," from which we get our word "pharmacy." The word indicates that witches and sorcerers often carry out their evil trade by using drugs that altered their mental state.)

3. *Third the text has a broader application to everyone here, even those who have never been drunk or used illicit drugs*. It teaches the folly of sin, of continuing in sin, and of not hating and turning from sin. While addressing one particular sin, and showing how that sin is destructive, it more generally implies that all sin, continued in and not repented of, is destructive to the soul.

II. His Folly: Deceived by Wine

A. **The greater part of our text points out the folly of drunkenness**. The text does so in various ways, and at length. Specifically, note five:

1. *Verse 31 teaches that the earthly properties of wine are deceptive.* The verse speaks of the wine being red, giving his color in the cup, and moving itself aright.

a. [Note, before we begin this tour of the main bulk of the text, that our text is Hebrew poetry. This means that the inspired poet does not always spell out his idea; he states it in picture form for his readers to understand. Some of the phrases involve plays on words. I am not going to spend time explaining why the inspired poet said what he said, but simply focus on what the text means.]

b. Verse 31 draws attention to two properties of wine: its appearance and its taste.

(1) As to its appearance, it is red; it looks delicious! The phrase "giveth his color in the cup" is literally, "gives its *eyes* in the cup," referring apparently to the sparkle and shine of the liquid. Everything about the appearance of wine attracts us to it.

(2) And it tastes good! It goes down so smoothly! This is the idea of "it moveth itself aright." Literally, "it walks straight." (Note again the poetic play on words. Wine walks straight, goes smoothly down, but when you drink enough of it, you do not walk straight).

c. Remember that Satan deceived Eve by how the forbidden fruit looked and would taste? He does that to us too. Always he works to convince us that what looks good and feels good must be good. And he is crafty; he is deceptive. Child of God, beware: never suppose that, because a thing looks good, tastes good, and has an initial pleasurable effect on you, it is truly good in God's eyes!

2. *Verse 32 teaches that, in presenting itself with allure and deception, wine has a different goal: to destroy.* The verse speaks of what wine does "at the last," in the end, when it has reached its goal: It bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder.

a. Here, and elsewhere in Scripture (Prov. 20:1), wine is personified–the text speaks as if wine thinks and acts. The personification is to the point, because Satan is working through the wine, and yet Satan never confronts us with his real motive and goal. He always covers up that he seeks our destruction.

b. Wine's goal is to hurt and destroy! In this way it is like the bite of a serpent and sting of an adder. Serpents' bites and adders' stings hurt and injure, at best. At worst, they kill. So, one who is drunk could die from alcohol poisoning, or other effects of drunkenness. But if death does not result, great bodily and spiritual and emotional and relational harm do result.

c. So understood, our text explains what Proverbs 20:1 means when it calls wine a mocker. Wine

claimed to be delicious and beneficial, so we drank some. It still looked good and promised to go down smoothly, so we drink more. Finally, when we are drunk and miserable, we turn on the wine and say, "You didn't tell me this would happen!" And the wine, personified, answers us: "You mean that you trusted me? You failed to understand what my ultimate goal was? You are a fool!" And wine laughs at us in our misery.

3. *Verse 33 teaches that the drunkard forgets the spiritual consequences of drunkenness.* It says that our eyes will behold strange women, and our mouth utter perverse things.
   a. Consider the matter of strange women first.
      (1) Incidentally, most Bible versions made in the last century or so change "strange women" to "strange things."
         (a) The change broadens the application of the verse, although it makes one ask, what are strange "*things*"?
         (b) But the change is unwarranted. The Hebrew word "strange" in this verse is a participle, so the emphasis falls on an activity. How does "strange" act and express itself? The most basic way that "strange" acts, especially in light of warnings to married men, is by women who are not those men's wives making themselves available, selling their wares. Because this idea fits better with the participle than "things," "women" is the more natural translation.
      (2) Why do the eyes of a drunkard behold strange women? Or, is it unusual that the eyes of the drunkard would? Might any sober man, at the beach, in the office, walking down the street, also notice and lust after other women?
         (a) But the drunkard often finds himself directly in the company of such women. Wherever he goes to get drunk (the bar, or the bawdy party), such women are. Where

the carcass is, the eagles will gather (Matt. 24:28).

(b) Furthermore, the drunkard has decreased his ability to discern and lowered his inhibitions. He is more ready to give himself over to these strange women. Perhaps they were not his first goal; his first goal was to enjoy drunkenness. But having these women is a natural extension of this first goal.

b. Now consider the matter of his speaking evil.

(1) That evil is perverseness, crookedness. The man gives himself over to sin in his speech; he makes lewd comments about women, expresses himself ready to kill someone whom he does not like, speaks evil of authorities, blasphemes the name of God, and speaks arrogantly against the Scriptures, worship, sacraments, and other holy things of God.

(2) In fact, such speech expresses the sinful nature that is common to us. Apart from grace, we will speak this way as well. But the man who is filled with the Spirit will avoid such words and hate the ideas. A man filled with wine gives himself over to them willingly.

(3) And that speech comes from his heart: the text does not say that his *mouth* will utter perversity, but his *heart*. In other words, what he speaks is truly what is in his heart. He is not basically a good man who became drunk and spoke words that he should not have. He is by nature an evil man, who when not drunk tries to restrain himself from expressing the evil that is in his heart, so that people think well of him; but when drunk, that evil comes pouring out. This is the real him!

c. I pause to make application to a person who has become drunk, and with whom the elders of the church are laboring. When the elders charge you with sin against the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th commandments of God's law, do not think that

they are piling it on. Do not make as your excuse that, if you were not drunk, you would not have committed those other sins. Acknowledge, rather, that wine deceived you, and led you to a host of other heinous sins; that it exposed that your heart was not right! And it underscored that, at bottom, you do not need a change of *life*, or a change of *habits*, but a change of *heart*.

4. *While verse 33 regards the spiritual consequences of drunkenness, verses 29, 34, and most of 35 regard the physical consequences*. The deceptiveness of alcohol and the folly of one who is deceived by it is that, while it promised to make you happy, it actually brought sad consequences. We have treated verse 29 earlier. We turn now to verses 34 and 35.
   a. Verse 34 refers to the dizziness and nausea that are the effect of drunkenness. The verse compares the drunkard to one who lies down in the midst of the sea or at the top of a ship's mast.
      (1) Imagine being a sailor on deck during a storm.
         (a) The ship is rocking up and down, to and fro. It is hard to keep your footing. It is also hard to keep your stomach contents in your stomach. But now imagine being that sailor whose turn it is to be up in the mast, a rope basket attached to a pole. He is twenty feet or more above the deck. The effects of the ship's rocking and rolling are all the worse for him! And he vomits.
         (b) Did you know, by the way, that the word "nausea" is derived from the same word as "nautical"? Nausea is very literally a dizziness that characterizes those at sea.
         (c) Likewise the drunkard. His stomach is not at ease; it is roiling and rocking. And it empties itself. And he thinks this is fun?
      (2) The first part of verse 34 mentioned one who lies down in the midst of the sea. Either that refers to one who, seasick, lies down, but finds no relief; or it refers to one who has completely lost all sense of sound judgment, wants a soft

bed, sees the water and thinks that he will sleep peacefully on top of it, dives in, and drowns.

b. Similar to verse 29, verse 35 refers to the physical effects obvious to others, the broken bones and bruises.

(1) "How did you get those?" one asks the drunkard. And in answer, he says that he is not sure; someone else must surely have done it; he does not know why they would have, because he did not deserve it; he is basically a good person, but he is a victim of the abuse of others.

(2) Yet he will not acknowledge that in his drunken rages he inflicts this very same harm on others! He is deceived; he is blind.

5. *The last part of verse 35 teaches that the folly of the drunkard is that, given the opportunity, he would return to his sin at the earliest opportunity*. Indeed, he seeks this opportunity! "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

a. For many who live with a drunkard, the question "when shall I awake" seems encouraging. The drunkard wants to be sober; he wants to return to reality. Might this be a sign of repentance; is *this* the time when he will change?

b. However, even in asking this question, he shows himself to be a fool. The reason that he wants to return to sobriety is that then he can repeat the process all over again!

(1) Did the nausea not repulse him? Are not the broken bones incentive for him to turn? Is not the sight of his wife and children, poorly clothed and fed because he has drunk all his earnings, pitiful enough to move him? No! He thinks only of himself! He wants to return to it! He is not different from a dog that returns to its own vomit, and a washed sow who returns to wallow in the mud (2 Pet. 2:22).

(2) This, at bottom, is the folly of drunkenness: *the drunkard will not repent*!

(a) He is a fool! He is a pawn in Satan's hand! He will live and die, not for Christ (Phil.

1:21; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 1), but for himself!

(b) So, when he is sober and expresses his regrets regarding all that he did, he is not sincerely penitent.

i) To those whom he has hurt, he says, "I feel bad. I'm really a kind person, you know." And we respond, "No, we didn't know that. We saw what you did. It was not kind." Impenitence!

ii) He expresses his astonishment that he spoke evil of God and Jesus Christ: "How could I have done that? Jesus is my Savior!" Seriously? You think that Jesus saved you so that you were free to give yourself over to drunkenness and sin? He is not your Savior. You live for yourself, and you serve the devil. Impenitence!

B. We have set forth five specific ways in which the text depicts the drunkard's folly. Now we must step back and **note three general points that the text is making**.

1. *First, the folly of the drunkard is both physical and spiritual*; he suffers in body and in soul, and he destroys his body and his soul.

a. The world, in the sense of society and civil government, understands this. The world establishes rehabilitation programs and centers to help the drunkard overcome his drunkenness. When I say that the "world" does this, I am not suggesting that the child of God who struggles with sin should not use those programs because they are worldly. Fact is the child of God who struggles with substance addictions should use those programs. They can help him or her.

b. But if the *world* understands this, he is the greater fool who considers himself a child of God and yet does not understand it. The church is able to realize more deeply than the world that the destruction of the drunkard's soul involves the destruction of his

relationship to God, to Christ, and to the church. The church must address the matter and do what we can to turn the drunkard from his or her sin! The elders must lead the way!

2. *Second, in the text the Holy Spirit depicts the folly of the drunkard so graphically* that no one can miss the point: this is *folly*!
   a. The Holy Spirit takes a sample drunkard, a representative drunkard, and points out all the ways in which he destroys himself, so that the sober person says: he is a fool!
   b. But the Holy Spirit is also speaking in the text about and to those for whom Christ died and who have Christ's life in them but are still given to the sin of drunkenness.
      (1) The warnings of Proverbs were for Israelites in the Old Testament, and the covenant people of God in the New. They were not first of all for the Egyptians or Philistines, or for worldly unbelievers today.
      (2) Do you, who confess that Christ died for you but who are expressing the depravity of your old man, hear God calling you a fool? He says this, not to suggest that you are hopeless; if Christ has died for you and the Spirit has renewed you, there is hope. But enjoying that hope requires you to turn, to repent, and to leave your sin. Understand that God calls it folly!
      (3) And do you, who confess that Christ died for you but who give yourselves over to drunkenness, understand that the Holy Spirit is pointing you out as a laughingstock? Drunkenness is not genuinely funny; but the folly and delusion of the drunkard is such that he becomes a laughingstock to the sober. The Holy Spirit makes this point so that God's covenant people realize the danger of being deceived by wine, and even the drunkard will see himself for what he really is, apart from grace.

3. *Third, the misery described in our text, these effects of drunkenness and expressions of folly, are certain!*
   a. Various parts of the text indicate this certainty.
      (1) The use of the future tense verbs in verses 32 and 33 serve two functions.
         (a) One is to indicate that the effect of drunkenness is future, in relation to the act of drinking. Drink now and suffer the effects later.
         (b) The second is to indicate that the effects are certain.
      (2) Also verse 34 indicates the certainty.
         (a) A person might say: "I won't be deceived. I can drink to excess, but I will not endure the consequences!" The drunkard always thinks for awhile that he can control his sin and its effect on him.
         (b) But the Holy Spirit says: you are a fool! Even Satan knows the certainty and uses it to his advantage.
   b. Explaining this certainty are several factors.
      (1) First, this is the goal of the wine; this is what alcohol, when not used moderately, inevitably does.
      (2) Second, this is Satan's goal. He desires that we get drunk, so he can abuse us when we are drunk.
      (3) Third, God judges sin with more sin and other temporal miseries. The text applies a general principle to the specific matter of drunkenness. Depravity of nature is common to all humans; those who are not filled with the Spirit will manifest that depravity and endure its effects.

C. **Fellow believers, confessing Christians, people of God: are we taking these lessons to heart?**
   1. *Drunkards, what effect does the exposition of this text have on you?*
      a. Do you see that, regardless of why you give yourself over to this sin, it controls you, and gives you no happiness?

(1) What happiness does it give you? Do you see that any happiness you think it gives is only an illusion, and you are actually less happy?

(2) What difficult circumstances in your life, past or present, are you trying to avoid confronting or dealing with? Repressed frustration or anger? Effects of abuse or bullying or other trauma? A desire for attention or appreciation? These represent real emotional and psychological scars that God's people bear, and must be responded to in a certain way. Do you see that your way is not working, and is not God's way?

b. Now that you see what God thinks of your sin (folly!), and of you so long as you continue in sin (fool!), what will you do next?

(1) Will you repent of your sin, acknowledging that you have replaced Jehovah as your God with alcohol as your idol? Will you admit that what you are doing is wrong, and that you need help to turn? Will you then pray to God, with genuine tears of grief, crying out in desperation for His help? Will you acknowledge that you have offended Him?

(2) Will you then come to your pastor or the elders of your church and inform them of your great need, so that they can help restore you? Will you do so, not worrying what damage this will do to your ego?

(3) And will you voluntarily call a rehabilitation center and make arrangements to be admitted? Will you make that phone call in the next hour? If you wait a day, you might never do it. Will you do this, regardless of what effect it will have on your current job, and what it will cost you?

(4) All this is the first step—a tiny step, and far from the end of the journey, but a first step—of true repentance.

2. *Congregation as a whole, what warnings and instruction are we taking to heart?*

a. Are we guarding against the sin of drunkenness in our own lives? It may be that we have never fallen into it, or fallen only seldom; but are we on our guard always? Do we realize that, being humans, we can fall into it?
b. Are we teaching others around us, including our children, to respect this danger and guard against it?
   (1) When our young people leave the house to be with friends, do we remind them that they must seek godly friends and be godly around their friends? That true friends promote godliness?
   (2) Do we model responsible drinking in their presence? Notice verse 26: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." The father is saying that he will model obedience to God regarding women (27-28) and wine (29-35). Fathers and mothers, are you models?
c. And do we know how much we may drink to God's glory, and when we are no longer drinking to God's glory?
   (1) Some Christians so respect the danger of alcohol that they will not drink any.
   (2) Others, including Reformed Christians generally, realize that God permits us to drink alcohol (Prov. 31:6-7; Matt. 26:27, regarding the Lord's Supper; John 2:1-10; 1 Tim. 5:23), with these restrictions:
      (a) We must drink, consciously directing it to God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31).
      (b) We must drink in faith (Rom. 14:23).
      (c) We may not drink when it would make a brother stumble (Rom. 14:21).
      (d) We may drink only a little (1 Tim. 5:23), that is, in measure.
   (3) So what is your limit? How much can you drink in faith, to God's glory?
      (a) Our limit is *not* however many drinks would make us drunk, minus one.
      (b) Rather, set a self-imposed limit, and stop

at it, so that at all times, even if you had an alcoholic drink, you remained filled with the Spirit and not with wine.

(4) And what do we do if our husband or wife, or another, tells us we have had too much? Do we take their warning to heart?

3. *And a question to each of us, even those who have never abused a substance to the point of intoxication: Do we desire to return to our favorite sins because we find pleasure in them?*
   a. Not only do drunkards excuse their sins and desire to return to them; every sinner does this, regarding each of our favorite sins. To make excuses for sin, to cover sin, is our nature. May God give us grace to see our sins as sins, to see them to be empty and vain, to see that they give no lasting happiness, and to hate them. So, rather than saying, "When shall I awake? I will turn to it again!" let us say, "What is this that I have done?!"
   b. Then, may we turn to God, our only hope; may we confess our sins to Him, hiding nothing; and may we look not to the redness of wine in the cup but to the red blood of the Lamb shed for us, as the basis for forgiveness and restoration.

III. **Its Effect: Admonished to Wisdom**

A. **This depiction of the folly of the sin of drunkenness, and the one who falls into it, serves to admonish us to be wise**.

1. *The text gives this admonition explicitly, but negatively*: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red" (31).
   a. That it is explicit is noteworthy. Often admonitions in the proverbs are implicit; the proverb states a fact and its opposite, leaving us to draw the correct conclusion. Not so here; the Holy Spirit drives the point home.
   b. That this admonition is negative reminds us that sin entices us, and that we are prone to sin.
      (1) Young people, when tempted to drink at a party, God says, do not! It may be that your

friends think it is cool, and you feel the need to earn their respect. But God does not think it is cool. Do not!

(2) Mature adults, when tempted to drink to drown your sorrows, this negative prohibition is God's stop sign: you will not find happiness when going down this road!

2. *Implied in the negative prohibition is a positive admonition: be wise!* Seek God's power, in the Holy Spirit, for Christ's sake, to serve Him!
   a. Instead of turning to the bottle, turn to God! Rather than opening a can, open the Scriptures! Rather than desiring to fulfill the desires of the flesh, grow in your desire to be pleasing to God and live in a way that glorifies Him!
   b. And if you recognize that you are doing what you may not, then stop, return to God and His Word, and begin anew to live rightly. Forgiveness for this sin is found in the blood of Christ, and the power to live rightly in His Spirit.

B. We are admonished to wisdom; but notice that we are admonished by Him who is Wisdom itself. In our text, wine is personified; in Proverbs 8-9, wisdom is personified, because it is the pre-incarnate Christ.

1. *In that connection, notice Wisdom's call, Proverbs 9:5-6:* "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding."
   a. As Christ the Savior, Jesus Christ has a bread and a wine.
      (1) The reference of Proverbs 9:5 is not to the bread and wine of the Old Testament feasts, or of the Lord's Supper. Those breads and wines point to the reality of which Proverbs 9:5 speaks.
      (2) The bread that He baked and wine that He mingled is the deep joy and ongoing happiness of the child of God who enjoys the benefits of salvation that come from Christ, and lives in covenant fellowship with Him.

(a) Eating food and drinking wine are specific ways of enjoying fellowship; think of the conversation and joy one has about a table. The point is underscored by the mention of wine, a little of which makes a happy heart. One finds happiness when eating with friends and family.

(b) Christ made that great spiritual feast of life in communion with God a reality, by:

i) giving His body to the death of the cross and shedding His blood. There He shed the blood that covered our sins in God's sight. There He earned for us the right to God's love and favor.

ii) rising the third day with heavenly life, and ascending into heaven, to pour out on His people all the blessings of salvation that He earned for us.

b. And now He calls us to eat of that bread and drink of that wine.

(1) It is a very different wine than that which the drunkard imbibes. It is spiritual in nature. But it is tasty, and it is satisfying. Not the mouth and throat, but the heart and soul imbibe this wine and are refreshed.

(2) Do you see, drunkard, how your seeking after earthly wine is depriving you of the greatest joys and happiness which are found only in Christ? You have turned from Him! But all for whom He died, even those who are under the influence of alcohol, He calls back to Himself to enjoy true peace (rest from anxiety), true happiness (in body and in soul), in the form of communion with God. Hear Him calling, with ears of faith, and heed His call, in the Spirit's power!

2. *Then we will have true joy. The carnal person, the fool, finds happiness in wine and women; the wise finds it in Christ and God*.

a. The griefs of soul and heart that led the drunkard to drink are then replaced with blessings that give

spiritual cheer, comfort, and joy.

b. In the place of bruises and broken bones comes the assurance that, even if I endure pain in my body, it is God's way of preparing me for glory and making me long for the resurrection.

c. We will behold a woman—not strange women, but the bride of Christ, whom we will consider beautiful and whom we will serve.

d. We will utter words—not speaking perverse words but singing Jehovah's praises.

e. We will tarry long—not at the table and at wine, but with God and His Word.

f. We will return again and again to that which gives us joy—not wine, but spiritual blessings, ministered to us through the gospel that is preached.

3. The ungodly seek wine and women; the righteous know the joys of salvation that far surpass. The *fool* does not understand this. The *wise* will. AMEN.

Book Reviews

Aiming to Please: A Guide to Reformed Worship, by Wes Bredenhof. Fergus, ON: The Study, 2020. Pp. 321. $22.50 CN. Softcover. ISBN 9780886661229. Reviewed by Aaron S. Van Dyke.

In this book, Wes Bredenhof, a Free Reformed pastor with Canadian Reformed roots, presents a guide to the principles and practices of Reformed worship. Bredenhof writes with a view to shoring up Reformed worship principles and practices in the hearts and minds of Reformed Christians, as well as "to demonstrate [to all] how the distinctives of Reformed worship serve the goal of pleasing God" (205). According to Bredenhof, this aim to please God is paramount: "God is at the centre of Reformed worship, not us" (14).

Bredenhof takes up his subject because he believes that while there are "several helpful volumes on Reformed worship," there is, nonetheless, a need to revisit this "important subject from within our circles…from the next generation" (12). According to Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please* differs from works such as Kuyper's *Onze Eeredienst* (1911) and Van Dooren's *The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy* (1980) in especially three ways. First, *Aiming to Please* "deals with newer challenges to Reformed worship" (12). The chief challenge to Reformed worship that Bredenhof identifies is

> what is commonly termed "Evangelicalism"…in the sense of Protestant churches afflicted with historical amnesia—they have no or little bearings in any history, and certainly not in the Reformation. They have no strength in confessional standards. Their worship typically takes place on a stage supported by an amplified band. (13)

Second, the

> book is also different regarding its approach. Unlike the previously mentioned authors, I maintain that the Regulative Principle of Worship is an important starting place for Reformed worship…this key principle is a part of our Reformed heritage that has been forgotten and now needs to be recovered. (13)

Third, Bredenhof is intentional about including a relatively large "number of resources for pastors in the appendices" (13, 219-231).

Part one of *Aiming to Please* treats the principles of Reformed worship. Bredenhof maintains that the covenant of grace is the *foundation* and "stage" of worship (17-19), that Scripture must regulate the *elements* of worship (38), and that the dialogical principle ought to govern the *order* of worship (41).

Part two treats the ordinary elements of worship. In this section, Bredenhof treats the introductory elements of worship, the singing of Psalms, the reading of the law (with confession and absolution), the preaching of the Word, congregational prayer, offertory, and the closing elements of worship.

In part three, Bredenhof first gives special attention to the sacraments as elements of worship and then treats other questions and issues pertaining to worship: various circumstances of worship, the second service, catechism preaching, profession of faith, musical accompaniment, days of commemoration, and questions relating to worship that arise on the mission field.

Part four concludes by reviewing nine distinctives of Reformed worship: Reformed worship has its starting-point in the covenant of grace (215); recognizes the presence of the holy God in the worship service (215-216); is reverent (216); is regulated by God's Word (216); reflects in its structure the character of the covenant of grace (216); focuses on the means of grace, particularly the preaching of the Word (217); prioritizes Psalm singing (217); is simple (217-218); and aims to please and glorify God by following His revealed will for worship (218).

Aiming to Please has a number of notable strengths. First, the work is a solid, condensed introduction to foundational principles and practices of Reformed worship. Bredenhof explains concepts such as the "Regulative Principle of Worship" and the "Dialogical Principle of Worship" in simple terms, explicitly grounds them in Scripture, and clearly brings them to bear on the issue of the proper elements and general order of worship. Bredenhof is sometimes overly thorough in his treatment of certain questions and details; yet his book is a nice, condensed treatment of the main topics of worship. It could be a beneficial resource for those who are new to the Reformed faith and

are looking for more than a basic introduction to Reformed worship. The book could also serve as a valuable quick-reference tool for those who are tasked with leading, overseeing, or providing instruction about Reformed worship.[1]

Second, Bredenhof's treatment of Reformed worship is covenantal, something one looks for in a book on Reformed worship. Bredenhof does more than this; the entire first part of *Aiming to Please* draws on the doctrine of God's covenant of grace in order to establish truths regarding the proper worship of God. Bredenhof is careful not to delve into some of the more involved or controversial questions of covenantal theology (18), but he does state that "in its heart and soul, the covenant of grace is a relationship between God and His people" akin to marriage in which "the vows and documents are important, but you would be wrong to say the marriage consists in these things… The heart and soul of marriage is a relationship" (18). According to Bredenhof, because God is sovereign in this relationship, worship is not the meeting of two equal parties, but a meeting in which we approach God as One who is infinitely greater than us and "alone has the right to determine the terms by which such encounters will occur" (21). Because of Christ's central place in the covenant, "The work of Christ as our Mediator must be the focal point of our worship" (22). Because God's covenant is essentially a relationship of love, our worship will consist of loving communication from and to our God (22). Because the covenant includes the children of believers, worship must include the children of believers from an early age.

Third, throughout *Aiming to Please*, Bredenhof consciously and consistently brings his readers back to Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and historical precedent. Bredenhof is not shy about sharing his personal opinions regarding the *circumstances* of worship, but he reminds his readers regarding *essential* points: "I would not want to leave you with the impression that this [given truth] is something that I have 'sucked out of my thumb.' It is seen in Scripture…" (44). "…When it comes to worship and our covenant conversation

1 For example, Bredenhof presents a concise list of "Ten Reasons to Worship Twice" that an officebearer could draw on if needed (152-56). Bredenhof concludes his work with helpful indices of Psalms, prayer-items, and policies for visitors to the Lord's Supper.

with God…Scripture is our guidebook" (119). In one of the clearest examples of his reliance upon the Reformed confessions, Bredenhof quotes the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus' commentary on it, and the Belgic Confession at length to demonstrate that the regulative principle of worship is indeed a continental Reformed tradition, and not simply "a Prebyterian or Puritan innovation" (32).[2] Moreover, *Aiming to Please* contains many citations of Reformed precedent regarding questions of worship. Bredenhof points his readers back to the historical Reformed tradition when discussing issues such as the inclusion of absolution in the worship services (82), Psalm singing (68-75), musical accompaniment (185), and special services (196). More examples could be given.

Fourth, in *Aiming to Please*, Bredenhof shows himself to be a familiar son and a helpful servant of conservative Dutch-Reformed congregations. He addresses questions that are pertinent to such churches: the threat of women in office (92); the timing, meaning, and propriety of the elder's handshake with the minister (55); whether the Lord's Supper may be administered on the mission field (213); and the possible origins of the slow tempo that is characteristic of the singing of certain Dutch Reformed groups (71-72). Furthermore, Bredenhof understands that the danger exists of changing worship practices with a view to pleasing man (Bredenhof is willing to criticize such changes even as he observes them in some Christian Reformed congregations, 94), as well as the possibly greater danger of the beneficiaries of the heritage of Reformed worship *retaining* their practices, but in a kind of heartless formalism: "Traditionalism will not protect us forever. 'We have always done it this way,' will only go so far for so long. Eventually a generation will arise (has arisen?) for whom the argument is not persuasive" (50). To combat both dangers, he redirects his readers to the rock whence they were hewn:

2 Bredenhof laments the lack of respect for the regulative principle of worship among Reformed churches, but notes, "There are some Reformed (i.e. non-Presbyterian Calvinist) believers who have given serious attention to our Reformed confession of the RPW. Chief among them would be some Protestant Reformed authors. For example, Barry Gritters writes on this in his booklet *Public Worship and the Reformed Faith*" (34).

> We must strive for a more robustly covenantal and confessional approach to liturgical questions. Especially when the confessions are undermined or neglected in this area, the door is left open to… aberrations. The biblical principle of worship expressed in our confessions safeguards the purity of worship and helps ensure that our worship will be pleasing to God (50).

One minor criticism of the book can be made. In a number of places, Bredenhof opens himself up to being perceived as pedantic by delving into great detail about issues that this reader judges to be relatively minor. For example, Bredenhof discusses whether in special services (such as Christmas and Easter.) a congregation should follow the order of worship that is usually used for morning services or evening services (200). He enters into a debate about whether it is right for seminarians (non-ordained people) to change the wording of inspired benedictions in order to convert them into prayers (60). A list of ways to avoid sleeping in church is provided (98), and at one point, the reader learns the merit of using *black*-colored bags in collection (113). This criticism notwithstanding, Bredenhof's attention to detail impresses the reader with both the gravity of worship and the strong feelings that can arise among congregants regarding even those things that some might consider circumstantial or indifferent.

I would recommend *Aiming to Please* to any officebearer or layperson who desires to review the underlying doctrines and elements of Reformed worship, especially when seeking to implement them on the mission field or to explain them to those who are new to the Reformed faith. The book provides guided reflection on principles and practices of Reformed worship. Rather than taking such for granted. the reader is led to value them as the way of worship that succeeds in its aim to please God.

The Grand Old Doc: Articles on the Thought of Gordon H. Clark, by Douma. Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2023. Pp. xv + 271. $16.95. Paperback. ISBN 9781891777387. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

The grand old doc of the book's title was the Presbyterian

philosopher/theologian Gordon H. Clark. In his day—Clark died in 1985—Clark was a well-known, controversial figure in conservative Presbyterian and evangelical circles, very much including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Also the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) have had a special interest in Clark's theology. Clark denied the doctrine that is deceptively called the "free offer of the gospel" in the OPC and that is rightly, and more honestly, called the "well-meant offer of the gospel" in the PRCA and in other Reformed churches.

Douma is correct in his analysis of the offer that Clark opposed: "the teaching that God desires the salvation even of the reprobate" (197). That Christ is "freely offered to us in the gospel," as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states in Q. 31, does not teach or even imply a desire of God to bestow Christ and His salvation to all to whom the gospel comes. Rather, it declares that Christ is given by God, and is to be received by the believer, without any merit and without the fulfillment of any condition on the part of the guilty sinner to whom the gospel comes. Christ is given and is to be received as a perfectly gracious gift of God to unworthy sinners. "Freely offered" asserts that Christ and His salvation are free, and that God gives Him to the sinner who believes without charge.

To understand Westminster's confession concerning the objects of this gracious gift in the love of God, one must read what Westminster confesses concerning predestination. Clark's doctrine in the controversy was the sound biblical and Presbyterian confession of grace: "God's desire for salvation is limited to the elect" (201).

Fascinating is Douma's detailed account of the scarcely veiled, determined effort by C. Van Til and other advocates of the Arminian well-meant offer to keep Clark out of the ministry in the OPC. They attacked him with all the favorite passages in the Arminian arsenal down the ages, including Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 2 Peter 3:9. Instead of questioning this aspirant to the ministry in the OPC, they argued with him, and that cleverly, attempting to trap him with questions that confused God's will of precept with His will of decree. They virtually drove Clark out of the OPC. Consequently, the OPC adopted the thoroughly Arminian doctrine of the well-meant offer in the most offensive language to a Reformed believer possible, that is, offensive

fundamentally to the faith of Dordt and Westminster, so that the theology of the well-meant offer became the official doctrine of the OPC. This controversy over the nature of the preaching of the gospel is the subject of the last chapter of the book, titled, "Anthropopathism and God's Desire of Salvation."

Fundamental to this controversy in the OPC was the issue whether the truth of the gospel is logical or paradoxical, that is, in reality, contradictory. Clark affirmed that the truth of Scripture is logical; Van Til insisted that truth is paradoxical. By "paradoxical," however, Van Til did not mean merely a *seeming* contradiction. He meant a *real* contradiction, at least with regard to human thinking. For Van Til, that God desires the salvation of the elect only and that God desires the salvation of all humans without exception is acceptable Christian doctrine, *because Christian truth is paradoxical*. Clark condemned this conception of the truth of Scripture, charging that such a view of truth makes all knowledge of truth—the truth of God—impossible. Only if truth is logical, that is, a harmonious whole, can we know God and His sure, clear revelation. Indeed, only then *is* there revelation. An illogical, paradoxical Word of God is not revelation, but confusion and ignorance.

According to Clark, Van Til, like Karl Barth,

> Is an excellent example of how neo-orthodoxy has permeated contemporary thinking. Dr. Van Til "adores paradox." He holds that man's mind is incapable of knowing any truth, that the Bible from cover to cover is not the truth, and that theological formulations, creed, and so on are only "pointers" to something unknowable (45).

A disciple of John Calvin and student of Herman Hoeksema will heartily agree with this indictment of paradoxical theology, indeed all paradoxical thinking. But he may disagree with Douma's judgment that "Clark, perhaps more so than any other Reformed theologian, emphasized the importance of logic in theology" (14). The debatable phrase is "more so than any other Reformed theologian."

Intriguingly, Hoeksema is also quoted as agreeing with Clark in allowing for the salvation of Arminians (133). A theologian can be strong in his confession of sound doctrine, and uncompromisingly condemnatory of false doctrine, without being radical in judgments

that belong to God only, and being virtually cultic. "High Calvinists," to use Douma's description of orthodox Presbyterian and Reformed stalwarts, are not by virtue of this commendable spiritual quality raving ecclesiastical madmen, who enthusiastically arrogate to themselves the awesome authority and ability to consign humans to perdition, and delight in doing so.

Although the chapter on the well-meant offer will be of special interest to the Protestant Reformed reader, and probably to a majority of other Calvinistic readers, it is only one of fifteen chapters and the briefest. These chapters treat as many important, and usually interesting, doctrinal subjects, often subjects that involved Clark in controversy and subjects to which Clark made a significant contribution. These subjects include the "philosophy of occasionalism"; the "Trinity"; "apologetic methodology"; the doctrine of "man"; the fascinating issue of "divine illumination," and more. The issue of "occasionalism," for instance, involves the question whether there are "second causes" of events in history, or whether God is the cause of all that occurs—the *sole* cause.

Especially Presbyterian and Reformed theologians and pastors ought to read the book. The doctrines it treats are substantial and of enduring significance. In addition, the book is doctrinal in nature, sometimes deeply, and almost darkly, doctrinal. It demands that the reader think. This is a welcome and healthy, and to the Reformed believer not unexpected, characteristic of a worthwhile book. God's revelation of Himself and His works is doctrinal, and not simplistically so.

I say "welcome" contribution, in that our day of publishing sees a flood of books that are "practical" and "experiential," having to do with the Christian life, practice, and experience. Doctrine recedes into the distant background. *The Grand Old Doc* administers a good, necessary dose of theological medicine to a doctrinally weak, and even sick, age. "Doc" Clark calls the church to *think*, and to think *rightly*.

According to the Westminster Standards!

Zwingli the Pastor: A Life in Conflict, by Stephen Brett Eccher. Bellingham,WA: Lexham Press, 2024. Pp xvi + 268. $26.99. Softcover. ISBN 9781683597353. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

This book review was first published in the November 2024 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the *Calvin Theological Journal*.

On the heels of Bruce Gordon's new biography of Huldrych Zwingli (*God's Armed Prophet*, 2021), Stephen Eccher presents this volume. Eccher's book is not a biography of Zwingli, but a focused study of his work and doctrine as pastor in Zurich (1519–1531). The introduction sketches out Zwingli's life prior to 1519. In six chapters, Eccher examines different facets of Zwingli's Zurich pastorate. The book's conclusion offers five theses to guide the reader in remembering Zwingli.

Chapter 1, "The Swiss Preacher," surveys Zwingli's preaching: expository, polemical (against Rome), and pastoral. Zwingli directed his preaching at the people's lives, not merely their minds. Eccher includes a section on Zwingli's hermeneutics and homiletics: Zwingli viewed Scripture as the ultimate authority for matters of doctrine and Christian conduct, and explained what he saw as the plain meaning of Scripture in a way that pointed the people to Christ.

The fruit of this preaching, as well as the outcome of printed pamphlets and disputations, is the subject of chapter 2, "The Reformation of Worship." The salient effects of the Zurich Reformation are treated: preaching and its centrality replaced the Eucharist, images were removed in the churches, all public singing ceased (sadly), the liturgy was revamped, and the Lord's Supper was administered in a Reformed manner.

Titled "Unveiling the Gospel," the third chapter treats Zwingli's doctrinal foundation for his reforming work. Although raised as a Roman Catholic, Zwingli came to view Christ, Scripture, and salvation differently than Rome. The chapter briefly notes the development in his covenantal understanding.

Chapter 4 addresses the doctrine that Zwingli viewed as basic to all others: God's sovereignty. The chapter treats Zwingli's doctrine of providence, and its effect on him during war, plague, and other hardships. As Zwingli understood God to be sovereign in predestination as well as providence, Eccher also treats Zwingli's

view of predestination.

Chapter 5, "Gospel Partnerships," notes those who influenced Zwingli (Erasmus, for instance), or whom he influenced (Bullinger), or whom he both influenced and was influenced by (his wife, Anna). The *Prophezei* is treated, as are the early Anabaptists. Not mentioned is Martin Luther; Luther and Zwingli developed their views contemporaneously, but independently.[1]

Luther does come up in chapter 6, "The Broken Body of Christ." Here Eccher surveys Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper in addition to the Marburg Colloquy.

Eccher, associate professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, specializes in Reformation-era church history. He is to be commended for his contribution to the study of Zwingli. In particular, chapter 6 includes a good survey of the development of Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper. While not stating the point explicitly, Eccher demonstrates that the traditional portrayal of Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper is insufficient, to the point of being wrong. Zwingli emphasized the need to remember Christ's death, but did not view the sacrament as a barren memorial. It served as a memorial because it was a sign. Zwingli also taught that partaking of the sign in faith was a means to assurance. More striking than his view of the Supper as memorial was his emphasis that our partaking is a pledge from us to God, not only from God to us.

Because the book is about Zwingli as pastor, it contains lessons that pastors (and others) can learn from Zwingli. The conclusion's five theses set forth instructive points from Zwingli's life. Positive lessons are also gleaned from remembering that while preachers must work hard and competently, only God can produce fruit and change hearts (128); and that the exegete who interprets in isolation from others is dangerous (144). Some aspects of Zwingli's conduct toward the Anabaptists, on the other hand, are warnings to us (154–55).

Three points of critique can be offered. First, Eccher notes significant aspects of Zwingli's covenantal thought in chapter 3 but does not devote a full chapter to it. The doctrines of God's sovereignty

1 I have been of this opinion for some time. Bruce Gordon agrees; see his *Zwingli: God's Armed Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 6.

and the Lord's Supper, in contrast, each get a separate chapter. The absence of an entire chapter on Zwingli's covenant thought is noteworthy in light of Eccher's admission that "two convictions informed the way he understood how the gospel shaped, related to, and was promoted within the Zurich community" (101). These two convictions were "Zwingli's covenantal theology" and his view of the Incarnation and its relation to the Lord's Supper.

Second, Eccher quotes Alister McGrath to the effect that Zwingli's Zurich reformation aimed at improving morals, "rather than ensuring correct beliefs" (104). Eccher apparently agrees with McGrath's false disjunction. In fact, Zwingli's reformation aimed at improving morals, *based on* correct beliefs. The desire for correct beliefs motivated Zwingli in his study of the doctrines of the covenant, God's sovereignty, and the Lord's Supper.

Finally, the five theses with which the book concludes (201) merit more development. The first two ("The Way of the Cross Does No Violence" and "Avoid Conflating Kingdom with Christendom") are certainly lessons that we learn from Zwingli's history. Yes, he made mistakes, and we must learn from them. But should we not put Zwingli in his context? Did not other men in his day, both some who shared his theological convictions and others who did not, make the same mistakes? The last two theses ("Beware the Blind Spots"; "Understand the Responsibility of Remembrance") could be used as the last word regarding any human subject. In explaining the third thesis ("Distinguish Between Scriptural Authority and Scriptural Interpretation"), Eccher says: "In short, Zwingli and many of the other Reformers suffered from a lack of epistemic humility. They could not—or refused to—acknowledge limitations to their own understanding of Scripture" (206). Certainly, they had limitations to their understanding; we all do. But is it *true* that they were *unable* to acknowledge them, or *refused* to do so? Are we different? If pastors in an earlier era were convinced that they were right *based on Scripture*, and latter scholars see more clearly where they were wrong, ought we not to respect these pastors for having stood their ground?

These critiques do not imply that the book's value is limited. Eccher presents Zwingli objectively and demonstrates his thesis: "Conflict shaped and informed his pastorate" (4). If Gordon's biography can be

compared to an edited video of Zwingli's entire life, Eccher's book can be compared to six portraits of the Zurich Reformer, each from a different angle or from a different point in time between 1519 and 1531.

Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers, by Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. Pp. xvii + 226. $23.99. Softcover. ISBN 978143355495. Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.

When I was a young pastor, I craved the times I could spend with my older colleagues when, not often enough, we would gather in the backroom at a restaurant and talk shop over lunch. Sometimes we had a topic; other times discussion was free; but all of the times were important to learn from the older men—as long as we young bucks were wise enough to keep quiet. I may not always have agreed with everything, but the experience of these older men (and the accrued wisdom from being in more than a few rodeos) deserved more attention than I was aware even at that time when I sought it. I could wish that these men were still here, like sometimes we wish that parents who died far too young were still here, to seek their good counsel. The memories of some of these worthies going sword to sword in a discussion all the way to the cash register reminds me that even their disagreements sharpened my iron.

Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls is appreciated as an effort to resurrect some of the church fathers and give them a voice today. Ford and Wilhite assemble a small circle of ten ancient fathers and put us in the middle of that circle so that these grayheads can teach us.

The authors are tired of celebrity pastors and the hype that surrounds them, which celebrity and hype leave the impression that unless we are like them, our ministry is probably not worth much. Make sure you put a "Sr." before "Pastor" on your business card, get enough people to read your blogs, and maybe even get Crossway to publish your book, and you are on your way to ministry success. Ford and Wilhite want pastors who truly love the flock and care for their souls to learn ancient wisdom. Their effort succeeds quite well.

It is always good to read history, including biographies of the

company of saints who lived in generations past. An easy mentality to adopt is that what is new may be so important that what is old is neglected. But even two biographies each year would not be enough to read what we need to learn about the lives of Bavinck and Kuyper, Machen and Spurgeon, Pink and Lloyd-Jones, Luther, Calvin, Dabney, Whitefield, Boston, Baxter, Newton, and scores of others. Aware of the risk of concluding that our ministries are not good if they are not like that of these men, we can pray to attain to a small portion of what we see in them.

But for some of us, the *ancient* fathers have not enough been in view. With the exception perhaps of the life of Augustine and the errors of Origen, our knowledge of the ancients comes from a survey in seminary or a brief treatment of them in a book. We can do better, and Ford and Wilhite give us an appetizer here.

The Reformers about whom we *are* aware showed that reform really takes place in light of the ancient fathers. As Ford and Wilhite describe it, the Reformers' was a "theology of retrieval." Of course they see danger in patrolatry, warning against putting too much weight in the fathers' opinion, so they agree with Michael Haykin: "The Fathers are not Scripture. They are senior conversation partners about Scripture and its meaning. We listen to them respectfully, but we are not afraid to disagree when they err" (14). Nevertheless, the authors press their claim that we have a lot to learn about the pastoral ministry from the ancients.

The fathers examined for exemplary lives are all contemporaries of Augustine (354-430), with the exception of Gregory the Great (540-604), Irenaeus (130-202) and Origen (185-253).

Ancient Wisdom is arranged topically and divided into three parts: "The Virtues and Spiritual Life of a Pastor," in which are treated Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, and Origen of Alexandria; "The Theological Vision of a Pastor" (Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, and Gregory of Nazianzus); and "The Ministry of a Pastor" (Gregory the Great and Chrysostom). Each chapter treats a particular virtue that is both important for the pastoral ministry as well as exemplified in the church father. The authors first treat the virtue biblically and theologically, but mostly with quotes from current scholars; then show how the church father modeled the virtue; and

conclude with applications to pastors.

The book has a few weaknesses in this reviewer's judgment.

1) The chapters are somewhat uneven in their theological explanation of the virtue, at times as short as two pages and others as long as twelve or more.

2) Even though Scripture is cited often, exegesis of Scripture to establish the theology is thin. The theological or hermeneutical weaknesses of some of the men is ignored (notably, Origen's), although the purpose of the authors was usually achieved without calling attention to their faults. At times Origen's hermeneutical weakness themselves appeared in the book, as, for example, when Moses is cited as an example of a "contemplative life" (44); the dark cloud into which Moses ascended was a picture of the "mysteries of God" (45); the dove carrying the twig to Noah's ark symbolized the Spirit carrying the cross of Christ (63); or the raven at the ark being symbolic of sin's despair.

3) Most surprising to this reviewer was that the theme of the chapters (Augustine's Theology, for example) was at times only a small part of what the church father exemplified. Sometimes this was disappointing (I wanted more of Augustine's theological strengths); at other times it was a delightful surprise to get more than was promised (I learned about Chrysostom's emphasis on a pastor's humility).

But the book's strengths make it a worthwhile read. Although the book did not often quote extensively from the fathers themselves, there were plenty of quotations from them and these whet my appetite for more. Thus, rather than look *in* the fathers to find support for my view on something (cherry-picking), I want to read them for the full picture of who they are. Just as I do not want to read Bavinck (even frequently) only by consulting the index of his massive four volumes, I also do not want to read the fathers that way.

Some examples follow. Basil's life taught that humility is the only path to restoring the glory that humans lost through pride. Gregory of Nyssa: seeking spiritual growth is not by increasing in mere knowledge, but by praying for more and more conformity to God's image. Origen: training in ethics should precede training in reading and understanding, because a student must be a certain kind of *person* before he is judged qualified to be a pastor: virtue precedes skills.

We are reminded that Augustine was more than a bold and clear theologian, although that was foundational; his theological output was always for the benefit of the sheep, not other theologians. And Augustine was convinced that good friendships are key to growth in Christ-like virtue and theological strength.

For this reviewer, a teacher of pastors, Chrysostom's chapter was most encouraging because Chrysostom, "the golden mouth," aimed at the congregation's growth through well-made and properly delivered sermons. Ford and Wilhite read this father and conclude: "If you want to know what concerned [the church fathers] most in their ministry, look to their sermons" (202). This golden-tongued preacher also exemplified humility of the best sort when he initially declined his elders' call to the pastoral ministry because pride must be conquered before a man can be a proper shepherd. Although he had taken a vow with Ambrose to enter the ministry together, he broke his vow: "If anyone nurtures within himself this terrible savage beast before attaining office, there is no telling what a furnace he will fling himself into after he has attained it." And Chrysostom moaned, "What troubles and vexations do you suppose a man endures, if he enters the list of preaching with this ambition for applause" (208).

J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism, by Crawford Gribben. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. Pp. xvi + 240. $23.99. Hardcover. ISBN 9780190932343. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

John Nelson Darby was one of the most influential theologians who ever lived, especially regarding the doctrine of the last things—eschatology. According to the author of this superb study of Darby's entire corpus of theology, Darby is also one of the most misunderstood and most misrepresented of prominent theologians. As the alleged father of dispensationalism, conceived as an eschatology centered on the rapture, Darby is regarded as the father of the eschatology of the vast majority of "evangelical Christians." Dispensationalism is far and away the most popular eschatology in all the world among confessing conservative Christians. This alone makes the study of the theology

of Darby worthwhile, if not necessary.

But the contention of the author of this book, obviously the scholarly authority on Darby and his theology, is that Darby himself regarded his theologies of salvation, of the church, and of the Holy Spirit as more important than his theology of the end. In surprising addition, Darby did not develop the theology of dispensationalism that now dominates the eschatological theology of multitudes of self-styled evangelicals. It is likely that Darby would not recognize the detailed dispensational thinking that prevails among evangelicals today and that loudly appeals for support to Darby. Indeed, Darby never used the term, "dispensationalism."

The theology that goes by the name "dispensationalism" is largely the work of C. I. Scofield. Scofield "modified" Darby's theology of the last things and popularized the result as "dispensationalism" in the "Scofield Bible," with its doctrinal and exegetical notes. If there is a single father of dispensationalism, he is Scofield.

Gribben characterizes Darby's theology as "Calvinist, catholic, charismatic, and [doing justice to Darby's theology of the end—DJE] catastrophic" (32, 33). That Darby claimed to be a Calvinist will shock the multitudes of self-styled evangelicals who embrace and promote what they suppose is Darby's theology of the last times, nearly all of whom are avowed Arminians. It will surprise the Reformed believers who reject Darby's theology. There was enough substance to Darby's claim to elicit from Presbyterian theologian Robert Dabney the judgment that Darby and his disciples were "fellow travelers to the Reformed denominations," if "awkwardly" so (141). Darby claimed to be Reformed. The claim should be taken with more than a grain of salt. For with regard to this claim, as with regard to all other aspects of his theology, Darby felt himself free, if not called by God, to "moderate," that is, revise and otherwise change, the Reformed faith according to his own interpretation of the Bible's pertinent teachings.

With regard to the nature and content of the Reformed faith, as with regard to the entirety of the Christian faith, Darby's fatal weakness was that he rejected the authority of all the creeds. The wisdom of the instituted church did not guide or constrain him. His disregard of the authority of the church was deliberate. For Darby, the church after the apostles had fallen hopelessly into "ruin," by which Darby meant "full

apostasy." It was this apostate condition of all churches that warranted, indeed, demanded, Darby's creation of the brethren's "gatherings," or "meetings"—Darby's own replacements of the church.

It could not have escaped the attention of Darby and his disciples that this was a daring move. He rejected the institution founded by Jesus Christ—a body of believers with their children, governed by elders, and taught by a pastor—and replaced it with an institution founded by Darby—the gatherings, informal meetings of whoever showed up, and in the end taught and governed by whatever lordly man thrust himself forward.

The implication of this damning judgment upon all churches, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, was the right of J. N. Darby to discover and proclaim the truth of the Christian religion as it were anew. The creeds of the church were useless, if not sharing in the "ruin" of the church.

Darby was a strange thinker. Gribben uses the mild word, "idiosyncratic." Rejecting the authority of all church creeds and church fathers, including Luther and Calvin, as well as the body of men called elders in the New Testament (Acts 14:23), supposedly in the interests of the honoring of the office of believer, Darby came to have and to exercise an authority over his movement that would have made the pope of Rome envious.

Despite the revision of Darby's eschatology (so that he would have found the dispensationalism of Scofield unrecognizable, including the seven dispensations) the root of dispensationalism is found in Darby's exegesis and theology. The author indicates as much in the full title of the book: *and the Roots of Dispensationalism*.

Basic to all the theology of Darby, especially his doctrine of the last things, centering as it does around the rapture of the New Testament church, was his doctrine of the essential difference between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. For Darby, these are two different bodies with two different salvations. The rapture of the church stands in the service of the difference between Israel and the church. The rapture is necessary in order to get the church out of the way, into heaven, so that Christ can bring about the earthly salvation of the nation of Israel. Darby argued that

> prophecy addressed two groups of people: the promises of the Hebrew

> Bible referred to Jews and would be fulfilled on earth, and the promises of the New Testament referred to Christians and would be fulfilled in heaven…He was arguing that the difference between Israel and the Church was so fundamental as to constitute two peoples of God with different, but dependent, eternal destinies (126).

The doctrine that Israel and the church are two fundamentally different peoples with two different salvations makes Darby and all his theological disciples "dispensationalists" with a vengeance. Israel and the church are two different peoples of God in their own, different times. Israel's distinct time was the dispensation of law; the church's is the dispensation of gospel. Israel's salvation is earthly; the church's salvation is heavenly. Implied is that Israel's savior is of an earthly stripe; the church's is heavenly.

In passing, I observe that this error condemns a doctrine as un-Reformed. It is fundamental to Calvinism that there is one, and one only, people of God; one, and one only, salvation; one, and one only, Savior; and one, and one only, hope of the one people of God. It is not the hope of a rapture of the saints.

This book is, no doubt, the definitive, concise study of the theology of J. N. Darby, particularly of his eschatology and of the role it played in the creation of modern dispensationalism. It establishes the author's surprising judgment that Darby "contributed some of the system's [dispensationalism's] key ideas: he saw the roots, but not the birth, of dispensationalism" (154).

Crowning His Gifts: Gracious Rewards in the Reformed Tradition by Brian Huizinga. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2024. Pp. xv + 265. Hardcover. $39.95. ISBN: 9781959515005. Reviewed by Daniel J. Holstege.

The theological and pedagogical gifts that God has given to the author of this book first came to the attention of some of us when we were in seminary together some fifteen or so years ago. God has blessed our brother with a sharp mind and a humble heart and has shaped him through theological education and life experience into a servant of Christ who is "meet for the master's use, and prepared unto

every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). Thus, it came as no surprise to me, and I was thankful to God for it, when he was appointed as Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at our Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in 2019. I count it a privilege to know Prof. Huizinga both as an esteemed colleague, a good friend, and a brother in Christ.

Prof. Huizinga would be the last to "toot his own horn." No doubt he knows what the wise man said: "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth" (Prov. 27:2). I am happy to be that "other man" and to say that the brother has written a solid, interesting, and helpful book. The scholarly reader who is interested in expanding his knowledge of the Reformed tradition will appreciate the research found in this book and the pleasant way that it is presented. The average believer who is reading for spiritual edification or answers to questions will not be disappointed. "With a few minor alterations" (xv) this book is the master's thesis that the brother submitted to the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) in 2022 in pursuit of a ThM degree.

The title of the book, *Crowning His Gifts*, comes from the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 24. That article teaches that it is impossible for us to merit anything from God by our good works, then adds: "In the meantime, we do not deny that God rewards our good works, but it is through his grace that he crowns his gifts." The title of the book makes clear that the author is thoroughly Reformed. He rejects the Romish idea that our good works merit eternal life. He teaches the gospel truth that God who sent his Son to merit eternal life for us by his obedience and death, who sends his Spirit into us so that we believe in Christ and do good works out of gratitude, also crowns those good works with a reward, which is eternal life itself. Huizinga writes,

> ...we must maintain with the broader Reformed faith that there is no inconsistency in understanding eternal life as a free *gift* and as a gracious *reward* for good works. Eternal life is a gift eternally ordained before any recipient was created or did any good, eternal life is earned by Jesus, eternal life is received by means of faith, eternal life becomes our right in justification. God then takes that eternal life and presents it to us under the title of a "reward for good works" for the holy purpose of stimulating our life of obedience in his covenant (49).

Huizinga's desire to stand with "the broader Reformed faith" is evident throughout the book. It is clear that he did extensive research into the Reformed tradition when writing this book. Through his study he found no "theological work in the confessional Reformed tradition that provides a comprehensive and systematic treatment of the biblical teaching that God rewards the good works of believers" (1). For various reasons, he felt compelled to supply something along those lines to help fill the void.

Huizinga has made an excellent contribution in his first major book. He reaches back all the way to Augustine, and touches briefly on Aquinas, but spends most of his time quoting and reflecting on the writings of Reformed theologians from the Reformation to today. He mines a host of precious nuggets from the writings of Luther and Calvin. He quotes and at times respectfully critiques a number of Reformed men through the ages, including Heinrich Bullinger, Francis Turretin, Abraham Kuyper, Jan Bavinck, Herman Bavinck, Herman Hoeksema, Herman Hanko, David Engelsma, and others. He leaves little room for doubt that the Reformed tradition taught that God graciously promises to reward the good works of believers.

I appreciated the section on "Rewards and Fear." I could relate to the fears that he mentions, like the fear that an emphasis on God rewarding our good works will "turn the Reformed church right back to Rome with its teaching of meritorious works" or "steer the hearts of believers away from the saving works of Christ and give undue attention to the labors of their own hands" (19-20). He quotes Derek Thomas of Reformed Theological Seminary who suggests that a certain false gospel that became popular in the twentieth century may be partly responsible for the negative reaction of many Reformed people to the idea of God rewarding our good works (24-28). Read this section of chapter two to find out more about that. Prof. Huizinga wisely states that "the remedy for fear is never avoidance of the issues that generate fear."..."A hush-hush approach to the fear of a good thing will only exacerbate unwarranted suspicion. If the Bible teaches rewards, then we must teach rewards" (31-32).

In the subsequent chapters, Huizinga expounds what the Bible and Reformed tradition teach about rewards. If you read the book, and I recommend that you do, you will learn that, according to the Reformed

tradition, "the conception of eternal life as a *reward according to works* presents no inconsistencies or contradictions with Scripture's presentation of eternal life as a *gift received by faith*" (45). You will also learn about the challenging but important teaching of Scripture on *degrees* of reward in heaven (for example, Rev. 22:12, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man *according as* his work shall be"). Huizinga answers objections like this: "inherent in the concept of gradations in the eternal reward is the notion of merit" (93); and this: if there were degrees of glory, that would "create jealousy or dissatisfaction among the saints in heaven" (95). In addition, he explains why the Reformed tradition calls us to exercise caution when we speak of degrees of reward.

Chapter five treats the rarely treated topic of *temporal* rewards: "special privileges and responsibilities, greater opportunities for service, and distinguished honors in God's kingdom" that God bestows on His people in this life (105). In this section, Huizinga explains a few different texts of Scripture, including Hebrews 13:2 which calls us to practice hospitality: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." He asserts, "Still today God can reward those who 'entertain strangers' by giving them a visit from angels" (108). What does he mean by that?! Read this chapter and find out for yourself.

In chapter six, Huizinga explains the biblical and Reformed truth that "this reward is not of merit, but of grace" (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 24). He sharply rejects the notion that we can by our good works merit or deserve a reward from God. "Unanimously, unambiguously, and strenuously the theologians of the Reformed faith reject the idea of a reward of merit" (137). What then does Paul mean when he confesses, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day..." (2 Tim. 4:7-8)? Proponents of merit think this passage supports their doctrine. But Huizinga refutes their interpretation and tells us what the text actually means. He concludes this chapter by listing the reasons why the reward is all of grace, for example, "because the good works that God rewards are his own gifts" (158).

In my judgment, chapter seven is very important. Here Huizinga

discusses God's purpose in promising to reward the good works that He has "before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). He carefully distinguishes motivation from incentive. He states on the basis of his research,

> The overwhelming majority of Reformed theologians, following the lead of Calvin, do not use the term *motive*, but employ a rich variety of other terms and expressions to teach in a positive and helpful way that God's purpose with rewards is to take his people, who are already motivated to be zealous for good works, and sweetly stimulate them to persevere in their determination to be holy in an unholy and hostile world. The noun commonly used to describe the reward is *incentive* or *stimulus* (168).

The positive purpose of God in promising to crown us with the reward of eternal life after we have finished running our race by faith in Jesus is to encourage, stimulate, and spur us on to keep running, in spiritual rain or sunshine. The content of this chapter is worth pondering at length.

The last chapter contains various implications for the Christian life. Huizinga exposes "the pernicious error of antinomianism" (199) but also warns that "obedience is never a condition in the covenant" (212). He points out that the promise of rewards in Scripture is often related to the suffering of believers in the midst of a hostile world. He has a special word of encouragement for us preachers who must preach things that may elicit angry responses from sinners who do not like having their sins exposed and condemned. God promises a crown of glory to the faithful minister "in order to excite him to continued faithfulness" (223). He also has a special word for Christian parents regarding the very practical matter of rewarding our children when they obey (231).

Read this book slowly and digest in your soul the meat of God's Word as taught by Reformed men through the ages and distilled in this book concerning God's gracious promise to crown our good works, which are His own gifts to us.

The Theology of Early French Protestantism: From the Affair of the Placards to the Edict of Nantes, ed. Martin I. Klauber. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023. Pp xii + 429. $30.00. Softcover. ISBN 9781601789846. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

Martin Klauber, independent scholar and affiliate professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, presents his third volume on French Reformed history and theology. His first volume (published in 2014) covered the years 1598-1685, and the second (2020) took the reader through the 1700s. These two volumes were favorably reviewed in past issues of this *Journal*. This third volume covers the years 1534-1598 but has some chronological overlap with the first volume.

All three volumes treat not merely *history*, but *historical theology*. Each is divided into two parts: historical background, and theology and theologians. And each presents new material (new in *English*, that is) regarding French Protestantism. Klauber and the authors of the various chapters have made a significant contribution to an under-studied subject.

Not explicitly stated in the work, but implied in the three volumes, is the argument that Reformed Protestantism began in France. For one thing, John Calvin and other early Reformers were born there; for another, the work of the Genevan Reformers always had as its goal the benefit of French Reformed churches. Even those who point to Huldrych Zwingli's Zurich as the real beginning of Reformed Protestantism must admit that the French Reformation soon overshadowed that of German Switzerland.

Historical Background

The first five chapters regard the history of the French Reformation. The chapters are not a general historical survey, but a detailed examination of specific moments in French Reformed history. Chapter one addresses the development of a French Reformed church order, the French national synods of the sixteenth century, and local church government. Among other points made, Glenn Sunshine notes the rise of the "colloquy" (similar to our classis) and the loss of the diaconate in French Reformed church polity. Church polity students and teachers will not want to overlook this chapter.

The "French Wars of Religion" refers to eight battles between the French Reformed ("Huguenots") and Roman Catholics between 1562 and 1598. Chapter two devotes a section to each war. Chapter three focuses on one moment in these wars, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (August 1572), during which thousands of Huguenots were slaughtered. This event made clear that France's king and Roman Catholic loyalists would never tolerate Reformed believers in France. The detailed treatment of these wars commends the chapter, but it contains French words and phrases that many English speakers will not understand.

Chapter four treats another foundational event in French Reformed church history—the conversion of King Henry IV from Protestantism to Catholicism in 1593. The chapter is primarily a biography of Henry, but it examines why Henry converted and whether his conversion was genuine. That Henry's goal was to unify France is a universal assumption. Also widely recognized is that after becoming Catholic, Henry was more sympathetic to the plight of the Reformers than any other French king. Lana Martysheva adds that the religious division in Henry's own family (a staunchly Reformed mother and a religiously unsettled father) was a factor in his conversion, as was the unsettled nature of his times.

Chapter five ("The French Monarchomachs") introduces a lesser-known facet of French Reformed church history: the development of a theory of resistance to rulers, which supposedly accorded with Scripture. The rise of this theory was another effect of the French religious wars and the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. Klauber focuses on the efforts of Francis Hotman, Theodore Beza, and other anonymous writers to develop this view.

This first part is a welcome contribution to the study of the French Reformation. One could find the essential historical points in other works, but particularly the first, second, and fifth chapters develop at length aspects of the French reformation that are not readily available in English. The history is not exhaustive, but it covers the essential background of the development of French Reformed churches and theology.

Theology and Theologians

The ten chapters in the book's second part are varied and can be divided into three categories. The first category includes three chapters devoted to a narrow subject. Chapter eight surveys and evaluates "John Calvin's Use of Ambrose," and chapter fifteen "Philippe du Plessis-Mornay's Use of Augustine." These chapters underscore that the Reformers believed their teachings to be those of the historic Christian faith. The Reformed faith, in other words, was truly *apostolic*, in contrast to Rome's view of apostolicity, that the pope is the successor of the apostles. Both Rome and the Reformed claimed to follow Augustine, but Mornay (1549-1623) demonstrated that Rome ignores some of Augustine's teachings, particularly in the matter of the Lord's Supper. Mornay was a prominent and influential man in his day—a Reformed theologian and a lieutenant of the king during the religious wars.

This category also includes chapter six, "Guillame Farel's Trinitarian Prayers." Guillame is William (1489-1565), who induced Calvin to pastor in Geneva rather than pursue a quiet life of study. Opponents accused both Calvin and Farel of being Arians (unorthodox regarding the Trinity). Theodore Van Raalte surveys five of Farel's prayers, demonstrating that Farel believed the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and never undermined it.

The second category includes five chapters that focus on a Reformer and his contribution to the Reformation. Two subjects are well known: Theodore Beza (1519-1605; chapter thirteen) and Pierre Viret (1509-1571; chapter fourteen). Both chapters are largely biographical. Michael Bruening indicates that Viret played a more prominent role in the Reformation, including by his writings, than English-speaking scholars realized. Scott Manetsch wrote a chapter on Beza's life in the first volume of this trilogy as well. In the first volume Manetsch emphasized Beza's role during the French civil wars. Now he notes areas in which Beza was faithful to Calvin's thought, and in which he modified it. This reviewer appreciates Manetsch's view that Beza had fundamentally the same view of double predestination as Calvin. Beza did present the doctrine somewhat differently than Calvin, but to call Beza's twist on Calvin's view "supralapsarian" (131, 313)

is to open up another debate.[1]

Others in the second category are not well known. Jeannine Olson introduces us to "Nicolas Des Gallars and the Colloquy of Poissy" in chapter seven. Gallars (c. 1520-1581) pastored in Geneva from 1544-1557, then in churches in Paris and London that requested pastors from Geneva. The 1561 Colloquy was Catherine de Medici's attempt to unite Protestants and Catholics by discussing, among other things, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Beza and Gallars were the two notable defenders of the Reformed position.

Chapter eleven analyzes the writings of a French Reformed individual, "TH.Q.T," who opposed the Jesuits. The chapter analyzes some of his anti-Jesuit writings, but also supports the thesis that this man was the pastor Antoine de Chandieu (1534-1591), and that he used his pseudonym to protect himself from the danger involved in openly opposing Rome.

Chapter twelve regards Simon Goulart (1543-1628), who succeeded Theodore Beza as the moderator of the company of Genevan pastors; in other words, Goulart succeeded the successor of John Calvin. This in itself makes him significant. Karin Maag notes ways in which, by speaking and writing, he defended the cause of the Huguenots.

The final category consists of chapters nine and ten, devoted to men who were not themselves Reformers but who had a decided effect on the French reformation. Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563) was a teacher and scholar who aspired to be ordained in Geneva but was refused. He later advocated religious tolerance. In Geneva, sympathetic to the Reformed, this was viewed as supporting heretics. When he advocated for this in the Roman Catholic France, he was considered a Huguenot sympathizer. Gary Jenkins asserts that his views anticipated, if they did not actively pave the way for, the Edict of Nantes in 1598.

Peter Ramus (1515-1572) was a French philosopher who opposed Aristotelian thought and logic. He proposed to organize all thought

1 Richard Muller, for one, distinguishes Beza's view from the supra-lapsarian view of Franciscus Junius, and argues that to call Beza's view supra-lapsarian is to suggest elements of the doctrine as it was later developed that do not apply to Beza. See Muller, *Predestination in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2024), 19, 127.

by dividing every subject into two parts, and subdividing further into two parts, and so forth. William Perkins, a Puritan, adopted his method and used it to organize his treatment of the doctrine of the covenant. Donald McKim concludes the chapter by noting the effect of Ramism on Puritan theology, ethics, education, preaching, and Bible interpretation. While Ramus lived and died in France, his real effect was felt in England and the Netherlands, where the Puritans lived.

Every reader will find some chapters in the second part to be of greater interest than others. Yet the men whose lives and works are covered in these chapters contributed significantly to the French Reformation, so each chapter is a welcome addition to the English-speaking world's understanding of the French Reformation. Will Klauber and others please continue their research and writing in this area?

Martin Luther on Mental Health: Practical Advice for Christians Today, by Stephen M. Saunders. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2023. Pp. 151. $17.99. Softcover. ISBN 9780758672049. Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.

Stephen Saunders adds another helpful book to the many that are published these days on mental illnesses. Books on mental health sell because of the prevalence of mental distress in the world as well as in the church. But Saunders' book is not merely an unnecessary addition to a glut of mental health books; it is a helpful addition because it is uniquely Lutheran. Saunders is Lutheran through and through, and the book is about *Luther. Martin Luther on Mental Health* examines how Luther himself counseled those with depression, anxiety, and other mental distresses. It is how Luther counseled himself.

Saunders is qualified, both as a PhD professor of psychology (at Marquette University in Milwaukee) and as a practicing clinical psychologist. He writes as a man who counsels others and as a teacher who knows how to make matters clear for the common person. The book's subtitle is *Practical Advice For Christians Today.* Saunders is explicit:

> This book is written to help readers, whether pastor or layperson, do what Luther wrote Matthias Weller in October 1534: "God has commanded men to comfort their brethren, and it is his will that the afflicted should receive such consolation as God's very own. Thus our Lord speaks through Saint Paul, 'Comfort the fainthearted.'" (14).

The book is the fruit of Saunder's reading of Luther's *Letters of Spiritual Counsel.* Luther's letters were first translated and published in 1955. They are edifying reading for all, and entertaining, as is all of Luther's writing. The *Letters* are Luther's pastoral care of his flock and friends to whom he could not speak in person. He wrote to comfort the sick, dying, and bereaved; to give instruction to the perplexed and doubting (suffering *Anfechtung*); to encourage the persecuted and imprisoned; to advise during epidemics and famines; to offer suggestions for pastors facing problems; to counsel regarding marriage and sex; and to cheer the anxious and despondent—the latter being the focus of Saunder's study here. The entire collection of Luther's letters is valuable reading.[1]

Saunder's examination of Luther's counsel to the anxious and despondent is divided into four parts. The first shows the prevalence of mental health problems, calling attention to what Americans face today. Those who suffer domestic abuse and adverse childhood experiences are at high risk. Saunders reminds the reader that mental health problems must be seen on a continuum, rather than in categorical terms, which is why he rejects the medical model for treatment. He suggests, therefore, that the proper question to ask is not "Is this a mental illness?" but "Is this problem bad enough to warrant help?" He emphasizes already here that the stigma attached to mental distress must be battled (in a later chapter he shows how the stigma also hurts the sufferer's family; he calls it "courtesy stigma"). Helpfully, these chapters show the association that Luther also made between thinking, behavior, and emotions—a thesis that carries through to the book's end.

The second section reviews the history of pastoral care, shows how it drifted from pastoral care to pastoral counseling, with pastors shifting their emphasis from preaching the gospel of justification to

1 See Martin Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed and transl. Theodore G. Tappert, Library of Christian Classics XVIII (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955.

teaching parishioners how to feel better about themselves (chapter 4). This section also emphasizes that, although *Anfechtung* is not the same as depression, pastors must address this spiritual struggle with theological consolation.

The third section deals most directly with Luther's own counsel for the depressed. It finds this counsel in Luther's letters, referred to above, but also in Luther's sermons and in his table talks (transcriptions of Luther's words by those who were guests at his table, of whom Luther had many). Here Saunders contends that Luther was a Cognitive Behavioral Therapist, ahead of his times. To be clear, Saunders is a Christian; he shows how Luther counseled Christians to *think* biblically, because their thinking was often unbiblical—thus, *cognitive* therapy. And he counseled them to *behave* obediently, because often Christians' behavior would cast them down—thus, *behavioral* therapy.

The book's last part is mostly Saunder's advice, practical applications of all that precedes: how to listen well, what mistakes to avoid, and how to decide whether to direct the sufferer to a mental health professional.

One of the book's great strengths is its description and promotion of Luther's "theology of the cross," as applied to Christians suffering *depression*. Saunders is a sworn foe of the "theology of glory" because Saunders is a good disciple of Luther. From beginning (39) to end (133, 137) and many places in between, Saunders shows that the theology of glory is "scurrilous falsehoods and outright heresies," (39) and that it devastates those who suffer depression. "A Christian who suffers from a mental health problem simultaneously with the depredations of the theology of glory is in grave danger…" (40). If your faith were stronger, you would not suffer, is not Saunder's counsel because it was not Luther's.

In this reviewer's estimation, Saunder's second strength is his comparison of Luther's counsel to the modern approach of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for depression. This commendation may be surprising, because many Christians today look askance at CBT's methodology, and for many reasons. Evangelical authors have pointed out the dangers of adopting the techniques of CBT, bereft as it usually is of spiritual content, and applied as it wrongly is to counseling for change in sinful *conduct*. The Christian Counseling and Educational

Foundation (CCEF) and the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) stand among others who have issued helpful warnings about CBT. But Luther and Saunders advise cognitive and behavioral change based on Scripture, and they do not apply it to someone trying to break with an addiction, but to the people of God suffering *depression*. Perhaps one could judge Saunders unwise to use the phrase *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* to describe Luther's practice, simply because the phrase carries such negative connotations in some Christian circles today. But apart from the modern connotations, Saunders makes a good case that *for depression* pastors must counsel a change of thinking and of behavior. This is true soul care.

Thinking biblically was Luther's counsel in his many letters to the depressed. Here his animosity to a theology of glory comes out. To *think* that a strong Christian will suffer neither *Anfechtung* nor depression is wrong; neither indicates God's disfavor or a defective faith. Then, Luther reminded his friends that Augustine warned against introspection to find evidence of God's approval, and instead counseled the exercise of faith in Christ and God's saving work in the cross. *Think* about Jesus.

Behaving as a Christian was just as important to Luther, and the behaviors Luther advised for those cast down were 1) Christian fellowship among believers, especially singing the Psalms, and 2) having fun.

For Luther, the sin that aggravated or fostered depression was not immorality or murder, but isolationism. In this connection, Luther calls attention to the devil, some would say *inordinate* attention to the devil. In our modern estimation that it is not sophisticated to speak of the devil, and that the Reformation-era folks were probably obsessed with him, we might overreact to Luther. But we ought to give the devil his due and follow Luther a ways down his path, of course being aware of his excess, like when he counsels Mrs. M to "spit on the devil." Luther's point is that the devil, like a lion, cannot take his prey except first he *isolates* it. Luther reminds us that "Christ was never alone except when he prayed" (109). In other words, solitude is bad except for engaging in spiritual exercises. When God created man, the first thing He said was "alone is *not* good." The other importance of Christian fellowship was to help one another. Being among the saints is not only

for *me,* it is for *them*. And then have fun. Get up, sing and play and ride your horse and go hunting, even if you do not feel like it (103).

Such is Luther's cognitive and behavioral advice for the melancholy.

Readers will have to forgive Saunders for being "too Lutheran" when he, without comment, quotes Luther's advice to one correspondent that he should drink more beer and wine, and to another that he ought to sin just to spite the devil. And all should question the absolute statements that no mental illness could be a sign of a spiritual problem and that the devil is the source of all illnesses, including mental health problems (13, 46, 47). But the reader will have to thank Saunders for reminding us how modern and biblical Luther was. These days, when help for the depressed seems so complicated and out-of-reach for most, Luther simplifies matters.

How to Read & Understand the Psalms, by Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. Pp. 588. $49.99. Hardcover. ISBN 9781433584336. Reviewed by Ryan J. Barnhill.

Most pastors likely have some books on or near their desk, readily accessible because of the book's importance in the daily work of the ministry. You might consider including *How to Read & Understand the Psalms* in that special group of books; such is its value! Any pastor who is preaching or teaching from the Psalms will profit from a careful reading of this work. The layperson, too, will benefit from this relatively non-technical treatment.

Summary

The first chapter is introductory. In it the authors state their thesis: "This present book attempts to enable better reading and understanding of these psalms in their own context as intended by their authors" (7). Belonging to the introduction is an explanation of Psalm 1, which is called the "wicket gate to the psalter" (10).

Chapter two discusses hermeneutics, or the interpretation of the Psalms. The authors stress that the study of the Psalms must be approached spiritually. They set forth an interpretative framework for

sober and wise study.

In chapter three, the authors bring out the importance of knowing the Psalms' historical setting. The superscripts and postscripts of the Psalms, designed to give details about the composition of a particular psalm, are addressed. That David is the human writer of many psalms is developed.

The royal orientation of the Psalms is spelled out in chapter four. The authors explain what they mean by "royal orientation": "By 'royal orientation' we mean that the king is the central figure. Fundamentally, the Psalms are both *by* and *about* the king…the royal orientation anticipates David's greater son promised to him in 2 Samuel 7:8-16 and finally realized in the Lord Jesus Christ" (73).

Chapter five analyzes the liturgical setting of the Psalms, or "the origin of the Psalms in relation to the temple and their use in Israel's worship" (84).

Hebrew poetry is treated in chapter six. The authors explain that poetry "is marked by certain restrictions, a sort of rhythm that does not normally govern prose" (133). Hebrew poetry is restricted in three ways: parallelism, brevity and terseness, and imagery and figures of speech. Careful consideration of a psalm's poetic elements is necessary for grasping its message.

In chapter seven, the authors address the categorization of different psalms. However, they caution that one cannot conclusively list all 150 psalms into certain categories. In some of the following chapters, the authors examine the various types of psalms as well as their forms and characteristics.

The first type of psalm is explored in chapter eight: praise psalms. These psalms express praise to God for who He is and what He has done. The standard structure (with exceptions) for such psalms is: 1) introduction (call to praise); 2) main body (cause or reason for praise); and 3) conclusion (often a renewed call to praise).

The second type of psalm is petition-lament psalms, as detailed in chapter nine. The psalmist laments a variety of circumstances, including, but not limited to, sin, sickness, persecution, military crises, and injustice. Almost without exception, the petition-lament psalms also include doxology or praise of God. With some variation, these petition-lament psalms have the following distinct elements: 1)

direct address with introductory petition that God hear the petition that follows; 2) lament/complaint regarding the psalmist's situation; 3) confidence in God; 4) petition to God regarding the lamentable situation; and 5) conclusion/praise. This chapter includes an explanation of imprecatory psalms in which the psalmist asks God to punish the enemy.

In chapter ten, the third type of psalm is treated: individual songs of grateful praise. The authors relate these psalms to the praise psalms, observing that individual songs of grateful praise are a subset of the praise psalms, but are, as the title indicates, individually focused. Individual songs of grateful praise are also related to the petition-lament psalms: the petition-lament psalms call for God's help, and the individual-songs-of-grateful-praise psalms praise God for that help after He gives it. Typically, these psalms adhere to the following pattern: 1) proclamation of the psalmist's intention to praise, or the praise itself; 2) introductory summary of what God has done; 3) reflection on past need and deliverance; and 4) praise.

The fourth type of psalms, explored in chapter eleven, is psalms of trust. These psalms "express a settled confidence in the Lord for his goodness and continuing care" (347). Once again, the authors endeavor to relate the psalm types:

> These songs of trust are a derivative of the lament psalm in that they typically reflect a context of trouble or concern of some kind, only it is the expression of trust that dominates…Whatever trouble there is lies in the background. Psalms of trust do not lament (Ps. 63 may be an exception) or make petition. Nor do they yet express the grateful praise of the individual songs of this genre. With trouble in the background they express a firm trust in the Lord's faithful care (347).

With exceptions, these psalms have the following elements: 1) an interior lament that is in the background, but occasioning the expression of trust; 2) calling on others to put their trust in the Lord along with the psalmist; and 3) expressing the basis of trust, that is, specifying a truth about God that renders Him trustworthy.

The fifth type of psalm is Messianic (chapter 12). "Messiah" means "anointed one." The chapter states, "The Messiah is the promised King—promised by the Lord in covenant with David. He is

the ideal King—both gifted and faithful. And he will rule universally in righteousness and peace at the end of the age" (371). The chapter traces the Messianic hope through the Old and New Testaments and examines the varieties of Messianic psalms.

The sixth type of psalm is didactic, as found in chapter thirteen. A helpful description is given of didactic psalms:

> They are given to instruct Israel in piety and ethics, seeking to honor God in a life devoted to him in faithfulness and shaped by his revealed will. These psalms are not designed to offer praise, as such. And they are neither prayers nor laments. Their purpose is that of instruction. They are designed to instruct Israel in faithful living under God (414).

Didactic psalms can be subdivided into three categories: 1) Psalms that extol the Torah and its value; 2) psalms that recount Israel's history mostly from the Exodus to the monarchy, and that, for instruction and exhortation; and 3) wisdom psalms.

Chapter fourteen studies the "poetic devices the psalmist uses to get his message across", including "the logic of the psalm, how it is put together, and how its construction conveys its meaning" (451).

In chapter fifteen, Waltke and Zaspel take a "big picture" approach to understanding how the Psalter fits together as a whole.

Evaluation

There are too many commendable features of this book to enumerate in this review, but here are some highlights.

First, Bruce Waltke and Fred Zaspel are orthodox in their approach to the Psalms. Their view is that the Psalms are the inspired and infallible Word of God. They take every word and structure seriously. This conservative approach is refreshing in our day of liberal scholarship. In fact, at numerous points Waltke and Zaspel are critical of those who undermine God's Word in unbelief.

Second, a commendable feature of this book is its explanation/illustration approach. Consistently, the authors explain a concept, then illustrate it from specific psalms. Not only is this good teaching strategy that fortifies understanding of the various concepts, but this also gives the reader greater familiarity with the Psalms themselves. A thorough index in the back of the book lists the Psalms treated throughout the

book, making it a ready reference for preaching, teaching, and studying the Psalms.

Third, Waltke and Zaspel do the reader a good service by showing the depth and richness of the Psalms. This is needed in our day. The Psalter is too often viewed as merely a pick-me-up during hard times. Perhaps the Psalms are only used as a quick way to finish personal or family devotions—read a brief psalm. But Waltke and Zaspel show us how *deep and rich* the Psalms are. The Psalter contains *so much more* than what may be evident at first glance; Waltke and Zaspel bring the reader on an enlightening journey through this treasured book of Scripture.

Fourth, belonging to this depth and richness is the Christological focus of the Psalms, which focus Waltke and Zaspel continually stress. What minister (and layperson) does not want to grow in his understanding of Christ in the Psalter? How exciting is the study and preaching of the Psalms with their anticipation of the Messiah!

How to Read & Understand the Psalms—highly recommended!

When the Man Comes Around: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation, by Douglas Wilson. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2019. Pp. ix + 272. $16.95 Softcover. ISBN 9781947644922. Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

Douglas Wilson, a prominent, contemporary figure in the Christian Reconstruction movement birthed by R. J. Rushdoony, has written a preterist reconstruction of the book of Revelation. "Preterist" means "past." According to this Christian Reconstructionist, virtually all of Revelation is the account of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. I qualify this description of Wilson's work on Revelation with "virtually" because every once in a (rare) while the real, biblical, future end of all things forces its way, if ever so briefly and ever so insignificantly, into Wilson's account of the last things as a past event. The only such (partially) future event that is of any consequence to Wilson is the millennium (thousand years) of Revelation 20. This is allowed to extend into a distant future, in contrast to the preterism of the entirety of the book, so that the church may

yet evangelize, and rule, the world. But having made its all-important appearance in Revelation 20, the future immediately disappears into the past already in Revelation 21. The "new heaven and a new earth" of Revelation 21:1 is, astoundingly, the re-creation of the entire world by the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

This description of Wilson's book on Revelation as "preterist" is not simply a Reformed (amillennial) charge, although, in fact, it is a charge—a devastating charge. It exposes the book as not only worthless as a commentary, but also as false doctrine from beginning to end. This charge implies also that Wilson's book strips the book of Revelation of one of its great and needful purposes and functions, namely, to instruct and forewarn the church of the nature of the last days as the assault upon the church by the devil in his kingdom of the Antichrist. For Douglas Wilson, the Antichrist was wholly a person in the past. His persecution of the church was completely a past event. For the church in AD 2024, the biblical warning of the coming of Antichrist, not only in the book of Revelation, but also in 2 Thessalonians and elsewhere, is irrelevant. The warning applied only to the church that existed prior to AD 70.

"Preterist," however, is not *simply* an amillennial charge *against* Wilson and his book on Revelation. It is Wilson's own description of himself and his book, as the virtue of the book. It is his own commendation of the book:

> The approach that has been taken throughout this commentary is the *preterist*. This comes from the Latin word for past, and means that the prophecies given were fulfilled in the prophet's future, but in our past—and for the most part overwhelmingly in the first century (244).

Let no one be deceived. Preterism applies also, and especially, to the coming again to earth of the ascended Jesus Christ. In the characteristically flippant language of the Christian Reconstructionists of the title of Wilson's book, Jesus is the one who "comes around." For Wilson, the all-important coming around of Jesus is not future, but past, in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Preterism does not only describe virtually all the events related to the second coming of Christ as foretold in Revelation; it extends to the coming itself. This makes Wilson's eschatology, as it reveals itself in explanation of the main

book of the Bible on the last things, deadly serious heresy. Whatever eschatology does not have the second (bodily) coming of Jesus as its main theme, but in fact puts this coming into the background, if it does not deny this coming altogether, is false doctrine concerning the last things.

When pressed, Wilson likely would reject the charge that he is a preterist, that is, one who denies a future second coming of Christ altogether. A full-fledged, consistent preterist denies that there is any teaching in Scripture about a future coming of Christ whatever. Wilson should take warning, however, from the fact that at least two of his Reconstruction colleagues have developed what might be called "partial preterism" into a thorough-going, full preterism. Reconstructionist David Chilton died denying the (future) second coming of Christ. Reconstructionist Gary De Mar tips his hand by refusing to answer three questions: will there be a bodily return of Christ in the future?; will there be a general resurrection in the future?; and will history end with the final judgment?

Wilson would contend that he escapes the heresy of fully developed preterism by his adherence still to the confession that there will be a second coming of Jesus in the body, although, according to Wilson, the Bible says almost nothing about it and although it is of little importance to Douglas Wilson. What is of importance to Douglas Wilson is Jesus' coming "around" in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. To this coming, a second (bodily) coming of Christ in the future plays second fiddle, if it is allowed in Wilson's eschatological band at all.

Regardless that Wilson would protest the charge that, in fact, his eschatology is full-fledged preterism, denying a future, bodily second coming of Jesus Christ, this is the clear implication of his "explanation" of the book of Revelation and, of necessity, his "explanation" of related prophecy of the end elsewhere in Scripture. If the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21:1, and all the works that accompany the Lord's re-creation of the universe according to what follows in Revelation 21 and 22, including the perfection of the church, are past, as part of the destruction of Jerusalem, as Wilson asserts (245), there is nothing left for Jesus to accomplish in a second coming.

Why, according to Wilson, should there be anything left for Christ

to do at a second coming? "The demolition of Jerusalem will be [in AD 70—DJE] the culmination of all things" (211). "The great theme of the book of Revelation" is the destruction of Jerusalem, not the second coming of Christ (196). "Revelation is not even ultimately *concerned* with the end of the world as we know it" (my emphasis; back cover). This last is the denial that the book of Revelation is concerned with the second coming of Jesus in the future.

That Wilson's ostensibly partial preterism in fact commits him to a full and final preterism, indeed already *is* a full and final preterism, denying the second coming of Christ with all that the Bible teaches will take place at this second coming, is evident in Wilson's astounding explanation of Matthew 24:14. The text is part—the *climactic* part—of Jesus' doctrine of the last things. It reads: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." "End" in the text is the Greek word, "*telos*," which not only means "conclusion," but also "goal." According to Wilson, this "end" was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (162, 163). AD 70 was the goal and culmination of all God's works and ways. If AD 70 was God's goal, His "*telos*," with all things, certainly among them the glorification of Himself in Jesus Christ, His person and work, there is no place at all for a future *telos* in a second coming of Christ. By his own admission, in his explanation of Matthew 24:14, Douglas Wilson's eschatology is a full and final preterism: AD 70 was the "end" (*telos*, or goal) of God's counsel and of His saving work in Jesus Christ—"*the* end." AD 70 with its destruction of Jerusalem—the "*telos*"!

Preterism cannot rest content with partiality. It strives to be, indeed, inherently is, full and final. AD 70 must be eschatology's everything. The difference between a David Chilton and a Douglas Wilson is two stages of development, or honesty, or deliverance from self-deceit.

Wilson's entire book clamors for critical observation, if not refutation. Several instances cannot be silenced, even in a book review. First, there is Wilson's ridiculous treatment of the number 666 in Revelation 13:18 as "the number of the beast." In the interest of making the beast, fully and finally, the Roman empire under Nero, rather than the future Antichrist, Wilson has recourse to an old letters/numbers game. This exegetical devise, which is not a scriptural method of the

interpretation of numbers, attributes numerical value to letters of the alphabet. "A" is number 1; "B" is number 2; and so on. The number 666 thus is made to become the numerical equivalent of "Caesar Nero"—*in the Hebrew* alphabet, not in the Greek language in which John wrote the book of Revelation, but in the Hebrew language. If the game had not worked numerically in Hebrew but would have worked in the Dutch language, Wilson would have appealed to the Dutch translation of "Caesar Nero," had there been one.

Second, Wilson is at pains to date the book of Revelation prior to AD 70, whereas the church, on good grounds and from the earliest time of the post-apostolic church, has always dated the book between AD 80 and AD 90. If John wrote Revelation about AD 80 and if, as Christian Reconstruction, including Douglas Wilson, holds, the book is mainly the prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Revelation is a prophecy of an event that had already taken place. This would be the fallacy of *vaticinium ex eventu*. The date of Revelation, therefore, must be moved back to a time prior to AD 70. Whatever is necessary for AD 70!

Third, Wilson misunderstands a Greek adverb in the book of Revelation, the word translated (correctly) by the AV as "quickly" in Revelation 3:11; 22:7; 22:12, 20 and other passages. A message of Revelation is that Jesus comes "quickly" in His second coming. This is true also of the message of Revelation 22:6. The Greek original has "the things which must be done quickly," or "in haste." The translation of the AV, "shortly," is erroneous. The word translated "shortly" in verse 6 is the same word that is translated correctly as "quickly" in verse 7. Revelation does not teach that the coming of Jesus will be in a short while, that is, in AD 70. But it teaches that Jesus is coming quickly—as fast as possible, in view of the execution in time and history of the counsel of God, especially concerning the salvation of the church. His coming—such is the meaning of the Greek "*tachu"*—is without delay. Wilson makes a serious exegetical and linguistic mistake when he explains Jesus's quick return as a "shortly" return—in AD 70. Jesus was coming quickly upon His ascension; He was not returning shortly. Nor does Revelation say so.

Fourth, what aids and abets this preterism, if it does not drive it, is Wilson's postmillennialism. For Wilson, the world must not come

to an end with the rise and world-dominance of Antichrist. Antichrist must be a reality of the past. Rather, the world's future must be the earthly victory of the church, especially in the form of Christian Reconstruction. Preterism is necessary for this postmillennialism.

Fifth, glaringly missing from Wilson's preterist explanation of Revelation is any appeal to the Presbyterian and Reformed creeds, by which Wilson as a Presbyterian is bound. The reason is evident. It is impossible to harmonize preterism with the eschatology of the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds. They all are plainly, and authoritatively, "futurist." Preterism is anti-creedal heresy.

And last, but by no means least, what a sorry recasting of "the end" of Matthew 24:14 and of the book of Revelation rightly understood! Instead of the awesome, glorious appearance of Christ on the clouds, attended by a multitude of angels, visible to all humans everywhere, raising the dead and conducting the final judgment, that is, the coming of the book of Revelation, Wilson has…what? A Roman army massacring some Jews and demolishing a temple in Palestine. This is supposed to have been the Christian hope. A hope that is past! This is announced as the coming of Christ. A coming that has come!

By its own admission, preterism has no hope for the future. The realization of its hope—the second coming of Christ—was AD 70. Therefore, it has no (future) hope at all. Wilson in particular and Christian Reconstruction in general are hopeless.

As a faint sign of the future event of the coming of Christ, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 had its meaning and worth. As the full reality itself of Jesus' second coming, the destruction of Jerusalem would have been the refutation and extinction of the Christian religion.

Contributors for this issue are:

Ryan J. Barnhill, pastor of Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD).

John Bolt, professor emeritus of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, MI).

David J. Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

Cory J. Griess, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

Barrett L. Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

Daniel J. Holstege, pastor of Wingham PRC (Wingham, ON).

Douglas J. Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

Aaron S. Van Dyke, senior year student at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

C. N. Willborn, senior pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Oak Ridge, TN and adjunct professor of Church History in Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Taylors, SC).

Books Reviewed

104 Bredenhof, Wes. *Aiming to Please: A Guide to Reformed Worship.*

108 Douma, Douglas J. *The Grand Old Doc: Articles on the Thought of Gordon H. Clark.*

111 Eccher, Stephen Brett. *Zwingli the Pastor: A Life in Conflict.*

115 Ford, Coleman M. and Wilhite, Shawn J. *Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers.*

118 Gribben, Crawford *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism.*

121 Huizinga, Brian. *Crowning His Gifts: Gracious Rewards in the Reformed Tradition.*

126 Klauber, Martin I. *The Theology of Early French Protestantism: From the Affair of the Placards to the Edict of Nantes.*

130 Saunders, Stephen M. *Martin Luther on Mental Health: Practical Advice for Christians Today.*

134 Waltke, Bruce K. and Zaspel, Fred G. *How to Read & Understand the Psalms.*

138 Wilson, Douglas. *When the Man Comes Around: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation.*

PRTJ Policies

Goal and Deadlines

The *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* has as its primary goal to publish scholarly works that promote the doctrines, practices, and history of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) and the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS). A secondary goal is to publish scholarly works that promote a broader understanding of the doctrines, practices, and history of the Reformed tradition.

Most articles that appear in the *PRTJ* have been previously solicited by the faculty of the PRTS through the editor of the *PRTJ*. The faculty will gladly consider unsolicited articles for publication; the editor, with the faculty, will make the final determination whether to publish.

Copy submitted for publication should be typewritten in Times New Roman 12 font and adhere to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Deadlines for submission are September 1 for the November issue and February 1 for the April issue.

The *PRTJ* provides no compensation to anyone who contributes to the content.

Book Reviews

Anyone who wishes to review a book is encouraged to consult with the editor before reading a book and writing the review. When the *PRTJ* editor gives prior approval to review a book, he will provide the reviewer with a copy of the book *gratis*. While the *PRTJ* welcomes unsolicited reviews of books not previously reviewed, the reviewer should still consult with the editor as early as possible. The *PRTJ* is not obligated to provide a *gratis* copy to unsolicited reviewers.

The purpose of book reviews is to alert readers to recently published books, either new publications or new editions of older works. The publication date of books, editions, and reprints reviewed in the *PRTJ* should ordinarily be within the past three years. The preferred length for book reviews is between 800-1200 words The editor may refuse to publish reviews of older books and may reduce word count of long reviews.

Alternatively, if a book was published longer than three years ago, a reviewer may write a review article not exceeding 5000 words. Review articles provide a deeper analysis of the book than a normal book review, evaluating at greater length the issues or ideas that the book raises. Prior approval for review articles is absolutely necessary.

All book reviews must be submitted with full bibliographic information, including page count, price, binding information, and ISBN.

Reprints

All content of the *PRTJ* is considered copyrighted. Those who wish to reprint an article or book review should secure the permission of the editor.