

Protestant *Reformed* **Theological** *Journal*

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Editor's Notes

In his contribution Prof. Barry Gritters defines and discusses such questions as: 1) What is the church and her calling? 2) What is the kingdom of God? 3) How are the church and kingdom related? 4) What is the *missio Dei*? What is the believer's calling as regards unconverted poor? Read, enjoy, and be instructed by this fine piece of work.

John P. Marcus treats the doctrine of eternal justification. He deals with a number of interesting and significant questions and controversies concerning this concept in the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions. We trust that our readers will benefit from this well-documented and well-written article. Mr. Marcus will conclude his discussion of this subject in the next issue of the *Journal*.

Rev. Mark L. Shand writes on the subject, Infant Baptism and the view of children in the Presbyterian tradition. His article is well-documented by references to the Reformers (Calvin, Bullinger, Zwingli, Knox) and by references to the Confessions of both the Presbyterian (Westminster Confession) and Reformed traditions (Heidelberg Catechism). Rev. Shand will conclude his excellent discussion of this subject in the next issue of the *Journal*.

The Editor concludes his exposition of the Epistle to Titus.

RDD

Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting

An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (10)

Robert D. Decker

We remind the reader that this exposition of the epistle to Titus was originally given in the form of chapel talks by the author during the weekly Wednesday morning chapel services at the seminary. The author began this exposition in the 1997-1998 school year and completed the series during the second semester of the 1999-2000 school year. The exposition is being published in the *Journal* with the hope that it will prove helpful to a wider audience of God's people in their study of this brief epistle in the sacred Scriptures.

So that both those familiar with the Greek language and those who are unable to work with the Greek may benefit from this study, all references to the Greek will be placed in footnotes. The translation of the Greek text is the author's.

We present this exposition pretty much as it was spoken in the chapel services, application and all. Perhaps this will help the reader gain some insight into what goes on in the seminary.

Chapter Three

Verse 1

Cause them to remember to subject themselves to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient to magistrates, and hence to obey a ruler, to be prepared for every good work.

In this third chapter, the apostle continues his instructions to Titus, the preacher in Crete. Titus is called to remind the people

of God to subject themselves to rulers¹ and to the authorities.² These rulers are the civil magistrates, the local, provincial, and national rulers of the empire, also the police and soldiers. Both words, “rulers” and “authorities,” are used in the New Testament to refer to the minister and elders of the church, but that is not the reference here. For two reasons: One, the apostle has already dealt with the calling of God’s people with regard to the elders of the church in chapter 1. It would be strange and even tautologous for him to return to the subject here in chapter 3. Two, in addition, the second infinitive, which is a further explanation of the first,³ means “to obey the magistrates.”

The New Testament Scriptures especially emphasize this truth in various passages. Romans 13:1-7 is the classic passage on the subject of civil government. “Let every soul be subject to the higher powers....” Also I Peter 2:13-15 teaches us that it is the will of God that we submit ourselves to every ordinance of man — to kings, governors, and those sent by them for the punishment of evildoers. Jesus likewise taught us to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s (Matt. 22:15-22).

We must obey these civil authorities because they are of God, ordained of God. Therefore, if we resist them, we are resisting the ordinance of God. Not only is this the case, but the Bible goes so far as to say that the rulers are ministers of God to us for good. Hence, we must obey them and pay our tribute or taxes (Rom. 13:1-7).

They are our rulers because God placed them over us. They have been given the right to rule us from God. Therefore, they are the authorities to which we must subject ourselves. These rulers are this whether they know it or not. Whether they are righteous by grace through faith in Christ or ungodly; whether they rule in the consciousness of their accountability to God or no; whether they live scandalously, as did former President Clinton, or strive to live a godly life, they are in authority over us for God’s sake.

When the apostle wrote this, the church was in the Roman

1. *Apchais* is the Greek term.

2. The Greek is *exousiais*.

3. The Greek is *peitharchein*.

empire. The corruption of Rome was unbelievable. Homosexuality and lesbianism existed all over the empire, even among the highest government officials. Nero himself kept a male lover. Prostitution, both male and female, was legalized and abounded in the empire. Adultery and divorce were as common as marriage. The athletic games were unbelievably cruel. Men fought with other men or with animals to death. Gluttony, drunkenness, greed, and murder were the order of the day. Still more, these authorities were persecuting the church. Still, Titus is told that he must teach the people to subject themselves to and obey these rulers.

The only exception to all of this is when the authorities demand of us that which is contrary to the will of God. There are several examples of this in the Bible. The Hebrew midwives, because they feared God, refused to murder the male babies as Pharaoh had commanded (Ex. 1:16-22). Daniel and his friends in Babylon are outstanding examples of this. They refused the king's meat and wine because it involved idol worship and the meat was unclean. The three friends refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's great image, though it meant a burning, fiery furnace for them. Daniel prayed to God as always in spite of the king's decree and in spite of the lions. And according to Acts 4:19, 20 and 5:29, the apostles Peter and John testified, "We ought to obey God rather than men." And they continued to preach the gospel even though they were forbidden to do so.

Hence, we obey the civil magistrates with that one exception and even then we do not rebel or attempt revolution. Quietly we suffer the consequences, whether that be imprisonment or perhaps martyrdom.

Finally, Titus must cause the saints to remember to be prepared for every good work. The concept "good work" has appeared earlier (1:16; 2:7; 2:14). Therefore we may be brief in its exposition. These good works are the fruit of faith, they are performed in harmony with God's law, and they are done to the glory of God. The saints must be reminded to be prepared to do every good work. That preparation comes by the means of grace, chiefly by the means of preaching. That preparation also comes by the study of God's Word and by fervent, daily prayer. When the

saints are immersed in these, they are being prepared by God for every good work.

Our task as preachers is to remind the saints of this calling. By our preaching and teaching publicly and from house to house, and by our example of life (vv. 2-11), we must be teaching the saints to be prepared to do every good work.

Verse 2

Cause them to remember to speak evil of no man, to be no brawler, but gentle, showing all meekness to all men.

The infinitives of this second verse are all complementary with the main verb in verse 1 (put them in mind; cause them to remember). The sentence begun in verse 1 ends with this second verse. Titus is exhorted to remind the saints to be obedient to the magistrates, to be prepared to every good work. Further, he is to remind the saints to speak evil of no man. This verb literally means to blaspheme. It is used to refer to those who speak in contempt of God and things holy, of God's church and kingdom and Word. In this verse the saints of Titus' day, and we too, are reminded that we must not speak blasphemy, speak reproachfully, or revile and slander maliciously our fellow saints. Such speech arises out of hatred against God and, therefore, over against the neighbor, especially our fellow saints in the church.

The aim or purpose of this kind of speaking, this malicious slander, is to hurt and destroy one's fellow saint. It is never intended to edify or build up that fellow believer in the faith. In fact, it is often done behind the back of the one of whom we are speaking evil. Those who are guilty of this great evil cause all kinds of tension and trouble in the church. They disrupt the unity of the church and create an environment where the truth of the gospel and the work of the church cannot flourish.

The mere fact that the Lord has so much to say about this sin and condemns it so sharply in so many passages of Scripture indicates what a great sin this is. This also indicates how easily this sin manifests itself among God's people. God's people need to be reminded repeatedly that they must not speak malicious slander concerning their fellow saints.

Further, they need to be reminded not to be brawlers, fighters, contentious persons. There are a few of these in virtually every congregation. They thrive on fighting. They are given to excessive, sharp, negative criticism. Often they mount their sharpest attacks against the minister. The minister's preaching is no good, or he is guilty of this or that sin, or he sets a poor example for the congregation. Or these contentious persons pick fights with the elders and deacons and others in the congregation. And their fighting is over non-essentials or perceived evils. The motive of all this fighting is not the salvation and spiritual well-being of their fellow saints. Out of hatred against God and His church, they are out to hurt and to destroy.

The saints must be reminded to be, not brawlers, but gentle. One commentator translates the term gentle as "sweet reasonableness." Mildness ought to characterize the Christian. He must always seek the spiritual good and well-being of his neighbors out of the love of God.

That sweet reasonableness shows all meekness to all men. This is the positive aspect of the exhortation. Meekness and gentleness are the very opposites of malicious slander and brawling. Meekness puts God first, then the neighbor, and self last. Meekness is quiet, humble submission to the will and service of God. The meek one does not call attention to himself. Rather he hates pride. He is lowly and strives to be Christ-like in all his speech and in all his actions. The aim of the meek is the salvation of the neighbor and the advancing of God's cause and the glory of God's name.

We must note that these virtues are gifts from God to His people in Christ. That is the emphatic message of the verses that follow verse 2. By nature, and apart from grace, we are blasphemers and we are brawlers. Since we are gentle and meek only in principle, we need to be reminded to fight against our blasphemous and brawling sinful flesh.

The fact that we are reminded to speak evil of no man and to be no brawler does not mean that we tolerate sin or false doctrine or ungodliness in the church. Not at all. There must be discipline of evil doers and false teachers in the church. We must gently and

meekly admonish and call to repentance the evildoer. And we must earnestly contend, that is, fight for, the faith once delivered to the saints.

And while all of this begins *in* and applies especially *to* our relationships with our fellow believers in the church, we are called to speak evil of *no man* and to show all meekness to *all men*. We must not speak malicious slander of the ungodly neighbor and we must not be a brawler in society in general. As Christians we must be gentle and meek with all with whom we come into contact. With the godly fellow saint, this results in the blessing of the fellowship and communion of the saints. With the ungodly we meekly, but clearly, point him to his sin, and remind him of the just judgments of God, and call him to repent in godly sorrow lest he perish in his sin and unbelief. Furthermore, with the ungodly neighbor we refuse to fellowship in his sin.

Verse 3

For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

When the text says we were once foolish, etc., it means “once” in the sense of “at some time or other.” Formerly, or aforesaid, we were foolish, disobedient, etc. The apostle simply means the time before God in His kindness, love, and mercy brought them to conversion. Before their conversion they lived in all these vices. For this reason Titus must remind the saints to be subject to the principalities and powers and to manifest to their worldly neighbors those Christian virtues mentioned in verses 1 and 2. The implication is that God might use this godly conduct to bring some as yet unconverted elect to conversion and faith.

The apostle continues by specifying precisely those sins, vices, or evils in which they formerly lived. They were foolish. This means they were lacking in wisdom, i.e., the wisdom of God. Wisdom is knowing reality and living in harmony with that reality. Once they were foolish. They knew reality, and reality is God. They rejected God in unbelief and thus they were foolish. They refused to live in obedience to the Lord’s will.

They were disobedient. This was the manifestation of their foolishness. They refused to obey God's will. God sent His Son into the world. And in spite of the fact that Jesus plainly revealed Himself as the promised Messiah by His gracious word, by the wonders He performed, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and raising the dead, they, in their disobedience, refused to believe in Him or follow Him.

They were led astray, in the sense that they were led away from the way of virtue, and in this way they were deceived. Prior to their conversion, Paul and Titus were led astray. Paul was led astray by Gamaliel and the doctors of the law. He was led away from the truth as revealed in the law and the prophets. He was led astray into Phariseeism and the heresy of works-righteousness. He was led astray into false doctrine. In this way he was deceived by them, which meant he was led astray from Christ Jesus. The Old Testament Scriptures, in their entirety, pointed to Jesus as the Christ of God, the Savior. Paul, before he was struck down on the Damascus road, was led astray into believing Jesus to be an imposter, a false Christ. He was the bitter enemy of Jesus, a fierce, zealous persecutor of Jesus' disciples and church.

Furthermore, they were serving various lusts and pleasures. The word translated "various" means "many different sorts or kinds of lusts and pleasures." To lust is to desire that which God clearly forbids. I John 2:15-17 tells us that all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. They were pursuing pleasures. Our English word "hedonism" is derived from this term. It refers to sinful, ungodly pleasures, the pleasures of the unbelieving world of lust. Especially are meant the sins of immorality, fornication, adultery, and worse.

But other sinful pleasures are meant as well. Paul reminds Titus that, before they were converted, they served these lusts and pleasures. Literally they were enslaved to these.⁴

That is the way we are too by nature. Apart from grace we are enslaved to all the various kinds of lusts and sinful pleasures: immorality, the love of money, the pleasures of sin. These are

4. The Greek is *douleuo*.

legion. And constantly we need warning. As preachers, we need to fight these lusts and pleasures of our own sinful natures. But also, as preachers, we must warn God's people concerning them.

They were living in malice and envy. Malice carries the notion of the desire to injure or hurt someone. That was literally true of the apostle Paul before his conversion. He consented to Stephen's death and wrought havoc among the saints. Envy looks with ill will at others because of what they have and what they are. We may well face the question: What is the relationship between malice and envy? William Hendriksen, in his commentary on the passage, writes: "One of its (malice) most soul-destroying manifestations is envy." This author thinks it is the other way around. Envy is the mother of malice. Because I am envious and look with ill will at others because of what they have or are, I seek to hurt them.

They were also hateful and hating one another. Once they were full of hate and therefore hating one another. They hated God and the neighbor. And to hate is to seek the destruction of the neighbor and the cause of God.

Again, this is what we are by nature. Apart from the grace of God, and since we have but a small beginning of the new obedience, we need warning, and we need to warn God's people to put away these vices and evils.

How does this serve as a reason for the exhortations of verses 1 and 2? In this way, being reminded of what we were before conversion and are by nature, and what we have become because of the kindness, love, and mercy of God in Christ, inspires us to thankful living. And thankful living is manifest in loving God by loving the neighbor as ourselves.

Verse 4

*But when the kindness and the love of mankind of our Savior
God hath appeared,*

These virtues, kindness and love toward mankind, are from God. God our Savior is the source of them, i.e., God shows kindness and love toward mankind, i.e., His elect in Christ. God is here revealed as our Savior. God is the One who, in His kindness

and love for us, saves us from our sin and death and brings us into the highest glory of fellowship with Himself.

His kindness and love toward mankind appeared. The reference here is to the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which climaxed in His atoning death on the cross and the victory of His resurrection from the dead. God's kindness and love toward us appeared, i.e., was made visible and real especially in the atoning death of Jesus Christ and in His resurrection. God is our Savior God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, as is evident from what follows in verses 5-7.

Verses 5, 6

Not by works, those in righteousness which we did, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (v. 5); whom he poured out upon us richly by Jesus Christ our Savior (v. 6).

Here the inspired apostle attributes all of our salvation to the sovereign God through Jesus Christ our Savior. God saved us, note well, "not by works, those works which we did in righteousness." It is utterly impossible for us to be saved by works that we did or do. We cannot do good works. We cannot merit or earn salvation. Prior to salvation and by nature, we were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2). As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it (Q and A 8), we are "so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness ... except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." Our works, therefore, can never be the basis for our righteousness before God. They are the fruit of our being made righteous by God in Christ. Therefore, not by works which we have done in righteousness, but (note well the sharp contrast as indicated by the Greek adversative *alla*) according to His mercy God saved us. Our salvation has its source in God's mercy. God in His mercy pities His people in the misery of their sin and desires to take them out of that misery into the joy of His fellowship. And God saved us "*according to his mercy.*" By His mercy and on the basis of His mercy, to be sure, we are saved. But we are saved also *according to His mercy.* William Hendriksen puts it nicely in his commentary on the text when he writes, "The wideness of God's

mercy being the yardstick which determines the wideness of their salvation.”

God then saves us according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. When the apostle speaks of the *washing* of regeneration, he in all likelihood alludes to that which baptism signifies, viz., the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. That connection between washing and sanctification is made clearly in Ephesians 5:25, 26: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” Regeneration means to be born again. Regeneration is the essential gift of God in the order of salvation as applied to the Christian by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration really implies all of the blessings of salvation. The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again with the life of Christ.

And the Holy Spirit renews us.⁵ This means a renewal effected by the Holy Spirit. Here the reference is to the lifelong process of the sanctification of the believer by the Holy Spirit according to which he becomes holy as God is holy. More and more holy — though always in principle. Perfection does not come until we are in glory. God our Savior saves us according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He (God our Savior) poured out upon us richly or abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. This is what took place when the day of Pentecost was fully come. God, through the exalted Christ, poured out the Holy Spirit. God did that richly. Each saint and the entire church of God in Christ receives an abundance of the Holy Spirit. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

Note well how all three persons of the Godhead are not only mentioned but are actively involved in the work of our salvation. God the Father our Savior, Jesus Christ His only Begotten Son in the likeness of our flesh, and the Holy Spirit are all involved in our

5. The Greek is *anakainooseos*.

salvation. Can there be, then, any question or doubt concerning the fact that all of our salvation is completely the work of our kind, merciful Savior God? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all involved in our salvation. Not in any sense by works of righteousness that we have done or do can we be saved. This makes salvation sure and certain. It is that blessed gospel we are privileged to preach. Good news indeed! Thanks be to God!

Verse 7

In order that, being justified by the grace of that one (God our Savior, v. 4), we might be made heirs with a view to the hope of eternal life.

In this text the inspired apostle expresses the purpose of God's saving us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Savior. Being justified by His grace is the summary of verses 4-6. Justification involves the forgiveness of our sins, our adoption as God's children, and the right to everlasting life and glory. In other words, we are saved by the grace of that One, God Himself. Grace here is the power by which God saved us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Always it is by grace, and never in any sense by our works, that we are saved. It is by grace through faith alone, God's gift, not of works, lest any man should boast. And the purpose of our being saved is that we might be made heirs with a view to the hope of eternal life.

Hope is the certain, joyful expectation of a future good. It is to be taken in the objective sense in this text. That hope is defined as eternal life. Eternal life is not merely endless living. That we have eternal life does not merely mean that we continue to live endlessly. Eternal life is really the salvation God wrought for us through Jesus Christ our Savior. It is resurrection life in Jesus Christ. It is the life Jesus attained by means of His suffering and death on the cross. It is to be transformed from the earthly to the heavenly. Eternal life is that marvelous change of which this same apostle speaks in I Corinthians 15:51-54. This corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality. It is life that cannot die. When this corruptible puts on incorruption and this mortal puts on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the

saying that is written (Is. 25:8), death is swallowed up in victory!

This great change has taken place already in principle through the wonder of regeneration, and it shall be realized in perfection at the end of the ages when Jesus will raise us from the dead. At that time we will join the multitude that no man can number gathered out of all nations to show forth God's praises forever in the new creation (Rev. 7). With a view to that hope we have been saved by God, justified by the power of His wonderful grace.

This is the future good that we certainly and joyfully expect. Note well, that hope of ours is not doubtful. Our hope is absolutely certain. We must not anxiously wonder whether it is real or really going to happen. It is certain. Christ suffered and died on account of our sins, God raised Him from the dead, and in Him we have the beginning of that eternal life now.

Therefore we long for its realization. With joyful anticipation we continue our pilgrimage in the confidence that every moment of every day and every step of our way is bringing us just that much closer to the realization of our hope of eternal life. Thus we go about our work and our leisure. In this hope we marry and give in marriage, we have our children and fellowship with our families. In the hope of this eternal life we fellowship in the communion of the saints in God's church, Christ's redeemed bride.

That certainty rests in God. Precisely because it does not depend in any way on our works or will or contribution, precisely because we are justified by the grace of the sovereign God our Savior through Jesus Christ, it is absolutely sure. Jesus said this too, did He not? "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25, 26).

That is the incentive to preach and teach the blessed gospel. That is the incentive to prepare you students to become preachers of the gospel. And that is your incentive to work diligently here in the seminary to become preachers of this wonderful gospel of the sovereign and particular and almighty grace of God in Jesus Christ our Savior.

Verse 8

Faithful is the saying even concerning these things, I will that thou affirm strongly in order that they may be careful to maintain good works, the ones believing in God, these matters are good and profitable unto men.

Faithful or weighty is the saying according to the text. William Hendriksen, in his commentary on this passage, translates the word “faithful” as “reliable.” The reference is to the statement of verses 4-7:

- 1) The kindness and love of God manifest in His saving us not by our works but according to His mercy.
- 2) The work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying us.
- 3) The grace of Jesus Christ by which power we are justified.
- 4) The purpose of all this that we should be heirs with a view to the hope of life eternal.

That is the weighty saying. The four-part heart of the gospel concerning our salvation is this: in no way is it our work. It is always all of God and, therefore, certain.

These things, the reliable, weighty, faithful saying, Titus is commanded to affirm strongly and confidently and constantly. The gospel is the only thing that can be affirmed strongly and confidently. This is the calling of Titus. And it is the calling of every preacher of the gospel. The preacher must not present the gospel as if it were merely some helpful hints for good living. The preacher must not present the gospel as some advice that the congregation is free to accept or reject. Neither must the preacher be weakly apologetic in his preaching. He must not be ashamed or embarrassed by the gospel. The preacher is called to assert or affirm the gospel strongly and confidently. The gospel, after all, is the truth, and the truth about everything. It is the truth about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit. The gospel is the truth about man, his creation, fall, depravity, his eternal election and reprobation, his salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, God’s gift. The gospel is the truth about our calling to serve the Lord.

That gospel is revealed in the inspired, infallible, sacred Scriptures. And, yes, this certainly implies that whatever we do in

the pulpit we must expound the Scriptures, adding nothing to the Word and taking nothing from the Word.

To affirm or assert the gospel strongly and confidently means the preacher must warn the congregation in no uncertain terms against the many forms of error and the lies that contradict the truths of the gospel. His preaching must be polemical and antithetical. The preacher must show the congregation how the gospel affects, determines, how they live before God's face and how they must not live.

To affirm or assert the gospel strongly and confidently will affect the delivery of the sermon, and that, too, from every point of view. The preacher must stand firmly and erect in the pulpit, with squared shoulders, and he must move and gesture at appropriate points. Do not allow your eye contact to be weakly furtive, but look the people in the eye. Let there be the ring of conviction in the preacher's voice. Speak clearly and project your voice. Vary the rate, pitch, and volume as is appropriate to the content of the exposition. Pay careful and prayerful attention to these matters so that you assert the gospel strongly and confidently. The purpose of the preacher's doing so is that the ones believing in God may be careful to maintain good works. The verb translated "careful" contains the notion of being thoughtful. The preacher must assert the gospel strongly in order that the believers give careful thought to maintaining good works.

Good works are the fruit of faith. They are performed in harmony with God's law and they are to God's glory. The believers must give them their undivided attention. They must strive to live in thankful service to the Lord. That purpose will be reached when the gospel is asserted strongly. And that is good and profitable (advantageous) unto men.

Where the gospel is strongly asserted and the believers give thought to maintaining good works, they will enjoy the blessings of salvation by God's grace. The believers will edify one another and be good examples to one another. The glory of God will be reflected in them! Advantageous indeed!

Verse 9

But foolish questions and genealogies and contentions (wranglings or strifes) and fights about the law shun (avoid), for

they are unprofitable and vain (devoid of truth, the lie, and, therefore, vain or useless).

This verse, with its warnings, stands in sharp contrast with the preceding verses 4-8 and especially verse 8. If Titus heeds the admonition of verse 8 and affirms or asserts strongly and confidently the gospel as summed in verses 4-7, he will of necessity shun foolish questions, genealogies, contentions, and fights about the law.

It is important to note the word order of this text. The four direct objects are placed before the verb, and there is the absence of the article before any of the four. As Hendriksen puts it in his commentary, “these facts clearly prove that all possible emphasis is placed on the quality and contents of the object.”

Precisely these things must be avoided. These are foolish questions. These are questions about which there are controversies and endless debates. They are foolish and imprudent and lacking in the wisdom of God and, therefore, vain, useless, futile. They contribute nothing at all as concerns the profit of the believer — the believer’s growth in the knowledge of God and the believer’s growth and development in the Christian life.

In the second place, genealogies must be avoided. They are the proud boasting of the Jews concerning their ancestry and their supposed superiority because they “had Abraham as their father.” The children of God are we, they were saying.

Contentions, wranglings, strifes, and fights about the law must also be avoided. No doubt the apostle is referring to the tradition of the Pharisees. The Pharisees could not agree on the proper interpretation of the law, and they argued and debated with wrangling and all kinds of fightings about the law. All of this Titus must avoid.

These foolish questions, genealogies, contentions, and fights about the law are unprofitable. This means they are lacking completely in profit for the believer. They contribute nothing to his knowledge of the truth of God’s Word. They are of no use as far as living the life of thankful obedience according to God’s perfect law of liberty is concerned.

They are without profit because they are vain. The term “vain” means “devoid of truth.” That is what these foolish

questions, genealogies, contentions, and fights about the law are. They are simply lies and, therefore, useless and vain for the Christian, both as concerns the true doctrine of Scripture and the Christian life. Titus must avoid them. He must step around them and have nothing to do with them. And, positively, Titus must affirm strongly and constantly the gospel of God's kindness and love towards His people in Christ Jesus.

That is our calling, too. We must not be involved in wrangling, contentions, fights about the law. That is vain. Preachers need to avoid all of that foolishness. It is a waste of time. We must avoid it in order to assert strongly and confidently the wonderful gospel of God's kindness and love. That is profitable indeed for our salvation. And that is to the glory of our God.

Verses 10, 11

A heretical man following a first and a second admonition reject (v. 10), knowing that one who is such is perverted and sins, being self-condemned (v. 11).

Note the strong language of the text. The term "heretical" comes from a verb that means to choose a party or a sect and its teachings rather than believing the truth of Scripture with the faithful church. A heretical person in this way creates schism in the church. He is guilty of splitting the church. That is a terrible sin. Church members are led away from the truth into false doctrine. And that false doctrine inevitably yields the fruit of ungodly and disobedient living. The unity of Christ's body as manifest in the congregation or the congregations of the denomination is broken. Brother is set against brother, and often families are divided as well.

But the worst of it is that, when there are heretics and schisms in the church, the name of Christ is blasphemed and the ungodly are given occasion to mock. The entire work and the life of the church and her members are severely affected. The preacher will not be able to avoid foolish questions, genealogies, contentions, and fights about the law, and in this way to assert strongly and confidently the gospel. Missions and evangelism suffer. God's people are fighting rather than growing in the truth.

Hence, Titus and all preachers are commanded to admonish these heretics. Preachers must do that by means of antithetical preaching. Preaching must present the truth of the gospel by way of sharply exposing and condemning the lie of false doctrines and heresies. If you are not willing thus to preach, do not pursue the gospel ministry.

That admonition is done also by way of discipline in its various steps (carefully laid out in the Church Order both for lay members and officebearers, and in the case of the latter it is suspension and deposition and perhaps even further discipline if the man is impenitent, all the way to the last remedy, excommunication itself). The point made in the text is that the admonition does not continue indefinitely. It comes to an end. The man who remains a heretic and stubbornly impenitent after the first and second admonition must be forthrightly rejected.

The verb means to refuse, to reject, shun, or avoid. He is avoided by being put out of the church, and with him the believer must have no fellowship. All we can say to him is "Repent!"

This Titus, and all of us, especially the preachers, must do, knowing that one who is such is subvertive. Subvertive means "to turn or to twist or to tear up, to turn aside, pervert, or corrupt." The heretical man is corrupted and completely turned and twisted by his heretical teaching. He is condemned by himself. This leaven of false doctrine may not be tolerated in the churches, for reasons already stated. This is why pastors are called to preach antithetically, sharply condemning the lie in its multitude of forms, and warning God's people. Then they will assert strongly and confidently the blessed gospel of God's sovereign and particular grace in Christ Jesus crucified and raised for the salvation of God's elect.

That is why professors of theology in the seminary must expound the Scriptures in their teaching and expose errors and heresies, especially those of the present day. This is not easy, and it means opposition and even persecution. But it is in this way that God is pleased to preserve His precious church. There is unity in the church, unity in the truth. There is joy and peace in believing. And God's name receives the glory.

May God be gracious to us, that we may be faithful to this sacred calling. ●

Doing (Material) Good to All Men

Barry L. Gritters

Preface

One of the important distinctions made in modern missiology is between missions and evangelism, where evangelism wins souls, but missions establishes the kingdom. In this theology of missions, kingdom becomes the main concept and goal; church is merely a “sign” of the kingdom. Kingdom is broad; church is narrow. Kingdom is cosmic and involves the establishment of Christ’s rule everywhere; church is parochial and only an instrument to accomplish the more important kingdom purposes of God in the world. Although there are variations among missiologists that range from a radical social-gospel approach, to a more moderate evangelical outlook, almost all agree that God’s church is penultimate goal; kingdom is ultimate.

With this understanding of kingdom and mission, missiologists ask how the church and how Christians will in fact promote and establish the kingdom. That is, how will they transform cities and develop communities for the kingdom? And how can believers and missionaries minister to the needs of the world—to promote God’s “shalom” everywhere?

Understanding this background will explain the approach of the following paper, originally written for one of the missions courses the undersigned took in preparation for teaching missions. The course, “Missions and Diaconal Ministries,” promoted the basic distinction mentioned above. The first part of the paper (revised for publication here) explains why the Protestant Reformed Churches would take a different approach to the question: the PRC defines “kingdom” differently. The second part of the paper examines some likely objections to the proffered definition of the kingdom. The third lays out principles of the church’s

diaconal calling in the world. Finally, the paper offers a short study of the history of PRC “diaconal ministries” and a tentative analysis of them.

Colleagues and other readers of the *Journal* are invited to interact with the paper, especially its analysis of the PRC regarding Christ’s call to her to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

Introduction

Although there have been almost 80 years of diaconal ministry in the PRCA (Protestant Reformed Churches in America) both congregationally and on the mission field,¹ there is no established policy that directs those ministries. As far as I have been able to determine, there have been no studies to consider the underlying principles of that work, either in the neighborhood or by missionaries. When faced with questions regarding this ministry of mercy, although some deacons and missionaries of the PRCA would have a general “sense” regarding their calling, most would likely admit either that they had not faced the question of how to minister mercy outside of the congregation, or that they had considered it but do not know what principles would apply.²

This paper will explore the doctrinal issues that underlie the subject of diaconal ministries as they relate to missions, witnessing, evangelism.³ The paper is not a study of the work of deacons within the congregation and for the sake of the members of the congregation. Instead, it is a study of the mercy that deacons may show to their non-Christian or non-member neighbors, and of the neighborly gospel-mercy a missionary may express in the area he is called to serve.

1. The Protestant Reformed Churches were formed in 1924.

2. Obviously, this statement runs the risk of being a faulty generalization. It is not based on any careful or scientific study of the PRCA. Rather, it is made on the basis of two things: first, my own experience as a pastor in the denomination; second, on the basis of an informal e-mail survey of all the pastors.

3. Although some have distinguished these terms, I use them interchangeably in this paper.

Then, I briefly consider the history of such diaconal ministries in the PRCA. I recognize that a thorough knowledge of this history is impossible, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the labors of deacons are local and mostly private labors, and access to the records of each congregation is not possible. Second, and not insignificantly, even what has been done denominationally has not all been recorded in the *Acts of Synod* or the denominational paper. Besides, the archives of the various denominational committees, although accessible, are so deep that it would take years to research them all. Thus, the historical study will be unscientific, although from the perspective of an insider who is familiar (by experience) with the labors of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

* * * * *

The *Missio Dei*

At the heart of the discussion regarding diaconal ministries as they relate to missions is the understanding of the so-called *Missio Dei*, or “the mission of God.” God’s mission in the world, or purpose in the world, becomes the church’s mission and purpose in her labors. What God’s goal is, the churches’ goal is. Thus, the important questions: what *is* the purpose of God in the world? Then, what is the church’s calling and goal? With what must the church busy herself? Along with those comes the question: Is hers a labor of the Word alone, or is hers a labor that involves relief of the poor? The latter, of course, say most. Then, is the mission of the church one in which the Word is primary and diaconal relief secondary? are Word and relief coordinate? are they somehow subordinated, one to the other? Since almost all would agree that the church’s calling involves relief for the poor, to what extent is that relief given? And to what poor is the help given: to all the poor of the world? If not, to whom? Then, what are the goals of this relief? All these questions are involved in the matter of missions and diaconal ministries, *and their answers flow out of the definition of the mission of God in the world.*

I note here that, significantly, there is no *confessional* definition of the term *Missio Dei*. Therefore, a Reformed Christian is not bound to anyone’s particular formulation of the concept, but

must come to an understanding of the *Missio Dei*, and answer the questions raised above, from biblical and confessional principles.⁴ This, I seek to do.

The Kingdom of God

Crucial to one's understanding of the *Missio Dei* is one's definition of the "kingdom of God." In studying the various definitions of the "mission of God," one regularly meets an attempt to define God's kingdom.⁵ One's definition of the kingdom has direct bearing on, indeed determines, one's understanding of the mission of the church. If the kingdom is the whole world, including all people and all the institutions of the world, then somehow the mission and goal of the church includes the whole

4. The closest I could come to an *official* definition of the *Missio Dei* in Reformed circles is in the Christian Reformed Church's *Manual of Church Government* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 2001 Revision), where a synodical decision of 1992 has: "The mission of God from which the church derives her mission is that activity of the triune God whereby he reconciles the world to himself through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sent One (2 Cor. 5:19, John 20:21)" (p. 400). The question would be: Was this an attempt by the CRC to give an official definition of the *Missio Dei*? It appears to be so, as this definition is given in the discussion of mission principles, the classic place for defining the *Missio Dei*. Although this description of 1992 goes on to give more substance to the understanding of the *Missio Dei*, it does not (at that point) answer the difficult questions. The CRC Synod of 1997, however, came closer to doing that when it added that "the goal of God's mission is the glory of God in the establishment and acknowledgement of his rule over all creation in our present age and for eternity." I note "all creation" and "in our present age" as being significant. The rest of my paper will reflect on these two important elements.

5. This is true of John Bolt's article in the *Calvin Theological Journal*, "Church and World: A Trinitarian Perspective" and of Roger S. Greenway's important pamphlet, "Together Again: Kinship of Word and Deed" (both authors in the Dutch Reformed tradition), as well as of the mission documents of the Lausanne Movement edited by John Stott. Implicit (and in some cases explicit) is a definite understanding of God's kingdom.

world. I begin, therefore, with a brief biblical and confessional explanation of the kingdom.

Although the kingdom of God is not identical to the church, they are so closely related as to be *almost* identified, looking at the same reality from two different perspectives. The church and the kingdom must be distinguished, but it is not wrong to say that the *kingdom* of Israel was the Old Testament *church*, and that the church is God's New Testament Israel (cf. Galatians 6:16: speaking to the church, Paul identifies them as "the Israel of God"). I begin here for more than one reason, not the least of which is that when this comparison is made and this connection is seen, many questions are answered and many of the problems resolve themselves. Israel is the Old Testament manifestation of God's kingdom. That physical kingdom in the land of promise was a type of the New Testament *spiritual* reality. The New Testament reality of God's kingdom is not a physical kingdom, but rather a *spiritual* reality with *spiritual* rule, *spiritual* blessings, and *spiritual* goals. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

I mention, without developing them, some of the main concepts: In this kingdom, Jesus Christ is Lord and *King*. The believing, elect, saints are the *citizens* of the kingdom. *Entrance* into this kingdom is through a spiritual translation (Col. 1:13), by regeneration itself, without which there is no ability even to see the kingdom (John 3:3). The *principle* of this kingdom is the rule and dominion of Jesus in the hearts of men (Ps. 110:3). For this reason, the "kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21). The *effect* of this rule is the willing submission of the citizens so that they live godly in all spheres of their lives. *Growth* in the kingdom is the increase in members by calling men out of darkness into the true light of Christ, and the increase of submission by these citizens to King Jesus. The *weapon* in this kingdom is none other than the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And, although all of the citizens of the kingdom wield the sword, of primary importance are the pastors who teach and the watchmen/elders on the walls who warn and defend (Ezek. 33).

That this is the proper view of the kingdom is the teaching of a crucial passage in the New Testament where Peter calls the *church* the “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (I Pet. 2:9), fulfilling the Old Testament description of Israel in Exodus 19:6. The New Testament *church* of Christ is God’s new “kingdom/nation.”

For a Reformed believer, it is difficult to adopt any other view of the kingdom, since the only explanation that the Reformed creeds give of the kingdom runs along these lines. Decisive in its explanation of God’s kingdom is the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the second petition. “Thy kingdom come” means “Preserve and increase thy *church*.”⁶ There is no description of boundaries or citizens beyond the limits of the church. The King’s victory in this kingdom is described in the prayer of the citizens: “Rule us so by thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee.” In Lord’s Day 12 of the Catechism, the Reformed believer speaks of “our eternal king, who governs us by His Word and Spirit and defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation He purchased for us.” In the lengthy and important section of the Catechism, questions 82-87, regarding entrance into and putting out from the kingdom by “keys,” we confess 1) that the “keys of the kingdom” are the *spiritual* instruments of the gospel and discipline, 2) that none but converted Christians will inherit *anything* of the kingdom blessings, and 3) that in order to do so a man must become a member of the church, outside of which there is no salvation.⁷

In its Article 27, the Belgic (Netherlands) Confession of Faith connects the kingship of Christ to the church alone. And when it describes the duty of earthly magistrates in Article 36, it does so in these terms: magistrates must oppose the kingdom of the devil and promote the kingdom of Christ, *by countenancing the true preaching everywhere and protecting proper worship*. This is the magistrates’ calling regarding the *kingdom* of Christ.

6. Lord’s Day 48, Question and Answer 123. The emphasis is mine.

7. Cf. also the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, Articles 27-29.

The Canons of Dordt (III/IV:10) teach, in connection with a Christian's "conversion to God and the manner thereof," that to enter into the kingdom one must be translated out of darkness into the light of Jesus Christ, spiritually. That is the extent of the Reformed confessional teaching regarding God's kingdom.⁸

Although missiologist Mark Gornik criticized him for it, the great church father Augustine was not wrong when he "conflated the church with the city of God."⁹ Making closest connection between church and kingdom does not meet with the favor of many missiologists (theologians, too) today; it does, however, meet with the favor of some giants of the faith. More important for the Reformed Christian, it is the view of the Reformed creeds.

* * * * *

This spiritual view of the kingdom, which sees the kingdom as "the church from a different perspective," runs up against a number of questions and objections, some of which should be treated here.

First, the Old Testament kingdom of David/Solomon extended beyond the boundaries of Israel and the people of God; therefore, must not the New Testament kingdom extend beyond the church "from sea to sea"? The answer to this comment/question contains two parts. Briefly, the extending of the kingdom from "sea to sea" is a prophecy of the *catholicity* of the church when it breaks the bounds of the nation of the Jews and the physical descendants of Abraham. More importantly, the kingdom of David/Solomon did extend beyond the boundaries of the national Jews, from the Euphrates to Egypt. David's dominion was an extensive dominion, which typified Christ's. About this dominion, however, note: 1) It was a dominion of power and not of grace,

8. A survey of our Presbyterian brothers' *Westminster Confession and Catechisms* will reveal the same.

9. *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) p. 24. In the article "The Kingdom of God" in the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), R.E. Nixon says that "Since the time of Augustine there has been a tendency to institutionalize the concept of the kingdom by identifying it with the church" (p. 568).

corresponding to the classic Reformed distinction between Christ's *regnum potentia* and his *regnum gratia*.¹⁰ 2) Those outside of the nation of Israel came under the dominion of David and Solomon, but to receive their blessings and favor these Gentiles must become members of the nation, the church. Even though Israel's physical prosperity perhaps "flowed over" to these nations, these physical gifts were not the favor or blessing of God (see Psalms 37 and 73, where the psalmist expressed how he learned that the material wealth of his wicked neighbor was in fact not a sign of God's favor). 3) The nation of Israel—God's people—always remained antithetically distinct from these other nations (Deut. 33:28: "Israel then shall dwell in safety alone"). 4) The relationship between the two was: the nations existed for the sake of the church. Tribute was levied upon them so that Israel could prosper, so the kingdom of God could be rich. And if an Israelite on the outer boundary of the kingdom was interested in (and he should be!) the real welfare of his neighbor across the field, he would proselytize him—bring him into the nation of Israel so that he would receive the true goodness of the kingdom through the worship of Israel's God. The corresponding reality of this in the New Testament would be clear. At the end of the day, the believer says to his neighbor, "The fashion of this world passes away; our pilgrim hope is in Jesus Christ; our real prosperity is in the gospel; our genuine freedom is as His people" (see more on this below).

Second, is not Jeremiah 29:7, which makes frequent appearance as a justification for "kingdom" concern outside of the church,¹¹ an important passage? Speaking to the Jews in captivity, Jeremiah calls them to "seek the peace of the city whither I

10. It is a mistake to scuttle this classic distinction for the one the Lausanne documents (*Document on Social Responsibility*, ed. John Stott, p.189) make—the distinction between Christ's rule *de facto* (over those who willingly submit to it) and his rule *de jure* (over those who do not). For Christ is King *de facto* over all His creatures, legally (*de jure*) and actually (*de facto*), whether man acknowledges it or not.

11. With many others, Mark Gornik finds in this passage one of the most powerful mandates to call Christians to their duty of reclaiming cities so that they may be part of God's kingdom. (*To Live in Peace*, Introduction).

have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” Over against a common but very recent understanding of this passage,¹² the passage does not call the captive Jews to seek to transform (even develop) Babylon into the kingdom of God. Throughout Scripture, Babylon is always the inveterate and incurable enemy of God’s people, which is not won over by the church, but 1) continually threatens to destroy the church and 2) is herself destroyed in the end. The passage does not call Israel to hope for Babylon’s transformation or to pin any hopes on Babylon’s change. For the concern of the Lord as He conveys this message to His people is not Babylon, but the *church in Babylon*. A study of the context indicates that the people of God in captivity might be tempted to subvert the rulers in Babylon, or live in a revolutionary spirit toward Babylon. But because the Lord’s judgment on Israel required that they remain in captivity for 70 years, the people must settle in there, marry there, have children and build houses there. But, in order for Israel/church to do that and prosper there, Babylon herself must not be at war and in turmoil: “for” if she is troubled, you will be troubled, and if she is at peace, you will be at peace. Thus the call: pray for the peace of Babylon; even seek her welfare. In New Testament terms, the call to the people of God is this: “Although you are only pilgrims in the world, and you must pin your hopes on heaven, you must live in the world. Therefore, pray that there might be peace in the world; pray for and seek prosperity and do justice in the world. And as you do so, remember that the purposes of God remain in the welfare of His beloved church.” This explanation of Jeremiah 29 conforms to the reason that Paul, in the New Testament, gives to Timothy for prayers for civil rulers:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for*

12. None of the ancient or Reformed or Presbyterian commentators that I read found any mandate in the passage for promoting the idea of, or hoping for a change in, the cities of *Babylon*.

all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (I Tim. 2:1, 2)

The purpose of these prayers for the welfare of civil authorities is “that” (purpose clause) the *church* may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Timothy and his congregation may have imagined that their *shalom* lay in the destruction of the world. Ultimately it did. But until Christ returns, their welfare usually is promoted by the existence of a peaceful empire.

Third, the question might be raised: “But this view of the kingdom seems to discount the positive purpose of God in creation itself.” The view of the kingdom described in this paper recognizes a positive purpose of God in the creation, but reckons with two things: 1) The purpose of God in creation is not a purpose independent of, nor along side of, God’s purposes with the church and redemption.¹³ 2) It is certainly not the purpose of God that, eschatologically, the creation will take the place of the church.¹⁴ Rather, the creation is a glorious “stage” on which Christ’s redemptive purposes are accomplished, and a stage that itself will be redeemed *in the end*.¹⁵ In this beautiful creation, itself a marvel

13. John Bolt, in his “Church and World: A Trinitarian Perspective” (*Calvin Theological Journal*, 18, 1983: 5-31), argues the case that a “first article theology” in which the theologian begins with and prioritizes creation rather than redemption, helps us see that there is an independent and primary purpose of God in creation, *over against the church*. See the entire article, but especially his conclusion on page 30: “It (Bolt’s view) is fully Christological and eschatological while it also preserves the *primacy and relative independency* of creation and law” (my emphasis: BG).

14. Cf. the common references to the church as a “sign of the kingdom.” Signs pass away when the reality appears. See, for example, Bryant L. Myers, *Walking With the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003) p.127, and David J. Bosch, “Evangelism, An Holistic Approach” (*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*), pp. 43ff.

15. Another difficulty that I see in the attempt to give “creation” or “the world” or “the earth” a positive purpose (which it indeed has) is that careful distinctions are not made between 1) the earth as brute creation, which certainly groans and waits to experience full redemption (Rom. 8), 2) the world of wicked men, 3) the *institutions* in the world of government, economics, etc.

that reveals God's glory, God works His purpose of saving His church—the body of His dear Son. *Through* this creation, which contains a multitude of signs of God's saving work in Christ, God teaches us how He works in His positive purpose in Christ as head of the church. Then, this creation itself will be redeemed as the object of God's love in Christ (John 3:16). This is how to understand not only Romans 8, but also Colossians 1, which, if read in their context, show both the inseparable connection between creation and the redemption of the church and that, if there is any subordination, it is subordination of the world to the church.

Fourth, at the basis of most of the views that hold the kingdom to be far broader than the church, and the calling of the church to serve the kingdom, is the doctrine of common grace.¹⁶ The doctrine of common grace asks: Is there no goodness of God for others than the elect? Are there no 'crumbs' for others than the church? Is there not a purpose of God in the world (a kingdom purpose) other than the purpose of the saving of the church? To those questions, the Protestant Reformed Churches have always given a clear and negative answer. The reader can see

16. The reader may judge for himself the importance of the doctrine of common grace for the view with which I differ in this paper; but he cannot minimize it. Note, for example, that the *Lausanne Covenant on Social Responsibility* appeals to common grace as the *basis* for their view of world transformation (p. 190); that Calvin Theological Seminary Prof. Dean Deppe makes the connection between the people of God and the kingdoms of the world to be common grace (see his hand-drawn chart for his students on the relation between church and kingdom); that John McIntosh (in his article *Missio Dei*) speaks of "the common grace promotion of social justice"; and that Abraham Kuyper, the originator of the new-calvinist perspective on the role of the church in the world, based his entire enterprise of the church's involvement in the world on the doctrine of common grace. In an interesting analysis of Kuyper's cultural views, written in 1998 for the anniversary of the publication of Kuyper's *Stone Lectures*, Anglican theologian Peter Heslam points out that Kuyper maintains a traditional Reformed and Calvinistic perspective, *except when it comes to his views on common grace* (see his *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.)

how the affirmation or denial of the doctrine of common grace will lead in quite different ways in the matter of the *Missio Dei*. Footnote 16 is important here, but this is not the place for a lengthy treatment of the doctrine of common grace.¹⁷

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Having briefly sketched the positive doctrine of the kingdom of God, and then having put that against the background of some different views, we now address the important questions that relate to ministries of mercy and the activity of the Christian in the world: 1) How does this view of the kingdom influence a Reformed Christian's views of Christian activity in mercy (and justice)? 2) To what extent does the church *inevitably* influence the world about her, and to what extent does the church *try* to do so? 3) How do the citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ live their lives in the world, although they are not "of the world."¹⁸

Briefly, now, it will have become clear what the Christian is not called to do as he seeks to live his Christian life in the world. It is not the *missio ecclesia*¹⁹ to seek out all men in the world to eliminate all injustice, stop all oppression, root out all poverty, cure all disease, and thus create "shalom" for the world. This is not only impossible for the church, it would be a distraction from her primary responsibility. Rather, the church's calling is to come to the aid of all who confess the name of Jesus Christ—"the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)—and assist the non-Christian neighbor whose needs he observes, and in a way that maintains the primacy

17. The interested reader may find most helpful Henry Danhof's and Herman Hoeksema's recently published *Sin and Grace* (Grand Rapids: RFP, 2003), originally published in 1923 as *Van Zonde en Genade*. Among other things, the book points out the fallacy of God's common grace operating side by side with special grace, with common grace seeking to establish a work outside of the church.

18. "In the world, but not of the world," is the classic Reformed formulation of how the believer positions himself in this life.

19. The distinction between the calling of the church and the calling of the individual is important, but does not come into play at this point. Here, we discuss how the *Missio Dei* would influence the activity of the church *or* the individual.

of aid to the church—“especially the household of faith.” In this work, there certainly is no *tension* between word and deed, between evangelism and benevolence, as is sometimes encouraged; there is not even some kind of *balance* that must be maintained, so that the one is not overemphasized and the other neglected. (Although this supposed “tension” or mandated “balance” are not surprising when one holds to an “independent purpose” of God in creation.) Rather, there is a relation between the two, wonderful to behold, in which they cooperate with and complement each other, just as priest and prophet did in the Old Covenant kingdom. Indeed, word and deed *are* the prophetic and priestly offices in Jesus’ kingdom, which not only may not be pitted against one another, but serve the one great purpose of Christ in His kingdom/church. The priestly office is the ministry of mercy, according to Hebrews 2:17: Jesus is “our merciful ... high priest.” It relates to the prophetic office (the Word of God) in that it ministers to the bodily needs of the people of God, whom God has redeemed in their *body* as well as their soul, and who experience that redemption by the prophetic gospel.

Before I expand on what is the positive calling of the church toward non-Christians, two things must be mentioned. First, it is commonly said that the Old Testament gives a clear mandate to care for all the poor, widows, orphans, etc., in the world,²⁰ and that Jesus’ miracles of healing sick and caring for the poor are examples of the church’s calling among the sick and poor of the world. Both of these positions fail to take into account one fundamental reality: that the Old Testament calling, and the work of Jesus, were among the people of God. The calling of the Old Testament and the work of Jesus are not in the world, but in God’s Israel. This is not to say that the church does not have a calling among non-Christians; only that this calling cannot be found in Jesus’ examples of healing, etc. Regarding Jesus’ healing and feeding labors, note 1) that they were primarily *signs* of the spiritual work He was to perform for the people, although certainly

20. For example, Roger Greenway, *Together Again*, p.10.

they point to Jesus' final deliverance of His people in the body; 2) it must be noted that Jesus did not heal everyone—not all the sick in the neighboring nations, and not even all the sick and hungry in Israel. He even refused to feed them all when He was pressed to do so. He did not succumb to the first temptation of the devil to “turn these stones into bread” (note the plural “stones,” which would have been more than to suffice Jesus' hunger), or the temptation to become the king who would provide all the physical needs of an admittedly needy nation. From all the calls to the church to feed the world, one is almost left with the impression that if Jesus would return today and conduct Himself as He did when He first came, the churches would crucify Him again for not coming aboard their programs to feed the world. The principal work Jesus engaged in was the gospel—the good news of the spiritual deliverance of His people. Though He had a care for their physical needs and He emphasized that they may pray for those needs (Matthew 6: “give us this day our daily bread”), He and His apostles reminded the citizens of the kingdom not to let that be much of an interest for them.

Second, if the objection is raised that this position does not give proper place to a concern for social justice, the objecting brother is pointed to the apostle Paul's inspired instruction in I Corinthians 7. There, the wisdom of Jesus Christ teaches about a believer who is a slave:

20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.
21 Art thou called *being* a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use *it* rather. 22 For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant. 23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. 24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God (KJV).

The beautiful and balanced wisdom of the Spirit for Christians who find themselves in one of the most unjust circumstances (institutions) of slavery is: First, let it not trouble you. Second, if you are able to be freed, take the opportunity. But, third, your outward condition as a slave or a free man is not what's important

in the Christian life. The important thing for the church to concentrate on is: Serve the Lord well in whatever your state and condition. Certainly, the church will preach against slavery to her members: “Treat your employees in righteousness.” “Pay them well.” Even, perhaps, “Give them their freedom” (although, cf. Philemon). However, following the lead of Paul here, the church does not consider it her calling to go to work in the world to overthrow all the injustice, poverty, oppression, in the world. She is troubled by it; she testifies against it in her preaching and teaching; she calls her members to live their lives as examples that testify against it. But she does not find in Scripture a mandate to correct all this in the world.²¹

The positive calling of the church has already been implied in the course of the paper thus far. It remains to outline succinctly that calling regarding her diaconal ministries.

The principles of the diaconal calling of the church (which admittedly can be developed more extensively), whether carried out by a local congregation or a missionary, are:

1. The people of God must have a strong consciousness and desire to “do good to all men” out of compassion for them in their misery. This must live in the minds of the people. The preaching of the gospel in the congregation will be the primary means to foster this consciousness, and do so over against a misunderstanding of the antithesis, which calls for spiritual separation from ungodliness. If this is not done, the deacons will never sense the call to minister to anyone outside of the congregation.
2. The people of God must be taught that the goal of this mercy they show is to lead people out of spiritual darkness into the light of the gospel and membership in God’s church, the only lasting and meaningful refuge for people in trouble. Apart from

21. It becomes clear, then, that the PRC would not define the great commission as a call to “reclaim the whole cosmos (soil, water, air, minerals) from the control of Satan and his kingdom,” as Roger Greenway would define it (see his *Together Again*, p. 24). The PRC pastors are not called to “equip our members to be agents of transformation in their communities and nations” (Greenway p. 24).

membership in the church of Christ, a man has nothing. Worse, to lead one to a better earthly life without showing him eternity is cruelty and wickedness. For the fashion of this world gives way very soon to another existence that never ends.

3. The deacons should make it a matter of prayer and careful thought how to carry out the mandate given them in the form for their ordination. The deacons should both be prepared to respond to requests for assistance, and develop their office and work so that the surrounding community knows the church herself as an institution of mercy.

4. Because the deacons are answerable to the consistory—the elders and pastor—the consistory should be giving leadership and direction to the deacons.

5. In areas where other organizations or churches²² are doing similar works outside their own membership, the deacons ought to consult with each other and with them so that the work is done wisely, without unnecessary duplication, etc.

22. Whether these are churches in one's own denomination or churches in other denominations is a question that will have to be faced. The PRC's Church Order does give some initial direction in this matter (Article 26: "In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them, to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have the greatest need. Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them. It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions."), although the interpretation given to the article by PRC ministers has been quite narrow. One *Standard Bearer* article explaining this part of the PRC Church Order took issue with H. Bavinck, Wm. Heyns, and VanDellen and Monsma, who advocate *ecclesiastical* (diaconal) institutions of mercy. The reason given was that the church has *only* the calling to preach, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline. One must ask: What of the labors of deacon—one of the three fundamental offices of Jesus Christ?

6. On the mission field, the difficulties become greater, but the opportunities abound. First, means must be provided to help in the physical needs of those who respond to the gospel. For this, if it is possible, missionary helpers ought to accompany the missionary, after the example of the missionaries in Acts, who traveled in companies—not just to assist the missionary in his earthly needs, but to be instruments of mercy. Second, this material assistance, here as well as in the local congregation, must always be in the service of the gospel, and never separated from the gospel, even when Christians assist their neighbor privately.

7. As to “social justice” matters, the PRCA should draw (and have generally drawn) these guidelines: a) There is a difference between what an individual Christian (sometimes called the “organic” life of the church) does, and what the church *qua* church (sometimes called the “institute”) does. As to the individual, he realizes the mission and goal of God and the church in the world, outlined above, as his goal. Understanding that, and then according to his own conscience and circumstances, he should seek to be a witness to his neighbors, speaking and voting and acting as he has opportunity, and working to maintain a peaceful community in which he can live as a servant of God’s church. As to the church, she seeks through her pastors and missionaries to be a witness to truth and righteousness, calling others (government officials, too) to obedience to their Creator: repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ.

8. Finally, difficult questions must be wrestled with, so that answers can be forthcoming. Among those questions²³ are the following: a) Must diaconal mercy be limited to those who *approach* us and make a *request*, or must it be broader, so that the deacons look for poor? b) If it is broader, what are the limitations, if any? (in this connection, the phrase, “as you have opportunity” in Galatians 6:10 must be studied). And, if it is broader, what would determine the kinds of aid that would be offered? The former two questions, a) and b), must be asked

23. As far as I am aware, the PRCA have not answered these questions.

with regard to congregational as well as mission labors. c) As pointed out in footnote 22, the churches must ask how they harmonize with the historical practice of diaconal relief performed by Reformed churches, both in this country and in Europe. d) If the church as institute is not engaged in social justice efforts, where must the lines be drawn between, on the one hand, being “witness” against evils in the world and teaching God’s people how to live the whole of their lives in godliness (e.g., in the labor and political arena, too), which the church must not hesitate to do; and, on the other hand, trying to be a political force in the world and seek to transform the world as though the kingdom of Christ is broader than the church (which the PRCA do not believe)?

History of the PRC in diaconal ministries

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America have progress to make (as do all churches) in developing and improving her witness to and love for her neighbors. The *next* section will detail some perceived weaknesses and areas where improvement can be made. *This* section will try to do justice to the labors that have been performed by these churches in the area that could be described as “diaconal ministry.”²⁴

It cannot be told with certainty, but with marginal confidence it may be said that Protestant Reformed Churches have not done a great deal with regard to diaconal help for their non-Christian neighbor. If anything may be said generally, it may be said that what help has been given to the poor has been help *in response to specific requests*. Answering an e-mail questionnaire, almost all the pastors who responded mentioned assistance given to poor neighbors or to someone who came knocking. There is plenty of opportunity for this, as I found in my pastorate of a church that was visible on a busy street. Deacons were active and willing to help those who showed genuine needs. The pastor of a church in the inner city said that he regularly gave help to the poor who came to

24. The PRCA have never called the work “diaconal ministry,” although she would not be unfamiliar with the term.

his door, whether or not they were Christians. In the 1960s my own pastor in Redlands, California commonly fed and witnessed to the “bums” in the poor neighborhood where the parsonage was located, until the police told him to stop because he was promoting their “irresponsible lifestyle.” Almost always this work has been “re-active” rather than “pro-active.” (The work of individual members assisting their poor neighbor is another matter. Because of the confidential nature of such work, it may not be possible to determine what has been done. But it can be said with some confidence that the members of the PRCA have not been completely lacking in that regard.)

The same may be said about diaconal assistance in the course of missions. For the most part, aid given has been given to members who join the worshiping fellowship. In fact, it is still the practice on some of the mission fields that, if a person does not attend the services of worship, he will not receive assistance. There are explanations for this, which will be mentioned below, but this is generally the case. The one known exception to this is in the case of a major hurricane disaster in Jamaica in the early 1990s, when the PRCA were active in missions on that island. When the churches took collections for relief, and raised thousands of dollars, the missionary administered relief not only to the Jamaicans who had confessed Christ, but to many others who lived in the vicinity of the little churches where the missionary was working.²⁵ Here, too, however, this is the exception rather than the rule. The norm has been: Help when asked.

There is another side to the story. I relate this “other side” from conversations with older members and ministers in the churches, and from general knowledge of the activities of the churches. From the very beginning, the PRCs have taken offerings for the support of Pine Rest Christian Hospital (its old name), Bethesda, and other institutions for the handicapped and distressed—mentally and physically. Offerings were (and are) taken for the homes for the aged. In some of the churches there were “Pine Rest Circles,” groups of women who would come together

25. This, according to a conversation with the missionary.

during the week to sow and knit for the cause of this mental hospital. I am told that my wife's great aunt was in the first graduating class of nurses who worked in Pine Rest. This conscious desire to help others continues, however unorganized it may be. For the past fifteen years, one retired member of Redlands, CA, PRC has been the president of a group of Christians who have seen the need for, and worked towards, a Christian home for the aged. In his years of retirement he has given thousands of hours to accomplish this work of mercy, both by serving as president of the board as well as working at the "thrift store" that raises funds for the home. The PRC in Redlands regularly takes offerings in support of this work. In the congregation I recently served, the deacons agreed to support a work to build a house where young men with handicaps like Downs Syndrome could live as adults with the limited supervision of Christian house parents. For this house, collections are taken in the Sunday services, and offerings from the children and young people at catechism are taken with careful explanation that this ministry of mercy is thankful obedience to Jesus' instruction in Matthew 25.

These are just some examples, which could be multiplied, of diaconal labors expressing the mercies of Christ to those outside of the churches.

But there is nothing written in the 80 years of the *Standard Bearer*, the unofficial voice of the denomination.²⁶ There is nothing written into the constitutions of the two mission committees of the PRC that would give direction either for giving material assistance to those who come to Christ, or for seeking out non-Christians with word *and* deed, with the compassion of the gospel and aid for the body.

Interestingly, in the early years of the PRC, one of the founding ministers wrote an article in the *Standard Bearer*, in which he criticized

26. To argue from silence is a risky proposition. Definite conclusions must be withheld. But the absence of a practice does indicate an attitude, even if it is unspoken. Searching the indexes of the *Standard Bearer* for 80 years brings up hundreds of articles and pages of references to missions, none of which, to my knowledge made reference to, much less laid out principles for, benevolent assistance to the needy.

the social gospel mentality, according to which science and medicine had replaced the evangelical purpose of missions. In this article,²⁷ the Rev. George M. Ophoff did not *contrast* the gospel and benevolence, but related them. Doctors, he said, should accompany the missionary on the mission field; Christians with knowledge in many different fields should be of assistance to teach the new Christians how to work out the principles of godliness in their daily lives. The minister was not advocating community development or transformational ministry among inner city folk; he was speaking of a “holistic” approach to missions on the field. But the history of missions in the PRC does not follow that lead of a “holistic” ministry in missions. Only very recently have “missionary assistants” been sent to fields. Even then, the assistants are more for the help of the missionary in his teaching (elders spent time in Jamaica to do some of the teaching of elders), or to relieve the missionary from the mundane tasks of repairing his roof and car (presently there are “assistants” in Ghana who work alongside of the missionary for at least six months each). In some cases they may help make decisions about benevolence, but their work is not a conscious effort to minister mercy to the needy.

Analysis of the PRC’s labors in diaconal ministries

First, I try to give explanations for the “lacks” in her diaconal ministry. By this, I do not justify the lacks; I only try to help us to understand them.

As to her history, the PRCA spent her energies in the early years of her existence trying to survive. What mission labors were done, were done to seek out others in the CRCNA who would join with them in their stand for truth. A decision of 1929 indicates a conscious effort first to expend the energies of the denomination among “erring members outside the PRC.”²⁸ In these early years,

27. “Doomed to Extinction” (the *Standard Bearer*, v. 6, p. 327, 1930—six years after the fledgling denomination had begun).

28. See index of minutes of combined consistory meetings of the PRCA (no publication data). In the early years of the PRCA (1924-1940) there was no Synod, only yearly combined consistory meetings. The handwritten minutes of these meetings have recently been translated from the Dutch, typed, and indexed, although they are not available for public use.

many of them in the depression era, her financial resources and energies were directed towards the small, newly-established needy congregations with no church buildings and little ability to pay their ministers. Then, because of a keen consciousness of the need for parental, Christian education, any excesses were directed to parents in these churches who wanted to begin, but could not afford, their own Christian schools.

Second, the PRCA have always been a very small denomination. Until recently, they never numbered more than about 1500 families across the country and in Canada.²⁹ The churches of only twenty-seven congregations extend themselves in many areas, which strains the limits of many of the members. Their own seminary, with a staff of three full-time professors, a denominational mission effort that supports seven full-time missionaries, and support of eight retired pastors fully “according to their need,” and a willingness to support relatively small churches for long periods of time, means that the denominational financial resources for diaconal ministry outside the denomination are limited.

Third, bad experience with free-loaders and “rice-Christians,” coupled with a sense of responsibility to be careful stewards, may also contribute to a failure to be as liberal (open-handed) as they could. Every pastor can relate stories of free-loaders coming to the church with a far-fetched story of woe. Every missionary can tell of being taken advantage of, like my experience in Jamaica, where a church had three or four “signs” indicating denominational fellowship—each one put out at the time *that* denomination came to visit the field; or like the experience in another mission where sick folk tried to convince the nurse to charge double, so that after the missionary paid their bill, the sick person and the nurse could split the “profits.” Wisely the church wants to be a good steward of the members’ gifts.

Yet these explanations may not be justifications of a lack, if indeed there are lacks. It remains that other Protestant Reformed members examine this analysis, and judge whether the following

29. The *2004 Acts of Synod and Yearbook* shows the present membership to be 1768 families and just over 7,000 members.

are indeed areas of theory or practice that must have improvement:

First, even though the churches were (and perhaps still are) small and busy supporting many ministries, this may not be reason for failing to follow Jesus' mandate to "do good to all men." This simply must be a part of the church's life, both through individuals and the official ministry of the churches. Has a focus on "especially to the household of faith" caused the churches to minimize, if not ignore, the main emphasis of the apostle's instruction?

Second, related to the above, the churches have rightly reacted against the social gospel. I suggest that the reaction may have become over-reaction, so that the material and bodily needs of people are not considered sufficiently. As long as priorities are kept and proper relationships are maintained, the churches will not (by the grace of God) fall into the errors of the "social gospel" liberalism of the last century.

Third, the PRCA may consider whether the antithesis is being taught properly—whether the life that is spiritually separate from the world and a heart that properly hates those that hate the Lord (Ps. 139) are taught in the light of the call to love one's enemies, do good to all men, and witness to all their neighbors of the truth, love, and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Objects of the free grace of God, recipients of the undeserved kindness of God, the members of the PRCA should be best equipped to show that same *undeserved* kindness to their unbelieving neighbor—unconditionally,³⁰ and do so *without violating the call to antithetical living*.

Fourth, the churches could do better by way of diaconal conferences³¹ and missions conferences³² in which these matters are discussed. Synod could mandate the two denominational

30. Only a Protestant Reformed member, or one who knows the PRCA well, can "read between the lines" to feel the full weight of the implications of these statements regarding *sovereign* grace and *unconditional* salvation.

31. The churches used to hold these conferences, but do not any longer, except for one that I asked our deacons to host about five years ago.

32. Missions conferences are held occasionally. It would only be necessary to have papers on these subjects.

mission committees to come with a study showing the history, the principles, and practical application of those principles, for diaconal ministry. The deacons' conferences might examine the principles that lie behind what offerings may be taken for causes outside the PRC, and for causes that are not directly related to the official calling of the church in her preaching and teaching labors.

Finally, the churches may consider the material wealth that has been entrusted to the membership of the PRCA. Although perhaps most of the members are not wealthy (the term is relative), there are many of the members who are very wealthy. Besides, even those who are not extremely wealthy are wealthy according to the standards of most of the rest of the world. In addition, many of the churches report benevolent funds of between 50 and 100 thousand dollars. There is no doubt that these excesses could be gone quickly in an emergency, but the large amounts in these funds discourage the membership from giving liberally to the cause of the poor.

Then, if there is fear that something might be given to a person who is merely using the church to live in his laziness, let the church be wise as possible, but let her consider that the Lord will be more tolerant (to speak foolishly) of a mistake on the side of generosity. Let us be liberal to the poor, and to the stranger in the land.

* * * * *

... humanity is not to be denied even to strangers.... For, when it pleased God that strangers should be permitted to inhabit the land, they were to be kindly treated according to the rights of hospitality; for to allow them to *live* is to make their conditions just and tolerable. ... (W)hen God recommends guests and sojourners to them, just as if they had been their own kindred, they thence understand that equity is to be cultivated constantly towards all men.... Since, then, they are thus destitute of human aid, God interposes to assist them.... He recommends strangers to them on this ground, that the people, who had themselves been sojourners in Egypt, being mindful of their ancient condition, ought to deal more kindly to strangers (John Calvin, *Commentaries: The Last Four Books of Moses*, vol. 3, pp. 127, 116). ●

The Doctrine of Eternal Justification in light of the Westminster Tradition

John P. Marcus

Introduction

Eternal justification has had a controversial history almost from the time of the Reformation. Much of the confusion and controversy hinges on its definition. At the time of the Westminster Assembly, many theologians had entirely rejected the term “eternal justification” because of the confusion it caused and the ensuing abuse that resulted. Although the Westminster assembly generally set forth a broad Calvinism, the sentiment against eternal justification was so strong that wording of the Confession even explicitly rejected it.

That the controversy over eternal justification has not gone away is evident from the role it played in the GKN ‘A’ and ‘B’ churches, which came out of the Afscheiding and the Doleantie traditions. Among the handful of doctrines that threatened the unity of the churches in the early twentieth century, eternal justification was one. The Afscheiding churches generally rejected eternal justification and the Doleantie churches held to it. These differences in the GKN over eternal justification and other doctrines, however, were settled in 1905 by the Synod of Utrecht.

Although not as heated as was the case previously, eternal justification continues to be a matter of some controversy. This is especially the case as Reformed churches have contact with Presbyterian churches. It may be useful therefore to consider the doctrine of eternal justification in light of the history surrounding the writing of the Westminster Confession. Why did the Westminster assembly reject eternal justification? Was the rejection of eternal justification a result of Arminian influences? What role did Antinomianism play? What criticisms do some of the

Westminster divines level against eternal justification? Are these criticisms valid? How must eternal justification be qualified? These are some of the questions that we seek to answer in this paper.

One way to examine the Westminster Confession's article rejecting eternal justification is to look at what some of the Westminster divines had to say about the doctrine of eternal justification. This we have been able to do to a limited extent in the writings of Anthony Burgess, Thomas Gataker, and Robert Baillie, all of whom were present at the Assembly. In addition, several other authors from that period and following show the general tenor of theological debates concerning the doctrine of eternal justification.

What is the doctrine of eternal justification?

Before we discuss the doctrine of eternal justification, it will be useful to give a working definition of eternal justification. Before we do that, however, we give a couple of definitions of justification itself. Hoeksema defines justification as...

that act of God's grace whereby He imputes to the sinner that is in himself guilty and condemned, but elect in Christ, the perfect righteousness of God in Christ, acquits him on the ground of Christ's merits of all guilt and punishment, and gives him a right to eternal life.¹

To add one more definition of justification, Brakel says,

Justification is a gracious work of God whereby He, as righteous Judge, acquits the elect from guilt and punishment and declares them to be heirs of eternal life because of the righteousness of Christ the Surety, imputed to them by God, and received by them through faith.²

1. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1966), 493.

2. Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 2, tr. Bart Elshout (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Ligonier, PA, 1993), 347-348.

Others define the term similarly. Both of these definitions include a positive and a negative aspect. First, there is an acquittal from guilt (non-imputation of sin). Secondly, there is an imputation of righteousness and a granting of adoption as sons. Both definitions refer to the fact that it is God's work and that the elect in Christ are the subjects of this act. It is significant, however, that Brakel defines justification as something "received by them through faith." This is consistent with his rejection of eternal justification. Adding that justification is *by faith* to his definition, Brakel is not denying a decree of God in eternity; rather he simply wishes to stress the fact that justification is received by faith. The fact that Brakel does not deny God's decree in eternity is evident from the fact that he speaks of God acquitting the *elect*. But when he defines justification in this way, it is almost inevitable that he will deny "eternal justification." And yet, he does not deny God's decree of election.

Although Brakel's definition of justification is similar to Hoeksema's, there are significant differences. These differences, no doubt, affect how one will approach the doctrine of eternal justification. It appears that much of the controversy concerning eternal justification hinges on one's definition of justification and on the qualifications one puts on the doctrine. That there are varying definitions and qualifications among various theologians makes this controversy a difficult one with which to deal.

Eternal justification, on the face of it, places justification in eternity. But the case is not so simple: here again, much controversy surrounds one's definition of eternal justification. Does eternal justification place *all* of justification in eternity? Some theologians actually taught that. It is no wonder that men reacted strongly against eternal justification when all of it was placed in eternity; we would do the same if that is what eternal justification meant.

Other men simply taught that there is an eternal *aspect* to God's act of justification. If that is what is meant, then we heartily embrace the doctrine. Says Kersten,

No one who desires to adhere to the truth of God will deny that that which God works in time, both in nature and in grace, is decreed by

Him from eternity. Thus the justification of the elect also lies in that decree.³

But Kersten and others mean to say more than simply that God decreed to justify the elect from eternity. This is why he refers to some theologians who “object to considering the decree itself as justification, and rather maintain that God decreed to justify the sinner in time by faith.”⁴ Thus, the question also arises: Is the decree in eternity itself a *decree that justifies*; or, is it simply a *decree to justify*?

Turretin says,

The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another — as the will to save and sanctify is one thing; salvation and sanctification itself another. The will or *decree to justify* certain persons is indeed eternal and precedes faith itself, but actual justification takes place in time and follows faith.⁵

Thus, it would appear that a justifying decree actually justifies the sinner in eternity, while a *decree to justify* leaves actual justification to be carried out in time and history by means of faith. But the case is not so simple: “actual justification” may mean different things to different theologians. Some take it to mean subjective justification, in which case such a justification could not possibly be in eternity. Others simply mean that there is an actual aspect of justification that occurs in eternity. Here is another instance of confusion due to terminology.

Kersten holds to a justifying decree; he says “not one who is Reformed can deny *justification before faith*. That is, from eternity in the decree of God.”⁶ Again, he says, “...those who are predes-

3. G. H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, tr. J. R. Beeke and J. C. Weststrate (Eerdmans, copyright Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee, 1983), 416.

4. Kersten, 416.

5. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, tr. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ 1994), 683.

6. Kersten, 419.

tined to eternal life are justified in God's decree...."⁷ Hoeksema also holds to a justifying decree. He says, "We are justified in the decree of election from before the foundation of the world."⁸ David Engelsma says that eternal justification is not merely the decree of God in His eternal counsel, that He would justify all the members of Christ; but rather a decree forgiving sins, imputing righteousness, adopting as sons.⁹ But these definitions do not clarify whether *all* of our justification is accomplished in eternity or whether only an aspect of our justification occurs in eternity. It would be more proper to say we are justified *in principle* in eternity, but the full execution of our eternal justification will come in history.

We define eternal justification as *an aspect of the believer's justification that actually takes place in God's decree*. This definition does not reject the truth that there is also an actual objective justification that occurs at the cross and in the resurrection; nor does this definition of eternal justification deny that there is an actual subjective justification that occurs by faith. When we define eternal justification in this way, we can embrace it fully. However, when eternal justification is defined in such a way as to exclude the truth that there is a real justification that occurs by faith, then we reject it.

Furthermore, there is confusion in how we understand the *decree that justifies* and the *decree to justify*. Some would argue that the *decree that justifies* indicates that all of justification is accomplished in eternity; others would say that the *decree that justifies* simply roots our justification in eternity. Similarly, a difference of opinion exists regarding a *decree to justify*. Some would take it to mean that no part of our justification occurred in eternity and that God accomplished justification only in time by faith. Others would say that the *decree to justify* includes an actual aspect of justification, which aspect occurs in eternity. We are not convinced that it will help to define these two terms, because one

7. Kersten, 421.

8. Hoeksema, 502.

9. David J. Engelsma, Dogmatics class notes, Protestant Reformed Seminary, Soteriology locus, Spring 2004.

may have a different understanding of one or both of the terms. We might define the *decree that justifies* as the *eternal decree of God that fully accomplishes the justification of sinners in eternity*. And we could define the *decree to justify* as the *eternal decree of God that forms the foundation and source of God's act of justification in time*. To use these definitions would seem to introduce too much bias into this paper in that we would ultimately come down against the *decree that justifies*, our rejection being based on the inclusion of the word "fully" in the definition. Of course, there is an aspect of our justification that is made ours in time by means of faith. On the other hand, the definition of a *decree to justify* might also be shaped to make it acceptable or unacceptable. The way we have defined it above, makes it an acceptable doctrine. Raising this issue concerning definitions, however, shows the confusion that surrounds the whole issue of eternal justification.

The Westminster Confession's alleged rejection of eternal justification

Much of the controversy surrounding the doctrine of eternal justification hinges on the distinction between a decree *to justify* and a decree *that justifies*. As mentioned above, the controversy also hinges on whether the decree that justifies is the *full* justification of which Scripture speaks. That there is a decree in eternity *to justify* the elect in time is not so much debated in Reformed circles. Presbyterians and Reformed alike hold that God decreed the entire salvation of the elect and executes that decree in time; thus, God also executes their justification in time. But the debate surrounds the issue of whether the elect are *actually* justified in God's act of making the decree. It seems that most Presbyterians and Reformed theologians reject the idea of a decree *that justifies*; at the very least they reject the idea that justification is *fully* in eternity.

The explicit rejection of a *decree that justifies* by Presbyterians goes back to the era in which the Westminster Confession was framed. In light of the fact that the Westminster Confession generally embraces a broad Calvinism, it is striking that it would explicitly reject a *decree that justifies*. It is true that some

theologians have interpreted the Confession to embrace a decree that justifies; but the language of the Confession is far too specific to lead to such a conclusion. In fact, the Westminster boldly denies it. The article in question, found in chapter eleven section four, reads as follows:

God did, from all eternity, *decree to justify* all the elect; and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.¹⁰

The wording of the Westminster is very clear; God decreed to justify the elect. The Confession does not say that God *actually* justified the elect from all eternity, only that He *decreed* to do so. Secondly, after the article states what God decreed from all eternity, it then turns to discussing actual history: “Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification....” To make matters even more explicit, the article spells out that although the above is true concerning a *decree to justify*, “nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.” The emphasis is on the fact that the elect are *not* justified until, in time, the Holy Spirit applies Christ to them. The article could hardly be more clear. It teaches in no uncertain terms that the elect are not justified in eternity.

Although not as explicit in rejecting a *decree that justifies*, the same idea is also found elsewhere in the Confession; namely, that there is an eternal *decree to justify*, but that justification itself is *in time*. This is the idea expressed in chapter three and section six, as well as in chapter eight and section one. Chapter three and section six of the Westminster Confession reads as follows:

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in

10. Westminster Confession, Chapter 11, Section 4.

Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.¹¹

The idea that God has ordained the *means* implies that God will bring these things to pass in time. Indeed, the Confession says that the elect are “called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working *in due season*.” But the elect are not only called *in due season*, they are also “justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept....”

Similarly, chapter eight and section one of the Confession concerning Christ the Mediator says the following:

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his Church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

The confession speaks of an *eternal purpose* in which God chose and ordained the Lord Jesus to be the Mediator. God *from all eternity* gave a people to this Lord to be His seed. But these people were by Him redeemed, called, *justified*, sanctified, and glorified *in time*. It appears this section is teaching eternal justification in the sense that God gave a people to Christ *from all eternity*. This language is in line with Westminster’s embrace of a *decree to justify*.

Some commentators’ assessment of Westminster’s decree to justify

Many commentators recognize that the Westminster only held to a *decree to justify*. Indeed, one is hard pressed to find any Presbyterian commentator who embraces the *decree that justifies*. For example, Robert Shaw says the following concerning Westminster’s article:

11. Westminster Confession, Chapter 3, Section 6.

This section is directed against the Antinomian error, that the elect were justified from eternity, or when the price of their redemption was paid by Christ. It is readily admitted that God, from eternity, decreed to justify the elect; but till the period of effectual calling they are in a state of wrath and condemnation.—Eph. ii. 3; John iii. 18. The righteousness by which they are justified was perfected in Christ's death, and the perfection of it was declared by his resurrection, and they may be said to have been virtually justified when Christ was acquitted and discharged as their head and representative; nevertheless, they are not actually and formally justified until they are vitally united to Christ by faith.¹²

It is important to understand that the Antinomians held to a *decree that justifies*. What Westminster was actually rejecting was not so much that our justification has its foundation and source in God's eternal decree, but rather it was rejecting the idea that God's people were fully justified in eternity, which justification would leave no room for justification by faith in time. In fact, it would appear that many of the Antinomians of that era rejected justification by faith altogether. Thomas Edwards, for example, who lists a catalogue of the errors of the various sectarians of that day, asserts that one of the errors was that "persons justified, are not justified by faith, but are justified from all eternity."¹³ In addition, the many works against Antinomians, some of which will be mentioned later, stress that justification is by faith; this is consistent with their rejection of the Antinomian doctrine that held only to a justification in eternity and not to a justification by faith.

James Packer is another of many who assert that Westminster rejected the doctrine of eternal justification. Concerning the Puritan doctrine of justification, he says that Westminster was seeking to safeguard against two things: "The first is that justifi-

12. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia, 1847) in loco.

13. Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena: Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last years* (London 1645): Electronic file: *Gangraena 1-125.pdf* in Puritan Bookshelf CD collection, Still Waters Revival Books. 25.

cation is from eternity, i.e., *before* faith.”¹⁴ The second misconception was “that God takes no notice of the sins of the justified.”¹⁵ With regard to the second misconception with which Westminster was contending, Packer especially points to a reaction against Antinomianism. Many of the Antinomians of that day were very base indeed; they held to gross heresies and lived profligate lives. To counteract the Antinomian view that God took no notice of sins in His people, Westminster added section five to the chapter on justification.

Although rightly pointing out that chapter eleven section five was a reaction to Antinomian heresy, Packer does not mention that section four of chapter eleven, concerning eternal justification, was also directed against Antinomians. Instead, Packer seems to suggest that Westminster was reacting to William Twisse, who held the doctrine of eternal justification “as part of his case against Arminianism.”¹⁶ We will seek to show that Westminster was indeed reacting against Antinomianism, though it may also be that it was a reaction against Arminian doctrine.

The Arminian rejection of a decree that justifies

Arminianism was certainly part of the mixture of ideas that pervaded the era of the Westminster Assembly. This is indicated by the many books against Arminian doctrine in that era and also by the fact that Dordt had just recently concluded their condemnation of the Arminians in 1619. Add to this the fact that some of the English representatives at Dordt had Arminian tendencies of their own, and one can readily see why men like Twisse saw Arminian doctrine as a great threat.

What did the Arminians teach about eternal justification? Clearly they were against it. This is evident from the opinions of the Remonstrants given at the Synod of Dordt and also from Episcopius’ *Arminian Confession*, which he published after Dordt.¹⁷

14. James I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: A Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Crossway books, Wheaton, IL 1990), 155.

15. Packer, 155.

16. Packer, 155.

17. The Dutch version he published in 1621 and the Latin in 1622.

It is no secret that the Remonstrants adamantly denied a *decree that justifies*. We read the following in the Remonstrant opinions:

Although Christ has merited reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sins for all men and every man, nevertheless, according to the new covenant of grace, no one becomes an actual partaker of the benefits merited by the death of Christ except by faith; nor are sins forgiven to sinners before they actually and truly believe in Christ.¹⁸

The emphasis of the Arminians was that Christ merited reconciliation for *all men* and *every man*. Then, on the condition of faith, only some of them become *actual partakers* of the benefits. Similarly, they believed that sins were not forgiven men, that is, they were not justified, “*before* they actually and truly believe in Christ.” Thus, the Arminians rejected any idea of justification before faith.

Episcopius’ *Arminian Confession of Faith* was translated into English in 1684. This confession contains some significant material in its chapter on the work of redemption. As in the Remonstrant opinion cited above, Episcopius speaks of God, who through Christ “reconciled all Sinners unto himself” and “open[ed] the door of eternal Salvation and the way of Immortality to them....”¹⁹ In addition, he says that our Savior makes “his faithful Followers...through Faith really partakers of all those Benefits, which he by his Obedience hath purchased for them.”²⁰ Taken

18. The Remonstrant Opinions, I.5 in Homer C. Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers* (RFPA, Grand Rapids 1980), 104.

19. *Confession of Faith of those called Arminians, Or a declaration of the opinions and doctrines of the ministers and pastors, which in the united provinces are known by the name of Remonstrants concerning the chief points of Christian Religion*. Translated out of the original. (London, Printed for Samuel Walsall 1684) Electronic file: Anon-Arminian Confession of Faith-C5791-1306 09-p1to138.pdf. Available through Early English Books Online. Ch. 8. Sect. 9.

20. *Arminian Confession*, Ch. 8, Sect. 9.

together, the two quotes above show that Arminians taught that Christ merited reconciliation for all men, of which benefits only some men partake through faith. Episcopius taught a universal atonement conditioned on man's activity of faith. But more than that, Episcopius was also willing to speak of God's purpose in eternity. Says he,

...it seemed good to the most Merciful God, in the end of the World, or in the fulness of time, in very deed to set upon and thoroughly to accomplish that most excellent Work, *which he had foreknown or purposed in himself before the Foundations of the World...*²¹

Of course, Episcopius' version of an "excellent work" is that God merely made salvation possible. The point we wish to make here, however, is that Episcopius held to a *decree to justify*, that is, an eternal (though not absolute) decree of God in which He purposed to act and upon which decree He did act *in the fullness of time*. In time, said Episcopius, God grants "sufficient, yea and superabundant Power and Ability, to cast off the Dominion of Sin, and to obey the Will of God with his whole Heart."²² But, ultimately, it is up to the sinner, acting in time, to become a partaker of Christ's benefits through faith. The idea is not unlike what the Westminster Confession says when it speaks of a "decree from all eternity to justify" and yet that the elect are only justified *in due time*. This certainly does not indicate that Westminster Confession chapter eleven and section four is Arminian, only that both the Westminster Confession and the Arminian Confession hold to an eternal *decree to justify* and to a justification in time. What distinguishes the two is how each doctrine is further qualified.

After spending nine articles defending the heretical idea of a universal atonement, the application of which is conditioned on faith, the *Arminian Confession* then "refutes" what it considers an error:

21. *Arminian Confession*, Ch. 8, Sect. 1 (emphasis mine, JPM).

22. *Arminian Confession*, Ch. 8, Sect. 1.

But those Men, who hold that there was both an absolute Election, and an absolute Reprobation of certain Persons (whether considered before the Fall, or only under or after the Fall, without Faith in Christ on the one hand, or Disobedience on the other hand) was in order first made and past, before Jesus Christ was designed of the Father as a Mediator for them, they enervate, nay do wholly and utterly overthrow the universal force and virtue of this same Merit, and the truth and reality of its Efficacy. Neither indeed was it necessary, that there should be made any true or real Expiation of Sins by the lutron, or Redemption of Christ for them, nay, nor indeed was it so much as possible (if Truth may be freely spoken) who were now long before by name peremptorily and absolutely destined or appointed, part unto Life, part unto Death. For the Elect as they call them, or those who are predestinated unto Life, have no need of any such Expiation and Reconciliation; because upon the very account of their being precisely or absolutely elected unto Salvation, they are likewise upon the same account in actual Favour with God, and already necessarily beloved of him, with the highest and immutable Love, and such as is peculiar to those that are Sons and Heirs of God. And as for the Reprobate, as they call them, they themselves deny that there was, or is any Atonement truly made for them; and besides, the thing is absurd of itself, as that which implies a contradiction. For upon their being reprobated, according to these Men's Opinion, they are thereupon wholly and altogether excluded from the Atonement made by Christ. Because those, whom God hath by an immutable Decree once reprobated or excluded from Salvation, or devoted to eternal Destruction, he doth not seriously will, nor can will, that any thing savingly good should really be conferred upon them, much less that the said Atonement should be common to them with the Elect.²³

Although eternal justification is not mentioned explicitly, it is implied in the absolute election to which the Arminians refer. The Arminians believed that an absolute election would make unnecessary "any true or real Expiation of Sins by the lutron, or Redemption of Christ for them..." Even stronger, the Arminians said that such an expiation was not even possible because "the

23. *Arminian Confession*, Ch. 8, Sect. 10.

Elect ... have no need of any such Expiation and Reconciliation; because upon the very account of their being ... elected ... they are ... in actual Favour with God....” The expiation and reconciliation referred to by Episcopius, no doubt includes justification. Thus, the Arminians rejected an absolute election because it would negate the need for the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, which sacrifice would serve as the basis for our justification in time. In other words, an absolute decree in eternity was seen by the Arminians to include justification. Their argument is that eternal justification (i.e., a *decree that justifies*) would make the cross (and its objective justification) unnecessary.

Similarly, the Arminians claimed that justification before faith would make our subjective justification unnecessary. In its chapter on faith, the *Arminian Confession* describes faith, in part, as...

a fiducial and obedient assent: which also is called affiance or confidence: *not* indeed an absolute confidence of special Mercy, as already perceived or enjoyed: to wit, whereby my sins are *already forgiven* me ... but whereby I firmly conclude that it is impossible, that I should by any other means, than by Jesus Christ, and in any other way, than by that prescribed by him, escape eternal Death, and on the contrary obtain eternal Salvation.²⁴

The key here is that the Arminian does not see faith as a confidence that “my sins are *already* forgiven me.” Episcopius would have forgiveness to follow faith and thus would reject any justification before faith (i.e., either eternal justification or objective justification at the cross).

Although the Westminster Confession did not embrace Arminianism, the question may be asked, was the Assembly influenced by Arminianism? It is certainly true that the Calvinism espoused by Westminster was broad (i.e., not as sharp as it could have been). Nor can it be denied that some of the language in the Westminster Confession is weak. History has shown too that the

24. *Arminian Confession*, Ch. 11, Sect. 2 (emphasis mine).

Amyrauldians at the Assembly did sign the Confession when it was completed. Therefore the possibility remains that there was also influence by the Arminian camp in the Westminster Confession's rejection of a *decree that justifies*.

The Antinomian embrace of a decree that justifies

In order to understand the controversy regarding this distinction between the *decree to justify* and the *decree that justifies*, one must also understand that there was a very practical matter in the minds of the divines at Westminster — that is, the heresy of Antinomianism. Antinomians believe that we are not bound to keep the law of God. They preach grace, but they will not preach duty. Thus, when men wrote against eternal justification (i.e., the *decree that justifies*), they did so out of concern that this doctrine was inherently Antinomian. While it is true that the same charge of Antinomianism is wrongly made against the doctrine of election, the fact remains that there were many true Antinomians in that day who also embraced the doctrine of eternal justification. The consequences of their Antinomianism were disastrous. Much of the problem with the doctrine of eternal justification and the *decree that justifies* can thus be traced to an association with Antinomianism.

The Antinomian controversy was fiercely engaged in the 1600s, close to the time when the Westminster Confession of Faith was framed. Even before this time, there had been a great problem with Antinomian heretics. This is evidenced in the example of Anne Hutchinson, who left England for the colonies, arriving in Boston in 1634. She led a conventicle during the years 1636-1638 in which she argued against “legal” preachers. Although Hutchinson held that redemption was God's gift, she erred in, among other things, her teaching that the soul remained passive to the work of divine grace.²⁵ Significantly, since the Holy Spirit was considered to be the only active agent in the believer, the justified saint was

25. Reader's Companion to American History, Anne Hutchinson, http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_044200_Hutchinsonan.htm.

no longer bound by the law.²⁶ The history concerning her shows that Antinomianism was alive and well in England from whence she came.

That Antinomianism was an enormous problem in England during that era is evident from the many works written against Antinomianism. Some of these works were anonymous, but many others were written by respected men who held positions in the Westminster Assembly. Most of those who wrote against Antinomianism also condemned the Antinomians for holding the doctrine of eternal justification.

Works against Antinomians indicate a prevalent sentiment

This controversy over Antinomianism continued for some time. This is evident from the fact that many men published significant works against Antinomians beginning around the time of the Westminster Assembly. Works against Antinomianism continued to be produced into the eighteenth century.

It is noteworthy that already in 1631 Henry Burton, who had a B.D. from Oxford and was rector of a church in London, published a work entitled,

The Law and the Gospell Reconciled.

OR

The Evangelical Fayth, and the Morall Law how they stand together in the state of grace.

A treatise shewing the perpetual use of the Morall Law under the Gospell to believers; in answer to a letter written by an Antinomi[an to] a faithful Christian. Also how the mora[lity] of the 4th Commandment is continued in the Lords day, proved the Christian Sabbath by divine institution.²⁷

Burton points out that there were, in his day...

26. "Preparation, Sanctification, and the Problem of Assurance in New England," available at http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/reacting/anne/print_problems.html

27. Henry Burton, *The Law and the Gospell reconciled*. Electronic file: [Burton_Henry-The_law_and_the_Gospell_reconciled-STC-4152-563_08-p1to58.pdf](http://burton_henry-the_law_and_the_gospell_reconciled-STC-4152-563_08-p1to58.pdf). Available through Early English Books Online.

Spurious spawnes, and monstrous birthes of all kinds of heresies, among which this of the Antinomians, a most pestilent and pernicious fest, is not the least, which denyeth any further use of the *Morall Law* to believers, no not as a rule of conversation, as of duty to be conformed unto, and seeing also how many counterfeit Christians are ready, & and do daily intertaine this *Libertine* doctrine, which lets loose the raines to all licentiousness, as both the *Doctors* and *Disciples* of this *Antinomian* heresie, the *Sons of Belial*, do evidently prove in their practise of their lawless and graceless life: & lastly waighing, how this Antinomian frye is, as an enemy to true fayth, and the power of religion, so a friend to all other heresies now on foot....²⁸

There is no question that Antinomianism was a concern already in Burton's day.

In 1643, Thomas Bakewell, a Presbyterian who wrote elsewhere against the Anabaptists, wrote a work entitled,

A short View of the ANTINOMIAN ERROURS:

With a Brief and plaine *Answer* to them, As the Heads of them
lye in order in the next Page of this Booke.

Being a nest of cursed Errors hatched by Heretics, fed and nourished by their Proselires; being taken as they were flying abroad were brought as the Eagle doth her young ones to see if they could endure to look upon the Sun-beams of truth with fixed eyes, the which they could not; were presently adjudged to be a Bastard-brood, and their necks chopt off, and their carcasses thrown to the Dunghill.²⁹

In 1646, Robert Baillie, a Westminster divine, published a book of one hundred seventy-nine pages entitled,

Anabaptism, THE TRUE FOUNTAINE OF
{*Independency, Brownisme,*} {*Antinomy, Familisme,*}

28. Burton To the Reader.

29. Thomas Bakewell, *A Short View of Antinomian Errors* (London, 1643) Electronic file: Bakewell_Thomas-A_short_view_of_the_Antinomian-Wing-B537-1115_08-p1to20.pdf. Available through Early English Books Online.

And the most of the other Errours, which for the time doe trouble the Church of England, UNSEALED.³⁰

It is significant that many of those writing against Antinomy, or Antinomianism, grouped it with Familism. Familists were said to have sprung from the Libertines. They believed in special revelations, denied the incarnation of Christ, and believed among other things that saints who were suffering were God manifested in the flesh.³¹

In 1648 Anthony Burgess, a Westminster divine, published a two hundred seventy-five page work entitled,

The True Doctrine of JUSTIFICATION
Asserted, and Vindicated,
from
The Errors of PAPISTS, ARMINIANS, SOCINIANS, and more
especially ANTINOMIANS.
In XXX Lectures Preached at Lawrence-lury, London.³²

30. Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, The True Fountain of {Independency, Brownisme,} {Antinomy, Familisme,} And the most of the other Errours, which for the time doe trouble the Church of England, Unsealed*. Electronic file: Robert Baillie_1-118.pdf in Puritan Bookshelf CD collection, Still Waters Revival Books.

31. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist, opening the secrets of familism and antinomianism in the anti-Christian doctrine of John Saltmarsh, and Will. Del, the present preachers of the army now in England, as well as others, in which is revealed the rise and spring of Antinomianism, Familists, Libertines, Swenck-feldians, Enthusiasts, etc. Also the mind of Luther, a most professed opposer of Antinomianism, is cleared and diverse considerable points of the Law and the Gospel, of the Spirit and Letter, of the two covenants, of the nature of free grace, exercise under temptations, mortification, justification, & sanctification, are discovered*. (London, 1648) Electronic file: Spiritual Antichrist_1-316.pdf in Puritan Bookshelf CD collection, Still Waters Revival Books.

32. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification asserted and vindicated from the errors of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially Antinomians*. In 30 Lectures preached in London. (London, 1647) Electronic file: Anthony Burgess_1-153.pdf. in Puritan Bookshelf CD collection.

In 1648, Samuel Rutherford, a Westminster divine, published a work of over six hundred pages with the title,

A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist.

Opening the secrets of *Familisme* and *Antinomianisme* in the Antichristian Doctrine of *John Saltmarsh* and *Will. Dell*, the present preachers of the army now in *England*, and of *Robert Town*, *Tob. Crisp*, *H. Denne*, *Eaton*, and others. In which is revealed the rise and spring of *Antinomians*, *Familists*, *Libertines*, *Swenckfeldians*, *Enthysiasts*, etc. The minde of *Luther* a most professed opposer of *Antinomians*, is cleared, and diverse considerable points of the Law and the Gospel, of the Spirit and Letter, of the two Covenants, of the nature of free grace, exercise under temptations, mortification, justification, sanctification, are discovered.

In 1652, Thomas Gataker, another Westminster divine, published a short work of 43 pages entitled,

Antinomianism Discovered and Confuted:

And Free-Grace As it is held forth in God's Word:

As well by the Prophets in the Old Testament, as by the Apostles and Christ himself in the New, shewed to be other then is by the Antinomian party in these times maintained.³³

And, around 1685, Herman Witsius also published a three hundred forty-four page work entitled,

CONCILIATORY, OR IRENICAL ANIMADVERSIONS:

on the controversies agitated in Britain, under the unhappy names of Antinomians and Neonomians.³⁴

33. Thomas Gataker, *Antinomianism Discovered and Confuted: And Free-grace as it is held forth in Gods Word: As well by the Prophets in the Old Testament, as by the Apostles and Christ himself in the New, shewed to be other then is by the Antinomian Party in these times maintained.* (London, 1652) Electronic file: Thomas Gataker_1-24.pdf. in Puritan Bookshelf CD collection.

34. Herman Witsius, *Animadversions*. Translated out of the Latin and printed in 1807 in Glasgow. Available in the Baldwin Library collection in Toronto, Ontario.

These are but a few of the many works available from that era that address the issue of Antinomianism. The fact that all these men, some of whom served on the Westminster Assembly, should write concerning the Antinomians indicates that these authors considered them to be a major problem. It was an issue on the minds of not a few theologians. Consider also the fact that large portions of even the larger works (e.g., Rutherford's and Burgess' books running into the hundreds of pages) treated the Antinomian ideas extensively. Burgess, in his book on the doctrine of justification, sees it especially important to vindicate the doctrine from the Antinomians; so he includes in his title the words "and more especially Antinomians." Clearly, Burgess had Antinomianism in his sights when he wrote about the doctrine of justification. Therefore, Antinomianism must have been an enormous issue in that era.

What the Antinomians practiced

The fact that so many reacted against Antinomianism makes one believe that they were quite a bad bunch. There is no question but that the Antinomians were roundly condemned. For example, Thomas Bakewell calls the Antinomian error "a cursed error suggested by the father of lies, into those that are led by him to believe lies."³⁵ He charges the Antinomians with a...

new Gospell, who have cast off all obedience to the law of God, who desire to live without rule like sonnes of Belial, that they may take their full swing in sinnne under their damnable presence, that they have gotten free grace that hath freed them from all obedience to the law of God.³⁶

Robert Baillie sees a connection between the Anabaptists of that day and the Antinomians; hence the title of his book calling Anabaptism the fountain of Antinomy among other things.³⁷ In his

35. Bakewell, 3.

36. Bakewell, To the Reader.

37. Baillie, title page.

work, Baillie points out that the Antinomians carried their doctrine into practice. He says,

I should be glad that all the question here were onely about words and phrases, or methods of preaching, as some would make it: but experience proves the difference to be too too [sic] reall; for we see that their words, phrases and method of preaching does carry their hearers to the grossest crimes, without any remorse of conscience or thought of repentance. When some of them are caught in theft they scorn either to be grieved or ashamed for it; others encourage themselves to commit adultery upon their Doctrine; some of them do constantly work in their handy-trade every Sabbath day; others make all repentance and prayer for pardon of the grossest sins to be sinful, and a fruit of misbeleef: finally, if the report of those who pretend to be acquainted with their carriage hold good, too many who have been noted for strictness of life, have fallen evidently after the embracing of these Tenets into a loosenesse of converstation.³⁸

Later, Baillie goes on to tell of some of the gross sins that were committed by the Antinomians and other heresies that they held to. Some rejected the resurrection of the dead, some claimed themselves to be very Christ, and others held that Scripture is a mere allegory.³⁹

A long list could be made of all the terrible things that Antinomians practiced. In short, it can be said that many in that day turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. And, by the sounds of it, they were a great problem in that era.

Antinomians held to a decree that justifies

What did the Antinomians of that day believe? It is significant that many of those who wrote against the Antinomians place eternal justification at the top of the list of the Antinomian errors. For example, at the beginning of Bakewell's work (published in 1643), he lists five errors of the Antinomians. We give the other

38. Baillie, 96.

39. Baillie, 99.

errors that Bakewell lists for the sake of completeness. Some of these are related to eternal justification and others not. It is significant that eternal justification is listed first on the list and is seen as the source of the other errors. Bakewell lists the errors as follows:

1. They hold that a man is justified as soon as he hath a being in the sight of God, before they have any faith or calling.
2. Then they say, God cannot see their sinne, for they are as perfectly righteous even as Christ himself, as soone as they have any being, and faith doth but declare to them what was done in them before they had it, even as soone as they were born.
3. This they know by revelation, or bare Testimony, or suggestion, they say, from the Spirit of God, when they deny the operation of the sanctifying worke of the Spirit of God, to be any meanes whereby they may come to know their justification; for so to doe, they say is the doctrine of our legall Teachers, which goe by markes and signes.
4. Then they being as righteous as Christ, they say, God doth not correct them for sinne, neither can he doe it, but onely to exercise their faith.
5. They are freed they say, by the free grace of Christ, from the commanding power of the law of God, and they are discharged from all duty or obedience to it, and now the law is no rule to them, but what they doe it onely out of love unrequired, not as any duty, for they are freed from all by their free grace.⁴⁰

John Flavel, who wrote against what he considered Antinomian errors in 1691, lists ten errors of the Antinomians. As with Bakewell, Flavel lists eternal justification as the chief error. Following is Flavel's complete list:

1. That the Justification of Sinners is an immanent and eternal act of God, not only preceding all acts of sin; but the very existence of the sinner himself, and so perfectly abolishing sin in our persons,

40. Bakewell, preface.

that we are as clean from sin as Christ himself, αναμαρτητοι, as some of them have spoken.⁴¹

2. That Justification by Faith is no more but the manifestation to us of what was really and actually done before. Or a being persuaded more or less of Christ's love to us. And that when persons do believe that which was his before, doth then only appear to them.⁴²

3. That Men ought not to doubt of their Faith, or question whether they believe or no. Nay, that they ought no more to question their Faith, than to question Christ.⁴³

4. That Believers are not bound to confess their sins, or pray for the pardon of them; because their sins were pardoned before they were committed; and pardoned sin is not sin.⁴⁴

5. That God sees no sin in Believers, whatsoever sins they commit; and seek a covert for this Error from Numb. 23:21 and Jer. 50:20.⁴⁵

6. That God is not angry with the Elect, nor doth he smite them for their Sins; and to say that he doth so, is an injurious reflection upon the Justice of God, who hath received full satisfaction for all their Sins from the hand of Christ.⁴⁶

41. John Flavel, *πλανηλογια: A Succinct and Seasonable discourse of the Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth and Remedies of MENTAL ERRORS*. Written some Months since; and now made publick, both for the healing and prevention of the Sins and Calamities which have broken in this way upon the Churches of Christ, to the great scandal of Religion, hardening of the Wicked; and obstruction of Reformation. Whereunto are subjoined by way of *Appendix*:

I. *Vindiciarum Vindix*: Being a Succinct, but Full Answer to Mr. Philip Cary's weak and impertinent Exceptions to my *Vidiciae Legis & Foederis*.

II. A *Synopsis* of Ancient and Modern *Antinomian Errors*: with Scripture Arguments and Reasons against them.

III. A *SERMON* composed for the preventing and healing of Rents and Divisions in the Churches of Christ.

Electronic File: Flavel_John-Planelogia_a_succinct_and_seasonable-Wing-F1175-889_15-p1to249.pdf. from Early English Books Online. 328.

42. Flavel, 340.

43. Flavel, 350.

44. Flavel, 354.

45. Flavel, 360.

46. Flavel, 365-366.

7. That by God's laying our Iniquities upon Christ, he became as completely sinful as we, and we as completely righteous as Christ. That not only the guilt and punishment of sin was laid upon Christ; but simply the very faults that men commit, the transgression it self became the transgression of Christ: Iniquity it self, not in any figure, but plainly sin it self, was laid on Christ: and that Christ himself was not more righteous, than this Person is, and this Person is not more sinful than Christ was.⁴⁷

8. That Believers need not fear their own sins, nor the sins of others; for as much as neither their own, or others sins can do them any hurt, nor must they do any duty for their own good, or salvation, or for eternal rewards.⁴⁸

9. "They will not allow the New Covenant to be properly made with us, but with Christ for us. And Some of them affirm, That this Covenant is all of it a Promise, having no Condition upon our part. They acknowledge indeed Faith, Repentance and Obedience, to be Conditions, but say they are not Conditions on our part, but on Christ's; and consequently affirm, that he repented, believed, and obeyed for us."⁴⁹

10. "They deny Sanctification to be the evidence of Justification; and deridingly tell us, This is to light a Candle to the Sun; and the darker our Sanctification is, the brighter our Justification is."⁵⁰

This list shows some of the errors Flavel thought were connected with eternal justification. On the one hand, we can understand why Flavel condemned the Antinomians for believing that they ought not seek forgiveness of sin (see number 4). The ninth error that Flavel lists also has some serious error in it, saying that Christ repented for us, etc. It is also understandable that Flavel should condemn those who do not see sanctification as an evidence of justification (see number 10). On the other hand, some of the statements sound rather orthodox. At the very least, some of them can be read with a right understanding. The list indicates that there is some confusion in Flavel's doctrine. However, we will not analyze each of Flavel's statements, since they are not the main topic of this paper. Still, both lists above evidence the fact that

50. Flavel, 404.

Flavel, Bakewell, and others were battling real Antinomians. Both lists attack the Antinomian error of denying the need to live a sanctified life (Bakewell 3 and Flavel 9 and 10).

What is striking is that both Bakewell and Flavel, as well as others, should place eternal justification as the first ranked error of the Antinomians. Flavel is especially clear in making the issue that of justification in eternity. Bakewell calls it an error to believe that “a man is justified as soon as he hath a being in the sight of God.”⁵¹ It would appear that he is referring to eternity, for he says, “To this I answer, leaving the decrees and purposes of God to himselfe as secret things, not belonging to us till we have faith and calling....”⁵² Thus, it would appear that these theologians linked Antinomianism and eternal justification.

Other men did the same. In the Continental tradition, Brakel specifically mentions a sect that he calls the “Hebrews,” so called because some of them fancied themselves Hebrew scholars. Says Brakel,

Some of them are disorderly people and have loose morals, who abuse the grace of God in order to commit fornication and ungodliness, and who abuse Christian liberty, using it as a pretext to indulge in the flesh.⁵³

Brakel traces their Antinomian streak to their views on justification. Like Bakewell and Flavel, when Brakel speaks of the doctrine of the “Hebrews,” he lists eternal justification as the first element:

They either hold to an unlimited election of all men who believe that Christ has died for them, or to an election limited to a certain number, who God from eternity views in Christ and thus from

50. Flavel, 404.

51. Bakewell, 1.

52. Bakewell, 1.

53. Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 2, tr. Bart Elshout (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Ligonier, PA, 1993), 379.

eternity justifies. Therefore, He has nothing against them from the very outset. At birth Adam's sin is thus not imputed to them, and the corruption of their nature is not sin to them, since they already are justified.⁵⁴

It is significant that Brakel sees a wide scope of doctrines subsumed under the heading of eternal justification. Nevertheless, he sees a *decree that justifies* as the culprit. Secondly, the "Hebrews" held that all the sins of the elect had been paid for, even future sins, and that God had perfectly justified them. As a result, Brakel says, "nothing is sin to them anymore, in spite of the fact that they do all that is called sin."⁵⁵ Thirdly, these people lived profligate lives, deeming that sanctification is simply "the cleaving of Christ's righteousness to them as their own personal righteousness."⁵⁶ The heretics against whom Brakel writes thought it was enough merely to believe that Christ died for them. For them to pray for forgiveness would be to mock God, since he had forgiven them already.⁵⁷ The bottom line as regards the connection of eternal justification to Antinomian practices of the "Hebrews" was that "the basis for all their abominable and carnal propositions is a misconception and abuse of the doctrine of justification."⁵⁸

James Buchanan, in his work on justification, also points to the doctrine of eternal justification as playing a major role in the Antinomian scheme. He points out a number of ways in which the Antinomians differed from the Reformers. Among other things, Buchanan considered that Antinomians differed from the Reformers...

in regard to the time and manner of a sinner's Justification — confounding it sometimes with the eternal purpose of election, — sometimes connecting it with the death, or with the resurrection, of Christ, — as if there were no difference between a divine purpose

54. Brakel, 379.

55. Brakel, 379.

56. Brakel, 379.

57. Brakel, 380.

58. Brakel, 380.

in eternity, and its execution in time, or between the work of Christ in procuring, and that of the Holy Spirit in applying, the blessings of redemption.”⁵⁹

Buchanan says that the Antinomians also differed from the Reformers...

in regard to the nature and function of faith, which was represented, not as the means of obtaining pardon and acceptance with God, but rather as the evidence or declaration, merely, of our Justification, by which we obtain the assurance of it; as if it was equally true, but only not so manifest before we believed.”⁶⁰

By the very mention of these doctrinal differences, Buchanan is implying that these doctrines contributed to Antinomianism and its disregard for God’s law. He says,

It may be safely affirmed that the whole spiritual character and experience of a believer who receives the doctrine of the Reformers, will differ from that of a man who is imbued with Antinomian opinions.⁶¹

Buchanan and others previously mentioned argue that holding to the doctrine of eternal justification, which they understand as the *decree that justifies*, has logical consequences for the life of the believer. One of those consequences is a tendency toward Antinomianism. Hence their rejection of the doctrine.

... to be concluded. ●

59. James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961 reprint of 1867 original), 159.

60. Buchanan, 159.

61. Buchanan, 160.

A Presbyterian View of Covenant Children (1)

Mark L. Shand

How ought Presbyterian and Reformed Christians to view their covenant children? What is the relevance of baptism so far as covenant children are concerned? Are covenant children to be viewed and treated as though they have been regenerated, even though they are too young intellectually to comprehend the gospel and to exercise repentance and faith consciously?

These are reasonable questions for those who practice infant baptism on the ground that their children are children of the covenant. This issue has been divisive within Reformed and Presbyterian circles. On the one hand, there are those whose views accord with those of Archibald Alexander, the nineteenth century American Presbyterian theologian and educator who, while acknowledging the possibility that covenant children may be regenerated early in life, even in the womb, nonetheless concluded that covenant children ought to be viewed as unregenerate, until they proved otherwise. Alexander, giving his thoughts on the religious experience of children, opined:

It is an interesting question, whether there are any persons sanctified from the womb. If the communication of grace ever took place, at so early a period of human existence, there is no reason why it should not now sometimes occur. God says to Jeremiah, 'Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee.' And of John the Baptist, Gabriel said to Zacharias, his father, "And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." The prophet Samuel also seems to have feared the Lord from the earliest childhood. In later times, cases have often occurred, in which eminently pious persons could not remember the time when they did not love the Saviour and experience godly sorrow for their sins; and, as we believe that infants may be the subjects of regeneration,

and cannot be saved without it, why may it not be the fact, that some who are regenerated live to mature age?¹

Alexander contended:

The education of children should proceed on the principle that they are in an unregenerate state, until evidences of piety clearly appear, in which case, they should be sedulously cherished and nurtured. These are Christ's lambs — "little ones, who believe in him" whom none should offend or mislead upon the peril of a terrible punishment. But though the religious education of children should proceed on the ground that they are destitute of grace, it ought ever to be used as a means of grace.... Although the grace of God may be communicated to a human soul, at any period of its existence, in this world; yet the fact manifestly is, that very few are renewed before the exercise of reason commences; and not many in early childhood. Most persons, with whom we have been acquainted, grew up without giving any decisive evidence of a change of heart.²

Alexander's view is premised upon the following:

1. While it is possible for covenant children to be regenerated, even in the womb, this is not the norm; in reality, very few children are regenerated prior to the time when they are able to exercise reason or, to put it another way, have come to the age of discretion.
2. Until evidence of regeneration is manifested, the instruction and education of covenant children should proceed upon the presumption that they are unregenerate.
3. Only when children give clear indication that they are regenerate are they to be "*sedulously cherished and nurtured*," because then they are evidently the lambs of God.

Charles Hodge, the leading nineteenth century American Presbyterian theologian, who was a student and contemporary of

1. Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

Alexander, regarded the views espoused by Alexander to be biblically defective. He expressed markedly different ideas regarding the approach to be taken to covenant children. Critiquing views similar to those espoused by Alexander, Hodge asks incredulously:

After consecrating them to God, in reliance upon his covenant, we still take it for granted that they are not His — that they are to grow up in sin, the children of the adversary, until some future and definite time, when they may be brought under conviction for sin, and led to embrace the Saviour. Hence they grow up, not looking to God as their Father, to Jesus as their Redeemer, to the Spirit of holiness as their sanctifier, and to the church as their home; but with a feeling that they are aliens, and God an enemy. In other words, we put them outside of the kingdom by our treatment, while yet we hold them to be in it according to our theory. We constantly assume that their first actions and emotions of a moral nature will be evil and only evil, instead of believing that by Divine grace, and in the faithfulness of the Most High to His own engagements, they will have true spiritual exercises from childhood. Hence, as they come to years of maturity, they stand aloof, waiting as it were, for God to enlist them — waiting to get religion, as the phrase goes, instead of feeling that they belong to God, and are to love and serve Him from the beginning.³

One of the features of the ecclesiastical landscape today is that the essentially baptistic views of Alexander and others like him have been embraced enthusiastically by many Reformed and Presbyterian churches.⁴

Does it matter? After all, while Alexander contends that the education of covenant children should “proceed on the principle

3. Charles Hodge, *The Mode and Subjects of Baptism with a Practical View of Infant Baptism* (The Evangelical Bookshop, Belfast, 1966), p. 41.

4. Lewis Beven Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 2; Robert S. Rayburn, “The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture and Covenant Succession,” *Presbyterian*, vol. 22, 1996, p. 76.

that they are in an unregenerate state,” he also acknowledges that “the religious education of children ... ought ever to be used as a means of grace.”

It does matter. It is not simply a matter of semantics. The significance of the differing approaches is indicated by Charles Hodge, writing in the context of infant baptism:

To our apprehension there is a practical error here of great perniciousness. Having given our children to God, in accordance with His appointment, we ought not to feel or to act as though it were a nullity. To our faith, the presumption should be that they are the Lord's, and that as they come to maturity they will develop a life of piety. Instead of waiting, therefore, for a period of definite conviction and conversion, we should rather look for, and endeavour to call out, from the commencement of moral action, the motions and exercises of the renewed heart. Teach them to hate sin, to think and speak of God as a father, and of Christ as a saviour. Let them be taught to say, We love the Lord, we love and trust Jesus, we love His people, we love the church with all her doctrines and ordinances, we hate sin in all its forms, and are determined, by God's help, that we will not be its slaves. And let us expect that, as they come to years of deliberate action, their life will correspond to this teaching. Is this too much to expect of our covenant God? Is this presumption? Is this less pleasing to God, than a spirit of unbelief, which nullifies His word? We think not. It may be a strong faith is required for such a course, but it is a legitimate faith, well pleasing to God, comforting to ourselves, and most blessed in its bearing upon our children. If we can but exercise it, by His help, vast numbers of our children will be sanctified from the womb, and will indeed grow up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and will stand like olive plants around our table and our dwelling.⁵

In denominations where covenant children are viewed as unregenerate, the spiritual life and existence of those denominations is in jeopardy. That view is the primary reason that many Reformed and Presbyterian churches today are devoid of youth.

5. Hodge, *The Mode*, pp. 42, 43.

Such thinking leads to a neglect of covenant youth and causes them to become alienated from the life of the church. As a result, such churches begin to hemorrhage. This situation is so serious in many Presbyterian churches that they are in grave danger of dying. They have lost their youth in succeeding generations, and so congregations consist predominantly of the elderly. What is the future for such congregations? They do not have one, and the reason is that they have not nurtured their covenant youth and have given no practical place to the truth that God's covenant runs in the lines of generations.

Infant baptism has become essentially a formal ritual that takes place following the birth of a child — something akin to a christening. There is confusion over its significance. Many consider it to be simply an indication of a future hope that the child may eventually prove himself to be a child of God.

The result is that, instead of Reformed and Presbyterian churches propounding the distinctively Reformed views concerning infant baptism, children in the covenant, and church membership of covenant children, the views being expressed have a distinctively baptistic flavor to them. This concern is so significant in modern Presbyterian circles that Robert Rayburn writes:

One of the features of Presbyterian thought and life which ought most dramatically to distinguish it from the prevailing evangelicalism is its view of the church's children. That even evangelical Presbyterianism is not clearly differentiated in this way is, in my judgment, one of the saddest and most dangerous consequences of the debasement of our theology in both pulpit and pew. I do not hesitate to say that there has been such a debasement in respect to the doctrine of covenant succession — i.e., that set of truths connected with the purpose of God that his saving grace should run in the lines of generations — and that this debasement has resulted in Presbyterian people being robbed of one of the most precious parts of their inheritance.⁶

6. Rayburn, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

A Historical Overview and Analysis

The view that covenant children are to be regarded as unregenerate involves a different idea of the covenant and of the children of the covenant than has been historically maintained in Reformed and Presbyterian circles.⁷ The overwhelming view of Reformed and Presbyterian theologians has been that covenant children are members of the church and are to receive baptism as a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace. They are not to be viewed as those who are unregenerate and, as such, a field for missionary endeavor.

In seeking to understand the thinking of the Reformers as regards covenant children, it makes sense to inquire as to the views of John Calvin. The starting point for Calvin was Genesis 17:1: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."⁸ Calvin considered that the covenant, the seal of which in the Old Testament was circumcision and baptism in the New, "contained nothing less than the promise of eternal life and that it was a spiritual reality and communion of life between God and man."⁹

The covenant, so far as Calvin was concerned, was not simply a formal, external relationship between God and His people, but it was a living, spiritual relationship; a relationship of friendship and

7. In 1940, Lewis Beven Schenck, in his dissertation for Yale University titled, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant: An Historical Study of the Significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church in America*, *op. cit.*, provided a very valuable historical analysis of this area. More recently Robert S. Rayburn has also made a substantial contribution with his article titled, "The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture and Covenant Succession," *op. cit.* I acknowledge my indebtedness also to Christopher F. Coleborn for his extensive collation of quotations from Reformed and Presbyterian sources in an unpublished paper titled, "Scriptural, Confessional and Historical References re the Regeneration of Children, and their Status before the Lord and in the Church," April, 1991.

8. Genesis 17:7.

9. Rayburn, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

fellowship; a relationship with Abraham and his spiritual seed; a relationship of substance.

Now, if we choose to investigate whether it is right to administer baptism to infants, shall we not say that a man is talking nonsense or indeed raving who would halt with the mere element of water and outward observance, but cannot bear to turn his mind to the spiritual mystery? If any account of this is made, it will be evident that baptism is properly administered to infants as something owed to them. *For in early times the Lord did not deign to have them circumcised without making them participants in all those things which were then signified by circumcision* [cf. Genesis 17:12]. Otherwise, he would have mocked his people with mere trickery if he had nursed them on meaningless symbols, which is a dreadful thing even to hear of. For he expressly declares that the circumcision of a tiny infant will be in lieu of a seal to certify the promise of the covenant. But if the covenant still remains firm and steadfast, it applies no less today to the children of Christians than under the Old Testament it pertained to the infants of the Jews.¹⁰ [Emphasis MLS]

According to Calvin, the covenant and its promises belonged not only to Abraham, but also to his children. The same is true for believers and their children in the New Testament dispensation. Consequently, the covenant promises that embraced fatherly love, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life belonged not only to Christian parents, but also to their seed.

Calvin drew a sharp distinction between the children of believers and children of the world.

Indeed, it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham [cf. Genesis 17:14] is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people, and that this word relates no less to Christians than it then related to the Jews.... Accordingly, the children of the Jews also, because they had been

10. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeil, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), IV.16.5.

made heirs of his covenant and distinguished from the children of the impious, were called a holy seed [Ezra 9:2; Isaiah 6:18]. For this same reason, the children of Christians are considered holy; and even though born with only one believing parent, by the apostle's testimony they differ from the unclean seed of idolators [1 Cor. 7:14].¹¹

He did not view the children of believers as unregenerate; quite the contrary, they were the recipients of eternal life. He maintained that the children of believing parents belonged to the church, even before they were engrafted into the visible church, by baptism.

From this it follows [that is, that children who die in infancy are not barred from the kingdom of heaven] that the children of believers are baptized not in order that they who were previously strangers to the church may then for the first time become children of God, but rather that, because by the blessing of the promise they already belonged to the body of Christ, they are received into the church with this solemn sign.¹²

The offspring of believers are born holy, because their children, while yet in the womb, before they breathe the vital air, have been adopted into the covenant of eternal life. Nor are they brought into the church by baptism on any other ground than because they belonged to the body of the Church before they were born. He who admits aliens to baptism profanes it.... For how can it be lawful to confer the badge of Christ on aliens from Christ. Baptism must, therefore, be preceded by the gift of adoption, which is not the cause of half salvation, merely, but gives salvation entire; and this salvation is afterwards ratified by Baptism.¹³

11. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.16.6.

12. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.15.22.

13. John Calvin, *Interim, Adultero — germanum: ciu adiecta est vera Christianae Pacificationis et Ecclesiae Reformandae Ratio. Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 35, p. 619, cited by Schenck, p. 13.

Nay, on what ground do we admit them to baptism unless that they are the heirs of promise? For did not the promise of life apply to them it would be a profanation of baptism to give it to them. But if God has adopted them into His kingdom, how great injustice is done to His promise, as if it were not of itself sufficient for their salvation.... The salvation of infants is included in the promise in which God declares to believers that He will be a God to them and to their seed.¹⁴

Calvin's views of covenant children were assailed on a number of grounds, particularly by the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists contended that children were incapable of regeneration, which they maintained was a prerequisite to baptism, and so they ought not to be baptized. Some of the arguments employed by the Anabaptists find favor with those who contend that covenant children should be viewed as unregenerate until they reveal otherwise.

They think that they are putting forward a very strong reason why children are to be barred from baptism when they claim that children because of their age are not yet able to understand the mystery signified in it, namely, spiritual regeneration, which cannot take place in earliest infancy. Our opponents therefore conclude that children are to be considered solely as children of Adam until they reach an appropriate age for the second birth.¹⁵

Calvin's response was terse.

But God's truth everywhere opposes all these arguments.... But how (they ask) are infants, unendowed with knowledge of good or evil, regenerated? We reply that God's work, though beyond our understanding, is still not annulled. Now it is perfectly clear that those infants who are to be saved (as some are surely saved from that early age) are previously regenerated by the Lord. For if they bear with them an inborn corruption from their mother's womb,

14. John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983), vol. 3, p. 109.

15. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.16.17.

they must be cleansed of it before they can be admitted into God's Kingdom, for nothing polluted or defiled may enter there [Revelation 21:27]. If they are born sinners, as both David and Paul affirm [Ephesians 2:3; Psalm 51:5], either they remain unpleasing and hateful to God, or they must be justified. And what further do we seek, when the Judge himself plainly declares that entry into heavenly life opens only to men who are born anew [John 3:3]? And to silence such gainsayers, God provided a proof in John the Baptist, whom he sanctified in his mother's womb [Luke 1:15] — something he could do in others. And they do not gain anything here by this mocking evasion — that it was only once, and that from this one instance it does not immediately follow that the Lord usually deals thus with infants. But we are not arguing in this way either. Our purpose is solely to show that they unjustly and wickedly shut God's power within these narrow limits to which it does not permit itself to be confined. Their other quibble has no more weight. They claim that, in accordance with the usual mode of expression of Scripture, the phrase "from the womb" is merely the equivalent of saying "from childhood." But we can clearly see that the angel, when he declared this to Zechariah, meant something else, namely, that John would, while yet unborn, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us not attempt, then, to impose a law upon God to keep him from sanctifying whom he pleases, just as he sanctified this child, inasmuch as his power is not lessened.¹⁶ [Emphasis MLS]

A related and still current objection, also raised by the Anabaptists, concerned the inability of infants to discern and comprehend the preaching of the gospel.

But faith, they say, comes by hearing [Rom. 10:17], the use of which infants have not yet acquired; nor can they be capable of knowing God, for, as Moses teaches, they are without the knowledge both of good and of evil [Deut. 1:39]. But these men do not perceive that when the apostle makes hearing the beginning of faith he is describing only the ordinary arrangement and dispensation of the Lord which he commonly uses in calling his people — not, indeed, prescribing for him an unvarying rule so that he may use no

16. *Ibid.*

other way. He has certainly used such another way in calling many, giving them true knowledge of himself by inward means, that is, by the illumination of the Spirit apart from the medium of preaching. But since they think that it would be quite absurd for any knowledge of God to be attributed to infants, to whom Moses denies the knowledge of good and evil, let them only tell me, I ask, what the danger is if infants be said to receive now some part of that grace which in a little while they shall enjoy to the full? For if fullness of life consists in the perfect knowledge of God, when some of them, whom death snatches away in their very first infancy, pass over into eternal life, they are surely received to the contemplation of God in his very presence. Therefore, if it please him, why may the Lord not shine with a tiny spark at the present time on those whom he will illumine in the future with the full splendor of his light — especially if he has not removed their ignorance before taking them from the prison of the flesh? I would not rashly affirm that they are endowed with the same faith as we experience in ourselves, or have entirely the same knowledge of faith — this I prefer to leave undetermined — but I would somewhat restrain the obtuse arrogance of those who at the top of their lungs confidently deny or assert whatever they please.¹⁷

Another objection mounted against Calvin's view of baptism by the Anabaptists concerned the contention that infants were not capable of either repentance or faith.

But, to insist still more stoutly upon this point, they add that baptism is a sacrament of repentance and of faith. Accordingly, since neither of these can come about in tender infancy, we must guard against admitting infants into the fellowship of baptism, lest its meaning be made empty and fleeting. But these darts are aimed more at God than at us. For it is very clear from many testimonies of Scripture that circumcision was also a sign of repentance [Jer. 4:4; 9:25; cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6]. Then Paul calls it the seal of the righteousness of faith [Rom. 4:11]. Therefore, let a reason be required of God himself why he commanded it to be impressed on the bodies of infants. For since baptism and circumcision are in the same case, our opponents cannot give anything to one without

17. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.16.19.

conceding it to the other. If they have recourse to their usual way out, that the age of infancy then symbolized spiritual infants, their path is already blocked. We therefore say that, since God communicated circumcision to infants as a sacrament of repentance and of faith, it does not seem absurd if they are now made participants in baptism — unless men choose to rage openly at God's institution. But as in all God's acts, so in this very act also there shines enough wisdom and righteousness to repel the detractions of the impious. For although infants, at the very moment they were circumcised, did not comprehend with their understanding what that sign meant, they were truly circumcised to the mortification of their corrupt and defiled nature, a mortification that they would afterward practice in mature years. To sum up, this objection can be solved without difficulty: infants are baptized into future repentance and faith, and even though these have not yet been formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden within them by the secret working of the Spirit. With this answer everything gleaned from the meaning of baptism that they twist against us is once for all overthrown. Such is the label with which Paul marks it when he calls it the washing of regeneration and of renewal [Titus 3:5]. From this they reason that it is to be conferred only on persons capable of experiencing these things. But we are free to counter this by saying: neither was circumcision, which designated regeneration, to be conferred upon any but the regenerate. And thus a thing instituted by God will be condemned by us. Accordingly (as we have already suggested at various times), all the arguments that tend to shake circumcision are without force in assailing baptism.... God's command concerning circumcision of infants was either lawful and not to be trifled with, or it was deserving of censure. If there was in it nothing incongruous or absurd, neither can anything absurd be found in the observance of infant baptism.¹⁸

Ulrich Zwingli was also confronted by the Anabaptists. Again their contention was that baptism presupposed faith, repentance, and conversion, all of which were impossible in the case of infants. He engaged the Anabaptists in a public disputation. Zwingli appealed to the analogy of circumcision in the Old Testament, to the command of Christ to "Suffer little children to come

18. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.16.20.

unto me,” and to 1 Corinthians 7:14, which he contended implied the church membership of covenant children. The Anabaptists were unable to respond satisfactorily and the adjudication went in the favor of Zwingli.

Following the death of Zwingli at the battle of Cappel in 1531, Heinrich Bullinger was called to be his successor in Zurich. He became, along with Calvin, the leading theologian of the Swiss Reformation. Bullinger was the author of the *Second Helvetic Confession*. It was initially written as his personal confession of faith, but was subsequently adopted by the Swiss churches in 1566.

Chapter 20 of that confession addresses the subject of baptism.

Now to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God; yes, and in this life to be called after the name of God; that is to say, to be called a son of God; to be cleansed also from the filthiness of sins, and to be granted the manifold grace of God, in order to lead a new and innocent life. Baptism, therefore, calls to mind and renews the great favor God has shown to the race of mortal men. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are the children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life. All these things are assured by baptism. For inwardly we are regenerated, purified, and renewed by God through the Holy Spirit; and outwardly we receive the assurance of the greatest gifts in the water, by which also those great benefits are represented, and, as it were, set before our eyes to be beheld....

We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the Kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God's covenant not be given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be initiated by holy baptism?

The embracing of covenant children within the church and a refusal to identify them with the children of the heathen was not

confined to the Swiss Reformation. John Knox, in his Order of Baptism, outlines the nature of the address that the minister should give to the congregation on the occasion of the baptism of a covenant child. This address makes plain that Knox viewed covenant children as separate and distinct from the children of the heathen.

Then let us consider, dearly beloved, how Almyghtie God hath not onely made us his children by adoption, and received us into the fellowship of his Church; but also hath promised that he wilbe our God, and the God of our children, unto the thousand generation. Whych thinge, as he confirmed to his people of the Olde testament by the sacrament of Circumcision, so hath he also renewed the same to us in his New Testament by the sacrament of Baptisme; doing us therby to wyt, that our infantes apperteyne to him by covenaut, and therefore oght not to be defrauded of those holy signes and badges *whereby his children are knowen from Infidells and Pagans. Neither is it requisite, that all those that receyve this Sacrament have the use of understanding and faythe; but chieffelye that they be conteyned under the name of God's people:* So that remission of sins doth appertaine to them by God's promise.¹⁹
[Emphasis MLS]

Moreover, ye that be fathers and mothers may take hereby moste singuklar comfort, to se your children thus receyved in to the bosome of Christes congregation, whereby you are daily admonished that ye nourish and bring up the children of God's favor and mercye, over whom his fatherly providence watcheth continually. Which thing, as otit oght greatly to rejoyse you, (knowing that nothing can chanunbce unto them wythout his good pleasure,) so oght it to make you diligent and carefill to nurture and instruct them in the true knowledge and feare of God.²⁰

Knox goes on in his prayer of thanksgiving to acknowledge

19. John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 4, p. 187.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

the gift that God has given and to thank Him for His infinite goodness:

which haste not only nombred us amongst thy saintes, but also of thy free mercie doest call our children unto thee, markinge them wyth thys Sacrament as a singuler token and badge of thy love. ...for Christes sake we beseche thee, that thou wilt confirme this thy favor more and more towards us, and take this infant into thy tuition and defence, whom we offer and present unto thee wyth common supplications, and never suffer him to fall to suche unkindes, whereby he shud lose the force of this baptisme, but that he may continually perceyve thee to be his merciful Father, through thy Holy Spirite working in his hart....²¹

In Article 16 of the *Scots Confession 1560*, which is headed "Of the Kirk," Knox and the other authors of that confession identify covenant children to be members of the church.

Out of the quhilk Kirk, there is nouthur lyfe, nor eternall felicitie. And therefore we utterly abhorre the blasphemie of them that affirme, that men quhilke live according to equitie and justice, sal be saved, quhat Religioun that ever they have professed. For as without Christ Jesus, there is nouthur life nor salvation; so sal there nane be participant thereof, bot sik as the Father hes given unto his Sonne Christ Jesus, and they that in time cum unto him, avowe his doctrine, and beleve into him, *we comprehend the children with the faithfull parentes*.²² [Emphasis MLS]

Similar thoughts concerning covenant children were also expressed by the Italian Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli.

But if thou demand how the children of the Christians belong unto the church or unto Christ, we will answer: no other wise, than the children of the Hebrews, being of the posterity of Abraham, were said to be contained in the covenant of God. For God promised

21. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

22. G. D. Henderson, *The Scots Confession 1560* (The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1960), p. 43.

(Gen. 17:7), unto Abraham that he would not only be his God, but also the God of his seed.... For as our own salvation is, so verily is altogether the salvation of our children of the mere election and mercy of God, which oftentimes goeth together with natural propagation.... Not that it doth always so happen of necessity: because the promise is not general as touching all the seed, but of that only in which the election together consenteth.... therefore we judge the children of the Saints to be saints, so long as they by reason of their age, shall not declare themselves strangers from Christ. We exclude them not from the church but embrace them as members thereof: hoping well, that as they be the seed of the Saints according to the flesh, so also they be partakers of the divine election, and that they have the Holy Ghost and grace of Christ: and for this cause we baptise them.²³

Not surprisingly the doctrine of the Reformation concerning covenant children found expression in the Heidelberg Catechism prepared by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus and first published in 1563. Question 74 of the Catechism asks, "Are infants also to be baptized?" The Catechism responds:

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

In his commentary on the Catechism, Ursinus offers these views:

Hence all, and only those are to be baptized according to the command of Christ, who are, and ought to be regarded as members of the visible church, whether they be adults professing repentance and faith, or infants born in the church, or school of Christ; and

23. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The Common Places* (Thomas Vautrollier, 1574), p. 115, cited by Coleborn, p. 18.

hence the Holy Spirit teaches them in a manner adapted to their capacity and age.... The Anabaptists, therefore, in denying baptism to the children of the church, do not only deprive them of their rights, but they also prevent the grace of God from being seen in its richness, since God wills that their offspring of the faithful should be included amongst the members of the church, even from the womb: yea they manifestly detract from the grace of the New Covenant, and narrow down that of the old, inasmuch as they refuse to extend baptism to infants, to whom circumcision was formerly extended; they weaken the comfort of the church, and of faithful parents; they set aside the solemn obligation by which God will have the offspring of his people consecrated to him from their very infancy, distinguished, and separated from the world; they weaken in parents their sense of gratitude, and the desire which they should have to perform their obligations to God;²⁴

The next generation of Reformers also embraced these same truths. Francis Turretin, in defending the baptism of covenant children against the Anabaptists, was called to respond to the contention that “infants are not capacious of the grace of regeneration, nor of the other blessings of the covenant which are accustomed to be conferred by the Spirit through the Word...”²⁵

But it is gratuitously supposed that they are not capacious of the blessing of the covenant. For who denies that they are capacious of the remission of sins and of Christ’s redemption, and of the other benefiits which depend upon the covenant into which infants are received? Who can doubt that baptism (with respect to these) is able to be a distinctive sign (introducing into the visible church) and a seal both of the divine truth in the federal promises and of our obligation to mutual duty? For if they are not capable of obligation in the present, they can be in the future. As to regeneration, however, why should infants not be capable of regeneration as they

24. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1852), pp. 366-368.

25. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1997), vol. 3, p. 416.

are of sin (unless we say that guilt has more power than grace)? And as they are rational (although we do not put forth an act of reason), what hinders them from being called holy and believers by the Holy Spirit given to them, although they cannot as yet exert an act of faith?²⁶

The Westminster Assembly did not deviate from the accepted understanding of the Reformed church as regards the place of covenant children within the church. Westminster's ecclesiology found a place for covenant children within the church. In chapter 25, dealing with the church, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states:

The *visible Church*, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; *and of their children*: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.²⁷ [Emphasis MLS]

The Confession also recognizes the possibility of the salvation of infants even though they have not reached years of cognitive ability, when it says of elect infants dying in infancy:

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how He pleases; so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.²⁸

On the subject of baptism, the Westminster divines concluded:

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn *admission of the party baptized into*

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 25:2.

28. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10:3.

the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world. [Emphasis MLS]

4. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but *also the infants* of one, or both, believing parents, *are to be baptized.* [Emphasis MLS]

5. Although it is a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, *yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.* [Emphasis MLS]

6. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, *the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.*²⁹ [Emphasis MLS]

The Assembly conveyed its views on baptism in the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. In response to the question, "Unto whom is Baptism to be administered?", the Assembly responded:

Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.³⁰

The *Directory for Public Worship* affords an even more detailed insight into the views of the Westminster divines. Over

29. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 28:1, 4, 5, 6.

30. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 166.

seventy sessions were devoted to the compilation of the Directory. Responsibility for the preparation of the Directory was entrusted to a sub-committee of the Grand Committee. This sub-committee consisted of Puritans Stephen Marshall, Herbert Palmer, Thomas Goodwin, Thomas Young, and Charles Herle, together with the Scottish Commissioners.³¹

Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature use and ends of this sacrament, shewing.... That baptizing, or sprinkling and washing with water, signifieth the cleansing from sin by the blood and for the merit of Christ, together with the mortification of sin, and rising from sin to newness of life, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ: That the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that their seed and prosperity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the covenant of grace, for substance being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before: That the Son of God admitted little children into his presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, For of such, is the kingdom of God: That children by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world and the flesh: *That they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are to be baptized:* That the inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that very moment of time wherein it is administered; and that the fruit and power thereof reacheth to the whole course of our life.³²

31. Iain Murray, "The Directory for Public Worship," *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly*, edited by John L. Carson & David W. Hall (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1994), p. 175.

32. *The Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian Publications, 1981), pp. 382, 383.

Furthermore, the minister is required to exhort the father of the child that has been baptized:

To consider the great mercy of God to him and his child; to bring up the child in the knowledge of the grounds of the Christian religion, and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and to let him know the danger of God's wrath to himself and his child, if he be negligent: requiring his solemn promise for the performance of his duty.³³

The prayer of thanksgiving is to this or the like purpose:

... that the Lord is true and gracious, not only in that he numbereth us among his saints, but is pleased also to bestow upon our children this singular token and badge of his love in Christ: That, in his truth and special providence, he daily bringeth some into the bosom of his church, to be partakers of his inestimable benefits, purchased by the blood of his dear Son, for the continuance and increase of the church.... That he would receive the infant now baptized, and solemnly entered into the household of faith, into his fatherly tuition and defence, and to remember him with the favour that he sheweth to his people; that, if he should be taken out of this life in his infancy, the Lord, who is rich in mercy, would be pleased to receive him up into glory; and if he live and attain the years of discretion, that the Lord would so teach him by his word and Spirit, and make his baptism effectual to him, and so uphold him by his divine power and grace.³⁴

Herman Witsius, a Dutch Reformed theologian, wrote in his treatise titled *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, first published in 1677:

Now after a principle of spiritual life is infused into the elect soul by regeneration, divine grace does not always proceed therein in the same method and order. It is possible that for some time, the spirit of the life of Christ, may lie, as it were dormant in some, (almost in

33. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

34. *Ibid.*

the same manner, as vegetative life in the seed of a plant, or sensitive life in the seed of an animal, or a poetical genius in one born a poet), so as that no vital operations can yet proceed therefrom, though savingly united to Christ, the fountain of true life, by the Spirit. This is the case with respect to elect and regenerate infants, whose is the kingdom of God, and therefore are reckoned among believers and saints, though unqualified through age, actually to believe and practice godliness.... But when the foundation is laid, divine grace does not always grow up in the same manner. It often happens that this principle of spiritual life which had discovered its activity in the most tender childhood ... grows up by degrees with the person after the example, of our Lord, who 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.'³⁵

Schenck concludes that "at least until the time of the Westminster Standards, there was no difference in the views of the leading exponents of covenant theology and those of John Calvin on the subject of the covenant."³⁶ Such agreement prevailed in Presbyterian circles until the nineteenth century.

It was in the nineteenth century that the first warning bells were sounded by the Congregationalist Horace Bushnell. In his widely circulated work titled *Christian Nurture*, Bushnell highlighted the departure from sound Reformed thinking of the congregational churches of New England in the area of covenant children. He described the problem in this way:

Our New England fathers, coming out as they did from a mode of church economy which made Christian piety itself to be scarcely more than baptism, and passing through great struggles to settle a scheme of church order that should recognize the strict individuality of persons and the essential individuality of spiritual regeneration, fell off for a time, as they naturally might, into a denial of the

35. Witsius, Herman. *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (The den Dulk Christian Foundation, Escondido, California, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 366, 367.

36. Schenck, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-52.

great underlying principles and facts on which the membership of baptized children in the church must ever be rested.³⁷

He attributed this denial of the underlying principles of infant baptism to the half-way covenant and the Great Revival.

The half-way covenant had its origins in the mid seventeenth century among the Congregationalists in New England. The Massachusetts Synod of 1662 asserted that baptized adults who had had no conversion experience might be received into church membership upon confession of piety of life. Such confessions became known as “owning the covenant.” This artifice resulted in many, on becoming parents, “owning the covenant” so that they could access for their children the right of baptism, but in circumstances where they themselves demonstrated little or no evidence of true piety.³⁸ This abuse ushered in dead formalism and an obfuscation of the true meaning of baptism. Not only that, but it had practical consequences because such persons were seldom competent or inclined to provide their children with faithful instruction in the things of the Lord. All that was expected of them was a decent morality and a respectful regard to Christianity.³⁹

Ultimately, the owning of the covenant became a meaningless form, with the result that it afforded the profane the opportunity of accessing the sacraments of the church. Many were prepared to make solemn vows that they then proceeded openly to desecrate.

Such practices spawned a dead formalism. Parents were only too willing to have their children baptized, but they were not so eagerly disposed to train them in the way of the Lord. Consequently, infant baptism had become simply a rite. It was practiced with little thought and without regard to covenant faithfulness.⁴⁰

37. Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 155.

38. Lyman H. Atwater, “Children of the Church and Sealing Ordinances,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, vol. XXIX, no. 1 (January 1857), Art. 1, p. 10.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Rayburn, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

The impact of the half-way covenant had this effect:

All ecclesiastical discipline was paralyzed. This standard of morality was itself vague, fluctuating, elastic to every demand of expediency. The system tended to a ceaseless degeneracy. It was hard to say what shortcomings in parents should debar their children from the boon of baptism. At length, the "owning of the covenant" became a mere form, which the heedless, and sometimes the profane, did not scruple to go through; thus making solemn vows which they profanely violated, in order to obtain holy rites which they openly desecrated. This system contained the seeds of its own dissolution. It must either end in the extinction of religion, or be uprooted by its revival.⁴¹

The growth of dead orthodoxy or dead formalism paved the way for revival movement within New England. The Great Revival or Great Awakening entailed a series of revivals in the American colonies between 1725 and 1760. The earliest stirrings occurred among the Dutch Reformed in New Jersey under the guidance of T.J. Frelinghuysen. These revivals received impetus from the Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent, who began to emphasize the need for "conviction." Within a short time, several Scotch-Irish Presbyterian congregations in New Brunswick were experiencing conversions and considerable excitement. Around the same time, a similar experience was being felt in Massachusetts, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

The revivals produced powerful conversion experiences, coupled with dramatic episodes of conviction of sin and anguish of soul. Such experiences were then followed with periods of peace with God.

As a result, the expectation developed that this was the norm. It led to the anticipation that true conversion experiences would conform to such a pattern. This was true for all, whether they emanated from a covenant home or not.

Bushnell assessed the influence of the half-way covenant and

41. Atwater, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the Great Awakening on the nurture of covenant children in this way:

Under this half way covenant, and probably in part because of it, practical religion fell into a state of great debility. The churches lost their spirituality, and had well nigh lost the idea of spiritual life itself; when at length the Great Revival, under Whitefield and Edwards, inaugurated and brought up to its highest intensity the new era of individualism — the same overwrought, misapplied scheme of personal experience in religion, which has continued until the present day. It is a religion that begins explosively, raises high frames, carries little or no expansion, and after the campaign is over, subsides into a torpor. Considered as a distinct era, introduced by Edwards, and extended and caricatured by his contemporaries, it has one great merit, and one great defect. The merit is that it displaced an era of dead formality, and brought in the demand of a truly supernatural experience. The defect is, that it has cast a type of religious individualism, intense beyond any former example. It makes nothing of the family and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace. It takes every man as if he had existed alone; presumes that he is unreconciled to God until he has undergone some sudden and explosive experience in adult years, or after the age of reason; demands that experience, and only when it is reached, allows the subject to be an heir of life.⁴²

Bushnell's book received favorable reviews in some Presbyterian circles. Charles Hodge, in reviewing the book, concurred with Bushnell's views that parental nurture was the great means that God had provided for the salvation of the children of the church. While recognizing the natural depravity of children and of their need of regeneration, Hodge observed:

But what we think is plainly taught in Scripture, what is reasonable in itself, and confirmed by the experience of the church, is, that early, assiduous and faithful religious culture of the young, especially by believing parents, is the great means of their salvation. A

42. Bushnell, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

child is born in a Christian family, its parents recognize it as belonging to God and included in his covenant. In full faith that the promise extends to their children as well as to themselves, they dedicate their child to him in baptism. From its earliest infancy it is the object of tender solicitude, and the subject of many believing prayers. The spirit which reigns around it is the spirit, not of the world but of true religion.... He is constantly taught that he stands in a peculiar relation to God, as being included in his covenant and baptized in his name; that he has in virtue of that relation a right to claim God as his Father, Christ as his Saviour and the Holy Ghost as his sanctifier; and assured that God will recognize that claim and receive him as his child, if he is faithful to his baptismal vows. The child thus trained grows up in the fear of God; his earliest experiences are more or less religious; he keeps aloof from open sins; strives to keep his conscience clear in the sight of God, and to make the divine will the guide of his conduct. When he comes to maturity, the nature of the covenant of grace is fully explained to him, he intelligently and deliberately assents to it, publicly confesses himself to be a worshipper and follower of Christ, and acts consistently with his engagements. This is no fancy sketch. Such an experience is not uncommon in actual life. It is obvious that in such cases it must be difficult both for the person himself and for those around him, to fix on the precise period when he passed from death unto life.... What we contend for then, is, that this is the appointed, the natural, the normal and ordinary means by which the children of believers are made truly the children of God. And consequently this is the means which should be principally relied upon, and employed, and that the saving conversion of our children should in this way be looked for and expected.⁴³

... to be continued. ●

43. Charles Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," *Biblical Repository and Princeton Review*, vol. XIX, no. 3 (October 1847), Art. III, pp. 509, 510.

Book Reviews

Romans: Exposition of Chapter 12, Christian Conduct, by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. (Carlyle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000.) Pp.xi-513. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

As most people know, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was formerly a medical doctor in Wales, but entered the ministry in 1938. From that date to his retirement in 1968, he was engaged in the ministry in Westminster Chapel in London, first as a co-worker with G. Campbell Morgan, and then, after Morgan retired, the sole pastor. It was his custom to go through entire books of the Bible or sections of books. Later, these sermons he preached were printed and are still being printed.

This book is part of a series on the important book of Romans. This is the twelfth volume in the series, something which indicates the extensive treatment given to each verse, chapter, and epistle. (Lloyd-Jones has eight volumes on the Epistle to the Ephesians.) The first chapter of this volume is the 297th sermon on the book. The present volume on chapter

12 includes 85 sermons that Lloyd-Jones preached on this chapter. Ten sermons were devoted to verses 1 & 2.

Lloyd-Jones' sermons held those to whom he spoke enthralled, and these weekly meetings attracted thousands. Reading the sermons, one can understand why. They are very interesting, delivered in a very conversational style, full of anecdotes and stories, and containing many practical insights into Christian living. Frequently, the book will provide one with exegetical insights that are interesting, helpful, and significant. One such interesting discussion is his critique of contemporary worship in connection with his exposition of verse 2.

There is a second way of being conformed to this world in one's thinking, and this is found even in the realm of evangelism. It is very subtle. The apostle's exhortation, remember, means: Do not allow yourself to be controlled by the outlook and the thinking of this world, apart

from Christ and without the Spirit. What, then, about a kind of evangelism which says, "Modern men and women no longer like preaching and long services, but they do like films. So don't preach, especially don't preach long sermons, but show films." What about that? The world says, "We like everything to be bright and breezy. We don't like solemnity. We don't like too much seriousness."

So what about an evangelism which says: "Well now, that's what the world likes. It likes colour and glamour and a lot of singing. It doesn't like too much reasoning but it does like stories and illustrations, so let's give people that." Is not this conforming to the world? The moment you allow the world — men and women without the Spirit and without Christ — the moment you set them up as a standard, and not the truth itself as revealed, then, I say, you have already violated this principle.

But the extensive treatment of the text and the style Lloyd-Jones used also fills the book with much irrelevant material, which, by no stretch of the imagination, can be gleaned

from the text itself. One example is Lloyd-Jones' treatment of the condemnation of Galileo by the Roman Catholic Church in connection with his exposition of 12:1, 2. It seems sometimes as if the text only provided a biblical platform to discuss whatever Lloyd-Jones wanted to discuss and whatever he thought might interest the listener or be of some practical help to him.

This rather cavalier treatment of Scripture is dangerous. The people of God come together to hear Christ speak to them, for the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd, is the only voice that will feed them, lead them, comfort them, and sustain them in their weary pilgrimage. But Christ's word is objectively in the Scriptures. If the minister of the gospel is to be the mouthpiece of Christ, he must expound the Scriptures. He must show, at every turn of the exegesis, that what he says is Christ's word in the text he is expounding. To fail to do that is to introduce the word of man in the place of the word of Christ.

Sad to say, in his commentary Lloyd-Jones opens the door of the church to the entire charismatic movement. He does this by spending no fewer than ten

chapters on verses 5-8 of Roman 12, and in these chapters insisting on special signs of the presence of the Spirit in extraordinary ways. His thesis is stated on page 22:

I am one of those who believes that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is something distinct and separate from regeneration, and I am deeply concerned lest that great doctrine should get into disrepute because of muddled, unscriptural teaching with regard to speaking in tongues.

But although Lloyd-Jones repudiates speaking in tongues, he insists on special signs of the Spirit. He seems to want to prove his point by all kinds of stories of events that were supposed to have happened, including even a resurrection from the dead. There is a sad contradiction here as well. Lloyd-Jones insists that one must formulate his theology, yet he bases the important doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit on events that took place, especially in revivals. He warns against denying history itself when the frequently bizarre happenings at revivals are denied as taking place by the work of the Spirit.

Yes, Lloyd-Jones supports revivals. In fact, a great deal of his ministry centered in the hope and prayer that God would send revival to the church. So indeed there has been the closest connection between revivals and the charismatic movement. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that not a hair's breadth separates revivalism from the charismatic movement. That is to be expected. If the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation departs from His ordinary way of working irresistibly but gradually, powerfully, but like the still small voice that Elijah heard, always bringing about a daily struggle with sin in the lives of God's people — if the Spirit departs from this way and resorts to special manifestations of His presence in bizarre happenings and special signs, then one indeed separates the baptism of the Spirit from regeneration. This is precisely the teaching of the charismatics. Martyn Lloyd-Jones knew it, and he openly advocated the errors of this increasingly influential heresy.

The author does point out a grave danger in revivals, a danger with which our seminary is able to identify and which

brought a chuckle to me when I read it. He writes: "When an intelligent young man is converted I can almost predict that he will very soon be assuming that he is meant to be a preacher. Or he may feel that he must go into full-time work. He says,

'It's no use my going on any longer as a school-teacher or in business or anything else, every Christian must be in full-time service.'"

I presume further volumes will follow on the important epistle of Romans. ■

Truth For Life: A Devotional Commentary on the Epistle of James, by John Blanchard. Webster, New York: Evangelical Press USA, 2003. Pp. vii-404. \$16.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

In many ways this is a fine commentary on the *Epistle of James*. The author's title accurately states that this is a devotional commentary. The author's writing style is pleasing, nicely worded, and easy to read. The style is not at all cluttered with the technical language of hermeneutics (rules for Bible exposition). This means that the commentary, though the author works from the Greek, can profitably be used for personal and family devotions as well as to prepare one for a Bible Study Society.

An example of the author's style is as follows:

We need to carry this same

lofty conception of our Saviour into our evangelism, too. When a friend of mine was still a young preacher he was given a piece of advice that I have never heard bettered; "Young man, whenever you preach, be sure that you do two things — lift the Saviour high and lay the sinner low." That advice was never more relevant than now. Some evangelism seems to me to run the risk of suggesting that there are ways in which a sinner can bring himself into the position where he will be acceptable to the Saviour, and then of bringing the Lord down in order to make him accessible to the sinner, so that one is eventually presented with the suggestion that two equals should come to an agreement. Beware of anything that remotely smacks of that kind of thing! Lift the Saviour high! Speak of his glory, his majesty, and his

power, as well as of his mercy, love and grace. Then lay the sinner low. Show him that he is not just unhappy or unfulfilled, but “dead in ...transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) and in need of a miracle if he is ever to receive eternal life (pp. 12-13).

Blanchard finds the theme of the Epistle in chapter two, verses 14-26, where James speaks of the relationship between faith and works. This reviewer is of the conviction that the theme of the Epistle of James is summed in chapter 1:26-27. Blanchard’s interpretation of the passage, however, is right on target. The author faces head-on the question whether the passage is in conflict with Romans 3:28. After he writes, “Now if Paul and James *are* in conflict then the whole of the New Testament is in ruins, and the authority and unity of the Bible destroyed,” Blanchard demonstrates conclusively that there is no conflict at all between those two passages (cf. pp. 159-175). The advocates of the heresy of justification by faith and works would do well to ponder what Blanchard has to say in the two chapters cited above.

The author clearly and sharply refutes the heresy of Arminianism (cf. p. 64). Blanchard also clearly affirms the doctrine of God’s sovereign predestination. Writes he, “Remove that truth from the Bible and you are left with a haphazard jumble of religious words; recognize it in the Bible and you have a firm basis for everything else you read” (p. 122). Blanchard continues by explaining that predestination is “incontestable,” “unconventional,” and “unconditional” (cf. pp. 122-126).

The commentary is not without faults. Blanchard strongly affirms the error of common grace by misinterpreting the common, so-called “proof texts” (Ps. 145:9 & 16; I Tim. 4:10; Matt. 5:45). The author does this while interpreting James 4:4-6! This would mean, if Blanchard’s view were correct, that God is gracious to His and our enemies whom the saints may not love, and that God, at one and the same time, is gracious to the proud and resists the proud!

Blanchard also incorrectly interprets James 5:14-15 to refer to physical healing. This reviewer would point out that the AV translation of the Greek

verb in verse 15 is correct. The text reads, "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick...." The text does not read, "shall heal the sick." As a matter of fact,

the text continues by speaking of the forgiveness of the sins of the sick person.

With these *caveats* we recommend the commentary. ■

Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ, by John Bunyan (1628-1688). Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004 (first published in 1681, and republished in Bunyan's *Works*, Volume 1, Banner of Truth, 1991). 230 pp. (paper). \$8.99. [Reviewed by Barry Gritters.]

The Calvinistic Puritan John Bunyan, best known for his *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote a fine exposition of John 6:37, which the Banner of Truth has recently republished in a small paperback. If the reader is hesitant to pick up a Puritan work because of expected tedium, he may find himself happily surprised at the sound exegesis, pointed applications, and non-tedious reading. For a work on this one verse ("All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out"), 200 pages is not too much.

John Bunyan's interest was a defense of a Calvinistic interpretation of the text over

against Arminianism, exalting God's sovereign grace in election and salvation. The book is full of memorable lines of powerful defense of the Reformed faith, easily understood by all believers.

More so, Bunyan was determined to explain the gospel to troubled sinners, especially sinners troubled by the possibility that they are not God's children. He succeeds powerfully. No arm-chair theologian (he spent most of twelve years in prison for his faithfulness in the gospel ministry), Bunyan knew the struggles in the battle against sin, doubt, the great Adversary.

Bunyan is wise in his pastoral applications. He avoids the temptation to ignore the causes of doubt. Although doubts are sown by the devil, there are reasons for doubt that require repentance and sorrow. In a pastoral manner, the sinner

is brought to comfort in the way of a confession of his own sin and real need for Jesus Christ. The “big-bellied promises” of God come with full force on pages 177ff., where ten causes are given, in unforgettable language, why some should “be so lamentably cast down and buffeted with temptations.”

It may be for several causes.

1. Some that are coming to Christ cannot be persuaded, until the temptation comes, that they are so vile as the Scripture says they are. True, they see so much of their wretchedness as to drive them to Christ. But there is an over and above of wickedness which they see not.... 2. Some that are coming to Christ are too much affected with their own graces, and too little taken with Christ’s Person. Therefore God, to take them off from doting upon their own jewels, and that they might look more to the Person, undertaking, and merits of His Son, plunges them into the ditch by temptations.... Yes, God often, even for this thing, takes as it were our graces from us, and so leaves us almost completely to ourselves and to the tempter, that we may learn not to love the picture more

than the Person of His Son....

3. Perhaps you have been given too much to judging your brother, to condemning your brother....

Of most interest to this reviewer was the expressed desire of the publisher that the book have wide readership because it is another salvo against the enemy hyper-Calvinism. The opening statement of the “Publisher’s Foreword” notes: “The Baptist preacher and theologian, Andrew Fuller (1745-1815), was raised under a ministry which had become unbalanced due to its Hyper-Calvinistic emphases.” The blurb on the back cover has Andrew Fuller finding help from this work to “set his denomination free from the grip of hyper-Calvinism.”

Because the Protestant Reformed Churches are often charged as being hyper-Calvinist, I read with greatest interest to find whether what Bunyan would say opposed PRC theology. But there is little, if anything, in the book, that does not harmonize well with Protestant Reformed teaching. A distinction between conditional and unconditional promises will make a Protestant Reformed reader

sit up carefully. An apparent inconsistency at the very end of the book that has one “coming to Christ” but not yet “come to Christ” and far from the Spirit of regeneration will leave one bewildered for a moment. But of a “well-meant offer of salvation” that has God desiring to save everyone because Christ is available to them all, there is nothing.

There is a hyper-Calvinism about, which denies that faith may be called for in the unregenerate, that denies that the gospel may call to Jesus Christ those who are not elect,

that denies that faith is the *duty* of unbelievers. Against that theology, Bunyan’s exposition of the passage is a strong and effective counter-measure. Reformed and Protestant Reformed preachers will grow from a reading of the book.

The Banner of Truth editors or members, perplexed as they may be by this positive review in the *Standard Bearer*, are invited to point out what, if anything, in PRC theology is effectively countered by Bunyan’s *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*. My invitation is sincere and well-meant. ■

Light for the City: Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty, by Lester De Koster. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004. 139pp. (paper). \$20.00. [Reviewed by Barry Gritters.]

Calvin scholar Lester De Koster has produced a small work whose thesis, apparent in the title, comes out more clearly in his “Forewarning,” as he puts it. First he lets Calvin speak: “It certainly is the part of the Christian man to ascend higher than merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul.”

Then De Koster, rhetorically:

“*Merely*” the soul? Yes, so he said. And “higher” than soul-salvation? His word, too. *Higher!* **To build, say, community called “city”?!?**

Preached from off the pulpits for which the Church is divinely made and sustained, God’s biblical Word takes incarnation in human selves and behavior, creating the community long known in the West as the City. Calvinist pulpits implanted the Word even now flourishing in the

great democratic achievements of the Western world (emphasis is De Koster's).

Lester De Koster contends that Calvin's goal was not church building, but City building. He speaks of "Calvin's courageous determination to preaching into a faction-ridden chaos the lineaments of the City" (p. 21). He bemoans the "absence of adequate, on-going pulpit nourishment." And he asks,

Doesn't the citizenry—while its presumed 'leadership' looks busily some other way—seem to wait well-nigh breathless upon the appearance of another 'Calvin' borne upon a tide of divine circumstance? (p. 22).

No one writes quite like DeKoster, professor emeritus of speech at Calvin College, and former editor of the Christian Reformed Church periodical, the *Banner*. Using the English language in ways that delight, stretching the rules of grammar like few others would be permitted by editors to do, DeKoster will keep you reading. Also because it's about Calvin. And preaching. And history.

De Koster quotes Marx, let's Cromwell speak via Carlyle, reaches back to St. Benedict in the sixth century, and reflects on the opinions of obscure historians of the early 1900s, all of which gives color and flavor to this new study of the man God mastered for the preservation of His church.

Reading lines like:

Oh yes, he was up to it—
Erasmus, move over!

and then,

Calvin remembered vividly every page he ever read, Beza says. And once, in the boot camp he thought his first Geneva experience, he totally humiliated a reckless ex-monk named Bolsec by quoting perfectly from memory, to his purposes, Church Fathers his critic had tried to use against him. Bolsec never forgot, nor forgave, and fathered a school of Calvinvituperation, which has to this day its own history (p. 27).

made me put up my feet and settle in for the short 130 pages.

De Koster got his thesis half right: The power of God to create what He designed is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus

Christ. No other instrument has the power that the preached Word has. Nothing is like preaching as the dynamo to produce what God wills to form. This is Calvin. It's also Scripture.

The critical other half of DeKoster's thesis is unconvincing, although it is popular these days.

The thinking runs like this (for more detail, see my article elsewhere in this issue on diaconal ministries): God's ultimate goal in the world *in human history* is not the gathering of His church but the reformation of the world. The cities of the world will become the "city of God." Politically, culturally, socially, they must (and will) be transformed. (Favorite text among those who reason this way is Jeremiah 29:7, where Jeremiah calls the people of God to "seek the peace [shalom] of the city," that is, of Babylon.) The instrument by which this transformation will take place is the church. Through her preaching and diaconal ministries (thus, the emphasis on diaconal ministries in mission theory today; although DeKoster's emphasis is on preaching), communities will be made

new and be the pleasure of God.

His argument is neither Calvin nor Scripture.

First, the alternative of "merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul" is not "to build community called 'city.'" The "highest aspiration of wisdom, old and new and divine," according to DeKoster, is the *City!* (p. xv). But Calvin did not believe that the "City of God" Augustine described was Geneva Christianized, or Los Angeles Christianized (p. xv). It's a simple logical fallacy to claim that one either preaches a "crusadist 'gospel'" or a "word of sermon and city" and that the alternative to offering Jesus as "savior" is preaching him as Lord who creates earthly cities (see pp. 44, 45).

Worse, DeKoster denigrates (we hope inadvertently) the church, beloved body of Christ, by elevating the "city" to the status of the goal of the church's work. "...for John Calvin the Church is in the world to create the social structure long called *City*" (p. 66). Jesus is not as interested in His bride as He is in the City. This is commonly done in Reformed circles today, where the church is considered merely (!) a "sign" of the king-

dom. So the church of the nineteenth century, in the face of Marxism, should have promoted social justice “in lieu of ‘Are you saved, brother?’” (p. 56). And

For John Calvin, Jesus came to live, to die, and to rise again to take rule in human history as King, for the creation through the Word declared by the pulpits, of “a model community” we’ve been calling “City” and the “Kingdom,” which is illus-

trated in the world of the West.

That Calvin taught extensively regarding civil life, and intended Geneva to be a city where the Word of God was honored and King Jesus acknowledged cannot be denied. To go from there, however, to making the *City* the goal of Jesus’ coming, death, and resurrection, and that according to Calvin, is a different matter altogether. ■

The Pastor in Prayer, by C.H. Spurgeon. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004 (Based on the second edition, London, 1893). 184 pp. (cloth). \$15.99. [Reviewed by Barry Gritters.]

My first acquaintance with Spurgeon’s *The Pastor in Prayer* was in the early years of my ministry when I was first looking for books on pastoral prayer. Pilgrim Publications of Pasadena, Texas was re-issuing all of the sermons and works of Spurgeon, this “choice selection of C.H. Spurgeon’s Sunday Morning Prayers” included (1971). One copy made its way

to the used book shelf at Bakers, where I snatched it up and read a prayer a week late each Saturday evening, taking notes as I went, to avoid the pitfalls of repetition or stale clichés in the congregational prayers.

Banner of Truth brings out a new edition, re-typeset, and with a new appendix from Spurgeon’s *Lectures to My Students*.

The Reformed pastor will be enriched by Spurgeon’s gift of prayer. The elder who will be required to lead the worship in the pastor’s absence will be helped here. This man who, at

the youthful age of twenty-one, was able to communicate his early sermons in a stunning and colorful way, was also a master at using biblical language and bringing out biblical figures of speech in his (these transcribed) prayers. The reader who is uncomfortable with addressing God in the vernacular “you” and “your” will be put at ease with Spurgeon’s King James English. The reader who is not will have no problem with the old English.

The twenty-six prayers, each about five or six pages, are rich in devotional piety; in expressions of God’s sovereignty; in hearty confessions of sin—so rare in prayers today (“we are not willing to confess our own sinfulness until Thou dost show it to us...”); in petitions that make the believer eager for heaven (“our spirit triumphs in the anticipation of the time when all thine enemies shall be destroyed, and death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire, and God shall be all in all”), and in obvious sympathetic unity with the people under his care (“Grant to Thy dear children who are by any means depressed because they feel the serpent at their heel, that they may bless the dear name of Him whose heel was bruised before, but who in

the very bruising broke the serpent’s head”). The pastor could do worse than read Spurgeon’s congregational prayers.

Regularly, Pastor Spurgeon would pray for their “College,” the pastor-training school.

Let every brother sent out be clothed with power, and may the many sons of this church that have been brought up at her side, preach with power today. It is sweet to think of hundreds of voices of our sons this day declaring the name of Christ. Blessed is the church that hath her quiver full of them, she shall speak with her adversaries in the gate....

Often, Spurgeon asked for blessings on the Orphanage, for the colporteurs “going from house to house,” for missions in foreign lands and “missions in the heathendom at home” (remember mid-nineteenth century London), for “plenteous prosperity to all the hosts of His Israel,” and that the Lord would graciously “gather in the unconverted”:

And, Lord, gather in the unconverted: our prayers can never conclude without

pleading for the dead in sin. Oh, quicken them, Savior! and if any one here has a little daughter that lieth dead in sin, like Jairus may they plead with Jesus to come and lay His hand upon her that she may live.

My estimation is that Spurgeon was at his best when he was bringing the minds of the people before the glorious throne of God, and when he was leading them to a godly confession of sin.

We have looked upon every act of our lives and desired that in all things we might be conformed to Thy will, and Thou knowest this makes us walk very tenderly at times, and with much brokenness of spirit before Thee, because the more we look into our lives, the more we see to lament; and in proportion as

Thou dost make us holy, in that very proportion do we spy our unholiness, and find nests of sin where we never dreamt that the loathsome things had been. Father, cleanse us from secret faults. Purge us! Thou hast purged us with hyssop once, and we are clean; now wash us with water, even as Thou, blessed Jesus, didst wash Thy disciples' feet, and make us clean every whit, that we may be Thy priests and kings, sanctified wholly; and make us a people zealous of good works.

His "Our Public Prayer" (appendix 2 from his *Lectures to my Students*) is a fine read about congregational prayer, as well as (almost incidentally) a beautiful defense of *preaching* as the heart of the church's worship. ■

Puritan Papers, ed. by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J.I. Packer. Foreword by W. Robert Godfrey. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 4 volumes (paper), 2000-2004. [Reviewed by Mitchell Dick.]

The rumor of their demise is greatly exaggerated. Puritans

live. And it is the aim of the recently published set of books called "Puritan Papers" to prolong and to promote their life, and theirs, to give life to many.

Yes, nothing less than the revival of the Puritans, and the reformation, and revival of

churches and Christians today through the writings of the Puritans, is the goal of the Papers.

In and through its Papers, P & R aims, in fact, at the same thing as do the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conferences. These annual conferences, ongoing, have been held by friends of the Puritans for over fifty years in the Westminster Chapel in London. "Puritan Papers" is comprised of the papers written for these conferences. It is assumed that P & R is sufficiently convicted of the worthiness of the Puritans to continue to add to its present four volumes of Papers until all or most of the Conference papers are included.

At the beginning of my review of these Papers, I want to say that I have never been a friend of the Puritans. This was not because I was an enemy. It was not because I actually listened to mockery of their, for example, being kill-joys, and hating bear-baiting and all of that, not because it gave pain to the bear but because "it gave pleasure to the spectators." Mostly it was because of lack of acquaintance.

Now, having acquainted myself more than ever with those people called "Puritans," and

that, with the help of the Papers, I can actually say that I consider them friends.

Not the greatest of friends, yet. Not that I agree with everything my new-found friends teach. Not that I would say that each and every one who has been called a Puritan I could drink or do theology with or even talk about without roundly condemning. Not that I would recommend them as J. I. Packer did so glowingly in his foreword to the 1958 Conference where he wrote "the Puritans were strongest just where Protestants today are weakest, and their writings can give us more real help than those of any other body of Christian teachers, past or present, since the days of the apostles."

But generally, from what I have read, I like them. We are on the same page, I can see, and the Papers have sharpened my vision. We are friends, Puritans and I, desiring to promote truth and godliness, life in Christ, and the revival of what in Christendom and our own walk with God is dead.

Having said that, I do want to suggest that P & R could have helped and could still help its readership with a better introduction to the Puritans. That

would have helped me become better acquainted with these folks called Puritans. It would help others also. Now I know a bit about their history and identity. Prof. Hanko and the seminary taught us some of this. And Peter Lewis and his "The Genius of Puritanism," and various dictionaries and articles introducing Puritans are out there. But why not have something in the Papers themselves? This would especially be helpful, seems to me, in order to explain why the papers and Papers included essays about men like John Calvin (the 1964 Conference focused on him), Charles Spurgeon, and Abraham Kuyper. Whenever I have thought of Puritans, I thought sixteenth and seventeenth century, England, and of those who were concerned that the Reformation had not gone far enough then and there. I thought of Perkins, and Sibbes, and Baxter, and Burroughs, and Owen, and Goodwin, and the like. But Calvin...a Puritan? And Kuyper?

Which suggests to me this other suggestion: after identifying just what is the Puritanism that is the substance of Papers, perhaps P & R could have someone write for a future volume an insightful essay showing that

from the Puritans, and from them especially, we ought to be reading, as Packer suggests, in order that there be reformation and revival in the churches today. If this is not proven, there will be some, I dare say, at least in the Dutch tradition, who will continue reading only or primarily continental Calvinists, and be more concerned with Dordt than with Westminster, with Bavinck than with Goodwin. Friends who may be friends indeed, and friends who stand to learn something from friends yet unknown, will never have the pleasure such friendships bring. And certain things and persons and doctrines dead that Puritans might have revived, might, because the Puritans themselves were never read, have to wait till the last trump.

About the content of the Papers, I would write not too much, but just enough to tell why I am finding among Puritans friends. In the four volumes printed to date there is a potpourri of subjects. Here's a sampling.

Scripture and the Interpretation Thereof

Puritans attempted to take every thought captive to, and to develop every doctrine in har-

mony with, the Word of God. This was because of their belief that the Bible and the Bible alone is the standard of doctrine, life, and worship. Packer, in this connection, has an informative essay on "The Puritans as Interpreters of Scripture" (vol. 1, p.191). And a sampling of Puritan exegesis is given in that same volume, which treats "Thomas Shepard's Parable of the Ten Virgins." Here some of the strengths and excesses of Puritan exegesis are revealed, as well as the preeminent concern that the truth be *applied*, that Scripture be known for all its "uses."

Election Key

The Puritan doctrine of election is treated in an essay in vol. 1 by Iain Murray. Murray is bold to say that *the reason* for the neglect and even spurning of the Puritan writings is their doctrine of election, and the place and value the Puritans give to it (vol. 1, p. 4), and that "the Puritans regarded a denial of the doctrine of election as an overthrow of the whole nature of the gospel" (p. 9). Evidence of the concern of the Puritans to have every truth of Scripture lived out, practically, among the believers, is Murray's quote of

the Puritan Anthony Burgess on the doctrine of election. Burgess writes: "This truth (of election) may be handled either sinfully or profitably; sinfully as when it is treated on only to satisfy curiosity, and to keep up a mere barren speculative dispute.... This point of election ... is not to be agitated in a verbal and contentious way, but in a saving way, to make us tremble and to set us upon a more diligent and close striving with God in prayer, and all other duties.... This doctrine, if any other, should produce sobriety, holy fear, and trembling" (p. 5). Though no mention is made of certain related and controversial matters such as reprobation or the different lapsarian positions, nor how heirs of the Puritans have come up with and do reconcile theories such as the free offer of the gospel with the doctrine of election, this emphasis, this fact that the Puritans regarded election as that "golden thread" of theology warms a Reformed man's heart.

Covenants before Cocceius

Of interest to the PRC and Reformed readers is E.F. Kevan's study of John Ball (ch. 4, vol. 1). Ball, Kevan argues,

arrayed "all theology under a system of covenants, anticipating Cocceius (1603-69) and the Dutch Federal School of Reformed Theology." Especially interesting to this reviewer was Kevan's discussion of Ball's teaching on Christ in the old covenant, and the law, and Christ, and grace.

Sande...what?

The 1967 Conference (vol. 4) was devoted to treating the theme "Profitable for Doctrine and Reproof." At this conference Martyn Lloyd-Jones considered a thing called "Sandemanianism" and the controversy in the eighteenth century that arose about it and the nature of saving faith. One wonders if there are not lessons to be applied from this controversy to the present controversy raging in Reformed and Presbyterian circles over that matter on which a church stands or falls, namely, justification by faith alone.

Preaching

Preaching and Puritans is addressed in different papers found in vols. 2 and 3 of Papers. One essay sets forth the place of preaching in Reformed worship, and cites the Westminster Di-

rectory for Public Worship as reflective of what the Puritans believed and taught. So when the Directory teaches that "Preaching of the word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him" (vol. 2, p. 166), we are to see the Puritans here. And we, preachers and parishioners alike, and because we believe this to be the very Word of God, ought to tremble.

Church and Worship

Two articles in the Papers deal with a matter crucial to the cause of the Puritans—that of worship. Both Packer and Murray consider the Puritan approach to worship, the regulative principle, and things controversial and vital in two fine papers (vol. 3) over which we today do well to pore. One question I come away with is this: is the *Puritan* regulative principle *really* the regulative principle of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 96)? And another: is there *anything* of Cranmer (who argued against the Puritan position, e.g.,

vol. 3, p. 35) to which we do well to give heed in the interests of steering between the ever-threatening Scylla (legalism), and Charybdis (antinomianism)?

In the 1965 Conference, entitled "Approaches to Reformation," in which are papers on Zwingli, Luther, Cranmer, Knox, and the Anabaptists, Lloyd-Jones gives a very good critique of "Ecclesiola in Ecclesia," a phenomenon of "churches within churches," which phenomenon appeared at the time of the Reformation and later, as a kind of "quasi" or "para-church" form of reformation. This critique is instructive and a warning for our day, in which everyone and his disgruntled brother is doing what is right in his own ecclesiastical eyes.

Real Christianity and Assurance

Several of the articles of Papers reflect the concern of the Puritans that professing believers believe *really*. In other words, there is the concern that we Christians be not hypocrites, but that we Christians be positively, fruitfully, and growing godly.

Examples are these:

"William Guthrie and the Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ" (vol. 1).

"The Puritan Conscience" (an excellent article by Packer, vol. 2).

"Knowledge—False and True" (by Lloyd-Jones, vol. 2).

Aspects of the Puritan doctrine of the assurance of believers are set forth in Packer's essay entitled "The Witness of the Spirit: The Puritan Teaching" (vol. 1). In this, Packer analyzes especially the works of Thomas Brooks, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Sibbes.

Puritans, according to Packer, speak of assurance at one time as a fruit of faith, sometimes as a quality of faith. "They talk both of assurance growing out of faith and of faith growing into assurance. Assurance is to them faith full grown and come of age; there can be faith without assurance, but where assurance is present, it is present as an aspect of faith, organically related to it, not as something distinct and separable from it" (vol. 1, p. 18.). Faith contains a measure of assurance within itself from the outset, but it is not "settled and well-grounded" assurance, which comes only as

faith is tried and ripens and is strengthened by conflict, doubt, and fluctuations of feeling. "Full assurance," as Packer interprets the Puritans, "is a rare blessing; even among adults it is a great and precious privilege, not indiscriminately bestowed." It is even the case, according to the Puritan Thomas Brooks (as quoted by Packer), that "assurance is a mercy too good for most men's hearts. God will only give it to his best and dearest friends." And "Assurance is the beauty and top of a Christian's glory in this life. It is usually attended with the strongest joy, with the sweetest comforts, and with the greatest peace. It is a ... crown that few earn...." "Assurance is meat for strong men; few babes, if any, are able to bear it, and digest it."

We Reformed would take issue with several of these statements re the doctrine of assurance. Peter does when he says on behalf of all true believers "we believe and are sure" (John 6:69). Our Catechism does when it teaches that assurance is of the essence of faith (Lord's Day 7), and not just something that comes along only after a while, and after much trial and conflict

and even doubt, and then perhaps only to a few.

We must take care, however, to assess the complete Puritan doctrine in the light, first of all, of their mission of missions: *religion true—in heart, in life, in Church, in the world*. Against *false* assurance Puritans preached, and to have professing believers "give diligence to make their calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10) was their repeated exhortation. It was their zeal for this *true* religion that led, I would suggest, to several errant conclusions and statements. But then, it is interesting to note that the Puritans spoke of assurance with pastoral heart and aims. They were concerned that those *lacking* assurance be assured, and to lead the doubters along the way of gladness and joy. This was one of the stated purposes of Guthrie's classic "The Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ." It is why "joy" (believe it or not!) was considered by Puritans a wonderful fruit of the believer's life. It is why the Puritans considered it a danger and sin to fail to rejoice (cf. J. Gwyn-Thomas' essay, "The Puritan Doctrine of Christian Joy," vol. 2, chapter 7).

This twofold Puritan approach to assurance is reflected,

I believe, among the Westminster divines, who themselves made the distinction, as did the Puritans, between the “being” and the “well being” of faith, and also spoke of different degrees and strengths of faith (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 14). Something of this same approach, I suggest, is what we need to take. To comfort God’s people. To guard against the the danger of merely speculative religion. In our own backyard. In our own heart.

Revival

Though the first Puritans would have rejected, song and dance, Finney’s revivals and revivalism (cf. vol. 4, “Finney on Revival”), yet Puritanism was all for revival—teaching and promoting the fact and necessity of unusual and powerful effusions and workings of the Spirit, during which the Church is roused from spiritual slumber and apostasy. Packer, writing in vol. 2 on “Edwards and the Theology of Revival,” contends that “a theology of revival” is “perhaps, the most important single contribution that Edwards has to make to evangelical thinking today” (p. 30). Lloyd-Jones (vol. 1, p. 295ff.) quotes with

approval Jonathan Edwards saying “It may be observed that from the fall of man to our day, the work of Redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable communications of the Spirit of God” (p. 313). And “though there be a more constant influence of God’s Spirit always in some degree attending His ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work always has been by remarkable effusions at special seasons of mercy” (p. 313, 14).

There are dangers here. In the first place, biblical warrant for revivals and seeking revivals of this sort is, as it seems to this reviewer, lacking. Secondly, it seems to me there is a kind of carnality in this whole business, this whole pursuit of extraordinary revival. A carnality, and a lack of faith. Kind of like the ones who refused to believe except they were given signs. Or the present-day charismaniacs, whose theology is rolling on the floor and out the door. Does not faith see, look for, delight (in Scripture’s light) in wonderfully *ordinary* fruit of the Spirit, such as repentance and faith and godliness,

good works, and joy, which is produced through God's ordained wonderfully *ordinary* ordinances such as preaching and teaching and the administration of the sacraments? Third, there is the danger here, in this promotion of revivalism, to "set free" the Spirit of Christ Himself, from the doctrine of Christ. This is apparent in Lloyd-Jones, when he argues (citing the life of George Whitefield as an example) that there can be revival without reformation, and a working of the Spirit upon the soul apart from and before a working of truth upon the mind. It is, in fact, Arminian, accord-

ing to Lloyd-Jones, to put such "conditions" and limitations (viz., the knowledge of the truth) on the sovereign working of God (p. 311).

Dangers, yes. But with the help of our Puritan friends, a sharpening. Puritans for true and needed revival, for the quickening of things like new men, old institutions, seminaries, pulpits, and ploughmen. Every day. In the Word. On our knees. Standing Christian. And walking. Reformed and ought to be Reforming. In these latter days.

P & R, bring on more Papers! ■

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