

# Protestant *Reformed* Theological *Journal*

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# Editor's Notes

Welcome to the pages of the November 2008 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. We trust that you will find the articles in this issue to be informative and edifying.

Rev. Angus Stewart continues his in-depth study of Calvin's conception of the covenant in his series entitled "John Calvin's Integrated Covenant Theology." Rev. Stewart's focus in this installment is on the blessings of the covenant, as delineated by Calvin. Rev. Stewart anticipates contributing two more articles before bringing his very worthwhile series to a close.

Dispensationalism is a real and present threat in our day. This heresy is widely promoted, and many—including many church leaders—are ill-equipped to respond to this false teaching. Although dispensationalism is primarily an aberrant eschatological view, there is an array of significant errors that are associated with the movement. Behind all its other errors, however, is dispensationalism's flawed hermeneutic. It is this fundamental flaw in dispensational theology that Rev. James Laning exposes in the first of two articles from his pen entitled, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism."

In April of this year, the Rev. Eugene Case was guest lecturer at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. Rev. Case presented three very informative lectures on the history of Southern Presbyterianism in the United States. The faculty of PRTS was convinced that the quality and content of these speeches make them worthy of a wider audience. Rev. Case has graciously consented to prepare his speeches for publication in PRTJ. The article printed in this issue is the first of two that together form a survey of the history of the Presbyterian church in the southern United States—the topic of Rev. Case's first speech. The second part of this article will appear, the Lord willing, in the April 2009 issue, with his other speeches to follow.

Prof. Russell Dykstra teaches Church History at PRTS. He has made another foray into the archives of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and discovered a gem. He treats the history and controversy in the PRC, as well as in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and in the Christian Reformed Church, over *handopening*. What is *handopening*? Read Prof. Dykstra's article and find out.

Our colleague Prof. Barrett Gritters teaches Practical Theology. One very important aspect of Practical Theology is the liturgy and worship of the church. And one very important aspect of the church's liturgy and worship is music. In this and in a future article Prof. Grit-

ters treats the important place that music, particularly congregational singing, has in the Reformed churches. He also reminds us of the musical heritage of the Reformation of the sixteenth century and the important teachings of the magisterial Reformers on the subject of church music.

This issue also contains a number of book reviews. The books are significant recent publications, the contents of which are carefully evaluated by our reviewers. Read these critical reviews and be made aware of some of the new titles that are hot off the press. Ministers, seminarians, and lay persons alike will undoubtedly want to add a number of these titles to their own libraries.

We trust that you will find this issue of PRTJ profitable.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

— RLC

## John Calvin's Integrated Covenant Theology (3): The Blessings of the Covenant

Angus Stewart

### Covenant Blessings

As in the previous two articles on Calvin's covenant theology, our point of entry is that section of his *Institutes* in which he most fully treats the covenant (book 2, chapters 10 and 11). For Calvin, the nature of God's covenant, summed in the "very formula of the covenant," determines the blessings of the covenant: "For the Lord always covenanted with his servants thus: 'I will be your God and you will be my people' [Lev. 26:12]. The prophets also commonly explained that life and salvation and the whole of blessedness are embraced in these words" (2.10.8).<sup>1</sup> The context, the reference to the "prophets," and the passages Calvin quotes (Deut. 32:29; Ps. 33:12; 144:15; Hab. 1:12) indicate that these covenant blessings ("life and salvation and the whole of blessedness") are given to Old Testament, and not only New Testament, saints!

In the next paragraph, Calvin proceeds from the nature of the covenant ("the Lord is our God" and "I am...your God" [Ex. 6:7]) to list some of its blessings. Included amongst "an abundance of good things" and "spiritual life" are God's "face" shining upon us, God's "presence" such that He "dwells among us," and "union" with God through "righteousness"; as well as "salvation," "the treasures of his salvation," "everlasting salvation," and "assurance of salvation" (2.10.8).

Similarly, in his commentary on Ezekiel 14:11 and after quoting the covenant formula, Calvin observes,

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1 As in parts 1 and 2, all citations of the *Institutes* are from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) and all citations of Calvin's commentaries are from the 22-volume Baker (repr. 1993) edition.

...it is well to remember what we said elsewhere, that under these words is contained whatever belongs to solid happiness. For if God acknowledges us as his people, we are certain of our salvation...we have nothing else to wish for towards the fullness of all good things and confidence in eternal life, than that God should reckon us among his people (Comm. on Eze. 14:11).

Calvin argues that Jehovah “did not declare that he would be a God to their bodies alone, but especially to their souls” (2.10.8). Nor is He merely our God in time but not in the world to come. He “promised that he would ever be their God. This he did that their hope, not content with present benefits, might be extended to eternity. Many passages show that this characterization of the future life was so understood among [the Old Testament saints]” (2.10.9), passages that Calvin goes on to treat at length (2.10.9-23).

For Calvin, the covenant promise to be our God applies not only to us in body and soul and in this world and the next, but it also applies to our (elect) children. Jehovah declares, “I shall be the God of your seed after you” (Gen. 17:7), for He shows His covenant “beneficence” and “mercy” “to a thousand generations” (Ex. 20:6), according to the promise of the second commandment (2.10.9).<sup>2</sup> Calvin calls Genesis 17:7 “the solemn covenant of the church,” and declares, “this blessing [is] promised in the covenant, that God’s grace shall everlastingly abide in the families of the pious” (2.8.21).

Even in the Old Testament, God’s covenant promise for body and soul, for time and eternity, and for us and our children, was through Jesus Christ, the mediator.<sup>3</sup> Thus Calvin begins the final section of book 2, chapter 10: “There are two remaining points: that the Old Testament fathers (1) had Christ as pledge of their covenant, and (2) put in him all trust of future blessedness” (2.10.23). Since God’s covenant is

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2 The Anabaptists attacked God’s truth by teaching a *carnal* covenant in the Old Testament and a *childless* covenant in the New Testament. The latter is true of all Baptists and the former of, at least, most Baptists in our own day.

3 Calvin emphasizes repeatedly that even in Old Testament days God’s covenant with His people is only through Christ (esp. 2.6; 2.9; see also, e.g., Comms. on Ps. 89:30-33; Isa. 42:6; 49:8; 55:4).

always in Christ, it must be a spiritual covenant. This is “a principle unassailable by any stratagems of the devil,” which Calvin has “boldly established”: “the Old Testament or Covenant that the Lord had made with the Israelites had not been limited to earthly things, but contained a promise of spiritual and eternal life” (2.10.23).

Calvin insightfully notes that Old Testament believers not only looked to Christ but also, thereby, looked to and communicated in the future age: “We must also note this about the holy patriarchs: they so lived under the Old Covenant as not to remain there but ever to aspire to the New, and thus embraced a real share in it” (2.11.10).

The Genevan Reformer summarizes, with approval, part of Augustine's *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* on the Old Testament saints:

...the children of the promise [Rom. 9:8], reborn of God, who have obeyed the commands by faith working through love [Gal. 5:6], have belonged to the New Covenant since the world began. This they did, not in hope of carnal, earthly, and temporal things, but in hope of spiritual, heavenly, and eternal benefits. For they believed especially in the Mediator; and they did not doubt that through him the Spirit was given to them that they might do good, and that they were pardoned whenever they sinned (2.11.10).

This is the conclusion Calvin draws: “It is that very point which I intended to affirm: all the saints whom Scripture mentions as being peculiarly chosen of God from the beginning of the world have shared with us the same blessing unto eternal salvation” (2.11.10).

Even justification by faith alone (by grace alone through Christ alone) is a blessing belonging to “the covenant of the gospel” in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament:

...the Old Testament was established upon the free mercy of God, and was confirmed by Christ's intercession. For the gospel preaching, too, declares nothing else than that sinners are justified apart from their own merit by God's fatherly kindness; and the whole of it is summed up in Christ. Who, then, dares to separate the Jews from Christ, since with them, we hear, was made the covenant of the gospel, the sole

foundation of which is Christ? Who dares to estrange from the gift of free salvation those to whom we hear the doctrine of the righteousness of faith was imparted? Not to dispute too long about something obvious—we have a notable saying of the Lord: “Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad” [John 8:56]. And what Christ there testified concerning Abraham, the apostle shows to have been universal among the believing folk when he says: “Christ remains, yesterday and today and forever” [Heb. 13:8] (2.10.4).

Peter Lillback lists many of the covenant blessings referred to in the writings of Calvin:

The saving benefits found in the covenant include: Christ as redeemer, salvation, eternal life, adoption, redemption, gospel, union with God, eternal salvation, life, blessedness, inheritance, privilege, access to God, reconciliation, pardon, forgiveness of sins, adoption into salvation, regeneration or sanctification, resurrection, and the believer’s future and eternal happiness, all of which is due to God’s covenantal mercy and grace.<sup>4</sup>

As Calvin eloquently puts it, “Since therefore this covenant contains solid and perfect blessedness, it follows that all who are excluded from it are miserable” (Comm. on Isa. 54:10).

### **The “Two Main Parts” of the Covenant**

Calvin often systematizes the blessings of salvation (soteriology) under a covenant scheme, that of the Bible itself in the celebrated prophecy of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. However, as one would expect, given that *Institutes* 2.10-11 deal with the similarities and differences between the Old and New Testaments, the passage from Jeremiah 31 (2.11.7-8) and other Scriptures that allude to it (II Cor. 3 in 2.11.7-8; Heb. 8-10 in 2.11.4; and “the cup of the New Testament in my blood” [Luke 22:20] in 2.11.4) are here treated not

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4 Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2001), pp. 178-179. In his extensive footnotes, Lillback cites as proof various places in Calvin’s literary corpus, especially his *Institutes*.

soteriologically (in terms of the blessings of the covenant) but hermeneutically (in interpreting the comparisons and contrasts between the old and new covenants).

In his commentary on Hebrews 8:8-12, itself quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34, Calvin declares, "There are two main parts in this covenant; the first regards the gratuitous remission of sins; and the other, the inward renovation of the heart" (Comm. on Heb. 8:10). The "two main parts" do not refer to those embraced in the everlasting covenant (the Triune God and His elect people in Christ), nor to Jehovah's work of saving us on the one hand and our calling to live new and holy lives on the other. The "two main parts in this covenant" are the two central covenant blessings of (legal) justification ("I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more") and (organic) regeneration or sanctification ("I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts"), as Calvin states above and goes on to explain (Comm. on Heb. 8:10).

Commenting on the covenant formula in Ezekiel 11:19-20, Calvin refers again to "these two things" (i.e., the covenant blessings of justification and sanctification), this time with a more practical application: the two are inseparable and so those who claim to be forgiven, yet live wickedly, seek to "rend" and "sever" God's covenant and "abolish half" of it:

Hence, whenever our salvation is treated of, let these two things be remembered, that we cannot be reckoned God's sons unless he freely expiate our sins, and thus reconcile himself to us [i.e., justification]: and then not unless he also rule us by his Spirit [i.e., sanctification]. Now we must hold, that what God hath joined man ought not to separate. Those, therefore, who through relying on the indulgence of God permit themselves to give way to sin, rend his covenant and impiously sever it. Why so? because God has joined these two things together, viz., that he will be propitious to his sons [i.e., justification], and will also renew their hearts [i.e., sanctification]. Hence those who lay hold of only one member of the sentence, namely, the pardon [i.e., justification], because God bears with them, and omit the other [i.e., sanctification], are as false and sacrilegious as if they abolished half of God's covenant (Comm. on Eze. 11:19-20).



In his exposition of the fifth and sixth petitions of the Lord's Prayer ("forgive us our debts...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"), Calvin refers to these "two members" of the covenant (justification and sanctification), again with reference to Jeremiah 31.

Christ briefly embraces all that makes for the heavenly life, as the spiritual covenant that God has made for the salvation of his church rests on these two members alone: "I shall write my laws upon their hearts," and, "I shall be merciful towards their iniquity" [Jer. 31:33; cf. ch. 33:8]. Here [i.e., in the fifth and sixth petitions of the Lord's Prayer] Christ begins with forgiveness of sins [i.e., justification], then presently adds the second grace: that God protect us by the power of his Spirit and sustain us by his aid so we may stand unvanquished against all temptations [i.e., sanctification] (3.20.45).

As in his commentary on Ezekiel 11:19-20, Calvin goes on to stress the inseparability of these two covenant blessings. But whereas there Calvin was opposing antinomians, here he is attacking perfectionist "rascals" "who imagine such perfection for themselves as would make it unnecessary to seek pardon." Calvin denounces these "new doctors" who have no need to pray "forgive us our debts" because of their spurious claim to "perfect innocence."

... these rascals, by cancelling one section of it [i.e., "I shall be merciful towards their iniquity"], tear apart God's covenant, in which we see our salvation contained, and topple it from its foundation...they are guilty of sacrilege in separating things till now joined (3.20.45).

In his treatment of vows, Calvin returns to the two great blessings of the covenant: "in the covenant of grace...are contained both forgiveness of sins and the spirit of sanctification" (4.13.6).<sup>5</sup>

Since Christ is the Christ of the covenant, it comes as no surprise to observe Calvin referring what he has called the "two main parts," the "two things" and the "two members" of the covenant also to Christ Himself as a "double grace":

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5 Other places where Calvin mentions the two main covenant blessings of Jeremiah 31:31-34 include his commentaries on Leviticus 26:9, Ezekiel 16:61, 62, and Daniel 9:27.

By partaking of [Christ], we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father [i.e., justification]; and secondly, that being sanctified by Christ's Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life [i.e., sanctification] (3.11.1).

This comes right at the start of the eight-chapter treatment of justification in Calvin's *Institutes* (3.11-18). Even as he begins this subject, he has his eye on a major Roman Catholic attack on the truth of justification by faith alone: "You Reformed people proclaim the free forgiveness of sins in order that you may live loosely!" Calvin gets his defence in early: those whom God justifies in Christ, He also sanctifies.

Calvin also uses this powerful argument at the start of *Institutes* 3.16, a chapter devoted to the refutation of false accusations of the Romanists against justification by faith alone.

Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ's righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he "is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption" [I Cor. 1:30]. Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies (3.16.1).

Justification and sanctification must be distinguished, but they must not be separated, continues Calvin:

Although we may distinguish [justification and sanctification], Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces [I Cor. 1:13]. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other (3.16.1).

Calvin sums up by explaining that we are justified by faith alone

but not a faith that is alone, that we are justified by faith without works but not a faith that is without works: “Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as [imputed] righteousness” (3.16.1).

Since Christ is the covenant Christ and the “two main parts” of the covenant (justification and sanctification) are treasured in Him, to separate imputed and infused righteousness is not only to “sacrilegiously” “tear apart God’s covenant” (3.20.45), it is to “divide” (3.16.1), “tear” (3.11.6; Comm. on I Cor. 1:30), and “rend [Christ] asunder” by a “mutilated faith” (Comm. on Rom. 8:13). In *Institutes* 3.11.6, Calvin refers to Christ being “torn *into parts*”; in his commentary on I Corinthians 1:30, He is torn “*in pieces*.” Calvin, of course, is not speaking literally, a point he makes abundantly clear: “he who attempts to sever [justification and sanctification] does *in a manner* tear Christ in pieces” (Comm. on I Cor. 1:30), for “Christ *cannot* be torn into parts” (3.11.6).

Through all this we see how the great Reformer skilfully uses the truth of God’s covenant and its two main blessings in Jesus Christ not only to defend the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, but also to call God’s people to a new and holy life.

For Calvin, the theologian of the Holy Spirit, as B. B. Warfield famously dubbed him, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the covenant, for in the new covenant “the regeneration of the Spirit... is promised” (Comm. on Jer. 31:34).<sup>6</sup> In fact, this is what makes the new covenant, “in some respects, a new thing, that God regenerates the faithful by his Spirit” (Comm. on Jer. 31:31-32).

Calvin also teaches that we receive Christ and all His blessings through the Holy Spirit and by faith.<sup>7</sup> In his commentary on I Corinthians 6:11, while noting that the “three terms [washed, sanctified, and justified] have the same general meaning,” Calvin adds, “there is, nevertheless, great force in their very variety.” Calvin explains,

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6 Similarly, the “new covenant” promises “that God would endow them with the Spirit of regeneration” (Comm. on Deut. 30:6).

7 As Calvin puts it, “to say all in one word, [the Holy Spirit] makes Christ with all his benefits to become ours” (Comm. on I John 5:8).

... there is an implied contrast between... *sanctification* and pollution—*justification* and guilt. His meaning is, that having been once *justified*, they must not draw down upon themselves a new condemnation—that, having been *sanctified*, they must not pollute themselves anew (Comm. on I Cor. 6:11).

Calvin's comments continue:

With propriety and elegance he distinguishes between different offices [i.e., the roles of Christ and the Holy Spirit]. For the blood of Christ is the procuring cause of our cleansing: righteousness [i.e., justification] and sanctification come to us through his death and resurrection. But, as the cleansing effected by Christ, and the attainment of righteousness, are of no avail except to those who have been made partakers of those blessings by the influence of the Holy Spirit, it is with propriety that he makes mention of the Spirit in connection with Christ. Christ, then, is the source of all blessings to us: from him we obtain all things; but Christ himself, with all his blessings [i.e., especially in this context, justification and sanctification], is communicated to us by the Spirit. For it is by faith that we receive Christ, and have his graces applied to us. The Author of faith is the Spirit (Comm. on I Cor. 6:11).

Not only do both the covenant and Christ contain the double blessings of justification and sanctification; Calvin also embraces these benefits under the gospel. After all, Christ is the Christ of the gospel, and the covenant is “the covenant of the gospel” (2.10.4). “With good reason,” states Calvin, “the sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins” (3.3.1).<sup>8</sup> Both “these two topics,” he adds significantly, “are conferred on us by Christ, and both are attained by us through faith.” What Calvin identifies as the “two topics” of the gospel (3.3.1), he later refers to as “two headings.”

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8 A few lines later, Calvin uses “newness of life” as synonymous with “repentance” (3.3.1). Calvin often treats repentance as the equivalent of mortification, which in turn implies quickening or vivification, which two constitute the negative and positive parts of sanctification (cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 88-90). Thus he states that repentance “consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit” (3.3.5).

Now if it is true—a fact abundantly clear—that the whole of the gospel is contained under these two headings, repentance and forgiveness of sins, do we not see that the Lord freely justifies his own in order that he may at the same time restore them to true righteousness by sanctification of the Spirit (3.3.19)?

With Christ and His gospel both containing the “two main parts” of the covenant, it is natural for Calvin to describe the sacrament of baptism (the New Testament equivalent of circumcision) as a sign and seal of both justification and sanctification:

We have, therefore, a spiritual promise given to the patriarchs in circumcision such as is given us in baptism, since it represented for them forgiveness of sins [i.e., justification], and mortification of the flesh [i.e., sanctification]. Moreover, as we have taught that Christ is the foundation of baptism, in whom both of these reside, so it is also evident that he is the foundation of circumcision (4.16.3).

Not only does baptism (or circumcision) represent justification and sanctification; Calvin also teaches that it signifies justification and issues a call to sanctification, as in this quotation that refers to Father Abraham:

...the first access to God, the first entry into eternal life, is the forgiveness of sins. Accordingly this corresponds to the promise of baptism that we shall be cleansed [i.e., justification]. Afterward, the Lord covenants with Abraham that he should walk before him in uprightness and innocence of heart [Gen. 17:1]. This applies to mortification, or regeneration [i.e., the call to sanctification] (4.16.3).<sup>9</sup>

“Cleansing” and “mortification” (or justification and sanctification) are the “two graces” signified in baptism (4.15.9), as they are

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9 This is similar to our Form for the Administration of Baptism, which in its second principal part declares (in brief) that the Triune God makes an eternal covenant of grace with us, justifies us, and sanctifies us and, therefore, in the third principal part calls us to a life of sanctification (*The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* [USA: PRCA, 2005], p. 258).

the “two main parts,” the “two things,” and the “two members” of the covenant and the “double grace” in Christ Himself.<sup>10</sup>

However, in his commentary on Hebrews 8:8-12, after Calvin declares, “There are two main parts in this covenant; the first regards the gratuitous remission of sins; and the other, the inward renovation of the heart,” he adds, “there is a third which depends on the second, and that is the illumination of the mind as to the knowledge of God” (Comm. on Heb. 8:10).

Likewise, in his commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-34, the passage quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12, Calvin states,

Here, then, he speaks of the grace of regeneration [i.e., sanctification], of the gift of knowledge [i.e., illumination], and at the same time promises that God would be propitious to his people [i.e., justification] in a different and more perfect way than he had been in former times (Comm. on Jer. 31:34).

However, the three blessings are not numbered in Calvin's commentary on Jeremiah 31:34; in fact, they can be identified as such only in the light of his commentary on Hebrews 8:10-11. Even there, Calvin notes that the third covenant blessing (illumination) “depends on the second” (sanctification) (Comm. on Heb. 8:10) and “is as it were a part of” it (Comm. on Heb. 8:11). The distinct yet inseparable “two main parts” of the covenant were much more useful to him in his battles with Romanists and antinomians than a threefold classification.<sup>11</sup>

This series of articles is entitled “John Calvin's Integrated Cov-

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10 For Calvin, the benefits received by elect believers through the sacraments are not only covenant blessings in Christ; they are also inwardly wrought by the Holy Ghost: “all [the] efficacy and utility [of the sacraments] is lodged in the Spirit alone” for grace “depends on the secret operation of his Spirit” (Comm. on Deut. 30:6).

11 This is not to deny that in various places Calvin speaks of illumination as a covenant blessing taught in Jeremiah 31:31-34, as well as justification and sanctification: justification (Comms. on Ps. 89:30-33; Rom. 11:27), sanctification (Comms. on Deut. 30:6, 11; Eze. 18:14-17, 31; Matt. 5:17; Rom. 2:29; II Cor. 3:3, 6), and illumination (Comms. on Isa. 11:10; 54:13; Hos. 2:19-20; Matt. 13:16; 24:4; John 16:23).

enant Theology” with good reason. For Calvin, the covenant not only serves to demonstrate the unity of the Bible and the people of God in all ages; it also shows the unity of the blessings of salvation. Though he does not treat each of the elements of the *ordo salutis* in turn as a covenant blessing, as does Herman Witsius in Book III of his *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* or David McKay in chapter 7 of his *The Bond of Love*,<sup>12</sup> Calvin repeatedly explains that all the blessings of salvation are summed in the covenant formula, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” which evidently includes, for instance, reconciliation, union with the Triune God in Jesus Christ, access to God in prayer, and eternal life.

Moreover, “the two main parts” of the covenant, justification and sanctification, are legal and organic blessings. From these Calvin often goes on to discuss faith (the way of receiving justification), the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness (the two parts of justification), and adoption and our eternal inheritance (closely related to justification); as well as regeneration (the beginning of sanctification), repentance or mortification and vivification (the two parts of sanctification), the struggle between the old and the new man, and the Christian life.

We may add the “third point” of the covenant (Comm. on Heb. 8:11), illumination, which includes the knowledge of God (as creator and redeemer in Jesus Christ) and the knowledge of ourselves (as fallen in Adam and saved in Christ).

Remember too that Calvin presents God’s covenant blessings as for body and soul, for time and eternity, and for us and our children (2.10.8-9). This is indeed an integrated theology of covenant blessings!

### **Covenant Blessings All of Grace!**

For Calvin, since the gospel and salvation are all of grace, the

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12 Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (Escondido, CA: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, repr. 1990), vol. 1, pp. 344-468 and vol. 2, pp. 1-107; David McKay, *The Bond of Love: God’s Covenantal Relationship with His Church* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), pp. 137-165.

covenant as the “covenant of the gospel” (2.10.4) and the “covenant of salvation” (Comm. on Heb. 8:10) must be and is also all of grace. Calvin even uses the term “covenant of *grace*” (e.g., 4.13.6; Comm. on Isa. 42:6). For him, God’s grace and God’s covenant are inseparably joined.

Here are Calvin’s comments on “the mercies of David” in Isaiah 55:3: “by this phrase he declares that it was a covenant of free grace; for it was founded on nothing else than the absolute goodness of God.” Calvin then lays down a general principle: “Whenever, therefore, the word ‘covenant’ occurs in Scripture, we ought at the same time to call to remembrance the word ‘grace’” (Comm. on Isa. 55:3).

According to Calvin, the blessings of the covenant, and especially the two main covenant blessings, declare that the covenant is gracious. Thus in his comments on Jeremiah 31:31-34, Calvin attacks the “foolish” and “arrogant” Romish “conceit” of free will that claims to “co-operate” with God, and so he exalts “grace” alone that God may receive all the “glory” in His covenant.

We may further learn from this passage, how foolish the Papists are in their conceit about free-will. They indeed allow that without the help of God’s grace we are not capable of fulfilling the Law, and thus they concede something to the aid of grace and of the Spirit: but still they not only imagine a co-operation as to free-will, but ascribe to it the main work. Now the Prophet here testifies that it is the peculiar work of God to write his Law in our hearts. Since God then declares that this favour is justly his, and claims to himself the glory of it, how great must be the arrogance of men to appropriate this to themselves? To *write* the Law in the heart imports nothing less than so to form it, that the Law should rule there, and that there should be no feeling of the heart, not conformable and not consenting to its doctrine. It is hence then sufficiently clear, that no one can be turned so as to obey the Law, until he be regenerated by the Spirit of God; nay, that there is no inclination in man to act rightly, except God prepares his heart by his grace (Comm. on Jer. 31:33).

In his exposition of Hebrews 8:10-11, Calvin exalts divine grace alone in his treatment of each of the “two main parts” of the covenant and the third point. First, God alone must sanctify us by His Spirit



because “perverse passions rule within, which lead us to rebellion,” for “our will is carried away by a sort of insane impulse to resist God.” Second, God alone must justify us, for “we are all of us guilty” and even as believers our old nature is still “vicious” and “many corrupt affections of the flesh still remain,” so that, of ourselves, “we are still guilty [i.e., worthy] of eternal death before God.” By the marvel of God’s grace, “pardon is promised to [us], not for one day only, but to the very end of life” (Comm. on Heb. 8:10). Third, God alone must illumine us since “our minds are blind and destitute of all right understanding until they are illuminated by the Spirit of God.” “Thus,” Calvin concludes, “God is rightly known by those alone to whom he has been pleased by a special favour to reveal himself” (Comm. on Heb. 8:11). This covenant favor is enjoyed according to divine election: “It is the fruit of the covenant, that God chooses us for his people, and assures us that he will be the guardian of our salvation” (Comm. on Heb. 8:10).

Calvin’s comments regarding these same key passages in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 on the two main covenant blessings also extol the far richer and more catholic blessings of the new covenant, of which we are beneficiaries.

Jeremiah...shews...how much more abundant and richer the favour of God would be towards his people [i.e., in the New Testament] than formerly [i.e., in the Old Testament]. He then does not simply promise the restoration of that dignity and greatness which they had lost, but something better and more excellent (Comm. on Jer. 31:31-32).

As then the Father has put forth more fully the power of his Spirit under the kingdom of Christ, and has poured forth more abundantly his mercy on mankind, this exuberance renders insignificant the small portion of grace which he had been pleased to bestow on the fathers. We also see that the promises were then obscure and intricate, so that they shone only like the moon and stars in comparison with the clear light of the Gospel which shines brightly on us (Comm. on Heb. 8:10).

●  
...to be continued.

# The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism (1)

James A. Laning

As is quite well known, dispensationalists glory in their “literal” method of interpreting Scripture. Repeatedly they claim that their entire eschatological system arises out of their hermeneutical method. Anyone, they say, who opens the Bible and believes what it literally says will become a dispensationalist. In their judgment, all the non-dispensationalists err, in one way or another, because they deviate from a consistent literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

On the surface the dispensational “literal” method may appear to be correct. But a closer examination manifests it to be a delusion. Many are the places where the dispensationalists reject what the Scriptures *literally* teach. They refuse to embrace the literal meaning of God’s own interpretation of His promises. And when this is pointed out to them, they use a number of tactics to try to escape—none of which have anything to do with a literal interpretation of Scripture.

Yet many people began listening to the dispensationalists when new theories arose in science and theology that clearly went against the fundamental teachings of Scripture. The nineteenth century was marked by the rise of what is sometimes called “liberal theology” or “modernism,” which embraced the philosophy of the Enlightenment and denied fundamental doctrines such as the fall of Adam, the virgin birth, and the deity of Christ. It was also characterized by the rising popularity of theories in worldly science that clearly went against the Scriptures. Uniformitarianism in geology and evolutionism in biology both denied outright that the teachings of Scripture were accurate.

Some who professed Christ opted not to fight against these new theories, but to embrace them. But this meant they would have to find some way to argue that these new teachings were not really in conflict with Scripture. One method that was commonly adopted then, and that is still adopted by many today, is to teach that the beginning chapters of Genesis are fictional stories written to convey certain ideas and not

meant to be read as an actual account of real historical events. Whether they called these stories allegories, myths, or something else, one thing was clear—they denied that these stories were literally true.

Especially significant was the enemy known as *higher-criticism*. Those who adopted the methods of the higher critics treated the Scriptures as though they originated with man, and not God. They subjected to critical analysis not only the beginning chapters of Genesis, but the whole of the Scriptures, as though the writers of Scripture were inventing stories to express their own religious experiences. The references to miracles were seen as simply mythical ways of expressing one's faith. As for our Lord Jesus Christ, He was often made out to be merely a man who taught moral principles, and who served as an example to others by the way He was willing to lay down His life for what He believed.

During a time such as this, when the teachings of Scripture were being blatantly denied—not only in the world, but also in the churches—many began to listen to the dispensationalists. At the same time that more and more people were referring to the Scriptures as myths, there were also many that were uncomfortable with this. In these circumstances many found the dispensational method of interpreting the Scriptures “literally” to be appealing.

But the dispensational method of interpreting Scripture “literally” was actually a deadly error in disguise. For all their boasts about holding to what Scripture literally says, they were actually in many respects doing the opposite. Their method is really better characterized as the *carnal* method of interpreting Scripture, involving a number of tactical maneuvers designed to protect their preference for a carnal interpretation of the land promised to Israel and the kingdom promised to David. Even though the Scriptures literally teach that the Bible speaks of spiritual things that must be discerned spiritually, the dispensationalists instead maintain that the interpretation that the carnal man might easily arrive at is in fact the correct interpretation of Scripture.

Since many have embraced their teachings, and undoubtedly even some of God's people have been somewhat deceived by them, it is very important that we be able to expose these carnal hermeneutics for what they are. Furthermore, recognizing that God has undoubtedly raised up this foe for a purpose, we should take the challenges of the dispensational-

ists seriously, searching the Scriptures more diligently, seeking to increase our own understanding of how to interpret God's covenant promises using the method that God Himself has given to us in Scripture.

There are undoubtedly statements in Scripture that are to be taken figuratively, rather than literally. Figures of speech such as metaphors are certainly found in God's Word, as are types and symbols. This of course is obvious, and the dispensationalists themselves would say the same. To accuse the dispensationalists of denying this would be making a caricature of their position.

But we are speaking now specifically about how we are to interpret the promises that God has given to His covenant people. Dispensationalists claim they are the only ones who teach that these promises will be *literally* fulfilled. Repeatedly they make this statement in an effort to attract people to their position. But is this claim of theirs accurate? And what precisely does a typical dispensationalist mean by a *literal* fulfillment? These are important questions to consider.

### **The fetish of literalism**

The dispensational idea of a "literal" hermeneutic is very deceptive. Undoubtedly many have fallen for it without really thinking about what it means. Curtis Crenshaw spoke of this in his recent book:

As a former dispensationalist I was mesmerized with the literal hermeneutic, the way in which we interpreted the Bible. I was satiated with the confidence that this principle of interpretation was the cornerstone of any true approach to Scripture, and paraded it before all as the bedrock of the dispensational method. This "literal" approach produced in me a calm lethargism to anything the covenant men could say. Any argument they could muster was disarmed in advance with such statements as this: "They do not advocate a literal hermeneutic." Yet no one seemed to know precisely what literal meant, but it was always a key word if one wanted to decidedly abolish the opponent. There was a mysticism that shrouded the term, giving it force but little content; it was a fetish of the highest order.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover E. Gunn III, *Dispensationalism: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (1985; repr. with critique and response, Memphis, TN: Footstool Publications, 1989), 1–2.

Crenshaw is to be commended for his candid confession and astute observation. He exposes what this literal hermeneutic really amounts to for many—a *fetish*.

A fetish is an object or idea that elicits *unquestioning* reverence and devotion. Indeed this is what we are dealing with here—at least on the part of many. For a close examination of dispensational methods will manifest that they actually reject what Scripture literally says. Many, of course, do not desire to perform such an examination. The phrase “literal hermeneutic” sounds good, especially in a day of rampant liberalism. Thus it is not surprising to see such a phrase elicit unquestioning reverence and devotion from many followers.

But the Scriptures exhort us to seek wisdom and understanding. We need wisdom to see underneath the facade, and to expose false methods of interpretation for what they really are. Furthermore, we need understanding to follow the precise method of interpretation that the Scriptures themselves exhort us to use.

### **Literal and spiritual: Not antithetical terms**

The *literal* meaning of a term or expression is one that adheres to the ordinary construction or primary meaning of that term or expression. The term *literal* is opposed to *figurative* or *metaphorical*. But what is especially important with regard to eschatology is the use of the term when referring to events. To say that an event is *literally* going to take place is to say that it is *actually* going to happen. So to interpret a prophetic statement literally is to take it to be not an exaggeration, but a statement of actual fact.

An event happening literally, therefore, is not opposed to it happening spiritually. Something that happens spiritually does actually happen. It is not the same as something that happens merely figuratively. If something happens merely *figuratively*, then it does not actually happen. But if something happens *spiritually*, then it does actually happen. An understanding of this distinction is crucially important.

Yet there are many who confuse what is meant by the term *literal* or *literally*. John Gerstner, for example, argues that John Darby, a

father of dispensationalism, did not consistently interpret the Scriptures literally. He writes:

Darby himself admits that the return of Christ referred to in John 14:18 is not visible and “literal” but an invisible coming through the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The passage referred to speaks of Jesus promising to come to His disciples soon after His ascension—a promise that was fulfilled when Christ poured out His Spirit upon the church at Pentecost. Gerstner appears to be saying here that even Darby admitted that this prophecy was not to be interpreted literally. But to say this is to imply that only a *bodily* coming of Christ is a *literal* coming of Christ.

But this is not true. Christ did literally come to His disciples when He came to them in His Spirit. Even though He came spiritually, His coming is something that actually happened. Christ’s promise was not an exaggeration. He was speaking of something that spiritually and literally was soon going to take place.

This same idea is important for an understanding of the Lord’s Supper. Believers literally partake of Christ when they by faith partake of the elements. They do not partake of Christ physically, but they do partake of Him spiritually in their souls by means of faith. A spiritual partaking is an actual partaking. To say that we partake of Christ is not an exaggeration. It is a statement of actual fact. Even though it happens in our soul, and not in our body, it is still something that literally does take place.

We need to apply this understanding of the term *literal* to God’s promise to His people that they will inherit the land and dwell there forever. This promise is not an exaggeration. Rather, God is promising His people something that literally is already beginning to take place now and will one day be fully realized.

It is literally already beginning to take place. Spiritually in our souls we believers are already dwelling with God in Jesus Christ, and that is really the essence of what it means to dwell in the land. This

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2 John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, 2nd ed. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 95.

is something that is literally happening, though invisible to the eye of the body.

But the ultimate literal fulfillment will take place on that glorious day when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, in which God's people will reign with Christ ruling over the land. This will be the final fulfillment of this promise, and we confess without any doubt that it is literally going to happen.

The key point, however, is that the ultimate literal fulfillment of this promise will take place *after* the final judgment, and not before. The dispensationalists err when they insist that it must happen *before* the final judgment. They are correct, of course, when they say it will happen after Christ returns. But Christ is going to return on the last day—which is also Judgment Day—and it is afterwards that God's people will fully inherit the land and live there with God forever.

### **Denying the literal meaning of Scripture's interpretation of Scripture**

Repeatedly dispensationalists proclaim themselves to be the only ones who consistently interpret the Scriptures literally. They do acknowledge that many others claim to hold to the literal meaning of what Scripture says. But dispensationalists insist they are the only ones who hold to the literal meaning *consistently*.

The difference, in their mind, has to do with how one interprets God's promise to give Israel the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. If one interprets this to be a promise of heavenly land to the church in Christ, the dispensationalists call this "spiritualizing" the text. The consistent literalists, they say, will interpret this to be a promise of earthly land only to the physical descendants of Jacob.

Now by using this argument they are actually rejecting what Scripture literally says. In the Bible we find not only God's promises, but also the *interpretation* of these promises. So holding to the literal meaning of Scripture involves holding to the literal meaning of God's own interpretation of His promises.

God literally says that this promise to Israel was a promise of heavenly land. Consider Hebrews 11, where God says the following about the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly (Heb. 11:13–16a).

The promise referred to here was of a heavenly land—a truth of which even the patriarchs themselves were aware.

Furthermore, Scripture says this promise was only to Christ, Abraham’s one Seed, and to all who are in Christ by faith:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:16, 29).

One who truly holds to the literal meaning of Scripture will hold to the literal meaning of God’s own interpretation of His promises, and will maintain that the promise of the land of Canaan was a promise of heavenly land to Christ and all those who are in Christ by faith.

### **Denying that the coming age will be literally “everlasting”**

It is also important to point out that God promised the land of Canaan as an *everlasting* possession. Dispensationalists, however, say this promise requires that the Israelis possess the earthly land for a thousand years. Now how can this be said to be a literal interpretation?

The following passage is one of many that clearly refers to the glorious everlasting age in which we will live with God forever, with Christ as our King, in the new heaven and the new earth. But dispensationalists claim it refers to some future carnal millennial age.

And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children’s children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant



of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore (Ezek. 37:25–28).

When dispensationalists say that passages such as this predict a carnal millennial kingdom for the Jews, they are left with a problem. The passage literally says that the coming age will be everlasting. But dispensationalists claim the next age will last for only a thousand years.

Calvin made a reference to this in his *Institutes*:

But a little later there followed the chiliasts<sup>3</sup>, who limited the reign of Christ to a thousand years. Now their fiction is too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation. And the Apocalypse, from which they undoubtedly drew a pretext for their error, does not support them. For the number “one thousand” [Rev. 20:4] does not apply to the eternal blessedness of the church but only to the various disturbances that awaited the church, while still toiling on earth. On the contrary, all Scripture proclaims that there will be no end to the blessedness of the elect or the punishment of the wicked [Matt. 25:41, 46].<sup>4</sup>

So how do dispensationalists get around this problem? Some have attempted to do so by attributing these statements to the inaccurate view of the prophets—although they would not express it quite this way. They say the prophets viewed the millennium to be everlasting, even though it really was going to last for only a thousand years. J. Dwight Pentecost, a prominent dispensationalist, made reference to this passage as well as some other similar passages, and explained things this way:

That which characterizes the millennial age is not viewed as temporary, but eternal.<sup>5</sup>

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3 A *chiliad* is a thousand years, and a *chiliast* is one who believes that Christ in the future will reign on earth for a thousand years.

4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Battles trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1995 (3.25.5).

5 J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (1958; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham Publishing, 1966), 490.

But how can this be said to be a *literal* interpretation of Scripture? The passage quoted above, and many others like it, clearly refer to the coming age as everlasting. To take such a passage and claim that the prophet *viewed* the age that way, when it was really going to last for only a thousand years, is clearly to reject what Scripture literally says. A thousand years is not forever. To use the language of the dispensationalists, when God says forever, He means forever. Thus to hold to the literal meaning of Scripture one must confess that the real Seed of Abraham will possess the heavenly promised land in a future age that will never end.

In an effort to defend themselves from this argument, dispensationalists make a distinction between a future earthly theocratic kingdom and a future everlasting kingdom:

Thus, while Christ's earthly theocratic rule is limited to one thousand years, which is sufficient time to manifest God's perfect theocracy on earth, His reign is eternal.<sup>6</sup>

This, however, is not a *biblical* distinction.

There is a biblical distinction between the present age and the age to come. We read of this in the epistle to the Ephesians, which speaks of how God has exalted Christ:

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:21).

The term translated *world* literally means *age*. This passage, therefore, makes a clear distinction between the age now and the future age that is yet to come. Dispensationalists, however, reject what this passage literally says, and instead effectively divide the coming age into two separate ages—the first lasting only a thousand years, and the second lasting forever.

Now if man wants to divide into two what God speaks of as one, he will commonly make a distinction and refer to the two parts as two aspects of the one thing. This is what Pentecost does when speaking of the coming age:

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 492–93.

In reference to the church the term *this present age* refers to the inter-advent period, that period from the rejection of the Messiah by Israel to the coming reception of the Messiah by Israel at His second coming. The phrase *the coming age* could be used in its earthly aspect, to which the church will be related (as in Eph. 1:21), or in its eternal aspect (as in Eph. 2:7).<sup>7</sup>

The dispensationalists really want the coming age to be divided into two different ages. So Pentecost here speaks of the coming age as having two aspects—an earthly aspect and an eternal aspect. But such a tactic is merely a maneuver to avoid the *literal* interpretation of Ephesians 1:21.

The biblical distinction between the present age and the age to come can be applied now to Ezekiel 37:25–28 (quoted above), which speaks of God’s people dwelling with the Messiah in the promised land. There is a sense in which this promise is already being fulfilled in the present age, since God’s people are right now resting with Christ in their souls. This is literally happening in the hearts of God’s people. It is happening in their souls, and not in their bodies, that is true. But when something is happening in our souls it is literally happening.

But leaving that subject aside for the moment, let us consider the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy, when God’s people in the new creation will dwell with Christ in both body and soul. According to this passage, how long will God’s people physically dwell with Christ in this new creation? Interpreting the prophecy literally, we would say that this coming age will last forever. To say that the first part of this coming age is going to last for only a thousand years is not to interpret the prophecy literally. Rather, it is to read into the prophecy that which simply is not there.

In short, dispensationalism’s “literalism” is actually a delusion, which a believer can clearly see when he looks at it more closely. Yet it became popular in an era characterized by the rise of liberal theology, which tried to make the Bible out to be nothing more than a book of myths. Dispensationalists rightly spoke out against these errors, but then promoted their “literal” hermeneutic as the method one

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7 Ibid., 131-132. The emphasis is his.

must use if he wants to maintain faithfully the accuracy of Scripture's teachings.

Yet many have been deceived, finding it attractive. And one of the reasons for this is that the dispensational method has the appearance of being a "scientific" one. The apparent parallel between the dispensational method of interpreting Scripture and the scientific method of studying the creation is an interesting and important subject. And since an understanding of this will help us to see what it is that the dispensationalists do with the Scriptures, we turn to this subject next.

### **Dangers of the Dispensational "Scientific" Inductive Approach**

Especially since the days of the Scientific Revolution, many have placed their trust in modern science to provide them with an understanding of this world and all that it contains. A divine revelation from heaven has been seen by many to be unnecessary, and proofs from Scripture have often been referred to as "unscientific" and thus invalid.

In an effort to defend Christianity, many theologians over the years have promoted the idea that theology also is a science. In fact, it is common to hear it referred to as the queen of the sciences—the one science that is exalted above all the others.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with referring to theology as a science, when one simply means that theology is a systematic study of the body of truths infallibly revealed to us in Scripture. But there are those who speak of theology as a science in another sense. This latter group maintains that the Scriptures should be interpreted using a "scientific" method similar to that which scientists of the world use when studying the creation.

This "scientific" hermeneutical method of which they speak is in some respects similar to the scientific method of Sir Francis Bacon, an English philosopher and statesman of the sixteenth century. The reverence for Lord Bacon became so strong among this group that the term Baconianism was coined to describe the philosophy of those who devotedly followed his method. Baconianism became so popular, in fact, that the philosopher Samuel Tyler contended in

1844 that “the Baconian Philosophy is emphatically the philosophy of Protestantism.”<sup>8</sup>

Americans for the most part encountered the teachings of Bacon not directly, but through the teachers of the Scottish philosophy known as Common Sense Realism. Thomas Reid (1710–96), the primary architect of this Scottish philosophy, and Dugald Stewart (1753–1828) who followed him, took Bacon’s inductive method and developed a theory that promotes the common man using his “common sense” to come to an understanding of truth.<sup>9</sup>

This scientific method and common-sense philosophy, though it may sound good, has a number of dangers associated with it. Using inductive reasoning to make generalizations that may or may not be true, dividing the Scriptures into a multitude of different man-made categories, and viewing each Scripture text as a fact that can be understood by the unbeliever with his common sense, are some of the main dangers that are associated with the so-called “scientific approach” to the interpretation of Scripture.

Among those who have fallen into these dangers are the dispensationalists. Placing their trust in their own inductive reasoning, they divide and classify passages of Scripture as they see fit. Yet they claim that their conclusions should be considered to be scientifically proven, and thus certain—a claim that many have found to be persuasive.

Although dispensationalists are not the only ones who make use of these methods, they are prominent among those who do. Therefore a brief discussion of this subject is helpful for an understanding of the hermeneutics of dispensationalism.

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8 Samuel Tyler, “A Discourse of the Baconian Philosophy,” quoted in E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 174.

9 A number of works have set forth the importance of this connection. Especially important is the seminal work of Theodore D. Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, 1977).

## The Uncertain Conclusions of Inductive Reasoning

Although Isaac Newton is an indisputable intellectual giant, many have argued that Newton was able to accomplish what he did because he used the method of inductive reasoning. He used the right method, they say, which led him to the conclusions for which he is famous. These people then go on to say that by using this same method today—both in secular science and in theology—great advances can be made in theology, just as they have been made in physics, biology, and the other sciences.<sup>10</sup>

This scientific method involves *inductive* reasoning, which is to be distinguished from *deductive* reasoning. The difference between an induction and a deduction can be summarized as follows:

*Deduction:* a process of reasoning in which a conclusion follows necessarily from the premises presented, so that the conclusion cannot be false if the premises are true.

*Induction:* any form of reasoning in which the conclusion, though supported by the premises, does not follow from them necessarily.

In other words, let us say that someone presents you with a number of statements that are known with certainty to be true and you then draw a conclusion from those statements. If the conclusion you came to follows necessarily from those statements, so that there is no way that your conclusion could be false, then what you did is make a deduction. You considered the true statements and from them you deduced a conclusion that is certainly correct. But if the conclusion you came to is merely somewhat supported by the statements, but does not follow from those statements necessarily, then what you did is make an induction. You considered the statements and from them induced a conclusion that is likely to be correct, but that may be wrong.

Making inductions is something we do all the time, and there is undoubtedly a value in doing so. When we see something that is not working properly, for example, and consider the different things that

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10 E. Brooks Holifield, “The Odd Couple: Theology and Science in the American Tradition,” March 2004, <[http://www.emory.edu/SENATE/FacultyCouncil/Committees/DFL\\_Lectures/Holifield%202004.pdf](http://www.emory.edu/SENATE/FacultyCouncil/Committees/DFL_Lectures/Holifield%202004.pdf)> (31 May 2008).

are happening that are not supposed to be happening, we often induce a conclusion as to what the likely cause might be. If the conclusion we came to is *likely* to be correct, but is not *certain* to be correct, then what we did is make an induction. This is something we do very frequently, and there is obviously nothing wrong with doing so.

When it comes to studying the creation, the inductive method can be profitably used. The scientist looks at a large amount of data, and then induces a conclusion as to what may be a general principle or law of nature that could in a certain sense explain the data. Then if no one has yet come up with a better explanation, it is likely that many will find the conclusion to be appealing and will hold to it. Yet the conclusion will continue to remain as only possibly correct. It could be wrong.

Although many boast of science as the means to come to certain truth, it is commonly acknowledged by the scientists themselves that the conclusions arrived at by the inductive method do not necessarily follow from the data being considered. Even though this is the case, the world still finds such conclusions to be useful in advancing technology and thus improving man's "quality of life."

But it is a different matter when it comes to Holy Scripture. If one applies the inductive method to biblical hermeneutics, he first digs up many similar passages of Scripture and then induces a theory to explain what all these passages mean. The process used has the appearance of being "scientific," but the problem is that the explanation might be false.

Dispensationalist Alva J. McClain, a former president of Grace Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has written one of the most thorough works on the dispensational view of the kingdom of God. The work is entitled *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures*. In his introduction, he makes the following statement:

Where disagreement exists in points of Biblical interpretation I have generally sought only to show that the interpretations adopted herein are exegetically possible....<sup>11</sup>

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11 Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1959), xii.

An inductive study results in “possible” interpretations. But our calling is to hold to the truths that are explicitly set forth in Scripture as well as the *certain* conclusions that can be logically deduced from Scripture. So there are obviously dangers in following the inductive approach, and the fact that dispensationalists tend to follow this method is something that should be kept in mind when looking at dispensational interpretations of specific passages of Scripture.

### **Dividing the Scriptures into a Multitude of Convenient Categories**

Just as natural scientists group together similar things found in the creation and classify them, so dispensational theologians group together similar passages of Scripture and assign them to a certain class. This may appear to be perfectly proper, but the dispensationalists use this practice to avoid Scripture’s own interpretation of Scripture, and to invent a multitude of unbiblical distinctions.

Take, for example, all the passages Reformed believers cite to prove from Scripture that the church is the kingdom of God. A typical dispensationalist will take all these passages and group them together as referring to the *Spiritual Kingdom*, or something like that. Then he will take all the passages that refer to the kingdom promised to David and group them together as referring to the *Davidic Kingdom*. Then he will *induce* the conclusion that there must be a distinction between the Davidic Kingdom and the Spiritual Kingdom.

Convenient, is it not? No matter how many passages you find that prove that the church is the kingdom of God, the dispensationalist will classify them all under the heading *Spiritual Kingdom*, and continue to insist that this kingdom is not the same as the kingdom promised to David.

But take note also that this conclusion has been *induced*. If there are some passages that speak of a spiritual kingdom, and if there are other passages that speak of a kingdom promised to David, the conclusion that these must refer to two different kingdoms is an induction. It may be true, or it may be false. It may be that these are two ways in which God speaks of one and the same kingdom.



Thus to come to certainty on this question one must seek to find in Scripture the Spirit's explanation of what is meant by the kingdom promised to David. After one has done that—as many Reformed believers have done in the past—he will discover that the church, which is God's spiritual and heavenly kingdom, is precisely the same as the kingdom promised to the Son of David. This is not surprising, inasmuch as the members of the church are said to have been translated into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13), and Christ is the Son of David to whom the kingdom was promised.

### **Viewing Texts to Be Facts Understood by “Common Sense”**

It would be a mistake to conclude that dispensationalists begin their inductive study of the Scriptures as unbiased investigators. There are assumptions they make before they come to the Scriptures—assumptions that they often maintain to be matters of “common sense.”

Now there are, of course, matters that do fall into this category of common sense. There are truths that are intuitively obvious to everyone, such as the reality of oneself and of the external world. These are matters of common sense that no one in his right mind would try to prove, or could possibly doubt.

But unbelieving man often asserts falsehoods, claiming them to be common sense truths that cannot be reasonably doubted. Take, for example, the dispensational position that God's promise to Israel of the land of Canaan is a promise of earthly land to Israel's carnal seed. Repeatedly dispensationalists say “Israel means Israel,” as though their position is a matter of common sense that no one in his right mind would ever doubt.

But there is another, even more basic, position that dispensationalists seem to adopt as a matter of common sense. That is the position that it is common sense that the Scriptures can be understood by common sense. In other words, the dispensational “literal” interpretation is in their mind a “common sense” interpretation. In their judgment, whenever God speaks of a glorious future for Israel, even the unbeliever with his “common sense” knows that this is referring to the carnal Jews. To them it is a matter of common sense, and common sense is all that is really needed to interpret the prophecies of Scripture.

This erroneous position of the dispensationalists is drawn from the philosophy of this world. George Marsden, in his popular work *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, has pointed out what he and others have seen to be a connection between dispensational hermeneutics and the Scottish philosophy known as Common Sense Realism. I string together here a number of quotes from this book, because I think they help to bring out another aspect of how dispensationalists approach the Scriptures. What I am especially interested in here is the idea that Scripture texts can be understood by common sense, rather than faith:

At least throughout the first two thirds of the nineteenth century “Lord Bacon” was the preeminently revered philosopher for many Americans, especially those of the dominant evangelical colleges. This popularity of Bacon, in turn, was built on the strong support for the Baconian tradition in Scottish Common Sense Realism.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, when it came to identifying their philosophical stance, until after the Civil War American evangelicals overwhelmingly preferred the method of Francis Bacon to “metaphysical speculations.” Common Sense philosophy affirmed their ability to know “the facts” directly. With the Scriptures at hand as a compendium of facts, there was no need to go further. They needed only to classify the facts, and follow wherever they might lead.<sup>13</sup>

To whatever degree dispensationalists consciously considered themselves Baconians (it is rare to find reflections on philosophical first principles), this closely describes the assumptions of virtually all of them. They were absolutely convinced that all they were doing was taking the hard facts of Scripture, carefully arranging and classifying them, and thus discovering the clear patterns which Scripture revealed.<sup>14</sup>

Bacon’s name inspired in Americans an almost reverential respect for the certainty of the knowledge achieved by careful and objective observation of the facts known to common sense. Whether the subject was theology or geology, the scientist need only classify these certainties, avoiding speculative hypotheses.<sup>15</sup>

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12 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55.

13 Ibid., 56.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 15.

The essentially optimistic view of human nature implicit in Common Sense philosophy appealed to the American temper. Although there was still room for the Calvinist and evangelical dogma that all people were born sinners, the belief that all were endowed with the potential to know God's truth was more conspicuous. Strict Calvinists had maintained that the human mind was blinded in mankind's Fall from innocence; in the Common Sense version, the intellect seemed to suffer from a slight astigmatism only.<sup>16</sup>

Although it may be difficult to prove the connection between dispensationalism and Common Sense Realism, it is not difficult to show that dispensationalists promote their "literal" interpretations as "common sense" interpretations. They view the texts to be facts that anyone can know directly, without the need for an interpretation. In their mind, anyone can pick up a passage of Old Testament prophecy, and immediately understand what the passage means. The passages, in their judgment, speak for themselves.

The Scriptures, then, cannot be regarded as an illustration of some special use of language so that in the interpretation of these Scriptures some deeper meaning of the words must be sought.<sup>17</sup>

When dispensationalists speak this way, they are actually saying that the carnal meaning that any unbeliever would come to is the correct one, and there is no need to seek to understand the spiritual meaning of the text.

Literal interpretation results in accepting the text of Scripture at its face value. Based on the philosophy that God originated language for the purpose of communicating His message to man and that He intended man to understand that message, literal interpretation seeks to interpret that message plainly.<sup>18</sup>

This quotation brings out the fact that dispensational hermeneutics are based on the worldly "philosophy" that God has written His Word

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16 Ibid., 16.

17 Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 88.

18 Ibid., 96.

to every human being without exception, with the sincere desire that each individual understand it. The truth is that God has revealed His Word only to His covenant people, and to them alone has He given the faith to understand and believe it.

This is a crucially important point. Dispensationalists think that the unbeliever can understand the Scriptures by his “common sense.” But the Scriptures say that it is only by faith, which is worked in our hearts by Christ’s Spirit, that we can understand the things the Spirit has written.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Heb. 11:3).

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:12–14).

The natural man with his “common sense” cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. An unbeliever can use his common sense to keep himself from walking in front of a moving car, but he is completely unable to come to a spiritual understanding of what the Scriptures teach. In fact, he hates what the Scriptures teach, and finds these things to be foolishness.

One must have the Spirit of Christ within him to be able to discern and rightly interpret what the Spirit has written. He must have God-given faith, a faith that looks for God’s own interpretation of the Word He has graciously given to His covenant people. ●

...to be continued.

# Survey of Southern Presbyterian History (1)<sup>1</sup>

Eugene Case

## Introduction

On the tenth day of June, 1983, the independent ecclesiastical history of what had been known for some 117 years as The Presbyterian Church in the United States sputtered to a rather inglorious end. Officially organized as The Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America on the fourth of December, 1861, the PCUS had long been known, unofficially, as The Southern Presbyterian Church.

Having begun her history as a strict adherent to the high Calvinism of the Westminster Standards—the Southern representative of Old School Presbyterianism in this country—the PCUS, by the time she ceased to exist, had abandoned every distinctive by which she had set herself apart at the time of her founding. With membership declining, due largely to an ongoing exodus of theological conservatives—the most significant contingent of which had departed in 1973 to form what is now The Presbyterian Church in America—the modernists in control of the PCUS were able, at last, to realize their long-standing desire to merge with the mostly northern United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, itself the result of a number of ecclesiastical realignments dating back to the early years of the twentieth century.

The new organization took the name The Presbyterian Church, USA, reflecting their claim to an unbroken institutional history stretching back to the early 1700s. By that time, however, people of

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1 This article is reconstructed from notes prepared for a lecture delivered at the Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in April 2008. Inasmuch as that venue did not require the sort of documentation one expects in a written format, no footnotes were attached. In preparation for publication, an attempt has been made, in the case of direct quotations, to give appropriate citation. A bibliography of sources has been included, and history being what it is, there would seem to be little point to the multiplication of citations from books that are themselves, very often, multiplications of citations.

Reformed, and even Presbyterian, conviction had been in the Southern portion of the North American continent on a more or less permanent basis for nearly a hundred years, with some temporary settlements dating back an additional fifty years. Thus, the presence of Calvinism on this continent substantially pre-dated the arrival of those notoriously poor navigators who ended up in Massachusetts in the 1620s; and that presence, from its earliest days, was in the South.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Beginnings of Presbyterianism in North America (Pre-Colonial Period–1706)**

#### **The Carolina Low Country**

“Presbyterians from France, seeking relief from persecution and war in their native land, had made settlements in Florida and South Carolina as early as 1562, but were soon overcome by the Spanish.”<sup>3</sup> These, of course, were not Presbyterians in the conventional sense, but Huguenots who, while hoping to escape the intensifying religious conflict in their native land, ended up in equally uncertain circumstances in the New World. Little is known about these early settlers, apart from their lack of success; but they have the distinction of being, probably, the first Reformed Christians to settle on these shores.

The respite from persecution provided by the Edict of Nantes in 1598 made the argument for emigration a bit less compelling for French Protestants. In 1610, however, their champion, King Henry IV, was assassinated, and the somewhat more congenial circumstances Protestants had lived with under Henry began to unravel. Henry’s grandson, Louis XIV, determined to make France the foremost power of Europe, and believing that this required uniformity in religion as well as everything else—in other words, the real god is the state, which will have no other gods before it—reintroduced repressive measures and eventually revoked the Edict of Nantes.

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2 In this connection, we should note that the first public Thanksgiving Day among English settlers on this continent took place in Virginia, not Plymouth Colony, a year or so before the “Pilgrim Fathers,” celebrated in story and song (not to mention *myth*), had even arrived on these shores.

3 Street, T. Watson, *The Story of Southern Presbyterianism*, Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960, p. 12.

In the midst of renewed turmoil and uncertainty, in 1669, three ships with Huguenot refugees landed on the Carolina coast, marking the beginning of permanent French colonization in South Carolina. More arrived in 1680. And with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the increased number of emigrants began to include men of substantial means whose names would become prominent in the history of the Palmetto State. The names of some of these early settlers may also still be found on the rolls of the French Protestant Huguenot Church of Charleston (originally, Charles Towne). That church, one of six established in the Low Country of South Carolina, was organized about 1687, and is the only one of its type still in existence in this country. The other Huguenot congregations gradually disappeared, with many of their adherents absorbed into the Anglican establishment that prevailed in the Low Country, though Presbyterian churches in that region also have members whose names link them with the early Huguenot settlers.

Those of Reformed and Presbyterian conviction also came to Low Country South Carolina from a number of other European countries—England, Wales, the north of Ireland, Holland, Switzerland, even Italy and, of course, Scotland. A number of these latter were refugees from the severe religious persecution inflicted upon their native land at the hands of the Stuarts.

Among them was a man named Henry Erskine (Lord Cardross) who, after being released from prison in 1683, established Port Royal, in lower Carolina, as a refuge for his fellow countrymen. In 1686, however, the settlement was destroyed by the Spanish. The few survivors of Port Royal moved to the area of Charles Towne, where they were absorbed into the settlements there.

Other Scots came because they had been banished from Stuart-controlled Scotland on account of their Presbyterian faith. One group of about twenty-two were said to have “received their indictment...for not owning the king’s supremacy..., their declining to call Bothwell Bridge rebellion, and refusing to renounce the covenants.”<sup>4</sup> Such as these, having defied the Anglican establishment in their homeland,

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4 Howe, George, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina: Volume I*: Columbia, South Carolina: Duffie & Chapman, 1870, p. 81.

were hardly inclined to unite with its American counterpart. Presbyterians there, they were Presbyterians here as well.

In 1688-'89 a Scottish trading company attempted, without success, to establish a colony in what is now Panama.<sup>5</sup> When the colony failed, one of the men who had gone as a minister to the colonists—the Reverend Archibald Stobo—decided to return to Scotland. His ship, however, was forced by a storm to land in Charles Towne. The Independent Church there, having recently lost their minister, prevailed upon Stobo to take his place, which he agreed to do, remaining as pastor until 1704. His insistence upon a strictly Presbyterian form of government in the church caused controversy, however, leading to his resignation. As a result, Stobo would be involved, over the next several years, in the organization of a number of churches on the Presbyterian model.

The aforementioned Independent Church had been organized in Charles Towne in 1690, and was composed of Puritans from old and New England, Presbyterians from Scotland and Ireland, and French Huguenots. This congregation, variously called “the Presbyterian Church,” “the White Meeting,” “The Independent Church,” and “the New England Meeting,” finally settled on “the Circular Church,” the name by which it is known to this day. Among the ministers of the Circular Church was Benjamin Morgan Palmer, uncle and namesake of the man who would be the first moderator of the Southern Presbyterian Church, and one of the most influential men, not only of that denomination, but in the entire South.

Another group of New Englanders, coming from Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1696, founded a settlement of the same name on the Ashley River in South Carolina. There they organized a Congregational church whose history, like that of other Puritan-organized Congregational churches, was to become very closely intertwined with that of the Presbyterian Church in the Low Country.

### **Virginian Colony and the Chesapeake Region**

In 1607 the first permanent English settlement on this continent was established in what came to be called Jamestown, in the colony of

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5 A detailed account of this may be found in Howe's *History*, pp. 136ff.



Virginia. Virginia Colony was a commercial enterprise. This did not mean, however, that there was no religious interest or concern among the early settlers. In fact, there are substantial indications that men of evident Reformed and Presbyterian views were among the early arrivals in Virginia.

To be sure, the charter granted to the Virginia Company by the English king provided that “the word and services of God be preached, planted, and used according to the rites and doctrines of the Church of England.”<sup>6</sup> At the time, though, the controversies over polity and worship in the English Church were still pending; and, as it happened, the Virginia Colony was controlled by those of Puritan sympathies, some of whom were inclined to Presbyterianism.

It is uncertain whether the Reverend Robert Hunt, who came to Virginia with the first body of settlers, was definitely of these views; but he received his education at Cambridge, which was a center of Puritanism, with some of the faculty known to hold Presbyterian views. Another of the early Virginia ministers—Alexander Whitaker, who arrived in 1611—not only was the son of a Cambridge professor of Presbyterian conviction, but in this country organized a church on the Presbyterian plan, and emphasized preaching and teaching rather than the sacramental and liturgical aspects common to Anglican worship. And Whitaker was succeeded by the Reverend George Keith, a Scotsman, who openly discarded the English prayer book, and erected a church government by ministers and elders.

In 1624 the Charter of the Virginia Company was revoked. A few years after this, an order “that all ministers residing and beeing, or who hereafter shall reside or bee within this colony, shall conform themselves in all things according to the canons of the Church of England.” At first the policy in regard to dissenters, in this new set of circumstances, was basically one of benign neglect. With the ascendancy of Sir William Berkeley as Governor of Virginia Colony, however, the lot of dissenters became more difficult. Berkeley was not only a strong-willed and staunch adherent to Episcopacy, but he took up his duties at a point coinciding with the onset of the politi-

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6 Thompson, Ernest Trice, *Presbyterians in the South; Volume One, 1607-1861*: Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1963, p. 11.

cal turmoil in England that would result, eventually, in the execution of King Charles I. The new governor set about to suppress what he regarded as rebellious—that is to say, Puritan—influences in Virginia. And as the English king’s position became more uncertain, Berkeley became more repressive, even banishing from the colony the man who had been, at one time, the governor’s own chaplain, but who had abandoned the established church to lead a Presbyterian group.

The repressive measures in Virginia led a number of the dissenting brethren in that colony to accept the invitation extended by the Governor of Maryland to move there, establishing themselves on the Western Shore in Anne Arundel and adjacent counties. It was in this region, actually, that organized Presbyterianism as such was finally to have its birth in the American colonies. Meanwhile, the efforts of Presbyterians to maintain a presence in Virginia’s Chesapeake region—the area of the early settlements—was gradually abandoned. Presbyterians of both English and Scottish backgrounds who remained in that portion of Virginia were apparently absorbed into the Anglican establishment.

The Virginia Presbyterians who moved to Maryland, on the other hand, increased in number and influence to the point that they were able, for a time, to seize control of that colony. This advantage was owing in great part, no doubt, to the unsettled political condition in England following the overthrow of the monarchy and the commencement of the Cromwellian era; and the end of that era, accompanied by the restoration of the Stuart dynasty, caused their influence to wane somewhat, frustrating as well their plans to extend their control back into Virginia. Their numbers were significantly increased, however, with the influx of Scots and Scots-Irish (from Ulster), particularly the latter, during the decade 1670 to 1680. Many of these settled in the area between the Potomac and the Patuxent Rivers, with the Scots-Irish especially numerous in the vicinity of Snow Hill, Dorchester County. By 1676, in fact, an Anglican clergyman residing in Maryland wrote somewhat dispiritedly to the Archbishop of Canterbury that “The greatest part of the inhabitants of that Province...doe consist of Praesbiterians, Independents, Anabaptists and Quakers, those of the Church England as well as those of the Romish being the fewest.”<sup>7</sup>

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7 Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South, Volume One*, p. 18.

The increase of the Presbyterian flock in Maryland was accompanied by a felt need for ministers to tend that flock. The problem was that the sheep were widely scattered and generally poor. To say that the situation was unsettled would be to understate the matter considerably. Indeed, for all that there had been men of Reformed and Presbyterian persuasion on the scene from the outset, there had been, as the seventeenth century drew toward its close, virtually no movement in the direction of the establishment of an organizationally distinct American Presbyterian Church. This, however, was about to change.

Among the Scots-Irish settlers in Maryland, there were some who, to the best of their ability, had kept up correspondence with the church in Northern Ireland, particularly with a view, it would seem, to obtaining ministers for themselves and their neighbors. Much of this correspondence was directed to the Presbytery of Laggan, which was quite receptive to the pleas of these overseas brethren for a competent ministry. Over the years, there had been some few men who had come from the midst of this Presbytery to take up the work; and there apparently had developed a consensus in the Presbytery that more needed to be done. There was only the question of how best to address the needs of the church in the New World. At one point the Presbytery itself voted to come. After further consideration, though, the decision was taken to send from among them a man whom they felt was well suited to the work in America. His name was Francis Makemie; and his brethren evidently were quite correct in their estimate of him. For, whatever may have been the services rendered by others who came before him, it is Francis Makemie who “is rightly revered as the father of organized Presbyterianism in America.”<sup>8</sup>

Makemie was born in County Donegal, somewhere around 1658. He was educated in Glasgow University and at Edinburgh, and was received under care of the Presbytery of Laggan in 1680. Later that year, as a probationer for the Gospel Ministry, he was present when a letter from Colonel Stevens, the most prominent official on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, was read, in which was described the destitute condition of religion among the Presbyterian colonists, and request was made for a missionary to be sent into their midst. Makemie was

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8 Ibid., p. 20.

licensed about 1681, the same year that the clerk and three of the most prominent members of Laggan Presbytery were arrested and imprisoned under new persecuting measures enforced against dissenters from the Anglican establishment. The following year, “after professing his adherence to the truth professed in the Reformed Churches against “Popery, Arminianism, prelacy, Erastianism, Independency, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness,” Makemie was ordained by the Laggan Presbytery, specifically for the mission field in North America. He arrived on these shores in 1683; and, for most of the next twenty-five years—excepting only the time it took to make a couple of trips to England, and a period spent in the Barbados – he traveled the length of the American colonies, from the Carolinas in the South to New York and Boston in the North.

Over the span of these years, Makemie published a catechism expounding the faith of the Confession drawn up by the Westminster Assembly, defended Presbyterian polity and Reformed doctrine against a series of opponents, organized churches at Rehoboth and Snow Hill on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and contended for the right to preach the gospel in areas where partisans of the Anglican establishment sought to prevent such.

Makemie was described by one of his adversaries—Lord Cornbury, the Governor of New York—as a “Jack-of-all-trades; he is a Preacher, a Doctor of Physick, a Merchant, and Attorney, or counsellor at Law, and which is worst of all, a Disturber of Governments.”<sup>9</sup>

Along the way Makemie also established a home in Accomac County, Virginia; found a wife – the daughter of a rich merchant of that county; and got into the mercantile business in order to provide a living for himself inasmuch as he refused to take a salary for his ministerial work, accepting only voluntary offering from those whom he knew to be able to give.

Makemie’s most notable accomplishment, however, was that of bringing together what he called “A Meeting of Ministers,” the design of which was “to consult the most proper measures for advancing religion, and propagating Christianity, in our Various Stations, and to

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9 Hays, George P., *Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative of Their Origin, Progress, Doctrines, and Achievements*, New York, J.A. Hill & Co., 1892, p. 75.

maintain Such a Correspondence as may conduce to the improvement of our Ministeriall ability.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Ecclesiastical Organization (1706-1789)**

### **The First Presbytery and Synod**

In 1706 Francis Makemie joined with six other ministers—three of whom, like himself, resided in Maryland; one from Philadelphia, and two from Delaware—to form the first Presbytery in North America. Philadelphia was chosen as the seat of this Presbytery, mostly because it was the principal city of North America, and was located in a colony that had a history of broad tolerance for dissenters. The presence of a number of Presbyterian congregations in Pennsylvania also likely entered into the choice. The first page of the record book in which the minutes of the organizational meeting were kept is missing, and it is not known, for sure, at whose call the ministers assembled. It is generally reckoned, however, that Makemie played a leading role in this organization—a reckoning strengthened by the fact that he was elected the first moderator of the Presbytery.

Francis Makemie died in 1708. His epitaph is that of the founder of institutional Presbyterianism in America. As E.T. Thompson notes, “He formed some of its earliest churches, was the foremost expounder of its tenets, and was its chief literary apologist. He defended its liberties, and was responsible for its first organization.”<sup>11</sup> The Presbytery formed at Philadelphia did not have a name, and though it is assumed the members came together on the basis of the Westminster Standards, there is little evidence that they actually adopted the Standards. There was growth, however; and in 1717 the first Synod was erected, divided into four Presbyteries. Two of these—the strongest—were centered around Long Island and Philadelphia. The other two were located farther South—one encompassing Delaware and a part of Maryland, the other the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Only four of the seventeen ministers of the Synod served churches in Maryland; and, despite a promising start, Presbyterianism ceased

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10 Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, p. 23.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

to thrive in that area. The 1691 establishment of the Anglican church in the colony led to a decreasing number of Presbyterian immigrants. And there were no churches south of Maryland that were aligned with the new Synod at the time of its organization.

### **The Adopting Act**

When the Westminster Confession was approved as the doctrinal statement of the Church of Scotland in 1648, there was no provision for ministers to subscribe its tenets. Subscription was not required in the Scottish Church until 1690. In Northern Ireland, subscription to the Confession became a statutory requirement in 1705. When the American Presbytery was organized in 1706, the matter of subscription apparently was not raised. A few years after this, however, the issue became a point of conflict in the mother Synod in Ulster; and it did not take long for the controversy to work its way to America.

In 1727 the Reverend John Thomson introduced an overture to the Synod of Philadelphia, the intent of which was to require strict subscription of the Confession by all ministers entering the Synod. The Scottish and Irish members of the Presbytery generally favored the overture. The English and Welsh did not. The debate very nearly resulted in the division of the Synod; but a compromise was reached in what is known as the Adopting Act, which provided that all ministers of the Synod would “declare their agreement in, and approbation of, the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of [their] faith.”<sup>12</sup>

It was also agreed that the Presbyteries of the Synod would “always take care not to admit any candidate of the ministry into the exercise of the sacred function but what declares his agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession.... And in case any minister...or any candidate for the ministry...have any scruple with respect

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12 Cf. Smith, Morton Howison, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, Jackson, Mississippi, Presbyterian Reformation Society; and Amsterdam, Drukkerij en Uitgeverij Jacob Van Campen, 1962, pp. 23ff.

to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government.”

Debate continued over the language “essential and necessary articles of said Confession,” to the point that the Synod, in 1736, felt it advisable to make the following declaration: “that the Synod have adopted and still do adhere to the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory, without the least variation or alteration, and without any regard to said distinctions. And we do further declare, that this was our meaning and true intent in our first adopting of said Confession, as may particular appear by our adopting act....”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Presbytery of Charleston**

The churches that had been organized in the Carolina Low Country were too far distant to be part of the Synod of Philadelphia. Sometime around 1722, however, Archibald Stobo, whose strict Presbyterianism had led him to resign as pastor of the Independent Church of Charles Towne, formed, along with two other ministers who had emigrated from Scotland—Hugh Fisher and Robert Witherspoon—an association, or Presbytery, which provided an institutional structure for bringing together the scattered Reformed communities in the region. Apparently this Presbytery was somewhat latitudinarian in its makeup; for the earliest references to the Charles Towne Presbytery are those that tell of controversy and division over—what else?—the subscription issue.

In 1729, as the Philadelphia Presbytery was ironing out its compromise with regard to subscription, the Reverend Josiah Smith, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Cainhoy, South Carolina, and a Harvard graduate, preached a sermon entitled, “Human Impositions proved unscriptural; or, the Divine Right of Private Judgment.” His point

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13 Anyone who may think this settled the matter is invited to consider several packages of ocean-front property in Arizona being offered for sale. Two hundred eighty years after the beginning of the debate, it still rages; only now, added to the debate is the meaning of the Adopting Act itself.

was that if Christians do not have the right to examine all teachings by the Scriptures, then the Scriptures are of no practical use. Smith was answered by a discourse from the Reverend Mr. Fisher, entitled, “A Preservative against Danger Errors in the Unction of the Holy One,” to which Smith replied with “No New Thing for Good Men to be evil-spoken of.” No short, catchy sermon titles for these fellows.

With the degree of temperance common to such controversies, the non-subscriptionists accused the subscriptionists of denying the right of private judgment and putting the Confession on the same footing as the Bible. The subscriptionists accused the non-subscriptionists of saying that the Unitarians had as much right to their views as they had to hold the truth. Smith, for his part, claimed to hold but one book in preference to the Confession, that being the Bible. But the majority of the Presbytery was unwilling to accept this unless Smith subscribed some clarifying articles of their framing, which he refused to do. Finally, he and the Reverend Nathan Basset, pastor of the Independent Church of Charles Towne, withdrew from the Presbytery. One of the by-products of this was the founding, in 1731, of a Presbyterian church on the Scottish model, which still exists as the First (Scots) Presbyterian Church of Charleston. It was started when twelve families—all Scots—withdrew from the Independent Church because they disagreed with their pastor’s non-subscriptionist views. As for the Presbytery of Charles Towne—later Charleston—it continued until the period of the American War for Independence, when it passed out of existence. After Charleston Presbytery ceased to exist, the First (Scots) Church remained independent until 1882, when it finally joined the Southern Assembly.<sup>14</sup>

### **North Carolina and Georgia**

There were a few lowland Scots in North Carolina before 1700; and in 1732 a group of Highlanders settled along the Cape Fear River. More Highlanders came after the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746. But the greatest influx came in the years just prior to the War for American Independence, particularly in the areas of Cross Creek and

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<sup>14</sup> Clarke, Erskine, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1996, pp. 48-49.



Campbell Town (now Fayetteville). The fact that these spoke only the Gaelic language protected them from the depredations of the Baptists; and, though they seldom had regular pastoral oversight, they kept up their custom of family worship and catechetical instruction.

Presbyterians also moved into coastal areas of Georgia, becoming the largest and most influential body of dissenters in that colony. One of their most enduring legacies was founded in 1755, when Highland and lowland Scots, Scots-Irish, and French and Swiss Calvinists joined with others adhering to the Westminster Standards to form the Independent Meeting House in association with the Church of Scotland. For many years the congregation called its ministers from the Presbyterian Church in the United States. More recently, the church has been served by men affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America.

### **The Back Country**

Though the development of a Presbyterian presence in the coastal areas of the Southern colonies waxed and waned, there was one area in which Presbyterianism thrived—the so-called “Back Country.” Described by Carl Bridenbaugh as “an irregularly shaped area running southwest from Mason and Dixon’s line for more than 600 miles to just beyond the southern banks of the Savannah River and varying from 20 to 160 miles in width,”<sup>15</sup> this region included portions of Western Maryland, the Great Valley of Virginia, and the Carolina Piedmont. Before the 1730s, this area was almost unoccupied. By the time of the War for Independence, however, there were more than a quarter of a million inhabitants, the greater and most aggressive portion of these being Scots-Irish Presbyterians in communities of considerable strength stretching along the Southern frontier from Maryland to Florida.

For a century before they migrated to America, these people had acted as an outpost of Protestantism in Roman Catholic Ireland. They were as ill-treated by the English as any, however; and they came to this country, as one writer put it, “resolved to brook no tyranny from landowners, lawmakers, or priests of the established church.”<sup>16</sup> This,

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15 Quoted in Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South, Volume One*, p. 41.

16 Hesseltine and Smiley, *The South in American History*, quoted in Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South, Volume One*, p. 45.

in large measure, is why these people took to the back country—in order that they might be left alone to pursue life without having to deal with the establishment in any form or guise.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Old Side-New Side Controversy**

To the earlier controversies regarding the meaning of subscription to the Westminster Standards, there was added, in the middle of the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, a debate that resulted in the division of the Presbyterian Synod. This debate arose out of what is known as “The Great Awakening.” Dr. Morton Smith characterizes this as “a period of spiritual blessing.”<sup>18</sup> Others, such as Charles Hodge in his *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, are somewhat less generous in their assessment. Whatever view one takes with regard to this division, however, the fact is that, in the Presbyterian church, there was a substantial difference of opinion with regard to this revivalistic movement. “In general the more ‘churchly’ authoritarian Scotch-Irish party, which a little earlier had favored subscription to the Westminster Confession, opposed the revival, while the more ‘sectarian’ dynamic Puritan party, which had opposed subscription, favored it.”<sup>19</sup>

There were several points of contention. The Old Side men objected that the revivalists invaded their parishes uninvited, were judgmental and condemnatory in their attitude toward those who did not approve their methods, and encouraged some rather unseemly behaviors attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. They also took umbrage at the insistence, on the part of the revivalists, “that all true converts are as certain of their gracious state as a person can be of what he knows by his outward sense; and are able to give a narrative of the

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17 An excellent treatment of the Scots-Irish of the Southern Back Country is found in the book by Virginia Senator James Webb, *Born Fighting*.

18 Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, p. 27.

19 Smith, H. Shelton; Handy, Robert T.; and Loetscher, Lefferts A., *American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents, Volume I, 1607-1820*, p. 321. This characterization no doubt would be disputed by some; but we find this distinction between anti and pro subscriptionists and the respective backgrounds of each interesting and telling.

time and manner of their conversion, or else they conclude them to be in a natural or graceless state, and that a gracious person can judge of another's gracious state otherwise than by his profession and life."<sup>20</sup>

A leading member of the revivalist party was a man named Gilbert Tennent, whose father, William, had started a theological training school for ministers known as the Log College. The products of this school were, for the most part, biased in the direction of the revivalist movement; and the anti-revivalist party in the church had sought to check their influence by refusing to endorse the Log College. In 1740, Gilbert Tennent preached a sermon entitled, "The Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry," in which he basically equated the anti-revivalist party in the church with the Pharisees of Jesus' day.<sup>21</sup> In the course of his sermon, Tennent charged that "The most likely Methods to stock the Church with a faithful Ministry, in the Present Situation of things, the publick Academies being so much corrupted and abused generally, is, To encourage private Schools, or Seminaries of Learning, which are under the Care of skilful and experienced Christians: in which only those should be admitted, who upon strict Examination, have in the Judgment of a reasonable Charity, the plain Evidences of experimental Religion."<sup>22</sup>

Now, it was the case, evidently, that at that time many of the English clergy of the established church—essentially political appointees, interested in the church only to the extent of receiving their salaries—did lead scandalous lives. On the other hand, the Scottish and Presbyterian criteria for ministers and members were orthodox theology, a life without public scandal, and regular participation in the Lord's Supper—things that could be considered objectively. This, however, was not satisfactory to men like Tennent. Assuming the ability to discern the spiritual state of others, Tennent and his party insisted on what they termed a "converted" or "regenerate" ministry, by which it was meant, of course, a ministry whose members were able to produce what was, to the revivalist party, satisfactory evidence

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20 Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South, Volume One*, p. 50.

21 The text was Mark 6:34.

22 Tennent, Gilbert, "The Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry," quoted in Smith, Handy, and Loetscher, *American Christianity*, p. 327.

of a religious experience. Tennent would later express regret for the harsh language used in his sermon. But, by the time Synod met in 1741, passions were running high.

The Presbytery of New Brunswick, in which the Tennents had their credentials, was a stronghold of what were termed “hot-gospellers.” It had adopted the practice of appointing members of that Presbytery to preach in vacant churches and mission fields within the boundaries of other Presbyteries. Sometimes, these itinerant revivalists would go even into churches over the objections of the resident minister, insisting that they had the right to follow out what they considered divine leadings, even though no one other than themselves had received or was able to understand the alleged providential directions.

When the Synod met, there were protests and counter-protests having to do with these matters, including one that challenged the right of the ministers of the New Brunswick Presbytery even to be seated because there were, among the members of that Presbytery, men who had not been examined by the Synod. The situation was further complicated by the fact that some of the most influential members of the Synod—ministers of the New York Presbytery who generally were able to bring the opposing parties to a measure of agreement—were absent. Somebody did the math, and found that the New Side men were in the minority. The New Siders withdrew, therefore, and left the Old Side men to proceed with the business of Synod. The New York Presbytery subsequently tried to work out a reconciliation. But this attempt failed; and, in 1745, the New York Presbytery ended up joining with the New Brunswick Presbytery to form an alternative Synod – the Synod of New York.

Both Synods declared their adherence to the Westminster Standards. And, after a little experience with the problem of churches being divided by the intrusions of itinerant evangelists, the New Side adopted measures to prevent this sort of thing, similar to what had been adopted by the Old Side men. The New Side party grew more rapidly than the Old Side, however, and in the South became the dominant party.

In 1758, the old antagonisms largely forgotten and forgiven, the two sides reunited on the basis of the Westminster creeds and directory for church government. There is a sense, however, in which the New

Side prevailed, inasmuch as American Presbyterianism, and especially Southern Presbyterianism, has retained an emphasis on what is called “experimental religion.” It is required, for example, in the examination of applicants to be taken under care of Presbytery as candidates for the gospel ministry, that they be examined “on experimental religion.” Candidates for licensure are to give a statement of their “Christian experience and *inward* call to preach the Gospel.” Interns moving from the bounds of one Presbytery to another must be examined on their “Christian experience.” And candidates for ordination are to be examined as to their “acquaintance with experimental religion.” If this sort of examination is intended to be merely a rehearsal of the candidates’ life in the faith, it is hardly objectionable. There is little question, however, that many who attend upon these examinations are looking for something along the lines of what the revivalist party in the Old Side/New Side controversy was insisting upon as necessary to prove one’s conversion.

### **Hanover Presbytery**

Ministers from both the Old Side and the New Side ministered to Presbyterians in the Back Country of the Southern Colonies. The Old Side Presbytery of Philadelphia sent three ministers into the region, the most noted of which was John Craig, who came to America from Ireland in 1734. Craig, in 1740, became the first settled pastor in Western Virginia, with charges at Augusta and Tinkling Spring in the Valley of Virginia, where he remained for thirty-four years. John Thomson, another Old Sider, settled near the present location of Statesville, North Carolina. From the New Side, Hugh McAden, sent out by the Presbytery of New Castle, made visits to some fifty settlements in North Carolina alone. And Alexander Craighead, after breaking with the New Side over their refusal to reaffirm the National Covenant of 1581 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, led a group of Covenanters that eventually ended up in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, which was destined to have one of the highest concentrations of Presbyterians anywhere in this country.

In the midst of the Old Side/New Side division, the New Side Synod of New York formed the first Presbytery in the South that was a part of the mainstream of American Presbyterianism rather than an

independent organization. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1755, four ministers and three ruling elders constituted the Presbytery of Hanover, which would become the mother of all Southern Presbyteries, incorporating an area stretching from western Pennsylvania, to include Virginia, North and South Carolina, and the settled parts of Kentucky and Tennessee. The first moderator of Hanover Presbytery was Samuel Davies, who not only helped build up Presbyterianism in Virginia Colony, but was a leader in the fight for religious toleration. Many of the liberties that Christians, at least until recently, have enjoyed in this country, may be attributed directly to the efforts of Davies and the Virginia Presbyterians. Among those who sat under his preaching was a young Patrick Henry, whose mother was a member of the Presbyterian Church.

### **Church Life**

Worship in the churches of this era was generally simple, on the Scottish model. The use of Psalms was customary; but again, in the tradition of the Scots, there were disputes about the version used, with some preferring the metrical Psalms, and others the paraphrases. Preaching was at the heart of the service; and on the Lord's Day there were two sermons, with a brief dinner break between the two. There were Communion seasons twice a year when, again on the Scottish model, several congregations and ministers would assemble for what was a social as well as a religious occasion.

These Communion seasons would begin on a Friday evening with a service of worship; followed by preaching throughout the day on Saturday; and then, on Sunday, the people would assemble to a location, sometimes outdoors, where long tables were set up, extending to the right and left of the pulpit, and down the aisle, covered with white linens. An "Action Sermon" was preached, dealing, generally, with the death of Christ and its fruits for the salvation of sinners. There followed the fencing of the table. Then the people would come forward, present their communion tokens to the elders (to show they had been examined and admitted to the sacrament), and take a seat at the table. This process would be repeated until all were served, usually with a different minister presiding at each succeeding table. On Monday, a sermon designed to

solidify the impression made on the minds of the people by the services of the preceding days was preached. There are records of as many as two thousand people being in attendance for some of these services, though only a fraction of these would actually come to the table.

Ministerial education was often supervised by an older, experienced minister. Requirements for licensure and ordination were, shall we say, stiff. T. Watson Street describes the trial parts for the licensure of one John Martin.

...on March 18, 1756, delivered a discourse before Presbytery on Ephesians 2:1, and was examined on religious experience, reasons for desiring the ministry, Latin and Greek languages, and briefly on logic, ontology, ethics, natural philosophy, rhetoric, geography, and astronomy! Later, before a committee of Presbytery, he delivered a sermon on First Corinthians 1:22, 23 and discussion of the question, *Num Revelation supernaturalis sit necessaria*.... He prepared for another meeting of Presbytery a sermon on Galatians 2:2, and an exposition of Isaiah 61:1, 2, but delivered them before “some members in a private capacity.” For the next meeting of Presbytery, August 25, he prepared a sermon on First John 5:16, and was further examined “in sundry extempore questions upon various branches of learning and divinity.” After he was licensed, there were other parts for ordination.<sup>23</sup>

With the reconciliation of the Old and New Sides in 1758, ministers from both were united in the Presbytery of Hanover, and the next several years witnessed growth and expansion, as reflected in the establishment of new Presbyteries created out of Hanover. These included: Orange Presbytery, covering the Carolinas, which was formed in 1770; South Carolina Presbytery, established in 1784; Abingdon Presbytery, covering Tennessee and Kentucky, and Lexington Presbytery in western Virginia, organized in 1785; and Transylvania Presbytery in Kentucky.

### **The War for American Independence**

The involvement of Presbyterians in the American War for Independence may be judged, somewhat, by the fact that certain have referred to it as a “Presbyterian Rebellion.” The only minister to sign the Declaration

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23 Street, *The Story of Southern Presbyterianism*, p. 20.

of Independence was Presbyterian John Witherspoon. And a year before the publication of that document, in and around Charlotte, North Carolina, the heavily Presbyterian population of the area anticipated the rest of the colonies by drawing up their Mecklenburg Resolutions, looking forward to independence. Daniel Morgan, who commanded American forces in the victory over the British at Cowpens in South Carolina, was an elder of the Presbyterian Church—just one of many who joined the fight. At King’s Mountain, another important American victory, virtually every soldier on the field, loyalist and patriot, was a Presbyterian. A number of Presbyterian ministers served as chaplains, and some were even officers of the line. Particularly in Virginia and the Carolinas, the strong sentiment for independence expressed by Presbyterians led to their being singled out for special treatment by the British whose war crimes against civilian populations are seldom mentioned in history books, but still reside in the historical memory of the people of this region.<sup>24</sup>

Hanover Presbytery, in response to the Declaration of Independence, delivered up a petition to the General Assembly (legislature) of Virginia, to secure “the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of our conscience,” in which we find an example of an early statement of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, which was to become one of the hallmarks of Southern Presbyterianism. Arguing against state establishment of religion, the Presbytery declared:

Neither can it be made to appear that the Gospel needs any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our blessed Saviour declares his *kingdom is not of this world*, He renounces all dependence upon state power, and as His *weapons are spiritual*, and were only designed to have influence on the judgment and heart of man, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in the quiet possession of their unalienable rights and privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the Apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish in the greatest purity, by its own native excellence, and under the all-disposing Providence of God.<sup>25</sup>

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24 As William Faulkner famously observed, in the South the past is not forgotten; indeed, in the South, the past is not even past.

25 Johnson, Thomas Cary, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty in Colonial and Revolutionary Times*: Richmond, Virginia, The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907, p. 84.



These sentiments would come to ever fuller expression as the years passed, and would become identified especially with the Southern part of the Presbyterian Church.

### **Formation of the General Assembly**

With the end of the War for Independence, the church began to turn its attention to western expansion, which, in turn, necessitated consideration of some modification in the ecclesiastical structure then in place. Though every minister was a member of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and every church entitled to representation by an elder, the practical difficulties of traveling from distant outposts of the church to Philadelphia for meetings of Synod resulted in fractional representation. In 1785, therefore, a committee was erected to study the matter and compile a system of rules for the government of the Synod, taking into consideration the constitution of the Church of Scotland and other Reformed churches. This process occupied the next three years; and, by the end of the Synod of 1787, work had progressed sufficiently to cause notice to be given that at the meeting in 1788, the proposals for the new form of government would be taken up and acted upon.

At that meeting, Synod went over the Confession of Faith, the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship, item by item, making changes having to do with the civil magistrate, before granting approval. The Presbyteries then in existence were considerably restructured as to their boundaries and membership. The Synod then declared that it would cease to exist at the end of that meeting, with four new Synods constructed. A General Assembly, whose membership would be based on delegated commissioners from the Presbyteries, would be called to meet at the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia in May of 1789. Two of the New Synods—Virginia, with four Presbyteries, and the Carolinas, with three—were in the South. Both of these held organizational meetings in late 1788. The latter would eventually take the name of the Synod of the Carolinas and Georgia. Among its Presbyteries was a reconstructed Charleston Presbytery.

...to be continued. ●

From the Archives

## “Handopening”

Russell J. Dykstra

Must every vacant congregation receive permission from classis to extend calls to any minister before making any trios and extending a call to a particular minister? To be sure, a classis has some involvement in the call of a minister. In Reformed church polity the ordinary practice is that classis appoints a moderator or counselor for a vacant congregation who oversees the calling process. The moderator, representing classis, is responsible to see to it that the various regulations of the Church Order are followed in the formation of trios and extending of calls. Whether classis gives some approval to the specific call is not the question.

Neither is it a question whether a classis must give approval to a congregation calling a minister from outside the denomination. Article 9 of the Church Order is explicit on this.<sup>1</sup>

Rather, the question is: When a congregation becomes vacant, must the congregation ask classis for permission to *begin* calling?

The question probably sounds strange to the Reformed believer in the twenty-first century. Permission to call? Of course not! This is not part of the process of obtaining a minister as outlined in the Church Order.

### ***Handopening in the Early Years of the PRCA***

However, this matter was neither strange nor unusual in the first half of the twentieth century. In fact it was the practice of many Reformed denominations, including the Protestant Reformed Churches, to require a vacant church to request *handopening* before extending

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1 The Church Order referred to is basically that adopted by the Synod of Dort of 1618-19. Article 9 reads: “Preachers without fixed charge, or others who have left some sect, shall not be admitted to the ministry of the church until they have been declared eligible, after careful examination by the classis, with the approval of synod.” The PRC also adopted a procedure for receiving a minister from another denomination.

even one call. The term is from the Dutch, and means literally precisely what the English words do—“hand opening.” Loosely speaking, this was taken as a request for permission to extend calls to ministers.

Thus the classical minutes of the Protestant Reformed Churches contained some unfamiliar, and from our experience, somewhat strange minutes concerning vacant churches.

### **June, 1927**

**Article 32.** The following churches request permission to call: Hudsonville, Sioux Center, Hull, Munster, Doon, Waupun. All are granted permission.

### **August, 1927**

**Article 14.** Roosevelt Park Consistory requests permission to call. Granted.

### **June, 1929**

**Article 11.** The following churches request permission to call a minister:

Byron Center, Rock Valley, Oak Lawn, Pella, Oskaloosa.  
Decided to grant their request.

**Article 13.** Pella requests permission to call a minister with Oskaloosa. Granted.

Sometimes the request was connected with a subsidy request from a needy church, as in December, 1931 –

Article 21. The following churches request support for the coming year: Sioux Center \$350.00; Oak Lawn \$300.00; Kalamazoo \$900.00 with permission to call; Roosevelt Park \$200.00; Doon \$600.00; Oskaloosa \$300.00 with permission to call; ...

More often it seems wholly separate from finances, as with Article 69 of the June, 1932 classis:

Request of Holland’s consistory for permission to call a minister.  
This is received for information. It is decided to grant this request.

In all these instances, the churches made a request for *handopening*.

As time went on, these requests for *handopening* were increasingly handled by the classical committee—the committee appointed to take care of necessary business of classis between the meetings of classis. This committee reported to the June, 1932 Classis on their work with newly formed congregations. They informed classis that they had

received two requests from the consistory of Pella:

1) To appoint Rev. Vermeer as moderator of the Prot. Ref. Church.

2) Request for permission to call a minister.

... The committee granted Pella consistory permission to call, but advised them not to call at present, under the present circumstances, but to wait until next June to call one of the future candidates.

Pella's consistory soon informed them that "they would not follow our advice not to call before June. This is received for information."

This same committee reported that they had treated

two requests from the consistory of Creston Prot. Ref. Church:

1) To appoint a moderator for that congregation, and

2) To grant permission to call a minister next June, 1932.

The committee decided to grant permission to call a minister, that is, *handopening*.

To the same classis, this committee also reported that it had authorized Rev. Vos to give *handopening* to the Redlands consistory, should that consistory request it when he visited them. They did, and he granted it.

Two additional actions of the classical committee were the appointment of a moderator and the granting of *handopening* for Hudsonville PRC. However, the committee added:

But since your committee heard that Hudsonville intended to call on a salary of \$1000.00, we advised them to raise this proposed salary to \$1200.00, if at all possible. The reason given was, that your committee is of the opinion that a minister can hardly live decently from \$1000.00.

That might suggest that *handopening* was connected to the minister's salary. Was it required to be sure the proposed salary for the minister was adequate? No certain connection can be made.

Most often the churches seemed to have no difficulty obtaining *handopening*. But occasionally, it seems, the consistory believed it might be necessary to make a case for *handopening*. The newly formed congregation in Los Angeles sent the following letter to classis.

The consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Los Angeles, California, at its regular meeting held January 18, 1933, instructed the clerk of the consistory to forward to the classis of February 1, 1933, for classical approval the following decision of the consistory:

Minutes Jan. 18, 1933. Art. 16.

"It is moved and supported to request classis for *handopening*. So decided."

The consistory's grounds for this request are:

1. The sentiment of the congregation is strongly favorable to this request.
2. The proper development of our congregation demands that Los Angeles shall have her own pastor as soon as possible.
3. The present method of having the services of classical supplies for periods of six or seven weeks will ultimately prove unsatisfactory for the proper growth of the congregation and the cause of the Protestant Reformed Churches as a whole.
4. The money now spent on Railroad fares would serve a more constructive purpose when used for a pastor's salary.
5. That portion of the pastor's time not needed for his own congregation could be wisely utilized for consistent mission work in the vicinity of Los Angeles, namely the Bellflower, Clearwater, Hynes, and Artesia area.
6. With a united effort put forth by the consistories of Redlands and Los Angeles, a program of propagating the Reformed truth could be organized which may reap rich blessings.
7. In view of the above mentioned reasons we may expect that the Lord's blessing shall rest upon our efforts to advance His kingdom; at a minimum expense upon the people of God.

Your brethren in Christ,  
The Consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church  
of Los Angeles, California

The minutes indicate that the request was not automatically granted in this case. Classis initially “decided to table the request of Los Angeles for permission to call until the next meeting” (Art. 21). But two articles later, the minutes state: “It is decided to rescind the decision of Art. 21. of these minutes. Proposed to grant Los Angeles permission to call. Adopted.”

Eventually this practice of requesting *handopening* became part of the official policy of the PRC. The June 6, 1934 classical minutes contained a report from an appointed committee “On Footnotes to the Church Order.” The report began:

Esteemed brethren,

At the classis of June 21 & 22, 1933 your committee was mandated to serve the classis with advice in connection with the footnotes included in the Church Order, and the desirability of adopting some of these.

In this our labor, that the classis laid upon us, we have followed the edition of the Church Order of the former Prof. W. Heyns, as also that of Hoeksema and Stuart, although we arranged these footnotes according to the edition of Heyns.<sup>2</sup> Thus the articles that appear in Roman numerals in this report refer to the articles as they appear in the Church Order.

In our investigation concerning these footnotes we found much material that at present does not yet serve our Protestant Reformed Churches, as, namely, footnotes concerning synodical gatherings, etc. Therefore your committee omitted those footnotes and deemed it wiser to deal with these when the time requires.

Moreover, your committee did not merely take up desirable *footnotes* in our report, but also a few ecclesiastical *usages* that can be of value for our churches in general.

According to the classical decision, a copy of this advice should be sent to the various consistories for them to peruse and study before the next classis. Your committee complied with this mandate by presenting this copy, and advises classis to adopt the following footnotes and usages as our own.

Of interest are the footnotes on Article 4 of the Church Order,

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2 These are Church Orders of the Christian Reformed Church. rjd.

regarding the calling of ministers. The second section addresses the matter of advice to classis and counselor. In addition to the usual responsibilities laid upon the counselor for orderly transaction of the call process, it states the following requirement of the consistory: “2. That the consistory of a vacant church requests of classis permission to call before it proceeds to call.” That is, the vacant church was required to request *handopening*.

The practice continued for a couple more years until First PRC in Grand Rapids brought the following request to the January, 1937 Classis: “Whether the custom of congregations asking for *handopening* is not contrary to Reformed church polity.” In response, classis appointed “Rev. G.M. Ophoff...to investigate this matter and to report at the next classis.”

Rev. Ophoff came to the next classis (June, 1937) with a lengthy report. One thing he pointed out is that the Protestant Reformed Churches had taken the practice from the Christian Reformed Church. The CRC had an interesting history in connection with asking for *handopening*. Thus before examining Rev. Ophoff’s report, it will be profitable to review the history of the practice in the CRC.

### ***Handopening in the Christian Reformed Church***

Whatever the significance of *handopening*, one thing is certain, it was tied to the Reformed church in the Netherlands. Specifically, it was tied to the Hervormde Kerk, which was very much under the control of the government in the 1800s. The request for *handopening* was made to the government.

In 1834, a large church reformation occurred in the Hervormde Kerk in the Netherlands, known as the Afscheiding, or Secession. Led by the Revs. De Cock, Scholte, Van Velzen, Brummelkamp, and Van Raalte, thousands of Reformed people left the established church due to the widespread apostasy found there. These ministers and believers endured severe persecution for their convictions. They faced ridicule, fines, beatings, and imprisonment. Some of these believers sought relief in America from the poverty and oppression. Rev. Scholte led a group of Seceders to the Pella, Iowa region. Rev. Van Raalte brought a second group to west Michigan, and established the city of Holland.

The CRC came from these Dutch Reformed people in west Michigan. Thus the first members of the CRC were from the Secession of 1834. The point is, that one would not expect that the churches of the Secession would have any use for the request for *handopening*. And for the most part, this was correct.

One early reference to the practice is found in the minutes of the February 20, 1867 Classical Assembly<sup>3</sup> of the CRC. Article 12 reads:

At the request of the president, Rev. Vanden Bosch provides enlightenment about what he understands by permission [*handopening*, rjd] with regard to the resources of a congregation, which is about to call a minister.

However, it is plain that the Classical Assembly distanced itself from the explanation of Rev. Vanden Bosch, for the October, 1867 minutes contain the following (Article 7):

Articles 11 and 12 of the previous Classis are voided, since the general assembly decided relative to Art. 11, to continue accepting members according to the rule of the compendium; and relative to Art. 12, that permission to call [a minister] [*handopening*, rjd] is not stipulated in our church order but only advised.

In 1875, the General Assembly faced a related matter, but the term used was *toestemming* (permission), not *handopening*.

Classis Illinois raises the matter whether a congregation may formulate a trio of ministers from the Netherlands, and from that formulated trio may call a minister without the permission [*toestemming*, rjd] of a classis, or a classical committee?

Which matter is also raised here by the congregation from Pella, since said congregation argues that such [permission] is not neces-

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3 In her early history, the Christian Reformed Church had three different names for their broadest ecclesiastical gathering. From 1857 to 1865, only one classis existed, and had the name “Classical Assembly” (*Classicale Vergadering*), which in the minutes is often simply shortened to “classis.” When a second classis was formed in 1865, the two classes met in a “General Assembly” (*Algemeena Vergadering*). In 1880 this was replaced by the *Synodale Vergadering*, or simply, synod.



sary. The assembly decides that the decision of the former assembly, regarding the established committee (see Art. 23 of the minutes of 1872) is lapsed and that efforts such as creating a nomination and calling a minister, is left to the counselor of each congregation, and that he shall continue to function as a consultant. (Art. 21).

However, in 1878, the term *handopening* is used in the minutes of the General Assembly:

Art. 7

Rochester

Per Art. 33 of the previous assembly, Rev L. Rietdijk presents a report on the organization of a congregation at Rochester, N.Y. This is approved.

Via a letter, this congregation requests a counselor, Rev. Rietdijk is named as such. And the request for *handopening* in calling a pastor is placed in the hands of the classical committee of Michigan.

The General Assembly referred to the practice in 1879 (Art. 13) in a question about “Repeat Calls,” seeming to require the practice, at least in the specific case.

Under letter D, Classis Michigan asks may a congregation call the same minister three times in succession?

The assembly unanimously unites behind the following, which it adopts as its decision: While we must be on guard as much against all invasion as misuse of Christian freedom, the assembly considers that in a repeated call to a minister, it is the duty of the counselor to ascertain that the reasons for this repetition are of sufficient significance. If there is a difference between him and the church council about this, the church council may not proceed without renewed permission [*handopening*, rjd] from the Classis to which they belong.

In 1867, the General Assembly of the CRC faced the matter with a specific request, but rejected the practice.

Article 28

The church council of Zeeland asks if the assembly will continue to permit Zeeland, to call a minister, as classis has granted. And since the word *handopening* is found [used] nowhere, the assembly

rejects not only that word but also what that word implies, and will adhere to Art. 4 of the church order. At this point the question is, can Zeeland call a minister, about which there is much discussion.... It is decided that Rev. Frieling, as a temporary counselor to Zeeland, will work toward the calling of a minister, so that that congregation is granted permission. [Note that the word used there is *toegestaan*, not *handopening*, rjd.]

Apparently the council of Zeeland CRC had requested *handopening* of the classis, which request was granted. However, when the council made the same request to the General Assembly, this body rejected the term and its implications.

This inconsistent policy in the CRC seems to indicate that the churches were not of one mind. One would expect that the Secession men in the USA would not be entirely happy with this practice, which practice traces back to the Hervormde Kerk, the state-governed church of the Netherlands that had persecuted the Seceders.

However, other influences were present in the CRC by this time. In 1886, Abraham Kuyper led a second group out of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (Doleantie). They soon united with the Secession churches (1892) to form the Gereformeerde Kerken (GKN). From this new church came immigrants to America who joined the CRC. Perhaps it was due to this influx that the practice of asking for *handopening* was resurrected. Official records of the practice are difficult to find. However, it is apparent that the requests for *handopening* became more common, for in 1902 the CRC Acts of Synod record the following:

Classis Grand Rapids West asks: "That Synod declare what is to be understood by the term '*handopening*.'"

Your Comm. answers: (i.e., Committee of Pre-Advice, rjd)

In *handopening* we find a certain guarantee for Classis that a congregation, which calls a minister, does so in a legal way; and a precautionary measure to prevent any financial difficulties.

But that answer of the committee did not become official, because the Synod of 1902 "[d]ecided not to enter into this matter" (Art. 103 II. Varia b.1).

This practice of a vacant church requesting *handopening* is made

an ecclesiastical regulation in the 1905 *Kerkenorde* of the CRC. Regulation one under Article 11 reads:

At the start of a vacancy, and before the first extension of a call, the consistory asks its classis for *handopening* to guarantee to the classis that a congregation calls in a lawful manner, and as a precaution against financial difficulties arising.

The reference supporting this as an ecclesiastical ordinance is the CRC Acts of the Synod of 1902 (see above). This is dubious support indeed! Although the 1905 articles accurately reflect what the committee of pre-advice recommended, the Synod of 1902 did not put its approval upon the interpretation of *handopening*, nor did it sanction the practice. Nonetheless, this is the support of the regulation in the 1905 *Kerkenorde*.

The revised *Kerkenorde* adopted by the CRC in 1914 contained only the bare articles of the Church Order, not the decisions of Synod or practices in the churches appended to the articles. Thus no mention of *handopening* is found there.

However, the *Kerkelijk Handboek* (Church Handbook, a commentary on the Church Order) by the Revs. I. Van Dellen and H. Keegstra published in 1915, does comment on this practice. Van Dellen and Keegstra describe it as “usual” (*gebruikelijk*) that vacant congregations ask classis for *handopening* when desiring to proceed to calling.

When the CRC Church Order was translated into English and printed in 1921, it included “Uses of our Churches.” The preface describes these “usages” as “synodical decisions and resolutions of the past.” Under Article 4 (not Art. 11 as in the 1905), the calling of a minister, is found this:

Usages in our Churches

B. Advice of Classis and Counselor

2. The consistory of a vacant church requests *handopening* of Classis when calling for the first time, since the question arises whether the calling church is able properly to support a minister.

It is, then, from these Church Orders and synodical decisions that the Protestant Reformed Churches drew their Church Order and deci-

sions in 1934, as noted above. And, as has been demonstrated, it was practiced from the beginning of the PRC's history until First Church asked for a study of the matter in 1937, and Rev. Ophoff brought his report. His report would convince the churches to end the practice. But it did something else. It set forth a very different significance to the term than had become the accepted meaning in both the CRC and the PRC.

### A New Direction

Rev. Ophoff's study was extensive. Officially entitled "The *Handopening*," it begins by setting forth the scope of the study.<sup>4</sup> Writes Ophoff,

The questions to be raised and answered are:

- 1) What was the *handopening* originally?
- 2) What did it come to be in the churches of the "Afscheiding" of 1834; in the Christian Reformed Churches of the United States of America; in our Protestant Reformed Churches?
- 3) Can the usage be retained?

Ophoff first researched the term and came up with a radically different idea than was accepted in the CRC. He writes:

1) What was the *handopening* originally? The *handopening* is a usage that was first inaugurated in the Established church (*Hervormde Kerk*) of the Netherlands by the government in the 17th century. Now it is not an easy matter to ascertain with exact precision just what the *handopening* originally was. According to the late Prof. Heyns, the *handopening* was originally an action consisting in the "Hervormde" churches seeking and obtaining by order of the state permission of the government to call a minister of the gospel. In Heyns' *Kybernetiek* (A "handbook" for the Church Order, rjd) we come upon a statement that reads, "The request for *handopening* is a custom arising not out of church-law and is an instance of state interference in the election of Ministers of the word. At many places the government demanded that in the case of vacancy a church not proceed to the calling of a

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4 Rev. Ophoff also printed this report in the *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 13, pp. 453-456.

preacher until having asked and obtained freedom to do so.” Thus, according to Heyns, the *handopening* proper was the permission to call, granted by the government to a calling church.

However, as Prof. Heyns was often far from reliable in his statements, it is to be doubted whether this was originally the *handopening*. This doubt is sustained by a statement found in the *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht* of the late Prof. Bouwma of Kampen. The statement reads, “The historical significance of this word *Handopening* is this, that the churches requested to know from the government the salary of the called preacher. The churches judged that the government was obliged to [pay] this, because it had appropriated to itself the church properties. In old times, however, the churches came with the request to the classis, which straightened out the matter with the government for the churches in question.”

This statement of Bouwma agrees perfectly with what we read in J. Jansen’s *Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* respecting this matter. We read, “The *handopening* was a request made by the classes to the government, and was related only to the salary, whereby through the classis, the assurance was given that a minister should be called for this amount of money. From this it follows that in the churches which receive no subsidy for the salary from the government, one cannot speak of a *handopening*.”

Thus according to the testimony of Bouwma, and sustained by that of Jansen, the *handopening* concerned only the salaries of the ministers. Now it is true, as Heyns avers, that the government required of the churches not in all but in some provinces that they gain its permission to call. But it is not true that either the gaining of this permission or the granting of it by the government constituted the *handopening*. This can be proven. The *Kerkelijke Geographie* of Bachiena contains a statement asserting that rule to the effect that before a church looking forward to asking the state to pay the salary of the minister it contemplated calling extent the call, it first gain permission of the state to call. This rule, we learned from the aforesaid work, was imposed only upon the churches in the provinces of South and North Holland. Why upon these churches and upon none others, the writer to whom we here appeal does not say. But the point is this: the state came with the requirement in question only to the churches in the two aforesaid provinces. On the churches in the other provinces the rule was not imposed. Thus, these other churches could apply for support without

complying with this law [i.e., the law imposed upon North and South Holland, rjd]. This shows that the *handopening* proper concerned indeed solely the salaries of the ministers.

The question is whether originally the term *handopening* signified the action of the churches consisting in their soliciting the financial aid or the action of the state consisting in this granting this aid. To state the question otherwise: Did originally the term *handopening* denote the action of the churches consisting in their opening their hand to receive the aid, or, the action of the government consisting in its opening its hand to impart the support? According to Bouwma, the term *handopening* denoted the action of the churches consisting in their receiving the aid. In his delineation on the usage in question, we read, "*Handopening* denotes that someone opens the hand in order to receive a gift." This statement of Bouwma can only be made to apply to the action of the churches consisting in their soliciting the aid. The church, according to Bouwma, approached the state with open hand for a gift. This was the *handopening*.

But this conception can not be the correct one. It does not agree with the expression "*Om handopening vragen.*" The churches, it is always said, "*vragen om handopening.*"<sup>5</sup> Now if *handopening* consisted in the church applying for the gift, it could and can, not very well be said that the churches ask for *handopening*. For if the *handopening* consisted in the churches soliciting the aid, asking for *handopening* would then have to be taken to mean that the churches petitioned the state to grant them permission to ask for the aid. This certainly the churches were not required to do. What they did is to simply solicit this support. And the government responded with granting the support they asked for. Hence, *handopening* must be made to signify the action of the state consisting in its opening its hand, that is, consisting in its granting the support. So much for the origin of the usage.

Having established the original meaning of the practice, Rev. Ophoff turns to the second question: "What did the *handopening* become in the churches of the Secession of 1834; in the Christian Reformed church of America; and in our own Protestant Reformed Churches?" He reports:

Firstly, what did *handopening* become in the churches of the

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5 The Dutch is "ask for *Handopening*" rjd.

Secession? In Heyns' *Kybernetiek*, we happen upon a statement that reads (Heyns here speaks of the churches of the Secession): "Since that time, this custom has passed over into the ecclesiastical domain so that we now ask the classis for *handopening* just as formerly one would ask the government." Whereas Heyns took the *handopening* to have been the action of the Hervormde churches consisting in their seeking and obtaining from the government the right or permission to call a minister, this statement of Heyns is in meaning equivalent to the statement that in the churches of the Secession, *handopening* came to be an action on the part of the churches consisting in their petitioning the classis for permission to call. He even averred in his *Kybernetiek* that *handopening* as he defined and desired it for his churches in America, received the sanction of a Netherlands Reformed (Gereformeerde) [i.e., GKN, rjd] synod.

Are these statements of Heyns true? They are most untrue. Heyns, as can be expected, failed to prove his contention. Yet he did make the attempt, by an appeal to an article found in the Acts of the Netherlands Reformed [GKN, rjd] synod of 1893. The article reads in part, "At the advice of the classis, the question comes up for consideration as to whether the calling church is able to support the called minister according to the demand of God's word." This is Heyns' proof. But it is not proof. There is certainly a vast and essential difference between the requirements of the ruling quoted by Heyns and the *handopening* as he defined and desired it. To ask a calling church whether it is able to support a minister, is one thing. To require of the calling church that it petition classis for permission to call, is quite another thing. Yet Heyns wrote, "Finally it comes, as the Netherlands' Synod of 1893 pronounced, at the advice of the classis the question for consideration as to whether the calling church is able to support the called minister according to the demand of God's word." Heyns continued, "This," namely, the question put by classis to a calling church whether it is able to support a minister, "This is called the request to the classis for *handopening*, i.e., for its authorization, after the departure of a preacher, to call another. Since that time this custom has passed over into the ecclesiastical domain...and for the Netherlands, the Synod of 1893 in the pronouncement quoted above has given sanction for it." We remark, the *handopening* as Heyns defined and desired it for his churches could not have become the usage in the churches of the Secession, for the simple reason that *handopening* as defined by

Heyns never existed in the “Hervormde” Church of the Netherlands and does not exist in this church at the present time.

What then was and is the *handopening* in the churches of the Secession and in the “Gerformeerde” churches in the Netherlands of this day? If the Netherlands authorities on Church Polity were using the term *handopening* today (these authorities are not using the term) they would say that *handopening* is an action consisting in the classis or group of financially able churches resolving to grant financial support to a needy church; and that asking for *handopening* is an action on the part of this needy church consisting in applying for this aid.

However, in the Netherlands, the authorities on Reformed Church Polity do not employ the word *handopening* to signify the action of classis consisting in its resolving to grant financial support to a needy calling church. These authorities make it a point to avoid this term, the term *handopening*. They do so, in that for them *handopening* can mean but one thing, to wit, the action of the Netherland Government consisting in its paying the salaries of ministers in the established church. These authorities without fail always define *handopening* as consisting in this action. So Jansen in his *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenorening*. Wrote Jansen, “This is no *Handopening*, because this was not a request by the congregation to the classis, but by the classis to the government and that in order to receive the salary for another church.” So, if the question were put to these authorities, “Have you *handopening* in the circle of your churches?” Their answer would be an emphatic *no*.

Rev. Ophoff next turns to the practice in the Christian Reformed Church, and demonstrates that the wrong conception of practice in the Protestant Reformed Churches stems from the erroneous view held by the Christian Reformed Church. He writes,

Let us now have regard to the Christian Reformed Churches of America. That these churches have *handopening* is certain. The question is, what is the official conception of *handopening* in these churches? And the answer: there is no conception of *handopening* in these churches that can be called official, as no synod of these churches has ever defined the usage, declared in the name of the churches what it wanted this usage to consist in. No synod of these churches has even



as much as sanctioned the usage. Thus, as to what *handopening* is in the Christian Reformed Church, we can learn nothing from the Acts of Synods. Prof. Heyns at one time attempted to have synod officially sanction *handopening* as he defined and wanted it to consist in, namely, as an action of the calling churches consisting in their petitioning classis for permission to call. But the professor failed in his attempt. Yet these churches have *handopening*. The regular custom in the circle of these churches is that the calling church asks classis for *handopening*.

Let us now raise the question: What is *handopening* in the consciousness of the membership of the Christian Reformed Church. How does the membership conceive of the *handopening*? It is certain that in the consciousness of the membership of the Christian Reformed church, *handopening* is an action consisting in the calling church petitioning the classes for permission to call. Consider, firstly, that Heyns was at school. And as professor, he succeeded pretty well in gaining his students for his conception of things. Through the channel of his students, who became ministers of churches, Heyns' views found their way into the minds and hearts of the members.

Secondly, also in the consciousness of the membership of our Protestant Reformed Churches, *handopening* is an action consisting in the calling church petitioning classis for the permission call. Now consider that we as churches are a chip off the old block; and that this block in our case is the Christian Reformed Church. Fact is that we took this erroneous view of *handopening* with us, when we left the Christian Reformed Church. Where else did we get it? My point is, that the fact that our conception of *handopening* is what it is, is conclusive proof that in the consciousness of the members of the Christian Reformed Church, *handopening* is what I said it must be; for we are out of that church. Fact is that as to our conception of *handopening*, we are followers of Prof. Heyns.

Now Heyns' conception of *handopening* was but a scion of a theory of Church Polity that is thoroughly hierarchical and thus unscriptural and unreformed. The implication of this last statement is that the action of a calling church consisting in petitioning the classis for the right to call, is thoroughly wrong. The congregation need and must not do this. The congregation has the right and therefore cannot receive it from the classis. And it is the solemn duty of the congregation to exercise this right, if able to support a minister. And for the exercise of this right therefore it need not gain permission. Doing so, it stands in the view

that classis may, if it deems that it must, forbid a congregation to call in the interest of the federation (*kerek verband*). But classis may no more forbid a congregation to call than it may forbid it to worship God. Every congregation has dire need of a pastor, to feed it, to administer to it the word and the sacraments. If there be no pastor there is no ministration of the Word, no breaking of the Bread of Life. How then may a classis forbid a congregation to call? If it may not, this asking the classis for permission to call has no meaning.

Next Rev. Ophoff gives a glimpse of the confusion that existed in the Protestant Reformed Churches concerning the practice, and how it was practiced.

Let us now return to our own churches. Yes, we, too, have the *handopening*. Repeatedly we hear the person who happens to be the presiding officer of classis say, “Congregation X asks for *handopening*.” And when the motion to grant the request is put to vote, a heavy chorus of yeas resounds through the room. Then the whole classis wonders for a moment just what it did when it passed the motion. Nobody knows for certain. And the delegates who asked for *handopening* go home thinking that they have received something. Actually, they obtained nothing. What have they obtained? Right or permission to call a minister? Impossible, as we have shown. What have they obtained? The promise of financial support on the ground of having received *handopening*? Nay. What congregation has ever received support on this ground? So what has that congregation received? Absolutely nothing.

Rev. Ophoff brings two possible actions for the classis to take. In the first, though it is not really to his liking, he “urges the following”:

1) Let us understand what *handopening* cannot possibly be, namely, an action of the calling churches that consists in their asking the classis for the right and the permission to call or act consisting in the classis granting this permission.

2) Let us understand that the word *handopening* can be allowed to signify nothing else than an action on the part of the classis consisting in its resolve to grant to a needy calling church financial support.

3) Let us as churches, when not in need of support, refrain from applying for *Handopening*.

4) To prevent ourselves as churches from ever again in the future returning in our thinking to the wrong course, described in this report, the undersigned begs to be allowed to suggest that we pass a motion to read: “Whereas *handopening* in the circle of a group of churches that desires to be Reformed, is and can be nothing else than an action on the part of classis consisting in its resolve to aid a needy calling church, only such churches, that are in the need of support, shall apply to classis for *Handopening*.”

But Rev. Ophoff comes with what he considers to be a better suggestion.

Why not drop the name *handopening* altogether? The reason? The word *handopening* has an exceedingly malicious connotation. It was coined by the established church in the Netherlands to do service as the name of a thoroughly unscriptural custom or usage—a usage consisting in the government paying the salaries of ministers. The word still renders this service in the established church of the Netherlands. In the consciousness of the members of the Christian Reformed Churches in the United States and also of the members of our own churches, the word *handopening* is the signification of an equally unscriptural custom or doing, to wit, a doing that consists in the calling church petitioning the classis for the right and permission to call. Why retain a term or name so besmeared with unscriptural meanings? Is there any real need of this? Can we not do without the word? Fact is that we have been doing without this word all along. *Handopening*, I said, can only be made to be an action of the classis consisting in granting financial support to a needy church. Now the classis has been doing this right along, namely, granting support to needy churches. But has this action been known among us as *handopening*? Assuredly, not. It means that, rightly considered, we have been doing without this term. I must therefore express myself thus: not, why retain, but, why adopt, a term so disgraced by pernicious meanings clinging to it.

Therefore the undersigned suggests that classis pass a motion to read:

Moved and accepted that we as churches eliminate from our ecclesiastical vocabulary the word *handopening*.

Reasons:

1) We have no need of this term as the action that it could be made to signify already has a name, the name *classicale steun* (classical support or aid, rjd).

2) The term *handopening* is too much disgraced by the unscriptural meanings that it has to be retained or adopted.

a. In the established church of the Netherlands it is being used as the name of an action consisting in the government paying the salaries of the ministers in the established church.

b. In the consciousness of the members of the Christian Reformed Churches of America and also of the members of our own churches it is the name of an action consisting in classis granting to churches the right and permission to call a minister of the gospel.

3) By adopting or retaining this name *handopening* we actually expose ourselves in the future and in our generations to the danger of returning in our thinking to the unscriptural meaning that the name now has in our land.

4) There is no conceivable reason why we as churches should recoil from dropping this term.

a. Our dropping this name will certainly not render it impossible or impermissible to render aid to needy churches.

b. The dropping of this term does not render it impermissible for the classes to ask a calling church whether it is able to support a minister of the gospel, if only this asking be not defined as an action on the part of the classis consisting in its granting to a calling church the right to call.

5) Rightly considered, the term is not ours but belongs to the established church of the Netherlands by which it was coined. To use it, to adopt it, is to appropriate what does not at all belong to us. And this, in plain English, is stealing.

It would not enter our minds, for example, to appropriate as a name for our churches, the name Christian Reformed. Why not? One reason is that the name is already in use and that we therefore have no right to it. Well, the same is true of the term *handopening*.

Respectfully,  
GM. Ophoff

The report convinced classis. It adopted the latter suggestion of Rev. Ophoff, and the practice immediately ceased in the Protestant

Reformed Churches. As Ophoff himself reported in the *Standard Bearer*:

A motion was made and carried to eliminate the word *handopening* from our ecclesiastical vocabulary. Thus the Prot. Ref. churches have purged themselves of the wrong usages consisting in a calling church asking classis for permission to call a minister.<sup>6</sup>

This practice was obviously a vestige of the CRC that was practiced without much thinking in the PRC for over ten years after their separate existence. It was a practice inconsistent with the PRC's emphasis on the autonomy of the local congregation. Every congregation is a manifestation of the body of Christ, and Christ gives His authority to the officebearers in each congregation. Consequently, classis does not have authority over the consistory to determine whether a congregation may call. The churches insisted that the actions of the CRC classes in 1924, deposing the ministers and consistories of Eastern Avenue, Hope, and Kalamazoo, were hierarchical and thus contrary to Reformed church polity. In 1937, they saw the hierarchical implications of the requests for *handopening*, and eliminated the practice.

### **Epilogue—*Handopening* in the Christian Reformed Church**

The practice of requesting *handopening* continued in the Christian Reformed Church for twenty more years. Classis California appointed a study committee (made up of the Revs. H.J. De Vries and M. M. Schans) and brought the matter to the Synod of 1936. The committee set forth the meaning of *handopening* that, according to Rev. Ophoff's contention, was the erroneous view of Prof. Heyns. Classis California overtured synod "to terminate the practice of *handopening*." The grounds given were:

- (1) The Church Order does not mention it;
- (2) It is un-Reformed;
- (3) Changed conditions eliminate it;
- (4) It is not necessary, and serves no good purpose.

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6 Vol. 13, p. 456.

However, the synod decided “not to adopt the overture to terminate the practice of *handopening*.”

If anything, the synod strengthened it with a different, though related decision. Fourth CRC of Chicago protested to synod a decision of Classis Illinois. The history was that the congregation had “called a second pastor without consulting Classis.” Classis Illinois held that Fourth CRC “should first have consulted Classis and asked for a moderator.” The consistory protested against that decision of the classis. It claimed that this was “not necessary” since they had their own pastor. They appealed to the church orders of Rutgers and Jansen of the Netherlands to support their claim.

However, the Synod of 1936 did not sustain the consistory’s protest. Hence, it became regulation that a church calling a second minister must consult with classis—though the term *handopening* was not used.

The matter of requesting *handopening* was raised a final time in 1957 when again the churches in the west (Classis Pacific) overtured synod “to eliminate the practice of ‘*Handopening*’ in the sense of ‘permission to call a minister’ except in the case of the first call after organization.” The grounds were:

1. Every church has an inherent right to call a minister.
2. *Handopening* is a thing of the past, as no church any more extends its open hand to the government for a donation toward the minister’s salary as was required or practiced when this custom originated.
3. Each case of a small or needy church will be brought to Classis for special attention anyway in connection with FNC [Financial Needs Committee]. (Agenda of the Synod of 1957, Overture 4)

This time the synod of the CRC responded favorably, adopting the recommendation of the committee of preadvice:

B. Recommendations:

1. Synod eliminate restriction of the right of a church to call a minister, with two exceptions:
  - a. In case a small or needy church seeks aid from the Fund for Needy Churches.
  - b. In case a church desires to call a minister for some type

of ministerial service according to the provision of Article 6 of the Church Order. (cf. Acts of Synod, 1950, Art. 136, p. 61)

Grounds:

- a. Every church has an inherent right and duty to call a minister.
- b. The term *handopening* has no warrant in our church polity.

-Adopted

2. We recommend that Synod declare that this decision constitutes its answer to the Overture of Classis Pacific. –Adopted

One final note. Earlier, the article maintained that churches that derive from the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands would not likely be favorable to the concept of asking for *handopening*. This is substantiated by the decision of one such denomination—the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Christian Reformed Churches, CGK, and mother church of the Free Reformed in North America). These churches formed when the Secession Churches united with the Doleantie to form the GKN in 1992. The CGK were Secession churches that refused to go along with the merger, and maintained the name that the Secession churches had adopted.

According to a pamphlet on the Free Reformed Churches in North America, the synod of the CGK took the following decision in 1925.<sup>7</sup>

- A) We do not observe handopening according to the original intent because it does not accord with Reformed Church order.
- B) No congregation can be forced to ask permission from the classis before calling a pastor, because the Reformed Church order attributes the right to call to the local church.
- C) A congregation that wants to call a pastor and is not able to pay the entire salary, can simply apply to classis for assistance. If the classis refuses, then the congregation still has the right to call the minister.
- D) Even though we would never speak of handopening we would advise the congregations, particularly those who are calling for the first time, to do this after receiving advice of the church counselor and of the classis.

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7 “For the Truth,” by Rev. J. Tamminga, available <http://freereformednotesbycvd.blogspot.com/2007/06/for-truth-chapter-4.html>

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# Music in Worship: The Reformation's Neglected Legacy (1)

Barrett L. Gritters

That proper worship in the church is a legacy of the Reformation is unquestioned. Students of Reformation history learn not only that God restored to His church the authority of Scripture alone: the church's rule for faith and life is the Word of God alone; and that the way to be justified by God is faith alone apart from works. They also learn that God restored the consciousness of proper worship, especially although not exclusively that worship is to be regulated by the Word of God. Few would claim that this matter of worship has not occupied the scholars in the Reformed tradition.

But music as a fundamental *part* of the liturgy and proper worship of God has been underemphasized and under-appreciated as a Reformation gift. In some Reformed circles, perhaps especially those that pride themselves in being historically and confessionally Reformed, the value of music has unjustifiably been eroded—unjustifiably, according to the witness of the Reformers.

The theme of this paper is the Reformation's esteem for music—specifically, congregational singing—itself. Thus, the paper's theme is not that important Reformation principle of the priestly (more properly the prophetic) office of all believers that restored *all believers* to an active part in the church's music, even though this was a crucial aspect of the Reformation. Neither does the paper plead for a renewed appreciation of congregational singing *in the vernacular*, although also this was a vital aspect of the Reformation's return to liturgical obedience.

Rather, the paper's concern is the more fundamental importance of music itself as a part of the church's worship. The paper addresses the temptation of Reformed believers to allow music, but to pay little attention to it; the error of calling the church's singing "preliminary," like the singing of the national anthem before a ball game is preliminary: "Let's get on with the game," (and could probably just as well be dispensed with); the mistake of supposing that while God



is pleased with a good sermon, He probably pays as much attention to the church's singing as a smoker does to the final doxology of a ninety-minute service, or a nervous young preacher to the song that immediately precedes the sermon.

Such an attitude towards music—congregational singing, specifically—was not the attitude of the Reformers. If Reformed churches today will hold fast to their traditions, and if they will truly be considered the children of the Reformation, they will remember how highly the Reformers valued music, how much attention they paid it in their writings, how they promoted it among the people of God. And why.

The great theologians of the Reformation, almost to a man, concerned themselves with church music, not only because the Roman Catholic Church had corrupted this part of the liturgy so badly, but because they recognized the value God indicated the church ought to give it. This Reformation emphasis on music was not lost on the Roman Catholic observers. So important a part did music play in the Reformation that, when the Roman Catholic Church retaliated in the counter-reformation, one of them complained that “Luther did more damage with his songs than all his other writings.”<sup>1</sup> Today, a theologian majoring (even for a time) on the subject of music as a part of worship might quickly be dismissed with a shrug as dealing with an unimportant matter. Luther would be shocked at such an attitude, for he often said, exaggerating only slightly, “Music is God’s greatest gift.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Reformer’s Valuing of Church Song**

If that statement is only slightly an exaggeration, his correlation between music and faith is not. Luther made the extravagant correlation between believing and singing, that failure to make music evidences absence of faith. Speaking of David, the “sweet singer of Israel,” Luther said:

...faith does not rest and declare a holiday; it bursts into action, speaks

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1 J. Smelik, “Music is Created for the Church, p. 1, [http://spindleworks.com/library/smelik/Music\\_Is\\_Created\\_For\\_The%20Church.html](http://spindleworks.com/library/smelik/Music_Is_Created_For_The%20Church.html).

2 *What Luther Says*, Ewald M. Plass, compiler, para 3102, St. Louis: Concordia 1991.

and preaches of this promise and grace of God, so that other people may also come up and partake of it. Yes, his great delight impels him to compose beautiful and sweet Psalms and to sing lovely and joyous songs.... And whosoever does not want to sing and speak of it [Christ's redemption of us] *shows that he does not believe* (emphasis mine: BLG) and does not belong under the new and joyful testament, but under the old, lazy, and tedious testament."<sup>3</sup>

Luther elevated music above all the other disciplines:

This is the reason why the prophets did not make use of any art except music; when setting forth their theology they did it not as geometry, not as arithmetic, not as astronomy, but as music.<sup>4</sup>

In short, noble music is next to God's Word the highest treasure on earth: it governs all thought, perception, heart, and mind.<sup>5</sup>

Of all the joys upon this earth none has for men a greater worth than what I give with my ringing and with voices sweetly singing.<sup>6</sup>

Most will remember Luther's comparison of music and theology, in which he clarifies his hyperbole that music is God's greatest gift: "Music is an outstanding gift of God and next to theology. I would not want to give up my slight knowledge of music for great consideration."<sup>7</sup>

We will see more below of Calvin's estimation of music in worship. Let it be enough for now to remind ourselves that one of the four conditions he laid down for his reentering Geneva after they had banished him was introduction of congregational singing of Psalms.<sup>8</sup>

Martin Bucer's prescription for proper liturgy included these instructions, which notably give great prominence to singing:

On Sundays when the congregation gathers together, the minister admonishes them to confess their sins and to pray for mercy, and makes confession to God for the whole congregation, prays for mercy, and

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3 *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*, Robin Leaver, (Lutheran Quarterly Books), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007, pp. 87, 88.

4 Leaver, p. 66.

5 Leaver, p. 78.

6 Leaver, p. 91.

7 *What Luther Says*, 3090.

8 Charles Garside, "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music: 1536-1543." Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979, p. 7.

proclaims to the faithful the absolution of sins. After that the whole congregation sings some short psalms or a song of praise.... [Then follows Bucer's call to prayer, reading, and preaching.] Thereupon the congregation sings again: the ten commandments or something else. [After this is Bucer's call to read the gospel.] After that the congregation sings the articles of our faith (i.e., the Credo).<sup>9</sup>

Let it also be mentioned, early here, that for all the Reformers this interest in church music was no intellectual pursuit, but a matter of being good pastors of congregations. Moved by the same motivation as the other Reformers—the welfare of the people of God—Calvin lamented the lack of congregational singing in this way: "...one will recognize what *advantage and consolation* the pope and his creatures have deprived the church, for he has distorted the... (singing) into a murmuring among themselves without any understanding."<sup>10</sup>

### **Basic Agreement in Spite of Differences and Opposition**

It is well known that the Reformers disagreed on some matters regarding music. Whereas Luther used musical instruments in worship, Calvin opposed them as belonging to the Old Testament economy, which disagreement still appears in their respective traditions. Also, while Luther's worship included songs from outside the Psalm-book of David, Calvin, who *originally* had written hymns for public worship,<sup>11</sup> gradually changed his mind about the use of songs other than the Psalms of David, and eventually forbade the singing of hymns, *even* in private and family worship.<sup>12</sup> But, differ as they did on these matters, on the importance of congregational singing as a part of worship they could not have been more united.

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9 Garside, p. 11.

10 Garside, p. 10; emphasis mine: BG.

11 Calvin authored metrical translations of the Decalogue, the Song of Simeon, the Apostles' Creed, and in 1542 included in one of the Psalm-books the Lord's Prayer.

12 F.L. Battles, in his *The Piety of John Calvin*, says "Calvin allowed, in addition to the Psalms, the singing of the creed, the Lord's Prayer, and such New Testament canticles as the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis." This is only partly true, because Calvin later changed his mind.

What accentuates their commitment to congregational singing is the reality that both these Reformers also faced opponents from within their own camps as to the importance of music in public worship. Luther had to contend with the radicals, whom he referred to as fanatics: “I am not satisfied with him who despises music, as all fanatics do.”<sup>13</sup> He also called them, sarcastically, “super-spiritual members.” He was referring to the opponents of music *in public worship*.

Calvin’s may have been the greater difficulty because it was Ulrich Zwingli, older and respected colleague, who opposed *all* music in the church’s worship. Zwingli’s opposition must not be misunderstood. Brother Ulrich loved music. Of all the Reformers, it is claimed that he was the most talented. Trained technically, Zwingli played almost all the instruments with skill and was a competent composer. Zwingli’s problem was not a failure to appreciate, even love, music. It was theological and exegetical. “Zwingli asked where in Scripture God has commanded singing in worship. Nowhere, he answered.”<sup>14</sup> His explanation of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 was a terse: these call the people of God to sing *in their hearts*, that is, silently.<sup>15</sup>

Against this opposition from within, both Calvin and Luther aggressively promoted, even required, congregational singing in public worship.

### A Gift from Creation

An important aspect of the Reformers’ appreciation for music as part of the church’s worship is the judgment that music was a direct gift of God originating in creation itself. As a *donum Dei*, music is no

13 *What Luther Says*, 3091.

14 Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 151.

15 From Zwingli’s position the church may take a lesson—extremism and over-reaction breed worse extremism. For when Zwingli finally sensed the need for the church to make united public expressions of faith, and with poetry, and thus proposed just *reciting* in unison the “Gloria in Excelsis” in the communion service, Zurich’s town counsel out-Zwinglied Zwingli—they forbid even that. A historical note of interest: only two generations later the congregation in Zurich was singing again. The church’s song cannot be silenced. See Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, 151.

invention of man, even though man developed the gift in many ways. According to the Reformers, one must imagine the sinless voices of Adam and Eve blended in beautiful harmony in the garden.

Luther envisages that music had a fundamental place in the worship of the ‘true church’ before the fall, and that it was the simple combination of human voices singing praise to God. Music is not the invention of man, but *donum Dei*, and therefore only secondarily a human art or science.<sup>16</sup>

Implied, with an implication that cannot be over-emphasized, is that the finest music in this life will be surpassed in the life to come. The incontrovertible proof for the Reformers that there was music in the first paradise is that there certainly will be music in the second. The paradise to come would reflect paradise the first, and excel it. Toward the end of his life, in typical, graphic fashion, Luther said:

If the Lord our God has given us such noble gifts in the latrine of life, what [music] will there be in eternal life where everything is perfect and joyful?<sup>17</sup>

### **The Judgment of no Mean Musicians**

Although Zwingli was the most talented among the Reformers, Calvin and Luther were no musical dilettantes. Their judgments were not made because some dabbling in music excited them about the art, though this is a common opinion today.

Others have debunked this common opinion of these two great Reformers, but the best and most recent work is Robin A. Leaver’s *Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*.<sup>18</sup> Reflecting on a common contemporary judgment of Luther, Leaver argues for a return to the judgment of *Luther’s* contemporaries. He argues that “more recent scholarship tends to understand the context of Luther’s time with clearer vision and to give more weight to the opinions of his contemporaries who are uniform in their praise of his abilities.” The composer and musician Johann Walter (a contemporary of Luther) “had no doubts about Luther’s

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16 Leaver, p. 64.

17 Leaver, p. 64.

18 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

ability as a creator of melodies” (p. 62). “In his understanding of how to compose melodies [Luther] had few rivals” (p. 59).

One of Luther’s own houseguests of four years, Cyriacus Spangenberg, himself a musician, wrote:

Of all the Mastersingers since the time of the apostles, Luther is the best and most artistic. . . . Everything flows and comes from him, most beautiful and artistic, full of spirit and doctrine. . . . The meaning is clear and intelligible; the melody and sound beautiful and heartfelt. In sum, everything is admirable and delightful, with marrow and strength that heartens and comforts, and truly no one is his equal, much less his master.<sup>19</sup>

Agree or disagree with the judgment of Luther as a musician of no mean abilities, all will agree that Luther so highly praised music as a gift of God that words failed him to express its importance for the church in her worship.

But this paper will not serve its purpose if it shows only the Reformers’ praise for music. It must show also the reasons for their praise. It is insufficient for Reformed churches to know *how much* Luther and Calvin promoted music if they do not know *why* they did. Elements in the church’s liturgy with as large a place as music must be justified. The Reformers did this with clarity.

If today music will retain (or be restored to) a significant place in the liturgy of Reformed churches, the members of these churches must understand the Reformers’ biblical reasoning. For them, Paul’s confession that he will “sing with understanding,” means not only that the believer must understand the meaning of the words he sings. It also means that he must understand *why* he sings.

## THE REASONS FOR CONGREGATIONAL SINGING IN WORSHIP

The Reformers were not the first to enumerate reasons for singing. Following others before them, they mentioned singing as the means of 1) proclaiming the gospel, 2) admonishing one another, 3) prayer, 4) confession of faith, 5) making vows, and 6) prophesying. Some mentioned 10 or 12 reasons.

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<sup>19</sup> Leaver, p. 63.

Among these, two are outstanding reasons that deserve the attention of Reformed churches today.

First, the church sings in order to praise God in worship. Second, the people of God sing in worship in order to edify the others who worship with them.

### **Praise of the Triune God**

Worship and praise of God with song is primary.

Singing is one of the main ways God's people publicly give Him the worship due Him. When Charles Garside explained Calvin's view of song in public worship, especially the singing of Psalms, he said: "Calvin acknowledges...his appreciation of the role which the psalms can ideally play in public worship. They possess, when sung, an extraordinary quality which can intensify communal prayer and praise of God by an appeal directed specifically to the worshipper's heart."<sup>20</sup> Calvin said: "Singing...has the power to arouse and stimulate our hearts, and in this fashion they can be raised in ardor in invoking and praising God."<sup>21</sup>

That is, although singing is one of the two *forms* of prayer, and is itself worship, Calvin claims that the singing-prayers stimulate *more* and *deeper* prayers and, thus, better *worship*.

Furthermore, it is a thing most expedient...to sing...public prayers by which one prays to God or sings His praises so that the hearts of all may be aroused and stimulated to make similar prayers and to render similar praises and thanks to God with common love.<sup>22</sup>

When Luther commended David's composing songs for worship, he emphasized this God-ward direction of congregational song:

Yes, his great delight impels him to compose beautiful and sweet Psalms and to sing lovely and joyous songs, both to praise and to thank God in his happiness....<sup>23</sup>

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20 Garside. P. 10.

21 Garside, p. 10.

22 Garside, p. 8.

23 Leaver, p. 87.

The logic of the Heidelberg Catechism may be helpful: Because prayer is the “chief part of thankfulness,” and singing is one of the two ways to pray, *singing* is one of the chief ways to express thankfulness to God. And what is more important than thankful praise of God? This logic is good, but Calvin’s argument is more compelling.

There is nothing to which all men should pay more attention, nothing in which God wishes us to exhibit a more intense eagerness than in endeavoring that the glory of his name may remain undiminished, his kingdom be advanced, and the pure doctrine, which alone can guide us to true worship, flourish in full strength.<sup>24</sup>

The “super-spiritual members” (Luther’s designation) who downplay the importance of song in the church are corrected by Calvin’s assessment of the relationship between right doctrine and proper worship. Pure doctrine, according to this Reformer, *aims at* true worship. Thus, a good sermon that expounds the truth of God and His free grace accomplishes its purpose when the people of God respond in praise. The praise is singing.

For this reason—singing is one of the most significant elements of *worship*—the Reformers were interested in 1) quality singing, 2) singing in the vernacular, and 3) singing the Psalms (primarily, although not exclusively).

### **Quality Congregational Singing**

The Reformers were interested in good church music, music of highest quality, music designed specifically for the church, because the praise of God deserves the best the church can offer.

Although the text was the most important matter<sup>25</sup> neither Calvin nor Luther would have anything to do with the modern notion that the

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24 From Calvin’s “The Necessity of Reforming the Church,” quoted in Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: the Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 199.

25 The Reformers followed the lead of the Church father Augustine, who said: “Yet when it happens, that I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned wickedly, and then I would rather not have heard the singing.” From Augustine’s *Confessions and Enchiridion*, quoted in Charles Garside, p. 20.



melodies are incidental, may be of inferior quality, and, as a matter of fact, could just as well be taken from secular musicians. This latter is a common view, with special appeal to Luther, who allegedly took most of his melodies from secular ballads that were used in pubs. This misunderstanding can be pernicious when promoted in mission circles. Its proponents advise putting gospel words even to hip-hop and rap music to attract unbelievers because “Luther used ‘bar-tunes’ for his Reformation music.” As an aside that deserves more than a footnote, I was never so ashamed as when, fulfilling a requirement for a course on missions, I attended a Saturday evening “gospel” service and witnessed a couple of young men “rapping” Amazing Grace. The deliberately sloppy dress of low-riding baggy pants and backwards baseball caps in God’s house of prayer were not even my greatest concerns.

The appeal to Luther’s use of “bar-tunes” likely comes from a misunderstanding of the musical expression “barform.” This German word, however, “means a poem with more than one stanza, each stanza in the form AAB. It has nothing to do with bars in the sense of pubs.” “Luther did not use popular music.” (Westermeyer, p. 148). “The very last thing Luther was, or could have been, was what we now call an adaptor of popular styles. He had no use for popular in the sense of the careless, or standards of ignorance. His melodies are the kind of melody far removed from the popular music.”<sup>26</sup> “Most of Luther’s music for worship was based not on worldly ballads, but rather on the chants of the church.”<sup>27</sup>

Associations matter. That is, what one is reminded of when he hears only the music is important. But the misunderstanding that Luther used tunes from public houses ought to be put to rest once and for all.

Like Luther, Calvin judged that church music was to be of highest quality. There was to be a difference between the music sung at one’s table and the “Psalms which are sung in the church in the presence of God” (Westermeyer, p.157). In his “Epistle to the Reader,” Calvin

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26 Erik Routley, *The Music of Christian Hymns*, quoted in Westermeyer, p. 149.

27 Leaver, p. 13. See also Westermeyer, p. 149: “Not one of his tunes is sweet, soft, clinging, sentimental... nor touched even by subjective qualities of reflection. On the contrary, they are bold, confident, joyful.”

taught that music in the church must be weighty and majestic: “There must always be concern that the song be neither light nor frivolous, but have gravity and majesty, as St. Augustine says. And thus there is a great difference between the music one makes to entertain men... and the Psalms which are sung in the church in the presence of God and his angels” (Garside, p. 32). Standards for church music today could start with Calvin’s (Augustine’s) “gravity and majesty.”

Although Calvin promoted music of highest standards and proper singing of the songs, he recognized the poor quality of singing in his congregation; the people had not learned to sing. In order to promote quality in congregational singing, Calvin made a bold proposal: the congregation of adults would learn from the children.

This manner of proceeding seemed especially good to us, that children, who beforehand have practiced some modest church song, sing in a loud, distinct voice, the people listening with all attention and following heartily with what is sung with the mouth, till all become accustomed to sing communally.<sup>28</sup>

The praise of God deserves quality music sung well.

### **Singing in the Vernacular**

Because Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians (14:14-19) requires that the praise of God be done with “understanding,” the Reformers called for singing in the language of the common man. They vehemently opposed the muttering of unintelligible words in some unknown language.

Luther urged “care... lest the people sing only with their lips, like sounding pipes or harps and without understanding.”<sup>29</sup>

Calvin was sharper: “From this, moreover, it is fully evident that unless voice and song...spring from deep feeling of heart, neither has any value or profit in the least with God”<sup>30</sup> (a warning appropriate for Reformed believers in every age, even when with quality sound and educated singers).

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28 From Calvin’s four articles when reentering Geneva in 1537.

29 Leaver, p. 9.

30 Garside, p. 8.

Bucer concurred: “Since what is done in the congregation of God should be beneficial to everyone in common, we neither pray nor sing anything except in common German speech, so that the laymen may in common say Amen, as the Holy Spirit teaches, 1 Corinthians 14(16).”<sup>31</sup>

### **Singing Psalms**

It is well known that Luther differed from Calvin in that Luther allowed songs in public worship that did not have their origin in David’s Psalm-book, and Calvin promoted only David’s. Nevertheless, both judged that the Psalms were to have an important place in the worship of the New Testament church.

Calvinists were convinced that they could legitimately appropriate the psalms to themselves... the psalms were *their songs* which they sang as the elect people of God in a covenant relationship with Him.<sup>32</sup>

But Luther also promoted the songs of Zion, even though he wrote and had his people sing many other songs and hymns. His love for songs that magnified God made the Psalms attractive to him.

What united the Reformers was their determination that the Scriptures provide the norm and content for what was sung as well as said. Bucer put it well: “In the congregation of God we do not use songs or prayers which are not drawn from Scripture” (in Garside, p. 12).

All the Reformers would be astounded at the tendency today to sing anything but the Psalms. God must be praised, and praised by the words that He Himself has given to the church in the Scripture.

### **Mutual edification**

To hear that the Reformers’ aim in singing was the honor and worship of God is not surprising. Nor has this been forgotten by many Reformed churches. What has been widely forgotten, however, is that congregational singing aims at more than this—more than the direct praise and worship of God.

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31 Garside, p. 12.

32 W. Stanford Reid, “The Battle Hymns of the Lord: Calvinist Psalmody of the Sixteenth Century” *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis, MO, The Foundation for Reformation Research, 1971).

Following the important teaching of Paul in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the Reformers laid great stress on the purpose of singing as edification. Congregational singing, to them, had a horizontal as well as a vertical aim. The welfare of the faithful as well as the glory of God was in view. The purpose of singing included building up the saints. It's not that this did not also honor God, for the ultimate goal in edifying the church was God's glory. But edification of the church in congregational singing must not be lost as a fundamental goal.

If Reformed believers today would be asked to write down the purposes of congregational singing, my experience teaches me that very few if any of them would mention edifying other believers. Even though Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 are clear—by singing, the people of God are “teaching and admonishing one another”—very few really reflect well what this means. I have heard greatest surprise from members of churches where I preached on these passages, as though they had not considered the truth before that. One of the main aims of this paper is to promote and restore this understanding of music in the church of Christ.

### **Music's power**

Implied in the Scripture's teaching that music edifies is that music has power. To build up the church requires a power. Truly to edify, that is, to build up Christians spiritually, in their *hearts*, demands a strength that no mere man has. God, therefore, has created music—so the Scripture teaching implies—with a unique power. When congregational singing combines melody with the very word of God itself, there is a power that few other God-created instruments have.

So Calvin said that “there is scarcely anything in the world which is more capable of turning or moving this way and that the morals of men.... And in fact we experience that it has a secret and almost incredible power...” (Garside, p. 22). That is, when the word of God is put to music, there is a special power in it. Bucer echoed the conviction: “... the music and song ordained by God is not only completely joyful and charming, but also marvelous and powerful. The nature and temperament of man is so formed that nothing moves it so powerfully... than artful musical singing...” (from Bucer's “Foreword” in Garside, p. 29).

This trio of Reformers recognized music's power when they saw evil words put to music as especially ruinous. "It is true that every evil word (as Saint Paul says) perverts good morals, but when the melody is with it, it pierces the heart that much more strongly and enters into it; just as through a funnel wine is poured into a container, so also venom and corruption are distilled to the depth of the heart by the melody" (Garside, p. 23).

In the service of God, music's power is "marvelous." This is why Luther magnified music and said that, after the Word of God, "music alone deserves to be celebrated as mistress and queen of the emotions of the human heart.... A greater praise of music than this we cannot conceive.... What can you find that is more efficacious than music? ...Not in vain, therefore, do the fathers and the prophets want nothing more intimately linked to the Word of God than music" (*What Luther Says*, 3103).

The "one little word" that would fell the devil most effectively for Luther was the word of God put to song. "Its use drives out Satan" (*What Luther Says*, 3103). "The devil... almost flees from the sound of music as he does from the word of theology" (*What Luther Says*, 3104; see also Leaver, p. 93).

The power is the Word of God, but the Word of God put to music.

Does this important place of music—and knowledge of its power—live in the minds and hearts of Reformed believers, and not least the elders and preachers? This is the Reformed legacy that must not be forgotten.

Next issue: What, specifically, the power of singing is. The power of music to keep the enemy at bay. Augustine's testimony about the place of singing in his return to the faith. How the people of God "admonish" one another in singing; and how singing relieved Luther's depression. What "teaching" power is in congregational singing; and how catechism teachers should view singing not only as worship but as pedagogy. The special place of Psalms in teaching and admonishing. The relation between singing and a man's ability to preach. And more. ●

## Book Reviews

*Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints*, by Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006. Pp. xxxvi + 896. \$35.00. Hardcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

This book is worthy of a place on every Reformed pastor's reference shelf. Its value is indicated in its subheading: it gives a good guide to anyone desiring to read or buy Puritan writings.

Noting the renewal of interest in the Puritans and their writings over the last 50 or so years, Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson provide help to all who are interested in reading or buying Puritan works "by providing a brief biography of each Puritan author whose works have been reprinted since 1956 and a brief review of those books" (p. xv). Included in this volume are brief biographies of 146 men and one woman, and reviews of "close to 700 volumes" (p. xxv).

Many other works or reprints are not included because they were reprinted earlier than 1956. Furthermore, the authors note that since "we would like to update this book periodically, we welcome suggestions from readers on Puritan titles that were reprinted in the last half century (1956-2005)

that we may have missed" (p. xxv). As they become available, one can find such updates on the web at [www.puritanseminary.org](http://www.puritanseminary.org), by clicking on the "Resources" tab and again on the tab "Entry Updates to Meet the Puritans."

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In the preface the authors briefly explain what Puritanism is, and give suggestions how to profit from reading Puritan writings.

The body of the book opens with a brief history of English Puritanism, then introduces 123 Puritans and their writings, treating them in alphabetical order of the man's last name.

Appendix 1 contains reviews of 27 collections of Puritan writings not reviewed earlier in the book.

Appendices 2 and 3 provide biographies and reviews of 24 more men who, though Puritan in thought, did not live in England or New England. Appendix 2 treats 12 Scottish Presbyterians and their modern reprints; Appendix 3 treats 12 men associated with the

Dutch *Nadere Reformatie*. Both appendices include an introductory section that relates Scottish Presbyterianism and the *Nadere Reformatie* to Puritanism, in both history and thought.

Appendix 4 is a compilation of some secondary sources on Puritans and Puritanism that have been printed in the last 20 years, while a 27-page bibliography appearing later in the book gives a more comprehensive list.

Appendix 5, a brief conclusion to the book, consists of a long quotation from J. I. Packer's book *Faithfulness and Holiness*.

In addition to the aforementioned bibliography, the reader finds a helpful glossary of terms and events to which the book refers, compiled by Ray Lanning, as well as an index of authors and titles.

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Almost all of the Puritans whose biographies are included and whose recently republished works are introduced were preachers. Their biography includes mention of their pastorates and their strengths as preachers.

Several, however, were not. Anne Bradstreet, the only woman whose biography and reprints are treated in this book, was not. But she was "the first American to

publish a book of poetry" (p. 89), which poems reflect her Puritan views.

Though a layman, Edward Fisher was "apparently well versed in theological issues" (p. 240). He is included in this volume because he authored the book that occasioned much controversy, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.

Though having prepared for the ministry, Samuel Sewall decided to enter the fields of business, law, and politics. Yet in his works, "he always promoted Puritan ideals" (p. 523). The same can be said of John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

To anyone familiar with Reformed and Presbyterian leaders in centuries past, some of the names of the subjects of this book ought be familiar—Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Stephen Charnock, Jonathan Edwards, John Flavel, Matthew Henry, the Mathers (Cotton, Increase, Richard, Samuel), John Owen, William Perkins, Matthew Poole, Robert Traill, and others in the main body of the book; Thomas Boston, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, George Gillespie, and Samuel Rutherford in appendix 2; and in appendix 3 men such as

Wilhelmus à Brakel, Theodore Frelinghusyen, Jean Taffin, Willem Teellinck, Gisbertus Voetius, and Herman Witsius.

Missionaries are not excluded. John Eliot's work as missionary to the native Americans, and writings in connection with that work, are included.

Several common threads run through the biographies. One is the fact that these men paid a price for their convictions, whether by being barred from preaching (remember that many of these men were expelled for nonconformity to the English Parliament's Act of Uniformity, requiring them to use the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*), or even by being put to death. Another is the reminder that these men lived in days when modern medicine was not available: many of them died relatively young, and many buried most or all of their children before they themselves died. Of John Owen and his wife it is written, "Of the eleven children born to them, only a daughter survived into adulthood. After an unhappy marriage...(she) returned to live with her parents. She died of consumption shortly afterwards" (p. 456).

The biographies mention any

aberrant views that these men held, such as John Davenant's "hypothetical universalism," Edward Fisher's sympathy for Amyraldianism, and Cotton Mather's mysticism and millenarian thinking.

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Not all of the reprinted works of these men are theological in nature.

Most are, of course. Included are many sermons; many commentaries on the whole of Scripture (Henry and Poole) or individual books of Scripture; and many works treating doctrinal points or topics of an experiential nature, as one would expect from the Puritans.

However, included are reviews of the first complete medical guide for the colonists (Cotton Mather's *The Angel of Bethesda*); many personal letters that have been compiled; several diaries; some biographies and histories; a grammar book (John Eliot's *The Indian Grammar Begun; Or, an Essay to Bring the Indian Language into Rules, for Help of Such as Desire to Learn the Same, for Furtherance of the Gospel among Them*); books relating to politics (Rutherford's *Lex Rex, or The Law and the Prince*); and



poetry (Anne Bradstreet's *To My Husband and Other Poems*).

While the reviews are usually limited to a paragraph or two, they do sometimes cover several pages, especially when that particular work is especially significant, or in the case of a multi-volume set such as the collected works of an author. The review is generally helpful for the reader to determine whether or not he might be interested in buying or at least reading the book.

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Over 75 publishers have published the works reviewed. These publishers range from major Christian book publishers (Baker, Eerdmans, Kregel, and Zondervan) to smaller operations (Old Paths Publications, Sprinkle Publications, Still Waters Revival Books), and to those associated with particular denominations (Free Presbyterian Publications, Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing, and Reformation Heritage Books). They include university presses and historical societies throughout the States and England.

Which publishers have contributed most to the reprinting of these works? I did not begin

reading the book with this question in mind, and did not later look back again to see if my theory was correct—but I recollect the names of two publishers appearing frequently: Banner of Truth Trust (Edinburgh, Scotland and Carlisle, Pennsylvania) and Soli Deo Gloria (division of Ligonier Ministries, Orlando, Florida).

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While every reader will come away thinking that some of the reprints are of no interest to him, he will at the same time have a list of books that he wants to read immediately. I can only mention a few that are on my list—Thomas Ford's book *Singing of Psalms: The Duty of Christians under the New Testament*; Obadiah Grew's *The Lord Our Righteousness: The Old Perspective on Paul*; Matthew Henry's *The Covenant of Grace*; and Johannes VanderKemp's *The Christian Entirely the Property of Christ, in Life and Death, Exhibited in Fifty-three Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism*.

Alas, so much to read, and so little time for it!

But at least, if ever I have the time, I have the book to guide me in finding worthwhile reading material from the Puritan divines. ■

***Lady Jane Grey: Nine Day Queen of England***, Faith Cook. Great Britain: Evangelical Press, 2004. Pp. 254. \$22.99 (Hardcover). ISBN: 0-85234-579-8. [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

From Leicester's Bradgate Park (where she was born and where the ruins of Bradgate Manor, including "Lady Jane's Tower," can still be seen) to the Tower of London (where she was beheaded for high treason), this biography traces the short but eventful 16 years of the nine-day queen, Lady Jane Grey.

Faith Cook does an excellent job setting the scene, with a treatment of Henry VIII (1509-1547) and his six wives, godly Edward VI (1547-1553) and his reforms, and Bloody Mary (1553-1558) and her counter-reforms, to help the reader understand the complicated political and religious circumstances that led to Lady Jane Grey's brief reign (10-19 July, 1553).

An unwilling bride (to Lord Guilford Dudley), she was also an unwilling queen. Both were the result of the strong hand of John Dudley, 1st Duke of Northumberland, who effectively ruled the country in the latter days of young Edward VI by holding two high offices: Lord President of the Council and Great Steward of the King's Household. Jane's

father-in-law deceived her and pressured her into accepting the crown. Many claimed that John Dudley was a tyrant; he was certainly an apostate. A strong *political* advocate of the Reformation, when he was outmaneuvered and imprisoned in the Tower by Queen Mary, he sought to escape death by converting to Romanism and affirming transubstantiation. On the scaffold, he denounced Reformed doctrines and preachers (pp. 154-155). The man who had made many tremble died a despised and contemptible figure. Lady Jane recalled Christ's words: "Whoso denieth him before men, he will not know him in his Father's kingdom" (p. 158).

To a former family chaplain, Dr. Harding, another apostate, she wrote,

I cannot but marvel at thee and lament thy case, which seemed sometime to be a lively member of Christ, but now the deformed imp of the devil; sometime the beautiful temple of God, but now the filthy and stinking kernel of Satan; sometime the unspotted spouse of Christ, but now the

unashamed paramour of anti-christ; sometime my faithful brother, but now a stranger and an apostate; sometime a stout Christian soldier, but now a cowardly runaway (p. 163).

Lady Jane's biblical convictions, by the blessing of God, developed and grew through the instruction of her first tutor and family chaplain, John Aylmer, a Protestant graduate of Cambridge (who returned from Switzerland to England after Mary's reign and became Bishop of London, p. 233) (pp. 31-32); her reading of the English Bible and Christian books, and prayer; her friendship with the pious Katherine Parr, Henry VIII's sixth wife (pp. 62-64); and her correspondence with various Reformers, including Sturm, Bucer, and Bullinger (who dedicated portions of his *The Decades* to Lady Jane, p. 235) (pp. 94-99).

She learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, besides the modern languages of French, Spanish, and Italian. One historian, Alison Weir, describes her as one of "the finest female minds of the [sixteenth] century."

This young Christian woman did not waver as her execution drew near. Only sixteen, she "kept the faith," while many erstwhile

Protestants denied Jesus Christ to win the favor of Bloody Mary. Lady Jane recited all of Psalm 51 at her execution and, like her Savior, commended her spirit to God, before the axe fell (pp. 199-200).

Victim of the ambition of professed friends and the enemies of the Reformed faith, one of Lady Jane's last written statements was, "God and posterity will show me more favour" (p. 196). Faith Cook's fine work helps redress the injustice for twenty-first century readers.

The book's final chapter mentions some of the bloodiest aspects of Mary's reign, including the martyrdoms of John Rogers, John Bradford, Hugh Latimer, Nicolas Ridley, and John Hooper. The three appendices contain a record of Lady Jane's debate with Dr. John Feckenham, a priest sent to convert her during her imprisonment (she ably defends the truths of justification by faith alone, the Lord's Supper, and the supremacy of Scripture); a letter commending God's Word, written on the night before her execution and sent to her sister, Katherine, and a moving prayer offered "in the time of her trouble"; as well as Lady Jane's family tree (helpful to keep the various connections straight). ■

***Job: An EP Study Commentary***, by Hywel R. Jones. Darlington, England and Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 2007. Pp. 304. \$29.99. Hardcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Reformed preachers do well to preach from the book of Job.

In doing so, one should not limit himself to the narratives with which the book opens and closes, and to the beautiful confessions of Job in Job 1:21 and 2:10. These make for good sermons indeed, but there is more to the book.

One should not overlook Job's beautiful statements in 13:15; 19:25-27; 23:10; and elsewhere. His statements regarding his integrity (chapter 31) provide God's people with a concrete example of godly, sanctified living. The passages in which Elihu speaks (chapters 32-37), as well as those in which Jehovah speaks (chapters 38-41), are instructive, moving, and humbling to all God's people, as they were to Job. Because Job's sin is one to which we all are prone, the account of his confession of sin and repentance (42:1-6) makes for a stirring sermon, particularly fitting for a preparatory service.

One gleans instruction not only from individual passages in Job, but also from an overall understanding of the exchange

between Job and his three friends. Subjects such as the wiles of Satan, godly ways to resolve conflict, godly self-defense when wrongly accused, and how to comfort those who are distressed, can be treated in this connection.

This makes the book applicable and profitable, not only for preaching, but also for Bible study.

But let the preacher beware: he ought not begin preaching on the book of Job without a clear and specific understanding beforehand of what the three friends are saying to Job, what Job says in response to them, and what Elihu says to all involved.

In coming to this clear understanding, he will not want to overlook Calvin's sermons on Job. Nor will he want to overlook this commentary by Hywel Jones.

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After serving pastorates and other positions in England, Hywel Jones became professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in California in 2000. He contributes to a worthwhile series of commentaries that Evangelical Press has been producing.

This commentary is not a verse by verse analysis of the book—and, I’m convinced, one would not want such a commentary when studying the book of Job. Rather, Jones divides the book of Job into sections and subsections, and explains the general thought of each.

This is not to say that the commentary does not deal with individual words, and does not discuss exegetical problems that a passage might pose; it does these things. As he explains the general thought of a section, Jones refers to individual words, phrases, or sentences of Job, his friends, Elihu, or God; these words appear in the text of the commentary in bold print. Often in his introductory comment on a section, Jones will alert the reader to the exegetical problems that the section will present, returning to them at the appropriate point.

Jones closely follows the English Standard Version’s translation of the book of Job—closely, but not exclusively. He does not hesitate to disagree with the ESV’s translation; recommends also the NIV translation; and at times prefers the KJV’s translation. The preacher who considers the KJV to be the most faithful

translation of the Scriptures in the English language ought not think it a weakness of Jones that he consults other translations. Striving for accuracy of translation, we do well to consult other translations of the Scripture also.

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Jones’ conviction, which he seeks to demonstrate in his commentary, is that “the point of the book is not to answer the problem of suffering but to consider, as the New Testament says, ‘the purpose of the Lord’ with regard to Job, and so to encourage all Christian sufferers” (p. 289).

This purpose and encouragement is not only to be found in Job’s end (in the historical conclusion to the book), but also in how Job is strengthened and preserved throughout his trial. This trial is prolonged not just by Job’s sickness, but by the words of his three friends. What they say is often formally true (such as God’s justice in punishing the wicked), but they do wrong in accusing Job of being impenitent in sin. Thus the friends, themselves children of God (as God requiring a sacrifice on their behalf would indicate), function as Job’s adversaries, and are Satan’s tool to continue to afflict Job and further weaken his faith. Not overlooking

that Job does sin in his responses to his friends, particularly in what he says about God, the fact remains that by resisting their arguments, “he is resisting Satan, and when he turns to God (not away from him) he is to some degree glorifying God” (p. 91).

But that Job triumphs in this battle, by God’s grace, is indicated by the fact that the speeches of his friends grow repetitive and shorter (Satan really has not so much to say, when all is said and done), while Job’s responses grow longer. He makes an astounding confession in 19:25-27, which Jones views as the turning point in the argument, and to which passage Jones gives a more detailed treatment than any other. And in his speeches following, Job is more moderate in what he says about God.

The role of Elihu in this exchange Jones understands and expresses correctly, in my judgment. Elihu *is* in God’s stead, as he says; he does say that which Job needs to hear. That God later speaks is not due to any weakness of what Elihu said, but to reinforce it, and to humble Job fully.

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Having preached once on several passages in Job, and having now read this commentary, I

would reevaluate several things when, God willing, I preach from the book again. The list that follows contains both ideas to which I am initially sympathetic, and some to which I am not—but in either instance, ideas that would have to be evaluated further before preaching on the relevant passages.

First, the idea that the friends function as Satan’s mouthpiece, as stated above, I would want to drive home all the more. Not infrequently believers speak well meaningly, but the effect of their speech is to tear down.

Second, Jones considers the feasts of Job’s first ten children to have taken place each on their birthday, so that the circuit was completed annually, while other commentators consider each to have taken place on a specific day of the week, so that the circuit was completed weekly. I had taken the latter view, and remain inclined to it, but would still want to give Jones’ argument a more careful look.

Third, the Scriptures make only one reference to Job’s wife, and there she appears in a negative light (2:10). As a result, “in the history of interpretation she has suffered much...” (p. 67).

Jones’ does not defend her for the advice she gave Job, but does defend her character more than many would, pointing out that Job did not actually call her a foolish woman, but compared her speech to that of a foolish woman. Jones’ comments in this connection are worth considering. Similarly, he is more gracious than many others in his view of the three friends—though certainly he does not defend what they say and how they say it.

Fourth, Jones explains Job 19:25-27 differently than we might, who consider it to be a confession of the resurrection of the body, as Handel did in his *Messiah*. Explaining carefully why he disagrees with the KJV translation here, Jones understands Job to be expressing his confidence that *in this life* his redeemer would come to defend and save him; “at the last” refers to the end of Job’s trial, and in referring to the destruction of his skin Job has in mind not its decomposition after death but to its emaciated condition as a result of his sickness. Understood in light of the gospel of Christ as Redeemer, the text can be used to point us to the day in which

our bodies are raised, and Christ defends us from Satan in the final judgment; but Job had in mind an event in his earthly life.

Fifth, Jones’ explanation of behemoth as perhaps signifying the two beasts described in Revelation 12-13 merits further study and consideration. Commentators have often wondered just what animal behemoth was. Jones thinks it wrong to think of him in terms of a physical creature, and rather considers him a spiritual creature, representative of the power of the devil, which God Himself created and controls.

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As I indicated earlier, the value of this commentary is both that it would aid the pastor in preparing to study the book of Job, and would aid the child of God in understanding the book, perhaps with a view to studying it with fellow believers in a Bible study. The basis of the commentary is not the Hebrew text, but an English translation; this enables all English-speaking readers to read the book with understanding. Jones’ explanations are simple and easily understood. And they give clarity to a book that might seem daunting. ■



***“Bless the Lord, O my Soul”*: The New-York Liturgy of the Dutch Reformed Church, 1767**, by Daniel James Meeter (Lanham, MD & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988) Pp., xxiii and 337. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

This jewel is No. 6 of the “Drew University Studies in Liturgy.” For those churches that still use the old time-tested liturgy of the post-Reformation era, Meeter’s book is packed with information concerning the history and origin of the whole of the liturgy these churches (including the Protestant Reformed Churches) use. While its chief interest is to give us what was the liturgy used in the Dutch settlements in New York and New Jersey, which continues mostly unchanged to the present, the book gives *also* a brief and concise history of the source of the Dutch Reformed Church’s liturgy. The book takes us back to the Reformation and gives a bird’s-eye summary of how that liturgy developed from the beginning of the Calvinistic Reformation in Europe until the Synod of Dordt, and how it was transferred to the Dutch colonies. The historical information alone is worthwhile.

The liturgy with which Meeter deals includes the Psalter or Psalmbook, the liturgical forms

(including the Marriage Form and the form for The Consolation of the Sick), the Order of Worship, the Nicean and Athanasian creeds, and the Church Order. All of the liturgy was developed over a fairly lengthy period of time, and many contributed to its final form. The names of such men as Calvin, Dathenus, Micron, Van der Heiden, and à Lasco appear frequently along with the contributions they made. The decisions of the Dutch synods up to and including the Synod of Dordt are also briefly treated.

Although the Synod of Dordt had approved a “received text” of the liturgy, which was intended to be used by all the Reformed churches, Dordt’s version was not widely followed. The chief reason for this was that no national synod was held from Dordt (1618-’19) till 197 years later, and no uniformity could be agreed upon. The final “received text” was formed in this way:

In 1637, the same year that the new translation of the Bible appeared, the printer



Van Ravesteyn published an edition of the Liturgy with some scriptural citations altered to agree with the “States’ Version.” He added a prayer, of unknown origin, for the opening of a meeting of the Deacons. He also incorporated Hommius’ list of changes, but applied these not to the 1611 Schilders edition but to an altered version of the 1566 Dathenus Liturgy.

In 1639 the publisher Cloppenburg of Amsterdam copied Van Ravesteyn’s work, and others followed suit. As a result, this “revised” text of the Liturgy came into use everywhere. Because of its widespread use, it is appropriately regarded as the “received text” of the Netherlands liturgy. It was the received text which was used by the colonial Dutch churches in North America and that served as the basis for the 1767 English translation made for the congregation in New York City. It was the received text that was made part of the Constitution of the whole denomination in 1792. (21)

The author adds a footnote in which he expresses regret that the “decision of the Synod of Dordt

was not carried out.” The footnote reads:

[The failure to carry out the decisions of Dordt is to be regretted] not only because the text of 1611, which was better in many ways, was thereby wholly out of use, but worse, lacking an officially approved standard edition, the printers could once more alter the Liturgy to their hearts’ content. And countless were the complaints that were brought to the provincial synods especially in South Holland, concerning the lack of care with which the Liturgy was printed. (21)

When the Dutch settled in what is now New York in the early 1600s, the liturgy of the churches in the Netherlands went with them. By 1628 the Dutch liturgy was fully in use in North America, particularly in the states of New York and New Jersey. But when the English took over the Dutch settlements, the Dutch churches were faced with a grave problem, for the English followed the Anglican liturgy of the Prayer Book. On the one hand, the churches of the colonies were under the jurisdiction of the State Church in Amsterdam, and the church in

Amsterdam required conformity to the Dutch liturgy. On the other hand, both the Dutch and English were under the control of their respective countries and loyal to their own governments. When the English took over, how could the Dutch become loyal subjects of the English? Would that not require the adoption of English liturgy because their church was taken over by the Anglican Church? But anticipated problems never materialized. The Dutch were given complete freedom by the English and this enabled the Dutch to maintain the Dutch heritage well into the nineteenth century.

An interesting side story involves the introduction of English into the Dutch churches. While the Dutch were able to maintain their Dutch traditions into the nineteenth century, there were always churches into which the English language crept. Consequently, English was used here and there, especially in those areas where people from the area of Leiden settled. Puritans from England had found refuge in Leiden, the Netherlands, when they were persecuted in England for their refusal to adopt the Prayer Book of the Anglican Church. Al-

though they later moved to North America and settled in Plymouth Rock, many stayed behind. Those in Leiden were part of the Netherlands Reformed Church, but they wanted their liturgy in English. Soon, therefore, much of the Dutch liturgy was translated into English by these Puritan refugees in Leiden. When English began to creep into the colonial churches, the English translation of the Dutch liturgy from Leiden was frequently used. In fact, when congregations in America became so Anglicized that they wanted an English-speaking minister, they called ministers from the Puritan churches in Leiden.

By 1767 the entire liturgy was translated into English; hence the date 1767 in the title of the book. This translation included the Psalter, but the translation was of the old Psalm book of Dathenus, which was primarily the Genevan Psalter. This translation of the Genevan Psalter never was popular because it was clumsy and almost impossible to use. The dissatisfaction with the Genevan Psalter was not the fault of the translators; the very nature of the Genevan Psalter made it difficult to translate into acceptable Dutch. The result was that

a new Psalm book was prepared in 1887. While the rest of the liturgy was kept unchanged, the Psalter was completely revised, and hymns were added to it. Our 1912 Psalter is the only part of our liturgy that, with a few minor exceptions, cannot be traced to the liturgy of 1767. (The Protestant Reformed Churches have a few English translations of the Genevan Psalter in the back of the Psalms section. While the tunes are from the Genevan Psalm book, the lyrics for the most part are of more recent origin. Some of the lyrics were composed by Dewey Westra, who prepared lyrics for all the Psalms.)

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Part 2 of the book consists of a replication of the 1767 liturgy along with all the liturgical forms; and the third part of the book is a commentary on the individual parts of this liturgy. We include here some interesting information taken from the third section of the book.

The Dutch, both in the Netherlands and in the colonies, made extensive use of form prayers. The list of form prayers used is quite long.

A prayer before the sermon.

A prayer after the sermon.

This prayer was very long, was comparable to the congregational prayer in our liturgy, and was called the "All Needs Prayer."

A prayer before the sermon on the Heidelberg Catechism and after the completion of the sermon.

A prayer for the people in the pews to use before the service, different for the morning and evening services.

A prayer at the opening of a consistory meeting and another prayer at its conclusion.

Prayers for the deacons' meetings.

There were also some form prayers for use in the home.

Some history of all these prayers is given.

The forms for Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper were considered to be the most beautiful of all the liturgy. The so-called "Flood Prayer" in the Baptism Form, so named because it mentions Noah's flood as a type of baptism, was taken from Luther's liturgy.

There were some objections to parts of the Baptism Form. Some did not like the clause "sanctified in Christ" in the first question asked parents. These people were obviously of the conviction that

the elect children of the covenant are not saved in infancy. Many in Reformed churches still object to the clause, but get around its presence in the Form by interpreting “sanctified” to mean, not “made holy,” but that all baptized children are separated from the world by the sacrament. Others objected to the clause in the second question asked parents: “taught here in this Christian church,” on the grounds that the clause was too critical of other churches. In the form for the administration of the Lord’s Supper, some objected to the list of sins mentioned in the didactic part. The author, quoting from another source, gives the interesting reason why this list was included.

The listing of sins and crimes generally strikes the modern ear as unedifying, and these portions of the liturgy, as in the Book of Common Prayer, are often omitted. But “fencing” was general pre-Reformation practice and reflects the situation of a state church where it was difficult to find a way for the exercise of discipline by the church apart from the magistrate, and where the total population was expected in church. (245) (The term “fencing” is

used to describe the practice of limiting the participants of the sacrament, HH.)

Again quoting another source, the author speaks of the practice of coming forward to the table to partake of the signs and seals of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

The custom of coming to sit at the table was, as far as I know, first used by à Lasco in London and has continued to be the custom of the Dutch church to this day. In other Reformed churches the custom is to stand around the table (German) or to kneel before it (French). It was Zwingli’s custom to have the element distributed to the congregation as they sat in their pews, a custom adopted by English Puritans and finally in the late nineteenth century imitated by most Reformed congregations. (253)

The book is altogether worthwhile. While in many Reformed churches the old liturgy has been altered and even supplanted by “contemporary worship,” we may be thankful that it still continues in conservative churches and in the Protestant Reformed Churches. ■

*The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, by John Piper. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007. Pp. 239. \$17.99. Soft-cover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

To the numerous books that respond to N. T. Wright's heretical ideas, John Piper, well known pastor at the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, adds this.

The title, and especially the word "future" in it, has a twofold significance. First, it indicates that the book deals with the future of the doctrine of justification—in other words, with recent developments regarding that doctrine, which will affect the way the church understands it henceforth. Second, the title indicates that the book deals particularly with Wright's view of justification. Wright considers God's legal declaration of justification to be exclusively future, something that God will pronounce in the final judgment. The primary purpose of the book is to assess that view of Wright.

Piper writes this book to defend the historic, Reformed, and biblical doctrine of justification as that act of God whereby He imputes to sinners His own righteousness, manifested in Jesus Christ, on the basis of Christ's

obedience, wholly apart from any work on the part of the sinner.

As he indicates in an introductory chapter entitled "On Controversy," he writes not primarily as a theologian, but as a pastor. "The reason I take up controversy with N. T. Wright and not, say, J. D. G. Dunn or E. P. Sanders... is that none of my parishioners has ever brought me a thick copy of a book by Dunn or Sanders, wondering what I thought about them" (p. 27). Piper goes on to indicate his real motive in writing this work, namely, to build up the church by promoting her true unity, which is based on truth alone.

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Born in 1948, Nicholas Thomas Wright is Anglican Bishop of Durham, England. His teachings regarding the "New Perspectives on Paul" are by now well known and have occasioned much stir in all branches of Protestantism.

That Piper has made himself well acquainted with Wright's teachings is evident from his copious citations from eight of Wright's books and nine other

essays and lectures by Wright and interviews of Wright.

Some of the more important statements Wright makes, to which Piper responds, are the following (the page references refer to quotations in Piper's book):

"The gospel" is not an account of how people get saved. It is...the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ (page 18 and elsewhere).

"Justification" in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God's eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people (p. 19).

The doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by "the gospel" (p. 19).

If we use the language of the law-court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys, or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed around the courtroom (p. 21 and elsewhere).

Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will

affirm publicly (according to [Rom.] 2:14-16 and 8:9-11) on the basis of the entire life (p. 22).

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Over the course of the book's eleven chapters, Piper responds to these notions.

Chapter one consists of a caution regarding the pitfalls of biblical theology:

The claim to interpret a biblical author in terms of the first century is generally met with the assumption that this will be illuminating. Some today seem to overlook that this might result in bringing ideas to the text in a way that misleads rather than clarifies. But common sense tells us that the first-century ideas can be used (inadvertently) to distort and silence what the New Testament writers intended to say (p. 34).

After giving his reasons why one might easily fall into this pitfall, Piper points out that Wright falls into this pitfall, by finding "new" interpretations of Paul, at the same time asserting that for the last 1500 years the Christian church has not understood Paul.

In chapter 2, Piper deals with Wright's idea that justification is God's declaration that one is in God's covenant family. By an exegetical investigation into the meaning of the word "*dikaiooo*," Piper shows Wright to be wrong on this point.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the word "justification" denotes much more than merely the final judgment. In this connection, Piper deals with two matters: Wright's notion that the doctrine of imputation that the church has taught for one and a half millennia is mistaken, and Wright's idea of God's righteousness. Again, by exegetical investigation into the concept of God's righteousness in Scripture, and focusing particularly on that concept as found in the epistle to the Romans, Piper shows that God's righteousness is not merely God's covenant faithfulness, as Wright says it is. The train of thought is continued in chapter 4, in which Piper argues that because the divine judge is omniscient, knowing the guilt of every sinner, He cannot pronounce anyone righteous unless He sees in him a true righteousness—which true righteousness cannot be his own.

To Wright's idea that the

gospel is the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and that Paul did not consider the doctrine of justification to be part of the gospel, Piper responds in chapters 5 and 6. From the Scriptures, particularly Acts 13, Piper exposes the falsity of Wright's claim. Piper also points out that to sinners, especially unforgiving and impenitent sinners, the declaration that Jesus Christ is Lord is not gospel, but terrifying news! The only good news for sinners (*some* sinners, of course) is that their sins are *forgiven*—which is simply to say that they are justified before God in Jesus Christ. Justification is in itself a saving act, in which God makes the sinner right (legally) before Him.

To the basis of justification, Piper turns in chapter 7, entitled "The Place of Our Works in Justification." He demonstrates that Wright considers our works to be the basis of justification in the last day. By exegetically explaining various passages in Romans 2, Piper disputes this theory. Contradicting Wright's notion that Reformed pastors and scholars do not pay enough attention to the relationship between justification and works, Piper quotes pertinent references from the Augsburg

Confession, the First Helvetic Confession, the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (the citations from which Wright ought himself know), and the Westminster Confession. These citations show that the church has grappled with the relationship between justification and works, finding that relationship not in that works are the basis of our justification, but in that works are the necessary evidence of a true faith by which one is justified.

But perhaps Wright is merely careless in using the word “basis” to describe the relationship of works to justification. After all, he interchangeably uses the term “according to works.” This question Piper investigates in chapter 8, concluding that in fact Wright differs with the Reformed tradition on this point, and that Wright does in fact consider the works of the sinner to be at least a part of the basis of God’s justification of the sinner in the final judgment.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with the question whether the works of the law to which Paul refers in Galatians 2 and 3 refer to the keeping of God’s whole law by all His people, or only to the keeping of certain aspects of the ceremonial law by the Jews.

Comprehensively set forth in chapter 9, Wright’s view is that Paul opposed justification by works because the Jews mistakenly considered their obedience to the outward law, rather than their faith, to be the true indication of being God’s covenant people. In chapter 10, by an exegesis of parts of Romans 3, Piper refutes Wright’s idea.

In chapter 11 Piper ties the various threads together. He points out again that Wright’s idea of God’s righteousness is not Paul’s; asserts that, at best, preaching Wright’s idea of justification will confuse the church; and then, from Romans 4 and 5, Philippians 3:9, I Corinthians 1:30, and II Corinthians 5:21, sets forth the biblical foundation of the doctrine of imputation.

In his conclusion, Wright asserts that the Reformation’s understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is right and relevant.

To the main body of the book are added six appendices. The first sets forth “Thoughts on Romans 9:30-10:4”; the second is entitled “Thoughts on Law and Faith in Galatians 3”; the third, “Thoughts on Galatians 5:6 and the Relationship Between Faith



and Love”; fourth, “Using the Law Lawfully: Thoughts on I Timothy 1:5-11”; the title of the fifth is the question, “Does The Doctrine of the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness Imply That the Cross is Insufficient For Our Right Standing With God?”; and the 6<sup>th</sup> contains “Twelve The- ses on What It Means to Fulfill the Law.” About these appendices, Piper says that they:

were not written in response to the work of N. T. Wright. Most of them were written before I had read Wright’s work. They do not interact with his work. The reason for their presence here is to give some windows into my wider understanding of justification and related exegetical issues (p. 189).

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Without question, Piper’s analysis of the error of Wright’s view of justification is dead on. And Piper is to be commended for his explicit *exegetical* response to Wright’s views. Piper puts to good use that which is the only authority for faith and life, the inspired Scriptures.

In assessing Wright’s views, Piper consciously strives to un-

derstand Wright and be fair to him. He desires to undertake controversy in a right way, as he indicates in an opening chapter. He is careful to investigate whether Wright is merely careless in his terminology, or in fact wrong, as noted in chapter 8 above.

If anything, his carefulness leads him to be too soft in his treatment of Wright. In his treatment of Wright’s *teachings*, he is not too soft. But he is more charitable than he needs to be in his view of Wright *personally*: never did I notice him call Wright a heretic, of which term Wright is worthy, for Wright’s teaching regarding justification differs from the teachings of the confessions of the Christian church, which teachings are derived from the Scriptures. And Piper is more cautious than he needs to be in his assessment of the effect of Wright’s teaching: “But in my judgment, what he [Wright] has written will lead to a kind of preaching that will not announce clearly what makes the lordship of Christ good news for guilty sinners or show those who are overwhelmed with sin how they may stand righteous in the presence of God” (p. 15). Again: “Following N. T. Wright in his

understanding of justification will result in a kind of preaching that will at best be confusing to the church” (p. 165).

But what will it do at worst? And what will it inevitably do, being heretical? It will damage and tear apart the church of Jesus Christ; it will cause to be manifest those who are not truly of the church. Piper would not have been out of line to call Wright to repentance for his false teachings, and remind him that any “future justification” for which Wright may be hoping is not given to teachers who deny the gospel. Wright, after all, is not merely one who has a wrong understanding of the gospel; he is one who has himself studied the Scriptures, throws out the church’s historic and confessional understanding of the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith alone, and teaches his wrong understanding over against the truth.

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In addition to the central importance of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the need to defend it, this book reminded me of three things.

The first is the relationship between the theology of the Federal Vision and that of the New

Perspectives on Paul. Wright is allied specifically with the latter group; but as I read the book, I could see how the teachings of the Federal Vision depend on the ideas developed by men such as N. T. Wright.

The second is the methodology of heretics. One tactic is to insist on distinctions in areas in which the church has not before, and at the same time to ignore crucial distinctions that the church has made. Wright does the former in his treatment of the phrase “the works of the law,” as well as in his view of justification in relation to divine calling (page 95). He does the latter in dealing with the relationship of works to justification—whether justification is on the basis of, or according to, our works (p. 118).

The third is that Reformed pastors do well to know in some detail what their own people are reading and hearing. I commend Piper for his pastoral reason for writing this book. That same pastoral heart should lead Reformed pastors to read at least one solid response to the views of Wright, and be ready to warn their flock against him and men of his ilk. ■

***Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe***, ed. Ben Quash and Michael Ward. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007. Pp xi + 148. \$16.95. Softcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

This book is the written form of a series of sermons preached in Peterhouse Chapel, Cambridge, England. Due to the great interest in this sermon series, the sermons are now published in book form.

The twelve chapters are divided into two parts. Part one deals with “Heresies of the Person of Christ, and How to Avoid Them.” In this section the heresies of Arianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, Adoptionism, and Theopaschitism are treated in order. Part two is entitled “Heresies of the Church and Christian Living, and How to Avoid Them.” Marcionism, Donatism, Pelagianism, Gnosticism, and the heresy of the Free Spirit are treated in order. Concluding part two is a chapter devoted less to heresy than to orthodoxy, treating the subject of the Trinity.

The book’s aim is not only to introduce various teachings that the Christian church in centuries past declared heretical, but also to identify ways in which those heresies manifest themselves today, and to tell the reader how

and why to avoid them. Accordingly, each chapter begins with a one-paragraph description of the heresy under consideration, and a statement of where and when the church condemned that heresy. Next follow two or three key passages of Scripture, sometimes lengthy, that set forth the truth over against that heresy. Then the author of that chapter explains the heresy in further detail, and deals to some extent with the “practical” matter of how and why to reject the heresy in its current form.

The book concludes with an epilogue in which Michael Ward points out ways in which orthodoxy becomes corrupted: 1) orthodoxy negatively defined—stating what the truth is *not* and failing to set forth clearly and fully what it *is*; 2) hyper-orthodoxy—defending orthodox belief by use of any available means, including some questionable means; 3) hypo-orthodoxy—reducing orthodox truth to its lowest possible level; 4) excessive balance, by which the orthodox emphasize some aspects of truth more than another;

5) violence and bloodshed on the part of the orthodox toward the heretics (which occurred in the case of Marguerite Porete, who promoted the heresy of the free spirit); 6) hypocrisy; 7) idolatry, in the form of requiring assent to the creeds rather than to God; and 8) intellectualism, which we might call dead orthodoxy.

I found the conclusion to many chapters to be thought provoking; but the epilogue was the most thought provoking section of the book.

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To comment on a few specific chapters, Luther's name is mentioned twice, both times negatively, in connection with Marcionism. Marcion rejected the notion that Jesus was the personal revelation of the Just and Holy God of the Old Testament. In fact, Marcion rejected the Old Testament, in the process becoming something of an antinomist. If, after all, the ten commandments are not part of the gospel, and if the heart of the gospel is love, then the law is to be set aside. Then this: "Marcion's denigration of the law anticipates the revolt of Martin Luther, who hated the law almost as much as Marcion did, and took refuge,

like Marcion, in the letters of Paul, particularly the letter to the Romans. But Luther was not a true Marcionite" (p. 77).

My point is that the modern-day manifestations of old heresies are not always accurately identified. If the author (Angela Tilby) is ready to admit that Luther "was not a true Marcionite," her negative allusion to him in connection with modern manifestations of Marcionism is misleading. She is more accurate in identifying other current manifestations of Marcionism; but the reader remembers that Luther was still dragged into the camp.

Gnosticism, treated in chapter 10, is certainly present today. The one clear instance of it given by Anders Bergquist is noteworthy: "A psychotherapy which suggested that the knowledge that we gain of ourselves in the psychotherapeutic relationship is itself what makes us whole human beings" (p. 111). Well put. But...no mention of the New Age movement in this chapter.

The heresy of the Free Spirit, treated in chapter 11, was a new one to me. Marguerite Porete, burned at the stake in 1310, was one promoter of the idea that the human will could be annihilated,

and the divine will could replace it. Apparently this was related to a mystical view of life; Meister Eckhart followed in her footsteps. The Council of Vienne condemned her views as heretical in 1312. The reason why Eckhart was not condemned, but Porete was, is attributed to her “ambiguity” (indeed, a notable trait of many heretics); she was perceived as teaching that she did not need the Church on earth (Church with a capital “C”, meaning what is now Rome; but implying that one could live in communion with God apart from the means of grace). If I understand this heresy correctly, the author could have done much more in pointing out ways in which it is alive today. This chapter was particularly brief on that point.

Finally, the last chapter, entitled “Biblical Trinitarianism: The purpose of being orthodox,” was an attempt to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is both relevant and practical today, and that a correct understanding of it is necessary to avoid heresy. The doctrine of the Trinity is correctly said to be the explanation for how Jesus could be truly God, yet with us in the flesh. But none should read the chapter hoping to learn

the one fundamental practical significance of the Trinity, namely, that it makes known God as a covenant God, a family God, a God of love, whose life must be reflected in ours.

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Although each author indicates that he, with the church in the past, views these ideas as heresies, the book betrays sympathy for the heretics themselves, and for how the heresies arose. It is true, and the book acknowledges it, that God has a purpose in the rise of heresy, one of which is that the church clarify her understanding of the truth. But the writers go farther in softening the harshness of the words “heresy” and “heretics.” This quote from the prologue by Ben Quash illustrates:

It is important to admit that... heresies (and heretics) aren't *all* bad. Even if we grant that too often heretics allowed a good point they wanted to make to get out of proportion, and to have a deforming effect on the larger picture painted by Christian teaching as a whole, nevertheless it may already have begun to become clear that many heresies were sincerely proffered as attempts

to clarify the belief of the Church and inform the lives of believers. Many of those who proffered them regarded themselves as orthodox and catholic believers. We can afford to listen to them generously in many cases. They are the losers in the history of Christian doctrine, and the victors...usually write the history books in a way that is unfavourable to those they have beaten.... [H]eresies often had some good points to make. The problem is they didn't always do so in the right way or in an appropriate context. Or in a good number of fascinating cases...they just *didn't go far enough* (p. 7).

That the Spirit of truth, in guiding the church into all truth, not only used these heresies to force the church to develop her understanding of truth, but also empowered the church to condemn these ideas as heresies, the authors of this book do not seem to appreciate.

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Primarily the book is written from the perspective of Anglicanism: 8 of the 12 contributors are Anglican (including the two editors), and in sermon form this book was preached in an Anglican chapel. Two contributors are

Roman Catholics; one is Eastern Orthodox; and one is Quaker.

Other evidence that the book is written from an Anglican perspective includes the use of an apocryphal text, Wisdom 1:12-15, as one of the "key Scriptures" on the basis of which the error of Nestorianism is exposed (p. 33); and the inclusion of that late heresy, the heresy of the Free Spirit (chapter 11).

That the book is written from such a perspective is interesting and significant.

It indicates that Anglicanism primarily, but also Roman Catholicism, is nominally and historically Christian. Anglicanism yet today adheres to the ecumenical creeds of the Christian church.

It shows that within Anglicanism are some who still put up a defense of the truth over against the lie. These reject the errors that occasioned the writing of the ecumenical creeds, and that the creeds condemn.

And that there was interest in the contents of this book, when preached in the form of sermons, indicates that within Anglicanism are those who desire to be instructed in these errors, and warned against them.

At the same time, the fact that

the book is written from such a perspective makes it of only limited value to the Reformed pastor or layperson.

Its value is that it gives us a general overview of some past heresies, and points us to ways in which those heresies show themselves today.

Its limitation is twofold. First,

it contributes nothing to a development of the truth over against heresy. Second, the modern-day manifestation of the heresies that it points out are rather general; the Reformed person, trying to avoid these heresies today in his own life, would have to think of more specific ways in which these heresies are evident. ■

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*Calvin's Theology of the Psalms*, by Herman J. Selderhuis. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. 304 pages. \$29.99. Softcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

In this book Selderhuis surveys Calvin's theology as set forth in his commentary on the Psalms.

The word "theology" is to be understood here in its narrower sense, referring to the study of God: "Calvin's theology is nothing else than *theo*-logy; by this I mean to say that the whole of his theology as well as all of its parts constantly deal with God" (p. 14). Realizing that God is at the very center of Calvin's theology, the author's stated purpose "... is to demonstrate this pattern of Calvin's thought from his commentary on the Psalms" (p. 19).

In both his preface and conclusion, Selderhuis explains why he does not turn to Calvin's *Institutes*, but to his commentary on the Psalms, to survey Calvin's theology. First, this "reflects the emerging consensus of Calvin research that the *Institutes* ought to be read in light of the commentaries and not the other way around" (p. 15). Second, "Calvin did not intend the work [*Institutes*, DJK] to be a summary of his theology, but rather he produced it as a theological glossary to accompany his commentaries" (p. 283).

Selderhuis argues that the commentary on the Psalms is suf-

ficient to use to survey Calvin's theology because for Calvin "the Old and the New Testament differ in clarity and not in essence. Hence his commentaries on the Old Testament are just as informative about his theology as his exegesis of the New Testament" (p. 14). More particularly, Selderhuis argues that Calvin meant his commentaries in general, and those on the Psalms in particular, to complement his *Institutes*, finding proof for this in the fact that "Calvin worked on both books simultaneously" (p. 283); the commentary on the Psalms appeared in 1557, while the last edition of the *Institutes* in 1559.

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Chapter 1 introduces the work by arguing that "Calvin's commentary on the Psalms provides an excellent case study in the relation between theology and biography" (p. 25). That is, Calvin finds himself to have much in common with David, and the situation in Geneva to have much in common with that in Israel in David's day. So Calvin's expositions of the Psalms are his own "spiritual autobiography" (p. 33).

In chapters 2-11 the author accomplishes his stated purpose. In keeping with the theological

emphasis of the Psalms, each chapter title begins with "God"; in order, chapters 2-11 are entitled: "God the Triune," "God the Creator," "God the Caring," "God the Speaking," "God the King," "God the Judge," "God the Hidden," "God the Holy One," "God the God of the Covenant," and "God the Father."

That Selderhuis uses the term "theology" in its narrower sense does not mean he does not treat subjects that we classify as belonging to the other five loci of Reformed doctrine. God's purpose in creating man, man's bearing the image of God, and man's fall are all treated in connection with "God the Creator"; "God the Caring" includes a treatment of providence and the relation of God to evil; and in "God the Speaking" one finds mention of the word and sacraments as being the way in which God reveals Himself to us today. The subjects of angels, God's law, and the Christian life come up under "God the King"; and sin, guilt, punishment, Christ's second coming, death, and eternal life under "God the Judge." Under "God the Holy One," Selderhuis treats sanctification and its relationship to justification, as well as



matters pertaining to the church's worship. The doctrine of the church as well as the subject of prayer are treated in the chapter "God the God of the Covenant," and the final chapter on "God the Father" includes a treatment of faith, grace, and predestination.

While the doctrines of the Lord's Supper, the Trinity, and election are mentioned in Calvin's commentaries on the Psalms, Selderhuis contends that they do not get much attention in the commentaries. Accordingly, Selderhuis gives them only comparatively little attention in his own book. In the author's own words, the reason why the doctrines of Christ as Mediator and of the Holy Spirit are not treated in more detail is this: "In his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin is vitally interested in the first person of the Trinity. Consequently Christology and Pneumatology lie on the periphery" (p. 60). In his conclusion, Selderhuis argues that Calvin scholarship was wrongly influenced by Barth to present Calvin as Christ-centered, and by Schleiermacher to present Calvin as man-centered; "it is more accurate to say that Calvin's theology...is utterly *theocentric*" (p. 285, emphasis his).

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As Selderhuis endeavors to be objective, and to let Calvin speak for himself, the book is overall a fair presentation of Calvin's views. Without question, the book demonstrates that God is at the center of Calvin's theology, and was at the center of Calvin's thinking when he wrote his commentary on the Psalms.

Yet the book has serious flaws.

Two of Selderhuis' main contentions are incorrect, in my judgment.

First, while it is true that Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries complement each other, Selderhuis is wrong in saying that Calvin intended his *Institutes* to be read in light of his commentaries, and not vice versa. Notice what Calvin says in his preface to the reader in the *Institutes*. I quote from Calvin's letter to the reader, dated 1<sup>st</sup> August 1559; but what is here said can be found, in almost the same wording, already in Calvin's introduction to his second edition in 1539.

For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it

will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents. If, after this road has, as it were, been paved, I shall publish any interpretations of Scripture, I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces. In this way the godly reader will be spared great annoyance and boredom, provided he approach Scripture armed with a knowledge of the present work, as a necessary tool.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin himself indicates that the commentaries should be read with a prior understanding of the *Institutes*!

Selderhuis' second incorrect contention is that in Calvin's commentary on the Psalms, Christology is peripheral.

Granted, Calvin does not develop the doctrine of Christ systematically in his commentaries. For that matter, neither does he develop the doctrine of God

systematically in them. Commentaries, including Calvin's, are expositions of the text of Scripture, not systematic developments of doctrine.

But Calvin is certainly Christological, and his commentaries do reflect this. To be God-centered *is*, for an orthodox Reformed theologian and expositor such as Calvin was, to be Christ-centered. The two go together; to pose them as an "either/or" is to pose a false disjunction. To produce a God-centered commentary on an entire book on the Bible simply cannot mean that in it the doctrines of Christ are "peripheral."

Selderhuis himself admits that Calvin deals with the main points of the doctrine of Christ. In connection with "God the Trine" Selderhuis treats the person, natures, and offices of Christ as Calvin sets them forth in his commentaries (pp. 55-59). On p. 78 Selderhuis notes that Calvin mentions Christ as being the one who restores the image that man lost when he fell. Selderhuis does not ignore that Calvin refers to the Holy Spirit as the means by which Christ effects this renewal of man. Even in speaking of Calvin's own hermeneutical method in expounding the Psalms, Sel-

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1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, transl. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), volume 1, p. 4.

derhuis indicates that Calvin was Christological.

I'll not belabor this point. It simply seems to me that Calvin's theocentricity does not require nor warrant Selderhuis' assertion that Christology is peripheral in Calvin's commentaries.

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At times Selderhuis appears to misunderstand or wrongly represent Calvin.

Several times this incorrect understanding of Calvin is seen in Selderhuis' treatment of man's total depravity by nature. He writes that, due to man's fall, "the situation [of the human race] is so bad that Calvin thinks the soul is almost dead" (p. 79). The reader who understands Calvin's doctrine of total depravity will immediately see that the word "almost" betrays a misunderstanding of Calvin. Then, according to Selderhuis, in dealing with Psalm 51:10-11 (vv. 12-13 in the Hebrew) Calvin is "not consistent in his logic and his use of biblical texts." He draws Calvin's interpretation of these texts to what he thinks is its logical conclusion, though admitting Calvin did not want to draw this conclusion, namely, that "the one who prays verse 12 of Psalm

51 is not born-again, but the one who prays the words of verse 13 must be a believer!" (p. 81). To understand Calvin this way is simply to misunderstand Calvin. Let the reader judge for himself by reading Calvin's commentary on that point.

In dealing with Calvin's view of whether God approves of sin, Selderhuis faults Calvin for deciding that the answer to this question is "incomprehensible," (p. 109), and says that Calvin "effectively seems to evade the question that he himself raised as to whether or not it is absurd that God would incline a human being to evil" (p. 110). In the conclusion to the chapter, "Calvin almost makes God responsible for evil as well" (p. 118). I am not convinced Calvin "almost" did this.

In connection with Calvin's view of predestination, Selderhuis makes a statement that does not accurately represent Calvin's position. "Therefore predestination...does not merely or even primarily pertain to our redemption from the consequences of sin in this life as much as to our service in this life now" (p. 277). Perhaps Calvin did give some insight as to the relationship of predestination to our service in this life now; but

that Calvin did not view predestination as “primarily” pertaining to redemption from sin simply is not true.

Statements such as those given above, in which Selderhuis appears to misrepresent Calvin, convince me even further that Calvin’s commentaries are to be read after, and in light of, his *Institutes*.

One wonders as to the cause for these misunderstandings. Is Calvin so unclear in his commentaries? Does he make statements that, if considered in isolation, appear to contradict what he says clearly elsewhere? Or do such statements tip the hand as to what Selderhuis himself actually believes? Does the fact that these statements occur in connection with depravity and predestination indicate that Selderhuis is not orthodox in these areas?

Because I do not know Selderhuis personally, because I have read none other of his writings, and because this book contains relatively little evaluation on his part, I cannot and will not assert that the answer to the last two questions is “Yes.” But because the book gives no reason to answer them negatively, the questions linger in my mind.

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Other critiques of the book pertain more to the translation and editing, and ought be corrected in a future edition.

I found at least a dozen spelling or factual mistakes in the book. There is in my Bible, for instance, no verse referenced I John 3:39 (p. 271). In addition, there were several grammatical and syntax errors that resulted in strange sentences.

Many Latin phrases were used throughout the book, which are meaningless to the English-speaking reader.

The book could also be edited in the future to avoid unnecessary repetition. At times, especially in the earlier part of the book, the author seemed to restate what he had already made clear.

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Herman Selderhuis is professor of church history and church polity at the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn (the seminary of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands), as well as director of the Institute for Reformation Research in Apeldoorn, and general secretary of the International Calvin Congress. In a brief statement on the acknowledgment page,

he identifies Victor d'Assonville and David Holmlund as being the translators of the work.

This volume is another in the series "Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought," edited by Richard A. Muller. The goal of the series is not only to translate some of the Reformers' original writings but also to publish scholarly studies of their works. The goal is worthwhile. Several of the works published already in the series are significant contributions to

the English-speaking Reformed community.

One could have wished that this present volume contributed more positively to this goal. In my view it does not. The prevalence of editing errors in a book that purports to be scholarly is unfortunate. And, while much of what Selderhuis says is good, his erroneous contentions and misunderstandings of Calvin will not aid the reader in better understanding Reformed thought. ■

*An Iron Pillar: The Life and*

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*Times of William Romaine*, Tim Shenton. Great Britain: Evangelical Press, 2004. Pp. 463. \$26.99 (Hardcover). ISBN: 0-85234-562-3. [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

In this fine biography of William Romaine, Tim Shenton takes us through the life and times of a leading eighteenth-century evangelical in the Church of England.

Born in 1714 in Hartlepool (to which town his French grandfather immigrated a few years before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes [1685]), Romaine attended the grammar school of Houghton le Spring (founded by sixteenth-century Protestant

Bernard Gilpin, "the apostle of the north" of England) and Oxford University. While at Oxford, he "studiously avoided" all connection with "The Holy Club" of the Wesleys, Whitefield, and others (p. 28), preferring instead the "Hutchinsonians," a high church group much given to a mystical, overly typological, philosophical reading of the Hebrew Old Testament (pp. 28-31). His assiduous Oxford studies led to Anglican orders, a reputation for scholarship,

and a high view of his abilities. Shenton places Romaine's later conversion to evangelical views "between the years 1739-1749" (p. 56).

The remainder of the biography traces his largely London-based ministry, his indefatigable labors, his fierce opposition from within the Church of England, his various controversies, his books (especially the trilogy *The Life of Faith*, *The Walk of Faith*, and *The Triumph of Faith*), his relationships with other evangelicals (including Augustus Toplady, Lady Huntingdon, and William Grimshaw), and much more, until his death in 1795.

Romaine was a confessional Anglican. He even "preached a course of sermons on the Thirty-Nine Articles," which were so well received that his church wardens and members petitioned him to publish them, though he did not accede to their request (p. 238). Following Articles 23 and 36, "He would not employ lay preachers or countenance their methods; thus he stood alone for a considerable time in the Church of England" (p. 379).

Romaine was a stronger Calvinist than most of his contemporaries (pp. 14, 256), loving

and preaching the truth of God's glorious grace in Jesus Christ and writing an enthusiastic preface to Elisha Cole's *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty* (p. 283). Romaine averred,

I would not be an Arminian for the world; because I am not only willing, but happy in getting more and more into Christ's debt. They are only pensioners in heaven; they take all from him in use, and carry all back to him in praise. God teach us this heavenly lesson. Although I have learned but little, yet I would not be saved in any other way, than by sovereign grace; for only by this can I find employment in oneness with God, or happiness in God—All is grace, all is debt (p. 328; cf. pp. 59-61).

Listen to Romaine on God's everlasting, unchangeable, and unconditional covenant, from chapter 4 of his *The Walk of Faith*:

I will make, says their God, an everlasting covenant for them, a covenant ordered in all things and sure by the counsel and oath of the blessed Trinity, the two immutable things, in which it is impossible God

should lie; the mountains shall depart and the hills shall be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from them, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on them. My covenant was made for them, and shall be made good to them. As I live, saith the Lord, I will not turn away from them to do them good. I will never change my purpose, nor alter the word that is gone out of my mouth. I mean nothing but good to them. My heart is fixed upon it. And I will not leave the event to them. They shall not have the management of my purposes, nor have any power to defeat them. My will to do them good shall not depend on their will or on their faithfulness, or on anything in themselves. I have taken all their concerns into mine own hands, and I will conduct them all to the praise of the glory of mine own grace. I will put my fear into their hearts that they shall not depart from me—they SHALL not depart from me. They are not the cause of their not departing, but I am. I have taken it upon myself. I will give them grace to walk close with me, and to fear me always. I have covenanted for all, the means as well as

the end, and I will keep them by my almighty power, till they receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.

Interestingly, Romaine's first biographer, William Cadogan, published a work, *The Continuance and Constancy of the Friendship of God, as a Covenant God with his People*, in London in 1795 (p. 409).

Romaine taught the truth of sovereign grace as it applies to good works:

If we do much for him, we have nothing to boast of; for he works in us both to will and to do. I am for good works as much as any of them; but I would do them to a right end, and upon a right motive; and after all, having done the best that can be done, I would not lay the weight of the least tittle of my salvation—no, not one atom of it, upon them. It all rests on Christ—he is my only foundation—he is my topstone: and all the building, laid on him, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord. He has done all for me: he does all in me: he does all by me (p. 265).

As one would expect, John Wesley slandered Romaine as an

antinomian (pp. 169, 201) and claimed that *all* of his writings were “brimful of Antinomianism” (p. 264). Romaine, for his part, saw Wesleyan perfectionism as a tool of Satan, working much mischief. Romaine combated it especially in Brighton, where the delusion had wrought havoc (pp. 188-191). However, Shenton states that Romaine and Wesley “ministered together on a number of occasions, [though] their doctrinal differences kept them from enjoying a truly close relationship” (p. 169).

Romaine insisted strongly on the truth of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (pp. 108-109). Shenton praises his “robust defence of justification by faith” (p. 266).

Romaine held that “preaching the gospel was the only God-ordained method of bringing sinners to Christ and the New Testament held no other view” (p. 279). He preached earnest, comforting sermons without any notes (p. 396). Those who heard him preach often remarked, “It was as though he had been in heaven, and came back to earth to tell us what was doing there” (p. 398).

This Anglican evangelical was an ardent advocate of Psalm

singing (of which his favorite was Psalm 121; p. 298). Shenton summarizes his position:

Romaine’s zeal for the Psalms was principally directed towards upholding and, where necessary, re-establishing biblical theology in the church. He wanted the pure Word of God read, preached and sung by Christian congregations. Nothing, in his view, should be countenanced that threatened the supremacy of Scripture. He strongly opposed hymns on the ground that they were man’s creation and not God’s, and that they lowered worship to the level of entertainment (pp. 276, 278).

Romaine saw hymn singing, according to George Ella, as a

substitute for true worship and a grave departure from the scriptural norm. Whenever there was a lack of “vital religion,” he thought, people left off praying, singing the Psalms and hearing the Word, and descended into singing [Isaac] Watt’s “flights of fancy,” along with other flippant pastimes. The words of man had become more important to a backsliding church than the word of God (p. 278).



Shenton's book is full of interesting material: Romaine's watching the famous David Garrick to improve his elocution (p. 33); his interpretation of Jephthah's vow (his daughter was not sacrificed, pp. 44-45); his preaching being used in the conversion of the man who was to become George III's state coachman (p. 105); his brief and highly controversial stint as Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College (he ridiculed and sought to overthrow Newton's system, pp. 110-115); his vehement opposition to a 1753 parliamentary bill granting naturalization to the Jews in Britain (the bill was defeated, pp. 118-122); his thoughts on the American Revolution ("wrong both spiritually and politically," pp. 284, 272), etc.

Romaine's piety stands out very clearly from Shenton's biography: his stress upon and constancy in prayer, his careful use of time (p. 321), and his emphasis on the battle between the old man and the new man. The doctrines of grace, he declared,

...are such constant use to the children of God, that without the steadfast belief of them, they cannot go on their way rejoicing. It is from these doc-

trines only that settled peace can rule in the conscience, the love of God be maintained in the heart, and a conversation kept up in our walk and warfare as becometh the gospel. It is from them that all good works proceed, and that all fruits of holiness abound to the praise of the glory of the grace of God (p. 283).

Doubtless Romaine was a godly man—Shenton even refers to him as an "iron pillar" of steadfastness—from whom many lessons may be learned. But there was a grievous flaw. He stayed in the Church of England, despite its clear doctrinal departure from the truth. This is directly opposed to our *Belgic Confession* 28-29. This apostasy was evident to Romaine himself, especially on the many occasions when he was strongly persecuted and opposed by heretical Anglican officebearers. He did consider leaving the Church of England (pp. 162-163). George Whitefield, commissioned to find a suitable minister for Paul's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, appealed to Romaine, who, after reflection, decided not to cross to America (pp. 194-196). Romaine did counsel John Newton not to enter

the Church of England ministry, but Newton was “priested” five years later (p. 176).

Look at the Church of England now! Its evangelicals are a tiny, deeply compromised minority, and most of them are charismatics! Currently, the Church of England’s two most famous evangelical leaders are both in their eighties: J. I. Packer, who associated themselves with Evangelicals and Catholics Together (and whose later “clarification” does little to improve things), and John Stott, who holds to annihilationism. The next generation is going further downhill, as the leavening process continues (I Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

The Bishop of Durham advocates the New Perspective on Paul, attacking the gospel of the righteousness of God in Christ by faith alone and, therefore, advo-

cating further false ecumenism with Rome. The Archbishop of Canterbury believes that God is like a nine-year-old spastic child, who communicates his inarticulate desires by grunts and moans. With this view of God and His Word, it comes as no surprise that he and many Church of England clergy approve of sodomy and homosexual “priests.”

The three marks of the church are even more defaced than in Romaine’s day. Openly heretical and wicked officebearers and members are not disciplined and are admitted to the Lord’s table, and “by this the covenant of God [is] profaned, and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation [and denomination]” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 82).

What would Romaine think of the Church of England now! ■

# 2009 Calvin Conference

“After 500 Years:  
John Calvin for the Reformed Churches Today”

## **Sponsor:**

The Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary,  
in commemoration of the 500th anniversary  
of the birth of the great church reformer  
John Calvin.

**Dates:** September 3-5, 2009 (Thursday-Saturday).

**Venue:** First Christian Reformed Church,  
Byron Center, Michigan.

## **Speeches:**

“Calvin as Model for Reformed Ministers”

**Prof. Barrett Gritters**

“Calvin as Church Reformer”

**Prof. Russell Dykstra**

“Calvin as Expositor and Preacher of Holy Scripture”

**Rev. Steven Key**

“Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification”

**Rev. Angus Stewart**

“Calvin’s Struggle for Church Discipline”

**Prof. Ronald Cammenga**

“Calvin’s Doctrine of the Covenant”

**Prof. David Engelsma**

“Calvin’s Doctrine of Predestination”

**Rev. Chris Connors**

In addition to the speeches, a panel discussion  
and a question and answer session are planned.

Everyone is invited!

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