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in this issue:

<i>Editor's Notes</i>	1
<i>Calvin's Reformation of Public Worship</i> <i>Ronald L. Cammenga</i>	3
<i>Antithetical Catechizing in the Twenty-first Century</i> <i>Nathan J. Langerak</i>	27
<i>Creation, Providence, and Divine Accommodation:</i> <i>John Calvin and Modern Theories of Evolution</i> <i>Erik Guichelaar</i>	61
<i>The Southern Presbyterian Doctrine of the</i> <i>Spirituality of the Church</i> <i>Eugene Case</i>	93
<i>Book Reviews</i>	110

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PROTESTANT REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

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Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary
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USA

Book Reviews

- 110 Clark, R. Scott. *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ*
- 114 Dennison, James T. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 2, 1552-1566.*
- 120 Hanko, Herman. *Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth.*
- 125 Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons*
- 128 McDermott, Gerald R. *The Great Theologians: A Brief Guide*
- 131 Moore, Jonathan D. *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology*
- 138 Olevianus, Caspar. *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed*

Editor's Notes

Welcome once again to the pages of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. We, the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, are thankful for the privilege of presenting to our readership another issue of our journal. We trust that you will find the articles included in this issue informative, soundly Reformed, and solidly biblical.

Rev. Nathan Langerak, a 2007-graduate of our seminary, contributes a timely article on antithetical catechism instruction. This article was first presented as a paper at an officebearers' conference of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the article, Rev. Langerak not only calls for the continuation of systematic catechetical instruction in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, warning against the trend in many churches to abandon or minimize catechetical instruction, but also, and especially, defends the need for *antithetical* instruction, instruction that forthrightly identifies and condemns the lie. He points out that in the end antithetical instruction is the only kind of instruction pleasing to God and profitable to the children and young people.

Erik Guichelaar is a second-year student at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. His essay, "Creation, Providence, and Divine Accommodation: John Calvin and Modern Theories of Evolution," was an award-winning essay in the contest that the seminary sponsored as part of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth. The paper demonstrates beyond doubt that Calvin held the biblical and confessionally Reformed view of creation. The paper shows clearly that Calvin cannot rightly be appealed to for support by those who embrace various forms of theistic evolution.

The Rev. Eugene Case continues his series on Southern Presbyterianism. These articles were first presented as speeches to the faculty and student body of PRTS. In this article brother Case takes up "The Southern Presbyterian Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church." You will find the article instructive and edifying. We thank the brother for his willingness to put his speeches into print for the profit of a wider audience.

The practice in many Protestant Reformed Churches is to commemorate the great Reformation of the sixteenth century by a celebration and speech. Over the years the undersigned has given a good number of Reformation Day speeches. These speeches are designed, not for scholars primarily, but for the ‘ordinary’ members of the church. At the same time, we trust that such speeches will be of profit to the readers of our journal. Believing this to be so, we include in this issue the Reformation Day speech that the undersigned was privileged to give recently in the Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington. The speech is entitled, “Calvin’s Reformation of Public Worship.”

The concluding section of the journal contains, as is our custom, a number of reviews of recently published books. We trust that you will find the reviews to be helpful.

Tolle lege!

Soli Deo Gloria!

— RLC

Calvin's Reformation of Public Worship

Ronald L. Cammenga

Worship of God is the highest and holiest activity of the believer. We have been made for the worship of God. Our salvation has as its highest aim our worship of God, now on this earth, and one day in the perfection of glory when we will join the hosts of the redeemed and the holy angels in the worship of God.

Our worship of God was the purpose of the death of Jesus Christ. Christ died for the elect and for the elect alone. He died for them and needed to die for them because they are sinners, sinners who have no right to stand before God or enter into God's presence, which is what worship is. By His death, He earned the right for us to approach God in worship. A way has opened up to us, a blood-sprinkled way. A way of access to God, a way, the only way to the throne of God has been made. Before that throne, we gladly bow in adoration and worship.

And worship—this is the great work of the Holy Spirit. He does not only regenerate us, and work faith in us, uniting us to Jesus Christ and to His body, the church. But He works in us the desire to praise, to glorify, and to worship God. He works in us in such a way that in response to the call of God, "Seek ye my face," from the heart we respond, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," Psalm 27:8.

This is what the church is: the worshipping community of believers and their children. The church exists for worship. Apart from the worship of God, the church has no purpose for existence. There is an organization for every purpose under heaven. But there is only one organization that has the purpose of the public worship of God, and that is the church. The church is not a society organized to promote a social or political agenda. The church is not a self-help support group, to which one can turn for mental and emotional assistance or to aid in overcoming an addiction. The church does not have as its aim the perpetuation of a particular ethnic sub-culture, let us say the Dutch or German sub-culture. The church does not serve the pur-

pose of providing opportunity for those who share the same ethnic background to socialize, speak their mother language, and engage in their native customs. But the church serves a higher purpose, and that higher purpose is the public worship of God. Everything else that the church does and every other aspect of the life of the church stands in the service of the public worship of God.

The Reformation and the Reformers were vitally interested in worship, in proper worship, in God-pleasing worship. The whole Reformation may be characterized as the work of God through the Reformers to return the church to the right worship of His name. The worship of the Roman Catholic Church had become false and blasphemous worship. The worship of the Roman Catholic Church had become idolatrous worship. God was not worshipped anymore as He willed to be worshipped. The worship of the church did not please God and carry away His blessing, but it incurred His wrath and judgment.

The Reformers reacted against Rome's false worship and sought to return the church to proper, biblical, God-pleasing worship. This was a concern of all the Reformers. This was especially a concern of John Calvin. Among Calvin's most enduring accomplishments, under the grace of God, are his accomplishments in the area of worship, public worship. Next time you go to church, think about that. For so much of what you see in your church building and for so much of the contents of your worship service, you are indebted to the reformer from Geneva. Calvin was both a theologian and a pastor. Gifts in both areas were necessary for Calvin's reformation of public worship. Last year the Reformed church world commemorated the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth. A fitting aspect of this commemoration ought to include his work on behalf of the public worship of the church.

The Restoration of Biblical Worship

The worship of the church at the time of the Reformation was in great need of restoration. Calvin complains in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

The worship of God has been deformed by a diverse and unbearable mass of superstitions. Doctrine (apart from which Christianity cannot

stand) has been entirely buried and driven out. Public assemblies have become schools of idolatry and ungodliness.¹

In his defense of the Reformation in his *Reply by John Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter*, Calvin wrote:

Meanwhile, impiety so stalked abroad, that almost no doctrine of religion was pure from admixture, no ceremony free from error, no part, however minute, of divine worship untarnished by superstition.²

In his treatise entitled *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, Calvin wrote:

I come now to ceremonies, which, while they ought to be grave attestations of divine worship, are rather a mere mockery of God. A new Judaism, as a substitute for that which God had distinctly abrogated has again been reared up by means of numerous puerile extravagancies, collected from different quarters; and with these have been mixed up certain impious rites, partly borrowed from the heathen, and more adopted to some theatrical show than to the dignity of [worship]....³

And again, in this same treatise, Calvin wrote:

When God is worshipped in images, when fictitious worship is instituted in His name, when supplication is made to the images of saints, and divine honours paid to dead men's bones, against these, and similar abominations, we protest, describing them in their true colours... how perverse, when these flagrant corruptions are manifest, not only to defend them, but cloak their deformity, by impudently pretending that they belong to the genuine worship of God!⁴

As to the Motivation for Worship

1 John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20, 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 4.2.2, 2:1042.

2 John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 2009) 1:49.

3 *Tracts and Letters*, 1:131.

4 *Tracts and Letters*, 1:148.

Calvin and the other reformers rejected Rome's false worship, and re-instituted the pure worship of God. Fundamental to Calvin's reformation of worship was his insistence on the proper motivation for worship. That had been lost and was buried in the worship of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. The motivation for worship had become human merit. Why worship God? Because by means of worship, we merit with God. That is what Rome made the great motivation for worship. Calvin and the Reformation rejected that motivation for worship.

Rather than merit, Calvin and the Reformation insisted that the proper motivation for worship is gratitude to God. Love for God, love for God that desires to praise God, love for God that desires to praise God for who He is and what He has done—this is the proper, the only motivation for worship. Worship is not motivated by the desire to earn something. But worship is motivated by the desire to express thanks to God for that which has already been received.

And here the Reformed doctrine of worship intersects the gospel of free grace and justification by faith alone, the gospel recovered by the Reformation. The gospel of grace repudiates all merit. The gospel of grace proclaims salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ's merits alone. That gospel, at the heart of the worship of the Reformed church, casts merit out of the worship of God. And that gospel makes praise of God and gratitude to God the only proper motivation for worship. Quoting Calvin:

But no one, except he be blinded by presumption, and fascinated by self-love, can feel assured that God will be a rewarder of his merits. Hence this confidence of which we speak recumbs [that is, rests] not on works, nor on man's worthiness, but on the grace of God alone; and as grace is nowhere found but in Christ, it is on him alone that faith ought to be fixed.⁵

That praise of God is the main motivation for worship, is not to deny that worship is edifying. That praise of God is the main moti-

5 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 273.

vation for worship is not to deny that worship builds up the church and the individual believer, that worship comforts, encourages, and strengthens the child of God. In God's goodness, all of these belong to the benefits of the proper worship of God's name. And, indeed, this is the will of God for worship. But none of these are the *main* purpose of worship. J. S. Whale comments on Calvin's view of the proper motivation for worship.

The bearing of such a doctrine of the Church on the function of worship is clear. Worship is not primarily designed to bring the consolations of grace to the sin-laden soul, but to be a solemn offering of confession, homage, and thanksgiving on the part of the whole congregation of the elect. They meet together to set forth God's most worthy praise and to hear His most holy Word.... Calvin always refused to derive religion from human aspirations or needs, such eudaemonism being the basis of religiosity rather than of religion. Answering Cardinal Sadolet he says, 'It is unsound theology to confine a man's thoughts so much to himself and not to set before him as the prime motive of his existence zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God and not for ourselves.'⁶

The church at the time of the Reformation did not see this. Many churches today do not see this. The emphasis is on a "meaningful" worship experience, as they say, on the part of those who attend the worship services. With the emphasis directed on the worshiper, churches aim at being "seeker-friendly." People are most of all interested in "getting something" out of the service, and frequently complain, "I didn't get anything out of the service." But what the people frequently forget is that we do not go to church first of all to get something; we go to church *to worship God*. Not to get something, but to *give* something, to give to God the praise and the honor that are His due. That is worship! And that must be the motivation of worship!

Hear what Calvin has to say on this matter. First, from his *Insti-*

6 J.S. Whale, "Calvin," in *Christian Worship: Studies in Its History and Meaning by Members of Mansfield College*, ed. Nathaniel Micklem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 158.

tutes:

... it will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honor and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him.⁷

A bit later, Calvin says:

I call ‘piety’ that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces. For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him—they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.⁸

In his commentary on Psalm 22:25, Calvin writes:

The Papists...show themselves so stupid and so ridiculous that it is unnecessary to spend much time in refuting them. What resemblance is there between [their] childish fooleries, with which according to their own imagination they attempt to appease God, and this holy testimony of gratitude, which not only a true sense of religion and the fear of God suggest...,but which God Himself has commanded and ratified in his law? Yea, how can they have the face to equal their foolish and infamous superstitions to the most precious of all sacrifices—the sacrifice of thanksgiving?⁹

Fundamental Principles of Proper Worship

What were the fundamental principles that undergirded Calvin’s and the Reformation’s restored worship? What were the fundamental principles that came to expression in the public worship of Reformed churches across Europe, in the British Isles, and elsewhere?

First of all, undergirding Calvin’s whole endeavor on behalf of the proper worship of God by the church was the conviction that it is

7 *Institutes*, 1.2.1, 1:40.

8 *Institutes*, 1.2.1, 1:41.

9 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, 5 vol. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 1:382, 383.

the will of God that His people gather for public, corporate worship. This is a fundamental aspect of God's will for worship. It is the will of God that believers engage in private, personal worship, to be sure. It is the will of God that believers engage in family worship, without doubt. But it is also the will of God that believers gather for public, corporate worship. It is the will of God that believers and their children, as members of the instituted church of Jesus Christ, gather with other believers and their children in order publicly to call upon the name of the Lord. Calvin's exposition of the 1st and 2nd commandments of the Decalogue is an exposition framed around the presupposition that God calls the church to worship Him as a body.

The 2nd commandment comprehends "all the forms and ceremonies of worship."¹⁰ The commandment not only enjoins the will of God for the proper public worship of His name, overagainst the corruption of public worship especially by the Papists, but also the added incentive for such worship: "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." This is added, says Calvin, in order "to encourage His worshippers to earnest piety." "This is proof," he goes on, "of [God's] inestimable kindness, and even indulgence, that He deigns to bind Himself to His servants, to whom He owes nothing, so far as to acknowledge, in His favour towards them, their seed also for His people."¹¹ "His worshippers" are clearly those worshippers who disdain the idolatrous, public worship of Rome, for the pure public worship of God in the churches of the Reformation. Calvin would have chastened in the harshest of terms those who contented themselves with worship in their homes, to the disdain of the public worship of God in the gathered congregation of His people.

Calvin's conviction with regard to the public worship of God included:

- 1) Diligent observance of the weekly Sabbath, the Lord's Day of the New Testament.
- 2) Membership in the instituted church, that is, in a local congrega-

10 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham, 5 vol. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 1:109ff.

11 *Four Last Books of Moses*, 1:111.

tion.

- 3) Diligent and faithful attendance at the public worship services. Hear Calvin. In his exposition of Psalm 95:6, he writes:

We are also to observe, that mention is made not only of inward gratitude, but the *necessity of an outward profession* of godliness. These words ... imply that, to discharge their duty properly, the Lord's people must present themselves a sacrifice to him *publicly*, with kneeling, and other marks of devotion.¹²

Commenting on Psalm 22:25, Calvin writes:

The Psalmist repeats what he had touched upon a little before, that he will show the tokens of his gratitude *in a public manner*, in order thereby to edify others.¹³

Second, worship is to be characterized by *reverence*, deepest reverence. That reverence is due to what worship is. Worship is meeting God. That was Calvin's settled conviction. In worship we stand in the presence of God and before the face of God. That is the solemn reality of worship. The God whom we worship is our covenant friend—to be sure. He is the God who loves us with an eternal and electing love. He is the God who blesses us and is favorable to us in Jesus Christ. But He is still GOD, the great God, the glorious God, the majestic God, the thrice-holy God. And we are mere men, and sinners besides. Knowing who God is and knowing ourselves, the proper worship of God is worship characterized by reverence.

Calvin writes in his treatise on *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*:

Let us now see what is meant by the due worship of God. Its chief foundation is to acknowledge Him to be, as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life and salvation; in accordance with this to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in Him alone, and

12 *Psalms*, 4:35.

13 *Psalms*, 1:382.

in every want to have recourse to Him alone.¹⁴

He goes on to say a bit later:

to praise and thanksgiving ... is united adoration, by which we manifest for Him the reverence due to His greatness, and excellency, and to this ceremonies are subservient, as helps or instruments, in order that in the performance of divine worship, the body may be exercised at the same time with the soul.¹⁵

Writing in his *Institutes*, Calvin stresses the necessity for reverence in the worship of God.

Here indeed is pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law. And we ought to note this fact even more diligently: all men have a vague general veneration for God, but very few really reverence him...¹⁶

There are many different aspects to and applications of reverence in worship. I choose to point out two. In the first place, as far as the worshipper is concerned, reverence implies sincerity of heart. All outward expressions of reverence, no matter how impressive, are in fact the height of irreverence if they arise out of an insincere heart. Hypocrisy is the greatest irreverence. In expounding Psalm 5:7, Calvin writes:

And as hypocrites, in giving thanks to God, do nothing else but profane His name, inasmuch as they themselves are unholy and polluted, [the psalmist] resolves to come in the fear of God, in order to worship Him with a sincere and upright heart.¹⁷

In his *Institutes*, he observes that “wherever there is great ostentation

14 *Tracts and Letters*, 1:127.

15 *Tracts and Letters*, 1:127.

16 *Institutes*, 1.2.2; 1:43.

17 *Psalms*, 1:58.

in ceremonies, sincerity of heart is rare indeed.”¹⁸

In the second place, reverence shows itself in public worship in the orderliness of the service. Reformed worship services are orderly worship services, at least historically they have been orderly worship services. Calvin championed orderliness in public worship. But Calvin championed orderliness in public worship as an aspect of reverence toward God. Disorderliness and chaos in public worship is irreverence before God who is a God of order. Calvin’s comments on Paul’s concluding injunction in I Corinthians 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order,” deserve mention:

... it is a rule by which we must regulate everything, that has to do with external polity [that is, the public worship of God]. As he [Paul] had discoursed, in various instances, as to rites, he wished to sum up everything here in a brief summary—that decorum should be observed—that confusion should be avoided... [that everything should be] subservient to propriety and peace. Hence we gather... [that] a doctrine that is always in force, as to the purpose of the polity of the Church ought to be directed.¹⁹

Third, Calvin promoted *simplicity* in the public worship of the church. This meant for Calvin an absence of distraction in worship, the distraction of the rites and rituals that the Roman Catholic Church had introduced into the public worship of God. The church service ought to be simple, altogether uncomplicated and free from outward show. That which dazzled the senses was to be avoided. Even the church building was to reflect simplicity and the beauty of simplicity in worship. This simplicity of worship stood in the service of the focus of worship: God and the glory of God. The focus of worship must not be on the elements of worship, or on the one called to lead the worship service. But the focus must be on God and on Christ, the grand object of worship. “Thus all who oppress the Church with an

18 *Institutes*, 1.2.2; 1:43.

19 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, 2 vol. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 1:473, 474.

excessive multitude of ceremonies,” says Calvin, “do what is in their power to deprive the Church of the presence of Christ.”²⁰

This principle of worship, all by itself, is the condemnation of the vast majority of what passes for worship today. This is the condemnation of the modern church growth movement. This is the condemnation of “contemporary” worship. This is the condemnation of “high worship.” And this is the continued condemnation of the priestly worship of Rome. Simplicity of worship, in order that God and not man may be worshipped.

In his exposition of John 4:22, part of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, Calvin writes:

Armed with this testimony, let us not hesitate to condemn the Papists in all their inventions and despise their reproaches. For why should we fear when we hear that God is pleased with this bare and *simple worship*, which is disdained by the Papists because it is not swollen with a mass of ceremonies?²¹

Fourth, Calvin insisted that worship must be *spiritual*. In worship, we meet God. But we meet God by faith. Faith is the means by which we worship God, the invisible and spiritual God, and worship Him in the way that pleases Him. Calvin made frequent appeal to Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him,” as well as to the deliverance of the law to Old Testament Israel. When the law was delivered, Israel heard the voice of God, but they saw no form. That circumstance was regulative not only for the Old Testament worship of God, but also for the worship of God in the New Testament.

In application of the 2nd commandment and the principle of spiritual worship, Calvin reprobated all images and pictures in public worship. Calvin condemns the foolish attempt by Rome to justify the

20 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*,” trans. William Pringle, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 1:162.

21 *John*, 1:163.

use of images and pictures as “books to the laity.”²² With a sweep of the hand, he dismisses the Roman Catholic distinctions between *latría*, worship due alone to God and to Christ, and *dulia*, veneration due to the saints, as well as *hyperdulia*, the reverence due to the Virgin Mary. Calvin describes such distinctions as “trifling,” and “foolish cavils” that are a “vain endeavor” to set aside the will of God in the 2nd commandment.²³ Calvin’s judgment is that “...all rites which do not accord with the spiritual worship of God, are...forbidden: and this is enough, and more than enough to put to flight all such misty notions...” as attempt to justify images and pictures in the public worship of God.²⁴

Fifth, Calvin insisted that worship was to be governed by the will of God, the express will of God. Calvin never used the term “regulative principle,” as the term is not found in the Three Forms of Unity. Nevertheless, Calvin held to the regulative principle, as do the churches that show themselves to be heirs to Calvin’s theology in the Reformed confessions. This principle is expressed in Heidelberg Catechism, the 96th Q.A., which insists that the requirement of the second commandment is that the church may not worship God “in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.”²⁵ The Westminster Confession of Faith insists on the same principle as regards the public worship of God. It states in the first paragraph of chapter 21, “Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day”:

The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called up, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the ac-

22 Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 98, *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 126.

23 *Four Last Books of Moses*, 2:109. Rome’s attempt to evade the force of the 2nd commandment is involved, too, in its inclusion of the 2nd commandment with the 1st. The Protestant division of the commandments adds force to the precept forbidding the making and worshipping of all graven images.

24 *Four Last Books of Moses*, 2:109.

25 *Confessions and Church Order of the PRC*, 125.

ceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in holy Scripture.²⁶

It is not enough that people have sincere motives in the worship of God. Sincere motives—the bare desire to serve God—are not enough. The only worship that pleases God is worship that is according to His will. God is not only pleased that His church worships Him; but He is pleased in the proper manner of worship. Commenting on John 4:22, “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship,” Calvin says:

This is a sentence worthy of being remembered, and teaches us that we ought not to attempt any thing in religion rashly or at random; because, unless there be knowledge, it is not God that we worship, but a phantom or idol. All good intentions, as they are called, are struck by this sentence, as by a thunderbolt; for we learn from it, that men can not nothing but err, when they are guided by their own opinion without the word or command of God.²⁷

In his commentary on Matthew 15:9, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men,” Calvin rebukes will-worship, all worship of God in ways devised by men.

...God is worshipped in vain when men's wills are substituted for teaching. Moreover, it is perfectly clear that these words condemn all [will-worship], as Paul calls it (col. 2.23). For, as we have said, because God wishes to be worshipped according to His will alone, he will not at all permit new forms of worship to be invented. Therefore, as soon as men allow themselves to wander outside God's Law, all their efforts and care in worshipping Him will only bring them the greater judgment, since religion is profaned by such figments....

26 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1905) fourth ed., 3:646.

27 *John*, 1:159.

Therefore let this remain firm, that, because obedience is more to God than sacrifice, all false worship is empty in His sight, nay, accursed and detestable....²⁸

In Calvin's defense of the necessity of the Reformation, he insisted on this fundamental principle of public worship.

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course?²⁹

On the ground that the public worship of the church is to be regulated by the revealed will of God, Calvin condemned the worship of Rome.

Having observed that the Word of God is the test which discriminates between his true worship and that which is false and vitiated, we thence readily infer that the whole form of divine worship in general use in the present day is nothing but mere corruption. For men pay no regard to what God has commanded, or to what he approves, in order that they may serve him in a becoming manner, but assume to themselves a license of devising modes of worship, and afterwards obtruding them upon him as a substitute for obedience. If in what I say I seem to exaggerate, let an examination be made of all the acts by which the generality suppose that they worship God. I dare scarcely except a tenth part as not the random offspring of their own brain. What more would we? God rejects, condemns, abominates all fictitious worship,

28 John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 2:161.

29 "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," *Tracts and Letters*, 1:128.

and employs his Word as a bridle to keep us in unqualified obedience. When shaking off this yoke, we wander after our own fictions, and offer to him a worship, the work of human rashness, how much soever it may delight ourselves, in his sight it is vain trifling, nay, vileness and pollution. The advocates of human traditions paint them in fair and gaudy colours...but as God values obedience more than all sacrifices, it ought to be sufficient for the rejection of any mode of worship, that it is not sanctioned by the command of God.³⁰

We might not agree entirely with Calvin in his *application* of the regulative principle. As is well known, in the rigor of his application of the regulative principle, Calvin did not permit any musical accompaniment to the singing of the Psalms in public worship. It was Calvin's conviction that the use of instruments in public worship belonged to the Old Testament form of the worship of God.

In speaking of employing *the psaltery* and *the harp* in this exercise, he alludes to the generally prevailing custom of that time. To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psaltery unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law, and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving.³¹

And again:

When he speaks of musical instruments the allusion is evidently to the practice of the Church at that time, without any intention of binding down the Gentiles [that is, the New Testament church] to the observance of the ceremonies of the law.³²

Although a number of our Presbyterian brethren are faithful to Calvin in dismissing the organ—the cherished instrument of the Dutch Reformed—from the church building and from the worship service, we

30 "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," *Tracts and Letters*, 1:132, 133.

31 *Psalms*, 3:98.

32 *Psalms*, 4:73.

who make use of musical accompaniment of congregational singing, insist that this does not in any way diminish our sense of indebtedness to Calvin for his labors on behalf of the reformation of public worship. Calvin's insistence that public worship must be regulated by the revealed will of God is a fundamental principle with which we express hearty agreement.

Sixth, a fundamental principle of public worship that Calvin insisted upon was the principle of *congregational worship*. The congregation must not merely be a silent witness to worship, but must actively participate in the worship of God on the Lord's Day. Every element of worship must be governed by the principle that the congregation as a body has come together for worship that is not only public but corporate. "In the worship of the Reformed Churches the congregation...once again takes the place assigned to it in the New Testament."³³

For this reason Calvin insisted that the worship services must be conducted in the vernacular, rather than in a language that the people could not understand. Whale comments:

It meant an enormous gain in spiritual reality that the minister faced the people, praying clearly and in the vernacular; so that each member of the congregation might pray in public as he would do in private, with the heart's attention.³⁴

Writes Calvin:

But the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same mouth, we all glorify God together, worshipping him with one spirit and the same faith. And we do this openly, that all men mutually, each one from his brother, may receive the confession of faith and be invited and prompted by his example.³⁵

33 Whale, "Calvin," 163.

34 Whale, "Calvin," 163.

35 Institutes, 3.20.31, 2:894.

And he adds:

From this also it plainly appears that public prayers must be couched not in Greek among the Latins, nor in Latin among the French or English, as has heretofore been the custom, but in the language of the people, which can be generally understood by the whole assembly. For this ought to be done for the edification of the whole church, which receives no benefit whatever from a sound not understood.³⁶

The importance of prayer in the language of the people, Calvin highlighted in his work on “The Necessity of Reforming the Church,” regarding this as a “fault...that we have corrected”:

Whereas men generally prayed in an unknown tongue, we have taught them to pray with understanding. Every man, accordingly, is taught by our doctrine to know, when he prays in private, what it is he asks of God, while the public prayers in our churches are framed so as to be understood by all.... For the design of prayer is to make God the conscious witness of our necessities, and as it were to pour out our hearts before him. But nothing is more at variance with this design than to move the tongue without thought and intelligence. And yet, to such a degree of absurdity had it come, that to pray in the vulgar tongue was almost regarded as an offense against religion. I can name an Archbishop who threatened with incarceration, and the severer penances, the person who should repeat the Lord's Prayer aloud in any language but Latin. The general belief, however, was, that it matter not in what language a man prayed at home, provided he had what was called a final intention directed to prayer; but that in churches the dignity of the service required that Latin should be the only language in which prayers were couched...it is easy to infer from the whole tenor of Scripture how deeply God abominates such an invention.... The method by which, in our churches, all pray in common in the popular tongue, and males and females indiscriminately sing the Psalms, our adversaries may ridicule if they will, provided the Holy Spirit bears testimony to us from heaven, while he repudiates the confused, unmeaning sounds which are uttered elsewhere.³⁷

36 Institutes, 3.20.33, 2:896.

37 *Tracts and Letters*, 1:158, 159.

One of the most important applications of the principle of congregational involvement in the public worship of the church was Calvin's abolishing of church choirs and replacement of choirs with congregational singing. "[C]ongregational singing [was] an almost entirely new phenomenon which modern worship owes to Luther and Calvin...."³⁸ In Calvin's view, the congregation must sing, not be sung to. Calvin's introduction of "metrical psalms is the part of the Protestant worship which is most distinctively congregational...."³⁹ Calvin strongly recommended congregational singing in the worship service, "provided [it is] associated with the heart's affection," that is, provided the singing be from sincere hearts.⁴⁰

Central Place to the Preaching

Of all the fundamental principles of public worship that Calvin recovered, we must take note especially of his recovery of the central place of the preaching of the Word. The preaching of the gospel had been lost in the Roman Catholic Church. The focus of worship was on the Mass. What preaching there was, was superficial and often unintelligible to the people. Calvin and the other reformers restored the Word of God and the preaching of the Word to its rightful place at the heart of the public worship of the church. "The Reformation," says Whale,

"laid primary emphasis on the Word as the basis of faith and worship...in it the preaching and hearing of the Word take the central place. 'To go to church' in Reformed Geneva was *aller au sermon*. Farel entitled his Genevan liturgy *La manière que l'on observe en la prédication, quand le peuple est assemblé pour ouyr la parole de Dieu*, and Calvin himself speaks of participation in public worship as *fréquenter les sermons*.⁴¹

Calvin criticized the Roman Catholic Church for its lack of the service of the Word of God :

38 Whale, "Calvin," 164.

39 Whale, "Calvin," 164.

40 Institutes, 3.20.31, 2, 894.

41 Whale, "Calvin," 165.

Therefore, although they put forward Temple, priesthood, and the rest of the outward shows, this empty glitter which blind the eyes of the simple ought not to move us a whit to grant that the church exists where God's Word is found. For this is the abiding mark with which our Lord has sealed his own: 'Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice' [John 18:37].⁴²

Commenting on John 4:22, Calvin says:

It amounts to this, that God is not properly worshipped but by the certainty of faith, which cannot be produced in any other way than by the word of God. Hence it follows that all who forsake the word fall into idolatry....⁴³

Calvin's chief criticism of the Roman Catholic Church of his day was that

“instead of the ministry of the Word, a perverse government compounded of lies rules there, which partly extinguishes the pure light, partly chokes it. The foulest sacrilege has been introduced in place of the Lord's Supper. The worship of God has been deformed by a diverse and unbearable mass of superstitions. Doctrine (apart from which Christianity cannot stand) has been entirely buried and driven out. Public assemblies have become schools of idolatry and ungodliness. In withdrawing from deadly participation in so many misdeeds, there is accordingly no danger that we be snatched away from the church of Christ. The communion of the church was not established on the condition that it should serve to snare us in idolatry, ungodliness, ignorance of God, and other sorts of evils, but rather to hold us in the fear of God and obedience to truth.”⁴⁴

Calvin honored the truth that preaching, not superstitious ritual, was to occupy the central place in the public worship of the church. For above all else, Calvin was a preacher—an extemporaneous preacher.

42 *Institutes*, 4.2.4, 2:1047.

43 *John*, 1:160.

44 *Institutes*, 4.2.2, 2:1042.

Calvin was an enemy of read sermons, as well as of long sermons.⁴⁵ He never used notes and always took with him into the pulpit his Greek New Testament or Hebrew Old Testament, expounding his text from the original. Calvin was a preacher. Before he was a lecturer in the Genevan Academy, before he was a member of consistory, before he was a participant in the ecumenical affairs of the church, before he was liturgist, he was a preacher. Calvin preached twice on Sunday and several times during the week in Geneva. Because of his heavy workload, the Genevan council, late in 1542, allowed him to preach only once on Sunday. However, in October 1549, he was again permitted to preach twice on Sundays, and in addition every weekday on alternate weeks. Occasionally someone tried to take down Calvin's sermons, but very few of his sermons are preserved before 1549. In that year the Genevan council hired a professional scribe to record all of Calvin's sermons. T. H. L. Parker's analysis of Calvin's sermons is that Calvin was a consistent preacher, both as regards the content of his sermons and his style of delivery.⁴⁶ In his sermons, Calvin worked his way slowly and systematically through one book of the Bible at a time: 23 sermons on Genesis, 200 sermons on Deuteronomy, 159 sermons on Job, 176 sermons on I and II Corinthians, 43 sermons on Galatians.⁴⁷

Calvin would have lashed out at those in the church today who are substituting the preaching with such nonsense as drama, liturgical dancing, skits, special numbers, testimonials, and whatever else. He, undoubtedly, agreed with the sentiments of his fellow reformer, Hugh Latimer: "Whenever the devil gets into a church, his plan is to cry, 'Up with candles and down with preaching.'"⁴⁸ He would have abominated the current trend to "downsize" the preaching, shortening more and more the time given to the sermon. And he certainly

45 Whale, "Calvin," 170.

46 T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (Cambridge: James Clarke Company, 2002) 116-123.

47 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 75.

48 Quotation taken from Doug Wilson, "Why Anglicans Matter to the Rest of Us," in *The North American Anglican*, vol. 1 (Winter 2008).

would have had harsh things to say to those who are pushing for the elimination of the second worship service altogether, supposing that listening to two sermons on the Lord's Day is too much to expect of a congregation.

In his comments on I Corinthians 1:17, Calvin answers the question, "Why is God pleased to use the simplicity of the preaching of the gospel in the salvation of His people?" This is his answer to that question:

... that He might put our obedience and teachableness the better to the test, and at the same time, instruct us in the way of true humility. For the Lord admits only little ones to His school. Therefore the only persons capable of heavenly wisdom are those who are content with the preaching of the Gospel, though it may be worthless in appearance, and who have no wish that Christ be covered over with a disguise. Therefore the teaching of the Gospel had to be made to serve the purpose of drawing believers away from all arrogance and haughtiness.⁴⁹

Because of his insistence on the central importance of the public preaching of the gospel, Calvin severely admonishes those who suppose that it is satisfactory that they remain at home on the Lord's Day and content themselves with reading the Holy Scriptures. Commenting on II Timothy 4:1, Calvin says:

It is proper to observe carefully the word *therefore*, by means of which he appropriately connects Scripture with preaching. This also refutes certain fanatics, who haughtily boast that they no longer need the aid of teachers, because the reading of Scripture is abundantly sufficient. But Paul, after having spoken of the usefulness of Scripture, infers not only that all ought to read it, but that teachers ought to administer it, which is the duty enjoined on them. Accordingly, as all our wisdom is contained in the Scriptures, and neither ought we to learn, nor teachers to draw their instructions, from any other source; so he who, neglecting the assistance of the living voice, shall satisfy himself with the silent Scripture, will find how grievous an evil it is to disregard that

49 *Corinthians*, 1:34.

way of learning which has been enjoined by *God* and *Christ*. Let us remember, I say, that the reading of Scripture is recommended to us in such a manner as not to hinder, in the smallest degree, the ministry of pastors; and therefore, let believers endeavour to profit both in reading and in hearing; for not in vain hath God ordained both of them.⁵⁰

Calvin insisted on the centrality of the preaching of the Word for several reasons. Calvin insisted on the centrality of the preaching of the Word because he understood this to be the will of God. Since God's will governs the public worship of the church, the preaching must be the central feature of the public worship of the church. Calvin insisted on the central place of the preaching of the gospel in public worship because he understood that the preaching was the chief means of grace. Not by means of the sacraments, not by means of private reading of the Scriptures, but by means of the public preaching of the Word God both works and God confirms the faith of His elect. And Calvin insisted on the central place of the preaching in the public worship of the church because he insisted on God's glory in the cross of Jesus Christ. God must be glorified in worship. This is the goal of the church's public worship. And God is chiefly glorified in the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the reason on account of which the preaching must be central in the worship of the church—preaching that faithfully proclaims the gospel of God's sovereign, efficacious, particular grace in the cross of Jesus Christ. In the preaching of this truth, and in the belief of this truth by His people, God receives all the glory. He receives all the glory for His greatest work, the salvation of lost, unworthy, totally depraved sinners.

This is the heritage that Calvin has bequeathed to the Reformed churches. His reformatory work aimed at restoring to the church the right worship of God. This above all else. May we, the Reformed church of the twenty-first century, be thankful to God for that glorious heritage. May we live in the consciousness of the sacrifices that were

50 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 251, 252.

made by Calvin and the other reformers so that we might be restored to the right worship of God. When we go to church next Lord's Day, let us think of the debt that we owe to the reformers for what we see and hear. And may we exert ourselves to retain that heritage.

If you are presently in a church whose worship has become corrupted, corrupted so that it resembles the worship of Rome in the days of Calvin, or you are a member of no church at all, think of your responsibility to do what Calvin and the others did under the sense of their obligation before God to be members of a church whose worship of God is pure. God and the glory of God require nothing less.

May we be motivated by a desire for the blessing of God, as well as our own salvation. For the blessing of God and our salvation are tied to proper worship. "...as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul," I must not only "avoid and flee from all idolatry," but "learn rightly to know [worship] the only true God; trust in him alone...love, fear, and glorify him with my whole heart...."⁵¹ Thus the Heidelberg Catechism applies the First Commandment of God's Law. May we also be motivated by the desire for the salvation of our children and grandchildren—the church of the future. Significantly, the true worship of God bound upon us in the Second Commandment includes His blessing "unto the third and fourth generation" of those who love Him and worship Him properly. Love of God, but also love for our children, must motivate us to preserve the proper worship of God in the church.

But may we especially be motivated by the glory of God and His praise in the church. And thus, may we be quickened in our desire for the coming of the day when as members of the church triumphant, joined by the company of the hosts of holy angels, we will glorify God in perfect worship of His name. That worship is described in Revelation 7:9-12: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne,

51 Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 94 (page number in green book).

and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.” ●

Antithetical Catechizing in the Twenty-first Century¹

Nathan J. Langerak

Introduction

Necessary Instruction

Commentators on catechetical instruction agree that the institution has both a biblical injunction and a historical precedent going back to the earliest days of the Christian church. Ursinus gives the distinctly Reformed view:

The same thing may be said of the origin of catechization which is said of the whole economy or service of the church, that it was instituted by God himself, and has always been practiced in the church. For, since from the very beginning of the world God has been God, not only of those of adult age, but also of those of young and tender years, according to the covenant which he made with Abraham saying, “I will be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). He has also ordained that both classes should be instructed in the doctrine of salvation according to their capacity: the adults by the public voice of the ministry, and the children by being catechized in the family and school.²

Catechism was instituted by God Himself. It has always been practiced in the church. It is particularly for the instruction of the children of the church in the doctrine of salvation according to the truth that He is their God as well as the God of their parents.

All also agree that theology and ethics, faith and life, doctrine and practice are the necessary content of catechetical instruction. Cat-

1 The basis of this article is a speech delivered by the author at the March 2009 Officebearers’ Conference of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The theme of that conference was Catechetical Instruction.

2 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Rev. G. W. Williard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 12.

echism has always been instruction in doctrine, the commandments, and prayer. The Christian church has taught her children these truths by explaining the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. As Philip Schaff says in his commentary on Luther's Small Catechism, "Religious instruction preparatory to admission to church membership is as old as Christianity itself.... It consisted chiefly of the committal and explanation...of the Ten Commandments...of the Creed...of the Lord's Prayer."³

In this regard, the present day rejection, outright neglect, or minimization of catechetical instruction by some Reformed churches is a rejection, neglect, or minimization of the Christian practice. Further, it is disobedience to the biblical command and, therefore, the divine injunction to catechize the children. It was a universal testimony of the Christian church that she must catechize her children. It was the universal practice of the Christian church that she did catechize her children. She did that in the doctrine of salvation because God instituted such instruction in His covenant for His children.

Catechetical instruction is also a necessary practice. Van Dellen and Monsma, commenting on Article 61 of the Church Order, sum up this attitude of Reformed churches regarding this necessity: "Catechetical instruction is indispensable to the welfare of our Churches as Reformed Churches."⁴ To this every Reformed man would heartily agree.

More precisely stated, catechetical instruction is essential not only for the welfare of the churches, but also for the very existence of those churches as true churches of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures warn sharply against the neglect of such instruction lest there arise a generation that does not know the Lord or the works that He has done because of a lack of instruction (cf. Judges 2:10; Hosea 4:6). Because parents did not insist on catechetical instruction, the elders did not demand it in the churches over which they had the oversight, and the pastors did not teach the little lambs of tender years committed to their charge,

3 Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., vol. 1, *The History of the Creeds* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 245–46.

4 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1941), 256.

churches have faltered as Israel faltered when they neglected instruction. Catechetical instruction is necessary for a Reformed church's existence as Reformed. At certain times the church has been more faithful in carrying out this duty than at others, and during those times when they were more faithful, those churches have prospered. When the churches have neglected this duty, they have suffered incalculable damage and threatened their own existence as true churches of Jesus Christ in the world.

Catechetical instruction has a biblical injunction. It is the practice of a Christian church. Catechetical instruction is necessary. Of those facts no Reformed man may have the slightest doubt. Of those facts every Reformed man must be convinced with all his heart. Out of that conviction every Reformed church member, and not only the officebearers, must insist on sound catechetical instruction in his own church, both for his own and for the rest of the church's children, and in love for the church herself.

A Necessary Question

The question that we answer is this: Is *antithetical* catechism necessary? This is not a question with a universally agreed upon answer. It is, therefore, an urgent question.

There are and always have been those who oppose the sharp condemnation of error and false doctrine and oppose that practice especially in the instruction of children. Philip Schaff already in the early 1900s, when commenting on the Heidelberg Catechism's polemic against the popish mass in Q&A 80, wrote:

It must be allowed to remain as a solemn protest against idolatry. But the wisdom of inserting controversial matter into a catechism for the instruction of the youth has been justly doubted. The eightieth question disturbs the peaceful harmony of the book, it rewards evil for evil, [and] it countenances intolerance, which is un-Protestant and unevangelical.⁵

In his conclusion that Q&A 80 ought to remain, he is better than

5 Schaff, *Creeds*, 1:536.

the pusillanimous and ecumenically-minded Reformed theologians who have removed the whole question and answer from the body of the Heidelberg Catechism and from their own teaching and preaching in the interest of an unholy alliance with the Roman Catholic Church.

Yet, he speaks for all those supposedly softer souls who castigate polemics as “rewarding evil for evil” and as “un-Protestant and un-evangelical” and who have always doubted whether such controversial material ought to be included in the catechetical instruction of the youth. Today many castigate not only antithetical catechizing, but also polemics—the sharp and persistent condemnation of error—as intolerant, unenlightened, a violation of the biblical injunction to be peacemakers, and an unnecessary and unwanted relic of a more barbaric theological and ecclesiastical age. Many view polemics as a hindrance rather than the means to unity in the church of Jesus Christ. This opposition to polemics, and by implication to antithetical catechizing, demands an answer.

Furthermore, answering the question of the necessity of antithetical catechizing is important because of a lack of material on the subject. In the writings of prominent theologians on the subject of catechetical instruction, such as church father Augustine; Reformation giants such as Luther, Calvin, and Ursinus; Presbyterians such as Alexander and Murray; and Reformed theologian Herman Hoeksema, one would search in vain for a thorough definition, explanation, and defense of the practice of antithetical catechetical instruction.

Without doubt they encouraged the practice. They certainly practiced it themselves.

Augustine, in his little book on catechetical instruction *On Instructing the Ignorant*, tells the preacher:

If one [of your catechumens] has fallen upon the productions of some heretic, and in ignorance, it may be, has retained in his mind anything which the true faith condemns, and yet [he] supposes it to be catholic doctrine, then we must set ourselves sedulously to teach him.⁶

6 Augustine, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 3 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 291.

Frederick III, the sponsor of the Heidelberg Catechism, informs us in his preface to the Heidelberg Catechism that his purpose in commissioning the composition of it and instructing the ministers and school masters to use it was to refute erroneous doctrine and to drive it out of his realm in order that the subjects of his realm would be built up in sound doctrine. When the Catechism was threatened by Lutheran and Roman Catholic princes and theologians alike, he ably defended it before those kings and rulers at the Diet of Augsburg in 1566.⁷

Luther, a capable and willing polemicist, wrote in the preface to his Small Catechism that the preacher in using it as the basis for his instruction of the youth must urge these things upon all, including the children. His preface is full of examples such as this:

Especially should you here urge magistrates and parents to rule well and to send their children to school, showing them why it is their duty to do this, and what a damnable sin they are committing if they do not do it. For by such neglect they overthrow and destroy both the kingdom of God and that of the world, acting as the worst enemies both of God and of men. And make it very plain to them what an awful harm they are doing if they will not help to train children to be pastors, preachers, clerks [also for other offices, with which we cannot dispense in this life], etc., and that God will punish them terribly for it.⁸

Luther himself carried out this kind of teaching, as only a cursory reading of his sermons and other writings make clear.

Calvin said that one of his reasons for writing the Catechism of the Church of Geneva was to distinguish the true churches from “the profane synagogues of Antichrist,” and thereby to promote the unity of the true churches. According to Calvin, there was “no better instrument” for this important task than catechisms, and presumably no better method to accomplish this purpose than by faithful, distinctive

7 George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism: Historical and Doctrinal Studies* (Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1913), 182–99. The account of Frederick’s defense of the catechism is in Schaff, *Creeeds*, 1:546.

8 *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church*, <http://www.bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php>.

instruction from those catechisms.⁹

Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote concerning catechetical instruction in general:

There is a necessity that all persons should be made acquainted with the rule and standard according to which we are to judge and decide, in relation to the various opinions and dogmas of men, that we may not be led into error, and be seduced thereby, according to the commandment which is given in relation to this subject, “Beware of false prophets,” “Prove all things,” and “Try the spirits whether they are of God.”¹⁰

According to Ursinus, there is a biblical warning that errors and false teachers will always be present in the church. Every member must beware of them, prove all things, and try the spirits whether they are of God.

Herman Hoeksema, in response to Philip Schaff’s comment about Q&A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote: “Why a book that is used for the instruction of the youth should *not* contain controversial matter is difficult to understand.”¹¹ That Hoeksema practiced what he preached is evident from the questions and answers he prepared for use in pre-confession classes. He expected those coming for confession of faith to be able to explain and to refute false doctrine, especially common grace.¹²

9 John Calvin, *Dedication to Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Being a Form of Instruction for Children*, http://www.reformed.org/documents/calvin/geneva_catachism/geneva_catachism.html.

10 Ursinus, *Commentary*, 15.

11 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1971), 2:636; emphasis added.

12 Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1936), 285–402; see also Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko, *Ready to Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997), 37–159.

From their writings it is evident that these men engaged in the defense of the truth, that they practiced antithetical catechizing, and that they urged this practice upon the churches. They simply took it for granted that any minister or instructor worth his salt would be antithetical in his preaching, writing, and catechetical instruction, and that any church worthy of the name would demand it of her ministers in all their teaching. But as to a careful definition, explanation, and defense of the practice of antithetical catechism instruction it is simply lacking.

The Demand

What is Antithetical Catechizing?

We begin by providing a definition of antithetical catechism instruction. *Antithetical catechizing is the church's official, authoritative teaching of the truth to the children of the church in which, in the course of setting forth the truth of the Word of God, the errors and lies that oppose that truth are clearly exposed and sharply condemned, in order that the truth may stand out clearly and victoriously and the people of God consecrated to God more and more in the love of the truth and hatred of the lie.*

Antithetical instruction is not a separate and distinct kind of catechism instruction, but belongs to the very manner in which the truth is set forth in the catechism room. In the course of setting forth the truth of the Word of God, the teacher clearly exposes and sharply condemns the errors and lies opposed to that truth.

In this antithetical instruction the minister sets forth the truth victoriously over against the lie. Never does he leave the issue in doubt regarding which is the truth and which the lie, or which of the two—truth or lie—will prevail. Christ and His truth prevail.

The goal of this instruction is the devotion of the children to God in the love of the truth, the life of truth, and the hatred of the lie that has been exposed and condemned.

The Basis of Catechetical Instruction

The covenant is the basis of this method of instruction. The covenant is the basis of all instruction of the children of the church, whether that takes place at home, in the school, or in the church's of-

ficial catechizing of the children. Ursinus pointed this out in his call to the church to catechize the children:

For, since from the very beginning of the world God has been God, not only of those of adult age, but also of those of young and tender years, according to the covenant which he made with Abraham saying, “I will be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). He has also ordained that both classes should be instructed in the doctrine of salvation according to their capacity.¹³

The covenant that is the basis of all the catechetical instruction of the church is the gracious relationship of living fellowship and friendship between God and His people in Christ. Christ is the head of that covenant. The elect in Christ are the members of that covenant. For these, and these only, Christ died, washing them in His own blood from all their sins. To these Christ grants His Holy Spirit, sharing with them His life and all His benefits by a true and living faith, by which they are made members of His body.

The covenant includes the children of believers. We are bound to view the children whom we teach as covenant children. According to Q&A 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the children of believers are baptized because they belong to the covenant of grace:

Are infants also to be baptized?

Yes; for since they, as well as their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God, and both redemption from sin, and the Holy Ghost, who works faith, are through the blood of Christ promised to them no less than to their parents, they are also by Baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be ingrafted into the Christian Church, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers, as was done in the Old Testament by Circumcision, in place of which in the New Testament Baptism is appointed.¹⁴

13 Ursinus, *Commentary*, 12.

14 Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 331.

We must be clear. In this answer the Catechism is not making an argument for who are and who are not included in the covenant as far as the infants themselves are concerned, that is, which particular infants born into the church are included in the covenant of grace, washed in Christ's blood from all their sins, and regenerated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. That truth we can deduce from the other Reformed creeds and even from the answer itself.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have deduced that and have an official position on that matter, which is set forth in its Declaration of Principles. Having quoted Q&A 74, the Declaration states that it teaches that "little children surely cannot fulfill any conditions. And if the promise of God is for them, the promise is infallible and unconditional, and therefore only for the elect" and that "the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to the little children no less than to the adult. And God surely fulfills His promise. Hence, that promise is surely only for the elect."¹⁵

The Reformed creeds teach that the covenant blessings are for the elect alone and that God's promise is unconditional and for them only.

However, the main purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A 74 is to state, over against the (Ana)-Baptist position that there are no children in the covenant and church of God, nor among the people of God, the biblical truth that God is the God of infants of believing parents as infants, and who as infants belong to the covenant of grace and the communion of the saints. Because infants of believers are included in the covenant of grace, they must receive the sign of the covenant in baptism and be, thus, added as members of the visible church and distinguished by that sign from the children of unbelievers.

This is clear from the language itself. In the first part of the answer, the words "people of God" and "covenant" are virtually synonymous. The German has *Bund Gottes* and *Gemeine*, which Schaff translates

15 *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 419.

as “covenant” and “people of God.”¹⁶ The German words also can be translated rightly as “covenant of God” and “church.”¹⁷ The word *Gemeine* looks at the church from the viewpoint of its invisible, spiritual fellowship and communion with Jesus Christ by faith. It is the same word that Q&A 54 uses to describe the church as a “chosen communion” that the Son of God gathers, defends, and preserves.¹⁸

The membership of this church and covenant is the same. It is all the elect. Children, as well as adults, are included in this covenant and church of God. There are children who as children, without ever making a confession of faith and without their conscious knowledge, are members of this church chosen to everlasting life, who are gathered, defended, and preserved by Jesus Christ, and included, therefore, in the covenant of grace. They are members by election and because Christ died for them. Because they are regenerated as a rule in their infancy, they have a spiritual communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit, who works faith in their hearts.

These same children the Form for the Administration of Baptism calls “sanctified in Christ.”¹⁹ They are holy children in Christ. They are holy not merely with an outward and objective and, therefore, worthless setting apart so that they are in some supposed better position to be saved. They are holy by an actual internal, spiritual, and real holiness worked by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, earned by the death of Christ for them, and in the same way that their parents may be said to be holy.

This church (communion) manifests itself in the local church institute. In the last part of Q&A 74 the Catechism uses the German

16 Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3:331.

17 This is the translation of the German words in Q&A 54 and Q&A 74 in the standard edition of the Heidelberg Catechism that is used in the Protestant Reformed Churches as found in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 104, 111.

18 Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3:325. The English edition used by Schaff, one prepared by the German Reformed Churches in 1859, here again tries to capture the unique idea of the word *Gemeine* by translating it as “communion.”

19 *Confessions and the Church Order*, 260.

word *Kirche* to describe the church.²⁰ This word emphasizes the local church institute as a manifestation of the universal, spiritual body of Jesus Christ joined to Him by faith. It is the church institute with her officebearers, her membership, her official ministry of the Word and sacraments, and especially as she gathers for public worship on the Lord's Day.

By baptism, according to Q&A 74, infants are admitted to this church. All the children of believers are added to the membership rolls of this local church by baptism because they are children—the elect, spiritual seed—in the covenant and church to whom God gives the promise.

The Heidelberg Catechism virtually adopts in all but name only the much maligned, but accurate distinction between membership in the covenant and being in the sphere of the covenant. All are baptized. All are added to the membership rolls of the church institute. All are in the sphere of the covenant. That does not mean and cannot mean that all are elect Israel joined to Christ by a true and living faith, that all are members of the covenant, nor that all receive the promise. The promise is for the elect, spiritual seed.

The covenant, and the fact that children are included in that covenant, therefore, is the basis for catechism instruction in Reformed churches. As covenant children they must be instructed. God demands it. The covenant demands it. The children's membership in the covenant demands it. The covenant, too, dominates and controls the content, form, and manner of that instruction. The deepest ground for catechism instruction is that the children of the church belong to the covenant of grace.

This idea also extends to the catechetical instruction of those who are coming from the outside, both on the mission field and in the local congregation, in which the minister, or missionary, must instruct in the rudiments of the Christian faith and Reformed doctrine. Here, too, the express purpose of such instruction is their eventual incorporation by confession of faith and baptism into the church so that they consciously take up the life of the covenant and kingdom of Jesus Christ.²¹

20 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:331.

21 Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *Confessions and the*

The Basis of Antithetical Catechizing

Since the covenant is the basis of the catechetical instruction of the church, if there is no basis for *antithetical* catechizing in the doctrine of the covenant, then it deserves no place in the catechism room. If the covenant demands it, then it must be in the catechism room, regardless of whether or not some find it distasteful, forbid it, or oppose it.

The deepest ground of *antithetical* catechizing is also the covenant because the covenant as such is antithesis. The truth that friendship with God—membership in the covenant—is enmity with the world demands antithetical instruction. Because there is friendship between God and His people, God puts enmity between His covenant people and the seed of the serpent. By virtue of God’s own work of uniting those children with Christ, regenerating, justifying, and sanctifying them, they are at enmity with their own sinful natures, the world, the devil, and the whole body of lies and evils hurled by the devil against the truth.

There must be warfare, then, on the part of the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent all the days of their lives. The spiritual reality of the covenant-children themselves demands this. They themselves are at war with the kingdom of darkness and all its lies because they are covenant-children.

The implication, then, is that their ministers must teach them to war. Today it is as necessary to teach antithetically as it was in the old covenant for the children to learn to fight with a sword, spear, and bow; for the city of Jerusalem to have walls, towers, and gates; and for the king to have an army trained well in the arts of warfare.

Catechetical instruction, in order to be such according to its ground in the covenant, must be antithetical. So crucial is it to the setting forth of the truth and so necessary to the practice of catechism instruction that it must be included in the very definition of right catechizing.

Church Order, 262. “Since therefore thou . . . art also desirous of holy baptism, to the end, that it may be to thee a seal of thine ingrafting into the church of God, that it may appear that thou dost not only receive the Christian religion, in which thou hast been privately instructed by us and of which also thou hast made confession before us, but that thou (through the grace of God), intendest and purposest to lead a life according to the same.”

Many might say catechizing the children is the historical practice of the church, the biblical mandate, and even necessary. But they would disagree that the instruction should be antithetical. There is, however, no true catechetical instruction where there is no *antithetical* instruction, and without it the churches will not flourish, the truth will not be promoted and developed, and right doctrine and the precepts of the Christian life will not be taught.

The Reformed Practice

Not only is catechetical instruction the Reformed practice, but also antithetical catechizing is the Reformed method. This is clear from the Reformed creeds, one of which—the Heidelberg Catechism—forms a large part of the catechetical instruction of every Reformed church.

The Heidelberg Catechism is polemical. It is called an irenic creed and praised for being irenic. But it is sharply polemical and was intended to be so. To the chagrin of many ecumenically-minded Reformed theologians, it is polemical most prominently in Q&A 80, which was deliberately inserted at the insistence of Frederick III in this tool for instruction to distinguish the Reformed confession of the Lord's Supper from the idolatrous Romish mass. By that insertion the Reformed faith accurately and devastatingly condemns the mass as a denial of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ and an accursed idolatry.

Yet, this is not the case only with Q&A 80, but also with other significant questions and answers that are polemical as well.

Q&A 30 asks and answers:

Do such, then, believe in the only Saviour Jesus who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or any where else?

No; although they may make their boast of him, yet in act they deny the only Saviour Jesus. For either Jesus is not a complete Saviour, or they who by true faith receive this Saviour must have in him all that is necessary to their salvation.²²

Q&A 48 contains a polemic against the Lutheran error of the ubiquity of Christ's human nature, by which the Lutherans justified

22 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:317.

their doctrine of the physical presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper in, with, and under the bread and wine:

But are not, in this way, the two natures in Christ separated from one another, if the Manhood is not wherever the Godhead is?

By no means; for since the Godhead is incomprehensible and every where present, it must follow that it is indeed beyond the bounds of the Manhood which it has assumed, but is yet none the less in the same also, and remains personally united to it.²³

There is the alarmed objection of the Roman Catholic—and the federal vision—against the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works in Question 62: “What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and a future life?”²⁴

There is the thorough treatment of the sacraments, which are persistently antithetical throughout. After setting forth the right understanding of the sacraments, the Heidelberg Catechism guards both sacraments from the corruptions of the (Ana)-Baptists, the Romanists, and the Lutherans.

All this is in a Catechism that was explicitly designed for use in the instruction of the youth and the ignorant.

The Belgic Confession does not fall one whit behind the Heidelberg Catechism in this antithetical approach to setting forth the truth. At the end of many articles in which the truth is positively set forth, the Belgic Confession exposes the error that opposes the truth. For example, Article 7 on the perfection of Scripture says, “Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule.” Article 12 on creation says, “Therefore we reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees, who deny the existence of spirits and angels; and also that of the Manichees, who assert that the devils have their origin of themselves.” Article 14 on the creation and fall of man says, “Therefore we reject all that is taught repugnant to this concerning the free will of man.” And Article 34 on baptism says, “Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the

23 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:322.

24 *Confessions and the Church Order*, 107.

one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of infants of believers.”²⁵

In classic fashion the Canons of Dordt set forth the truth of the doctrines of grace with astounding clarity and, in a carefully crafted rejection of errors after each head of doctrine, proceed to demolish, reject, and damn as bringing again out of hell the errors of the Arminians.²⁶

Indeed, antithetical is the Reformed methodology.

Demanding an Antithetical Prophet

It must be clear that such antithetical catechizing demands an antithetical prophet and teacher.

It is a demand touching his faithfulness to his office and obedience to Jesus Christ, who sent him with the command to feed His lambs (John 21:15). A faithful shepherd does not feed the lambs, and then run away when the wolves come. Jesus called such behavior the unmistakable mark of the hireling (John 10:12). The faithful shepherd, like the Good Shepherd who sent him, both feeds the lambs and wards off the prowling wolves.

Further, it belongs to the definition of his office as prophet that a minister is antithetical in his teaching. Herman Bavinck comments perceptively on the antithetical idea of the prophetic office: “[A prophet is one] who opposes the thoughts of God to the thoughts of human beings, his truth to their lies, his wisdom to their folly.”²⁷ A prophet who does not oppose the thoughts, truth, and wisdom of God to the thoughts, lies, and folly of human beings—a prophet that is only positive—is no prophet at all. If he is not antithetical, he is unfaithful in his office.

Can you imagine the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, and Amos not being antithetical? The pain they would have spared themselves if they were otherwise. If they had only judiciously and faithlessly refused to be antithetical, lest they step on the toes of some powerful

25 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:388, 396, 399, 427.

26 Canons of Dordt, 2, Rejection of Errors 3, in *Confessions and the Church Order*, 165.

27 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 330.

or influential family in the nation, alienate some part of the nation, or undermine some favorite venture of the mighty. If only they had relentlessly proclaimed only the positive! If only they had studiously avoided the known sensitive areas! If only they had talked about the many things that everyone had in common!

They might have been popular, but they would not have been prophets.

A prophet, a faithful prophet, is an *antithetical* prophet. He is one who proclaims God's word over against the lie of the Liar.

All the prophets in this respect were antithetical: they always proclaimed the truth over against the lie. In this they were faithful servants of the chief prophet Jesus Christ. He was polemical against the scribes, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and against the Liar, Satan himself. He called His own people, and His sheep heard His voice and followed Him, and He faithfully warned them against the leaven of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians.

This obligation to be antithetical—also in catechetical instruction—is binding upon every ordained Reformed prophet as part of his ordination vow and his signing of the Formula of Subscription. He promised to be polemical so that he actively refutes the lies that militate against the Reformed creeds, and especially the lie of Arminianism, which militates against the Canons of Dordt:

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors.²⁸

That promise before God covers all his catechetical instruction from beginning Bible stories to more advanced classes in doctrine.

A Pedagogical Necessity

Besides, antithesis is a pedagogical necessity. Antithesis is not *merely* a practical demand, but it is *at least* a practical demand. Any

²⁸ Formula of Subscription, in *Confessions and the Church Order*, 326.

teacher of any value whatsoever must be antithetical in the broad sense of the term. A teacher is simply a failure as a teacher if he is unwilling or unable to be antithetical. Antithesis belongs to the practice of good pedagogy. If a teacher is explaining mathematics, he not only explains what some equation means, but he also explains what it does not mean. If he is explaining physics, he demonstrates the theory, and in order to make the proper explanation stand out clearly, he shows what it does not mean. If he is teaching good writing, he also demonstrates what bad writing is.

So much more is this antithesis important in the instruction in the doctrine of eternal life. The setting forth of the truth of the Word of God over against the error makes the truth stand out clearer and sharper. It crystallizes the truth in the catechumens' minds. The truth is set forth over against the dark background of the lie, and the truth stands out sharply, clearly, and distinctly.

Do we not have an interest that our children know the truth?

Antithesis is crucial for them to know the truth.

But most importantly, according to the Reformed form for confession of faith, every Reformed young person must affirm, at his or her confession of faith before the church of Jesus Christ, before God, Jesus Christ, and His holy angels, that he or she has “resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life.”²⁹

Each person must be able to answer that question honestly and faithfully and to carry that out in his or her life in the church. To that end faithful, antithetical instruction is necessary.

God will require it of the unfaithful ministers and consistories who do not equip their catechumens to be able to answer that question and to fulfill that vow in their life, so that as a result of their failures the churches are full of members who are like the children of Israel in the days of Saul, when in the day of battle there was found neither sword nor spear among them (I Sam. 13:22). Rather, we must be like David, who performed this commendable act at the very beginning of his reign: “he bade Israel to be taught the use of the bow” (II Sam. 1:18).

29 Public Confession of Faith, in *Confessions and the Church Order*, 266.

The Practice

How Shall We Practice It?

Implied in the practice of antithetical instruction is that the minister teaches the truth. This is the truth of Scripture, especially as that truth is summarized in the Reformed creeds. There can be no proper antithesis where the truth is not taught.

It implies, too, that in setting forth the truth the truth is allowed to dominate and shine gloriously in the instruction. Antithetical instruction is not merely setting forth and refuting the errors. We may not only curse the darkness. There may be no morbid interest in warfare for warfare's sake. It is the method of setting forth the truth. In the course of setting forth the truth, the errors that oppose that truth are refuted.

Furthermore, that antithetical setting forth of the truth must begin with the youngest children. Antithesis does not wait until the children are in doctrine classes. There is a solid starting place in the biblical history. That biblical history is antithetical. For example, the history of Abraham as he walked with God as God's friend in obedience to God stands out over against the gross wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and the unfaithfulness of Lot to the covenant when he "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Gen. 13:12). God says about His friend, and that over against and in light of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). The history of God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the reason for that destruction was to be part of the basic catechetical instruction of every Israelite child as he was being taught justice and judgment.

Teach Their Hands to War

This work of antithetical instruction involves the training of the children themselves in antithetical thinking and practice.

This is not advocating the so-called Socratic method of instruction in which in the course of the hour of catechism the instruction takes the form of almost continual questions and answers between the minister and the children. If the minister takes seriously that catechetical

instruction is instruction and essentially the preaching of the gospel fitted to the age and mental capacity of the children, then the teaching will also take the form in which Scripture mandates the preacher to preach: “instruct, exhort, rebuke, admonish, with all longsuffering” (Titus 2:15). The minister will instruct in catechism, and the elders will see to it that instruction dominates the hour.

Nevertheless, the practice of antithetical instruction involves training the children in the tactics of battle.

One of the ways that a man teaches this is by doing it. In this way he teaches by example.

The other way is to teach it explicitly to the children. Luther has something colorful to say about this in his commentary on Genesis 18:

For when you teach your own people, you are not beginning a war there but are providing training for war. You see, however, that in training it is not proper for us to use spears made of iron and swords that are sharp. Now, then we use wooden sticks and swords fashioned from wood. In battle, however, iron is needed, and it must be firm and well sharpened for striking. Thus when we argue against the enemies of the church, sound strong arguments must be advanced; for if this is not done, the enemies not only laugh at us but are more strengthened in their error. Thus we have proved the Anabaptists and the Sacramentarians wrong, not only by proving our points with many sound reasons but also by taking note of the mistakes they make as the result of improper conclusions and quotations. Therefore it is one thing to teach and another thing to exhort. Rhetoric, which is useful for exhorting, often plays games and often hands you a piece of wood which you suppose is a sword. But dialectic carries on war and busies itself with matters that are serious. Therefore it does not show the opponent pieces of wood; it shows iron.³⁰

Luther here is talking about instruction that provides training for war. That is what the minister is after in his antithetical catechizing. The

30 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 3, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15–20*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 191.

fact that we reject Schaff's assessment of Q&A 80 as unsuitable for children does not mean that we do not take into account the age of the catechumens and their mental capacity in this antithetical instruction. Sometimes we give them wooden swords. We do not enter into every possible argument, but show them the basics. We let them practice the art of defending the truth. We tolerate their questions and probing. We show them that the truth must be defended, can be defended, and how to defend it. We show them that the lie can be defeated, must be defeated, and how to defeat it.

A Wise Emphasis

We acknowledge the limited amount of time when teaching catechism. The preacher during catechetical instruction can often feel like Augustine, who complained about his own lack of space for adequate polemics in his little catechism book, *Enchiridion*: "To state what are the true objects of faith, hope, and love is easy. But to defend this true doctrine against the assaults of those who hold an opposite opinion, requires much fuller and more elaborate instruction."³¹

Ministers can often feel as though they do not have enough time to set forth the true doctrine, let alone adequately to explain and to defend against those who hold the opposite opinion. This is especially true as the heresies multiply. What is the preacher to do?

There must be a wise emphasis.

First, there are the fundamentals of the doctrines of grace that must be defended. The Formula of Subscription recognizes this as especially important for the Reformed officebearer: "We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned Synod."³² While the Reformed preacher must reject all the errors that militate against the creeds, he must be particularly concerned with those Arminian errors that were rejected by the Synod of Dordt in the Canons.

Second, focus on the issues that the children will face in their

31 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 3, 238.

32 *Confessions and the Church Order*, 326.

particular area. The minister and elders must know the lambs in their particular situation. For example, in the Chicago area there is the labor union issue that is a perennial concern. It is something that the working man faces especially in the construction and trucking industries. There are pressures from others to join and by joining to validate the massive disobedience to the Word of God by other Reformed church members and churches. The men face temptations because well-paying, profitable jobs are available only to those who join the union. If a minister in Chicago never teaches his catechumens about the error of union membership and never condemns it from the Word of God, he is to blame for their faltering. He was culpably negligent of his own sheep and lambs that are pressured by the issue and need the Word of God to address it in order to confirm them in their faith, to warn them of the judgment of God on that rebellion, and to comfort them in their suffering. The threats that face the church are always in a certain sense similar, but they are also peculiar to different churches in different areas.

Third, instruct the youth especially with regard to the errors that they will regrettably face in college and especially at the Christian colleges. A minister must prepare his catechumens for the challenges to their faith and doctrine they will face in college by pointing out what they will face and how to face it.

Doctrinal Antithesis

Right antithetical instruction must reckon with the errors that the church faced doctrinally.

The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism rejected in their book for the instruction of children the ubiquity of Christ's human nature, the popish mass, works righteousness, and many other doctrinal errors. The Belgic Confession mentions the errors of the Manichees, the Epicureans, Marcion, Manes, Praxeas, Sabellius, Samosatenus, Arius, the Pelagians, and more than once the error of the Anabaptists. The Canons reject Arminianism. The minister treats the errors that have affected the church in the past. He must treat the errors of the past, if for no other reason than to teach that the church has fought for the truth in the past. Besides, many of the old errors are still held today. For example, Rome still believes and teaches her doctrine of

the mass. The Heidelberg Catechism in this sense is as fresh today as it was five hundred years ago.

But treatment of the errors of the past also recognizes that errors of the past come up again with new faces, new names, and new presentations. The treatment of the errors must be done in and for the twenty-first century.

This does not mean that, because we are in the twenty-first century, we do not condemn the old errors as sharply and emphatically as our spiritual fathers did in the past, that is, that we pull back from the creeds' condemnation of the errors and the errorists. The Arminian error is still Pelagianism brought up out of hell. We still detest the errors of the Anabaptists.

That the treatment must be done in and for the twenty-first century refers to *how* the preacher handles the various errors treated in his instruction. Since there is no new thing under the sun also with regard to false doctrine, the minister will treat the old errors as they threaten the church today.

Take, for example, the Belgic Confession's rejection of the error of the Manichees in Article 12. The minister might be tempted to say that there are no Manichees today. Thankfully that heretical sect has died out, so with a sigh of relief the minister briefly says a few words about those miserable Manichees that threatened the church long ago. With this he contents himself that he has been antithetical.

He would be wrong. Manichee was a heretic in the early church who taught a good god with good angels and an evil god with evil angels. Yet, when the Belgic Confession rejects the error of the Manichees, it is not merely interested in Manichee himself, but with his error "that the devils have their origin of themselves, and that they are wicked of their own nature, without having been corrupted."³³ Manichee essentially taught dualism. The Belgic Confession, and thus the Reformed faith, opposes dualism. The Reformed faith confesses that the devils are not eternal beings with their origin of themselves alongside God. Also, they are not wicked of their own nature without having been corrupted, so that a principle of evil exists in the world outside of God's providence, and the evils in the world are not workings of the devil outside of God's

33 Belgic Confession, Art. 12, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:396.

sovereign governance of the world. The devils are creatures dependent upon God, who is sovereign over them. The warfare is not between equals, but God governs the devils even in their warfare against Him, as He does all creatures, with His sovereign power.

This very error of the Manichees—dualism—with its blatant denial of the sovereignty of God is found in evangelical and Reformed churches today. It is found wherever theologians or preachers teach a god that is in control of the good things but is not in control of evil things. It is found wherever it is denied that when evil strikes, God sovereignly determined and controlled the carrying out of that evil event by His eternal decree, so that the evil happened and happened exactly as God determined and governed its carrying out. When that is taught and God's sovereignty is denied, as it is today, there is the reappearance of Manicheism. Thus the minister in catechism explains Manicheism and its present-day reincarnation and warns the children diligently against this prevalent heresy of our day.

The minister must explain the strange terms to the children, and then treat the errors especially as they affect the churches today and are a threat to the children whom he is teaching.

He also must refute the current threats to the church's orthodoxy. He will not merely explain Rome's false view of justification by faith and works, but also that false view as it is promoted by the men of the federal vision who teach that in the final judgment a man will enter heaven on the basis of his faith and good works.

The minister would warn against the present-day attacks by theistic and atheistic evolutionists on the biblical truth of creation in six days.

He should expose the rampant unbelief with regard to Scripture that pervades the most conservative Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries so that theologians write books, purporting to teach the truth, that have as the underlying premise that Scripture is unreliable and false in important respects.

He should carefully explain and refute the denial of the truth of the doctrine of the covenant by almost the entire Reformed church-world that teaches in one form or another a conditional covenant cut free from election.

He would be obligated to refute the popular, but false, doctrine of

the well-meant gospel offer, which teaches that God in the preaching of the gospel expresses His desire that all who hear the gospel be saved, and along with that the erroneous teaching of common grace as it was adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 and has infected wide portions of the Reformed church-world.

He should teach the truth of the kingdom of God over against the false ideas about the kingdom of both the theory of common grace and men of the federal vision, with their covenant vision that is not driven by a view of the tabernacle of God with men in the new heavens and new earth but by a postmillennial “Jewish dream” of the kingdom on earth.

Dispensationalism is a huge error the children will encounter. The popular face of Christian eschatology is Tim LeHaye, Jerry Jenkins, the *Left Behind* series, and other books, authors, and theologians like them.

The criticism of the emergent church movement and the host of undenominational community churches and mega-churches, growing like hydra’s heads from the stumps of former Reformed churches, and whose pews are full of former Reformed church members, is worthy of some time devoted to it in the catechism room.

There are always issues about the sacraments. They were not merely issues during the sixteenth-century Reformation. The sacraments are a twenty-first century issue encountered in the (Ana)-Baptists’ detestable practice of rebaptism and denial of infant baptism, a resurgent Rome, a push for the practice of child’s communion, and the federal vision’s corruption of the sacraments by universal, ineffectual, sacramental grace.

Believe!

As in the preaching of the gospel on the Lord’s Day, the call to faith and holiness is preached during catechism.

In a recent book by Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, which is the pretentious title of one of his latest books, this was rarely if ever done in his teaching. This proceeds from that fact that his purpose with the book is not to expose and condemn false doctrine and religion, but to promote “respectful dialogue” and to “make a case...for the truth of Christianity in general—not for one particular strand of it.” As a

confessional Presbyterian he does not have the liberty to do that.³⁴ It is a violation of his subscription vows.

Furthermore, having explained his “general” version of the Christian faith, he has this conclusion: “It is possible though by no means certain that Christianity may be more plausible to you now that you’ve read this book.”³⁵

Plausibility is a despicable term in this context. Plausibility means it has the appearance of truth. It might be true. Again, it might be false. It may be worthy of belief. Again, it may not be. Besides, the word reeks of the idea that skeptics can be argued into faith through skillful human reason. They are softened up by the slick logic of the speaker and prepared to hear the gospel. The apostle Paul argued with skeptics. He argued with a whole hill full of them. What pricked their interest was not that he went toe-to-toe with them in rational arguments—although that most learned, erudite, and intellectually commanding apostle certainly could have—but that he preached the resurrection. And he did not leave them with questions of plausibility, but with the divine command to repent and believe (Acts 17:22-31). If “plausibility” is all that the minister has to say after writing—or for that matter after teaching in the catechism room—he might as well leave the ministry. His language would expose his own lack of love for the truth and his own lack of conviction that the truth he teaches is revelation of “the mystery of godliness” (I Tim. 3:16).

The call to believe and to walk in this way or that way as demanded by the truth must be issued. It is not something plausible.

It is commanded.

By God.

In catechism the call to believe and to walk is not an incipient Arminianism, nor is it practically a Baptist view of the children. It is an extension of the basis of the instruction, the covenant, which demands conversion from the youth up, that is, that the covenantal child put off the old man with his sins and lies, and put on the new man created in Christ Jesus unto all good works.

34 Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), xix.

35 Keller, *Reason for God*, 227, 117.

Such a call is also an implication of the task of the prophet as the servant of God to oppose God's truth to Satan's lies and call all men everywhere to repent and believe.

What preacher would not do this from the pulpit?

The same must be true during catechetical instruction.

This is the truth and that is the lie. This must be believed. That must be rejected. Because the truth has been set forth as truth, a right and thorough explanation of the authoritative Word of God, and because the lie has been exposed and refuted, the truth, as truth, has the authority to demand faith and a certain life of holiness.

Holiness Is the Purpose

The goal of this antithetical catechetical instruction is holiness. In the practice of catechism the preacher must keep this before his mind. The covenant is the basis of catechetical instruction. The covenant is also the goal of catechetical instruction: the devotion of the people of God to God in the fellowship of the covenant in a holy life, especially the love of Jesus Christ revealed in the truth, and the hatred of the lie that denies the truth and thus denies Jesus Christ.

It is this that the apostle Paul purposed in his own spiritual warfare in the churches, as he relates in II Corinthians 10:3-5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The weapons of his warfare were mighty for the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and for bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

That is the purpose of antithetical catechism instruction. It aims, in the act of destroying the strongholds of Satan, to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

This is implied in Christ's commission to the church in Matthew 28:19 to go into all the world and teach. The word "teach" is literally

“to disciple” all nations, that is, to teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded.

That instruction in the truth in catechism has as its goal the holiness in the life of the child of God, as Genesis 18:19 makes plain. Literally God says to Abraham, “he [Abraham] will charge his children and household after him and they will keep the way of the LORD to do justice and judgment.”³⁶ In Abraham’s instruction of his children—and therefore the instruction of every covenant father, and by implication the instruction of the church and school—a charge to keep the way of the Lord by doing justice and judgment was laid on the children. To do justice and judgment refers to doing all things in harmony with the revealed will of God in His law with a right discernment of good and evil, especially as this becomes practical in their rejection of friendship and fellowship with the ungodly, as the subsequent history of Lot in Sodom makes plain.

This goal of antithetical catechizing is also implied in the scriptural designation of the truth as *doctrine according to godliness*, or, *truth which is after godliness* (I Tim. 6:3; Titus 1:1).³⁷ That phrase is often interpreted as doctrine that leads to godliness. But if we take seriously that the preposition in the original Greek is *kata* (κατ εὔσε, βειαν),

36 Genesis 18:19: אֵל יְהוָה לֵבִי יָדָעְתִּי: לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרֵנָה אֶת-בְּנָיו וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ, אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרֵנּוּ וְיַעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט: לְמַעַן הָבִי לְעַלְיָתָם אֶת-אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר עִדְלִישׁוּדָשׁ: מִרוּ, יִדְרֶה יְהוָה לְעַשְׂתָּ: שְׂדֵקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט: לְמַעַן הָבִי

“For I know him for the purpose that he shall teach his children and house after him and they will keep the way of Jehovah to do justice and judgment in order that Jehovah cause to come upon Abraham what he promised him” [translation mine]. The text also makes plain that it is in the way of Abraham’s instructing his children that God would bring upon Abraham all He promised in the covenant and as part of the promise that the children of Abraham will walk in justice and judgment. He will teach. They will keep—because God blesses that teaching. Also, the text makes clear that all this blessing flows out of God’s knowing of Abraham, that is, God’s eternal election of Abraham in love to be His friend and to be the friend of his elect seed.

37 Εἰ τί ἕτεροδιδασκαλεῖ καὶ. μὴ. προσερχετα ὑγίαι, νουσι.ν λο,γ οἱ τοῖ τοῦ κυρι,ου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ. τῆ κατ εὔσε, βειαν διδασ καλι,α (I Tim. 6:3). Παῦλό δουλό θεοῦ ἀπο,στολό δε. Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κατα. πι,στιν ἐκλεκτῶν θεοῦ καὶ. ἐπι,γνωσιν ἀληθει,ὰ τῆ κατ εὔσε, βειαν (Titus 1:1)

which means according *to the standard of*, then the phrase means that the doctrine that is taught in the churches must accord with the standard of godliness. If the doctrine does not accord with the standard of godliness, as that godliness is taught in the Scriptures, so that godliness is its fruit and effect—and the standard, therefore, according to which a teaching can be measured—it has no business being taught and held by the people of God.

Truth produces godliness. By its fruits you know it. The lie produces all sorts of ungodliness. That is the test, in the end, of all teaching.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema had an insightful observation in this regard. He was often accused of being uninterested in practical preaching. To a certain kind of practical preaching he was absolutely opposed, but not to preaching true holiness. He says this in his devotional commentary on the epistle to the Romans:

There is a very intimate, indeed inseparable relation between doctrine and life. There is an inseparable relation between the truth and practice. The relation is mutual. There is an influence of doctrine upon life, which doctrine is applied, but there is also an influence of life upon doctrine.

It is a question to me which of the two is more important. A certain inclination toward a certain direction and walk in life tends toward a certain form of doctrine. In other words, if it is our inmost desire to walk in ways of sin, corruption, and the world, it is impossible for us to maintain the truth. For the sake of the sinful life, for the sake of a life in the world, we will forsake and corrupt the truth.

People sometimes say that we must have practical preaching. But there is nothing more corrupt than the practical preaching they have in mind. It is not often that anyone will reject a piece of doctrine as long as it is just a piece of doctrine. It is not very likely that anyone will hate me just for preaching a certain doctrine. He may not like it, but he will not hate me for it. But as soon as doctrine becomes practical, we will never tolerate doctrine, unless we depart from the way of sin. As soon as doctrine is applied, the test comes. Jesus says that he who will do the will of His Father will say that His doctrine is true (John 7:17).

Ultimately the church does not consist of people who believe doc-

trine, but of people who adorn doctrine with a godly life. Therefore, we can test doctrine by its fruit. If a certain doctrine leads to a corrupt life, to a life in sin, there is something wrong with that doctrine. If, on the other hand, a doctrine leads to a godly life, you can depend upon it that it is the truth.³⁸

Hoeksema was opposed to all practical preaching not rooted in and flowing out of true doctrine, a practical instruction after the fancy of the congregation and the preacher. But he recognized the necessity of instruction in the holy life that true doctrine demands. He also astutely noted that it was especially when the doctrine was shown to lead to and demand godliness that the doctrine was rejected. There is a close and inseparable connection between doctrine and holiness in the life of God's people. Without the truth, there is no holiness. And if holiness does not follow from a particular teaching, then you can be certain that it is not the truth.

There may be no interest in a bare, cold, intellectual grasp of the truth. The catechumens must know it intellectually, and that knowledge must affect the whole person, so that they love it and so that they see that that doctrine demands a certain holy life from them. The instruction itself must make plain to the children that the goal of the instruction is practical and spiritual. It is not merely that they have a head full of wonderful facts, but that they live their life doing justice and judgment in God's covenant.

The preacher is entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit for working this love by the teaching. This does not mean, however, that he may use this as an excuse for his own failure so to teach the truth as doctrine according to godliness, which necessarily opposes ungodliness. Exposing the errors heightens the love of the truth as the truth, and works a godly life by the work of the Spirit of Christ.

There must be no minimization of this ethical aspect of antithetical catechism instruction. The practical issues that face the children must be faced during catechetical instruction. Antithetical instruction

38 Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 243–44.

must be doctrinal and practical. The commandments, the guide to the thankful life, are a major part of catechism instruction and, therefore, the ethical will figure large in that instruction.

Furthermore, if a man recognizes that we are deeply into the calendar of eschatology, he will take seriously Christ's warning: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12). Christ does not say that the love of the truth will fail, and then iniquity will abound. Christ warns that because of abounding iniquity, the love of many for the truth will wax cold. A similar thought is expressed by the apostle Paul:

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess. 2:10–12).

He does not say that they did not believe the truth because they believed the lie. But they believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Pleasure in unrighteousness made impossible belief of the truth.

Lawlessness and wickedness will abound as a threat to the church and as a threat to the church's hold on the truth of Scripture. The minister must teach the holiness that the belief—and love—of the truth demands.

The Fruit

A Fruitful Practice

The fruit of faithful antithetical catechizing is the church's prosperity. Such instruction is essential for the church's own prosperity, growth, and development. This is what Psalm 144:11–15 teaches:

Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in

our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.

Verse 11 speaks of God's ridding "me" of strange children. These strange children have a mouth that speaks vanity. They confess false doctrine and teach false doctrine. Furthermore, these strange children have a right hand of falsehood, that is, all that they put their hand to do is wickedness, and they do their wickedness with all their strength. From these strange children, God delivers. God did this typically in David and his kingdom, and in reality in Jesus Christ and all those who belong to Jesus Christ. Verse 12 and following speak of the abounding prosperity of the church and kingdom of God because of this. The transition between verses 11 and 12 is simply the Hebrew word *asher*.³⁹ This connection indicates that there is an inexpressibly close connection between God's ridding the church from the hands of strange children, whose mouth speaks vanity and whose right hand is the right hand of falsehood, and the prosperity of the church of God in which the sons and daughters are healthy, strong, and beautiful; the sheep abound; the oxen pull sturdily in their yokes; and there is no complaining in the streets.

Making the appropriate application to the New Testament church, this connection means that there is a vital relationship between God's ridding the church of strange children and the church's spiritual health and prosperity.

God rids the church of strange children through the means of faithful antithetical instruction of all kinds, including faithful antithetical catechizing, as is clear from the first verse of Psalm 144, in which David blesses Jehovah who taught David's hands to war and his fingers to fight. The ridding of David and the kingdom of strange children was accomplished in the way of David's fighting and warring. In the New Testament church it is accomplished in the way of fighting for and with the truth in all teaching and preaching, and thus also in catechizing.

39 אֲשֶׁר *asher*

Fruitful to Develop

This antithetical instruction faithfully carried out is fruitful in a man's own ministry. The prophet himself, when he explains the truth over against the lie, will become sharper in his formulation of the truth and stronger in his grasp of the truth. This simply recognizes the vital role that heresy has played in the development of the truth. There is always heresy. There is always opposition. Error is a reality. False teachers are a threat. Apostasy from the truth is real. That is and will be the reality of every man's ministry. And a man's own antithetical instruction will bring it out and hasten it.

The fruit of that opposition is that the truth is developed. It will be developed in the church, and the preacher himself will be sharpened by his own conflict with the error as he prepares all his preaching and teaching from that point of view.

Fruitful to Deliver

Christ, through the preacher who is faithful in this necessary work, delivers His little lambs from error, from falsehood, and from the fiery darts of the devil.

The fruit is not first of all that the little lambs are equipped to fight the devil and false doctrine. That is the fruit, too. They are given the tools necessary for that. Under such instruction they will grow up, by God's grace, into spiritually strong, faithful, Reformed church members and they will have in their own hands a sword sharper than any dragoon's saber.

The first fruit, however, is that by means of that instruction Christ actually delivers them from error, guards and defends them, and edifies them so that they develop from lambs into sheep in their love of the truth, their confession of that truth, and in the Christian life. Christ by means of it rids the church of strange children with their vain mouths and lying hands from within the church, and falsehood and false teachers from without the church. Christ through it builds up the church in unity and love for the truth.

Fruitfully Dividing

Antithetical catechizing divides. That is its commendable feature.

That is its purpose. That is the fruit of its foundational principle, the antithesis. Calvin recognized this in his own Catechism. There was no better tool for the unity of the churches than the simple, but effective, instruction of the catechism that clearly marked the lines between the “profane synagogues of Antichrist” and the true churches of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

This is what King Jehoshaphat forgot in all his ecumenical-mindedness. He willfully ignored the antithesis and its fruitful division. “I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war,” he proclaimed on that deplorable day in Samaria (II Chron. 18:3).

Judah and Israel were not the same. They were fundamentally different peoples—one worshiping the true God, ruled by the true son of David, and the other worshiping golden calves, which were no gods, and ruled by Ahab, the wicked son of Omri.

For this error God painfully rebuked Jehoshaphat by the mouth of the antithetical seer Hanani: “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD” (II Chron. 19:2). His sin of alliance with Ahab was a sin that struck at the heart of the covenant as friendship with God. He allied himself with the ungodly and loved those who hated the Lord.

For Jehoshaphat’s folly God Himself brought “wrath,” in the form of horrible chastisements, on the kingdom of Judah in the horde of enemies that came to dispossess them of their land, and in the murderous rule of the southern kingdom by that wicked daughter of Ahab, who brought the royal line within a hair’s breadth of extinction.

Jehoshaphat was not antithetical. In his mad rush to join with Ahab, he willingly ignored the basic differences between Israel and Judah. He willingly ignored the doctrinal and practical differences between the two peoples. He did not teach his people the antithesis. For his failure the whole kingdom suffered under the chastening hand of God. The outcome of his actions was not prosperity, but misery.

40 John Calvin, Dedication to *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, http://www.reformed.org/documents/calvin/geneva_catachism/geneva_catachism.html.

Antithetical catechizing divides. It divides sharply and decisively. It divides in the covenant between Jacob and Esau. It divides in the kingdom of God between the true seed and the strange children. It divides between Judah and ostensibly Christian, but apostatizing and apostate, Israel. It divides between the Israel of God and the uncircumcised Philistines.

The preacher in his antithetical instruction must be aware that what he is teaching will divide. He is marking the division and enmity that God Himself placed between His people and the world, between Christ and Belial, between righteousness and unrighteousness, between the holy and beautiful temple of God and the dark synagogue of Satan, and between the true and living God of the covenant and abominable, worthless idols.

Fruitfully Uniting

Antithetical catechism instruction unites. It unites by clearly marking the dividing line, by keeping the walls high and the guard up, and thus endeavoring to keep the unity of the church.

Many want unity. The cry for unity reaches a fevered pitch today as a false ecumenism sings its siren song. It is false precisely because it is a unity attempted outside of and at the expense of the truth, in which alone that unity is constituted. Precious unity is forged only in the furnace of the truth, and that unity is more tightly affirmed in the bonds of the truth as that truth stands out with stunning clarity against the dark backdrop of sin and the lie.

In that unity there is peace and prosperity for the people of God. It is as the psalmist wrote: “That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets.”

Is there a lovelier description of the prosperity of Christ’s kingdom? Indeed, happy is the people who are in such a case, because Christ delivers the church by means of faithful antithetical catechizing. ●

Creation, Providence, and Divine Accommodation: John Calvin and Modern Theories of Evolution*

Erik Guichelaar

Introduction

In his commentary on Genesis, and in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin makes it explicit that he believes the earth to have been created in six literal 24-hour days. In his commentary he writes, “I have said above, that six days were employed in the formation of the world.”¹ In the *Institutes* he writes, “...[W]e are drawn away from all fictions to the one God who distributed his work into six days.”² It would be surprising, therefore, to find present-day theologians and professors asserting that, if he were living today, Calvin would reject a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 in favor of an evolutionary understanding of creation. Nevertheless, this is exactly what we find.

Alister McGrath, who was until recently Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Oxford, argues that Calvin would be an evolutionary theist if he were alive today. In *A Life of John Calvin*, McGrath writes:

1 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), vol. 1, 105. Gen. 2:3.

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 161. 1:14:2.

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Calvin may also be regarded as eliminating a major obstacle to the development of the natural sciences—biblical literalism.... [For Calvin] the biblical stories of the creation and Fall (Genesis 1-3) are accommodated to the abilities and horizons of a relatively simple and unsophisticated people; they are not intended to be taken as literal representations of reality.³

McGrath argues that Calvin was the one who freed “scientific observation and theory from crudely literalist interpretations of Scripture.”⁴

Davis A. Young, professor emeritus of Geology at Calvin College, also strongly suggests that Calvin would have accepted modern evolutionary theories as true. Although admitting that “Calvin believed that Scripture taught that the earth is only a few thousand years old,”⁵ he exonerates Calvin for taking such a position: “Calvin’s contemporaries believed the traditional views. Should he have been any different?... In his day, of course, there was no recognition by natural philosophers of the geological evidence that is available to us today that compels acceptance of an extremely ancient Earth.”⁶ He proceeds by raising the question whether Calvin would hold to a literal six-day creation were he alive today, suggesting that he might not, and recommends that “judicious application of Calvin’s principle of accommodation would go a long way toward solving some of the problems concerning the relation of science to the Bible,”⁷ implying that Christians today can use Calvin’s notion of divine accommodation to help interpret and understand Genesis 1 and 2 in light of modern evolutionary theories.

Even Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), who “was the most wide-

3 Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study of the Shaping of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 257. Emphasis original.

4 McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 255.

5 Davis A. Young, *John Calvin and the Natural World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 159.

6 Young, 159.

7 Young, 230.

ly known advocate of confessional Calvinism in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries,”⁸ argues that Calvin’s doctrine of creation was the embryo of modern evolutionism. He writes: “it should scarcely be passed without remark that Calvin’s doctrine of creation is, if we have understood it aright, for all except the souls of men, an evolutionary one.... Calvin doubtless had no theory whatever of evolution, but he teaches a doctrine of evolution.”⁹ Furthermore, Warfield states, “Calvin...very naturally thought along the lines of a theistic evolutionism”¹⁰ and “forms...a point of departure for [the modern evolutionary theorists].”¹¹

McGrath, Young, and Warfield represent those who long to have Calvin as a reference to back up their unscriptural opinions. Rather than humbly accepting as truth what the Bible clearly sets forth, and submitting to it, these men, and others who follow their teachings, are more concerned with making the Bible amenable to modern, so-called scientific theories, and compliant with the speculations and philosophies of man-centered, God-denying academia. And these men want to associate Calvin, the great Reformer and defender of the truth of God’s holy Word, with themselves.

One can be sure, however, that Calvin was not such a man as to entertain such thoughts, nor would he be if he were alive today. This essay, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of Calvin’s birth, intends to demonstrate this very fact. In this essay, I will examine, first, Calvin’s doctrine of creation; second, his understanding of divine providence; and third, his notion of divine accommodation. I will show in each section that Calvin’s teaching on the matter speaks unmistakably and unequivocally against any evolutionary understanding of creation, and permits nothing but the scriptural teaching of a

8 Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, introduction to *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings*, by B. B. Warfield (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 16.

9 B. B. Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Creation (excerpts),” in *Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 308, 309.

10 Warfield, 310. fn. 36.

11 Warfield, 309.

literal six-day creation. Ultimately, I will argue that Calvin, even if he were alive today, would find the theory of evolution repugnant, and repudiate it as antithetical to the Word of God.

Calvin's Doctrine of Creation

We begin by examining Calvin's doctrine of creation. How does Calvin interpret Genesis 1 and 2? And how does what he says speak to modern evolutionary theories? In this section, we will pay particular attention to how Calvin understood the action of God in the six days of creation. To do so, we look to Calvin's commentaries and to his *Institutes*.

The first thing we notice when reading Calvin's commentary on Genesis is that Calvin treats the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 as literal history. Before he even begins commentating on Genesis 1, Calvin asserts that the account of creation in Genesis is historical fact: "[s]ince the infinite wisdom of God is displayed in the admirable structure of heaven and earth, it is absolutely impossible to unfold THE HISTORY OF THE CREATION OF THE WORLD in terms equal to its dignity."¹²

The second thing we notice is that Calvin asserts that the account of creation given in Genesis 1 and 2 is not simply the invention of Moses, but the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who cannot lie. Concerning the first chapters of Genesis, Calvin writes: "[Moses] does not here put forward divinations of his own, but is the instrument of the Holy Spirit for the publication of those things which it was of importance for all men to know."¹³ Elevating the book of Genesis to the level of divine origin, Calvin brings the reader to a proper frame of mind for beginning a study of Genesis 1 and 2.

As he begins commentating on Genesis 1:1, Calvin immediately emphasizes that God created the world out of nothing: "[w]hen God in the beginning created the heaven and the earth, the earth was empty and waste. He [i.e., Moses] moreover teaches by the word 'created,' that what before did not exist was now made.... Therefore his mean-

12 Calvin, *Genesis*, 57. Argument. Emphasis original.

13 Calvin, *Genesis*, 59. Argument.

ing is, that the world was made out of nothing.”¹⁴ Calvin stresses here that God is responsible for everything that is. Nothing comes about by means of anything other than God, for nothing existed from all eternity besides Him. All of creation has its beginning from God.

Calvin reiterates this point in the *Institutes*, where he gives further instruction concerning God’s act of creation:

It is important for us to grasp first the history of the creation of the universe.... From this history we shall learn that God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon he brought forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind, that in a wonderful series he distinguished an innumerable variety of things, that he endowed each kind with its own nature, assigned functions, appointed places and stations....¹⁵

In this excerpt, not only is creation “out of nothing” stressed, but it is emphasized as the product of the power of the triune God. Furthermore, we see Calvin also asserting that God continued in His act of creation by bringing forth all living creatures and inanimate things of every kind.

With regard to God’s act of “[bringing] forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind,” a central and critical question arises: *how* did God act in bringing forth the creatures and inanimate things? Did He do so through a creative activity on His part, so that immediately the creatures came into existence through the immediate power of His word? Or did He do so through relying on the intrinsic forces inhering within the “rude and unpolished...shapeless chaos”¹⁶ of Genesis 1:2 as these forces worked over time to produce the world we see around us? In deciding between these two options we see the difference between those who would understand Genesis 1 and 2 as literal history, and those who would understand Genesis 1 and 2 as figurative, and supplying only a framework for how all of creation came into being. What does Calvin have to say on the matter?

14 Calvin, *Genesis*, 70. Gen. 1:1.

15 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.20.

16 Calvin, *Genesis*, 73. Gen. 1:2.

As has already been noted in the introduction, B. B. Warfield states that Calvin's doctrine of creation is "an evolutionary one."¹⁷ He reads Calvin in such a way as to argue that Calvin understood God's act of bringing creatures and things into existence as being done by using the intrinsic forces within the "heavens and the earth" of Genesis 1:1, 2. In this way, Warfield understands Calvin's understanding of creation to be a "pure evolutionary scheme."¹⁸ When treating the above quotation from Calvin's *Institutes*, Warfield states the following:

It is God who has made all things what they are, Calvin teaches; but, in doing so, God has acted in the specific mode properly called creation only at the initial step of the process, and the result owes its right to be called a creation to that initial act by which the material of which all things consist was called into being from nonbeing. "Indigested mass" as it was, yet in that world-stuff was "the seed of the whole world," and out of it that world as we now see it (for "the world at its very beginning was not perfected in the manner it is now seen") had been evoked by progressive acts of God; and it is therefore that this world, because evoked from it, has the right to be called a creation.

The distinction which Calvin here draws, it is to be observed, is not that which has been commonly made by reformed divines under the terms first and second creation, or in less exact language immediate and mediate creation. That common distinction posits a sequence of truly creative acts of God throughout the six days, and therefore defines creation, so as to meet the whole case, as that act "by which God produced the world and all that is in it, partly *ex nihilo*, partly *ex material naturaliter inhabili* [from preexisting material not itself capable of producing something new], for the manifestation of the glory of his power, wisdom, and goodness".... It is precisely this sequence of truly creative acts which Calvin disallows; and he so expresses himself, indeed, as to give it a direct contradiction."¹⁹

17 Warfield, 308.

18 Warfield, 309.

19 Warfield, 304, 305.

After quoting Calvin on Genesis 1:21,²⁰ and treating the passage, Warfield continues:

It should scarcely be passed without remark that Calvin's doctrine of creation is, if we have understood it aright, for all except the souls of men, an evolutionary one. The indigested mass, including the promise and potency of all that was yet to be, was called into being by the simple fiat of God. But all that has come into being since—except the souls of men alone—has arisen as a modification of this original world-stuff by means of the interaction of its intrinsic forces. Not these forces apart from God, of course; Calvin is a high theist, that is, supernaturalist, in his ontology of the universe. To him God is the

20 The relevant section from Calvin's commentary on Gen. 1:21 reads as follows: "*And God created.* A question here arises out of the word *created*. For we have before contended, that because the world was created, it was made out of nothing; but now Moses says that things formed from other matter were created. They who truly and properly assert that the fishes were created because the waters were in no way sufficient or suitable for their production, only resort to a subterfuge: for, in the meantime, the fact would remain, that the material of which they were made existed before; which, in strict propriety, the word [created] does not admit. I therefore do not restrict the creation here spoken of to the work of the fifth day, but rather suppose it to refer to that shapeless and confused mass, which was as the fountain of the whole world. God then, it is said, created *whales* (*balænas*) and other fishes, not that the beginning of their creation is to be reckoned from the moment in which they receive their form; but because they are comprehended in the universal matter which was made out of nothing. So that, with respect to species, form only was then added to them; but created is nevertheless a term truly used respecting both the whole and the parts" (Calvin, *Genesis*, 89). Warfield uses Calvin's comments here to defend an evolutionary account of Genesis 1 and 2 as Calvinistic. Suffice it to say, there is no indication from the above excerpt that Calvin thought of God's act of creation as being done by evolutionary means. Because a discussion of this passage is beyond the scope of this essay, as well as the fact that the passage has been satisfactorily treated by John Murray in his essay "Calvin's Doctrine of Creation," the author recommends the interested reader look up Murray's essay (John Murray, "Calvin's Doctrine of Creation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17, no. 1 (Nov 1954): 21-43.), especially noting the discussion on pages 32-35.

prima causa omnium [first cause of all], and that not merely in the sense that all things ultimately—in the world-stuff—owe their existence to God, but in the sense that all the modifications of the world-stuff have taken place under the directly upholding and governing hand of God, and find their account ultimately in his will. But they find their account proximately in second causes, and this is not only evolutionism but pure evolutionism....

What concerns us here is that he [Calvin] ascribed to second causes as their proximate account the entire series of modifications by which the primal indigested mass called heaven and earth has passed into the form of the ordered world which we see, including the origination of all forms of life, vegetable and animal alike, inclusive doubtless of the bodily form of man. And this, we say, is a very pure evolutionary scheme.²¹

According to Warfield, Calvin asserts that God used secondary causes—that is, evolution—to bring about “the ordered world which we see” from the “primal indigested mass” of Genesis 1:1, 2. Warfield intends this evolutionary scheme to include both the origins of all life and the physical form of human beings. Essentially, therefore, Warfield understands Calvin to take a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. Although he qualifies himself by stating that “the six days he [Calvin], naturally, understands as six literal days,”²² Warfield clearly portrays Calvin as one who would most certainly have accepted modern evolutionary theories were he alive today.

However, Warfield’s argument is fallacious and dishonest. As John Murray points out, “Warfield’s inferences with respect to Calvin’s doctrine of creation are not supported by the relevant evidence.”²³ Examining what Calvin has to say on the matter, we will show that, in fact, Calvin explicitly understands God as active and busy within the six literal days of creation, and leaves no room for evolutionary thinking. In doing so, we consider three main passages

21 Warfield, 308, 309.

22 Warfield, 299.

23 John Murray, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 17, no. 1 (Nov. 1954): 41.

from Calvin's commentaries that deal specifically with the issue at hand.²⁴

Consider, first, what Calvin has to say when he treats Genesis 1:11, where it says, "Let the earth bring forth grass." In this passage, Calvin remarks:

Hitherto the earth was naked and barren, now the Lord fructifies it by his word. For though it was already destined to bring forth fruit, yet till new virtue proceeded from the mouth of God, it must remain dry and empty. For neither was it naturally fit to produce anything, nor had it a germinating principle from any other source, till the mouth of the Lord was opened. For what David declares concerning the heavens, ought also to be extended to the earth; that it was 'made by the word of the Lord, and was adorned and furnished by the breath of his mouth,' (Ps. 33:6.) Moreover, it did not happen fortuitously, that herbs and trees were created before the sun and moon.... When he says, 'Let the earth bring forth the herb which may produce seed, the tree whose seed is in itself,' he signifies not only that herbs and trees were then created, but that, at the same time, both were endued with the power of propagation, in order that their several species might be perpetuated.²⁵

The passage is plain. Until the third day, the earth was "naked and barren." Without God's direct involvement, the earth would remain in its existing state, "dry and empty." In addition, the earth was not "naturally fit to produce anything," nor had any "germinating principle." It was only when God took direct action in speaking that living things came into being. Furthermore, Calvin implies that unless God had given the living things the power to propagate, these living things which God had just created would have no way of spreading and multiplying. As Murray notes, "[Calvin's] thought is surely to the effect that creative action supervened upon this naked and barren

24 Acknowledgment must be given to Murray's essay for leading me to the bulk of the quotations from Calvin that follow.

25 Calvin, *Genesis*, 82, 83. Gen. 1:11.

material in endowing it with new virtue, germinating capacity, and the power of propagation.”²⁶

From the above passage it is also evident that Calvin considered God to have actually created the herbs and trees on the third day, implying a direct, active role on the part of God throughout the six days of the creation week. This idea is found elsewhere in Calvin’s commentary on Genesis. On Genesis 1:5, Calvin states that “[God] distributed the creation of the world into successive portions, that he might fix our attention.”²⁷ On Genesis 1:20, Calvin remarks: “On the fifth day the birds and fishes are created. The blessing of God is added, that they may of themselves produce offspring.”²⁸ And on Genesis 1:21, when commentating on the phrase, “the waters brought forth,” Calvin does not resort to an evolutionary explanation of how the waters brought great whales and living creatures into being, but takes the direct literal understanding of the passage, stating that “[Moses] proceeds to commend the efficacy of the word, which the waters hear so promptly, that, though lifeless in themselves, they suddenly teem with a living offspring.”²⁹ Calvin explicitly affirms that throughout the creation week, God was busy, actively bringing objects into existence, and creatures to life.

Consider, second, how Calvin discusses the origin of life in his commentary on Genesis 1:24. On this occasion, Calvin is discussing specifically the infusion of life into the creatures:

He [i.e., Moses] descends to the sixth day, on which the animals were created, and then man. ‘Let the earth,’ he says, ‘bring forth living creatures.’ But whence has a dead element life? Therefore, there is in this respect a miracle as great as if God had begun to create out of nothing those things which he commanded to proceed from the earth. And he does not take his material from the earth, because he needed it, but that he might the better combine the separate parts of the world with the universe itself.³⁰

26 Murray, 38.

27 Calvin, *Genesis*, 78. Gen. 1:5.

28 Calvin, *Genesis*, 88. Gen. 1:20.

29 Calvin, *Genesis*, 90. Gen. 1:21.

30 Calvin, *Genesis*, 90. Gen 1:24.

In this passage, Calvin cannot fathom life arising from anything else than from the direct command of God's omnipotent word. He believes that the creation of life is so magnificent that it is a miracle comparable to that of creating "out of nothing." And as has just been observed, he also understands that on the third day the earth was "naked and barren," empty and dry, without any power of germination or propagation. Putting these two thoughts together, it would seem impossible for any life to arise spontaneously from the "indigested mass" of Genesis 1:2. It is hard, therefore, to comprehend how anyone could say that Calvin's doctrine of creation is an evolutionary one. For Calvin, there is no possibility that anything living could ever arise out of the earth without God's direct involvement. As far as Calvin is concerned, an evolutionary account of creation is completely absurd. Indeed, attributing a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 to Calvin is inappropriate and unacceptable, considering Calvin's understanding of the origins of life.

Consider, third, what Calvin says in his commentary on Psalm 33:6. There, Calvin writes, "In saying that the heavens were created by *the word of God*, he [i.e., the inspired writer] greatly magnifies his [i.e., God's] power, because by his nod alone, without any other aid or means, and without much time or labour, he created so noble and magnificent a work."³¹ When one combines this with what Calvin had said in Genesis, that "what David declares concerning the heavens, ought also to be extended to the earth,"³² specifically citing Psalm 33:6, Calvin's position on the matter becomes certain beyond a shadow of a doubt. According to Calvin, not only were the heavens formed by God's direct activity and express command, but also the earth, and everything within it, including living creatures and inanimate things. Moreover, this was done, Calvin asserts, "without any other aid or means," besides God's powerful word, and "without much time or labour." In no way, then, can Calvin's doctrine of creation be understood as evolutionary. Nor is it possible to understand Calvin in any

31 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), vol. 1, 542. Ps. 33:6.

32 Calvin, *Genesis*, 82. Gen. 1:11.

other way than to see that he emphatically held to a literal, six-day creation, where God was busy at work bringing into existence all things according to His perfect will.

Combining these three passages together, Calvin's doctrine of creation becomes clear. For Calvin, God provided all plants and vegetation with a germinating capacity, and with the power of propagation; He gave life to the animals—a miracle as great as creation *ex nihilo*; and He did all this solely by means of the power of His Word, without much time. Calvin's doctrine of creation leaves absolutely no room for evolutionary thinking.

We must conclude, therefore, that Warfield was grossly mistaken when he alleged that “Calvin... very naturally thought along the lines of a theistic evolutionism.”³³ On the contrary, when we consider how Calvin used Scripture to emphasize that God was busy at work during the six days of creation, bringing everything to existence by His powerful hand, we must say that Calvin very naturally believed Genesis 1 and 2 to be literal history. Calvin's writings leave no other possibility. Calvin's doctrine of creation speaks emphatically against any evolutionary interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. Rather, his comments unequivocally support and defend a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. We will continue to see that this is the case throughout Calvin's writings, as we turn next toward Calvin's understanding of divine providence, and later, toward his notion of divine accommodation.

Calvin's Understanding of Divine Providence

In his commentary on Psalm 33, Calvin writes: “the creation of the world leads us by direct consequence to the providence of God.”³⁴ And in the *Institutes*, Calvin states: “...unless we pass on to his providence...we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say; ‘God is Creator.’”³⁵ It makes sense, therefore, and is necessary, after focusing on his doctrine of creation, to turn toward Calvin's understanding of divine providence. In this section, we will see that for Calvin, if we properly understand what God's providence encompasses, it would be

33 Warfield, 310. fn. 36.

34 Calvin, *Psalms*, 542. Ps. 33:3.

35 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.1.

incoherent, and indeed impossible, to accept the modern evolutionary theories for the creation of the universe.

Conveniently, Calvin gives us an exact definition of what he means by “providence”:

By Providence, we mean, not an unconcerned sitting of God in heaven, from which He merely observes the things that are done in the world; but that all-active and all-concerned seatedness on His throne above, by which He governs the world which He Himself hath made. So that God, as viewed in the glass of His Providence, is not only the Maker of all things in a moment, but the perpetual Ruler of all things which He hath created. That Providence, therefore, which we ascribe to God, pertains as much to His operating hands as to His observing eyes. When, therefore, God is said to rule the world by His Providence, we do not merely mean that He maintains and preserves that order of nature which He had originally purposed in Himself, but that He holds and continues a peculiar care of every single creature that He has created. And true and certain is the fact, that as it was the wonderful wisdom of God that originally made the world, and disposed it in its present beautiful order, so, unless the omnipotent power of God, ever present, sustained it thus created and disposed it, it could not continue in its designed order and form one hour.³⁶

In this definition of providence, we see three central features that define what providence is. First, we see that the concept of providence, if rightly understood, requires a God that is ceaselessly active in everything, so that everything that happens is directed by His omnipotent hand. Second, we see that providence excludes the possibility of chance or fate to play any role whatsoever in the phenomena of the world and, consequently, also in the creation week. Third, we see that the very concept of God’s providence reveals that the earth in and of itself is unstable and inclined toward self-destruction and chaos. Examining these three features of Calvin’s definition of providence, we ascertain that what Calvin has to say on providence is entirely in

36 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God and the Secret Providence of God*, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1987), 224.

opposition to the theories of evolution that so-called scientists are espousing today.

Let us begin, then, with the first point: the concept of providence requires a God that is ceaselessly active in everything, so that everything that happens is directed by His omnipotent hand. God is active in everything, governing everything and bringing all events to pass, even as He sits and directs all things from His throne in the heavens. This is that “all-active and all-concerned seatedness [of God] on His throne above”³⁷ of which Calvin speaks. This all-active seatedness of God is the heart of the concept of providence. Calvin defines providence elsewhere as “not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events.”³⁸ The concept of providence entails, therefore, that all things, even the creation of the world, are governed and directed by God’s fatherly hand. Accordingly, in the creation week, God *must* have been actively engaged in bringing all things into being.

Really, what the concept of providence does is give due acknowledgment to the omnipotence and sovereignty of God. Calvin expresses this sentiment in the *Institutes*:

And truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence —not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists imagine, but a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity. Not, indeed, an omnipotence that is only a general principle of confused motion, as if he were to command a river to flow through its once-appointed channels, but one that is directed toward individual and particular motions. For he is deemed omnipotent, not because he can indeed act, yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness, or continues by a general impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation. For when, in The Psalms, it is said that “he does whatever he wills” [Ps. 115:3; cf. Ps. 113(b): 3, Vg.], a certain and deliberate will is meant. For it would be senseless to interpret the words of the prophet after the manner of the philosophers, that

37 Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, 224.

38 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.4.

God is the first agent because he is the beginning and cause of all motion....³⁹

Calvin brings God's omnipotence and providence together in such a way that to deny the providence of God is to deny His omnipotence. God does not govern the world simply by bringing it into existence, and then, as it were, leave the universe to take care of itself while He busies Himself with other work. No. In this excerpt, we see that "a certain and deliberate will" is included in Calvin's understanding of divine providence. Indeed, for Calvin, God is not simply directing the grand scheme of things, but His hand "is directed toward individual and particular motions." According to Calvin, to say otherwise is to deny God His omnipotence.

Fittingly, therefore, in the above quotation we also see Calvin explicitly rejecting the idea that God could be understood to be merely the first agent of all things. Calvin does not even waste time questioning whether or not God was simply the first mover of all things, but takes the even stronger position that it is impossible that God could ever be only the first mover. According to his understanding of God as the omnipotent One, it would be senseless to think that the activity that goes on in this world happens outside of the will and power of God. For Calvin, God must be the one who gives life and breath to all things, and in whom all things have their being (Acts 17:25-28). God must be the one who protects and governs the whole world by His rule. He must be the one who "sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow."⁴⁰ Anything else does injustice to Calvin's understanding of divine providence, and thus also does injustice to the omnipotence of God.

From Calvin's definition of providence we see, secondly, that providence excludes the possibility of chance or fate to play any role whatsoever in the phenomena of the world, and consequently, also in the creation week. This comes as a direct result of the first point, for it is easy to see that if God's omnipotent hand governs and sustains all things, nothing can happen through chance or fate. As Calvin asserts,

³⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.3.

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.1.

“we must know that God’s providence, as it is taught in Scripture, is opposed to fortune and fortuitous happenings.”⁴¹ Indeed, for Calvin, there is no such thing as chance, for providence eliminates chance.

Consider how this aspect of Calvin’s definition of God’s providence relates to the creation of the world. Modern theories of evolution *depend* on chance and luck. Essentially, these “scientific” theories argue that everything that is has developed over billions of years from mere chance and good fortune. The earth is in its present state by being in the right place at the right time. Evolutionary scientists, never minding where place and time themselves came from, argue that accident and chance, coupled with random, fortunate genetic mutations, produced the vast array of animals—including humans—that make up this world. This is not to mention the majestic waterfalls, the glorious sunsets, the awe-inspiring night skies, the sublime mountain ranges, and all the other wondrous features of God’s great work of art. Everything, these theories insist, comes by chance. These theories, therefore, rely upon means, upon a process, which Calvin does not even permit to exist. Calvin’s understanding of divine providence, therefore, does not give modern theories of evolution even the *chance* to get off the ground.

But since Calvin speaks specifically on providence and chance as they relate to the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, let us listen to what Calvin himself says on the matter. In his commentary on Genesis 1:11, Calvin discusses why the trees and plants were created on the third day, while the sun, moon and stars on the fourth. Calvin writes:

Moreover, it did not happen fortuitously, that herbs and trees were created before the sun and moon. We now see, indeed, that the earth is quickened by the sun to cause it to bring forth its fruits; nor was God ignorant of this law of nature, which he has since ordained: but in order that we might learn to refer all things to him, he did not then make use of the sun or moon. He permits us to perceive the efficacy which he infuses into them, so far as he uses their instrumentality; but because we are wont to regard as part of their nature properties

41 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.2.

which they derive elsewhere, it was necessary that the vigour which they now seem to impart to the earth should be manifest before they were created.⁴²

Calvin states that it did not happen by chance that the trees were created before the sun and moon, but that God did so in order to teach us that everything has its being not in the warmth of the sun, but in the providence of God. God intentionally created the trees before the sun, Calvin writes, so that we might better see that all things depend on God, and not on the laws of nature. Indeed, for Calvin, the laws of nature are themselves ordained and upheld by God.

See how foreign and contrary Calvin's position is to the theories of evolution that are perpetuated today! Calvin's creation account includes the trees and plants being created a day before the sun, in order to show that all things derive their existence from God. Modern theories of evolution argue that the sun *had to have existed* billions of years before the trees and plants ever could arise, due to the fact that all things essentially derive their existence from the warmth of the sun. Calvin argues that the laws of nature were ordained by God, and could be abandoned by God at any moment. Modern evolutionary theories argue that there is no God, and that the laws of nature are unchangeable and eternal. To be sure, Calvin's view of providence, especially as it eliminates any possibility of chance or fate, is diametrically opposed to modern theories of evolution. To put it in other words, Calvin's view of providence and modern theories of evolution are antithetical to each other. Calvin's arguments fly in the face of modern evolutionists, and would even baffle them if presented to them today. Nevertheless, Calvin uses Scripture as his authority, and stands on the word of truth to defend a literal six-day creation account. To speculate anything else of Calvin is sheer absurdity.

If there is any necessity to show more clearly Calvin's position on the creation account and the involvement of chance in the creation week, we give one more quotation from Calvin, this one coming from his commentary on Psalm 19:1:

⁴² Calvin, *Genesis*, 82. Gen 1:11.

David shows how it is that the heavens proclaim to us the glory of God, namely, by openly bearing testimony that they have not been put together by chance, but were wonderfully created by the supreme Architect. When we behold the heavens, we cannot but be elevated, by the contemplation of them, to Him who is their great Creator; and the beautiful arrangement and wonderful variety which distinguish the courses and station of the heavenly bodies, together with the beauty and splendor which are manifest in them, cannot but furnish us with an evident proof of his providence. Scripture, indeed, makes known to us the time and manner of the creation; but the heavens themselves, although God should say nothing on the subject, proclaim loudly and distinctly enough that they have been fashioned by his hands: and this of itself abundantly suffices to bear testimony to men of his glory. As soon as we acknowledge God to be the supreme Architect, who has erected the beautiful fabric of the universe, our minds must necessarily be ravished with wonder at his infinite goodness, wisdom and power.⁴³

The beauty of creation, for Calvin, bears witness that it could not have been created by mere chance. Instead, only the supreme Architect could have created, through deliberate work, such a masterpiece. Is there any role at all that chance might be able to play in the creation account? Is there any room for random and fortuitous evolutionary processes to contribute to the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2? For Calvin, the answer is a resounding “NO.” We look at the heavens, Calvin says, and cannot help but see that this is the deliberate work of an unceasingly active, omnipotent God.⁴⁴ Whether we choose to

43 Calvin, *Psalms*, 309. Ps. 19:1.

44 Elsewhere, Calvin writes: “For it is not by chance that each of the stars has had its place assigned to it, nor is it at random that they advance uniformly with so great rapidity, and amidst numerous windings move straight forwards, so that they do not deviate a hairbreadth from the path which God has marked out for them. Thus does their wonderful arrangement show that God is the Author and worker, so that men cannot open their eyes without being constrained to behold the majesty of God in his works” (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*. trans. William Pringle [Edinburgh, Calvin Translation Society, 1843]; reprint [Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1984], vol. 3, 232. Is. 40:26).

acknowledge this or not, however, is a different matter.

Calvin's understanding of divine providence also has another feature. From his definition we see, in the third place, that the concept of God's providence highlights the fact that the universe, in and of itself, is unstable and inclined toward self-destruction, chaos, and collapse. This comes from his definition when he writes that "unless the omnipotent power of God, ever present, sustained it [i.e., the creation] thus created and disposed it, it could not continue in its designed order and form one hour."⁴⁵ Without God's sustaining and upholding hand constantly at work, this creation would degenerate and collapse into chaos. And if God would remove His hand completely, this universe would vanish away. God's providence, consequently, has the function of keeping order and stability in an otherwise chaotic and volatile universe.

Calvin speaks specifically of this function of God's providence as it relates to the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. Commenting on Genesis 1:2, Calvin writes:

We have already heard that before God had perfected the world it was an indigested mass; he [i.e., Moses] now teaches that the power of the Spirit was necessary in order to sustain it. For this doubt might occur to the mind, how such a disorderly heap could stand; seeing that we now behold the world preserved by government, or order. He therefore asserts that this mass, however confused it might be, was rendered stable, for the time, by the secret efficacy of the Spirit....

A few lines later, Calvin continues by comparing the disordered state of the universe as found in Genesis 1:1, 2 with the beautiful creation that we see around us, stating:

But if that chaos [referring to Genesis 1:1, 2] required the secret inspiration of God to prevent its speedy dissolution; how could this [present] order, so fair and distinct, subsist by itself, unless it derived strength elsewhere? Therefore, that Scripture must be fulfilled, 'Send forth thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the

45 Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, 224.

face of the earth,' (Ps. 104:30;) so, on the other hand, as soon as the Lord takes away his Spirit, all things return to their dust and vanish away, (ver. 29).⁴⁶

Calvin asserts that without God's providential hand already at work during the six days of creation, without God's direct involvement in sustaining and upholding His works, all things would have vanished away, and what God had accomplished would have turned to nothing. How far, therefore, does Calvin's understanding of divine providence separate him from and place him in opposition to the modern theories of evolution advocated today even by many self-proclaimed Calvinists! His concept of providence highlights and emphasizes the fact that without a God busy in ceaseless activity, the universe would regress rather than progress, and deteriorate rather than evolve! In this third feature, then, too, we see Calvin's understanding of divine providence butting heads with modern evolutionary theories.

Examining Calvin's understanding of divine providence as a whole, then, what we notice is that his view of providence leaves no room for modern evolutionary theories. Quite the contrary, in fact, is true: Calvin's concept of providence is such that nothing happens by chance, but by God's fatherly hand, and that if left to itself, this world would never evolve into the masterpiece it is, but would fall into chaos and confusion. For Calvin, if we properly understand what God's providence encompasses, it would be illogical, and indeed, impossible, to accept an evolutionary explanation for the existence of the universe. To be succinct, Calvin's understanding of divine providence speaks emphatically and unequivocally against modern evolutionary theories. Calvin's understanding of divine providence, therefore, maintains a strictly literal six-day interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. In the next section, we will see that Calvin consistently upholds this position, even when it might seem that his notion of divine accommodation could open the door to a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2.

46 Calvin, *Genesis*, 73, 74. Gen. 1:2.

Calvin's Notion of Divine Accommodation

Having seen that Calvin's doctrine of creation unequivocally refuses any evolutionary interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2, and that his understanding of divine providence directly opposes an evolutionary explanation for the universe, we move on to examine what Calvin's notion of divine accommodation has to say on the matter. We include an examination of Calvin's teaching concerning divine accommodation within our analysis because in more recent times Calvin's teaching of accommodation has been used to argue that an evolutionary account of creation would have been permissible within Calvin's thought. Indeed, the way in which many scholars interpret Calvin's understanding of creation depends largely on how they understand his teaching of divine accommodation. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to examine thoroughly what Calvin has to say on the matter.

Calvin makes ready use of the concept of divine accommodation throughout his commentaries and his *Institutes*. He writes in his commentaries that God "accommodates himself to our capacity in addressing us,"⁴⁷ and that "God accommodates to our small capacities what he testifies of himself."⁴⁸ Calvin states that God, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, continually accommodates Himself to the finite comprehension of feeble human beings. Indeed, as Ford Lewis Battles notes in his classic essay on Calvin's understanding of divine accommodation, "for Calvin, the understanding of God's accommodation to the limits and needs of the human condition was a central feature of the interpretation of Scripture and of the entire range of his theological work."⁴⁹

So what is divine accommodation? Edward A. Dowey, Jr.,

47 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), vol. 1, 104. 1 Cor. 2:7.

48 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 69. Rom. 1:19.

49 Ford Lewis Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 19.

professor emeritus of the History of Christian Doctrine at Princeton Theological Seminary, defines Calvin's understanding of divine accommodation as follows:

The term accommodation refers to the process by which God reduces or adjusts to human capacities what he wills to reveal of the infinite mysteries of his being, which by their very nature are beyond the powers of the mind of man to grasp.... The term includes within its scope all the noetic aspects of the Creator-creature relation. It points to a gap between God and man that is bridged only by God 'in some way descending' to meet the limitations of human nature, never by man himself overcoming them.⁵⁰

Simply put, divine accommodation is God accommodating Himself, or adjusting Himself, or condescending, to human intellectual capacities, by speaking and acting in such a way that we—feeble men and women—may understand Him.

Calvin illustrates what he means by “accommodation” when he handles those passages that speak of God repenting of His decisions (e.g., Jonah 3:10; Jeremiah 18:8, 10; Amos 7:3):

What, therefore, does the word ‘repentance’ mean? Surely its meaning is like that of all other modes of speaking that describe God for us in human terms. For because our weakness does not attain to his exalted state, the description of him that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it. Now the mode of accommodation is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us. Although he is beyond all disturbance of mind, yet he testifies that he is angry toward sinners. Therefore whenever we hear that God is angered, we ought not to imagine any emotion in him, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience; because God, whenever he is exercising judgment, exhibits the appearance of one kindled and angered. So we ought not to understand anything else under the word “repentance”

50 Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1952; expanded edition, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 4, 5.

than change of action, because men are wont by changing their action to testify that they are displeased with themselves.⁵¹

When the unsearchable, inscrutable God (Job 11:7-9; Rom. 11:33, 34) speaks, therefore, the language He uses must be accommodated to our finite and puny level of understanding. We are not able to comprehend God, nor are we able to understand God as He understands Himself. And the only way we can know God is if He descends in some way from His loftiness, to our level; only in this way is it possible to begin to understand who God is.

Divine accommodation is, therefore, according to Calvin, God's act of stooping down far beneath His loftiness in order to reveal Himself to His people, to instruct them, and to save them, all in a manner in which they can begin to understand.⁵²

As has already been evidenced from some of the quotations in the introductory paragraphs, some scholars want to use Calvin's concept of divine accommodation to allow for a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. McGrath is one who insists that Calvin's use of divine accommodation paves the way for a harmony between the biblical account of creation and theories of evolution, because it allows one to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 as figurative rather than literal. We give again the quotation from McGrath:

[For Calvin, the] emancipation of scientific observation and theory from crudely literalist interpretations of scripture took place...in the insistence upon the accommodated character of biblical language.... The biblical stories of the creation and Fall (Genesis 1-3) are ac-

51 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.13.

52 Elsewhere in his commentaries, Calvin writes: "God cannot be comprehended by us, unless as far as he accommodates himself to our standard. ... God is incomprehensible in himself, nor did he appear to his Prophet as he really is (since not angels even bear the immense magnitude of his glory, much less a mortal man), but he knew how far it was expedient to discover himself. ..." (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), vol. 1, 304. Ez. 9:3.

commodated to the abilities and horizons of a relatively simple and unsophisticated people; they are not intended to be taken as literal representations of reality.⁵³

Elsewhere, McGrath declares that, for Calvin, “the phrase ‘six days of creation’ does not designate six periods of twenty-four hours, but is simply an accommodation to human ways of thinking to designate an extended period of time.”⁵⁴ McGrath reinterprets Genesis 1 and 2 as though God was not giving a factual, historical account of creation to Moses, but that God was giving them a story of sorts, so they could have at least some sort of account of how the world came into existence; this was an account that was accommodated to their primitive level of thinking and scientific knowledge. What McGrath really does is try to use accommodation in Calvin’s writing to open the door to a non-literal interpretation of the creation account.

As we have seen already as well, from the introduction, Young attempts to do the same thing. He writes:

...it seems to me that the appropriate time to consider invoking the principle [of accommodation] is where Scripture includes a statement about the natural world that is clearly contrary to firmly established and empirically verified knowledge.... Many Christians have inferred from the biblical text that the Earth is only a few thousand years old. However, it has been firmly established by numerous lines of empirical evidence that the Earth is vastly older than a few thousands of years. If the Bible really seems to suggest that the Earth is young, then it may be that Scripture has merely accommodated itself to that belief. In my judgment, judicious application of Calvin’s principle of accommodation would go a long way toward solving some of the problems concerning the relation of science to the Bible. Accommodation of the type suggested should in no way undermine the doctrine of creation or any other basic Christian doctrine, nor should it be seen as incompatible with a divinely inspired, infallible Bible.⁵⁵

53 McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 255-257.

54 Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 11.

55 Young, 230.

Young argues that if only we would extend the concept of divine accommodation as Calvin understood it, and apply it to Genesis 1 and 2, many of the conflicts between what Scripture says and what science teaches would be remedied.

Really, what both Young and McGrath want is to interpret the concept of accommodation as Calvin uses it in order to make Genesis 1 and 2 accommodate to modern evolutionary theories. They want to elevate man's speculation over and above the clear testimony of Scripture, and use Calvin as a prop.

However, understanding and using the concept of accommodation as these men desire *does* undermine the doctrine of creation, *does* undermine so many basic Christian doctrines, and *does* destroy the authoritative, inspired Word of God. Such a reading makes God's Word nothing more than a myth or fable! This goes directly against Calvin's high view of the infallible, inerrant, divinely inspired Word of God. It goes against the core of Calvin's character—Calvin's love, reverence, and respect for Holy Writ as *the word of God*. It goes against key doctrines that were fundamental to Calvin, such as the providence of God. And, needless to say, it goes against how Calvin himself clearly read and understood Genesis 1 and 2.

Furthermore, the desire to use accommodation in this respect fails to agree with Calvin's own use of the concept in dealing with the creation account. Both McGrath's and Young's desire to use the concept of divine accommodation to interpret the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 as simply language "accommodated to the unsophisticated, uneducated minds of the people of Israel" is exactly contrary to Calvin's use of accommodation when dealing with the same passages! In fact, both in his commentaries and in his *Institutes*, Calvin states that when God used six literal 24-hour days to bring the creation of the universe to completion, He was doing so for the very reason of accommodating to the intellectual capacities of the people! For Calvin, God *was* accommodating to His people when He gave the creation account, but He was doing so only by virtue of the fact that He was accommodating *his very act of creating* to the benefit of His people!

Listen to how Calvin uses the concept of accommodation with regard to the creation account:

Indeed, as I pointed out a little before, God himself has shown by the order of Creation that he created all things for man's sake. For it is not without significance that he divided the making of the universe into six days [Gen 1:31], even though it would have been no more difficult for him to have completed in one moment the whole work together in all its details than to arrive at its completion gradually by a progression of this sort. But he willed to commend his providence and fatherly solicitude toward us in that, before he fashioned man, he prepared everything he foresaw would be useful and salutary for him.¹

Here, Calvin states that God used six literal days for creation *for the very sake of* showing His people that He created everything for them, and for exhibiting His fatherly love and concern for His people. As Calvin would have it, men like McGrath and Young have it entirely backwards! It is not as though God accommodated Himself to the pre-existing beliefs of the people of Israel, or to their level of understanding, when giving the account of creation. God was not giving a well-thought-out fable in order to satisfy the primitive minds of the people. Exactly the opposite is true: God accommodated His *act* of creation to demonstrate to His people how much He loves and cares for them. God accommodated not the *account* of creation, but the *very execution* of creation, Calvin states. And He did so, Calvin asserts, so that when Moses wrote down the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, it would be nothing but factual history demonstrating God's love for His people. Intentionally making first the land and the seas, then the trees, then the sun, moon, and stars, then the animals, and finally man, Calvin says, God wanted to demonstrate that He was creating all things for man's sake, having man's bodily frailty in mind. The only thing left to consider, for Calvin, is how wonderful, gracious, and loving our God is that He should go so far as to accommodate even the creation of the universe, by using six days, to our finite capacities, so that we would see more clearly that God made the universe for our sake.

What is even more striking, however, in view of the assertions made by McGrath and Young, is to see that Calvin uses his notion of divine accommodation in order to *emphasize* a literal six-day creation.

56 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.22.

For Calvin, divine accommodation does not detract from the factual history of the creation account, but only highlights the actuality of a literal six-day creation. As Jon Balsarak notes,

[Calvin] maintains that God had the ability to choose to create in a variety of different ways (admittedly he only mentions the one, but his language suggests that numerous options were open to him) and that the course of action he chose when creating was one which was accommodated to human capacity.... [I]t can be seen that accommodation is linked to Calvin's thinking on the created order in a way which suggests that God's ordaining of that order was influenced by his desire to accommodate himself to his people's frailties.²

In the quotation from Calvin above, it is clear: Calvin uses the notion of divine accommodation to defend and explain a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2.

But it is not as if Calvin spoke on the subject of divine accommodation as it relates to creation only this one time. Calvin affirms similar sentiments in numerous other places as well. A few quotations will illustrate this fact. In the *Institutes*, Calvin writes:

With the same intent Moses relates that God's work was completed not in a moment but in six days [Gen. 2:2]. For by this circumstance we are drawn away from all fictions to the one God who distributed his work into six days that we might not find it irksome to occupy our whole life in contemplating it.... [w]e ought in the very order of things diligently to contemplate God's fatherly love toward mankind, in that he did not create Adam until he had lavished upon the universe all manner of good things.³

In his commentary on Acts 12:10, he remarks:

So he created the world in six days, (Genesis 1.) not because he had any need of space or time, but that he might the better stay us in the

57 Jon Balsarak, *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 152.

58 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.2.

meditating upon his works, (Ex. 20:11,) for he applieth the manner of doing unto our capacity, and unto the increase of faith.⁴

In his commentary on Genesis 1:5, he observes:

...it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction. Let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men. We slightly pass over the infinite glory of God, which here shines forth; whence arises this but from our excessive dullness in considering his greatness? In the meantime, the vanity of our minds carries us away elsewhere. For the correction of this fault, God applied the most suitable remedy when he distributed the creation of the world into successive portions, that he might fix our attention, and compel us, as if he had laid his hand upon us, to pause and to reflect.⁵

And finally, in his commentary on Genesis 1:26, he contends that “the creation of the world was distributed over six days, for our sake, to the end that our minds might the more easily be retained in the meditation of God’s works.”⁶

How does Calvin’s notion of divine accommodation speak to the account of creation as found in Genesis 1 and 2? Can Calvin be any clearer on the matter? The concept of divine accommodation is used in Calvin’s thought to defend and explain a literal six-day creation account, to the exclusion of any possibility for interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 as myth adapted to the capacities of the people. Calvin teaches that six days were intentionally used by God for the sake of His people. As a result, Calvin argues against any sort of evolutionary interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. That God would use six days to create,

59 John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Christopher Fetherstone, ed. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), vol. 1, 484. Acts 12:10.

60 Calvin, *Genesis*, 78. Gen. 1:5.

61 Calvin, *Genesis*, 92. Gen. 1:26.

Calvin asserts, only magnifies His love and care for His people, and thus demands a greater fear and awe for Him within us, and a greater respect and appreciation of His creation.

Conclusion

Since the birth of the great reformer 500 years ago, many things have certainly changed, especially with regard to scientific study and theorizing. Indeed, Calvin never had to concern himself with the theories of evolution that modern scientists are expounding today. But from the excerpts of Calvin's writings that we have considered in this essay, it must be concluded that Calvin would certainly have rejected as heretical and repulsive the theories of evolution that we as Reformed believers are faced with today. His doctrine of creation allows nothing but a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. His understanding of divine providence emphasizes that everything that occurs is governed by God's fatherly hand, so that nothing can happen by chance or accident. And his notion of divine accommodation can be understood only as maintaining and defending the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 as historical fact.

To let Calvin speak one last time, consider Calvin's own words with regard to the creation account:

“[Moses] does not transmit to memory things before unheard of, but for the first time consigns to writing facts which the fathers had delivered as from hand to hand, through a long succession of years, to their children. Can we conceive that man was so placed in the earth as to be ignorant of his own origin, and of the origin of those things which he enjoyed? No sane person doubts that Adam was well-instructed respecting them all.”⁷

There can be no question on the matter: Calvin unmistakably held to a literal understanding of the creation account. And his doctrine of creation, his understanding of divine providence, and his notion of divine accommodation speak unequivocally and explicitly against the modern theories of evolution.

62 Calvin, *Genesis*, 58. Argument.

For those of us who celebrated in this year the birth of a man greatly used by God, a man whom we as Reformed believers are indebted to and thankful for, there is something of great significance to learn from this essay—something even greater than simply that Calvin maintained and stressed a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. What we must see through this entire discussion is the *consequence* of adhering to either the Word of God, or the philosophies of mankind. If we with Calvin hold in high regard the almighty and everywhere present power of God, namely, His providence; if we with Calvin hold the Scriptures to be the inspired, infallible Word of God; if we with Calvin maintain that God is a caring and loving Father, who does all things for our sake, and for our benefit as His dear covenant children, then we with Calvin must steadfastly believe and maintain Genesis 1 and 2 to be historical fact. A literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 is the logical consequence of believing in these doctrines.

Likewise, there are logical consequences if we, contrary to Calvin, believe and maintain the modern theories of evolution. If we uphold modern evolutionary theories as accurate, then we must, to be logically consistent, throw away the omnipotence and providence of God; then we must read the Bible with an eye of distrust and doubt, even cynicism; and then we must view God, if there is a God, as a God who has our well-being as the least of His concerns, and who certainly does not care to maintain any sort of covenant relationship with those who call themselves “His people.” The ruin of our faith, and the annihilation of God, are the logical consequences of believing in the theory of evolution.

In the time in which we live, we are besieged on every side by the philosophies of the world, and the intelligentsia of the universities, who make a mockery of the Word of God, and who rob God of the glory due unto His name. But in this essay, and through Calvin’s writings, we see that the doctrine of creation as put forth in Scripture, the providence of God, and God’s relationship of friendship with His people require that Genesis 1 and 2 be established as historical fact in the hearts and minds of God’s people. Let this essay, then, serve as an encouragement to redouble our faith in the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2, seeing that we do not rely upon science or philosophy to tell

us that God made the heavens and earth, but we understand this by faith (Heb. 11:3). ●

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The Southern Presbyterian Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church

Eugene Case

Though Presbyterianism in the Southern United States has a history reaching back to the earliest days of European settlement in North America,¹ what would become known, popularly, as the *Southern Presbyterian Church*—officially, at first, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, and then, post-bellum, the Presbyterian Church in the United States—did not come into existence until almost a year after South Carolina had seceded from the Union, and nearly eight months after the commencement of hostilities in what would become the War to Prevent Southern Independence. Other denominations had divided along sectional lines over the question of slavery. Some, in fact, had been split into northern and southern bodies for a considerable period of time. The Old School Presbyterian Church, however, had managed to stay united, despite strong opinions on both sides of the slavery issue. Indeed, there was optimism in some quarters that not even the onset of war would disrupt the united church. That optimism faded rather quickly, though, in the charged atmosphere that characterized the meetings of the Old School General Assembly in Philadelphia, in May 1861.

On the third day of the meetings, Dr. Gardiner Spring, a well-known minister of a prominent church in New York City, proposed that a committee be appointed with a view to the possibility of some expression, on the part of the Assembly, of devotion to the Union and loyalty to the government in Washington. That motion was tabled; but two days later, Dr. Spring brought forth a second resolution—one that would acknowledge the Assembly's loyalty to the federal government. The committee that was handed the resolution recommended against

1 Cf. "Survey of Southern Presbyterian History," part one, PRTJ, vol. 42. November 2008.

its adoption, on the grounds that it touched upon matters expressly prohibited to synods and councils by the Confession of Faith. The Assembly, however, over-rode this recommendation, and adopted language that stated that it was the obligation of the church to promote and perpetuate the integrity of the United States, “and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal government in the exercise of all its functions.” A protest of this action, drawn up by Dr. Charles Hodge of Princeton, maintained that “The General Assembly in thus deciding a political question, and in making that decision practically a condition of Church membership, has, in our judgment, violated the Constitution of the Church, and usurped the prerogative of its Divine Master.”²

Though it is unlikely that a united church could have been maintained, given the circumstances, it was, nevertheless, the case, that the Spring Resolutions facilitated the division and ensured that there would be no reunion of Old School Presbyterians after the South had been subjugated to the centralized government that resulted from the Northern victory in the war. Following the May Assembly actions, from a preliminary conference held in Atlanta, in August of 1861, a call was issued to the Southern Presbyteries of the Old School Assembly to meet at the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia, in December of that year, for the purpose of organizing a separate ecclesiastical body. Not surprisingly, at that meeting, the Spring Resolutions were still much on the minds of the Southern men. For example, in his sermon opening the Assembly, Dr. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, with obvious reference to the actions of the Philadelphia Assembly, declared:

But a little while since, it was attempted in the most august court of our Church to place the crown of our Lord upon the head of Caesar—to bind that body, which is Christ’s fulness, to the chariot in which that Caesar rides. The intervening months have sufficiently discovered the character of that State, under whose yoke this Church was summoned to bow her neck in meek obedience.... And now this Parliament of

2 Thompson, E.T., *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. I (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1973), pp. 564-564.

the Lord's freemen solemnly declares that, by the terms of her great charter, none but Jesus may be the King in Zion.³

The remedy for this usurpation of the crown rights of King Jesus was more fully dealt with in the "Address to All Churches of Christ," which the Augusta Assembly adopted. In this Address, authored, principally, by James Henley Thornwell, what would come to be known as the doctrine of "The Spirituality of the Church" was set forth:

The provinces of Church and State are perfectly distinct, and the one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other. The State is a natural institute, founded in the constitution of man as moral and social, and designed to realize the idea of justice. It is the society of rights. The Church is a supernatural institute, founded in the facts of redemption, and is designed to realize the idea of grace. It is the society of the redeemed. The State aims at social order; the Church at spiritual holiness. The State looks to the visible and outward; the Church is concerned for the invisible and inward. The badge of the State's authority is the sword, by which it becomes a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well. The badge of the Church's authority is the keys, by which it opens and shuts the kingdom of Heaven, according as men are believing or impenitent. The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force. The Constitution of the Church is a Divine revelation; the Constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are as planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world as the collision of different spheres in the world of matter.⁴

3 Johnson, Thomas Cary, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1906), p. 261.

4 Adger, John B., and Girardeau, John L., Editors, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D., Volume IV—Ecclesiastical* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1873), p. 449.

This view of the Church—and particularly of the relationship of the Church to the State—is sometimes also referred to as the “non-secular,” or even the “non-political” view of the mission of the church.

Now, as pertains to Southern Presbyterianism—and specifically to Southern Presbyterianism in the middle years of the nineteenth century—the assertion is sometimes made that the single purpose of the promotion of this idea of the non-secular, non-political, spiritual nature of the church was the desire of Southern Presbyterians of the post-war era to avoid having to address certain issues arising out of the defeat and subjugation of the Southern Confederacy. Jack Maddex, for example, in an article in the *Journal of Presbyterian History*, contended that “confederate Presbyterians knew nothing of a rigidly ‘non-secular church.’” “It was,” he maintained, “the overthrow of the Confederacy and slavery which turned Southern Presbyterians to believe in a wholly ‘non-secular’ church.”⁵ This, of course, is utter nonsense, as is amply demonstrated in the aforementioned “Address to All Churches of Christ.”

Admittedly, the Southern Church, from time to time, gave evidence of inconsistency in adhering to this principle. Even Dr. Thornwell, during the first assembly, supported a memorial addressed to the Congress of the Confederate States asking for an amendment to the Confederate Constitution that would have given explicit recognition to the Christian religion. After being prevailed upon by other members of the assembly, however, he withdrew the overture.⁶ Moreover, following the war, General Assemblies of the Southern Church explicitly repudiated actions taken during the conflict that had touched upon political matters. In 1866, a report of the Committee

5 Maddex, Jack, “From Theocracy to Spirituality: The Southern Presbyterian Reversal on Church and State,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54, 1976, pp. 446, 447.

6 Palmer, Benjamin Morgan, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D.* (Richmond, Virginia: Whittet and Shepperson, 1875), p. 507. Cf. also, *A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, Virginia, 1923), p. 898.

on Foreign Correspondence was adopted, which had the following language:

The old conflict for the spirituality and independence of the Church is, to the amazement of many, renewed in our day and upon our own continent. The battle fought generations ago by the Melvilles, Gillespies and Hendersons, of Scotland, is re-opened with singular violence, and the old banner is again floating over us with its historic inscription, "For Christ's Covenant and Crown." Upon no one subject is the mind of this Assembly more clearly ascertained, upon no one doctrine is there a more solid or perfect agreement amongst those whom this Assembly represents, than the non-secular and non-political character of the Church of Jesus Christ. Whatever ambiguous or indiscreet expressions may have been extorted, under the pressure of extraordinary excitement, from individuals amongst us, the Assembly of this Church deliberately reaffirms the testimony given in the solemn Address to the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the Earth, issued in 1861... (cf. reference cited above).⁷

In 1870, the Assembly directed the Committee of Publication to "publish, in tract form, the public official utterances of our Assemblies in relation to the spirituality and independence of the Church"; and, in 1875, a committee was appointed to review the testimonies of the Assembly as to the non-political character of the church, "to the end that no vestige of anything inconsistent with the clearly defined position of our General Assemblies be left to impair the testimony of our Church upon this vital point," it being recognized that "certain expressions have been in advertently admitted into some of the papers on our records which, as it is alleged, are not consistent with the well-considered and formal views aforesaid...."⁸

The same period saw large accessions to the Southern Assembly from the states of Kentucky and Missouri. Most of the churches and

7 Alexander, W.A., *A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1911), pp. 519-520.

8 Alexander, p. 521.

ministers of those synods had remained in the Old School Northern Church during the war. Among these, however, were a number of men who stoutly resisted the continuing pattern of political deliverances that emanated from the Northern Assembly. On account of this resistance, some were deprived of their pulpits and others were denied the right to sit in the church courts. The most egregious example of this involved Dr. Samuel B. McPheeters, pastor of the Pine Street Church in St. Louis, who, despite the fact he had subscribed an oath of allegiance to both the state and federal governments, had taken a vow to make no expression whatsoever concerning the then-current political situation, and enjoyed the approbation of a large majority of his congregation, was put out of his pulpit by a meeting of the local presbytery, which was composed only of those who were vocal supporters of the Lincoln government, all others, constituting the majority of the presbytery, having been excluded from the gathering by order of the military authorities.⁹

There was one man, however—a minister of the Synod of Kentucky—who was anything but silent in his disdain and contempt for those who would make use of the church to promote a political agenda. That man was Dr. Stuart Robinson, who, at the outset of the war, was pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Already in August 1861, Dr. Robinson had authored a resolution, which was adopted by Louisville Presbytery, repudiating the action of the previous Old School Assembly in adopting the Spring Resolutions as a usurpation of power and a flagrant apostasy from the non-secular, non-political idea of the church. In the inaugural issue of his paper, the *True Presbyterian*, he asserted that ministers “have no right to teach directly in their pulpit utterances nor to edge in political theories. Their hearers have a right to expect that in the place of divine worship they will have rest from the agitation without, and that coming to be instructed in spiritual things, no one of them

9 The details of this infamous episode, as well as of other events surrounding the departure of the Kentucky and Missouri Synods from the Old School Northern Church to join the Southern Assembly, are set out in chapter eight of the second volume of E.T. Thompson’s *Presbyterians in the South*.

will be wounded by reason of his political opinions. This is true of prayers in the pulpit as well as of discourses.”¹⁰ Nor was Dr. Robinson a ‘Johnny-come-lately’ to this view. Rather, it was a position he had fervently maintained in the years prior to the secession of the Southern States and the division of the Old School Assembly into Northern and Southern factions.

What is more, Dr. Robinson advanced his views, not simply in reaction to current events, but on the basis of a well thought-out consideration of the place of the church in the scheme of redemption—a consideration set forth in the significant title of a book on the subject, published in 1858: *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof*. The most important word in that title is the word “essential”; and upon that word hangs a view of the church that stands athwart, not only the usurpations that Robinson and others stood against, but also the modern tendency, on the one hand, to de-emphasize the importance of the church, and, in particular, the visible church, and, on the other hand, to co-opt the church in the interest of the furtherance of various social and political causes.

The high view of the church set forth by Robinson was grounded in chapter twenty-five of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and, particularly, in sections two and three of that chapter:

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

Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.

10 Quoted in the aforementioned second volume of Thompson’s *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 2, p. 159.

In his book, Robinson sought to set forth “an earnest inculcation of the truth concerning the Church of God” in order to address “the increased activity and zeal of the advocates of an anti-evangelical Churchism on the one hand, and the prevalence of an anti-ecclesiastical evangelicalism on the other.”¹¹ Taking as his point of departure the idea that in the Calvinistic system of theology, “the eternal purpose of God is, ideally, the great central truth,” Robinson asserted:

All that has transpired under the reign of grace and under the administration of Providence, since the world began, is conceived of as simply the gradual manifestation in time of the purpose formed from eternity. The revelation which God has made of himself in his word is but the record of the execution of his Eternal Decree, and the publication to the world in time of the proceedings had in the counsels of eternity. The revelation of Himself experimentally to the souls of his people is but the manifestation of the love wherewith he loved them before the world began. Every syllable of truth revealed in the Scriptures is conceived of as having its significance and its importance determined by its relation to the purpose previously existing in the Divine Mind; so that the doctrine of the Decree and Predestination of God is not so much a doctrine of Calvinism—one distinct truth in a system of truth—as a mode of conceiving and setting forth all the doctrines which make up revealed theology....

... taking this theory of Calvin as correct, a sure and reliable central point will be found for the doctrine of the Church, likewise, in the eternal purpose of God.... It is set forth as a distinguishing feature of the purpose of redemption, that it is to save not merely myriads of men as *individual men*, but myriads of sinners, as composing a Mediatorial body, of which the Mediator shall be the head; a Mediatorial Kingdom, whose government shall be upon His shoulder forever; a Church, the Lamb’s Bride, of which He shall be the Husband; a bride whose beautiful portrait was graven upon the palms of His hands, and whose walls were continually before Him, when in the counsels of eternity He undertook her redemption.

The mission of Messiah, undertaken in the covenant of eternity,

11 Robinson, Stuart, *The Church of God* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858). Reprinted by Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press (Greenville, South Carolina, 1995), p. 11.

was not merely that of a teaching Prophet and an atoning Priest, but of a ruling King as well. His work was not to enunciate simply a doctrine concerning God and man's relations to God, as some Socrates, for the founding of a school; nor even merely to atone for sinners as a ministering priest at the altar: it was, as the result of all, and the reward of all, to found a *community*, to organize a *government*, and administer therein as a perpetual *king*.¹²

Robinson contended that there is no more room for human innovation in regard to the order and ordinances of the church than there is in respect of the church's doctrinal creed. He considered "the tendency of our times to underrate the importance of the doctrine of Christ as a King and the great system of truths that belong to it, in comparison to the doctrine of Christ as a Priest and the great system of truths that belong to it, as wholly arbitrary and out of harmony with the spirit of the revealed word."¹³ He also insisted that:

as the affairs of the spiritual kingdom of Christ are of such a nature as to preclude any human devices in the way of means and instrumentalities for administration, so also the divinely appointed agencies for the administration of these affairs preclude the idea of the use of these agencies and the power accompanying them for any other purposes than the one great purpose of the kingdom itself...the evangelization of the world, and the calling and gathering out of it the elect of God. Hence, the too common conception of the Church as power to be used directly for the promotion of mere humanly devised reforms, however desirable in themselves considered, and important to men, as men and citizens, to effect such reforms, or the conception, of the ordinance of the word preached as an instrumentality to rectify wrong public opinion, wrong moral views of social and civil affairs; or the conception of the courts of the Church as agencies through which to reach directly and reform civil evils and to arraign the State on national wrong-doing, is inconsistent with the fundamental nature of the Church itself....¹⁴

12 Robinson, pp. 37-39.

13 Robinson, p. 122.

14 Robinson, p. 123.

On the basis of this idea of the church, Robinson maintained “that a Calvinist theology cannot long retain its integrity and purity save in connection with a Calvinistic ecclesiology.” There is, he asserted, an “intimate connection between a wrong theology and wrong views of the Church.”¹⁵ It is, in the light of church history, a conclusion with which it is difficult to argue.

In addition to *The Church of God*, Robinson’s views were set forth in a number of discourses and articles.

One of the most entertaining of these, published in his paper, *The True Presbyterian*, was entitled “The Fast Day, Concerning Extraordinary Devotional Impulses of the Present Civil Administration.” Citing the provision of the Directory for Worship, which stated that “if at any time the civil power should think it proper to appoint a fast, or a thanksgiving, it is the duty of the ministers and people of our communion, as we live under a Christian Government, to pay due respect of the same,” Robinson allowed as how a “proper respect” for the appointment of such days could very well be to pass them by in silence. Further, inasmuch as the Directory specifically stated that “such appointments are ‘scriptural and rational,’ only ‘as the extraordinary dispensations of Divine Providence may direct,’ he admitted that he had never ‘felt able, on any occasion of a thanksgiving or fast appointed at Washington, to show distinctly any thing so extraordinary in the providence which is made the ground of appointment as to call for such special service.’” Not that Robinson did not believe that there might not be reason for thanksgiving to God. Indeed, he stated, “We have every day abundant reason for thanksgiving. It is a reason for profound gratitude that things are no worse; that the recklessness, the follies, the faithlessness, the robberies that characterize the public service, have not brought down wrath in the shape of utter ruin upon us; that the fanaticism of the people that has led to the entrusting of their interests into the incapacity of a self-seeking, sycophantic, ranting and canting tenth-rate-ism, has not already been visited with all the terrible penalties which God has ordained for such national folly—these, and thousand other causes of gratitude occur every day. But

15 Robinson, p. 40.

does it follow, therefore, that the President should call upon the people to make every day a special thanksgiving day?" Besides which, he wrote, "Nothing tends more directly to the subversion of all reverence in the popular mind for the sublime doctrine of Providence, than these continual appeals to their faith in it by worldly and irreligious men, for the forwarding of mere worldly ends. Nothing can more directly subvert the Christian theory of prayer, than these perpetual calls for prayer by men who themselves have no true conception of Christian prayer, and who, if they have any faith in prayer at all beyond its effects upon the feelings of the suppliant, regard it as a mere machinery whereby selfishness may import certain favours from heaven."¹⁶

Perhaps the most significant of Robinson's dissertations on this subject, however, was entitled, "Relations of the Temporal and Spiritual Powers Historically Considered. The Scoto-American Theory,"¹⁷ which appeared as an appendix to his book *Discourses of Redemption*. As the title indicates, this is a survey of the history of the relationship between church and state, not just on the continent of North America, but going back to ancient times; and it was Robinson's contention that such a review established three facts. In the first place, he maintained "that the conception of a use of religion for state purposes is Pagan in its origin, and, therefore, impossible, in any form of it, to be actualized under Christianity." Second, he insisted "that the union of the Church with the state, whether as subject to, superior to, or co-ordinate with, the state is due in all cases to the usurpations of the civil, rather than the ecclesiastical power." Finally, he asserted "that the troubles and agitations on the whole subject cannot be removed save by a full recognition, both by Church and state, of the doctrine of Jesus, 'My Kingdom is not of this world.'"¹⁸

Nor was Robinson having any of the idea that the Jewish nation of the Mosaic economy was evidence in contradiction of this.

16 Reproduced in *A Kingdom Not of This World*, Graham, Preston D. Jr. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), pp. 246-249.

17 Robinson, Stuart, *Discourses of Redemption*, Fourth American Edition (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1866), pp. 474-488.

18 Robinson, p. 476.

Much as has been said of the mingling of civil and ecclesiastical in the Mosaic constitution, it is a fact that in that constitution only of all the ancient governmental constitutions was the distinction between the civil and the ecclesiastical powers carefully distinguished, as Gillespie, of the Westminster Assembly, has abundantly shown.

The idea of a blending of the two powers, secular and spiritual, is purely a Paganism in its origin. Only in the Jewish nation, of all the nations of antiquity, is to be found any exception to the general practice.¹⁹

Even Calvin comes in for criticism on account of what Robinson perceived as inconsistency.

Calvin's ideal of Church necessarily flowed from his theology; and, far more assiduously than either Luther or Zuingli, he laboured to establish the Church as a perfect spiritual government. But while holding with Luther's first ideal that the Church and State are two distinct powers, he held also with Zuingli that the State may suppress heresy by force. While claiming that the Church is a complete autonomy under her divinely appointed rulers, yet like Zuingli he supposes that the "little council" of state may be assumed to represent the people and by advice of the clergy appoint her ruling elders. Bearing in mind that Calvin, being educated a lawyer, was imbued with the ideas of the Justinian code, then still in the ascendant as the source of all law; it is not surprising that Calvin, the lawyer, should have failed in organizing a government according to the ideal of his gospel theology. In so far as Calvin failed it was as a lawyer, and in spite of his theology.²⁰

Robinson argued that the Scottish "of all the National Churches of the reformation came nearest to realizing the true Protestant ideal of an independent Church." For various reasons, however, the Scottish church did not fully reach the goal.

The sum of the whole matter as gathered from the reformation history

¹⁹ Robinson, p. 477.

²⁰ Robinson, pp. 479-480.

is, that while the true theory of the relation of the Church as independent of the State was conceived of generally, and in the Scotch Church fought for during a century, yet there was a general failure to actualize the theory for three (sic) reasons—1st That the reformation was not only a spiritual but a political revolution. The chief aim of the civil governments was to emancipate themselves from the Papal yoke, under the ecclesiastical constitutions of Constantine and Justinian. 2nd Whatever ideas the Church might have, being compelled to take shelter under the civil power against the legions at the command of the Pope, they were not permitted to develop them. 3rd In any attempt to develop actually the Church, as an independent spiritual government—a “kingdom not of this world”—the jealousy of the civil powers, on whom the Church was dependent for protection, suppressed the effort. 4th The current notion among the civilians of that era was that of the Theodosian and Justinian code—the whitewashed Pagan theory—of the right of the state to employ religion as one of its governing powers.²¹

With the settlement of the new world the situation did not change much, at first. New England Puritans established a system that was decidedly Erastian in nature. On the premise that “morality is essential to liberty and good government, and religion essential to morality,” the constitution of Massachusetts provided that “the state should provide for the temporal support and propagation of religion.”²² Such prominent men as Daniel Webster maintained “that the preservation of Christianity is one of the main ends of all government.”²³ Indeed, jurist and Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story (a Massachusetts native who served on the Court from 1811-1845) declared that “the right of a society or government to interfere in matters of religion will hardly be contested by any persons who believe that piety, religion, and morality are intimately connected with the well-being of the state, and

21 Robinson, pp. 481-482. (The addition of a fourth point after having previously stated that there would be three is apparently an editorial oversight.)

22 Robinson suggested that while the premise was true enough, the true inference is, “therefore the state should keep its sooty fingers off religion.”

23 Quoted by Robinson (p. 485) from his speech on the Girard Will Case.

indispensable to the administration of civil justice.” “It is impossible,” Story wrote, “for those who believe in the truth of Christianity, as a divine revelation, to doubt that it is the especial duty of government to foster and encourage it among all the citizens and subjects.”²⁴

Robinson’s response to this was to write that if this declaration was true, “it is difficult to see for what end Jesus Christ set up a distinct spiritual government; or how the Apostles could declare the Church of the Living God ‘to be the pillar and ground of the truth.’ If this is true, then, obviously, the conception of Hegel and Strauss, that the Church is simply ‘a crutch of the state,’ for the purpose of preserving Christianity, is the true one!”²⁵

Initially, established churches were also the rule in the middle and southern colonies. About the time of the American War for Independence, however, dissenters in the various colonies began to assert themselves; and nowhere was this anti-establishment sentiment more pronounced than in Virginia and among Virginia Presbyterians. In 1776, the legislature of Virginia, meeting for the first time under the state’s new constitution (which included a bill of rights enshrining the principle of the freedom of religious expression), was showered with numerous petitions dealing with the subject. Among these was one from the Hanover Presbytery, which frankly set forth the conviction that “the only proper objects of civil government are the happiness and protection of men in the present state of existence.” The Presbytery, on this basis, renounced any notion that the gospel needs the aid of the civil government.

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

24 Quoted by Robinson (pp. 484-485) from Story’s work on the Constitution.

25 Robinson, p. 485.

excellence, and under the all-disposing Providence of God.²⁶

In 1777, the same Presbytery, in another memorial, had this to say about the proposal for a general assessment to be made for the support of the churches.

...as every good Christian believes that Christ has ordained a complete system of laws for the government of his kingdom, so we are persuaded that by his Providence, he will support it to the final consummation. In the fixed belief that the kingdom of Christ and the concerns of religion are beyond the limits of civil control, we should act an inconsistent and dishonest part were we to receive any emoluments from human establishments for the support of the Gospel....

It was further asserted:

As the maxims have long been approved, that every servant is to obey his master; and that the hireling is accountable for his conduct to him from whom he receives his wages; in like manner, if the Legislature has any rightful authority over the ministers of the Gospel in the exercise of their sacred office, and it is their duty to levy a maintenance for them as such; then it will follow that they may revive the old establishment in its former extent; or ordain a new one for any sect they think proper; they are invested with a power not only to determine, but it is incumbent upon them to declare who shall preach, what they shall preach; to whom, when, or at what places they shall preach; or to impose any regulations and restrictions upon religious societies that they may judge expedient. These consequences are so plain as not to be denied; and they are so entirely subversive of religious liberty, that if they should take place in Virginia, we should be reduced to the melancholy necessity of saying with the apostles in like cases, "Judge ye whether it is best to obey God or man," and also of acting as they acted.²⁷

26 Johnson, Thomas Cary, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty* (Richmond, Virginia: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907), p. 84.

27 Johnson, pp. 89-90.

From all of this, it seems evident that charges to the effect that the doctrine of the spirituality of the church—or the non-secular and non-political nature of the church—was the invention of the post-war Southern Church cannot be sustained. But, beyond this, the views of such as Robinson, Thornwell, and the Virginia Presbyterians of the Colonial era are important for the church today, no less than in those former days, for another reason. If it is true—and we believe that it is—that the church is an *essential* element of the gospel—if the church is the *one* institution ordained by God for the propagation and preservation of the gospel of redemption through Christ—then it is incumbent upon us stoutly to resist all attempts either to relegate a portion of that work to some other institution (such as the state, or other independent societies) or to co-opt the church in the interest of remaking society according to whatever current fad may be in the ascendancy. Some of us can remember how appalled those who considered themselves ‘conservative’ were to see the church, in the 1950s and 1960s, pressed into the promotion of certain political and social causes coming from the ‘liberal’ or modernist wing of the Church. Some of us, now, are equally appalled to see the church, today, being pressed into the promotion of political and social causes arising from the opposite side of the spectrum. This is not about what individual Christians may, or ought to be, doing in their capacity as private citizens. It is no doubt true that a Christian citizenry would have an effect on society at large. Before there can be a Christian citizenry, however, there must be a Christian church to call men to the truth as it is in Christ. Men cannot be made Christian by the power of the sword, which is the only instrument that governments have to do their work. Hypocrites, they can be made by such, perhaps, but not Christians.

In this setting, the words of Stuart Robinson, in his previously cited article on “The Fast Day,” seem to be right on the mark.

There are many of our good people who seem to regard it as of the highest advantage to religion, to have now and then a patronizing recognition from the great men of civil and military life, and who therefore are shocked at any disposition to demure when such patronage is proffered. When will men learn that such alliance with, and dependence

on, politicians is ever fatal to the church? The Church of God has little to fear, except from her professed friends; her open enemies are harmless. “The gates of Hell shall not prevail against her.”²⁸ ●

²⁸ Reproduced in *A Kingdom Not of This World*, Graham, Preston D. Jr. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), p. 249.

Book Reviews

Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ, by R. Scott Clark. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008. Pp. xxii + 257. \$25.00. Softcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

The role of Caspar Olevian (1536-1587) in the development of covenant theology is the subject of this book. The book is recommended to anyone who loves this subject.

Originally published in 2005 by Rutherford House in Edinburgh, Scotland, this book is now published in the United States by Reformation Heritage Books, and is included in the series “Reformed Historical-Theological Studies.” R. Scott Clark is professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary in California.

Clark defends Olevian against the charge of some, especially since the mid-1800s, that he is “anti-federalist” (183).

In addition, Clark’s purpose in this book is to supplement the work of Lyle Bierma, who set forth Olevian’s covenant view in his book *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus*.

Clark demonstrates what role this covenant view played in Olevian’s theology—not that of helping the church develop in her understanding of the covenant, but of demonstrating that the doctrine of the covenant is the foundation for, and the organizational structure of, all of theology. In Clark’s own words: “The covenant was a tool for, not the sum of, Olevian’s theology” (xviii); and, “Olevian’s federalism should be said to unify, rather than dominate, his theology” (139, footnote 4).

The Man and His Times

How God prepared Olevian for his work is the subject of the first three chapters. Chapter one describes the historical context of Olevian’s life and work. Chapter two is a biographical sketch of Olevian’s life. Chapter three, entitled “Olevian’s Scholastic Humanism,” demonstrates that Olevian received a solid education in the classics, enabling him to read

and study widely. In distinction from many humanists, Olevian put his humanism into the service of Reformed, Calvinistic orthodoxy: “To say that Olevian was a humanist...is to say more about *how* he conducted his studies than *what* he actually believed” (44).

Chapters such as these are helpful to lead the reader into the body of a book like this. Yet much of the third chapter seemed to me to be a digression from the book’s subject.

Trinitarian Theologian

Because he rightly understood the doctrine and importance of the Trinity, Olevian could organize his theology by the doctrine of the covenant. “Indeed, he was a federal theologian because he was a Trinitarian theologian” (74). Treating Olevian’s doctrine of the Trinity in chapter 4, Clark demonstrates that Olevian set forth the doctrine of the Trinity both pastorally and polemically: he taught this doctrine as essential to the knowledge of the true God, and he defended God’s glory against anti-trinitarian heresies.

The three distinct commentaries on the Apostles’ Creed that Olevian wrote indicate his own development in his understand-

ing of the Trinity. His first (*A Firm Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, 1567) demonstrated that right understanding of justification and sanctification, and proper enjoyment of true Christian comfort, required a right knowledge of the Trinity. His second (*Exposition of the Apostles’ Creed*, 1576), approached the doctrines set forth in the creed “primarily in terms of the two kingdoms: Christ’s eschatological kingdom and the kingdom of darkness” (95), intending to teach more fully the doctrine of Christ as Savior, rooted in the truth that Christ is truly God. (A review of Lyle Bierma’s translation of this work is found elsewhere in this journal, p. 130.) His third work (*The Substance of the Covenant of Grace Between God and the Elect*) more particularly relates the doctrines of the Creed to the covenant of grace.

The “Double Benefit”

The title of Clark’s book includes a reference to the title of this third commentary of Olevian. To what exactly does Olevian refer by the phrase, the “substance of the covenant”? The answer is suggested in Clark’s subtitle: “the double benefit of Christ.” Simply

put, in bringing His people into covenant relationship with Him, God not only justifies, but also sanctifies us.

These two expressions, ‘substance of the covenant’ (*substantia foederis*) and ‘double benefit’ (*duplex beneficium*) summarized his soteriology. Considered objectively, the substance of the covenant is comprised of God’s saving acts in Christ and the explanation of those acts in Christian theology. Considered subjectively, it refers to the Christian’s personal apprehension of Christ’s benefits. This phrase, double benefit, describes the two things which Christ has earned for his elect: justification and sanctification. (xviii)

This term, “double benefit,” Olevian borrowed from Calvin’s opening statement regarding justification, in the 1559 edition of his *Institutes*.

Developing the idea of this double benefit, Clark treats “Olevian’s Federalist Christology” in chapter 5; “Justification: The First Benefit of the Covenant of Grace” in chapter 6; and “Sanctification: the Second Benefit of the Covenant of Grace” in the seventh and last chapter.

Olevian’s covenantal Christology followed from his understanding of the Trinity: Christ, truly God and truly man, came as Mediator of the covenant that God had established from eternity with His elect. This view of Christ served as the basis for Olevian’s response to the eucharistic controversy between the Lutherans and Zwinglians.

Olevian developed his doctrine of justification in relation to the covenant particularly in his commentary on Romans (indicating that his doctrine was based on exegesis), in which he taught that justification is the imputation to the elect sinner of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our covenant head, by means of God’s gift of faith.

In connection with justification, Olevian treated his view of the covenant of works, emphasizing especially that God’s covenant with men existed even before the fall. By this also Olevian compared and contrasted Adam and Christ as heads of God’s covenant, and showed that all men objectively need to be reconciled to God.

Olevian also related justification to predestination and to the *pactum salutis*, again from

the viewpoint of the “double benefit”—God appointed Christ to justify and to sanctify.

Olevian’s doctrine of sanctification (the second aspect of his “double benefit”) “has received scant attention in the scholarly literature” (182), and has occasioned the charge of legalism and anti-federalism against Olevian. Clark shows that Olevian developed Reformed, Calvinistic soteriology along the lines of the covenant: he emphasized that sanctification is a benefit that comes from Christ our covenant head, and that the Christian life of holiness is one of fellowship with the triune God.

In connection with Olevian’s doctrine of sanctification, Clark directs the reader’s attention to what Olevian taught concerning the means of grace, the sacraments in particular, and faith as the work of God in the sinner’s heart.

These last four chapters are the heart of this work, and the real value of it. One who does not have time to read the whole book should read these chapters.

His Covenant View

The reader concludes from these last four chapters that Ole-

vian had a sound and relatively mature view of God’s covenant, especially bearing in mind the times in which he lived.

That the covenant consisted of fellowship between Christ and His covenant people, Olevian noted, even though it appears that he did not develop it at length.

The sovereign grace of this covenant, including justification by faith alone without works, and a justification that “produces sanctification” (187), he taught.

That at the same time the covenant has two parts, one being the obedience that gratitude works in us, Olevian taught.

Even Olevian’s use of the terms “offer” with reference to Christ’s being set forth in the preaching, and “condition” with regard to faith, do not betray a weakness in his theology, in my judgment. Clark’s presentation of Olevian’s view (“Though not all receive him, Christ is to be offered to all, since it is through the preaching of the gospel that God creates faith in the elect,” 196) is in harmony with the calling to proclaim the gospel promiscuously, as our Canons of Dordt sets it forth (II, 5; III/IV, 8-10), and is to be distinguished from the well-meant offer of the gospel.

Regarding faith as a condition in the covenant, Olevian used the term in the sense of faith being the necessary and only way to receive the benefits of salvation. “Olevian did not consider, however, that faith is something which the Christian contributes to justification. Rather faith was said to be a divine gift and the sole instrument by which one apprehends Christ’s righteousness...” (164).

One statement is clearly wrong. To whom the error must be charged, however, is not clear. Clark says that Olevian taught that “the *reprobate* (emphasis mine, DJK) remain in the old covenant, under certain condemnation, ‘until they should pass over into

the new covenant”” (195). Was Olevian mistaken on this point, or does Clark misunderstand him? Not having a copy of Olevian’s work from which Clark quotes, I cannot be sure. However, a third option seems plausible, and is supported by the context in which Clark makes the statement: this is an unfortunate editorial mistake in which Clark actually meant to say that “the *elect* remain in the old covenant...” So understood, he presents Olevian as teaching that even though we have been chosen eternally to salvation, we experience ourselves to be under God’s wrath until God works faith in us and assures us that Christ has atoned for our sin. ●

Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 2, 1552-1566, compiled with introductions by James T. Dennison, Jr. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010. Pp. 909 (hard cover), \$50.00. [Reviewed by Ronald L. Camenga.]

Magnificent! Heart-warming! Soul-stirring! Helpful! Instructive! Edifying! These are just some of the adjectives that this volume calls to mind. It contains a treasury of Reformed theology for any serious-minded Reformed

pastor, seminary professor, seminary student, officebearer, or well-read layman. It is a book that can be read profitably by anyone desiring to learn the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed faith. We are deeply indebted to Dr.

Dennison and to Reformation Heritage Publishers for this book and for the series of which it is a part.

This is the second volume of a very worthwhile set. It contains confessions from the mid-sixteenth century. The documents included capture the breadth and the richness of the Reformed faith. They also impress the reader with the catholicity of the Reformed faith. Confessions are included that were written by English, Polish, French, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Hungarian Reformed Christians. Reformed Christians from all these different lands and all these different ethnic backgrounds confessing the one biblical, Reformed faith. Each group confessing that faith in their own way and out of their own experience, but confessing fundamentally the same faith.

The publication of this volume and this series is particularly refreshing in our day. Ours is an age in which confessing Christians, at best, ignore the historic confessions of the church, and at worst despise them altogether. The confessions of the church of the past are viewed as outdated and irrelevant. Officebearers resist subscription to the confes-

sions. The cry is heard in the churches for new confessions. Confessions are proposed that retool and distort the Reformed faith. Confessions are proposed that advance a socialist, feminist, even racist agenda, like the Belhar Confession. Over against this movement that contemns the historic Reformed faith, the documents included in this series gladly articulate the historic Reformed faith. This is the heritage that Reformed churches today must recognize as their own. The truths confessed in these creeds are the vital truths that Reformed churches must maintain or, if they have departed, to which they must return. These are the truths that Reformed ministers must proclaim from their pulpits for the salvation of believers and their children. These same truths must be brought on the mission fields for the saving and building up of the elect gathered by the gospel from the nations. These are the truths that elders must safeguard, if necessary by the exercise of Christian discipline. And these are the truths that must be taught in the Reformed seminary to aspiring pastors.

Dennison adds thirty-five more documents in this second

volume, bringing the total in the two volumes that he has edited to sixty-eight. Besides the more familiar Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Second Helvetic Confession, some of the confessions included are: the Emden Examination of Faith; the Confession of Piotrków (a Polish Reformed confession); the Confession of the English Congregation at Geneva (a congregation of Marian exiles); the Frankfort Confession; several Hungarian Reformed confessions, including the Hungarian *Confessio Catholica* and the Confession of Tarcal (1562) and Torda (1563); the Geneva Students' Confession; Lattanzio Ragnoni's *Formulario* (the first Reformed confession published in the Italian language); the Confession of Faith in the Genevan Bible; the Scottish Confession; Theodore Beza's Confession; the Confession of the Spanish Congregation of London; and the Antwerp Confession.

The worth of the volume is greatly enhanced by the helpful introductions that Dr. Dennison has written. Each confession is set in its historical context. The author(s) are identified and some pertinent biographical information about them is given.

Among the outstanding features of these confessions—something that the reader cannot but be struck with—is their fundamental agreement on all of the main doctrines of the Reformed faith. There is unanimity on the doctrine of the Trinity; the deity of Christ; the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Holy Scripture; the efficacy and limited scope of the death of Jesus Christ; the Reformed view of the sacraments as positive means of grace (conscious rejection of both the Zwinglian/Anabaptist devaluation of the sacraments and the Roman Catholic doctrine of *ex opera operato*); predestination; justification by faith alone; sanctification, including the proper place of good works in the life of the Christian; the marks of the true church; the necessity of membership in the true church; the fundamental principles of Reformed church government; and amillennial eschatology.

One thing that stands out in the confessions included in this volume is the overarching influence of the great reformer John Calvin. A number of these confessions were composed by groups who took refuge in Calvin's Geneva. Many of the authors were person-

al acquaintances and colleagues of Calvin, like Theodore Beza. Some had actually been trained by him. They were men who sat at Calvin's feet and received his instruction, like John Knox and Francis Junius. Calvin assisted in writing a number of these confessions. Others he reviewed and edited. Calvin's impress is plain to be seen on most of them.

What anyone who reads and studies these confessions must also be impressed with is the fact that these truths of the Reformed faith were not merely academic matters to their authors. Many suffered persecution, and even died, for the truths of the Reformed faith that they confessed. A good number of them were in exile at the time that they wrote their confessions. Many of the churches and church groups had suffered or would suffer at the hands of ruthless magistrates—kings, queens, and emperors—for the sake of the doctrines of the Reformation. Some were forced to flee their homelands. And a good number of them even died martyrs' deaths for the truths contained in their confessions. That was the case with Guido deBrès, who was burned at the stake for authoring the Belgic Confession.

That was the case with Matthieu Verneuil, Pierre Bourdon, and Jean du Bourdel, who were drowned for the Reformed faith they were attempting to plant in Brazil. We twenty-first century Christians, who for the moment experience protection and toleration by the magistrate, must not forget the sacrifices of those who have gone before. May God give us the same resolve both publicly to confess and to persevere in our confession of the truths of the Reformed faith, which are the truths of Scripture.

Another thing that stands out in nearly all of the confessions that are a part of this volume is their rejection of everything Roman Catholic. Those in the Reformed churches today who are promoting cordial relations with Rome and the rewriting of the Reformed confessions so as to make them less offensive to the Roman Catholic Church (most notably Q/A. 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which Dennison properly includes) are simply unfaithful to the Reformed tradition. Rome's view of Scripture and tradition, transubstantiation and the Mass, the papacy, priestly orders, clerical celibacy, the saints and the Virgin Mary, and

much more besides are rejected as unbiblical impositions on the church. Members of the Roman Catholic Church are not made to feel comfortable as members of a false church, but are called to come out in order to join the Reformed churches.

Theodore Beza's Confession (1560) concludes with a lengthy, thirty-five-page refutation of Roman Catholicism, "A Brief Comparison of the Doctrine of the Papists and that of the Holy Catholic Church." I include a sampling from this section of Beza's confession, taken from section 10:

10. In Popery, They Do Not Know What Good Works Are. For it appears by what we have declared before...that we intend nothing less than to reprove good works, when, on the contrary, we maintain that regeneration (from which good works proceed) is inseparably joined with faith in such a way that he is a liar who says he believes in God and nevertheless does not study to live according to the rule of God. But on the contrary, these persons neither know where good works which are acceptable to God spring from, nor what they are, nor

what purpose they serve. Nevertheless, they will say to those that like to hear them that they are advocates of good works (pp. 342, 342).

It is worth mentioning that Beza wrote his confession for his father, who questioned his son's orthodoxy. Beza penned this confession to show his and the Reformed faith's orthodoxy, and gave it to his father when he visited him for the last time (p. 236). His confession includes a marvelous statement concerning the assurance of salvation.

To Be Assured of our Salvation by Faith in Jesus Christ is in No Way Arrogance or Presumption. By this it appears that to be assured of our salvation by faith is not any arrogance or presumption (Rom. 8:16, 38; Heb. 10:22-23); but on the contrary it is the only means of taking away all pride from ourselves and to give all glory to God. For faith alone teaches us to go out of our own selves and to know that in us there is nothing but the matter of damnation, and sends us to one alone—Jesus Christ, by whose righteousness alone it teaches and assures us that

we *will* find salvation before God...by faith we possess a remedy sufficient to assure us fully of eternal life....

By now it ought to be clear that I highly recommend this volume, as well as its predecessor. I make one recommendation to the editor and publisher. By all means plan to conclude the series with an index of the main subjects treated in all the confessions, creeds, and catechisms that are included. This will enhance the overall worth of the set, will provide ready access to the contents, and will be an indispensable tool for those making use of the set for research.

I close this review by quoting two conclusions of confessions that are included in this volume. First, the concluding prayer appended to the Scottish Confession (1560):

Arise, O Lord, and let Thy enemies be confounded, let them flee from Thy presence that hate Thy godly name. Give Thy servants strength to speak Thy word in boldness, and let all nations attain to Thy true knowledge. So be it (p. 206).

And, second, the conclusion to Beza's Confession (1560), which is a bold challenge to the enemies that reject and persecute the Reformed faith. That challenge is as fitting today as it was in 1560.

Nevertheless, let them endeavor and do all that they may and do the worst to us they can, which is to cut us off and destroy us utterly—for that is the best that we can hope to have at their hands. But if it pleases the Lord, they will win no other thing. For despite them, our poor paper in the end will quench their fires, our pens will break their swords in their hands, our patience will vanquish their cruelty, and they will see with their eyes that truth will have the victory and their wicked kingdom should be overthrown. For it must be... that this Word pronounced by the Son of God will be fulfilled: “every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be plucked up” (Matt. 15:13). Such is that faith for which we suffer, in which we now live, hope to die, and to live forever. Finis (p. 369). ●

Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth. Herman Hanko. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 2010. xviii + 373 pages. \$28.95 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Russell Dykstra.]

As the title of the book indicates, *Contending for the Faith* is a book that describes the church's struggle for the truth over against the lie. The brief preface of the book convincingly demonstrates the significance of the subject matter. In it the author, Herman Hanko, reminds us that "from the end of the apostolic era until the present, the church has never been free from the threat of false doctrine" (xvii). He points out that "fighting false doctrine is a crucial part of the church's existence." Rightly he concludes: "One cannot understand the history of the church militant without understanding her battles against false doctrine" (xviii). That is only the start. The knowledge of the church's battles is of crucial importance from a most practical point of view for the ongoing battle today. The reader will not want to skip over this preface.

Nor should one omit the introduction. Among other things it contains a clear definition of heresy—something rarely found in books on either the history of

doctrine or the history of error. In addition, it contains an interesting and helpful discussion of how and why heresy arises in the church. The introduction faces the question: Why does the sovereign God determine that there shall be heresies in the church?

Contending for the Faith is the fruit of many years of study. For over thirty years, Prof. Hanko taught seminary courses on church history and the history of dogma. That gave him the opportunity not only to study the errors and the battles for the truth, but to see the patterns and relationships between the various heresies. That has given rise to a book of significant value from so many points of view.

One obvious benefit of Hanko's presentation is that the book ties together the ancient heresies to later manifestations of the same. The book determines to show, as Solomon teaches, there is no new thing under the sun. Thus the work not only clearly demonstrates the errors of Marcion (a second-century heretic),

it points out that in him are the seeds of higher criticism of the Bible that sprouted in the church some fifteen centuries later. Not only is Gnosticism explained and condemned, but the book demonstrates that Gnosticism is a synthesis religion, and exactly that sort of religion will be the religion of the Antichrist in his kingdom. That kind of analysis makes the ancient heresies significant for the twenty-first century reader.

Another theme of the book is that the introduction of a heresy into the church resulted in development of doctrine. This is not merely explained in the introduction, it is demonstrated in chapter after chapter.

I found the treatment of the material to be as fair as possible to the historical figure. Where possible, the book points out the strengths of a man, if there were some, and then demonstrates where he went wrong, teaching serious error with the devastating consequences. Phillip Melancthon is such an example. The man was a support to Luther and a close friend of Calvin. But he introduced the deadly error of synergism into the Lutheran camp, with tragic results.

Along this same line, the

treatment of the ancient heretic Apollinaris is similarly thoughtful. Hanko writes (49):

Apollinaris was not, I think, a heretic when he first began to propound his views. A heretic is one who teaches doctrines contrary to those that have been officially established by the church as the truth of Scripture.

This may sound somewhat strange, but it must be remembered that it has often happened in the hard work of developing the truth that one of the church's theologians, in struggling with a difficult theological or exegetical problem, came up with a solution to the problem that turned out to be wrong. This is not surprising, for all men in the church of Christ have imperfect understanding, and any one of the saints can come up with wrong ideas about theological problems.

Hanko further explains:

Apollinaris came up with a solution to the problem, not yet understood by the church, of our Lord's humanity and divinity and the relation between them. It was a wrong solution, and the church as a

whole demonstrated unmistakably that he was wrong and that his views could not be sustained by Scripture.

At that point he became a heretic. If only he had had the grace and humility to admit that he had erred and that the solution to the problem had to be sought elsewhere.

Then the author gets to the heart of the issue (50).

What was the heresy of Apollinaris?

It seems to me that the problem with this man was that he had spent too much time with, and had thought too highly of, pagan philosophy. He was something of a rationalist. That was his downfall.

Again, I found evaluation of mysticism very helpful and thought provoking as it describes what gives rise to it, and why the church has had to deal with mysticism repeatedly in its history. Writes Hanko (137):

We can find, I think, an explanation for mysticism and its constant attractiveness. In a sense, mysticism is an effort to pay unpaid bills. Mysticism

arises when the church does not preach the full gospel of Jesus Christ, or at least does not live fully the gospel that she preaches. Mysticism fills the vacuum.

Later he writes (138):

Mysticism flourished as a reaction to what was often a cold, formal religion without heart. Man is more than a head that thinks. He is also a soul who feels, loves, hates, grieves, and sings; this part of man also has to be caught up in his religion....

So the pendulum in the church swings back and forth. It swings toward mysticism during periods of worldliness and dead orthodoxy, and it swings toward intellectualism when religion is reduced to feeling. But both are reactions. Mysticism is the swing of the pendulum toward feeling.

This kind of evaluation is exceptional, and exceptionally helpful to the church today.

The scope of the book is broad. It treats heresies from the ancient period to the present day. The chapters are listed below, divided in the book according to five periods of history.

The outstanding value to me is that the book's evaluation of the heresies is uncompromisingly and unashamedly Reformed. To demonstrate that, I point out that virtually any work on heresy condemns the ancient heresies of Sabellius (Unitarianism), Arianism, and Pelagianism. Some will condemn the works-righteousness of the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages. But the treatment by theologians of such errors of Arminianism and Amyraldism is gentle, if not outright approving. And how many will condemn theistic evolution and Pentecostalism as heresy? Or common grace and the conditional covenant? The evaluations of this book are grounded in the Reformed faith and her confessions.

A book of this scope and nature contains much evaluation of people, movements, and heresy. Not surprisingly, I found those evaluations to be consistently right on target. I did, however, find scattered statements in them capable of leaving the wrong impression. For example, the book states: "Westminster left room for the Amyraldian position, which taught a universal atonement in some sense" (235). One could be left with the impression that

the Westminster Confession allows for a universal atonement, something I do not believe it does, although some who signed the confession taught that error. But then, some who held that same error also signed the Canons of Dordt—John Davenant a prime example.

Another example is the treatment of the covenant of works (322-324). The reader may well be left with the impression that everyone who holds to the covenant of works believes that Adam could have merited eternal life. In reality, although many proponents of the covenant of works do include merit as a necessary element, others do not.

Statements such as these are not characteristic flaws of the book. They are widely scattered. I highly recommend *Contending for the Faith*. It will be read and studied with profit. Indeed, every Reformed reader will be both encouraged to stand and equipped to fight for the truth that God has entrusted to His church to promote, defend, and proclaim.

The contents of the book:
Ancient Period, 100-476
 Marcion: First Bible Critic
 Gnosticism: Synthesis Religion

Montanus: First Charismatic
Sabellius: First Unitarian
Arius and the Council of Nicea
Apollinaris and the Doctrine of Christ
Nestorius and an Unholy Squabble about Christ
Pelagius and Celestius: Enemies of the Doctrines of Grace
Cassianus, Faustus, and Semi-Pelagianism

Medieval Period, 500-1517

Gregory I: First Medieval Pope
Rabanus and the Victory of Semi-Pelagianism
Berengar and Transubstantiation
Abelard and the Doctrine of the Atonement
Innocent II and Papal Hierarchy
Thomas à Kempis and Medieval Mysticism

Reformation Period, 1517-1577

Erasmus and Humanism
Melanchthon and Synergism
Agricola and Antinomianism

Anabaptism: The Right Wing of the Reformation
The Nicodemites
Bolsec and Predestination
Servetus and the Denial of the Trinity

Post-Reformation Period, 1577-1900

Arminius and Arminianism
Amyraut and Amyrauldism
Cocceius and Biblical Theology
The Marrow Men and the Marrow Controversy
Wesley and Arminianism
Finney and Revivalism
Darwin and Evolutionism
Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel

Modern Period, 1900-2010

Errors Concerning the Covenant
Higher Criticism
Azusa Street Revival and Pentecostalism
Common Grace
Federal Vision Theology ●



Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons, by Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. Xvii + 340 pages. \$26.00. Softcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

This is the third “Preaching Christ” book written by Sidney Greidanus, professor emeritus of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. His other works are entitled *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* and *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*.

Summary

In his introductory chapter, Greidanus treats the value of preaching from Ecclesiastes; the difficulty in interpreting this book (in which he treats the customary introductory matters of the book’s genre, author, recipients, date, purpose, and structure); and the difficulty of preaching from this book (selecting a text, formulating one theme for that text, and preaching Christ from the book).

Greidanus divides the book of Ecclesiastes into fifteen sermon texts, treating one each in chapters 2 through 16. In each, he notes the text’s context, literary features,

structure, theocentric interpretation, and theme and goal. Then, helping the reader move from exegesis to sermon, he suggests ways in which the preacher could preach Christ from the text, sets forth a sermon theme and goal, and gives a sermon exposition.

The longest sections in each chapter are usually the sermon exposition, which often runs eight to twelve pages, and the section regarding preaching Christ.

Already in the introductory chapter, Greidanus sets forth various ways in which one might preach Christ from Ecclesiastes, which he terms 1) redemptive-historical progression, 2) promise-fulfillment, 3) typology, 4) analogy, 5) longitudinal themes, 6) New Testament references, and 7) contrast. That the promise-fulfillment approach will not work for any text in the book, he notes immediately. Using the six other approaches, he investigates how the preacher could preach Christ from each text. He usually finds more than one possible way to

preach Christ from each text, and at the same time shows why one or more of the six possible ways will not work for that particular text. Not to be overlooked is the fact that Greidanus rejects any attempt to preach Christ by allegory.

Four appendixes, a select bibliography, and four indexes conclude the book. The appendixes treat 1) ten steps from text to sermon, 2) an expository sermon model, 3) a meditation on Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, and 4) a sermon on Ecclesiastes 9:1-12.

Value

For any preacher desiring to preach on the book of Ecclesiastes, this book has value.

Some value might be found in Greidanus' exegesis of each text. By treating the context, literary features, and structure of each text, and by providing an exposition of each text, Greidanus does provide exegetical helps. Whether or not the exegesis is in all instances accurate, I leave the reader to judge for himself. But this exegesis is basic, both because of the length of the text selections, and because of the nature of the book itself. The preacher would certainly want to

do more exegetical work than this book does for him.

Especially, the value of the book is to help the preacher get from exegesis to sermon, and to preach Christ from the book. In light of the indisputable fact that the book of Ecclesiastes is more difficult than others from which to preach, and especially on which to preach a series, this book is an invaluable tool.

Weaknesses

Limiting the value, however, are the weaknesses of this book.

First, the fifteen texts into which Greidanus divides the book are simply too long to be manageable. Greidanus argues that each text should be a literary unit (23). Without question, each text should be a unit, and each text will consist of several verses—but if treating each text as a *literary* unit means that some texts are a whole chapter long or even longer, then the preacher ought to take smaller units as his text. The challenges of preaching on this book notwithstanding, the preacher ought seriously to consider preaching more than 15 sermons to do justice to this book.

Yet, to divide Ecclesiastes

into other texts is to lessen the value of Greidanus' book. The preacher could still learn from and apply the guidelines regarding preaching Christ, but would find Greidanus' textual theme and sermon exposition to be only partially helpful.

Second, the reader must read Greidanus' introductory remarks with discernment. Greidanus denies that Solomon was the inspired writer of Ecclesiastes, and he conjectures that the book was written during the intertestamentary period. That Solomon is the inspired writer is a fixed point in my mind. Without actually naming the writer, the book gives some biographical information about him: he was the son of David, he was king in Jerusalem, and he was king over Israel (Eccl. 1:1, 12). This data is sufficient to dispute Greidanus' theory that the book was written during the intertestamentary period. No son of David sat on the throne in Jerusalem during that time. In fact, Solomon is the only one who was at the same time the son of David, and king over *Israel* in Jerusalem; after the division of the kingdom, David's royal sons reigned only over *Judah* in Jerusalem. Greidanus illustrates the

error of his own position when he says that in 1:12-2:26, the Teacher "pretends to be Solomon in order to give his important message greater impact" (59).

Third, in one crucial respect the book fails to achieve its own stated purpose, that of helping the preacher preach Christ from this book. Following Greidanus' approach, one preaches Christ by finding how Christ taught the same truths as are set forth in Ecclesiastes—how the Old Testament teacher taught the same as the Great Prophet Himself.

This is to bring Christ into the sermon, but is not the same as preaching Christ as crucified and risen Savior.

To preach Christ from Ecclesiastes, in addition to all that Greidanus writes, is to note from the book our need for Christ: Ecclesiastes exposes the folly of man by nature as he strives to serve himself by pursuing earthly goals and pleasures. To see the vanity of this, we need Christ to give us proper spiritual understanding! Then we need to see that Christ is the one who bestows true, heavenly wisdom on us by His faith-giving, sanctifying power. The preacher preaches Christ, as he exhorts God's people

to manifest true wisdom by devoting all our work, possessions, and pleasures to God, and using them in His service. This wisdom comes from above, bestowed by God's sovereign and irresistible grace, which we must seek from Him.

This fundamental way of preaching Christ, Greidanus not only does not mention, but appears specifically to reject: "Preachers cannot simply proclaim Old Testament wisdom as 'gospel' in the Christian church.... Old Testament wisdom has to be confirmed by the New Testament before it can be proclaimed as 'gospel'" (24). But why? Were the words of the Preacher not the gospel to those who heard or read them already in the Old Testament? Did not Christ speak through the Preacher to His

church in the Old Testament, and did not Christ in this way convey grace to His saints then?

If the Preacher in Ecclesiastes is divinely inspired (something Greidanus neither questions nor asserts), then we expect that his teachings will be confirmed by God's Word elsewhere. But to preach Christ is to do more than this. It is to impress on the congregation that Christ is speaking to us in that very book itself, and that only in the power of Christ can we understand the message of the book. It is also to lead them to Christ to find that power. And it is to set forth the positive message of the book as being the way in which we will live, showing our gratitude to God for His grace.

Then Christ is preached, God is glorified, and the church is edified. ●

The Great Theologians: A Brief Guide, by Gerald R. McDermott. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010. 214 pages. \$20.00. Softcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Gerald R. McDermott, professor of religion and philosophy at Roanoke College in Salem, VA, and pastor at St. John Lutheran Church (LCMS), wrote

this book "to provide a short and accessible introduction to some of the greatest theologians—so that any thinking Christian could get a ballpark idea of what is distinctive

to each” (11). He means not to provide a historical or biographical introduction to the man, but to provide an introduction to the man’s theology.

The eleven theologians that he treats in this book—Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Schleiermacher, Newman, Barth, and VonBalthasar—are those who “have had the most influence on the history of Christian thought” (13). McDermott realizes that his book does not treat the thought of many other great theologians, and that he includes some theologians whose teachings “have done damage to Christian thinking” (14). (One wonders, though, just which theologians he has in mind by this statement.)

With each theologian, he provides a biographical sketch, an introduction to the main themes of the person’s theology, a more detailed examination of one theme peculiar to that theologian, a list of lessons that we can learn from that theologian, and a short selection from the original works of that theologian.

Envisioning this as a means to stimulate Christians to be theologically minded, and to be able to discern good theology from

bad, he suggests further reading material for each theologian. And considering that this book could be the text for private study or a small group study, he includes study questions at the end of each chapter.

The eleven chapters devoted to these theologians are sandwiched between an introductory chapter entitled “Why Study Theology?” and a concluding chapter entitled “What These Theologians Teach Us About Theology.”

Anyone who desires a brief introduction to these eleven theologians finds here an interesting, thought-provoking, and concise introduction.

Christians, both lay and clergy, can use help discerning good theology from bad. In providing such help, this book fails at key points. I list a sampling of ways in which this is so.

Having pointed out that Origen developed the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, McDermott does not clearly indicate that this was bad. The three lessons we learn from Origen are all positive, and all regard his doctrine of Scripture. As such, the lessons are not wrong. The point is that McDermott does not

highlight, for the benefit of the Christian who wants to discern good theology from bad, that Origen's allegorical interpretation is bad.

Himself a Lutheran, McDermott presents Luther as teaching that we are justified by faith, but that this faith is one that unites us to Christ, and by which God's love is worked in our hearts (86). All nice enough, if the point is that the faith by which we are justified is the same by which we are sanctified. But this does not seem to be McDermott's point; the reader is left with the impression that Luther taught our works of faith to be part of the basis for our justification.

Calvin was himself a man, and open to criticism. Even Calvinists should evaluate his theology in the light of Scripture. But to devote over a page to the thesis that anger was Calvin's besetting sin, and especially to find evidence of it in referring to his opponents as dogs, curs, and mongrels (105), is to make the criticism personal, and to fail to appreciate the reason why Calvin used such terms. I suppose that one who reads this book to become acquainted with theology, and who knows how Jesus talked

in the gospel accounts, might wonder if anger was not Jesus' besetting sin also.

I have my criticisms of Edward's theology—but I would not fault him, as does McDermott for being “fearless in the pulpit. He seemed to have no compunction about offending people in the pews if he felt sins needed to be preached against” (129). McDermott presents “his denunciation of charismatic gifts and fulminations against Catholicism” (130) in a negative light, as well as his inability to see that Scripture opposes slavery.

Von Balthasar is a twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian. To say that from him we can learn that “Protestants and Catholics can learn from each other” (201) is to be too uncritical. McDermott is himself a former Roman Catholic. Does he truly see the errors of Catholicism, and want his readers to discern them too?

I say again that this book provides a good introduction to these eleven theologians. In a review that highlights the book's fundamental weaknesses, this positive should not be overlooked.

But the Christian who wants

to learn to discern good theology from bad will need more help than this book gives. He will have to read this book also with discernment. ●

English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology, by Jonathan D. Moore. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. xx+304. \$36 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The worth of Jonathan D. Moore's definitive study of the Puritan John Preston's doctrinal development is far greater than its fascinating historical account of Preston's relation to Perkins before him, to a rising Arminianism in the Church of England around him, and to the Puritanism that would follow him. Moore's book confronts twenty-first century Calvinism with weighty issues raised by the conflict between Calvinism's confession of salvation by sovereign, particular grace, on the one hand, and Arminianism's proclamation of universal, resistible grace, on the other hand.

These are the issues of the relation of the external call of the gospel to a limited, efficacious atonement; of the implication of a conception of the external call as a

"well-meant offer" for a desire of God to save the reprobate; of the conditionality or unconditionality of the new covenant, in closest connection with one's view of the call; and of the place of the eternal decree of predestination with regard both to the redemption of the cross and to the work of salvation. Ultimately, they are the issue of salvation by grace alone.

All of these are issues that still trouble Reformed churches in the twenty-first century, that often result in the same "softening" of Reformed theology (to use Moore's term) as characterized Preston, and that occasion a nervous, unseemly dance around the issues by many Reformed theologians.

At the heart of the book, as at the heart of Preston's theology, is the issue of the relation between

the sincere, serious, external call of the gospel to all and sundry and the atonement of the cross. Does the promiscuous preaching of the gospel, particularly the serious call to all to repent and believe, demand a death of Christ for all humans without exception, in some sense? Does the external call, which is wider than election (Matt. 22:14), imply the broadening of the grace of God in Christ beyond the boundaries set by divine election?

John Preston was a prominent Puritan in the Church of England in the beginning of the seventeenth century. He died in 1628. This was a time of the ascendancy of Arminian theology in the Church of England. In the Netherlands, where Arminianism had its origin, the Synod of Dordt condemned Arminian doctrine as heresy at its great gathering in 1618/1619. Moore relates the amusing anecdote of the response of an arrogant Anglican prelate to the plea of Reformed men that the Church of England go on record as understanding its Thirty-Nine Articles after the manner of Dordt: "I beseech... that we of the Church of England be not put to borrow a new faith from any village in the Nether-

lands" (156). Canterbury held Dordt in contempt. That was the death of Canterbury.

Preston heavily influenced subsequent Puritanism. He is highly regarded by contemporary advocates of Puritanism and the Puritans. J. I. Packer counts Preston among "the leading Puritan theologians" (*A Quest for Godliness*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990, 333).

Preston "softened" the Reformed theology that had been taught by Calvin, established in England largely by William Perkins, and professed in early days by Preston himself, by teaching an atonement that was universal and inefficacious, although it also had a special design for the elect. In defense of the universality of the atonement, Preston distinguished Christ's intercession from His satisfaction. Christ earned redemption for all men without exception, but He prayed, for example, in John 17, for the application of the redemption only to the elect.

This was certainly a "softening" of Reformed orthodoxy concerning the atonement as established by Dordt. In article eight of the second head of doctrine, Dordt authoritatively pronounced on the

extent, efficacy, and delimiting source in predestination of the cross of Christ: "It was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father" (Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966, 587).

Of special significance is Dordt's insistence later in the article that Christ's death also "purchased" faith for all those for whom He died. This makes utterly impossible that anyone for whom Christ died should perish in unbelief.

Preston was wont to express the universality of Christ's death by the phrase, "Christ is dead for everyone." According to Preston, the preacher may, and must, "Goe and tell every man without exception, that there is good newes for him, Christ is dead for him, and if he will take him, and accept of his righteousnesse, he shall have it; restraine it not, but goe and tell every man under Heaven" (116, 117). With meticulous, incontrovertible scholarship, Moore

demonstrates that by "Christ is dead (for every man)" Preston meant, "Christ died (for every man)." The attempt by the Marrowmen in the eighteenth century and by David C. Lachman in the twentieth century to construe the phrase otherwise, and less damningly, is mistaken (116ff.).

Significantly, the pressure that moved Preston away from the doctrine of limited, or particular, atonement was the charge by the Arminian theologians that the Reformed truth of limited, or particular, redemption makes a serious, external call of the gospel to all hearers impossible. Preston, John Davenant, and others were responding, in the words of John Hales, to the "Remonstrants' 'odious imputation of illusion in the general propounding of the Evangelical Promises'" (198).

It was not only the doctrine of limited, or particular, atonement that Preston "accommodated" the Arminian foes of the Reformed faith. Preston also came to teach a love of God for all mankind, a desire of God to save the reprobate, and a "conditional Covenant of Grace, which is common to all" (124). In Preston's doctrine of a conditional covenant, "the gospel almost even becomes a

new law.... Making an explicit parallel with the prelapsarian covenant of works with Adam, Preston asserts that ‘we are offered Christ, and to be heirs of heaven upon condition of obedience to the Law of faith.’” The doctrine of a conditional covenant implied for Preston that, in proclaiming the covenant God is gracious to all who hear the proclamation, reprobate as well as elect. The covenant of grace is “indefinitely propounded unto all men & such universal grace we grante” (124).

Preston’s theology, thus, was “an accommodating brand of hypothetical universalism” (167).

Moore shows that Preston “accommodated” the Reformed faith, which he espoused, to Arminianism at the historic York House Conference of 1626. It should be noted that this conference took place only seven years after the Synod of Dordt, with whose creed Preston was thoroughly familiar. The conference was intended to be Preston’s defense of Calvinism against the influential Arminian Richard Montagu before powerful ecclesiastical and political dignitaries. Montagu was a bitter enemy of Calvinism. He had written that

Calvin’s doctrine of predestination was “execrable impiety” (166).

Preston failed miserably. Moore’s description of Preston’s concessions at the York House Conference, which at the same time indicates the aspects of Preston’s “softening” of Reformed theology, deserves to be quoted at length.

At York House...we have seen him [Preston] advocate a twofold donation of Christ, the hypothetical redemption and salvability of the reprobate (in comparison with demons), and a ransom paid by Christ for the reprobate. We have also seen him teach that although the gospel call is itself an effectual means of awakening the dead, there is a universal conditional covenant made with the reprobate, founded upon the death of Christ. This teaching was accompanied by advocating universal redemption in contrast with limited intercession, as well as a universal redemption providing sincerity to the universal gospel call (168).

In this “softening” of Reformed theology, in order to “accommodate” Arminianism, Preston significantly departed

from the earlier Reformed theologians in England, particularly the outstanding Reformed theologian and father of Puritanism, William Perkins. Moore sets Preston in the light of the theology of Perkins. Perkins denied a universal grace of God in the preaching of the gospel, while maintaining that ministers should “indifferently...exhort all and every one to repent” (49). He denied also that God desires the salvation of the reprobate, rejecting the Arminian interpretation of such texts as Ezekiel 33:11 and I Timothy 2:4, that God sincerely desires the salvation of all men without exception.

“World” in John 3:16, Perkins explained as the elect in all nations, not as all humans without exception.

Perkins denied that God promises salvation to all who hear the gospel. “On the contrary Christ promises absolutely and unconditionally to save his elect people” (53). Moore summarizes Perkins’ position regarding the preaching of the promise thus: “In Perkins the gospel call may be said to be the universal proclamation of a particular promise” (52).

Moore also examines the

relationship between Preston and the famed Bishop James Ussher. Ussher too taught universal atonement:

[The death of the Lamb of God] doth not *actually* take away all the sins of the world, but *virtually*. It hath power to do it *if* it be rightly applied, the sacrifice hath such virtue in it, that *if* all the world would take it, and apply it, it *would* expiate, and remove the sins of the whole world (cited in Moore, 181).

Moore correctly analyzes Ussher’s doctrine of the atonement as teaching that “Christ on the cross did not actually expiate or take away the sins of anybody at all” (181).

For Ussher, like Preston, one important purpose of a universal atonement is “to procure a universal offer of the gospel. Ussher could go so far as to say that without a universal atonement the universal call of the gospel would be an impossibility” (182).

The hypothetical universalism and conditionality of Preston’s mature theology are remarkably similar to Amyraldianism. With the cautious, careful discernment of a scholar, Moore distinguishes

the two theologies. Valid though it may be, the distinction in no wise rules out the essential oneness of Preston's hypothetical universalism and Amyraldianism. Both are a universalizing of the grace of God in Jesus Christ in contradiction of the biblical and Reformed truth of predestination—the eternal particularizing of His grace by the gracious God Himself. Both, therefore, also make the (saving) grace of God resistible. And, all protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, both make the actual salvation of the sinner dependent on his will—his acceptance of the invitation of the gospel, offered in grace to all alike, with a sincere desire on God's part to save all alike, and grounded in an atonement for all.

Writing as an academic church historian, Moore does not permit himself to weigh in on the issues. "I have sought, rather, to unfold the significant differences in the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction and its proclamation, which existed amongst late Elizabethan and Jacobean divines, and let those facts speak for themselves" (229).

The reviewer is under no such constraint. The book makes plain,

first, that an understanding of the external call as a gracious offer of salvation to every hearer, expressing the divine desire to save every hearer, necessarily entails universal atonement; a fervent, sincere desire of God to save the reprobate, in flat contradiction of His predestinating will to damn the reprobate; and a conditional covenant, the condition being one's acceptance of the offered salvation.

In terms familiar to professing Calvinists in the twenty-first century, the "well-meant offer" is the nose of the Arminian camel in the Reformed tent, indeed half the beast.

Second, the pressure exerted upon the few Reformed churches that deny that the external call of the gospel (which they firmly hold and energetically extend to all and sundry as God gives them opportunity) is a gracious, impotent offer to all hearers, by charging that they cannot indiscriminately and urgently call sinners to repent and believe and by slandering them as "hyper-Calvinists" is characteristically Arminian tactics. That this pressure is exerted by churches and theologians that profess to be Reformed makes no difference. The purpose of this pressure is to

force the few Reformed churches that have not already done so to “accommodate” Arminianism by “softening” Reformed theology.

Third, the “softening” of Reformed theology by John Preston in the seventeenth century and, similarly, by multitudes of Reformed and Presbyterians in subsequent centuries, to the present, is, in fact, the corruption of the Reformed faith at its heart: salvation by particular, sovereign (that is, irresistible) grace, grounded upon an efficacious, particular atonement and having its source in God’s eternal, discriminating decree of predestination. The mush that results from the “softening,” whether called hypothetical universalism, Amyraldianism, the Federal Vision, or, candidly, Arminianism, is not the faith of Dordt and Westminster. He who runs may read.

Fourth, early on in the history of Puritanism, men who were close to the center of the tradition—John Preston and others—radically diverted at least much of the stream of Puritan soteriology from its source in the reformers and in Perkins. English Calvinism after Perkins “weakened the emphasis on absolute predestination and the uncon-

ditional particularity of grace” (226). No Reformed Christian in the twenty-first century, therefore, may uncritically accept men, doctrines, movements, and organizations that promote themselves as perpetuating and renewing “the Puritans and Puritanism.” By no means does the banner of Puritanism guarantee Reformed orthodoxy, that is, the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace.

To neo-Puritanism, as indeed to the old Puritanism represented by John Preston, searching questions must be put. What does this Puritanism teach about assurance of salvation? What does it teach about the millennium and the nature of the Messianic kingdom? And what, especially, does it teach about the call of the gospel and, with its teaching of the call, about the atonement of Christ, on which the call is based, and about God’s predestination, whence the call issues? By its unambiguous, sound answers to these questions, neo-Puritanism must prove its Reformed orthodoxy.

By this outstanding work of scholarship, by his grasp of the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith and their interrelationships, by his penetrating insights into the subtle issues that

always threaten the “softening” of the Reformed faith, and by his lucid exposition of the history and theology of his topic, Dr. Jonathan D. Moore establishes himself as a

first-rate, Reformed church historian. Reformed Christianity can benefit from his gifts. We hope to hear more from him. ●

An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed, by Caspar Olevianus, translated by Lyle D. Bierma. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009. Pp. xxx + 160. \$40.00. Hardcover. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Preaching again through Lord's Days 8-22 of the Heidelberg Catechism, I read two recently published expositions of the Apostles' Creed.

Both were extremely disappointing, to say the least.

Michael Bauman's book *The Creed: What You Believe and Why* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002) was too brief and simple for my purpose. The pocket-sized book numbers 118 pages, with generous type and line spacing. Its exposition of the Creed is very basic; it spoon-feeds the teachings of the Creed to infants in the faith, and is far too simple for Christians who are well-grounded in their faith.

Holding greater promise, I thought, was Michael Horton's book *We Believe: Recovering*

the Essentials of the Apostles' Creed (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998). Not only is the book considerably larger than the former (259 pages, and of normal dimensions), but it is also written by a Reformed minister and seminary professor. But this treatment of the Creed was also rather basic. Horton's goal is to enable the reader to respond to the challenges with which today's post-modern culture confronts us. Accordingly, he treats only the main points of the Creed, and not every word or phrase.

Far more helpful was Bierma's translation of Olevianus' 1576 work, *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed (Expositio Symboli Apostolici)*. This is volume two in the series "Classic Reformed Theology," published

by Reformation Heritage Books, which “seeks to produce and provide critical English translations of some of the more important but generally neglected texts of the orthodox period,” most of which translations are the first in English of these older works (viii). For translating and publishing this work, Bierma and Reformation Heritage Books are to be commended.

Before the translation proper, Bierma includes a preface to the series, as well as a biographical introduction to Olevianus and historical introduction to this work. The translation proper includes not only the body of Olevianus’ work, but also his letter to Prince Frederick, letter to the reader, and introductory remarks to aid the reader in studying the Creed.

While some divide the Apostles’ Creed into three parts, considering all the articles that follow the one regarding the Holy Spirit as belonging to the third part, Olevianus divided the Apostles’ Creed into four parts. The third part is devoted exclusively to the article regarding the Holy Spirit; the fourth part includes all that follows, and “contains the effects of all the preceding parts” (18).

Olevianus’ treatment is thorough. He treats not only each article of the Creed, but each phrase. Each name of God and of Christ, as well as each step in Christ’s humiliation and exaltation, is treated distinctly.

His treatment is explicitly biblical. His exposition of every phrase begins with “testimonies from the prophets and apostles” that show that the doctrine being treated in that section is taught in Scripture. The sections that usually follow this—in which he explains the meaning and the fruits of the doctrines set forth in the Creed—are replete with Scripture references.

Olevianus is explicitly covenantal. Bierma says,

The present work is a good example of the way Olevianus related his covenantal theology to what we call systematic theology today.... The subtitle of the work is telling: “In which the main points of the gracious eternal covenant between God and believers are briefly and clearly treated.” For Olevianus, the substance of the covenant between God and believers...is the faith summarized in the Apostles’ Creed. (xx)

In his own introduction, Olevianus explains what Christ's kingdom is, in which the covenant is administered; emphasizes that this covenant is of grace; and indicates that the Apostles' Creed is the summary of that covenant. In the body of his work, he repeatedly ties the doctrines to God's covenant.

Furthermore, Olevianus drives home the comfort that the believer can receive from these doctrines. In almost every section, after showing the biblical evidence for the doctrine, and briefly explaining the meaning of the phrase in the Creed, he sets forth the "fruits" of the doctrine. Invariably, the fruit regards the comfort that the child of God receives from knowing this particular truth.

Not surprisingly, in that Olevianus was one of the two authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, one finds similarity between Olevianus' explanation of the Creed, and that of the Catechism. In treating the phrase "only begotten Son," for instance, he explains why Christ is called "only begotten," when all believers are God's children.

But this similarity is never

bare repetition of the Catechism. If anything, Olevianus adds to the Heidelberg's explanation at significant points. In treating Christ's descent into hell, the Catechism speaks of the hellish agonies Christ suffered while on the cross. Olevianus adds to this the "utter disgrace...while He was held down in the grave until the third day" (90), arguing from the order of the articles of the Creed that we must include this humiliation of His burial in His descent into hell. Whereas Lord's Day 17 speaks of three fruits of Christ's resurrection, Olevianus finds a fourth (third, as he orders them): "the assurance of our perseverance in faith and of full victory against sin and death" (97).

While his treatment of the phrases "God the Father," "Almighty," and "Lord" are very brief, taking up about a half page each, his treatment of other doctrines is expansive—for example, God's attributes, God's providence, Christ's conception and birth, Christ's descent into hell, and every step of Christ's exaltation.

Not infrequently, in a footnote Bierma corrects the Scripture citation that Olevianus gave in the

body of his work. Usually the correction makes the citation just a verse or at most a chapter away from what Olevianus said—for example, where Olevianus cited Psalm 133, Bierma corrected it to Psalm 132:11 (p. 70); again, Bierma changes the citation of Jonah 2:5, 7 to verses 4 and 6. Either Olevianus gave citations from memory, and so was inaccurate, or he worked with a text whose verse divisions were different from our English translations. In fairness to Olevianus, I consider the latter likely.

Either Bierma in his translation, or (more likely) Olevianus in his original, added the word “in” to the confession regarding the church and the forgiveness of sins: “I believe in the holy catholic church,” and “I believe in...the forgiveness of sins.” While we will overlook the mistake in Ole-

vianus, Reformed preachers today should not repeat it. We believe *in* the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; He is the object of our trust. We *believe* the holy catholic church of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins; we know they are realities that God formed and that God gives to us. But we do not put our trust *in* these.

Anyone looking to read a substantive exposition of the Creed is encouraged to read this work. With respect to the doctrines set forth in this book, one who is solidly grounded in the Reformed faith will find nothing new—nor should that be our desire. But one finds in this book a biblical, thought-provoking, comforting, solid exposition of the timeless truths that Christians confess. ●

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