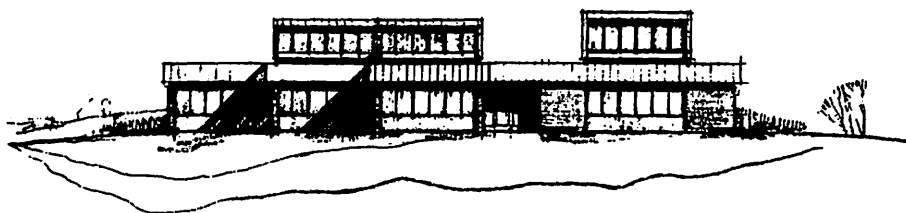


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The Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches

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David J. Engelsma
Herman C. Hanko

by
Herman Hanko (editor-in-chief)
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Editorial Notes

We have included in this issue an article by someone other than the professors in the Seminary. It is an article entitled "Heidelberg Catechism Preaching" and it was submitted for publication by Rev. Ronald Cammenga, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado. It consists of a paper which Rev. Cammenga read at an Officebearers' Conference of Classis West which was held in South Holland, Illinois on March 6, 1990.

While the paper will have special importance for those who are accustomed to preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism, a practice continued in the Dutch Reformed Churches from the time of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-1619, it will also be of interest to those of our readers who stand outside this tradition and who not only wonder on occasion why preaching on a creed is done when preaching from a text of Scripture is considered proper, but who also wonder how this can be effectively accomplished so that genuine preaching still takes place.

While we are talking about this article, it might be well to remind others that we do carefully consider worthwhile and significant papers which are submitted to us for publication. If any of our readers wishes to submit such a paper, we can assure you that it will be carefully considered for publication in the *Journal*.

* * * * *

Prof. Robert Decker continues in this issue his series on the preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. With the great interest in the work and preaching of this noted British preacher, writer, and evangelist, many will eagerly want to read the rest of Prof. Decker's evaluation of Lloya-Jones' work as pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England.

* * * * *

Professor David Engelsma has been busy with a series of articles on "Holiness in Marriage and Single Life: Interpretation and Application of I Corinthians 7." The first article, entitled "Sex for the Saints without and within Marriage," appeared in the Fall, 1991 issue of the *Journal*. The title of the article which appears in this issue is: "Honorable Single Life and Holy Marriage." The third and concluding installment, which will appear in the Fall, 1992 *Journal* will be entitled, "Desertion, Divorce, and Remarriage."

* * * * *

Professor Hanko begins in this issue a series of articles dealing with the subject of common grace. It seems as if both in this land and in other countries the subject of common grace is once again on the ecclesiastical agenda. It is well worth our while to take a new look at this doctrine and some of its implications in various other areas of doctrine. To do so is important, for there is the real possibility of discussion on the subject. We welcome others to contribute articles on common grace if these articles will help to advance the discussion and give new light on some of the ramifications of the doctrine.

* * * * *

A recent book review of a book by Dr. Gordon Clark (along with another book review of one of Dr. Clark's books) sparked a rather spirited rebuttal from a member of the Trinity Foundation, an organization which publishes and promotes Dr. Clark's extensive writings. The letter brings to the fore some crucially important issues in the doctrine and faith of the church of Jesus Christ. We have, therefore, published this rebuttal, along with an answer, not only to give the author opportunity to defend Dr. Clark's writings on the Trinity and the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also to highlight how crucially important the issues discussed are.

* * * * *

Along with three reviews of three important books which have been recently published, we present this issue of the *Journal* to our readers in the hope and with the prayer that it will not only be enjoyed, but also be profitable. We might add that we are grateful to Mr. David Ondersma for contributing a review of a book which is in the area of his expertise.

Heidelberg Catechism

Preaching

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

The *Heidelberg Catechism* has been subscribed to and preached by Reformed churches the world around ever since its first publication in 1563. Sermons on the *Catechism* have been a regular part of the spiritual diet of Reformed Christians for years in Germany, The Netherlands, America, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and more recently, Singapore. Generations of Reformed men and women have lived out their 70 or 80 years listening to 40 or more *Catechism* sermons every year. Nearly half of all the preaching done by Reformed preachers — preachers still faithful to their bounden duty — is *Catechism* preaching.

For church and preacher alike, therefore, the importance of *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching can hardly be exaggerated.

However, *Catechism* preaching must be more than merely a “tradition” among us, if this practice is going to survive into the future. It must be a tradition that has a solid basis, a basis that is understood by pulpit and pew alike. There must continue to be appreciation — yea, love — for the exposition of the *Catechism* and regard for the outstanding benefits of this method of preaching.

From many quarters there are assaults directed against the Reformed practice of *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching. This is not altogether surprising, since from the very beginning there have been those who voiced objections to *Catechism* preaching. What is surprising, however, is that these objections are being heard with increasing frequency within the Reformed churches themselves, where the blessings of *Catechism* preaching have so long been enjoyed. Even among our own people, the importance and place of *Catechism* preaching is not always appreciated. And even from time to time dissatisfaction with the practice is heard and a call is issued for putting an end to it.

The main purpose of this paper is not so much to defend *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching *per se*, as to deal with the practice itself. My main concern is with how the *Catechism* should be preached and with discussing suggestions for the enrichment of *Catechism* sermons.

Composition of the *Heidelberg Catechism*

We need not go into detail regarding the history of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Yet a brief sketch will set the background for our discussion and

serve to illustrate the suitability of the *Catechism* for sermon-making.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* is named after the city of its nativity, Heidelberg, which in the 16th century was the capital of the German-speaking Palatinate. Its ruler was an "Elector," one of seven German princes who were responsible for the election of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

Early on Heidelberg had come under reformatory influences. In 1406 Jerome of Prague, countryman, sympathizer, and eventually fellow-martyr with the Bohemian pre-Reformer, John Huss, spent several months preaching in Heidelberg. Several of the Brethren of the Common Life found refuge in the city and even taught at the university. Martin Luther himself made several visits to the city. While still an Augustinian monk, he attended a theological conference in Heidelberg in 1516. In 1518 Luther publicly defended his teachings on the bondage of the will, free grace, faith, good works, and the authority of Holy Scripture in Heidelberg. On his way to the Diet of Worms, 1521, Luther spent a night in Heidelberg, taking the opportunity to preach in the Church of the Holy Ghost.

It was especially under the reign of Otto Henry (1556-1559) that the Reformation was planted in the Palatinate. Although Otto Henry was personally sympathetic to Lutheranism, he was also congenial to the Reformed. During his rule many persecuted Reformed Christians found a place of refuge in the Palatinate, and even in the city of Heidelberg itself. This was the beginning of tensions between these two branches of Protestantism that figured so much in the composition of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

In 1559, however, Otto Henry died unexpectedly. Because he left no male heir, his nephew, Frederick III (later surnamed "The Pious") became the new Elector of the Palatinate.

By the time Frederick assumed his rule, division between Lutherans and Reformed was deepening. There was even the threat of civil war. In Heidelberg there had been several public clashes between Tilemann Hesshius, the leader of the Lutheran faction, and Wilhelm Klebitz, leader of the Reformed. At the heart of the controversy, of course, was the whole issue of the presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord's Supper. Matters became so bad that one Sunday Hesshius and Klebitz struggled at the communion table.

Frederick was concerned to bring peace to his realm, and, if at all possible, conciliate the Lutheran and the Reformed. He made several attempts at this. The first was the formulation of a liturgy, to which all could agree, that might be used at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In 1561 Frederick convened a conference of the leading theologians in his realm. But the conference served only to indicate that fundamental differences still existed. Finally, in 1562, he ordered the preparation of a new catechism that

would be subscribed to throughout the Palatinate. In the meantime, Frederick himself had become thoroughly convinced of the Reformed (Calvinistic) view of the Lord's Supper.

The task of writing the new catechism was entrusted primarily to two men, Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus. Olevianus was at this time the Elector's court-preacher. Ursinus was theological professor in the University of Heidelberg. Even though these two are indisputably the primary authors of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, they were assisted by Frederick himself, as well as by certain members of the University faculty and consistory, such as Pierre Boquin, Emmanuel Tremellius, Michael Diller, and Thomas Erastus.

Other catechisms were consulted and borrowed from in the work of Ursinus and Olevianus. Ursinus himself had previously prepared a catechism known as *Summa Theologiae*. Use was made of catechisms produced by Bucer, Jud, Bullinger, Calvin, and a'Lasco, as well as some early Dutch catechisms in circulation.

The work of Ursinus and Olevianus was subjected to the scrutiny of a special commission appointed by Frederick. After revision by the commission, a general synod of all the ministers of the Palatinate was convened. It met from January 11-18, 1563. The result was the unanimous approval of the new catechism and the mandating of its immediate publication. The first edition appeared that same month bearing the title, "Catechismus Oder Christlicher Unterricht Wie Der In Kirchen Und Schulen Der Churfurstlichen Pfalz Getrieben Wirdt." ("Catechism, Or Christian Instruction, According To the Usages of the Churches and Schools of the Electoral Palatinate.")

Instantly the *Heidelberg Catechism*, as it was now called, won the acceptance of Reformed believers in the Palatinate. Before long, its influence began to be felt in Reformed circles throughout Europe. This is not hard to understand, writes Philip Schaff, since:

The *Catechism* is a work of religious enthusiasm, based on solid theological learning, and directed by excellent judgment. It is baptized with the pentecostal fire of the great Reformation.... It is the product of the heart as well as the head, full of faith and unction from above. It is fresh, lively, glowing, yet clear, sober, self-sustained. The ideas are biblical and orthodox, and well fortified by apt Scripture proofs. The language is eloquent. It is the language of devotion as well as instruction. Altogether the *Heidelberg Catechism* is more than a book, it is an institution, and will live as long as the Reformed Church.¹

1 Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), Vol. I, p. 542.

Besides the initial edition of the *Heidelberg Catechism* which appeared in January of 1563, two other printings were required before the year's end.

The only major revision concerned the 80th question and answer, which denounces the Roman Catholic celebration of the mass as "a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry." This question and answer was absent from the first printing of the *Catechism*, partially inserted in the second edition, and present in the third edition as we have it today. This question was added at the express command of the Elector Frederick, who may himself have written it. The notice was appended at the end of the second and third editions: "What has been overlooked in the first print, as especially on folio 55 [which contains the 80th question and answer], has now been added by command of his electoral grace. 1563."

Very early the *Catechism* was accepted among the Dutch Reformed. Already in 1566, Peter Dathenus translated the *Catechism* into Dutch and included it as an appendix to his Dutch rendering of the Genevan Psalter.

History of the Homiletical Use (Preaching) of the *Catechism*

Nearly from the first, the *Heidelberg Catechism* was preached. Besides serving as a confession, as an instructional tool for the youth — one of its main purposes as stated by Frederick in his introduction to the *Catechism* — it also very soon became the text of sermons.²

The first documented use of the *Catechism* for preaching is by Peter Gabriel, minister in Amsterdam, in 1566 (only three years after the publication of the first edition). It is apparent that he was not alone in this practice, but one of several Dutch Reformed ministers preaching to their congregations from the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

It was also in 1566 that the *Catechism* was published for the first time with the questions and answers numbered (120 questions and answers) and divided into fifty-two "Lord's Days," evidently to facilitate use in preaching.

The practice of preaching from a catechism did not originate with the preaching on the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Already before the publication of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, other existing catechisms were used in preaching. Among Lutheran ministers sermons were often made on the basis of Luther's *Catechism*. And after the *Heidelberg Catechism* made its appear-

2 Besides the homiletical use of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Dr. P.Y. DeJong mentions eight other uses: confessional, juridical, catechetical, liturgical, polemical, evangelistic, ecumenical, and devotional. "Comments On Catechetical Preaching," *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, vol. 1, number: 2, Fall, 1985, pp. 175ff.

ance, some ministers still preferred to make use of other catechisms in their preaching, as, for example, the *Catechism of Geneva*. Gradually, however, the *Heidelberg Catechism* won out over these other catechisms, largely because of its superior suitability for preaching. Several synods of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands encouraged its use in preaching before the Synod of 's Gravenhage, in 1586, made preaching on the *Heidelberg Catechism* mandatory.

Already a question was put to the Synod of Dordt, 1574, regarding the advisability of *Catechism* preaching. The Synod decided:

The answer to the question of Walcheren whether it would be good that good homilies based on the *Catechism* be made is as follows: This shall be left as it is [optional, that is, R.C.], but it would be good if the ministers in an orderly manner take turns in the classical meeting to explain in summary form a question or two from the *Catechism* and in this way teach and sensitize each other and also learn to explain the *Catechism* thoroughly to the congregation in an orderly and edifying manner.³

The Synod of Dordt, 1578, encouraged the preaching of a sermon based on the *Heidelberg Catechism* in the afternoon service after the administration of the Lord's Supper.

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, was asked to produce an exposition of the *Heidelberg Catechism* that might aid the ministers in producing *Catechism* sermons.

Question: Whether it would be good to make some explanations of the *Catechism* in the form of homilies or something similar for beginners?
Answer: Jeremias Bastingius and the Classis of Walloon are considering this and, working on the *Catechism* of our churches, shall bring together and shall produce not homilies but exegesis which, having been examined by the Classis of Brabant and Walloon, shall be distributed.⁴

It was the Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1586, that was the first Dutch Reformed synod to make *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching mandatory.

Ministers shall on each Lord's Day, generally, in the afternoon sermons, briefly explain the sum of Christian doctrine contained in the *Catechism*, which at present is accepted in the Netherlands churches, in such a way that

3 *Ecclesiastical Manual*, translated by Richard R. DeRidder (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 75.

4 DeRidder, p. 130.

it may be finished annually, following the division of the *Catechism* itself, made for that purpose.⁵

The Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19, after carefully examining the *Heidelberg Catechism*, opposed any changes in the *Catechism* — changes for which the Remonstrants had been agitating — and in its 148th Session, May 1, 1619, passed a resolution affirming that the *Heidelberg Catechism*

...formed altogether a most accurate compend of the orthodox Christian faith; being, with singular skill, not only adapted to the understanding of the young, but suited also for the advantageous instruction of older persons; so that it could continue to be taught with great edification in the Belgic churches, and ought by all means to be retained.⁶

Out of this conviction, the Synod of Dordt affirmed the decision of the Synod of 's Gravenhage requiring weekly *Heidelberg Catechism* sermons.

This requirement exists still today in Reformed churches throughout the world. The Protestant Reformed Churches are one example of this.

The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the *Heidelberg Catechism* so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the *Catechism* itself, for that purpose. *Church Order*, Article 68.

These churches are serious about the carrying out of this requirement. For this reason, at every annual church visitation the question is put to the consistory: "Is the *Heidelberg Catechism* regularly explained in the services for Divine Worship, so that no doctrine is left untreated?"

***Heidelberg Catechism* Preaching as Preaching of the Word of God**

Over the years numerous objections have been raised against *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching. We are not going to take notice of all these objections or spend any time refuting them. Suffice it to say that no objection of real substance has yet been brought forward. The majority of the objections, when analyzed, concern the WAY in which the *Catechism* is preached, not *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching *per se*.

There is one accusation that we do wish to say a few things about, that is the accusation that *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching is NOT preaching of the Word of God. This is the most serious of the objections lodged against

5 DeRidder, p. 151.

6 Schaff, p. 549.

this practice, and the most often heard. At the same time from the very beginning the Reformed churches gave an answer to this charge.

The accusation is serious because, if it is true, the Reformed churches are guilty of the most serious thing a church can be guilty of — not preaching the Word of God. Still more, the Reformed churches have been guilty of this for over 400 years, mind you!

One of those who faults *Catechism* preaching on this ground is D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his well-known *Preaching and Preachers*. He writes:

...on the whole I do not believe in preaching through a catechism. There are those for whom I have great respect who do this regularly; but I suggest that this is not a wise procedure, chiefly for the reason that it tends to produce a theoretical attitude to the Truth, an over-intellectual attitude to the Truth. It is not that I do not believe in teaching people the *Catechism*. I do. But my view is that this should be done at another time and in a different way. I would place this under the heading of instruction and deal with it in a series of lectures. But, still better, it seems to me, is to tell the people to read and study the *Catechism* for themselves and then consider it together in discussion groups.

I say all this because I believe, as I have been indicating, that in preaching the message should always arise out of the Scriptures directly and not out of the formulations of men, even the best men. After all, these catechisms were produced by men and men who were concerned to emphasize certain things in their peculiar historical situation, over against certain things in their peculiar historical situation, over against certain other teachings and attitudes. At their best, therefore, they tend to be incomplete, they tend to have a particular emphasis; and therefore they tend to leave out certain things. But my final argument against preaching through the *Catechism* is that the same object can be achieved by preaching from the Scriptures in the way I have indicated; for after all, the catechisms derive from the Scriptures. The function of a catechism, I would have thought, ultimately, is not to provide material for preaching; it is to safeguard the correctness of the preaching, and to safeguard the interpretations of the people as they read their Bibles. As that is the main function of creeds and catechisms, it is surely wrong therefore to just preach constantly year after year on the *Catechism*, instead of preaching the Word directly from the Scriptures itself, with the Scriptures always open before you, and the minds of the people directed to that rather than to men's understanding of it. Though what you are preaching is your understanding of the meaning and the teaching of the Scriptures this method preserves, and emphasizes in a clearer manner, the idea that you are giving the message of the Bible rather than the dogma of a particular church.⁷

7 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 187.

The charge that *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching is not the preaching of the Word of God is fallacious. Because its contents stand in full agreement with the Word of God — as every Reformed minister avows who signs the “Formula of Subscription” — and are an explanation of the Word of God, it can unhesitatingly be asserted that *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching is preaching of the Word of God.

Much of the *Catechism* is taken directly from the Scriptures: the articles of the “Apostles’ Creed,” the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer are examples. There are over 650 Scripture references throughout the 120 questions and answers of the *Catechism*. Copious Scripture references line the outside column of every page. The whole purpose of the *Heidelberg Catechism* was that it should systematically set forth the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. All of Scripture has been consulted and its teaching on every fundamental truth has been considered. VanDellen and Monsma remark:

Sometimes it has been objected that *Catechism* preaching is the setting aside of the Word of God. It is claimed to be preaching of man’s Word. This presentation is utterly false for every Lord’s Day division of the *Catechism* is the summary of several Bible passages. Virtually, therefore, the Minister who preaches on a certain Lord’s Day division of the *Catechism* is preaching on several passages of God’s Word.... When we preach a *Catechism* sermon, we are preaching the Word of God just as well as if we preach on a certain text or passage taken directly from the Bible. Only, in case of catechism preaching, one expounds and applies the Word of God according to a summary of that Word adopted by all the Churches and agreed to by all the members of our Churches.⁸

Defending *Catechism* preaching as the preaching of the Word, Dr. P. Y. DeJong writes:

No sermon — and on this all will have to agree — is simply a verbatim recitation of a large number of biblical texts. If this is what our Lord had wished, he would never have ordered his apostles to “preach” and to “teach.” Nor would he have said to them after speaking his parables, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” In a similar vein Paul urged Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth,” supplementing this with the

8 Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), p. 277.

command, "Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage — with great patience and careful instructions." These and many other passages demonstrate that the gospel is to be explained and applied to those who hear.⁹

There can really be no doubt about it that faithful *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching IS preaching of the Word of God.

How the *Catechism* is to be Preached

An important question is HOW the *Catechism* should be preached, the method of *Catechism* preaching.

The *Church Order* answers this question: "The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly ... the *Heidelberg Catechism*...." The *Catechism* is to be preached. The *Catechism* is to be explained. The language of the *Catechism* is to be exegeted, if you will. Very really, the particular Lord's Day or part of a Lord's Day is the "text" of the sermon. In his sermon the minister must deal with the words, phrases, sentences, and thoughts expressed in the *Catechism*.

The method that is to be rejected here is that of preaching on a text of Scripture and only referring to the *Catechism*. Or what is worse, using the *Catechism* as a jumping-off point for the sermon, to which point the preacher never returns in the course of his sermon. This is mere lip-service to the requirement of Article 68 of the *Church Order*, no actual carrying out of its demand.

VanOosterzee writes:

By this we do not of course mean to say that every kind of preaching on the *Catechism* is desirable or useful. Everything here depends on the character of a preaching which has added to the history of Homiletics many a fair page, but also many a blurred and blotted one. One may preach on the *Catechism* merely for the pleasure of being able to contradict it; the moral dishonesty of this line of practice, however, where it extends to the essence of the Church's Confession, hardly needs pointing out. One may read out a section of the *Catechism*, and then proceed to preach wholly at large upon the subject embraced in this section, with the employment now and then of a word from the textbook; a compliance with the form, to the total perversion of the meaning of the requirement. One may also converse upon the *Catechism*, paraphrase it, dilute the precious wine of its teaching with copious draughts of water; a most effective way of sending the hearers to sleep, and attenuating still more the congregation usually present. One may, in the last place, fulfill in all conscientiousness the twofold requirement of delivering a discourse

9 DeJong, *MJT*, Vol. 2, Number 2, Fall, 1986, p. 159.

less oratorical, more didactic in its style, aiming most of all at the clearer presentation and confirmation of Christian knowledge; the contents, extent, and course of which are, so far as may be, determined by the nature of the subject and the peculiarity of the section now in its turn under review.... Here what is called for is above all clearness and accuracy of dogmatic presentation, not at the cost, but in the interest, of the practical side of the subject, as will be the case where the work is entered upon with zest.¹⁰

That it is the *Catechism* itself that must be preached is also the position taken by the late Prof. H.C. Hoeksema. In a classroom syllabus entitled *Homiletics*, prepared for use in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, he writes:

In view of the fact that increasingly this practice [of *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching, RC] is neglected in many churches, and in view of the fact that many ministers try in various ways to evade this duty, it is not amiss that we stress that the minister must preach on the *Heidelberg Catechism* itself, and must in his preaching expound the *Catechism*. He must not preach on a text from Scripture and merely refer to the *Catechism* in the course of his sermon. He must not merely preach on the truth on which the *Catechism* touches in a particular Lord's Day. But he must preach on the *Catechism* itself. He must read the Lord's Day as he reads his text before the sermon, and then he must proceed to preach a sermon on that Lord's Day. Anything less than this cannot properly be called *Catechism* preaching.¹¹

In a pamphlet entitled *Heidelberg Catechism Preaching: Our Reformed Heritage*, the Rev. Marvin Kamps vigorously defends this method of *Catechism* preaching.

As to the method of preaching the *Catechism*, therefore, there can be no doubt but that our fathers wanted the *Catechism* itself to be explained and applied in the Light of Scripture.¹²

Kamps goes on to fault those "...Reformed preachers (who) do not want to have the Lord's Day itself as their text."¹³ And he rejects the "...erroneous

10 J.J. VanOosterzee, *Practical Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), p. 261.

11 Homer C. Hoeksema, *Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1975), p. 42.

12 Marvin Kamps, "Heidelberg Catechism Preaching: Our Reformed Heritage" (Grandville: Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, 1978), p. 10.

13 Kamps, p. 10.

idea that we must not preach the *Heidelberg Catechism* itself.”¹⁴ It is true, as he alleges, that historically the refusal to preach on the *Catechism* itself was the first indication of dissatisfaction with and departure from the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. This is precisely what happened with the Remonstrants in the 16th and 17th centuries in The Netherlands.

Although the *Catechism* itself must be preached, this does not prohibit the judicious use of a text or passage of Scripture in connection with the exposition of the *Catechism*. This certainly may and ought to be done. Concerning this Hoeksema writes:

The minister must not forget to leave the impression with the congregation that even in *Catechism* preaching he administers the Word of God... we make the point that this ought to be explicit in the preaching. It is a good custom, therefore, that at the beginning of the sermon the minister quotes a few pertinent texts and points the congregation to them as the basis of the instruction contained in the particular Lord's Day on which he is preaching. And while it is not always equally possible to be explicit on this in (the) course of one's sermon, the minister should certainly let his sermon as much as possible be controlled by the Scriptures. We may remark, too, that frequently it is appropriate as well as enriching to make room in the sermon for a brief explanation of this or that related passage of Scripture.¹⁵

VanDellen and Monsma state:

It may be said in this connection that *Catechism* sermons should be so constructed that the congregation sees very clearly that the truths embodied in the *Catechism* are indeed but reproductions of God's own Word.¹⁶

Always the *Catechism* must be preached in the light of Scripture. Since the contents of the *Catechism* are based upon and derived from Holy Scripture, this must be demonstrated. Ultimately the faith of God's people must be made to rest in Jesus Christ *as He is revealed in Scripture*.

Especially for the sake of the young, as well as for recent converts to the Reformed faith, it must be demonstrated that the various teachings of the *Heidelberg Catechism* are the teachings of God's Word. They must be brought to see and be convinced of that.

This may be done, as has been suggested, by reference at the beginning

14 Kamps, p. 11.

15 Hoeksema, p. 43.

16 VanDellen and Monsma, p. 277.

of the sermon to various Scripture passages on which the teaching of a particular Lord's Day rests. Often ministers have concluded the reading of these references with the formula: "On these and similar passages of Holy Writ is based the teaching of Lord's Day...."

For myself, I have preferred not to follow this approach. Rather, I make use of the passage or a part of the passage used in the Scripture reading in the course of the sermon. The passage underlies the main truth set forth in the Lord's Day or an important aspect of that truth. Some freedom must be granted here, each man doing what he is most comfortable with and what, in his judgment, is most edifying for the congregation.

That it is the *Catechism* itself that must be preached does not either preclude, in my judgment, a fuller treatment of certain truths skipped over or only slightly treated in the *Catechism*. There are various doctrines given scant treatment in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, as, for example, the doctrine of Holy Scripture, the doctrine of predestination, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, and the doctrine of the covenant. Fuller treatment of these doctrines is possible.

It may be profitable for the minister, in connection with the statement of Lord's Day 7 that faith "...hold(s) for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word..." after a treatment of the contents of the Lord's Day proper, to preach a brief series of sermons on the doctrine of Holy Scripture. In connection with Lord's Day 9, especially in light of the present day threat of theistic evolution, it may be good judgment on the minister's part to preach several sermons dealing with the truth of creation. Or, in connection with Lord's Day 20, which deals with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the minister may spend some time developing various aspects of this doctrine not explicitly referred to in the Lord's Day, in addition to what is said concerning the Spirit's person and work. Lord's Day 21, the 54th answer, speaks of the church as "chosen to everlasting life." Here the minister may appropriately pause and preach a couple of sermons on election, with direct reference to the language of the 54th question and answer. The 52nd answer, dealing with Christ's return in judgment, makes reference to "everlasting condemnation" and "heavenly joys and glory." It might be worthwhile for the minister to preach a sermon, in connection with this Lord's Day, on hell and on heaven. The 124th answer speaks of our doing the will of God "...as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven," and the 127th answer refers to our mortal enemy, the Devil, who "cease(s) not to assault us." At this point the minister may find it profitable to preach on the subject of the angels and devils, about which there is great ignorance and misconception. This would properly be done after a consideration of the general contents of these Lord's Days. This certainly is not a violation of the requirement of *Catechism* preaching, and I have found that congregations appreciate this.

Preaching Through the *Catechism* Within One Year

Article 68 of the *Church Order* stipulates that the preaching of the *Catechism* shall “...as much as possible ... be annually completed, according to the division of the *Catechism* itself, for that purpose.”

In light of this stipulation, some have argued for a treatment of the *Catechism* that takes approximately one year, and have been opposed to spending two or three years in preaching through the *Catechism*.

VanDellen and Monsma state:

Again, sermons that go into great detail, so that two, three, or more sermons are required for one Lord’s Day division should be avoided. Let the rule of Article 68 be observed. If our fathers, having more time and moving much slower than we, found it best to cover the *Catechism* in one year’s time, then in all likelihood it is best for us also.¹⁷

Prof. Hoeksema writes:

The minister should try as much as possible to go through the *Catechism* once a year.¹⁸

The fact of the matter is, however, that it is impossible for the minister to complete the *Catechism* in one year’s time.

One reason for this is that there are often “special” services at which the *Catechism* is not preached: baptism services, Lord’s Supper, and various Christian holidays (like Easter and Pentecost). Besides, often the minister is forced to be absent from the pulpit in his own congregation due to classical appointments, vacation, attendance at Synod, and so forth.

Besides, it simply is not often possible to cover all of the material in a given Lord’s Day in one sermon. A hasty treatment of the *Catechism* does not do justice to the *Catechism*. Many of the Lord’s Days contain an abundance of material, and although the minister need not attempt to exhaust each Lord’s Day each time through the *Catechism*, often more than one sermon is necessary before he is ready to move on to the next Lord’s Day. Lord’s Day 6, for example, not only proclaims Jesus as the only possible Mediator, but also explains how the whole Old Testament foreshadowed His coming, and teaches the proper relationship between the testaments. Lord’s Day 7 deals with the several aspects of saving faith. Lord’s Day 12 treats of the threefold office of Christ AND what it means to be a Christian. How could all of this material be “crammed” into one sermon? Lord’s Days 15

17 VanDellen and Monsma, p. 279.

18 Hoeksema, p. 42.

and 16 treat the steps in Christ's humiliation. Several sermons can be preached on this material, treating the steps individually. Recently I listened to a tape of a sermon by a Reformed minister on Lord's Days 14-16, covering everything from the virgin birth to the descension into hell. All in one sermon, and a half-hour sermon at that! What an affront to the *Catechism*.

On this question of preaching through the *Catechism* in a year, Dr. P. Y. DeJong gives the following advice:

For the first series, not only at the beginning of his ministry but also when assuming a new charge, a pastor does well to follow the regulation as faithfully as possible. he thus lays solid foundations for any further treatment of this "sum of Christian doctrine" in the years allotted to him. Soon, however, he discovers that certain Lord's Days are so laden with material that they deserve occasionally two, three, or ever four sermons.¹⁹

We ought to understand the rationale behind the insertion into Article 68 of the *Church Order* the requirement that as much as possible the preaching through the *Catechism* be completed annually. The intent was not so much to assure that within one year all the fifty-two Lord's Days of the *Catechism* would be preached upon, as to insure that there would be regular, uninterrupted preaching on the *Catechism*. If the ministers were required to preach through the *Catechism* in a year's time, they would be forced to "stick with it" and not preach on the *Catechism* only sporadically.

Recent revisions of the *Church Order* by the Christian Reformed Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches have dropped this requirement.

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, following its sequence. (Christian Reformed Church, *Church Order*, Article 54b.)

The consistory shall call the congregation together for worship twice on the Lord's Day. The consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the *Heidelberg Catechism* is proclaimed. (Canadian Reformed Churches, *Church Order*, Article 52.)

It is good, therefore, that there is a certain amount of flexibility in *Church Order*, Article 68: "...as much as possible...." The minister ought to take proper advantage of that flexibility.

But this flexibility must never become an excuse for a minister to become irregular and negligent in preparing and preaching *Catechism*

19 DeJong, *MJT*, Vol. 3, Number 1, Spring, 1987, p. 121.

sermons. The minister may not weary of *Catechism* preaching and so begin to ignore his duty. Usually this begins gradually. The minister does not preach a *Catechism* sermon every Sunday he could or should. This laxity has crept into several denominations today where once *Catechism* preaching was a recognized institution. Already in 1902 the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church was cognizant of this laxity and issued the following exhortation to the churches:

With a view to dangers from without that threaten sound doctrine, and in consideration of the great need of, and the very meager interest in the regular development of dogmatical truths, Synod emphasizes the time-honored custom of *Catechism* preaching, and the Classes are urged to give proper attention to this matter, that the regular consideration of the *Catechism* may be observed.²⁰

Here elders and church visitors have a responsibility. Elders must see to it that their minister is faithful in carrying out the duty of *Catechism* preaching. They must see to it that he preaches the *Catechism* and that he preaches the *Catechism* regularly. Church visitors must not fail to inquire into this at the annual church visitation, admonish those who might be negligent, and report such negligence to the classis.

Maintaining the Vitality of *Catechism* Preaching

Often *Catechism* preaching is criticized as being dull and repetitive, theological lectures that contain little by way of practical admonition and application to God's people. Sad to say, often this complaint is justified. Prof. Hoeksema writes:

Perhaps the most common complaint against *Catechism* preaching is that it becomes stale and uninteresting. If this complaint is ever justifiable — and it may very well be in some instances — then the blame for this is largely to be laid at the door of the minister. There is no need whatsoever that *Catechism* preaching should become stale and uninteresting. But it can become uninteresting if the minister allows it to become monotonously repetitious. And the antidote for such repetitiousness is study and development on the part of the minister. He certainly must not be satisfied to prepare a series of fifty-two *Catechism* sermons, and then to “turn the pile over” after he has preached on Lord's Day 52 and begin again with sermon number one with little or no change. In fact, he must never be satisfied merely to revise and to rephrase an old sermon, but he should prepare a new sermon each time he preaches on a given Lord's Day.... Let the minister, therefore, study diligently. Let him

20 Quoted from VanDellen and Monsma, p. 280.

prepare new sermons. Let him treat the *Catechism* each time from a new point of view. The results of this method will be surprising. The minister himself will grow and develop in the understanding of the truth; his preaching on the *Catechism* will be enriched; the interest of the congregation will be maintained at a high level; and the congregation will grow in the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and become well-founded in the faith.²¹

Allow us to be so bold as to make a few suggestions that may be helpful in maintaining freshness in *Catechism* preaching. (Feel free to offer your own suggestions in the discussion period to follow.)

The first suggestion is: Read! Read widely. Read voraciously. Read the Scriptures, examining anew all (or as many as possible) passages bearing on a given Lord's Day. Read theology. Consult the systematics on the various doctrinal subjects treated in the *Catechism* — Hoeksema, Berkhof, Hodge, Dabney, Calvin, to mention just a few.

Read works that have been produced on various doctrinal points covered in the *Catechism*. Read books on the providence of God, the Trinity, the virgin birth, the atonement, the church, baptism, the Lord's Supper, justification, sanctification, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.

Read the other Reformed confessions, the *Belgic Confession*, the *Canons of Dordt*, and the *Westminster Confession*, in particular. Compare the explanations of various truths in these creeds with that of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

Read the various expositions of the *Heidelberg Catechism* that are available, both in Dutch and English. Two new works in English that have recently been published are worth mentioning. The first is *Comfort and Joy*, by Andrew Kuyvenhoven, former editor of the *Banner*. Mid-America Reformed Seminary has released the first of two volumes of sermons on the *Heidelberg Catechism* entitled *That Christ May Dwell In Your Hearts*, sermons on Lord's Days 1-20. The second volume was expected to be printed in the Fall of 1990.

Good use can also be made of the many Dutch commentaries on the *Heidelberg Catechism* that are available, either new or used. This is also a good way for the minister to brush up on his Dutch, which has probably become quite moldy since Seminary days. Two works that are worth translating, or at least consulting, are Kuyper's *E Voto* and Veldkamp's *Zondagskinderen*.

A second suggestion for maintaining the vitality of *Catechism* sermons: Apply the truths of the *Catechism* to the needs of the congregation.

21 Hoeksema, p. 43.

In the good sense of the word, be practical! Take present attacks upon the faith into consideration in the polemics in which you engage — theistic evolution, Pentecostalism, paedo-communion, abortion, birth control, women's rights movement, drugs and alcohol, teen suicide, materialism, hedonism, pleasure-madness, Sabbath desecration, ecumenism, Self-Esteem movement, New Age movement, etc. Be up-to-date, addressing the Word of God in the *Catechism* to current issues confronting God's people. This ought to be an important part of the making of every *Catechism* sermon. The minister must work at it to apply the preaching, often the most difficult part of the task.

A third suggestion: Pay attention to the original German of the *Catechism*. This will afford fresh insights into the *Catechism* and provide some nice points that can be used in sermons. The German may be significantly different from the English, add something left out in the English, or simply provide a different nuance of meaning. Let me give some examples.

Second question is not, "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, *enjoying* this comfort mayest live and die happily?", but, "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, *in* this comfort mayest live and die happily?"

Tenth question, "Will God suffer such disobedience and *rebellion* to go unpunished?" is really, "Will God suffer such disobedience and *apostasy* to go unpunished?"

Twelfth answer is not, "*God will* have His justice satisfied," but "*God wills* that His justice be satisfied."

Sixty-seventh answer speaks literally and much more graphically of our salvation "standing" in the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, rather than just "depending upon."

Seventy-fourth answer regarding infant baptism does not say that salvation is promised to "adults" no less than to infants, but to "their parents."

Eighty-first answer speaks literally not just of being displeased with our sins, but with "ourselves" — take that, you Self-Esteemers.

Eighty-second and eighty-third questions and answers do not merely speak of the keys of the kingdom, but the "office" of the keys.

Eighty-fifth answer speaks not just of excommunication's exclusion from the Christian "church," but from the Christian "communion."

Eighty-sixth answer mentions as a motivation for performing good works not simply that "others" may be gained to Christ, but "our neighbors."

Eighty-eighth question speaks not merely of conversion, but "repentance" and conversion. Repentance is an important part, the beginning of conversion. It is also the evidence of conversion.

Ninety-eighth question deals with the Second Commandment. The

question in the English is, "But may not *images* be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity?" Literally the German is, "But may not *pictures* be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity?" A different word is used here than the word for "image" in question and answers 96 and 97.

One hundred third answer speaks of part of our obedience to the Fourth Commandment as our diligently frequenting the church of God, not simply to "hear" the Word of God, but to "learn" the Word of God. Also, the calling implied in the Fourth Commandment is not that we "cease" from our evil works and yield ourselves to the Lord, but "rest" from our evil works, a significant statement in connection with the Fourth Commandment.

One hundred sixth answer speaks of the causes of murder as "secret" murder. And whereas the English speaks of God "accounting" all these as [secret] murder, the German says that all these things are murder "in His sight." The idea is that God beholds, sees, and knows the thoughts of the heart.

One hundred sixteenth answer, speaking of the necessity of prayer, mentions that God gives His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires "ask" them of Him. The German has "beg."

One hundred twenty-second answer does not simply make reference to God's power, but to His "Almighty" power.

One hundred twenty-sixth answer speaks not simply of our transgressions, but our "manifold" transgressions.

One hundred twenty-seventh answer is much more expressive in the German. "Moment" is "eye-blink"; "resist" is "stand against"; and "be overcome" is "sink."

A final suggestion: Use various themes and treat the *Catechism* from different viewpoints.

There are several main themes from which all the Lord's Days can be treated. Some possibilities are:

- 1) Comfort, or The Teaching of Comfort.
- 2) The Covenant.
- 3) The Kingdom of God.
- 4) The Doctrine of the Church.

Or, since the *Catechism* follows the broad outline of the Book of Romans, extensive use might be made of the Epistle to the Romans. Or, the Lord's Days could be preached in the light of the Old Testament. Or, the Book of Psalms, which like the *Catechism* is experiential, could be used.

The various parts of the *Catechism* could be treated from the perspective of varying themes.

- 1) The Apostles' Creed.
 - a) I Believe....
 - b) The Church's Confession.

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- c) With Heart and Mouth.
- d) The Catholic Faith.
- e) The Fundamentals of the Gospel.
- 2) The Sacraments.
 - a) Means of Grace.
 - b) Means of Faith.
 - c) Means of Salvation.
 - d) Means of Assurance.
 - e) Signs and Seals of the Covenant.
- 3) The Ten Commandments.
 - a) The Rule of Gratitude.
 - b) The Standard For Christian Living.
 - c) The Law of Liberty.
 - d) The Law of the Covenant.
 - e) The Law of Love.
 - f) Obedience and Blessedness.
- 4) The Lord's Prayer.
 - a) The Chief Part of Thankfulness.
 - b) In the School of Prayer.
 - c) Prayer and Praise.
 - d) The Prayer That Teaches to Pray.

These are just a few suggestions for maintaining the vitality of *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching.

Our prayer is that this institution does not die out among us, but continues to flourish. God give us preachers the ability to make good *Catechism* sermons. And may He use us and our preaching diligently on the *Catechism* for the instruction, growth, and comfort of His people, young and old alike. Thus will the church be saved — preaching's great goal. And thus will God's Name be glorified — preaching's still greater goal. ▲

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Another Look At Common Grace (1)

Herman C. Hanko

Introduction

It might arouse a sigh of weariness in the souls of some to see another series of articles devoted to the subject of common grace in a Protestant Reformed magazine. There are undoubtedly those with some knowledge of the Protestant Reformed Churches who may have thought these churches really never wrote about much else but common grace; and another series of articles on the subject is in keeping with their character. These churches continue to grind old axes that have been ground on the stones of Protestant Reformed theology now for some 70 years.

There is some truth to all this, we readily admit.

Disagreement over the doctrine of common grace was the occasion for the organization of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Those who denied this doctrine were not permitted to be ministers within the Christian Reformed Church. The reasons were clear enough: The Christian Reformed Church adopted common grace as official dogma in keeping with Scripture and the Reformed Confessions; the Protestant Reformed Churches repudiate common grace and claim that it is a doctrine contrary to both Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. Hence, two denominations.

Because the question of common grace has occupied such an important place in the beginning of the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, it is not surprising that a great deal has been written on this subject by Protestant Reformed preachers and theologians. Perhaps the amount of writing by Protestant Reformed authors outweighs the total amount of writing on this subject by all other authors combined — although many different theologians, from both Presbyterian and Reformed traditions, have written extensively on the subject.

It would, it seems, require some justification to return again to the subject in this series of *Journal* articles.

Although a specific formulation of the doctrine of common grace by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 in the now famous “three points” became the immediate occasion of the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and although most of the writing dealing with the subject in Protestant Reformed theological literature has focused on those three points, there are significant ways in which both the three points

and the discussions surrounding them have become outdated.

Scarcely anyone knows anymore what the three points are all about and what specifically they teach. They are, seemingly, a part of ancient history which interests only a few historians. They themselves are really no longer relevant to current theological discussion. This is the more true because, after a brief flurry of writing in their defense shortly after 1924, the three points have been, for the most part, consigned to oblivion, to be raised only when some aberration of doctrine and life needed theological support.

But this does not mean that the whole subject of common grace is no longer relevant. It may not be all that relevant in the form given to it by the "three points," but it remains a subject of much discussion in both Presbyterian and Reformed churches, both in this land and abroad. Much is still being written on the subject; appeal to common grace is common in theological circles; and, in fact, in some circles it seems so completely accepted as truth that no one even thinks of questioning the doctrine. It has almost the hallowed sanctity of the doctrine of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all the writings that have appeared, especially in more recent years, some interesting questions have come up which have not been faced earlier. This in itself gives reason for taking a new look at the subject. Not only has enough time passed to give the objectivity of a more distant perspective to the discussion, but new questions have come up which require answers and new issues have been raised which need to be addressed.

Among these new issues is to be found the obvious fact that not all people use the term "common grace" in the same sense of the word. In fact, in discussing the issues surrounding the whole idea of common grace, one soon discovers that there are many who believe that common grace means nothing more than the providence of God in His daily rule of creation. Common grace is the providential control of rain and sunshine which God is pleased to send upon the earth. Now, while one may perhaps quarrel with the use of the term "grace" in this connection, no one will quarrel with the idea. That God's providence is His power by which He controls all that happens in all creation is a truth written large on every page of Scripture and imbedded firmly in all Reformed and Presbyterian creeds. But misunderstandings of this sort need badly to be cleared up; and perhaps the time has come to make an effort to do this.

But all this must not detract from the fact that the ongoing discussions which are directly on the subject of common grace or which appeal to common grace as some sort of theological basis for other ideas have raised new and interesting aspects of the whole question which were not addressed in the bitter controversies of the 1920s. Various subjects which are directly or indirectly related to common grace are repeatedly discussed and are,

therefore, worthy of closer attention. It is our purpose to concentrate on some of these subjects.

One event of no little importance seems also to require a new look at the subject. Recently in the Christian Reformed Church, the mother church of the Protestant Reformed Churches, events have brought about a serious crisis, with the result that many individuals, congregations, or parts of congregations have felt compelled to forsake their denominational ties and secede from their mother church. Secession has been forced on these people because of false doctrine within their mother church. While many within this conservative and secession movement are not at all persuaded that common grace has played a role in the apostasy of their mother church, there are others who are not so sure. They are at least inclined to take a look at the question of whether or not the seeds of the apostasy of the last couple of decades were not sown back in the early '20s. Some of them have expressed the desire to take another and new look at the whole subject of common grace.

It is in the hope and with the prayer that this series of articles may clear up misunderstandings which have existed and open the door to new discussions that we venture upon this project. Implied in this is an invitation for anyone interested in the subject to submit material relating to common grace which will be seriously considered for publication in our *Journal*.

Material To Be Treated

The subject of common grace is a broad subject which is related to many other theological concepts and truths. Some of these we are interested in and some of them we are not.

The whole subject of the free offer of the gospel, e.g., is intimately and inescapably connected with common grace. This was true of the "three points" of 1924 which spoke of the fact that God's attitude "of favor or grace" which "He shows to all His creatures in general" is manifested in "the general offer of the gospel." And those who have discussed the whole question of the free offer of the gospel have pointed out that such an offer can be understood only within the boundaries of common grace.

It is not, however, our intention to enter into that question of the free offer of the gospel in this series of articles. Much has been written about it, also in this *Journal*, and to discuss this whole question again would involve us in massive redundancies. Not only that, but one wearies of the whole subject at last. The Protestant Reformed Churches have, over the years, set forth the position of Scripture and the Confessions on this question over and over again. Some choose to ignore what has been written; some continue, in spite of all that has been written, to misrepresent the view which we defend; some, understanding the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches, take issue with it and defend a position contrary to it. The latter

are to be respected, even though they differ. But in any case, there is little point in writing more. We are not going to raise our banner again in defense of the sovereign and particular address of God in the gospel.

There are fundamental questions of common grace which are addressed by all who discuss the matter — whether it be the defenders of the “three points” of 1924; the proponents of common grace by those who have forgotten 1924; the Presbyterian theologians such as Charles Hodge and John Murray; or the proponents of common grace in other parts of the world whose denominations or congregations have never been touched by controversy over the issue.

These questions, generally speaking, involve several points.

Perhaps the most crucial question is the precise meaning of common grace. Louis Berkhof, e.g., in his *Systematic Theology*, speaks of three kinds of common grace: universal common grace, general common grace, and covenant common grace.¹ Is there agreement on this question, or do differences also emerge here?

In close connection with the question of the meaning of common grace, the relationship between common grace and the cross of Christ must be examined. The most fundamental question is: If common grace is indeed *grace*, is that common grace earned by the atoning sacrifice of Christ? — an affirmative answer to which question would indicate that, in some sense of the word at least, the cross of Christ is universal.

Some have answered the question in the negative; others have answered it with an emphatic Yes; still others have answered with a somewhat hesitant and circumscribed Yes. That it is an important question is evident from the fact that the Christian Reformed Church in the mid-1960s dealt with the question of the universality of the death of Christ as that death of Christ stands related to the universal love or grace of God. This question was discussed at length on the broadest level of ecclesiastical assemblies.

Common grace, perhaps in its most basic sense, involves the question of God’s good gifts to the ungodly. God’s good gifts, the gifts of His providence, come to all. They come to wicked and righteous. They come to the praying saint and the blaspheming sinner. They come to the elect and the reprobate. The crucial question, the one that needs discussing, is: Are not these good gifts of God evidences of his grace? Does one ever give good gifts in anger and hatred? Are not the good things of life, in the nature of the case, gracious gifts of God? ... gifts undeserved? ... gifts gratuitously given? ... gifts, therefore, of grace? It is a question that needs looking into.

¹Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 434.

A discussion of the good gifts of God's providence immediately brings us into the whole question of the meaning of grace. It is clear to all, I think, that grace is surely unmerited favor. And that point, in itself, needs no further elucidation. But there are those who, while very uncomfortable with the views of common grace taught in years past, are nevertheless accustomed to calling God's good gifts, grace. And, as I indicated earlier, although there may be areas of agreement on the question of whether God actually is favorably inclined towards all men, the terminology at this point becomes extremely important. It must not be forgotten that the defenders of common grace have spoken freely not only of common *grace*, but also of common *love*, common *mercy*, common *longsuffering*. And this is important, for the question is real and vital to every Reformed man: Does God love all men?

So a close look at terminology is crucial.

Another fundamental aspect of the common grace controversy is the whole question of the restraint of sin in the lives of the ungodly.

The question of such a restraint of sin is a fairly complicated one which involves different questions more or less directly related to the main question.

There has never really been any question about the fact that God indeed restrains sin. The Protestant Reformed Churches have sometimes been accused of denying such a restraint; but this accusation is incorrect. From the beginning of the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, these churches have held to the obvious fact that indeed God restrains sin. But the question is: How is this sin restrained? Is it restrained by the policeman? or is it restrained by some general operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of all men?

If God restrains sin through the policeman, then grace need not necessarily be involved; although we are quick to add that some have wanted to place the restraint of sin by the police as well in the realm of God's grace towards men. It has been maintained that government in general, and its power to enforce law and order, is the product of God's grace. Nevertheless, the restraint of sin by enforcement of law does not *necessarily* involve grace. Restraint by an inward operation of the Holy Spirit emphatically involves grace.

There are other questions. If from the beginning of history God did not restrain sin, would Adam (and the human race with him) have become a beast? Was the grace of restraint of sin, operating on his nature, necessary to prevent him from descending into total bestiality? So it has been maintained by many, beginning already with Dr. Abraham Kuyper.

The question of the restraint of sin is an important question because it also involves the question of the ability of the sinner to do good in the sight of God. Can the sinner do good? More concretely, when an unregenerated

man builds a hospital for the care of the sick, is this not good? Does a man go to hell for rescuing a drowning child? Is his punishment all the greater because a man has endowed the local art museum with money to buy costly paintings? Is there no difference in the sight of God between the butcheries of Stalin and the neighbor who cares for his wife and children, works faithfully at his job, and keeps the law of the land?

The whole question is worth some thought and attention because the simple fact of life is that the keeping of the law of God, though admittedly outward, brings greater reward than a violation of it. The man who lives faithfully with the wife of his youth enjoys the institution of marriage; the homosexual acquires AIDS. The drug addict winds up in the hospital or prison; the man who turns away from drugs never suffers their debilitating effect. The nation which keeps the law of God prospers; the nation which tramples the law of God under feet suffers the just judgment of God. If it is true that even outward good is rewarded (completely apart from the question of salvation) is this not because that which is rewarded is truly good?

And this whole problem in turn involves the question whether it is proper to distinguish in the life of the unregenerated man between total and absolute depravity. Many have done this. Man is not absolutely depraved, although he is totally depraved, it is said. And, the questions are basically the same, is it correct to say that God hates man's sins, but loves man? ... that God makes distinction between sin and the sinner?

The question of the ability of the natural man to do good involves important practical questions, questions which involve the life and calling of the child of God in the world. These questions center in what, in Reformed circles, has been called, "the antithesis."

The question of the antithesis has been raised in different connections. But the basic argument is clear enough. If it is true that a gracious restraint of sin in the unregenerate results in good works in the lives of the unregenerate, does it not follow that cooperation in certain areas of life between the people of the world and the people of God is possible? To cite but one example: Certainly there are plenty of people in the world who are not regenerated, but who despise with their entire being the monstrous evil of abortion. They have set themselves to do battle with this evil and to attempt to eradicate it from the land. No Christian would ever think of approving of the murder of unborn infants. Cannot the Christian make common cause with the wicked at this crucial juncture so that both work together for a common goal?

But this entire question of the antithesis has been raised in connection with other problems. The incorporation of higher critical methods into a Reformed Hermeneutics has been justified on the grounds of common grace and the ability of the natural man to do good. If God's Spirit operates in man

to produce good, man is able to produce good thinking and good ideas. Higher criticism is one of these good ideas.

Common grace has been the justification to accept the findings of natural science, not only in such questions as the revolution of the planets about the sun in our solar system, but also in such questions as the origin of our universe. Natural science has discovered that the universe is from 15 to 20 billion years old and that the universe as we now know it has developed from lower forms of life to higher forms of life over these lengthy spans of time. And, because science is possible because of common grace, we must accept these findings of science as the fruit of God's grace in the lives of unregenerated scientists.²

But, whether one agrees with all this or disagrees, the question remains: Is it due to the influence of God's gracious operations in men which enables them to discover truth — whether that be in the area of science, or philosophy, or ethics, or anywhere else. And if this obvious discovery of truth on the part of the ungodly is not due to God's grace, how is it to be explained?

To conclude this discussion, it can also be pointed out that the *purpose* of common grace has often been discussed. Why does God bestow His grace and favor upon men while they live in this world? Some have pointed out that this is necessary for the church to survive and the elect to be saved through the mission labors of the church. It is argued that without common grace this world would be such a "hell" that the church would be unable to survive even for a day. Others have gone a bit beyond this, and have suggested that common grace, especially as it is operative in "general revelation," is a necessary preparatory work for God's special grace. The wicked world is prepared by common grace for special grace, for salvation, for membership in the church. This is argued, e.g., by the great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck: "It is common grace which makes special grace possible, prepares the way for it, and later supports it; and special grace, in its turn, leads common grace up to its own level and puts it into its service."³

In discussing this question, appeal is made to general revelation in distinction from special revelation. General revelation is common grace; special revelation is special grace. So common has this idea been that an entire book has been written with the title: *General Revelation and Common*

²The Christian Reformed Church, in a committee report on this question, specifically appealed to common grace.

³Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 38.

Grace.⁴ The fact is that throughout the history of the discussions of common grace, the question of general revelation has always been introduced. And it is important, therefore, that we take a look at that question too.

And so it seems to be worth our while to take another look at this important question, investigate anew what the Scriptures have to say about it, and open the door to discussion on the matter.

And this we shall do, God willing, in subsequent articles. ▲

⁴William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953).

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The Preaching Style of Martyn Lloyd-Jones (3)

Robert D. Decker

HIS VIEW OF PREACHING (HOMILETICS)

Writing in 1980, Kenneth Kantzer had this to say concerning Lloyd-Jones and his conviction concerning preaching:

He is no narrow-minded bigot. He reads widely in all schools of thought, and encourages others to do the same, but he remains profoundly convinced of one thing lacking today, something that is the greatest need of the church: a return to expository preaching. Spoken by one who could keep people motionless for 45 minutes at a time in the most uncomfortable seats in London, it is a conviction that should give clergy a thoughtful ponder or two.⁵

We quite agree with Kantzer's assessment of "the Doctor." More importantly, we share the Doctor's conviction concerning the church's "greatest need." We too are convinced of "one thing lacking today," in many a pulpit, *viz.*, good, expository preaching. If the Bible is what it claims to be, God's inspired and infallible Word, and it is; and if preaching is what the Bible says it is, God's power by which He is pleased to save them that believe (cf. I Cor. 1:21), and it is; then preaching which exposes a given text and sets forth its meaning and significance for God's people remains "the greatest need of the

⁵ Kantzer, "Martyn Lloyd-Jones: For Whom Preaching Was Paramount," p. 146.

church.” Lloyd-Jones would have agreed heartily with H.D. McDonald’s description of apostolic preaching:

Above all else, apostolic preachers focus on the Word of God. Second, they engage in *exposition* rather than *exhibition*. They have no time for vague, topical, story-telling episodes echoed in many modern pulpits. ... To preach in an expository way is to “expose” or to “place out” before men the message of God in a given section of Scripture ... it means unfolding the power of the Cross. True preaching must set forth the reality of the Cross. The Cross turns a speech into a sermon, and a sermon into the gospel.⁶

By means of this kind of preaching it pleases the Son of God to “gather, protect, and preserve for himself, out of the entire human race, a church chosen for eternal life.”⁷ These, in brief, were the convictions of Lloyd-Jones concerning preaching. He held to them strongly for the duration of his lengthy ministry. That long and successful ministry at both Aberavon and Westminster Chapel, as well as his itinerant preaching in both Great Britain and North America, are powerful evidences of the truth of his convictions.

His Definition of Preaching

In dealing with this subject, we are faced with the same difficulty we encountered in connection with Lloyd-Jones’ view of Scripture. One looks in vain for definitions in the writings of the Doctor. This is true even of his lectures on preaching delivered in the spring of 1969 to the students and faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. These lectures were published under the title, *Preaching and Preachers*. Lloyd-Jones is far into the subject (chapter 5) before he asks: “What is preaching?”⁸ His answer is:

Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course they are not. Reason concerning this Truth ought to be mightily eloquent, as you see it in the case of the Apostle Paul and others. It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man’s understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A true understanding and experience of the Truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one.⁹

Preaching is, the Doctor explains, first of all declaration. It is

⁶ H.D. McDonald, “Apostolic Preaching,” *Christianity Today* 24 (1980): 164.

⁷ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 54.

⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 97.

⁹ *Ibid.*

delivering the message of God. The preacher is an ambassador for Christ, one who comes with the message of Christ. The preacher is not in the pulpit merely to entertain people or just to talk to them. True preaching always brings people under the judgment of God and affects the whole person in all of his life.¹⁰

At this point in his discussion of the subject, Lloyd-Jones distinguishes two elements in preaching: first, the content, which is the sermon, and, second, the act of preaching itself, the delivery of the sermon. This latter element the Doctor calls “the lightning and the thunder.”¹¹

In his discussion of the sermon, Lloyd-Jones makes still another distinction between the content of the sermon and the form given to that content. Since “the form given to the content” of a sermon really is a matter of style, we shall discuss this element under that heading.¹² For now we shall limit ourselves to his treatment of the content of the sermon and his comments on the delivery of the sermon.

In his sermon a preacher ought not talk about events or news headlines; i.e., these ought not be the source of the sermon’s content. Lloyd-Jones does not approve of “topical preaching with a moral twist.”¹³ Preaching is not to be a moral essay or a psychological treatment of a subject designed to make people “feel happy.”¹⁴ Preaching is not an intellectual, philosophic dissertation. The world, Lloyd-Jones contends, can do all of these things. The preacher must not.

The content of the sermon is what the preacher has received. Lloyd-Jones explains:

The way in which the Apostle Paul put that is, “I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received.” That is what determines the message or the sermon as such; it is that which the preacher has received. The other term used by Paul — “ambassador” — brings it out very clearly. An ambassador is not a man who voices his own thoughts or his own opinions or views, or his own desires. The very essence of the position of the ambassador is that he is a man who has been “sent” to speak for somebody else. He is the speaker for his Government or his President or his King or Emperor, or whatever form of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56ff.

¹² As best we can determine, Lloyd-Jones makes three distinctions: by “content” he means the material of the sermon; by “form” he means the structure or outline of the content of the sermon; and by “act of preaching” he means the dynamics of the delivery of the sermon.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

government his country may have. He is not a man who speculates and gives his own views and ideas. He is the bearer of a message, he is commissioned to do this, he is sent to do this; and that is what he must do.¹⁵

What the preacher has received is what is called in the New Testament "The Word" or "The Gospel" or "The whole counsel of God." In other words, the content of the sermon is strictly limited to the message of the Scriptures.

The content of the sermon, the message of the Scriptures, must be delivered. When speaking of the act of preaching, Lloyd-Jones lists no fewer than twelve characteristics of what he calls "authentic preaching."¹⁶ 1) The whole personality of the preacher must be involved. In preaching, all "One's faculties should be engaged, the whole man should be involved." The preacher ought "not stand like a statue and just utter words through his lips." 2) The preacher must have a "sense of authority and control over the congregation and the proceedings. The preacher should never be apologetic." The preacher does not come to put forward ideas or suggestions. He stands before the congregation as a "sent messenger," as one commissioned to declare God's message to His people. 3) Authentic preaching is characterized by freedom. Assuming that the sermon has been carefully prepared, the preacher must be open to the inspiration of the moment. 4) Wherever true preaching takes place, there is an element of exchange between the preacher and the congregation. The preacher feels a certain responsiveness, and in that sense receives something from the congregation while preaching. 5) Authentic preaching is marked by seriousness. The preacher must never give the impression that he is dealing with something "light or superficial or trivial." What happens in preaching is that the preacher is speaking to his congregation from God and about God. The message from and about God is a message which speaks also about the state of the souls of the people. It is a message about their lost condition apart from Jesus Christ. Nothing could be more serious than this. No one put it better, says Lloyd-Jones, than Richard Baxter, who said: "I preached as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men." 6) There must be "liveliness" in the preaching. The preacher must never be dull or boring. 7) Preaching must be done with zeal and out of a sense of concern. The preacher must be "gripped by what he is saying." 8) There must be "warmth" in preaching. The Preacher must not be "clinical." 9) Closely related to the foregoing is the element of urgency which must characterize true preaching. 10) Persuasiveness characterizes authentic preaching. 11) There must be

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81. Cf. note 98 above. At this point Lloyd-Jones is not talking about "form," but about the dynamics of delivery.

“pathos” in the preaching. By this Lloyd-Jones means emotion, feeling, or sympathetic understanding of God’s people. 12) Lastly, authentic preaching is marked by power. Preaching is not just a man uttering words. It is God speaking through the preacher. As Paul put it in I Corinthians 2, preaching must be “in demonstration of the Spirit of power.”¹⁷

In sum, Lloyd-Jones defines authentic preaching as a combination of the sermon (the message of Scripture) and the act of delivering that message. The chief end or purpose of preaching thus defined is “... to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.”¹⁸

Three Types of Sermons

Lloyd-Jones is convinced that the message of the Bible must be divided into two main sections. Writes he:

The first is what you may call the message of salvation. The *kerygma*, that is what determines evangelistic preaching. The second is the teaching aspect, the *didache*, that which builds up those who have already believed — the edification of the saints. Here is a major division which we must always draw, and this must always be a controlling factor in our preparation of our sermons and messages.¹⁹

The “perfect summary” of what he means by evangelistic preaching Lloyd-Jones finds in I Thessalonians 1:9, 10. The passage reads:

They themselves shew of us what manner of entering we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

In this passage Paul “... reminds the Thessalonians of what it was that he had actually preached to them ... this is what brought the Church at Thessalonica into being.” Another summary of the evangelistic sermon Lloyd-Jones finds in Acts 20:17-21. In this passage Paul reminds the elders of Ephesus that he had preached “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁰

Evangelistic preaching, according to the Doctor, is a proclamation of the being and power and glory of God. This in turn leads to preaching the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Law of God. This is designed to bring people to a conviction of sin and repentance. And this, in turn, should lead people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Savior. "That," says Lloyd-Jones, "is the message of salvation, that is what is called evangelistic preaching."²¹

The second main section of the message of the Bible is "the teaching aspect." A sermon which emphasizes the *didache* aspect is designed to build up the saints. This type of preaching is instructional but "primarily *experimental*," i.e., preaching related to Christian experience.²²

A third type of sermon is what Lloyd-Jones calls the "purely instructional."²³ This type of preaching, as the name would indicate, is designed to teach the doctrines of the Word of God.

Thus, Lloyd-Jones distinguishes three kinds of preaching: first, evangelistic preaching, *kerygma*, which he did on Sunday evenings; second, instructional-experimental preaching, *didache*, which he did on Sunday mornings; and, third, the purely instructional sermons which he preached to his Friday Night Bible Class.

Lloyd-Jones emphasizes that these distinctions must "not be pressed in too absolute a sense." They ought, however, be borne in mind: "... for the general guidance of the preacher in his preparation of his message."²⁴

These three types of sermons are interrelated and interdependent. The way to preserve the interrelatedness of these three types of sermons is always to base one's preaching on the theological foundation of Scripture. While preaching must never be lecturing on theology, it must, nevertheless, always be controlled by systematic theology. Each text or passage is a part of the whole truth of Scripture. Lloyd-Jones explains what he means, by issuing a warning:

It is wrong for a man to impose his system violently on any particular text; but at the same time it is vital that his interpretation of any particular text should be checked and controlled by this system, this body of doctrine and of truth which is found in the Bible.²⁵

Finally, in this connection, Lloyd-Jones emphasizes that preachers are not to preach *about* the gospel, but they must preach the *gospel*. After the manner of the format of the New Testament Epistles the preacher must preach the whole Gospel. Preaching the gospel involves, therefore, preach-

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64-66.

ing the doctrine of the Scriptures and then the application of that doctrine to the lives of the people.²⁶

His Style (Method) of Preaching

Lloyd-Jones begins his discussion of “the form” of the sermon with two negatives. “A sermon is not an essay,” he stresses.²⁷ By definition, the style of the sermon is entirely different from the style of an essay. The former is spoken and is meant to be “listened to,” while the latter is written and meant to be read. Hence in an essay one looks for “literary elegance and a particular form, whereas that is not one of the primary desiderata in a sermon.” Further, Lloyd-Jones contends, repetition in an essay is bad, but repetition in a sermon is good. In fact, he claims, repetition is a part of the “essence of teaching and preaching” An essay lacks the “element of attack” which ought to characterize every sermon.

The second negative is that a sermon is not a lecture. Lloyd-Jones explains the difference as follows:

A lecture starts with a subject, and what it is concerned to do is to give knowledge and information concerning this particular subject. Its appeal is primarily and almost exclusively to the mind; its object is to give instruction and state facts ... so a lecture, again, lacks, and should lack, the element of attack, the concern to do something to the listener, which is vital in preaching. But the big difference, I would say, between a lecture and a sermon is that a sermon does not start with a subject; a sermon should always be expository. In a sermon the theme or the doctrine is something that arises out of the text and its context, it is something which is illustrated by that text and context.²⁸

By “exposition” or “expository preaching” Lloyd-Jones does not mean a running commentary on, or a mere exposition of a verse, passage, or paragraph of Scripture. A sermon must always be an exposition of the text: “... but it is this exposition turned or moulded into a message which has this characteristic form.”²⁹ The preacher must begin by expounding the text; i.e., he must analyze the various concepts and determine the relationships among them. In this process of exposition the preacher must put questions to his text, the most important of which is: “What is the message of this passage?” Exposition, if done properly, will yield “... a doctrine which is part of the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

whole message of the Bible.”³⁰ The crucial question is always: what is the special message, the particular doctrine in this text? Having isolated the doctrine, the preacher must face the question: what is its relevance to the people; why is it vitally important to them?

The answer to these questions must be stated in the form of a theme. The theme must then be divided into logical headings, and these headings must be arranged so that they progress to a conclusion. Application of the doctrine must be made throughout the sermon and not be merely tacked on to the conclusion. The “entity” or “unity” must be brought to a climax and the sermon ought to be concluded with application.³¹

All of this involves hard work. We certainly agree with the Doctor’s conclusion:

So it comes to this. The preparation of sermons involves sweat and labour. It can be extremely difficult at times to get all this matter that you have found in the Scriptures into this particular form. It is like a potter fashioning something out of the clay, or like a blacksmith making shoes for a horse; you have to keep on putting the material into the fire and on to the anvil and hit it again and again with the hammer. Each time it is a bit better, but not quite right; so you put it back again and again until you are satisfied with it or can do no better. This is the most grueling part of the preparation of a sermon; but at the same time it is a most fascinating and a most glorious occupation. It can be at times most difficult, most exhausting, most trying. But at the same time I can assure you that when you have finally succeeded you will experience one of the most glorious feelings that ever comes to a man on the face of this earth. To borrow the title of a book by Arthur Koestler, you will be conscious of having performed an “Act of Creation.”...³²

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Preaching

Lloyd-Jones believed that the unction or anointing of the Holy Spirit is, “... the greatest essential in connection with preaching.”³³ The anointing of the Spirit does not preclude careful preparation of sermons. In fact, the two — careful preparation and the anointing of the Holy Spirit — are complementary, and the latter happens only after the preacher has gone through the “sweat and labour” of preparing his sermon.

But what precisely is this anointing of the Holy Spirit? Lloyd-Jones answers:

It is the Holy Spirit falling upon the preacher in a special manner. It is an

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-79.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-79.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

access of power. It is God giving power, and enabling, through the Spirit, to the preacher in order that he may do this work in a manner that lifts it up beyond the efforts and endeavours of man to a position in which the preacher is being used by the Spirit and becomes the channel through whom the Spirit works.³⁴

Lloyd-Jones asserts that it "... is quite clear that all the Old Testament prophets are illustrations of this anointing." Confining himself to the New Testament for proof of this special anointing, the Doctor points first to the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. In Luke 1:15-17 we are told that John would be "filled with the Holy Spirit." Jesus, when baptized by John, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and Himself testifies to this in His sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:18ff.). Even Christ needed this anointing of the Spirit in order to perform His work. The apostles were promised power "after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). This power of the Holy Ghost would enable them to become witnesses of Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This, the Doctor contends, was fulfilled on Pentecost. Lloyd-Jones attaches a great deal of significance to the Pentecost event. One would think, he argues, that the apostles, because of the three years they spent with Jesus, "... were in a perfect position and condition already to act as preachers." They witnessed Jesus' miracles and heard the Lord's teaching and preaching. Surely they were prepared to preach. But they were not! They needed the anointing of the Spirit to enable them to be witnesses to the Lord. "Now if this was necessary for these men," Lloyd-Jones concludes, "how much more is it necessary for all others who try to preach these things?" By this "accession of power" or "effusion of power" Peter was enabled to expound the Scriptures and preach "...with such mighty effect that three thousand people are converted under his preaching."³⁵

Lloyd-Jones believes that this anointing of the Spirit, this "effusion of power" can "... be repeated, and repeated many times." For proof Lloyd-Jones cites several passages in Acts which speak of apostles and others being filled with the Spirit. While he finds further proof for his contention that this anointing is repeated many times subsequent to Pentecost in the epistles and the Book of Revelation, crucial to his argument is I Corinthians 2:3-5. In this passage Paul describes his preaching as being "... in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power" Paul, the Doctor contends, was a man of extraordinary ability. Yet he deliberately refused to use the methods of the Greek rhetoricians. His preaching was in demonstration of the power of the

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 305-308.

Holy Spirit. Lloyd-Jones found confirmation for his view of the Bible's teaching on the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Reformation and various times of revival. These times were invariably characterized by powerful, effective preaching.³⁶

Lloyd-Jones concludes that, without the anointing of the Spirit, preaching is ineffective. One may be thoroughly educated and trained to preach, he may possess the skills to preach, and he may prepare excellent sermons; but if he lacks the anointing of the Spirit he cannot preach. Thus, the Doctor exhorts preachers to seek and expect to receive the power of the Spirit.³⁷

Summary: Preaching, the Primary Task of the Church

There can be no doubt but that Lloyd-Jones considers preaching as described above to be the primary task of the church. After dealing with various reasons for the decline of preaching and the questioning of the necessity of preaching the Doctor points to the fact that both Jesus and the apostles considered preaching to be their chief task.³⁸ The Epistles teach the same. And the Bible's teaching is confirmed by the history of the church. Times of revival and reformation were periods of great preaching. Lloyd-Jones is convinced that:

the ultimate justification for asserting the primacy of preaching is theological
... the whole message of the Bible ... drives us to this conclusion.³⁹

The "whole message of the Bible" teaches that man's real need is not to be found in a "... kind of moral or mental or spiritual sickness." Man's real need, according to the Scriptures, lies in the fact that he is dead in sin. The only cure is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This great message must be preached.⁴⁰

For preaching there may be no substitute. Discussion, dialogue, debate, for example, may never take the place of preaching. The message of God must be delivered by preaching. Where true preaching takes place, people will come and God's church will be built and preserved.

Such are the convictions of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. And he lived those convictions. From November 11, 1926 until June 8, 1980, the Doctor

³⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, pp. 309-324.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 325.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-44.

never wearied of preaching that great message of God to sinners of every station in life.

In a tribute to him written shortly after Lloyd-Jones had died, John Richard deWitt said:

... Dr. Lloyd-Jones was instrumental, as few men have been, in reviving faith among the people of his generation in the spiritual dynamic of the Word proclaimed. Once after World War II Emil Brunner attended a service at Westminster Chapel, and afterward exclaimed, "Now that is Reformed preaching!" It was. It was indeed. In his view of preaching the Doctor showed his spiritual kinship with John Calvin whose doctrine of preaching was Lloyd-Jones' own. I sometimes think that the Doctor in a way represented a time between the times with respect to the Christian pulpit. He entered upon his ministry in a day when there was not much conviction that preaching could do anything. In the last few years, especially in quarters where there was once much rejoicing at able and faithful preaching of the gospel, people seem again to have lost their way and to be looking everywhere but in the direction prescribed by Scripture for the renewal and health of the church. Perhaps Dr. Lloyd-Jones may remind us even now, though he has been taken away from us, and remind us in a mighty way, that God is pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.⁴¹

Yes, perhaps he may. We pray that he will! ▲

⁴¹ deWitt, "David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: A Tribute and an Appreciation," p. 4.

Holiness in Marriage and Single Life: Interpretation and Application of I Corinthians 7

David J. Engelsma

2. Honorable Single Life and Holy Marriage

I Corinthians 7 is the outstanding passage in Scripture on the practical aspects of marriage. The reason is that the apostle is answering questions from the Corinthian Christians concerning problems they faced in marriage: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me" (v. 1). The apostle of Christ, who has such a lofty view of Christian marriage in Ephesians 5, seeing it as the symbol of the heavenly covenant between Christ and the church, here gets "down to earth," giving instruction concerning various practical aspects and problem-areas of marriage. Even the reasons he gives for his exhortation to the men and women in the church to marry are earthy, realistic, and practical: "to avoid fornication" (v. 2) and because it is "better to marry than to burn" (v. 9).

So must the church be practical about marriage in her preaching, her teaching, her writing, and her counseling. This is one of the most urgent demands upon the church at the end of the 20th century when marriage after marriage breaks up and when many other marriages suffer severe strains.

Because the passage is "merely" practical and because it "only" has to do with certain problems in everyday life, we may not, therefore, take the passage lightly. We may not regard it as mere advice, and probably as advice that was good only for that time and that culture. For, first, all of the instruction that Paul gives comes straight out of the fundamental, unchanging, and unchangeable truth about marriage that he expresses at the conclusion of the passage in verse 39: Wives and husbands are bound to each other as long as they both live. This is the principle, the basic, God-established truth, regarding marriage.

In the church of Christ, practice is determined by principle. The

preacher exhorts the practical matters of Christian life “which become sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). The elders discipline according to the standard whether the member denies God and occasions blasphemy of His Word by his works (Titus 1:16; 2:5). This is not, in fact, how it goes in many churches. Today, practice is permitted to set aside and abolish the fundamental biblical principle concerning marriage. But this only reveals the reality and extent of the falling away, the becoming cold of the love of many, and the abounding of lawlessness in the last days foretold by Scripture (II Thess. 2:3; Matt. 24:12).

We ought not take the practical instruction lightly, in the second place, because the apostle expressly states, several times throughout the passage, that what he teaches is the commandment of the Lord Jesus, binding upon all Christians everywhere. Concerning the prohibition against wives leaving their husbands and husbands putting away their wives in verses 10 and 11, Paul writes, “I command, yet not I, but the Lord.”

At the end of all that he has said in I Corinthians 6:9-7:17 about fornication; sex in marriage; the rule that Christians marry; the exception that some remain single; and the forbidding of divorce, the apostle writes in verse 17, “And so ordain I in all churches.” What he has said on these matters is not “mere advice” but a laying down of law, as the binding rule for Christian life, by the apostle of Christ. And all of his instruction is ordained “in all churches.” It was binding for all churches in all the world at that time. It is binding for all churches today.

A third reason for taking this practical instruction seriously is that the dark background of it all is the threat of fornication. Contrary to the notion that is found even in the churches today, fornication is no trivial matter. Impenitent fornicators will be excluded from the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9,10). For a Christian, fornication is joining Christ to a whore (I Cor. 6:15ff.). The urgent admonition to every child of God, married as well as unmarried, is, “Flee fornication!” (I Cor. 6:18).

In his marriage-instruction, the apostle reminds us that the threat to those who ignore his instruction is the vile, shameful, cursed sin of fornication. This is the warning of I Corinthians 7:2 where he gives as the reason for marrying, “to avoid fornication.” Verse 5 warns that failure on the part of married Christians to live together sexually will mean that “Satan (will) tempt you ... for your incontinency,” that is, tempt one or the other to fornicate.

One takes the teaching of I Corinthians 7 lightly at his peril. The peril is mortal.

The Word on Single Life

Implied is that the apostle’s instruction in the passage about single life

also be taken seriously. This too is the authoritative Word of Christ to all churches.

If I Corinthians 7 is the outstanding passage in Scripture on the practical side of marriage, it is also the outstanding passage on the single life for some Christians. It is safe to say that the Reformed have generally failed to do justice to what the apostle says about single life in this passage. They have, therefore, failed to do justice to the single life that some of their members actually live and that others might live, if properly instructed. There are two main reasons for this failure. One is the strong reaction on the part of the Reformed against the Roman Catholic use of this passage to support its teaching that the single life is inherently more spiritual and religious than marriage. This has resulted in Rome's glorifying of celibacy, especially for her clergy.

The other reason is the Reformed emphasis upon marriage and family on account of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Since God establishes His covenant with believers and their children, gathering His church in the generations of believers and using the godly home to rear covenant children to maturity in Christ, the Reformed emphasis upon marriage is right. But such an emphasis on marriage as ignores or even disparages single life is wrong. Justice must be done to what I Corinthians 7 teaches about the single life. After all, this too is part of biblical doctrine. Besides, failure to reckon with the biblical teaching on single life discourages the unmarried. They begin to think of themselves as second-class citizens of the kingdom. Some may even plunge into a disastrous marriage in order to escape singleness. What is even worse, if we ignore what is said about single life for some, we hinder the life of special devotion to the Lord that some may very well choose to live as single.

Single Life is Honorable

Right in the middle of the outstanding passage on marriage, the Spirit of truth clearly and emphatically teaches that single life is honorable for some Christians.

A sketch of the passage will be helpful to show this. The background of chapter 7's teaching on marriage is the condemnation of fornication in chapter 6:9-20. Chapter 7:1a indicates the subject and approach of the chapter: answering questions on marriage matters. Verses 2-5 treat of the sexual aspect of marriage. Verses 10-17 prohibit divorce and remarriage. Verses 18-24 contain the important reminder to all Christians that the earthly circumstances in which they find themselves — racial, social, economic, marital — become their calling from God. Believers are to accept these circumstances and live in them in the service of God. Verse 39 lays down the basic truth about marriage that governs everything that is said about

marriage throughout the entire chapter.

This leaves two large sections of the chapter unaccounted for, verses 6-9 and verses 25-38. The subject in these passages is single life for Christians. And the very last word of the apostle in the great chapter on marriage is praise of single life: "But she (the widow) is happier if she so abide," that is, remains single (v. 40).

Being single, being unmarried, is honorable for the Christian man and woman. Singleness as a lifelong state is honorable. In verses 1 and 8, the apostle states that being and remaining single is good for certain Christians: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman"; "It is good for (the unmarried and widows) if they abide even as I." The word translated "good" is the Greek word *kalos*, meaning 'excellent' or 'honorable,' especially since the thing that is good is useful for worthwhile purposes.

In important respects, being single is preferable to marriage. According to verse 38, the father who marries off his daughter does well but a father who keeps his daughter in single life does better. Verse 40 teaches that, although a widow may remarry, she is happier if she remains unmarried. This is not merely the personal opinion of Paul but the judgment of one who is conscious of having the Spirit of inspiration.

Indeed, the apostle could wish that all members of the congregation would remain single. He recommends this way of life, if a particular condition is met: "For I would that all men were even as I myself," that is, unmarried (v. 7a); "Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife" (v. 27b).

The excellence of the single life is illustrated in Paul himself, and was experienced by him. Paul was single, and he found single life rewarding, indeed much preferable to marriage.

The question is, in what does the goodness, or excellence, of single life for the Christian consist, and in what respect is it superior to marriage?

Devotion to the Lord

Single life is good inasmuch as marriage is not an absolute requirement for Christians. This is the apostle's point in verse 6: "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." He has just exhorted men and women in the church to marry and to live together sexually (vss. 2-5). Someone might suppose that this was a command to all without exception. Not so, says Paul in verse 6. To marry is permitted, not commanded. Therefore, single life is an option for the Christian. Singleness is an earthly way of life in which the believer may serve the Lord, as much as is marriage.

Single life is preferable to marriage because it allows one to devote himself or herself more fully to the Lord and to the work of the Lord. It is not the case that single life is preferable to marriage because marriage is inherently evil, or because single life is intrinsically more spiritual and holy,

or because the single Christian merits salvation by remaining single.

But singleness can be useful to the kingdom of Christ. In certain instances, it is very useful. Singleness lends itself to greater devotion and service to Christ. Single life is earthly life free from the cares and troubles of marriage. Paul has a strong awareness of the problems, burdens, and responsibilities of married life. He calls these responsibilities “the present distress” in verse 26 and “troubles in the flesh” in verse 28. The everyday pressure of these responsibilities upon the souls of married Christians and the demands of these responsibilities on their time, he describes as “carefulness” in verse 32: “I would have you without carefulness.” The apostle recommends singleness because he wants to spare Christians these cares (v. 28).

But the purpose is not that the single Christian may be carefree, much less that he or she lead an irresponsible life. Rather, since the single life is free from the cares that invariably attend marriage, it can be devoted more fully to Christ. This is the teaching of verse 32ff. The unmarried person cares for the things of the Lord Jesus, how he may please the Lord. The married person cares for the things of the world — job, money, house, clothes, doctor bills, Christian school tuition, time for the family — how he may please wife and children. In this connection, the apostle advocates that fathers not give their virgin daughters in marriage; he wants these girls to attend upon the Lord without distraction (v. 35).

The single Christian can please the Lord in a special vocation. There is place, even need, for the unmarried pastor; the unmarried missionary; the unmarried teacher in the Christian school; the unmarried full-time assistant to the deacons (cf. I Tim. 5:9ff.).

The single Christian can please the Lord in an ordinary vocation. The single person has more time to pray; more time to study Scripture; more time to serve the other members of the church in their needs; more time and energy to volunteer for all kinds of tasks that promote the kingdom.

I say that single life can be devoted *more fully* to the Lord than married life because also Christian married life is devoted to the Lord. The apostle surely does not mean that the married believer is completely worldly, whereas the unmarried believer is completely other-worldly. Nevertheless, it is the case that the unmarried has time and energy that the married expends, and sometimes exhausts, upon the earthly cares of marriage and family.

Esteem for the Single

Important practical truths about singleness in the congregation and about the congregation’s view of the singles follow from the apostle’s teaching of the excellency of being unmarried. First, it is wrong for the church to suppose that everyone ought to be married and that there is

something shameful or doubtful about being unmarried. The married majority of the people of God may not look down on the “old maid” and “old batch.” The opening and closing verses of one of the outstanding chapters in the Bible on marriage recommend their state.

Second, the unmarried themselves must not regard their singleness as failure and inferiority. Certainly, no one should plunge himself or herself into a foolish marriage, just to escape the “stigma” of being unmarried. Altogether apart from the apostle’s spiritual outlook on single life, there is truth in Shakespeare’s line, “Better well hanged than ill wed.”

Third, some single young people, as well as the widows and widowers, may well ask themselves, “Am I possibly called by God to serve Him in singleness, and am I willing to do this?” There is still place in the Christian life for such devotion to Christ. There is still need in the kingdom for the work that such devotion performs.

But, fourth, the motivation must be spiritual: The single would devote himself or herself to Christ. For a young man to refuse marriage merely because he disliked the cares involved in marriage, having no intention to devote himself to Christ more fully, would not be honorable at all. The likelihood is that he will fall into the sin of fornication, or at least live the miserable life of always burning sexually.

This is I Corinthians 7’s commendation, and recommendation, of single life.

The Conditio Sine Qua Non

One condition qualifies everything that the apostle has to say about the advantages of single life: The man or woman must have the gift of self-control over the sexual desire — what Paul calls the ability to “contain” in verse 9. If one does not have this gift, he or she ought to marry. And since relatively few have this gift, the rule for Christians is that they marry: But if they are not able to be self-controlled sexually, let them marry! (v. 9) Even if one has this gift, he is free to marry. But if he lacks it, he ought to marry, lest he fall into fornication.

This leads naturally into the teaching of I Corinthians 7 concerning holy marriage. This is, in fact, the approach of the apostle: “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (I Cor. 7:2).

The Unwilling Single

Before we consider what the chapter teaches about marriage, a word is in order concerning a real problem with which some single Christians struggle. These are the singles who are unmarried not by choice and not because they have the special gift of being continent but because of the

circumstances of their lives over which they have no control. They may desire marriage. They probably feel the need of marriage in what Paul calls “burning” in verse 9. But no one proposes marriage, if they are women, or no one accepts their proposal, if they are men. Or there are other extraordinary circumstances that make marriage impossible for them.

What does Christ say to these believers?

First, “let them marry” (v. 9). Do they pray about their need? Do they ask a husband or a wife from the Sovereign of the universe? Are they being too choosy about a mate, even unbiblically choosy? Is the main criterion for the man that the woman be beautiful rather than that she fear the Lord? Does the young woman turn down and turn away the young men of the church who are not handsome and dashing suitors according to the standards of the romance magazines of the world? Are both the young men and the young women waiting for the feeling of falling madly in love, when they have every right to proceed with marriage on the basis of their unity in Christ, their suitability for each other, and their warm affection for each other?

It is the duty of the young men of the church to date and marry the daughters of the church, and it is the calling of the young women to accept the young men. This is implied in the command of verse 39, “(Marry) in the Lord.”

Still, God makes marriage impossible for some. These Christians are to accept the single life submissively as the will of God for them. They should learn to view their single life not simply as a cross to bear but as the specific way of life in which they are to glorify God. Are they called being single? Let them not trouble themselves about these circumstances of their earthly life but serve God in these circumstances. Let them seize singleness as the opportunity to serve the Lord Christ more fully than would be possible if they were married. They may trust that God’s grace will be sufficient, particularly for sexual self-control. They are required to abstain from sexual relationships, that is, from fornication. This is possible. Jesus taught that some make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom’s sake (Matt. 19:12). Not only is there the gift of sexual self-control, but there is also the powerful grace of self-discipline and chastity.

Holy Marriage

Ordinarily, however, God both calls us to marriage and opens up the way for us to be married. The rule for Christians is marriage: “If they cannot contain, let them marry” (v. 9). To the teaching of I Corinthians 7 on marriage, we now turn.

In the rest of this article, I will look at the basic nature of marriage as this is indicated in the crucially important 39th verse of I Corinthians 7. I will also treat certain practical aspects of marriage taught in the passage, all

of which derive from the basic nature of marriage. Some of these, I fear, are not as familiar to married Christians as they should be. I will not in this article deal with the matters of separation, divorce, desertion, and remarriage. These are prominent in the passage. But I reserve treatment of these subjects for the third and last article in this series which will appear in the Fall 1992 issue of this journal.

The Essence of Marriage: The Lifelong Bond

Before we can accurately examine and rightly judge the threats to marriage, we must have sound understanding of the truth of marriage. What marriage is, the Holy Spirit tells us in verse 39: "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." The apostle of Christ indicates the essence of marriage also in verse 27: "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed."

Marriage is a lifelong bond between one woman and one man, formed by God the Creator Who created man and woman for marriage and marriage for man and woman. Marriage is not a human contract dependent on the two parties fulfilling the agreed-upon stipulations, although there certainly are mutual duties in marriage. Neither is marriage a conditional promise that the husband and wife make to each other, although they do enter upon marriage by way of a solemn promise. But marriage is a bond that joins the two. It is a union and communion.

It is a special bond, indeed a unique bond. There are other bonds, e.g., that of parent and child and that of two friends. But there is none like the bond of marriage. This is the only one-flesh bond. This is the only bond to which belongs the sexual relationship. But it is a bond. "The wife is *bound*," according to verse 39, that is, she is bound to her husband. The sense is that the wife is bonded to her husband.

Because marriage is essentially a bond of love and friendship between the two, it serves as the earthly symbol of the covenant-relation between God and His people. In the age of the old covenant, the prophets described the special relationship between Jehovah and Israel as marriage (cf. Ezek. 16). Ezekiel 16:8 explicitly identifies marriage as "covenant" (cf. Mal. 2:14). The fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ is the marriage of Christ and the church according to the apostle in Ephesians 5:22ff. The bond that constitutes earthly marriage is made by God. I Corinthians 7:39 literally reads, "the wife *has been* bound." She did not bind herself to the man she married. Neither did her husband bind her to himself. No earthly agency at all binds two married persons, whether state, or church, or parents. But God binds wife and husband. The "law" spoken of in verse 39 as the instrument by which the wife has been bound to her husband is the living Word of God

functioning in the realm of creation. (I note that one reading of the text omits the phrase, “by the law.”)

Whenever a man and a woman willingly engage to marry, have the union sanctioned by a proper authority, and consummate the relationship sexually, God binds them in His institution of marriage. In the words, “has been bound,” in verse 39, the apostle expresses what we read about marriage in the creation-account in Genesis 2:18ff. and what Jesus teaches about marriage in Matthew 19:4-6, namely, that God has joined husband and wife together in the one-flesh bond.

The bond is for life: “as long as her husband liveth.” The Holy Spirit could not make the truth of marriage simpler or clearer than He does here. The church has always understood this truth very well. For a thousand years after the time of the apostles, it was the virtually unanimous judgment of the church that marriage was for life, so that all remarriage during the life of the original mate was forbidden, even when divorce had taken place on the ground of adultery. Until recent times, the marriage form universally used in “church weddings” required that the persons marrying promise to take each other as husband and wife “until death us do part.” Still today, when churches and theologians accept and justify divorce and remarriage for many reasons, even those writers who maintain that marriage can be dissolved apart from death and who sanction remarriage while an original mate is yet living grudgingly admit that the idea and ideal of marriage is that it be lifelong.

Since wife and husband are bound and since it is God Who has done the binding, the only loosing is that which is done by God, namely, the death of one of the married persons. As plainly as language can state it is it taught by the Holy Spirit in verse 39 that death, and only death, dissolves the marriage bond: “but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will”

The Controlling Principle

This fundamental truth of marriage governs everything that Paul teaches about marriage in I Corinthians 7. This is the principle that controls Christian marriage practice.

Fornication is forbidden and sex within marriage is commanded as a duty because sexual intimacy is a vital part of the bond.

Separation and divorce are forbidden because they tear at the bond.

The wife may not marry another man while her husband is living because this violently violates the bond.

Whatever has to do with marriage, sexual ethics, separation, divorce, remarriage, and family must reckon with this foundation-truth and reality: Marriage is a lifelong bond formed by God. Christian marriage lives or dies

in a church as this principle is maintained or abandoned. To paraphrase Luther, it is the article of the standing or falling of the church with regard to marriage, sexual holiness, and the home.

And the sorry fact is that most of the church has fallen!

Application of the Principle

I conclude this article by noting the apostle's application of this fundamental truth of marriage to several practical aspects of marriage.

First, the marriage sanctioned by God, and alone approved by the obedient church, is the monogamous bond between one man and one woman. Each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband (v. 2). Plurality of wives or of husbands is condemned, whether this plurality be simultaneous or successive. There may be no homosexual pseudo-"marriage."

Second, life and conduct within marriage ought to be characterized by mutuality. Husband and wife share in every aspect of married life; together engage in behavior of mutual giving and receiving; actively participate in one life of communion. This is the heart and secret of marriage. Granted, this does not rule out order in the marriage. Ephesians 5:22-33 teaches that the husband enters into the communion of marriage as the head who has authority and that the wife enters into the communion of marriage as the body who willingly is submissive. But this order does not exclude, overshadow, or weaken the friendship, the mutuality, of the marriage. For marriage is a bond.

Mutuality is a striking feature of the practice of Christian marriage in I Corinthians 7. To avoid fornication, every man has his own wife, but every woman also has her own husband (v. 2). The husband pays off his sexual debt to his wife, but also the wife pays off her debt to her husband (v. 3). The wife does not have sole authority over her body, but neither does the husband have authority over his body (v. 4). If there is abstinence from sexual relations, it is by mutual consent (v. 5). The wife may not leave her husband, but neither may the husband divorce his wife (vss. 10,11). Unbelieving husbands are sanctified by believing wives, but so are unbelieving wives sanctified by believing husbands (vss. 12-14). Wives must care for the things of everyday life, how they may please their husbands, but husbands must do the very same (vss. 33, 34).

The apostle is perfectly even-handed as regards behavior in marriage. This is not because he is temporarily delivered from his male chauvinism, but because he knows marriage to be the most intimate bond of friendship.

If believing husbands and wives will practice this mutuality from the first day of their marriage, peace and bliss are assured. Failure here will result in misery, if not marital disaster.

A third practical application of the basic truth that marriage is a life-long bond is that every believer is called to marry “in the Lord (Jesus)” (v. 39). The believer may only marry a person with whom he or she is one in Christ, one in the truth of Holy Scripture, and one in church membership.

The marriage of a believer and an unbeliever is a valid marriage, a real marriage, as is the marriage of two unbelievers. The validity of the marriage of believer and unbeliever is insisted on in verses 12-16: If a brother has an unbelieving wife, let him not put her away; if a sister has an unbelieving husband, let her not leave him. They are truly married. Marriage is not a church-ordinance like the sacraments but a creation-ordinance like civil government. So wonderfully tight is the bond, and so does God wonderfully protect His saint in the bond, that the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever is not polluted by the unbeliever but sanctified by the believer. Also, the children of the mixed marriage are holy, covenant children: “Else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (v. 14).

Even so, what a lack, at best, of the most precious oneness of all, and, at worst, what disharmony. What must it be to live in marriage with someone who rejects Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior!

Young people, widows, widowers, all unmarried Christians, if they marry, must marry in the Lord.

Fourth, living married life rightly is, for every married Christian, a calling from God. God has bound married Christians, and He privileges and requires them to glorify Him by honorable behavior in the bond. The single, most important, absolutely decisive question for the married Christian is not, “Am I happy?,” or “Am I fulfilled?,” or “Do I feel that I love my husband or wife any longer?,” or “Is my wife or husband keeping her or his end of the bargain (as though marriage were a bargain!)?” But the question is just this, come what may, “Will I or will I not walk as God has distributed to me in my marriage and as the Lord has called me in my marriage?” (cf. v. 17) Marriage is holy not only because the institution is good and sleeping together is pure but also, and especially, because marriage is consecrated to God.

Living rightly in marriage is not easy. The Bible never says that it is. On the contrary, the Bible warns believers that every marriage, every marriage *of those who marry in the Lord*, will have its share of troubles. Those who marry will have “trouble in the flesh” (v. 28). They will have cares (v. 32). Is there any marriage that has never been strained by these troubles that must come when two sinful people are bound as closely as is the case in marriage? Is there any marriage that has not been oppressed by the burden of the special responsibilities that come with marriage, particularly when the marriage produces children, who also are sinful?

Martin Luther begins his commentary on I Corinthians 7 by freely

acknowledging the folly of marrying on account of the earthly troubles:

“What a fool is he who takes a wife,” says the world, and it is certainly true. And many learned scholars have decided that a wise man should not take a wife, even if she were wisdom personified. This, too, is true and well said, for those who believe that there is no life after this one (as such people do) act almost wisely in falling back on free fornication and not tying themselves to the labor of married life. In this way they have at least fewer evil days in this life.

He immediately adds:

But on the other hand the Spirit says: “He is a wise man who takes a wife.” This, too, is certainly true, and this truth leads to the conclusion that a wise man should take a wife, even though she were foolishness personified. This, too, is right and well said, for since a Christian man is waiting for another life after this one, it is a matter of wisdom that he should have fewer good days on earth so that in eternal life he might enjoy only happy ones (*Luther’s Works*, Saint Louis: Concordia, 1973, 5).

And then Luther married and discovered that there was a great deal more happiness in marriage than he supposed in 1523.

The traditional Dutch Reformed marriage form is biblical, realistic, and helpful when it begins, “Whereas married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions, to the end that you ... may also be assured in your hearts of the certain assistance of God in your afflictions, hear therefore from the Word of God how honorable the marriage state is” How wonderful, in this connection, is the wisdom of Reformed churches today. The troubles and afflictions of married persons due to sin are wreaking havoc upon marriages in their fellowship as never before in history. And just at this time they jettison the old marriage form as “too gloomy” and adopt a new form that presents marriage as a bed of roses.

The story is told of the pious, old Dutch wife who was asked by friends at the celebration of her 50th wedding anniversary, “*Vrouw*, in all those years did you ever contemplate divorce?” After a long moment’s reflection, she replied thoughtfully, “No, not divorce. Murder, a couple of times, but never divorce.”

Married persons are generally by reason of sin subject to many troubles. In the times of trouble, the sense of calling sees the believers through. The reason why there are many more divorces in the churches today than there were 50 years ago is not that the troubles have increased but that the sense of calling has decreased. Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of Christ when He said, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Although a calling and although of the greatest importance for the present existence of the kingdom of Christ, marriage is not of ultimate importance. This is the final practical application of the basic truth about marriage that the apostle makes in I Corinthians 7. All must "sit loose to their marriage," so to speak: "They that have wives (must) be as though they had none" (v. 29). For the time has been shortened, the time both of the life of each married person and the time of history itself. The form of this world is passing away. The bond of marriage is lifelong, but only lifelong. God will surely loose the bond by the death of one of the married persons. And He will abolish the institution at the coming of Christ (cf. Matt. 22:30).

Does someone have a bad marriage? Let this encourage her. Is someone in danger of making an idol out of his marriage? Let this warn him. Does someone suffer because God withholds marriage from her? Let this comfort her.

The earthly symbol is quickly, finally, and utterly dissolved. Only the heavenly reality lasts forever: the bond of love and friendship, the covenant bond, the mystical union, that unites every believer with Jesus Christ.

Upon this, the Real Marriage, unmarried and married alike are to set their heart. ▲



Letter and Response

The letter which follows contains a reaction of Mr. Garrett P. Johnson to reviews of two books by Gordon H. Clark: *The Incarnation* and *The Trinity*. The first, by Prof. David Engelsma, appeared in the *Standard Bearer*; the second in the *Journal*.

December 7, 1991

Dear Professors Hanko and Engelsma,

I recently read your reviews of Gordon Clark's *The Trinity* and *The Incarnation* and I was dismayed by both. I believe that you have both misunderstood and misrepresented both Clark and VanTil. Your attack on Clark is a serious mistake on your part. I sincerely hope that my comments in this letter will clarify these issues and cause you to reconsider what you have written.

It seems to me that much of your misunderstanding comes from your unreasoned and kneejerk dislike and rejection of Clark's principle of individuation and the resulting definition of "person." Gentlemen, let me

ask you, What is your principle of individuation? Clark lays out three choices. Which do you prefer, or do you have another, never before thought of? What is your definition of a person? Please do not respond by appealing to the traditional formulas: subsistence, substance, etc. Clark has demonstrated that those terms are meaningless. It is time that you, as teachers of the church, engage the argument, rather than clinging to meaningless, though hoary terms.

As an example of how the argument is being carried forward, I am enclosing a new essay that will be appearing in the January/February issue of *The Trinity Review*. The author (Joel Parkinson), using Clark's definition of a person, demonstrates how God can be indivisibly one and three. This is real theological progress (and, I would hope that you are not opposed to progress). Reasserting undefined phrases that have been around for more than a millennium is not. You are simply failing to defend the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation against the onslaught of modern unbelief. As teachers, you ought to know better.

Contrary to what you say, Clark based his criticisms of VanTil on more than two brief references in one obscure source. Clark also quoted from the *Complaint* and *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Clark showed that VanTil was (1) putting forth a new view of the Trinity (VanTil's followers realize this), and (2) that this new view contradicts itself and the Bible. VanTil taught that God is, at the same time, both three persons and one person. This is unscriptural and absurd.

I am astonished that you say that you could not find in VanTil's writings "any denial of the truth of the Trinity." You gentlemen know quite well (or do you?) that there are two ways to deny a doctrine: One is saying that it is untrue; the other is by saying that yes, it is true, but so is this other doctrine true. Liberals deny the divinity of Christ in this manner by saying that yes, of course, Christ is divine, and so is everyone else. VanTil says yes, of course, God is three persons, and He is also one person. I suggest that you read J. Robbins' *Cornelius VanTil: The Man and the Myth* for a longer discussion. And, of course, you should consult Herman Hoeksema's invaluable editorials on the Clark-VanTil controversy.

You regard Clark's definition of a person as his "most fundamental" error. Why? What is wrong with it? What is your definition? Why do you make false criticisms devoid of biblical alternatives? Clark quotes SCRIPTURE to support his view. Among other things, he wrote an entire book (*The Johannine Logos*) to deny the neo-orthodox dichotomy between propositions and persons. Of course, the neo-orthodox were not the first to make this false separation, but they have been the most consistent. That is how they came up with their theology of encounter. (Incidentally, one time I confronted a liberal, [encounter-type] Presbyterian minister and proposed Clark's

theory of individuation. He immediately exploded in great anger and accused Clark of speculative nonsense. When I asked for his definition of a person, he rudely walked away in a tantrum.)

Gentlemen, there is no middle ground between Clark's definition of persons as thinking propositions (Christ said: "I am the Truth") and neo-orthodox irrationalism. The past millennium of confusion on this point has been eliminated as the theological argument has progressed. You accuse Clark of using "strange and abstract" definitions, but nothing could be more strange and abstract than defining a person as a "subsistence" or a "substance." Clark's definition, far from being strange or abstract, is derived from Scripture. "Subsistence" and "substance" are not. As teachers in the church, you are divinely commanded to teach what the Scriptures teach, not what Aristotle or Boethius taught.

You assert that "it is difficult to see how ... a collection of thoughts can generate, by an act of will, another collection of thoughts." I don't think it is difficult at all. You seem to think that thoughts are dead, lifeless things. But Scripture does not. Christ said His words, His doctrine, His thoughts, are life, did He not? When we call God the "living" God, we do not ascribe biological life to Him. We mean that He is a thinking and speaking God. God is His mind, and that mind, those thoughts, express themselves. What else is there? If you think God is something else than His thoughts, prove to me from Scripture just what He might be. Nevertheless, the doctrine that God is His mind is the major difference between God and idols, according to Scripture. God creates by speaking thoughts; He upholds the universe by thinking (in contrast to natural laws), He reveals truth by speaking thoughts. Are these also "difficult to see"? God, who is truth, a collection of propositions (i.e., scriptural and infinite) created human and angelic persons.

You seem to be confused by the words "necessary" and "free." Whatever God does is from the sense that nothing external to Him controls Him. We are not free, for God controls us. Whatever God does is both necessary and voluntary, because His works are acts of His will (i.e., voluntary) and He is immutable (i.e., necessary). If God's decree is eternal, then He had to create, not because something outside of Him was forcing Him to, but because He is immutable. If you keep the definitions of "free" and "necessary" clearly in mind, there is no problem understanding why Clark says that God's works are necessary. To suggest (as you seem to imply on pp. 57-58) that they are not necessary is to suggest that God is neither immutable nor eternal.

When you say that "This may be difficult to understand; but God is the infinite One whose ways are past finding out," you are imagining a contradiction that is not there. And since God has revealed this matter to us, it is not "past finding out." I am sorry that you are seminary teachers and have

not understood these things. I am a humble layman, and by trade a professional musician. Joel Parkinson is an engineer by trade. When musicians and engineers are forced to correct the teachers of the church, the church is truly in a sad state of affairs.

Fortunately, past teachers of the church were not as confused as they are today. Consider this passage from John Gill's *The Cause of God and Truth*: "God is a most free agent, and liberty in Him is in its utmost perfection, and yet does not lie in indifference to good and evil; He cannot commit iniquity, He cannot lie, or deny Himself; His will is determined only to that which is good; He can do no other; He is the author of all good, and of that only; and what He does He does freely, and yet necessarily...." Perhaps you would like to retract your statements about necessity, once you have thought about them.

Then you make another mistake: "If creation is necessary, it flows from the being of God Himself." Please furnish the argument justifying this conclusion. (Are you implying that if creation is free, it does not flow from the being of God Himself? Or are you using "creation" to mean something else? Does it mean "universe" or "the act of creating"?)

Then you make another mistake: "This is Pantheism." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "pantheism" as "the religious belief or philosophical theory that God and the universe are identical (implying a denial of the personality and transcendence of God); the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God." Obviously, necessary creation is not pantheism.

Then you compound your mistakes by making a vicious insinuation about Clark: "It is not strange that ... Clark speaks with approval of the pantheist Spinoza." As I recall, Paul also quotes a pantheist philosopher in Acts, under the direction of the HOLY SPIRIT: In him we live and move and have our being. Dare you insinuate that Paul is also a pantheist? If not, then you ought to apologize to Clark, and to your readers. I demand such an apology and retraction in the next issue of your magazine.

If you were even faintly aware of Clark's writings you would have known his rejection of Spinoza's pantheism. Try reading *A Christian View of Men and Things* and *Thales to Dewey* for starters. As teachers of the church, it is inexcusable for you to be saying and writing these things.

You accuse Clark of rarely using Scripture in developing his own views of the Trinity. In 139 pages he cites 104 passages of Scripture. In your misleading review, you do not cite one reference supporting your views.

You conclude your review by writing that Clark's "thinking is dangerous and inimicable to the Reformed faith." Hardly. What is dangerous and inimicable to the faith is the unwillingness to think that you have shown in your review, the unwillingness to engage the contemporary

opponents of Christianity, and the eagerness to repeat undefined and misleading formulations that have not been clarified in centuries.

You say that “it takes a certain amount of intellectual arrogance to set one’s self up as an authority against the whole tradition of the Christian church and brush this tradition aside with the wave of the hand, then to promote ideas which are more philosophical than biblical.” First, Clark does not set himself up as an authority; his authority is Scripture. Second, you yourself admitted that his historical discussion of the Trinity goes on for 100 pages; this is hardly a “wave of the hand.” Third, it is you, using terms like “subsistence” and “substance,” who are more philosophical than biblical. Fourth, Clark does not challenge the “whole tradition of the Christian church” but the erroneous parts of that tradition. Or are you saying that church tradition is infallible?

Finally, you accuse Clark of being “overly intellectual,” which is a bit like accusing a man of being overly virtuous. Then you end the review with a litany of unfounded and scurrilous charges about Clark being “cavalier,” “cutting,” “off-handed,” and “all-but-joking.” You cite no quotations; you give no examples. It seems to me that it is you who are being cavalier and cutting, though not overly intellectual.

Now, as for the review of *The Incarnation*, let me rehearse the impasse to which the traditional view has brought us: If Christ was not a human person, no one died, no one suffered on the cross, no one was raised from the dead, no one thirsted, no one grew in wisdom or stature, no one hungered, no one prayed not my will but thine be done, no one was tempted, and no one was ignorant. Clark prefers to stick with Scripture which repeatedly refers to “the man Christ Jesus” and says that Jesus did all these things.

It is a mistake to say that the second Person of the Trinity died in His human nature, not only because the second Person of the Trinity cannot die, but because you have not told us what a nature is. Do you mean that Christ has a human will? That He has a human intellect? If your answer to these questions is yes, then what was Christ lacking to be a human person? Please do not hide behind the skirts of Chalcedon; the theological debate has moved much further in the past 1,500 years. And no, to answer your question directly, I do not think that the Holy Spirit led either Chalcedon or Westminster into all truth, because councils and men may err and have erred.

Finally, back to “persons.” You write: “As three persons, God then is three composites of propositions. On this definition it is not obvious to me that a compound English sentence is not a person.” Your mistake is elementary: All persons are propositions does not imply that all propositions are persons. All dogs have four feet does not imply that all animals with four feet are dogs.

As for God’s simplicity, you really are grasping at straws in your

attempts to denigrate Clark: God is simple with the simplicity of one system. God is truth, and truth is a system. But within that system, there are many truths. Many of them are revealed to us in the Bible. That is how the one and the many exist in God: The many truths form one system.

Finally, you end the review oddly (although you may simply intend to smear Clark again) by saying that “the point at which the traditional doctrine [of the Incarnation] is being challenged [today] is that of the ‘full, real humanity of Jesus.’” I have yet to meet a full, real human who is not a person. In fact, there is no such thing.

Cordially,
Garrett P. Johnson

There are several reasons why it is difficult to deal with Garrett P. Johnson’s letter. The first is that he deals with two separate articles by two different men in one letter, and one cannot always be sure with whom he disagrees. The second is that one of the book reviews to which Mr. Johnson refers, written by Prof. David Engelsma, appeared in the *Standard Bearer* (in which periodical both Mr. Johnson’s letter and Prof. Engelsma’s response rightly ought to appear), while the other book review, written by myself, appeared in the last issue of the *Journal*. We have solved these difficulties by printing Mr. Johnson’s letter in this issue of the *Journal* and by arranging the answer in such a way that Prof. Engelsma and I have each answered that part which seems to refer to our own reviews.

The third reason why it is difficult to answer Mr. Johnson’s letter is that Mr. Johnson repudiates the historic creeds of the church. Specifically he repudiates the Creed of Chalcedon and the Westminster Confessions with respect to their teachings on the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is serious business, because one who repudiates the creeds of the church on this central question puts himself outside the church which confesses this truth. Mr. Johnson sets himself outside of all Presbyterian Churches by his repudiation of Westminster on the point in question; presumably he sets himself outside the Reformed Churches by a similar repudiation of what the Belgic Confession teaches (identical with Westminster); but he also sets himself outside Christendom when he repudiates Chalcedon, which, along with Nicea, defines the entire Christian tradition.

Now Mr. Johnson may do this if he wishes; but he himself will have to admit that such action makes fruitful discussion all but impossible, for it is all but impossible for one who stands firmly within this entire tradition of the church (beginning with Nicea, leading through Chalcedon and the *Symbolum Quicunque*, embracing the whole of the Reformation, and coming to us through all the Presbyterian and Reformed creeds) to talk

fruitfully with one who separates himself from it on such a crucial question of faith.

Mr. Johnson may perhaps argue (as he does) that “councils and men may err, and have erred”; but to any thinking Christian two thoughts immediately come to mind. The first is that the whole church since Chalcedon and the whole Protestant church since the Reformation have unanimously confessed the truth to which Mr. Johnson takes exception. The whole church has confessed this truth, not out of careless commitment and thoughtless acceptance of an ancient belief, but out of a conviction that this truth is biblical; that it is forged in the fire of controversy; and that, after continual re-examination in the light of God’s Word, under the pressures of attacks made against it, it remains firmly imbedded in the faith of the people of God. Enemies have marshalled against it every argument known to man, for it is rightly the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It has withstood every attack. It is no little matter to set oneself over against all the church of the entire new dispensation and over against theological giants whose abilities put ours to shame and whose devotion to the cause of the truth of the gospel has so far outstripped ours that one is embarrassed to make a comparison.

Mr. Johnson makes a plea for development of the truth. The plea is well made. But development of the truth has never and does not now take place by a repudiation of what has been the confession of the church throughout her history. If in the work of developing the riches of the truth in Christ Jesus, one is always obligated to “start from scratch” as it were, the task would not only be impossible, but it would lose all its attractiveness and luster. Christ promised to His church the Spirit of truth to lead the church into all truth. That promise has been fulfilled from the day of Pentecost to today. The church, after comparing the creeds with Scripture and finding them sound, receives these creeds as the fruit of the Spirit of truth. Joyfully and thankfully she takes them as a gift of grace given to the church from the Spirit.

That is her incentive to develop these truths. The truth has always and now still develops as a flower unfolds from a bud to a glorious blossom; as a mighty oak develops from an acorn. It does not develop by spurning what the church in the past has confessed.

But let us grant that the church for 1,500 years has been wrong in her confession of the truth concerning Christ and that the church today, through her creeds, confesses false doctrine. Any man who loves the church of Christ does not merely repudiate openly and publicly what the church has always confessed, but makes it his business to go the proper ecclesiastical way to demonstrate to the church that her confession is wrong and that, for the sake of her own salvation, she ought to correct it and bring it into harmony with the Scriptures. He has the moral responsibility before God and before the

church to do this. But this goal is not accomplished by publicly taking positions contrary to the heritage of the church, and then writing biting letters against those who seek to uphold that glorious heritage which has served the church so well for a millennium and a half.

* * * * *

What follows is Prof. Engelsma's response.

Let it be clearly understood, I do indeed (to use Mr. Johnson's pejorative language) "hide behind the skirts of Chalcedon." To say it rightly, I confess what the Spirit of Christ led the church to confess at Chalcedon: Jesus Christ is one divine person — the person of the eternal Son of God — in two natures — human and divine. I reject as heresy what the Spirit led the church to reject at Chalcedon: the error that Jesus is two persons (Nestorianism) and the error that Jesus is a mingling of deity and humanity (Eutychianism).

I "hide behind the skirts of Chalcedon" because I am a Reformed believer and an officebearer in a Reformed denomination. Reformed believers are bound in their theological thinking by the Reformed creeds. Reformed officebearers promise at their ordination to be faithful to the Reformed creeds.

The Reformed creeds teach about the person and natures of Christ exactly what the Christian church taught in the Symbol of Chalcedon. The Belgic Confession teaches that

by this conception, the person of the Son is inseparably united and connected with the human nature; so that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person: yet, that each nature retains its own distinct properties (Art. 19).

The Westminster Confession teaches the same:

The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man (8.2).

The teaching that Jesus is two persons as well as two natures is heresy — the Nestorian heresy.

What Jesus lacks to be a human person is not a human intellect or a human will, which belong to the human *nature*, but a human subsistence in His rational, moral nature, or, to put it differently, a human self-conscious subject of all his thinking, willing, and doing. The “I” in Jesus, as in “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58), is the subsistence, or self-conscious subject, of the second person of the Trinity.

This brings up Dr. Clark’s novel definition of person as a “composite of propositions.” The definition is a startling contradiction of the thinking of Christ’s church for the past two thousand years. It is an arid reduction of the rich revelation in Scripture of the person of the Savior and of the persons of the Godhead to an abstract concept. Can a “composite of propositions” love me and give itself for me? Can a “composite of propositions” dwell in me and comfort me? Can I pray to “composites of propositions”? Would I care to?

Clark’s definition of person is also absurd. I repeat, Johnson’s charge of an elementary error in my logic notwithstanding, on Clark’s definition of person as a composite of propositions a compound English sentence is a person. So is a book. Clark *defines* person. A definition gives the essence of a thing and distinguishes the thing from other things. If I defined a human being as that which stands on two legs, men would have every right to reject my definition on the ground that it included two-legged tables as persons. They could also reject my definition on the ground that it excluded babies as persons, since they do not stand on two legs.

This raises another question about Clark’s definition of a person. Is a newborn baby a person? Is an unborn baby a person? A severely retarded human?

Mr. Johnson is mistaken to say that the church is in sad shape when humble laymen must correct the teachers of the church. When this really takes place, the church is in good shape. The teachers probably are in sad shape, but the church is healthy that has such capable laymen.

The church is in sad shape, however, when laymen and theologians take it upon themselves harshly to criticize and violently to repudiate the fundamental doctrines of the church as laid down by the Spirit of truth in the confessions of the church.

* * * * *

What follows is Prof. Hanko’s response.

We ought, I think, to have a brief lesson in church history.
The brilliant but erratic and speculative heretic Origen was the first

theologian in the church to teach clearly the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. This was a significant and important step forward in the church's understanding of the doctrine of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The difficulty was, however, that Origen taught that the generation of the Son by the Father was an act of *God's will*. This was not only a serious flaw in Origen's position, but it caused a great deal of grief and confusion in the church. The orthodox were often wont to appeal to Origen in support of their contention that the relation between the First and Second persons of the Trinity was a relation of generation. They did this with considerable justification.

The trouble was that the arch-heretic Arius, intent on denying the divinity of Christ, also appealed to Origen in support of his heresy, and pointed out that the act of the generation of the Son by the Father was an act of God's will. Because generation was an act of God's will, Christ was less than divine. He was not "very God of very God," to quote Nicea. Further, because generation was an act of the will, the Second person of the Trinity was subordinate to the First person. Christ was lower than God.

The relationships between the three persons in the holy Trinity are *necessary* relationships, for they involve the very essence of the triune God. These relationships are not free, nor a part of God's will. Generation and spiration are so of God's essence that God is not God without them. If God's will were involved in these relationships, then the First person has a will of His own according to which He wills the generation of the Second person and the spiration of the Third person; the Second person has a will of His own according to which He wills to be generated and to spirate the Third person; the Third person has a will of His own according to which He wills to proceed from the Father and Son. Thus God would have three wills, which is the same as saying that there are three Gods.

God's counsel is free. It is not necessary in any sense of the word. It is not necessary in the sense that it belongs to the essence and being of God. It is not necessary in the sense that anything within God Himself or outside of God could and did compel Him to formulate His counsel or to include in it such things as He did. It is not necessary because the eternal God *willed* a counsel from all eternity, and the choice of His will is a sovereignly free choice. It is not necessary in the sense that God needed His counsel to attain His glory and enrich His own essence. Sovereignly and freely, as an act of His will, He determined His counsel. His counsel is His own eternal will and eternal thought. The triune God with one will and one mind wills His counsel. It is His will which makes His counsel free.

Having willed His counsel, what God willed shall also surely come to pass. His free and sovereign counsel makes all His works in time "necessary" from the viewpoint of the counsel, but emphatically free from the viewpoint

of God Himself. When God determines His counsel, He determines to realize it in time and history as well. But because the counsel is free and because history is the realization of God's counsel, all that God does is free. God has no need of His creation; He freely forms all things. God has no need to save sinners; He freely does so through the gift of Jesus Christ. God has no need to save me by the power of His grace; He freely determines to do so — a wonder for which eternity will be insufficiently long to praise His blessed name.

God is both immutable and eternal. The immutable and eternal God freely determines His counsel eternally. He freely determines to execute that counsel for the glory of His own name.

To make the counsel and creation necessary is to deny that the counsel and creation are acts of God's will. It is to maintain, therefore, that God had no choice in the matter of forming His counsel and creating the world. It is to maintain that God's counsel and creation are of the very essence and nature of God — in the same sense in which generation belongs to God's nature and is necessary. This is Pantheism. Pantheism teaches that God's counsel and creation are but an overflowing of the divine essence, necessary and inevitable. To make creation necessary is to be a Pantheist.

God's work of creation is that act of God's will by which He freely and sovereignly gave existence to the creation which He had determined in His counsel to form. God gave such existence to that creation by giving it existence which was distinct from His own divine being, but which was nevertheless totally dependent upon Him. This is the biblical and creedal doctrine of creation.

And this has been and is now the faith of the church. ▲

Book Reviews

Dominion & Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress, by Gary North. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987. Paper. \$8.95. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

As a postmillennialist who finds in Revelation 20:7ff. the prophecy that history ends with a Satanic assault upon the church, Gary North

has a problem. How can the breakup of the victorious postmillennial kingdom of Christ be explained? And where do these ungodly hordes, "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea," come from? The worldwide revolt against the Lord Christ at the end would seem to be a powerful proof for amillennial eschatology.

Not so, says North. There is an explanation that accounts for both a

future postmillennial conquest by the godly and a final rebellion on the part of many ungodly. The explanation is common grace. Common grace is essential for postmillennial eschatology.

As increasing numbers of persons are converted in the future, they will obey the law of God themselves and apply it to the life of nations. The result will be abundant material prosperity as the blessing of God upon those who keep His law. Some of this prosperity will fall also to the ungodly (crumbs to the dogs under the table is how North puts it). These gifts are the common grace of God. Recognizing that external obedience to God's law and cooperation with the successful saints are in their best earthly interests, the ungodly conform to the millennial program. Their external obedience to the law is due to the work of the law written in their hearts, as the apostle puts it in Romans 2:15. This also is God's common grace. Taking issue with Professor C. VanTil, who taught that common grace decreases toward the end, North contends that God increases common grace as the end approaches. But His purpose with common grace is to prepare the wicked for destruction. North speaks of God's giving them rope with which to hang themselves. According to this purpose of God, at the very end the wicked revolt. "The unregenerate ... would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven" (p. 162). Immediately, God destroys them.

The central theme of this book

(is that) God grants evil men common grace in the form of external blessings. Then He destroys them. The greater the common grace, the greater their rebellion. The greater their rebellion compared to God's common grace, the greater God's judgment against them (p. 165).

The postmillennial kingdom of Gary North will contain great numbers of unregenerates whose compliance with the laws of the kingdom is only external and whose motivation in living the life of the kingdom is merely the desire for earthly benefits. It may even be that the majority of people are unconverted. All that is required for postmillennialism is that "there will be large numbers of converts, and the civilization of the world will generally reflect God's biblically revealed law-order" (p. xv). Also required is common grace to keep the unconverted in line for a while.

North's doctrine of common grace, however, is radically different from the doctrine current in Calvinistic circles today. North himself calls attention to this difference. He condemns the three-point doctrine of common grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. He repudiates the theory of common grace propounded by Cornelius VanTil of Westminster Seminary. In fact, North states that "this book is basically a refutation of Prof. Cornelius VanTil's book, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, a compilation of his essays on common grace" (p. 9). North expresses agreement with

the Protestant Reformed rejection of common grace as an attitude of favor toward the reprobate wicked: "On this point, the Protestant Reformed Church is correct" (p. 93). He praises Protestant Reformed theologian and churchman Herman Hoeksema:

Herman Hoeksema, who was perhaps the most brilliant systematic theologian in America in this century, left the Christian Reformed Church to form the Protestant Reformed Church. He and his followers were convinced that, contrary to the decision of the CRC, there is no such thing as common grace (p. 6).

For North, common grace is only the earthly gifts that God gives the ungodly, not a favorable attitude of God toward them. Common grace is "favors," not favor. God's attitude toward the reprobate wicked is hatred. His purpose in giving the wicked the "blessings" of rain and sunshine is the destruction of the wicked. The gifts are rope given to the ungodly with which to hang themselves. "Common grace is... a form of long-term (eternal) curse to the rebellious ... " (p. 25). Similarly, the aspect of common grace that consists of the work of the law written in the hearts of the unregenerate refers only to their self-serving insight that outward obedience to the law of God spares them much earthly misery and gets for them much earthly good. Their "good works" are merely external compliance with the demand of the law. In reality, the works are not good. The reason is that, as totally depraved sinners, the unre-

generate do not love God in all their seeming good works, but rather hate Him.

North is correct when he asserts that there is basic agreement here between himself and the PRC. The objection of the PRC to common grace, specifically to the doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924 and forced upon Hoeksema and others as binding dogma, has never intended to deny that God gives good gifts to the reprobate wicked, or that many ungodly people live outwardly decent lives, or that God restrains the dissoluteness of men in its expression in society.

What the PRC object to is the teaching that the good gifts that God gives to the reprobate wicked reveal an attitude of favor, or love, in God towards these rebels who are outside of Jesus Christ. This conflicts with the teaching of the Bible that God hates all workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5) and contradicts the biblical doctrine that God eternally reprobates some persons in hatred (cf. Rom. 9:13). The notion of a favor of God toward all men invariably is accompanied by or leads to the Arminian doctrine of a love for all in the gospel and of a desire of God to save all by the gospel, which love and desire to save are then dependent upon the will of the sinner. This doctrine stands condemned in the official creeds of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Confession.

The theory of a restraint of sin

that the PRC find objectionable is that which maintains a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the sinner, without regenerating him, so that some good is preserved in the fallen sinner. As a result of this gracious operation upon the heart of the unregenerate, it is held, he is able to perform works that are truly good, albeit only in the realm of society. This, the PRC think, is outright denial of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity as taught in Ephesians 2:1ff., Romans 8:5ff., and the Canons of Dordt, III,IV/1-5.

There is also agreement between North and the PRC in their view of history, leaving aside for the moment their differing eschatologies. North sees common grace as being significant for history. For North, this significance is that common grace serves the elect church and the establishment of the kingdom of God (pp. 57ff.). In this aspect of his common grace theory also, North differs sharply from the prevailing view. Many advocates of common grace attribute to common grace a positive purpose and value altogether apart from the church.

Throughout their history, the PRC have fought a lonely battle in the Dutch Reformed community against the conception of history that the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper spun from his theory of common grace. On Kuyper's view of history, God has two independent purposes with history. One is the development of their culture by an

ungodly world by means of common grace. The other is the gathering of the church by special grace. These two purposes of God run down through history side-by-side, and never the twain do meet. At least Kuyper thought that the salvation of the church is the more important of the two purposes of history. Kuyper has disciples today who regard the world's development of its godless culture as the more important of the two purposes so that the chief calling of the church is to help the world as much as she can. The PRC maintain that the one purpose of God with history is the establishment of His covenant and kingdom in Christ. The ungodly world in all its developments serves the church. The church does not exist for the world, but the world for the church. And God does not exist for the church, but the church for God.

Ultimately, North grounds his denial of a favor of God toward the ungodly upon eternal predestination. North is a rare Calvinist. He has a Bible that contains Romans 9. He reads the chapter. He believes what it plainly teaches. He is not afraid to confess, in print, the "horrible" but biblical doctrine of double predestination (pp. 201ff.). And, *mirabile dictu*, he submits to the plain, logical implication of the doctrine—God does not have an attitude of favor toward every human.

The question arises (from Romans 9 — DJE): How does God view those who are not predestined to eternal life? Does He

regard them with some degree of favor, or none, during their earthly lives? Do they as “creatures as such” or “men as such” become the recipients of his love or favor, “after a fashion”? Is the unregenerate vessel of wrath in some way the object of God’s favor to “clay in general”? The Synod of 1924 (of the CRC — DJE) said yes. Hoeksema said no. Hoeksema was correct (pp. 204, 205).

Since North means by common grace merely the good gifts that God bestows upon the reprobate wicked and a work of the law written in the hearts of the ungodly that causes them outwardly to conform to the law for selfish reasons, he should give up the terminology, “common grace.” His usage is not the common usage. The Bible does not use the term. Nor do the Reformed creeds (the only time that the “Three Forms of Unity” speak of “common grace” they attribute the belief to the Arminians in the Canons of Dordt, III, IV, Rejection of Errors/5). North’s insistence on employing the term to refer to the gifts that God gives the wicked, while rejecting any attitude of favor on God’s part toward the wicked, results in paradoxical, confusing statements. Speaking of the ungodly at the end of the world—those whose revolt is a problem for North in view of the victory of the coming millennial kingdom — North writes:

He (God) has been gracious to them all to the utmost of His common grace. He has been gracious in response to their cov-

enantal faithfulness to His *civil* law-order, and He has been gracious in order to pile the maximum possible quantity of hot coals on their God-hating heads (pp. 114, 115).

“Covenantal faithfulness” on the part of God-haters? God graciously piling hot coals on people’s heads? Theology becomes nonsense. Instead of speaking of common grace, North should speak of the bounties, or gifts, of God’s Providence. With the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 50, he should distinguish between the “gifts” of earthly necessities that God gives men and the “blessing” that believers request from God with these “gifts,” without which blessing the gifts do not profit.

God’s providential care of all men is the subject of I Timothy 4:10: “... the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.” North calls this text “the key verse that describes two kinds of grace” (p. 5) and “probably the most difficult verse in the Bible for those who deny universal salvation from hell, yet who also deny the existence of common grace” (p. 22). In fact, the text does not speak of grace at all. Rather, it teaches that the “living God” gives earthly life and whatever material things that they enjoy to all men. He is the Savior of all in the sense of upholding their existence and supplying their physical needs in His Providence. The preceding context reveals God as Creator and as the Giver of material good things (vss. 1-5). These gifts are not grace

to the ungodly. For the gifts, although good in themselves as creations of the good God, are good only to those persons who receive them with thanksgiving because they believe and know the truth (vss. 3,4). They are curses to the unthankful. Since the living God gives earthly gifts to the believers with His favor, He is especially the Savior in His Providence of those who believe.

It is noteworthy that, despite North's sharp difference with Reformed theologians who explain common grace as the favor of God toward those outside of Christ, he is at one with them in making common grace the basis of cooperation between the saints and the unholy. Common grace explains the cooperation of the unregenerate, "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea" (Rev. 20:8), with the regenerate in creating and maintaining the millennial kingdom of Christ. Common grace justifies the believers' working together with unbelievers in bringing about Christ's kingdom: "There can be cooperation between Christians and non-Christians.... We can cooperate with the enemy in positive projects because of common grace" (p. 198). Cooperation with the world in his political activities in The Netherlands was also the purpose of Abraham Kuyper (in many ways the father of the doctrine of common grace) with his *gemeene gratie* (common grace). It was one of the main purposes of the CRC with its doctrine of common grace in 1924. The CRC intended to silence

those in its fold who taught the antithesis (on the significance of the common grace controversy in the CRC for the antithesis, cf. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, Eerdmans, 1984, pp. 93-119).

But the apostle of Christ forbids this cooperation in II Corinthians 6:14ff. The passage makes clear that cooperation between the church and the world in building the kingdom of Christ is impossible. Christ will not cooperate with Belial in establishing His kingdom — He will use Belial, but He will not cooperate with him. Satan on his part will never agree to cooperate with Christ in promoting Christ's kingdom. Satan is foolish. He is not stupid. North deludes himself when he supposes that the sons of Belial will be willing to help usher in the millennial kingdom and then for a millennium to cooperate in supporting it. We have Christ's word for it: "And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (Matt. 12:26).

North's thesis fails. The saints *may* not cooperate with the unholy, certainly not in the spiritual task of extending the kingdom of Christ. The ungodly will not cooperate in such a work. As willing slaves, they are engaged in building the kingdom of Satan. On North's own admission, the days immediately before the coming of Christ will see a Satan-inspired, worldwide assault upon the church of Christ. North's "common grace" does not solve his problem

concerning a victorious millennial kingdom filled with unregenerates and collapsing in a Satanic revolt.

As a postscript, I only remark the utter injustice that North does to creedal Reformed Christianity and to multitudes of Reformed and Presbyterian Christians living and dead when he repeatedly charges them with the heresy of antinomism. "The amillennialist must reject biblical law I think antinomianism is the underlying motive of amillennialism" (p. 154). The Reformed Christian makes the law of God the rule of the whole of his thankful life, as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in its third part. He teaches it to his children. He witnesses of it to his neighbor as he has opportunity. Because of his obedience to the law, he suffers scorn and loss. But because he does not share Reconstructionism's belief that the Spirit will write the law upon the heart of a majority of the human race and make it the constitution of nations prior to the coming of Jesus, this man of God must needs be damned as antinomian (I remind Dr. North that antinomism is a heresy—a soul damning heresy). This is a cruel slander and a gross injustice.

One gibe aimed specifically at the Protestant Reformed Churches is intolerable and may not be allowed to go unanswered. North declares that this denomination "still speaks with a Dutch accent" (p. 110). Ja, dere you have it. Dit is da same old ting ve Gereformeerde Dutchmen have always had to put up met in dis

country. Even dose who are nice to da unregenerates poke fun met us. Do ve speak met en Dutch accent? Met al mine strengt, ik zei, "Neen!"



New Testament Criticism & Interpretation, ed. by David Alan Black & David S. Dockery; Zondervan Publishing House, 1991; 619pp., \$17.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

It appears as if the entire church world has gone mad over higher criticism. And this book would seem to be the proof of it. One of the blurbs on the back cover speaks of the fact that "The editors have assembled a talented team of conservative-evangelical scholars" for the writing of this book; and so it is. But every one without exception is a higher critic and, as the title indicates, is given to higher criticism of Scripture. The list of authors reads like a "Who's Who" in American evangelicalism and high praises for the book are sung on the back cover by leading evangelicals from leading evangelical Seminaries around the world.

In three separate sections the authors discuss what is meant by critical studies of Scripture, what are the basic methods in New Testament criticism, and some special issues that arise in New Testament interpretation.

In the first section, a brief history of higher criticism is given, and the role of higher critical methods is justified. In an important essay D.A.

Hagner from Fuller Theological Seminary justifies historical critical methods of exegesis on the grounds that the historical accuracy of the biblical record must be decided on empirical grounds.

In the second section, almost every kind of critical study of Scripture is described and discussed: textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism, canonical criticism, sociological criticism, structuralism. One is impressed with the fact that every time the student of Scripture turns around, he discovers that someone, somewhere has invented yet another method of examining and explaining the text of Scripture. And who knows how many more methods will be proposed? Yet each one claims to hold a key to an understanding of God's Word.

The third section deals with many different related questions such as the use of the Old Testament in the New, the development of doctrine in the New Testament, and the relation between critical studies and preaching.

The authors are very bold in what in fact constitutes an attack on the integrity of Scripture. One author says that the historical accuracy of Scripture must be decided on rational and empirical grounds (p. 81), and that, while we may admit the possibility of the supernatural, this too must be historically investigated and the reliability of witnesses examined (pp. 87-90). Another argues forcibly for multiple meanings in the

text, a view which carries us back to medieval Roman Catholic interpretation which closed Scripture to the people of God (pp. 270, 271). Another boldly states that the authors of Scripture did not agree in doctrine (p. 475), and yet another is not ashamed to insist that the gospels are not historically reliable (p. 508).

At the same time, all forms of literary and historical criticism are recommended as being invaluable tools for the understanding of Scripture. And the authors insist that this critical approach is in no way incompatible with firm belief in divine inspiration.

Nevertheless, serious objections must be brought against these approaches to God's Word. These objections we consider to be so serious that no true biblical interpretation is possible if one adopts them. It is not, as the critics contend, that the use of their methods gives us new keys to biblical understanding; it is just the opposite: to make use of these methods closes Scripture completely to the child of God.

What are the objections which have to be raised against critical methods?

Some objections are, for the most part, pragmatic; but some, we are convinced, are rooted in fundamental principles.

There is a kind of *prima facie* case against all these methods of higher criticism, which case is raised by the defenders themselves. That *prima facie* case is made on the basis of the assertions of the authors them-

selves that, not only is no agreement ever reached concerning results of higher critical methods, but no agreement is ever reached on even the value of the methods themselves.

Let us take a look at what is said in the book. Repeatedly the authors stress that the conclusions reached by critical methods are tenuous and speculative, that those who practice these methods come up with wildly different conclusions, and that much of the work is sheer guesswork (see, e.g., the chapters on redaction criticism and background studies). On the one hand, the authors not only insist on the importance of critical studies, but go so far as to claim that these studies are necessary to understand Scripture. But, on the other hand, methods change, new methods are constantly introduced, the conclusions of all methods are constantly being altered. "The assured results of modern scholarship" is a figment of the imagination — in critical studies of Scripture as in the natural sciences. Grant R. Osborne tells us: "I would go so far as to say that any responsible study of the Gospels must proceed from a redaction — (and literary-) critical perspective" (p. 215). But he, in other parts of his chapter, is quick to point out that no agreement has been reached among scholars on the question. If we have to wait for scholars to agree among themselves before we can understand Scripture, we shall not understand it until the Lord comes back.

This approach to Scripture, recommended so highly by the crit-

ics, is an empirical approach to Scripture rather than the approach of faith. It is interesting that the Christian Reformed Church in 1922 condemned and fired Dr. Ralph Janssen, professor of Old Testament in the Seminary, for using empirical methods in his study of Scripture. How has the gold become dim!

The empirical approach to Scripture is an approach which requires that the divine origin of Scripture be proved by empirical methods, and that the data of Scripture be established by rational proof before it can be accepted. We have, earlier in this review, alluded to the fact that this empirical method is approved by authors in this book. Donald A. Hagner admits this when he writes: "Two other main criteria for establishing the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus that should be mentioned here..." (p. 81). Although he says that an *a priori* exclusion of the supernatural is unjustified, he, nevertheless, writes: "Contrary to the fear of many historians, openness to the possibility of the supernatural does not entail the acceptance of every claim that a supernatural event had occurred. Every such claim must be evaluated case by case with attention to such things as the nature of the event and especially the evidence backing up the claim. In the latter the extent and character of the witness to the event are especially important. Where, for example, we have eyewitness control of more than a few witnesses ... the probability of the occurrence of the event escalates

✓ accordingly" (p. 87).

The approach of faith, the only proper approach to Scripture, receives the Scriptures as the Word of God on the basis of their own self-testimony, and receives what the Scriptures contain as true in every respect because God the Holy Spirit has said so. They need no outside corroboration, something which, as a matter of fact, can never be obtained. Within the Reformed churches this approach is also confessional. The *Belgic Confession* writes that we receive all the books of Scripture and believe all things contained in this because (critical scholars have proved their authenticity? God forbid!) — because "the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves" (Art. V). To take any other approach is to take a rationalistic approach to the Word of God. And let the critics understand: A rationalistic approach is the approach of unbelief.

The results of an empirical approach are far-reaching and totally destructive of Scripture. It is not, according to this approach, necessary for the different writers of Scripture to agree with each other, and, in fact, one can only expect that there will be vast disagreement. Jerry W. McCant writes: "We cannot force every New Testament author to speak to every doctrinal issue, and we need not force authors to agree on every subject" (p. 475). My only comment is: "The poor Holy Spirit who has not sufficient intelligence to

write in a way which is not self-contradictory."

If no doctrinal agreement can be found among the writers of Scripture, one would not expect either that the factual data are historically reliable. Craig L. Blomberg writes: "Most (modern scholars) have given up believing that the gospels may be viewed as historically reliable, except in certain places. Instead, they conclude that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote to express their theological understandings of the person and the work of Christ, and to record instructions relevant for the Christian communities to whom they wrote" (p. 508). Apparently only the critical scholars are in any kind of position to tell us what we may accept as historically reliable and what must be rejected. So, if one of our children asks us about the cleansing of the temple by our Lord, we shall have to tell them that Jesus never really did cleanse the temple, but we have here only a piece of Johannine theology in which John expressed some idea he had concerning Jesus. I do not then really see any point in reading Scripture either for myself or for my children. What a dreadful thing.

All of this is based on the fact that Scripture is a human book. I suppose that, if you would ask these authors whether Scripture is the Word of God, they would all say, Indeed it is! I suppose that if I would criticize them as denying the divine authorship of Scripture, they would scream at me that I am misrepresenting them

(as some of them have already done in the past). But the fact remains that this entire book has no single chapter, much less paragraph, which says anything about the truth of divine inspiration. Once or twice a passing reference to this truth may be found in this book, but that is all!

Donald A. Hager is an example of this. In a chapter in which he defends the use of the historical-critical method, he reminds us that Christianity is a historical religion and is thus open to historical research and investigation (p. 74). Then he goes on to say that the record and interpretation of Christianity (by which he means the Bible) also came through history and is therefore also open to historical research and investigation (pp. 75, 76). By deftly arguing in a circle, he then goes on to say that the New Testament is to be explained in terms of the influence of the church and the authors of Scripture (p. 80). Thus the historical accuracy of the record must be decided on rational and empirical grounds (p. 81).

In all the book, there is no room for the infallible inspiration of the Scriptures. The historical-literary critics are so deeply immersed in the dusty Talmud and in archaeological digs, are so hot in the pursuit of pre-Markan documents, are so intent on spinning new theories of how the Scriptures came into existence, that they have no time for nor interest in the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead of a Scripture that is God-breathed, we have a Scripture that is

Paul-breathed or church-breathed. Instead of holy men of God speaking, we have weak and frail people speaking, whose sins and misconceptions are strewn over their writings. Instead of holy men of God speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, we have people and groups speaking as they were moved by popular opinion and current conceptions. Although Scripture says that no Word of God expresses individual and private opinions (II Pet. 1:20), the higher critics say just the opposite: the Word of God expresses private and individual opinions. They know better than the Holy Spirit how Scripture came into existence.

There are two striking passages in this large book. One destroys all higher critical theories. It is not by one of the authors, but by another, David Steinmitz. It is devastating for all higher criticism. How Michael C. Parsons can quote Steinmitz and still promote his critical conceptions is a mystery lost in the mind of Parsons himself. The quote reads: "Until the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted — as it deserves to be — to the guild and the academy, where the question of truth can endlessly be deferred" (p. 271).

And this is, after all, the issue. Can questions of truth be endlessly deferred? Can they be deferred when covenant parents are obligated to

teach their children truth from God's Word? Can they be deferred when the preacher confronts his congregation to bring to them the gospel of Scripture? Can they be deferred when missionaries go into all the world in obedience to the command of Christ and when the gathering of the church depends upon the proclamation of the truth? Can they be deferred when the whole church (up to about 100 years ago) relied upon the truth of Scripture for its very existence? Dare we relegate all the saints before us who have confessed truth — even on the scaffold and in prison — to a bunch of naive people who never really understood what truth really is — for the higher critics had not yet decided what in Scripture is true and what is not? Can truth be deferred when the salvation of the souls of men is at stake? What kind of arrogance is it that claims this to be true? What kind of insufferable nonsense is it which openly proclaims such a position? What kind of wickedness is it which does not hesitate to chew the Word of God to pieces between the teeth of unbelieving rationalism?

The other quote is in a chapter on New Testament Interpretation and Preaching.

This generation of preachers has access to a range and depth of biblical scholarship unparalleled in the history of Christendom. The sciences of hermeneutics, exegesis, and textual and other critical studies are finely developed. Yet preaching is in crisis.

We do well to recall, of course, that every age, even the nineteenth-century "golden age of preaching," has had its crisis. But the contemporary crisis is, to put it bluntly, different: It is the seeming inability to preach biblically despite (or *because of*?) a full century of the most intense biblical scholarship ever known. In the words of David Buttrick: "Preachers drift out of seminaries trained in historical-critical method, practiced in homiletical techniques, yet at a loss to preach 'biblically.'"

The author then asks the question: "Depending on one's point of view, the current crisis amounts either to a failure to make use of what is now available, a failure to be honest about known critical problems, or the demoralizing effect of critical approaches to Scripture" (emphasis mine, HH). The author is convinced that his first option is the correct one. How can he be so blind? It simply is a fact that critical approaches to Scripture have a demoralizing effect not only on preaching, but on all Bible study. And until evangelicals are willing to see this, the situation is not only hopeless, but bound to get worse.

Anyone who is interested in Hermeneutics in general and in higher criticism in particular ought to read the book. It will give him a clear summary of all the current methods used in higher criticism, but will also show him the futility and wrong of critical approaches to God's holy Word. ♦

The Problem of Poverty, by Abraham Kuyper, edited and introduced by James W. Skillen. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 79pp. [Reviewed by David M. Ondersma.]

This book is a translation of a speech by Abraham Kuyper entitled "The Social Problem and the Christian Religion" made on the occasion of the first Christian Social Congress held in The Netherlands on November 9, 1891. Kuyper is a well-known Dutch theologian living from 1837-1920 who often addressed the social issues of his time. The book notes the fact that Kuyper's acclaimed views on social reform were made possible because of his many "political, journalistic, ecclesiastical, and academic activities," one of which was to found the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880.

Mr. James W. Skillen, as editor of this book, presents an English translation of the Kuyper speech in a very readable way, permitting one easily to grasp the concern that Kuyper had over the problem of poverty and his advocacy for a Christian approach in dealing with the issue. Readers will appreciate Skillen's rather lengthy introduction which is necessary to explain Kuyper's viewpoints that are relevant to his speech, and to summarize the economic and social setting that gives rise to the poverty condition at that time. Skillen also uses the King James Version of the Bible for all direct biblical quotations, which adds quality and meaning to Kuyper's

speech as it has been translated.

Kuyper did not intend in his speech to describe in detail the poverty conditions at that time, nor does he suggest any practical solutions to the problem. Instead, Kuyper raised the issue of poverty as a social concern, and then sought to inspire his audience to take action, using a Christian approach.

An important benefit in reading this book comes from the approach that Kuyper suggests which can be used even today by Christians in dealing with many problems. Certain truths provide the bases for the approach suggested by Kuyper which can best be summarized as 1) a Christian makes a commitment to God to serve Him in all spheres of his or her life, not just in the spiritual; 2) a Christian's possessions belong to God and our management of them is purely one of stewardship; 3) God's Word is not limited only to matters affecting our salvation, but it gives us direction and guidance for problems which may involve family, marriage, the work place and other social/economic conditions; and 4) a Christian must be active in helping others and not be "lukewarm" about his or her faith.

Clearly the message that Kuyper brings in his speech, that Christians must step forward and make a contribution in this world, is inspired by Christ Himself (John 13:15). ♦

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