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EDITOR'S NOTES

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra presents the first article of a series on "A Comparison of Exegesis: John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas." Because of the stature of these two theologians (Calvin in the Protestant, i.e., especially Reformed Protestant tradition; Aquinas in the Roman Catholic tradition), Dykstra points out that for these two men to be "compared and contrasted in many areas of their work and thought is only natural." And indeed there are many works published contrasting these giants. Most of these are based in Aquinas' *Summa* and Calvin's *Institutes*. Very little work has been done comparing the exegesis of these theologians. This, in spite of the fact that "both Aquinas and Calvin are not only theologians, they are accomplished exegetes of the Scriptures." Dykstra's purpose in writing this series is to demonstrate the significant similarities and striking differences in the exegeses of these men.

In his contribution, "Nothing but a Loathsome Stench: Calvin's Doctrine of the Spiritual Condition of Fallen Man," Prof. David J. Engelsma presents a clear and important and well-documented summary of Calvin's teaching on original sin and total depravity. While candidly admitting Calvin's erroneous teaching called "General Grace," Engelsma demonstrates the serious implications for doctrine and life of the church of any compromise on Calvin's correct teaching on "the spiritual condition of fallen man." Calvin's purpose in his "admittedly dark analysis of man's spiritual condition ... is to open up the way to belief of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only source and means of the salvation of the sinner." In this connection the reader must pay careful attention to what Engelsma has to say in footnote 3 about the implications of the denial of God's creation of man as good and man's depravity and sinfulness through his falling from that original goodness in Adam! Read this important article. The Reformed reader will, after having done so, breathe a fervent prayer of thanks to God for giving John Calvin to His church.

Pastor Lau Chin Kwee presents the second article in his series on the "Serious Call of the Gospel."

Undersigned continues his exposition of the Epistle to Titus.

As usual we also offer a number of book reviews to aid the busy pastors and members of the churches.

Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting

An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (5)

Robert D. Decker

Again we remind the reader that this exposition of the Epistle to Titus was first given in the form of “chapel talks” by the author at the weekly Wednesday morning chapel services at the seminary. The author began the exposition in the 1997-1998 school year and completed the series the second semester of the 1999-2000 school year. The exposition is being published in the *Journal* with the hope that it will prove helpful to a wider audience of the people of God in their study of this brief letter in the sacred Scriptures. So that both those able to work with the Greek language and those unable to do so may benefit from this study, all references to the Greek will be placed in footnotes. The translation of the Greek text is the author's. We present this exposition pretty much as it was spoken in the chapel services, application and all. Perhaps this will help the reader gain some insight into what goes on in the seminary.

Chapter Two

Verse 1

After extending his greetings to Titus the young preacher (chapter 1:1-4), the apostle explains why he left Titus in Crete, viz., to “set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city...” (1:5). The apostle then explains what gifts the elders must have if they are to serve in that office in the church (1:6-9). In the last section of the first chapter, the apostle describes

the foolish and vain talkers whom Titus must sharply rebuke (vv. 10-16).

Chapter two introduces a contrast with that last section of chapter one. The first verse reads,

But thou¹ speak that which becomes (or befits)² sound teaching.³

In sharp contrast to the speech of the foolish and vain talkers, Titus is emphatically commanded to speak that which befits sound/healthful teaching/doctrine.

The antidote to the unruly and vain talkers, that which will sharply rebuke them, is sound doctrine. The church needs to be taught wholesome or healthful doctrine. Note well that this must characterize all of Titus' labors as a pastor. He must in all his preaching and teaching speak those things which befit wholesome, healthful, sound doctrine. By way of sharp contrast with the unruly and vain talkers, whose false teaching/doctrine subverts whole houses, Titus must speak the things which befit wholesome doctrine. In other words, the sound doctrine which Titus must teach will edify, i.e., build up the saints and thus the church.

The speech which befits sound doctrine is that which is consistent with, that which harmonizes with, sound doctrine. More specifically, that speech which is consistent with sound doctrine describes the godly life of sanctification which must flow out of the sound doctrine/teaching of the sacred Scriptures. Or, we could say, that speech which is consistent with sound doctrine describes the good works which are the fruit of a true and living faith.

"The things which befit sound doctrine" are carefully laid out in the rest of the chapter. Especially is this true of verses two

1. The Greek text places the second person personal pronoun first in the sentence for emphasis. It's as if the inspired apostle is saying, "Titus, pay attention to what I'm about to say!"

2. The Greek is *prepei*.

3. The Authorized Version (hereafter, AV) has "sound doctrine." The Greek is *tee ugiainousee didaskalia*, which A. T. Robertson translates "healthful teaching" (cf. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* on this verse).

through ten, in which section five classes of church members are exhorted and addressed:

1. The aged men (v. 2).
2. The aged women (vv. 3 - 5).
3. The young, married women (vv. 4 - 5).
4. The young men (v. 6))
5. The slaves (vv. 9 - 10).⁴

Not only must the above mentioned be exhorted by Titus, but he, himself a young man, must set the example of good works in his own daily living.

We need to pause at this point lest we fail to be impressed with the tremendous importance of and indispensable place of sound doctrine/teaching in the work of the ministry. Sound doctrinal teaching is the only source of the godly life of good works, which are the fruit of faith, performed in obedience to God's law, and done to God's glory.⁵ Because sound doctrine is the source of the Christian's life of faith, it is the only thing that will expose the deceptive, false teachings of the unruly, vain talkers and thus render their errors ineffectual in the church! Therefore the teaching of Titus must be sound and he must in his living show himself as "...a pattern of good works" (v. 7).

We must heed these exhortations as well. As ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ and as those who are preparing to serve the church and her Savior in that office, we must, in the face of opposition if necessary, "speak the things which become sound doctrine." Our preaching, our catechism teaching, even our counseling and comforting the distressed, the sick, the mourners will edify God's people when in all these contexts we teach the sound doctrine of the Word of God. And while we are busy speaking the things which become sound doctrine we must show ourselves a pattern of good works. Our lives too must be in harmony with the sound doctrine of God's Word!

4. The Greek is *doulos*, which the AV almost always translates "servant," but which properly means slave.

5. See Romans 14:23, "...for whatsoever is not out of faith is sin," and Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 91.

In the rest of the chapter, as we noted earlier, the apostle makes clear precisely what these “things which become sound doctrine” are. In verse two he writes:

... the aged men that they be sober (abstaining from wine), grave (to be venerated, respected, honorable), temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience.

The aged men of the church must be exhorted to be sober, i.e., they must not be drunken. Neither this verse nor any other passage of Scripture teaches that the people of God must totally abstain from alcoholic beverages. In fact this same apostle exhorts another young preacher, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (I Tim. 5:23). The important word in this verse from I Timothy is, obviously, “little.” But the verse under our consideration and a host of other passages in Scripture do teach emphatically that the saints must not be drunken.⁶ The aged men of the church must not be drunken. If they choose to use alcoholic beverages, they must use them moderately so that they remain sober at all times. The aged men must have their faculties, so as to be able to discern the truth and godliness and the signs which herald the Lord’s return. These aged men in the church will, in obedience to this Word of God, set a good example to the younger men in the church especially, but to all the members of the church as well.

Furthermore, the aged men must be grave. The term “grave” means “to be honored, venerated, respected.”⁷ Thus the aged men are to be taught to live their lives in such a manner as to be worthy of the respect of the younger members of God’s church. The aged men will have that honor when they are upright in both their doctrine and their walk of life. Should they fail in this they can very easily become the occasion for the younger members of the church to stumble!

Titus must instruct the aged men to be sound in faith. Faith in this context must be understood both from the point of view of

6. See, e.g., I Corinthians 5:11 and 6:9 - 10.

7. The Greek has *semnos*.

its object (that which the aged men must know and believe, viz., the truth of Holy Scripture) and from the point of view of its activity (the actual believing of the aged men). This means that the aged men must possess that certain knowledge of all that God has revealed in His Word. They must hold that certain knowledge for truth!⁸ And these aged men must possess “an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in [their] hearts; that not only to others, but to [them] also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”⁹ In both of these senses the aged men must be sound in faith, i.e., strong in faith.¹⁰ This means, therefore, that the aged men must be convinced and assured in their hearts that that certain knowledge of all that God has revealed in His Word, that which they hold for truth, is for them. That must be evident in all their thinking, willing, speaking, and doing. There must be no errors mixed in with their doctrine. That which they hold for truth must indeed be the unadulterated, pure doctrine of the Word of God. And that pure doctrine must be determinative of the way they live in the communion of the saints in the church and the way they conduct themselves in their daily life in the world.

The aged men are to be instructed to be sound (strong) in love.¹¹ John Calvin, in his Commentary on this verse, limits this reference to “love” to the second table of the Law of God, i.e., commandments five through ten, summed by Jesus as, “love thy neighbor as thyself.” It is with a great deal of hesitancy that we differ with Calvin’s exegesis. In a way we really do not differ with Calvin, if we understand that the Christian expresses his love for God precisely in the way of loving his neighbor. The “second commandment,” Jesus said, “is like unto the first.” And the Savior added, “. . . on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”¹²

8. See the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 21.

9. *Ibid.*, Q. 21.

10. Again, the apostle uses the verb *hugiainoo*. See note 3 above.

11. AV has “charity”; the Greek is *agapee*.

12. Matthew 22:34 - 40. In this connection see also I John 3:11 - 17 and 4: 7 - 21.

However we understand the text, this love is the love of God, for God is love (I John 4:8). God's love is the bond of perfectness which unites the three persons of the Godhead in perfect fellowship and communion. Because love is God's, it is the chief virtue of the child of God (Col. 3:14). God's love is "the more excellent way" (I Cor. 12:31 - 13:1 - 13). That love God commended to us, in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). We receive that love and are able to love God and the neighbor only because God's love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us (Rom. 5:5)

In God's love the aged men must be strong! Again, in the communion of the saints in the church and in the world the aged men must give evidence of the fact that they love God because He first loved them. And they do precisely that when they love their neighbors. If that neighbor be ungodly, the aged men manifest God's love to him by calling him to repentance from his sins and faith in the Lord Jesus. If that neighbor be a fellow saint, the aged men love him by seeking his eternal welfare and by sweet fellowship with him around God's Word, especially in the worship of God by the church.

Terribly important it is that the aged men in the church are strong in love. That is true because love is chief among the spiritual gifts and virtues with which God blesses His people. I Corinthians thirteen, a chapter to which we referred earlier, in the context of chapters twelve and fourteen, makes this abundantly plain! Without God's love, all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit mean nothing. Let the aged men of God's precious church leave a good example to the younger members in this regard. Above all else let them be strong in God's love!

The aged men must also be strong in patience.¹³ In my preaching and teaching, I often refer to this virtue/gift, patience, as the Christian's "staying power." Patience is always related in Scripture to the end of all things, i.e., the victorious return of the crucified, risen Lord Jesus at the end of the ages. This gift of

13. The Greek here is *hupomonee*. This word means steadfastness, constancy, endurance.

patience also often occurs in the context of the trials, chastening, and persecutions of the Christian. The aged men must be strong in patience. They must endure the Lord's chastening. They must remain constant in the faith even while enduring the sufferings of the present time. Especially important is it that they be patient when persecuted on account of their faith.

In these ways the aged men will be good, exemplary leaders in the church. Let them be sober, grave, temperate, sound (strong) in faith, in charity (God's love), in patience. In these ways let us preachers exhort, "speak the things which befit sound doctrine" to the aged men. God has given to the aged men in the church a large, indispensable, wonderful, and crucially important place. That place is succinctly described in this little text. Let not one aged man in the church think otherwise. Indeed, let not one member of the church young or aged think otherwise.

Verse 3

The aged women in like manner (that they be) in behavior (deportment, bearing)¹⁴ as becoming holiness (or, as becoming in things sacred to God),¹⁵ not prone to slander (accusing falsely),¹⁶ not enslaved to much wine,¹⁷ teachers of good things.

The behavior of the aged women must be in harmony with holiness. This is what Titus, the bishop of Crete, must teach them. "Likewise" or "in like manner," the apostle writes. In other words, just as Titus must teach the aged men to be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity (love), in patience, so he must instruct the aged women of the church "that they be in behavior as becometh (befits) holiness. The aged women must in their deportment, in the conduct of their daily life, refrain from sinful behavior and be consecrated in the service of God. This is what holiness is: separation from sin and consecration to the Lord.

14. The Greek is *katasteema*, from the verb root *kathistemi*.

15. The Greek is *hieroprepees*.

16. The Greek is *diabolos*.

17. The Greek is *dedouloomenas*, which is the perfect passive participle of *doulooo*, which means to be a slave.

But the inspired apostle is not writing about the fact that the behavior of the aged women must harmonize with holiness in general. He means that their behavior must befit holiness in certain, very specific ways.

The behavior of these aged women will befit holiness when they are not prone to slander. Slander is one of the forms of a great evil in God's church, the sin of evil speaking. That this is a grievous sin and one often occurring in the church is evident from the mere fact that Jesus and the Scriptures quite in general have so much to say about this sin. The other form of evil speaking is that of backbiting. When someone backbites, the content of what he is saying may very well be true, but he speaks not to the brother or sister involved, but to others.

Here, however, the apostle speaks of slander. This is the sin of speaking lies, bringing false accusations of sin against a brother or sister in the church. The evil motive of the slanderer is to destroy the reputation, blacken the good name, of the fellow saint. Slander is the very opposite of sound speech, which would edify, instruct, encourage, comfort, and, if need be, admonish a fellow believer. The aged women must not be prone to slander, guilty of being false accusers.

Neither must the aged women be "given to much wine."¹⁸ The aged women must not be enslaved to much wine! When one becomes immoderate in his use of alcohol, he becomes enslaved to it. We have no quarrel with the world's calling that enslavement "addiction," but that addiction is not an illness, it is the judgment of God upon that sinner and his sin of habitual drunkenness.

If an aged drunken man is a pitiful, shameful sight to behold, a drunken woman is even more so! Such a woman leaves a terrible example to the younger women in God's church! Not only does the drunkard lose her ability to discern reality and think clearly and speak sensibly and clearly, but she loses her inhibitions, especially

18. Neither the translation nor the word order of this phrase in the AV is as accurate as it could be. The Greek has it thus, *mee oinoo polloo dedouloomenas*, "not to much wine enslaved." This is much more emphatic than the AV's "not given to much wine."

as concerning morality and modesty. She is easily given to cursing, swearing, profanity. Often she becomes crude in her speech. She quickly expresses filthy sexual innuendo and becomes overtly and bluntly suggestive. This writer has on more than one occasion had to deal with this sort of thing during the course of his nearly forty years in the ministry. I can assure the reader, it is not a pretty thing to see or hear.

On several occasions we have had the opportunity to speak of the Bible's teaching on the proper use of alcohol. Now again the Scripture puts the matter before us. Once more let it be said, the mere fact that there are so many warnings against this sin, the sin of drunkenness, ought to give us pause. When one becomes immoderate in its use and does so repeatedly, he or she becomes enslaved to it. And a horrible bondage that is. Indeed! If aged women in the church are warned against this enslavement, then surely we preachers and aspiring preachers ought to be warned against it as well! What is more, we must warn the church sharply and in no uncertain terms against this grievous sin in our preaching and teaching. And by our own proper use of alcohol we must set a good example for the congregations we are called to serve.

The aged women must also be "teachers of good things."¹⁹ When the aged women are teachers of good things, they are teaching those things which are in harmony with God's will revealed in Scripture and summed in His Law. These good things are the fruit of a true, living faith and have the glory of God as their goal. The apostle will define precisely what those "good things" are in verses four and five.

When the aged women conduct themselves in this way, their behavior will befit holiness.

Before getting into an exposition of verses four and five, we feel compelled to make one more point in this connection. In our (the Protestant Reformed Churches') polemic against women serving in the threefold special office of Christ (pastor, elder, deacon), I fear we tend to lose sight of and, therefore, appreciation for the large, wonderful, indispensable place God has given to the

19. The Greek is *kalodidaskalous*, a compound noun meaning teachers of good things.

women of the church. Women have no authorization to preach the Word or to lead the congregation in prayer, no right to rule in God's church, and no right to collect and dispense the alms; but they do have an important, highly significant calling in the church. It is a calling for both the aged women and the younger women, and it is a calling that only they can fulfill by the grace of God. Where the godly women are obedient to that calling, that congregation is richly blessed! And in that congregation God's great glory shines brightly!

Verse 4

In order that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children.

Here the apostle states the purpose for the aged women to be in behavior as becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things. The point is simply this: by means of their godly behavior and by means of their teaching, the aged women are called to instruct the younger, married women. These young, married women of the church must be taught by the aged women to be sober. The young women must be sound in mind. It goes without saying that they may never be drunken in the literal sense of the word, but the point here is that they must be spiritually sober or of sound mind. The reason for this is, no doubt, that they may be obedient to their calling. Only when they are of sound mind can they love their husbands, love their children, etc.

The aged women must teach the younger, married women to love their husbands. The implication is that the husband is the head of his wife. The love which the younger woman must have for her husband is God's love. Her love for her husband must be the love of God according to which she is a good, faithful help to her husband. Her love for her husband must be a submissive love.

At this point it ought not escape our attention that whenever the Scripture speaks of the relationship between the wife and her husband, it always does so in terms of God's love. Husbands must love their wives (Eph. 5:25). They are to "nourish and cherish" their wives, "even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:29). That the husband is the head of his wife does not give him sanction to

exercise harsh tyranny over his wife. Such action would be the very antithesis of the biblical concept of headship. Christ, as Head of the church, “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). And the wife must submit in love to her own husband, just as the church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:22-24). This is the proper relationship between the husband as the head of his wife and the wife as the obedient help fit for her husband. This is so because God instituted our earthly marriages as a picture of “the great mystery ... concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31-33).

Oh, how this great truth concerning Christian marriage needs to be preached and maintained in our day, in which, not only in the sinful world, but also in much of the church, there is so much unfaithfulness, unbiblical divorce, remarriage of divorced persons, and other forms of marital immorality!

Further, the aged women must teach the younger women to “love their children!” A. T. Robertson aptly remarks concerning this point, “This exhortation is still needed where some married women prefer poodle dogs to children.”²⁰ The younger women must love their children.

This exhortation contains several important implications.

1. The younger, married woman must love to bear children. She wants a family! This is so because the younger, married woman desires to serve the Lord in the highest calling a woman can be given, viz., to be a covenant mother.

2. Loving her children implies that the godly mother denies herself and, in a self-sacrificing way, seeks the welfare of her children. She will, by God’s grace, cheerfully always “be there” for her children.

3. Loving those children, God’s heritage and reward (Ps. 127:3), the godly mother will teach them God’s fear, the great truths of His inspired, sacred Word, as that Word applies to the life of the Christian. She will begin this instruction when her children are very young. She will begin with simple Bible stories of the great saints and “heroes of faith,” with simple prayers, and with “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19). She will

20. See Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, pp. 602-603.

continue instructing her children as they mature and arrive at years of discretion. And until her dying day the godly mother will set a good example of godliness and genuine piety for her children.

4. Loving her children implies, too, that the godly mother will discipline them. She knows and is convinced of the truth of Scripture that to spare the rod is to spoil the child. She knows that correction of the child in the form of applying the rod delivers the child's soul from hell (Prov. 23:13 - 14). Knowing this truth the godly mother will admonish, reprove, correct, and discipline her children from earliest infancy on.

5. Loving her children implies finally that the godly mother wants nothing more than to witness her children fearing and loving the Lord. She wants them to know and love the truth of God's Word and to lead new, godly lives. She wants her children to be obedient to all in authority over them, to be respectful of their elders, and to be active, faithful members of the church.

This is what it means for a mother to love her children. Again, how this needs to be preached, and maintained by means of church discipline if necessary, by the church through her pastors and elders. And modeled by godly mothers!

Verse 5

To be discreet (moderate, exercise self-control),²¹ chaste, workers at home, good (kind, upright, distinguished for goodness),²² obedient to their own husbands in order that the Word of God be not blasphemed (to speak reproachfully, to rail at, often accompanied by sarcastic mockery).

The younger woman must be taught to be moderate, to exercise self-control. The godly mother will not be given to noisy, emotional outbursts. Nor will she be prone to uncontrolled outbursts of anger. She must be chaste as well, i.e., free from immorality.

The godly mother must be a worker at home. How this too

21. The Greek is *soophonee*.

22. The Greek is *agathee*.

needs all the emphasis we can muster in our day! Bearing and raising a family of children is full-time work! Being a good, faithful wife and mother takes all the time a woman has, and then some! And, we hasten to add, a woman could have no higher, no greater, no more honorable or noble a calling than this! Young mothers and wives in the church need not only to be exhorted and instructed in all this, they need (and their husbands too!) as well to be encouraged and commended in this wonderful calling. And they need our prayers.

The godly younger women must be good, i.e., kind and upright, distinguished for goodness. Their speech, actions, all of their living must be in harmony with God's will, done out of faith, and performed for God's glory. This is goodness!

The godly woman must be obedient to her own husband. This aspect of her calling we have already discussed, but do not fail to note how the passage emphasizes the importance of this!

The purpose in all this instruction given to the younger women by the aged women is that God's Word be not blasphemed. If the younger women fail to heed this good instruction, God's Word will be evil spoken of by the ungodly. They will rail at God's Word, speak against it sarcastically and with mockery. That must not happen! That will not happen when the younger women live in obedience to these instructions from the Word of God. ●

A Comparison of Exegesis: John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas

Russell Dykstra

That John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas should be compared and contrasted in many areas of their work and thought is only natural. These are two of the most outstanding theologians in the history of the church. They stand out in their genius, their scholarship, and their influence both on the church and on subsequent theology. Both produced theological works which still dominate their respective traditions – Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* in the Roman Catholic Church, and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in the Protestant churches, particularly the Reformed branch. Thus these two men serve as obvious points of comparison on many aspects of these two church traditions.

One might, therefore, consider another comparison of Calvin and Aquinas to be of little value – a reworking of old ground, and perhaps even presumptuous. However, little has been written comparing the *exegesis* of these theological giants.¹ In large measure this can be ascribed to the heavy emphasis placed on the *Summa* and on the *Institutes*. Too many consider these to be the only significant works these men produced.² The fact of the matter

1. David Steinmetz did compare the exegesis of Romans 9 by Aquinas, Calvin, and Bucer in "Calvin Among the Thomists," *Calvin in Context*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 141-156. To date I have not found any other direct, published comparison of exegesis.

2. T.L.H. Parker documents the history of the false notion that Calvin was a man of one book only (*Calvinus homo unius libri*) and then proceeds to demolish the myth, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) Second Edition, pp. 6ff.

is that exegeting Scripture was a major part of the work of both men! Aquinas lectured on the Scriptures from the age of 27 until near the end of his life. He wrote commentaries on Isaiah, Job, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Romans, John chapters 1-5, and 1 Corinthians chapters 1-7. His lectures on Matthew, John, the Pauline letters, and Psalms were transcribed, corrected by Aquinas, and published.³ Aquinas also preached, and although Hughes Oliphant Old indicates that Aquinas is not generally “recognized as one of the princes of the pulpits,”⁴ Old does have high regard for Aquinas’ sermons.

Calvin is well known as a man steeped in the Scriptures. He preached upwards of five days a week and lectured in the academy on various books of the Bible. He wrote commentaries on eight books of the Old Testament and on all but two of the New Testament. He published lectures on seventeen more Old Testament books, and preached on these and still other books of the Bible, many of which sermons were printed as well.⁵

The point is, both Aquinas and Calvin are not only theologians, they are accomplished exegetes of the Scriptures.

There are excellent reasons, therefore, not only for comparing these men as theologians, but also for comparing and contrasting their exegesis. It is the purpose of this article to undertake that effort. We are confident that this comparison will demonstrate that while many similarities can be found in the exegesis of Calvin and of Aquinas, yet striking differences exist. These differences

3. Matthew L. Lamb, O.C.S.O in the introduction to the *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, by Thomas Aquinas, (Albany: Magi Books, Inc., 1966), pp. 22-23.

4. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 3, The Medieval Church*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 408.

5. T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, pp. 6-35. Cf. T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin the Expositor*, pp. 187-189 for a chronological list of Calvin's commentaries, and W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, translated by Lyle D. Bierma, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 89-120, for a concise discussion of Calvin's commentaries, lectures, and sermons.

are traceable to the significant advances in exegesis that marked the Protestant Reformation. First of all, we will set forth the exegetical principles and methods of both men so far as these principles can be known. Secondly, we will examine specific specimens of exegesis from Ephesians in order, first, to observe whether or to what extent these men remained consistent with their principles in their exegesis, and, secondly, to compare and contrast the exegeses of Calvin and Aquinas. Finally, we will offer explanations for the differences found in their respective exegeses.

Because principles of exegesis arise, either consciously or unconsciously, out of the exegete's view of Scripture, it is necessary to begin there. From a formal point of view, Calvin and Aquinas have nearly identical views of Scripture. Both men receive the Bible as God's Word. Writes Aquinas, "The author of the Holy Writ is God."⁶ Likewise Calvin asserts that the Scriptures "have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."⁷ Calvin and Aquinas thus have the same starting point—Scripture is the Word of God.

However, Calvin, coming some 400 years after Aquinas, and being a second generation reformer, knows well the means by which this crucial truth can be corrupted and perverted, and consequently he develops it considerably more. He emphasizes particularly the *authority* of Scripture, insisting that receiving the Bible as the Word of God demands also *submission* to that Word. He writes,

Paul saith the Word of God deserveth such reverence that we ought to submit ourselves to it without gainsaying. He likewise informeth us what profit we receive from it; which is another reason why we should embrace it with reverence and obedience. There have been some fantastical men at all times who would wish

6. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, 1, 10.

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), I, 7, 1.

to bring the Holy Scripture into doubt; although they were ashamed to deny that the Word of God ought to be received without contradiction. There have always been wicked men who have frankly confessed that the Word of God hath such a majesty in it that all the world ought to bow before it; and yet they continue to blaspheme and speak evil against God.⁸

And again,

Moreover, we must not read the Holy Scripture in order to support our own notions, and favorite sentiments; but submit ourselves unto the doctrine contained therein, agreeably to the whole contents of it; for it is all profitable.⁹

That is the attitude with which Calvin approaches the Bible. In this respect he differs considerably from Aquinas on the authority possessed by Scripture relative to such things as the church, pagan philosophers, and even the church fathers, as will become evident later.

Since both Calvin and Aquinas hold the Scriptures to be the Word of God, they insist that the exegete must approach the Bible in faith. Aquinas maintains that "those who wrote the Scriptural canon, such as the Evangelists, Apostles and others like them, so firmly asserted the truth that they left nothing to be doubted. Thus it states: 'And we know that his testimony is true,' (Jn. 21:24)."¹⁰ Calvin maintains the same.

Another striking point of agreement between these two men is that the true and accurate meaning of the Scripture is in the text, i.e., the words as received. Both theologians place great emphasis on the text itself. They speak of the need for the exegete to determine the mind or intent of the writer. Writes Calvin, "Since almost his only duty is to lay open the mind of the writer whom he

8. Sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, in *The Mystery of Godliness*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 129.

9. Sermons on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *Godliness*, p. 133.

10. Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan. 21*, Lecture 6, quoted by Lamb, Introduction to *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 19.

has undertaken to explain, he deviates from his mark, or at least strays out of his own sphere, to the extent that he leads his readers away from it."¹¹

Laying "open the mind of the writer" is not to be understood as something different from discerning the "mind of the Spirit." Calvin ever links the human writer and the Spirit. In one striking passage in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:9 (where Isaiah is quoted), after presenting a possible interpretation, Calvin rejects it because, he writes, "it is too remote from Paul's mind, a consideration on which we should rely more than on any other. For who is a more sure and faithful interpreter of this oracle than he himself dictated to Isaiah than the Spirit of God as he expounds it by the mouth of Paul?"¹² Notice that in the same breath Calvin speaks of the mind of Paul, dictation by the Spirit, and the Spirit expounding Scripture by the mouth of Paul!

Parker insightfully draws out two exegetical principles from this conviction of Calvin. First, the text itself "is the 'speech' of the Holy Spirit, the text that is written in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic by some man or other. The mind of the Spirit is understood when the text of the document is understood."¹³ Secondly, the proper interpretation of the text is possible only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The human mind may understand the written words of Scripture intellectually, but the Spirit's working is required before one understands spiritually, and believes the truth.¹⁴

This means that the *text* is of critical importance for Calvin in exegesis, as Parker correctly concludes. For,

what is believed and accepted is the plain meaning of the story or the argument, and that means, the plain sense of the text of the

11. Preface to his *Commentary to the Romans*, quoted by T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 91.

12. Quoted by Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 96. In the same place Parker cites more instances of the same.

13. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 107.

14. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 108.

document. Hence, when the commentator reveals, clearly and succinctly, the mind of the writer expressed in the text, he is fulfilling almost his only duty.¹⁵

This has further implications for Calvin, as Parker points out.

When we understand that for Calvin the proper study of the expositor is the text, other factors in his New Testament work fall into place: his great care in establishing what he thinks is the most reliable Greek text; his literal translation of it into Latin; his championing of the *litteralis sensus* of Scripture; indeed, the very form of his commentaries, following the text, in distinction to Melancthon's method.... The text is the place where the expositor encounters his author.¹⁶

The Literal Meaning

A great divide among exegetes is exactly the issue of a literal or non-literal interpretation of Scripture. This determines much about the product of exegesis. How do Aquinas and Calvin compare in this vital aspect of exegesis?

There is no question but that Calvin is a champion of the literal sense of the text. In his commentary on Galatians 4:22, Calvin castigates Origen, "and many others along with him," for their allegorizing, describing it as a "torturing of Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense." He condemns it as a "contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage." Scripture may be rich with meaning, but Calvin denies "that the fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign." And he adds, "Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely."¹⁷

One ought not conclude from this that Calvin is an absolute

15. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 108.

16. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 92.

17. *Calvin's Commentaries*, Translated by William Pringle, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), vol. 21.

literalist in his exegesis. Calvin knows that Scripture contains figures of speech, and he recognizes and interprets them accordingly. Calvin develops this significant exegetical principle in the battle over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the presence of Christ.¹⁸

As noted above, Aquinas seeks the meaning of Scripture in the text, and that in the literal sense. However, there is considerable difference of opinion as to whether or not Aquinas is guilty of allegorical interpretation. Farrar criticizes him for allegorizing "incessantly" in the "simplest narratives of the Gospels" and provides some documentation.¹⁹

In fact, Aquinas is cited as a promoter of the fourfold senses of the meaning of Scripture. Nicholas of Lyra, around the year 1300, wrote out the well-known distich that expresses the four senses of Scripture.

The Letter teaches events,
Allegory what you should believe,
Morality teaches what you should do,
Anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.²⁰

The poem can be traced back to a work that expounds the teaching of Thomas Aquinas set forth in the first Question of the *Summa*.²¹ In fact, Aquinas answers the question "Whether in Holy Scripture a word may have several senses?" in the affirmative and distinguishes four senses. He insists that the "first sense [is] the historical or literal." Next he distinguishes the "spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it." That "spiritual sense has a threefold division," namely, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical senses. He draws these senses from Scripture

18. Cf. Han-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," *Interpretation*, 31, (1977), 8-18.

19. Frederick W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, Bampton Lectures, 1885, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 271.

20. Quoted by Henri de Lubac in *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. I, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 2000), p. 1.

21. De Lubac, *Four Senses*, pp. 1, 2.

in the following way. First, the Old Testament is a figure of the New, and therefore, “so far as the things of the Old Law (or Testament, RJD) signify the things of the New Law (or Testament, RJD), there is the allegorical sense.” The moral sense arises out of the fact that what Christ our Head has done is an example for us of how we ought to live. The anagogical sense is based on the idea that the New Testament is a figure of future glory, and thus sets forth what we should be aiming, or hoping for.²²

In another place, Aquinas explains how the words *fiat lux* (“let there be light”) can be understood in four senses.

For when I say “fiat lux” with reference to the literal meaning of corporeal light, this pertains to the literal sense. If “fiat lux” be understood to mean ‘Let Christ be born in the Church,’ this pertains to the allegorical sense. If “fiat lux” be said as meaning ‘Let us be led into glory through Christ,’ this pertains to the anagogic sense. And if “fiat lux” be taken to mean ‘Through Christ let us be illumined in understanding and enkindled in emotion,’ this pertains to the moral sense.²³

In spite of the fact that Aquinas allows for these four senses of meaning, he does react against the allegorizing of the exegetes both prior to him and in his day.²⁴ He contends that the first meaning of the Scripture passage is the literal meaning, and that the spiritual meaning is based on the literal.

While he expresses the same desire as Calvin, namely, to obtain the literal meaning of the text, Aquinas approaches it from a different point of view. Calvin’s insistence on finding the literal meaning of a passage arises out of his view of Scripture as the very Word (even, *words*) of God. Aquinas does not deny that, but he seeks the literal meaning as a result of his philosophical viewpoint. Aquinas is an unabashed proponent of the philosophy of Aristotle.

22. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 10.

23. De Lubac, *Four Senses*, II, p. 197.

24. Along with Albert the Great, cf. Richard Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 18.

One of the main reasons that his appointment to the chair of theology at the university of Paris was controversial was exactly that he promoted Aristotelianism.²⁵ Beryl Smalley points out,

The contrast between St. Augustine and the newly recovered Aristotle, which aroused [Aquinas'] strongest passions, upset or modified his most cherished notions about the universe and its Creator, was bound to have a disturbing effect on his study of the Creator's special book. Aristotle caused him to see Scripture as freshly as he saw all creation.²⁶

The effect of the Aristotelian view on exegesis in the Middle Ages was "sobering" according to Thomas F. Torrance. He writes that "it disparaged the development of a world of meaning ... [without] ... reference to the historical sense of Scripture and careful examination of its words and concepts."²⁷

Accordingly, Aquinas sees the true meaning to be in the letter, the words, first of all. "[T]hat first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal."²⁸

From this literal meaning, a spiritual meaning may be discovered. "That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it."²⁹ Thus, as Muller explains,

Aquinas resolved the questions ... concerning the relationship of the literal to the other senses by emphasizing the connection

25. O'Meara, *Theologian*, pp. 14ff.

26. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd revised edition (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 301.

27. "Scientific Hermeneutics According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962), 259, cited by Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*. (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2001), p. 67.

28. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 10.

29. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 10.

between the 'thing' (res) signified by the word of the text and the rest of the spiritual meanings and by insisting that any word in a given text could mean only one thing. It was not as if a multiplicity of spiritual meanings could be elicited by finding a series of significations for a particular word: each word of the text, given the grammatical context in which it stands, must speak univocally. The 'historical or literal' sense is rooted directly in the 'things' that the words signify and is the sense intended by the human author of the text.³⁰

Only when that one meaning intended by the author is established does Aquinas set forth the threefold spiritual meaning – the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical, as noted above. And Aquinas concludes,

Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says, if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses.³¹

Aquinas does not allow, therefore, that the exegete may simply draw out whatever meanings he can according to his own imagination. He disputes the contention that having more than one sense will result in equivocation on the meaning of Scripture. "In Holy Writ no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one—the literal – from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended allegorically, as Augustine says."³²

30. Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 19.

31. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 10.

32. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 10. In his defense of Scripture having more than once sense, Aquinas frequently cites Augustine. He does this with some justification, for Augustine was sometimes guilty of allegorizing, although he was generally more careful than many of the ancient fathers. However, the allegorizing escalated greatly in the Middle Ages under the influence of Pope Gregory I (A.D. 590-604).

Thus it is that while Aquinas maintains that Scripture does have more than one meaning, he does not hold that *each passage* necessarily has four levels of meaning. Additionally, the meaning may never be divorced from the very words of Scripture.

The conclusion of this matter, so significant for exegesis, is that both Calvin and Aquinas seek the literal meaning of the text. Yet, they arrive at this point by radically different paths, and Aquinas also maintains that one word in Scripture can have several senses of meaning. The difference becomes evident in their exegesis, as Calvin shuns the use of allegory and Aquinas is much more prone to its use – not infrequently (according to Farrar) seeing “spiritual meaning in minor events.”³³

Another significant issue which must be addressed is the matter of exegetical freedom. This concerns, for example, the relationship between tradition and Scriptures, and the authority of the church over exegesis. The exegete’s view on these questions determines much about the final product of his exegesis. On these crucial matters, Calvin and Aquinas will differ.

(...to be continued) ●

33. Lamb, Introduction to *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 23. Lamb contends that this is due to Aquinas following the lead of patristic sources.

The Serious Call of the Gospel — Is the Well-Meant Offer One? (Part 2)

Chapter II What Is the Well-Meant Offer of Salvation

Lau Chin Kwee

As we enter into this chapter to consider the teaching of the “well-meant offer of salvation,” we must immediately take note that many Reformed writers of the past did use the term “offer” but in a different sense than the word is commonly used today. Prof. Engelsma noted:

In the past, the word “offer” from the Latin word “*offero*” was used by Reformed men to describe God’s activity in the preaching of the gospel because the word has originally the meaning “bring to (someone),” “present (something or someone to somebody).” All Reformed men hold that Christ is presented in the preaching to everyone who hears the preaching. In this sense He is “offered” in the gospel.¹

For the purpose of our paper we shall understand the well-meant offer to be as given by Rev. B. Gritters thus:

The “free offer of the gospel” is the teaching that God offers salvation to all men when the gospel is preached promiscuously to all. The free offer teaches that God graciously and sincerely offers

1. Engelsma, *Hyper-calvinism & The Call of The Gospel*, p. 48.

salvation to all who hear the preaching, and honestly and sincerely desires to save all of them.²

That the dispute is over the matter of God desiring the salvation of all men in the preaching of the gospel to all, John Murray also acknowledged in his booklet *The Free Offer of the Gospel*.

It would appear that the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God desires the salvation of all men. The Committee elected by the Twelfth General Assembly in its report to the Thirteenth General Assembly said, "God not only delights in the penitent but is also moved by the riches of his goodness and mercy to desire the repentance and salvation of the impenitent reprobate"....³

A. The Arminian idea of the well-meant offer.

To begin with, we must note that the Arminians do not believe that the will in the fallen state can will any saving good before calling. In "The Opinions Of The Remonstrants" submitted to the Synod of Dort, the Arminians state in C, 4:

4. The will in the fallen state, before calling, does not have the power and the freedom to will any saving good. And therefore we deny that the freedom to will saving good as well as evil is present to the will in every state.⁴

To surprise us further how the Arminians could sound most orthodox like many today, let me quote the Third Article of The Remonstrance of 1610:

2. Barrett L. Gritters, *Grace Uncommon*, (The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan), p. 13.

3. John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, (New Jersey: Lewis J. Grotenhuis, Belvidere Road), p. 3.

4. Peter Y. De Jong, Ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches, Essays in commemoration of the great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, (Published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. Grand Rapids, Michigan), p. 226.

3. that man does not have saving faith of himself nor by the power of his own free will, since he in the state of apostasy and sin cannot of and through himself think, will or do any good which is truly good (such as is especially saving faith); but that it is necessary that he be regenerated by God, in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, affections or will, and all powers, in order that he may rightly understand, meditate upon, will, and perform that which is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John 13:5, "Without me ye can do nothing."⁵

Reading the above articles of the Arminians all by themselves, one may not realize their error in the third point about "total depravity." However, when one combines this third article with their fourth on the conversion of man, one begins to realize that their idea of the will of man is such that it is ultimately the final arbiter of its own salvation. Without the intervening of God's sufficient grace, man is doomed, but with it in the hearing of the gospel, man can still resist the grace of God to his own condemnation. We read in their Opinion C, 6 thus:

6. Although according to the most free will of God the disparity of divine grace is very great, nevertheless the Holy Spirit confers, or is ready to confer, as much grace to all men and to each man to whom the Word of God is preached as is sufficient for promoting the conversion of men in its steps. Therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion falls to the lot not only of those whom God is said to will to save according to the decree of absolute election, but also of those who are not actually converted.⁶

In the mind of the Arminians, whatever God may do in His grace, man's will still stands sovereign and able to reject that grace if he chooses (Opinion C, 8). Even the so-called efficacious grace of God is not irresistible (Opinion C, 5). As this error can be clearly seen only when the doctrine of the Fall of man is compared to that of the conversion of man, the Synod of Dort dealt with the

5. Ibid., p. 208.

6. Ibid., p. 226.

Third and Fourth Heads of doctrine together. It is good to read Rejection VI of these Heads to have a better idea of this error:

That in the true conversion of man no new qualities, powers, or gifts can be infused by God into the will, and that therefore faith through which we are first converted and because of which we are called believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it cannot be said to be a gift, except in respect of the power to attain to this faith.

Man's will needs God's in order to be saved, but God's will also needs man's before He can save a man. Thus we have Opinion C, 8, 9 of the Arminians:

8. Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhyprocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.

9. There is not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word that according to it (that is, the secret will) He does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom He seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel and by His revealed will; and we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.⁷

The Arminians were very clear about what they believed. God indeed does offer salvation to all men. In fact, even by His sufficient grace in the offer, He empowers the will of all who hear the gospel so that they are now able not only to accept, but also to reject the offered salvation. God's decree of election is based on His foreknowledge of what man would do with this offer. If a man choose to believe then, God elects him to be saved; if not, then he is reprobated. A. C. DeJong said as much:

He is a reprobate because he does not want to believe, because he

7. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

wills to live without God, and because he resists the redemptive will of God revealed in the gospel call. His unbelief, his rejection, his resistance bears an indirect relation to the will of God's decree similar to God's "permissive will" in relation to sin.⁸

It must also be noted here that, as far as the content of the gospel is concerned, the Arminians also believe that Christ died for all men head for head to make the atonement available for all men. Christ by His atonement only made salvation possible. The salvation benefits for all men are there, and they are applied only to those who accept the offer by their own free will. The Canons reject the following error:

Synod rejects the errors of those who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching, that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace.⁹

Notice the Arminian tendency to make man the final arbiter of his own salvation and God someone "...minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ." Arminians are not fully convinced that all men are truly hell-deserving and that salvation is fully of the Lord, who saves effectually whom He wills.

But now we must turn to the Reformed "offer," which is essentially the same as the Arminian's, except that they still claim that they believe in the Five Points of Calvinism, and that any

8. A.C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder*, (T. Wever - Franeker, 1954), p.130.

9. Canons Article VI, Head 2.

apparent discrepancy is due to the mystery and paradox of God, which the truly humble and pious should not dare to challenge.

B. The so-called Reformed offer.

1. Using the same term “offer” led to confusion in the Reformed camp.

As has been noted earlier, there were Reformed writers who used the term “offer.” Even in the Reformed confessions we find this term being used. For examples:

Article 9 of the III/IV Heads of Doctrine of the Canons of Dort reads:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted.

Article 14 of the III/IV Heads of Doctrine of the Canons of Dort reads:

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred upon him, breathed and infused into him; nor even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because He who works in man both to will and to work, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

The French Confession, Article XIII:

XIII. We believe that all that is necessary for our salvation was offered and communicated to us in Jesus Christ. He is given to us for our salvation, and ‘is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:’ so that if we refuse him, we renounce the mercy of the Father, in which alone we can find a refuge.

Westminster Larger Catechism Q67: What is effectual calling?

A67: Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

Heppe quoting Olevian also used this term:

For the elect on the other hand, who in view of the law and the covenant of works see themselves in the first instance in the same situation as the rejected, they are a preparation for faith, since by His prevenient grace God leads the elect out of darkness into light by causing a serious longing for redemption to proceed from these terrors of conscience, and then holding before them the promise of grace in the Gospel and causing what is offered them from without to be brought into their hearts by the H. Spirit (OLEVIAN, p. 252).¹⁰

From Article 14 of the III/IV Heads of Doctrine, it is apparent that the divines at Dort were aware of the Arminian usage of this term as it rejects the idea of offering to be accepted or rejected at one's pleasure. It is also clear from Article 9 of the same Heads, that the phrase "Christ offered therein" refers to the Christ set forth in the gospel.

In the French Confession, the phrase "was offered and communicated" also conveys the idea of setting forth to be communicated rather than to be accepted or rejected.

In the Westminster Larger Catechism, grace is said to be offered and conveyed in the call of the gospel. The phrase "and

10. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 513, 4.

conveyed” is to be taken as an immediate explanation that the word “offered” must not be misconstrued as offer in the Arminian sense, but rather has the idea of “conveyed.” That this should be the case should not surprise us, as the Westminster divines were men who knew and spoke highly of the Canons of Dort. Dort had said that faith was not offered, and how could Westminster say that grace was offered without any qualification?

In the above quotation from Heppie, he did not mean by “offered” the Arminian understanding, which involves the choice of man, because in the same section he quoted from HEIDEGGER (XXI, 12) thus:

Quite otherwise than the reprobate the elect are called to salvation in such a way that when called they are also affected, drawn and led, and that according to the eternal purpose and testament; and absolutely, although not without means, which however as regards the called are not conditions within their sphere of choice, but God’s free benefits.¹¹

Surely Heppie did not have the idea of offer in the sense of people being given a choice, but offer in the sense of setting forth “to be brought into their hearts by the H. Spirit.”

In any case, it can be observed down through the history of the Presbyterian Churches, that this term “offer,” as found in their Confession, has provided a hiding place for those with Arminian tendency within the camp. A. A. Hodge, in answering the objection that his truly Reformed view of the design of the atonement was inconsistent with the doctrine of the general offer of the gospel, failed to point out the proper understanding of the term “offer,” but instead went on, by various means, to show that these two concepts (one Reformed and the other Arminian) are not contradictory, but can be harmonized.¹²

The Dutch Reformed churches are also not spared of this error. In 1924 the Christian Reformed Church adopted the “Three

11. Ibid., 514.

12. Archibald A. Hodge, *The Atonement*, (T. Nelson And Sons, Paternoster Row; Edinburgh; New York), pp. 385-390.

Points” of common grace. In the first point, which speaks of God having a certain non-saving, favorable attitude towards all men, synod finds support for this in articles from the Canons, which she claimed to set forth “the general offer of the gospel.”¹³

Though many in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today do hold to this erroneous idea, we must take note of what Prof. Hanko, a professor in Church History, has to say:

Quite consistently the doctrine of the free offer has been held by heretics who were condemned by the church. Quite consistently the church has refused to adopt any such doctrine. The weight of history is surely behind those who deny that the free offer is the teaching of Scripture.¹⁴

2. Essentially the Reformed “offer” is similar to the Arminian idea of the offer.

That the Reformed “offer” is similar to that of the Arminians is proudly acknowledged by one of their advocates. Hoekema put words into the mouths of the divines of Dort as addressing the Arminians thus:

“We quite agree with you that God seriously, earnestly, unhypocritically, and most genuinely calls to salvation all to whom the gospel comes. In stating this, we even use the very same words you used in your document: *serio vocantur* (‘are seriously called’). But we insist that we can hold to this well-meant gospel call while at the same time maintaining the doctrines of election and limited or definite atonement. We do not feel the need for rejecting the doctrine of election and repudiating the teaching of definite atonement in order to affirm the well-meant gospel call.”¹⁵

13. Herman Hanko, *The History of the Free Offer*, (Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Grandville, Michigan), p. 183.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan), p. 78. Note: No one reading Art. 8 of Head III/IV and the rest of the Canons can imagine the divines of Dort making such a statement.

This also means that the Reformed “offer” constantly runs into conflict with the other Reformed doctrines, especially those set down by the Canons of Dort. This difficulty is expected, as the whole Canons was formulated against the Arminians’ idea of the freedom and power of the human will. The doctrine of the well-meant offer is exactly built upon this doctrine of man’s free will to save himself.

In the offer, God shows grace to all to whom the gospel comes.

Here they believe that God shows grace to anyone who hears the gospel to begin with. They could have gathered this belief from the Canons where we read, “to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.”¹⁶

Their idea is that God must have shown these people favor since He gives them a chance to be saved, while to many others the gospel has never even come once in all their lifetime.

This is a mistaken notion, as the good pleasure of God does not necessarily speak of His grace. For example, we may say that it is God’s good pleasure to cast the wicked unbelievers to hell in His just judgment. There is no show of grace in such good pleasure of God.

God has His own purpose in sending the gospel to some and not to others. There is no indication of grace in this activity of God, just as there is no indication of grace when God sends rain or sunshine upon the wicked. The grace of God is not in things.

This is much like the Arminians, who spoke of the common sufficient grace which enables men to make a decision for Christ. The Canons say:

But that others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so he confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of

16. Canons, Head II, Art. 5.

darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; and may glory, not in themselves, but in the Lord, according to the testimony of the apostles in various places.¹⁷

In the offer, God expresses His desire to save all to whom the gospel comes.

The Reformed “offer” also taught that in the offer of salvation and grace, God shows desire to save all who receive the offer.

In his review of John Murray’s booklet entitled “*The Free Offer of the Gospel*,” Matthew Winzer states:

It appears that a dispute had arisen with regard to a previous report on the subject which had predicated “that God *desires* the salvation of all men.” Prof. Murray was confident that such a desire could be predicated of God, and set about to establish a Biblical case for the position.¹⁸

Mr. Winzer did a very thorough work in this review and convincingly showed that John Murray had failed to show that God desires the salvation of all men in the preaching of the gospel. Readers are highly recommended to read this review.

3. An important difference between the Arminian and Reformed “offer” is the latter’s belief in antinomy.

What is the belief in antinomy?

As the name implies, antinomy is a belief that certain things are beyond the realm of logical law (νομοσ), so that they cannot and need not be harmonized by existing laws of logic. To people who believe in such things, others are rationalists when they try to harmonize things which the former classified as antinomous.

In this world of increasing superficiality, there are more antinomists around than before. Winzer exposed one in R. Scott

17. Canons, Heads III/IV, Article 10.

18. Matthew Winzer, *Murray on the Free Offer: A Review*, (The Blue Banner, vol. 9, Issue 10-12, Oct./Dec. 2000), p. 3.

Clark in his review and also charged him for unjustly making John Murray an antinomist.¹⁹

The two tracks of antinomy in this Reformed “offer.”

As has been hinted earlier, the Reformed “offer” is so disharmonious with the doctrines of grace that there can be quite a few sets of antinomies which can be established, if one wishes to do so. For example, the Amyraldian controversy could have been settled simply by invoking the antinomian categories. In fact, all disputes, great and small, may be similarly settled. Another disharmony was expressed by Mr. Tom Wells thus:

The difficulty over the free offer may be put like this: since God has chosen to save some and to pass others by, how can it be said that *he offers salvation to those he has decided not to save? Doesn't this make God of two minds, wanting all to be saved on one hand, and desiring only his elect to be saved on the other?* Anyone who cannot see that there is some difficulty here must have done very little thinking about theology.²⁰

Antinomists tend to despise the logic of others, while promoting their own. DeJong wrote of Hoeksema thus:

Hoeksema's view may possess logical symmetry but it is not Scripturally informed. It unsettles the gospel truth that God wills that his call to salvation be accepted in the way of faith. It renders God's gospel call questionable.²¹

4. Arminianism within the covenant.

One of the hallmarks of the Reformed faith is its teaching on covenant theology. God establishes His friendship with His people

19. Ibid., p. 3. Note: Robert L. Reymond had a nice section in his recent *Systematic Theology* dealing with the ways of the antinomist — the ways of mysteries and paradoxes, pp. 103-110.

20. Tom Wells, *Notes on the Free Offer Controversy*, (West Chester, OH: Tom Wells, 7686 Grandby Way), p.5.

21. A. C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, p. 130. Note: Having read Hoeksema myself, I do not find DeJong's remarks on him fair.

in the line of generations. So it is true that God calls His children out of our children and also out of those in heathen darkness of this world. This is exactly what is meant that He is the Savior of the world. From here, does it follow that gospel presentation to those within the church is different from that to the heathen nations?

Yet, there is among some Reformed people the idea that, as far as the gospel preached to people outside of the covenant is concerned, the use of the concept “offer” is un-Reformed and Arminian, but when the same thing is done within the covenant, it is permissible. In other words, to children born in the covenant, we may and must say to them, God offers to save you from sin and hell on condition that you repent of your sins and believe in Christ. This way of presenting the gospel of salvation certainly makes one’s repentance and faith outside of God’s grace of salvation. In fact, it makes all of salvation dependent upon man’s repentance and faith. This is a typical Arminian way of presenting the gospel as shown above.

This conditional theology is another form of Reformed “offer” which we have to expose here. But there are other so-called Reformed men, like A. C. DeJong, who openly advocate the well-meant offer of salvation whether within or without the covenant.

The calling God seriously and unfeignedly offers salvation in Jesus Christ upon the condition of repentance and faith to all the elect and non-elect sinners to whom he mercifully sends his gospel preachers.²²

22. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

“Nothing but a Loathsome Stench”: Calvin’s Doctrine of the Spiritual Condition of Fallen Man

David J. Engelsma

Introduction

With the reality of the spiritual condition of fallen man, John Calvin begins Book II of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The heading of Book II is “The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ, First Disclosed to the Fathers Under the Law, and Then to Us in the Gospel.” Recalling the opening lines of the *Institutes*, concerning knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves, Calvin declares that we cannot know God as redeemer, if we do not know ourselves as fallen and depraved. The danger, however, is exactly that men know themselves as good, able, and excellent. Calvin refers to this deliberate self-deception as “blind self-love.”¹

Therefore, the subject of the right knowledge of our spiritual condition as fallen is fundamental. Calvin expressly states this with specific reference to the bondage of the will of the fallen sinner: The truth of the bondage of the will is “fundamental in religion” (*Inst.*, 2.2.1). Such is the seriousness of the error of knowing oneself as naturally good, able, and excellent, rather than depraved, incapable, and vile, that “any mixture of the power of free will that men strive to mingle with God’s grace is nothing but

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.1.2. Ed. John T. McNeill. Tr. Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). All citations of the *Institutes* in this article are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

a corruption of grace” (*Inst.*, 2.5.15). In the *Institutes*, 2.2.10, Calvin asserts that any notion of good in oneself by nature is from the devil. The notion is fatal. That man has the best knowledge of himself who most thoroughly knows his depravity.

This approach to the treatment of the condition of man by nature is that of the Heidelberg Catechism. “How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou in this comfort mayest live and die happily? Three things: First, the greatness of my *sin* and *misery*.”²

The requisite manner of this right self-knowledge, according to Calvin, is the light of “God’s truth.” God’s truth is, first, the revelation in Scripture of our good creation in Adam. Only in light of our creation in the beginning as good will we view ourselves as fallen from our former high position.

God would not have us forget our original nobility, which he had bestowed upon our father Adam.... That recognition [of our first condition in Adam], however, far from encouraging pride in us, discourages us and casts us into humility. For what is that origin? It is that from which we have fallen. What is that end of our creation? It is that from which we have been completely estranged, so that sick of our miserable lot we groan, and in groaning we sigh for that lost worthiness.³

2. Question and Answer 2, in Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), p. 308.

3. *Inst.*, 2.1.3. Denial of God’s creation of man as good, therefore, which is the implication of every evolutionary theory of man’s origin, theistic as well as atheistic, is necessarily the annulment of man’s knowledge of himself as sinful. What the Christian church (to say nothing of the Bible!) has regarded as the sinfulness of man is merely the innate savagery of his animal ancestry, a “congenital weakness,” as Henri Rondet puts it (*Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, New York: Alba House, 1972, p. 245). If man has not fallen from the original high estate described in Genesis 1 and 2, there is no original sin. That this is indeed the implication of theistic evolution’s account of the origin of man is acknowledged by the Reformed writer Jan Lever in his book *Where are We Headed? A Christian Perspective on Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) and by the evangelical Henri

In the second place, “God’s truth,” which is necessary for our right knowledge of ourselves, is the divine standard that requires perfection of us. We must examine ourselves “according to the standard of divine judgment” (*Inst.*, 2.1.3).

The purpose of Calvin’s admittedly dark analysis of man’s spiritual condition—the “Calvinistic” doctrine of total depravity — is to open up the way to belief of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only source and means of the salvation of the sinner. Immediately following the description of man’s depravity and hopelessness, Calvin declares: “We must, for this reason, come to Paul’s statement: ‘Since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of preaching to save those who believe’ [I Cor. 1:21]” (*Inst.*, 2.6.1). Calvin makes the same observation in his commentary on Romans 5:20:

Our condemnation is not set before us in the law, that we may abide in it; but that having fully known our misery, we may be led to Christ, who is sent to be a physician to the sick, a deliverer to the captives, a comforter to the afflicted, a defender to the oppressed (Is. 61:1).⁴

Then occurs a damning indictment of the notion that there can be salvation outside of Christ in the gospel:

Thus, all the more vile is the stupidity of those persons who open heaven to all the impious and unbelieving without the grace of him

↳ Blocher in his book *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). On the similar surrender of the biblical teaching of original sin in order to accommodate modern science by contemporary Roman Catholic theology, see S. Trooster, *Evolution and the Doctrine of Original Sin* (New York: Newman Press, 1968).

↳ 4. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 215. Earlier on the same text, Calvin had written, “He indeed teaches us, that it was needful that men’s ruin should be more fully discovered to them, in order that a passage might be opened for the favour of God” (p. 214).

whom Scripture commonly teaches to be the only door whereby we enter into salvation [John 10:9] (*Inst.*, 2.6.1).

The reference, no doubt, is to Erasmus and Zwingli. Today, Calvin's condemnation falls upon multitudes of Protestant theologians.

Original Sin

Calvin teaches that all men come into the world depraved of nature. At conception and birth, every human is sinful, is corrupt. Calvin teaches original sin, which he defines thus:

Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls "works of the flesh" [Gal. 5:19]. And that is properly what Paul often calls sin (*Inst.*, 2.1.8).

This depravity is not only lack of original righteousness. It is also an active source of all evil, positively: "a burning furnace giv[ing] forth flames and sparks"; "so fertile and fruitful of every evil that it cannot be idle" (*Inst.*, 2.1.8).

For this corruption of nature with which each is born without his will, man is guilty before God. The reason is that this is not how God made man. God made man upright and holy. Further, God's standard, by which alone we know our misery, as Calvin has insisted before, requires a sinless, righteous nature.

This depraved nature is inherited from our parents. We are corrupt, not only *at* conception and birth, but also *by means of* conception and birth. At this point, Calvin refutes the "profane fiction" of Pelagius:

That Adam sinned only to his own loss without harming his posterity. Through this subtlety Satan attempted to cover up the disease and thus to render it incurable. But when it was shown by the clear testimony of Scripture that sin was transmitted from the first man to all his posterity [Rom. 5:12], Pelagius quibbled that it was transmitted through imitation, not propagation (*Inst.*, 2.1.5).

Against the Pelagian heresy, Calvin appeals to Psalm 51:5: "Surely there is no doubt that David confesses himself to have been 'begotten in iniquities, and conceived by his mother in sin'" (*Inst.*, 2.1.5).

The source and explanation of original sin is the transgression of Adam. In this connection, Calvin proposes a distinctive and intriguing analysis of the basic nature of Adam's sin. The traditional view has been that Adam's sin was primarily pride, attended by ambition. Calvin agrees that pride was the "beginning of all evils," but suggests a "fuller definition." Calvin sees Adam's sin as primarily unfaithfulness, rooted in distrust of God's Word. Holding "God's Word in contempt," Adam "turned aside to falsehood." "Unfaithfulness, then, was the root of the Fall" (*Inst.*, 2.1.4).

This view of the sin of Adam has distinctively covenantal overtones. Indeed, in thus describing Adam's sin as the unfaithfulness of disobedience, Calvin has his eye on Romans 5:12ff. Adam was in covenant with his Creator, so that his sin was covenant transgression. Calvin's understanding of Adam's sin also stresses the importance of the Word of God, which Adam disobeyed. Calvin's description of the sin suggests that it was idolatrous in that Adam trusted the word of another. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, idolatry is "instead of the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word, or along with the same, to conceive or have something else on which to place our trust."⁵

For Calvin, the transgression of Adam is the cause and source of original sin in all men inasmuch as Adam was the root of the race. Adam's sin ruined us all. "Adam, by sinning, not only took upon himself misfortune and ruin but also plunged our nature into like destruction" (*Inst.*, 2.1.6). The Reformer says the same in his little-known but important work, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*. Contending with Pighius' teaching that man has some freedom of nature to do the good, Calvin remarks that this teaching "betrays the fact that he [Pighius] does not hold to the first

5. Question and Answer 95, in Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 342.

axiom of our faith, that we and all our power to act well perished in Adam.”⁶

Adam’s sin ruined the race in this way, that the effect of his deed was the corruption of his own nature. He then, as progenitor of the race, passed on this corruption through physical generation. “He infected all his posterity with that corruption into which he had fallen”; “Adam so corrupted himself that infection spread from him to all his descendants” (*Inst.*, 2.1.6).

Calvin’s doctrine of original sin, therefore, consists of the teaching of original depravity, which depravity is due to Adam’s being the root of the race. Reformed theology speaks of this relation of Adam to the race as his “organic headship.”

Manifesting his wisdom, Calvin declines to enter into an “anxious discussion,” *how* Adam’s sinfulness, especially sinfulness of the soul, can be transmitted to his posterity by physical generation. That is, Calvin refuses to enter into the vexed controversy between creationism and traducianism (*Inst.*, 2.1.7).

The question necessarily comes up, whether there is in Calvin’s doctrine of original sin any teaching of original *guilt*, that is, the liability of the entire race to punishment for Adam’s disobedience because of Adam’s being the legal representative, or federal head, of the race? This is certainly not Calvin’s emphasis in his discussion of original sin. Nor is this clearly affirmed. It certainly is not developed in Calvin.

Yet, there are some intimations, admittedly faint, of the doctrine of original guilt. Calvin explains the controversy over original sin among the church fathers from this, that “nothing is farther from the usual view than for all to be made guilty by the guilt of one, and thus for sin to be made common” (*Inst.*, 2.1.5). Contending that it is just that we are condemned for our corrupt nature, Calvin says:

This is not liability for another’s transgression. For, since it is said that we became subject to God’s judgment through Adam’s

6. John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*. Ed. A. N. S. Lane. Tr. G. I. Davies. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), p. 145.

sin, we are to understand it not as if we, guiltless and undeserving, bore the guilt of his offense but in the sense that, since we through his transgression have become entangled in the curse, he is said to have made us guilty (*Inst.*, 2.1.8).

Calvin comes the closest to a clear statement of original guilt in his refutation of an objection against his doctrine of the bondage of the will. The objection is that if the will of man is enslaved to sin by nature, man sins of necessity, but to sin of necessity is not sin. Calvin responds that the sinner's inability to choose the good derives "from the fact that Adam willingly bound himself over to the devil's tyranny ... the first man fell away from his Maker." Calvin adds: "If all men are deservedly held guilty of this rebellion, let them not think themselves excused by the very necessity in which they have the most evident cause of their condemnation" (*Inst.*, 2.5.1).

Calvin says something similar in his "Defence of the Secret Providence of God." He responds to his adversary's attack on reprobation by pointing out that the adversary overlooks the fall of the human race in Adam. "All men," says Calvin, "are hateful to God in fallen Adam." Calvin continues:

Whence arises this miserable condition of us all, that we are subject not only to temporal evils, but to eternal death? Does it not arise from the solemn fact that, by the Fall and fault of one man, God was pleased to cast us all under the common guilt?

Against the interpretation of Calvin that has him teaching original guilt, albeit in embryonic form, however, stands Calvin's commentary on Romans 5:12ff. He explains our relation to Adam in terms of Adam's extending his corruption to us, which corruption constitutes our only guilt in the matter of Adam's sin. Calvin explicitly rejects the doctrine of original guilt in the sense of our responsibility for Adam's deed of disobedience.

7. John Calvin, "A Defence of the Secret Providence of God," in *Calvin's Calvinism*. Tr. Henry Cole. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 270.

There are indeed some who contend, that we are so lost through Adam's sin, as though we perished through no fault of our own, but only, because he had sinned for us. But Paul distinctly affirms, that sin extends to all who suffer its punishment: and this he afterwards more fully declares, when subsequently he assigns a reason why all the posterity of Adam are subject to the dominion of death; and it is even this—because we have all, he says, sinned. But to sin in this case, is to become corrupt and vicious; for the natural depravity which we bring from our mother's womb, though it brings not forth immediately its own fruits, is yet sin before God, and deserves his vengeance: and this is that sin which they call original.

Commenting on verse 17, which compares death's reigning by Adam and our reigning in life by Jesus Christ, Calvin calls attention to a "difference between Christ and Adam":

By Adam's sin we are not condemned through imputation alone, as though we were punished only for the sin of another; but we suffer his punishment, because we also ourselves are guilty; for as our nature is vitiated in him, it is regarded by God as having committed sin. But through the righteousness of Christ we are restored in a different way to salvation.

For Calvin, our sinning in Adam, as taught in Romans 5:12, is strictly that "we are all imbued with natural corruption, and so are become sinful and wicked."⁸ The race becomes guilty for Adam's transgression only by sharing in Adam's depraved nature. Adam sinned. The punishment for Adam was, in part, the immediate corruption of his nature. But this is the nature of all his posterity (Christ excepted). All of Adam's posterity are held responsible for the corrupted nature. Not sheer legal representation by a covenant head, but involvement in a corporate nature renders the race guilty before God. I am not responsible for Adam's disobedience of eating the forbidden fruit. But I am responsible for the sinful nature with which God punished Adam for his act of disobedience.

8. Calvin, *Romans*, pp. 199-210.

This view of original sin leaves Calvin with a huge problem. *By what right did God inflict the punishment of a corrupt nature on Adam's posterity?* That the corruption of human nature was divine punishment on Adam, Calvin acknowledges. But it was as well punishment of Adam's posterity. This, Calvin does not like to acknowledge. Rather, he likes to regard the depraved nature only as the *guilt* of Adam's posterity. The question that exposes the weakness — *serious* weakness — of Calvin's doctrine here is this: If I am not guilty for Adam's act of disobedience, with what right does God punish me — not *Adam*, but *me* — with a totally depraved nature?

Calvin's explanation of the origin of the sin of the human race also has an important implication for the headship of Adam. Adam was head of the race, to be sure. But his headship consisted only of his depraving the human nature of which all partake. His was not the headship of legal representation. Adam did not stand in such a covenantal relation to all men, that, altogether apart from the consequent corrupting of the nature, all are responsible before God for Adam's act of disobedience.

In view of the apostle's comparison between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12ff. ("as by the offence of one ... even so by the righteousness of one," v. 18), Calvin's explanation of the headship of Adam would mean that Christ's headship also consists only of His being the source of righteousness to His people by actually infusing it into them. If Adam's headship was not legal representation, neither is Christ's headship legal representation. But this destroys the fundamental gospel-truth of justification as the imputation of Christ's obedience.

Calvin recognizes the danger. Therefore, in his commentary on Romans 5:17 Calvin proposes a "difference between Christ and Adam." "By Adam's sin we are not condemned through imputation alone," but "through the righteousness of Christ we are restored in a different way to salvation." The trouble is that Paul does not teach such a "difference between Christ and Adam." Paul rather declares, "as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). If

our guilt in Adam is not by imputation of a deed of disobedience, neither is our righteousness in Christ by imputation of a deed of obedience. This is the theology of Rome, dishonoring the God of grace. It is also the heresy that increasingly finds favor with Protestant theologians.

The “difference between Christ and Adam” that Calvin injects into Romans 5:12ff. does not exist. Verse 18 teaches that the transgression of one man — Adam, according to verse 14 — was the condemnation of all men. In verse 19, the apostle states that the disobedience of the one man rendered many people sinners. The verb translated “made” by the King James Version does not mean “made” in the sense of causing people actually to become sinful. Rather, it means “constituted” in the sense of a legal standing of guilt before God the judge. One could translate: “By one man’s disobedience many were *declared* sinners.”⁹ Even so, the righteousness of one — Jesus Christ — was the justification of all whom He represented, and His obedience constitutes many people righteous.¹⁰

The comparison between the two covenant heads of the human race in history consists exactly of this, that both are legal representatives of others, Adam, of the entire human race, Christ only excepted, and Christ, of the new human race of the elect church. Because Adam was covenant (federal) head of the race, his act of disobedience was imputed to the race as their guilt. Because Christ is covenant (federal) head of the elect church, His obedience is imputed to the church as our righteousness.

The Canons of Dort go beyond Calvin in formulating the doctrine of original sin. Like Calvin, the Canons teach that the posterity of Adam “have derived corruption from their original parent ... by the propagation of a vicious nature.” Unlike Calvin, the Canons add that all the posterity of Adam have this corrupt

9. The verb is *kathisteemi*.

10. Again in the second part of verse 19, the verb is *kathisteemi*.

nature “in consequence of a just judgment of God.”¹¹ The depravity of nature of the human race is not simply our guilt. It is also divine punishment upon us all for our guilt in the disobedience of Adam in the garden.

In his doctrine of original sin, Calvin tells us, he is opposing three main errors. The first is men’s natural approval of themselves. The second is Pelagianism. The third is the error of ascribing man’s natural corruption to God Himself, as though He created man so. Of course, Calvin is not contending with the error of theistic evolution. Nevertheless, the third error that Calvin opposes has a modern expression in this theory of origins. If man has descended from the primates, even though this has happened under God’s superintending providence, man is “wicked” and subject to death from the very beginning of his existence. Since his origin as evil and subject to death is God’s own “creation” of him in this way, God Himself is responsible for man’s evil condition. Following Calvin, the Heidelberg Catechism condemns the theory of theistic evolution, which would not appear as a threat to the Reformed churches until hundreds of years after the writing of the Catechism, in Lord’s Day 2:

Did God create man thus wicked and perverse? No; but God created man good, and after his own image — that is, in righteousness and true holiness; that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him, and live with him in eternal blessedness, to praise and glorify him.¹²

Having established original depravity, Calvin takes up the issue of the extent of this depravity.

11. Canons of Dordt, III, IV/2, in Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 588. The Latin original of “in consequence of a just judgment of God” is “*justo Dei judicio*” (Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 564). Some editions of the Canons, following the translation of the Reformed Dutch Church, omit the phrase—a very serious defect.

12. Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 309.

Total Depravity

Calvin teaches that, apart from the regenerating grace of Christ, the depravity of fallen man is total. The whole nature is completely corrupted by the infection of sin, so that there is in fallen man no capability of doing any good and so that he performs what is evil. It is “indisputable that free will [which Calvin accepts here for the sake of argument, meaning by ‘free will’ only a will that is not under ‘compulsion’] is not sufficient to enable man to do good works, unless he be helped by grace, indeed by special grace, which only the elect receive through regeneration.” Calvin goes on to deny the doctrine that man “still has some power, though meager and weak,” which, “with the help of grace,” can “also do its part.” This is the context in which occurs the line that is well-known in the controversy over the “well-meant offer of the gospel: “For I do not tarry over those fanatics who babble that grace is equally and indiscriminately distributed” (*Inst.*, 2.2.6). Henry Beveridge translates this line differently: “For I stay not to consider the extravagance of those who say that grace is offered equally and promiscuously to all.”¹³

Summing up his doctrine at the conclusion of the treatment of the depravity of man, Calvin says this:

Therefore let us hold this as an undoubted truth which no siege engines can shake: the mind of man has been so completely estranged from God’s righteousness that it conceives, desires, and undertakes, only that which is impious, perverted, foul, impure, and infamous. The heart is so steeped in the poison of sin, that it can breathe out nothing but a loathsome stench. But if some men occasionally make a show of good, their minds nevertheless ever remain enveloped in hypocrisy and deceitful craft, and their hearts bound by inner perversity (*Inst.*, 2.5.19).

This statement of man’s total depravity fills out the terse judgment that Calvin had passed upon man’s fallen nature at the

13. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1. Tr. Henry Beveridge. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

outset of his treatment: "The whole man is of himself nothing but concupiscence" (*Inst.*, 2.1.8).

Another way of expressing man's total depravity for Calvin is to assert that fallen man has lost the image of God in which he was created. Calvin holds that the image is "obliterated" (*Inst.*, 2.1.5). Mere "traces" remain, which distinguish man from the brutes (*Inst.*, 2.2.17). It is doubtful that any clearer, sharper statement of the loss of the image can be found in the writings of Calvin than that in Chapter 1 of the original, 1536 edition of the *Institutes*. This statement also reveals Calvin's view of the image itself in which Adam was created, as well as Calvin's assessment of the apparent good that is done by unregenerated men and women.

In order for us to come to a sure knowledge of ourselves, we must first grasp the fact that Adam, parent of us all, was created in the image and likeness of God [Gen. 1:26-27]. That is, he was endowed with wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and was so clinging by these gifts of grace to God that he could have lived forever in Him, if he had stood fast in the uprightness God had given him. But when Adam slipped into sin, this image and likeness of God was cancelled and effaced, that is, he lost all the benefits of divine grace, by which he could have been led back into the way of life [Gen. 3]. Moreover, he was far removed from God and became a complete stranger. From this it follows that man was stripped and deprived of all wisdom, righteousness, power, life, which — as has already been said — could be held only in God. As a consequence, nothing was left to him save ignorance, iniquity, impotence, death, and judgment [Rom. 5:12-21]. These are indeed the "fruits of sin" [Gal. 5:19-21]. This calamity fell not only upon Adam himself, but also flowed down into us, who are his seed and offspring. Consequently, all of us born of Adam are ignorant and bereft of God, perverse, corrupt, and lacking every good. Here is a heart especially inclined to all sorts of evil, stuffed with depraved desires, addicted to them, and obstinate toward God [Jer. 17:9]. But if we outwardly display anything good, still the mind stays in its inner state of filth and crooked perversity. The prime matter or rather the matter of concern for all rests in the judgment of God, who judges not according to appearance, nor highly esteems outward splendor,

but gazes upon the secrets of the heart [I Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10]. Therefore, however much of a dazzling appearance of holiness man may have on his own, it is nothing but hypocrisy and even an abomination in God's sight, since the thoughts of the mind, ever depraved and corrupted, lurk beneath.¹⁴

For Calvin, the image of God in which Adam was created was the spiritual perfections that qualified and adorned his whole nature. By his transgression, Adam lost the image entirely. Indeed, the Creator "stripped" Adam of the image. Nothing of it remains, except "traces." These "traces" are not any part of the content of the image itself, some residue of "goodness." Rather, they are merely the evidences that man once had the image — an aggravation of man's misery. The "traces" amount to man's humanity, which he retained, and could not but retain, after the fall. The "traces" consist of man's body with its natural skills, his soul with its thinking and willing, and his enduring conscious relation to God, now a relation on man's part of hostility and dread.

Because of the loss of the image, whatever appearance of goodness fallen man displays is appearance only. Even the occasional "dazzling" appearance of goodness is never genuine. It is "hypocrisy." Especially the "dazzling" appearance of holiness, which greatly impresses theologians and church synods, so that they pronounce it truly good by virtue of "natural theology," or "common grace," is abomination. For it pretends to be real goodness, when in fact the heart of the pretender is far from God. And, unlike the theologians and synods, "God gazes upon the secrets of the heart."

Calvin maintains total depravity by contending for the bondage of the will. Much of the section on man's original sin is devoted to the bondage of the will. Then as now, denial of man's depravity takes the form of affirming free will. In addition to the important treatment of the bondage of the will in the *Institutes*,

14. John Calvin, *Institution of the Christian Religion*. Tr. Ford Lewis Battles. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), Chapter 1, B.

Calvin wrote a treatise on the subject, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. He wrote this treatise in 1543.¹⁵

In developing the truth of the bondage of the will, Calvin shows himself a good teacher by distinguishing carefully. He notes, and insists on, the importance of maintaining the distinction between “compulsion” and “necessity.” The will of the sinner does not choose evil under compulsion, that is, against its own inclination. Rather, the will of the sinner chooses evil willingly. But it does choose evil necessarily, inasmuch as it is under the ruling power of sin in the nature of man. The will of the unregenerated sinner is like a horse that is ridden by Satan. It is controlled by Satan.¹⁶

According to Calvin, the will is enslaved, is in bondage to sin. “Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good, much less apply itself thereto” (*Inst.*, 2.3.5). In his *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Calvin defines the bound will:

A bound will ... is one which because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse.¹⁷

With the bondage of the will, Calvin teaches the corruption also of man’s reason, which logically precedes the activity of the will, so that the mind cannot bring the good, as good, to the will’s attention.

15. See footnote 6 above.

16. Luther also used the figure of a horse ridden by Satan to describe the bondage of the will of the natural man. “So man’s will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills.... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it” (*The Bondage of the Will*, tr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, London: James Clarke & Co., 1957, pp. 103, 194).

17. Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, p. 69.

The specific inability of man by virtue of his corrupted mind and enslaved will is the inability to come to Christ, or choose salvation when it is presented in the gospel, or believe.

Calvin's demonstration and proof of the bondage of the will are overwhelming. He adduces many texts, including John 3:6, Romans 3, Romans 8, Ephesians 4:22ff., and Jeremiah 7:9.

Of decisive importance for the controversy over the bondage of the will is Calvin's rejection of the appeal by the defenders of a free will to Romans 7. The testimony of Romans 7 ("the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do," v. 19), says Calvin rightly, is that of a regenerated person. The importance of the right interpretation of Romans 7 for the truth of the bondage of the will and, therefore, for the gospel of salvation by grace alone cannot be stressed too strongly. It was not accidental that James Arminius first disclosed his heresy in his exposition of Romans 7. Arminius taught that verses 13-25 describe the spiritual condition of the unregenerated man. Unregenerated men, therefore, have a free will, a will that can choose and does choose the good. The doctrine of free will is fundamental to the Arminian heresy. If an unregenerated man is speaking in the chapter, as a number of evangelical and Reformed theologians are contending today, fallen man has a free will, the heresy of Pelagius and Arminius is vindicated, and the gospel of grace is overthrown.¹⁸

Certain of Calvin's arguments on behalf of the bondage of the will are worthy of note. If God in conversion must give us a heart of flesh, the stony heart was incapable of willing the good (cf. Ezek. 36). God works in us to will (cf. Phil 2:13). Good willing arises from faith, and faith is the gift of God (cf. Eph. 2:8). According to I Corinthians 12:6, God works all in all in us.

Free will is the exclusive privilege of the elect.

18. Anthony A. Hoekema opts for the interpretation of Romans 7:13-25 as a description of the condition of the unregenerated: "I believe that what we have here in Romans 7:13-25 is not a description of the regenerate man, but of the unregenerate man who is trying to fight sin through the law alone, apart from the strength of the Holy Spirit" (*The Christian Looks at Himself*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 62).

It is obviously the privilege of the elect that, regenerated through the Spirit of God, they are moved and governed by his leading. For this reason, Augustine justly derides those who claim for themselves any part of the act of willing, just as he reprehends others who think that what is the special testimony of free election is indiscriminately given to all. "Nature," he says, "is common to all, not grace." The view that what God bestows upon whomever he wills is generally extended to all, Augustine calls a brittle glasslike subtlety of wit, which glitters with mere vanity. Elsewhere he says: "how have you come?" By believing. Fear lest while you are claiming for yourself that you have found the just way, you perish from the just way. I have come, you say, of my own free choice; I have come of my own will. Why are you puffed up? Do you wish to know that this also has been given you? Hear Him calling, 'No one comes to me unless my Father draws him' [John 6:44 p.]" And one may incontrovertibly conclude from John's words that the hearts of the pious are so effectively governed by God that they follow Him with unwavering intention. "No one begotten of God can sin," he says, "for God's seed abides in him." [I John 3:9.] For the intermediate movement the Sophists dream up, which men are free either to accept or refuse, we see obviously excluded when it is asserted that constancy is efficacious for perseverance (*Inst.*, 2.3.10).

The end of this lengthy quotation has Calvin insisting that the grace of God that gives freedom of the will to the elect is efficacious. It does not merely make coming to Christ possible, but effectually draws to Christ. With this insistence, Calvin had begun the section:

He does not move the will in such a manner as has been taught and believed for many ages — that it is afterward in our choice either to obey or resist the motion — but by disposing it efficaciously. Therefore, one must deny that oft-repeated statement of Chrysostom: "Whom he draws he draws willing."

Remnants of Good in Fallen Man

We are compelled to recognize that, however inconsistently, unclearly, and relatively infrequently, Calvin does teach some remnants of good in fallen man by virtue of a "general grace" of

God. There are in fallen men, writes Calvin, certain gifts and abilities regarding earthly life, including “civic fair dealing and order” (*Inst.*, 2.2.13) and “the arts, both liberal and manual” that are to be ascribed to the “peculiar grace of God” (*Inst.*, 2.2.14), the “general grace of God” (*Inst.*, 2.2.17), God’s “kindness” (*Inst.*, 2.2.17), and God’s “special grace” (*Inst.*, 2.2.17).

Also, there is a certain “purity” and “virtue” in some unbelievers that is due to a “grace” of God which, although it does not “cleanse” corrupt human nature, does “restrain it inwardly” (*Inst.*, 2.3.3).

These are the materials in Calvin that Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck seized in order to construct their far more elaborate and optimistic theory of a common grace of God that must produce a good culture and even Christianize society.¹⁹

Calvin’s “general grace” is not a grace that is saving, or that desires to save, or that enables one to come to Christ for salvation. Calvin definitely limits his general grace to earthly things and to earthly life.

Significantly, the biblical Calvin offers no proof from Scripture for his notion of a general grace of God to the reprobate ungodly.

Often, in the very same passages that teach this general grace there are expressions indicating that the phenomena that Calvin describes in terms of general grace should rather be described in terms of God’s providence. Indeed, Calvin himself suggests that though he speaks of grace he has providence in mind. This is true of that passage in the *Institutes* on general grace that is the most troublesome. In 2.3.3, Calvin is impressed by “persons who, guided by nature, have striven toward virtue throughout life.” These persons show “some purity in their nature.” Seemingly, they give the lie to the Bible’s, and Calvin’s, doctrine of total

19. For Abraham Kuyper’s common grace theory, see *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1902-1904) and *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1981). For Herman Bavinck’s common grace theory, see *De Algemeene Genade* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, n.d.).

depravity. Calvin then accounts for what he judges to be the honorable conduct of these unregenerated persons.

But here it ought to occur to us that amid this corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace; not such grace as to cleanse it, but to restrain it inwardly. For if the Lord gave loose rein to the mind of each man to run riot in his lusts, there would doubtless be no one who would not show that, in fact, every evil thing for which Paul condemns all nature is most truly to be met in himself.

Having listed the sins that Romans 3:10-18 finds in the unregenerated, Calvin continues:

If every soul is subject to such abominations as the apostle boldly declares, we surely see what would happen if the Lord were to permit human lust to wander according to its own inclination. No mad beast would rage as unrestrainedly; no river, however swift and violent, burst so madly into flood. In his elect the Lord cures these diseases in a way that we shall soon explain. Others he merely restrains by throwing a bridle over them only that they may not break loose, inasmuch as he foresees their control to be expedient to preserve all that is.

By mentioning a "bridle," Calvin already goes in the direction of explaining his restraining "grace" as providence. That, in reality, he has providence in mind as the power by which God restrains sinners and controls the power of sin is made explicit in the concluding sentence of the paragraph: "Thus God *by his providence* bridles perversity of nature, that it may not break forth into action; but he does not purge it within" (emphasis added).

This having been said in mitigation of Calvin's doctrine of a general grace of God upon and in the unregenerated, we must disagree with Calvin on this matter. The natural gifts of the ungodly are to be explained from man's remaining human after the fall and from the providential operations and gifts of the Spirit that uphold and govern natural life. The natural gifts are not to be explained from any grace of God.

Calvin's theorizing in 2.3.3 of the *Institutes* about a restrain-

ing grace that accounts for good deeds by the noble heathen is unbiblical, and contrary to Calvin's own theology. Calvin has just appealed to God's searing judgment upon all mankind by nature in Romans 3:10ff. Then, with his eye on Camillus and other noble pagans, Calvin asserts a general, restraining grace and says, regarding the Romans 3 passage, "We surely see what *would* happen *if* the Lord were to permit human lust to wander according to its own inclination" (emphasis added).

But Romans 3:10ff. does not teach what *would* happen, apart from *general, restraining grace*. Romans 3:10ff. teaches what *does* happen, what is true of all, apart from *the gospel* and its *regenerating grace*.

Calvin has forgotten what he had written on good works against Pighius in *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*: "The worth of good works depends not on the act itself but on perfect love for God so that a work will not be right and pure unless it proceeds from a perfect love for God."²⁰

Enthusiastically picking up on Calvin's erroneous teaching of a general grace of God for the reprobate ungodly, some in the later Reformed tradition have developed a theory of common grace that effectively overthrows the biblical doctrine of total depravity that Calvin so powerfully taught and so vehemently defended. By virtue of common grace, fallen man retains much good. In many Reformed churches today, total depravity, though acknowledged, is defined as man's being corrupt merely in every part of his being. Common grace has forged a doctrine of partial depravity. This is, in fact, the rejection of total depravity by those who claim to confess it.²¹

20. Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, p. 27.

21. Reformed theologian Anthony A. Hoekema maintains that what Reformed theology has traditionally called "total depravity" means only that "the corruption of original sin extends to every aspect of human nature: to one's reason and will as well as to one's appetites and impulses." It does not mean that "the unregenerate person by nature is unable to do good in any sense of the word. Because of God's common grace ... the development of sin in history and society is restrained. The unregenerate person can still do certain kinds of good and can exercise

The enemies of Calvinism see through this posturing. Clark Pinnock has recently written:

The depth of human sinfulness was another matter that soon demanded my attention. Calvinists, like Augustine himself, if the reader will excuse the anachronism, wanting to leave no room at all to permit any recognition of human freedom in the salvation event, so defined human depravity as total that it would be impossible to imagine any sinner calling upon God to save him. Thus they prevented anyone from thinking about salvation in the Arminian way. Leaving aside the fact that Augustinians themselves often and suspiciously qualify their notion of “total” depravity very considerably and invent the notion of common grace to tone it down, I knew I had to consider how to understand the free will of the sinner in relation to God.²²

Pinnock points out what is at stake in “toning down” the doctrine of total depravity.

The Reformed churches must maintain, or recover, Calvin’s doctrine that fallen human nature is nothing but concupiscence and

certain kinds of virtue.” Recognizing that it is a mistake, if not absurd, to call a depravity that is merely partial, “total,” Hoekema proposes a new adjective to describe the depravity of the unregenerated man: “pervasive” (*Created in God’s Image*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 150-152). Although Hoekema does not notice, this results in a change in the historic acronym describing the Reformed confession of the doctrines of grace: PULIP. Hoekema’s doctrine, which is probably the prevailing opinion in Reformed circles today, is open rejection of the confessionally Reformed doctrine of man’s total, that is, complete, depravity by nature. So open a rejection is it that this new doctrine changes the name of the traditional, confessional doctrine. It is a doctrine of *partial* depravity. And common grace is the cause. For a critique of the ongoing revision of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity because of the notion of common grace, see my article, “Total, Absolute, or Partial Depravity?” in the *Standard Bearer* 77, no. 12 (March 15, 2001): 268-270.

22. Clark H. Pinnock and others, *A Case for Arminianism: The Grace of God, the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 21.

that the heart of the natural man breathes forth “nothing but a loathsome stench.” This humbles the sinner. This magnifies the grace of God in the salvation of the elect sinner. And this, under the blessing of the Spirit of Christ, opens the way to faith’s seeking the righteousness of God in the cross of Jesus Christ alone. ●

Book Reviews

Whatever Happened to the Reformation, ed. by Gary L. W. Johnson & R. Fowler White. Philipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing Co., Publishers, 2001. Pp. xxviii-337. \$15.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Evangelicalism has fallen on bad times. It has departed from the faith, become a severely divided house, and has, consequently, ceased to be a force in American life. Various books have been written in the past few years calling attention to evangelicalism's death. None is as hard-hitting and to the point as this recent volume. It is a book which is primarily doctrinal and has as its stated task the demonstration of the fact that evangelicalism has died an ignoble death because of its apostasy. More particularly, as the title indicates, the problem with modern evangelicalism is its complete abandonment of all the Reformation stood for. It has cut its ties with the Reformation and is like a ship adrift on stormy

seas. In my opinion, anyone who wishes to understand modern evangelicalism must read this book.

R. C. Sproul points the way when, in the foreword to the book, he rightly identifies one's view of God as decisive for all theology. It is his contention that evangelicalism has a corrupted conception of God. Faulting *Christianity Today* (the voice of evangelicalism) for leading the way, Sproul contends that

This (an editorial in CT) ... is simply one illustration among many that could have been chosen of how confused the evangelical church has become. More than that, it shows that the growing definitional fogginess within evangelicalism is now reaching into our understanding of God himself. It is one thing to debate the wisdom of using *inerrancy* (a term evangelicals refuse to apply to Scripture, HH); it is something entirely different to imagine that God is as

hobbled and as baffled by life as we are.

The truth of the matter is that the fraying at the edges of the evangelical world has now turned into an unraveling at its center... (xxviii).

The basic reason why evangelicalism has abandoned doctrine is its preoccupation with the need to adapt itself to modern-day culture, according to the book's authors. The result is that all the essentials of the Christian faith have been lost. Gary Johnson, an editor of this book, quotes John H. Leith with approval.

There is a prevalent conviction that the faith the church has confessed in the past is not adequate for post-Enlightenment culture, the idea that the faith must be accommodated to culture has undermined the teaching of the church's faith (1, 2).

A great deal of evidence is produced to establish beyond doubt the truth of the book's claim. It is a sad picture which is presented, so sad, in fact, that the expressed hope of the authors that the book will bring evangelicalism back to its heritage strikes one as a vain and

empty hope. A person in whom all the vital signs are gone is beyond restoring to life and health.

There are three areas especially which the authors see as key areas in diagnosing evangelicalism's troubles. The first area is its doctrine of God; the second, its view of Scripture; and the third, its view of preaching. Each area is discussed in several chapters and by different authors.

The first section deals with the view of God in evangelical thought. In this connection the authors are very specific. They insist that evangelicalism has adopted an "openness-of-God" theism. This same view is sometimes called "process theology."

This openness-of-God theism denies that God is omniscient, that He knows the future, and that He has control over all events which take place in the world. This position is maintained in the interests of preserving man's free will. So total is man's free will that God is limited by human choices, can only react to what He sees man do, and is impotent in influencing decisively man's moral deeds. So ignorant is God of the future that He is repeatedly caught by surprise when

He observes events, and, indeed, was not even sure that Christ would actually go to the cross to die for sin.

It is the ultimate and necessary development of an Arminian conception of God against which the fathers at Dordt fought furiously and long. The real issue, as it always has been in the church, is the issue of the absolute sovereignty and particularity of grace. To the credit of the authors, Arminianism is taken to task in no uncertain fashion. One could wish, however, that the emphasis on God's absolute sovereignty would be stronger. The only real defense is an unwavering defense of God's sovereignty in all history. Even the king's heart is, after all, in the hand of the Lord to turn wherever God wills. And Assyria is an axe in God's hand to cut down the vine of Israel.

Whether someone really believes in God's sovereignty or only mouths the word is finally determined by one's unwavering defense of, not only sovereign election, but also sovereign reprobation. Anything less will finally bring one into the camp of the "openness-of-God" heresy.

The second part of the book

(especially chapters 6 & 7) deals with the doctrine of Scripture and the rough treatment which Scripture receives at the hand of evangelicalism. The chief subject treated here is the influence the charismatic movement has had on modern evangelicalism. Especially the insistence of charismatics on the doctrine of on-going revelation comes under attack. And, as a necessary corollary of the doctrine of on-going revelation, the "special guidance" notion of life comes under attack. This latter is a reference to the claims of so many today to being led by the Spirit directly and immediately, apart from the objective testimony of the Scriptures.

In defense of the truth, the authors spell out the doctrines of the closed canon (the truth that direct revelation came to a close with the writing of the book of Revelation), the sufficiency of the canon (that Scripture is sufficient for all we need to know concerning the truth and will of God), and the authority of the canon (that Scripture is absolutely regulative for all our faith and life).

The defense of the book against this grave weakness of evangelicalism is solid, though mild. One could wish, espe-

cially in a book that defends Reformation truth, that the authors would have had some of the ferocity of Luther when he told the promoters of on-going revelation by the Spirit: "I hit your Holy Spirit in the snout."

The third part of the book comes to grips with a crucially important error in evangelicalism: its denial of the centrality and absolutely decisive character of preaching. The authors scathingly condemn modern evangelical preaching. Evangelicalism is repeatedly savaged for failing to carry out its one divine mandate: to preach the Word.

The book is not only negative, but firmly positive in its defense of sound preaching. Hart argues that the strength of the church is most emphatically not in an educated membership, and that the trust which evangelicals place on learning will never save the church. He insists that preaching is absolutely decisive for the Christian life, but also for a biblical perspective on learning in general and the purpose of education.

David Powlison defends and promotes biblical, Christ-centered, sin-oriented preaching and pastoral work, especially in what is today called "coun-

seling." He denounces evangelicalism for adapting worldly philosophy to religious needs.

In discussing specifically homosexuality, he writes of the problems of a hypothetical lesbian:

Only the active-worshiping-heart-responsible-before-God finally explains and causes any particular way of life. Amelia has come to believe that she "understands" and has a "proper perspective" on her past history. But psychodynamic myth has mingled a significant illusion with elements of Christian truth. To say that her lesbian struggles were caused by unhappy childhood circumstances fails to bow before the riddle, unfathomableness, and culpability of sin. Sin is its own final reason. Any theory that claims to explain sin actually falls prey to sin's intellectual effects, and wriggles away from both theological truth and psychological reality. Sin is the deepest explanation, not just one more problem begging for different and "deeper" reasons (p. 221).

Such an emphasis on preaching as chapters 7 through

11 present is like a breath of fresh air in the stale atmosphere of today's boring, silly, shallow, man-centered little homilies delivered in twenty minutes or so by moralistic professional pedants who have not even a cursory knowledge of the Scrip-

tures which they are supposed to preach.

One will find the book informative, interesting, helpful, and necessary in understanding what has gone wrong with current evangelicalism. ■

The Quest for Full Assurance, The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors, Joel R. Beeke. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. Pp. vxi-395. No price available. (Paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Joel Beeke wrote his doctoral thesis for Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) on this subject, and this book is a revision of that thesis. It is basically a historical study which, though concentrating on Reformation and post-Reformation thought, nevertheless begins with early Christian teaching and Medieval ideas concerning the road to full assurance. The book devotes the largest section to a study of the *Nadere Reformatie* or "Further Reformation," in which Willem Teelinck played a prominent role and is, in fact, often considered its father.

Yet, as the sub-title indicates, the book is really primarily interested in showing that post-Reformation thought, especially in the *Nadere Reformatie*, is not a betrayal of Calvin's thoughts on assurance. Thus, the book is primarily historical. From that point of view, it contains an abundance of material on the subject.

I have some problems, however, with the approach which the book takes.

The first problem I have is the idea that there is a *doctrine* of assurance. I am not at all convinced that one can properly speak of a doctrine of assurance, at least in the same way that one speaks of a doctrine of sanctification, or a doctrine of the divinity of Christ.

My first problem with this is that it leads to some confusion. Beeke is not so much talking about assurance as such

in this book, but about *the way one comes to assurance*. That, it seems to me, is quite a different matter. The distinction between the two is blurred in the book.

The second problem with this is certain dubious statements in the book when the views of others are being described. Augustine, for example, is said to have avoided an assertion of personal assurance. Now, as a matter of fact, that is flatly not true. It is perhaps true that he never spoke of a "doctrine" of assurance; but anyone who reads his *Confessions*, a book which breathes in every line Augustine's joyful assurance of the salvation which has been given to him by grace, will wonder what in all the world Beeke means by that statement.

Luther is said to have taught degrees of assurance. I have never found anything like this in Luther. Once again, the trouble seems to be in holding to a certain "doctrine" of assurance, and confusing assurance with the way in which it is acquired. There is no question about it that Luther struggled all his life with what he called his *anfechtungen*. There is no question about it either that Luther, in the throws of these *anfech-*

tungen, struggled with the severe temptations of doubt. What child of God has not experienced these temptations of the devil? But degrees of assurance? How is that possible? When I am standing in a cloudburst, can I have degrees of assurance concerning the question of whether or not I am getting wet in the rain? Or, can one have degrees of assurance that God is? I believe that He is, or I believe that He is not. Where is the middle ground implied in "degrees"?

Another problem is that the book discusses the views of various men on assurance in such a way that the impression is often left that this subject is really the only important subject in theology. I think this problem stands closely connected with the first problem which I mentioned, especially if one insists on speaking of a "doctrine" of assurance. But in any case, while the Scriptures speak of assurance repeatedly, such is by no means the central and pivotal doctrine of the Word of God. In fact, one ought not to consider at all the matter of assurance as understandable or important *in its own right*. It is the fruit of all the work of God in the heart of His people. To set it aside as

important in its own right is to be self-defeating.

Let me use an illustration. I am born and brought up within the family of my parents. They brought me into the world, nurtured me from infancy on, cared for my needs, instructed me in the ways of God's covenant, and devoted themselves to my care. I cannot recall that the question ever occurred to me to ask myself whether I was truly a child of my parents. But supposing I had. Supposing that every morning, upon rising, I would wash my hands and face, brush my teeth, and, when older, shave, all the while asking myself the question: Am I truly a child of these parents who claim me as their child? Am I perhaps deceiving myself? Are these people truly the ones that brought me into the world? So important was this question to me that I made it the central and pivotal part of my life in the family. I even constructed a doctrine of assurance to prove my claim to be a member of the family.

I am absolutely sure that if I lived my whole life in the family developing my doctrine of assurance, whatever that doctrine may be, I would soon doubt seriously whether I really be-

longed to that family. I would begin to discover all kinds of "evidence" which testified to the contrary. And all my problems would be compounded if there were some who knew my family and told me that I was not really one of that family at all.

There were, of course, in my own childhood, times when I so grossly broke the rules of the family and displeased my parents with my conduct that I did wonder about one thing: Do I have any right in myself to claim membership in this family? Would not my parents have every right to disown me? But that kind of question is different. The very fact that I considered myself worthy of being disowned was proof that I belonged.

It seems to me this is the way it is in our relation to God. We do not make the matter of our assurance a doctrine. We do not even make the way we arrive at assurance a doctrine. We are born again into our heavenly Father's family. In that family God gives us countless blessings of the preaching of the Word, the instruction of covenant parents, the teachings of Christian school teachers, and the catechism classes of mother church. In that family God provides for all our needs, tells us

of the blessedness that is ours in Christ, averts all evil or turns it to our profit. I grow up in that. Assurance is a necessary part of it. It lies in the very nature of being a member of the family.

If in that family I am forever asking myself the question: Am I a child of God? Do I really belong to that family? What proof do I have that I am in that family? How can I construct a doctrine of assurance that will assist in convincing me that I am in that family? I tell you that if I lived that kind of a life, I would persuade myself in two days' time that I was, after all, not a part of that family at all. And I would be plagued by doubts of every sort.

It is true that the child of God is tempted by doubts sometimes. This is always when he is overcome with his sin. He sees his own unworthiness and recognizes that he has no right in himself to be a part of that family. But that is exactly what drives him to the cross of Christ. Christ is God's Son! And we are called to believe in Christ. When we do, then we know, oh, we know, beyond any doubt, that we are also children of God for Christ's sake.

That is exactly how, looking at it now from God's point

of view, God gives His children the assurance of their place in the family of God. God works that faith in the hearts of His people so that they flee always to Christ. In Christ is nothing but assurance. God gives us that, not as some kind of extra blessing which we can possess only when there are marks and signs, a clear doctrine of assurance, but because we are at the foot of the cross where you will always find the whole family of God. It comes spontaneously, naturally, almost unconsciously. It is a part of family life; so natural a part that one never really thinks about it.

My parents would have become exasperated with me if, when I was a child in the home, I kept asking them for proof that I was truly their child. They would have said, Don't we take care of you? feed you? clothe you? instruct you? love you? What in the world is the matter with you?

So also our heavenly Father. Doubting the parentage of our heavenly Father is sinful and gross ingratitude. This is not easy believism, easy religion, easy and perhaps deceptive assurance. This is a part of being a member of God's family. To do anything less is wicked.

I do not think my earthly father would be pleased if I would write a book setting forth my own personal “doctrine” of assurance by which I explained how I finally, after lengthy

struggle, attained a higher degree (are there really degrees? — as Luther is supposed to have taught?) of assurance that I really did, after all, belong to the C. Hanko family

Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos, ed. by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. Philipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishers, 2001. Pp. xiii-571. \$29.99 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

P&R has republished a work which this publisher first printed in 1980. The book has long been out of print, and it is high time that it once again becomes available to the reading public.

Geerhardus Vos was an outstanding theologian of the last half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. He was born in the Netherlands in 1862 and came to the United States in 1881, five years before the *Doleantie* under Dr. A. Kuyper. He earned his degrees from Calvin Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the University of Strasbourg, from which

he acquired a Ph.D in Arabic Studies. Vos was ordained a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the USA, but never served a congregation in that or any other denomination. He was asked by Kuyper to return to the Netherlands and take the position of professor of Old Testament Studies on the faculty of the Free University in Amsterdam. He declined and chose rather to teach in the Seminary of the Christian Reformed Church. He remained there from 1888 to 1893, when he was appointed as professor to the newly-created chair of Biblical Theology in Princeton Seminary. He remained in Princeton for 39 years, after which he retired to a life first in California and later in Grand Rapids. He died in 1949. His wife was Catherine Vos, the author of the well-known *Child's Story Bible*.

It is something of a mystery why Vos chose to cast his lot with the Presbyterian tradi-

tion and to leave his teaching responsibilities in Calvin Seminary, where the Reformed tradition was taught. And, having said that, it is also a mystery to me why he did not depart Princeton with G. Gresham Machen when it became evident that Princeton had chosen the road of apostasy.

Perhaps part of the answer to the first question can be found in the fact that his move to Princeton was due to an appointment to the chair of Biblical Theology, a chair newly created. One of the important writings in this volume is his inaugural address, which he delivered at the outset of his work as professor of Biblical Theology. For some reason he seems to have been attracted to this study in distinction from Systematic Theology, although he is also the author of a "Systematic Theology," first published in beautiful hand-written form, and later (1910) in printed form. He may even have been somewhat influenced by a long (and sometimes bitter) conflict over this very question in the Netherlands during the latter part of the seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth between the so-called Voetians and Cocceians.

The writings of Vos are not the easiest to read, chiefly because Vos was able to pack a great deal of information in a relatively few words. Nevertheless, his writings are sufficiently important that they ought to be read by anyone who has an interest in the truth of God's Word and the development of Reformed theology. Two chapters in this book are of great importance and stand out as the best of the book. The first is Vos' inaugural address, when he took the chair in Biblical Theology in Princeton. It is the first chapter in the book and has the title "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline." It has had enormous influence on seminaries throughout the country and on biblical studies in both the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions.

The second article, Chapter VII in the book, is an important study on the history of the doctrine of the covenant. It has the title "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology." It goes back to the Reformation and traces many different lines in both Reformed and Presbyterian thought, including the influence which covenant theology has had in the maintenance of infant baptism.

Vos' study of Historical Theology is particularly attractive to me. While Vos' defense of Biblical Theology is probably the best defense which can be offered, it remains unpersuasive. While it is impossible to enter into a discussion of this broad subject, the chief objection against Systematic Theology made by biblical theologians is that such systematic organization of Scripture's teaching does not do justice to the historical development of revelation from Paradise to its fulfillment in Christ. Systematic Theology is accused of "proof-texting," that is, proving doctrines from every part of Scripture without regard to the historical setting of a particular passage and its meaning in the point of time at which it was written.

In my opinion, Historical Theology also has its dangers, greater and more serious than those with which Systematic Theology has been charged. It tends to separate the Old and New Testaments. Cocceius, really the father of Biblical Theology, was accused of Dispensationalism. It tends to lose sight of the organic unity of Scripture and easily falls into the danger of looking at a given

part of Scripture in separation from the whole canon. Even Vos has chapters on "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," "The Pauline Conception of Reconciliation," "The Pauline Conception of Redemption," "The Sacrificial Idea in Paul's Doctrine of the Atonement."

Paul's doctrine of the atonement? What about Peter's, and John's, and David's, and Isaiah's? That is, what about the Holy Spirit's doctrine of the atonement? This "piecemeal" approach to Scripture can easily lead to a "Pauline Eschatology," which perhaps is to be distinguished from and which at certain points does not agree with "Petrine Eschatology."

I recall, in a classroom setting, making an argument for a particular interpretation of a passage in the Gospel According to John from Paul's letter to the Colossians. I was summarily informed that the argument was irrelevant because we were dealing with Johanine literature, and Paul's views were irrelevant to the understanding of John.

A fundamental rule of all exegesis which is performed through the centuries-old method of Historical-Gram-

matical Exegesis is to interpret a text in its historical context. Reformed systematic theologians have always done that. Systematic Theology is still the way to go, and, it seems, many

seminaries are coming to similar conclusions. There is, I think, a return to "Systematics" in the last ten or twenty years.

A Textual Index has been added to this new edition. ■

Princeton Versus the New Divinity. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001. Author: Various. Pp. vii – 340. \$22.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Angus R. Stewart.]

Princeton Versus the New Divinity is a valuable addition to the literature on "Old" Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. The "Publisher's Introduction" describes the New Divinity as "a movement in theological thought which had pervasive influence in parts of the United States in the 1830s. While diverse elements went into its composition, its leading ideas were a revision of teaching on the fallen condition of man, the nature of the atonement and the extent to which man is dependent upon the Holy Spirit for regeneration" (p. vi). Most readers of the PRTJ are aware of Princeton's opposition to the New Divinity, which arose

in New England, and the "New Measures" implemented particularly by Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875). But how seriously did the Princeton men evaluate the threat of the New Divinity and Finney. What were the key issues over which swords were crossed? What arguments – historical, theological and Biblical — did they use? Probably the answers that we would give to these questions are derived primarily from the secondary sources. In *Princeton Versus the New Divinity*, the Banner of Truth Trust has furnished us with the Princeton polemic firsthand by republishing eight of the most significant articles from Princeton Seminary's *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* (renamed *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* in 1837).

Three of the essays are by Archibald Alexander, the

seminary's founding professor (articles 2-4). These treat the kindred subjects of total depravity, original sin, and the inability of the unregenerate to believe on Christ (all of which the New Divinity denied). All these articles approach the topic from a historical perspective considering the views of such men as Pelagius, Augustine, Aquinas, Sohnnius (a sixteenth century Lutheran; pp. 98-114) and Jonathan Edwards.

Charles Hodge weighs in with two essays on regeneration (articles 1 and 5). Both articles criticize sermons by New Divinity men (Samuel H. Cox and Finney, respectively) and include appeals to earlier authors to expose the New Divinity's specious claim to the authority of orthodox theologians.

The remaining three articles are by lesser-known men. John Woodbridge's "Sanctification" (article 7) is a superb refutation of the Perfectionism of Finney and Asa Mahan, his fellow professor at Oberlin College. Albert B. Dod's essay is a lengthy critique of Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* and *Sermons on Various Subjects* (article 6). The book

closes with Thomas Cleland's "Bodily Effects of Religious Excitement," in which he describes and evaluates the phenomena of swooning and jerking etc. at the camp-meeting revivals in Kentucky (article 8).

The New Divinity men took the classic Free Will position that the "obligation to obey any command supposes the existence of an ability to do the action required" (p. 128). Albert Dod writes, "Mr. Finney asserts the perfect, unqualified ability of man to regenerate himself. It is easier, indeed, he says, for him to comply with the commands of God than to reject them. He tells his congregation that they 'might with much more propriety ask, when the meeting is dismissed, how they should go home, than to ask how they should change their hearts'" (p. 207).

Charles Hodge quotes Finney's description of regeneration: "I will show what is intended in the command in the text (to make a new heart). It is that a man should change the governing purpose of his life. A man resolves to be a lawyer; then he directs all his plans and efforts to that object, and that

for the time is his governing purpose. Afterwards, he may alter his determination and resolve to be a merchant. Now he directs all his efforts to that object, and so has changed his heart, or governing purpose" (p. 159). According to Finney "the simple volition of the sinner's mind [to turn to God] through the influence of motives ... is all that is necessary to make a sinner a Christian" (p. 160).

Hodge's evaluation is correct: "We believe that the characteristic tendency of this mode of preaching is to keep the Holy Spirit and his influences out of view; and we fear a still more serious objection is that Christ and his cross are practically made of no effect.... We maintain that this is another gospel" (pp. 166-167). Dod concurs: Finney's gospel "is evidently another gospel" (p. 203). "Throughout his whole system indeed," Dod continues, "it is painful to see how small a space is allotted the cross of Christ" (p. 205).

Not only did the Princeton men see that the denial of man's depravity required the denial of the new birth but they also understood the harmony between the theology of the New Divinity and the practice of the New Mea-

asures. Dod writes, "... Mr. Finney's mistaken views of the nature of religion lie at the bottom of his measures and have given to them their character and form ... these measures, therefore, wherever used, will tend to propagate a false form of religion" (p. 253). After all, if regeneration is merely resolving to be a Christian and directing one's efforts to that object, then the "anxious seat" is a useful tool to put pressure on sinners to turn to God (pp. 232-242).

The Princeton men understood the origin of Oberlin College's Perfectionism: the New Divinity's heretical position on man's Free Will (p. 321). They could also see that it would wreak devastation. Thus Thomas Cleland writes, "Experience has proved that perfectionism peculiarly prepares the ground, where it is cultivated and flourishes, for an abundant crop of infidelity and the most odious forms of delusion and imposture" (p. 319).

Finney, on the other hand, placed great confidence in his message and methods: "If the Church will do all her duty, the millennium may come in this country in three years" (p. 257). The church's duty included not only sup-

porting Finney's revivalism but also abstaining from tea, coffee, tobacco and alcohol (p. 263). Finney writes, "I am convinced that the temperance reformation has just begun, and that the total abstinence principle, in regard to a great many other subjects beside alcohol, must prevail before the church can prosper to any considerable extent" (p. 319).

Of these three — the New Divinity, the New Measures, and what we may call the "New Asceticism" — it is the New Measures that must keep in closest step with the times. Finney writes: "The object of our new measures is to gain attention, and you must have something new" (p. 224). When Finney's methods lose their appeal, something else must gain the public's interest. "And so we shall never want for something new" (p. 224). Is there not much of this spirit abroad today in the church world?

The New Divinity did not bring in the "millennium." It brought in heresy and all kinds of unbiblical practices and extravagances. It did bring people into the churches, but most soon

left (pp. 257-258); and those who stayed, if they remained under the spell of Finney, only corrupted the churches. Congregations were divided and the Presbyterian Church split in 1838. Yet today many evangelicals around the world laud Finney as a great man of God! Books like *Princeton Versus the New Divinity* help to set the record straight.

One question kept resurfacing as I read the book: why did the Presbyterian Church not discipline Finney for heresy? Throughout his ministry, Finney ridiculed the Westminster Standards (p. 218) as "the tradition of the elders" and attacked ministers who preached the doctrines of grace (pp. 174, 319). Thus Dod speaks of Finney's "sin of broken vows" (p. 272) and points out his duty to leave the Presbyterian Church (pp. 219, 272). Finney must go "out from us," Dod concludes, "for he is not of us" (p. 272). Strong words, but why was Finney not disciplined? Instead of *Princeton versus the New Divinity*, it should have been the *Presbyterian Church versus the New Divinity*. ■

Eschatology, by Hans Schwarz. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. xv + 431. \$26 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The seminarian, seminary professor, or minister who is interested in a wide-ranging survey of eschatological thought will find this an informative, often fascinating, and sometimes profound book. The author is professor of systematic theology and director of the Institute of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg, Germany. He examines the doctrine of the last things in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, in the history of the church, and in contemporary theology. He exposes secular thinking about the future of the individual, of humanity, and of the cosmos. "Secular varieties of hope" include science, philosophy, and religiosity. The last is mainly New Age spirituality.

All secular eschatologies, from Marxism to humanism, teach that man can and must perfect himself.

Schwarz's judgment is that apart from the hope that is grounded in the resurrection of Christ, there is only the nihilism of Nietzsche. Schwarz puts the

alternative to the Christian hope this way: "We come into life by accident, go through life in weakness, and vanish from life in resignation" (p. 369).

The main value of the book is its demonstration of the prominence of eschatology in contemporary theology and its description and analysis of the theologians regarding the last things. The consensus is sheer universalism: all humans without exception shall be saved. Moltmann extends salvation to Satan and the devils. Hardly anyone teaches hell. In his analysis of various teachings about the last days, Schwarz is penetrating. To all forms of millennialism with their dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ in history, Schwarz puts the question: "But can we really expect Christ, who during his life on earth rejected vehemently all nationalistic and political messianic aspirations, to establish a transitory kingdom of God on earth, as millennial thinking requires?" (p. 336).

The weakness of the book is that it is not biblical. Neither does it set forth the biblical doctrine of the last things by careful explanation of Scripture, nor does it take Scripture seriously as the inspired Word of God

when it proposes answers to eschatological questions.

Hans Schwarz is probably as conservative as it is possible for a German theologian to be. But this a woeful condition. Because belief of a "premortally state" of man would conflict with (evolutionary) science, Schwarz denies that death is the result of the fall of man. This leads him to deny the historicity of Adam. One effect of evolutionary science on Schwarz's eschatology is his rejection of an "immortal soul" and, therefore, his dismissal of an intermediate state as unnecessary and illegitimate speculation.

Despite his recognition of the powerful biblical testimony against it, Schwarz holds out for the possibility of universal sal-

vation in the end ("universal homecoming"). Of great significance is Schwarz's sole biblical basis for universalism: the teaching of the New Testament, as he supposes, that "God wants all people to be saved." He appeals to I Timothy 2:4 (p. 395).

Reformed theologians at the beginning of the twenty-first century who think that they can contradict the biblical doctrine of predestination and particular grace without deadly serious consequences for eschatology deceive themselves. The doctrine that God has a sincere desire for the salvation of every human without exception leads inexorably to universalism. For this doctrine *is* universalism, in principle. ■

Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church, by Harry Boonstra. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 2001. Pp. xi-155. (Paper.) [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Over the years, Eerdmans has published a number of books in what is called "The Historical Series of the Reformed

Church in America." Quite naturally, the quality of these books has varied greatly, with some being particularly interesting and useful. Two examples of the latter are *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies*, by Gerald F. De Jong, and *Sources of Secession* by Gerrit J. tenZythoff. This book belongs to the series.

The author apparently

senses that readers might wonder why a book on a Christian Reformed College appears in a series which deals with the Reformed Church of America. His explanation is that "the gradually widening cooperation between the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches" goes far to explain this contribution.

Although Boonstra gives a brief history both of the CRC and Calvin College, this is not his main purpose in writing the book. His main interest is in the relationship between the college and the church itself: "My focus will be on the interaction, the mutual influence between Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church. This interaction obviously comes into play in the origin of the college but will be seen also in much of its subsequent history. Curriculum, student conduct, student publications, faculty hiring (and occasional firing), faculty views, and a host of other issues were and are affected by the relationship between the college and the church" (ix).

To describe his purpose in writing the book more specifically, Boonstra observes that "the history of the relationship between the church and the college involves various issues in

theology (Sabbath observance, interpretation of Genesis, common grace), philosophy, anthropology, geology, astronomy, film, drama, music, and card playing" (ix). Taking this perspective, Boonstra deals especially with the many criticisms which were brought against the board of trustees, the administration, the faculty, and the student body by those who were concerned with what was going on in the college from a theological point of view and from the point of view of the moral life of the student body. He discusses such subjects as the struggles between the ARCL and the AACS on the one hand and Calvin on the other (the latter of which later became the ICS, a movement with its headquarters in Toronto and which had its roots in Dooyeweerdian philosophy; the former of which was the Association of Christian Reformed Laymen, a conservative group of CRC members who were appalled at the liberalism sweeping the church); the whole debate (which reached Synod) over worldly amusements, including dancing; the outrage at the *Bannaner* (a student-produced spoof of the *Banner*); the debate over creation vs. evolutionism, and such like issues.

Boonstra is quick to admit that the doctrine of common grace played a major role in the struggles: "Whereas most theologians in the CRC stressed the antithesis in doctrine and life, the college often emphasized the doctrine of common grace, especially in the approach to culture and learning" (104). The book becomes a sort of "case-study" of how the doctrine of common grace worked its way

through the churches and its college, directing the thinking, the theological direction, and the moral life of the entire denomination. The author invariably comes out on the side of what he calls the "progressive" movement.

The book is a case-study in the gradual apostasy of a denomination that once stood solidly in the Reformed tradition. ■

Revelation Down to Earth: Making Sense of the Apocalypse of John, by Edwin Walhout. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. viii + 254. \$20 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Apart from the question whether it does in fact make sense of the last book in the Bible, this work is not a commentary on the book of Revelation. Neither does it carefully explain the text, whether verse by verse or in larger sections, nor does it give the message itself of the book of Revelation. That is, *Revelation Down to Earth* does not give the message that the Spirit obviously in-

tended when He moved John to write Revelation. Rather, Walhout's book is the author's broad summary of lines, verses, or sections of Revelation in terms of present-day activities and experiences of the church. Although Walhout ties his analyses and applications to the text of Revelation, one gets the distinct impression that for Walhout the meaning of Revelation is not in the text itself, but in the interpretation of the "commentator."

The thrust of *Revelation Down to Earth* is that the work of the church will eventually save the majority of the human race, perhaps all without exception, and so influence civiliza-

tion worldwide that this world will become the kingdom of Christ. Even the strange "crisis" of the nations in the future that results in the destruction of Christianity ends in the salvation of the world. Explaining the loosing of Satan for a little season and his assault on the camp of the saints in Revelation 20:7-10, Walhout writes:

In terms of actual history this vision is showing us that some great crisis, comparable to the crisis that Jesus instigated among the Jews, must occur in the human race as a whole. It must be a crisis in which the human race must make a decision, just as the Jewish people had to make a decision. Which way will we go, the way of godlessness or the way of Christ? The Jews ratified the Adamic choice when they crucified Jesus. The whole human race will make the same choice when it rejects Christianity. But Jesus secured the reversal of the crucifixion when he rose from the dead, and we are promised that Jesus will secure the reversal again when he sends fire from heaven to consume the opposition (pp. 212, 213).

With the exception of this coming "crisis" and the forecast

of an eventual saving of all mankind and earthly civilization in history, nothing in the book of Revelation turns out to be future. There is nothing in the book of Revelation, apparently, about the bodily coming of Jesus Christ, a literal final judgment, or an eternal state of righteous and wicked. All is explained as symbolic description of developments in time and history. This is the meaning of "down to earth" in the book's title. Walhout's explanation of the vision of the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 is characteristic.

God is always the judge. He is not postponing his judgment until some undetermined date in the future, the end of the world, as people like to think of it. No indeed! He is constantly functioning as judge of what goes on in the world.... With John we should see that all of human history is constantly being paraded before the throne of God, and that God is helping us to analyze and comprehend our own human history.... "The lake of fire," you will recall, symbolizes the elimination of evil as a force within human life and culture. The only people

thrown into this lake of fire are those who represent the function of sin within human life. Before God can fully establish his kingdom on earth, that is, before the human race can become perfect, everything evil and contaminating has to be eliminated.... The only way for the world to achieve the kind of society we all want is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus. Everything else will ultimately be judged worthless. That is what we must see in the broad dimension of God's purpose and the way of God's judgment (pp. 214-217).

Even the war of Revelation 12:7ff., which Scripture expressly describes as "war in heaven," Walhout explains as social struggle on earth (p. 129).

The central message that the book reads into Revelation is the coming perfection of the human race and its civilization in time. This will be the kingdom of Christ, if not the coming of Christ itself. The calling of the church is that she work at accomplishing this perfection.

The book very definitely suggests that one important aspect of this perfection will be the salvation of all humans without exception. At least, there is

not, and never will be, a real hell for real people. Every statement in the book of Revelation concerning God's wrathful judgment upon, and damnation of, the ungodly is explained as promising only the eventual defeat and abolition of evil. There is no hell, for Jesus loves everybody, and the love of Jesus rules out hell.

Walhout's interpretation of Revelation 14:10, 11, God's judgment upon those who worship the beast, deserves quotation at some length. The text is: "the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." This is Walhout's explanation:

Taken literally, it offers a picture of Jesus and the angels watching as people burned with everlasting fire but without burning up or dying. It is a picture of total, complete,

and endless misery—with Jesus gloating in heaven. Such an understanding violates the picture we get from the Gospels where love is the decisive characteristic of Jesus. A loving Jesus would not gloat through endless eternity over the torment of sinners in burning sulfur. God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (Ezek. 18:32); neither does Jesus. John wants us to understand by this image exactly what he says in the context: no rest day or night for those who live unnaturally. There is no peace, no contentment, no joy, no love, and no happiness. Don't think of this as in the future, beyond the grave, or beyond the end of history. It is now, in the present. Think existentially, of what life for an unbeliever is like. Everyone has experienced how miserable life can be, how stressful and pressurized daily existence can be. Christians know that in spite of this they can find contentment, forgiveness, acceptance, and new perspectives on life. They can live with a genuine personal peace of heart and soul.... In this third gospel angel's message,

do not see Jesus gloating over the eternal anguish of people in eternal fire, but see him now as he watches from heaven as people continue to resist the gospel, suffering under the delusions they accept from the dragon and the beasts. Jesus is not gloating; he is anguishing over their tenacity in sin. He wants them to get out of Babylon, to recognize that Babylon's day is past, and to come stand on Mount Zion with him. He wants them to come out of that doomed city where life is so miserable, and come with him where life is good and pleasant and peaceful (pp. 149, 150).

Not even the devil will suffer eternal punishment. The reason is that the devil is not a real spiritual person. The devil merely "represents the possibility of wrong decision making on our part" (p. 202).

This work is no commentary on Revelation. Nor is it biblical eschatology. But it is a startling revelation of hermeneutical and theological developments in Reformed churches. Edwin Walhout is a Christian Reformed theologian. ■

Calvin: A Biography, by Bernard Cottret. Tr. M. Wallace McDonald. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. xv + 376. \$28 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

From a French historian who is neither a theologian nor a Calvinist, we have a new biography of John Calvin that is outstanding. It gives insight into the man John Calvin without resorting to miserable psychologizing. "Thin as a lath," writes Cottret of Calvin, contrasting him with his fat foe, Perrin, "(he) said only what he knew, and detested bluster." It traces Calvin's life and development. It takes up all of Calvin's controversies with the heretics, as well as all of the important church-struggles in Geneva. The issues in these controversies and struggles are described fairly. The gifted writer does justice to the pressures and tensions for Calvin in these conflicts. And the third main section of the book, headed "Beliefs," consists of brilliant analysis of Calvin the polemicist, Calvin the preacher, Calvin's *Institutes*, and Calvin the French writer.

The book is the product of fresh study of the sources. The

result is new light on aspects of Calvin's life and work. The French Reformed synod that met in Paris in 1559 to draw up a confession of faith replaced Calvin's proposed first article on "The Word of God" with five articles of their own. Calvin's proposed article concluded with the words, "it is God who speaks." Rightly, Cottret observes, "this is undoubtedly the most perfect summary of Calvin's theology: God speaks, God chooses, God summons." Cottret adds: "But this message, by its audacity, escaped his contemporaries."

To the Reformed in France who were about to hold a conference with the Roman Catholics, Calvin sent advice instructing them that the main issues were, first, the regulative principle of worship and, second, justification by faith alone.

As regards the bitter struggles in Geneva, when Berthelier was rebuked by the authorities for disrupting Calvin's sermons by coughing violently, he responded, "Calvin doesn't want us to cough? We'll fart and belch." An opponent of Calvin's teaching on predestination, carrying on the opposition of Jerome Bolsec, blasphemed predestination with a

shockingly foul adjective. Cottret's account of Calvin's encounter with the infamous Servetus is fascinating. The account of the Reformer's encounter with Idelette de Bure—Calvin's wife—is ironic: “conjugal bliss.”

Although Cottret himself is plainly no Calvinist, his analysis of Calvin's doctrine is correct, as the analysis by many who claim to be Calvinists is not. Cottret understands, though he does not agree, that “the Calvinist doctrine, in its implacable character (*sic*), promises salvation without conditions; it does not depend on any works, on any will, on any contrition, on any repentance.” There is hardly a Calvinist theologian in the world today who shares this understanding of Calvinist doctrine.

Cottret also recognizes, though he doubts Calvin's wisdom for doing so, that Calvin himself “gave an increasing emphasis to predestination in his work,” so that “it is right to ask whether Calvinism is not simply predestination.” Today, the theologians hate or fear predestination with all the intensity of Calvin's anti-predestinarian enemies, all the while advertising themselves as Cal-

vinists. Probably, they suppose that they are.

Besides all this, the style of the author, which the translator, M. Wallace McDonald, has managed to keep, is lively and vivid. An example, which will add to our knowledge of Calvin the man:

He hardly had a body. Sleeping little, eating similarly, prey to violent headaches, Calvin did not hesitate to dictate certain of his works while lying in bed at the end of a life of austere labor. The clarity of his style and the transparency of his thought found their origin in this asceticism, crowned by a proverbial chastity. Fasting was neither mortification nor weakness for Calvin; instead, it was the result of a disgust for food, or rather a way of protecting his sickly body. He was a meditator certainly, but nevertheless not a contemplative; a dreamer, and also an often inflexible man of action, sometimes even frantically so, from fear of yielding to weakness, to the secret “softness” and “mildness” that his adversaries hardly suspected. His slender, almost elegant body housed a will of iron.... ■

Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism, by Leigh Eric Schmidt. Second edition with a new preface. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. xxix + 278. \$27 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

“Holy fairs” was the fitting name for a peculiar, if powerful, institution in Presbyterian Scotland not long after the Reformation: the communion season. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of people from all over a certain large area of Scotland would gather at set times for an elaborately ritualized celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Usually, the celebration lasted four days. It was held out-of-doors. This communion season was promoted among the Presbyterians as the high point of the spiritual life of the people. Numbers of preachers preached many experiential and emotional sermons. The gatherings aimed at personal conversions and at revival of the churches. To a student of the history of the Presbyterian church in Scotland, the Cambuslang revival of 1742 represents an exceptional instance of such communion season revivals.

The book *Holy Fairs* is a

thorough study of this strange, long-lasting practice. The author offers well-grounded criticisms. The communion season was expected to provide what ought to be found in the regular worship of God within doors every Sabbath. It elevated the sacrament above the preaching of the gospel. The preaching at these events encouraged mystical experiences and indecent, disorderly bodily behavior on the part of the audience. The exaltation of the Lord’s Supper at these services was virtually a Presbyterian counterpart to the Roman Catholic ritual of its Eucharist. And these large gatherings in the open air for days on end often took on a holiday atmosphere that resulted in drunkenness and sexual immorality. They were “holy fairs.”

The special importance of the book lies in its demonstration that the Scottish holy fairs contributed to American revivalism. The immigrant Scots brought their communion seasons to America, where they became camp meetings and revivals. The famed Cane Ridge revival (in Bourbon County, Kentucky in 1801) had its origin in the Presbyterian communion season. Even the frenzied physical manifestations of the

Spirit at the American revivals owed a great deal to the communion seasons in Scotland. The weepings, groanings, visions, falling to the ground, and jerking had their source, if not in most cases their exact equivalents, in the holy fairs in Scotland. They are all now continued, and intensified, in the charismatic movement.

Scottish Presbyterianism

Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology, ed. David W. Baker. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001. 383 pp. \$29.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The worth of this volume on eschatology is not at all the astigmatic look into the future, but the penetrating glimpse it provides into the present condition of “evangelicalism.” Evangelicalism is shot. The best of the evangelicals are the bizarre premillennial dispensationalists. The worst are the “open theists.” Much of the book is taken up with Clark Pinnock’s defense of a god who does not even know the future, much less ordain it and direct all toward it. What feeble oppo-

has long suffered from the serious weakness of looking to revivals for the conversion of sinners, the heightened experience of salvation, and a richer season of grace for the church. This book is further confirmation of this reviewer’s growing conviction that nothing good has ever come from revivals, and nothing ever will. ■

sition there is to this idolatry is pathetic. The reason is that open theism is the logical, natural, inevitable development of the theology of Arminianism: a god dependent on the will of depraved man. And evangelicalism is committed, heart and soul, to Arminian free-willism. The few who still hold out for something of the sovereignty of the God of Christianity refuse to condemn Arminianism as a false gospel.

Open theism is not even original. Its favorite figure for the relation between God and humans is that of a master playing chess with mere novices. The master chess player — open theism’s god — neither knows nor governs the moves of the novices, but because of his su-

perior ability he is able in the end to counter all their moves, checkmate their king, and win the game. This was the philosopher William James' defense of free will against the sovereignty of God long ago. In his essay "The Dilemma of Determinism," James wrote (about 1900):

The belief in free will is not in the least incompatible with the belief in Providence, provided you do not restrict the Providence to fulminating (*sic!*) nothing but *fatal* decrees. If you allow him to provide possibilities as well as actualities to the universe, and to carry on his own thinking in those two categories just as we do ours, chances may be there, uncontrolled even by him, and the course of the universe be really ambiguous; and yet the end of all things may be just what he intended it to be from all eternity. An analogy will make the meaning of this clear. Suppose two men before a chessboard — the one a novice, the other an expert player of the game. The expert intends to beat. But he cannot foresee exactly what any one actual move of his adversary may be. He knows, however, all the *possible* moves of the

latter; and he knows in advance how to meet each of them by a move of his own which leads in the direction of victory. And the victory infallibly arrives, after no matter how devious a course, in the one predestined form of check-mate to the novice's king. Let now the novice stand for us finite free agents, and the expert for the infinite mind in which the universe lies. Suppose the latter to be thinking out his universe before he actually creates it. Suppose him to say, I will lead things to a certain end, but I will not *now* decide on all the steps thereto. At various points, ambiguous possibilities shall be left open, *either* of which, at a given instant, may become actual. But whichever branch of these bifurcations become real, I know what I shall do at the *next* bifurcation to keep things from drifting away from the final result I intend. The creator's plan of the universe would thus be left blank as to many of its actual details, but all possibilities would be marked down.... So the creator himself would not need to know *all* the details of actuality until they came; and at any time his own view of the world would be a view partly of facts and partly of

possibilities, exactly as ours is now. Of one thing, however, he might be certain; and that is that his world was safe, and that no matter how much it might zig-zag he could surely bring it home at last.

James' zigzagging deity is one of the more interesting gods of the philosophers. If he existed, I would challenge him to a game of chess. Novices sometimes accidentally beat masters. Master chess players sometimes make a stupid move. This now is the god of open theism. Accordingly, open theism's doctrine of the last things is that everything is up for grabs. This is some "gospel"! This is some "hope"! The god of James and Pinnock, however, is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At least, the open theists in *Looking into the Future* should have credited William James for their theology.

In addition to his bold espousal of an ignorant, hapless Christian God, evangelical Pinnock proclaims the salvation of pagans by their own good

works of service to their heathen deities. This teaching is advertised as the development of Christian doctrine "toward a more inclusive eschatology."

The evangelical falling away from the gospel of God carries with it the publishing houses as well. The book is published by Baker, once known the world over for producing solid Reformed works. Rather than publish this vain volume on eschatology, Baker should have scoured the Reformed community for men of God who would write the truth about the last things—Reformed amillennialism—and defend it. Admittedly, Baker would have had to have "run ... to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem" to find a few.

There is one exception. Presbyterian Bruce Waltke's opening article on "The Kingdom of God in Biblical Theology" is sound, scholarly, and helpful. His detailed explanation of the typology of Israel's relation to the land of Canaan is particularly good. ■

Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in

America, ed. D. G. Hart and Mark A. Noll. Downers Grove,

IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999. Pp. vii + 286. \$16.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The editors of this new dictionary are right when they claim that it “fills a significant gap in historical and theological reference works.” This dictionary concentrates on the many aspects of the development of the Reformed faith in America. It pays special attention to prominent persons and to churches. The coverage is thorough. The explanations are succinct and usually accurate.

There are also longer essays on themes, doctrines, and movements that are of importance to the Reformed tradition. The editors have an informative introduction, “The Presbyterians: A People, a History & an Identity.” There are articles on covenant theology, predestination, Puritanism, and other subjects. The article on revivalism is rightly critical of the entire movement. In their introductory article, the editors also criticize revivalism. The revivalism of Whitefield and Edwards had a harmful effect upon virtually every aspect of the Reformed faith.

James Bratt writes the ar-

ticle on Herman Hoeksema. Herman Hanko has an article on the Protestant Reformed Churches. Hoeksema comes up for mention also in the article on the Canadian Reformed Churches and in the article on the Christian Reformed Church.

The treatment of Reformed worship is bland. There is no mention of the regulative principle as a fundamental principle of Reformed worship from Calvin on. Why the editors picked Baptist Norman Geisler to write the important article on the Reformed doctrine of predestination is a mystery. Geisler thinks that the predestination of Dordt is “extreme Calvinism.” The author of the article on “Arminianism” is seriously confused about the infralapsarian view of predestination. He describes it as a view “which held that God’s decrees were not eternal but were made after and in light of the Fall.” The same author is correct, however, in his analysis of the “distinguishing feature” of Arminianism: “a conditional view of grace.”

The dictionary will be useful for all who desire information about many aspects of Presbyterian and Reformed Christianity in America. ■

The Eschatology of the Old Testament, by Geerhardus Vos. Ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2001. Pp. ix + 176. \$11.99 (paper). [Reviewed David J. Engelsma.]

Geerhardus Vos is not the easiest going under normal publishing conditions. The difficulty of reading him is aggravated in *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* inasmuch as the book is a compilation of his writings on the subject from various of his course lectures and unfinished manuscripts. Nevertheless, this slim volume will handsomely repay the effort of the Reformed minister to work through it.

Vos traces the development of the doctrine of the last things in the Old Testament. In keeping with the method of biblical theology for which the Princeton Seminary professor is known, Vos considers the eschatology of several distinct periods and junctures in the history of revelation in the Old Testament, including the “pre-redemptive,” the flood, Sinai, and the “Mosaic Theocracy.”

He also explains outstanding eschatological prophecies and promises, including Gen-

esis 3:15, the Shiloh prophecy in Genesis 49, the “oracles” of Balaam, and the Davidic promise of II Samuel 7.

Of great importance in view of the literalist interpretation of Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messianic kingdom both by fundamentalist premillennialism and by postmillennialism now making inroads into Reformed churches is the chapter on “The Mosaic Theocracy.” Vos affirms the characteristic Reformed (and Christian!) understanding of the earthly form of Old Testament prophecy of the coming theocratic, Messianic kingdom. In the earthly form that was necessary for Israel at that time, the prophets foretold a spiritual reality. “In the New Testament it is spiritualized” (p. 118). As for the “hermeneutical principle” that decides the spiritual fulfillment and explains the fulfillment in detail, this hermeneutical principle is simply “the New Testament teaching in regard to that fulfillment” (p. 119).

In fragments from Vos’ writings that make up an appendix to the book, Vos gives helpful exegesis of eschatology in the prophets, especially the visions of Zechariah.

Throughout, the believing

Old Testament scholar interacts judiciously with leading liberal, higher-critical scholars, particularly Wellhausen and Gunkel.

Vos is to be faulted for his hesitancy to find Messianic prophecy where scholarship might have some doubt about it. He doubts that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 is Jesus Christ. He rejects Shiloh in Genesis 49 as a proper name for the future 'Rest Giver.' According to Vos, there is no connection between Balaam's star and the star that heralded the birth of Jesus. Vos leaves undecided whether Psalm 72 is Messianic.

Vos is capable of expressing grand truth in a fetching manner. He expresses the contrasting effect of eschatology upon the life of the ungodly world and upon the life of the Christian this way.

The world throws itself headlong into all excesses of wickedness because it is obsessed by a desperate sense of the speedy approach and the inevitableness of its doom. The world makes all the use possible that this night of dissoluteness affords it; for it reasons, "Let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die." The world lives, as it were, in kind of cosmical night-club, whereas the Christian should pursue the last things to be attended to before the break of morning... (p. 40).

Of the eschatology in the Psalter, Vos says, "The worshipping congregation of Israel sing 'a new song' because their hearts are full of the 'new things' that are on the wing with which the air is already vibrant" (p. 131). ■

Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism by David J. Engelsma. Published by The Reformed Witness, Redlands, CA, 2001. 158 pp. \$9 (paper). [Reviewed by Russell Dykstra.]

dearth of material published in defense of the Reformed position of amillennialism over against the many errors in eschatology that abound today. This book goes far toward filling the gap. It was originally written as a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer*. The Stan-

There has long been a

dard Bearer, with Editor David J. Engelsma taking the lead, has been virtually alone in the battle for a Reformed eschatology. The book will be welcomed by all those who love the Reformed faith and seek support and guidance in eschatology.

The term millennium or millennialism, of course, comes from the thousand-year period described in the vision of Revelation 20. Engelsma sets forth the amillennial view that he defends as biblical and Reformed.

The present age, from Christ's ascension until shortly before His second coming, when Satan shall be loosed from his prison, is the thousand year period of Revelation 20. The Messianic kingdom in history is not a future carnal kingdom, whether of Jews reigning from Jerusalem or of saints exercising political power.... It is, rather, Christ's spiritual reign by His gospel and Spirit in the hearts and lives of the believing elect. The victorious kingdom of Christ is, as it ever has been, the true, faithful church in the midst of a hostile world (pp. 22-23).

Engelsma goes where the battle is hottest, namely, opposing the postmillennial and especially the postmillennial Chris-

tian Reconstruction movement. He exposes their position as contra the Reformed creeds, which creeds reject an earthly kingdom and teach the true, spiritual kingdom (pp. 8, 9, 17, et al.). The sad consequences are enumerated. Postmillennialism can lead to passivity where there should be zeal (sometimes no interest in establishing Christian schools) (p. 11); a desire to Christianize the world (11); unholy alliances (pp. 11, 12); judaizing (restoring Old Testament civil laws) (p. 12), and, what is to me the most damning element – the loss of the believer's hope. For, since the postmillennial Reconstructionist rejects the near coming of Christ, "that Christ will not come for hundreds of thousands of years saddens [the] postmillennialist not at all. Indeed, this gladdens his heart. For Christ's coming is not his hope; the carnal kingdom is" (p. 11).

Engelsma is careful and precise, as he must be, for the battle soon comes to him in the form of strongly worded letters and challenges. He writes, "'Stupid' is your word and suggestion, absolutely not mine.... I did not demean the postmillennialist. I condemned postmillennialism. There is a dif-

ference” (pp. 16, 17). And again, “I never used [in the particular article attacked, RJD] the word ‘heresy’ to describe the post-millennialists. Not once. That was deliberate. The reason was my very high regard for some of the theologians mentioned...” (p. 28).

At the same time, no reader will charge the author with being timid. He continues by affirming that the postmillennialism taught by a well-known writer as well as by Christian Reconstruction is heresy, that is, “not only a serious departure from the teaching of Scripture, but also a grievous corruption of the gospel” (p. 28).

Make no mistake about this book – it is not sensationalist. While it is bold and challenging, it is that for the sake of the truth. It is pointed and cuts to the heart of the error. It demonstrates that Christian Reconstructionism is preterist, that is, that it believes that Jesus’ second coming, and virtually all the activities that the Scripture connects with that coming – all happened in A.D. 70. There is not another coming of Christ. Indeed, the believer’s hope is nullified by the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionist. This extraordinarily serious

charge is carefully proved. This book is incisive.

And it is far more. It is pastoral. The very first chapter is not a dogmatics-like introduction to eschatology; it is about the believer’s *hope!*

It is historically researched and accurate. The (amillennial) positions of the church fathers such as Augustine and John Calvin are accurately set forth over against the false presentation of a Christian Reconstructionist.

The book is most instructional. Chapter eight carefully explains Revelation 20 over against the millennial errors. Chapter nine answers the question “What must the believer expect?” by rejecting the notion that the world will improve and the church dominate. Rather, it demonstrates that the Reformed creeds’ answer (and thus the Bible’s) is, “Expect apostasy and persecution.”

This work is exegetical. Four chapters expound Jesus’ teachings on the last things found in Matthew 24. It deals with the exegetical heart of the postmillennial error – the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious kingdom of the Messiah, which they interpret to refer to a literal, earthly kingdom.

Engelsma chooses a representative text (Is. 65:17-25) used by the postmillennialist and exegeses the text, exposing the false interpretations, and explaining the true and spiritual meaning.

One of the most endearing aspects of the book is that it demonstrates throughout that Reformed amillennialism is not, as it is charged, pessimistic, defeatist, encouraging lazy, isolated believers. Quite the opposite. It is the eschatology of victory. Christ is victorious – accomplishing every facet of God’s eternal counsel. Christ is victorious not only in that He will have the victory one day when He returns. He rules now, seated at God’s right hand, and He rules in His church on earth. The gospel goes forth, gather-

ing His people. The church is victorious, and nothing can destroy her. The same is true of each and every member of Christ’s church also. The Reformed amillennialist does not reject victory. He rejects the impossible and non-biblical victory that establishes an earthly kingdom. Christ rules victoriously.

The Evangelism Committee of the Redlands Protestant Reformed Church is to be commended for making this book available. Those who enjoyed the articles will appreciate reading the book even more. It is well worth having this defense in one small book. Copies can be purchased from that committee. (1307 E. Brockton Ave., Redlands, CA 92374). Highly recommended. ■

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