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Robert D. Decker, Editor
Russell J. Dykstra, Book Review Editor
David J. Engelsma
Barrett L. Gritters



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Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary
4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418
USA

Editor's Notes

In his lengthy article, "The Messianic Kingdom and Civil Government," David J. Engelsma contends (and rightly so, in my opinion) that the Scriptures teach that the only duty of the state and civil magistrates is "... the maintenance of outward order and external peace in the nation." The Messianic kingdom is manifest in the church (typically in the Old Testament kingdom of Israel) and in reality in the New Testament under her only King, merciful High Priest, and chief Prophet, Jesus Christ. The civil authorities have no right to support or defend the church and kingdom of Christ with their "steel sword."

Steven Key demonstrates convincingly that one cannot find support for the error of common grace in the Canons. Indeed Rev. Key rightly argues that holding to the error of common grace amounts to an outright rejection of the biblical teachings of the Canons of Dordrecht 1618-1619.

In addition there are several very helpful and important book reviews from which lay readers and clergy can benefit.

RDD

Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (9)

Robert D. Decker

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

Chapter Two Verse 14

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness and cleanse to himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.

The antecedent of "Who" is Jesus Christ our great God and Savior (v. 8). Here in verse nine the inspired apostle teaches us what Jesus Christ our great God and Savior did for us and why He did that.

What Jesus Christ did for us is, He “gave himself for us.” This, in one word, refers to the cross of Christ. There Jesus Christ our great God and Savior in perfect obedience of love to His Father gave Himself. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the wrath of God and suffered the agonies of eternal hell for us, for all whom the Father gave Him in His decree of eternal election of grace.

At this point human language fails. It fails to describe the horror, the terror, the profound agony of the suffering Jesus endured. Aside now from the blatant, blasphemous transgression of the second commandment of God’s law, no motion picture (no matter how graphic it may be) can convey the depths of the agonies of hell that Jesus endured in the darkness of the cross. We will never comprehend that suffering! Jesus our great God and Savior assumed our flesh and blood and while remaining fully divine became fully human (except without sin) and gave Himself to the death of the cross.

Jesus did that “for us.”¹ The preposition “for” with the genitive has at least six shades of meaning, which may be reduced to two basic senses or meanings. One is “in the place of,” and the other is “for the advantage or benefit of, for the sake of.” We are not forced to choose one of these meanings to the exclusion of the other. They both apply. Jesus Christ our great God and Savior gave Himself “in the place of us.” This is why He had to take on Himself the flesh and blood of the children, “... that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:1-18). Jesus died as our substitute, in our place.

Precisely because Jesus died in our place He died for our benefit or advantage. Jesus our great God and Savior merited for us all of the blessings of salvation. This is what the rest of the text is all about! The purpose of His giving Himself for us is that He might redeem or ransom² us from all iniquity or lawlessness. We were held in the slavery of lawlessness.³ We were guilty, deprived

1. *Huper heemoon.*

2. *lutroosetai*, aorist middle subjunctive of *lutrooo*. The verb means to liberate or redeem by the payment of a ransom.

3. *anomia.*

sinner, "...so corrupt that we were incapable of any good and inclined to all evil..." to borrow the language of the Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 2, 3. Jesus Christ our great God and Savior paid the price, He gave His own life, in order to free us. Because of His merits, God imputed His righteousness to us so that we are not guilty. This is the first aspect of the purpose of Jesus giving Himself for us.

The second aspect of that purpose is "...that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The verb "purify"⁴ means to cleanse, to free from the filth and defilement of sin, to purify. Christ's purpose in giving Himself for us is both to justify us and to cleanse or sanctify us. We are cleansed by His blood.

And, therefore, we are His own "peculiar people."⁵ "Peculiar" means that which is one's own possession. That was God's purpose in Christ's giving Himself to the death of the cross. Christ gave Himself in order to purify us to Himself as a people for His own possession. This implies that God from all eternity ordained Christ to be our head. God gave us, all of His elect, to Christ. This is God's gracious counsel of election in Christ. And Christ gave Himself to the cross to redeem (justify) us and to cleanse us from all the filth of our sin.

Thus we are Christ's own possession, and Christ is God's only begotten Son! As God's possession we are a people zealous of good works. That is the fruit of our justification and sanctification. We eagerly desire to live in good works. We burn with zeal to live our lives out of faith, in thankful obedience to God's will revealed in Scripture and summed in His law. And we are zealous of good works in order to manifest the glory of Jesus Christ our great God and Savior!

Did Jesus give Himself in your place and on your behalf? Did Jesus redeem you from all lawlessness? Did He and does He cleanse you from the filth of your sins? Did Jesus purify you to

4. *Katharisee*, aorist active subjunctive of *katharizoo*.

5. *Laon periousion*.

Himself as His own precious possession? If so, the fruit will surely be evident in your lives. You will be burning with zeal to do good works. What is more, you will eagerly desire to preach that precious, wonderful gospel of the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus. Eagerly you will preach and teach, and with zeal you will learn and prepare to preach the Word here in the seminary.

Verse 15

These matters speak: both exhort and rebuke (reprove, severely admonish) with all authority (with every possible form of authority), let no one despise you.

With this verse the apostle concludes the thought of chapter two. He really repeats, but with added emphasis, the exhortation given to Titus in the first verse of this chapter, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." What follows in verses two through ten are the various exhortations to the different classes of members in the church: aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and servants. To all of these saints Titus must be a good example. These are the things he must speak.

The reason he must do this is that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all classes of men. That grace of God teaches us that we should live soberly and godly in the way of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts in this present world. And we live godly, looking for the blessed hope even the glorious appearing of the great God our Savior, even Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us for the purpose of redeeming and purifying us.

These things Titus must speak. The verb "to speak" is a more general term for speaking.⁶ Usually in the New Testament it refers to everyday conversation. In only a very few instances does the verb refer to the official preaching of the Word. No doubt the Holy Spirit means that Titus must in all his contacts with the saints, official and otherwise, public and private, speak these things. But Titus must do this primarily and especially in his official preaching and teaching.

6. The verb is *laleo*.

That this is the meaning is evident from the general content of the entire Epistle. Paul left Titus in Crete to set in order the things lacking, or wanting, and to ordain elders (1:5). That Paul lays the stress on preaching is also evident from the immediate context of chapter 2 and from verse 15 itself. The two imperatives that follow “to speak” define what kind of speaking this must be. Titus must exhort the people of God. That verb “exhort” means to address the people with encouraging instruction.⁷ In his preaching, Titus must instruct God’s people, teach them the sound doctrine of the Word as that doctrine determines how they ought to live. Further, Titus must rebuke them. The verb “rebuke” means to reprove, to admonish severely.⁸ This too must characterize the preaching of Titus. Preaching must instruct, comfort, encourage the people from the Word of God. But, when necessary, preaching must also sharply admonish them. When God’s saints wander into sinful living or manifest certain weaknesses, when they are faced with severe temptations, they must be reproved sharply. Neither Titus nor any other preacher must hesitate or be loathe to do this.

And Titus and all preachers must do this with all authority.⁹ This authority must be viewed in two senses. First, there is the lawful call of Christ through His church to the minister, with all that this implies. By this lawful call of Christ the minister is authorized, given the right, to preach the Word. Second, the authority lies in the Word of God itself. God’s Word is inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, is the infallible and sole authority for the faith and life of God’s people.

This means that when the minister, who is authorized by Christ to preach, expounds, explains the meaning of the Word of God, adding nothing of his own to the Word and taking nothing from the Word, the saints hear the very voice of God and His Christ (Eph. 4:20-21). The minister speaks in the way of exhorting and sharply admonishing, with the authority of God and His Christ.

When the minister does this, no one will be able to despise him or hold him in contempt. One finds this same thought (though

7. The verb is *parakaleoo*.

8. The verb is *periphroneoo*.

9. *Epitagee*.

a different word is used) in I Timothy 4:12, where Timothy is instructed to let no man despise his youth. The verb used in Titus really means, "let no one out think you and thus despise you."¹⁰ Titus and all of us who are called to the sacred task of preaching the Word must not ever let that happen. It cannot happen when the preacher carefully and faithfully expounds the text of the Word of God.

No one, after all, can out think God!

This then is our task as preachers and as those who aspire to that sacred office! We must speak these things by both exhorting and sharply admonishing with all the authority of Christ's call and Word. In this way the church will be built and gathered on the solid foundation of the truth of Holy Scripture. No one will despise you. And God's name will be glorified.

It is our hope to complete the whole of chapter three in our next issue of this *Journal*. ●

10. *Periphroneseo*.

The Messianic Kingdom and Civil Government

by David J. Engelsma

Introduction

The relation between the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the civil state is a vexed, controversial subject. Basically, the issue is this: Are the state and its officers mandated by God to promote the true church and the gospel by the physical, steel sword, or is it the duty of the state simply to keep outward order in the nation?

Many Presbyterians have taken and still do take the position that the state is called to promote the true church by establishing and supporting it as the official church of the realm. This position is known as the "Establishment Principle." These Presbyterians vehemently condemn the position that denies that the state has any duty to establish a church, promote the gospel with physical force, or punish heretics. For some obscure reason these Presbyterians call this position "voluntaryism." According to William Cunningham, voluntaryism, or the voluntary principle, which he rejected, holds "entire separation" of state and church. "Nations, as such, and civil rulers in the official capacity, not only are not bound, but are not at liberty, to interfere in any religious matters, or to seek to promote the welfare of the church of Christ, as such." The alternative, which Cunningham espoused, is "the doctrine of national establishment of religion."¹

In recent years, the issue has come to the attention of Reformed Christians in North America through the movement known as Christian Reconstruction. As an aspect of its postmillennial eschatology, Christian Reconstruction teaches that in the future a

1. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, vol. 1 (London: Banner of Truth, repr. 1969), p. 391.

majority of people will become Christians. Civil government then will be in the hands of Christians, indeed, Presbyterian Christians. It will be the duty of civil government to establish the Presbyterian church as the one church of the realm, to throw the whole weight of the government behind the true church, to decree the political laws of the Old Testament (“theonomy”), and to punish idolaters, vocal heretics, and other transgressors of the Old Testament statutes with physical punishments, including death.

In this article, I contend that Scripture teaches the duty of the state and its magistrates to be only the maintenance of outward order and external peace in the nation. I deny that God calls civil government to promote the gospel with its steel sword. Whether and in how far the position set forth in this article may agree with traditional voluntarism is of no concern to me. I am not defending voluntarism. I intend to demonstrate the calling of civil government from Scripture. In light of the calling of civil government, I will indicate the right relation between the kingdom of Jesus Christ and civil government.²

It must frankly be acknowledged at the outset that the position I hold was not that of most of the Reformers. Calvin strongly affirmed that the state is called to recognize, support, and promote the true church and the gospel. He insisted that the office of the magistrate “extends to both Tables of the Law.” He thought that theory of the duty of civil government “folly” that would

neglect the concern for God and would give attention only to rendering justice among men. As if God appointed rulers in his name to decide earthly controversies but overlooked what was of far greater importance—that he himself should be purely worshipped according to the prescription of his law.³

2. On the idea and history of “Voluntarism,” see James Bannerman, “Note on the History of Voluntarism,” in *The Church of Christ*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), pp. 354-360. The analysis is that of a sworn foe of voluntarism.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960): 4.20.9. It is significant that the only biblical proof adduced by Calvin for his position is from the Old Testament, where the reference is to the godly ruler in Israel.

In his commentary on John 18:36, Jesus' word to Pilate that His servants do not fight, John Calvin wrote: "They who draw this conclusion, that the doctrine of the Gospel and the pure worship of God ought not to be defended by arms, are unskillful and ignorant reasoners."⁴

Calvin's doctrine of the duty of the magistrate was that of most of the Reformers. The important exception was Martin Luther.

The nearly unanimous opinion of the Reformers regarding the calling of the state found a place in the Reformed confessions. Chapter 24 of the Scots Confession (1560), on "The Civil Magistrate," states:

The preservation and purification of religion is particularly the duty of kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates. They are not only appointed for civil government but also to maintain true religion and to suppress all idolatry and superstition.

Significantly, showing how completely this view of the calling of the civil rulers bases itself on the Old Testament, the Confession adds: "This may be seen in David, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others highly commended for their zeal in that cause."⁵

The Belgic Confession (1561) treats the duty of the magistrates in Article 36. The "office" of the magistrates, according to this article, is

not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted.⁶

4. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 210.

5. "The Scottish Confession of Faith, 1560," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 183.

6. "The Belgic Confession, AD 1561," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1983), p. 432.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) expands the duties of the state to include calling and overseeing the church's assemblies.

He [the civil magistrate] hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.⁷

This remarkable ascription of all kinds of duties to the magistrate in, over, and on behalf of the church makes plain that the magistrate the Westminster divines had in view was Old Testament David, or Hezekiah, not the Caesar of Romans 13. The form of political rule that governed their thinking was that found in Israel, the Old Testament type of the kingdom of God. Israel united nation and church and made king and elders cooperate on behalf of the people of God.

I note here that the Protestant Reformed Churches have relieved me of my obligation to submit to the teaching of the particular section of the Belgic Confession quoted above. Otherwise the "Formula of Subscription" requires me to regard this teaching, as all other teachings in the "Three Forms of Unity," as in harmony with the Word of God and forbids me militate against this doctrine.

A footnote qualifies Article 36 of the Belgic Confession at the point of the article's assertion that the state has the duty to "protect the sacred ministry, and thus ... remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship." The footnote reads, in part:

This phrase, touching the office of the magistracy in its relation to the Church, proceeds on the principle of the Established Church....

7. "The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647," 23.3, in Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 653.

History, however, does not support the principle of State domination over the Church, but rather the separation of Church and State. Moreover, it is contrary to the New Dispensation that authority be vested in the State to arbitrarily reform the Church, and to deny the Church the right of independently conducting its own affairs as a distinct territory alongside the State.... The office of the magistracy [is not to be conceived] in this sense, that it be in duty bound to also exercise political authority in the sphere of religion, by establishing and maintaining a State Church, advancing and supporting the same as the only true Church, and to oppose, to persecute and to destroy by means of the sword all the other churches as being false religions.⁸

A Spiritual Kingdom

Underlying much of the enthusiastic affirmation today of the state's duty to advance and defend the gospel is the notion that a Christian state aggressively promoting the gospel and the true church is the Messianic kingdom of God, or a very important form of the Messianic kingdom. Those who hold this notion suppose that a future Christian state, governing all the life of the nation according to the Word of God and supporting and promoting the true church with all the great power of the sword, will be the *real* and *full* form of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. They will acknowledge that the church today is a preliminary form of the kingdom. But the *real* Messianic kingdom will be the Christian nation in the future, which will depend, of course, on a Christian civil government. That coming Christian nation may be one particular nation, perhaps Scotland or the United States. It may be all the nations on earth, united in their common allegiance to King Jesus.

Some who stress the duty of the state to uphold the true religion do not go this far. They recognize that the church truly is the kingdom of Christ. Nevertheless, they regard a future Christian nation, whether Scotland or the nations of the world united in Jesus Christ, as the Messianic kingdom in a specially important

8. "The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order," in *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 36.

way. It will be the more glorious form of the kingdom in history. It will be a far more glorious form of the kingdom than is the church.

This notion, which inevitably sets any discussion of the relation of state and church on a wrong footing, is mistaken. Whatever the right relation of the state and the church may be, this relation has nothing to do with the Messianic kingdom's being political, or mainly political, or even importantly political. For one thing, the notion that the kingdom will take form as a Christian nation, or even as an entire world of Christian nations, is erroneous eschatology. The notion is the postmillennial dream: By the gospel, Christ will convert a majority of Scotland, or of the United States, or even of all the nations of the world. In this way, Christian nations and even a Christian world are a possibility.

Scripture teaches a radically different earthly future prior to the second coming of Christ. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [of Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thess. 2:3). The future of politics is not a carnal kingdom of Christ, but the world-kingdom of Antichrist, as is the teaching of the last book of the Bible and as is confirmed by developments in the world of nations today.⁹

Apart from its false doctrine of the last things, the notion that a future Christian state will be the glorious kingdom of Christ suffers from two fatal errors. First, this notion cannot rid itself of the Jewish conception of the Messianic kingdom as political: earthly power, indeed dominion, by the physical sword of civil government. What Jesus taught of His kingship and kingdom in John 6 and John 18 holds to the world's end: His kingship and kingdom are spiritual. He is not a political king, and His kingdom is not a political kingdom. The kingdom of God in Christ never was, is not now, and never will be the Rome of Constantine; the

9. For the refutation of the postmillennialism especially of Christian Reconstruction and a defense of Reformed amillennialism, see David J. Engelsma, *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, California: The Reformed Witness, 2001).

Zurich of Zwingli; the Scotland of Knox and Melville; the England of Cromwell; the Netherlands of Kuyper; the United States of Paine, Jefferson, Franklin, and Washington; or the Christian world-kingdom dreamed of by Christian Reconstructionists in North America and by Presbyterians in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

If the United States should someday come to have a Christian civil government, the United States would not thereby be the kingdom of Christ, or an especially glorious form of the kingdom of Christ. The true church would still be the kingdom of Christ.

The Presbyterian theologian, Geerhardus Vos, was right when he observed that “the Jewish hope [of the kingdom of God] was intensely political and national, considerably tainted also by sensuality.” Vos added: “From all political bearings our Lord’s teaching on the kingdom was wholly dissociated.”¹⁰

Closely related to the error of politicizing the Messianic kingdom is the error of supposing that a future Christian state will be the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel as a nation. The truth is that the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel *as a nation* is the New Testament church of believers and their children. This is the explicit teaching of the New Testament in I Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

The apostle quotes from Exodus 19:4-6, where Jehovah describes Old Testament Israel as “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Applying this description to the New Testament church, the apostle identifies the New Testament elect, believing, despised, persecuted, culturally insignificant church as the true nation and kingdom of God on earth. The church has been the kingdom of Christ in the world since the day of Pentecost. The church is the kingdom of Christ today. The church will be the

10. Geerhardus Vos, *The Kingdom of God and the Church* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, repr. 1972), p. 42.

kingdom of Christ until the Lord returns. The church will be the kingdom of Christ everlastingly in the new world.¹¹

Does the New Testament church believe this? Does she take herself seriously as God's nation in the world? Does she take God seriously when He clearly identifies her as His nation?

The church in the catacombs in the first few centuries after Christ was the national kingdom of God. The Presbyterians worshiping God on the moors of Scotland in the seventeenth century were the national kingdom of God. They were the kingdom of God by virtue of being the true, believing, worshiping church, not by virtue of any signing of a national league and covenant. The small, culturally unimpressive, physically powerless true churches of Christ in all the world today are the national kingdom of God. Two or three gathering in Christ's name for worship are the national kingdom of God.

If the United States or Scotland should become "Christianized" and Christian, that earthly nation will not be the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel as a nation. It cannot be. The church is the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel as a nation.

Recognition of the New Testament church as the fulfillment of the nation of Israel also delivers Reformed theologians from the illusion that there can and should be national revival of Scotland, or the Netherlands, or the United States as fulfillment of the national reformations of Judah in the Old Testament. The fulfillment of the national reformations of Judah during the days of Judah's godly kings is not the reformation of Scotland or of the United States, but the reformation of God's church in the world. Neither Scotland nor the United States is the New Testament

11. A more extensive treatment of the related truths, that the Messianic kingdom is spiritual and that the kingdom is the church, appeared in a series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer* under the title, "The Kingdom of God." See David J. Engelsma, "The Kingdom of God," the *Standard Bearer* 77, no. 4 (November 15, 2000): 76-78; 77, no. 5 (December 1, 2000): 100-102; 77, no. 15 (May 1, 2001): 341-343; 77, no. 16 (May 15, 2001): 364-366; 77, no. 19 (August 2001): 436-438; 77, no. 20 (September 1, 2001): 460-462; 77, no. 21 (September 15, 2001): 484-486.

reality of which Judah was type. The church is. “You who are being built up a spiritual house by virtue of your union with the living stone by faith, you elect strangers scattered throughout all nations—you are the holy nation of God in the present age, the spiritual reality of which Judah in the Old Testament age was merely an earthly type” (I Pet. 1:1, 2; 2:1-10).

And if someone asks, “How is the church to behave as God’s nation in the world?” the answer is not that the church exert herself to get political dominion over the world of the ungodly, or that the church attempt to impose the civil laws of Old Testament Israel upon the wicked, or that the church work to “Christianize” society. The calling of the church as God’s nation is the right worship of God, a faithful witness to the world of the truth, especially by the sound preaching of the gospel, and obedience to God’s law in the holy lives of the members. The church is “a kingdom of *priests*, and an *holy nation*” (Ex. 19:6).

Recognizing that the Messianic kingdom is not political puts the discussion of the proper relation of state and church on a sound footing.

Promoting the Gospel with the Steel Sword

The position I reject holds that civil government, in addition to keeping order in society, must consciously and actively promote the true church and the gospel. According to those who hold this position, civil government must officially recognize, or establish, the true church in distinction from all other churches and religions. Civil government ought to support the true church financially from the funds of the state and, generally, throw the full weight of the state behind the true church and her work. Civil government is also called to condemn and prohibit idolatry, false worship, heresies, and heretics. It should punish those citizens who are guilty of these religious crimes, whether by fines, imprisonment, banishment, or death.

It is curious that contemporary defenders of the position that the state is called to promote the gospel with its steel sword shrink from asserting that the state must punish the heretical, idolatrous, and irreligious. At the critical point of the issue, they rather advocate religious toleration and liberty of conscience.

The Scottish theologian William Cunningham defended “the principle of national establishments of religion—namely, that it is competent to, and incumbent upon, nations, as such, and civil rulers in their official capacity, or in the exercise of their legitimate control over civil matters, to aim at the promotion of the honour of God, the welfare of true religion, and the prosperity of the church of Christ.” But he condemned as “unlawful,” that “civil rulers, in seeking to discharge their duty in regard to religion” should “inflict upon men civil pains and penalties—fines, imprisonment, or death—merely on account of differences of opinion upon religious subjects.” Cunningham rejected “all intolerance or persecution” on the part of magistrates carrying out their duty of promoting the true church and the gospel.

Cunningham took issue on this matter with the Reformers, particularly Beza. Beza had written a treatise vigorously defending the calling of civil government to punish heretics with death. He was particularly interested in vindicating Calvin’s act of handing Servetus over to the magistrates for burning as a heretic. Cunningham condemned Beza’s position as “intolerant and persecuting principles.” Contrary to the thinking of Beza, and indeed of most of the Reformers, Cunningham declared that “under the Christian dispensation, civil rulers are [not] warranted, ... much less bound, to inflict the punishment of death upon heretics and blasphemers.”¹²

The same inconsistency appears in James Bannerman. Against the advocates of the “Voluntary cause,” who hold that the state must “maintain neutrality between the profession and the denial of Christianity,” Bannerman boldly asserted the calling of the state publicly to acknowledge the true church and to promote its interests. The state should make the church’s confession of faith part of its constitution: “embody its confession of doctrine in the national statute book.” The state should endow the true church:

The state may furnish out of the national resources pecuniary aid for upholding Gospel ordinances, and providing such an endow-

12. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, vol. 2 (London: Banner of Truth, repr. 1969), pp. 557-569.

ment for Gospel ministers, as may secure that they be set apart wholly to their office of ministering in sacred things.

This amounts to the establishment of the true church as the religion of the state.

Such recognition, support, and promotion of the church are the state's calling from God: "There is nothing in all this but what is imperatively demanded from the state as a duty done to God on behalf of God's ordinance, the Church."¹³

One could only expect that Bannerman would insist on the state's duty to proscribe all false public worship and to punish all idolaters and heretics, if not all who practice religion apart from the true church. Surprisingly, Bannerman rejected the teaching that the state must punish idolatry, heresy, and false worship. Such a doctrine is a "persecuting principle." He criticized the seventeenth century Scottish theologians Rutherford, Dickson, and Fergusson for calling the state to punish idolaters and to eradicate heresy and false worship with their cold, steel sword.

Rutherford, Dickson, and Fergusson ... in some instances went too far, and laid down positions which were indefensible, and really involved persecution. Their errors on this subject mainly arose from their holding that the Jewish political laws were of permanent obligation, and consequently that capital punishment might still be lawfully inflicted for such offences as idolatry.¹⁴

13. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, repr. 1974), pp. 124-135.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 183. The Scottish theologian astutely noted that a basic error of those who call on the state to execute idolaters and heretics is their notion that the civil laws of Israel are still binding upon earthly nations. This notion is inexcusable in one who subscribes to the Belgic Confession or the Westminster Confession of Faith. Article 25 of the Belgic Confession states that the "ceremonies and figures of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians" (Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 413). The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that the "sundry judicial laws," which God gave to Israel as "a body politic," have "expired together with the state of that people, not obliging

Bannerman defended the doctrine “of the full toleration that is to be granted [by the state] in spiritual matters to societies as much as to individuals.”

No plea that the religious opinions of an individual are in themselves false and unfounded, will set aside his legal right to adopt and hold them, if his conscience so teaches him; and, in like manner, no plea that the proceedings or deliverance of a Church are in substance and upon the merits wrong, will warrant the interference of civil authority, if the Church is acting within its own province, and *in re ecclesiastica*.¹⁵

Avowal of the state’s duty to establish the true church, while disavowing religious persecution, as was the position of Cunningham and Bannerman and as is the position of many Presbyterians today,¹⁶ is an exceedingly strange and inconsistent position. The position that the state must establish the true church and promote the gospel with the state’s sword necessarily includes

any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require” (19.4, in Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 641).

15. Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, vol. 2, pp. 389, 390.

16. It is amusing, how Christian Reconstructionist Greg Bahnsen shrewdly backed away in public debate from the stand of theonomic Christian Reconstruction, that the coming Christian, or “Christianized,” state must and will execute idolaters and heretics. The question to him was, “Should we execute idolaters?” Bahnsen answered: “The *prima facie* understanding of the biblical texts would seem to support the justice of punishing idolatry, even today. But I have not done sufficient homework and reflection on this question” (*God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989, p. 268). In fact, it is not difficult to imagine North, De Mar, Gentry, and the other disciples of Rushdoony stoning to death, among all the others, the few remaining uncompromising Reformed amillennialists as blasphemers. For Rousas J. Rushdoony’s charge that Reformed amillennialism is “blasphemy,” see his article “Postmillennialism versus Impotent Religion” in the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 3, no. 2 (Winter, 1976-77): 126, 127.

the calling of the state to forbid the public worship of false religions and false churches, as well as to punish those who do not worship the true God rightly or who do not worship Him at all.

First, to establish and support one church is a kind of punishment of all the others, especially if tax-money goes to support the established church.

Second, nothing less than the prohibition of false worship and the punishment of false worshipers was what the Reformed confessions called for in their original editions. Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, on the magistrates, declared:

[God] invested the magistracy with the sword, for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. And their office is, not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted.¹⁷

The Westminster Confession of Faith, though denying to the state the power of the keys, affirms that the civil magistrate

hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed...(23.3).¹⁸

The language of the creeds, as always, is clear. The state must recognize, support, and promote the true church. This is its calling from God, whose servant the state is. This recognition, support, and promotion include prohibition of false worship and punishment of heretics and idolaters.

If anyone attempts to evade the clear, forceful language of the creeds, the teaching and practice of the Reformers, whose views on

17. Sohaff, *Creeds*, p. 432.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 653.

the duty of the state were incorporated into these sections of the creeds, put the matter beyond doubt. John Calvin firmly believed and openly taught the necessity of the punishment, the *capital* punishment, of heretics by the civil government. With his consistory, he handed the heretic Servetus over to the Geneva state for execution. In the face of widespread criticism already in his own day, Calvin defended his action in the affair of Servetus to the end of his life.¹⁹

Beza wrote a well-known tract in defense of Geneva's dispatch of Servetus in particular and of the state's duty to punish heretics in general, *De Haereticis a civili Magistratu puniendis* (*That Heretics are to be Punished by the Civil Magistrate*).

Bannerman acknowledged that leading Westminster divines held that the state should punish idolatry with death.²⁰

Third, the biblical passages appealed to in support of the state's promotion of the gospel do not merely support the idea of

19. On Calvin's active role in the execution of the heretic Michael Servetus, see Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (London and New York: William Collins Sons, 1963), pp. 93-98. Wendel observes that "Calvin was convinced, and all the reformers shared this conviction, that it was the duty of the Christian magistrate to put to death blasphemers who kill the soul, just as they punished murderers who kill the body" (p. 97). The Roman Catholic Church must not open its mouth in criticism of this one instance of Calvin's involvement in the execution of a genuine heretic by anyone's standards. Rome is guilty of the judicial, as well as strictly ecclesiastical, murder of hundreds of thousands of the precious saints of God. Think of the Inquisition in the countries where the Reformation gained a foothold! Think of the bloody persecution of the Reformed in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century! Think of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France in the sixteenth century! Thomas Aquinas taught that the church has the duty to hand the impenitent heretic over to the state for execution: "If he [the heretic] is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 2 [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947], p. 1226).

20. See footnote 14 above.

an established church. These passages require the state to punish idolaters and heretics, and to punish them with death. The only conceivable biblical support for the position that the state must recognize the true church and promote the gospel is the Old Testament laws requiring Israel to enforce the true worship of Jehovah God. There is no support whatever for the position in the New Testament, although the New Testament is not lacking in passages that describe the duty of the state as a servant of God. James Bannerman admits that all evidence is lacking in the New Testament for the position he advances. "Nor is the doctrine of the duty of the state to recognise and aid the Church invalidated by the absence of an express command in the New Testament Scriptures, confirmatory of the duty as announced in the Old."²¹ But the Old Testament laws that established the pure worship of Jehovah God also called the rulers of the nation to stone idolaters and false prophets. "That prophet ... shall be put to death" (Deut. 13:5). Indeed, a private person who tried to convert an Israelite to another god had to be killed (Deut. 13:6-11).

Those who do attempt to ground the position that the state must establish, support, and promote the true church on the outstanding New Testament passages on the state, Romans 13 and I Peter 2, thereby commit themselves to teaching that the state must prevent false worship and punish false worshipers. If these passages mandate the state to establish the true church and promote the gospel, they also require the state to execute wrath upon every false worshiper, to punish every heretic with the state's sword, and thus to be a terror to all who are outside the true church, for no other reason than that they are outside the true church.

"Put Up Thy Sword"

Reformed churches must repudiate the position that the state has the calling from God to recognize and support the true church, to promote the gospel, and to destroy the false church and false religion. Reformed churches must repudiate this view of the

21. Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, vol. 1, p. 133.

calling of the state even though it was held by most of the Reformers. Reformed churches must repudiate this doctrine of the state's calling as found in the original edition of certain of the Reformed confessions.

First, there is the undeniable fact that in the almost two thousand years of the history of the church of the New Testament after Pentecost it has almost never been the case that a godly state has established and promoted the true church as its duty to the Lord Jesus Christ. There certainly have been times when God in His providence used the state to protect and defend the true church in extraordinary circumstances. One thinks of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, of Elector Frederick of the Palatinate in the sixteenth century, and of Prince Maurice of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. But God's use of the state in His providence is not the same as a godly state's consciously promoting the true church as an act of obedience to God. Even in the most outstanding instances of the state's protection and defense of the true church in New Testament history, the genuine godliness of the prince is suspect. Regarding Constantine and Maurice, there is good reason to believe that their energetic defense of the true church was motivated not so much by a desire to obey God as by a desire to use the church for their own political ends.

The doctrine of an established church, so passionately held by some, is unrealistic. It is a doctrine about something that has never been, is not anywhere on earth today, and never will be to the world's end. It has no practical application. This in itself is not so serious, perhaps, although the advocates of the doctrine contend for it as if it were a fundamental doctrine of the Reformed faith, but the doctrine presents itself as God's will for civil government.

The question about the doctrine is this: Is God's will for civil government unrealistic, unrealized, and unrealizable? In the language of Romans 13:1, if the higher authorities are God's servant by establishing the true church and promoting the gospel, are these authorities, in fact, never God's servant at all?

Although this was not true of the Reformers, most modern Presbyterian defenders of the notion that the state must establish the church and promote the gospel hang their doctrine of the state

on the peg of postmillennialism. They concede that states have not yet been the servants of God they are called to be, or *truly* the servants of God as they ought to be. They concede the impossibility of any contemporary state's being the servant of God. But they pin their hope on the coming millennium. When, in the earthly future, Scotland, the United States, and all the other nations of the world are "Christianized" by the conversion of the vast majority of the human race, then, finally, the state will become the servant of God, establishing the Reformed church, making her confessions the law of the land, outlawing all other public worship, and punishing heretics, if not all who dissent from the Reformed religion.

As James Bannerman cast about for proof in Scripture that the state must "recognise, and, in so far as circumstances permit, ... endow the Church," he could only appeal to "the alliance of Church and state among the Jews." But he quickly, and significantly, added:

This evidence of the Divine sanction given to the support and recognition of the Church by the state might be very greatly augmented by a consideration of those predictions in regard to the future or millennial state of the Church, in which kings and kingdoms are especially represented as in the latter days bringing their gold and their honour unto it, and becoming the great instruments of promoting its spiritual interests.²²

Projecting the state's service of God by establishing and promoting the true church into the millennium concedes that until that time the state has not, in fact, been the servant of God, or, at least, the servant of God as it ought to have been. Since postmillennialism is a dream—according to the Second Helvetic Confession "*Jewish dreams*"²³—the notion that the state will one

22. *Ibid.*

23. "We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth" ("The Second Helvetic Confession, 1566," chap. 11, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, pp. 245, 246).

day be the servant of God by recognising and promoting the true church is fantasy.

A second reason for rejecting the doctrine that the state must actively support the true church is the warning of church history. This warning is that whenever a civil government did exert itself to establish the church, support it with money and the other physical resources of the state, punish ministers who opposed the church's doctrine, and extirpate dissenters, the result has always been detrimental to the true church. Indeed, the result has been well-nigh ruinous.

One of the greatest disasters in church history was the recognition of Christianity as the religion of the realm by Constantine. Thousands of hypocrites flooded the church. The church began to rely on the steel sword of the state rather than the spiritual sword of Christ. And the Romanizing of the church was assured.

Usually, the establishing of a church meant persecution for the true church. Very clearly before my mind is the suffering of the Reformed saints in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century at the hands of the state and the Roman Catholic Church in unholy alliance and again in the nineteenth century at the hands of the state and the established *Reformed* church.²⁴

Even the most ardent advocates of the position that the state must support, promote, and defend the true church admit that the implementing of the position has proved to be harmful to the church. Arguing that nations and their rulers are obliged "to aim, in the regulation of national affairs, at the good of the church of Christ, and the welfare of true religion," William Cunningham acknowledged that "it is undoubtedly true, that in most cases the interference of the civil power in religious matters has done more evil than good." He referred particularly to the evil of the established church's consenting "to sinful interferences upon the

24. For a brief account in English of these persecutions of the true church in the Netherlands by alliances of the state and the established church, see D. H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), pp. 7-20, 79-98.

part of the civil authorities with the rights and privileges which Christ had conferred upon [the church].” Cunningham doubted whether “any Protestant established church has ever wholly escaped this sin and degradation, except the Church of Scotland at the era of the second Reformation.”²⁵

In the third place, and most importantly, there is no biblical warrant for the position that God mandates the state to establish the church, punish heretics, and root out false religion.

The mandate to Old Testament Israel to punish idolaters and the examples of kings actively promoting the true worship of Jehovah God do not apply in the new dispensation to any earthly nation. The application is alone to that nation which is the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel. That nation is the church. The church is the “holy nation” today (I Pet. 2:9). The church promotes the right worship of God and wars against the kingdom of the lie, not by physical force, but by purely spiritual power and weaponry. “*Ecclesia non sitit sanguinem.*”

The true church is established and promoted, not by the sword of the state, but by the gospel. Heresies within the church are dealt with by the church’s excommunication. False religion and idolatry outside the church are destroyed by the church’s confession of the truth. “We do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:3-5).

The state has no *power* to promote the gospel. All that the state has is the steel sword. Promotion of the gospel demands the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The state has no *ability* to promote the gospel. What competency does Caesar have to judge doctrine? to recognize the true church among all the sects and false churches claiming to be the church of Christ? to destroy “spiritual wickedness in high places,” which is the real foe of the church? (Eph. 6:12)

25. Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, vol. 1, p. 394.

Certainly, God does not charge this institution, this servant, of His with a duty for the execution of which He gives His servant neither power nor ability.

The state has no *authority* to recognize, establish, support, and promote the true church. In the entire New Testament, there is no divine mandate to civil government, to promote the true church with its steel sword. There is a mandate to civil government in the New Testament. Repeatedly, the New Testament charges civil government with a vitally important duty. It charges every civil government with this duty. It charges the civil governments of that day with their duty. But the mandate of the New Testament is not that the state promote the true church by establishing the church and by destroying false religions.

Very few even of the most ardent advocates of the supposed duty of the state to establish the true church dare to appeal to the New Testament. For good reason. Romans 13:1-7, classic passage on the state and its service of God, teaches that the existing state, the godless, idolatrous Roman Empire, is—not *should be*, or *will be*, but *is*—the servant of God. As servant of God, the godless Empire—the Caesar—has a mandate from God, which it is also carrying out—in *Paul's own day*. That mandate, which the Roman state is also carrying out, certainly is not recognizing, supporting, and promoting the true church. The notion is absurd. Nor is the Roman state, in *Paul's own day*, the servant of God by virtue of its punishing heretics and rooting out false religion. Obviously, the mandate is something completely different. The service of this servant of God to its divine master is radically different from the service rendered to God by the kingdom of Christ, the true church. God intends that the service of earthly nations be radically different from that of the spiritual nation, the church.

When Jesus told Peter to put his sword away and when He reminded Pilate that His servants would not fight, He laid down a universal, inflexible, profound, and necessary law: His kingdom is not promoted by physical force; neither does His kingdom wage war on the kingdom of Satan with carnal weapons (Matt. 26:52, 53; John 18:36). This law rules out the promotion of the church by the state, for the only force the state has is physical and the only weapons the state has are carnal.

For all his stubborn insistence on the duty of the state to execute heretics and to defend the church with arms, Calvin was too biblical a theologian to rest easy with this stand. Immediately after his defensive comment on John 18:36 quoted earlier in this article, that those who infer from the text that “the doctrine of the Gospel and the pure worship of God ought not to be defended by arms are unskilful and ignorant reasoners,” Calvin quickly and correctly, though inconsistently, added: “The kingdom of Christ, being spiritual, must be founded on the doctrine and power of the Spirit. In the same manner, too, its edification is promoted.” He assured his readers that magistrates only “accidentally” defend the kingdom of Christ. And, happily, he concluded: “The kingdom of Christ is strengthened more by the blood of the martyrs than by the aid of arms.”²⁶

Luther on the Temporal Authority

Of all the Reformers, only Martin Luther saw and clearly expressed the basic issues in the controversy whether the church and the gospel should be promoted by the cold, steel sword of the state. In his treatment of “temporal authority,” that is, the state, in 1523, Luther asserted and demonstrated that the duty of the state is exclusively to keep outward order in the nation. “The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth.” “The temporal lords are supposed to govern lands and people outwardly.” In Romans 13:1 ff., the apostle does not mandate temporal authority to “command faith,” but “he is speaking rather of external things, that they should be ordered and governed on earth.” The “human ordinance” of civil government of I Peter 2:13 “cannot possibly extend its authority into heaven and over souls; it is limited to the earth, to external dealings men have with one another, where they can see, know, judge, evaluate, punish, and acquit.” “Worldly princes” must address themselves only to such matters as “usury, robbery, adultery, murder, and other evil deeds.”

26. Calvin, *Gospel according to John*, pp. 210, 211.

Luther emphatically denied that the state should concern itself with worship, doctrine, and faith. “Where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God’s government and only misleads souls and destroys them.” For civil government to decree, judge, and enforce belief and confession of the gospel is madness and folly.

For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authority should compel or create.... The blind, wretched fellows fail to see how utterly hopeless and impossible a thing they are attempting. For no matter how harshly they lay down the law, or how violently they rage, they can do no more than force an outward compliance of the mouth and the hand; the heart they cannot compel, though they work themselves to a frazzle.... They only compel weak consciences to lie, to disavow, and to utter what is not in their hearts.

The state must “let men believe this or that as they are able and willing, and constrain no one by force.”

Luther’s condemnation of the state’s punishment of heretics was brilliant, and conclusive. In light of the fact that this condemnation of the state’s attempt to eradicate heresy by its sword is at the same time a condemnation of the state’s attempt to promote the gospel, the following long quotation of the greatest of all the Reformers is warranted.

Heresy can never be restrained by force. One will have to tackle the problem in some other way, for heresy must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword. Here God’s word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water. God’s word alone avails here, as Paul says in II Corinthians 10 [:4-5], “Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty in God to destroy every argument and proud obstacle that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to take every thought captive in the service of Christ.” Moreover, faith and heresy are never so strong as when men oppose them by

sheer force, without God's word. For men count it certain that such force is for a wrong cause and is directed against the right, since it proceeds without God's word and knows not how to further its cause except by naked force, as brute beasts do. Even in temporal affairs force can be used only after the wrong has been legally condemned. How much less possible it is to act with force, without justice and God's word, in these lofty spiritual matters! See, therefore, what fine, clever nobles they are! They would drive out heresy, but set about it in such a way that they only strengthen the opposition, rousing suspicion against themselves and justifying the heretics. My friend, if you wish to drive out heresy, you must find some way to tear it first of all from the heart and completely turn men's wills away from it. With force you will not stop it, but only strengthen it. What do you gain by strengthening heresy in the heart, while weakening only its outward expression and forcing the tongue to lie? God's word, however, enlightens the heart, and so all heresies and errors vanish from the heart of their own accord.²⁷

A few years earlier, Luther had written:

I refuse to fight for the Gospel with force and slaughter. With the Word, the world was won, and by it the Church is preserved, and by it the Church will be restored. For as Antichrist [the pope] arose without arms, so without arms will it be confounded. If the Gospel were of such a nature that it could be propagated or preserved by the powers of this world, God would not have entrusted it to fishermen.²⁸

On one occasion, Luther remarked that if heresy could be destroyed by physical force the hangman would be the best evangelist.

Luther's insight is not nullified by his own undue dependence upon the state or by his failure, later in his life, to adhere to the principle that the state is not to punish heresy and false religion.

27. Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: to What Extent It should be Obeyed," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), pp. 75-129.

28. Cited in Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms* (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 94.

Separation of Church and State

By no means, however, does the denial of the state's calling to establish, support, and promote the true church imply that there is no relation between church and state, or that the state does not have a God-given calling to serve the church, or that the state is not a servant of the kingdom of Christ.

The state, or civil government, is an institution of God, not in His grace, like the church, but in His providence. Whether the origin of civil government, biblically, is the family as ordained by God in His creation of man on the sixth day of creation, or the divine Word to Noah in Genesis 9:5, 6 concerning the execution of murderers, civil government is not grounded in the gospel, but in the revelation of God in creation. Civil government does not concern itself with the salvation of sinners, but with the existence and order of the nation. The validity of civil government does not depend upon the state's adherence to Scripture, or upon the Christianity of the rulers, but "the powers that be are ordained of God," whether Shih Huang-ti of China, or Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, or Caesar Nero of Rome, or Hitler of Germany.

The state is separate from, and independent of, the church. A strong doctrine of the separation of church and state is not an American theory. It is the plain teaching of the Bible in both testaments. As regards the teaching of the New Testament, there can be no dispute. Alongside the churches in all countries were civil governments. These governments had no connection with the churches whatever, had little, if any, knowledge of the churches, and certainly did not establish, support, and promote the churches. For the most part, the rulers were pagans. But these civil governments were institutions of God among men. As citizens of a particular nation, the members of the churches were called to honor the rulers in the state as vested with authority from God (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-17).

Also the Old Testament clearly teaches the separation of church and state. It recognizes the legitimacy of the rulers of the nations as appointed by God to their office, even though those rulers sustained no relation whatever to the Old Testament church (Israel) and even though those rulers were heathens. "Thou, O

king, art a king of kings,” said Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, “for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory” (Dan. 2:37). “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:25, 32; see also Dan. 2:21 and 5:21). These heathen rulers rightly kept order in their nations, punished murder, and defended their countries against invasion. When, occasionally, the God-fearing Israelite came into contact with these rulers, as Joseph with Pharaoh, David with Achish, and Daniel with Darius, he honored them as appointed to their rule by God.

The only argument from the Old Testament, indeed from the whole of Scripture, for an intimate relation, even union, of church and state in which the state actively supports and promotes the church rests on a serious misunderstanding of Israel. This is the argument that contends that the distinctly ecclesiastical and distinctly national character of Israel is fulfilled in a modern Christian state that will support the true church, as King Josiah supported the high priest Hilkiah.

Arguing for “the lawfulness of a friendly alliance and co-operation between the Church . . . and the state,” James Bannerman appealed to the union of religion and political authority in Old Testament Israel.

Under the Jewish economy there was a close and intimate union between the Church and the state—between religion on the one hand, and the civil magistrate on the other. The Church and state were not merged into each other under that system, but still remained separate and independent. They were different in regard to their laws, to their office-bearers, and to a certain extent in regard to their members; but nevertheless they were nearly connected, and that, too, for a lengthened period of time, and under the express sanction of the Almighty. In this fact we acknowledge and assert a warrant for the alliance of things civil and sacred, for the connection and co-operation together of the king and the priest, of the throne and the altar.²⁹

29. Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, vol. 1, p. 117. For an extended discussion of the distinction of the civil and the ecclesiastical in Israel, see George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming: The Divine Ordinance*

The misunderstanding is that Israel as a nation is fulfilled in some earthly nation or other, especially Scotland. The truth is, as I Peter 2:9 clearly teaches, that Israel as a nation, as well as Israel as the church, is fulfilled in the New Testament church of believers and their children. The local congregation is both the kingdom and the church of Jesus Christ. The distinction between, and relation of, the ecclesiastical and the national in Old Testament Israel have nothing to do with any political state in the present age and nothing to do with proper relations of the church and the state in the New Testament.

Such is the witness of the Bible to the separation of church and state that one of the most fervent advocates of the supposed duty of the state to establish and promote the church acknowledged this separation. James Bannerman wrote: "The separation between Church and State [is] so strongly asserted in Scripture." He continued:

There can be no doubt that the principle so plainly laid down in Scripture, of the entire separation between the religious and political societies [church and state] as to the nature of their powers and as to the subject-matter of their administrations, legitimately and inevitably carries with it the conclusion, not only that each is complete within itself for its own work and its own objects, but also that each is independent of any control not lodged within itself, and brought to bear from any foreign quarter upon its internal arrangements.³⁰

That Bannerman could still plead for the establishment of the church is baffling. Establishment is fatal to the church's indepen-

of Church Government Vindicated (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle, 1985), pp. 1-19. Gillespie, however, was opposing the Erastian confusion of church and state. William Symington argued for a close alliance of church and state, with the state promoting the church, on the basis of the union of civil and religious authorities in Israel (William Symington, *Messiah the Prince or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ* [Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, repr. 1990], pp. 271-277).

30. Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, vol. 2, pp. 369, 370.

dence “of any control not lodged within itself, and brought to bear from any foreign quarter upon its internal arrangements.” That the Scottish Presbyterian was, in addition, open to the state’s financial support of the church defies belief. Surely he knew that “the queen’s shilling is followed by the queen’s command.”

Outward Order

As an institution of providence, rather than grace, as an institution based on God’s revelation in creation, rather than the revelation of Scripture, and as an institution separate from and independent of the church, the state has its own peculiar calling. This calling is radically different from the calling of the church. The calling of the state is to maintain earthly peace and order in the life of the nation. By carrying out this calling, the state proves itself the servant of God.

Romans 13:1-7 describes the state’s duty as the punishment of those citizens who do evil and the praise of those who do good. Since the specific state in view is the Roman empire of that day, the evil referred to is outward acts of violence that threaten the order of national life, specifically, treason, murder, theft, rape, and the like. The good is external obedience to the laws of the land.

Rome was not an avenger executing wrath upon the high priests of false religion, idolaters, blasphemers, and heretics, nor did the apostle expect that Rome would punish such sins. Similarly, the good that the Roman state praised was not the worship of the triune, one, true God, but submission to Rome’s political authority and obedience to Rome’s laws governing national life.

The same divine calling of the civil magistrates is found in I Peter 2:14: “Governors ... are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” No governor anywhere in the world at that time punished men for the evil of denying or subverting the Christian religion or praised citizens for their faithful confession of Jesus Christ. Indeed, precious few governors have done so since that time. But governors—governors in general, all governors—carry out the divine mandate to punish evil and praise the good, because the evil in view is disturbance of the outward order in a nation and the good is external keeping of the peace of society.

For this work, the state has authority. It has this authority, not from the people, but from God. "Power" in Romans 13:1 is the Greek word meaning 'authority.' The authority of the state is "of God," so that whoever resists the state resists the ordinance of God and will be damned (Rom. 13:2, 3). Because the state is vested by God with His own authority, the Christian must be subject to the state, not only on account of the wrath that the state can inflict upon the rebel, but also "for conscience sake" (Rom. 13:5). I Peter 2:13, 14 suggests that the governor's right to rule is from God when it calls on Christian citizens to submit to the king and his governors "for the Lord's sake."

For this work of keeping order and peace in the nation, the state has also the capability and power. Its power is the sword—the very real threat of physical punishment, including the death penalty—which every state knows how to wield, and when to wield it, in defense of itself and the earthly security of its citizens. The state has this knowledge by the natural light of reason, altogether apart from the light of special revelation.

By keeping outward order in the nation, every kind of civil government, to one extent or another, *is* God's servant. Every state actually carries out God's will for government and fulfills its mandate. The apostle does not teach in Romans 13 that the powers that be *ought to be* God's servants, or that one day (in the dream-world of the millennium) they *will be* God's servants (by establishing the true church and punishing heretics). Rather, he teaches that the powers *are* God's servants.

States are God's servants in spite of their ignorance of the true God and in spite of their opposition to the true God. They are servants of God *unconsciously and unwillingly*. They are the servant of God as Cyrus was God's anointed servant in decreeing the return of Israel to Canaan (Is. 45:1). States are God's servants, not by the operations of grace that make them willing, but by the secret power of providence that causes them to fulfill God's will regardless of their will.

Second Table, Both Tables, or Neither?

In the light of these truths about the state and its God-given calling must the age-old controversy among Reformed theolo-

gians, whether the state is called by God to enforce the entire decalogue or only the second table, be decided. This issue is part of the controversy over the proper duty of the state. Those who insist that the state must support and promote the church contend that the state is called to enforce both tables of the law of God, all ten commandments. Those who restrict the duty of the state to the keeping of outward order in society traditionally hold that the state must enforce only the second table of the law.³¹

The truth is that the state is not called to enforce either the entire decalogue or the second table. God did not give the ten commandments to the state for the state to enforce among its citizens, whether in whole or in part. God gave the ten commandments to Israel, His chosen, covenant people and holy nation. He gave the ten commandments to guide the thankful life of a people redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. The preface, which is an integral part of the law, makes this plain: "I am Jehovah thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). The ten commandments, or the second table, can be enforced on its citizens by Scotland, or the Netherlands, or the United States, if—and *only* if—the enforcing magistrate can also say to Scotland, or the Netherlands, or the United States, in the name of God, "I am Jehovah thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

That the state is not called to enforce the entire decalogue is evident to all from the fact that the decalogue includes the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." Even the most ardent defender of the duty of the state to enforce the entire moral law of God must agree that the tenth commandment falls outside the jurisdiction of the state.

As regards the second table of the law, excepting now the tenth, commandments five through nine do not consist merely of

31. For a discussion of the issue, whether the magistrate is to enforce both tables of the moral law of God or the second table only, by one who vigorously advocates the former position, see Symington, *Messiah*, pp. 239-241, 268, 269.

prescription or proscription of outward deeds. They require love for the neighbor in the heart out of a grateful love for the triune, one, true God. If the state is to enforce the second table of the law, it must require love for the neighbor in the heart of every citizen. It must also punish the citizens for any lack of love for the neighbor in their heart.

There is no one, therefore, not even the most fiery Scottish Presbyterian or most aggressive Christian Reconstructionist, who believes that the state must enforce either the entire decalogue or the second table of the decalogue. At most, some believe that the state must enforce the *external conduct* required or forbidden by the *first nine commandments* of the decalogue, or by *commandments five through nine*.

In his exposition of the decalogue, Herman Hoeksema warns the preacher against proclaiming the ten commandments “as an external code of precepts,” which, says Hoeksema, is implied by that supposed use of the law known as the “*usus politicus*.” A preacher might be tempted to use the law in this political manner in order to reform an increasingly lawless society. But the law is given to the church. The proper uses of the law are teaching the redeemed people of God their misery and especially guiding them in their life of thankfulness and holiness (“*usus paedagogicus*” and “*usus normativus*”).³²

Although Hoeksema is addressing the preacher, the implication of his admonition is that the ten commandments were not given to the state for a “*usus politicus*” and that the state certainly cannot enforce the ten commandments upon ungodly society.

That this is his position comes out clearly in his Revelation commentary, *Behold, He Cometh!* Explaining the whore and her relation to the beast in Revelation 17:15-18, Hoeksema describes the calling of the state as the maintenance of “law and order in the midst of a corrupt world,” by punishing evil-doers and protecting the good. The state is a purely “temporal institution.” The power by which the state fulfills its calling is strictly “material”: the

32. Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), pp. 122-124.

sword. The state has no “spiritual” power, namely, the Word of God.

This view of the state’s calling is closely related to Hoeksema’s rejection of the notion that the state ever represents “the development of the kingdom of Christ.” As soon as a state becomes dissatisfied with being a “punishing power upon evil and a maintainer of public order” and takes up “rooting out evil and establishing real righteousness and peace by main power, by the power of the law and by the action of the sword,” the state becomes “the beast.”³³

The Law in Creation

The law of God that the state enforces is the same law of God that gives rise to some form of civil government among all peoples and in all times. This is not the law written down on the pages of Scripture. What did all the civil governments in all the nations other than Israel during the time of the Old Testament know of the written law of God, the ten commandments? What did the Roman government directly referred to in Romans 13:1-7 know of the decalogue? Nevertheless, the Roman government existed as a valid government on the basis of the law of God, and the Roman government functioned as a servant of God by enforcing the law of God.

The law of God that grounds states and that states enforce is the law of God in creation itself. God makes known to all men that there is a difference between right and wrong, that right should be rewarded and wrong should be punished, that the doing of the right and prevention of the doing of the wrong—order in society—are necessary for human life together, something of the nature of right and wrong, particularly as they bear on human life together in a nation, and that for the securing of order in society it is necessary that some men rule over the rest.

Paul teaches this revelation of the law of God in creation in Romans 2:14, 15: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law,

33. Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), pp. 583-586.

do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” Although the pagans do not have the written law of God—the decalogue—they possess a form of the law of the God, for they have the work of the law written in their hearts. That is, God shows them something of the difference between right and wrong, as also the importance of doing the right and abstaining from the wrong.

To this law of God in creation the Canons of Dort refer, when they acknowledge that fallen man possesses “glimmerings of natural light,” so that he retains some knowledge of the “difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment.”³⁴

This law of God in creation is not sufficient to establish the kingdom of Christ in any nation. Indeed, this “light of nature” is not even sufficient to enable men to perform good works in the realm of “things natural and civil.” Rather, “this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it [back] in unrighteousness; by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.”³⁵ But it is not God’s purpose with the law that it establish the kingdom of Christ. It is God’s purpose, which He also accomplishes throughout history, that the kingdom of Christ be established by the gospel. The law revealed in creation, including the minds of fallen men and women, is sufficient to keep outward order in society. This is God’s purpose with the law.

Should there be a Christian prince, a “rare bird,” as Luther observed,³⁶ or a Christian politician, equally a rare bird, he would

34. “The Canons of the Synod of Dort, 1619,” III, IV/4, in Schaff, *Creeds*, p. 588.

35. *Ibid.*

36. “Since the beginning of the world a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince even rarer” (Luther, “Temporal Authority,” in *Works*, p. 113; Luther added: “They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth; therefore, one must constantly expect the

certainly take instruction concerning righteousness from the much clearer ten commandments, as from the equity of the political laws of Israel. But he would apply the law of God strictly to the outward behavior of the citizens of the nation as that behavior concerns national, earthly, temporal life. The fact that the prince or politician is a Reformed Christian would no more require, or allow, him to punish Arminians, Roman Catholics, or Muslims, or to prohibit their false worship, than the fact that an employer is Reformed requires him to punish employees for heresy, or to fire them for adultery.

The Sword's Service of the Cross

By keeping outward order in the nation, the state serves the church. The state does indeed serve the kingdom of Christ. The sword serves the cross. God compels His unwilling servant, the state, to serve His willing servant, the church. The external order in a nation provided by the state allows the church to exist and function institutionally and permits the members of the church to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

The church does not ask the state for help in her financial support, her discipline of heretics and other ungodly members, her warfare with the kingdom of darkness in the false church, cults, pagan religions, and the godless, her government, or her work on behalf of the gospel. The church does not need the help of the state. She dishonors herself and her king when she seeks help from the state. Besides, the state lacks all ability to help her in these spiritual matters. The only sword the state has is a physical one.

Indeed, the urgent calling of the church today is vehemently and strenuously to resist all efforts by the state to meddle in the church's affairs. "Hands off! Keep out! Mind your own business!" is the warning of the sovereign kingdom of Christ to the state. In the words of the "Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches," which is the church order of Dordt, the consistory shall take care that "they may never suffer the royal

worst from them and look for little good"—true still today in the United States, of Republicans and Democrats alike).

government of Christ over His church to be in the least infringed upon."³⁷

What the church does require of the state is that the state attend to its own, God-given business, which is the maintenance of order in society. The state accomplishes this by protecting those who do well and punishing those who do evil and by defending the citizens of the nation from aggression on the part of other nations.

When a state keeps outward order, so that the church can exist and do her work, the state shows itself, not only a servant of God, but also a servant of the Lord Jesus. God has certainly given states and political rulers into the power of the risen Jesus Christ, who sits at God's right hand in the heavens as king of kings and lord of lords (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23; Rev. 19:16).

Christ's mediatorial kingship over nations was an important ground for Symington's argument that "IT IS THE DUTY OF A NATION, AS SUCH, ENJOYING THE LIGHT OF REVELATION, IN VIRTUE OF ITS MORAL SUBJECTION TO THE MESSIAH, LEGALLY TO RECOGNISE, FAVOUR, AND SUPPORT, THE TRUE RELIGION."

Nations and their rulers are, as we have seen, the subjects of Christ. They are under, not only his providential control, but his moral authority. Now the religion of Christ, that is to say, his Church or spiritual kingdom, must be to him an object of the deepest interest; it is that, indeed, to which everything else is subordinate. To it, of course, the nations of the world must be subordinate; and if so, is it not utterly inconceivable that they should be freed from all obligation to have respect to the interests of religion? ...The dominion of the Head of the Church over civil society, renders it, not only expedient and safe, but dutiful and obligatory, for nations, as such, to interest themselves about the true religion.³⁸

37. Art. 28, in "The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 2002 Edition" [published at Grandville, MI by the Protestant Reformed Churches].

38. Symington, *Messiah*, pp. 264, 265. The capitalization for emphasis is Symington's.

But Christ's mediatorial rule of nations in no way implies that Christ now saves all kings and lords, commands them to throw the full force of the state into the promotion of the church and the gospel, and uses states to support the true church and root out heresy and false religion. The history of the past two thousand years proves that this explanation of Christ's mediatorial kingship over princes and nations is false. Christ has been mediatorial king over nations and rulers since His ascension into heaven. God "set him [Christ] at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:20-22). Nations and kings have been subject to Him for the past nearly two thousand years. But they have not been subject to Him by establishing the church and harassing heretics.

The lordship of Christ over states and political rulers consists of His sovereign rule of them so that they, mostly apart from their consciousness and against their will, keep outward order in society and thus provide room for His beloved church. Most governments have done this.

The disobedience of a political ruler, therefore, as regards his exercise of his office, for which also he will be judged by his lord, is not that he fails to establish the church. Rather, it is that he fails to punish the evil-doer and protect the well-doer. Invariably, he then protects the evil-doer and punishes the well-doer. He coddles criminals, while exposing law-abiding citizens to the violence of the unrestrained rapists, robbers, and murderers. He refuses to execute murderers, while murdering millions of unborn citizens, who are innocent before the law of the land.

The state is also disobedient to its divine calling when it extends its dominating power into virtually every aspect of the life of the citizens: education; business; welfare; the arts; and even the family. The jurisdiction of the state is limited: justice, public order, and defense. The omnipresent, omniscient, and omniscient state is a beast that soon threatens the life and labor of the kingdom of Christ and persecutes the citizen of the kingdom of Christ in its midst. This state deifies itself.

In addition, it is disobedience to its calling on the part of a state to envision and then embark on world conquest and world domination. It is one thing for a nation to subdue another, aggressor nation in self-defense; it is quite another thing for a powerful state arrogantly to impose itself and its ways on other nations. God wills the government of mankind by many nations, whose bounds He has appointed (Acts 17:26). Imperialism is demonic. It is the urge and effort of Satan to rear up the kingdom of the beast of Revelation 13. God wills one universal kingdom in history—and everlastingly: the peaceable, spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ (Ps. 72; Dan. 7; Rev. 11:15).

The very worst disobedience by the state to Christ is the persecution of the church. In this rebellion against its lord, the state directly opposes Christ's main purpose with the state: the protection of the church.

But even when the state persecutes the church, the antichristian state serves the church, for the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. Even then the state is servant of God, for the persecuting state chastises and purifies the church, displays the church's glory as she confesses Christ by the suffering and death of her members, and prepares the church and all things for the coming of Christ. Bloodthirsty Assyria was a rod in God's hand (Is. 10:5).

To pray, "Thy kingdom come," is, as regards states, to ask that God will so rule states that the church may freely do its work in the midst of them. It is not to ask God for the "Christianizing" of nations so that they become the Messianic kingdom.

On her part, the church is submissive to the state. She is obedient to the "powers," as long as the "powers" do not forbid her to do what God commands or require her to do what God forbids. She preaches to her members to be well-doers in the nation, not evil-doers, submitting to the civil authorities and paying the taxes they exact, regardless that invariably the taxes are exorbitant (Rom. 13:1-7).³⁹ The members of the church are to be motivated in

39. The evangelical form used in Basel for the administration of the Lord's Supper included in the section that fenced the table these words: "Let those be excluded from us who do not honor their father and mother, who are disobedient to the civil authority, being rebellious and loath to

their submission to the state, not only by fear at the threat of punishment, but also, and especially, by gratitude to God for the relative order the state provides on behalf of the church and the Christian. One pays the taxes gladly when he remembers that the state, for all its corruption, great robberies of its citizens, and vile officials, still serves the church by maintaining the order within which the church can preach the gospel and worship and the Christian can live his holy, covenant life.

Under the great blessing of God to her, consisting of the outward order and earthly peace provided by civil government, let the church be diligent in the right worship of the true God, in preaching and teaching the gospel, in building up her members and in making disciples of God's elect in all nations. Served by earthly kingdoms, let the church be what she is—the spiritual kingdom of Christ in the world—and do what she alone is called and empowered by God to do—maintain and extend the Messianic kingdom. ●

meet their interest, taxes, etc.” (“Form and Manner of the Lord’s Supper, Infant Baptism, and the Visitation of the Sick as They are Used and Observed in Basel [1525?]”, in *Liturgies of the Western Church*, selected and introduced by Bard Thompson [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], p. 212).

The Canons and Common Grace

Steven R. Key

Although it sometimes may seem as if common grace is an issue confined to the archives of Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed church history, an awareness of what is taking place in the church world today will demonstrate that it remains an issue that must be reckoned with. In recent history, not only have various departures from Scripture been based at least in part on the doctrine of common grace, but prominent churchmen in the Reformed community have again called attention to that teaching.¹

For that reason we may not forget our place in the history of this controversy. Nor may we lose sight of the horrible implications that have become manifest through the decades of development where this doctrine has been adopted. We must continue to give ourselves to the defense of the truth of sovereign, particular grace over against the error embraced by the theory of common grace.

One aspect of the common grace controversy easily overlooked today is the fact that the defenders of common grace in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) appealed to the Canons of Dordt in defense of both the First and Third Points in the synodical decisions of 1924. In fact, Scripture itself is not cited in the actual decisions of the Synod adopting the Three Points. Four articles of

1. Especially John Bolt and Raymond Blacketer, in articles written in the *Calvin Theological Journal*, April 2000, and Richard Mouw in his book *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), have attempted to bring the doctrine of common grace to the fore again, pleading for further consideration of this doctrine and its implications.

the Canons of Dordt, as well as two articles of the Belgic Confession, are the citations made in the decisions themselves.²

Any evaluation of the doctrine of common grace as adopted by the CRC in 1924 *must* take into account the Reformed confessions, and specifically the Canons of Dordt. It is fitting, therefore, that we give consideration to the subject *The Canons and Common Grace*.

The Canons and the First Point

The First Point of the CRC's decision concerning common grace reads as follows:

Relative to the first point which concerns the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general, and not only the elect, synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the Confession that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which he shows to his creatures in general. This is evident from the scriptural passages quoted, and from the Canons of Dort (II, 5, and III/IV, 8 and 9), which deal with the general offer of the gospel, while it also appears from citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology that our Reformed writers from the past favored this view.³

The reference to Article 5 of the Second Head clearly cannot stand by itself in support of the First Point.⁴ The article simply

2. *Acta der Synode 1924 van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk, Gehouden van 18 Juni tot 8 Juli, 1924 te Kalamazoo, Mich., U.S.A.*, Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Printing Co., pp. 145-147. While several passages of Scripture, Calvin's *Institutes*, Van Mastricht, and Ursinus were cited by the study committee, those citations were not attached to the decisions taken by the Synod.

3. *Acta der Synode 1924*, English translation from *Synodical Decisions on Doctrinal and Ethical Matters*, Grand Rapids, MI, Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976, p. 16.

4. The Article reads: "Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and

speaks of the church's mandate to preach the gospel promiscuously. It says nothing of that preaching being an *offer* to all who hear it, let alone an expression of God's *grace* to all who hear it. But it becomes evident by the reference that the Synod viewed the preaching as both an offer and an expression of God's grace to all who come under that preaching. Their interpretation of common grace, therefore, colored their interpretation of this article.

Furthermore, because this article lies in the midst of the Reformed fathers' defense of limited atonement and the Arminian charge that this doctrine prevented the gospel from being preached, it should immediately be evident that the fathers — had they indeed desired to teach a general and well-meant offer — would have clearly and succinctly stated so. They did not. They did not because the whole idea of a well-meant offer of the gospel, expressing God's sincere desire that all be saved, is not in harmony with the doctrine of limited atonement. How could God desire the salvation of those whom He did not give to Christ in eternal election and for whom Christ did not die?⁵

The second reference from the Canons that Synod laid hold of in support of a general favor or grace of God toward all men is that of the Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Articles 8 and 9, where the Canons speak of the serious call of the gospel, and hold

believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel." For a full exposition of this article, confer Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), pp. 349-358.

5. In a controversy that shook the CRC in the late 1960s, Harold Dekker, a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, tied the well-meant offer of the gospel as adopted in the First Point of 1924 to the atonement, and maintained that the offer could be sincere only if Christ died for all. He quoted Canons II,5 to maintain the availability of salvation to all. He wrote in *The Reformed Journal*, January 1964, under the title "Redemptive Love and the Gospel Offer," "*Is not this precisely what the sincere offer of the gospel says to all men about the redemption in Christ? For if something which is offered is not available, evidently there is no genuine offer*" (Quoted by Herman Hoeksema, *Standard Bearer*, vol. 40, p. 247).

forth the truth that those who reject that serious call are themselves to blame. The fault is not to be found in the gospel “nor of Christ offered therein.”

Note well, the Synod in adopting its First Point made a logical jump from the concept of the *call* to that of an *offer*, and took the position that God’s making a serious call is an indication that God makes a genuine offer of salvation to all who hear the gospel and expresses His desire that they accept the offer.

Louis Berkhof, in his pamphlet defending the Synod’s position, wrote: “This call of the Gospel, or this offer of salvation, is, according to Synod, general.”⁶ He goes on to say, “In the second place, we desire to point to the fact, that the general offer of grace is *well-meant*.”⁷ In this, Berkhof points particularly to Canons III/IV, 8. He proceeds to explain — and notice the interchanging of the word *offer* with *call* — “The call of the Gospel is earnestly meant. If we invite anyone, yet at the same time hope that he will not accept the invitation, then our request is not well-meant, but insincere. Sincere and well-meant it is only, if we mean what we say. God calls and invites sinners, and gives us the solemn certainty in His Word that He earnestly desires, that the called ones come to Him. His inviting is without hypocrisy, it is well-meant.”⁸ In his *Systematic Theology*, Berkhof puts it this way: “When God calls the sinner to accept Christ by faith, He earnestly desires this.”⁹

The articles of the Canons referred to read as follows:

Article 8

As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to

6. Louis Berkhof, *De Drie Punten in Alle Deelen Gereformeerd* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1925), p. 13. Citation taken from a translation by Marvin Kamps, October 1997.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

9. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 462.

Him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him.

Article 9

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. The fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the Word by perplexing cares and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).

When we examine Article 8, we find the idea of a general, well-meant offer contrary to the teaching of the article — and that especially as this article has its place in a creed that consistently holds the particular nature of salvation. Here also the promise of God is set forth as *particular*. Though proclaimed to all to whom God in His good pleasure brings under the hearing of the gospel, the promise itself is plainly limited “to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him.” Their identity, and how it is that they “come to Him and believe on Him,” is established in Articles 10 and following. They are those whom God “has chosen as His own from eternity in Christ” and upon whom He confers faith and repentance, accomplishing His own good pleasure in them.

But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their mind by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions (Article 11).

Thus God works His own perfect work through the preaching of the gospel, accomplishing His own good pleasure in the salvation of those whom He has chosen from eternity in Christ. And because it would be impossible to preach the gospel only to the elect, that preaching must go forth promiscuously. That is also according to God's sovereign purpose.

But that promiscuous proclamation of the gospel is not a well-meant offer or invitation to all, expressing God's desire to save all. That is clear in the light of the First Head of Doctrine, Articles 6 and 15, where the fathers at Dordt rejected the idea that God willed to save all and expressed such a desire by the gospel call. The fact that God has sovereignly decreed to leave in their common misery those whom He has not chosen, thus making righteous discrimination between men, ought to give clear indication that He does not will the salvation of the reprobate.

Rather, the preaching of the gospel is the proclamation that serves God's sovereign purpose, even as set forth by the inspired apostle in II Corinthians 2:15-17: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

It is noteworthy that the sovereign hardening element that takes place in preaching to the reprobate is not expressed in these articles cited by the Synod of 1924.¹⁰ But we may say that although it would be possible to strengthen the exposition of these articles by a biblical treatment of the truth set forth in II Corinthians 2:15-17, I Peter 2:8, and other like passages, the lack in these articles does not detract from the fact that any idea of a well-meant offer of the gospel as expressed in the First Point of 1924 is out of harmony with the teaching of the Canons.

10. It is possible that the failure of the Canons to address this issue was a matter of compromise, due to the differing opinions expressed by various delegates to the Synod of Dordt. Cf. H.C. Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers*, p. 487.

When we turn to Article 9 as cited by the Synod, there are especially two elements that need our examination.

The first is the use of the term *offer*, a term that seemingly fits very well with the Synod's first point and its reference to the "general offer of the gospel." It can be noted immediately, however, that the term *offer* has an entirely different connotation today from its original Latin definition. In the Canons, the term *offer* simply means *to present* or *to set forth*. The idea is that of Acts 13:46, where Paul and Barnabas addressed the Jews, and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should first *have been spoken*¹¹ to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." To take the simple concept, well understood by the fathers at Dordt, and to add the baggage associated with the idea of a well-meant offer is unwarranted. Indeed, the preaching of the gospel may not be called an *offer* if by that term is meant that through the preaching of the gospel God earnestly desires and seeks the salvation of all who hear it. Such is a denial of gospel preaching as the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

The second matter that deserves our attention is the reference to the "various gifts" God confers upon those who are called by the gospel but who refuse to come and be converted. The fathers apparently had in mind such passages as Romans 9:4-5 and the opening verses of Hebrews 6. Those gifts referred to, therefore, are not gifts of grace. But, as those passages make clear, they are the spiritual gifts given to the church, which are tasted only naturally by those who eventually fall away. In some cases, men come into very close contact with the truth and the gifts that belong to the kingdom of God. They see its beauty and goodness, and all that is associated with life in God's kingdom. But they taste and see only with their natural senses, not having received the grace to receive them spiritually. In fact, God does not bestow those outward gifts upon them out of grace, but most assuredly to bring to manifestation their own wickedness and hardness of heart, and this according to His own sovereign decree (Canons I, 5-6).

11. The verb comes from λαλέω, to sound forth or to proclaim.

Having considered the teaching of these two articles, III/IV, 8-9, in the light of their context, are we to conclude that the Reformed fathers actually taught that in His sovereign and eternal decree God determined that not all should receive the gift of faith and conversion, and that Christ's death covered God's elect only, but that nevertheless God well-meaningly offers salvation as an expression of His grace to all who hear the preaching and desires that everyone accept the offer?

It cannot possibly be. For such an interpretation cannot possibly fit these articles. If such were indeed the correct interpretation, Article 9 would not even be necessary. For if the gospel comes as a well-meant offer to all, with God's desire that they accept the offer, and yet many reject it, there would be no question at all about the culpability. Of course the blame would lie entirely upon those rejecting the offer! But it was because the fathers maintained God's absolute sovereignty also in regard to the unbelief of those who reject the command of Christ in the gospel call to repent and believe, that the Arminians came with the accusation that the Reformed make God the author of the sin of unbelief. So the Reformed fathers respond.

Noteworthy too is the fact that one searches the Canons in vain for any hint of a plea holding to a double-track theology and hiding behind the term "mystery."

The doctrine of common grace attempts to maintain an untenable dualism. Not many years after the controversy of 1924, D. Zwier, a minister in the CRC, wrote a series of articles entitled "God's General Goodness" in *De Wachter*, the Dutch language periodical of the CRC. Herman Hoeksema responded by his own series of Dutch articles in the *Standard Bearer*, a series that was later translated into English and published in 1939 in a book entitled *God's Goodness Always Particular*. In this book, Hoeksema pointed out that Rev. Zwier "holds not only that God loves the ungodly always and everywhere and in all things of this present life, but also that He hates them always and everywhere and in all things. He not only teaches that temporally His favor is upon the wicked, but also that from eternity to eternity His wrath abideth on them. His view is not only that God blesses the workers of iniquity through the things of this present time, but also that He curses them

through these same things and prepares them for eternal destruction."¹²

Over against these contradictory propositions, Hoeksema insisted that while "the truth may far transcend our comprehension, it is never in conflict with the fundamental laws of logic. If it were, it could not even be apprehended. A truth that would be contrary to our understanding would simply elude our grasp."¹³

Living several decades later, and having seen the deterioration of wholesome doctrine in the churches that adopted this theory of common grace, we have witnessed on the part of many a rejection of the second part of Zwier's propositions. After all, it is certainly distasteful to the natural mind to think that God hates the ungodly always and everywhere and in all things, and that from eternity to eternity His wrath abides on them. If one is going to cling to the love of God for everyone, it is a natural development that he clings to the love of God for everyone *always* and *everywhere*, and even *forever*.

It is also simply a fact that it is impossible to reason from Scripture with those who will steadfastly hold to the possibility of logical contradictions in the revelation of God's truth. They have an entirely different hermeneutical principle, which prevents any fruitful discussion. Fruitful discussion is possible only after the doctrine of revelation and sound principles of Bible interpretation have been dealt with.

It is true, we demonstrate those sound principles of Bible interpretation from Scripture itself. Scripture interprets Scripture. We demonstrate from Scripture that God's Word is never contradictory, and when we find in Scripture what first *appear* to be contradictory texts or statements, we have cause to sit back and look at the context and at Scripture itself for the proper interpretation.

But it is only after we have worked through and established the correct hermeneutical principles that we can have any fruitful discussion about God's grace, and any other principle doctrine of Holy Scripture. Hoeksema took exactly that approach in *God's*

12. Hoeksema, Herman, *God's Goodness Always Particular*, Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1939, pp. 23-24.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Goodness Always Particular. He addressed the dispute, and immediately pointed to the question of exegetical method. That issue he expressed as a fundamental difference. It remains such today.

After examining the First Point of 1924 and its adoption of the well-meant offer of the gospel as an example of God's common grace toward all men, we state this simple fact: If it is true that God loves every human being who comes under the gospel and desires to save them all, the Canons must be rejected. If it is true that there can be no promiscuous preaching without a universal grace and the possibility of salvation for anyone to whom the gospel is addressed, the doctrine of the Canons must be rejected.

But we insist that the Canons are faithful in expounding the truth of the Scriptures — with no allowances made for a well-meant offer of the gospel, with no offer of salvation for all, and with no expression of grace for all. Grace is particular. We preach promiscuously a particular promise. We do so in established congregations as well as on the mission field. And by that “foolishness of preaching” (I Cor. 1:21), Christ gathers His elect. God remains God, sovereign in the work of salvation, even from beginning to end.

The Canons and the Third Point

While the Second Point of Synod's formulation of common grace does not refer to the Canons, the Third Point does.

Relative to the third point, which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerate, synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations from Scripture and from the Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4 and from the Belgic Confession, Article 36, which teach that God, without renewing the heart, so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers from ancient times were of the same opinion.¹⁴

14. *Acta der Synode 1924*, English translation from *Synodical De-*

The Third Point adopted by the Synod in 1924 was strongly influenced by Kuyper's perspective, as was the Second Point.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Kuyper distinguished between two distinct operations of common grace, which do not develop in harmony with each other.

One common grace aims at the *interior*, another at the *exterior* part of our existence. The former is operative wherever civic virtue, a sense of domesticity, natural love, the practice of human virtue, the improvement of the public conscience, integrity, mutual loyalty among people, and a feeling for piety leaven life. The latter is in evidence when human power over nature increases, when invention upon invention enriches life, when inter-national communication is improved, the arts flourish, the sciences increase our understanding, the conveniences and joys of life multiply, all expressions of life between more vital and radiant forms become more refined, and the general image of life becomes more winsome.

But in the end it will not be these *two* operations which flourish to perfection in "Babylon the great." The glory of the world power which collapses in the time of judgment will consist solely in the second kind of development. Enrichment of the *exterior* life will go hand-in-hand with the impoverishment of the *interior*. The common grace that affects the human heart, human relations, and public practices will ever diminish, and only the other operation, the one that enriches and gratifies the human mind and senses, will proceed to its culmination. A splendid white mausoleum full of reeking skeletons, brilliant on the outside, dead on the inside — that is the Babylon which is becoming ripe for judgment.¹⁶

cisions on Doctrinal and Ethical Matters, Grand Rapids, MI, Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976, p. 16.

15. It is true that the First Point was also of Kuyperian influence insofar as Kuyper taught that God's good gifts to all men were tokens of His common grace. It departed from Kuyperian thought, however, with its adoption of the well-meant offer as evidence of that common grace.

16. Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 181.

Kuyper himself, as did the Synod of the CRC some twenty years later, cited the Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Article 4 in support of his teaching. However, he quoted only a portion of it.

There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil.

The omitted section goes on to read as follows:

Nay, further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.¹⁷

The reference to the Canons, III/IV, Article 4, was treated by a young Christian Reformed minister, the Reverend Herman

17. George M. Ophoff calls attention to this omission of Abraham Kuyper and exposes the seriousness of it. (Cf. *Standard Bearer*, January, 1925, vol. I, No. 4, p. 28.) Richard J. Mouw, in quoting the entire Article 4, apparently finds discomfort in the fact that this article has been used to support the concept of common grace, seeing the sharp limitation the second part of the article places on the first part. (See *He Shines in All That's Fair*, p. 92.) Mouw, however, still clings to the creeds as supporting common grace, stating that, "While the Heidelberg Catechism makes the unqualified judgment that apart from the regenerating grace of God we are incapable of 'any good,' the Canons of Dort introduce an appropriate nuance, telling us that we are all 'by nature children of wrath, incapable of any saving good' — thus leaving open the possibility of deeds that are morally laudable without meriting salvation" (*He Shines...*, p. 38). His reference to the Canons is to the Third and Fourth Head, Article 3. For rebuttal of this claim that the Canons introduce such a nuance, confer Homer C. Hoeksema's *The Voice of Our Fathers*, p. 463.

Hoeksema, very early in the common grace controversy as he wrote in *The Banner* under the rubric "Our Doctrine."

Although not stating so specifically, Hoeksema in his treatment of this article of the Canons was apparently reflecting on the teachings of common grace especially by Abraham Kuyper.¹⁸ Hoeksema understood that implicit in the teaching of the Third Point was a denial of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. The proposition that common grace enables a man apart from Christ, an unregenerate man, to perform genuine good works pleasing to God, and the doctrine of total depravity, which holds that all men are wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness, are of necessity mutually exclusive.

Because those writings are not so readily accessible, I will quote a lengthy section from Hoeksema.

The *facts* which are commonly referred to as manifestations of "common grace" we do not deny. To do this would mean to contradict Scripture; it would mean to stand diametrically opposed to a reality in the world that is too real to be denied; it would to a certain extent bring us into contradiction with some expressions in the Confession of Faith and the Canons of Dordt. In the Confession we read that man "has retained a few remains thereof," that is, of his original excellent gifts (Art. XIV); and in the Canons it is stated that "there remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society and for maintaining an orderly external deportment" (Chapters III, IV; Art. 4). As we have emphasized before, and as must be clear without any argument to all, when Adam and Eve were saved from utter ruin and death, not only the elect but the whole human race from a natural point of view was preserved for the time being. The members of this human race all possess the same natural life of soul

18. Kuyper developed his doctrine of common grace over a six-year period in *De Heraut*. The material was then collected and published in the three volumes *De Gemeene Gratia* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormster, 1904). Hoeksema began reflecting on Kuyper's view in earlier articles, but did not refer to him by name in the particular article I quote.

and body, manifest the same power of intellect and will. They live in the same world and enjoy the same outward privileges. They move in the same spheres of life, in state and society and to an extent even in the church. From this point of view elect and reprobate, those that are and that are not in Christ Jesus, may live in the same house, be born of the same parents, receive the same education, move about in exactly the same surroundings and enjoy the same environments. Still more. In the Christian world, they may be baptized with the same baptism, live under the same preaching of the Word, partake of the same Lord's supper. The nearer anyone lives to the outward sphere of Christianity, the more he receives of these outward gifts, free for all and, in that sense, common. Yet, Scripture emphasizes this still more strongly, when it wants us to understand, that even the seed of the devil may be enlightened, may taste of the good Word of God, taste of the heavenly gift, taste of the powers of the world to come, and, what is more, be partaker of the Holy Spirit, and yet show by his irretrievable falling away, that he belonged to the reprobate! Hebrews 6:4,5; cf. Hebrews 10:28, 29.

It is not the facts, therefore, concerning which there is any controversy on our part. It is the explanation of these facts from the point of view of a "common grace" which we wish to dispute. For once more, the question that must be answered first of all is this: Is there grace, in the real sense of the word, for those that are not in Christ Jesus, the Head of the Covenant of Grace?¹⁹

Hoeksema then goes on to point out that the creeds not only give us nothing to justify the phrase "common grace," but show an emphasis entirely contrary to the common grace teaching of a natural goodness in man.

What they emphasize very strongly is not this natural goodness but the natural corruption and depravity of human nature because of sin and man's incapability even of receiving the blessings of grace unless he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. That this is true you may be able to judge for yourselves if we quote the whole of the paragraph where these expressions occur. Art. XIV of the

19. Herman Hoeksema, *The Banner* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Publications, April 17, 1919), p. 248-249.

Confession has it: "For the commandment of life which he had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts, which he had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying, The light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not, where John calleth men darkness" etc. Surely, it must be admitted that the "remains" are not over-emphasized in this article! And in the same strain the Canons speak in Chapters III, IV, Art. 4: "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this natural light from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright *even in things natural and civil*. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God." ...And as far as the very term "common grace" is concerned it must be observed that it occurs only in the negative part of the Canons Chapters III, IV, Art. V, where the phrase is laid in the mouth of the enemy of Reformed Doctrine. For there we read that the Synod rejects the errors of those who teach: "That the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which *they* understand the light of nature) or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use, a greater, viz., the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself."

Reflecting then on what later would be adopted in the First Point of 1924, Hoeksema writes:

In the second place, it must be clear that the term "common grace" implies that in some way God is graciously inclined to all men, without distinction, regardless of their relation to Christ Jesus, that He assumes an attitude of favor and love to those too,

that are not in Him, whom God has not foreknown from all eternity. I am well aware of the fact that no one ever asserted that this "common grace" was saving in power, and that it is always maintained that it results in blessings only for this present time. But principally this makes no difference. The fact remains, that in some way, to a certain extent, in a certain measure all men partake of grace, and hence God must be graciously inclined to all. Now it must be said, that in the light of Scripture, and in the light of the fundamental conception of our Reformed Doctrine such an attitude of God is utterly inconceivable. From the Arminian or Semi-Pelagian point of view this were possible. If you will deny that God in Sovereign grace chose His own people from before the foundation of the world; if you will deny, therefore, that God knows with Divine certainty who are to be saved and who are not; if you will deny that from eternity God considers His people in Christ and others outside of Christ; this conception of an attitude in God of universal grace, thru which He is favorably inclined to all for a time, is, indeed, conceivable. In that case God must first assume the attitude of watchful waiting. He sent Christ into the world, as far as He is concerned for all men indiscriminately. And now He watches to see who of men might haply accept Him. In the meantime He cannot but assume an attitude of general grace toward all without distinction. But, surely, he who stands with us four-square on the basis of the Reformed View of life will not thus surrender his conception of God and deprive Him of His absolute Sovereignty.

God has His own people in the world. These He knew with divine love in Christ from before the foundation of the world. To them He assumed an attitude of grace in our Redeemer from eternity.

But as well as He knows the elect He knows the reprobate. They are not in Christ. They stand before Him in all their sin and transgression. They are guilty. They have forfeited all. For time as well as for eternity they have lost the right to any of the blessings of grace. They are, in a word, objects of His wrath.

To maintain that, objectively speaking, God can assume an attitude of grace to them, say for six thousand years, is to make an attack upon God's holiness and righteousness. No sinner can stand in any relation to the holiness of God without being deprived of all grace. No naked sinner can maintain himself or be maintained as an object of love in view of God's righteousness. And principally

it makes no difference whether you assume such an attitude of love and favor in God over against the sinner outside of Christ for an endless eternity or for a single minute. The fact remains the same.

And thus it is according to Scripture. Jacob and Esau are both children of Isaac. To a large extent they enjoy the same blessings. Esau even enjoying the privilege that he is first-born. But Jacob is the child of election, Esau of reprobation. And what saith the Scripture? Does it say: Esau I loved but Jacob I loved more? Does it say: Esau I love for the time being, but Jacob for eternity? No, most positively it says: "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated". Rom. 9:13

Hence, we deny that in any way or to any extent, for time or eternity God assumes an attitude of positive favor or grace over against the reprobate. The seed of the serpent are objects of His wrath.²⁰

Hoeksema's exposition of Scripture and the confessions notwithstanding, the Synod of the CRC laid claim to Canons III/IV, 4 in their adoption of the Third Point. They did so, repeating the error of Kuyper in conveniently deleting the concluding portion of the article.

The Synod's adoption of the Third Point of common grace is closely connected to its teaching in the Second Point, namely, that God restrains sin in the unregenerated man by a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit within the sinner's heart. It is because of this restraining operation of the Holy Spirit that the unregenerated man is viewed as able to do good in things natural and civil.

The appeal to Canons III/IV, 4 in support of this point is an appeal to the "glimmerings of natural light" of which the article speaks, "whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment."

What then are those "glimmerings"? They refer to the remnants of the excellent gifts God bestowed upon man in creation. When man fell, he did not completely lose his gifts of

20. *Ibid.*, p. 249-250.

thought and will. That which belongs to his human nature, though devastated through sin, was not lost. His depravity is not a matter of intellectual ignorance. For God would hold him accountable as a thinking, willing creature.

The article itself explains those glimmerings in terms of the remnants of some knowledge of God. That is the truth set forth in Romans 1:18-32. By that knowledge man is left without excuse before God. Man also retains some knowledge of natural things. He continues in his created position as king of the earthly creation, able to use the earth and its resources, and even to discover relationships between various elements of creation and to make earthly advancements by way of many inventions. Man retains some knowledge “of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment.” That is so, as Romans 2:14-15 explains, because they have “the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”

But any appeal to this article in support of common grace is unfounded. The Arminians insisted that man, by those natural gifts, could come to a saving knowledge of God. Over against this the Synod of Dordt maintained that it was not so. In the portion of the article omitted by Abraham Kuyper, as well as by the CRC, the Reformed fathers — continuing to develop the biblical doctrine of total depravity — insisted that this “light of nature” is not sufficient to bring man to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion. But then the fathers make a positive conclusion. So different is the biblical picture of the natural man from that drawn by the Remonstrants, that man is incapable of using these glimmerings aright “*even in things natural and civil*. Nay, further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders *wholly polluted* and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.”

By the use of the Canons in support of the doctrine of common grace the Synod of 1924 very really overthrew the teachings of Dordt. In the Second and Third Points in particular

they denied the biblical doctrine of total depravity. Abraham Kuyper discovered what he was looking for — a broad area of cooperation in things natural and civil by the children of God and the children of this world. The CRC affirmed it by adopting this doctrine in the Three Points.

In doing so, they established a common playground for believers and unbelievers alike. The playground is named “Farewell Antithesis.”

The result has been devastating.

It continues to wreak havoc to the antithesis in spite of all the warnings to the contrary by the Synod of 1924. Richard Mouw is one common grace theologian who recognizes this. In spite of his desire to hold to some form of common grace, he recognizes that the doctrine has had destructive consequences on the antithesis. He has even attempted, in writing and speaking, to defend and restore the doctrine of the antithesis. We would that he could understand the impossible position in which he stands. To maintain the antithesis while clinging to a doctrine that fundamentally undermines the truth of total depravity is an impossibility.

The doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924 is fundamentally flawed.

There is a reason why the Canons mention common grace once, and that in a negative light.²¹ It was a doctrine held by the Arminians, a doctrine that undermined the truth of Scripture. Even though the Arminians took it farther than a mere restraint of sin and the ability of man to perform *civic* good, and taught that man could achieve salvation by use of the abilities given him in common grace, nevertheless, their error was fundamentally the same as that of those in the Reformed camp who adopted their own version of common grace in 1924 and defend it today. They watered down the biblical truth of total depravity, and gave a real ability to the natural man to do good in God’s sight by virtue of His work of grace in them. And they affirmed that God’s grace was revealed in a desire on God’s part to save all, a desire expressed in the well-meant offer of salvation to all.

21. Heads III/IV, Rejection of Errors, Article 5.

We are careful to point out that it was Abraham Kuyper's view of common grace and not the view of the Arminians that was adopted in the Three Points. But the Kuyperian error ended up taking the church down a side path that connected with Arminianism. And as we look at the 1924 Synod's creedal defense from the Canons, we may say that even though our defense of sovereign, particular grace over against any idea of common grace is primarily an exegetical defense, we also insist that common grace is a fundamental rejection of several principle truths set forth in our Reformed creeds.

The Canons of Dordt leave no room for a common grace of God, but uphold the truth of particular grace. May God give us grace to continue to stand upon that foundation of our Reformed creed, and ardently to oppose all doctrine contrary to it, while maintaining the glory of God's grace, which is always particular.

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Book Reviews

The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission, by Donald G. Bloesch. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. 351 pp. \$27 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Donald Bloesch's work on the church is the sixth of seven volumes of his systematic theology. The previous five volumes have been reviewed in this journal.

As is true also of the other volumes, the treatment of the subject is thorough and wide-ranging. Bloesch explores the relation of the church and the kingdom; authority in the church; the marks of the church; right worship; and the sacraments and preaching (oddly, the sacraments are treated before the preaching).

An erudite theologian, Bloesch quotes and interacts with the church fathers, the Reformers, contemporary theologians, Rome, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the cults. Light is shed on the ecclesiology of these men, churches, and organizations.

The book takes up contem-

porary issues, including process theology; developments in public worship; the charismatic movement; the ordination of women to church office; postmodernism; and ecumenicity, particularly, "evangelical-Catholic unity."

Certain of his observations on these issues are helpful. Concerning a popular aspect of contemporary worship, Bloesch remarks, "From a Reformed standpoint the attempt to embellish worship by banners, paintings and statues is bound to result in worship whose object is to exhilarate the senses rather than give glory to God" (p. 128).

Bloesch's insight into what he calls "the crisis in worship today" is sound. The crisis in worship "signifies a crisis in spirituality." "Contemporary worship is gnostic and secular." It "converts worship into therapy."

Worship is now a means to tap into the creative powers within us rather than an occasion to bring before God our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Hymns that

retell the story of salvation as delineated in the Bible are being supplanted by praise choruses that are designed to transport the soul into a higher dimension of reality (pp. 130, 131).

If psalms are substituted for hymns and if the reading of the law is inserted into the order of one of the two worship services on the Lord's Day, Bloesch's model "Evangelical Order of Worship" is not much different from that followed every Sabbath in the Protestant Reformed Churches (p. 141). Sermons, though, are longer than twenty minutes (p. 142).

Bloesch notes the "disturbingly high divorce rate for clergy couples," although he approves the ordination of women to all offices in the church (p. 225).

In the reminder that "the current ecumenical movement has its roots in the cooperation of the churches in world mission" is a warning to true churches of Christ concerning their conducting of missions, especially missions abroad, even though the author does not intend this (p. 252).

Bloesch claims to be "forging" an evangelical theology for the present day. He likes to

position himself in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation. In certain important areas he is critical both of Rome and of Protestant liberalism. Bloesch regards the Reformation as necessary and often quotes Luther and Calvin with approval. He condemns Rome's hierarchical church government and its teaching of works-righteousness. He is sharply critical of the relativism and syncretism that characterize the mainline Protestant denominations. Bloesch affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation and calls on all churches to proclaim this.

In spite of his frequent quotation of the Reformers, Donald Bloesch's evangelical theology is not that of the Reformation creeds and therefore not the evangelical theology of the Reformation. Bloesch rejects the Reformation's doctrine of Scripture as an inspired book, which is therefore the sole source of, and authority over, the teachings of and about the church. Dismissing the doctrine of "inerrancy," which, in fact, refers to the doctrine of an inspired, authoritative book, Bloesch opts for a doctrine of "infallibility." But Bloesch's

doctrine of "infallibility," unlike the Reformation's doctrine of an inspired, authoritative book, permits Bloesch to find confusion and contradiction in Scripture on important issues of the church's faith and life. In his treatment of church government, for example, Bloesch finds the New Testament teaching both episcopacy and presbyterianism.

At odds with the Reformation regarding its "formal principle," namely, the doctrine of Scripture, Bloesch also takes issue with the "material principle" of the Reformation, namely, its message of salvation as embodied in the Reformation creeds. "In its protest against imbalances (*sic*) in Catholic thought and devotion, the Reformation generated imbalances of its own, such as justification as bare imputation and double predestination, which makes God the creator of evil" (p. 260).

Denying predestination, Bloesch embraces universal atonement and universal grace in the gospel. Unless Jesus in the end saves all—something Bloesch hopes and allows for—Jesus' lordship is thus fatally compromised. Bloesch declares

that the true church must confess and proclaim Jesus Christ as savior and lord. Upon examination, it becomes evident that in Bloesch's evangelical theology Christ is neither savior nor lord. He does not effectually save all for whom He died and whom He tries to save through the gospel. The implication is that those who are saved are not so much saved by Him as by themselves. They themselves are the real saviors. And if Christ fails in His efforts to save all without exception, He is exposed as impotent and thus a dubious lord.

Bloesch would contend that it is illegitimate, indeed scholastic and rationalistic, to define Jesus' lordship in this way. Bloesch is an ardent neo-orthodox disciple of Barth and Brunner. His theology is the offspring of the marriage of neo-orthodoxy and modern evangelicalism. As a disciple of Barth and Brunner, Bloesch plays Jesus off against "articles of faith," as he also plays the preaching of the gospel off against "a verbal formula."

We confess not articles of faith so much as the living Lord (p. 35).

Among the signs that at-

test the reality of the presence of Christ in the midst of the faithful is the pure preaching of the Word of God. The evangelical theology that has its source in the Protestant Reformation was very determined that this sign be recognized above all others. By the Word of God the Reformers did not have in mind a verbal formula or a theological interpretation but the truth of the gospel illumined and communicated by the Holy Spirit (p. 104).

The last line in the quotation above, playing the truth of the gospel off against “a verbal formula” intends to assert that Luther and Calvin were very good Barthians. Donald Bloesch must not take us for fools. It is one thing to advocate the neo-orthodox notion of truth as an ineffable encounter. It is another thing to foist this theology off on the Reformers. Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers

would have responded to this disjunction between the pure preaching of the Word of God and a “verbal formula,” or a “theological interpretation,” with the question, “How can one preach purely without verbal formulas, or theological interpretations?” The insistence of the Reformation upon verbal formulas and theological interpretations—*exact* verbal formulas and theological interpretations—is evident in the Reformation creeds, both the fact of the writing of them and the nature of them as careful expressions of the truth of the gospel. Did Luther think that one could preach the Word of God purely apart from the verbal formula, “We are justified by faith only”?

Against the theology of Donald Bloesch, there is no Jesus as object of the faith of the church than the Jesus known in orthodox verbal formulas and right theological interpretation. ■

Institutes of Elenctic Theology, by Francis Turretin. Tr. George Musgrave Giger. Ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1992-1997. Vol. 1, pp. vii+685 (cloth, \$39.95). Vol. 2, pp.

vii+724 (cloth, \$39.99). Vol. 3, pp. vii+814 (cloth, \$49.99). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

P&R's publication a few years ago of Francis Turretin's

dogmatics was a notable event. For the first time Turretin's three-volume work is widely available in English translation. And Turretin is among the very finest Reformed dogmatics after the Reformers. Prior to publication the English translation existed in the form of a handwritten manuscript in Princeton Seminary library. At the request of Princeton Seminary professor Charles Hodge, George Musgrave Giger had translated Turretin from the Latin, so that Hodge's students could use Turretin's dogmatical work. Giger worked at the translation for sixteen years, completing it sometime before his death in 1865. It is this translation that P&R has published.

Francis Turretin was professor of theology in the Academy of Geneva, which Calvin had founded in 1559, from 1653-1687. Turretin was a staunch defender of the Reformed faith as taught by his great predecessors, Calvin and Beza, and as more recently defined and confessed by the Canons of the Synod of Dordt. In his defense of the Reformed faith, Turretin notably opposed the heresy of Amyraldianism, which had re-

cently sprung up at a Reformed seminary in Saumur, France and which was spreading throughout the Continent. Amyraldianism is a subtle form of the teaching that the grace of God is universal, dependent for its efficacy in the salvation of particular sinners upon the will of the sinner. In 1675, Turretin co-authored a Swiss Reformed creed that condemned Amyraldianism, the Helvetic Consensus Formula. The creed is little known today, and appreciated even less. But it is well worth reading as a defense of Dordt against a clever attack on the sovereignty of grace that is popular in nominally Reformed churches still today. Turretin's *Institutes* repudiates universal grace in all its forms and fashions.

Turretin named his dogmatical work *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. "Institutes" describes the work as basic instruction in the teachings of the Bible as understood by the Reformed faith. "Elenctic" theology is an explanation of the doctrines of Scripture that refutes false teachings with logical arguments. Turretin's theology is deliberately and frankly polemical. From beginning to end, it

engages in controversy especially with Rome, Lutherans, the Anabaptists, and the Arminians, or Remonstrants. Turretin stated his polemical purpose in his preface to the reader: "to explain the importance of the principal controversies which lie between us and our adversaries" (vol. 1, p. xl).

This purpose explains Turretin's method. He introduced the various subjects of Reformed dogmatics with a question that sets forth the important issue on which the Reformed faith differs from its foes. At the end of the question, he indicated the Reformed position on the issue. He then proceeded to develop the subject itself at length. In the chapter on "Calling and Faith," for example, Turretin came to the subject of the serious call of the gospel to the reprobate. He introduced his treatment of the subject with this question:

Are the reprobate, who partake of external calling, called with the design and intention on God's part that they should become partakers of salvation? And, this being denied, does it follow that God does not deal seriously with them, but hypocritically and falsely,

or that he can be accused of any injustice? We deny (vol. 2, p. 504).

Then follows a thorough explanation of the calling of the reprobate, including the refutation of those who teach that God calls the reprobate with some desire to save them.

Basic to the controversy carried on in the *Institutes* is Turretin's conviction that the doctrines of Scripture harmonize with each other. Biblical truth is consistent. It is not contradictory. Specifically, if Scripture teaches, as it does, that God loves and desires to save some men only—the elect—the teaching that God loves and desires to save all men without exception is false. Elenctic theology refutes error by *logical* arguments. Of course, if biblical truth is not capable of being defended by logical arguments, it cannot be defended at all. Neither can it be explained at all. And neither can it be understood at all.

The three volumes of the *Institutes* were first published, in Latin, in the years 1679-1685.

That Turretin's theology is controversial in no wise detracts from its being a thorough treatment of all the main doctrines of

Holy Scripture as confessed by the Reformed faith. The order of the treatment is that which became traditional for Reformed theologians, the order of the six *loci*. After an introductory section on the nature of theology, Turretin set forth the Reformed doctrine of Holy Scripture as fundamental to the right knowledge of God. This is followed by the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation, and the doctrine of the church. The work concludes with the doctrine of the last things.

Volume one begins with Turretin's dedication of the work, which includes a fascinating history of the struggles of the Geneva church against heretics. Turretin spoke of Michael Servetus, "not a man, but a monster of all wickedness." In addition, the first volume also contains Turretin's preface to the reader, the introductory section on theology, and the treatment of the doctrines of God and of man.

Following an extended explanation of the law of God, at the heart of which is detailed exposition of the ten commandments, volume two takes up the

doctrine of Christ. Introductory to the doctrine of Christ is important development of Scripture's teaching on the covenant. Volume two concludes with the doctrine of salvation.

Volume three contains Turretin's treatment of the doctrines of the church and of the last things. At the end of the last volume are found the editor's account of "The Life and Career of Francis Turretin," the "Funeral Oration of Benedict Pictet concerning the Life and Death of Francis Turretin," a brief biography of translator Giger, and several indices to the entire three-volume set.

Turretin was a learned theologian. The *Institutes* is replete with quotations from, references to, and interaction with the church fathers, Jewish theologians, Roman Catholic theologians and theology, Lutheran writers, Socinians, Arminian theologians, and secular authors. The Swiss theologian was also a biblical theologian. He derived his Reformed theology from Scripture. The pages of the three volumes are full of biblical citations, biblical references, and exegesis of biblical texts. The logic of Turretin's exposition and defense of Reformed theol-

ogy is that of Scripture itself.

In the chapter on "Calling and Faith," Turretin refuted the teaching of the Arminians that the grace of God in the call of the gospel is directed to all who hear, and is therefore resistible. The Arminians always appeal to Matthew 23:37 in support of their doctrine of common, resistible grace in the preaching of the gospel. The text has Christ declaring that He willed to gather Jerusalem's children, but that certain men were not willing that Christ should do so. Turretin explained Matthew 23:37.

Although Christ professes that "he had wished to gather together the children of Jerusalem, and they would not" (Mt. 23:37), it does not follow that grace is resistible. (1) Jerusalem is here openly distinguished from her children and by it are denoted the elders, scribes, priests and other leaders of the city (who are gifted with the better name of city [as Mt. 2:1, 3] and who wished to be considered the fathers of the people). Nor does Christ say that those whom he wished to gather together were unwilling to be gathered together. But only that

Jerusalem was unwilling that her children should be gathered and "thou wouldst not" (*kai ouk etheleesate*) (to wit, ye leaders). And thus Christ does not so much complain of those who being called had not come, as of those who resisted the calling of others as much as they could (the key of knowledge being taken away); not entering as to themselves and prohibiting others who entered (i.e., who desired to enter) as much as in them lay, as we read in Lk. 11:52. But still Christ did not cease, notwithstanding the resistance of the leaders of the city, to gather whom he wished, as Augustine has it (*Enchiridion* 24 [97] (vol. 2, p. 556).

This quotation of Turretin demonstrates the soundness of the Geneva professor, particularly as regards the gospel of salvation by sovereign, particular, irresistible grace. This gospel had just been defended by the Synod of Dordt. The Canons defined Reformed orthodoxy for that and all time. Turretin was an avowed and ardent champion of the sovereignty of God in His grace in Jesus Christ.

On the issue "whether the

virtues of the heathen were good works from which the power of free will to good can be inferred," Turretin declared, "We deny against the papists." Turretin explained this Reformed denial by a series of quotations from Augustine, including these: "However highly the works of unbelievers may be extolled, everything which is not of faith, is sin"; "without the worship of the true God, even what seems virtue is sin, nor can anyone please God without God; and he who does not please God, whom does he please except himself and Satan" (vol. 1, pp. 683, 685).

Turretin held that the Reformed faith rejects the doctrine that God has a sincere desire to save all men. Considering predestination, Turretin raised the issue in this question and answer:

Can there be attributed to God any conditional will, or universal purpose of pitying the whole human race fallen in sin, of destinating Christ as Mediator to each and all, and of calling them all to a saving participation of his benefits? We deny.

He clarified the issue.

The question is not whether there is in God a will commanding and approving faith and the salvation of men; nor whether God in the gospel commands men to believe and repent if they wish to be saved; nor whether it pleases him for me to believe and be saved. For no one denies that God is pleased with the conversion and life of the sinner rather than with his death. We willingly subscribe to the Synod of Dort, which determines that "God sincerely and most truly shows in his word, what is pleasing to him; namely, that they who are called should come to him" . . . But the question is whether from such a will approving and commanding what men must do in order to obtain salvation, can be gathered any will or purpose of God by which he intended the salvation of all and everyone under the condition of faith and decreed to send Christ into the world for them.

Turretin continued:

Thus the question may be reduced to these boundaries—whether there is in God a general decree; whether it is called a counsel or purpose or a conditional will by which

God truly and earnestly intended to have mercy unto salvation upon each and every one (not by giving faith, but by sending Christ for each and every one and calling all to salvation under the condition of faith and repentance). The patrons of universal grace maintain this; we deny it (vol. 1, pp. 395-417).

In harmony with his rejection of universal grace as a will, or desire, of God for the salvation of all men without exception, Turretin denied that God externally calls the reprobate wicked with any “design and intention” that they be saved.

Are the reprobate, who partake of external calling, called with the design and intention on God’s part that they should become partakers of salvation? And, this being denied, does it follow that God does not deal seriously with them, but hypocritically and falsely; or that he can be accused of any injustice? We deny.

The first reason why there can be no will in God for the salvation of the reprobate is that

God cannot in calling intend the salvation of those whom

he reprobated from eternity and from whom he decreed to withhold faith and other means leading to salvation. Otherwise he would intend what he knows is contrary to his own will.... This everyone sees to be repugnant to the wisdom, goodness and power of God.

Turretin distinguished the external call of the gospel, which comes to all who hear the gospel, from the gracious, efficacious call, which He addresses to the elect alone.

For [external] calling shows what God wills man should do, but not what he himself had decreed to do. It teaches what is pleasing and acceptable to God and in accordance with his own nature (namely, that the called should come to him); but not what he himself has determined to do concerning man. It signifies what God is prepared to give believers and penitents, but not what he has actually decreed to give to this or that person (vol. 2, pp. 504-510).

There is a very careful, cautious treatment of the question whether the covenant is

conditional or unconditional. Although Turretin approved speaking of conditions in a certain, carefully defined sense, he rejected conditions, not only as the meritorious cause, but also as the “impulsive” cause of the covenant. That is, he rejected conditions as acts of the sinner that make a universal, gracious promise effective in some, in distinction from others. The only acceptable sense, for Turretin, of conditions in the covenant is that of instrumentality: “the instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant.”

But the “first” thing Turretin had to say about the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant was this.

If the condition is taken antecedently and *a priori* for the meritorious and impulsive cause and for a natural condition, the covenant of grace is rightly denied to be conditioned. It is wholly gratuitous, depending upon the sole good will (*eudokia*) of God and upon no merit of man. *Nor can the right to life be founded upon any action of ours, but on the righteousness of Christ alone* (vol. 2, pp. 184ff.; emphasis added).

By the time of Turretin—some one hundred years after the death of Calvin—the view of the covenant with Adam in Paradise as a covenant of works was well established in Reformed theology. There is in Turretin a full-blown doctrine of a covenant of works, including the notion that Adam, by his obedience, might have obtained the immortal, heavenly life that believers now have in Christ (vol. 1, pp. 574ff.).

Especially in Turretin’s explanation of the ten commandments is found instruction concerning the Reformed, Christian life. The seventh commandment, among other prohibitions, forbids

the painting of the face and the loose and lascivious dress of the body, when lewdness flows . . . from the soul into the clothing, from the conscience to the surface: dances and lascivious motions, demoralizing scenic representations and stage plays (usual now) (vol. 2, p. 121).

No review of this enormous contribution to Reformed theology in the English language would be fair that neglected to mention the prodigious work of

the editor, James T. Dennison, Jr., in preparing the volumes for publication. Editing the eight thousand pages of the Giger translation required work on the text itself, for example, shortening sentences and clarifying expressions; checking and correcting all Scripture quotations (which are based on the King James Version); examining and providing full bibliographical data for all Turretin's quotations from other authors, secular as well as theological; and transliterating the Greek and Hebrew words and phrases.

In addition, Dennison has written an essay on "The Life and Career of Francis Turretin"

and a sketch of the life of the translator, George Musgrave Giger; has compiled a "biographical dictionary" of all the names, historical and mythical, that occur in the *Institutes*; and has provided important indices—an index of proper names, an index of subjects, an index of Scripture and apocrypha, an index of significant Hebrew words, an index of significant Greek words, and an index of works cited. These all appear at the end of volume three.

This editorial work makes a great work of theology useful to the scholar, minister, and layman. ■

Theologians of the Baptist Tradition, by Timothy George & David S. Dockery, eds. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2001). Pp xviii- 414. Paper. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The book, edited by George and Dockery and comprising a number of essays written by many different men, has as its stated purpose a discussion of the life and views of theologians who were influen-

tial on or found within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The SBC is far and away the largest Protestant denomination in this country and continues to leave a significant mark on the religious life of the United States of America.

While many of the theologians discussed in this book are perhaps not so well known, most will recognize the names of such men as John Gill, Andrew Fuller, James Petigru Boyce, John A. Broadus, O. T. Robertson,

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Herschel H. Hobbs, W. A. Criswell, and Carl F. H. Henry. A short biography of each theologian is given, but a description and evaluation of each man's theology is the main purpose of each essay.

John Gill was accused of being a hyper-Calvinist in his day because of his emphasis on eternal justification and the sovereign grace of God in salvation — perhaps partly because he held Tobias Crisp and Joseph Hussey, two hyper-Calvinists, in high esteem. Yet Gill never denied that the command to repent and believe in Christ must be brought to all men.

Andrew Fuller fought bitterly against hyper-Calvinism, but was congregationalist in his thinking and was post-mil in his eschatology. These men were theologians from the British Isles.

James Petigru Boyce (1827-1888) was educated at Princeton and influenced by Francis Turretin. He started the first seminary in the SBC and insisted on a confessional basis for it. He opposed Arminianism, but supported Dwight L. Moody and considered Arminian theologians to be wrong only in their

emphasis on different points of doctrine — different, that is, than the emphasis of Calvinists on sovereign grace. By his time the church of which he was a part already had many Arminians in it, and his toleration of this abysmal error opened the door for the final victory of Arminianism in his church.

John A. Broadus (1827-1895) was a chaplain in Robert E. Lee's army during the Civil War. He assisted Boyce in founding the first seminary of the SBC, and was what one can probably call a mild Calvinist. His most famous book is on Homiletics (the art of sermon making), a book which contained his lectures to his first Homiletics class. The class had one student who was blind.

A. T. Robertson (1827-1895) was the son-in-law of John Broadus. He was a master of Greek and wrote a massive grammar on New Testament Greek that is still used today in many seminaries. He is also well known for his "Word Pictures of the Greek New Testament." His theology was syncretistic.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1872), widely known today through his writings and

sermons, never received any formal theological training and was ordained to the ministry at 17 years of age. His ministry at New Park Street Baptist Church still casts a long shadow over the church in the British Isles and America. He was thoroughly acquainted with Puritan writers, was deeply influenced by them, and is considered to be a Calvinist. He waged war with hyper-Calvinists, was an admirer of Dwight L. Moody, and had Sankey sing at his funeral.

It is interesting to note that the book cannot quite make up its mind on what a hyper-Calvinist is. Sometimes hyper-Calvinism is equated with being a supra-lapsarian, sometimes it is said to be a denial of evangelism, sometimes it is described as believing that the gospel can be preached only to the elect; then again it is equated with a description of "high Calvinism," or as a denial of the gospel offer; or even as a denial of human responsibility. One is almost forced to the conclusion that the editors of the book consider any denial of Arminianism to be hyper-Calvinism.

Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836-1921) was an interesting figure in Baptist thought. He

was a very ambitious man who was dissatisfied with a small church and would not accept the chair of theology at Rochester Seminary unless he was given the presidency. He was fairly orthodox in his theology, but he appointed liberal professors to the Seminary, including Rauschenbusch, the father of the social gospel. He was an avowed theistic evolutionist and all but identified the creation with Christ. He was influential on Clark Pinnock, the liberal "Openness of God" theologian. The book says of him:

On the first level Strong's theology identified him as a conservative, orthodox theologian, truly a "fundamentalist" in the early twentieth-century sense of the word. Strong defended such traditional doctrines as the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the supernatural reality of the biblical miracles, substitutionary atonement, and the inspiration and authority of the Bible. On the second level Strong maintained considerable continuity with the Reformed theology tradition. Strong held to a high view of God's sovereignty, imputation and original sin, unconditional election, a particular application

of the atonement, and the efficacy of grace. On the third and perhaps most profound level, Strong's theology was thoroughly modern. Strong sought a rapprochement between classical theology and the challenges he saw posed to it by philosophical and scientific discourse.

He attempted the impossible task of defending orthodoxy on the basis of a philosophical methodology — and lost his faith.

Benajah Harvey Carroll (1843-1914) was the most influential theologian in the SBC during the last half of the nineteenth century. He was also notable for raising 24 children, and that on a poor minister's wages. Though orthodox on fundamentals, he was Arminian and post-mil.

W. A. Criswell (1909-?) was the well-known minister of First Dallas Baptist Church with 26,000 members and 6,000

regular attendees. He wrote 50 books, although 47 were his sermons. On Old Years Day, 1961, he preached from 7:00 in the evening until 1962 arrived, a total of five hours. He believed in the gap theory of theistic evolution, was a "four-point" Calvinist, denying the particular redemption of Christ, and was pre-mil & dispensational.

The interesting part of the book is its record of the gradual decline of the SBC from the days of the Calvinism of John Gill to a denomination of almost any and every religious persuasion found in America and abroad. It still has its conservative men, such as Carl F. H. Henry and Millard J. Erickson. But it is also the church that can keep as members in good standing such men as the syncretist Jimmy Carter and the morally depraved Bill Clinton. The struggle between conservatives and liberals goes on in the denomination. ■

John Wesley, A Biography, by Stephen Tomkins. Grand Rapids, MI, William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003. Pp. 208. \$20.00 (paperback). [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

In 24 short chapters, Stephen Tomkins has given us an interesting and readable life of the heretic John Wesley (1703-1791). This book is all the more valuable, perhaps, be-

cause it was written by one who is very sympathetic to Wesley and his message.

Wesley was a remarkable man by any standards. In his 87 years, he rode over 250,000 miles to preach over 40,000 sermons (p. 199). He was a man of indomitable will, rising at 4 a.m. each morning and braving foul weather and hostile crowds. One reads of his escapes from angry mobs with wonder (pp. 110-120). Tomkins writes that in his last few years he was widely received with "veneration"; indeed he was "almost a national treasure" (p. 183). In 1790, there were 61,811 Methodists in the United States and 71,463 in the United Kingdom (p. 190). Today, there are some 33 million Methodists worldwide. Last year was the tercentenary of his birth and accolades poured in from all over the world, with some of the most effusive coming from purported Calvinists. Surely, then, John Wesley must have been a faithful servant of God, owned and honored in the cause of Jesus Christ.

The Reformed believer "judgeth all things" in the light of "the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:15-16) revealed in sacred Scripture and summed in the Reformed confessions. We bear

record of Wesley that he had a zeal for God, but was it according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2)? We marvel at his endurance: riding from London to Bristol, Wales, and Ireland in the west; and to Newcastle and Scotland in the north, but we remember another who is even more assiduous, ever "going to and fro in the earth" (Job 1:7). And did not our Lord call down "woe" upon the scribes and the Pharisees for traveling across "sea and land to make one proselyte" because they made him "two-fold more the child of hell than" themselves (Matt. 23:15)? The question then is this: What was the gospel that Wesley preached? Was it the true gospel (with some weaknesses, perhaps) or was it "another gospel" "which is not another" (Gal. 1:6-7)? Tomkins' book alone provides enough information to answer this question. Wesley even quotes Whitefield as saying that the two of them "preached two different gospels" (p. 94).

Wesley's gospel was the false gospel of salvation by the free will of the sinner. Free will, for all Westley's talk of God's grace, was the deciding factor in salvation. In loving free will, Wesley hated predes-

tion, calling it "blasphemy." He declared, "It represents the most holy God as worse than the Devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust" (p. 78).

However, the *Canons of Dordt* state that the "decree of election and reprobation" is "revealed in the Word of God" and "though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation" (I.6). Where does his leave Wesley? Not with the "holy and pious souls," but with the "men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds" who "wrest" the truth of predestination "to their own destruction."

In its "Conclusion," the Synod of Dordt "warns calumniators to consider the terrible judgment of God which awaits them." Wesley certainly belongs in this category, for he is guilty of the sins the "Conclusion" proceeds to enumerate: "bearing false witness against the confessions of so many Churches [including the church in which he lived and died] ... distressing the consciences of the weak; and ... laboring to render suspected the society of the truly faithful."

Remember that Wesley

was not simply a church member but a church officebearer and that his church's creed (Article 17 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*) taught election. Moreover, he was a founder of societies (and eventually a denomination), and he saw himself as a restorer of primitive Christianity! If church teachers shall receive a greater judgment (James 3:1), where will this leave Wesley?

With his faith in free will, the doctrines of total depravity, particular atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints had to go as well (pp. 71, 96, 171), contrary to Articles 9, 15, and 17 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. At the 1770 Methodist Conference, Wesley's doctrine of justification by free will led him to espouse an even more crude heresy: justification by works (pp. 171-173). Briefly, Wesley dropped the formula that the conference had approved, but "almost immediately afterwards" he printed a defense of the original minutes (p. 173). Tomkins makes no reference to Wesley's denial of the imputed righteousness of Christ in justification.

Wesley's corruption of the will of God in sovereign grace fits with his misunderstanding

of God's will in providence. Wesley believed in opening the Bible at random for guidance at critical junctures (pp. 54, 78), as did his brother, Charles (pp. 68-69). He also resorted to lots (pp. 54, 75, 78), dreams (p. 133), and intuitions (p. 71). This unscriptural understanding of divine guidance led him into further trouble.

Wesley and Whitefield had reached a truce on God's decree, agreeing to "let sleeping dogmas lie," as Tomkins puts it. But one day, Wesley "found himself *inwardly called* to speak out against predestination" (p. 71; italics mine). Tomkins continues, "After making the point at length, [Wesley] prayed aloud (again on divine impulse) that if he was right God would send a sign." People began to fall down and cry out (pp. 72-73). To Wesley Almighty God was "stamping Divine approval" on his message (p. 73). "On one occasion," writes Tomkins, Wesley even ascribed his recovery from illness "as a reward [from God] for preaching against the Calvinists" (p. 98).

While mysticism led him to preach against predestination, the casting of lots brought him to publish against it: "he re-

sorted to pulling God's will out of a hat and was told 'Print and preach,' which he did" (p. 78). What are we to make of this? The Lord "put a lying spirit in the mouth" of John Wesley (I Kings 22:23) and He willed, in His sovereignty over the lot (Prov. 16:33), that Wesley's lies be printed for the deceiving of the reprobate (II Thess. 2:10-12) and the testing of the elect. Not content to attack the truth of predestination merely in his preaching and his books, Wesley also used "hymns," as did his brother, Charles (p. 93).

Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification by the free will of man fits with his teaching of justification by the free will of man, though not with Articles 9 and 15 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. He was already teaching perfectionism in the "Holy Club" at Oxford University in 1733 (p. 38). By 1739-1740, through a dispute with the Moravians, he reached the point where he would "castigate any who denied perfection as antinomians who were happy to accept their sinfulness" (p. 88). This was a doctrine in which Wesley "passionately believed," and so he "preached" it and "fought for it at length" (p. 156).

Wesley's free-will theology also carried over into his view of the church. Though an ordained minister in the Church of England, he organized a connection of societies (along side the institute church) governed by his rules and regulations, i.e., his free will (e.g., pp. 166-167). Methodist laymen were being used of God (p. 81), Wesley thought, so in 1739 he "gave his permission" for them to continue preaching (p. 82), contrary to Articles 23 and 36 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. When a Methodist lay preacher administered Communion in 1755, Charles states that "John was not greatly troubled" (contra Article 23 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*). Wesley "suggested that this was the logical conclusion of appointing lay people to preach: 'We have in effect ordained already'" (p. 150).

Women preaching followed in the 1760s (pp. 159-160), with Wesley giving them rules (p. 167). Sarah Crosby "traveled nearly 1,000 miles a year, speaking at over 200 public meetings and 600 class or band meetings" (p. 175). Mary Bosanquet, another woman preacher, "married Wesley's close friend and defender John

Fletcher in 1781, and the couple operated virtually as joint ministers in his Madeley parish" (p. 190). As Tomkins says, Wesley "was a pragmatist"; this was "his deepest instinct" (p. 160). Remember too that when Wesley was a boy, his mother, Susanna, "led in prayer and discussion and read sermons" and missionary stories to 200 members—including men—of her husband Samuel's congregation in their crowded parsonage on Sunday afternoons when he was away at Convocation (p. 16).

Wesley and the Methodists also corrupted God's worship with their "testimonies" (p. 81) and hymn singing. Both John and Charles wrote hymns, with the latter penning between 4,000 and 10,000 (p. 95). John even published America's first hymnbook, in 1736 (p. 51). Tomkins writes,

These hymns were of vital importance to Methodism. They were used to gather crowds for outdoor preaching, they were a popular part of the societies' worship, and they wrote Methodist teaching in the memory of the singers and in their hearts too....
They were also weapons in the war over predestination

and perfection, and much of Charles's sectarian propaganda survives in hymns sung all over the world today (pp. 95-96; italics mine).

Tomkins adds, "John was not above stopping the congregation halfway through to ask them if they really meant what they were singing" (p. 96). What about that for a way of catching a congregation in an Arminian, perfectionist trap! Write "exuberant and emotional," anti-Calvinist hymns (p. 95); lead those assembled in the singing; then explain their meaning; and the people are snared. Ulster fundamentalist Ian Paisley once stated that he could derive all five points of Calvinism from the hymns of the Wesleys. John and Charles would turn in their graves!

Methodist revivalist meetings were attended with charismatic phenomena. There were people crying out (pp. 65, 71, 105, 108) or laughing (p. 157), with children often playing "prominent parts" (p. 175) in both the wailing (p. 155) and the laughing (p. 157). Some fell down prostrate (pp. 72, 79, 105, 156-157) and others had visions and revelations (p. 156). Was this a rare thing? No, Tomkins

writes, "this kind of thing happened almost daily" (p. 71). But did this occur where Wesley himself was preaching? Yes, his preaching provoked the "charismatic phenomena" (p. 65), including the "wailing and convulsions" (p. 103). Thus his preaching was a "noisy event" (p. 72). Tomkins writes that "charismatic phenomena... were to surround Wesley throughout his life" (p. 39). But did not Wesley oppose these things? No. He was "impressed," "delighted," and "wholly positive" regarding the charismatic phenomena (pp. 73, 157), viewing the outbreaks "most favourably" (p. 105). Wesley "championed... charismatic gifts" (p. 195) and "embraced" dreams and visions "unreservedly" (p. 65). But, of course! For not only other Methodists (pp. 60, 102, 123, 161), but Wesley himself, had dreams (p. 133). He also believed in miraculous healing (pp. 162-163) and evidently believed that on one occasion he raised the dead, or at least one "dangerously ill" (p. 106).

Other "bizarre religious phenomena of Methodism" include the man "who had the gift of preaching in his sleep."

He would sing a hymn, recite a text and then preach a six-point sermon, sometimes breaking off to dispute with a clergyman who came to interrupt him (p. 144).

Then there was the Wesleyan lay preacher who spoke in tongues and the demon-possessed girl who recovered before Wesley was able to make it to her house (p. 144).

Tomkins sums up the role of charismatic phenomena in Methodism:

The importance of Methodism's willingness to embrace the miraculous and charismatic has not always been recognised, but it was crucial. It was, though by no means uniformly, a religion of dreams and visions, healings, convulsions, ecstatic worship, exorcisms and messages and guidance from God. Such phenomena were exciting for participants and drew many spectators. They were also often decisive in Methodist conversions and played an ongoing part in their spiritual lives (p. 85).

Tomkins rightly sees Wesley and his Methodism as a forerunner of the Pentecostal movement (pp. 196, 198-199). This

is where his free-will gospel was to take many of his followers in years to come.

Moreover, the fusion of free will and emotionalism in modern Pentecostalism has much in common with Wesley, who stressed "look[ing] within" and "feel[ing]" God's love (p. 66) and who "put such store on his feelings as proof of his soul's state" (p. 62). John Wesley's love of the medieval mystics and his indebtedness to the "emotional" Moravians (p. 46) comes in here too. They placed a lot of "emphasis on experience and feelings in the spiritual life." There is a lot to be said for Tomkins' reckoning: "Moravian spirituality ... [had] an incalculable impact on the shape of Methodism" (p. 46).

Tomkins' lively biography is highly revealing and, given his doctrinal sympathy for Wesley, remarkably even-handed. He concludes that Wesley "certainly" was a "web of contradictions" (p. 195) and that the accounts of his life and work contain "a dizzying degree of spin" (p. 196). He quotes at length Wesley's bizarre letter of confession—"I do not love God. I never did" (p. 168). He writes of his "romantic debacles" (p. 196), including his

“distant and unhappy” marriage (p. 167), his “serial plagiar- [ism]” (pp. 177-178), and his (doctrinally significant) a-bridgement of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* for the American Meth-odists (p. 187). Tomkins writes that Wesley “was a founding father of evangelicalism, but for his last 20 years, he consistently

retreated from its stark certainties” (p. 196). This is where Wesley’s free-will theology took him! Of course! For free will itself is the end of the certainties of the evangel. Wesley’s followers today are still retreating ever more consistently from the gospel. ■

Luther in Context. David C. Steinmetz, Second Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. xiii + 195 pages. (paper). Price: \$19.95. [Reviewed by Russell Dykstra.]

Baker Academic (a division of Baker Book House) has published a second edition of a fine work by Dr. David C. Steinmetz. *Luther in Context* was first published in 1995. The new edition is not a mere reprint; new and worthwhile material (three chapters) has been added.

The book now consists of thirteen relatively brief chapters, each of which treats a particular topic. Steinmetz’s stated task is “to cast light on Luther’s thought by placing it in the context of his theological anteced-

ents and contemporaries” (xii). He succeeds admirably.

These essays on Luther are, in the writer’s words, “exercises in intellectual history.” That is to say, the book is not intended to be devotional or edifying, but is an academic study. The book, accordingly, contains a number of concise and well-documented evaluations. In addition, every attempt is made to evaluate Luther’s positions in the light of his times, rather than to judge the man by today’s standards or later development in theology. Dr. Steinmetz is careful, and the reader profits from this all-out effort to present Luther’s work honestly and accurately.

However, an intellectual study of Luther has its drawbacks. One of the weaknesses is that the studies are not always

very relevant for the disciple of Luther accustomed to reading Luther for edification. Also, some of the comparisons, while accurate, tend to be rather formal in nature, obviously not aiming for deep, theological evaluation. In addition, some of the chapters are technical descriptions of exegetical method.

In spite of these negative aspects, the book is valuable.

The book compares Luther to a variety of theologians — from Roman Catholic, to Calvin, Augustine, and the Anabaptists, and that on a wide range of topics. Many of the topics are on the heart of the Reformation's struggle, such as Chapter 1, on Luther's *Anfechtungen*, or spiritual trials, through which God led Luther to the right understanding of justification.

Another significant chapter discusses the concept of "free will" (Chapter 6, "Luther and Hubmaier on the Freedom of the Human Will"). Known to all is Luther's controversy with Erasmus on the will of man. Less is known of the fact that Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier wrote two pamphlets against Luther's view of the will of man. Hubmaier was a converted Roman Catholic who later became an Anabaptist. Luther never

answered the man directly, but Steinmetz contrasts the views of the two men from their respective writings. A brief description of the chapter will serve to illustrate the value of this kind of study.

Steinmetz sets the stage on this topic of free will by examining the view of man's will that both Luther and Hubmaier had imbibed in their earlier years in Rome, specifically the teaching of William Ockham and of Gabriel Biel. They taught that fallen man retains sufficient good so that if he simply "does what is in him," that is, uses the good left in him, he will merit God's saving grace. Both Luther and Hubmaier, in their early days, expressed similar beliefs on this score. However, Luther later repudiated that position, and by the time of the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, Luther maintained that "free will after the Fall exists only in name, and as long as a man 'does what in him lies,' he is committing mortal sin" (quoted by Steinmetz, p. 66). Hubmaier, on the other hand, maintained that the will of fallen man not only retained some good, but was inclined to the good. Hubmaier goes so far as to make a free human decision a necessary preparation for

regeneration! Steinmetz's analysis is that "Hubmaier's Anabaptist convictions and his scholarly heritage coincide. Affirm freedom of the will, and the Anabaptist vision of redemption can be affirmed with it. Deny freedom of the will (as Luther has done) and the Anabaptist position becomes impossible to maintain" (p. 70).

Also incisive is Steinmetz's analysis of the covenant views that were connected with a free will, namely, a conditional covenant. He writes,

When Hubmaier thinks of a covenant between God and the Church, he thinks of a two-sided covenant in which there are mutual obligations and to which human response provides the key. While God has taken the initiative in establishing the structure in which human beings may be saved, his act of regenerating sinners is itself a response to the human act of fulfilling the condition of the covenant. God draws sinners to salvation or permits them to be damned, if they will not be saved (p. 69).

Steinmetz's description of Hubmaier's covenant theology captures the essence of the con-

ditional covenant taught in many Presbyterian and Reformed circles today. However, Steinmetz goes farther, by spelling out the conclusions that Reformed promulgators of the conditional covenant have been unwilling to draw. He writes, "In the last analysis, it is human choice and not divine sovereignty which is decisive" (p. 69). This is exactly what happens when election is disconnected from the covenant, as Hubmaier demanded and the modern conditional covenant theologians teach. If God's decree of election does not determine who is saved, then man's will must determine it. But that is not Reformed.

Among the other significant chapters included in the first printing of the book are one comparing Luther and Augustine on Romans 9 (Ch. 2), "Luther and the Hidden God" (Ch. 3, on the topic of revelation), "Abraham and the Reformation" (Ch. 4), and "Luther and Calvin on Church and Tradition" (Ch. 8).

One of the newly added chapters, Chapter 11, entitled "Luther and Formation in Faith," examines both how Luther differed from the Romish Church, and in what manner he

reformed the faith and practice of the church. Luther had countless decisions to make after the break came with Rome. The author maintains that in some matters Luther did not greatly depart from the practice of Rome. He cites, as an example, Luther's appeal to the ancient church, even as the Romish Church appealed to tradition. This example of Steinmetz is, however, rather weak. Steinmetz himself notes that Luther's use of the fathers was selective and he gave more weight to the "better fathers." Writes Steinmetz, "Luther was content to leave Origen and Jerome, whose exegesis he mistrusted, to Erasmus, if he could have Augustine" (p. 130). In addition, Luther always placed the authority of Scripture above that of the fathers, something that Rome did not do.

This fascinating essay, "Luther and Formation in Faith," demonstrates that Luther rejected Romish teaching outright, as on clerical marriage. In other areas, Luther retained some of the forms of Rome, but gave much different content or a new basis to the practice. One example of this is the private confession of sins to the minister. Rome required members to

see a priest at least once a year, confess all the sins they could remember since the last confession, and receive absolution from the priest. Luther made the practice an option, though he encouraged it. However, the member was not required to list all the sins that he could possibly remember. It was sufficient to confess that he was a sinner who had transgressed God's law and was in need of God's grace, as well as to mention some of the sins that were particularly grievous to him. The minister would inquire about the confessor's belief in the forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ, and assure him of forgiveness. According to Luther, the forgiveness was given not because of a minister's special connection to Christ, "but because the Word of God binds and looses from sin" (p. 138). Indeed, insisted Luther, this confession might also be made to another believer.

In all this, one is struck by the enormity of the task that Luther accomplished by God's grace in the midst of horrendous apostasy. Steinmetz gives a brief analysis of why Luther's efforts to reform the church were not always carried out in the Lutheran church. One of the

main reasons was the dissent within the Protestant camp, and especially within Lutheranism itself. He does not face the question of whether Luther himself should have gone farther in some areas.

The two additional chapters compare and contrast Luther's exegesis with other theologians — on the passages Jacob's dream of the ladder, and Jacob's wrestling at Peniel. Although these are somewhat technical in nature, they do reveal something about Luther's method of doing exegesis. These chapters indicate that Luther was well acquainted with the commentaries available, and that he faced some of the same questions as earlier commentators from other ecclesiastical traditions. At the same time, Luther took the liberty not only to give different answers, but also to face different exegetical questions. In harmony with his character and faith, Luther was bold in his exegesis, yet seeking ever to be faithful to the Bible.

There is one interesting and, I believe, significant omission in the book that should be noted. There are many today who promote the false notion

that the two theological giants of the Reformation, Luther and Calvin, differed on the doctrine of justification by faith. It is significant that Dr. Steinmetz, a recognized scholar on both Luther and Calvin, does not set Luther and Calvin at odds in any of the places where he discusses justification by faith. Indeed, in chapter eight ("Luther and Calvin on Church and Tradition") Steinmetz mentions Luther's view of justification by faith in connection with the church, and also sets forth (briefly) what Calvin taught on justification by faith and the place of good works (pp. 93, 94). This would have been an opportune time for Steinmetz to explore conflicts between Calvin and Luther. He does not. On the contrary, already in the introduction of that chapter Steinmetz observed with approval that "Karl Holl called Calvin Luther's best disciple" (p. 86). As noted earlier, Dr. Steinmetz is an honest student of history.

This book is well written, and serious students of doctrine and of Luther will profit much from it. It is highly recommended. ■

Contributors for this issue are:

Robert D. Decker, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

Russell J. Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

David J. Engelsma, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

Herman C. Hanko, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

Steven R. Key, pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa.

Angus Stewart, missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches, currently serving in Northern Ireland.