

# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

We think our readers will once again enjoy the articles prepared for t his **issue of *The Journal***. Prof. David Engelsma continues his study of the history of **divorce and remarriage** in the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions.

**The church, almost entirely**, has caved in to divorce and remarriage on **almost any grounds**. It seems possible and cogent to argue that this is, at least **in part, due to a basic** error of interpretation and exegesis of Scripture on the **f+ndamental question: May those divorced on grounds of adultery and/or desertion remarry**. Without many exceptions, both the Reformed and **Presbyterian traditions have** said: Yes — something Engelsma makes **abundantly clear**. **He** contends, however, that, while a Reformed believer **cherishes his tradition**, it is also Reformed to maintain that Scripture stands **above all tradition**.

**In our day when** immorality and promiscuity is a way of life and when **this very** immorality is **used** by Satan in his great (and, perhaps, last) attack **on that most basic** of society's institutions — the sacred institution of **marriage—the church needs a strong** voice to shout what Scripture teaches **and to shout loudly enough** for all to hear. Prof. Engelsma is that voice.

May the church which still desires holiness in the world of sin stop to listen and join in protecting marriage as an institution of Christ.

The problem of God's good gifts to men has evoked much discussion over the years. Many have insisted that these good gifts can be interpreted in no other way than as evidences of God's grace towards all men.

As many (if not all) of our readers know, the Protestant Reformed Churches have taken a stand against this doctrine as destructive of the truths of sovereign and particular grace. In fact, this doctrine and controversy over it are the causes of the beginning of our denomination.

An article in this issue of *The Journal* examines this question. The article brings up some important aspects of the question: If good gifts are grace towards unbelievers, are bad things judgments of wrath upon believers? To explain good gifts in terms of grace is one thing; how does one explain the terrible things which are the lot of all men?

Besides this, is it possible that we judge those things which God is pleased to send us in this life according to our earthly and subjective standards of what is good and what is bad? This is important, for only Scripture can really tell us how to evaluate all that God does. He is great and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

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But all these matters are yet not the heart of the question. The article turns to Scripture to learn why God sends "good gifts" to all men without distinction; but also why God sends "bad things" to all men without distinction. Scripture explains. And if we understand Scripture, we will have no problem defending the truth of sovereign and *particular* grace.

Two and a half years ago the Seminary sponsored a successful and enjoyable Conference on Scripture. Many came from different parts of the country and from different denominations to participate in that conference. It was a Conference which, in the speeches delivered, set forth the Reformed doctrine of Scripture over against attacks on many fronts: a denial of inspiration which is infallible and inerrant, a denial of inspiration which leads to destructive higher criticism, a denial of inspiration which opens the door to faulty exegesis and to the introduction of false doctrine —particularly the false doctrine of evolutionism.

At the conference, Prof. Decker delivered the first and keynote address in which he drew the Reformed and confessional lines of the doctrine of inspiration. He has provided us with a written transcript of that lecture for publication in *The Journal*. It is a statement of the truth of inspiration taken from Scripture and the Confessions which is sharp, clear, and beautiful. It is that which the enemies of the truth want no more.

Read it and be edified.

Added to this variety of articles are several book reviews of important books which our readers may want to purchase.

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# A History of the Church's Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

*David J. Engelsma 2*

## **The Reformed Tradition**

In the November, 1993 issue of this journal, I set forth the doctrine of marriage that is maintained by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. This doctrine holds that marriage is a bond established by God between one man and one woman for life. The bond is broken only by the death of one of the married persons. Divorce in the sense of a lawful separation is permissible on the ground of the sexual unfaithfulness of one of the married persons. But there may be no remarriage as long as both are living. Not even the "innocent party" in a divorce may remarry.

In taking this position, the Protestant Reformed Churches are guided exclusively by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures. They are well aware that this stand means suffering for some Christians. They are sympathetic to this suffering. But Scripture alone determines the stand of the churches on this vital aspect of the holy life of their members. Genesis 2:24 as interpreted by Christ in Matthew 19:4-6 makes known that God instituted marriage at creation as a lifelong, unbreakable bond between one man and one woman. Ephesians 5:22-33 teaches earthly marriage as an indissoluble bond in that marriage is the God-appointed symbol of the covenant of grace between Christ and the church. The passages in the New Testament that treat of marriage, divorce, and remarriage clearly and powerfully affirm marriage as a lifelong bond, forbid divorce in the sense of a legal separation except in the case of fornication, and condemn all remarriage after divorce as adulterous (Matt. 5:31,32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2, 3; I Cor. 7:10, 11, 39).

The Protestant Reformed Churches came to this position on marriage largely through the leading of Reformed theologian and churchman, Herman Hoeksema. On the basis of careful exegesis of Holy Scripture, Hoeksema defined marriage as

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the union between one man and one woman for life, a union that is based on a communion of nature, on a communion of life, and a communion of love, which is a reflection of the covenant relation between God and His people and of the relation between Christ and His church; a union, moreover, that has its chief purpose in bringing forth the seed of the covenant.

He asserted that every marriage is indissoluble:

The marriage bond is absolutely indissoluble. It cannot be broken. No more than the union between Christ and His church can be dissolved, no more can the marriage tie ever be severed. It is a most intimate union of life and for life, which only death can dissolve.

From the nature of marriage as an indissoluble bond it follows, according to Hoeksema, "that therefore remarriage while both parties are still living is condemned by the Word of God."

This doctrine of marriage represents a break with the Reformed tradition. Originating in the Reformation of the 16th century, the doctrine of marriage held by the Reformed tradition maintains that, although marriage is a lifelong bond by virtue of God's institution and intention, the marriage relationship can be dissolved by sinful human behavior. One sinful act that breaks the relationship is the sexual infidelity of the husband or the wife. Fornication in Matthew 5: 31, 32 and in Matthew 19:9 is the adultery of one of the married persons, and adultery dissolves, or can possibly dissolve, the marriage so as to permit the "innocent party" to remarry. In the main the Reformed tradition has until very recently been adamant that adultery permits only the "innocent party" to remarry. The guilty party has been forbidden to remarry.

The other sinful act that has been recognized in the Reformed tradition as dissolving a marriage is the desertion of a believer by an unbelieving husband or wife. Advocacy of desertion as a valid ground of both divorce and remarriage is based on a specific understanding of Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 7:15: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." This understanding supposes that the apostle teaches that the abandoned believer is no longer "bound" to the deserter, as though "not under bondage" is the same as "is not bound." The words that follow, "But God hath called

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Cited in David J. Engelsma, "A History of the Church's Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: The Development of Herman Hoeksema," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (November 1993): 11, 12.

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us to peace," are explained as meaning, "God gives the one deserted the right to remarry." Desertion as a ground of remarriage is known as the "Pauline privilege" since it is thought to be Paul's adding of a ground to a ground given by Christ in Matthew 19:9, namely, adultery.

### The Dutch Reformed

Not all Reformed churches and theologians, however, have agreed that desertion constitutes a biblical ground for remarriage. Prior to 1956, the Christian Reformed Church for many years took a firm stand that only adultery breaks the marriage tie and that in this case only the "innocent party" may remarry. Describing the stand of the Christian Reformed Church before 1956, J. L. Schaver wrote: "Adultery is the only biblical ground for divorce. ... Wilful separation is not considered a biblical ground for divorce."<sup>2</sup>

The "Report of the Committee on `Marital Problems' "to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Edinburgh 1953 addressed the matter of "Biblical grounds for divorce":

The case of adultery is quite clear. In the case of I Cor. 7:15 (desertion because of religious hatred), it can be a matter of opinion if divorce with the right to remarry should be granted or only separation of bed and board'

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Potchefstroom, South Africa adopted the recommendation of its committee rejecting the view that I Corinthians 7:15 provides a ground for divorce and subsequent remarriage:

As regards so-called malicious desertion, it appears to us that, as declared by the American report in the Agenda, we have to do in I Corinthians 7:15 with a very special case. Here we have a desertion *religionis causa*. We must pay

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<sup>2</sup>J. L. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, 4th rev. ed., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: **International** Publications, 1956), p. 225. Schaver gives the gist of certain ecclesiastical cases involving complicated marital situations that make plain that the Christian Reformed Church was long determined to condemn and keep out of the church all remarriages except those of the "innocent party." Particular decisions of the Christian Reformed synod of 1936 were inconsistent according to Schaver (pp. 225-232).

' "Report of the Committee on `Marital Problems'," *Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod Edinburgh 1953* (Edinburgh: Lindsay & Co. Ltd., 1953), 91. Even **though** its recognition of adultery as a ground of "divorce" refers to a right of the "innocent party" to remarry, the report immediately adds: "The *conclusion* of your committee is that marriage as a divine ordinance has in its essence the character of a lifelong union" (pp. 91, 92).

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attention here to the context of the whole chapter which possesses par excellence a pastoral character. Paul, as Apostle, here supplies incidental advice for specific situations facing believers in his times. To believers as a result of the commandment of Christ he expressly disallows the dissolution of a marriage and contraction of a second (I Corinthians 7:10-11). In addition he distinguishes another type of marriage, viz. that between a believer and an unbeliever. It appears to us that we have to do here with marriages of heathen, one of whom then became a believer. The question then arose in the case of desertion of the unbelieving partner whether the believing partner should keep insisting on the restitution of the marriage. It has been accepted by some that Paul's answer to the question has the nature of a so-called second ground for divorce. In the opinion of your commission this is certainly not the case. It is especially in this case incorrect to speak of a "Scriptural ground for divorce." Judging from the context the following appears to be the case: The man had deserted the wife as a result of religious friction or hatred, and Paul felt that for the Christian wife it was necessary to accept the situation. The question of how far Paul implied by the expression of 7:15 ("A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases") that the marriage is here legally dissolved, cannot be answered on exegetical grounds. It is also not clear here whether he allowed a second marriage in such cases.

Indicative of the reluctance particularly within the Dutch Reformed tradition to recognize desertion as a ground of divorce and remarriage on the basis of I Corinthians 7:15 is the commentary of the highly respected exegete, F. W. Grosheide. Commenting on Matthew 19:9, Grosheide states freely that "*er maar een oorzaak is, waarop echtscheiding volgen mag, n. L hoererei, at is de feitelijke verbreking van het huwelijk.... Jezus noemt dit de eenige Peden*" ("there is but one cause why divorce may follow, namely, **fornication**, that is the actual dissolving of the marriage.... Jesus calls this the only reason").<sup>6</sup> In his commentary on I Corinthians 7:15, however, Grosheide says not one word about any breaking of the bond by the unbeliever's Desertion of the believer. Nor does he so much as hint that the deserted believer might have a right to remarry. That the deserted believer is "not under bondage" means that he or she does not have to try at all cost to prevent the unbeliever from leaving. The "peace" of the deserted believer is the peace with God and with the neighbor that would be disturbed if the believer continually would have to restrain the unbeliever from separating.<sup>6</sup>

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*Acts of the Fourth Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Potchefstroom, South Africa 1958* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Herald, 1958), p. 98.

F. W. Grosheide, *Het Heilig Evangelic volgens Mattheus* (Amsterdam: H. A. Van Bottenburg, 1922), p. 226. The translation of the Dutch is mine. <sup>6</sup>F. W. Grosheide, *Paulus' Eerste Brief aan de Kerk te Korinthe* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1954), pp. 89, 90: "God heeft ons in vrede geroepen. *De roeping hier*



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Nevertheless, H. Bouwman presents the marriage doctrine of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands as approving remarriage on the grounds both of adultery and of desertion. Bouwman does admit that it is not "decisively expressed" in I Corinthians 7:15 whether "the Christian party who is left alone may indeed marry again ... or must remain unmarried." But Bouwman is confident that "the marriage bond is broken by that deliberate desertion, and the deserted party can again make a new marriage." The position that adultery and malicious desertion are lawful grounds of divorce and remarriage, says Bouwman, has been the position of the Reformed theologians in the Netherlands almost without exception. He mentions Danaeus, Junius, Ames, Rivet, van Mastricht, and A Brakel as taking this position.<sup>1</sup>

### The Presbyterians

The Presbyterian wing of the Reformed tradition likewise has viewed marriage as a relationship that can be dissolved both by adultery and by

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*bedoeld, is de roeping tot zaligheid Die roeping staat in her teken van den vrede, ze geschiedt in vrede en ze brengt tot vrede, vrede met God, maar ook daardoor vrede met den naaste, Rom. 5:1; 12:18; Gal. 5:22. Die vrede mag niet worden verstoord en dat zou het geval zijn, indien de gelovige partij voortdurend de ongelovige van scheiding moest pogen terug to houden."*

<sup>1</sup> H. Bouwman, "*Echtscheiding*," in *Christelijke Encyclopaedic voor het Nederlandsche Volk*, ed. F. W. Grosheide, J. H. Landwehr, C. Lindeboom, J. C. Rullmann, vol. 2 (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n. d.), pp. 3-13. The translation of the Dutch is mine. In harmony with Bouwman's analysis of the Dutch Reformed tradition as permitting divorce and remarriage on the two grounds of adultery and desertion is the position of Dutch Reformed ethicist W. Geesink. In his explanation of the seventh commandment, Geesink states that, according to the Word of God, the magistrate may grant a divorce only on the grounds of adultery and malicious desertion. By divorce Geesink understands the dissolution of the marriage. Interestingly, Geesink observes that the granting of the divorce by the magistrate is merely the declaration that a marriage which has already been dissolved, presumably by the sinful act of adultery or desertion, is indeed dissolved ("... is dan ook niet dan een voor ontbonden verklaren van een echt, die metterdaad ontbonden is"). See W. Geesink, *Van's Heeren Ordinantiën*, vol. 4 (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925), p. 226. The notes in the margin of the Dutch *Staten Bijbel*, the "*kantteekeningen*," explain I Cor. 7:15 as permitting the deserted believer to remarry: "*Dat is, nietgehouden van hunnezijde de band des huwelijke verder to houden, of ongetrouwd to bliiven*" ("That is, not required from their side to maintain the bond of marriage any longer, or to remain unmarried" — my translation of the Dutch).

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desertion so that both the "innocent party" and the deserted believer are allowed to remarry.

John Murray explained Matthew 19:9 as the Lord's teaching that when a man puts away his wife for the cause of fornication this putting away has the effect of dissolving the bond of marriage with the result that he is free to remarry without thereby incurring the guilt of adultery. In simple terms it means that divorce in such a case dissolves the marriage and that the parties are no longer man and wife.<sup>1</sup>

Although Murray concluded that I Corinthians 7:15 does permit a believer deserted by an unbelieving marriage companion to remarry, he was very cautious, even tentative, in reaching and teaching this conclusion. Murray called the explanation of the verb, "is not under bondage," in I Corinthians 7:15 "one of the most perplexing questions in New Testament interpretation." He recognized that the word translated by the King James Version as "is not under bondage" does not obviously refer to a dissolution of the marriage bond. In addition, to explain the word as giving a ground for divorce and remarriage would seemingly bring Paul into conflict with Christ. Christ, on the view now of those who explain Matthew 19:9 as offering a biblical ground for remarriage after divorce, gave one, and one only, ground for remarriage: the fornication of one's wife or husband. Paul, in defiance of Christ, adds yet another ground. These considerations led Murray frankly to acknowledge that "it is difficult to make out a strong or valid case for the view that *ou dedoulootai* (*is not under bondage*) means dissolution."

Nevertheless, Murray found "cogent arguments" also on the other side of the question and came to the conclusion that "there is much to be said in favour of the view that I Corinthians 7:15 contemplates the dissolution of the bond of marriage."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *Divorce* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Murray, *Divorce*, pp. 69-78. Immediately upon concluding that I Corinthians 7:15 permits a believer deserted by an unbeliever to remarry, Murray deplored the abuse of the "Pauline privilege" by believers in that believers abandoned by professing Christians appeal to the "privilege" in support of their actions of divorcing and remarrying. Murray was critical of the Westminster Confession's treatment of "wilful desertion" as a ground of divorce and remarriage in chapter 24.6. The Confession failed "to confine the liberty of dissolution to the precise conditions prescribed by the apostle in this passage," leaving a "loophole ... (that) cannot be maintained on the basis of Scripture" (pp. 77, 78).

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The expression of the characteristic Presbyterian position on marriage, divorce, and remarriage by the Southern Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney is noteworthy for several things. It acknowledges that marriage is ideally dissolved only by death. It insists that adultery and desertion are the only two sins that "annihilate" the bond. It suggests that the reason why a bond that is ideally lifelong can yet be dissolved while both marriage partners are living is that an adulterous or deserting marriage companion may be regarded as "dead."

Under the New Testament, divorce proper can take place only on two grounds, **adultery** and permanent desertion. See Matt. xix:9; v:32; I Cor. vii:15. A careful examination of these passages will lead us to these truths: That marriage is a permanent and exclusive union of one woman to one man; and so, can only be **innocently** dissolved by death: But that extreme criminality and breach of contract by one party annihilates the bond so that the criminal is as though he were dead to the other: That the only sins against the bond, which have this effect, are those which are absolutely incompatible with the relation, adultery, and wilful, final desertion. In these cases, the bond having been destroyed for the innocent party, he is as completely a single man, as though the other were dead. Some commonwealths have added many other trivial causes of divorce; thus sinning grievously against God and the purity of the people. The Church may not recognize by her officers or acts, any of these **unscriptural** grounds, or the pretended divorces founded on them.<sup>10</sup>

**John Owen spoke for** both the older Presbyterians and the Puritans.

Adultery is a just **and** sufficient cause of a divorce ... (which) consists in a dissolution "*vinculi matrimonialis*" and so removes the marriage relation as that the **innocent** person **divorcing** or **procuring** the divorce is at liberty to marry **again**.

As for the "Pauline privilege,"

the apostle Paul expressly sets the party at liberty to marry who is maliciously and obstinately deserted, affirming that the Christian religion doth not prejudice the **natural** right **and** privilege of men in such cases: I Cor. vii. 15."

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<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, repr. 1972), pp. 409, 410.

"John Owen, "Of Marrying after Divorce in Case of Adultery," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 16 (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 1968), pp. 254-257.

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Acceptance of adultery and desertion as grounds of lawful divorce and remarriage and, with this, the view of marriage as a contract that can be voided by the actions of men are credal positions for Presbyterians. Whereas the distinctively Reformed creeds, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, do not pronounce on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith does. With appeal to Matthew 19:9, it approves the remarriage of the "innocent party":

In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

On the basis of I Corinthians 7:15, it also approves the remarriage of the deserted believer:

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage....<sup>12</sup>

Despite this confessional statement, there have been prominent Presbyterians who have questioned whether desertion dissolves a marriage and whether such a doctrine can be drawn from the apostle's teaching in I Corinthians 7:15. The Presbyterian theologian Robert Shaw **acknowledged** this in his commentary on the Westminster Confession:

There can be no question that adultery is a just ground for "the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending

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<sup>12</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, 24.5, 6, in *The Subordinate Standards and Other Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons LTD, 1973). In spite of the overall agreement between the "Three Forms of Unity" and the Westminster Standards, so serious a matter is the Westminster Confession's approval of remarriage after divorce that this would stand in the way of full ecclesiastical relationships between a church that subscribed to the Westminster Confession **and a** denomination of churches that held in a heartfelt way the indissolubility of marriage. A divorced and remarried member of the former would not be accepted at the Lord's Table in the latter. A Presbyterian officebearer who was convinced of the impermissibility of remarriage after divorce would have to **sign** his subscription to the Westminster Confession with stated objection against the teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in chapter 24.5, 6.

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party were dead." ... But whether the wilful and obstinate desertion of one of the parties sets the other party at liberty to marry again may admit of dispute."

### The Reformers

The prevailing view in the Reformed tradition, that adultery certainly and desertion probably are valid grounds for remarriage after divorce, entered the tradition through its father, John Calvin. In his commentary on Matthew 19:9, Calvin explained that "it is not in the power of a man to dissolve the engagement of marriage, which the Lord wishes to remain inviolate," except that a husband or a wife who commits adultery can and does dissolve the marriage. This sets the "innocent" wife or husband "at liberty"; he or she is now free to remarry. Calvin criticized as "very ill explained" the interpretation of the second part of the text ("and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery") that holds that

celibacy is enjoined in all cases when a divorce has taken place; and, therefore, if a husband should put away an adulteress, both would be laid under the necessity of remaining unmarried. As if this liberty of divorce meant only not to lie with his wife; and as if Christ did not evidently grant permission in this case to do what the Jews were wont indiscriminately to do at their pleasure.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (London: Blackie & Son, n. d.), p. 243. Shaw mentions Dr. Dwight as one who opposed the interpretation of I Cor. 7:15 that finds in the passage a dissolving of the marriage bond. Shaw's own defense of the Confession's doctrine concerning desertion is notable for its hesitancy: "But at verse 15 (the apostle) *appears* to declare that the party who was deserted . . . was free to marry again. And the decision *seems* just ... it is not *reasonable* that the innocent party should be denied all relief." Shaw does call attention to an aspect of the issue that is often overlooked by those who contend that adultery and desertion are grounds for remarriage since they dissolve the marriage bond. "Adultery does not, *ipso facto*, dissolve the bond of marriage, nor may it be dissolved by consent of parties. The violation of the marriage vow only invests the injured party with a right to demand the dissolution of it by the competent authority; and if he chooses to exercise that right, the divorce must be effected 'by a public and orderly course of proceeding'" (pp. 243, 244). Neither adultery nor desertion dissolves the marriage bond. The "innocent" or deserted party cannot dissolve the marriage bond. But the state dissolves the marriage bond at the demand of the injured party. What God has joined together, the state is authorized and able to put asunder.

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, is. William Pringle, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 382-385.

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An unbeliever's desertion of a believing wife or husband as described in I Corinthians 7:15, Calvin saw as the unbeliever's divorcing "God rather than ... his or her partner. There is, therefore, in this case a special reason, inasmuch as the first and chief bond is not merely loosed, but even utterly broken through."<sup>15</sup> Not only adultery, therefore, but also desertion broke the marriage bond, in the judgment of Calvin, freeing the deserted Christian to remarry.

In keeping with Calvin's thinking on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the marriage ordinances of Geneva, drafted under Calvin's inspiration, approved remarriage after divorce on the ground of adultery, as well as the remarriage of some who had been deserted by their husbands or wives. The ordinance governing remarriage on the ground of adultery read:

If a husband accuses his wife of adultery and he proves it by sufficient witnesses or evidences and demands to be separated by divorce, it shall be granted, and thereafter he shall be able to marry again if he so wishes.<sup>16</sup>

Several ordinances dealt with desertion in various forms. One stated:

If a husband who is debauched has deserted his wife without his wife having given him any occasion for doing so or being in any way to blame for it.... The wife ... if she is unable to discover where he is, shall wait until the completion of one year . . . and when the year is up she shall be able to come before the Consistory. If it is then ascertained that she needs to be married, she shall be exhorted and sent to the Council.... After this the public **announcements** previously mentioned shall be proceeded with so that liberty may be **given** to the woman to remarry."

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<sup>15</sup> **John Calvin**, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, tr. John Pringle, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 244.

<sup>16</sup> *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, ed. and tr. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 77. **In an even-handed way, the ordinances went on to apply this law** of the dissolution of marriage by adultery to the wife whose husband has been guilty of adultery.

<sup>17</sup> Hughes, *Register*, p. 79. It is striking that the rules governing remarriage because of desertion related desertion closely to "debauchery." In his magisterial study of divorce, Roderick Phillips makes a convincing case for the contention that, although Calvin recognized desertion as a second ground for divorce **and** remarriage, desertion for Calvin necessarily involved adultery on the part of the deserter. Essentially, then, Calvin acknowledged only one ground for remarriage: adultery. See Roderick Phillips, *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 54, 55.

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In his view that adultery and desertion were grounds for divorce and remarriage, Calvin agreed with Martin Luther. Already in "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" in 1520, Luther proposed, although somewhat tentatively, that remarriage be permitted on these two grounds:

Christ, then, permits divorce, but only on the ground of unchastity. The pope must, therefore, be in error whenever he grants a divorce for any other cause.... Yet it is still a greater wonder to me why they compel a man to remain unmarried after being separated from his wife by divorce, and why they will not permit him to remarry. For if Christ permits divorce on the ground of unchastity and compels no one to remain unmarried, and if Paul would rather have us marry than burn (I Cor. 7:9), then he certainly seems to permit a man to marry another woman in the place of the one who has been put away.... I, indeed, who alone against all cannot establish any rule in this matter would yet greatly desire at least the **passage** in I Cor. 7 (:15) to be applied here.... Here the Apostle gives permission to put away the unbeliever who departs and to set the believing spouse free to marry again.<sup>18</sup>

In his commentary of 1523 on I Corinthians 7:15, Luther wrote:

Here the apostle releases the Christian spouse, once the non-Christian partner has separated himself or will not permit his mate to lead a Christian life, giving the former the right and authority to marry another partner.<sup>19</sup>

In a sermon in 1531 on Matthew 5: 31, 32, Luther approved the

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The case of Galeazzo Caracciolo then represented the exception to the rule. For Calvin **approved** the **divorce** and remarriage of this **Italian refugee** who **had** left his Roman Catholic wife in Italy when he fled to Geneva. The ground of the divorce and remarriage of this convert to the Reformed faith was simply the refusal of his wife to join her husband in Geneva on account of her determination to remain Roman Catholic. Given their interpretation of I Cor. 7:15, Calvin and Reformed Geneva approved a believer's divorcing his wife and marrying another on the ground of the believer's desertion of the unbeliever! See William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: John Wiley & Son, Inc., 1967), pp. 184-186; also, **Bouwman**, "*Echtscheiding*," p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 236,237. Luther was here opening up a radical break with the church's doctrine and practice of marriage.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol 28, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), p. 36.

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remarriage of the person divorced on the ground of the marriage companion's adultery:

But you ask: "Then is there no legitimate cause for the divorce and remarriage of a man and his wife?" Answer: Both here and in Matthew 19:9 Christ sets down only one, called adultery.

The reason that Luther gave for this right to remarry is significant since it shows that the Reformer was convinced that, in reality, only death dissolves the marriage bond:

He (Christ) cites it (adultery as the only legitimate cause for divorce and remarriage) on the basis of the Law of Moses, which punishes adultery with death (Lev. 20:10). Since it is only death that can dissolve a marriage and set you free, an adulterer has already been divorced, not by men but by God Himself, and separated not only from his wife but from this very life. By his **adultery he has divorced himself from his wife and has dissolved his marriage.** He had no **right to do either of these, and so he has brought on his own death,** in the sense that before God he is already dead even though the judge may not have him executed.'

It is plain that, beginning with the great Reformers themselves, the Reformed tradition adopted and defended the view that remarriage after divorce is lawful for Christians on the grounds of adultery and desertion. Thus, the tradition denied that marriage is an **unbreakable** bond for life established by God. The stand of the Reformed tradition implies that marriage is merely a **human** contract. A marriage **may have been** made by God, but it can be broken by the sinful deeds of men and women.

Roderick Phillips is correct when he describes the position that adultery and desertion are grounds for divorce and remarriage as "a Protestant orthodoxy" and when he asserts that the Reformers "rejected the doctrine of marital indissolubility."<sup>21</sup>

### Testing the Tradition

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Reformed tradition on marriage, divorce, and remarriage is radically and **unalterably** opposed to

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Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol 21, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 96.<sup>21</sup> Phillips, *Putting Asunder*, pp. 40, 83.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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the bond, to the absurd theory that an adulterer or a deserter should, and may, be regarded as dead. Mighty things are accomplished by adultery! Adultery is able to put asunder what God has joined together! Adultery renders a living man or woman actually dead, not spiritually now but physically, so that the survivor may remarry! It may be that an adulterer ought to be put to death. **But if he is not put to death**, or does not die naturally, the simple, obvious, **and undeniable** fact is that he is not dead but alive. And the perfectly plain testimony of Holy Scripture is that only death sets a married person at liberty to marry another." The married person who remarries while an original marriage companion is still living commits adultery.<sup>34</sup> God joins together in the marriage bond; God severs the bond that He made by death.

The facile theory that adultery dissolves a marriage — and this was the basic notion of the Reformers in their teaching of remarriage — runs seriously stuck on the gospel of grace. The married Christian whose wife or husband commits adultery, perhaps over a period of time, perhaps more than once, is permitted, if not called, to forgive the offender, to be reconciled to her or him, and to take her or him back to the marital bed and board. This is the glorious example set by the real husband, Jesus Christ, in His dealings with His wife, the church. It is fundamental to salvation that Christ does not permit the church's adultery to dissolve the real marriage, the covenant of grace. But this makes plain that adultery *does not dissolve the bond*. If adultery dissolved the bond there could be no possibility of the restoration of the adulterer and the continuance of the marriage. This means that what really dissolves the bond is the decision of the husband or wife who has been sinned against by an adulterous marriage companion. If the "innocent party" decides that he or she wants the marriage broken, regardless of the repentance of the guilty party, this dissolves the marriage, perhaps with the cooperation of the government. What God has joined together, the will of man can put asunder."

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" I Cor. 7:39.

" Rom. 7:2, 3; cf. Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18.

n The point here is not that every Christian whose marriage companion has committed adultery in some form or other, regardless of the conditions and consequences, is required to take the offender back and to resume living with him or her again. No one, including the church, can require this of a husband or wife whose marriage companion has committed adultery. Christ says that the person whose mate has committed adultery has the right to divorce the one who has so seriously disturbed the bond. He or she, however, may forgive and receive back, gladly. He or she may do so as obedience to a calling from the gracious Lord Himself. But the point here is that adultery as such, on anyone's reckoning, cannot be said to dissolve a marriage. It does not have this power. The bond established by God can survive adultery. It has survived adultery in any number of instances

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The Scriptures teach that only death dissolves the marriage bond so that a married person may marry another (Rom. 7:2, 3; I Cor. 7:39). They mean real death, the death that ends earthly life and puts the body of the dead person in the grave. If now the Reformed tradition, accepting as it does that only death dissolves marriage, would renounce the notion of fictitious death, it would necessarily repudiate all remarriage after divorce, including the remarriage of the "innocent party."

The Reformers and the tradition that followed them must be criticized and rejected in that aspect of their doctrine of marriage that consists of the dissolving of marriage by adultery and desertion and the right of remarriage on these grounds. The tradition, precious as it is to us, may not be allowed to override the Scriptures, but the Scriptures test, condemn, and purify the tradition. That the Reformed church and believer may test and reject certain aspects of their own tradition according to the standard of Holy Scripture is the testimony of the Reformed creed:

We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an Apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures.... Neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all: for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule.'

The teaching that adultery and desertion dissolve the marriage bond "doth not agree with this infallible rule." The Reformed tradition has erred in its interpretation of the texts on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, especially Matthew 19:9 and I Corinthians 7:15 37

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in the church. Those who appeal to adultery as the ground for remarriage are, therefore, compelled to explain exactly what it is that really does dissolve the marriage.

' Belgic Confession, Art 7, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), pp. 387, 388.

" For the explanation of these passages, and the refutation of the interpretation by the Reformed tradition, see my *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, repr. 1983), pp. 81-122, and my *Better to Marry: Sex and Marriage in I Corinthians 6 & 7* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1993); Heth and Wenham,

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The error has had serious consequences. Contrary to the intention of the Reformers, who restored marriage to honor and exerted themselves to strengthen the family, the view of the Reformers and of the Reformed tradition that the dissolution of marriage by man is possible so that remarriage is permissible has grievously weakened marriage and the home throughout Protestantism. This view has led to such a disgraceful condition of divorcing and remarrying in evangelical and Reformed churches in our day as outstrips the transgressions against marriage by Rome that so offended the Reformers. The scandal of divorce and remarriage in evangelical and Reformed churches today makes the Roman Catholic Church blush.

We love the Reformed tradition, but we also love the Christian tradition. When the Reformed tradition embraced the notion that adultery and desertion dissolve the marriage bond so that remarriage is permissible, it itself broke with the Christian tradition. For some one thousand years after the apostles the universal Christian church with virtually one voice taught that marriage is an indissoluble bond. This tradition was faithfully carried on until recently in the Anglican Church, at least, in her creedal statements. This important phase of the history of the church's doctrine of marriage, we intend to consider in the next issue of this journal, God willing. A

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*Jesus and Divorce*, pp. 100-152; and Andrew Cornes, *Divorce & Remarriage: Biblical Principles & Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 180-309.

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# Another Look At Common Grace (5)

## Blessings For All Men?

*Professor Herman Hanko*

### **Introduction**

As our readers will recall, we are discussing the idea that God, in His common grace, gives blessings to all men. We explained what was meant by this and quoted from a number of theologians who held to this position. We noticed that the main concern of those who hold to this aspect of common grace is that the good things in God's world, which all receive, are evidences of God's favor, love, mercy, grace, and kindness towards all men in general. These good things in God's world are rain and sunshine, health and prosperity, life in God's creation and the enjoyment of the treasures which God has placed in His world.

We examined a few questions which also arise in connection with this position. We talked briefly about the relation between these "blessings" and the cross of Christ, and noticed that some proponents of common grace believe these are merited through the cross which is, in some sense, an atonement for all men; while others are not prepared, in the interests of maintaining a particular atonement, to say that Christ died for all — even to earn the limited blessings of common grace. We also briefly referred to the question of how the proponents of common grace explain the many judgments which come on the creation and which affect the lives of all those who experience sickness and suffering, drought and floods, hurricanes and earthquakes. If the good things in God's world are blessings, how can these judgments of God be interpreted in any other way than curses? And, just as it is obvious that the good things of life come to all men, so also it is obvious that God's judgments come upon the righteous and unrighteous, the elect and reprobate. How is this to be explained?

We are convinced that Scripture gives to us the key to understand this problem. Scripture tells us why, on the one hand, God gives good gifts to all men, elect and reprobate alike; and Scripture tells us why God sends His judgments upon all men, righteous as well as wicked. And, if we only understand what Scripture says of these things, we will also see that God's grace is always particular and for His elect alone.

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## Sundry matters

Some matters of importance must first be cleared up before we enter into the heart of the issue.

Those who hold to this theory of common grace teach, first of all, that common grace means an attitude of God's favor towards creatures in general. God is favorably inclined towards trees and flowers, alligators and kangaroos, stars and rocks. So, e.g., the first point of common grace adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 speaks of the fact that there is "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general."

I do not have any serious objection to this idea as such. In fact, if we understand it properly, this is surely the teaching of Scripture. Psalm 145:9 reads: "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works."

The fact is, and Scripture clearly teaches, that this creation which God formed by the Word of His power is His creation. He formed it and He upholds it by His providence. He guides it in such a way that it serves His own purpose.

It is true that man, who was created as the head of creation, fell into sin. It is also true that through his fall the curse came on all the world, a curse which will not be fully lifted until the creation is redeemed. But this tragedy of unparalleled proportions which came on the world does not imply that God abandons His world and gives it over to total destruction. His providence sustains it and gives it its continued existence.

God loves His world. He has formed it; and, although man brought the curse upon it, the world remains God's world. He will not forsake it. This is partly the meaning of that well-known text, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

It is true that the reference in this text to "world" is primarily a reference to the world of elect men. This is evident from the fact that the last part of the verse, in defining "world," speaks of those who believe in Christ. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the term "world" is used here because it is the organism, the *kosmos*, of the entire creation with the elect under Christ as the new humanity which God loves.

The Psalms repeatedly speak of the creation as praising God. Psalm 148, e.g., reads:

Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: fire, and hail; snow,

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and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word: mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl ... (vv. 3-10).

Not only does God love His world, but Christ also died for it. This is the clear teaching of Colossians 1:19, 21: "For it pleased the Father that in him (Christ) should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

Paul is saying here that God reconciles all things to Himself through the cross of Jesus Christ. And, lest his readers misunderstand the import of the words "all things," Paul goes on to say that this "all things" includes all things "whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

This is because Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (verses 15-17).

Christ's death indeed accomplishes universal redemption: not in the sense of an atonement for every man head for head, but in the sense of a cosmic redemption which embraces all God's world.

Thus, also, the creation shall be redeemed. When, at the coming of Christ, this whole world is burned with fire (II Peter 3:10-12), this great burning is not the annihilation of the creation, but its destruction. It is the sin-cursed creation that is burned. But the creation itself is preserved in order to be renewed and redeemed. It is transformed into a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell (Rev. 21:1).

Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:19-22: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

God loves His world, and He will save it.

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Another question to which we must give our attention is: Are the gifts which God gives good gifts?

In a way, this is an important question, for it is at this point that there is confusion and misunderstanding. The defenders of common grace often accuse those who deny common grace of refusing to acknowledge the good gifts of God.



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Let it be clearly understood: the good gifts which God gives are indeed good. James 1:17 is decisive: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

It is quite obvious to anyone who thinks about it that God cannot give bad gifts. He is in Himself good. He is good in all that He does. The creation which He has made is a good creation. Even the curse which He brings upon it because of the sin of man is good. In all His works and ways our God is good, good in the absolute sense of the word.

Thus the gifts which He gives are also good gifts. They *cannot* be anything else. With open and lavish hand, He bestows good gifts on men. Rain and sunshine, health and well-being are good gifts. No one has, so far as I know, ever denied this.

Whether these good gifts speak of a gracious attitude of God towards all is quite another question. But the gifts are good; of that there can be no question at all. Those who refuse to believe that Scripture teaches any kind of common grace do not deny God's good gifts. Let that be clearly understood.

It is also true that from a certain point of view God's gifts are always unmerited. Man can never merit with God, nor the creature with the Creator. Even when we have done all that is required of us, we are still unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). If God gives good gifts to men, these are surely unmerited.

There are those who refer to this unmerited character of God's gifts when they speak of grace. They mean nothing more than that God gives gifts to men which are totally unmerited by them. We have no objection to this idea in itself, although we noticed in an earlier article that the word "grace" in Scripture means more than the giving of an unmerited gift. It also refers back to an attitude of God. Grace is unmerited *favor*; and favor is an attitude. The question is: Do the good gifts God gives express His *favor* towards the wicked?

We ought also to ask in this connection: What is the purpose of God in giving good gifts? But we will refrain from *answering* this question at this point, for it will be considered at some length a bit later in the paper.

But all this does not yet explain the presence of judgments and calamities in this world. Not only does God give many good gifts, but He also sends many catastrophes of every kind. He brings abundant crops in one place, but total crop failure in another. He gives some people health, but He gives others sickness. Some people live lives that are relatively free from trouble; others know nothing but grief and travail in this world. Some are born healthy and robust; some are born crippled and mentally handicapped. It is easy to speak of God's good gifts; it is not so easy to speak of God's

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judgments, or whatever other name one wishes to give to those things which seem to us tragedies. It is perhaps rather natural to think of God's favor when all goes well; it is quite different to think of God's hand upon us when all things go wrong. If we are going to talk about grace, we ought not only to talk about good gifts, we ought also to talk about the evils which God sends into this sorry world. In fact, the latter far outnumber the former, and all life's good things are overshadowed by the trials and afflictions which are our lot.

There is, it seems to me, a rather natural inclination for us to think in terms of good things as indicative of God's favor, while we think of bad things in terms of God's anger. Who of us has really escaped that? When all is well, we are inclined to bask in the sunshine of God's favor upon us; when troubles and sorrows are our lot, we are inclined to think that God is angry with us and that we are receiving things at His hand which indicate His displeasure. What pastor, visiting one of his sheep in times of great distress, has not had to lead such a saint into the truths of Scripture which evaluate the sufferings of our lives in ways different from our evaluation?

But we do get things wrong. Our evaluations are not always governed by the Scriptures and our opinions concerning what befalls us in life are not always those of God's Word.

For one thing, it is important that we realize that we are poor judges of what is good and what is bad. We tend to weigh the worth of things according to our own personal likes and dislikes. It is a very personal and subjective evaluation which we make. We want our way in life. When God's way is different from our way, we are unhappy and dissatisfied. We set up our judgments over against those of the God of heaven and earth and want only that which we happen to think we need.

If we are planning a vacation at the beach, rain is distasteful to us and interferes with our enjoyment of sun, sand, and sea. And we quickly grumble. But the very rain which spoils our vacation may be the moisture which the farmer needs for his crops. If the people who own golf courses were to decide the weather, their decisions would be quite different from the farmer who needs rain for his daily bread. We, often very selfishly, look at what happens in God's world from the viewpoint of our own personal desires without any regard for our neighbor's welfare, much less the great purpose and plan of God Who does that which seems good to Him.

Even more to the point, some things which are indeed good in themselves may be very bad in the hands of some people. A sharp knife is an indispensable tool in the kitchen where mother slices fruits and vegetables to feed her family. But no one thinks of giving that sharp knife to a small child. He may want it, scream for it, and create a tantrum when it is refused; but to give in to the child and hand him the knife would be reckless irresponsibility.

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A child does not understand why it is necessary for him to go to the hospital and suffer the pain of surgery for a shattered bone. But it is good. The pain is good. The suffering is good. It is necessary for the welfare of the child.

A child may think ice cream is so good that all that he wants is ice cream. That it is good, no one will deny. That one eats only ice cream is bad. A child will die if all he is given is what he wants.

And, after all, we are all small children in the sight of God, children who have no idea of what is good for us and what is bad.

Surely these truths are obvious.

If a child should try to determine the love of his parents by what they give him and what they refuse him, he would be terribly wrong. If only ice cream indicates his parents' love, he can only conclude that his parents are very cruel and heartless and probably hate him. If getting what he wants is indicative of their love for him, he would conclude that their refusal to give him a butcher knife only shows that they are heartless parents, uninterested in his welfare.

We must be very careful that our evaluation of God's attitude towards men is not perverted by our own personal opinions about things. Sometimes God's gifts of prosperity are bad; sometimes affliction is good. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:8, 9).

To make doctrines based on our own personal evaluation of things is dangerous business. To find grace in what is pleasing to us and judgment in what is not pleasing is to impose our superficial opinions on matters of profoundest truth.

### **The Perspective of God's Purposes**

If we are to understand aright the problems which arise in our mind concerning God's good gifts to men and God's judgments upon men, we have to look at them, as Scripture does, in the light of God's purposes.

A Reformed man looks at all that transpires here in the world from the viewpoint of God. This is the viewpoint of Scripture, which alone can give us the proper perspective and understanding of all that takes place in the world.

God's purpose is His everlasting and unchangeable counsel. From before the foundation of the world, God has determined all that shall take place in all history. This is the only explanation of providence. God not only created all things by the Word of His power; He continues to uphold every creature so that it receives its life and existence from its Maker.

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But this very truth that God upholds every creature surely also implies that God controls and governs all things. All creatures are so in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10). The Reformed man believes that nothing comes by chance, but all things take place by the will of God.

That purpose of God is to glorify His own great name. He is Himself the God of all glory. He is high and lifted up, far above heaven and earth. He is jealous of the honor of His own name and He does only that which will be for His own praise.

God has purposed to glorify Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:1-3).

This theme is struck again and again in Scripture. Just a few verses from Ephesians 1 will illustrate this. "According as he hath chosen us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.... Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth ... that we should be to the praise of his glory ... (vv. 4-6, 9, 10. See also vv. 11, 12).

This purpose of God to glorify Himself through Jesus Christ is realized in the salvation which God provides through the atonement of Christ on the cross. It is a salvation which embraces the whole cosmos — as we noticed above; but it is a salvation of all the elect in Jesus Christ who form the organism of the human race in God's eternal purpose.

That salvation is fully realized when this present sin-cursed creation is transformed into the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. That creation the elect shall inherit when they are brought, through the blood of Christ, into the perfection of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. Then the wicked shall forever be cast into everlasting darkness as the manifestation of God's perfect justice, and then shall the righteous be delivered from sin and death to enjoy fellowship with God forever.

All things which take place in this world are to be explained and interpreted in that light of God's eternal purpose.

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## God's Elect Organism

It is at this point that we must introduce the idea of the "organism" of the human race.

It has struck me over the years that this concept is one rarely understood in today's church world. I am not sure what the reason for this lack of understanding is. Sometimes I think that the problem is that Arminianism has had more influence in the church than we really realize. Arminianism is always individualistic. Scripture is not. It is true that God deals with men individually; but it is also true that God deals with men organically. It is the latter which is so often not recognized.

The human race is an organism. This is true because God created the whole human race in Adam. He is the organic head of the human race, the father of all mankind, the one from whom the whole human race comes forth.

We can perhaps understand this somewhat better if we recognize that the human race is like a mighty oak tree. Just as the whole oak tree which becomes a mighty tree over the course of many years comes forth from a lowly acorn, so also does the whole human race come from our first parents, Adam and Eve. All the human natures of all men were created in Adam by God just as the whole oak tree was created by God in the acorn.

Within the oak tree, there are smaller organisms as well. The leaf is an organism in its own right; so is the branch, the trunk, and an individual root. So, within the organism of the human race are lesser organisms: the race, the nation, the family. Each in its own right is an organism with which God deals; but each is an organism within the larger organism of the human race.

This organic unity of the human race implies also the *federal* unity of all mankind. Adam was not only the organic head of all men; he was also the federal head.

While we cannot go into detail on the question of the federal unity of the human race, it is important, at least, to understand it. That Adam was the federal head of all mankind is the same as saying that he was the legal head, or the judicial head.

This fact is important, for it is because of Adam's sin of disobedience in the garden that the *guilt* of Adam's sin became the guilt of all mankind. Adam's punishment for his sin was death: "The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This death was not only physical death, but it was also spiritual death. Adam was, at the moment of the fall, made totally depraved. The death of total depravity is a penal concept. It is a punishment for sin. It is the judgment of God upon man for his sin. This total depravity of man's nature was passed on to all his descendants. And, although this total depravity was passed onto all men through the organic headship of Adam,

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i.e., because Adam was the organic head of the human race, the total depravity which comes on all men is God's judgment upon all men for their sin in Adam. Because all men are guilty for Adam's sin, all men are also born spiritually dead.

This is the clear teaching of Romans 5:12-14: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." Death passed upon all men because all have sinned. But this death for sin came upon all men because by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world.

Thus, in connection with the sin of Adam and the punishment for sin, God did not deal with Adam as an individual only, but dealt with the whole human race.

Following this same pattern, God teaches us that He deals in a similar way with the smaller organisms within the one organism of the human race. So He dealt with Shem, Ham, and Japheth from whom the races of the earth descended (Gen. 9:25-27). So God repeatedly dealt with the nation of Israel. Guilt for sin in Israel was corporate guilt. First of all it was true that the sins of the leaders in Israel brought trouble upon the nation as a whole including wicked and righteous. A wicked king brought grief to the whole nation, and the effects of the wrath of God against a wicked king were felt by the whole nation. David's sin of numbering the people brought the angel of death in fury against Israel and brought death to 70,000 men (II Sam. 24). But even individual sins of members of the nation brought with it a corporate guilt. This is clear from many passages in Scripture. Briefly we can refer the reader to Joshua 7, in which chapter we are told that the entire nation suffered defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin. The text tells us in so many words: "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also" (verse 11). Far and away the majority of the people did not even know what Achan had done; yet "*Israel* hath sinned," and "*they* have taken of the accursed thing...."

In like manner, although this was the pattern through Israel's entire history, Ezra confesses as his own, in a poignant manner, the sin of the nation which brought the nation into captivity and again threatened her existence: "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers

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have we been in a great trespass unto this day ..." (Ezra 9:5ff.).

So also Daniel prayed when he was in captivity. He prayed and made confession: "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings ..." (Dan. 9:4ff.). Daniel confessed the sins of the nation which brought them into captivity, but did so in the first person, thereby confessing that all these sins of his fathers, even before he was born, were his own.

The same federal unity is found in the family, for God "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him" (Ex. 20:5).

Life is filled with this. The leaders of a nation may declare war. The citizens may not be entirely in agreement with their rulers. But all the sons go to war; the homes of all are destroyed; all suffer the consequences of war.

It is with good reason that the Heidelberg Catechism tells us that when we confess that we believe in the forgiveness of sins, we confess also that we believe that God forgives *our corrupt nature* against which we have to struggle all our life long (Q. & A. 56), for we are shaped in iniquity and conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). We are responsible before God for our corrupt natures with which we are born.

If we understand our federal and organic unity in Adam properly, we can also understand that it is God's purpose to create a new federal and organic union in Christ. This also is the clear teaching of all Scripture. Romans 5:14 says that Adam, as the federal head of the whole human race, was "a figure of him who was to come." Paul, in speaking of the resurrection of the body, says: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22).

We must now expand the figure somewhat.

If we look at the matter from the viewpoint of God's purpose, then we are able to understand that the whole human race is indeed an organism, but it is an organism from the viewpoint of Christ and His elect people, which serves a specific purpose which God has in mind in His eternal counsel: the salvation of the elect in Christ. It is out of the human race that Christ comes according to His human nature; it is out of the human race that the elect are saved in Christ.

It is perhaps better in this connection to use the figure which Jesus uses in John 15:1-8. Although the figure probably refers, in the first place, to the nation of Israel, it can be applied equally to the whole human race. God is the Husbandman of this vine, Jesus is Himself the vine. There are many

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branches in the vine, some of which do not bear fruit and some of which do. Whether the branches bear fruit or not depends upon whether they are in Christ or not in Christ: "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (verse 5). The branches that do not bear fruit, though actually in the vine (i.e., in the human race) must be taken away, cast forth, and burned in the fire (verse 6).

This is the distinction between election and reprobation in the human race. The elect are in Christ and are saved; the reprobate are not in Christ and are cut off the vine and burned. But the vine is one organism.

This figure is apparent in all creation. The man who owns a vineyard must, for the sake of the branches that bear fruit, constantly prune the vine and cut away branches that are finally burned.

Scripture uses other figures as well.

A figure repeatedly used in Scripture is the figure of wheat. The whole plant grows together, but the wheat is finally gathered into the granary while the chaff is destroyed. The organism is one and grows as one, just as the human race is one and grows as one. But the whole organism grows for the purpose of the few kernels of wheat which are finally saved, while the greater part of the plant is burned when the wheat is ripe. The ungodly are like the "chaff which the wind driveth away" (Ps. 1:4). Christ is the One "whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

The human race, looking at it organically, is thus the wheat plant which grows throughout history. Christ comes for the harvest (Rev. 14:14-20) and gathers His harvest to bring the elect into His everlasting kingdom, but to destroy forever the wicked.

The human race is an organism, and the elect in Christ are the fruit gathered into eternal blessedness.

### **Zion Delivered Through Judgment**

The Scriptures, in connection with what we have said, lay down a fundamental principle which governs God's dealings with men. That principle is explicitly stated in Isaiah 1:27: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." Parenthetically, we should notice that the text is intended to be an explanation to the people of God in Judah why captivity was to come, and why this terrible captivity was to take away the whole nation, including the people of God. This is evident from what is probably a more accurate translation of the last clause: "And her returning ones with righteousness." The Hebrew parallelism here makes the text mean, therefore, "Zion's returning converts are redeemed through righteous judgment."



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The key word here is "judgment." This word, both in the Old and New Testaments, in its noun, verb, and adjective cognates, has different meanings. If we limit ourselves to the New Testament (although the same is true of the Old), we discover that the word has primarily the meaning of "rendering judgment." That is, the word means that act of a judge by which he passes a verdict on a matter or on a person expressing whether that matter or that person is right or wrong. It is the act of judgment itself, the weighing of the evidence, and the thoughtful consideration of the entire matter, the determination based on a standard of right and wrong. Such is the meaning, e.g., in John 8:15, 16: "Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me."

The same word can also refer to the verdict itself, the content of the verdict, that which a judge expresses, the statement of the determination to which a judge has come. As such, the word can have two different meanings. The word can refer to either an unfavorable verdict or a favorable verdict. It can be one of guilt and punishment, or innocence and blessing or favor. And, in this same connection, the words can refer to the actual execution of the sentence, i.e., the judgment of punishment and the judgment of favor. As an example of the former, Matthew 23:33 is pertinent: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation (judgment' in the Greek, HH) of hell?" And as an example of the latter, we find Lydia, a convert of Paul in Philippi, saying: "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there" (Acts 16:15). And this favorable idea of judgment is perhaps expressed in I Corinthians 6:3: "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

In Isaiah 1:27 the meaning of the word judgment is, clearly, the execution of the sentence of God upon wicked Judah for the sins of which the nation is guilty, sins which are eloquently described in the entire chapter. God has found Judah guilty, and now the judgment of the captivity must come upon the nation.

But it must be remembered that the great truth of the text is that Zion shall be redeemed through this judgment.

The reference here to "Zion" is to the true children of God within the organism of the nation. Zion was a mountain on which Jerusalem was built. It was the stronghold of the city. As long as Zion was not conquered, the city remained standing. (See Psalm 48, especially vv. 2, 12, 13.) It is typical of the church of all ages from the viewpoint of her impregnable position in the world. (See Psalm 87:5, Heb. 12:22, 23.)

As long as Zion continued standing, the city of Jerusalem was unconquered; and as long as Jerusalem could not be conquered, Judah remained as the people of God. But now Isaiah prophesied that Zion would be laid desolate, a catastrophe which seemed to indicate that Judah would no

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longer be the people of God.

This word of the prophet is God's explanation of this catastrophe, about to befall the nation; and it is intended to be a word of comfort to God's people when disaster strikes: Zion shall be redeemed with judgment. The judgment of the captivity, into which the whole nation had to go, would be the redemption of the true people of God.

It is evident, then, that the word "redemption" in Isaiah 1:27 refers to the restoration of the nation at the end of the captivity when the faithful in the nation would, through God's preserving care, be brought back and kept as the people of God till Christ should come. But it is typical also of how God deals always with His church in the midst of the world. A principle is laid down which covers all history.

Thus, the word "redemption" has a broader significance. Objectively, it refers to the work which Christ performed on the cross, and, indeed, in Scripture the word is often used to describe Christ's atoning sacrifice. Its basic meaning refers to the payment of a price to secure another's freedom. It was used, e.g., in the purchase of slaves. A man might pay a fixed price to purchase a slave so that that slave could become his possession. But especially when a man purchased a slave in order to free the slave is the word "redemption" apt.

We are the slaves of sin. Christ pays the price of His own precious blood (I Peter 1:18-20) to secure our freedom. But, by means of the freedom purchased for us through that great price of Christ's blood, we are not only delivered from the bondage of the slavery of sin; we are also made Christ's possession. Both ideas are merged into one. For true freedom is to be a slave of Jesus Christ. Redemption, then, means that Christ purchases us so that we may be His own.

That price of Christ's blood is the objective accomplishment of redemption. But such redemption is actually and subjectively accomplished in that work of Christ whereby His sacrificial merit is given to us and we are actually delivered from our bondage, become His possession, and enjoy that perfect freedom of belonging to Christ.

Redemption, therefore, comes objectively through the judgment of God for our sins upon Jesus Christ. The whole world is under the just wrath of God for sin. That wrath of God is terrible, for it drives the sinner into untold grief and trouble, and finally, brings him to death, the grave, and hell. But God has chosen His elect people in Christ. The judgment of God against sin, rightfully due these elect as well as the wicked, is assumed by Jesus Christ, Who suffered the death of the cross to take it away.

It is in this light that we must understand Isaiah 1:27. The passage lays down a principle which really is an explanation of the application to all history of what happened at Calvary. And understanding **this, we will have**

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help to understand the strange mixture of good gifts of God and His judgments (in the sense of the expressions of God's wrath as He punishes the world for their sins), which are the experience and lot of all men here below.

Not only does God give many good gifts to man; God also visits the world with many judgments. Good gifts and judgments are the pattern and norm for life here below. Never must good gifts be considered alone without taking into account the fact and reality of judgments.

This pattern of His works is true of the history of the human race, for throughout the world the good gifts of God come along with judgments. Not only does all the world receive rain and sunshine; it also receives drought and floods. The rain and sunshine are indeed the good gifts of God; the drought and floods are His judgment. And all, without exception, receive both. The reprobate receive rain and sunshine, but so do the elect. The reprobate receive the judgments of God, but so do the elect. Floods and tornados do not spare the righteous.

Why is this?

The answer is that Zion shall be redeemed through judgment.

That is, the organism of the elect in Christ is redeemed through the way of judgments which come upon the earth.

This truth can be applied on different levels.

It has application in the first place to the individual child of God. God causes His people to endure much affliction in this world, afflictions which, as far as their objective character is concerned, are no different from those judgments which come upon men for sin. God's people get cancer as well as do the unbelieving. Disease and trouble, sorrow and pain, come to the righteous as well as to the wicked. But these evils which are judgments upon wicked men for sin, are blessings for God's people, though in themselves judgments, for Christ bore God's judgment which was rightly theirs. Hence, for the righteous, all these things are chastisements from the hand of the Lord (Heb. 12:5-13); the Lord *loveth* every son whom he chastens. They are fiery trials which burn away the dross of sin in order that faith may be purified (I Pet. 1:7). They are the way in which the child of God is made ready for heaven. Each child of God is redeemed through judgment.

The same is true of the church. The church of Christ, in the course of the years, becomes gradually weaker, more worldly, more carnal, less faithful to the truth. The only way in which God can save His faithful people is through judgment. Sometimes this judgment takes the form of persecution; sometimes it takes the form of church reformation, for, indeed, church reformation, with its suffering and pain, its distress and personal agony, is judgment. But it is a judgment of God upon a faithless institute which brings reformation. But, again, Zion is redeemed through judgment, for the church is purified through the dark way of church reformation.

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But more broadly this is true of the whole church of Christ in the world. And this is of immediate concern to us.

Why is Zion redeemed only through judgment? The answer is, very clearly, that the whole human race has sinned, and sin can be destroyed only through judgment. The elect, a part of that human race, can only be saved out of it through the way of judgment upon all men. The nations have sinned, and the elect can be saved out of the nations only through judgment upon the nations.

There is no other way. Zion can be redeemed only through judgment. But it is precisely this judgment which both destroys and saves.

It is with good reason that the Holy Spirit is compared to a fire and His work to that which burns (Acts 2:3). Judgment begins at the house of God: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter 4:17, 18).

The nation of Israel suffered these dreadful judgments of God, for repeatedly the nation forsook God and turned to idols. Nor were the elect immune from these sins, for they joined with them, or, at best, did nothing to prevent them. The elect are not saved because they are better than others. And so, throughout her history, famines stalked the land, foreign invaders laid the nation waste, pestilences of every kind destroyed the crops and herds, and finally the nation went into captivity. The purpose was that Zion might be redeemed through judgment, for Zion are God's true elect in the organism of the entire nation. And the elect were purged, chastised, delivered, and saved through all these terrible judgments. They were a part of the nation. The sin of the nation was also their sin. Only in the way of judgment could Zion be redeemed.

And so it is throughout history. Judgments come upon the earth. They come because of sin. Within that sinful mass are the elect, sinners as all the rest. But Christ bore their judgment. So when judgment comes upon the world, it is the destruction of the wicked, but it is also the means of separating the elect from the wicked in organic connection with which they are born.

Here, too, figures from God's creation will help us. The figure is especially clear in the threshing processes of Bible times. When the wheat was to be separated from the chaff, the farmer threw the bundles on the threshing floor, which was a smooth piece of ground where ordinarily winds would blow. He turned his oxen loose in the wheat so that it could be trampled by the oxen. The purpose was to separate the kernels of wheat from the chaff.

When, finally, all was reduced nearly to powder and the kernels freed from the straw, the farmer would, when a strong wind was blowing, throw all in the air with a winnowing fork. The lighter chaff would be blown away while

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the heavier wheat would fall to the threshing floor.

It was all laborious work, and the wheat had to undergo brutal punishment under the hooves of the oxen to be separated from the chaff.

It is an interesting figure. During the time the wheat plant is growing, the chaff is absolutely necessary: the wheat cannot grow without the chaff. The kernels of wheat are even a very small part of the entire plant. Yet the entire plant is grown for the purpose of the kernels. And when the wheat kernels are ripe, not only are they separated from the chaff, but the chaff, having served its purpose, is now useless and is blown away by the wind.

So in the organism of the human race. Within that organism is God's elect, the wheat that needs harvesting. As long as the world exists, the wicked serve the righteous and both must be together (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). But when the wheat of the elect are ready, the final judgment comes. Separation takes place and the wicked are burned forever, while the righteous are saved. But because the elect are being constantly saved from this world and brought into heaven, so judgments come all the time to separate the elect from the reprobate. But these judgments which separate are also the means of purifying and cleansing the elect who are wicked in themselves. Their separation is precisely their salvation, as sin is destroyed in them and they are made holy.

Zion is always redeemed through judgment.

### **Blessing and Cursing**

It is in the light of all that we have said that we must consider the problem of common grace. We have asked and answered the question: Why do judgments come upon wicked and righteous? But we have not yet asked and answered the question: Why do good things also come upon the wicked as well as the righteous?

It surely is true that God gives many good gifts to men; not only to the elect, but to men. It is also true that in this life these good gifts are strangely mixed with all kinds of judgments. But judgments are curses to the wicked, for they are God's means of destroying the wicked. And judgments are blessings for the elect, because they are the means of Zion's redemption.

Now the question is: Are the good gifts God's grace to all men?

Once again we must remember that the human race must be considered as an organism. We may use here the example of a vineyard with many grapevines in it. God works with the human race in the same way a husbandman works with his vines. He gives his vines fertilizer and irrigation water, and upon these vines the sun shines and the rain falls. All that the vine receives is good for the vine.

But at the same time the vinekeeper prunes away from the vine

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branches that do not bear fruit. This is important, for only when the vine is properly pruned will the good branches bring forth their fruit. Good things must be given to the vine.

Let us look at this vine from the viewpoint of the vine itself. The rain and sunshine, the fertilizer and irrigation, all have the effect of making *all* the branches grow. But, through the growth of the branches, it soon becomes apparent that some branches do not bear fruit and others do. The fruitless branches are cut away so that the fruitful branches may bear "more fruit" (John 15:2).

But we must also look at the vine from the viewpoint of the owner of the vineyard. He knows with certainty that all the care which he bestows upon the vine will result in the growth of the fruitless branches as well as the fruitful branches. Does he perhaps say to himself: "I will withhold from the vine fertilizer and water because the fertilizer and water make the fruitless branches grow?" He would be foolish if he did, for his vines would, through neglect and lack of food and moisture, die. Does he, perhaps, give this care to the vine *in spite of the fact* that the fruitless branches grow too, thinking to himself: "I cannot do anything about it; I might as well face the fact that the fruitless branches will also grow?"

No, the vineyard keeper has a purpose in it all. His purpose is finally that the vine may bring forth abundant and delicious fruit. But his purpose is also that, through the growth of the fruitless branches, he may know what branches have to be pruned. It is only in pruning the useless branches that the fruitful branches bring forth "more fruit."

This is the way God deals with the human race. He gives an abundance of good gifts so that the whole human race may grow. But the whole human race must grow and develop because God's purpose is realized in this way. God's purpose is that the wicked may reveal themselves as wicked when they spurn God's good gifts. In that way they become fit to be pruned away. They are burned. But God's ultimate purpose is that the elect people of God may bring forth more fruit and manifest themselves as those who belong to Christ.

This figure is not a figure of my invention; it belongs to Scripture.

Psalm 80 compares Israel with a vine, taken out of Egypt and planted in Canaan. God prepared room before it, and caused it to take deep root so that it filled the land. But God also broke it down through the boar out of the wood which wasted it and the wild beast of the field which devoured it. It is burned with fire. Then comes the plaintive cry: "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; **and** we shall be saved" (verses 17-19).

The figure is explicit in Isaiah 55: "For as the rain cometh down, and

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the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (vv. 10, 11).

Still more clearly is this figure used in Hebrews 6:4-8. It is strange, to say the least, that this text should be used in support of common grace. Let us listen to it. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” Then the figure which explains it all: “For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

All receive the rain. That rain brings forth herbs which are blessed by God. But that blessing is for the herbs. The same rain causes the land to bring forth briers and thistles. They are rejected and cursed and their end is to be burned.

### **God’s Blessings for All?**

If we take this organic viewpoint, we will properly understand God’s good gifts, but also His judgments. And so we will be able to understand not only rain and sunshine upon the ungodly, but also droughts and famines upon the people of God—for all that happens in the creation happens to all alike.

Let us begin with the figures we have used.

When a vinekeeper applies fertilizer to his vines, he knows that the result will be that the fruitless branches will grow. The question is: Is he favorably inclined towards these fruitless branches? Are the good gifts which he bestows on the plant evidences of his favor towards the fruitless branches?

To ask the question is to answer it. No, the presence of fruitless branches is a nuisance to him and only means more work as they are carefully pruned away.

Is the growth of the fruitless branches only a necessary evil which he must tolerate? In a way it is, but he wants them to grow too so that he can identify them. Only after they grow can they be identified as fruitless branches.

But in the fruitful branches he finds delight. All the work is finally for their purpose. He rejoices in the fruit and in the wine which makes his heart glad. All his labor is forgotten in the joy of the abundant harvest. He has favor

and love towards the good branches.

So it is with the works of God. He gives good gifts to men. He does so because in this way the world develops and grows. These good gifts are themselves the means to reveal the wicked as wicked, for they despise God's good gifts, use them to sin against Him, and reveal themselves as reprobate. They are not blessings for them. God is not favorable to them. He has no love for them. He does not send His good gifts to them so that perhaps they may, by these good gifts, be changed to elect. He knows His own. He knows also who are not His own. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked" (Prof. 3:33).

Asaph finally understood these things when he went into the house of God. The prosperity of the wicked was God's way of setting them in slippery places and casting them down into destruction (Ps. 73:17-19). And when, in God's sanctuary, he understood these things, then he could say: "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (v. 22).

But these same good gifts which God gives are always blessings to God's people. They are indications of God's favor and love, for by them God's people know that their Father in heaven takes care of them. Even as the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, so "He blesseth the habitation of the just" (Prov. 3:33). And Asaph could say, even when he suffered: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Ps. 73:23, 24).

But all these things put also judgments into their proper perspective.

The judgments which come upon the world and upon our nation are God's pruning so that the elect may bring forth more fruit. Not only do they see that God is judging the world now, but they see these judgments as the rumblings of the thunder of the great judgments of God which shall come on the world when Christ comes back again.

When these judgments come upon them personally or when they suffer because of the judgments upon the world, they know that these are necessary for their salvation. They are chastisement to correct and save (Heb. 12:5-11). They know that all things work together for their good, for they are called according to the purpose of God (Rom. 8:28). They know that all things are theirs, for they are Christ's, and Christ is God's (I Cor. 3:21-23). They can be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity, for they know that nothing can separate them from God's love (Q. & A. 28, Heidelberg Catechism).

God's favor and love rest upon them, while the wicked are consumed.

Although it is not our intention at this point to go into this matter in detail, let it be clearly understood that all that we have said centers in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the cross Christ bore the judgment of God against the sin of all His



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people. The judgment of God's wrath can no more come upon them. It is gone through Christ's perfect sacrifice for sin. The cross is the center of the truth that Zion is redeemed through judgment. But Christ bore the judgments of God which are deservedly the portion of the elect. He died for them and endured their judgment that they might never have to be punished for their sins. And so, when the judgments of this present world come upon men, the people of God hide themselves beneath the shadow of the cross where all the judgments that come upon the world are turned into blessings for them.

But, at the same time, the cross is the judgment of the world, as Christ Himself makes clear: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31).

If only we are willing to take the perspective of Scripture and let the light of God's Word fall upon these perplexing problems of life, if only we do not try to interpret what goes on in this world by our own ideas and notions, then it will be clear to us that God, the sovereign One, works His great and glorious purpose in all things, that His own people may be brought out of this sinful world into glory with Christ.

### Proof Texts

We have not yet had an opportunity to look at the texts which are quoted to support common grace.

There are not so many texts which are quoted, but we ought to look at those which the supporters of common grace appeal to in defense of their position.

John Murray appeals first of all to Hebrews 10:26, 27: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.'

Murray himself does not explain why he chooses this text in support of his defense of common grace, but one may deduce from his writings that his reference to this text is based upon the fact that the text speaks of those who perish as those who receive the knowledge of the truth. The argument then is: That the reprobate receive the knowledge of the truth is indicative of God's favor upon them.

It ought to be quite obvious that such a line of argumentation is invalid.

In the first place, no one denies that all men receive a certain knowledge of the truth, whether that be the heathen who never hear the gospel and who

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See our last article in the November, 1993 issue of the *Journal* in which we **quoted at length** from Murray.

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receive this knowledge through creation, or whether that be those who are born and raised within the church and who know the truth through the preaching of the gospel.

It is important to God that all men receive such knowledge of the truth. God Himself sees to it. But the good gift of the knowledge of the truth is not indicative of God's favor. It is not God's purpose to show them His love and grace. Paul tells us exactly what that purpose is: It is the revelation of the wrath of God from heaven and it is given "so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18, 20). It is important that the wicked reveal themselves as wicked so that when God punishes them in hell, their punishment is the just and perfect manifestation of God's wrath against all that sinned. They will never be able to say that they did not serve God because they did not know Him. God shows Himself to them. They are without excuse.

It is more puzzling that Murray should refer to Hebrews 6:4, 5 in support of his views on common grace. He apparently means, by appealing to this text, that the enlightenment of the wicked, the heavenly gift given to them especially in the Holy Spirit, and the powers of the world to come which they taste, are all blessings.

But this will never do.

In the first place, the apostle is speaking here of people who are born and raised in the church, for their sin is crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to open shame (v. 6). The good gifts which they receive are, therefore, the *outward* good things of the preaching of the gospel. These wicked even have a certain understanding of the blessedness of the preaching and can appreciate the blessings of the world to come. Nevertheless, they never receive these gifts in their hearts.

That this is the meaning is evident from the fact that these gifts are compared to the rain which falls upon the earth (v. 7). But that rain brings forth thorns and briers.

If an inward gift of these blessings were referred to in the text, then one can only conclude that the text speaks of a falling away of saints. After all, if these people who commit the unpardonable sin actually receive these blessings inwardly, then they are actually saved. But we know that Scripture teaches exactly the opposite: the preservation of the saints. (See John 10:26-30.)

More to the point are the texts which were quoted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 in support of a general attitude of God's favor upon all men, texts to which John Murray also refers.

The first is the passage in Psalm 145:9: "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works."

As is so often the case in the Psalms, this verse makes use of the rhetorical and poetical device known as Hebrew parallelism. That is, the two

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parts of the verse are so related that they explain each other. God's goodness is explained in terms of His tender mercies, and the "all" of the text is explained by "all his works."

The text, therefore, teaches that God is good to His entire creation, which includes all His works. We have noted earlier that this goodness of God towards all His works is evident in the fact that also the creation is saved in Christ. He loves His creation and shows His favor and goodness towards it.

But even if this Hebrew parallelism is ignored and the word "all" is interpreted to mean "all men," then still the meaning of the text is not that God is favorably inclined towards the reprobate. How can this be, when "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked"? But the gifts which God gives to men are always good gifts. He cannot give bad gifts, for He is good in Himself and in all that He does.

Perhaps no single text has been quoted as often in support of common grace as the passage in Matthew 5:44, 45: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Similar passages, also often quoted, are to be found in Luke 6:27, 35 and Acts 14:16, 17. Luke 6 :27, 35 reads: "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.... But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and evil." And Acts 14:16, 17 reads: "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Let us begin with the passage in Acts 14, which is not difficult to explain.

The text clearly refers to the fact that God, even in the old dispensation, did not leave Himself without witness. This witness was through rain from heaven and fruitful seasons which filled men's hearts with joy and gladness. It was part of the witness in the creation of which Paul speaks in Romans 1:18ff. It was to make known to all men that God is a good God Who gives good gifts and Who must, because of His goodness, be served and worshiped as God alone. But God's purpose was that men might be without excuse when they are punished for their evil.

That these wicked continued in their own evil ways is evident from the text itself: all nations walked in their own ways.

If we only will understand that the gifts of rain and sunshine are good gifts of God, then we will have no problem understanding either that these

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good gifts are not, in themselves, testimonies of God's favor and love towards the wicked. They are the rain and sunshine which cause the fruitless branches of the vine of the human race to reveal themselves as wicked.

Matthew 5:44, 45 is an important passage. The supporters of common grace apparently argue in this fashion in their interpretation. We must love our enemies and in this way love all men. When we love all men we are children of our Father in heaven. Our Father in heaven also loves all men and reveals His love for all by giving them rain and sunshine, for He sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Thus God loves all men and shows grace to all men, for all men receive rain and sunshine.

We need not repeat here what we have already said about the fact that all God's gifts are good and that He gives these good gifts to all men. Nor need we repeat what we have said about the purpose of God in giving good gifts to men. But let it be clearly understood that this text too must be explained in the context of all the other passages of Scripture to which we **have referred.**

Let it also be understood that it would be a serious problem for the people of God if they had to contemplate the fact that God loves all men, and not only loves them. It would be a terrible thing if God loved those who walk in every sin; and it would be a terrible thing if God loved those who kill the people of God, persecute them, destroy them from the earth, and do so blaspheming God's name while never repenting of their sin.

This would be a terrible thing because it would be (and I speak as a man) **a** kind of adultery on God's part. His church is His bride, His beloved, to whom He is married in an everlasting bond of marriage. The world is not so. **The** world is the enemy of God. James is right when he severely castigates the church for loving God's enemies and calls them adulterers and adulteresses: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Yet so, common grace defenders say God loves those with whom we must not be friends.

If God loves anyone but His bride, it is tantamount to my loving a woman other than my wife. Nor would she be placated by my statement: "Yes, wife, but my love for this other woman is a love of complacency, not a love of benevolence." She would tell me in no uncertain terms that I ought to be loving her alone. And she would be right.

What does Matthew 5 teach?

The love of which Christ speaks when He enjoins us to love our enemies is a genuine love. By that I mean that it is a love which is not sloppily sentimental, not simply the giving of material help; it is a love which is like the love of God. God's love seeks (and accomplishes) the salvation of sinners. So also our love must seek the salvation of sinners, although we cannot

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accomplish that salvation; it is God's work. But we must, even when we do good to those who hate us, seek their salvation. We must call them to forsake their evil way, repent of their sins, and believe in Christ.

In this connection, it must be immediately understood that God knows those who are His own. We do not know them. God pours out His love upon His people, and by the power of His love He saves them. We have no such power in our love. We can only reveal to others God's love for us. But because we seek their salvation, we reflect God's love for us.

If that expression of love is shown to an elect, it will be the means God uses to bring that sinner to Christ. If the one to whom we show love is a reprobate, it will be the means to harden that sinner in his sin so that he will no longer want even the good that we show to him.

And so we reflect God's love for us and show that we are the children of our Father in heaven. God also loves us when we are unthankful and evil. He does not give love to those who deserve it; He gives His love to undeserving sinners such as we are. It is this very consciousness of God's unmerited love that moves us to show our love to those who hate us, persecute us, and curse us. Undeserving sinners who are the objects of God's love show love to other undeserving sinners.

We show this love by doing good to sinners. God also does good to sinners, not only to the elect, but also to the reprobate. In this way too, we reflect the love of God. God's good gifts to reprobate sinners harden them in their sins so that they are without excuse; God's good gifts to elect sinners bring them to repentance and faith through the work of the Spirit in their hearts. Our love, which we show to our enemies, does the same.

The only difference is that God knows His own; we do not know those who belong to Him. He accomplishes His sovereign purpose; we are instruments in His hand to accomplish that purpose.

But of God's love or favor to reprobate sinners the text says not a word.

The passage in Luke 7 teaches the same thing. How churlish and ungrateful we would be if we, the objects of God's unmerited love, would show love only to those who are deserving of our love. Even the publicans do that. But we are children of our Father in heaven. We must be different.

Thus, we come to the end of our discussion of this part of the doctrine of common grace. If we look at things from the viewpoint of God, and learn to **think** theologically instead of thinking in a man-centered way, we will have no problems.

All we can do, finally, is adore the riches of God's sovereign and particular grace as we humbly confess that, though we are wholly unworthy of any of God's blessings, we are given, through Christ, the riches of everlasting salvation. **A**

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# The Reformed Doctrine of the Inspiration of Holy Scripture

*Prof Robert D. Decker*

Of the several confessions or creeds belonging to the Reformed tradition the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter I, Articles 1-10) and the Belgic Confession of Faith (Articles 2-7) offer the most detailed statements on the doctrine of Holy Scripture. We shall limit ourselves to a discussion of the Reformed doctrine of the *inspiration* of Holy Scripture and that too on the basis of the Belgic Confession.

These articles are as follows:

Article II. We know him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely his power and **divinity**, as the apostle Paul saith, Rom. 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse. Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation.

Article III. We confess that this Word of God was not sent, nor delivered by the will of man, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care, which he has for us and our salvation, commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed word to writing; and he himself wrote with his own finger, the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

Article IV. (This article speaks of the Canon of Holy Scripture and lists the books of the Old and New Testaments. We need not quote it.)

Article V. We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.

Article VI. (This article speaks of the difference between the canonical books and the apocryphal books. We need not quote it.)

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Article VII. We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship, which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden, to add unto or take away anything from the word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.

The *Belgic Confession* speaks in Article II of the two means by which God may be known by us. The first is by the "creation, preservation, and government of the universe" and the second means is by God's Word, "God is known more clearly and fully by his holy and divine Word." Article III speaks of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Article V speaks of the source of the dignity and authority of Holy Scripture. Article VII is really a summary of the preceding with emphasis on the sufficiency of Holy Scripture as the only rule of faith.

Two facts ought be noted concerning these articles on Holy Scripture. The first is that beautifully woven into the fabric of these statements are what have been called the attributes of Holy Scripture. By attributes we mean the authority, the necessity, the perspicuity (clarity), and the sufficiency of Scripture. The second fact is that the Reformed doctrine of Holy Scripture is presented as the object of the faith of the believer. This latter is obvious from the language used: "We know him by two means ..." (Article II); "We confess ..." (Article III); "We believe ..." (Article IV and VII); "We receive ..." (Article V); and "We distinguish ..." (Article VI). *The Belgic Confession* thus insists that Holy Scripture belongs to the wonder of grace in Christ Jesus and, therefore, can be received only by faith, God's gift. When one stands before the Word of God, Holy Scripture, he either believes that Word or he rejects it in unbelief.

*The Belgic Confession* presents three fundamental truths concerning Holy Scripture. First, Holy Scripture is from God through men. Second, because Holy Scripture is from God, Scripture is the sole authority for the

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faith and life of the Christian, utterly necessary for the salvation of the believer, perfectly perspicuous, and completely sufficient for the faith of the believer. Third, we know all of this *by faith*. We shall examine each of these truths in a bit of detail.

Holy Scripture is from God through men. The *Confession* introduces the subject of Holy Scripture in Article II by stating, "We know him (God) by two means, first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe." This creation is "before our eyes as a most elegant book." All creatures in this book of creation "are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity." The article teaches that the revelation of God in His creation is "sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse, as the apostle Paul saith in Romans 1:20." This is, in brief, the Reformed doctrine of general revelation. The second means by which we know God is "his holy and divine Word." God makes Himself known in His Word "more clearly and fully" and, "as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation." This, in brief, is the Reformed doctrine of special revelation.

Article III speaks of the origin of God's "holy and divine word" and is, in our opinion, the *key statement* on the Reformed doctrine of inspiration. Concerning the spoken Word, the Article states, "This Word of God came not by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the apostle Peter saith" (II Pet. 1:21, RDD). Concerning the written Word, the Article states, "God, from a special care, which he has for us and our salvation commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed word to writing and he himself wrote with his own finger, the two tables of the law." For this reason, the article concludes, "we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures."

Among other things, two truths are plain from these two articles of the *Confession*. Holy Scripture comes from God. It did not come to us by the will of man. Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Not only so, but *God* commanded His servants to commit His revealed Word to writing, and *God* makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word. The second truth is that this Word from God came through men. Holy *men* of God spoke as moved by the Holy Spirit and God's *servants*, the prophets and apostles, at God's command committed His revealed Word to writing. Because of these two truths, the *Confession* says, "... we call such writings holy and divine Scripture." Holy and divine Scripture is, in other words, God's infallible and inerrant Word! This, in brief, is the Reformed doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture.

The *Confession* beautifully and accurately reflects Holy Scripture's teaching concerning this truth. The question is, how did we get the Bible? God spoke His Word. The Lord spoke directly to many of the saints: to Adam,



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Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others. God spoke to His people through angels: to Abraham, Manoah, Zacharias, Mary, the shepherds, the women at the tomb of Jesus. God also spoke to His people by means of dreams and visions, as well as by mighty signs and wonders. God spoke to the prophets who in turn brought that Word to the people. How often do we not read, "Thus saith the Lord" or "The Word of the Lord came unto me saying...." Jesus promised the apostles the Spirit of truth who would lead them into all the truth by causing them to remember all that Jesus taught them. The apostle John was commanded to write in a book all that he saw (Rev. 1:11). The apostles were keenly aware of the fact that they came with nothing more or less than the Word from God. Paul, for example, reminds the saints in Corinth that he came to them not with excellency of speech or of wisdom when he declared to them the *testimony of God*. He assures them that he came to them in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God!

Concerning itself Holy Scripture says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17). "All Scripture" can be translated "all" or "every" Scripture. It makes no difference; in either case the meaning is the same. The whole of Scripture, Scripture in all of its parts (all its poetry, its teachings, its history, its chronologies) is the Word of God. All Scripture, word for word, every "a, and, and the," is given by inspiration of God, i.e., is "God-breathed." God, as it were, breathed His Word into the human authors and thus they spoke or wrote His Word.

This certainly means that Scripture is not the product of men. Holy Scripture is not of human origin. It's not merely the words of Moses, David, Paul, or Peter. Scripture is not mere myths, teaching models. Nor is Scripture the human writers' accounts of their religious experiences or encounters with God.

But there's more. Neither is Scripture the result of a cooperative effort between God and the human writers. We must not speak of a divine and a human factor in revelation. Scripture is not partly divine and partly human. James Boice addresses this point when he writes:

The third position is the one we are especially wrestling with today. This is the view that the Bible is the Word of God and the word of men combined — **in this sense. When** you read the Bible you find things there that have certainly come to us from God and are therefore truthful. But we have to admit (so this **thinking** goes) that when we read the Bible we also find things that are not truthful, things we know to be in error, and because God does not speak

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that which is untruthful, these things come from human beings alone. We have a combination of divine words and human words, and it is the task of scholarship to sort these out.

What happens in that framework is that the scholar becomes God. That is, he becomes the authority who tells Christian people what is true and what is not true, what is of God and what is not of God, what they are to believe and what they are not to believe. And the danger is that because we are sinners (which includes the scholars who, perhaps at this point, are even greater sinners than the rest of us) we always weed out the things we do not want to hear. The very saying of God that is there to correct the church, discipline our thinking, and influence our lives is the part we decide is in error and get rid of. That is what happens when one departs from the evangelical view."

The late Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema held strongly to this view as well. He discusses the matter in detail in an excellent little book on Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Scripture, we must insist, is wholly divine.

The question is, how must we understand this? Are there not different human authors who employ different language and style? Obviously Paul's Epistles are much different from John's or Peter's. How must we understand this? Were the human writers merely like computers with the Holy Spirit punching the keyboard?

Scripture itself answers these questions in II Peter 1:20-21 where we read, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." When the text says, "holy men of (literally "from," RDD) God, it means God did not just happen to find a David or a John and decide to inspire them to write or speak His Word. God chose, ordained these men; their birth, characters, personalities, life's experiences, gifts, talents. God set these men apart and God consecrated them to Himself as holy men. God prepared them to be fit instruments of His revelation.

And these holy men from God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. God moved them by His Holy Spirit. God breathed His Word into them. Thus and only thus did they speak and write the very Word of God.

For these reasons no Scripture is of any private interpretation. Scripture is not the private opinions of men. It's God's Word through the instrumentality of the human writers.

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Standing on the Rock* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 1984), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Doctrine Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Re-formed Free Publishing Association, 1990), pp. 51-77.

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Thus Holy Scripture is a unique book! One of a kind! The Bible cannot be compared with any human writings or subjected to the same literary criticism as human writings. There are no mistakes in the Bible, no errors. This is true not only of the original manuscripts, but also of the Bible as we have it today. God saw to it that all through the centuries His Word was preserved.

Because Holy Scripture is from God through men, it is the absolute authority for the faith and life of the believer. Scripture reveals the truth of creation, the fall of mankind into sin, the promise of redemption in Jesus Christ by the sovereign grace of God. The Bible presents the Christian life of gratitude to God. All the believer needs to know for his faith and for his life is revealed in Holy Scripture.

This is the teaching of Article 2 of the *Belgic Confession*. According to this article of the creed we know God by two means, the first of which is creation. Creation is as a most elegant book in which all creatures are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God. This revelation of God in creation, the creed points out, is sufficient to leave men without excuse. The article goes on to say that we know God more fully and clearly through His holy and divine Word. Those adverbs, "more fully and clearly," must not be overlooked. The fact that we know God more fully and clearly through His holy and divine Word means that all that we learn from God's creation must be interpreted and understood in the light of Holy Scripture. Everything must be evaluated in the light of Scripture. John Calvin uses an interesting simile to illustrate this very point,

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, **even** if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers (creation and providence, RDD) but also opens his own hallowed lips.'

Further, because Holy Scripture is from God it is *sufficient* for our salvation. With Article 7 of the *Belgic Confession* the Reformed believer asserts that whatever man ought to believe unto salvation is *sufficiently* taught in Scripture. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us

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' John Calvin, John T. McNeill, editor, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book I, Chapter VI, Section 1, p. 70.

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is written in Scripture. No one, not even an apostle or an angel from heaven, may teach otherwise than what is taught in the Bible. Nothing may be added to or taken from Scripture because Scripture's doctrine is perfect and complete in all respects. No writings of men are of equal value with Scripture and we must reject with all our hearts whatever does not agree with Scripture.

Because Scripture is from God it is *necessary* for our salvation. With Article 2 of the *Confession* we maintain that whatever is necessary for us to know in this life to God's glory and our salvation, God clearly and fully makes known to us in His holy and divine Word.

Finally, because Scripture is from God, it is perfectly perspicuous, clear. Part of the wonder of the inspiration of Holy Scripture is the fact that God spoke to us in language that we can understand. Scripture, this means, is not an enigma, a riddle, a mystery. Holy Scripture is not so deep and profound that it requires a trained theologian to understand its meaning. Scripture is perfectly clear. A child has no difficulty understanding the Scriptures.

All this we know by faith! Article 5 of the *Confession* teaches that we receive Holy Scripture for the regulation and confirmation of our faith, believing without any doubt all things contained in them. We receive Holy Scripture thus, not so much because the church receives and approves the Scriptures as such. That the church receives and approves Holy Scripture is significant and important, but that cannot be the reason why we receive these books as holy and canonical. We receive them and believe all things in them because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God. No matter what the scholars, the theologians, or the scientists may say, the believer says, I believe this Bible to be the Holy Word of God, the final and absolute authority for my faith and my life. I believe the Bible to be such because the Holy Spirit witnesses within my heart that this is so.

This faith determines our attitude toward and approach to Holy Scripture. We do not approach the Scriptures in doubt, wondering whether or not these things are true. We do not approach the Bible to see or determine what in it is from God and what is from man. We do not go to Scripture to ascertain what teachings or standards of conduct applied in Bible times and what applies in our own time and culture. Rather, we believe all things in the Scriptures without any doubt. We accept the Scriptures for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith.

This, in brief, is the Reformed doctrine of Holy Scripture.

This doctrine has very serious implications for all believers, but especially for preachers of the Word. According to II Timothy 3:16-17, God inspired the Scriptures and made them profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. God did that for this purpose, that the man of God (Timothy, the preacher, all preachers) might be perfect,

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thoroughly furnished unto all good works! The apostle in the very next breath exhorts Timothy and all preachers to preach the Word, to be instant in and out of season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine, and to do so without shame or apology (II Timothy 4:1-3).

The faithful preacher can preach the Word confidently and boldly. The Word which he preaches, the inspired Word of God, is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow, and it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). Indeed, the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Let no one, and certainly not the Reformed preacher, ever be ashamed of that gospel! A

## Book Reviews

*Sermons on Job*, by John Calvin. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993. 751 pp. \$49.95 (hard-cover). *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries: Daniel I (Chapters 1-6)* by John Calvin. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and Carlisle, Cumbria: The Paternoster Press, 1993. 300 pp. \$24.99 (paper). *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, by T.H.L. Parker. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. 239 pp. \$16.99 (paper). *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, by T.H.L. Parker. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. 257 pp. \$16.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

books by and about John Calvin have recently been published.

The Banner of Truth has published the 159 sermons on Job that Calvin preached in 1554 and 1555. The worth of this big book can hardly be overestimated. It gives us the preaching of Calvin as he delivered the sermons. The sermons were taken down by a professional scribe hired for this purpose. The book is full of biblical exposition, sound doctrine, and exhortation to a godly life. Pastors will learn something about good, Reformed preaching. All Christians will be edified. Hear Calvin on Job 1:12, "And the Loin said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Loin":

Several important, profitable

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Here at the first blush a man might marvel, why God did so give over his servant Job to Satan's pleasure: is it meet that the Devil should have such credit with God, that when he craveth leave to work us mischief, God should grant it him? It see meth that God favoereth him, and that he maketh sport with us in the meanwhile as with a tennis ball. But let us mark, that when God granteth Satan this thing, he doth it not to pleasure him, neither is he moved of any favor that he beareth towards him: but because he hath ordained it in his own purpose: he is not moved by Satan's suit, nor persuaded by him to suffer Job to be punished. He had already so determined in his own purpose (p. 21).

Since this is a facsimile edition of the translation by Englishman Arthur Golding in 1574, the book is cast in Elizabethan English and uses the old English script. In no time, however, the attentive reader figures out that "v" is "u," "u" is "v," and a letter that looks for all the world like "f" is really "s."

Adding to the value is a good table of contents (by 16th century Golding) that shows where in "this Booke" the "principall matters (are) conteyned."

Calvin's *Daniel* commentary is the first of two volumes on Daniel. This volume gives Calvin's lectures on Daniel 1-6. A subsequent volume will give his lectures on chapters 7-12. This volume is also the firstfruits of the ambitious project by Rutherford House to provide a new translation in

English of all of Calvin's Old Testament commentaries. The Old Testament commentaries were last translated into English in the 19th century under the auspices of the Calvin Translation Society. This is the translation that was published by Eerdmans in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The commentary on Daniel published by Eerdmans in 1948 was the translation by one Thomas Myers in 1852. In his outstanding work, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, T. H. L. Parker is critical of that 19th century translation of Calvin's Old Testament commentaries:

The Old Testament volumes are in general badly edited. In few instances are the foot-notes at all helpful; often they are downright silly. The exceptions shine as rare gems. The editor of Genesis adds to the score against him that he omits anything that might bring a blush to the cheek of the young person — Gen. 19:31ff. and 38:10 are left out in *toto*. The translating in most of the volumes is unsatisfactory, not in the sense of gross incorrectness but in its imprecision. This was, it may be suspected, often deliberate, in their effort to make Calvin a good "Evangelical" of the mid-nineteenth century breed.... The truth was that the editors were not **interested in presenting a sound** edition of their author but only in supplying commentaries on the Bible that should carry the authority of Calvin's name **and** therefore be of polemical service (pp. 2, 3).

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Calvin's New Testament commentaries have recently been retranslated into English. Now the Old Testament commentaries are being similarly published in a new English translation. The general editor of the project is D.F. Wright assisted by D.F. Kelly. Consultant editors are T.H.L. Parker, J.H. Leith, J.I. Packer, and R.S. Wallace. Contributing editors are R.C. Gamble, D.C. Lachman, A.N.S. Lane, and J.G. McConville.

The new translation of Calvin's *Daniel* from the original Latin is by Calvin scholar, T.H.L. Parker. The translation is faithful and readable. Calvin's lectures to his students (and this is what the *Daniel* commentary is), though helpful to the work of the seminarian and the pastor, are clear and instructive to the layman.

Worthwhile simply as Calvin's explanation of the Holy Scriptures, the commentary on *Daniel* has special importance by virtue of its treating God's Word on the conflict between the kingdom of antichrist and the church in the last days. Commenting on the refusal of *Daniel*'s three friends to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image as recorded in *Daniel* 3:16-18, Calvin said:

This is a most noteworthy passage. For first this reply is to be remarked: when men tempt us to deny God, we must shut our ears and admit no deliberation. For as soon as we even debate whether it is lawful to leave his pure worship we begin to injure God severely,

whatever our reason may be. Would that it were well known to all that God's glory is so transcendent, so vital, that everything must be put in its proper place when there is any thought of diminishing or obscuring that glory. But today the fallacy deceives very many into thinking it right to weigh in the scales, so to say, whether it might be best to swerve from the true worship of God for a time when some advantage on the other side suggests itself (p. 131).

The commentary exposes the suggestion by the theonomists that Calvin was postmillennial as the merest nonsense. In his explanation of the dream of the great image in *Daniel* 2, Calvin distinguished the kingdom of Christ — the little stone — from the other four kingdoms as heavenly, spiritual, and not visible or external. It is identical with the church. In the preface to the commentary, Calvin declared that "the throne and scepter of Christ is the preaching of the gospel."

The book is handsome in appearance featuring Holbein's flattering portrait of Calvin. The completed set will be impressive.

*Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* and *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* by T.H.L. Parker are companion pieces. In these volumes, the noted Calvin scholar — and sympathetic spirit — analyzes Calvin's commentaries on the books of the Bible. The work on the New Testament commentaries is more technical. It treats of such

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matters as the history of the writing and translating of the New Testament commentaries and the Greek text used by Calvin. The two most important chapters for the Protestant pastor are chapter four, "Calvin's Method and Interpretation," and chapter eight, "Prolegomena to Exegesis." The latter has an interesting section on Calvin's relation, in exegeting Scripture, to other interpreters of Holy Scripture. Calvin the exegete availed himself of the work of others, but also demonstrated, and insisted on, freedom of exegesis. He refused, for example, to be bound by the interpretation of Luther. This, he said, would constitute slavery for the minister of the Word called by God to work with the Scriptures.

It is Parker's study of the Old Testament commentaries that is the gem. The book is a valuable introduction to the Reformed view of and work with Old Testament Scripture. It treats in some depth and at some length Calvin's doctrine of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments; Calvin's exposition of the history in the Old Testament Bible; Calvin's view of the law; and Calvin's interpretation of prophecy.

Parker's description of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is intriguing (pp. 181ff.). It will sorely discomfit those who have convinced themselves that Calvin taught that the covenant is a conditional agreement and that the promise of the covenant is to all the natural progeny of Abraham.

Calvin's attitude of childlike

faith toward the Old Testament, as set forth by Parker (who barely hints at some doubts of his own about this attitude), is simply delightful. Referring to Calvin's acceptance of all the miraculous in the Old Testament, Parker writes:

Improbability causes him no problems. He even goes out of his way to emphasize the improbability of some stories. We might say that the more improbable a story is, the better he is pleased. For Calvin's world was one in which God himself was present and active continuously, a world in which, although men had wills and could use them, God's will was done, a world in which God continuously and continually did miracles, the ordinary miracles of the created order or the extraordinary miracles transcending the created order (pp. 96, 97).

Parker illustrates Calvin's attitude toward the "improbable" from Calvin's explanation of the history of the flood, specifically the ark: "how the humans were going even to survive for three days shut up in a box — 'the smell of dung alone' he says, 'would have stifled all the living creatures in the Ark'. But all these problems would be looked after by God" (p. 98).

Coming through in every aspect of the Reformer's explanation and application of the Old Testament is his reception in faith of the Scriptures as the very Word of God:



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The fact is that for Calvin the Bible, the whole Bible and every nook and cranny of the Bible, is the Word of God as completely as if God himself had spoken the actual words. At every point, therefore, we are confronted by God's will, God's mind, and not by human purposes and ideas (p. 66).

God grant His church today spiritual sons of Calvin in the preaching and teaching of the Old Testament Bible.

**Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries** is a treasure.

This entire harvest of books by and about John Calvin is a feast for every student of Calvin and of the Word that he served faithfully and well in his day.

**A Theology of the New Testament**, by George Eldon Ladd (Revised Edition); (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993) v-xiii, 764pp., \$34.99 (paper). [Re-viewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

This work is probably the *magnum opus* of George Eldon Ladd (1911-1980), who was for many years professor of New Testament exegesis and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. It is a work used in many seminaries throughout the country and which has influenced scores of students and ministers.

This edition has been revised and updated by Donald Hagner, and

Diane Bradley has removed all the "sexist" language of the earlier editions. We are informed, however, that "masculine pronouns in reference to God have been retained, [al-though] it is perhaps worth reminding readers that God is not masculine (or feminine)" (viii). Two essays have been added: one on the theology of each of the Synoptic Evangelists by R. T. France, and another on the question of unity and diversity in the New Testament, by David Wenham.

Although the book is a mine of information and can be read with some profit, I have two serious objections to it. The first has to do with the structure or, perhaps better, the approach of the book; the second with its contents. My first objection is to the whole idea of "biblical theology"; the second has to do with the pro-found commitment to higher criticism. Let us look at each in turn.

Perhaps it is well to give a definition of biblical theology before we proceed. In the Introduction we find the following:

Biblical theology is that discipline which sets forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting. Biblical theology is primarily a descriptive discipline. It is not initially concerned with the final meaning of the teachings of the Bible or their relevance for today. This is the task of systematic theology. Biblical theology has the task of ex-pounding the theology found in the Bible in its own historical setting, and its own terms, category-

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ries, and thought forms. (20)

A number of years ago I re-viewed an important and well-known book by Herman Ridderbos: "Paul: An Outline of His Theology," which was a translation of the original Dutch *Paulus*. Although at that time I had not paid much attention to the whole idea of biblical theology (versus systematic theology) I can recall that the book left me uneasy, and I recall criticizing the book for this approach. Since that time, there has been opportunity to study the matter further and do some reading of the subject, particularly the historical material concerning the controversy which raged over this subject in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the 17th century and the writings of Gerhardus Vos, including his inaugural address in 1893 when he took the newly-created chair of Biblical Theology in Princeton Seminary.

The argument in favor of biblical theology (and Vos has done the best job of defending that position that I have read) is that it alone can do justice to the progressive character of revelation. There is something to this argument, for systematic theology can fall into the danger of ignoring this truth — although that need not necessarily happen. It ought to be noticed that Vos's definition of historical theology differs in important respects from Ladd's definition. (*Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 3-24.)

While, however, biblical theology avoids this problem of not do-

ing justice to the progressive character of revelation, it runs the risk of falling into a greater evil: the denial of the *unity* of Scripture.

This danger is very real, and it is a serious question in my mind whether it can be avoided under any circumstances. Vos himself was conscious of this danger, for he advocated that a seminary ought to retain systematic theology even if it taught biblical theology. And many seminaries have followed his advice.

This book too, while committed to biblical theology, is quite conscious of the danger of denying the unity of Scripture: it includes in the Appendix a chapter on "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament" in which the question of the unity of the New Testament is faced head-on.

I might add by way of parenthesis that I do not quite understand the need for doing justice to the progressive character of revelation in the New Testament. One can understand that in the Old Testament this is necessary, for revelation extended over a period of 4000 years. But in the New? Revelation covered less than 100 years.

But on close examination, one discovers that this book believes that also in the New Testament "revelation" was progressive. I put the word "revelation" in quotes because my statement does not accurately represent the position of the book. The book, looking at the contents of the New Testament, believes that the New Testament Scriptures set down the theology of the New Testament

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church; and this theology of the New Testament church was emphatically progressive. But I intend to return to that matter a bit later.

Although it is necessary to treat the weakness of biblical theology (especially as applied to the New Testament) and the pervasive reliance on higher criticism separately, we ought to be clear on the fact that both share a common basis. That common basis is the view of the author (and the others who write in this new edition) concerning the doctrine of Scripture.

What is their doctrine of Scripture?

While the book sets forth no explicit doctrine of Scripture, it is not impossible to determine what this doctrine is.

On the one hand, one can find statements which express the author's view that Scripture is of divine origin, although such statements are few and far between, and very little, if any, mention is actually made of the inspiration of Scripture itself. Ladd speaks of revelation, but not much of inspiration. He writes, e.g.: "Paul's sense of authority derives from his apostolic consciousness of being the bearer of revelation, i.e., the divinely given word that discloses the meaning of the cross and reveals an historical event to be what it really is, namely, the revelation of the wisdom and power of God" (424).

But Ladd shows us what he means just a paragraph later: "... Revelation is also the total Christian message without regard to the

way it is made known to people (Rom. 16:25)... Revelation, then, is the totality of the historical event of Jesus Christ plus the apostolic interpretation of the divine meaning of the event — the apostolic interpretation being itself a part of the event" (424, 425).

Putting this in the context of other statements in the book, the general view of Scripture is this. At the very heart of revelation stands the person of Jesus Christ and the works which He performed while on earth. Through His works Jesus Christ has accomplished redemption. So far so good. But there is more.

The Scriptures are, of course, the record of this Christ and His work. But the Scriptures came about in the following way. Jesus Himself did not write anything. What we do have concerning Christ and His works is to be found in documents which were written from about 30 years after Christ's death (A.D. 60) to the end of the first century.

During the thirty years between Christ's death and resurrection and the writing of the first documents which comprise the New Testament, the stories and traditions of what Jesus said and did were preserved in the tradition of the church. When Paul, the evangelists, and other authors of Scripture began to write down what Jesus said and did, as well as their interpretation of these things, they relied upon the stories that were being circulated, the written documents which had been prepared during this 30 years but which are not

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included in Scripture, the interpretations of these events to be found in various Christian communities throughout the empire, and their own judgments and opinions.

Now all this material, says Ladd in the quotation made above, actually belongs not only to revelation, but is part of the event itself. That is, the stories preserved by individual saints, the interpretations given to events in the life of Christ, etc., etc., are part of revelation — indeed part of the event of Christ's redemptive work.

In what sense of the word all this material can be called "revelation" is difficult to see. And what is meant by the fact that all this material is indeed part of the event is still more difficult to see. But it is obviously a ploy to try to preserve a concept of the divine origin of Scripture while introducing higher criticism. How can the genealogical records of Bethlehem (which Matthew used in Mt. 1), the stories of Mary which Luke used, the primitive view of the atonement found in the early church (366), and the memories of John be themselves revelation? They can be such only if one defines revelation very loosely. But when all this is incorporated in Scripture as "revelation," it is not difficult to imagine that one cannot possibly have an infallible Scripture which is "God-breathed."

The views go somewhat further. When these documents which comprise the New Testament were actually written, they were written by

Paul and the other human authors for particular reasons. They were writ-ten under specific historical circumstances, within different Christian communities, with different kinds of people in mind, for different purposes. For example, Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to combat the error of Judaism in those churches, while Matthew's gospel was written to prove to Jews that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy.

Now all of this is in itself true. In fact, so far as I know, every Re-formed exegete from the Reformation till today has recognized this aspect of Scripture as being a characteristic of Scripture which must be taken into account in exegesis. It has traditionally been called "the historical aspect" of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation. It is my own experience (as it is, I am sure, the experience of every faithful exegete) that attention to this truth yields rich rewards in exegesis and sermon making.

The trouble is that Ladd (and all those who are addicted to higher criticism) limit themselves to the human aspect of Scripture. They have no time or patience to discuss the Scriptural teaching of divine inspiration. They have no interest in the fact that Scripture is "God-breathed" and that Scripture came because "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." In fact, Ladd's development of his idea of revelation really makes divine inspiration impossible.

I want to examine this whole

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concept a bit more. But for the moment we must concentrate on the fact that this view of Scripture under-lies both errors which I find in this book: the approach of biblical theology and the commitment to higher criticism.

Let us look at the whole question of biblical theology first of all. Is biblical theology a legitimate way to deal with Scripture?

It is clear to me (and this book verifies my conviction) that the approach of biblical theology fails to do justice to the unity of Scripture. It would seem that, on Ladd's grounds, this is, in fact, impossible. If different witnesses of Jesus' life and works had different memories of what they saw and heard; if different stories with different emphases were circulated in the period between Jesus' death and the writing of the first book of the New Testament; if different people gave different interpretations to the life and work of Christ; if different Christian communities emphasized different ideas and developed these ideas in different ways and along different lines; if all these things are true (as the book affirms) how is it possible that there be any unity in Scripture when Scripture is written by different men under different circumstances for different purposes and relying upon all these different materials which were all that was available to them? Unity is manifestly impossible.

It is because of this obvious truth that the editors of this present volume see the need to discuss the

question whether unity is possible. They finally come to the conclusion that there is unity all right, but the unity is limited to the one fact that all the writers agree that Jesus Christ was sent by God to accomplish redemption. For the rest, the New Testament is diverse (See Wenham's chapter on "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament").

If one holds the doctrine of divine and infallible inspiration, most of the problems which Ladd faces simply fade away. While it is not my purpose in this review to state the truth positively, a brief statement of it will demonstrate how simple and beautiful the truth really is.

God determined His Scriptures as a whole from all eternity. They were determined by Him as a part of the great work of salvation which He had purposed to perform in Christ for the glory of His name. To accomplish that purpose, God appointed eternally the men whom He determined to be the instruments of inspiration. In time, by His providence, God prepared them and determined all their life so that they would be able to write that portion of Scripture assigned to them.

Because the Scriptures were to be (and are to this day) the infallibly inspired record to the *revelation* of God, we must understand what revelation is. Ladd's definition will never do. Revelation is God's speech concerning Himself in which He reveals all His glory, perfections, and power. He does so that He alone may be praised and glorified. He reveals

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Himself in the highest possible way in Jesus Christ and the salvation of His elect church in Christ. All revelation has that as its central theme. All revelation is for God's glory.

When the Scriptures were inspired, God Himself caused them to be written by men of His choice so that every word which they wrote was given them by the Holy Spirit. They were written within the context of history—as revelation takes place in history. They were written by different men with different gifts. These men could indeed make use at times of available material. But whatever may be the truth of all this, God, through the Holy Spirit, supervised, directed, controlled and regulated these human writers so that they did not write one word which was not given them by God. In such away God gave His church (for their salvation) an infallible record of His revelation of Himself so that by it the church might be saved and, in her salvation in Jesus Christ, show forth the praises and the glory of Almighty God. Thus all things are and forever will be for God's glory.

All the diversity in Scripture (and it is a beautiful and glorious diversity which makes Scripture the wonderful book that it is) is subservient to the unity of God's revelation in Christ of His own infinite perfections. Then there is true unity in Scripture, a unity which finds its deepest principle in God Himself, the Author of all our salvation.

What does Ladd's biblical theology do? Something quite different.

If the unity of Scripture is indeed the revelation of the greatness and glory of God in the work of salvation, Ladd has missed this completely. It would follow from what I have said that the great truth of God's absolute sovereignty would be emphasized on every page of Holy Writ. Ladd has not noticed this truth anywhere in the New Testament. There is no mention of it in the whole book.

Ladd finds many different themes in the different authors. One writes with one theme; another writes with another theme. Each author deals with many subjects. All of this is, of course, in itself true. But Ladd's choice of themes in his description of Matthew's theology, Paul's theology, James' theology, etc., is purely arbitrary. Paul's central theme is, e.g., "the realization of the coming new age of redemption by the work of Christ" (412).

Well, maybe, although I doubt it. John's main theme has to do with Christ's absolute divinity. That is surely true. But the choice of themes in these various writers is a wholly arbitrary choice on Ladd's part. The absolute sovereignty of grace in the work of salvation is never mentioned in the discussion of John's theology. There are crucial themes in Paul (in Ephesians 1 and Romans 9-11, e.g.) which are scarcely mentioned in Ladd's book. On what grounds does Ladd choose his themes in the various books of the Bible? Why is prayer never mentioned as a theme, e.g., in Matthew? Why is predestination never mentioned anywhere as a

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theme in any book? Much is made of the fact that the kingdom is the most important theme of Jesus' preaching according to the evangelists (54); but even if this is so, why only certain aspects of that theme of the kingdom? Why no discussion of the truth that only the elect enter the kingdom and that by a work of sovereign grace?

That is one thing.

The **approach** of biblical theology leads to the notion of a theology of Paul, a theology of Matthew, a Petrine eschatology, a Johanne Christology, and the like. Such language is constantly employed in the book. Now there are two things wrong with that. The first is that the New Testament contains no such thing as Pauline theology or Johanne Christology. Scripture does not contain **any such thing because John had no Christology and Paul had no eschatology**. There is only one truth in the whole world, and that is God's truth, the truth of God Himself which He reveals. He communicates this truth to men sovereignly, efficaciously, and graciously as He reveals the riches of the mysteries of the salvation which He prepared in Christ. That one theology of God Himself was not only revealed but also put into the Scriptures by infallible inspiration so that Scripture contains only God's theology, nothing else. It is God's theology, revealed through many means of revelation in the Old Testament; it is theology fully revealed in Christ; it is theology given by divine inspiration to those men whom God used to write

the Scriptures. But it is and always shall remain God's theology.

To talk of anything else is to deny the fundamental truth of revelation, to deny the truth of the Scriptures as the Word of God, and to deny all that the church has held for truth since time began. It is that serious. It is that bad a sin.

Secondly, not only does each of the writers of Scripture have his own theology, but the individual theologies, according to Ladd, some-times conflict. Ladd writes: "The differences between John and the Synoptics must not be glossed over. These *differences in theology* (emphasis is mine) are corollaries to differences in matters of introduction" (251). Ladd **may** say, **perhaps**, that these differences are only differences in **approach**, in emphasis, in differing historical circumstances. But they are differences in *theology*, and theology is the doctrine of God. John and the Synoptics have different doctrines of God— so says Ladd.

But there is more. In a footnote on pp. 502, 503 Ladd writes: "It should be noted that other New Testament writings *diverge* (emphasis is mine) from Paul in their use of *psyche* ...," although he adds in the same footnote that "this is a usage that does not contradict but complements Pauline use of the term." But even with the concession, one would be hard pressed to say: "The Holy Spirit in other New Testament writings diverges from Himself in His inspiration of Paul in the use of *psyche*."

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And so one finds all sorts of strange expressions and statements in the book with which a Reformed student of Scripture could not possibly agree. "If the kerygma is concerned more with Jesus' death than with his life, a natural question follows: What meaning of his death, i.e., what view of the atonement, did the early church proclaim? The answer to this question reflects *the primitive character of this theology* (emphasis is mine), for it is impossible to formulate any doctrine of atonement from the sermons in Acts" (366).

Again:

While it is obviously true that Paul has not left the church a systematic theology, and he can-not be called a systematic theologian in the sense that he deliberately tried to work out a consistent, **balanced**, coherent system like a modern **theologian**, it is **equally true that Paul** was a theologian from his Jewish origins (I am not sure what this means: i.e., what the **phrase**, "from his Jewish origins" modifies, H.H.), *and clearly tries to think through the implications of God's redemptive work in Christ so far as the needs of his churches demanded it* (415). (emphasis is mine.)

Is Paul's efforts to work out the implications of God's redemptive work as far as the needs of his churches demanded it what we find in Scripture? Or do we find in Paul's writings what the Spirit saith to the churches?

"We may say that we owe what-ever understanding we have of Paul's thought to the 'accidents of history,' which required him to deal with various problems, doctrinal and practical, in the life of the churches" (416). A Reformed man would say: "God so ruled sovereignly in all history by His providence that in the churches in which Paul labored, problems arose which became the occasion for God to reveal specific aspects of His truth as revealed in salvation in Jesus Christ."

"How much more complete might be our knowledge of Pauline eschatology if, in one of his churches, a group of converts from the synagogue had carried over into their Christian faith the belief, held by some Jews, **that a sort of purgatorial, cleansing fire awaited those who had been only moderately wicked, and that some such way of salvation after death might avail for those who had not yet heard and therefore had not flatly rejected the salvation offered in Christ**" (416). So much for what our Confessions call "the sufficiency of Scripture."

In examining the question of unity and diversity in the New Testament, Wenham makes some astounding statements.

Some scholars see the divergences between the different New Testament authors as so great that **any attempted reconciliation of their ideas is misconceived**. The religion of Paul is, for example, seen as radically different from



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that of Jesus. Dunn represents a more cautious position. While insisting on diversity in the New Testament, he maintains that there is a core of belief in Jesus as the risen Lord that unites the different and sometimes conflicting New Testament writings. He sees the canon of Scripture as defining both the center and the circumference of Christian belief, i.e., as making clear what must be part of any Christian belief, if it is to be Christian, but also showing how wide a range of expressions authentic Christian faith can have. But although there are limits to Christian diversity, Dunn is clear that there is no such thing as "one orthodoxy" or a single "theology" of the New Testament. We should speak rather of different "theologies" (as we have been forcefully reminded by redaction criticism).

This unavoidable conclusion means that some of what has been done with Scripture is illegitimate, namely: (1) using verses and passages of Scripture as proof texts, as though the Bible presented a **homogenous body** of doctrine, (2) much of the harmonizing of biblical passages and ideas that has been done, since it represents a failure to appreciate the diversity of Scripture, and (3) interpreting biblical texts in terms of later Christian orthodoxy, since so-called Christian orthodoxy represents only one of several theological viewpoints represented in the New Testament and since it is a mistake to read later orthodoxy into the early

It is impossible to discover what

in this section is Dunn's view and what is Wenham's; or what in Dunn's view meets with Wenham's agreement; but it is clear that Wenham is not moved to righteous indignation against this denial of the unity of Scripture.

But this is indeed what happens when one is committed to biblical theology.

The second serious objection I have against Ladd's book is its deep commitment to higher criticism. Throughout, it simply assumes the legitimacy of form criticism, redaction criticism, source criticism, and the like.

Again, such commitment of higher criticism is the direct consequence of the author's view of inspiration and the almost exclusive emphasis on the human element in or authorship of Scripture.

The author faces head-on the idea of inspiration and flatly rejects it when he writes:

Thus far we have been speaking solely from an historical point of view, evaluating Paul's thought as we must regard the thought of any ancient. This approach is unavoidable because the sources for Paul's thought are thoroughly historical situations and must be studied in context. The "proof-text" method of interpreting Paul's letters, which views them as direct revelations of the supernatural will of God conveying to people eternal, timeless truths that need only to be systematized to produce a complete theology, obviously ignores the means by which God

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has been pleased to give to men and women his Word (417).

I happen to believe that Scriptu<sup>re</sup> is indeed direct revelations of the supernatural will of God conveying to people eternal, timele<sup>ss</sup> truths. I happen to believe that this is exactly what Scripture teaches concerning itself. I do not believe and emphatically reject the notion that this ignores the means by which God was pleased to give men and women his Word. Scripture itself insists and Paul himself writes that he received not the gospel which he preached from men or from any other source than the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12, 15, 16; I Cor. 11:23). Ladd is well aware of these passages, but he denies that they teach that God through Jesus Christ directly communicated the truth to Paul; he rather says that all these passages simply refer to the appearance of Christ to Paul on the road to Damascus when the persecutor Saul became the apostle Paul.

It is true that Ladd often, after lengthy descriptions of liberal views, rejects them and adopts the conclusions of more conservative thinking. But even here Ladd often does so on strictly rational grounds.

This is an important point, and we ought to pay a bit of attention to it. In one place in the book Ladd has the right approach. He

writes:

Our conclusions raise the question of the relationship between history and faith. Does historical and critical study prove the transcendence of Jesus? How can faith really be faith if it is established by historical and critical findings...? If faith rests upon historical verification, it is no longer authentic faith but is reduced to good works — of the historian....

While history does not prove the validity of my faith, history is essential to true faith....

For the person aware of history, history must provide an ad-equate foundation for faith. But in the last analysis, faith comes by **hearing, and hearing by the Word** of God (Rom. 10:17) (177, 178).

It is not altogether clear precisely what Ladd means by this latter statement. If he means that faith rests upon and has as its content genuine historical reality as God works sovereignly in history, I agree. If he means that faith exists without the historical fact, but only has room in it for the historical fact ("My faith does not create that construct but my faith that the nature of God and history has room for such a Jesus as the Gospels picture makes it possible for me to accept the biblical witness" [178]), then I violently disagree.

But, however that maybe, Ladd makes the point that faith does not rest upon historical proof. This is true and important. Faith rests solely upon the Word of God. The Word of

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God is the object of faith; what the Word of God says about itself as the Word of God is the object of faith. Faith needs no corroboration.

Yet over and over again in the book this truth is denied. When the liberal critics of Scripture are addressed, the arguments raised against their position are rational arguments.

Perhaps an example will help — not necessarily Ladd's, but reflecting the approach of the book. Liberal critics may deny that Paul is the author of Ephesians. Our answer to that assertion is simply that it cannot be true because the epistle itself claims to have Paul as its author. If the liberal critics wail about the fact that this is not necessarily proof because someone else may have written it under the name of Paul the apostle, our answer is: "Scripture is infallibly the Word of God. God says that Paul wrote Ephesians." That is the end of the argument as far as a believer is concerned.

But the book is not satisfied with that. The book repeatedly goes on to demonstrate *on rational grounds* that the liberal critic is wrong (or right). The testimony of Scripture itself is insufficient.

All this does not mean that a student of Scripture may not take the time and put forth the effort to show the evidences of Pauline authorship — if such is his desire. But he does not do so with the purpose either of refuting liberal scholars (who cannot be refuted if they reject the infallible inspiration of God's Word) or of bolstering one's own faith (which

needs no rationalistic bolstering). He does so within the context of a firm and unwavering commitment to Pauline authorship (on the basis of Scripture's own testimony).

To succumb to the temptation to argue with liberal critics on their own grounds is to lose the battle. No general of any skill lets the enemy choose the battlefield. Most of his maneuvering is precisely to gain for himself the advantage of strategic terrain on which to fight. Our defense of Scripture is, after all, a battle. It is a battle between faith and unbelief. (Maybe the trouble is that those, even within evangelical circles, who adopt higher critical methods have forgotten that the believer is called to fight the enemy.) Standing by faith on the infallible Scriptures we have such a safe place from which to fight that it is impossible that we ever be defeated. Abandoning that safe place and allowing the enemy to define the battle in terms of rationalistic or empirical argument will inevitably end in defeat. And many scholars within evangelical and conservative circles have demonstrated vividly by their own positions how complete the defeat is.

Briefly we point out some of the wrong positions to which a commitment to higher criticism has brought the author.

The difference between canonical and non-canonical writings is not infallible inspiration, but "the books outside the canon lack the sense of holy history found in the canonical books" (27). What about Arts. 4-6 of

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the Belgic Confession?

On pages 133ff. the question is examined in detail whether the name "Christ" was a name which goes back to Jesus, or whether it is a name given to Jesus by the early church.

"Not all scholars believe that Jesus himself had a developed theology of the cross. But the Evangelists agree that Jesus saw his death as his divinely given destiny and as a saving event. Their unanimous testimony is not to be quickly dismissed; it is entirely plausible historically that Jesus foresaw that he, like John the Baptist, would be killed, and extremely likely that he reflected deeply on the meaning of John's sufferings and his own" (706, foot-note 61). What in the wide world is this? It is *plausible* historically that Jesus foresaw His death? He Who was the eternal Son of God in our flesh and Who came exactly to suffer and die for the sins of His people? It is likely, even extremely likely that Jesus reflected on His suffering? He Who was the Man of sorrows all His life, Who walked every moment in the consciousness of His calling to fulfill Psalm 40: "I come to do thy will, O God"? The united testimony of the Evangelists must not be quickly dismissed? May it be slowly dismissed? Are we to accept the words of the evangelists because they agree in their interpretation of Christ's destiny? What kind of caricature of our Lord is this?

"Matthew, Mark, and Luke, no less than John, were not mechanical compilers of traditions but pre-

senters of a message, writing in the light of their own particular understanding of Jesus and of the situations of the different churches for which their Gospels were originally composed. While we come to them primarily to learn what Jesus said and did, that information comes to us through their interpretation of the tradition they received" (212). Well, I don't know why Ladd goes to the gospels. I go to the gospels in order that I may learn what the Holy Spirit is pleased to tell us of our Lord Jesus Christ in order that we may, by listening to the Scriptures, sit at the feet of our only Prophet, for in His instruction alone is life everlasting.

Jesus accepted "the designation Messiah when it was applied to him" (179). "It is probably that the form" of the passion sayings "has been molded by the church in the preservation of the tradition" (183). "It is obvious that Jesus shared the prevailing Jewish view of the resurrection" (195). Would Ladd or any evangelical higher critic possibly concede that the biblical view of the resurrection was given to the Jews by Jesus Himself? Perhaps not.

"The three reports of the [Olivet discourse], in their present form, are clearly the result of the editorial work of the Evangelists drawing upon available traditions" (196). Is nothing to be left to the Holy Spirit?

"The most superficial comparison of the Synoptics and John leaves one with the impression that the Johanine Jesus is little interested in eschatology" (334). The Johanine

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Jesus? John's Jesus? Just maybe Jesus does not belong to John, but John belongs to Jesus. Or, if Ladd means to say: "John's theology of Jesus," the fact of the matter might be that Jesus has His own theology of Himself which He communicated to John. After all, I could not care less about the Johanine Jesus.

"Since these speeches (re-corded in Acts), particularly those of Peter, are ostensibly the primary source for the beliefs of the Jerusalem church, the critical question must be faced as to whether these chapters with their report of apostolic speeches are historically trustworthy" (347).

"Paul retains the Jewish idea of the subordination of woman to man" (573).

And so we could go on, page after weary page. The human characteristics of Scripture so pervade Ladd's thinking that he looks at everything in Scripture from a different viewpoint. "The prominence of the idea of divine sonship in John probably reflects not primarily the Evangelist's theological creativity, but more the particular context in which he was writing" (698). What kind of nonsense is this? John (as well as the other disciples) were so completely overwhelmed and awed by this absolute divinity in Christ that they were swept away by it, overwhelmed by its shattering truth, captured by its eternal blessedness, and finally saved by its enormous power. Reflects John's theological creativity? Reflects the context in which John was writing? What be-

liever can speak such nonsense?

"As for questions of eschatology and 'early catholicism,' it is entirely probable that perspectives changed with the passing of time. No doubt Paul's expectations about whether he would live until the Lord's return changed as he grew older, and issues such as church order may have become more important to him as his ministry drew toward its end" (698). But now, just suppose that the writings of Scripture are, as even Ladd admits a couple of times, the writings of the Holy Spirit, did the Holy Spirit change His mind about the nearness of Christ's coming? How can that be? Either Scripture is authored by the Holy Spirit, in which case all Scripture is without error, or Scripture is authored by Paul (and Mark, and Luke, etc.), in which case we have some farfetched ideas of some ancient men, but nothing from God for our soul's salvation. Or if Ladd wants to take a middle lane and say that Scripture is partly of God and partly of Paul (and Mark, and Luke, etc.), who is going to tell what be-ongs to whom? Is it for this reason that we need the writings of the higher critics?

Let it be understood that this is the direction in which evangelical and Reformed scholarship is going. It is an apostasy that takes the church far from the rich pastures of the truth of Scripture into the barren wilderness of critical speculation where there is no food or drink for our souls.

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*A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology*, by Donald G. Bloesch. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992. 336 pp. \$21.99 (Hardcover). [Re-viewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is the first volume of a projected seven-volume systematic theology. This volume is prolegomena. It treats of the nature of theology, faith and reason, theological language, natural theology, apologetics, theological authority, Scripture, the gospel, and the struggles of an evangelical theology **today**.

Bloesch is a prominent evangelical theologian. He teaches systematic theology at Dubuque (Iowa) Theological Seminary.

Bloesch's evangelical theology is neo-orthodox (Barthian). This is evident in the definition of theology: "The systematic reflection within a particular culture on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested in Holy Scripture and witnessed to in the tradition of the catholic church" (p. 114). Following Barth, Bloesch repudiates not only natural theology, but also general revelation. There is the characteristic advocacy of paradox: Orthodoxy strives for "paradoxical intelligibility" (p. 81). (To this the biblical thinker responds, "an oxymoron.")

The basic error of this volume of introduction is its denial that the Holy Scriptures are an inspired book **and**, therefore, the only source of

theology and the sole authority over church and theology. The Bible is "both the word of God and the word of human authors" (p. 200). The Bible is not the authority for the church and theology as is commonly said: "Our indefeasible criterion is not the Bible as a book of rules but the divine promise and the divine command relayed by the Spirit through the Bible" (p. 186). The norm in the church is the gospel or the living voice of Christ. With Barth and all neo-orthodox theologians, Bloesch plays "Christ" off against the Bible as though the Bible were not the living voice of Christ and as though the only Christ we know were not the Christ revealed in the propositions of the Bible. The quotation from Johann Christoph Blumhardt is significant:

*One must have norms, even for the Bible. And in this case it is Christ, as he is presented by the apostles. Wherever in scripture I cannot make that norm fit, then that passage is not for me until I can make it fit. Many times, then, I must wait until the teaching comes, until finally it is given to me (p. 205).*

The ultimate norm of theology, the living voice of Christ, which is not to be confused with the Holy Scriptures, "can only be dimly perceived" (p. 186). This is an astounding admission. It is also devastating for a theology that is formed by this "dimly perceived" norm. A theology that is formed by a "dimly perceived" norm must be an uncertain and un-

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stable theology at best. Defending the uncertain evangelical theology that he envisions, Bloesch strikes out at the Reformed orthodoxy that was, and is, sure of itself, so sure of itself that it expressed itself in confessions that were to be believed. He is dismissive of the Reformed confessions, among others, as authorities under the Scriptures for the faith. He is critical of the orthodoxy that considers "past confessions," such as the Westminster Confession, and "past systems of theology," such as that of Calvin, as models in its dogmatic and apologetic efforts. This orthodoxy is to be faulted for not critically examining the confessions "in the light of new truth that the Spirit brings to his church through God's holy Word" (p. 255). The "great creeds and confessions of the church" are mere "road signs" on the path of the church, theology, and the Christian. None of the church's creeds, whether the Nicene Creed on the Godhead of Jesus or the Canons of Dordt on the sovereignty of grace, is a certain, authoritative, final expression of truth.

Bloesch ridicules the confessional orthodoxy that carries on theological debate according to the old creeds. The church that does this is a "restorationist" because it attempts to bring modern thought back to the old theological formulations. This is silly, according to Bloesch: "The restorationist often resembles Don Quixote, who tilts at windmills, imagining them to be giants, while completely missing the real enemy"

(p. 254). Lest anyone miss his point, Bloesch identifies these foolish theologians and churches in a footnote: "The continuing Calvinist attack on Arminianism and the Arminian counterattack illustrate this Quixotian mentality" (p. 325). Thus, by supercilious footnote, is consigned to the ash heap of church history the entire struggle of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, the Synod of Dordt, and the divines of Westminster on behalf of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace.

In light of all of this, we entertain no great expectations for Bloesch's renewed, evangelical theology, rather winningly outlined on pages 124-126.

*The Christian's Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Ex-pounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated*, by Wilhelmus aBrakel. Volume I. Translated by Bartel Elshout, with a biographical sketch by W. Fieret and an essay on the "Dutch Second Reformation" by Joel Beeke. Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992, cxvi + 658 pages, \$40.00 (cloth). [Reviewed by Richard A. Muller, Calvin Theological Seminary.]

The Reformed community should be grateful whenever one of the great classics of the confessional tradition is brought forward in a modern edition, but the appearance of a Brake l's *The Christian's Rea-*

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*sonable Service* or *Redelijke Godsdienst* in English for the first time is truly a major event. Not only is a Brakel's masterpiece an important historical document of the *Nadere Reformatie* or "Second Reformation," it is also a work that shaped Dutch Reformed theology and piety for more than a century after its publication in 1700. Over twenty editions were published in the eighteenth century.

In scope, this first volume of a Brakel covers preliminary topics such as the knowledge of God and Scripture as the Word of God and then moves on to discuss the doctrines of God, the decrees, the covenant of redemption, creation, human nature, providence, the covenant of works, sin, the covenant of grace, the *Per-son*, office, and states of Christ. In **each** of these doctrinal topics, A Brakel evidences the balance of doctrine **and** piety for which he is justly famous—and which is characteristic of the theology of the *Nadere Reformatie*. Readers unaccustomed to seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century theological style may be surprised at the consistent recourse to questions and answers followed by objections and replies to the objections, as, similarly, they may be surprised at the fairly frequent occurrence of technical terms (often given in Latin) in a work where the Christian religion is the primary subject **and** piety the stated goal of doctrinal exposition. The style is in fact similar to that of Zacharias Ursinus' lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism,

where answers to the catechetical questions are developed at considerable length, objections raised and replies given to the objections. The style, in short, is scholastic and suited to a Brakel's (and, before him, Ursinus') purpose of defending the faith as well as simply expounding it positively. In fact, as both of these works evidence, the scholastic method of the older Reformed theologians cannot be equated to a form of metaphysical speculation or severed from a warm, churchly piety. A Brakel, in particular, was adept at moving from the technical language of theology and the defense of Reformed doctrine to the significance of theology for Christian life. *The Christian's Reasonable Service* stands, therefore, as strong evidence that theology need not be bereft of piety and that piety can thrive in relationship to sound theology.

Thus, for example, a Brakel's doctrine of the divine essence and attributes meets the exacting standards of **seventeenth-century** theological system, drawing on the tradition of Reformed exegesis of Scripture and on the highly detailed structure of definitions and distinctions characteristic of the scholastic and technical side of the dogmatic tradition—but it also is finely tuned to the needs of piety and to the assumption that all Christians can learn doctrine with profound profit to their spiritual life. The author is very much aware that "our words and expressions are derived from terrestrial objects" and are therefore inadequate to the ex-



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pression of divine things unless God in His goodness "adjusts himself to our limited capacity to comprehend" (p. 89). The general problem of theological language and the specific problem of the predication of divine attributes are expressed by a Brakel in a way that does justice to the difficulty of the problem, that mirrors Calvin's own view of divine accommodation to the needs of human understanding, and that so anchors the resolution of the problem in the goodness of God that even the rather abstruse issue of the predication of attributes carries with it a lesson for piety.

This first volume of a projected four-volume translation is enriched by a substantial biographical essay (by

Dr. W. Fieret) and by an excellent introduction to the *Nadere Reformatie* (by the Rev. Joel Beeke) in which A Brakel played so important a role. Given the dearth of works in English dealing even tangentially with these matters, each of these essays is a welcome addition to the volume. The translation ought also to receive high praise for its ability to render a Brakel's thought into a fine prose reminiscent of the high style of seventeenth-century translations of continental theological works. Finally, the volume as a whole ought to be praised for its fine typography and beautiful illustration with reproductions of seventeenth-century portraits, scenes from A Brakel's time, and title-pages of early editions of a **Brakel's** works.

***Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South***, by Douglas F. Kelly. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992. pp. xxvi-198. \$22.95, (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This fine little volume is a study of the lives and preaching of four servants of God who lived between 1791 and 1902 in the South-

eastern Atlantic states of America, more popularly known as "the Old South." The four preachers are Daniel Baker, James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, and John L. Girardeau.

Kelly gives a brief biography of each and then analyzes their preaching. The book is enhanced by a detailed Index. Of more significance is the Introduction. Himself a southerner and believing the South

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to be "... both a place and a state of mind," Kelly writes of the culture of the "Old South," the context in which these men lived and preached.

Although the author concentrates on the preaching of these great men of God, one gains a glimpse of the theology which prevailed in the Southern Church in the 19th century.

This book can be profitably read by all of God's people. Ministers and seminarians will benefit especially from the analysis of the preaching of these men.

Prof. Kelly teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Michigan.

*The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, by Thomas Manton. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993. Three volumes, (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

The Banner of Truth Trust is to be commended for making available the sermons of Thomas Manton (1620-1677). These sermons were originally published in 1870.

Essays by J.C. Ryle and William Harris are included. Ryle said of Manton, "If ever there was an English divine who must be classed as a Puritan, that man is Manton ... his works, like the *Pilgrim's Progress*, deserve the attention of all true Christians ... as an expositor of Scripture, I regard Manton with unmingled admiration. Here, at any rate, he is *facile princeps* (easily first) among the divines of the Puritan School...."

These sermons will make good devotional reading.

The books are listed at \$25.95 each, but could probably be purchased for less if all three are bought as a set.

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