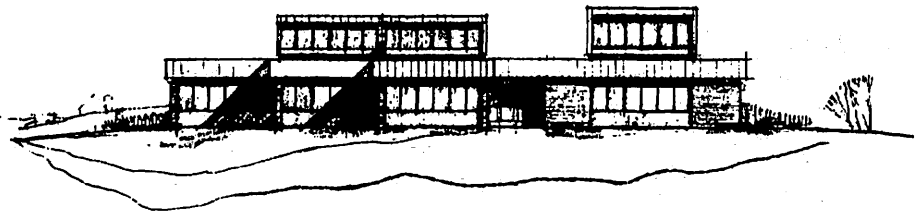


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**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL
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Grandville, Michigan

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EDITORIAL NOTES

We have included in this issue a list of Seminary Publications, which can be ordered from the Seminary. Many of these are syllabi which are used in classroom instruction. Others are materials prepared for general sale — such as the chapel talks and exegetical works. We call special attention to the last five books on the list which are copies prepared here in the Seminary of difficult-to-obtain but worthwhile works. We have only a small supply of these and we have no intention of preparing additional copies. They will be sold on a first come, first served basis. So get your order in quickly if you wish to have them.

Family Visitation

Prof. Robert D. Decker

Family visitation is a uniquely Reformed practice. Family visitation as practiced in the Reformed churches is not found in other branches of the church. J.J. Van Oosterzee writes: "It is sufficiently evident that house to house visitation may be looked upon as a peculiar fruit of the Reformed soil" (J.J. Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, p. 520). Family visitation is, according to the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, obligatory and not optional. Article 23 of the Church Order states: "The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others with respect to the Christian religion." This article of the Church Order assigns the work of family visitation to the elders, but this has never been understood to exclude the ministers. The minister, after all, is a teaching elder. We believe that it is a good, beneficial and biblical practice which ought to be preserved and done properly.

As to the history of this practice we may note that family visitation (in the form as we know it today) was introduced by John Calvin in Geneva. It was not introduced as a substitute or filler for the Romish practice of the Confessionals and "sacrament of penance." Calvin always strove to get back to biblical practices and believed that family visitation belonged to the duties of the office of the minister of the Word. The churches of the Reformed tradition continued the practice from earliest times. Mention is made of this at the Convent of Wezel (1568) already. Various subsequent synods up to and including Dordt (1618-19) qualified and set forth various rules for its practice. It is obvious that in earlier times great stress was placed on this aspect of the duties of the pastor so that the visits were much more frequent than today. The Church Order requires, for example, "as time and circumstances demand" eight visits per year, something practically impossible except in the smallest of the congregations. No doubt this greater frequency was due to the fact that the churches were in their infancy and were composed of many members just recently converted from Roman Catholicism.

The practice continues today. Family visitation is done once per year as required in the questions for church visitation. It is often looked up against by the minister. This ought not be for principle and practical reasons. Family visitation is highly significant work belonging to the official function of the pastor. He ought to take it seriously and go about it enthusiastically. The proper practice of this time-honored biblical tradition yields a rich, positive fruit in the congregation.

To find biblical grounds for this practice is not difficult at all. There are several passages to which we do well to pay attention. In Acts 20:20, 21 we read, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." It is obvious from this passage that the apostle Paul not only taught repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ publicly, but also from house to house. He visited families in their homes and expounded the Scriptures to them. I Peter 5:1-4 reads, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." The word translated "feed" in verse 2 of this passage is "shepherd." The elders must shepherd the flock of God. This is done both publicly and individually. In Hebrews 13:17 we read, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Here believers are exhorted to obey the elders who have the rule over them because these elders watch for their souls and must give account of their labors. Finally, in I Thessalonians 5:12-15 we read, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." In this passage the people of God are to honor and esteem the elders for their work's sake. The elders are exhorted to warn the congregation, comfort, support the weak, and be patient, see that none render evil for evil. In the light of these passages it is obvious that

Scripture does not explicitly say "the pastor and an elder or two elders shall conduct family visitation at least once per year." Nonetheless our practice of this time-honored tradition certainly may be defended on the basis of the Scriptures. It is a wonderful means to carry out the biblical mandate to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you."

The entire congregation according to the Church Order must be visited. This includes not just the adults, but the youth and the children as well. This includes not just families but individuals too. Widows and widowers, the unmarried must be visited. But specifically it is the family which is the object of family visitation. This is in harmony with Scripture's emphasis on the family as the very heart of the covenant of God in Jesus Christ. The family as a whole and each individual of the family with a view to his or her place and calling within the covenant must be visited. Each individual means young children too. From a practical point of view this means that consistories must schedule families with very young children early in the evening. Consistories ought to insist on the presence of all family members.

There have been and still are various objections raised against family visitation. It is sometimes said that family visitation is repetitious and stale. This can be a valid criticism due to the fault of the one conducting the visits. One must take care that family visitation is not the same old generalities every year. One ought not begin family visitation each time and each year with the question, "And how is it with your spiritual life?" Such visits are fruitless and quite meaningless. This is not to say that some matters must not be emphasized over and over. Faithfulness to the means of grace and obedience to the rule of Christ are matters which must be stressed constantly. If family visitation becomes stale it is on account of one of two reasons: either the objector is spiritually weak or not a genuine child of God, or the one conducting the visit is not faithfully expounding the Scriptures in application to the lives of the members of the church. Family visitation is said to be mechanical by others. Family visitation is a mechanical rule, a mechanical process, mechanically conducted. In answer to this we say regularity does not imply that family visitation is mechanical. There is a certain artificiality unavoidably present for the hour or so that the preacher comes with an elder. Much can and ought to be done to overcome this. Family visitation should be prepared for by all concerned: the families and the pastor and elder, too. The visit itself can be natural and relaxed if the pastor and elder strive to make it such.

As to the practice of family visitation, it ought to be stressed that the pastor should thoroughly prepare for this work. The motivation for this preparation must be the conviction that he feels with and cares for in the name

of Christ, the precious flock of God, bought with the infinitely valuable price of the blood of Jesus Christ. This preparation ought to be primarily (i.e., above everything else) spiritual. It is done by means of prayer. That preparation ought to be done by the families too, but especially by the pastor and elders. It is wise in this connection for the consistory to decide on the theme and/or passage to be used for family visitation. The pastor ought to seek the counsel of the elders who often know the congregation better than he. Once the passage is selected it should be discussed by the consistory so that all of the elders are prepared. This ought also be announced some weeks prior to the beginning of family visitation so that the various families have time to study the passage and reflect on it prayerfully. In preparing for family visitation the pastor should proceed in two directions. First, the pastor must know the sheep he is about to visit. What is the occupation of the father of this family? What is the age of the parents? Have they any specific spiritual problems or needs? Are the children good, faithful, obedient catechumens? What is the aim of the youth in life? What profession or occupation is the young man or the young woman aspiring after? In addition the material content of the visit must be prepared. The pastor ought to know what he is going to say. He ought to know in what direction he is going and what applications need be made, what emphasis must be made. That preparation ought to center on a specific passage. The passage ought not be too lengthy, preferably just one or a very few verses.

In this connection it is well to observe that the pastor must not expect the spectacular on family visitation. The pastor is not likely to set the church on fire nor is it likely that he'll find something new and original on every visit. It is well to remember that the sheep to be visited are *normal* sheep, living a normal spiritual life requiring normal spiritual care. It is also well to remember that life is much the same for all of the people of God. This means that the same areas must be treated and emphasized. The pastor must pay attention to the life of the individual within the context of the family, the congregation, and the world. The pastor must stress the training of the children of the covenant in the home, church, and school. Other aspects of the life of the family must also be treated: the duties and calling of the husband and the wife, for example. The pastor must also stress the life of the congregation: societies for Bible study and fellowship, relationships with fellow saints, the faithful attendance of the means of grace. Life in the world must also be stressed: the work, leisure, antithetical living must be enjoined and encouraged. Besides all these, the temptations experienced by the sheep are pretty much the same for all. The point simply is that normal people of God need normal care. They need the same spiritual food day by day just as we need daily food. All of this means

that the pastor must not expect the spectacular and ought to be satisfied with keeping the congregation in a pattern of normal, steady, spiritual growth. This becomes "plodding" and "plugging" along a step at a time. The pastor must not tire of this for this is healthy and normal. This is growth in depth in distinction from unhealthy, temporary revivalism.

We wish to emphasize that family visitation ought to be directed towards the normal and not the abnormal. For example, matters of a disciplinary nature ought not be saved for family visitation. It certainly is not wrong and in fact it is entirely beneficial to engage in "preventive soul care." But the consistory must not shirk its duty to admonish the wayward and leave that for the minister on family visitation. The same applies to the work of the deacons. The pastor must not be called upon to admonish a budget delinquent on family visitation. In this connection family visitation is not a "catch-all" for all criticisms collected over the year. Certainly one may treat a general weakness in the congregation such as in giving. But family visitation is not intended to take the place of the work of either the elders or the deacons.

A record ought to be kept of all the visits. The pastor should keep a duplicate membership roll. He should make a record each year of the visit to each family. This serves a good purpose. The pastor has a record of the content of each visit and subjects will not be duplicated. The pastor can make a note of any particular problem which might arise and which might need to be checked on the next visit. Besides, the pastor is obligated to give the consistory a report of the visit. This report should be detailed, more than mere generalities. This report should contain the material content of the visit and especially any matter that needs further attention. This, appearing in the minutes, will guide future visits. All of the foregoing is designed to enhance family visitation which should be a continuing building process in the congregation and not a series of aphoristic visits.

How ought family visitations be conducted? In general the pastor should always open with prayer. Petitions should be directed to the throne of grace for each member of the family in his or her place and calling. This serves the purpose of bringing all involved into the proper frame of mind. This is also the best way to overcome the difficulty of artificiality. One should open with prayer rather soon after arriving. Some (P.V. DeJong) suggest asking specific questions in dealing with specific subjects. DeJong suggests asking each of his knowledge of the Reformed faith. There should be questions dealing with the member's attendance at worship, his partaking of the Lord's Supper. Personal attention ought also be given, says DeJong, in bringing wandering sheep into the fold and caring for the sick (cf. *Taking Heed to the Flock*). Others say that

family visitation must be connected with the Lord's Supper and that this aspect ought to be stressed. The Lord's Supper, however, is no longer closely tied with family visitation. What is more, there is the danger that this could lead to sickly mysticism or pietism. Still others suggest that each member ought to be questioned concerning his spiritual life. This is true enough, but rather general. These questions ought to be concrete and natural. The Reformed Church of Utrecht had a resolution stating what should be asked. Against this it may be said that each subject could become the subject for one visit. To ask all of these questions is to become mechanical. Positively, some subjects ought never be neglected. Opportunity should be given family members to raise any question they may have. This should be done at the close of the meeting. This should not, however, become a "gripe session." The pastor should beware of becoming party to slander and backbiting. Neither may the pastor presume to take the place of the consistory by speaking when only the consistory should speak. The pastor can, however, often serve with preventive advice.

A word is in order about chronic complainers. Every congregation has some. Usually the consistory and especially the pastor are the target of their complaints. Some are chronic complainers about the preaching. The pastor ought to consider the source of these complaints. They will say that the preaching is too doctrinal or too practical or too deep, etc. All this ought not bother the pastor, especially the young pastor. The chronic complainer is often silenced by a remark that he ought to criticize himself.

The youth must be cared for on family visitation. The age of adolescence is a critical one. The entertainment, romances with those outside of the church, making confession of faith, deciding upon a career are all subjects of concern for young people in God's church. The pastor ought to be aware of these matters and make them his concern. The pastor must be in a position to guide the young people of his church according to the Scriptures.

The pastor must not be general nor should he attempt to accomplish too much. Family visitation should be conducted each year from the viewpoint of one specific subject. Spiritual, practical instruction should be given in one subject and from the point of view of one, specific text or passage. A subject which might be covered is prayer. But then be specific: family prayer, personal prayer. Other subjects might include the home and the instruction of children or our calling to be witnesses in this world or congregational life or the means of grace. The subject must be treated from the viewpoint of the Word of God. The pastor must begin with a pertinent passage of Scripture. The passage ought not be too long. The discussion should be narrowed to a particular text. The longer the passage the more general will be the ensuing discussion.

The passage should be ended with the reading of the pertinent text. This should be followed by asking the head of the home a personal question: "Is this true in your life?" Preparation should be done with a view to the explanation of the significance of the particular text as it sheds light on the topic to be treated on family visitation. The pastor must not preach a sermonette and thus monopolize the conversation. The lines of the passage should be pointedly, briefly, pungently drawn. The purpose of the exposition is practical and, therefore, the pastor must not be theoretical and abstract. In the course of the visit he must take the opportunity to apply the Word to persons and their lives. On family visitation the Word is to be brought by *conversation* so that the people of God express their needs and open their hearts. The pastor must not be disappointed if the above method at first appears stiff and unsuccessful. All of this does not mean that the pastor must rigidly limit the visitation to a specific topic. He may discuss a specific text or passage as well. There are many texts in the Bible which are suitable for this purpose. Among these are: Joshua 24:15, Matthew 6:24-34, Colossians 3:16, 17; John 10:27.

The elder has a place in family visitation as well. The elder is not there as a silent witness nor merely to keep the minister company. He ought to participate. On the other hand, there are loquacious elders who misdirect the conversation. If necessary these must be told bluntly. The tendency on the part of the elder is, however, to allow the minister to conduct the entire visit. This ought not be. In the way of prayerful preparation, the elder will be in a position to contribute to the edification and guidance of the families of the congregation.

■ ■ ■ ■

The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (2)

THE REFORMERS

Prof. H. Hanko

Martin Luther

It ought not to come as a surprise that the whole issue of the free offer of the Gospel was not an issue in the controversies between the Reformers and the Romish church. The question of the preaching of the Gospel, and the controversy between the Reformation and Rome over preaching was not so much what constitutes the character and content of the preaching; it was rather: is preaching an integral part of the life of the church? Throughout the Middle Ages, with the growth of Romish sacerdotalism and with increasingly strong emphasis on the mass, very little preaching was to be found in Romish worship services. And if it were present, it was often little more than the recitation or reading of homilies from preachers of an earlier age. Expository preaching of the Scriptures simply did not exist in the Romish church prior to the Reformation.

The Reformers, without exception, restored preaching to its rightful place in the worship services. This "radical" transformation of the worship services by the Reformers was a necessary consequence of their view of Scripture and of the office of all believers as it functioned within the church. Thus it was that the questions of the character and content of the preaching (questions which are of the heart and essence of the issue of the free offer of the gospel) were not specifically faced as the Reformers concentrated their attention on opposing the false views of Rome.

It is interesting to note, however, that when preaching was restored to its proper place in the worship services, the Reformers, guided exclusively by the biblical givens and considering the Scriptures to be the rule of faith and life also in their preaching, returned to preaching as it originally existed in the Christian church. They began anew a tradition of preaching which was present in the church in her earliest New Testament history and which continues to be the distinguishing mark of all churches of the Reformation which are faithful to their heritage. Preaching has, since the Reformation, been the outstanding feature of genuinely Protestant churches and has been the real and only strength of those churches for almost five hundred years. If in today's ecclesiastical

world, radical changes are coming about in the place which the preaching occupies in the worship services, in the nature and character of the preaching, and in the contents of the preaching, this is because today's church refuses to be faithful to her Reformation heritage, indeed, consciously departs from it.

In our consideration of the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian controversy, we noticed that, while the question of the free offer of the gospel was not one of the issues, nevertheless, doctrinal questions which are inseparably connected to the question of the free offer were faced. Some of these questions were: the extent of the atonement, the particularity or universality of grace, the intention of God with respect to salvation — whether His intention was to save all or only those whom He Himself had chosen, and the related question of God's will of decree and God's will of command and how these two stood in relation to each other. Some of these doctrinal questions were issues at the time of the Reformation; some of them were not. For example, the question of the extent of the atonement was not an issue: all the Reformers and the Romish theologians agreed that the atonement is particular. They may have agreed on this for different reasons — although they both stood in the Anselmian tradition;¹ but there was no important controversy between them over this question. But other issues which stand connected with the free offer were discussed at considerable length.

We must be careful, however, that we do not attempt to interpret the Reformers and their views in the light of our modern times and modern theological controversies. This is a great danger whatever may be one's personal views of the free offer. All who wish to appeal to Calvin especially and to the Reformers in general as their spiritual fathers ought to be honest enough not to put words in the mouths of the Reformers or appeal unjustly to them in support of views which we now believe and cherish, but which were far from the minds of those who brought reformation to the church in the sixteenth century. We can well bear in mind the remarks of William Cunningham, whom we quote at some length because of the importance of what he has to say on this question.²

1 It is basically the position of Anselm on the atonement which is incorporated into the Heidelberg Catechism in its discussion of the need for a Mediator in Lord's Days 4-6. This basic agreement between the Reformers and Rome is also one reason why the question of the *extent* of the atonement is not extensively discussed in the writings of the Reformers.

Some have laid hold upon this fact to claim that especially Calvin taught a certain universality of the atonement; or at least, that he did not specifically teach a particular redemption. This is a misinterpretation of Calvin, as we shall see when we discuss this matter somewhat more in detail.

2 W. Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Banner of Truth, 1979), pp. 409 ff.

In almost all theological controversies, much space has been occupied by the discussion of extracts from books and documents adduced as authorities in support of the opinions maintained; and there is certainly no department of theological literature in which so much ability and learning, so much time and strength, have been uselessly wasted, or in which so much of controversial unfairness has been exhibited. Controversialists in general have shown an intense and irresistible desire to prove, that their peculiar opinions were supported by the fathers, or by the Reformers, or by the great divines of their own church; and have often exhibited a great want both of wisdom and of candour in the efforts they have made to effect this object. . . . There is no man who has written much upon important and difficult subjects, and has not fallen occasionally into error, confusion, obscurity, and inconsistency; and there is certainly no body of men that have ever been appealed to as authorities, in whose writings a larger measure of these qualities is to be found than in those of the Fathers of the Christian church. . . .

In adducing extracts from eminent writers in support of their opinions, controversialists usually overlook or forget the obvious consideration, that it is only the mature and deliberate conviction of a competent judge upon the precise point under consideration, that should be held as entitled to any difference. When men have never, or scarcely ever, had present to their thoughts the precise question that may have afterwards become a matter of dispute, — when they have never deliberately examined it, or given a formal and explicit deliverance regarding it, — it will usually follow, 1st, That it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain what they thought about it, — to collect this from incidental statements, or mere allusions, dropped when they were treating of other topics; and, 2d. That their opinion about it, if it could be ascertained, would be of no weight or value. A large portion of the materials which have been collected by controversialists as testimonies in favor of their opinions from eminent writers, is at once swept away as useless and irrelevant, by the application of this principle. The truth of this principle is so obvious, that it has passed into a sort of proverb, — "*Auctoris aliud agens parva est auctoritas.*" And yet controversialists in general have continued habitually to disregard it, and to waste their time in trying to bring the authority of eminent writers to bear upon questions which they have never examined; and have not scrupled, in many cases, to have recourse or to make them speak more plainly. The opinion even of Calvin, upon a point which he had never carefully examined, and on which he has given no formal deliverance, is of no weight or value, and would scarcely be worth examining;

were it not that so much has been written upon this subject, and that his views upon many points have been, and still are, so much misrepresented.

In dealing with authorities, then, it is necessary to ascertain, whether the authors referred to and quoted have really formed and expressed an opinion upon the point, in regard to which their testimony is adduced. It is necessary further to collect together, and to examine carefully and deliberately, the whole of what they have written upon the subject under consideration, that we may understand fully and accurately what their whole mind regarding it really was, instead of trying to deduce it from a hasty glance at partial and incidental statements. And in order to conduct this process of estimating and applying testimonies in a satisfactory and successful way, it is also necessary, that we be familiar with the whole import and bearing of the discussion on both sides, as it was present to the mind of the author whose statements we are investigating. Without this knowledge, we shall be very apt to misapprehend the true meaning and significance of what he has said, and to make it the ground of unwarranted and erroneous inferences. . . . To manage aright this matter of the adduction and application of testimonies or authorities requires an extent of knowledge, a patience and caution in comparing and estimating materials, and an amount of candor and tact, which few controversialists possess, and in which many of them are deplorably deficient.

With these preliminary remarks we turn to a brief consideration of Luther's views on these matters relating to the free offer, and the views of subsequent Lutheranism.

One can search Luther's writings in vain for references either to the free offer of the Gospel or to those doctrines which have been related to the free offer. There is no solid evidence that Luther himself wanted any part of any of these views.

In our search in Luther's writings for anything which relates to the question of the free offer of the Gospel, we came across one interesting passage in his "Bondage of the Will" which might at first glance suggest something similar to a free offer. Luther writes:

Therefore it is rightly said, "If God does not desire our death, it is to be laid to the charge of our own will, if we perish:" This, I say, is right, if you speak of GOD PREACHED. *For He desires that all men should be saved* (italics ours), seeing that, He comes unto all by the word of salvation, and it is the fault of the will which does not receive Him: as He said (Matthew 23:37).³

3 Edition of 1931 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 173.

Now it is interesting that one has to search far and wide in the writings of this prolific author to find even one statement which seems to suggest the idea of the free offer. But even here there is no reference to the free offer as such, although Luther does express here that it is God's desire to save all men. We ought to note, however, that this statement is found in a section dealing with a discussion of Ezekiel 23:23, a passage which Erasmus appealed to in support of his doctrine of free will. Erasmus argued that this passage teaches that God desired all men to be saved, that only some are saved, that therefore, the decision concerning salvation rests with the free will of man. Luther repudiates this interpretation with all his soul and insists that the expression, "God desires not the death of the sinner" is simply that promise of God, found in a thousand places in Scripture, which is intended to comfort the hearts of those who are troubled by their sin and fearful of the wrath of an Almighty God (pp. 166-168). But these are those who are already saved by the power of God's grace in their hearts, i.e., those in whom the law has brought sorrow for sin and fears of death, and in whom, therefore, the promises of the gospel are now worked (p. 170). But why is it that some are so affected by the law and others are not? Luther himself answers:

But *why it is*, that some are touched by the law and some are not touched, why some receive the offered grace and some despise it, that is another question which is not here treated on by Ezekiel; because, he is speaking of THE PREACHED AND OFFERED MERCY OF GOD, not of that SECRET AND TO BE FEARED WILL OF GOD, who, according to his own counsel, ordained whom, and such as, He will to be receivers and partakers of the preached and offered mercy: which WILL, is not to be curiously inquired into, but to be adored with reverence as the most profound SECRET of the divine Majesty, which He reserves unto Himself and keeps hidden from us, and that, much more religiously than the mention of ten thousand Corycian Caverns (p. 171).

It is clear from all this that Luther clearly interprets Ezekiel 23:23 as referring to God's people alone. This is very striking since this is exactly one of the passages in Scripture which the defenders of the free offer have often appealed to in support of their view. Nevertheless, Luther does not teach here that this passage must be interpreted to mean that God wants all men to be saved. That he seems indeed to contradict himself is true, but it must again be remembered that Luther was not facing squarely the questions which later theologians faced after the whole doctrine of man's free will had been taught and defended in the church.

Not only was Luther very strong on this question throughout his book "The Bondage of the Will," but he also was strong on such doctrines as the particularity of the atonement, the harmony between the hidden and revealed will of God, and the particularity of grace. All his writings which deal with these subjects reflect this emphasis.

Nevertheless, Lutheranism itself did not remain strong. This was in large measure due to the influence of Melancthon, Luther's co-worker and fellow reformer. We cannot enter into this question in detail, but it is a well-known fact that Melancthon, especially after Luther's death, drifted away from the strong and sharp truths of sovereign grace as maintained by Luther and introduced into Lutheran thinking synergism in the place of sovereign grace, a synergism which taught that salvation was the cooperative work of God and man. This weakness in later Lutheranism was reflected in the Lutheran Confessions, particularly *The Formula of Concord*. In Article XI, dealing with the subject of eternal predestination, paragraphs 7 and 11, we read:

VII. But Christ calls all sinners to Him, and promises to give them rest. And He earnestly wishes that all men may come to Him, and suffer themselves to be cared for and succored. To these He offers Himself in the Word as a Redeemer, and wishes that the Word may be heard, and that their ears may not be hardened, nor the Word be neglected and contemned. And He promises that He will bestow the virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit and divine aid, to the end that we may abide steadfast in the faith and attain eternal life.

XI. But as to the declaration (Matt. xxii. 14), "many are called, but few are chosen," it is not to be so understood as if God were unwilling that all should be saved, but the cause of the damnation of the ungodly is that they either do not hear the Word of God at all, but contumaciously contemn it, stop their ears, and harden their hearts, and in this way foreclose to the Spirit of God his ordinary way, so that he cannot accomplish his work in them, or at least when they have heard the Word, make it of no account, and cast it away. Neither God nor His election, but their own wickedness, is to blame if they perish (2 Pet. ii. 1 sqq.; Luke ii. 49, 52; Heb. xii. 25 sqq.).

These ideas come out perhaps even more strongly in the negative section of this article:

... We therefore reject all the errors which we will now enumerate:

1. That God is unwilling that all men should repent and believe the Gospel.
2. That when God calls us to Him He does not earnestly wish that all men should come to Him.

3. That God is not willing that all should be saved, but that some men are destined to destruction, not on account of their sin, but by the mere counsel, purpose, and will of God, so that they cannot in any wise attain to salvation.

Luther himself would have violently disagreed with these statements, and it is striking that the theology of the free offer does not appear as an integral part of Luther's thought, but as a doctrinal formulation brought into being under the weakening influence of Melancthonian synergism.

John Calvin

It is not our purpose to enter into detail on the question of the teachings of John Calvin on this subject of the free offer. There are three reasons for this. First, Calvin himself never faced specifically and concretely the question of the free offer of the gospel any more than did Luther. As we remarked in the early part of this article, the nature and character of the preaching was never an issue between the Reformers and the Romish church. Although there are innumerable passages in Calvin's writings which make use of the word "offer" — and we shall comment on this a bit later — the actual *theology* of the free offer was a question which Calvin did not face. The issue of the free offer arose over a half-century later. To interpret Calvin, therefore, in the light of subsequent controversies over the free offer is to read into Calvin something which is not there. We remind our readers of the warnings of Wm. Cunningham which we quoted earlier. Secondly, it is clear from all of Calvin's writings that he militated against all the ideas which have become such an integral part of free offer theology. We hope to show this briefly, but it can safely be said that every one of the doctrines which form such an integral part of the teachings of the free offer were expressly and specifically refuted by Calvin at one point or another in his writings. Taking all of Calvin's views into account and the whole genius of his theology, one can only conclude that present day ideas of the free offer were foreign to Calvin's thinking. The most that can be said is that in some respects Calvin used ambiguous language, especially if we are determined to weigh this language in the light of subsequent theological discussions, and that Calvin made, again in the light of modern day controversies, statements which appear contradictory to the main emphasis of his theology. Thirdly, there have been others who have written on this subject and who have proved beyond doubt that Calvin wanted no part of what today goes under the name of the free offer. We refer to such writings as: "Calvin, Berkhof and H.J. Kuiper, A Comparison," by H. Hoeksema, published in pamphlet form by the Reformed Free Publishing Association; *"De Kracht Gods Tot Zaligheid, Genade Geen*

Aanbod," (The Power of God unto Salvation, Grace No offer), by H. Hocksema, also published in pamphlet form by the R.F.P.A.; "Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel," by D. Engelsma, published in book form and available from the R.F.P.A.

Concerning Calvin's use of the term "offer," we agree with Engelsma when he writes: "It is of no consequence, therefore, that the *term* 'offer' appears in Calvin, in other Reformed theologians, and in such Reformed creeds as the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The word 'offer' had originally a sound meaning: 'serious call,' 'presentation of Christ.' We are fundamentally uninterested in warring over words. No, but we are interested to ask concerning the *doctrine* of the offer: is it Reformed?"⁴

We quote first from some passages in Calvin's *Institutes*.

In Book III, Chapter 22, Section 10, Calvin writes:

It is objected by some that God will be inconsistent with Himself, if He invites all men universally to come to Him, and receives only a few elect. Thus, according to them, the universality of the promises destroys the discrimination of special grace. . . . How the Scripture reconciles these two facts, that by external preaching all are called to repentance and faith, and yet that the spirit of repentance and faith is not given to all, I have elsewhere stated, and shall soon have occasion partly to repeat. What they assume, I deny as being false in two respects. For he who threatens drought in one city while it rains upon another, and who denounces to another place a famine of doctrine, lays himself under no positive obligation to call all men alike. And he who, forbidding Paul to preach the Word in Asia, and suffering him not to go into Bithynia, calls him into Macedonia, demonstrates his right to distribute this treasure to whom he pleases. In Isaiah, he still more fully declares his destination of the promises of salvation exclusively for the elect; for of them only, and not indiscriminately of all mankind, he declares that they shall be his disciples (Isaiah 8:16). Whence it appears, that when the doctrine of salvation is offered to all for their effectual benefit, it is a corrupt prostitution of that which is declared to be reserved particularly for the children of the church. . . .

In Chapter 24, Section 1 of the same Book, Calvin writes:

But, in order to a further elucidation of the subject, it is necessary to treat of the calling of the elect, and of the blinding and hardening of the impious. On the former I have already made a few observations, with a view to refute the error of those

⁴ D. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, p. 81.

who propose the generality of the promises to put all mankind on an equality. But the discriminating election of God, which is otherwise concealed within himself, he manifests only by his calling, which may therefore with propriety be termed the testification or evidence of it. . . .

Calvin then goes on to show how the Scriptures teach that there is perfect unity between the truth of sovereign election and the calling of the gospel.

Calvin even speaks in more than one place of the sovereign purpose of God in the preaching of the gospel to harden the reprobate. For example, he writes in Section 8 of the same chapter:

The declaration of Christ, that "many are called, and few chosen," is very improperly understood. For there will be no ambiguity in it if we remember what must be clear from the foregoing observations, that there are two kinds of calling. For there is a universal call, by which God, in the external preaching of the Word, invites all, indiscriminately, to come to him, *even those to whom he intends it as a savour of death, and an occasion of heavier condemnation* (italics ours).

In section 12 he writes:

As the Lord by his effectual calling of the elect, completes the salvation to which he predestinated them in his eternal counsel, so he has his judgments against the reprobate, by which he executes his counsel respecting them. Those, therefore, whom he has created to a life of shame and a death of destruction, that they might be instruments of his wrath, and examples of his severity, he causes to reach their appointed end, sometimes depriving them of the opportunity of hearing the Word, *sometimes, by the preaching of it, increasing their blindness and stupidity*. . . (italics ours).

In section 13 he writes:

Why, then, in bestowing grace upon some, does he pass over others? Luke assigns a reason for the former, that they "were ordained to eternal life." What conclusion, then, shall we draw respecting the latter, but that they are vessels of wrath to dishonor? . . . It is a fact not to be doubted that God sends his Word to many whose blindness he determines shall be increased. For with what design does he direct so many commands to be delivered to Pharaoh? Was it from an expectation that his heart would be softened by repeated and frequent messages? Before he began, he knew and foretold the results. He commanded Moses to go and declare his will to Pharaoh, adding at the same time "But I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go" (Exodus 4:21).

In section 15 Calvin writes concerning a passage referred to often by defenders of the free offer of the gospel:

But as objections are frequently raised from some passages of Scripture, in which God seems to deny that the destruction of the wicked is caused by his decree, but that, in opposition to his remonstrances they voluntarily bring ruin upon themselves, — let us show by a brief explication that they are not at all inconsistent with the foregoing doctrine. A passage is produced from Ezekiel, where God says, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). If this is to be extended to all mankind, why does he not urge many to repentance, whose minds are more flexible to obedience than those of others, who grow more and more callous to his daily invitations? Among the inhabitants of Ninevah and Sodom, Christ himself declares that his evangelical preaching and miracles would have brought forth more fruit than in Judea. How is it, then, if God will have all men to be saved, that he opens not the gate of repentance to those miserable men who would be more ready to receive the favor? Hence we perceive it to be a violent perversion of the passage, if the will of God, mentioned by the prophet, be set in opposition to his eternal counsel, by which he has distinguished the elect from the reprobate. Now, if we inquire the genuine sense of the prophet, his only meaning is to inspire the penitent with hopes of pardon. And this is the sum that it is beyond a doubt that God is ready to pardon sinners immediately on their conversion. Therefore he wills not their death, in as much as he wills their repentance. But experience teaches, that he does not will the repentance of those whom he externally calls, in such a manner as to effect all their hearts. Nor should he on this account be charged with acting deceitfully; for, though his external call only renders those who hear without obeying it inexcusable, yet it is justly esteemed the testimony of God’s grace, by which he reconciles men to himself. Let us observe, therefore, the design of the prophet in saying that God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner; it is to assure the pious of God’s readiness to pardon them immediately on their repentance and to show the impious the aggravation of their sin in rejecting such great compassion and kindness of God. Repentance, therefore, will always be met by Divine mercy; but on whom repentance is bestowed, we are clearly taught by Ezekiel himself, as well as by all the prophets and apostles.

While we could multiply similar passages from the *Institutes*, we turn now to Calvin’s treatises on “The Eternal Predestination of God.”⁵

5 We quote from the edition of Henry Cole, published by Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, in the book, “Calvin’s Calvinism.”

In this treatise Calvin argues against Pighius, a bitter opponent and one who denied, among other truths, the truth of eternal and sovereign predestination. Calvin writes in answer to Pighius:

All this Pighius loudly denies, adducing that passage of the apostle (1 Tim. 2:4): "who will have all men to be saved;" and, referring also to Ezekiel 18:23, he argues thus, "That God willeth not the death of a sinner," may be taken upon His own oath, where He says by that prophet, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the wicked that dieth; but rather that he should return from his way and live." Now we reply, that as the language of the prophet here is an exhortation to repentance, it is not at all marvelous in him to declare that God willeth all men to be saved. For the mutual relation between threats and promises shows that such forms of speaking are *conditional*. In this same manner God declared to the Ninevites, and to the kings of Gerar and Egypt, that He would do that which in reality, He did not intend to do, for their repentance averted the punishment which He had threatened to inflict upon them. Whence it is evident that the punishment was denounced on condition of their remaining obstinate and impenitent. And yet, the denunciation of the punishment was positive, as if it had been an irrevocable decree. But after God had terrified them with the apprehension of His wrath, and had duly humbled them as not being utterly desperate, He encourages them with the hope of pardon, that they might feel that there was yet left open a space for remedy. Just so it is with respect to the *conditional promises* of God, which invite all men to salvation. They do not positively prove that which God has decreed in His secret counsel, but *declare only* what God is *ready to do* to all those who are brought to faith and repentance.

But men untaught of God, not understanding these things, allege that we hereby attribute to God a two-fold or double will. Whereas God is so far from being variable, that no shadow of variableness appertains to Him, even in the most remote degree. Hence Pighius, ignorant of the Divine nature of these deep things, thus argued: "What else is this but making God a mocker of men, if God is represented as really not willing that which He professes to will, and as not having pleasure in that in which He in reality has pleasure?" But if these two members of the sentence be read *in conjunction*, as they ever ought to be — "*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;*" and, "*But that the wicked turn from his way and live*" — read these two propositions *in connection* with each other, and the calumny is washed off at once. God requires of us this conversion, or "turning away from our iniquity," and in whomsoever

He finds it He disappoints not such an one of the promised reward of eternal life. Wherefore, God is as much said to have pleasure in, and to will, this eternal life, as to have pleasure in the repentance; and He has pleasure in the latter, because He invites all men to it by His Word. Now all this is in perfect harmony with His secret and eternal counsel, by which He decreed to convert none but His own elect. None but God's elect, therefore, ever do turn from their wickedness. And yet, the adorable God is not, on these accounts to be considered variable or capable of change, because, as a Law-giver He enlightens all men with the external doctrine of *conditional* life. In this primary manner He calls, or invites, *all men* unto eternal life. But, in the latter case, He brings unto eternal life those whom He willed according to His eternal purpose, *regenerating* by His Spirit, as an eternal Father, *His own children* only.

It is quite certain that men do not "turn from their evil ways" to the Lord of their own accord, nor by any instinct of nature. Equally certain is it that the gift of conversion is not common to all men; because this is that one of the two covenants which God promises that He will not make with any but His own children and His own elect people concerning whom He has recorded His promise that "He will *write* His law in *their hearts*" (Jeremiah 31:33). *Now a man must be utterly beside himself to assert that this promise is made to all men generally and indiscriminately.* (This italics is ours).⁶

It is clear from these quotes, and they could be multiplied, that Calvin expressly repudiates the theology of the free offer of the gospel.

An integral part of the theology of the free offer of the gospel is the doctrine of a certain universality of the atonement of Christ. It has been maintained in recent times that Calvin taught a universal atonement, and various references in Calvin's writings have been quoted to substantiate this view. That the question of a universal atonement is closely connected to the question of the free offer of the gospel is evident from the fact that wherever the free offer of the gospel has been taught the universality of the atonement of Christ has become an inseparable companion doctrine. It is true that those who wish to remain identified as Calvinists in distinction from Arminians will point out that they do not believe certainly in a universal *efficacy* of the atonement. But they will still defend a universal atonement at least with respect to *sufficiency* and almost always with respect to *intention* and *availability*. It is not difficult to see that these ideas constitute important aspects of the idea of the offer. If

6 *Op. cit.*, pp. 98-100.

God indeed through the preaching expresses His desire and intention to save all who hear the preaching, then this expression of God's desire and intention can be serious and well-meant, only if it is true that in some sense of the word salvation is also available to all who hear the gospel. By the implications of the free offer, those who adopt such a view are driven inevitably to a universal view of the death of Christ. And so the question, whether indeed Calvin taught a universal atonement is an important question in our discussion.

W. Cunningham has an interesting discussion on this very subject in his book, "The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation."

It has been contended very frequently, and very confidently, that Calvin did not sanction the views which have been generally held by Calvinistic divines, in regard to the extent of the atonement, — that he did not believe in the doctrine of particular redemption, that is, that Christ did not die for all men, but only for the elect, and for those who are actually saved, — but that, on the contrary, he asserted a universal, unlimited, or indefinite atonement. Amyraut, in defending his doctrine of universal atonement in combination with Calvinistic views upon other points, appealed confidently to the authority of Calvin. . . .

It is certain that Beza held to the doctrine of particular redemption, or of a limited atonement, as it has since been held by most Calvinists, and brought it out fully in his controversies with the Lutherans on the subject of predestination; though he was not, as has sometimes been asserted, the first who maintained it. It has been confidently alleged that Calvin did not concur in this view, but held the opposite doctrine of universal redemption and unlimited atonement. Now it is true, that we do not find in Calvin's writings explicit statements as to any limitation in the object of the atonement, or in the number of those for whom Christ died, . . . Of all the passages in Calvin's writings bearing more or less directly upon this subject, — which we remember to have read or seen produced on either side, — there is only one, which, with anything like confidence, can be regarded as formally and explicitly denying an unlimited atonement; and notwithstanding all the pains that have been taken to bring out the views of Calvin upon this question, we do not recollect to have seen it adverted to except by a single popish writer. It occurs in his treatise, "*De vera participatione Christi in coena*," in reply to Hushusius, a violent Lutheran defender of the corporal presence of Christ in the eucharist. The passage is this: — "*Scire velim quomodo Christi carnem edant impii pro quibus non est crucifixa, et quomodo sanguinem bibant qui extiandis eorum peccatis non est effusus.*" This is a very explicit denial of the universality of the atonement. But it stands

alone, — so far as we know, in Calvin's writings. . . . The topic was not then formally discussed as a distinct subject of controversy; and Calvin does not seem to have been ever led, in discussing cognate questions, to take up this one and to give a deliverance regarding it. We believe that no sufficient evidence has been brought forward that Calvin held that Christ died for all men, or for the whole world, in any such sense as to warrant Calvinistic universalists, — that is, men who, though holding Calvinistic doctrines upon other points, yet believe in a universal or unlimited atonement, — in asserting that he sanctioned their peculiar principles. . . .

There is not, then, we are persuaded, satisfactory evidence that Calvin held the doctrine of a universal, unlimited, or indefinite atonement. And, moreover, we consider ourselves warranted in asserting, that there is sufficient evidence that he did *not* hold this doctrine; though on the grounds formerly explained, and with the one exception already adverted to, it is not evidence which bears directly and immediately upon this precise point. The evidence of this position is derived chiefly from the following two considerations.

1st. Calvin consistently, unhesitatingly, and explicitly denied the doctrine of God's universal grace and love to all men — that is, "*omnibus et singulis*," to each and every man, — as implying in some sense a desire or purpose or intention to save them all; and with this universal grace or love to all men the doctrine of a universal or unlimited atonement, in the nature of the case, and in the convictions and admissions of all its supporters, stands inseparably connected. That Calvin denied the doctrine of God's universal grace or love to all men, as implying some desire or intention of saving them all, and some provision directed to that object, is too evident to anyone who has read his writings to admit of doubt or to require proof. We are not aware that the doctrine of a universal atonement ever has been maintained, even by men who were in other respects Calvinistic, except in conjunction and in connection with an assertion of God's universal grace or love to all men. And it is manifestly impossible that it should be otherwise. If Christ died for all men, *pro omnibus et singulis*, — this must have been in some sense an expression or indication of a desire or intention on the part of God, and of a provision made by Him, directed to the object of saving them all, though frustrated in its effect, by their refusal to embrace the provision made for and offered to them. A universal atonement, or the death of Christ for all men, — that is, for each and every man, necessarily implies this, and would be an anomaly in the divine government without it. No doubt, it may be said, that the doctrine of a universal atone-

ment necessitates, in logical consistency, a denial of the Calvinistic doctrine of election, as much as it necessitates an admission of God's universal grace or love to all men; and we believe this to be true. But still, when we find that, in point of fact, none has ever held the doctrine of universal atonement without holding also the doctrine of universal grace, — while it is certain that some men of distinguished ability and learning, such as Amyraut and Daillee, Davenant and Baxter, have held both these doctrines of universal atonement and universal grace, and at the same time have held the Calvinistic doctrine of election; we are surely called upon in fairness and modesty to admit, that the logical connection cannot be quite so direct and certain in the one case as in the other. And then this conclusion warrants us in maintaining, that the fact of Calvin so explicitly denies the doctrine of God's universal grace or love to all men, affords a more direct and certain ground for the inference, that he did not hold the doctrine of universal atonement, than could be legitimately deduced from the mere fact, that he held the doctrine of unconditional personal election to everlasting life. The invalidity of the inferential process in the one case is not sufficient to establish its invalidity in the other; and therefore our argument holds good.⁷

With this important statement of Cunningham we are in complete agreement. But in the course of proving that there is, in Calvin's writings, abundant proof that Calvin did not hold to the doctrine of universal atonement, Cunningham makes several other important observations to which we ought briefly to call attention. In the first place Cunningham, and correctly so, insists that Calvin "consistently, unhesitatingly, and explicitly denied the doctrine of God's universal grace and love to all men." We have earlier called attention to the fact that there are more recent defenders of the free offer of the gospel who have attempted to prove that Calvin indeed taught a universal grace and love of God. Cunningham explicitly denies this, and we are in agreement with him. In the second place, Cunningham also points out that Calvin in no sense of the word taught a desire or purpose or intention of God to save all men, an idea which is an integral part of the theology of the free offer. In fact, Cunningham insists that he can rest his case of Calvin's denial of universal atonement upon Calvin's repudiation of this entire idea. How much more strongly can it be put? That Calvin denied all this "is too evident to anyone who has read his writings, to admit of doubt or to require proof." Cunningham understands Calvin. Would that more modern defenders of the free offer would have the same clear

7 *Op. cit.*, pp. 395 ff.

conception of what Calvin taught. And history has proved Cunningham correct. The idea of a free offer of the gospel is inseparably connected with the idea of a general grace and love of God to all men and a universal atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ.

Cunningham further proves his thesis that Calvin repudiated the doctrine of a universal atonement by quoting from Calvin's Commentary on I Timothy 2:4 and I John 2:2. Cunningham's argument is that Calvin interprets some "of the principle texts on which the advocates of that doctrine rest it, in such a way as to deprive them of all capacity of serving the purpose to which its supporters commonly apply them." We give here the pertinent quotations from Calvin's Commentaries rather than directly from Cunningham because Cunningham quotes them in Latin.⁸ We quote only that part of Calvin's remarks on this verse which are quoted by Cunningham.

The apostle simply means, that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to all without exception. Now the preaching of the gospel gives life; and hence he justly concludes that God invites all equally to partake of salvation. But the present discourse relates to classes of men, and not to individual persons; for his sole object is, to include in this number princes and foreign nations. (Commentary on I Timothy 2:4.)

Here a question may be raised, how have the sins of the whole world been expiated? I pass by the dotages of the fanatics, who under this pretense extend salvation to all the reprobate, and therefore to Satan himself. Such a monstrous thing deserves no refutation. They who seek to avoid this absurdity, have said that Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world, but efficiently only for the elect. This solution has commonly prevailed in the schools. Though then I allow that what has been said is true, yet I deny that it is suitable to this passage; for the design of John was no other than to make this benefit to the whole Church. Then under the word *all* or *whole*, he does not include the reprobate, but designates those who should believe as well as those who were then scattered through various parts of the world. For then is really made evident, as it is meet, the grace of Christ, when it is declared to be the only true salvation of the world. (Commentary on I John 2:2.)

8 We quote from the translation of Rev. W. Pringle, published by Eerdmans Publishing Co. in 1948.

Cunningham concludes his discussion of this subject with the remarks:

He gives the very same explanation of these two passages in his treatise on "Predestination." Now this is in substance just the interpretation commonly given of these and similar texts, by the advocates of the doctrine of particular redemption; and it seems scarcely possible, that it should have been adopted by one who did not hold that doctrine, or who believed in the truth of the opposite one.

From all of this it is clear that Calvin did not only not teach the doctrines which form an inseparable part of the free offer of the gospel, but that he was at great pains to contradict such doctrines and refute them with the power of the Scriptures. Anyone who has read Calvin will have to admit that efforts to appeal to him in support of the free offer are useless.

From all this, several conclusions can be made. 1) Calvin repeatedly used the word "offer" and by it often meant to express the fact that the Christ in Whom alone is salvation is presented to men through the preaching of the gospel. With this no one disagrees. 2) Calvin emphasizes very strongly that, through the general proclamation of the gospel to all, the command comes also to all to repent of sin, turn from evil and believe in Christ. Also with this truth no one disagrees. 3) But with respect to the *doctrines* of the offer, the genius of Calvin's theology repeatedly militates against the offer. Calvin wants no part of a double will in God which is in conflict with itself, according to which God, on the one hand, determines to save only His elect, but, on the other hand, God wills to save all. Calvin, if Cunningham is right, and we believe that he is, wanted nothing of a universal love or grace of God which is shown to all. Perhaps passages can be quoted here and there in Calvin's writings to suggest such ideas, but Calvin's *theology* militates against it. While, finally, Calvin did not write extensively on the question of the extent of the atonement, what he did write surely shows conclusively that Calvin taught an atonement limited only to the elect.

From all this, appeals to Calvin in support of the free offer of the gospel are made in vain.

The Simplicity of God's Will and the "Free Offer" (9)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

[In harmony with our intention announced in Volume XV, Number 1, we continue with our translation of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's polemic against Professor W. Heyns entitled *The Gospel, The Most Recent Attack on the Truth of Sovereign Grace*. We continue first with the translation of chapter VI, "The Gospel, According to Heyns."]

One of the basic flaws in the entire reasoning of Prof. Heyns is that in writing about *The Gospel* he has not taken the trouble to discover from the Word of God itself what must really be understood by the Gospel, what is the Scriptural idea indicated by this term. Nevertheless, in his articles he indeed gives a description of the Gospel; but it is a description which is not at all grounded in Holy Scripture, but which is really not much more than the presentation of a preconceived idea to which Heyns gives an appearance of truth and scripturalness by a roundabout way in his reasoning. In this way Heyns arrives at a threefold presentation of the Gospel. It is, according to him, in the first place, the glad tidings of the forgiveness of sins, the glad tidings to the world that reconciliation with Him is *possible*; in the second place, the invitation of God to sinners to participate in the feast of salvation which is prepared in Christ; in the third place, an offer of grace, accompanied by a command to believe, with the assurance that he who believes shall be saved. In order to demonstrate that this is actually the presentation of Heyns, we shall quote him as fully as possible.

Heyns writes in *De Wachter* of December 7, 1932:

When the Publication Committee commissioned me to take his place during a vacation requested by Rev. Zwier as co-editor of *De Wachter*, the idea quickly came to me that the above subject was very fitting for some Wachter-articles.

And that first of all because it is an all-important subject. It reminds us of that solemn hour when the time of the Savior's sojourn on earth had come to an end, and when He stood ready, as far as His bodily presence was concerned, to leave His disciples

and to ascend splendidly to the glory which He had before, there to receive a place at the right hand of the Father. For the last time He had gathered them around in order that they should be witnesses of His ascension, and in order to give them a mandate. And a mandate given in these solemn moments, given by the only begotten Son of God, Who had come in the form of a servant, Who had borne reproach and revilement, the torments of the cross and the sufferings of death to the full, in order that the world through Him should be saved — what could such a mandate be other than a most important and salutary mandate?

Well, then, it was a mandate concerning the Gospel. "Go ye into all the world," so He spoke, "Preach the Gospel to all creatures." In that word *Gospel* He comprehended all the salvation which He had merited through His active and passive obedience, through His obedience unto death, yea, the death of the cross. And that they must preach that to all creatures as *glad tidings* for them, included that it was intended to be glad tidings for every one to whom it should come, tidings in which peace was preached to him, whether he was nigh or far off, by God Himself, under whose wrath and curse they lay (Ephesians 2:17), reconciliation with God through the blood of the cross. The Lord called it a Gospel, glad tidings, and could there be gladder tidings for a world in itself helpless and hopelessly lost, for a world going to everlasting destruction? It was the tidings of which Isaiah had so jubilantly and gloriously prophesied as the tidings of the Messiah, who was sent "to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

And those glad tidings they may now bring not to Israel only; indeed to Israel first, but not to Israel alone. It would now no more be as formerly when He had given them commandment to go with their preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom not into the way of the Gentiles, or into any city of the Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now they were to go into all the world and to preach the Gospel to all peoples, yea, as if this were not yet broadly enough expressed, *to all creatures*. That was a second element of the glory of this Gospel.

And yet a third element of that glory was that the way to obtain a personal part in the full content of those glad tidings was not a way which involved much difficulty and sacrifice, nor that of a legalistic yoke, as under the Old Testament, but simply and only that of *believing* the Gospel. Nothing more. For the Gospel was the tidings of deliverance and salvation altogether freely, only out of grace. Indeed that redemption had cost the greatest possible sacrifice, but that offering Christ had brought. Thereby He had paid all the debt to the very last farthing, so that there remained nothing for sinners to pay. Instead they may accept that salvation and appropriate it to

themselves, as someone may take and eat of a feast to which he is invited. "He who believes and is baptized," thus the Gospel stated further, "shall be saved; but he who shall not believe shall be condemned."

The reader should note that in the preceding quotation the author simply proceeds from the one text in which the Savior gave to His church the mandate to preach the Gospel. And this text precisely does not tell us at all *what* the Gospel is, but presupposes that the apostles and the church know this. Holy Scripture tells us in various ways, as we hope to make plain, what the Gospel is; but all those passages of Scripture Heyns simply leaves alone, in order to proceed from a single text in which precisely nothing of the idea and the content of the gospel is told us.

In the second place, the reader should also note how Heyns in the above quotation, without any Scriptural proof or reasoning from Scripture already here slips into his reasoning the Arminian, general presentation of the Gospel. He writes that the Gospel was intended to be glad tidings *for every one to whom it should come*. Scripture teaches this nowhere. Scripture indeed teaches that the Gospel is intended to be a savor of death unto death, as well as a savor of life unto life; that Christ is set for a fall, as well as for a rising again; that many are appointed to stumble at the stone of stumbling. But that the proclamation of the Gospel was intended (by God) to be glad tidings for all men is simply concocted out of the human brain. Heyns carefully avoids all definite terms and expressions of Scripture. In the text which he quotes from Isaiah it speaks of all who mourn, of those who mourn in Zion. But Heyns speaks rather of glad tidings *for a hopelessly lost world, for a world which is going to destruction*. And he also avoids carefully the Scriptural presentation of faith as a gift of the grace of God and substitutes for it that all men *may accept* this salvation as someone may eat of a feast to which he is invited. It is necessary that we immediately fix the attention on this apparently unintentional substitution of un-scriptural ideas and terms, which in themselves appear to be rather innocent, but which nevertheless must serve as the basis for introducing a wrong presentation of the Gospel. It is here as with much preaching in which men seek refuge in vague and general terms. One still preaches truth then, but he does not touch *the* truth. One then proclaims indeed that he who believes shall be saved (and who would be able to criticize this?), but one does not come to a sharper definition of the nature and the origin of faith. One then says indeed, altogether in general, that the Gospel is glad tidings for sinners (and who would dare to find fault with this?), but one keeps silence about the question: for which sinners? And thus the congregation is rocked to sleep, gradually becomes

accustomed to it that the sharp lines in the preaching are no longer drawn; and before they themselves realize it, they have arrived in the camp of the Arminians. Hence, we must pay close attention to the manner in which Heyns lays his broad basis for an un-scriptural presentation of the gospel.

In the following quotation he does not reason whatsoever anymore from Scripture in order to come to a correct presentation of the Gospel:

What the Gospel is is variously expressed, and those various expressions have each their own value in illuminating the matter and helping to understand it. The one places this particular and the other that particular more on the foreground, and so they complement one another.

The Catechism describes "the promise of the gospel," and that is the Gospel itself, the tidings which must be brought to all creatures, as follows: "that he (God) grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross" (Question 66).

Shorter is the most common definition that the Gospel is the offer of grace and salvation.

And in the Apostolic Confession the Gospel is meant in Art. 10 with the words: "(I believe) the forgiveness of sins."

Let us first pay attention to the last.

All the items mentioned in the Twelve Articles are items which must be believed unto salvation, as the Catechism gives us to understand in Lord's Day VII. That among those items the Gospel should be missed is inconceivable; and if anywhere, then in Art. 10 it must be meant. Thus it is to be read from this article that the Gospel is the glad tidings of the *forgiveness* of sins, and by this the forgiveness of sins is placed on the foreground in the salvation-content of the Gospel.

The *forgiveness* of sins. That means that God in place of demanding something, of whatever nature, for the satisfaction of his enormous debt, will forgive the sinner his entire debt, in order nevermore to remember it, nevermore to reckon it against him. *Forgiving* is the direct opposite of *demanding payment*.

Notice that Heyns here first says: "What the gosepl is is variously expressed, and those various expressions have each their own value in illuminating the matter and helping to understand it. The one places this particular and the other that particular more on the foreground, and so they complement one another."

Now we might presuppose that Heyns had in view expressions of Scripture with these "various expressions." Further, we might expect that Heyns would now lead us through Scripture, showing us how Scripture describes the Gospel in

various ways, in order along that path to arrive at a correct Scriptural presentation of the matter about which he writes. Especially of Heyns we might expect this. For he can inveigh so against those who rationalistically put a certain idea on the foreground, in order to reason from it instead of from God's Word! And yet nothing comes of all this. He appeals first to the Catechism. And also Question 66 of the Heidelberg Catechism Heyns then immediately places in a wrong light. For that question says absolutely nothing about the proclamation of the glad tidings to all creatures, but speaks about God's promise to *us*, that is, the church (the subject there is after all the Sacraments). And that question also does not speak about tidings or about an offer, but about a *promise* that God *grants to us* forgiveness of sins and eternal life out of grace. These very definite terms are certainly altogether different from the general terms which Heyns repeatedly wants to substitute. Besides, Heyns could also find a much richer answer in Question and Answer 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son."

But it becomes still worse with Heyns. Also the Catechism apparently does not satisfy him, does not bring him where he wants to be. First he lets Scripture lie. Then he lets the Catechism be. And then he comes bringing the very poor: "Shorter is the most common definition that the Gospel is the offer of grace and salvation." Now anyone who reflects seriously on this simply stands amazed when he reads something of this kind. It becomes plain that Heyns with his "various expressions" did not have his eye on Scripture whatsoever! For after all, Scripture nowhere describes the Gospel as an offer of grace and salvation! If therefore we want to learn from Heyns what the holy Gospel is, then we shall have to makeshift with a definition of which he says that it is the most customary! Here we shall most decisively refuse to follow Heyns. Heyns and I are agreed that we should reason from Scripture, not from the presentations of men. To do the latter is rationalistic, also according to Heyns. He is in agreement with me if I differ from him in this, that we must not take into account the most customary terms and expressions of men. He grants that I am right if I part ways with him at this point in order to turn to Scripture.

And what a strange bit of reasoning about the Apostolic Confession! It would be strange, says Heyns, if the Gospel was not mentioned there! If it is mentioned there, then it must be mentioned in Art. 10: "I believe the forgiveness of sins." Ergo: the Gospel is the glad tidings of the forgiveness of sins! For such a manner of reasoning there is but one word: *arbitrary*. If you please,

does not all the rest of the Confession of Faith belong just as well to the Gospel? Why then is Art. 10 singled out as only speaking of the Gospel? But we shall refrain from further characterizing this reasoning. If only it has become very clear that the entire passage from Heyns quoted above brings us not one step further toward a correct understanding of the Scriptural presentation of the holy Gospel. We must not be hoodwinked, but stick to the point.

After Heyns, following this altogether unscriptural path, has arrived at the presentation that the Gospel is glad tidings of the forgiveness of sins to a hopelessly lost world, he can proceed further, and he changes the *calling* into an *invitation* to all men to participate in the forgiveness of sins. He does this in the following:

Light is cast on the question, What is the Gospel? also by the fact that Scripture calls the proclamation of the Gospel *a calling*. From this we may recognize the Gospel as *an invitation*, and as an invitation which can be nothing less than well-meaning for everyone to whom the Gospel comes.

To call someone means to invite someone to come. It means that in our own language and equally as much in the language of Scripture. When the Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman: "Go, call thy husband, and come hither," this meant that she must immediately invite her husband to go along with her and then to return to Jesus with him. And that is always the meaning. When in Matthew 22:3 it speaks of calling them that were bidden to the wedding, in Mark 1:20 of calling the disciples, in Mark 10:49 of calling blind Bartimaeus, in John 11:28 of calling Mary, always it is the invitation to come. The purpose of this invitation to come is our everlasting salvation. It is a being called to the peace of God (Col. 3:15), to the fellowship of Christ (I Cor. 1:9), to God's kingdom and glory (I Thess. 2:12; I Pet. 5:10), to eternal life (I Tim. 2:16). And it takes place through the Gospel (II Thess. 2:14).

Thus on the basis of God's Word the Gospel is also to be described as an urgent invitation of God to all creatures and to everyone to whom it comes personally to come without delay and to receive a part in the salvation in Christ, to come and to sit down at the feast of salvation, to eat of the bread and to drink of the water of life freely.

The Gospel is therefore not simply the tidings of a bare announcement that there is forgiveness of sins, but the tidings of being invited, urgently invited to participate in the forgiveness of sins. That cannot be other than well-meaning. It cannot be other than well-meaning because it is a message of God, the message of Him, who has no delight in the death of the wicked,

but delights therein, that the wicked turn from his wicked way and live (Ezekiel 33:11), who will have all men to be saved (I Tim. 2:4), who had sent John in order to bear witness of the light, in order that all through him should believe (John 1:7). It can also not be other than well-meaning because to invite someone to something that is to his advantage is always a presenting of oneself as favorably inclined toward the one invited, and that all the more according as the good to which one invites is higher and more glorious. For that reason to invite to something good without intending it is always falsehood, and to invite to the highest good without intending it would be the highest falsehood. To ascribe such a falsehood to God by asserting that His invitation to His kingdom and glory is in few instances meant and in many instances not meant cannot take place without making oneself guilty of grievous blasphemy.

To begin with the last sentence, Heyns here uses very strong language. He here accuses his opponents of "grievous blasphemy." Now such language would still be justifiable if Heyns actually instructed us from Scripture. But as we have already seen, all his reasoning concerning the real meaning of the Gospel has precisely nothing to do with Scripture. And now he comes to the heavy accusation of grievous blasphemy, partly on the ground of his preceding unscriptural reasoning about the Gospel, partly through the fact that in that which we quoted above by an adroit twist he changes the calling into an invitation to accept the forgiveness of sins, that is, the Gospel. Notice, however, how little this "invitation" of Heyns has in common with the Scriptural idea of "calling." You sense this immediately as soon as you attempt to substitute "invitation" for "calling" in the texts which Heyns quotes. Thus:

Col. 3:15: "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." According to Heyns: "to the which also ye are invited." Result: nonsense.

I Cor. 1:9: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Heyns: "by whom ye were invited unto the fellowship." etc. Result: a complete change of the thought.

I Pet. 5:10: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus. . . ." Heyns: "who has invited us to participate in his eternal glory." Result: paralysis of the text.

Enough. Scripture speaks of calling. Heyns substitutes invitation. The Scriptural idea of the calling is that God has also called those whom He predestinated, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, these He has also glorified. Thus Heyns comes to the conclusion that the invitation is well-meaning, that God well-meaningly invites all men, that to invite

someone without meaning it is false, that those who deny the well-meant character of that invitation for all men make themselves guilty of grievous blasphemy.

Heavy language.

But resting upon an adroit change of "calling" into "invitation."

Nevertheless Heyns simply says: "To call someone means to invite him to come. . . . And that is always the meaning. . . . The purpose of this invitation is our everlasting salvation. . . . Therefore on the basis of God's Word the Gospel is also to be described as an urgent invitation of God to all creatures and to everyone to whom it comes to come without delay and to receive a part in the salvation in Christ. . . . That cannot be other than well-meaning. . . .because it is a message of God. . .who wills that all men be saved."

Thus Heyns teaches. Thus many, following him, preach.

And is that not Arminian? Seriously: explain to me then what is indeed Arminian! But the reasoning, which is as clear as crystal, rests upon a twisting of the meaning of the "calling." Just a small step, and Heyns is where he wants to be. The Gospel of God is now presented as a well-meant, general offer of grace. Notice:

There is, however, yet a third description of the Gospel, namely, that it is *an offer of grace*, accompanied by a demand to believe, and by the express assurance that whoever believes shall be saved. This description again focuses on something else, and indeed this, that the Lord comes to sinners with the blessing of salvation by way of an offering of it, in which is implied a certain putting in possession. Not a full putting in possession, for that can only follow, as with every offer, upon the acceptance and appropriation of that which is offered; and if that acceptance does not follow, the offer and what belongs to it falls away. But yet a putting in possession in so far as an offering gives a right to what is offered, a right which one cannot have without the offer, namely, the right to deal with it as his own, to take it and to appropriate it, a right, therefore, rich in gracious significance.

Also this description of the Gospel as an offer of grace, and indeed a general offer of grace well-meant for all, is grounded in God's Word and is included in our Confessions as an element of the Reformed doctrine.

The expression "offer of grace" does not occur in Scripture, but the matter itself so much the more, for that is to be found in every proclamation of the Gospel occurring in God's Word.

In how far this last is true, namely, that the matter itself occurs so much

the more in Scripture, we must investigate later, when we enter into the texts quoted by Heyns. In any event we are happy with the acknowledgement that with his reasoning Heyns finally arrives at a description of the Gospel which does not occur in Scripture. This is not of much weight for Heyns; but for him who wishes to reason out of Scripture it is of the more weight, because Scripture after all describes the Gospel in all sorts of ways, as presently we hope to see.

At present it is sufficient if we see that we, according to Heyns, should describe the Gospel as follows:

The Gospel is the glad tidings of God to a hopelessly lost world wherein God well-meaningly offers to all men the forgiveness of sins, thereby putting them in possession of salvation, but thus, that they must accept this salvation and that the being put in possession on God's part is frustrated by men if they reject the salvation, also after God has urgently invited them to the salvation.

It is also of importance that we have seen very clearly that Heyns does not arrive at this entire presentation of the Gospel through study of Holy Scripture.

We shall see further to what presentation of the Gospel we come on the ground of and through serious study of God's Word.

Chapter VII

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

He who investigates Scripture with the purpose of learning from it what is the real meaning of the Gospel is immediately struck by the great importance which God's Word attaches to that Gospel. We have only to pay attention to the terms with which Scripture describes that Gospel in order to convince ourselves of its rich content and high and holy character. Very often does Scripture make mention of the Gospel; and it describes the Gospel in various ways, in order to impress upon us its many-sided significance and glorious content. Thus, God's Word speaks of "the Gospel of God," Romans 1:1, II Corinthians 11:7, I Thessalonians 2:8, 9, I Peter 4:17. It is God's Gospel, not ours. He conceived of it; never did it arise in the heart of man. He realized it. He also proclaimed it, both in the old and new dispensation. He who sets about to proclaim that Gospel, in order to say or to write something about the Gospel, must then also be on his guard not to concoct a gospel out of his own brain. He who would describe it must not inquire after the terms most commonly used among men. Let him turn to the Word of the living God Himself in order to learn what the Gospel is. According to its content, the Gospel is described as the Gospel of God's Son. It is the Gospel which God promised afore concerning His Son Jesus Christ, Romans 1:2, 3; or simply the Gospel of His Son, Romans 1:9;

Mark 1:1. In the Gospel, therefore, God proclaims something to us concerning His Son; and it behooves us to be careful that we do not change the image of His Son through our preaching into that of a corruptible man, as is only too often done, especially in our own times. Thus it is also called the Gospel of Christ or of Jesus Christ, the anointed of God, of the anointed Savior, Who saves His people from their sins, Romans 15:19; I Corinthians 9:12; II Corinthians 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Galatians 1:17. It is further described as the Gospel of the glory of the alone blessed God, and our proclamation of the Gospel must not be an attack upon that glory, I Timothy 1:11. The glory of the face of Jesus Christ shines in and through the Gospel, II Corinthians 4:4. It is also the Gospel of the kingdom, Matthew 4:23; 9:34; and where the Gospel is proclaimed, therefore, this kingdom must be spoken of according to its idea, its blessings of salvation, its realization, its basis, its life and heirs, as well as according to its future. Still more, the Gospel is described as the Gospel of the grace of God, the Gospel of your salvation, the Gospel of peace, Acts 20:24; Ephesians 1:13; 6:15. When we take all these terms together, we receive the impression that in the Gospel we have to do with something divine, with something of a most glorious and holy content, which can easily be corrupted through our proclamation and robbed of its power and glory. It is the Gospel of God, the Gospel which He proclaims concerning His Son, the Gospel of the glory of the only blessed God, of the glory of Christ, the Gospel of Christ, of the kingdom of heaven, of the grace of God, of your salvation and of peace. And if we add to this that it is indeed the calling of the church to proclaim that Gospel, and that the apostle writes to the church of Galatia that there is no other Gospel than that which he has preached and that whoever proclaims another Gospel is accursed, be he a man on earth or an angel from heaven, then we will certainly agree that Heyns took his task altogether too lightly when he thought to be able to describe the Gospel for his readers with some most commonly used terms!

Scripture employs two words in the original Greek which are very closely related to one another. They are the words *epangelia*, promise, and *euangelion*, gospel. That also in the consciousness of the church they were closely connected with one another appears indeed from the very frequently used expression: promise of the Gospel, which also occurs in our own Confession. In this expression it is at least indicated that in the Gospel there is a promise proclaimed. But this close relationship between Gospel and promise, *euangelion* and *epangelia* is better indicated when we, instead of speaking of the promise of the Gospel, turn this around and speak of the *Gospel of the promise*. By the latter expression the real idea of the Gospel is set forth correctly. It is a Gospel of the Promise. The Promise is the real essence of the Gospel. And the Gospel

is the good news concerning the Promise. This is literally according to Scripture. For this idea is verbally expressed in Galatians 3:8: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." Notice that in the last part of the text the promise is simply mentioned: "In thee shall all nations be blessed." That is the promise which came to Abraham and his seed. And the text teaches us that when God gives this promise to Abraham, then He preaches the Gospel to him. Promise and Gospel are here, therefore, so identified that the Gospel is the preaching of the Promise. Thus we find it also in Acts 13:32, 33: "And we declare unto you glad tidings (*euangelizometha*, preaching of the Gospel) how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again." It will be plain that the promise which is here mentioned and which was made unto the fathers is the same as that mentioned in Galatians 3:8. And also in the text from Acts the promise and the Gospel are simply identified. The proclamation of the Promise is the preaching of the Gospel. When Paul and the apostles proclaim that God has fulfilled the Promise, then they proclaim good news concerning the Promise and then they preach thereby the Gospel. The Gospel is, therefore, essentially the Gospel of the Promise. It strikes us immediately how far distant this Scriptural description is from the "most commonly used" description of Heyns: "offer of grace." There is here just exactly no offer. God does not offer to Abraham that in him all nations shall be blessed, but gives him in the Gospel a promise, the fulfillment of which depends altogether upon God, as lies indeed in the nature of the case. The apostles have nothing to offer, but proclaim that God has fulfilled the Promise in Jesus; and then they preach the Gospel. If therefore we would understand the Gospel, then we must before all else pay attention to this promise.

Very often Scripture speaks of the promise. Sometimes God's Word employs the plural: *the promises*. This is to indicate the manifold riches of the content of the promise. Frequently also the singular occurs in order to remind us that however manifold the riches of grace may be which God has promised, nevertheless the promise is essentially one. Of the promise Hebrews 11:13 speaks. After God's Word has here pointed to the examples of Abel and Enoch and Noah, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it continues and says: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." And at the end of the chapter, referring to all the saints of the old dispensation, Scripture says: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise." It is plain

from these quotations that throughout the old dispensation there was a promise, *the* promise; the Gospel was proclaimed to the saints of the Old Testament. This promise was not yet fulfilled. They all died without seeing the fulfillment of the promise, because God had provided some better thing for us, in order that they without us should not be made perfect. But by God's grace they embraced the promise by faith and lived in the hope of that promise. With their eye on that promise, they were willing to sacrifice all, were willing to confess that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, had subdued kingdoms, quenched the violence of fire, turned to flight the armies of the aliens; had not accepted deliverance, even though they were sawn assunder, even though they had to endure mockings and scourgings, and bonds and imprisonment. So all overwhelmingly glorious and rich was the Gospel of the Promise to them that they allowed themselves to be stoned and burned, that they wandered in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth — all because of the Promise which they had never yet received but only seen from afar off. That was the power of the Gospel. The glimpse of the Promise filled the souls of the saints, filled them with that power of faith whereby they challenged and defied all in the world and, dying, conquered! In the light of all this it will surely be plain to everyone that Heyns substitutes something altogether different for this mighty Gospel of the Promise when he wants to teach us that the Gospel is nothing else than the powerless, lame, colorless, altogether uncertain offer of grace to a hopelessly lost world which is dependent on wicked men! No, no offer, but the proclamation of a divinely certain, eternal, unspeakably glorious Promise, confirmed by the oath of God — that was the Gospel in the old dispensation! Not an uncertain offer, but a certain Promise!

Of this Gospel the Epistle to the Galatians also speaks. For to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, 3:16. And, although for a time the law was imposed upon the promise, nevertheless the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect, 3:17. Not by the law, but by the promise was the inheritance given to Abraham, 3:18. And seeing that the real Seed of the promise is Christ, therefore are we also Abraham's seed if we are of Christ and heirs according to the promise. As far as the content of this Promise is concerned, Holy Scripture speaks of it as the promise of the Holy Ghost, which is centrally fulfilled to Christ: for He being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received the promise of the Holy Ghost, has shed forth this, Acts 2:33; and we also obtain it by faith, Galatians 3:14. Further, it is the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, I Timothy 4:8; the promise of life, II Timothy 1:1;

the promise of eternal life, for this is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life, I John 2:25. It is the promise of His coming, II Peter 3:4; the promise of entering into His rest, Hebrews 4:1; the promise of becoming heirs of the world, for the promise that he should be an heir of the world is to Abraham and his seed, not through the law, but by the righteousness which is of faith, Romans 4:13. Therefore also Holy Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit of promise, Ephesians 1:13; of children of the promise in distinction from children of the flesh, that is, of children which were born according to the promise and by the power of the promise as spiritual seed and upon whom the promise rested, Romans 9:8; of the heirs of the promise, to whom God certainly fulfills the promise, Hebrews 6:17; 11:9, etc. And at the inauguration of the new dispensation on the day of Pentecost the Gospel is immediately proclaimed in the words: "For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." And it is the glad tidings of God to the heirs of the Promise in the midst of the world which are designated in Scripture by the term: Gospel. This thoroughly scriptural description, therefore, we place over against the "most commonly employed descriptions" of Heyns: the holy Gospel is the glad tidings of God concerning *the Promise* of God to the seed of the Promise, those chosen by God as heirs of the Promise in the midst of this dark and comfortless, lost world!

By this Scriptural description of the Gospel the presentation of Heyns is eradicated root and branch. In place of the uncertainty in his presentation there now comes divine certainty; in place of the general in the description of Heyns there now comes the sovereign and particular of Scripture; in place of Arminianism we now obtain from Holy Scripture Reformed truth. For a promise differs from an offer precisely in all these respects. An offer rests for the certainty of its fulfillment with two parties: the one who offers and those to whom it is offered. A promise is as certain as the faithfulness and veracity of him who promises. Applied to our subject, this means that an offer of grace rests in God and man for its certainty; and since a chain is never stronger than its weakest link, the offer of grace is as certain as the faithfulness and veracity of man, sinful man, a hopelessly lost and wicked world. In other words, all certainty is gone, except the certainty that the cause of God is an altogether lost cause, the certainty that the offer will never be accepted. This is the presentation of Heyns. I understand very well when I write this that Heyns will retort that alongside this line of the offer he also wants to hold fast to the line of election; but then my answer is that I am not opposing the Reformed Heyns, but the Heyns of the general offer. Besides, I have never yet read from Heyns a Reformed presentation of the Gospel. All certainty is completely gone with Heyns.

But a promise rests only in the one who promises; the Promise of the Gospel rests for its certain fulfillment only with the eternal and true God; the Gospel of the Promise is, therefore, eternally sure. For a promise is an oral or written declaration whereby the one who promises is bound to do something or to bestow something. The Gospel of the Promise is, therefore, the glad tidings that God has bound Himself to bestow upon the heirs of the Promise eternal life and all things. And this brings me to the second point of difference: an offer is in the nature of the case general and indefinite; a promise is particular and definite. If the Gospel is an offer, then it is glad tidings to all men without distinction; if the Gospel is a promise, as Scripture teaches, then it is the glad tidings of God to the heirs of the promise only.

And how could it be otherwise? Where, after all, would there be a party next to or beside God to whom He should promise something? Permit me to say it with emphasis, as a witness in our God-forgetting, watered down, colorlessly religious world, in which everyone piously worships his own little idol in his own little sanctuary, in which the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, is more than any other thing missing, because men always substitute their own little idol for the fearful and living God and exert themselves to convert the world for that little idol and to save the world by that idol: . . . God is GOD! He is "the Wholly Other"! All that we ever conceive and say of God of ourselves is always a lie. We always construct an idol. All true knowledge of God has its source only in God's speech concerning Himself. We must always be still, reverently still, still in holy amazement, when He speaks, and listen and repeat after Him. He is the Absolute, Subject and Object in Himself, the perfectly Self-sufficient, the Alone-blessed, the Eternal, the altogether Other. Outside of Him, above Him, next to Him, without Him there is nothing. He is His own party. To whom then would God promise something, much less offer? Where would there be a party, outside of God, to whom God could discharge a promise? No, if there is a Promise of God, then the entire content of that Promise is of Him, then also the heir of that Promise is only of God. Then God has sovereignly known the heirs, that is, so known them, that it is precisely through that divine, sovereign knowledge, that eternal divine conception, that they are. Therefore you can conceive of no Gospel without divine, sovereign predestination of the heirs of the Promise. Then the holy Gospel is the glad tidings of God concerning the Promise to those heirs. And thus it is in Holy Scripture. For, in the first place, the Heir of the Promise is Christ. For He saith not "to seeds, as of many; but to thy Seed," namely, Christ. And in Him is the promise to the seed of Abraham, that is, to those who are of Christ. Therefore also the promise of the Gospel is so eternally certain for those heirs

of the promise that we read: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, *willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel*, confirmed it by an oath." To the heirs of the promise, therefore, the Promise is certain, because the certainty of it is rooted in the immutable counsel of God.

The idea of the Gospel, therefore, is such that it is the good or glad news concerning this promise which God has promised from the dawn of history to the heirs of the promise. Good news, glad tidings, that is the meaning of the word *euangelion*. It is the good news, glad tidings, in a double sense of the word. In the first place, because the heirs of the promise live and move in the midst of a world that lieth in wickedness. With that world they lie by nature in the midst of death. In that world also the heirs of the promise are subject to the suffering and death of that world. In that world they are born under the guilt and in the sin of that world, by nature children of wrath even as also the others. And the promise causes to arise in their hearts the hope of deliverance out of the night of misery in which they are sunken. It is the promise of salvation, and therefore a glorious promise. Therefore the tidings of that promise are *euangelion*, good news, which comes to them from God in the dark world. And, in the second place, the proclamation of that promise is good news because the promise is the promise of a state of glory which far exceeds all our thinking and imagination. God does not only promise to the heirs that they shall be delivered out of their present state of misery and woe in order then to be restored to the former state of righteousness in the first paradise; but through the promise He holds forth to them a state of heavenly glory and eternal life that is as exalted in its riches of blessedness as the Lord from heaven is exalted above the first Adam. It is, therefore, unspeakably glad tidings that are proclaimed through the Gospel to the heirs of the Promise. And it is indeed *news*. The Gospel has never arisen in the heart of man. Eye has never seen nor ear ever heard its content. Therefore it is God Who proclaims the Gospel concerning His Son. It comes to the heirs of the promise through revelation, even though the proclamation of the Gospel takes place through men. So that he proclaims the Gospel who in the name of God is able to say something with certainty concerning the promise, concerning the glory of its content, concerning the certainty of its fulfillment, concerning the time of its realization. Throughout all of history there are in the world heirs of the promises, who walk as pilgrims

through the night of this world and who look forward to the day; who with earnest longings of soul ask: do you know anything of the Promise? Watchman! what of the night? And he proclaims the Gospel who has a certain answer to this question and who comforts the heirs of the promise even unto everlasting life!

By this idea, this Scriptural idea of the Gospel, the content of the Gospel is also determined. If according to its idea the Gospel is glad tidings concerning the Promise to Abraham and his seed, then it follows from this that the Gospel can proclaim nothing else than that Promise. That Promise is the content of the Gospel. Nothing else. Nothing more. Nothing less. He who purposes to proclaim the Gospel must speak, as far as the content of that proclamation is concerned, of nothing else than this promise of God. He who proclaims something else is simply no minister of the Gospel. A *Verbi Dei* Minister is a proclaimer of the promise of God, or he is an impostor. And not only can his proclamation have no other content than the promise of God, but he is also called to present the Gospel as the glad tidings of a *promise*, which God certainly fulfills. He who makes of the certain promise of God an offer which is dependent for its fulfillment on the will of man, does violence to the Gospel of God. And, finally, this proclamation must be the glad tidings of the sure promise of God *to the heirs of the promise*. He who presents it otherwise, who presents it as though the promise of God is intended for all men, makes God a liar. For He does not realize His promise to all men; nor has He ever promised such a thing as salvation to all men; but He promises the inheritance to the heirs, Abraham and his seed, and that promise He fulfills as the faithful and unchangeable God. Heyns does not hesitate, proceeding from the "most commonly used" terms of men, to accuse those who refuse to present the Gospel of God as a well-meant, general offer of grace and salvation of grievous blasphemy. So be it. But there is in our heart not the least doubt whether he who hawks the Gospel as a cheap article of merchandise, who is not ashamed to present God as a peddler and offerer of the wares of salvation to all men, makes himself guilty of exactly such grievous blasphemy and casts the bread of the children to the dogs and swine, who trample it with their feet. And eternity shall reveal that those hawkers of the Gospel have made out God as a liar!

We must still speak further concerning the proper content, the historical realization, and the preaching of the Gospel.

If the Gospel, according to the Scriptures, is the glad tidings concerning the promise, then it lies in the nature of the case that the content of that promise of God must also be the content of the holy Gospel. Now we can, from this viewpoint, distinguish the content of the Gospel according to its

objective and its subjective aspect. Objectively the central content of the promise, and therefore also of the Gospel, is Christ and all His benefits. Christ is at once the heir of the promise, for indeed God says not "and to seeds" as of many, but "and to thy Seed," which is Christ; and the fulfillment of the Promise, for He is the promised Seed, on Whom the heirs of the Promise fix all their hope. And He is the fulfillment of the Promise because God realizes His eternal covenant in and through Him. Hence, in the Gospel Christ must be preached in all His significance, according to His incarnation, His person and natures, His offices and relation to God's covenant and kingdom, according to His Word, wherein He has revealed to us the full counsel of God concerning our salvation, according to His work, His suffering and death, His resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of the Father, His rule and dominion over all things, and His return for judgment, in order to make all things new and to subject them to the Father. And the Gospel proclaims then that God in Christ has reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and prays in Christ's stead: be ye reconciled with God! Heyns wants to make of this reconciliation "a possibility of reconciliation," completely in harmony with his general offer. But this is not according to the Word of God. He who proclaims the possibility of reconciliation does violence to the Gospel. For the Gospel is the fulfillment of the Promise of God by God. The reconciliation is an accomplished fact. Nineteen hundred years ago God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and the "world" is therefore reconciled.



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