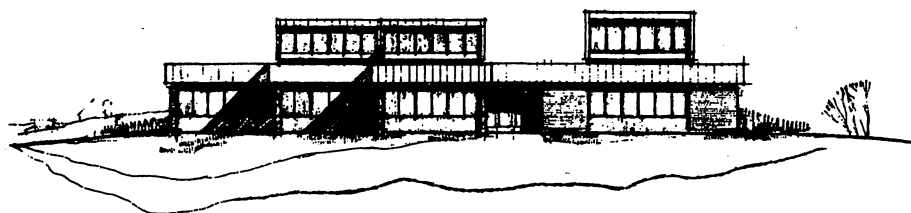


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PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



APRIL, 1990
VOLUME XXIII, No. 2

**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL
OF THE
PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES
GRANDVILLE, MICHIGAN**

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EDITORIAL NOTES

While churches today are struggling with many different issues which strike at the very heart of what it means to be Reformed, there are three such issues which, perhaps more than any others, are, or ought to be, of concern to God's people. These three issues are addressed in three separate articles in this issue of our *Journal*.

No one can argue with the fact that the pulpit is declining in power and significance within the church. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, but no one can deny that in this welter of reasons, one reason stands out: What does it mean to preach in the tradition of the Reformed faith? This question involves two other questions: What is Reformed preaching as to its form? and, what is Reformed preaching as to content? To both these questions, Prof. R. Decker, professor of Homiletics in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, addresses himself in an important article. If there are those among our readers who are concerned about the decline of preaching, they can do no better than to read what Prof. Decker has to say.

This concern over Reformed preaching is so general that an Office-bearers' Conference, held in the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland on March 6, 1990, was entirely devoted to this subject. The gist of Prof. Decker's keynote address at this Conference is given in his *Journal* article.

Rampant universalism, often of the most Arminian kind, is openly taught and defended in the church today, even among those who profess to be Calvinists. While, again, there may be many false views which contribute to this blatant universalism, so completely contradictory of all the Reformed faith, one notable contributing factor is the defense of the well-meant offer of the gospel.

Prof. D. Engelsma has written a book on the question: Is a denial of the free offer to be construed as synonymous with hyper-Calvinism? Closely examining the history of the Reformed faith, Prof. Engelsma, in his book, clearly shows that the answer to this question is a resounding, No!

In the article which is included in this issue of the *Journal*, Professor Engelsma takes another look at the free offer, examines some recent developments and writings in this field, and once again shows beyond dispute that the whole concept of the free offer is not only contrary to all that is and has been Reformed, but also that it leads inevitably to the horrible, God-denying error of universalism. Whether you have long held the doctrine of the free offer to be a valid part of Reformed theology or

whether you have seen the error of this view, you will profit from this fresh discussion.

Everyone admits that at the basis of many current aberrations in churches and Seminaries lies questions of Hermeneutics. Those who promote evolutionism in place of the biblical doctrine of creation; those who push hard for the ordination of women into the special offices in the church; those who condone the membership of homosexuals in the church; all those and many more freely admit that the controversy is, at bottom, a controversy over Hermeneutics.

Now must the Bible be interpreted? This is the burning question of our times.

While it is clear that one's Hermeneutics is determined by one's view of Scripture itself, i.e., by one's view of the inspiration of Scripture, the fact remains that much confusion reigns over the question of biblical interpretation. It is to this question that the first in a series of articles on Hermeneutics is addressed. The whole subject, under the influence of literary and historical criticism, has become clouded and obscure. This series of articles is intended to clear away the darkness and restore the whole matter of biblical interpretation to its proper place in the church.

May God graciously grant that these articles serve to strengthen the faith of God's people in these troubled times. □

The Reformed View of Preaching

Prof. Robert D. Decker

There are various ways to treat this subject. We might concentrate on the question: what is preaching, or how has preaching been defined in the Reformed tradition? Herman Hoeksema defines preaching as "... the authoritative proclamation of the gospel by the church in the service of the Word of God through Christ."¹ That this is an accurate reflection of Reformed thinking on this question few would dispute. We might also consider the subject from the point of view of preaching as the chief means of grace. The Reformed tradition has always stressed this truth and

1. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: The Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), pp. 637-641.

we trust there is no disagreement among us on this fundamental point. We might also consider the subject from the point of view of method or style, i.e., what approach to constructing the sermon is advocated in the Reformed tradition?

It can be demonstrated that the Reformed tradition has always stressed a thematic style of preaching. Various terms have been employed by Reformed Homiletics to describe this approach to preaching. Among these we find the following: "art homily" (Herman Hoeksema, William Heyns), "reconstructive" (Carl Kromminga, P.Y. DeJong, Nelson Kloosterman), "analytic-synthetic" (T. Hoekstra, Samuel Volbeda), "thematic" (James Daane, Simon Blocker), "synthetic homily" (J.J. VanOosterzee), "the centrality of purpose, determining the Spirit's *telos* of a passage" (Jay E. Adams), "exposition moulded into a message" (David Martyn Lloyd-Jones), "the message of the text in its context" (F. Campbell Morgan).²

It is this subject which we wish to explore in some detail in this paper. It is our conviction that the art homily or thematic approach to sermon making is to be preferred. Not only so, but we believe it is the correct approach to sermon construction, a method of sermon construction required by the very nature of Holy Scripture itself. From this point of view, the Reformed tradition has a unique contribution to make to the whole field of homiletics.

Before addressing this aspect of the subject, however, it is necessary to stress the Reformed view of preaching as the chief means of grace. We find this necessary because of the many contemporary, strenuous, even strident denials of this truth. Charles H. Kraft, for example, a professor at the large, influential School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, in one of his recent books devotes an entire chapter to what he calls "Ten Myths Concerning Communication."³ According to Kraft, "Myth 5" is "Preaching is God's ordained means of communicating the gospel," and "Myth 6" is "The sermon is an effective vehicle for bringing about life change." Kraft defines preaching as "monologuing while the listeners sit silently."⁴ Kraft is only reflecting a current, general trend in evangelical churches, a trend which may be observed in churches standing

2. Consult the select bibliography for the books in which these terms and the concept "thematic preaching" are used and discussed.

3. Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983), pp. 35-54.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition as well. That trend is away from preaching as the chief means of grace. No longer is preaching the center of worship in much of the church. Some proceed in the direction of more elaborate, "high church" liturgy. These introduce choirs, responsive readings, and other elements into the worship. The sermon often is little more than a pious homily of about ten to fifteen minutes. Others lay the stress on all kinds of ministries to all kinds of "hurting" people. There are support groups and counselors provided for singles, divorced persons, youth, alcoholics, etc. But very little emphasis is placed upon preaching. Still others prefer a charismatic emphasis in the worship. These services are characterized by a great deal of singing, hand-clapping and hand-raising, prayer requests from the congregation, testimonies from the people, etc. Again, the emphasis is not on preaching as the means of grace. All these and many like them have lost confidence in the preaching of the Word and do not think that God will use that as the means to save and build and gather His church.

Along with this denial of the power and efficacy of preaching we witness another phenomenon in the contemporary church, *viz.*, a rather harsh and very vocal criticism of the preaching going on in the pulpits of the church. People wonder why they get so little out of the preaching they are hearing. What has gone wrong with preaching? Why are the seminaries not graduating men who can preach?

We believe these two phenomena are related. The current criticism of preaching, we believe, is justified. Pastors do not make preaching a priority in their ministries. Neither do pastors expound the Holy Scriptures as they ought. Perhaps the seminaries are to be faulted for not teaching men the correct way to preach, *viz.*, by expounding the Scriptures.⁵ Whether it is the fault of the seminaries, or the fault of their graduates who fail to make preaching their chief priority, or the fault of the people in the pew who clamor for things other than preaching, two facts remain: preaching must be exegetically based or it is not preaching, and this is not generally done. For this reason the pulpit has lost its power and many turn to other means to get people to church and keep them there.

Over against all this we wish to stress that preaching is the means ordained by God by which God, the Holy Spirit, works His grace in the hearts of the elect in Christ.

5. Jay Adams blames the seminaries for not teaching men how to preach in his book, *Preaching With Purpose*, cf. pp. ix-xiii.

Holy Scripture is perfectly clear on this point. The inspired Apostle writes to the Church at Ephesus:

And he (the crucified, risen, exalted Christ) gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. . . that we. . . may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16).

This passage teaches that Christ gave pastors and teachers to the church to make the saints perfect, complete. The people of God through the work of the ministry are edified, i.e., built up into the body of Jesus Christ. This is what preaching accomplishes.

In response to the schism and party strife in Corinth, Paul stresses that not baptism, but preaching is the chief means of grace. Christ did not send me to baptize, writes Paul, but to preach Christ crucified. The reason for this is that preaching is: "Christ, the power and wisdom of God" and "... it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. . . ." (I Corinthians 1:17-25).

In the marvelous tenth chapter of the Gospel According to John Jesus reveals Himself as the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life and takes it up again for His sheep and Who gathers the sheep into one fold under Himself as the one Shepherd. What distinguishes the sheep of Jesus from all unbelievers is the fact that the sheep hear Jesus' voice, are known of Him, and follow Him (verses 14-30).

The question is, how do the sheep hear the voice of Jesus? How do they hear His voice today? The answer is found in Romans 10:13-15 where we read:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

This passage teaches that in order to be saved one must call upon the name of the Lord. In order to call upon the name of the Lord one must believe on Him, and in order to believe on the Lord one must hear the Lord.⁶ In order to hear the Lord one must have a preacher who is sent. This

6. The Greek is, *hou ouk eekousan*. The verb *akouoo* takes the genitive object. Thus the correct translation is: "how shall they believe in him whom (not of whom) they have not heard." One must hear Christ Himself in order to believe on Him.

means that we hear the voice of Jesus by means of a preacher called, qualified, ordained by Christ through the church. This is the means God chooses to use to work faith in the hearts of His people enabling them to call upon His name and be saved. This is utterly crucial, for it means that without preaching there can be no believing, and without believing there can be no calling upon the name of the Lord, and without calling upon the name of the Lord there can be no salvation. John Calvin asserted this strongly:

God might himself have performed this work, if he had chosen; but he has committed it to the *ministry* of men. This is intended to anticipate an objection. "Cannot the church be constituted and properly arranged, without the instrumentality of men?" Paul asserts that a *ministry* is required, because such is the will of God.

For the edifying of the body of Christ. This is the same thing with what he had formerly denominated the *settlement* or *perfecting of the saints*. Our true completeness and perfection consist in our being united in the one body of Christ. No language more highly commendatory of the ministry of the word could have been employed, than to ascribe to it this effect. What is more excellent than to produce the true and complete perfection of the church? And yet this work, so admirable and divine, is here declared by the apostle to be accomplished by the external ministry of the word. That those who neglect this instrument should hope to become perfect in Christ is utter madness. Yet such are the fanatics, on the one hand, who pretend to be favoured with secret revelations of the Spirit, — and proud men, on the other, who imagine that to them the private reading of the Scriptures is enough, and that they have no need of the ordinary ministry of the church.

If the edification of the church proceeds from Christ alone, he has surely a right to prescribe in what manner it shall be edified. But Paul expressly states, that, according to the command of Christ, no real union or perfection is attained, but by the outward preaching. We must allow ourselves to be ruled and taught by men. This is the universal rule, which extends equally to the highest and to the lowest. The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry. Those who neglect or despise this order choose to be wiser than Christ. Woe to the pride of such men! It is, no doubt, a thing in itself possible that divine influence alone should make us perfect without human assistance. But the present inquiry is not what the power of God can accomplish, but what is the will of God and the appointment of Christ. In employing human instruments for accomplishing their salvation, God has conferred on men no ordinary favour. Nor can any exercise be found better adapted to promote unity than to gather around the common doctrine — the standard of our General.⁷

7. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), pp. 281-282.

The Reformed Confessions freely bind us to this truth. The *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches that the Son of God gathers His elect out of the world by means of His Spirit and Word (XXI, q. 54). The *Catechism* also insists that the Holy Spirit works faith by the preaching of the gospel (XXV, q. 65). Preaching is one of the keys by which the Kingdom is opened to believers and shut to unbelievers (XXXI, q. 83, 84). The *Catechism* also insists that images are not to be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity because we must not pretend to be wiser than God who will have His people taught not by dumb images but by the lively preaching of His Word (XXXV, q. 98).

With the *Belgic Confession of Faith* we believe that: (1) faith is wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God (XXIV), (2) preaching is one of the marks of the true church (XXIX), and (3) there must be ministers to preach the Word. . . that by these means the true religion may be preserved (XXX).

The Canons of Dordrecht (1618-1619) teach that the promise and command of the gospel ought to be published and declared to all nations and persons promiscuously to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel (II, 5). *The Canons* also declare that just as God uses means to prolong and support our natural life so God uses means to nourish and support our spiritual life. And the means God uses are the admonitions of the preaching of the gospel (III, IV; 17).

The Reformed tradition maintains, therefore, that preaching is the chief means by which God works His grace in the hearts of His elect in Christ and preserves them to everlasting life and glory. If we as Protestant Reformed Churches are to continue to be a Confessionally Reformed church it is absolutely necessary that we hold fast to this biblical truth. Preaching is not merely a "monologic address" as Kraft and others maintain. Preaching is much more than a lecture on some doctrine of the Bible. Preaching is that unique, mysterious miracle by which God uses a sinful, weak man in the way of expounding Holy Scripture to "save them that believe!" By the means of preaching, the sheep of Christ hear His voice and, hearing His voice, they know and follow the Good Shepherd into life eternal.

This truth means that, as to its content, preaching must declare and proclaim nothing less than and nothing more than the Word of God. And, because this is true, preaching must be exegetical or expository. Preaching must explain the plain, simple, yet utterly profound meaning of the Word of God as that Word applies to every sphere of human life and meets every need of the child of God.

We are convinced that this truth, *viz.*, that preaching is the chief means

of grace ordained by God "to save them that believe," belongs to the traditions to which we must hold fast (cf. II Thessalonians 2:15). This being the case, it is crucial that we by the grace of God maintain this truth. Preaching must remain central in our liturgy; it must continue to be the main element in our worship. Our people are exposed to the influences of the false teachings concerning preaching. Some of them too are critical of the preaching in our churches. Some of our people complain that sermons are too long or too deep or not practical or too doctrinal in their content. Sometimes they ask, "why may not we have the choir sing during worship?" or "why may not we have this or that introduced into our worship services?" Let us never yield to these criticisms. In the unshakable confidence that it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, let us never be ashamed of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 1:16).

There are at least three utterly crucial implications of this truth. Ministers must make preaching their chief priority and take this work seriously. It takes diligent, hard work and much study of the Word of God and much prayer to make sermons which truly expound the Word. Elders must insist on good preaching and on the faithful attendance of the members of the church upon the means of grace. Believers too must, in the office of believer, insist on good preaching, and they must "diligently frequent the house of God on the Lord's Day" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. XXXVIII). Not merely the well being, but the very existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches as confessionally Reformed churches depends on this!

* * * * *

The question now is: what is the proper or correct method of constructing a sermon? There are several different methods of sermon construction which have been and still are used. There is the analytical method. The preacher who uses this method typically explains a passage phrase by phrase, and sometimes even word by word, following the order of the passage. This method has this advantage that it adheres strictly to the text. The weakness or disadvantage is that while the various phrases, clauses, and words of the text are explained, the message of the text tends to be lost. There is also the synthetic method. The preacher who uses this approach selects a topic or subject on which to preach and then searches for a text or several texts on which to develop the subject. If preaching must expound (exegete) the text of Scripture (and it must), then this method has nothing for which to commend itself. The topical approach found its way into the pulpits of the liberal churches of the nineteenth century and is still being used in churches of that tradition

today. It ought never be used. Preaching must never become dogmatic lectures. There are two combinations of the above described methods: the analytical-synthetic and the synthetic-analytical. According to the former, the theme is taken from the text while the divisions are topics. According to the latter, the theme is topical while the divisions are taken from the text. The weaknesses which apply to the analytical and the synthetic methods apply as well to the two combinations of these.

There is also the art homily or thematic method. According to this method a text (a single verse or several verses), containing one complete thought, is selected. The main thought of the text is expressed in the theme, and the theme is divided logically into two or more points logically along the lines of the text itself. It is simply a fact that the majority, if not all, of the theologians in the Dutch Reformed tradition advocated the art homily or thematic style of preaching (cf. the impressive list of theologians and preachers given earlier in this paper). Why is this? What were their reasons for adopting this approach to preaching?

The answer, we believe, is that the very nature of Scripture itself demands this method of sermon construction. In this connection there are several essential truths concerning Scripture to which we are all committed. Scripture, according to its own testimony and the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirits, is verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit (II Timothy 3:16, 17; II Peter 1:20, 21). Because Holy Scripture is verbally inspired it reveals the very Word of God Himself. Because Holy Scripture reveals the very Word of God it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, and it must be preached in and out of season (II Timothy 3:16, 17; 4:1-3). Holy Scripture is the only and absolute rule for the faith and life of the child of God. To Holy Scripture nothing may be added and from Holy Scripture nothing may be subtracted (Revelation 22:18, 19). Because Holy Scripture is the verbally inspired Word of God, the absolute rule for the faith and life of the Christian, Holy Scripture is an organism, a unity.

This means that Holy Scripture, from beginning to end and in all of its parts and details, reveals the Sovereign God, the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, the Redeemer of His people in Jesus Christ. Each book of the Bible, each chapter, each text contributes a facet of that one great truth.⁸ Genesis One, for example, is not merely a narrative in-

8. This is why we, with the Reformers (Calvin *et. al.*), insist on the principle: *Scriptura Scripturae Interpres*. Because Scripture is its own interpreter, no text or passage may ever be preached out of its context. The preacher must preach the text in the immediate context of the chapter and book, but also in the context of the whole of Scripture.

forming us of the origin of the universe. The first chapter of the Bible reveals the beginning of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This chapter informs us of the beginning of the unfolding of God's counsel in Jesus Christ in time and history. From this point of view Genesis One is about God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The narratives concerning King David are not merely interesting stories about one of the greatest kings of Israel, from which stories some moral implication may be drawn. These narratives reveal David as a type of Christ, the eternal King of the church. We quite agree with Peter Y. DeJong who emphasizes that Scripture stresses one, central message, *viz.*, Christ crucified. DeJong points out that each part of Scripture (book, chapter, text) has its unique message and purpose within the context of THE MESSAGE of Holy Scripture. In this connection DeJong argues convincingly that the reconstructive approach (art homily, thematic) is to be preferred because "it allows for adopting the better qualities of each of the other four (analytical, synthetic, analytical-synthetic, synthetic-analytical –RDD) without falling into some of their weaknesses," and "it aims at making clear *the message* (emphasis mine, RDD) of the text."⁹ Similarly Herman Hoeksema stressed that the sermon must "... proclaim the whole counsel of God on the basis of Holy Scripture from the viewpoint of a particular text or passage."¹⁰ Simon Blocker, who taught Homiletics at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, emphasized the same point:

Thematic Christian preaching is thus primarily concerned with what the Bible says and means from the standpoint of its main Divine intention. The Bible is always to be regarded as the record of God's self-revelation. . . . Thematic Christian preaching stresses Biblical content as well as sermon organization and structure. The content of Christian preaching must serve the total significance of Biblical revelation. A verse or passage of Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of its context.¹¹

Because he believed that a verse or passage of Scripture could be interpreted correctly only when done so in the light of its context, Blocker emphasizes the necessity of a thematic approach to sermon construction:

9. Peter Y. DeJong, *Homiletics: A Class Syllabus* (Orange City, Iowa: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 1983), pp. 249-262.

10. Herman Hoeksema, *Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1975), p. 12.

11. Simon Blocker, *The Secret of Pulpit Power Through Thematic Christian Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), pp. 14-15.

A preacher, being under the most solemn obligation to preach the Word of God, is by so much under the abiding necessity of finding out what the main idea of a Scripture verse or passage is. . . . The first effort to construct a theme for a sermon is only the beginning of resolute determination to pursue the quest of a theme by repeated reconstruction. A sentence is wanted which is worthy of the content of a particular Scripture chosen and of the Bible as a whole.¹²

Samuel Volbeda, when giving his reasons for advocating the "analytic-synthetic" method (art homily, RDD), as the best method, concludes: "This method, then, combines in a beautiful manner, perfect loyalty to the Word of God in general and to the particular text in hand."¹³ One finds this same emphasis on the unity and the one central message of Holy Scripture in the writings of Dr. Carl Kromminga, Prof. William Heyns, Dr. T. Hoekstra (Kampen), Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and Dr. J.J. VanOosterzee.¹⁴ All of these men proceeded on the basis of this truth to advocate the art homily or thematic method of sermon construction.

It may be argued, therefore, that the art homily is the method advocated in the Reformed tradition. From the point of view of sermon style or construction this is the Reformed view of preaching. Whether this method ought to be followed slavishly with every text or passage and with every "genre," type, or kind of passage or text is another question. Life is bigger than rules and we ought not be rigid in our approach to making a sermon. It may be that the analytical approach is more effective with some of the narrative portions of Scripture or with some of the parallelism one finds in the poetic writings. However we go about the business of sermon construction we *must* preach the MESSAGE of the text in its context and within the context of the whole of Scripture. Those of us who studied homiletics under Reverend Herman Hoeksema (who received his homiletics instruction from Professor Heyns) will recall how he (and Professor George M. Ophoff) never wearied of insisting that the would-be preachers find the theme of the text and develop that theme logically along the lines of the text. Hoeksema was concerned that the message of the text be clearly proclaimed in the context of THE MESSAGE of Holy Scripture. His successor to the chair of homiletics in our Seminary, the late Professor Homer C. Hoeksema, shared that concern, and he too in-

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 34.

13 Samuel Volbeda, *Homiletical Technique: Of the Art of Sermon Making* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, n.d.), pp. 22-23.

14 Cf. the bibliography for the works of these men.

sisted that his students preach the theme of the text!

For this great, Reformed heritage and preaching tradition we ought to be profoundly thankful to God. May God continue to give us grace to "preach the Word in and out of season" in this fashion, and may God in His mercy continue to use us for the gathering, defending, and preserving of His church in Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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Is Denial of the "Well-Meant Offer" Hyper-Calvinism?

by David J. Engelsma

The doctrinal issue involved in the question, "Is denial of the 'well-meant offer' hyper-Calvinism?" is precisely addressed, and thoroughly explained, by our Lord's teaching in the parable of the wedding of the king's son in Matthew 22:1-14. God calls many men, both Jews and Gentiles, to the salvation that He has prepared in the death and resurrection of His Son. Many of those who are called by the preaching of the gospel refuse

to come: “and they would not come” (v. 3). Some do come to the marriage with the true faith that receives the wedding garment of the imputed righteousness of Christ. The reason for this twofold outcome of the call of God in the preaching of the gospel, Jesus gives in the concluding verse of the parable: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (v. 14).

There is a call of God by the preaching of the gospel to many more persons than those who have been elected. This call, however, is sharply distinguished from the call that God gives to the elect. The parable, thus, warns against hyper-Calvinism on the one hand, which tries to restrict the call to the chosen, and against Arminianism on the other hand, which denies any distinction between the call to the elect and the call to the reprobate. The Reformed doctrine and practice of preaching, obedient to the instruction of Christ in the parable, is concerned to avoid error on either side.

The formulation of the doctrinal issue of the call of the gospel in the question, “Is denial of the ‘well-meant offer’ hyper-Calvinism?” demands some historical background. In the 1920s, controversy erupted in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) over the doctrine of the grace of God – the “common grace” controversy. In adopting the doctrine of common grace, the CRC committed itself to the doctrine that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to all who hear. It denied that God is gracious in the gospel only to the elect. The preaching of the gospel is a “general offer” of grace to all. Several CR ministers dissented from this dogma that the preaching is a gracious offer to all, holding that the grace of God in the preaching is particular – for the elect only. The insistence by the CRC that these men subscribe the doctrine of common grace and the subsequent discipline of them resulted in the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

Because of their objection to the “well-meant offer of the gospel,” the PRC are widely regarded within the Reformed and Presbyterian community as hyper-Calvinists.¹

1. By this time, it is not even a matter of debate, whether the PRC are hyper-Calvinistic. The hyper-Calvinism of the PRC is an established fact. Reformed authorities merely pass the information on to the world in their works. In *On Being Reformed* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1983), I. John Hesselink speaks of “More recent hyper-Calvinists such as Herman Hoeksema (founder of the Protestant Reformed denomination). . .” (p. 133). Under “Hyper-Calvinism” (“an exaggerated or imbalanced type of Reformed theology”), in the recent, popular *New Dictionary of Theology*, Peter Toon identifies the latest hyper-Calvinist: “The most prominent recent theologian is the Dutch-American, Herman Hoeksema, in his *Reformed*

A similar controversy occurred in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in the 1940s. This controversy centered in the person and theology of the well-known philosopher and theologian, Gordon H. Clark. Among the charges brought against Clark by the leading lights in the OPC was that of denying the free offer of the gospel. At that time, the OPC virtually adopted the view of the preaching of the gospel set forth in the report of John Murray and Ned Stonehouse presented to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the OPC in 1948. This view, like the doctrine adopted by the CRC, maintains that the gospel-call is a gracious offer on the part of God to every hearer. The report states that "the full and free offer of the gospel is a grace bestowed upon all."²

The stand of the CRC and of the OPC on the offer has been influential upon other Calvinist churches and thinkers.

The controversy over the nature of the call of the gospel is of more than passing, historical interest. It ought to be of concern to others besides those denominations that have been directly involved. This is evident from the issue itself: Is God gracious in the gospel to all men without exception? Every Christian and every church that professes to believe the sovereign particularity of the grace of God as this particularity is confessed in the "five points of Calvinism," or "doctrines of grace," has an interest, indeed a stake, in the controversy over the "well-meant offer." It is not a minor, peripheral issue.

If it was possible to smother the issue with a blanket of silence in the past, this is no longer possible today. The issue forces itself upon Reformed churches today inasmuch as appeal is made to the "well-meant offer" in order to challenge the traditional Reformed confession of the sovereign particularity of grace. This challenge arises from within the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. It takes dead aim especially at the doctrines of limited atonement and of (double) predestination, election and reprobation.

The Dutch Reformed theologian, M.J. Arntzen, in his book, *De Crisis in de Gereformeerde Kerken* (*The Crisis in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands* — GKN), has called attention to the fact that the notion of the "well-meant offer" has been a powerful means to undermine pre-

Dogmatics. . ." (*New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer, Leicester, England, Intervarsity Press, 1988, pp. 324, 325).

2. *Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1948, Appendix, pp. 51-63.*

destination in the preaching and confession of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands.³

In a recent book on Scottish theology, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, M. Charles Bell shows that the conception of preaching as grace for all has been of decisive influence in introducing universal atonement into Scottish Presbyterianism.⁴

Reformed theologians in the United States, convinced that the Canons of Dordt are in error in their teachings of limited atonement and of reprobation, have argued for a change in the church's thinking from the doctrine of the "well-meant offer." Both by public writing and by official appeal to the church assemblies to change the church's creed, Reformed theologians are contending for universal atonement and for universal election as necessary implications of the "well-meant offer."⁵

Whether in response to these developments or for other reasons, there has been renewed interest in the issue of the nature of the gospel-call in recent years. Calvinists are devoting conferences to the subject.⁶ Articles

3. M.J. Arntzen, *De Crisis in de Gereformeerde Kerken* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1965). Cf. particularly chapter 3, "*De uitverkiezing en de tweerlei bestemming van de mens.*"

4. Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985.

5. For an appeal to the "well-meant offer" in support of universal atonement, cf. the series of articles by Harold Dekker on God's love for all men in the Dec., 1962, Feb., 1963, March, 1963, Dec., 1963, Jan., 1964, March, 1964, May-June, 1964, and Sept., 1964 issues of *The Reformed Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.). Harry R. Boer argues that the "well-meant offer" implies the falsity of the creedal doctrine of reprobation in his *The Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983). Boer's gravamen to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church against the doctrine of reprobation as taught in the Canons of Dordt appears in the "1977 Acts of Synod" of the CRC, pp. 665ff

6. Especially Baptists who claim to be Calvinistic because of their adherence to the "doctrines of grace" are holding conferences at which the offer is defended. At such a conference in New Jersey in 1985, a paper was given entitled, "The Crux of the Free Offer: God's Indiscriminate desire for the Salvation of Sinners," in which the PRC's rejection of the "well-meant offer" was criticized as hyper-Calvinism. A similar conference was held in New Jersey in October, 1989. Apparently, certain "Calvinistic Baptists" are now taking it upon themselves to add a section on common grace to the Baptist Confession of Faith, which is an adaptation of the Westminster Confession to Baptist purposes. The proposed section on common grace that is to be added includes the statement that common grace's "ultimate expression is his (God's) sincere and benevolent offer of mercy and salvation from sin through Jesus Christ, made to sinners indiscriminately, to elect and reprobate sinners alike, through the Gospel."

on the offer appear frequently in religious periodicals. In 1978, the Australian Presbyterian, K.W. Stebbins, published the book, *Christ Freely Offered*, in which he subjected the PR doctrine of the call of the gospel to sharp criticism and vigorously defended the "well-meant offer."⁷ Although a few Calvinists are fearful of some of the stronger expressions by the defenders of the "well-meant offer," with rare exception the consensus among Reformed and Presbyterians is that the denial of the "well-meant offer" by the PRC is hyper-Calvinism.

My concern in this article, however, is not the defense of the PRC against the charge of hyper-Calvinism. I admit that I find it irksome always to be dismissed out of hand as a hyper-Calvinist and that I feel keenly the reproach of this charge, especially because there has been a deviation from Calvinism that may with good right be condemned as hyper-Calvinism. But as a lover, not primarily of certain churches, but of the Reformed and Presbyterian faith, my concern here is with the issue itself. I will defend that view of preaching which denies the "well-meant offer" against the charge of hyper-Calvinism. My purpose is that some who suppose that denial of the "well-meant offer" is departure from genuine Calvinism may reconsider, especially those who are troubled by the apostasy of Reformed churches from the great, creedal doctrines of sovereign, particular grace. They should subject the "well-meant offer," so often uncritically accepted as a legitimate element of Reformed truth, to careful examination.

It is part of my purpose that men be clear as to the exact nature of the PR denial of the "well-meant offer." Ours is a denial that arises out of the Reformed faith itself, that is in perfect harmony with all aspects of the Reformed faith (including the serious, external call to all who come under the preaching!), and that is made for the sake of the maintenance of the Reformed faith. It is not a rejection of the church's duty to preach the gospel to all men indiscriminately. We believe that the many must be called.

Since the attack on the denial of the "well-meant offer" is three-pronged, accusing the denial of being unreformed as to doctrine, as to logic, and as to practice, my defense of the denial of the "well-meant offer" is threefold: doctrinal, logical, and practical.

7. Strathpine North, Australia: Covenanter Press.

Defense of the Denial of the "Well-meant Offer" Against the Charge that It is Unreformed Doctrinally

Let us begin by having clearly in mind the positions in this controversy over the preaching of the gospel. By the "well-meant offer" is meant the conception, or doctrine, of the preaching of the blessed gospel in Calvinistic circles that holds that God sends the gospel to all who hear out of an attitude of grace to them all and with the desire to save them all. The "well-meant offer" insists, at the very least, on these two notions: God is gracious in the preaching to all hearers; and God has a will, or sincere desire, for the salvation of every man who hears the gospel. Whenever I speak of the "offer" in this article, I have reference to this conception of the preaching of the gospel.

I deliberately refrain from describing the offer in terms of its implications. It has been charged against the offer by its foes that it necessarily implies universal atonement and the freedom of the natural human will. Even though I firmly believe this to be the case and even though of late certain friends of the offer have been agreeing that the offer does indeed imply universal atonement, I do not here describe or criticize the offer with respect to its implications. One reason is that some advocates of the offer, who reject these implications and deny that they are implications of the offer, complain that attacking the offer in terms of these alleged implications is unfair, is in fact attacking a straw man. Louis Berkhof made this complaint already in 1925 in his defense of the "well-meant offer" in his booklet, "The Three Points (of Common Grace) in All Respects Reformed."⁸

Therefore, I rigorously restrict myself to that which every advocate of the offer himself champions as sound, Reformed truth about the preaching and denial of which, according to the advocate of the offer, brands a church with the ignominious mark of hyper-Calvinism: God's gracious attitude towards all and a will of God for the salvation of all.

Just as the offer must be carefully and fairly described, so also must the denial of the offer by the PRC be honestly treated. The PRC do not deny that the gospel is to be preached to all men, or that the preaching includes a call to all hearers without exception, to repent and believe on Jesus Who is presented in the gospel, or that the promise of God, that every one who does believe shall be saved, must be declared to all. But their rejection of the offer is the denial that the preaching goes out to all who hear from a

8. *De Drie Punten in Alle Deelen Gereformeerd* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.).

gracious attitude of God towards them all and with a will of God to save all. In short, these churches deny that the preaching of the gospel is grace to all who hear it. The basic question in the controversy is this: Is God in Jesus Christ gracious in the gospel to all who hear the preaching? The answer of the PRC is an unqualified, emphatic "no!" Neither is there a gracious operation of the Spirit of Christ upon the heart of the reprobate who hears the preaching, nor is there a gracious attitude in the Father of Jesus Christ towards the reprobate who comes under the preaching.

This opposition to the "well-meant offer" on account of the offer's doctrine of universal grace must be sharply distinguished from the denial that the gospel must be preached to all men indiscriminately and from a refusal to call all who hear the gospel to repent and believe. Certain Baptists, especially in England, have limited the preaching of the gospel and the call of the gospel, "Believe on Jesus Christ!" to the regenerated. They have argued that preaching to all indiscriminately and calling all without exception to repent and believe would contradict the basic tenets of Calvinism, namely, limited atonement and total depravity.⁹ This is not the position of the PRC. Nor may the position of the PRC be confused with this view. Restriction of the preaching, and particularly of the gospel-call, to those who give evidence of election by their regeneration is a real hyper-Calvinism. It is disobedience to the command that God gives the church in Matthew 22:9: "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, call to the marriage." It is exposed as erroneous by verse 14 of Matthew 22, "many are called, but few are chosen." The objection of the PRC to the offer is not at all that the offer requires that the gospel be preached to all, or that the offer insists that all be called to believe on Christ. But the objection is that the offer holds that this preaching and calling are grace to all.

Denial of the offer by the PRC arises from a certain view of gospel-preaching. First, the church must preach the gospel to all people to whom God sends her, both within the congregation and on the mission field. This preaching consists of exposing the misery of all because of sin against the just and holy God; of proclaiming Jesus Christ as God's Way out of this misery; of calling all to come to Jesus; and of announcing the sure promise of God that whosoever believes shall be saved, as well as the warning that every one who rejects Jesus abides under the wrath of God.

9. On these theologians and churches and their doctrine, cf. David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), pp. 9ff.

It should be noted that on the view of preaching held by the PRC the church does not proclaim a love of God for all, a death of Christ for all, a grace of God to all, a will of God for the salvation of all, or the promise of God to all.

Second, this indiscriminate preaching of the gospel is strictly controlled by, and carries out, the sovereign, eternal predestination of God, His election and reprobation. God makes the preaching of His church His powerful, indeed effectual, instrument of salvation for every elect in the audience by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the elect. God withholds the Holy Spirit from the reprobate in the audience (and, of course, church and preacher are altogether ignorant, who they may be), in order that they not be converted by the preaching. Rather, He exposes their wickedness, renders them inexcusable, and hardens them in their sin, without infringing in the slightest upon their responsibility.

Accordingly, in the third place, denial of the offer makes a crucially important distinction between the call that comes in the preaching to God's elect and the call that comes to the non-elect, or reprobate. The calls are not the same. God does not call all men alike. God calls the elect, through the preaching, with the life-giving, converting, and irresistibly drawing Spirit in their hearts, whereas He calls the reprobate only with the external Word. He calls the elect out of grace, the grace with which He chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, whereas He calls the reprobate in divine righteousness, requiring of them their duty, namely, repentance and faith. He calls the elect with the will to save them, whereas His will with the call of the reprobate is both their exposure as depraved rebels and the illustration of the sheer graciousness of His choice and saving calling of the elect.

The preaching of the gospel is grace only to the elect.

This doctrine is repudiated by Reformed and Presbyterian churches as hyper-Calvinism. It is not genuinely Reformed Christianity, but an aberration, if not a heresy. It goes beyond true Calvinism. It forces Calvinism to such an extreme that the result is a distortion, a caricature, of Calvinism. This position has overdone the sovereignty of God. It has overemphasized divine predestination; and it has done so in the crucial matter of the preaching of the gospel.

Denial of the offer is unreformed doctrinally.

Against this charge, our defense is, first, that the view of preaching that denies the offer is the Reformed tradition. This was the view of preaching of John Calvin. In his commentaries, in the *Institutes*, and in the powerful treatises that he wrote near the end of his life on providence and predestination, Calvin taught that the preaching of the gospel is controlled

by the decree of predestination. Calvin also taught that the effectual, saving call of the elect is to be sharply distinguished from the outward preaching that comes to the reprobate, unaccompanied by the internal work of the Spirit. Typical is what the Reformer wrote in the *Institutes*, 3.24, treating of the confirmation of election by the calling of God. His opening words are, "But that the subject may be more fully illustrated, we must treat both of the calling of the elect, and of the blinding and hardening of the ungodly." He continues: "... the preaching of the gospel springs from the fountain of election." In section 18, with reference to Jesus' words in Matthew 22:14, Calvin states, "... there are two species of calling — for there is a universal call, by which God through the external preaching of the word, invites all men alike, even those for whom He designs the call to be a savor of death, and the ground of a severer condemnation. Besides this there is a special call which... God bestows on believers only..." Having asked the question, "Why, then, while bestowing grace on the one, does He (God) pass by the other?" Calvin explains, "because (the one) was ordained to eternal life," whereas the other was "vessel of wrath unto dishonor."

The view of preaching that denies the "well-meant offer" is the classic Reformed position as described in Heinrich Heppe's authoritative volume on the Reformed tradition, *Reformed Dogmatics*.¹⁰ In Chapter XX, Heppe gives the orthodox, Reformed teaching on "Calling." The saving "calling," writes Heppe, "is imparted only to the elect" (p. 512). Heppe stresses the sharp distinction that Reformed theology has made between the call of the elect ("the internal call") and the call of the reprobate ("the external call"): "So there must be a distinction between the external call and the internal call" (p. 513). Reflecting Reformed thought, Heppe then denies that God calls the non-elect with the purpose of saving them: "Moreover outward Church calling is not imparted to the non-elect in such wise that God wished to present them with faith... Otherwise the possibility would arise of a counsel of God being perhaps rendered futile by man..." (p. 513).

This was a prominent view of preaching in the Dutch Reformed tradition that came down from the Secession (*Afscheiding*) of 1834 in the Netherlands. Professor C. Veenhof has pointed this out in his book, *Prediking en uitverkiezing (Preaching and Election)*. Veenhof acknowledges that a very prominent theology in this tradition, if not the dominant theology, was that which denied the "well-meant offer" and held

10. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950.

preaching and sacraments to be grace only for the elect. This was the view held by the best theologian of the Secession, Simon VanVelzen. What makes this admission all the more significant is that Veenhof himself, a theologian of the “Liberated” Churches, does not favor such a doctrine of preaching. He explains its presence in the churches of the Secession as the carry-over of “scholasticism” into these churches.¹¹

However one may explain it, the fact is that the denial of the offer has an honorable pedigree. With good right, it may claim to represent the Reformed tradition. Those who dismiss it out of hand as a novelty only show their own ignorance of the Reformed tradition.

Far more important for our defense is the appeal to the creeds. The Reformed faith is a confessional religion. The creeds are authoritative.

It is absolutely not to be found in “The Three Forms of Unity” that God sends out the gospel in grace for every human without exception and with the sincere desire to save every child of Adam. But the doctrine that lies on the very face of the Canons of Dordt in particular (and the Canons, we remember, are only an explanation of the doctrine contained in the Catechism and in the Confession) is that God’s will unto salvation, and His grace, are for the elect alone (Head I) and that this gracious will is realized by the effectual call of the gospel (Heads III/IV, 10). The entire, massive weight of the Canons comes down on the side of the denial of the offer and against the “well-meant offer” in its essential elements: a grace of God in Jesus towards every human; a will of God to save every human by Jesus; preaching as an offer made in love and with the desire to save to every sinner without exception.

The only possible appeals to the Canons by the defenders of the offer are to the use of the term, “offer,” in III/IV, 9 (“Christ offered therein,” i.e., in the gospel) and to the statement in the preceding Article that all who are called by the gospel are “unfeignedly,” i.e., seriously, called. The use of the term, “offer,” proves nothing for the “well-meant offer,” since the Latin word, *offero*, which the fathers of Dordt used, simply meant “set forth” or “present.” No one denies that Jesus is presented in the gospel to all who hear the preaching. What must be proved is the new

11. Kampen: J.H. Kok N.V., 1959. Chapter 3 is entitled, “Strijd over de ‘Walmenende Aanbieding’” (“Controversy over the ‘Well-meant Offer’”). The PRC ought to do more with the history and doctrinal controversies of the Secession. Veenhof shows that Kok, Joffers, and VanVelzen, prominent preachers and theologians of the Secession, fought for a particular promise and for particular grace in the gospel and in the sacraments, repudiating as unreformed the notion of a “well-meant offer” advanced by other ministers of the Secession.

meaning that has been poured into "offer" by advocates of the "well-meant offer," namely, that it expresses love for all and the will to save all. The appeal to the mere use of the word, "offer," in the Canons for this is little short of desperate.

That God is serious in the external call to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect, does not mean, or even imply, that He wishes all to be saved, but rather means that He commands all to believe on Christ, and that this command is in dead earnest. Coming to God by believing in Jesus is the solemn obligation of every man who hears the gospel. This pleases God. All those called to the marriage in Matthew 22 ought to have come. Those who refuse bring down on themselves the wrath of God for their refusal. Unbelief displeases God. God can be serious in commanding someone to do his duty, even though God has willed that he not obey the command and even though God uses the command itself to harden him in his disobedience. Think only of Jehovah's dealings with Pharaoh in Exodus 4-14, as explained by Paul in Romans 9:17-23.

The Westminster Confession of Faith is in full agreement with the Canons of Dordt in limiting the gracious call to the elect. Chapter III teaches that God's eternal and free will is that the elect, and the elect only, be effectually called to Christ. Chapter V teaches that God "withholdeth His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened," from the reprobate wicked so that "they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others." Thus, God accomplishes His purpose to "blind and harden" these persons. Chapter X strictly limits God's desire for the salvation of men to "those whom God hath predestinated unto life." To them alone is God gracious "by His Word and Spirit." The "others not elected" are only "called by the ministry of the Word," and "cannot be saved."

In the light of this overwhelming testimony of Westminster to the particularity of the will of God unto salvation and to the particularity of God's grace, precisely in the matter of the preaching of the gospel, for defenders of the "well-meant offer" to appeal to the mere mention of the word, "offer," in Chapter VII, in support of their notion of a universal will of God unto salvation and of universal grace in the preaching, borders on the ludicrous. There is indeed an exhibiting and presenting of Jesus to sinners as the source of life and salvation under the covenant of grace. The blessings of salvation in Christ are proclaimed as free gifts to every one who receives them by believing. This is the meaning of the phrase, "He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ. . ."; and this is Reformed orthodoxy. That it is a mistake to discover in the phrase the teaching that God desires the salvation of all and extends to all His grace

is evident from the words that immediately follow: “. . . and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” As God freely offers life and salvation under the covenant of grace, His purpose, will, and desire is to give life and salvation to the elect only. In the gospel, His promise is to the elect only. And by the gospel, which freely offers life to sinners, He gives (not only “presents,” but also “conveys”) grace to the elect, to make them believe.

It is a curious thing that professing Calvinists, zealous for the “well-meant offer,” hold up the phrase in the Westminster Confession, VII, III, “freely offereth,” as though it were the very essence of Westminster’s doctrine of the calling, indeed the only thing that Westminster has to say on the calling, while ignoring not only all that Westminster teaches elsewhere on the effectual call but also that which Westminster says about the particular promise in this very article.

If the Reformed tradition is weighty and the Reformed creeds are authoritative, Scripture is decisive in our defense of the denial of the offer. The Bible makes preaching dependent upon predestination; distinguishes between the call of the elect and the call of the others; and describes the preaching of the gospel as the effectual means of grace to the elect alone. This is the doctrine of the Chief Prophet and Great Evangelist Himself in Matthew 22:1-14, which concludes with the words, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” There is a difference between the call of the many and the call of the few, a difference that explains why the many do not come to Christ, whereas the few do come. This difference is due to God’s election of the few, in distinction from the many who do not come.

God indeed calls the many. By His preachers, He says, “All of My salvation is prepared now in the death and resurrection of My Son, Jesus: Come, by believing on Him.” But He does not call them according to election. Therefore, He does not call them out of grace. He does not call them with the will to save them. He does not call them in such a way that He draws them by the Holy Spirit.

The few, on the other hand, He does call out of love, with the will that they be saved, and by teaching them in their hearts concerning their own need and concerning the riches of the marriage-banquet. The reason for this effectual, saving call is election: The few were eternally chosen.

It is an aspect of our defense of the denial of the “well-meant offer” that we take the offensive: We charge, in dead earnest, that the offer is the Arminian view of gospel-preaching.

The Arminians of the 17th century set forth their conception of

preaching in their "Opinions," delivered to the Synod of Dordt in 1618.¹² They said this about the preaching of the gospel:

1) In the preaching, God confers, or is ready to confer, grace to every man.

2) God is serious in calling every person who hears the gospel because He calls "with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save."

3) God does not "call the reprobate to these ends: that He should the more harden them, or take away excuse. . . or display their inability." These are not the purposes of God in calling the "reprobate" since for the Arminians God calls all alike to "these ends," namely, "that they should be converted, should believe, and should be saved."

4) In summary, God calls all alike out of grace and with the sincere desire, or will, to save.

This doctrine of preaching was fundamental to the entire Arminian theology. To give the devil his due, the Arminians themselves forthrightly pointed this out in Article 9 of their confession "concerning the grace of God and the conversion of man":

There is not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word that according to it (that is, the secret will) He does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom He seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel and by His revealed will; and we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.¹³

On the Arminian view of preaching, there cannot be a decree of predestination in God excluding any from salvation. And if there is no decree of predestination, as confessed by Reformed orthodoxy, neither is there any of the other of "the five points of Calvinism."

The PRC see the "well-meant offer" of professing Calvinists as identical with the Arminian doctrine of preaching in at least two basic respects: grace for all in the gospel of Christ and a divine will for the salvation of all. It is incontrovertible that the offer teaches — does not imply, but teaches — that God's grace in the preaching is resistible, *and resisted*, and that God's will for the salvation of sinners is frustrated. Many towards whom grace is directed in the preaching successfully refuse it; and many whom God desires to save perish.

12. Cf. *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, Peter Y. DeJong, editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), pp. 221ff.

13. *Crisis*, DeJong, p. 227.

Indeed, we ask the defender of the offer, "On this view why are some saved by the gospel, and others not?" The answer cannot be God's grace and God's will, for His grace and His will to save are the same both to those who are saved and to those who perish. The answer must be the will of the sinner — free will. The "well-meant offer" is forced to rewrite Matthew 22:14: "For many are called, but few choose."

A customary response by Reformed defenders of the offer to this attack on the offer has been the appeal to "mystery" and "paradox." How the offer harmonizes with predestination is a "sacred mystery," unknown and unknowable. Defenders of the offer condemn denial of the offer as unreformed logically, i.e., they criticize the PRC's use of logic in theological thinking.

Defense of the Denial of the "Well-Meant Offer"

Against the Charge that It is Unreformed Logically

Presbyterian and Reformed churches that defend the offer necessarily hold that God is, at one and the same time, gracious to all men and gracious only to some men, and that God, at one and the same time, wills that a certain man be saved and wills that that man be damned. Predestination has them teaching the one thing; and the offer has them teaching the other thing. This, they admit, is seeming contradiction — a "paradox." This does not embarrass them, for Reformed, biblical truth (so they argue) is paradoxical, illogical, and "mysterious."

The contention of those who deny the offer is that the God of the Reformed doctrine of predestination cannot be gracious in the gospel to all, and that the God Who has willed the salvation of some and the damnation of others cannot will to save all by the gospel. Particular grace in the gospel is in accord with the particular grace of predestination. The definite will of God for men's salvation in the gospel is in accord with His definite will in predestination (and, for that matter, with His definite will in the limited atonement of our Savior). The truth of the Reformed faith is consistent, harmonious, and logical.

Upon this aspect of the denial of the offer falls severest condemnation by the broad Reformed community: "scholasticism!" "rationalism!" "too logical!" "hyper-Calvinism!"

The denial of the "well-meant offer" is unreformed, because it is theologically logical.

We have listened to the charge. We have considered it carefully. And we are constrained by the love of God's own truth to defend the denial of the offer against this charge.

We do not hold the view of the calling that we do because we think it

logical, but because we think it biblical and creedal. Nevertheless, we regard the rational, non-contradictory, logical character of the doctrine as evidence of its truthfulness, rather than as proof of its falsity. That the denial of the offer harmonizes not only with such doctrines as predestination, limited atonement, and efficacious grace but also with Scripture's teachings about God's sovereignty, the power of preaching, and the bondage of the natural human will does not render it suspect, but rather commends it.

The truth of the Bible – Christianity – is rational, non-contradictory, and logical. The Triune God is rational, non-contradictory, and logical. For this is the nature of His revelation in Scripture; and this revelation makes Him known as He is. Jesus Christ is "the Word," according to John 1:1ff., literally, "the Logos," (whence our "logic," so that even linguistically "logical" does not have to hang its head in shame among Christians) – "the logical, non-contradictory Word of God." Because Jesus is the logical Word, He can declare God to us humans (v. 18). If He were sheer paradox, an utterly illogical Word, a Jesus Whose word to us is "yes and no," we could know nothing of God, salvation, or heavenly reality (which is exactly the condition of much of the nominally Christian church today).

Biblical truth is propositional (to deny this one must repudiate the Bible as such); and this propositional truth is capable of being understood by the mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit, which is to say that it is logical and non-contradictory. Paul argues by reasoning from premises to conclusions, a procedure based on the logical character of divine truth. John instructs by contrasting opposites, a procedure based on the non-contradictory character of divine truth. And every human instrument of the Author of Scripture teaches on the basis of the fact that a thing cannot both be and not be, or be true and false, in one and the same respect.

The truth of the Christian religion, although it exceeds human comprehension, does not mock our minds. Although Christianity is, finally, supra-rational, it is not irrational. Although it ends in our adoration of the God Whose judgments are unsearchable and Whose ways, past finding out, Christianity does not end in our despairing of knowing anything at all about His judgments and ways.

In our view of the logical nature of truth, we have the whole, great weight of Christian tradition on our side. Read Augustine. Read especially Augustine's close argumentation in his anti-Pelagian writings. Listen to Luther say at Worms, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture *and plain reason*. . . I cannot and will not recant. . . ." Read the church's creeds, not only the Reformed creeds, but also the ecumenical creeds. They are logical (and ominously all are being discredited today as "philosophical")

and “scholastic”). Consider the Westminster Confession’s view of the nature of biblical truth when it says in Chapter I, VI, “The whole counsel of God... is either expressly set down in scripture, *or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture. . . .*” Deduction of the counsel of God by good and necessary consequence is an absolute impossibility unless Scripture is logical.

Jesus is perfectly logical in Matthew 22:14 with regard to the matter at issue: the call of the gospel. First, the very fact that He *explains* the twofold effect of the call shows Jesus to be a logical thinker (if truth is illogical, explanations are ruled out): “*For many are called, but few are chosen.*” Second, the explanation is the difference in the call itself, corresponding to God’s differing purpose with the different objects of the call – a logical explanation: The “few,” He calls according to election; whereas the “many” are called only outwardly, without any divine love or will to save.

It is part of our defense of the denial of the offer that we take the offensive against the offer. We charge that the offer involves a Calvinist in sheer contradiction. That God is gracious only to some in predestination, but gracious to all in the gospel, and that God wills only some to be saved in predestination, but wills all to be saved by the gospel, is flat, irreconcilable contradiction. It is not paradox, but contradiction. I speak reverently: God Himself cannot reconcile these teachings. Nor is there any similarity between this contradiction and the truth of the Trinity that surpasses our understanding. The truth of the Trinity is not contradictory, for it holds that God is one *in being* and three *in persons*, not, therefore, one and three in the very same respects.

There is no relief for the sheer contradiction in which the offer involves a Calvinist in the doctrine of “common grace,” as though the grace of predestination were a different kind of grace from that revealed in the gospel. For the offer exactly teaches that the grace of God for all *is grace shown in the preaching of the gospel*. This grace is not some non-saving favor directed towards a prosperous earthly life, but saving grace, the grace of God in His dear Son, a grace that desires eternal salvation for all who hear the gospel. The offer proposes universal saving grace – precisely that which is denied by predestination.

Nor is there any relief from this absolute, intolerable contradiction in a distinction between God’s hidden will and God’s revealed will. This is attempted as some kind of explanation and mitigation of the contradiction: The desire to save all (of the offer) is God’s revealed will; the will to save only some (of predestination) is His hidden will. But this effort to relieve the tension of the contradiction in which the offer involves Calvin-

ists gets us nowhere. For one thing, the will of God to save only some and not all is not hidden, but revealed. It is found on every page of Scripture. It is Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:14: God has eternally chosen only some ("few") to be saved, in distinction from the others ("many"). For another thing, the distinction leaves us right where we were before the distinction was invented: God has two, diametrically opposite, conflicting wills.¹⁴

Such teaching is destructive of truth and fatal to knowledge of truth. Such teaching thrusts confusion and strife into the very being of God: Does God, or does He not, desire every human to be saved? Is God, or is He not, in His own being, gracious in Jesus to every human? I make bold to suggest that the god of the offer had a very peculiar way of displaying his grace to all and of carrying out his will to save all in the time of the old covenant, when he showed his word unto Jacob, but did not deal so with any nation (cf. Psalm 147:19, 20). Is it presumptuous humbly to request of the offer-god worshiped by professing Calvinists that he make up his mind between the alternatives of the offer (the will to save all) and of predestination (the will to damn some)?

Fact is, this contradiction cannot and will not be maintained in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The one teaching must drive the other out. The doctrine of the "well-meant offer" will drive out the doctrine of predestination. Universal grace is intolerant of particular grace. The Arminians pointed this out at the very beginning of the effort to introduce universal grace into the Reformed church. Affirming in Article 9 of their "Opinions" that God's revealed will is the salvation of all, they denied any hidden will in God that contradicts this revealed will by decreeing the salvation of the elect only.

Evidence abounds in Reformed churches today that predestination and the offer are incompatible and that embrace of the offer results in repudiation of the theology of predestination. Official decisions are made by Reformed churches in the Netherlands rejecting the double predestination of the Canons of Dordt as "scholasticism" and "determinism."

14 This illicit and impossible distinction between two, opposite wills in God must not be confused with a distinction in the will of God that is taught by Scripture and sanctioned by Reformed tradition: the distinction between the will of God's decree (God's plan, or counsel) and the will of God's command. There is no contradiction between these for God's decree is His decision as to what He will do, whereas His command sets before a man what he ought to do. From God's command, e.g., "Let My people go," it cannot be inferred that it is God's decree that the command shall be obeyed, e.g., that Pharaoh will let the people go.

Synods of Reformed churches in the United States approve the boldest teaching of universal atonement and the sharpest attack on the doctrine of an eternal decree of sovereign reprobation. The most effective rejection of predestination, however, goes on in the preaching and teaching in the congregations and in the churches' work of evangelism. The prevailing message in Reformed pulpits, catechism classes, seminaries, and mission fields is that of a love of God for all, of a death of Christ for all, and of the ardent desire of God to save all. This explains why Reformed churches can cooperate in evangelism with the most notorious free will preachers and organizations. Of reprobation, nothing is heard. Of an election that constitutes one eternal decree with reprobation, nothing is heard. And this means that nothing is heard of Reformed, biblical election. But if nothing is heard of biblical election, silence falls over the doctrines of grace.

Indeed, it is now the rule that Reformed and Presbyterian theologians defend the universalism of the offer by appeal to those texts of Scripture that Pelagius used against Augustine, that Erasmus used against Luther, that Pighius and Bolsec used against Calvin, and that the Arminians used against the Synod of Dordt: Ezekiel 33:11; John 3:16; I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9b. The point is not so much that the defenders of the offer are found in the company of the conditional universalists of all ages, using select texts against the doctrine of unconditional particularism, as it is that their appeal to these texts, on behalf of the offer and against predestination, necessarily involves them in a thorough-going semi-Pelagianism. Their deep attachment to the semi-Pelagian doctrine of universal, conditional grace (despite their avowals of Calvinism) manifests itself in their hostility towards those whose only offense is their faithful confession of the sovereign, particular grace of predestination. They inveigh against these Reformed saints at every opportunity as "harsh hyper-Calvinists."

But denial of the "well-meant offer" destroys good, urgent gospel-preaching. Especially does it make evangelism and missions impossible. Denial of the offer is unreformed *practically*. This is a third charge of the friends of the offer against the denial of the offer.

Defense against the Charge that

Denial of the "Well-meant Offer" is Unreformed Practically

The charge is that a Reformed church that denies the offer cannot preach the gospel to all, cannot call all to believe, cannot do missions. Such a church has no compassion for lost sinners. She intends to preach only to the elect, and can only preach to the elect.

This is a damning indictment. Any doctrine that restricts the preaching

of the gospel in this way is false doctrine. Any doctrine that requires the preacher to ascertain the election of his audience before preaching to them is false doctrine. Any doctrine that binds the church to disobey the "great commission" (Matt. 28:18-20) and that forbids her to command all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) is false doctrine. For God commands the church "Go ye . . . into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, call to the marriage" (Matt. 22:9).

But this is not the doctrine of the PRC in our denial of the offer. It is not intended to be our doctrine. It is not the implication of our doctrine. We have considered the charge that the denial of the offer is unreformed practically and testify before God and men that the charge is false.

Our denial of the offer involves no restriction upon the preaching, no rejection of missions, no embarrassment at calling sinners to Jesus Christ. We believe that the gospel is to be preached everywhere, to everyone "promiscuously and without distinction" (Canons of Dordt, II/5); that the ascended Christ sends the New Testament church out to do missions; and that all who hear the preaching are to be called to come to Christ.

The basis for this, however, is not universal grace and a universal will to salvation, as the "well-meant offer" likes to have Calvinists believe. Rather, the basis is predestination. God has chosen certain persons unto salvation. These persons, found among all peoples in all places, must be gathered unto Christ by the gospel. For their sakes is the gospel preached to all. It is also God's will that the gospel come to the reprobate with whom His elect are mixed in natural life. It is not merely the case that the gospel unavoidably comes to them also, because of their proximity to the elect. But this will of God that the gospel come also to the reprobate is not a will, or desire, that they be saved. For God has eternally rejected them, appointing them to stumble at the Word and perish (I Pet. 2:8). But they have an obligation to believe on Jesus Christ (even though they are unable to do so by virtue of their bound wills). And God wills to expose their outrageous wickedness, render them inexcusable, and harden them, as "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22), for His own glory and to illustrate the sheer graciousness of His effectual call to the elect.

All of this is to say that the necessity, the freedom, the promiscuousness, and the urgency of the preaching of the gospel are not *in spite of* election, but *because of* election.

We appeal to the teaching of our Savior in Matthew 22:1-14. Although only few are chosen, many must be called. This condemns all hyper-Calvinistic restriction of preaching to the elect, or to the regenerated, or to the "sensible sinner." Election in no wise hampers the promiscuous

preaching or the serious call to all. But neither may the call of the many ignore, or conflict with, or destroy the election of the few. The sole saving purpose of God with the call of the many is the salvation of the few. The preaching of the gospel has its source, basis, and reason in the election of the church.

Having defended the denial of the offer against the unfounded and unjust charge that it restricts preaching, we may be permitted to put the hard question to those who criticize the denial of the offer as making missions impossible: Do they really want to maintain that a faithful carrying out of Christ's command to the church to preach the gospel is impossible apart from universal grace and a universal will to salvation? This is what the defenders of the offer are really arguing here: Good, urgent, promiscuous preaching, especially a serious call to every hearer, is impossible except on the basis of a love of God in Jesus Christ for every human and on the basis of a will of God for the salvation of all men. But this has always been the objection of Rome and of the Arminians to the Reformed doctrine of predestination and sovereign grace: The Reformed doctrine of particular grace, expressed especially in predestination, makes preaching impossible.

The Roman Catholic Church condemned, as a denial of the gospel-call, the Reformation teaching that grace is limited to the elect in Canon 17 of the section "On Justification" in its "Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent":

If any one saith that the grace of Justification is only attained to by those who are predestined unto life; but that all others who are called, are called indeed, but receive not grace, as being, by the divine power, predestined unto evil: Let him be anathema.¹⁵

The Arminians likewise condemned the Reformed doctrine of particular grace as a fatal weakening of the gospel-call in Articles 8-10 of their "Opinions" concerning the conversion of man.¹⁶ Article 9 has been quoted above. In Article 8 the Arminians gave their own view of the call of the gospel and rejected the Reformed conception:

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

15 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Volume II (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), p. 114.

16 *Crisis*, DeJong, pp. 226, 227.

In Article 10 the Arminians repudiated the Reformed doctrine that the call of the reprobate, though serious on God's part, is without grace for them (which is, of course, exactly the position of the PRC in their denial of the offer):

Nor do we believe that God calls the reprobate, as they are called, to these ends: that He should the more harden them, or take away excuse, or punish them the more severely, or display their inability; nor, however, that they should be converted, should believe, and should be saved.

Is it indeed true that the doctrines of predestination, limited atonement, and efficacious calling hinder, or even destroy, free preaching, urgent missions, and a serious gospel-call? Is it indeed the case that a Reformed church needs the teachings of universal grace and a universal will to salvation to come to the rescue, so that she is able to preach and to evangelize? Then Rome and the Arminians were right! Let us admit it! Let us renounce Dordt! Let us call a world-wide Reformed synod, preferably at Dordt, in order to rescind the condemnation of Arminianism and in order to make humble confession of our fathers' sins against Arminius, Episcopius, and the others! And let us come, caps in hand, to the head of Rome, acknowledging that at least with regard to its fundamental doctrine of sovereign grace the Reformation was dead wrong!

While we are at it, let us also make the necessary correction in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:1-14. As the explanation of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel and its twofold effect, let us put, "For many are called and many are chosen, but only a few exercise their free will to accept the well-meant offer."

Thus, we will have arrived at the false gospel that Paul damns as "anti-gospel" in Romans 9:16, "It is not of him that willeth. . . but of God that shows mercy." But we will, at least, be honest and forthright.

We warn the advocates of the offer that, so far is it from being true that the denial of the offer destroys gospel-preaching, the offer-doctrine itself corrupts biblical preaching. The teaching of the "well-meant offer" creates preaching that assures all and sundry of the love of God for them in the cross of Jesus. It creates preaching that then must proclaim faith, not as God's free gift to whomever He wills, but as the condition which the sinner must fulfill, to make God's love effective. It creates preaching that soon adopts the most atrocious free will abominations, on the mission field and in the congregations: the altar-call and all its accessories. It creates preaching that silences basic biblical truths — truths that Jesus Himself loudly preached in His own evangelism: "ye must be born again"; "all that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me"; "no man can come to me, except the Father. . . draw him"; "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of

heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight.”¹⁷ In the end, the offer silences preaching altogether, for more effective methods of winning all to Christ are discovered.

Yet I must end with a warning to ourselves who deny the offer. There has been a cold, callous, careless hyper-Calvinism. There is the danger that we are afraid to preach to all, afraid to call all, afraid to exhort and admonish — afraid, lest we compromise Calvinism, and afraid, lest someone accuse us of compromising Calvinism.

Read Calvin.

Study the Canons of Dordt:

And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings. . . by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith. . . (1/3).

This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel (11/5).

Most importantly, hear our Lord: “Go ye. . . and as many as ye shall find, call. . . for many are called, but few are chosen.” □

Issues in Hermeneutics (1)

Prof. H. Hanko

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no single issue has dominated the agenda of the Reformed and Presbyterian church world today more than the issue of Hermeneutics. This is not only because various methods of interpretation have been proposed in the last few decades which have more or less made concessions to higher criticism, but many other issues which the church has faced are rooted to Hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. Evolutionism vs. Creationism, homosexuality, marriage and divorce, women in ecclesiastical office — all these issues and more are at bottom hermeneutical. The answers which theologians and ecclesiastical assemblies have given to these questions have depended upon how Scripture is to be interpreted. The

17 John 3:7; John 6:37; John 6:44; Matthew 11:25, 26.

door has been opened wide to every heresy within the church; evolutionism has become almost the only way to teach science; women have been ordained into the offices of minister, elder, and deacon; homosexuality has been condoned and homosexuals have not only been permitted church membership, but have even been ordained into office; and all this has happened on the basis of specific and concrete theories of hermeneutics.

The way in which one interprets the Scriptures has determined one's position in all these matters.

In many, if not most, seminaries in the country higher critical views of Scripture are taught, whether these seminaries stand in the Reformed or in the Presbyterian tradition. Concessions of every conceivable sort have been made to higher criticism and defended even by those who claim to hold to the doctrine of infallible inspiration.

And that is the root of the matter. One's hermeneutics is, after all, determined finally by the view one takes of inspiration. How did the Bible come into existence? That it is the Word of God almost no one within the mainstream of evangelical thought will deny. That God used men to write the Scripture is also too obvious from Scripture itself to contradict. But when the question arises concerning the relation between God's work and His use of men in writing the Scriptures, there is a great deal of disagreement. The larger the role given to the human instruments, the more reliance one places on higher criticism with its various techniques.

And yet one cannot help but gain the impression that the debate, in the final analysis, is not a debate over various techniques in Hermeneutics; one cannot escape the conclusion that not even the doctrine of inspiration is the real point at issue. One is constantly led to the conviction that when all else is said and done, the issue is a profoundly spiritual one. That is, the debates, while swirling around academic discussions concerning a proper biblical Hermeneutics and concerning the truth of inspiration, carry with them spiritual implications. By this I mean that the debate is finally one concerning the *authority* of Scripture.

Now that in itself is something of an academic question, of course. But the point is that when one begins to speak of the authority of Scripture, one is confronted with the fact that Scripture is unlike any other book. It does not come to us for verification. It does not present its case to be examined on evidence outside itself as to whether or not it ought to be believed. It is not a text on the philosophy of history which presents startling views on how one must explain history, views which are open to examination and questioning. It is the Word of God which comes to man with the "Thus saith the Lord." It carries with it the authority of the sovereign God Himself before which all men are required to bow in

humility. Upon this hangs the issues of heaven or hell. It is this spiritual question which is the basic and underlying issue at stake. Will you bow humbly before the authority of God? To a certain extent, hermeneutical issues are smoke screens to cover the more basic issue. Or, to put it differently, various theories are proposed in the field of Hermeneutics and inspiration to escape the compelling and inescapable authority of the Word of God.

Our chief purpose in writing about these things is a positive one. Although some attention will have to be paid to modern higher critical views of Scripture, we are concerned about presenting principles of Hermeneutics which can be used by the child of God in studying God's holy Word.

This latter is important. If modern theories of Hermeneutics are to be used in the study of Scripture, Scripture is effectively taken out of the hands of God's people as a book incapable of being understood except by those who are adept at applying, e.g., literary-historical criticism to biblical interpretation. This is a great evil and has been, at least in part, the cause of a disinterest in Bible studies among those who sit in the pew. Quite reasonably the people of God argue that if expertise is required to understand the Word of God, there is little point in taking the time and dissipating the energy required to turn to God's Word themselves. They are better off leaving these esoteric matters in the hands of the experts. If, e.g., Genesis 1 does not mean what it says, why read it to begin with? But this is a denial of the great Reformation truth of the priesthood of all believers.

Our intention of being primarily positive sets up some limitations in this study. Although we shall have to say some things about the doctrine of inspiration, we do not intend to examine this question in detail.¹ Further, although we shall have a few things to say about modern theories of Hermeneutics, we do not intend either to describe them in detail or analyze them completely. Insofar as we describe and discuss them, we do so only to demonstrate what such theories have done to Scripture's inspiration and to proper Hermeneutics.

There are many things which need badly to be said. If others would rise and say them, these articles would not have to be written. But the

1 A book is presently being prepared for publication by the RFPF which contains a Reformed view of the truth of inspiration. It was originally prepared by Prof. H.C. Hoeksema as a series of lectures which were delivered as an elective course in the Seminary, which he intended to prepare for publication, but which work was prevented by his departure to glory. It is intended to be a supplement to Rev. H. Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics*, currently available from the RFPF.

ecclesiastical press is strangely silent on these matters, and, insofar as they are discussed at all, they seem to be inadequate to answer the stinging attacks of higher criticism. Only occasionally and then from unexpected places can one find what is an acceptable answer to higher criticism and what constitutes a Hermeneutics which the man in the pew is able to use. It is in the interests of helping the man in the pew that we turn to this subject.

God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our path. This is the song of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:105. Every child of God, whether a small child or an aged patriarch, whether a parent weighed down with the responsibilities of the home or a student studying in a college, whether a saint caught in the throes of persecution or battling false doctrine and the onslaughts of the evil one — every child of God sings this song of the Psalmist triumphantly and joyously. If he cannot sing it, his life is reduced to despair. He must have the confidence to take God's Word with him wherever he goes, whether it be to the graveyard or his work place. He must be comforted when others seek to snatch God's Word from his hands. He must rest assured that he can understand the Bible as well as any theologian, for "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (I John 2:27).

May God's people everywhere be persuaded that God's Word is truly the light they need on life's pathway, that it shines clearly and brightly for them, that no one need teach them, and that walking in the way of that Word there is joy and peace.

The Need for Hermeneutics

From a certain point of view, the child of God needs no instruction in Hermeneutics. If Hermeneutics is the science of biblical interpretation, it follows from the very nature of Scripture itself that no formal instruction is necessary for a regenerated saint to be able to understand what God is saying in His Word. Countless saints over the centuries have read the Word of God without ever knowing the first thing about Hermeneutics, without even having heard the word. They have read Scripture, understood what God was saying to them with stark clarity, and have taken that Word into their hearts.

It is true that we teach Hermeneutics in Seminary as a required course for prospective ministers of the gospel. Students are obligated to learn the principles of biblical interpretation and to apply them to Scripture. But if they, with their acquired learning, think that by these studies they have

gained an edge on God's people, they are sadly mistaken.

It has always been a principle of the Protestant Reformation over against Roman Catholicism that Scripture is easy to understand. Objectively, Scripture is perspicuous, i.e., clear and understandable by anyone who is able to read. Subjectively, the truth of the priesthood of all believers means that all God's people have the Spirit of truth in their hearts to lead them into all truth. Any child of God, therefore, is able to understand God's Word. It makes no difference what his age, education, or station in life is, he can know what the Spirit says to the church. He has no need of anyone telling him in a formal classroom setting what the principles of Hermeneutics are.

Why then talk about Hermeneutics at all? It seems redundant. And, let it be clearly stated that, in a sense, instruction in Hermeneutics is redundant. The child of God, led by the Spirit, knows, as it were instinctively, intuitively, without being able to give an account of it, what the Scriptures teach. If you should ask him what a given passage means, he will be able to tell you. If you should pursue the matter further and inquire of him how it is that he can understand the Bible, what principles of Hermeneutics he has applied to his study, he will not usually be able to tell you. The Bible is, from that point of view, like any other book. If he can read anything written in the language which he speaks, he can read the Bible. If he can understand what is being conveyed by the tongue he uses, he can understand what the Bible says. The Bible means what it says. The literal meaning of God's Word is the correct one, as we are wont to say.

All this does not mean that the Scriptures are not inexhaustible in their truth. They surely are. The perspicuity of Scripture, as we shall notice, does not mean that Scripture is shallow and devoid of content. Perspicuity is part of the wonder of the miracle of Scripture. This can be easily illustrated. One of the simplest passages of Scripture is Luke 2:7: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." While a very little child is able to understand this passage of Scripture without difficulty, at the same time no theologian has ever been able to plumb its depths, and more books than can be counted have been written concerning this profound truth of the birth of Christ.

Why then do we study Hermeneutics?

The answer is a very limited one. All Hermeneutics really does is crystallize, systematize, and articulate principles which are intuitive to every child of God. When a child of God hears, perhaps for the first time, what the principles of Hermeneutics are, his response ought to be (and will be, if the Hermeneutics is correct), "I knew that all the time." It makes

clear and brings to consciousness that which has all along been assumed. Hermeneutics has nothing new to say, no new thing to communicate, no new insights to give information to a man who has been a serious student of holy Scripture.

This is humbling — as it ought to be. A mastery of a course in Hermeneutics does not give a man a position of superiority over God's people. It does not give him insights into Scripture which the man in the pew cannot gain on his own with careful and diligent attention to God's Word. It does not set him apart in a class by himself, as a possessor of a body of knowledge which God's saints cannot acquire without the same formal course. It does not put in his possession a key to unlock the treasure house of Scripture, which key no one else has who has not taken his post-graduate courses. If he thinks it does, he doesn't belong on the pulpit. He possesses an arrogance which makes him unfitted to be a teacher in Israel.

Every minister of the Word, even if he has gained a top grade in his course in Hermeneutics, had better listen to what God's people say when they tell him of their own understanding of God's Word. They will have something worthwhile to say, something that he can learn, something that will enrich his own understanding of what God has to reveal to the church.

This is especially true when we consider that so often the minister does his exegetical work in the ivory tower of his study and makes his work of explaining the Scriptures the object of intense intellectual activity. The people of God speak of what God's Word has meant to them in their life and calling. The Holy Spirit has sealed the truth upon their hearts in the distresses and sufferings of life. They know, know in a way which only a minister who lives with them, prays with them, suffers with them, can know. They know together, within the communion of the saints as they admonish each other, help each other along the difficult pathway of this life, and join together in praises to the God of their salvation.

Higher Critical Views in Hermeneutics

We must say something concerning various theories which have been proposed in Hermeneutics, if for no other reason than that it will help us to see what others have done to destroy any proper interpretation of God's Word, so that we may avoid these evils like the plague.

All views of higher criticism have their roots in modern philosophy.

Modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes, was rationalistic; i.e., it appealed to the human mind as the standard and arbiter of the truth. In reaction to the synthesis philosophy of the Scholastics, it made a distinction between philosophy and theology. Philosophy was the domain of reason; theology was the domain of faith. Philosophy answered the basic

questions of the universe, of man, and of his ability to know; theology dug its material out of the Bible.

The earlier philosophers of the modern period maintained, at least outwardly, their orthodoxy and did their philosophizing in a separate area from their theologizing. They held, as it were, to two bodies of truth, one acquired from their reason as it probed the mysteries of the universe, the other acquired through a study of Scripture. It was hoped that the two would never conflict, that in fact philosophy could serve as a bulwark for theology, a foundation for faith, a rational justification for biblical truth. But conflict between the two did not overly bother them.²

This could not continue. It was a false dichotomy in knowledge. The questions of philosophy concerned ultimate things necessarily involving theological questions. And most of the time the conclusions of reason were in direct conflict with the theology of Scripture. And so some kind of solution had to be found. No man can, ultimately, live with such conflicts and be serious about what he believes.

The philosophers began, therefore, to turn their attention to theological matters. But the viewpoint, the perspective, the approach was one of reason, for the philosophers were committed to the autonomy of human reason. Whether these were the continental rationalistic philosophers or the empiricists of England, reason was the criterion of truth. That which met the standards of man's reason could be accepted; that which failed the test of man's reason had to be rejected. And it was inevitable that as efforts were made to square theology with philosophy, philosophers would turn their attention to Scripture and the doctrine of inspiration.

The sad part of all this is that their views found ready acceptance in the church. The insidious influence of rationalism devastated the church, partly because these rationalists professed orthodoxy in matters of faith, and partly because the church itself had in the latter part of the 17th and in the 18th centuries entered a period of dead orthodoxy which made them vulnerable to rationalism.

A few of these early ideas are worth mentioning.

1. Deism, which arose chiefly in England but spread to the continent,

² Something of the same idea is followed today by the defenders of theistic evolution. They hold that general revelation teaches an old earth, the creatures of which came into existence through evolutionary processes. Special revelation teaches a different view of origins. When the two conflict, problems arise. Some are not overly troubled by these conflicts and simply claim to accept them. Others twist Scripture to fit their evolutionary theories and thus force biblical teachings into the mold of reason.

spoke of the universe as a closed system, operating under its own laws. It was, so to speak, a mechanism created by a divine Creator much like a watch-maker manufactures a watch which is able to run by itself after it is wound. So God created the universe with its own laws by which it operated so that no longer was any divine interference necessary. All the phenomena of creation could be explained in terms of the laws by which it ran.

It is evident that this excludes much of the Christian faith. The Deists attacked Scripture's accuracy, therefore, in the historical facts and the miracles of which Scripture spoke, for they were incompatible with the assumptions of Deism. It is not hard to see that the theistic evolutionists, if such they may be called, are basically deistic in their reliance upon scientific observations as an explanation for the origin of the universe.

b. Also in the 18th century a school of thought arose which posited the notion of a natural religion. Leibnitz and Christian Wolff spoke of such a natural religion which was independent of Scripture and based upon scientific observation and proof. It was a religion, not formulated by a study of Scripture, but simply expressing what elements of deity were to be found in a study of the universe. Lessing in Germany carried this idea a bit further and spoke of the fact that all religions in the world were evidences of this natural religion and thus have value for us today. And Herder included in the history of this natural religion, the Bible which recorded the ancient religions of the Jewish people especially. The evil of this position was that it denied the truth of revelation and refused to believe that the origin of the religion of the Jewish people and the church had its origins in divine revelation.

Immanuel Kant, the influential German philosopher from Koningsburg, had more influence on higher criticism than any other individual. He spoke of the human intellect as being limited in its acquisition of knowledge by time and space so that it was incapable of knowing anything at all beyond this present creation and the time and space which bound it. He was an intellectual agnostic and ruled out any knowledge of spiritual things. Yet, although he pushed God out of the front door of the universe, he attempted to drag God back in through the back door. He spoke of the fact that all men could know God through the "Thou shalt" of God's moral law. The result of this was the notion that religion is nothing but morality. The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, e.g., is nothing more than the personalization of the moral idea as it is in God. And the church is a moral society to train men to live morally upright lives. Scripture is not the written record of God's revelation but a lesson in morals which has come down to us from ancient peoples in their own

superstitious beliefs.

Hegel and Schleiermacher followed these ideas of Kant to a certain extent. Hegel was a philosophical idealist and a theological pantheist. In his thinking, Christ was nothing but the highest God-consciousness which could be found among men. History is the absolute being of God relativized in creation and returning to the absolute. Consciousness is the highest reality, God coming to consciousness in man and especially in the Lord Jesus Christ. Schleiermacher held that God is essentially unknowable to the mind, but comes to be known through the feelings, particularly the feeling of dependence. Man has an indestructible sense of dependence upon a higher being, and this is essentially all religion. Inspiration is really holiness which comes through contact with the one holy Being. Scripture is a divine-human book which is the best of all Christian writings, but a product of the church in past years and of the general spirit in the church which arises from a collective consciousness of God. No longer must Scripture be considered of divine origin; it is only divine insofar as it expresses the sense of divinity in the church as the community of believers in every age made a record of their experiences in religion as they expressed their dependence upon a higher Being.

From all these notions which prevailed in the 18th century, it soon became necessary to explain how Scripture could include in its records of miracles and supernatural events. How was it, e.g., that the church came to believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that He suffered and died for sin, and that He arose again from the dead? David Frederick Strauss set about explaining that. He studied under both Hegel and Schleiermacher and wrote his *Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Christ)* in 1835. In this influential book he set forth what became known as the mythical theory of biblical interpretation. The church expressed her faith in the form of myths as being an acceptable mode of speaking, conducive to conveying their beliefs to the age in which they lived. That which is miraculous in Scripture is nothing but a mythological way of expressing one's faith. Christ was, therefore, a mere man who wanted to reform his nation. Gradually He became persuaded that He was the Messiah of which the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken. At first He was alarmed at the thought, but gradually He came to accept it with such fervency that He was willing to die for it. So He was a man of such high moral caliber that He was willing to give His life for what He believed.

Two important schools arose during this same period. The first was the Tubingen School of F.C. Baur. Concentrating especially on the New Testament, it explained the New Testament in terms of basic differences between the Pauline and Petrine parties in the church. The Petrine party

stood for close reliance upon the Old Testament laws, while the Pauline party wanted a newer and more radical doctrine. The whole history of the apostolic church was to be interpreted in terms of this conflict and its final resolution. The result was that each book of the New Testament was examined closely to determine what role each played in the conflict. And, quite understandably, most of Paul's epistles were rejected as being authored by the apostle to the Gentiles. It is not difficult to see that such an interpretation of Scripture has nothing to do with its divine origin.

The other school was the Graf-Kuenen-Welhausen School which concentrated especially on the Old Testament. Special attention was given to the Pentateuch; its Mosaic authorship was denied; and it was explained as basically the work of editors who put it together from four separate documents which had survived many hundreds of years of Israel's history. These documents were called by the letters, J, E, D, and P.³

These views laid the groundwork for all of modern Hermeneutics.

IV Modern Views in Hermeneutics

Before we discuss specific views of more modern times in the field of Hermeneutics, there are a couple of things which must be understood.

1. In the first place, the views which we are about to discuss range over a broad spectrum of thought. They can be placed on a line, the one end of which is very modern and liberal Hermeneutics which basically denies the divine character of Scripture altogether; and the other end of which is the more "conservative" view of Hermeneutics which holds to Scripture as the Word of God in whole or in part. That they together belong to destructive higher criticism is my thesis. I am not unaware of the fact that many "conservative" Bible scholars would deny this and insist that they believe in inspiration and, in fact, the *infallible* inspiration of Scripture. In spite of these claims, it is my firm conviction that they belong to destructive criticism for all that, and that they must be repudiated by one who holds to Scripture as God's Word. Their disclaimers are not persuasive, and we do not hesitate to characterize their views as being rationalistic approaches to Scripture which destroy Scripture's fundamental character and rob God's Word of its final authority.

2. The second point which needs to be made is that one need not necessarily pick out one of the views which we are about to discuss as

3 A discussion and critique of this theory can be found in Rev. R. Harbach's Commentary on the Book of Genesis.

being the preferable way to interpret Scripture. One can hold to several of these views at the same time.

It is one of the striking features of modern Hermeneutics that every year brings different theories forward concerning methods of biblical interpretation. One can hardly keep up with them all. Each new pet theory is another way which is supposed to offer us insight into biblical interpretation and becomes another tool in the hands of the interpreter of God's Word to help explain Scripture. But the proposing of a new theory does not necessarily mean that older ones have been abandoned. Those who promote, e.g., Form Criticism may at the same time hold to literary and historical criticism. The views overlap. More than one can be used.

With this introductory note, we turn to a brief discussion of some of these views.

On the more liberal end of the spectrum we find several such views which are rather common today even though proposed many years ago.

A very commonly held idea and one which has gained wide acceptance is Form Criticism. While there are variations of this view, basically it holds that especially the New Testament books of the Bible must be interpreted in terms of writing down what were originally oral traditions. The idea goes something like this. During the years of our Lord's ministry, gradually gospel stories and sayings of the Lord were formulated as people told others about what they had seen and heard, or what they had received from others. These stories, as stories have a way of doing, became somewhat stereotyped so that they took on a fairly fixed form.

After the Lord died and went to heaven, these stories and sayings circulated as separate units in various Christian communities as the gospel spread throughout the world. Some of them were even written down in old documents, no longer available to us, but lying at the basis of the gospel narratives. Such documents are supposed to be the explanation for the similarities between the gospel narratives. An investigation of all this is the method used to solve the so-called "synoptic problem," which addresses itself to the question of why there are similarities but also differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke.⁴

These units of oral tradition entered their twilight period during the years A.D. 30 - 60. Gradually they were altered and embellished under the influences of the beliefs in different Christian communities mainly for the purpose of being used effectively for communicating the gospel to others

⁴ Cf. for a detailed discussion of this subject, my article in the *Theological Journal*, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 27ff.

outside the church, and they were finally put into fixed form by the gospel narrators.

The result is basically four layers in the gospel narratives. The lowest layer is Jesus' own words and the authentic memories of His deeds. The next layer is the contributions made by the Post-Easter community. The third layer is the contributions of the Hellenistic community. And the final layer is the contributions of the evangelists themselves as they put all these traditions into their final form.

It is the task of the critic to discover in the gospel which parts are truly original and authentic.

It is clear that the efforts to discover what elements in the gospels are original and authentic are going to be determined by one's pre-suppositions. Hence, very liberal critics find very little which is truly reliable. One critic went so far as to say that when we finally penetrate all the layers and discover what is really authentic, we can conclude only that there once lived a man who was called Jesus. More conservative critics find much more that is authentic and are even willing to concede that most, if not all, we find in the gospels can be relied upon as trustworthy.

2. Another view, somewhat related to Form Criticism, is the approach to Scripture called *Gemeinde Theologie* or, Church Theology. This view holds to the notion that the church at the time Scripture was written formulated her beliefs concerning Christ which she incorporated into various documents. These beliefs were the response of the church to all God's speech. Scripture is the record of the believers' reaction to what God has said in Christ. Scripture is a kind of confession which the church makes concerning her faith. And this is, of course, something in which the church still engages.

A distinction was often made also between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. While both German words can be translated by the one word "history," the idea of the distinction is this: *Historie* refers to the facts of history itself; *Geschichte* emphasizes the mutual encounter of persons as they participate in and personally interpret Historie. This *Geschichte* involves various "encounters." It involves the original encounter of a person or persons with the facts of history, the encounter of the recorder who sets about recording such data, and the encounter of the interpreter. Other aspects of such an encounter can be added. The idea of calling all this "encounter" is that through the entire process one encounters Christ Who comes through the *kerygma*, i.e., the proclamation of Christ.

Bultmann developed this idea further when he spoke, e.g., of the resurrection of Christ as being the *Geschichte* of the *Historie* of the cross.

It might be well to pause for a moment and examine this, for there are

a couple of interesting elements about it. For one thing, it is an example of the deception of some higher critical studies. If, e.g., one would ask a man whether he believed that the resurrection of Christ was history, his answer could (and, perhaps, would) be: Yes; but he would mean this in the sense of *Geschichte* and not *Historie* since both words mean the same thing. Thus by means of the distinction the historical reality of the resurrection is denied, for the resurrection narrative is only, in mythical form, what the church believed concerning the cross; i.e., that the dead Messiah continues to live in the life and consciousness of the church.

Bultmann was the one who also proposed a de-mythologizing of Scripture in order to get at what was authentic and historically factual. He interpreted a myth as being anything which was contrary to the modern scientific world-view of our time. This included a denial of the concept of a three-story universe with hell below earth and heaven above. It included also a denial of the intervention of supernatural powers including devils and angels. And it included the possibility of miracles. All these are contrary to science and cannot be accepted by the modern man. All in Scripture, therefore, which speaks of these things must be considered as myth. And the only way to understand Scripture is to de-mythologize it. What we have left when all the myths have been stripped away is the notion that the cross and resurrection of Christ mean that judgment is brought into the world with the possibility of a new life opened for man.

3 Another rather popular method proposed is the *Sitz im Leben* theory of inspiration which must be taken into account in Bible interpretation.⁵ The idea of this view, although more involved than we can explain here, is that the biblical writers were influenced by their own "situation in life," so that their own cultural viewpoints were incorporated into their writings. This has become increasingly popular in our day as the view that the biblical writers were culturally conditioned in their writings. The statements of Paul, e.g., which deny the right of women to hold ecclesiastical office are only his cultural conditioning and not to be accepted today as normative for the life of the church.

Many different techniques are applied to Scriptural interpretation in modern Hermeneutics. Form Criticism, e.g., concentrates upon the literary form in which Scripture comes to us. Redaction Criticism em-

5 This view is discussed and defended in an article by Bastiaan VanElderen in Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), pp. 111ff. I have discussed this view in the *Theological Journal* of our Seminary in the article mentioned earlier.

phasizes that the final products of Scripture which we have in our possession are the work of editors who assembled traditions, writings, and other available material in one coherent document. Source criticism makes an effort to determine the sources which the biblical writers used whether they were rabbinical writings, Old Testament writings, apocryphal writings, genealogies, early forms of the gospels, or whatever.

All of these belong, more or less, to what is commonly known as literary-historical criticism. This form of criticism examines the documents of Scripture to determine such things as their literary genera and their historical setting. So popular has this become in our day that there is scarcely to be found anyone in the major Seminaries of the country who does not hold to this view of biblical interpretation.

T. Longman III A striking example of this is to be found in Tremper Longman III's book, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Criticism*.⁶ Tremper Longman III is professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He is, therefore, a "conservative" Bible scholar who would undoubtedly claim to hold to the infallible inspiration of Scripture. After discussing in Chapter I Source, Form, and Redaction Criticism, he devotes his book to a study of the problem involved in literary criticism.⁷

1. He speaks first of all of the fact that the writer may be an editor or a redactor and that he may have used sources. In considering this aspect of Scripture one must take into account the writer's purpose in writing as well as his cultural milieu.

2. Secondly, one must consider the narrator in the writing who is usually different from the writer. Sometimes he is a real person, sometimes fictional. One must determine his purpose in speaking and his cultural milieu, taking into consideration the fact that he may be omnipresent and omniscient. One must also take into consideration the narratee within the story and how he hears. But even then one is not finished. One must reckon with the person or person to whom the writing is addressed; the reader, not always the same as the one to whom the writing is addressed; and later readers.

3. Thirdly, one must consider the setting of a writing, the genre (whether poetry, narrative, prophecy, etc.), the figures of speech; the devices used (e.g., Matthew makes an analogy between Christ's life on earth and Israel's forty years of wandering);⁸ and, finally, the plot.

6 Zondervan Publishing House, 1987.

7 It is interesting that, in Chapter 2, Longman refers to common grace as the ground for accepting the findings of higher critics. See p. 49.

8 One wonders how Longman can be so sure of this.

Now apart from any other consideration, one wonders how in all God's world it is possible for even a trained exegete, much less an untrained child of God, ever to discover what Scripture means if all these things are necessary. Not only is the process much too long and complicated for anyone to apply it successfully, but most of the information that has to be gained by this method in order to understand the biblical text is sheer speculation and almost totally unavailable to us. The whole structure is a house of cards which tumbles by its own weight. Every man has his own idea of who the narrator (whether real or fictional) is; of who the narratee and the addressee are. The simple fact of the matter is that Scripture is not pleased to reveal this to us in many instances, quite obviously because all this stuff is not necessary to understand the Word of God.

The difficulty is that Longman and others who take this same approach justify it on the grounds that this is really nothing more than an application of the old and traditional grammatical and historical method of exegesis. This method goes back to the early church and the School of Antioch; it was used by the great fathers in the church with more or less consistency; it was the method of the Reformers; it continues to hold a treasured place in the life of the church to this day.

But the question is: Is this appeal justified? We shall have to give an answer to this question in a later article, an answer which will give us opportunity to discuss various other aspects of the problem.

- For the present, we may draw several conclusions. In the first place, it is not difficult to trace many contemporary views in Hermeneutics to rationalistic philosophy. That ought to give us pause. The approach of these modern methods of Hermeneutics is the approach of rationalism, and rationalism stands directly opposed to faith. It is the antithesis of faith vs. unbelief, of Christ vs. Belial. In the second place, wherever on the spectrum of higher criticism one may stand — whether towards the liberal end or towards the conservative end — it is fundamentally all of one piece. Even such a brief survey as we have offered demonstrates clearly how many modern views in Hermeneutics share a common ground with suggestions and ideas promoted by the early philosophers who applied the principles of rationalistic philosophy to Bible studies. In the third place, one cannot doubt even for a moment that all such views ultimately make biblical interpretation impossible for the untrained believer.

And this is, after all, what we are most concerned about. To apply the principles of Hermeneutics outlined in our survey necessarily forces one to take one of two positions. He must either admit that the Bible is in whole or in part not the Word of God, or he must fall back on the old Medieval distinction between two levels of meaning in Scripture: one level that of

the simple meaning open to any child of God; the other a deeper level of meaning available only to the expert. And that accursed notion also effectively takes God's Word out of the hands of His people. □

Book Reviews

Christian Faith & Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View, Noll, Mark A. and Wells, David F., editors. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988. (Reviewed by Rev. Bernard Woudenberg.)

This book consists of a collection of essays written by a number of present-day theologians with the intent of showing how with modern scholarship historical Christianity can be applied to the problems of the contemporary world. They are men who would call themselves "evangelicals" inasmuch as they wish to retain identity with traditional Reformation theology, and, in the words of the book's *Introduction*, they all "believe that God has revealed himself uniquely through Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit, who produced the written Scriptures, and that such revelation deserves attention, respect, and obedience" (p. 2). But that is exactly the problem with the book. This statement is carefully crafted to have the sound of orthodoxy while being vague enough to be acceptable to just about anyone who wishes to call

himself Christian.

And so it is. The spectrum of the book covers everything from J.I. Packer and his essay entitled *God the Image-Maker*, in which with his usual verbal skill he lays out all of the basic attributes of God^o in historically Reformed terms, to the ill-tempered article by Clark M. Pinnock, *The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*, in which he exclaims: "In Protestant theology, however, we often meet with a very closed-minded attitude. We have to buck a strong tradition that refuses to grant any gracious element in general revelation. . . . I find this appalling.

"Basically I am offended by the notion that God who loves sinners and desires to save them tantalizes them with truth about himself that can only result in their greater condemnation.

"My proposal would be that God takes account of faith in him even if it occurs in the context of general revelation, and always sees to it that those responding to the light they have encounter Jesus Christ, whether before or after death" (p. 160). And then, who does he quote to support his claim,

but J.I. Packer himself, (although without giving a reference by which the quotation may be verified)? "We may safely say (i) if any good pagan reached the point of throwing himself on his Maker's mercy for pardon, it was grace that brought him through; (ii) God will surely save anyone he brings thus far; (iii) anyone thus saved would learn in the next world that he was saved through Christ" (p. 164).

Between these two extremes we find a variety of different essays of varied interest and worth.

One of the more interesting of these is that by Donald Bloesch, *God the Civilizer*, in which, while pressing aside Common Grace — which he defines as "the general providence by which God prevents human kind from destroying itself by its own sin" — as of little value in this matter (p. 185), he uniquely in this book maintains an anti-theetical stance: "I suggest that history is the story of human vanity and creativity in conflict with the omnipotence of God to which every culture bears witness in some way or other. . . .

"In Calvin's view, the world is the theater of the glory of God, the sphere in which God's glory is advanced even in the midst of human destruction as well as human liberation. . . .

"I propose a vision of the world as the locus for the pilgrimage of faith, the crucible of probation where the people of God are tested

and prepared for eternity. . . ." (pp. 182, 183).

Another point of interest in this book, as in modern theology generally, is the frequency with which the covenant of grace is mentioned, and that from a relational rather than a legal point of view. Since first the covenant was defined as "a *relation* of friendship" by Rev. Danhof in 1918, we have considered this to be somewhat of a Protestant Reformed distinctive; and yet it now appears frequently in very similar terms, particularly among the more liberal theologians (due no doubt to the influence of Karl Barth, who also spoke of the covenant in this way). It gives good reason for us to work diligently at developing the positive aspects of this concept in harmony with conservative principles over against those who are using it for some very questionable ends.

And they are; for frequently this idea of the covenant is brought up in connection with one of the most pernicious of modern heresies, that of Process Theology, the view that God — because He exists in relationship — is supposedly always in the process of changing. Few who claim to be orthodox wish to identify with Process Theology directly, if for no other reason than that the originator of it, Alfred North Whitehead was blatantly anti-Christian and in many ways outright pagan; and yet there are repeated efforts made to assimilate

his basic ideas into modern theological thought. And this is true also in this book. The immutability of God is questioned repeatedly: and Cornelius Plantinga Jr., in his essay, *Image of God*, speaks directly of the "salutary contribution of process theology" (p. 52). This is certainly one of the most dangerous viewpoints at large in the theological world of our day, and concerning which we should be diligently on guard.

The book is interesting for those who would like to get a taste of where modern theology is going. And it does provide an opportunity to test these modern spirits whether they be of God. But what one finds in this book is a very fragmented presentation. In spite of the affirmed loyalty to the Scriptures, there is no serious exegesis in the book; and accordingly the unifying power of God's Word is not found. □

Three Types of Religious Philosophy, Gordon H. Clark, The Trinity Foundation, Jefferson, Maryland, 1989. (Reviewed by Rev. Bernard Woudenberg.)

Ever since the publication of *The Text of a Complaint* by Herman Hoeksema there has been a certain affinity which the Protestant Reformed Churches have felt for Dr. Gordon Clark and his positions. Although much of his work was in the area of philosophy,

the similarity of viewpoint does come through, as is evident also from this recent reprint by the Trinity Foundation. In turn, this book supplies an intriguing introduction for anyone who might like to gain a feel of what philosophy is all about.

In this book Dr. Clark actually deals with not three but four different areas of philosophical thought, the fourth of which, however, he refuses to recognize as being either truly philosophical, or validly religious, or for that matter real thought. And yet it is at this point that Dr. Clark holds his greatest disagreement with modern theological views.

RATIONALISM

The first philosophy to which Dr. Clark introduces us is rationalism. For this view Dr. Clark holds a basic respect, if for no other reason than that it was held at least in part by Augustine, usually considered the greatest theologian in Christian tradition. "Here is rationalism's strongest position. . . . (An instructor) cannot appeal to anything more basic than the laws of logic. . . . All explanation must use them. If an instructor explains a principle of economics, or of chemistry, or what-not, he says, Because: Such and such is true because — and then the instructor gives a reason, from which the thing to be explained can be deduced, or inferred. Therefore logic cannot be "explained" or "proved" or de-

ducted from anything else because it is absolutely and without exception basic" (p. 30).

With the second principle of rationalism, however, Dr. Clark decisively disagrees. It is the supposition that with the use of logic one can discover truths before unknown; and nowhere does it come out more clearly than in the countless efforts made through the years to prove the existence of God.

Already Augustine provided his proof based on the supposition of truth, as Clark presents it: "Either the truths themselves are God and God is truth; or if there is something superior to truth, then this higher being is God. In either case it is proved that God exists" (p. 32). But the most famous of all proofs for God was provided by a purer rationalist than Augustine — Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109). He formulated what is now known as the Ontological Proof, in his own words: "Assuredly that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist in the understanding alone. For suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality, which is greater. . . . Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality" (p. 34). By Descartes, that was later reduced to a simple syllogism: "God, by definition, is the being

who possesses all perfections; existence is a perfection; therefore God exists" (p. 35).

In time, however, there arose another form of rationalism, one which sought with logic to disprove the very arguments for God which Augustine, Anselm, and others had sought to prove. Chief proponent of this was Emmanuel Kant, the great German philosopher who was thought to have demolished Anselm's argument while at the same time disproving the very reality of the historical concept of God. There might be a god, but in no way could he be compared to the idea of God found in the human mind.

To Clark's mind both views are essentially invalid. Anselm could not prove the existence of God, but neither could Kant disprove it. It is the nature of rationalism, beginning with nothing it can prove nothing. Although he doesn't use the figure, Clark sees rationalism as an effort to lift oneself up by his own intellectual bootstraps; and it doesn't work.

EMPIRICISM

The next philosophy considered by Clark is Empiricism, which holds that nothing can be known except that which is experienced by the senses. Beginning with Aristotle, the father of logic, it is not opposed to logic. He believed, however, that knowledge does not have its beginning with idea but with the thoughts obtained by the im-

pressions of the senses.

It was Thomas Aquinas (1125-1274) who gave this way of thinking a place in Western thinking, especially with his argument for the existence of God: "It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. . . . Motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. . . . Whatever is moved must be moved by another. . . . But this cannot go on to infinity. . . . Thus it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other; and this everyone understands to be God" (p. 60). It was a dramatically different approach. Whereas all previous arguments had proceeded from the consciousness of God in the mind, Aquinas built his argument upon that which is externally observed, an argument which in due time was strikingly reformulated by William Paley (1743-1805) along these lines: "If a person walks along an uninhabited beach and finds a watch on the sand, he will infer from its marvelous mechanism that an intelligent workman made it. So too the mechanism of the world implies a super-natural designer" (p. 65).

Against these arguments, and many others of the same kind, Clark brings a number of objections, the most telling of which is perhaps this: all "movers" and "designers" and such like, whose

existence is derived from empirical sensation, are not in any sense the God we know in Christianity. The fact is that the only thing that can actually be derived from sensation is itself only sensation, and it has little to do with true religion.

IRRATIONALISM

Clark's sharpest barbs, however, are reserved for the non-philosophy which he calls Irrationalism. It may constitute a completely invalid way of thinking, but it has a very real place in the modern mind.

It began with Soren Kirkegaard as a reaction against Hegel's exaggerated claim to have outdone Kant by finding a single cohesive "System" comprehending all things. Over against this, Kirkegaard proposed irrationalism as a kind of "non-solution" to all of life's troubles. By breaking free from Rationalism's preoccupation with universal truth, he felt Christianity could escape its concern for abstract, universal truths and concentrate on individual persons and their inter-communications with each other. His reasoning went like this: "Without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk, the greater the faith. . . . When Socrates believed that there was a God, he held fast to the objective uncertainty with the whole passion of his inwardness, and it is precisely in this contradiction and in this risk, that faith is rooted. . . . The absurd is — that the eternal truth has come into being in time,

that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth. . .” (pp. 103-104).

The fruit of this reasoning has come out in modern times through Karl Barth and his theology of paradox. While much more subtle, he too in the end bypasses the objective truth of systematic theology: “God’s word is not a thing to be described, nor is it a concept to be defined. It is neither a content, nor an idea. . . (nor) a fixed total of revealed propositions” (p. 110).

For Clark this is nothing more than a rejection of faith in preference for an arousal of passion and feeling, a kind of nihilism, as he concludes: “If historical information, such as, ‘Christ died,’ and the intellectual explanation, ‘for our sins,’ cannot bring blessedness, why should one think that an infinitely passionate appropriation of nothing could do the trick? Empty nihilism is the meaning of empirical philosophy and empirical religion” (p. 114).

DOGMATISM

And so, having cleared the docket of all primary competition, Clark is ready to set forth his brand of philosophy which he calls “Dogmatism.” By this he apparently means the acceptance as a philosophical principle the existence of God and the complete validity of his revelation in Scripture.

This is what we have been waiting for; and eagerly we search

for Clark’s application of these principles to philosophical thought – and with that the disappointment sets in; for one looks in vain.

Through the last part of the book Dr. Clark answers a number of criticisms against this starting point, with which we quite agree. And he reiterates a number of objections to other starting points, which only repeats what has already been said. But a meaningful development of Clark’s presuppositional approach we don’t find; and it makes this book essentially a disappointment. One hopes it is a deficiency that has been filled in some other of Dr. Clark’s works; and, if so, I for one would like to read it. But it belongs here, and without it this book does not live up to what its title promises. That we regret. □

Josephus, The Essential Writings, An Illustrated Edition of: Jewish Antiquities, and The Jewish War, A New Translation, by Paul L. Maier. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1988. 413pp., \$16.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Agatha Lubbers.]

Kregel Publications is to be complimented for having published this handsome condensation of the essential writings of Flavius Josephus. Few readers and students of the history of the period recorded by Josephus would

have the perseverance and patience to plow through the 90,000 lines in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities and War*.

Paul Maier reports that the venerable Whiston translation of the complete Josephus (1737) had a quasi-scriptural authority and used to stand next to the Bible on many library shelves in the English-speaking world. Maier notes that he is aware of only one other condensation — an edition in antiquated English by William Sheperd.

Josephus was the son of a priest named Matthias; his mother descended from the royal Jewish family of the Hasmoneans. The life of Josephus coincides with the six decades of the Apostolic Age of the Christian Church (A.D. 37 - c.100). Josephus, a native of Jerusalem, traveled to Rome to intercede in behalf of some Jewish priests whom Felix, the Judean procurator, had sent to Nero for trial, A.D. 64. Like the apostle Paul, Josephus suffered shipwreck enroute to Rome. Josephus wrote that he was one of the 80 rescued from a shipload of 600.

When Josephus returned to Palestine from Rome, A.D. 67, the land was on the verge of revolt against Rome. Josephus, who had become enamoured with Rome, reluctantly joined the rebellion and was appointed commander in Galilee. Will Durant, in *Caesar and Christ*, p. 544, describes Josephus thus: "Among them was

a priest named Josephus, then a young man of thirty, energetic, brilliant, and endowed with an intellect capable of transforming every desire into a virtue." Having been commissioned by the rebels to fortify Galilee, Josephus prepared for battle against the Romans led by Vespasian. He defended the stronghold, Jotapata, against the siege of Vespasian until only forty Jewish soldiers hiding with him in a cave remained alive. Durant says, (*Ibid.*, p. 545), "Josephus wished to surrender, but his men threatened to kill him if he tried it. Since they preferred death to capture, he persuaded them to draw lots to fix the order in which each should die by the hand of the next; when all were dead but himself and one other, he induced him to join him in surrender."

Josephus was about to be sent to Rome in chains but was freed and emerged as a hero and prophet because he predicted that Vespasian would soon become emperor. Vespasian gradually accepted Josephus as a useful advisor in the war against the Jews. He served the Romans as a mediator and interpreter during the war, appealing to his countrymen to put down arms and save their city and the great Temple of Herod from the destroying power of Rome. Josephus accompanied Titus to the siege of Jerusalem. Because of his survival at Jotapata in Galilee, and his later activities, many Jews

vilified Josephus as a coward and turncoat, an attitude that persists in some Jewish circles to the present day. His writings, which glorify the Jews as a nation, have caused others to overlook the "failings" of Josephus.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Josephus sailed to Rome with Titus and accompanied the conqueror of his people in a triumphal procession that exhibited captive Jews and Jewish spoils. Josephus enjoyed the patronage of the Flavians for the rest of his life, adding their family name "Flavius" to his own. He lived in the former mansion of Vespasian, with Roman citizen's rights as well as an imperial pension, and therefore could devote himself to a literary career. His domestic life was not as successful — his first marriage was by command of Vespasian, his second wife deserted him, and he divorced the third — but he had five sons. When he died, soon after A.D. 100, he was honored with a statue at Rome.

Dr. Paul L. Maier, the translator of this edition of the writings of Josephus, is Professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan University, and an author of books dealing with the rise of Christianity and the Roman Empire. He authored *Pontius Pilate*, a biographical novel, and his latest is *The Flames of Rome*. Dr. Maier has explored many of the sites described by Josephus, and lectures

widely across the country. (Paul Maier is the son of the deceased Walter A. Maier, former pastor on the Lutheran Hour.)

Part I of the new translation by Maier is the book *Jewish Antiquities*. *Jewish Antiquities* was published in A.D. 93-94. It is an extremely ambitious and extra-biblical history of the Jews from the Creation to the outbreak of the war with Rome. Although the writings of Josephus are given a halo of respectability by the secular and Jewish writers, the truth is that the writings of Josephus have no more authority or honor than a commentary one might compose about Scripture. The fact is, however, that the writings of Josephus are less trustworthy than a faithful commentary because he frequently embellishes history so that his writings are contrary to the facts of Scripture.

Josephus identifies the daughter of Pharaoh and the Egyptian "mother" of Moses as Thermuthis. Following is the account by Josephus of the first meeting between the infant Moses and Pharaoh, father of Thermuthis: "... She put the infant into his hands. He took him and kissed him, and playfully put his crown upon the child's head. But Moses threw it down to the ground and trod upon it with his feet in mere childishness. But when the sacred scribe saw this (he was the one who had foretold that a child would be born

to the Hebrews who would reduce the dominion of Egypt) he made a violent attempt to kill him. He cried out, 'This, O King, is that child we must kill to calm our terror! He shows it by treading upon your crown. Kill him, and deliver us from our fear and thus deprive the Hebrews of the hope he inspires' " (p. 49). Although Moses was a very precocious child and was later given the ability by Jehovah God to perform miracles, the tale related by Josephus in no way resembles the Scriptural account concerning Moses and Pharaoh. Josephus glorifies the exploits of the man Moses and does not glorify Jehovah, the God of Israel.

The flight of Moses to Midian, as related in the Scriptures, was caused by his murder of an Egyptian and his rejection by a fellow Israelite. According to Josephus, Moses fled to Midian because the Egyptians envied him after he defeated the Ethiopians. "They thought he might take advantage of his good fortune and try to subvert their government. The king was also afraid of him, and prepared to assist in the murder of Moses. Learning that there were plots against him, Moses secretly escaped across the desert, since the roads were patrolled" (p. 50). Those familiar with Scripture will know how much the story has been changed.

The speculations of Josephus are

obvious in several other places. Concerning the sacrifices of Cain and Abel he says, p. 21, "Abel offered up milk and the firstborn of his flocks, a sacrifice which God preferred, since it was produced by nature, not human ingenuity." The Scriptures tell us simply that God accepted the sacrifice of Abel and hated the offering of Cain (cf. Hebrews 11:4), "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Concerning the journey of Abraham to Egypt, Josephus writes, p. 26, "While in Egypt Abraham talked with the priests and other men, showing them their error in worshipping false gods. He also taught them many things he had learned in Chaldea, including arithmetic and astronomy, and the Egyptians later taught these sciences to the Greeks." Nothing is written by Josephus concerning the dishonesty of Abraham in Egypt with respect to his wife Sarai (cf. Genesis 12:10-20). The narrative of Josephus is a speculative, apocryphal, and fanciful version of events of sacred history recorded in Scripture.

Josephus was a contemporary of the apostle Paul. Although he suffered shipwreck as he went to Rome like the apostle Paul, it is here that the similarity ceases. He

was not a lover of Christ like the apostle Paul. Josephus was an unbeliever. The most famous passage in the writings of Josephus is his reference to Jesus as a man but certainly not to Jesus as the Son of God. "At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have reported wonders. And the tribe of the Christians, so named after him, has not disappeared to this day" (p. 265).

Part II of the *Essential Writings* is *The Jewish War*. *The Jewish War* was written first and was published in Greek, A.D. 77 or 78. It is placed last in this condensation for chronological reasons. Because *The War* was written under Flavian auspices, it is the most pro-Roman of any of the writings of Josephus.

The details of the conquest of Galilee, Judea, and Idumea forms the primary content of *The Wars*. The report of the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem is done with terrifying details.

The excruciating famine that preceded the fall of Jerusalem is described as follows:

"All hope of escape and all food supplies were now cut off from the Jews, and famine devoured thousands upon thousands. The alleys were choked with bodies, the survivors not having enough strength to bury the dead and even falling into graves with them. No mourning was heard in Jerusalem, for famine stifled all emotions, and an awful silence shrouded the city. The rebels at first ordered the bodies buried at public expense, finding the stench unbearable, but then flung them into the ravines when they became too numerous.

"When Titus, as he made his rounds, saw these valleys choked with dead bodies oozing decay, he groaned, and lifting up his hands, called to God to witness that this was not his doing. . ." (p. 349).

Josephus' description of the Roman army indicates that he has admiration for the organizational skill of the Romans, but it is tempered by phrases that show that he is a Jew faithful to the cause of the Jews. His admiration is evidenced in this passage. "Small wonder that the Roman empire has extended its boundaries to the east as far as the Euphrates, in the west to the ocean, in the south to Libya, and in the north to the Rhine." Knowing that such praise will not be well accepted by fellow Jews, he tempers it as follows:

"This is not to extol the Romans so much as to console those whom they have vanquished, and to deter others who may be tempted to revolt" (p. 297).

The reader must also wonder about the accuracy of the details in the writings of Josephus. Josephus describes the capture of the stronghold Jotapata in Galilee by Romans. "The Romans again set up the ram, and went on battering the wall at the same place. Just then, an arrow hit Vespasian in the sole of his foot, which caused great alarm among the Romans, especially Titus. But Vespasian easily relieved their fears, and incited them to fight that night more fiercely against the Jews" (p. 302). Notice that the sole of the foot was struck by the arrow — a rather strange place to be wounded, it seems to me.

In addition, the pagan emperor Titus is presented as a God-confessor by Josephus. "As Titus entered the city he was astonished by its strength. . . . He exclaimed, 'Surely God was with us in the war, who brought the Jews down from these strongholds, for what could hand or engine do against these towers?' "

One hardly knows what to believe when reading Josephus who claims to have been an eyewitness of the destruction of Jerusalem. When he writes about this destruction he writes with great hyperbole as follows: "Pouring into the streets [of the upper city], they

(the Romans) massacred everyone they found, burning the houses with all who had taken shelter in them. So great was the slaughter that in many places the flames were put out by the streams of blood" (p. 365).

Writers have been advised to translate the works of others when they cannot write themselves. The work of a translator is both tedious and challenging. The translator is controlled by the syntax and style of the author. Sentence structure and placement of modifiers are challenging aspects of the translation process.

Writers have undoubtedly misgivings about their work when they come to the conclusion. Geoffrey Chaucer and Robert Herrick, English writers, expressed regrets to the reader about the contents of their works. When Josephus comes to the conclusion of *The Jewish War*, he writes, "Here we close the history, in which we promised to relate accurately how this war was waged by the Romans against the Jews. My readers may judge its style, but as to truth, this has been my aim throughout."

Paul Maier is also to be commended for having made available to the modern student of ancient history this digest of the writings of Josephus. But as to truth, we have our doubts.

Although a condensation may flaw the original, this condensation will induce the modern reader to

become familiar with one of the writers of antiquity. Libraries, historians, and theologians can profitably include this book in their collection. □

Calvin: Geneva and the Reformation, by Ronald S. Wallace; Baker Book House, 1988; pp. viii-310 (cloth). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

Ronald Wallace is Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia. He now lives in Edinburgh, Scotland where he also earned a Ph.D. in Divinity. He is a Calvin scholar of the first rank and has put his massive learning into an important, interesting, and excellent book. His book gleans its material from all of Calvin's writings, including Calvin's Commentaries, his Tracts and Treatises, his correspondence, as well as Calvin's *magnum opus*, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Anyone who is interested in the work and theology of Calvin will enjoy and profit from this work.

Perhaps one of the most appealing features of the book is the author's ability to weave the life of Calvin into discussions of Calvin's views and writings. Although especially the first part of the book is biographical, the author intersperses gems out of Calvin's life throughout his discussions. And he deals with Calvin's multi-

faceted labors and astounding genius in a fair and compelling way. The three main sections of the book are: 1) The Reformer and his City, 2) Churchman and Pastor, 3) The Theologian. Under the first main heading, the author deals with, "The Aim and the Plan," "Decisive Issues in a Mundane Setting," "The Struggle for 'Spiritual Government,'" "Rumors, Slanders and Cases," "Economics in Geneva," "Education and the Humanities in Geneva," "Towards a Christian Society."

There are many parts of the book which particularly struck my attention, of which we mention a few. The author includes important information on the relation between the Council in the city of Geneva and the Consistory, in which he demonstrates that Calvin was far from being the dictator he is often described as being (pp. 54-64). While the Council in Geneva abolished feast days, the author claims that Calvin himself was in favor of them (p. 58). Although Calvin held firmly to the idea of private ownership of property, he differed from modern capitalistic theory. On page 109 Calvin's condemnation of instrumental accompaniment of singing is documented; but the author demonstrates how balanced Calvin really was in his application of the regulative principle. There is an excellent chapter on Calvin's thoughts on education (pp. 102ff.)

in which Calvin's emphasis on its importance is set forth. On Calvin's views concerning the relation between church and state the author is correct in his analysis of Calvin's position. One of the most moving and enlightening chapters, in my opinion, was the chapter which dealt with Calvin's pastoral work both in Geneva proper and through his correspondence. Generally speaking, the author also does justice to Calvin's theology, although it sometimes seemed to me that the author occasionally fell into the mistake of putting Calvin's theology into a modern context and evaluating it in the light of present-day theological discussion and dispute.

An example of this latter is the author's treatment of Calvin's views of grace, which are discussed especially in the chapter on education. The author maintains that Calvin called the good in the wicked, grace, and holds that Calvin even went so far as to say that common grace is redeeming grace which has its origin in the cross (p. 104). A certain argument can surely be made in support of the first proposition, but the simple fact is that: 1) Calvin did not write in the context of the modern controversy over the subject of common grace, and, 2) Calvin's theology as a whole certainly militates against any kind of common grace. As far as that element of common grace is concerned

which is called "the free offer," even William Cunningham is forced to the conclusion that Calvin did not teach it.

Calvin's doctrine of the extent of the atonement, a subject being much debated these days, is relegated to a footnote on page 251; and the conclusion of the author is that Calvin is not clear on it. Again, W. Cunningham cites important evidence from Calvin's writings that Calvin held to the doctrine of limited redemption, even though the specific references are relatively scanty.

While Calvin's views on predestination are, for the most part, accurately presented, the author does find certain ambiguities on this subject in Calvin; but it appears as if the author does not reckon sufficiently with Calvin's refusal to enter into questions, especially concerning reprobation, on which Scripture itself is silent.

All those who are spiritual children of Calvin will find this book delightful and instructive reading, and not many books can be as valuable an addition to one's "Calvin Library" as this one. □

Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition, by Robert G. Tuttle, Jr.; Zondervan Publishing House, 1989; 204pp., no price. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

This is an important book for anyone who wishes to understand

John Wesley and the great revivals which began with his work in England. Its thesis is that Wesley was, in his early years, heavily influenced by mysticism, especially of the Roman Catholic variety, but that he escaped from it at the time of his Aldersgate experience. The author is himself a Methodist, standing in the Wesleyan tradition, sympathetic to Wesley, and deeply indebted to Wesley's thought. He understands Wesley well, as is evident from his writing, which is also carefully presented and crafted in a scholarly fashion.

Wesley himself wrote to his brother Charles in 1736: "I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of faith was the writings of the mystics." The book argues convincingly that Wesley was most mystical prior to his Aldersgate experience (his "evangelical conversion"), starting really with his second stay at Oxford, although this does not discount the many earlier mystical influences to which he was earlier subject. After Aldersgate, Wesley abandoned the worst in mysticism, but retained the best, with the result that mysticism continued to influence him in his work and theology all his life. The author approves of this, and holds this up as the model for theology in the Wesleyan tradition.

There are several interesting aspects of this question.

Tuttle is convinced that Wesley

abandoned the worst features of mysticism when he saw the great truth of justification by faith alone. This argument depends for its validity on the premise that Roman Catholic mysticism had several weaknesses, among which were its crucial error of putting sanctification before justification. This error led to a salvation by works rather than by faith in Christ, something which is an essential bypassing of the atonement in the interests of the mystical concept of immediate union with God.

Nevertheless, the book makes clear that mysticism, even in the purified form in which Wesley later maintained it, contains in it the seeds of Arminianism (cf. especially pages 122, 132, 133). This is interesting and important. In a paper on Arminianism presented at a Banner of Truth Conference in Leicester, England, the author, J.I. Packer, makes a distinction between rationalistic Arminianism as held by the Arminians in the Netherlands at the time of the Synod of Dordt and the Arminianism of the Wesleyan revival which is called a "mystical Arminianism." This paper, published along with the other papers under the title, "The Manifold Grace of God," makes clear the same thesis of this book, i.e., that Arminianism is always incipient in mysticism. The author, of course, holds to the biblical correctness of this kind of Arminianism.

The book is interesting and important, not only for this historical data, but also because of its precise treatment of what mysticism is all about. Its definition of mysticism is helpful.

"Perhaps as good a definition as any could begin with the statement that mysticism is anything that gets one in touch with reality beyond the physical senses. Furthermore, mysticism embraces a 'right brain' awareness of God and all mystics stress (more or less) the essential unity of God, nature, and humankind; therefore, union with God can be achieved (more or less) through the mystical contemplation of that unity. More specifically, mysticism is in essence that "deep sense of union with God in the inmost depths of the soul, an immediate awareness of a unique relationship with God. . . . (Its) innate consciousness of the beyond is both the origin and raw material of religious experience, and mysticism arises when one tries to bring this higher consciousness into close relation with the other contents of the mind" (p. 22).

Mysticism speaks of five steps one must follow to attain union with God: An awakening, a spiritual purgation which includes humility and poverty of spirit, an illumination, the dark night of the soul, and final union with God which includes moral perfection. All mysticism until the present has included either all or some of these

five steps. It is clear too that, because of this mystical process, assurance is always closely tied up with mysticism and becomes in many instances the final quest.

Wesley retained several elements of mysticism which, in his view, were compatible with justification by faith, among which was the idea that justification came only in the way of struggle, a struggle not only out of the dark night of the soul, but a struggle also to perform works of faith. Hence, the emphasis on works became an integral part of the Wesleyan tradition and gave Methodism its basic Arminian coloring.

There are two disappointing aspects of the book. One is its open Arminian position, made clear in the last chapter especially. Students of history will know that George Whitefield broke with John Wesley over the question of the sovereignty of grace. The other is its last chapter in which the author deals with the dangers of present-day mysticism. One almost looks forward to this chapter, but, upon reading it, is disappointed. It is weak and incongruous because it deals with such mystical aberrations as the occult, the mysticism of Sun Myung Moon, Shirley McLain's reincarnation ideas, and the New Age Movement. How much better it would have been to evaluate the mysticism which appears in more traditional Reformed and Presbyterian circles. □

Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey, by Hendrikus Berkhof. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989. pp. i-316. Hardcover, \$24.95. (Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.)

Two Hundred Years is a survey and analysis of Protestant theological thought from the 18th century to the present. It begins with Kant and ends with Tillich (and this tells the tale about the spiritual state of modern Protestant theology). Berkhof's scope is broad: He concerns himself not only with theology on the continent of Europe, but also with theology in England and in the United States. Among the theologians whose teaching Berkhof describes are Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, the *Lux Mundi* school in England, Ritschl, Herrmann, Barth, Bultmann, Kuitert, Rauschenbusch, and the Niebuhrs.

Berkhof's grasp of all these theologians is masterful. His description for the sake of "pastors, teachers of religion, and advanced theological students" is clear. The work lends itself admirably to use for a course in Contemporary Protestant theology.

But the Leiden professor of theology is not intent merely on describing prominent Protestant theologians in the past 200 years. He sees a line, a consistent intellec-

tual development, in Protestant theology. This line is determined by the desire of Protestant theology to "bring about a reconciliation between the gospel and the spirit of modernity" (p. 131). Protestant theologians have adapted and accommodated the gospel to modern, secular thought, in order "to make the gospel understandable in their world" (p. 308). Although the attempt has failed, inasmuch as "secularized culture manifested polite indifference if not outright intolerance" (p. 309), the result for Protestant theology has been the abandonment or corruption of every Protestant, and indeed Christian, doctrine as established in the ecumenical and Reformation creeds.

The history of Protestant theology from A.D. 1700 to the present is apostasy.

Not that Berkhof thinks so. The reason is that Berkhof, like the Protestant theologians he describes, regards Christianity as a search and a journey in a never-ending quest for truth, rather than as a revealed body of doctrines to be known with certainty by the believing mind and to be asserted with confidence by the mouth (and pen).

"The truth of the gospel is a very different one from the truths of the natural sciences because in them people start at the point where their predecessors left off. In contrast, the truth of the gospel

is a road everyone must travel by himself. This road is itself the truth. One does not "stand" in the truth but "walks" in it on the way toward the goal that is not attainable this side of eternity" (p. 306).

For Berkhof, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Tim. 3:6, 7) is the ideal for theology. For the apostle, it is the characteristic of silly women in the last days.

Basic to this view of "truth," to the accommodation of God's gospel to this world's godless and anti-christian thought, and to the apostasy of Protestantism generally is the rejection of Scripture as divine revelation. The issue for Protestant theology since A.D. 1700 has been the simple question, "Is Scripture the inspired Word of God and therefore the sole source, by the Holy Spirit, of the knowledge of God and truth?" Protestantism has said "no." This "no" to God's revelation makes Protestantism's search for the knowledge of God both futile and wicked. Protestantism has a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of God's knowledge, and going about to establish its own knowledge, it has not submitted itself to the knowledge of God.

The book holds special interest for those in the Dutch Reformed tradition. In the chapter, "Coming up from Behind in the Nether-

lands," Berkhof sets the reform of the Dutch church through A. Kuyper and H. Bavinck in the context of the modernism of the time. The influential role of G.C. Berkouwer in opening up the Reformed church to the unconfessional theology of modern Protestantism is indicated (pp. 114, 212).

And in an intriguing discussion of A. Kuyper, in which Berkhof entertains the possibility that Kuyper "drifted far away from Calvin," Berkhof concludes that Kuyper did follow the Calvinistic tradition, "apart from his broad development of the doctrine of common grace" (p. 109). I suggest that this definitely unreformed teaching was Kuyper's concession to modern Protestant theology's determination to accommodate the gospel to the culture of the world. Opposed to modernism in other respects and insistent on the antithesis between the gospel and the unbelieving world, with his doctrine of common grace Kuyper was engaged in what Berkhof refers to in another connection as "building a bridge between the church and the modern world" (p. 229).

The last word to Berkhof's "report of a personal journey" by one who is, and intends to remain, Reformed must be that he refuses to accompany Hendrikus Berkhof on this theological straying from the Way. □

The Parables of Grace, by Robert Farrar Capon; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988; \$14.95. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

According to the cover, Robert Capon is "a free-lance writer and lecturer, Episcopal priest, and former Dean and teacher of Greek and Dogmatic Theology on Long Island." Among other of his writings, he has given special attention to the parables of the Lord. He has divided the parables into three categories: 1) parables of the kingdom — an earlier book; 2) parables of grace — with which this book deals; 3) parables of judgment — in a book yet to be published. The parables with which this book deals are "all the parables, acted as well as spoken, that the Gospel writers place between the feeding of the five thousand and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem" (p. 8).

This book is not the kind of explanation of the parables one would ordinarily expect in a book of this sort. The author is rather very much interested in the entire context of the parables; he offers comments and ideas concerning the context; he relates the context with the parables proper; in fact, sometimes he has very little if anything to say about the parable itself, other than to put the parable into his own and more up-to-date language.

The book has some very in-

teresting things to say, sometimes things of importance. And they are sometimes said very well. On the parable of the Banquet Feast, he says:

"None of the people who had a right to be at a proper party came, and all the people who came had no right whatsoever to be there. Which means, therefore, that the one thing that has nothing to do with anything is rights. This parable says that we are going to be dealt with in spite of our deservings, not according to them. Grace as portrayed here works only on the untouchable, the unpardonable, the unacceptable. It works, in short, by raising the dead, not by rewarding the living."

On the clergy he says:

"After all the years the church has suffered under forceful preachers and winning orators, under compelling pulpiteers and clerical bigmouths with egos to match, how nice to hear that Jesus expects preachers in their congregations to be nothing more than faithful household cooks. Not gourmet chefs, not banquet managers, not caterers to thousands, just Gospel pot-rattlers who can turn out a decent, nourishing meal once a week."

The theology of the book is fundamentally at fault. It is not so easy to understand what the author's theological position is; nor is it so easy to brand his theology as false when he repeatedly em-

phasizes the priority and absolute necessity of grace in the work of salvation. Yet the author is wrong, very wrong. Some of the difficulty of understanding his theology rests in the fact that he uses obscure ideas which he never takes the time to explain in the context of his whole position. Some of these words are found in an expression repeated so often as to become the theme of the book: These parables deal with the importance of "lastness, lostness, leastness, littleness, and death" in the work of salvation. But these terms are never carefully defined, nor is an explanation offered as to what they mean in the work of salvation.

It is clear, however, first of all, that he holds to baptismal regeneration. He writes:

"Accordingly, the church's creedal teaching seems to be that no matter what sins we commit subsequent to baptism, every last one of them is committed inside an effective suit of pardon that we can neither lose nor undo. To be sure, sinners can refuse to believe they are wearing the suit — and they can even, by refusing to forgive others, set themselves at cross-purposes with the suit; but I do not think we ought to talk as if the church, on its own motion, has any power to remove the suit by withholding absolution. . . .

"Just what does this passage about binding and loosing mean then? Well, if you accept my view

that Jesus was being ironic when he suggested that a sinning brother should be given only three whacks at forgiveness, these words show him dropping the irony and saying, seriously and plainly, what will happen if anyone follows such an unforgiving, unshepherdlike course" (pp. 44, 45).

In keeping with this position, it is the author's belief that all men are included in Christ, are united to Him, are among those for whom He died. The only way in which one actually gets out of Christ and finally goes lost is to deny one's "lastness, lostness, leastness, littleness and death."

"But in hell, too, there are only forgiven sinners. Jesus on the cross does not sort out certain exceptionally recalcitrant parties and cut them off from the pardon of his death. He forgives the badness of even the worst of us, willy-nilly; and he never takes back that forgiveness, not even at the bottom of the bottomless pit.

"The sole difference, therefore, between hell and heaven is that in heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along, while in hell it is rejected and blocked. In heaven, the death of the king is welcomed and becomes the doorway to new life in the resurrection. In hell, the old life of the bookkeeping world is insisted on and becomes, forever, the pointless torture it always was.

"There is only one unpardonable sin, and that is to withhold pardon

from others. The only thing that can keep us out of the joy of the resurrection is to join the unforgiving servant in his refusal to die" (p. 50).

The same idea, from a slightly different viewpoint is expressed in the following:

"As Jesus envisions it, however, inclusion in the kingdom has already happened – and it happened for everyone – in the catholic mystery of which he himself is the sacramental embodiment. . . . Furthermore, as Jesus proclaims this mystery on his way to Jerusalem, it calls not for triumphant, upright action but simply for being last, lost, least, little, and dead – all of which, luckily, everyone eventually will be, willy-nilly. In short, it is a gift already given to the world in its dereliction, not a plausibility to be negotiated for with a down payment of good deeds" (p. 69).

In the first paragraph of this review I quoted a section from the book which defines parables. In that definition appears the statement that also some of Jesus' acts were parables. It is not clear from the book whether the author means to deny that the acts of Jesus were, after all, historical, but I suspect that in some sense the author would say that this is true. If so, that becomes a tragedy of unparalleled proportions because among these parabolic acts the author includes the coin in the

fish's mouth, "the temptation in the wilderness, his walking on the water, his casting of the money-changers out of the temple, his cursing of the fig tree, and above all, his resurrection and ascension. . ." (p. 19).

His exegesis often makes a passage teach exactly the opposite from what it appears to teach. We can only give one example of this (and at the same time it will give a taste to the reader of the author's often facetious use of Scripture, sometimes extremely offensive to the point where one can hardly bear to read it). He is talking about the parable of the friend at midnight.

"The nap out of which the house-holder/Christ-figure rises is Jesus' three days in the tomb. The door he closes is the door to the exchanges of ordinary living. And the sleep to which he finally goes is the endless sabbath of the death of Jesus, which is the perpetual basis of the resurrection to eternal life.

"And what, at that rate, is the narrow door the householder has still left open? Well, it is the remote possibility that, instead of noisily insisting on their own notions of living their way to salvation, they might just join him in the silence of his death and wait in faith for resurrection.

"Is that forcing the original text? On balance, I don't think so. But even if it is, I'm not worried:

no one ever gets through Scripture without occasionally putting the arm on one passage in favor of another. Accordingly, because I really do think the (householder's) door should be interpreted not as the locking out of the damned but as the closing of the door of ordinary living as a way to eternal life, Jesus our (householder) rises out of his three-day nap in the grave and he closes all other doors to salvation except faithful waiting in the endless sabbath of his death. He leaves us, that is, no entrance into life but the narrow door of our own nothingness and death — the Door, in fact, that is Jesus himself."

Not a very good book. □

The Nations, Israel and the Church in Prophecy, by John F. Walvoord; Zondervan Publishing, 1988; 497pp., no price available, (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

The author of this book is the chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, the leading Seminary in pre-millennial thought. The book was originally published as three books: "The Nations In Prophecy," "Israel in Prophecy," and "The Church in Prophecy." These three books are now published in one volume by Zondervan.

The first book, "The Nations in Prophecy," gives a brief summary of the whole history of the world from the viewpoint of the prophetic writings in Scripture; the

second book, "Israel in Prophecy," deals with the prophecies which, in the author's opinion, treat the history of the Jews; the third book, "The Church in Prophecy," discusses those prophetic utterances which deal specifically with the church.

There are many differences among premillennialists over many questions of prophecy: differences with respect to various dispensations; differences concerning the interpretation of individual texts as they relate to both Israel and the church; differences between pre-tribulationists and post-tribulationists on the question of the rapture; and differences concerning the role of the nations in relation to Israel. The author occupies something of an intermediate position — if that expression can be used. While opposed to covenant theology, he does not hold to rigid dispensationalism as propounded, e.g., by the well-known Scofield Bible. He does not hold to an absolute literal interpretation of Scripture, but allows for symbolic interpretation where the context requires this. He does not even make a clear-cut distinction between the church and the "kingdom people," although the distinction is surely present in his thinking. Nevertheless, his position is squarely in the tradition of premillennialism.

In general, he holds to the fact that, with the crucifixion of Christ, the Jews went into exile. The ages

of the new dispensation up to this point are the times of the Gentiles when the church is gathered. This time of the Gentiles will be brought to an end by the rapture which can occur at any point. Those who have been faithful from the church, both living and dead, will be caught up into the air. Immediately following this, the nation of Israel will establish a covenant with the nations and live in peace for three-and-a-half years during which a kingdom in Israel will be firmly established (something which is already taking place with the establishment of that nation in Palestine). After three-and-a-half years, Russia, the revived Roman Empire of Europe (developing now in the common market), and the nations of the East, will march against Israel and a time of great persecution and suffering will begin for the Jews and for those Gentiles who, during this period, turn to God. This also will last three-and-a-half years after which Christ will come again with those who have been taken in the rapture. This coming of Christ will usher in the millennium. Christ will reign on Mt. Zion. The temple and the sacrifices will be restored. The faithful Jews throughout history will be raised, including David, to live in the millennial period. The nation of Israel will enjoy a millennium of unparalleled prosperity. All the Gentiles will also live with the Jews in that kingdom. This

millennium will be brought to an end by the gathering of the nations against Israel and the great battle of Armageddon will be fought. All the enemies of Israel will be defeated by Christ and the eternal joy of heaven will be ushered in.

We cannot, in a book review, evaluate the position of premillennialism. We call attention to three areas which, in our judgment, are basic to a criticism of this position.

The first area is that of Hermeneutics. This is, to us, most crucial. It involves the whole question of the "literal" interpretation of Scripture. While Walvoord is ready to grant that Scripture must be interpreted symbolically in some places, he calls the amillennial interpretation of prophecy a "spiritualizing" of prophecy. Especially when amillennialists refer prophecies of the Old Testament to the church when Israel is mentioned, he demurs and castigates amillennialists for refusing to take Scripture literally. He refuses to recognize that the New Testament itself refers such passages to the church. I have in mind, e.g., such passages as Amos 9:11-15 and Acts 15:15-18, Hosea 2:28 and Romans 9:25, 26, and others. In fact, although the passage in Amos 9 is briefly treated, he does not even mention these other passages.

In connection with this, he, along with all premillennialists, does not understand the *typical*

character of the Old Testament. This is a serious error and leads to many wrong interpretations.

The second area is the whole area of the forced division between the nation of Israel and the church. He admits that the Scriptures speak of the elect Gentiles as the seed of Abraham as well as the Jews, but the very nature of premillennial thought makes an identification of the two impossible. He does not reckon with the fact that Stephen, in his speech before the Sanhedrin, literally refers to the nation of Israel in the wilderness as the "church." He claims, wrongly, that the word "Israel" never means "church" in Scripture. And so he denies that the church in all ages is one, that Christ is both the Head of this one church and the King of the kingdom in which all the people of God are citizens, that this one universal church, gathered from the beginning to the end of time from both Jews and Gentiles has its great unity in Christ Jesus the Head and Lord of all. This too is a fundamental error.

The third area is his obviously wrong exegesis of texts which are twisted to fit his premillennial conceptions. I can give only a few examples. Both John 14:1-4 and I Corinthians 15:51-57 are said to be descriptions of the rapture, an obvious impossibility. Psalm 2:6, 7 is said to refer to the resurrection of David and his reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom, an ob-

vious contradiction of Acts 13:33 where Paul explains that Psalm 2 was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The whole premillennial conception also brings to the fore various serious doctrinal questions which the premillennialists seem incapable of answering. I refer to such questions as: Why, if the one sacrifice of Christ is complete and perfect, will the sacrifices have to be restored in the millennial kingdom? Walvoord answers that they will be merely symbols of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. But this stands in conflict with Hebrews which tells us that the symbolic and typical sacrifices of the Old Testament, which could not take away sin, are forever removed by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Another problem is the question of how it is possible that the glorified bodies of the people of God taken up into the air at the time of the rapture can live with the earthly bodies of the people who live in the millennial kingdom of Israel. Walvoord brushes this question aside as being unimportant. Still another question is how the sounding trumpet of I Corinthians 15:52 can be called the "last" trumpet when it only ushers in the millennium and when another trumpet will have to be sounded at the end of the age.

The clearly written book of Walvoord not only describes in a very understandable way the position of premillennialism, but sharp-

ly defines its many weaknesses. □

The Text of the New Testament, by Kurt and Barbara Aland; tr. by Erroll F. Rhodes; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989; 366pp. (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

Kurt Aland has served for nearly half a century as co-editor of one of the more widely used editions of the Greek New Testament, the Nestle-Aland edition. Barbara Aland has worked in a similar position since 1979. It is not surprising, therefore, that this book is a defense of and a companion volume to that edition of the Greek New Testament Scriptures. This book is the second edition, extensively revised and enlarged.

The book has in it a vast amount of material which is extremely helpful to the student who works with the Greek and who needs to know something about the textual apparatus so that he may come to his own conclusions on the proper reading of a given text. The book contains a lengthy discussion of the many editions of the New Testament; it devotes a chapter to the transmission of the text; it discusses at some length the manuscripts which have been discovered (5400 in all, although some have been lost or destroyed); it contains a lot of material on the early versions of the New Testament, not only the Greek, but also the trans-

lations; and it devotes a large section to the use of the Nestle-Aland edition especially and the principles which underlie the establishment of a text. It is, therefore, of great help to the student who is beginning his study of the Greek text of Holy Writ.

While, on the whole, the Nestle-Aland edition follows the text of Westcott and Hort (and, therefore, also the principles which Westcott and Hort used in determining the text), the theory of Westcott and Hort has been somewhat modified. It is not surprising that the authors of this book should, therefore, defend the Nestle-Aland edition, but it is somewhat surprising that they take almost no notice of those who violently disagree with this edition and defend vigorously the *Textus Receptus*, which text lies at the basis of the King James Version of the Bible. Hence, anyone who begins his study of the Greek text by reading this book will hardly know that there are others who criticize the text of Westcott and Hort, who find serious flaws in the edition of Westcott and Hort, and who challenge the whole theory underlying this work. This is a serious lack. Important work has been done in this area by such men as John Burgon, Wilbur Pickering, and Jakob VanBruggen — to name but a few. Whether the authors agree finally with the work of these men or not, fairness would require, one would think, an analysis of this

alternate position.

One gets the impression from the Alands' book that they dismiss the work of other scholars with whom they do not agree with something approaching a sneer. Almost from the outset the authors' strong antipathy against the *Textus Receptus* (which is based on the much-maligned Byzantine Text) comes through. Writing about Codex Bezae, the authors say that if this text "had prevailed in the early period it would have proved far more difficult than the *Textus Receptus* for scholarship to overcome, and even this took a full three hundred years" (p. 4). The point is, of course, that the *Textus Receptus* has nothing to do with "scholarship," and that it was only after a long and bitter struggle that "scholarship" overcame what can hardly be a text worth talking about (which would include our King James Version). Speaking in another place of beautifully decorated MSS, the authors say, "Thus from the sixth century there have been preserved several manuscripts of consummate artistry (parchment stained purple, inscribed with silver letters, and illuminated with gold), and yet since they offer nothing more than a Byzantine text. . . they are in consequence quite irrelevant for textual criticism" (p. 104). On page 106, the authors baldly state: "It was tempting to limit the list to uncials of particular interest for textual criticism,

omitting not only a large number of fragments but also the uncials which have a purely or predominantly Byzantine Majority text — groups of very little importance for the student."

This failure of the book to address itself to the arguments raised against the Westcott and Hort text almost makes one so suspicious that he is inclined to view the *Textus Receptus* with a great deal of favor, on the basis of the principle, that a scholar of such renown probably dismisses with a wave of the hand arguments raised against his position because he cannot answer them.

Along the same lines, the book, while so casually dismissing the work of others, never once gives any firm justification for its commitment to the Westcott and Hort text. With something more than a touch of arrogance, the authors seem simply to take the position: "Scholarship" has proved the superiority of the Westcott and Hort text; the *Textus Receptus* is valueless; anyone who does not agree is not a scholar.

What is clear from the book is that the Westcott and Hort text (the one basically followed by the Nestle-Aland edition) is determined in large measure by "internal evidence." While we cannot here go into a discussion of internal evidence as opposed to external evidence, I know from experience that internal evidence is a highly

subjective criterion that is finally useless in determining the text of the New Testament.

Yet the authors confidently affirm that in the latest edition of the Nestle-Aland New Testament we have the exact text of the Autographa. That kind of confidence is a bit overwhelming if one is at all acquainted with the difficulties involved in the problem.

It is not wise to read this book as the only book on textual criticism, for one will be left with an extremely prejudiced and unbalanced view of the problems which are involved.

What is of value in the book is the large collection of plates from all different kinds of old MSS; interesting and helpful tables which sort out the many MSS and give information on what parts of the New Testament each contains; and valuable information about many of the most important MSS.

While, therefore, the book can certainly be useful for college and Seminary students who must learn to use the critical apparatus of the Greek New Testament, it is perilous to say the least to limit oneself to this volume as if it contains the whole truth. □

Book Notices

Thoughts on Preaching, by J.W. Alexander. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988, pp. xiii-318, \$14.95 (cloth). (Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.)

Once again we are debtors to The Banner of Truth Trust for giving us this attractively bound reprint of Alexander's *Thoughts on Preaching*, a work originally published in 1864. Every preacher ought to make every attempt to make every sermon expository, and every preacher who is committed to this method ought to read this book. Ruling elders in God's church are responsible for the pulpit, and every one of them too ought to read this book. Though written in the mid-19th century,

Alexander's style is lucid, easy to read, and in not a few instances simply delightful.

James W. Alexander (1804-1859) was the eldest son of Archibald Alexander who served as the first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary. During his relatively brief career he pastored several large Presbyterian churches in New York and also taught at Princeton from 1849-1851.

Here are two quotations to whet the reader's appetite. To avoid being dull and repetitious in his preaching Alexander argued that the preacher ought to read widely and especially meditate upon Holy Scripture. Wrote he: "It must be the habit of the preacher to be continually opening new veins, and

deeply considering subjects allied to those on which he is to preach. This habit is greatly aided by judicious reading on theological topics. A man will be as his books. But of all means, none is so effectual as the perpetual study of the Scriptures. Let a man be interested in them day and night, continually laboring in this mine. . . and he will be effectually secured against self-repetition" (p. 12). One of his arguments for expository preaching runs as follows: "There are some important and precious doctrines of revelation which are exceedingly unwelcome to the minds of many hearers; such for instance, are the doctrines of predestination and unconditional election. These, the preacher is tempted to avoid, and by some they are never unfolded during a whole lifetime. . . . Moreover, it is unquestionable that many doctrines are abhorrent to the uninstructed mind, when they are set forth in their naked theological form, which are by no means so when presented in their scriptural connection. Here again, is a marked superiority on the side of exposition" (p. 241). □

New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude, by Simon J. Kistemaker. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987, 443pp. (cloth), \$19.95. (Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.)

Dr. Kistemaker, professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, is completing the series begun by the late William Hendriksen.

Kistemaker writes clearly and is easy to follow. In addition, the format makes this commentary a useful tool for both the lay person and the preacher. The body of the commentary contains no Greek and little technical language. The author treats important grammatical and syntactical points in a separate section called: "Greek Words, Phrases, and Constructions. . . ."

Kistemaker provides a detailed introduction to each of the three epistles and an outline of each. The Select Bibliography, Index of Authors, and Index of Scripture are helpful additions especially for pastors and others who might wish to do a more in-depth study of these epistles either for preaching or teaching.

The exposition of the classic text (II Peter 1:20, 21; pp. 271-274) on the Divine origin and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is good. Not so the exposition of I Peter 2:8 where it appears that Kistemaker interprets the text to teach reprobation conditioned on the wicked's persistent unbelief and rejection of Christ. This text clearly teaches that, in contrast to the chosen generation (vs. 9), unbelievers are appointed (*titheemi* is the Greek verb) by

God to stumble over Christ. This, however, ought not deter anyone from using this otherwise fine commentary. □

Biblical Doctrines, B.B. Warfield, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988, 665pp., \$24.95 (cloth). (Reviewed by Rev. Kenneth Koole.)

There are books that require a review in order to assist the Reformed reader in making a decision whether a book is worth purchasing or not, and there are books that require only a notice that they have been published to insure themselves of a purchasing and a reading public. This book belongs to that latter category. It contains sixteen chapters (or articles) on various biblical doctrines from the pen of Dr. B.B. Warfield, which is to say, over 650 pages of solid gold. This is not surface gold, however, to be picked up by the mere "skimmer," but is of a deeper, richer vein, rewarding the diligent laborer willing to delve into the deeper things of God.

To whet the taste for this volume we list a few of the subjects treated: "Predestination," "The Foresight of Jesus," "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," "The Person of Christ," "The Christ That Paul Preached," as well as "The Prophecies of Paul," and "The Millennium and the Apocalypse." These are but seven sub-

jects of the sixteen dealt with.

This is a volume every serious student of Theology will want. The only item giving pause to the purchaser is the rather "handsome" price — \$24.95. But when has gold ever come cheaply! The Banner of Truth Trust has once again left us their debtors. □

Commentary on Jude, by Thomas Manton; Kregel Publications, 1988; 384pp., (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

This book is a reprint by Kregel Publications of a commentary published over 300 years ago. Thomas Manton (1620-1677) was a Puritan minister in the Presbyterian Church. He was a very popular preacher who preached before the Parliament in the days when the Puritans ruled the land. He was present at the Westminster Assembly and functioned as one of three clerks. He was a prolific writer, and this commentary is not the only book of Manton which has been preserved for us.

Many Puritan divines have given us commentaries on various books in the form of sermons which they preached in their churches. This is not that sort of commentary, but is a verse by verse exposition of the letter of Jude. It is an excellent piece of work, shows the deep devotion of the Presbyterian divines to Scripture, and gives many interesting and helpful insights

into the text.

It deals with the Greek text and, therefore, sometimes contains material which cannot be used by those who do not know Greek. But these times are few and far between and no single person interested in a good commentary on Jude ought to pass it by.

It is, however, a typical Puritan work. That is, it is extremely verbose and wanders off into many paths which are only very indirectly suggested by the text. Peter Masters, who writes the Foreword, points out that Manton has three solid pages on the first six words of the epistle, eleven pages on the meaning of the word "called," and twenty-four pages on the result of the call. This is not,

however, all bad. The commentary may be what we call long-winded, and its many side-tracks may make it somewhat more difficult to use as a commentary; but the very diversity of the material makes it wonderfully rich devotional material; and Manton possessed *par excellence* the gift of applying the truths of Scripture to the life and calling of the people of God and to their own subjective experience of the riches of God's grace in Christ.

For ministers, especially those who preach on Jude, it is a must. For any of God's people who like to read material of a devotional kind, this will give many hours of spiritual pleasure and much blessing. □

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