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Editorial Notes

Two subjects dominate this issue of the *Journal*: common grace and missions.

Concentrating so much attention on missions is surely warranted when we consider that the missionary calling of the church is her marching orders from Christ the Captain of her salvation. A church without an active mission program is a church which withers on the vine of the church of all ages. The Lord, to change the metaphor, will remove her from the candlestick.

Prof. Robert Decker, professor of missions here in the Seminary, continues his examination of "cross-cultural missions," the name for many aberrations of the church's missionary calling which have become so popular today. It is the sincere prayer of the faculty that his articles will give to those addicted to this aberration sufficient pause to reconsider their position and return to the tried and true paths which Scripture lays down.

Into this emphasis of Prof. Decker, Rev. Bassam Madany's article fits perfectly. It applies the Reformed critique of cross-cultural missions to specific mission work among the Muslims.

The Seminary was favored to have Rev. Madany on its premises for two speeches on the subject of mission work among the Muslims. His first speech was published in the last issue of the *Journal*. Rev. Madany, though now retired, was an effective and biblically Reformed missionary to the Muslims. His work was, in his last years, concentrated on radio ministry. Perhaps no one knows the nature of the work better than he, and surely no one is better able to evaluate mission work among the Muslims than he.

We take this opportunity to thank Rev. Madany for his willingness to give the Seminary the benefit of his expertise and for his kind permission to republish his speeches in our *Journal*.

Some critics of the PRC might carp at the fact that so much space is devoted in the *Journal* to the subject of common grace. We here at Seminary are not unmindful of the fact that the PRC have been criticized for "playing only one string on the harp," for "riding the same old hobby horse," for defining its existence only in negative terms of our opposition to the doctrines of common grace.

It is without apology that we continue to speak of these matters.

But before the carping gets too loud, let me remind our readers of a few pertinent points. In the first place, the simple fact of the matter is that those whom God used to establish the PRC were indeed expelled from the fellowship of the CRC because of their refusal to agree with common grace. It was indeed the occasion for the establishment of the PRC.

In the second place, the whole question of common grace continues to be an issue in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. It is not only a doctrine that has pervaded the theology and practice of many denominations (whether implicitly or explicitly), but it has also reappeared on the agenda of the church — though sadly enough, usually to condemn the PR position.

In the third place, the emphasis on common grace in PR circles is not by any means a negative emphasis. It is simply not true that our whole existence is bound up in “being ag’in it all.” Under the initial work of those who were instrumental in the establishment of the PRC, the churches have been busy developing the implications of the positive truths of sovereign and particular grace. Nowhere has this appeared more obvious than in the development of the doctrine of the covenant.

While I continue my analysis of common grace and offer some positive ideas over against various implications of common grace, Prof. Engelsma introduces a translation of an important brochure which belongs to the archival history of our denomination. It is a printed copy of a speech which one of the first fathers of the denomination delivered some six years before the denomination began. It has to do with the relation between common grace and God’s covenant. It draws, with stark clarity, the lines along which all biblical development of this doctrine has taken place within our circles. We offer this introductory material in this issue, and the translation of the brochure will follow in subsequent issues.

Do not overlook the book reviews. Especially important is Prof. Engelsma’s book review of John Frame’s analysis of the thought of Cornelius Van Til.

Van Til’s writings have never been easy to understand. Frame, in an excellent description and analysis, lays Van Til’s thought bare. At the same time, Frame’s own criticism and defense of Van Til’s thought is an excellent occasion for Engelsma to look at both Frame and Van Til from a distinctly Reformed perspective. Because of the importance of

Van Til in both Presbyterian and Reformed churches, Frame's book is must reading.

We send this issue of the *Journal* out with the prayer that it will be a blessing to all those who desire to be Reformed and put current theological thinking in a Reformed perspective.

Herman Hanko, Editor

Cross-Cultural Missions (3)

Robert D. Decker

If the life of the apostle Paul indicates anything at all it indicates that the work of a faithful missionary/preacher of the gospel of the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ is incredibly difficult. Acts 17 records the history of the apostle's preaching in Thessalonica and Berea while he was on his second missionary journey. In both places there was much positive fruit upon the preaching of Paul. Many believed and churches were established. In both places, however, the apostle encountered fierce opposition and persecution. In Thessalonica certain Jews, who were moved with envy, provoked "lewd fellows of the baser sort" to set the whole city in an uproar while attempting to capture Paul and his co-workers (vv. 5-9). The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas by night to Berea. These same unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica followed the apostle to Berea and stirred up the people there. Under these circumstances the apostle fled to Athens alone (vv. 10-15). While waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, Paul first disputed with the Jews and certain devout persons in the synagogue and, in the market place, with whomever he met. During this time, at the request of the pagan Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, Paul preached his famous sermon on Mars' hill (vv. 16-34). It is to this incident, and especially to this sermon of the apostle, that we wish to direct our attention. It has, we are convinced, much to teach us concerning the proper method of performing mission work among those who have never heard the gospel. Paul is involved here in Athens in cross-cultural evangelism.

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is in Athens. He is very really *in* the world but not *of* the world. The apostle is in the very heart of the world. Athens was the seat of the culture of the Graeco-Roman world not only, but also she was destined to be the seat of the culture of the whole of Western civilization. Politically Athens was of little or no importance. It was the university seat of the world with all its rich environment and traditions of philosophy and learning, of literature and the arts. Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, was in the city of Pericles and Demosthenes, Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides. In its Agora (market place) Socrates had employed what became known as the "socratic method" of teaching (getting his students into the material by asking questions). Here was the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle, the porch of Zeno (founder of Stoicism), and the Garden of Epicurus (founder of Epicureanism). Here men still talked about philosophy, poetry, history, religion, and anything anyone wished to discuss. Athens was the art center of the world. The Parthenon, that most beautiful of temples, crowned the Acropolis.

It is likely, at least that is the impression one receives from the narrative of Acts 17, that the apostle did not intend to go to Athens to preach. Once there, however, he will not be idle. God in His providence will not leave Himself without witness in this heart of the antichristian, godless culture and learning of the world. The apostle will preach the gospel of God's sovereign grace in the crucified, risen Lord Jesus Christ. Also here the world's most brilliant philosophers and learned men must respond to the question, "What think ye of Jesus who is called Christ?"

While waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Thessalonica (Acts 17:15-16), Paul's spirit was stirred, or provoked, when he saw that the city was wholly given to idolatry (more correctly translated, "the city being full of idols," v. 16). This is no exaggeration. Ancient historians inform us that Athens was "all altar, all sacrifice and offering to the gods." The idolatry and the sensualism of it all leered at Paul from every side. Ancient historians inform us that Athens had more idols than all the rest of Greece put together. We are told that at the time of the emperor Nero, Athens had over thirty thousand public statues, besides countless private ones in the homes. One wag sneered that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Every gateway or porch had its god of protection. Idols lined the streets and caught the eye at every prominent place.

What this means is that there was no place on earth where it was more unlikely that the preaching of the gospel would gain converts for Christ than in Athens. Is it any wonder that the spirit of this holy man of God was provoked within him? Paul was zealous for the Lord and His Christ. He simply could not stand all this blatant blasphemy of the holy name of His God. At the sight of all this corruption the apostle was saying in his heart, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."

First Paul went to the synagogue and disputed with the Jews. The literal meaning of the verb "dispute" is "reason." In other words, the apostle was explaining and defending the gospel of Jesus Christ over against the idolatry of the Athenians to the Jews and God-fearers. No doubt he was showing the Jews in the synagogue that Jesus of Nazareth, by means of His crucifixion and resurrection, is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. At other times, and along with this preaching in the synagogue, the apostle went to the market place where he reasoned with anyone who happened by (vv. 17-18).

It was in this market place that there stood the "Painted Porch" where Zeno, the Stoic, held forth. Thus it is not at all strange that the apostle encountered the Stoics and Epicureans (v. 18). These professional philosophers and professors were always ready for an argument, so they frequented the market place. It is quite clear from the text that these two groups were united in their love of arguing and in their attitude of opposition toward Paul and his preaching. Some dismissed the apostle as a mere babbler of foolish and vain things, but others wished to hear more of Paul. These took the apostle to the Areopagus where Paul would preach. Before we examine the apostle's sermon we must know something of these Stoics and Epicureans.

While they were united in their opposition to the apostle and the gospel of the crucified, risen Christ, the Stoics and the Epicureans were in fact two rival schools of philosophical thought. The rivalry was rather intense as well. From a certain point of view both were born out of the earlier, classical Greek philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. At the same time, however, they were also reactions to the more abstruse philosophy of the earlier period. Socrates had turned men's thought inward. His theme was "Know Thyself." This was fundamental and more basic than the study of physics. Plato followed with a profound development of the inner self (metaphysics). Aristotle sought to unite and relate both physics and metaphysics. Both Zeno and Epicurus took

a more practical turn in this intellectual, philosophical turmoil and raised issues that touched on matters of everyday life.

Zeno (336-264 B.C.) was the father of Stoicism. This philosophy was called Stoicism after the porch (*stoa* in the Greek) in the market place where Zeno taught his students. The tenets of this philosophy are rather difficult to sum. This is true for two reasons. The first of these is the influence of Platonism on Zeno's thought, and the second is the fact that Zeno's thought underwent several modifications. A. T. Robertson comments, "He (Zeno) taught self-mastery and hardness with an austerity that ministered to pride or suicide in case of failure, a distinctly selfish and unloving view of life....."¹ Already at this point it is obvious that Stoicism is the very antithesis of the gospel of Christ which the apostle was preaching. What is more, the Stoics were Pantheists. They identified God with the universe. And still more, they were determinists or fatalists in the strictest sense. They believed in the repetitive, successive cycles of existence. (Might this be an influence of the ancient philosopher Heraclitus, who taught that everything is in a state of flux, change?) Not even the gods could intervene and save a man from his fate. Thus they faced the experiences of everyday life and "took it as it came" almost without emotion. From this latter aspect of their philosophy is derived the meaning of the English word "stoic." This philosophy was subjected to further modifications and, to a certain degree, it was popularized by three Stoics of the later Roman period: Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

Concerning Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) Robertson makes this comment: "Epicurus considered practical atheism the true view of the universe and denied a future life and claimed pleasure as the chief thing to be gotten out of life."² Epicurus was a disciple of Democritus. This philosopher taught that the world came into existence by the accidental coming together of constituent atoms (a flat contradiction of the Creator God of Holy Scripture). These thought that the ultimate aim in life was the pursuit of happiness. Epicurus himself, however, constantly counseled his followers against sensual indulgences of any kind. Further, these philosophers denied the existence and intervention of God in the affairs of human life. Hence they denied life after death and any kind of

¹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, vol. III, p. 280.

² *Ibid.*, p. 280.

punishment or reward after death. The followers of Epicurus conveniently overlooked his insistence that sensuality was incompatible with pleasure. These, consequently, were known in New Testament times for their immorality and coarse corruption. They pursued pleasure for its own sake. They held that there was no absolute moral law by which men must conduct their lives. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" was their credo.

These Stoics and Epicureans made up Paul's audience on Mars' hill. God's servant was in the heart of the antichristian world. In an environment which could hardly have been more inimical to the Christian faith the apostle would do just one thing. He does not attempt to meet and refute these ungodly philosophers on their own philosophical grounds. Much less does the apostle accommodate the gospel to these corrupt philosophies. Paul brooks no compromise. He does what every faithful missionary/preacher must do no matter where he finds himself. Paul preaches the gospel of the sovereign God in Christ who commands all men everywhere to repent because He has appointed a judgment day (vv. 30, 31)!

This entire incident in the missionary ministry of Paul, it strikes us, is a beautiful example of proper, biblical cross-cultural evangelism. The apostle's audience had never heard the gospel, nor were they familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and the Jewish religion. The sermon Paul preached illustrates that of which he spoke to the Corinthians:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without the law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without the law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.³

Note well, the apostle does not compromise either the content of the gospel or his method of presenting the gospel. He proclaims the gospel of the crucified, risen Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. But the apostle does that in terms to which the Athenians can relate.

³ 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.

Paul, pointing to their extreme superstition (their sin), to their idols, and to their poets, commands them to repent of all this and believe in the resurrected Christ. Note too that the apostle does not do this on the basis of an exposition of the law and the prophets as he always did when preaching to the Jews. Rather, Paul points to the God of creation. To the Athenians he became as an Athenian, that by all means he might save some of them.

According to verse twenty-two the apostle “... stood in the midst of Mars’ hill.” Concerning the significance of this, John Peter Lange comments, “With all the confidence of faith he takes a position in the middle of the plateau on the hill.... He saw before him the Acropolis, which rose above him, and was adorned with numerous works of art; beneath the spot on which he stood, was the magnificent temple of Theseus; around him were numerous temples, altars, and images of the gods.”⁴ The apostle was standing on the very platform of the antichristian philosophy, art, science, religion, and culture of the Graeco-Roman world! Here he will preach the gospel of the sovereign Creator God as revealed in the resurrected Jesus Christ.

In his introductory comments on Paul’s sermon (vv. 22 - 31), Calvin writes:

We may divide this sermon of Paul into five members. For though Luke doth only briefly touch those things which he set down in many words, yet I do not doubt but that he did comprehend the sum, so that he did omit none of the principal points. First, Paul layeth superstition to the charge of the men of Athens, because they worship their gods all at a very venture (“at a very venture” is a poor translation of the Latin, *fortuito*. A better translation would be “fortuitously” RDD); secondly he showeth by natural arguments who and what God is, and how he is rightly worshipped; thirdly, he inveigheth against the blockishness of men, who, though they be created to this end, that they may know their Creator and Maker, yet do they wander and err in darkness like blind men; fourthly, he showeth that nothing is more absurd than to draw any portraiture of God,⁵ seeing that the mind of man is his true image; in the fifth place, he descendeth at length unto Christ and the resurrection of the dead. For it

⁴ John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, John - Acts*. p. 323.

⁵ “to draw any portraiture of God” is in the Latin text, *Deum statuis vel picturis figurare*, “to figure God by pictures or statues.”

was requisite to handle those four points generally, before he did descend unto the faith of the gospel.⁶

Observing all their idolatry, the apostle proclaims, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious” (v. 22). “Too superstitious” means “very or extremely superstitious.” Not a few commentators attempt to soften the blow by interpreting Paul to mean that the Athenians were a very religious, even God-fearing people.⁷ This simply is not true. The apostle points to the very heart of the problem of these Athenian philosophers. They were very superstitious! This means they were wholly given to idolatry and vain philosophy. They had turned from the living God, the one true God, to the worship of idols of their own making. The apostle certainly does not compromise the gospel or accommodate himself to this heathen audience. He begins his sermon by pointing to their unbelief as that was manifest in their idolatry. This is where every missionary must begin. Paul simply tells them that in all of their affairs they are very superstitious.

As evidence of all this superstition the apostle cites this: “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with the inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (v. 23). Among the multitude of altars and shrines to the many gods was this one with the inscription, “To The Unknown God.” Apparently the Athenians were concerned lest they miss one of the gods. They feared the anger of the god they may have overlooked. More than this, the altar to the unknown god indicates the weakness and the utter futility and foolishness of their idolatry. To this point the Rev. George C. Lubbers wrote convincingly,

So morbid is their fear that they even have an altar erected to the UNKNOWN GOD. They had written that superscription on that altar. And it should be quite evident that Paul is not here teaching or suggesting that the Pagan was in real spiritual quest after the living God. They were not *seeking* God. Paul only cites this as evidence that the Athenians’ multiplicity of “gods” shows that none of these are truly gods, for else they would not have still built an altar to another. Paul points to the “Achilles’ heel” in their idolatry. It is here that he points to the deep spiritual-psychological bankruptcy of all the other “gods,” and even this

⁶ John Calvin (Henry Beveridge, editor), *Commentary upon The Acts of the Apostles*. p.154.

⁷ Cf. Lange, A. T. Robertson, *et. al.*

unknown god does not avail them aught. Notice well that Paul is here not merely engaging himself in some clever witticism, but is giving, by implication, a profound, basic and soul searching psychoanalysis of all their religiosity. With this one observation he points out the "Achilles' heel" of the vaunted invulnerableness of the religion of these Epicureans and Stoics!

Paul is not engaging in a philosophical discussion of "comparative religions," that he may come to the "conclusion" that the Christian religion excels that of paganism on certain points as to doctrine and ethics, being careful not to expose "Athens" as being entirely corrupt and worse than useless, but he is preaching! And all the world must stand "under sin," and all the world must stand guilty before God, and every mouth must be stopped (Romans 3:19). The entire world must *become* ... guilty before God. Also here in Athens on Mars' hill! Here the glories of the Graeco-Roman world stand in the condemnation; the Greek moralist too is guilty; thus he stands in his own conscience. The altar to the UNKNOWN GOD attests to this fact. Thus Paul preaches.

Have we not pointed out that Paul here too knows himself a debtor to the Greek as well as to the barbarian?

Well, then, all the philosophic constructions with which the Greek attempts to bolster his idolatrous world with his "wisdom" must be shown to have this one "Achilles' heel." And here too Paul will be caused to triumph in Christ, making the savour of His knowledge known in every place, to the one the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life. For Paul is not as many, which corrupt the Word of God; but of sincerity, but as of God, in the presence of God he speaks in Christ! And in this preaching he does not find a spiritual-ethical good *point of contact* with these pagans. There is none. There is only a point of "apprehension" for those who are "grasped" by the Spirit of grace, and plucked out of this evil world. And these were but few here in Athens!

Still Paul appeals here to the "conscience" of these men, an evil conscience, a non-sanctified conscience! Thus we read in II Corinthians 4: 1, 2, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but *by manifestation of the truth* commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Here is no mere sparring for advantageous position in debate, no cheap trafficking of the gospel as done by ancient and modern "gospel hucksters," but a commending to the consciences of these haughty Epicureans and Stoics! These are weighed in their own consciences and found wanting. All their "gods" are found wanting! The altar to the "UNKNOWN GOD" attests to this fact. And the imaginary impregnable fortress topples, as did Dagon of old when he fell prostrate to the ground.*

* George C. Lubbers, "The Gospel of Christ Preached on Mars' Hill," *Standard Bearer*, XLI, 428 - 429. September 1965.

Concerning this altar to the "UNKNOWN GOD" the apostle continues, " ... Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (v. 23). There is another reading of this sentence which is translated, "What therefore ye ignorantly worship, this declare I unto you." This latter reading has the better support and we accept it as the correct one. It was not, therefore, as many commentators explain, that the Athenians ignorantly worshiped Jehovah by means of their altar to the "UNKNOWN GOD." Not at all! *What* they worshiped in their spiritual ignorance and blindness out of the hardness of their hearts was not the Almighty God, but an idol! They worshiped a conception of their own minds, and that is an idol. In their spiritual ignorance they rejected God as He was plainly revealed to them "in the things which are made." In the creation all about them those Athenians could see even God's "eternal power and Godhead." But they had changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things (cf. Rom. 1:18ff.). This accounts for all their foolish wickedness and futile superstition. This is what I declare to you, says Paul. He speaks plainly of their spiritual ignorance and blindness. The apostle did not, therefore, proclaim an idol unto them, nor did he commend them for seeking after the true God. He pointed them to their idolatry, which came from their spiritual blindness and rejection of the one, true God. Paul proclaimed the sovereign God of heaven and earth, the Creator God.

Note well, Paul *declared* God to them. That word means to announce, promulgate, make known, proclaim publicly, publish abroad. One thing it does not mean is to offer or invite! The apostle simply published abroad, there on Mars' hill, the glorious gospel of sovereign grace in God's Christ. And Paul did that against the black background of idolatry, vain philosophy, and foolishness of the learned Athenian philosophers.

The God that the apostle declared to them is the one, true, and living God. This God, thus Paul preaches, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Temples constructed by men cannot contain God. Temples can only contain the productions of men's hands and those are idols. God cannot be limited in any way by man. God is the Creator! God made the world and all things therein, proclaimed the apostle. This means that God is Lord, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. That God is the sovereign Lord of all things created means that it is utterly

impossible that God should dwell in temples made with hands. Solomon declared that even the heaven of heavens cannot contain God (I Kings 8:27).

Because God is the Creator of heaven and earth He is not worshiped with men's hands as though He needed anything. God gives to all men life and breath and all things. Not only is God self-sufficient, but God is the source of all life. The moment the Lord withholds the breath of a man he dies and returns to the dust. Thus these Athenians and all men everywhere, if they are to know God and worship Him properly, must have the proper conception of God. That proper conception of God comes only from God through His Holy Spirit. Apart from that, there is only idolatry in all its vanity and futility.

The apostle continues by telling them that God made of one blood "all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (v. 26). At this point Paul preaches the great truth of Scripture that all nations of men on the face of the earth came from one man. This is the truth of the organic unity of the human race. God did not create individuals or individual nations. God created a race, a race which fell in Adam and was saved in the last Adam. This truth stood in direct opposition to the notion of the Greek and Roman philosophers who believed that each nation had its origin in its god. Polytheism had no conception at all of the unity of the human race.

But there is more that these Athenians had to learn. This Creator God who made of one blood all nations of men also "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations" (v. 26). The Creator God is also the God of providence. God determined the history of the human race. God governed and upheld the nations. God determined where and when and for how long they should exist in time and history. God ruled them too so that they served His purpose in Christ.

This is borne out by what we read in Genesis 11:1-9, "The whole earth was of one speech and of one language." There were no separate nations prior to the confusion of tongues at Babel! God *made* the nations! It is stupid pride and horrible unbelief that would make each nation come from a national god or primordial. It is a denial of the judgment of God and of God's Christological purpose in all things, namely, that Japheth shall dwell in the tents of Shem. But here the record is set straight. Of this Moses sings in Deuteronomy 32:7-9, where we read, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations (generation and

generation); ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders and they will tell thee. When the Most High divided the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance."⁹

The apostle proclaimed God's eternal purpose in Christ in all of this. God made the nations of one blood. God set the boundaries of their habitations. God determined the times of their existence. God in His providence ruled them. God did all this, "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (vv. 27-28). God's purpose was that men should serve him, "find him and feel after him." The vast majority (the Athenians among them) refused to do this. In spite of the fact that through "glimmerings of natural light"¹⁰ even some of their own poets recognized the unity of the human race, they refused to seek the Lord. In spite of the fact too that God is not far from everyone of us, so that in him we live and move and have our being, they refused to seek Him. God is indeed near to man in His creation. Even His invisible things, His eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen through the things that are made (Rom. 1:18-20). In spite of all this, man changes the glory of God into an image made like to corruptible man (Rom. 1:23).

Having established the fact that God is the Creator of the human race, Paul instructed them not to think that God can be compared to gold or silver or stone, "graven by art and man's device" (v. 29). This is impossible! This too points to the futility of Greek philosophy and religion. The gods of the Greeks were less than those who presumably worshiped them! They could be manipulated by their worshippers. What folly! What nonsense! Paul brooks no compromise. There is no syncretism in the apostle's preaching! He simply proclaimed the gospel of sovereign grace over against the background of their spiritual ignorance and terrible sin of idolatry! This is what every missionary/preacher must have the courage to do in every cultural context.

⁹ George C. Lubbers, "The Gospel of Christ Preached on Mars Hill," *Standard Bearer*, XLI, p. 467 (September 1965).

¹⁰ *Canons of Dordrecht*, III & IV, 4.

Paul continued, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (v. 30). The translation "winked at," of the Authorized Version, is both incorrect and unfortunate. It implies that God for a time condoned the idolatry of the ungodly. This simply is not true. God is angry with the wicked every day. God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men. The word literally means, to overlook, take no notice of, not attend to. The point is that in the Old Testament times, before Christ came, salvation was limited to Israel. To Israel was the promise, the type, the shadow, the law. Not all Israelites were children of the promise, but all the children of the promise were Israelites. In that sense God overlooked the heathen. God kept them, with but very few exceptions (Rahab, Ruth, *et. al.*), in ignorance. But now all of that is changed. Christ has come, and through His cross and resurrection (v. 31) He has brought redemption. Now God will gather His church out of all nations. Therefore God " ... now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (v. 30).

Paul also gives the reason for this universal command to repent: "Because he (God) hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (v. 31). That day of judgment has already come. That day came with the incarnation of "that man whom he hath ordained," *viz.*, our Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself to whom all judgment has been committed (John 5:22) said not long before He went to the cross, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:31-33). The cross of Jesus Christ as sealed in His blessed resurrection from the dead is most emphatically the judgment of the whole world. For this reason the command to repent must be preached to all universally. All men everywhere must be confronted with the command of the gospel. All must give answer. The elect will respond in faith (v. 24) and the ungodly will respond in unbelief (v. 32). All are rendered without excuse. That day of judgment, ordained of God, will culminate in the final judgment at the end of the ages. Then all shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether good or evil (II Cor. 5:10).

Consider now what Paul has done here in Athens. He has without compromise exposed these philosophers of Athens in all their superstition and idolatry. He has preached the God of creation and providence. He has instructed them concerning the proper worship of Jehovah. He has preached Christ crucified and raised. He has announced the judgment of the world by Jesus Christ. He has preached the universal command of the gospel to repent. Once more, what the apostle did *not* do is preach an offer of the gospel. He preached the gospel of the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ against the dark background of human depravity, which renders all men everywhere incapable of any good. The overwhelming testimony, not only of apostolic preaching, but also of all of Scripture, contradicts all notions of free will, offers of the gospel, and universal atonement. The only possibility of salvation for those who are dead in trespasses and sins is this: "... by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:1-8).

The fruit of Paul's preaching? Some mocked. Others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter." A few believed (vv. 32-34). But Athens was confronted with the sovereign God in Jesus Christ. The Athenians were commanded to repent. They gave their answer, and the vast majority stood condemned under the just judgment of God. The elect believed and were saved.

Thus it is always, wherever the gospel is preached in truth according to the Scriptures. This must characterize all mission preaching. With the same boldness of faith must Christ's ambassadors open their mouths to make known the mystery of the gospel of sovereign grace to the glory of God (Eph. 6:19). In this way will the church be gathered out of the nations. The world will be brought into judgment. God will be praised. ▲

Re-Thinking Missions Today

Neo-Evangelical Missiology and the Christian Mission to Islam

Bassam Madany

During the last two decades, some severe criticisms have been leveled at the missionary work which has been undertaken since the days of William Carey. We are told by these critics, for example, that missions among Muslims have been a failure. Most of the missionaries of the past, so the critics say, were not good at "cross-cultural communication." This happened because missionaries failed to "contextualize" the Christian message.

In this paper I refer to evangelical missionary theorists who have espoused and propagated this way of looking at the modern missionary enterprise as the neo-evangelical missiologists. I would like to examine their thesis about the alleged failure of missions among Muslims from three inter-related perspectives: the historical, the theological, and the biblical perspectives.

I - The Historical Perspective

In attempting to work out a new methodology of missions, several neo-evangelical missiologists base their endeavors on their own interpretation of the history of missions in the last 200 years. This is specially the case when they are re-thinking the Christian mission to Muslims. They seem to be oblivious of the fact that the Christian-Muslim encounter began almost fourteen centuries ago! The difficulties we face as we seek to reach Muslims with the gospel are embedded in history long before the rise of the Protestant missionary enterprise. To put all the blame on the messengers of the gospel during the last 200 years does not only ignore history, but it dishonors the testimony of countless Christians who lived under Islam and who were not ashamed of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We must never forget these points of history: according to the Arabian prophet,

- 1 - Christ never claimed to be the Son of God;
- 2 - the belief in the Trinity amounted to faith in many gods; and,
- 3 - the Messiah never died on the cross.

In the Islamic tradition, the whole system of Christian doctrine has been judged as inferior and corrupt. Islam alone is the final and complete faith. As some Muslims remind me in their letters, the preaching of the Christian faith is anachronistic. As far as Allah is concerned, *Inna deena 'inda Allahi al-Islamu*, i.e., the accepted religion with God is Islam!

Rather than to indulge in too much introspection as we survey the history of missions to Muslims during the last two centuries, we must bear in mind that, as far as Muslims are concerned, there is no need to consider seriously the claims of the Christian message. The true gospel, the *Injeel*, no longer exists, for the Christians have corrupted it. Anyhow, the Quran has superseded and supplanted the gospel. There is nothing more striking about the Muslim's attitude to other religions than his absolute conviction about the superiority and finality of his faith!

The majority of the peoples conquered by the Arab armies in the initial days of the conquest were Christian. Their Christianity was not pure. Some were Chalcedonian, while others entertained erroneous teachings concerning the two natures of Jesus Christ. But in all fairness to these Eastern Christians, we must not write them off as if they presented no Christian testimony to the invaders. Granted that they were weak in the areas of biblical anthropology and soteriology, they all confessed their faith in the triune God, the deity and sonship of Jesus Christ, His atoning death on the cross, and the complete trustworthiness and final authority of the Bible.

The writings of the Christians of the Middle East who lived during the caliphates of the Umayyads (7th and 8th centuries) and the 'Abbasids (8th- 13th centuries) reveal that they did not hesitate to explain why they did not Islamize. It is very surprising to read the contents of their apologetical and polemical works. Many Christians worked in the courts of the caliphs in Damascus and later on in Baghdad. They conversed freely about points of difference between the two religions.

Some neo-evangelical missiologists seem to forget that the core of the Christian message was adequately defended by the conquered Christians of the Middle East. The hardening of the attitude towards the Christian faith among Muslims happened before the conversion of the ancestors of many European and American missionaries!

Having referred briefly to the role played by the Christians of the conquered lands, we may consider the record of some of the pioneer Protestant missionaries who worked in the Arab world. I am better equipped to deal with this part of the Muslim world, since my pre-seminary education took place within the Arab world. Furthermore, my own involvement in the Muslim world has continued because of the very nature of my ministry. I have had the privilege of corresponding with thousands of Arabic speaking listeners, both Muslim and Eastern Christian. Thus, my knowledge of Islam is neither purely academic nor archaic.

Does the historical record uphold the charge that the pioneer missionaries who labored among the Muslims were intent upon spreading their culture as well as the gospel? Let's take the history of the American University of Beirut. This institution of higher education is considered the most powerful academic institution in the entire Middle East. But it was not founded as an American cultural mission. Its original name was the Syrian Protestant College, and it was founded by Presbyterian missionaries in 1866. The founders planned to teach all the subjects in Arabic. The Evangelical Church which they organized was an Arabic speaking church. Its liturgy was simple, the Word of God was central, and every part of the worship service was in Arabic. When we think about the translation of the Arabic Bible, the names of some pioneer missionaries like Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck come to mind. Their wonderful work was accomplished with the help and cooperation of such Lebanese scholars as Yazigi and Bustani. One of these early missionaries, the Rev. George Ford, learned the language so well that he composed Arabic hymns which are still used today in the evangelical churches of the Arab world!

Of course, one should not hide the fact that some of the later missionaries did attempt to foist Western concepts on the people of the Middle East through the instrumentality of educational institutions which were modeled after Western schools. This is a part of my personal experience as I have had the privilege to study and later on to teach in

Roman Catholic and Protestant mission schools. But this later development took place after the triumph of religious liberalism in Protestant missionary circles. That this was a factor in the decline of missionary work among Muslims cannot be denied. But I am puzzled by the fact that neo-evangelical missiologists do not seem to take this sad fact into account. I am referring to the impact of liberalism on missions. Why this silence? Is history a lesser authority than the newer discipline of cultural anthropology?

May we still maintain that Christian missions among Muslims have failed when for more than a quarter of a century (between the two great wars, while the Middle East was under British and French colonial rule) the gospel was seldom heard in most of the mission schools? I shall never forget many commencement speeches, which were disgusting, for they contained nothing biblically Christian, just plain platitudes. No wonder that some of the graduates of mission schools joined radical movements, including the Communist parties of their respective countries!

To sum up, a careful study of the history of Islam and the Christian presence in the Muslim world indicates that the thesis that missions to Muslims have failed, and that this failure would not have taken place had the pioneer missionaries and those who followed them contextualized the gospel, cannot be sustained. Islam from its beginnings had a built-in bias against the Christian faith. This strong anti-Christian motif has solidified across the centuries. Western culture has indeed invaded the Middle East and other Islamic countries. This took place primarily because of the triumph of Western imperialism among the followers of Islam. We cannot speak of the temporary setbacks of missions to Islam without taking into account the destructive role played by liberalism in the mission field. And finally, as we end this historical excursion, we thank God for the advent of radio missions and the awakening of many nationals to testify of their faith among their fellow citizens who follow the Muslim way. The gospel is being proclaimed without Western baggage, and equally without the novel methods of syncretistic missiologies.

II - The Theological Perspective

Neo-evangelical missiologists would like the church to embark on new ways in missions to Muslims since they claim that the old methods

of the last 200 years have been faulty. As we have noticed in Part I of this paper, a careful study of the history of the Christian-Muslim encounter during the last 1400 years does not sustain the thesis of these missiologists. The difficulties in the Christian mission to Muslims are not to be located in the alleged wrong methods of Western missionaries but in the Muslim tradition itself. From its inception, Islam has been a consciously anti-Christian faith, and its basic motifs have been anti-redemptive. So when we continue to study the reasons for this radical shift in the attitude of some Western missiologists towards Islam, we discover that the inspiration for the call to change did not come from a re-discovery of a thoroughly biblical theology, nor from a fresh appreciation of the rich Christian tradition, but from an inordinate fascination with the new discipline of cultural anthropology. I will now dwell on this important point. In his contribution to the Consultation on Gospel and Culture held at Willowbank in Bermuda, in January 1978, Stephen C. Neil began with these words:

Throughout history, religion and culture have been inextricably connected. There has never yet been a great religion which did not find its expression in a great culture. There has never yet been a great culture which did not have deep roots in a religion. (*Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, edited by John R. Stott and Robert Coote, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1980. p.1)

In spite of this timely observation by a veteran missionary scholar, one could not help but notice among the many papers read at the Consultation a lack of a deep interest in the theological dimensions of the problems we face in missions among Muslims. Culture was regarded as the important bridge which will enable us to reach the Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is as if the "discoveries" of cultural anthropology have provided us with a modern Aladdin's lamp which will solve all our problems. This novel attitude is in marked contrast with the approach of the pioneers. They did not merely confine their scholarly pursuits to the study of Islam, its history and its practices. They reflected theologically on Islam. One thinks, for example, of Samuel Zwemer's *The Moslem Christ*. An excellent and lucid study in the area of Islamic Christology and its implications for missions. Another classic is the monumental work of Prof. J.W. Sweetman: *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study of the Interpretation of Theological*

Ideas in the Two Religions. This missionary scholar who labored most of his life in India (prior to its partition in 1947) shows the extreme importance of a deep theological reflection not only on Islam but equally on Christianity in its relation to Islam.

When we look at the contributions of scholarly men such as W. Montgomery Watt, we cannot escape noticing that the theological approach remains very prominent. In his book ***The Formative Period of Islamic Thought***, whole sections of the book deal with such themes as: God's Determination of Events, The Support in Tradition for Predestinarian Views, The Distinction between *Iman* (faith) and Islam, God and Evil, The Createdness of the Quran, The Attributes of God, The Denial of Anthropomorphism, and The Maturing of Sunnite Theology.

One more reference to a recognized historian, Bernard Lewis, who taught before his retirement both at the University of London and at Princeton University. His writings on the history of the Middle East are filled with deep theological insights. In the quarterly journal *American-Arab Affairs*, the following comments appeared in a review of Lewis' latest book, ***The Muslim Discovery of Europe***.

In trying to account for this lack of interest in the world of Christendom, Professor Lewis offers two principal explanations, one historical, the other theological. The second explanation (theological) for the Muslim attitude derives from the politico-religious character of Islam. For the followers of Muhammad, Islam is the final dispensation of a revealed truth. As such it logically engenders among the Muslim community a sense of ultimate fulfillment in being chosen to receive the final revelation from God through his Messenger the Prophet. As Professor Lewis suggests:

The Muslim doctrine of successive revelations culminating in the final mission of Muhammad led the Muslim to reject Christianity as an earlier and imperfect form of something which he, himself, possessed in the final, perfect form, and to discount Christian thought and Christian civilization accordingly. After the initial impact of eastern Christianity on Islam in the earliest period, Christian influences, even from the high civilization of Byzantium, were reduced to a minimum. Later, by the time that the advance of Christendom and the retreat of Islam had created a new relationship, Islam was crystallized in its ways of thought and behavior and had become impervious to external stimuli, especially those coming from the millennial adversary in the West (*American-Arab Affairs*, Spring 1983, Number 4, p. 155).

While theology in Islam has not played the same role that it has in Christianity, and while the *Shari'a* (Law) is more prominent in the mind of the Muslim than *Kalam* (theology), we may not jump to the conclusion that Islam is a non-theological religion. For example, when Muslims attack the Christian faith, it is always done in terms of the so-called theological and doctrinal errors of this religion. Consciously or unconsciously, Muslims give theological grounds for their instant rejection of the gospel of Christianity.

In the light of all the foregoing considerations, and having noticed how even secular scholars cannot but seek to understand Islam theologically, how are we to assess the words of the Rev. John Stott in his Foreword to *Down to Earth?* Writing about the meager results of missions among 600 million Hindus of India and the 700 million Muslims of the world, he remarks:

Although different answers are given to these questions, they are basically cultural. The major challenge to the world-wide Christian mission today is whether we are willing to pay the cost of following in the footsteps of our incarnate Lord in order to contextualize the Gospel. Our failure of communication is a failure of contextualization (p. viii).

According to the Rev. Stott, we have made hardly any progress among Muslims because we have not made the right analysis which would have shown us that our problems are basically cultural! As if when dealing with Muslims it is quite easy to separate the theological from the cultural. According to the Rev. Stott, the incarnation of the Son of God has become the prototype for proper contextualization. And since we are not willing to pay the price of following in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we refuse to contextualize, and thus we fail to communicate the good news.

These are far-reaching charges. In my readings of scholarly works produced by non-evangelical Christians or by non-Christians, I see no such one-sided emphasis on the cultural aspect of Islam. Nor do I encounter the new jargon of some Western missiologists. It pains me so much that it is some of my dear brothers in the faith who are espousing these novel theories and making far-reaching statements about failure of missions to the Muslims. That we must study and learn the cultures of the people to be reached for the Lord is axiomatic and has never been doubted by any serious missionary of the gospel. The first Western

missionary to Muslims, Raymond Lull, did not go to his field of labors in Tunisia before learning the Arabic language and culture. He even lobbied for the introduction of the study of Arabic in the universities of Europe. Enough has been mentioned in the first part of this paper to indicate that the pioneer missionaries excelled in learning Arabic as well as the culture of the people. None of them ever dreamt of staying for one or two terms in the mission field. Their graves in Beirut, Cairo, and elsewhere in the Middle East testify to their complete devotion to the cause of Christ. They respected the uniqueness of the person and mission of the Messiah and tried to model their missionary activities in the tradition of Paul and the other holy apostles, and not after an incarnational model!

Since Islam claims to be a revealed and theistic religion, are we right when we place so much emphasis on a cultural approach to Islam? As Stephen C. Neil observed when he was referring to the close relationship of history, religion, and culture: "the church entered into easy relations with that culture only when the religion which underlay it had ceased to be a living force." But when we consider Islam, the words just quoted gain added weight. There is hardly an aspect of Islamic life and culture which has not been infused with the Muslim faith. It is impossible to separate between Islam as culture and Islam as a religious faith. Islam has shaped its own theistic worldview.

Several neo-evangelical missiologists tell us that our past efforts among Muslims and others have failed. They place the reason for our failure in the cultural area. The implication of their claims are unavoidable. Contextualize, take this and that element from the Islamic way of worship and culture, and you will begin to succeed in your mission. Actually, this approach is very shallow and does not reckon with the theological subjects which are of great importance to Muslims. For no matter how much we contextualize the gospel message, the stumbling block remains: according to the fundamentals of Islam there is no need for redemption from without. The Quranic doctrine of God takes care of the acknowledged need for forgiveness. Allah is both *Rahman* (Merciful) and *Raheem* (Compassionate). He forgives sins without any recourse to the death of the Messiah.

Islamic culture, as we have already noted, is totally influenced by the Muslim faith. It is impossible to divorce the two. The difficulties in missions among Muslims are real and have been with us for fourteen

centuries. At this late date in history, to suggest that we shift the emphasis from the theological to the cultural is to part company with a long-standing Christian tradition. Furthermore, it offers a false hope that once the magic of contextualization has been put into action, success is guaranteed!

We are now ready to view from a biblical perspective the main theme of some neo-evangelical missiologists, i.e., that Christian missions among Muslims have failed because of a lack of a proper cultural approach.

III - The Biblical Perspective

It is when we view the modern contextualization movement among the neo-evangelicals from the biblical perspective that we become very alarmed. One fails to see how the major biblical themes which deal with the mission of the church in the New Testament age have been taken into consideration. Furthermore, one notices upon the reading of the literature of the contextualization movement the impact of the theologies of the World Council of Churches. Just as one recognizes the eclectic nature of the WCC teachings and pronouncements, so one finds the same thing occurring among the proponents of the new missiology. More emphasis on incarnational theology and less emphasis on preaching and proclamation. There is more preoccupation with secondary issues such as forms of worship, fasting, and the timing of baptism than a genuine desire to understand the true nature of Islam and the biblical guidelines for missions among Muslims. The spirit of the new approach, as stated earlier in this paper, is not so much the Bible as the new discipline of cultural anthropology.

In this third part of my paper, I plan to deal with two main passages of Scripture which have tremendous implications for missions to Muslims: Romans 10 and I Corinthians 1 & 2. In Romans 10, Paul deals with the main reason for the failure of the Old Testament people of God in reaching their destiny. "They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they do not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:2b, 3 NIV).

Paul does not deny the general principle revealed in the Old Testament that "The man who does these things will live by them" (Lev. 18:5 NIV). The Jews of Paul's day believed that they could be saved by

doing the requirements of the law. The Muslims believe that God is pleased with them when they live in accordance with the *Shari'a* (Law). Paul did not deny the truth which is revealed in Leviticus 18:5, but he taught that there was no such human being who could attain salvation by doing the law. God had revealed another way, which was compatible with the fallen state of man. Paul does not theologize as if no doctrine of redemption had been revealed. Rather, he quotes at length from Deuteronomy 30. Moses points to a righteousness which is given to the repentant sinner by God's grace. Now the instrumentality or the means for this gift is the saving Word of God.

Personifying the "righteousness that is by faith" Paul writes:

Do not say in your heart, "who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or, "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10: 6-9 NIV).

It is quite evident from these words of Paul that he puts the emphasis on both content and proclamation. Through this activity of the church, the saving Word of God comes so close to the hearers that it is as near to them as their own heart and mouth. Of course, the saving message must be appropriated. It must be believed and confessed. Paul is giving us in this chapter a very important teaching about missionary activity. He summarizes the teaching of this section of his Letter to the Romans by saying in verse 17: Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Paul is dealing here with what is commonly known as the instrumental cause of our salvation. Saving faith, regardless of the cultural background of the hearer, comes into being in an atmosphere where Christ is proclaimed. This is not meant to aggrandize the role of the apostle or the messenger of the gospel. This is simply the God-ordained way of missions across the ages, in all lands and among all cultures.

When we come to the teachings of Paul in I Corinthians 1 & 2, we meet the same high regard for the doctrine of proclamation. In doing his work as an apostle and pastor and in correcting doctrinal errors, Paul called the church of Corinth back to the fundamentals of the faith. He

stated his thesis both negatively and positively. "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (I Cor. 1:17 NIV).

In elaborating this thesis in the remaining verses of chapters 1 and 2, Paul equally emphasized the contents of the proclamation and the appropriate method which was compatible with the message. His agenda after his conversion was simple: the preaching of the cross of Christ. Why was Paul equally concerned about the message and the method? He was aware of the fact that the content of the message: Jesus Christ and Him crucified, required a methodology which gave all the glory to the triune God and not to man. The faith of the converts must be anchored in the power of God and not in the wisdom of man.

Paul teaches us in a passionate way the importance of guarding the integrity of the Christian faith when it is being propagated. He must have been tempted to compromise in order to make the message more acceptable to the hearers. He knew very well that the basic presuppositions of the Greeks precluded any belief in the crucial doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, the Jewish tradition could not tolerate any teaching about a crucified Messiah. But Paul did not compromise. This is what he wrote: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18 NIV).

When applying these words to the situation in the Muslim world, we must realize that the message of the cross is foolishness to the followers of Muhammad. The gospel of the cross is denied both on Quranic and doctrinal grounds. According to Islam, Allah (God) did not and could not have permitted the Messiah to be killed by the Jews. But we must recognize that Muslims throughout history have not always been totally consistent with the teachings of their faith. The legalism of Sunni (orthodox) Islam has pushed many to look for peace with God in the way of Sufism (mysticism). Also, suffering and redemption are not foreign to the minds of Shi'ite Muslims. Neither should we forget in our missionary work that Muslims are never sure about their standing with their Creator on the Day of Judgment. All these factors must be taken into consideration when we present the gospel to them, as well as when we elaborate missionary principles for work among them. But the fundamental reason why we must proclaim without compromise the

word of the cross is that God has ordained it to be the means of grace for the salvation of all those who put their trust in the crucified and risen Messiah.

When we reflect on the first two chapters of I Corinthians, we also notice that Paul deals with the utter failure of man to find his way in the universe by relying on his own wisdom. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21 NIV). The implication of this apostolic teaching is tremendous. In God's sovereign disposition, He has ordained that all humanly originated attempts to find Him must fail, and they cannot but fail, since man's heart is totally darkened by sin. The only God-ordained way of salvation is through the preaching of the gospel. This great emphasis on proclamation may sound rather out of place in an age when dialogue is becoming very fashionable and when all kinds of gimmicks are being used to bring about conversions. And yet the words of Paul are very clear: God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. We cannot avoid the offense of the word of the cross. The contextualization which the Muslims require of us in order to make our message acceptable to them is nothing less than unconditional surrender. It is rather naive on the part of so many missiologists who are flying the banner of contextualization in missions to Muslims to think that the followers of Islam will settle for anything less than the Islamization of the Christian messenger!

Paul's concern was the necessity of being completely faithful to the received gospel. His mind was focused on the message. This does not mean that he neglected what is called today cross-cultural communication. As a native of the Mediterranean world, Paul was at home in several cultural milieus. He spoke the language of the people and gave not only the gospel message but himself with the message. He became all things to all men that he might win some. But he never compromised on the fundamentals. His main concern was always God-directed. Or, as he put it in the second chapter of I Corinthians:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony of God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that

your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (vv. 1,2,4,5).

The faith which Paul spoke about in these verses was not simply the orthodox or apostolic teaching about the Messiah. It was equally that personal faith which was evoked and created by the Holy Spirit. This is why the human instrument or channel was de-emphasized by Paul. He wanted the faith of the converts to rest not on men's wisdom, but on God's power. It was such an important subject for the apostle that he kept on discussing the crucial importance of a proper methodology. The unique role of the Holy Spirit must be maintained in any teaching about missions. Unless and until the Spirit of God touches the hearts of those listening to the proclamation of the gospel, the words of the missionary remain fruitless. As Paul put it:

This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught us by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (vv. 13,14).

Needless to say, the apostle ended his teaching about the importance of the message and the proper method which must deliver the message with a special emphasis on the unique role of the Holy Spirit. He alone is the author of conversion. Regardless of the cultural or ethnic background of any human being, and no matter how hard we try to bring the message to his attention, the work of the Holy Spirit remains indispensable for his or her conversion. Today, the mission of the universal church is at the crossroads. Unlike the early years of this century when it was rather easy to distinguish between liberal and Bible-believing and orthodox missionaries, the lines are rather blurred in our times. The Liberationists quote Scripture in order to re-interpret the meaning of salvation and desire to clothe their ideology with the mantle of the gospel. Neo-evangelical missiologists who are specially concerned about the challenge of Islam are eager to stress that they do not want to part company with the historic Christian tradition. However, our examination of their claims from the historical, theological, and biblical perspectives has shown that their map for a successful missionary endeavor among Muslims cannot stand the test. If we follow in their

footsteps, we are not showing fidelity to the tremendous missionary heritage of the ancient church or of the specifically Protestant era of missions during the last two centuries.

In conclusion, I would like to submit for further reflection the following theses:

1. The Christian mission to Muslims has a bright future, as long as it is carried on in the time-honored apostolic tradition, i.e., with emphasis on the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God.

2. The present situation in the Muslim world is unique. Since 1800, it has been undergoing radical changes due to the end of the isolation of its masses from the currents of world thoughts. It is therefore uniquely open to the impact of the Christian message.

3. The advent of mass communications is bringing the gospel to many areas of the Muslim world which had never heard its redeeming message. Young Muslims are very eager to learn about the contents of the Christian Scriptures. This provides us with a golden opportunity to present the claims of Christ.

4. The Muslim diaspora in the West presents a unique opportunity for mission work. The uniqueness of the Muslims' presence, neither as conquerors nor as conquered, but as guest workers, students, and immigrants, is a new situation which has no parallel in history.

5. A reading of Muslim literature written by open-minded writers and of listeners' letters who are responding to gospel proclamation indicates that the Lord is moving by His Word and Spirit. He is creating hunger and thirst among the Muslim masses for a message which can be found only in the authentic gospel. Our hope is re-kindled, and we believe that the best days for missions among Muslims are ahead of us. Muslims will be converted through Christian testimony and through the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

This paper is based on the presentation of Rev. Bassam M. Madany at a Caucus on Missions to Muslims held at Four Brooks Conference Center near Philadelphia, PA, on July 9-11, 1985. ▲

Another Look At Common Grace (8) Restraint of Sin and General Revelation

Herman C. Hanko

Introduction

In discussing that aspect of common grace which has to do with the restraint of sin, we concentrated, in our last article, on the fact that an inward restraint of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the unconverted necessarily implies a moral change in man's nature. This change in man's nature involves an improvement of the nature which leaves an unconverted man in a state other than one of total depravity. The Holy Spirit so works that the natural and unconverted man is no longer totally depraved, though he remains unconverted. This, as we noticed, is a denial of the biblical and confessional doctrine of total depravity.

Other elements of the doctrine of the restraint of sin have also been discussed by various theologians in the course of their defense of common grace. One of the chief of these is the relationship between general revelation and common grace. It is to this aspect of the doctrine that we turn in this article.

The Teaching

The whole concept of general revelation has, through the years, become closely associated with common grace.

In his work "Common Grace," Herman Bavinck refers to this relationship when he claims that common grace is important because it prepares the way in the whole creation and in the human race for special grace by which the whole cosmos is saved.¹

¹Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," tr. by R. C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal*, XXIV, pp. 60ff. (April, 1989).

More clearly, Bavinck speaks of this relationship in his book *Our Reasonable Faith*. In speaking of general and special revelation, he writes:

Grace is the content of both revelations, common in the first, special in the second, but in such a way that the one is indispensable for the other.

It is common grace which makes special grace possible, prepares the way for it, and later supports it; and special grace, in its turn, leads common grace up to its own level and puts it into its service.²

Louis Berkhof, in a lengthy discussion of common grace, includes general revelation as a means by which common grace operates. Appealing to Romans 2:14, 15, Berkhof speaks of the fact that general revelation gives to the unregenerate many gifts, including the knowledge of God, which gifts are tokens of God's grace to the reprobate.³

A. A. Hodge connects general revelation and the restraint of sin when he writes:

"Common grace" is the restraining and persuading influences of the Holy Spirit acting only through the truth revealed in the gospel, or through the natural light of reason and of conscience, heightening the natural moral effect of such truth upon the understanding, conscience and heart. It involves no change of heart, but simply an enhancement of the natural powers of the truth, a restraint of the evil passions, and an increase of the natural emotions in view of sin, duty, and self-interest.⁴

No one has devoted more time to this relationship than William Masselink, who wrote an entire book to demonstrate the close connection between general revelation and common grace. In this book, entitled *General Revelation and Common Grace*, he notes that the two cannot be identified because they differ in origin, purpose, and how we acquire knowledge of them. But he then goes on to say:

They are related, however, because in common grace God uses the truths of general revelation to restrain sin. The two results of general

² Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 38.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), pp. 440, 441.

⁴ A. A. Hodge, *Outline of Theology* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878), pp. 449, 450.

revelation are: God-consciousness and moral consciousness. By means of these two results, through God's common grace, sin is curbed in the natural man.⁵

Masselink rather strangely claims that Reformed theology all but went into eclipse for 200 years after the Reformation because "The great fact of the Christian's relation to the world was neglected." Kuyper and Hodge are to be thanked for reviving this crucial element in Reformation theology.⁶

Donald McCleod, in his crassly heretical book and vicious attack on those who deny common grace, includes God's general revelation as one of the instruments of the restraint of sin, a restraint which enables man to perform civil good.⁷

It is clear from these quotations, and their number could be multiplied, that general revelation assumes an important role in the whole doctrine of common grace, and that it is associated with that element of common grace which has to do with the restraint of sin.

The Relation Between the Two

As we have noticed before in our discussions of common grace, it is not so easy to define specifically what the defenders of common grace mean by their assertions. They tend to speak in rather general and vague ways which give some very general notions of their ideas; but when one asks specific questions, the answers are not all that easy to find.

The same is true of our present subject. What precisely do the proponents of common grace mean when they speak of a relation between general revelation and common grace, or general revelation and the restraint of sin? The answers are not easy to find, and one must take guesses as to what they have in mind.

It seems, however, that the general idea is this.

God reveals Himself in two ways to men. He reveals Himself in Scripture and He reveals Himself in creation and history. The former is God's revelation in Jesus Christ; the latter is His revelation in the works

⁵ William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷ Donald McCleod, *Behold Your God* (Christian Focus Publications, 1990), p. 121.

of His hands in which Christ is not made known. The former is God's speech through the gospel which results in the salvation of the elect; the latter is His speech to all men.

Nevertheless, both are grace. The former is God's gracious speech in the overtures of the gospel; the latter is God's gracious speech to all. The former is God's gracious speech through Jesus Christ; the latter is the revelation of His love and kindness towards everyone. The former is the revelation of God's special grace; the latter is the revelation of His common grace.

We might note here, in passing, that even at this point there is some confusion. While it is generally admitted that the grace revealed in general revelation is general, there is no consensus on the question of whether general revelation is grace to reprobate and elect alike. Some maintain that general revelation is grace only to the reprobate; others maintain that it is grace to reprobate and elect alike.

But even more confusing is God's revelation in Scripture. While all agree that the revelation of God in Scripture is not revelation to all men (for all do not hear the gospel in the history of mankind), nevertheless, the defenders of common grace maintain that special revelation, i.e., the revelation of God through Scripture and the preaching of the gospel, is shown to reprobate as well as elect, for the preaching of the gospel expresses God's desire to save all men and is, therefore, grace to reprobate as well as elect. This is the point of connection between common grace and the well-meant gospel offer.

But the question of the well-meant gospel offer is not our concern in these articles.

The question remains, however: How is general revelation grace, be it but common grace?

The primary texts which are quoted in this connection are Romans 1:18-25, particularly the expression: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse"; and Romans 2:14, 15: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."

The argument goes like this. In creation God reveals “His eternal power and Godhead” and writes “the work of the law” in the hearts of all men, so that the consciences of all men bear witness to the truth. Thus all men possess the knowledge of God and of God’s law. This knowledge of God and of His law is graciously given. Without such revelation those outside the preaching of the gospel would not even know God, nor would they possess any knowledge of His law. They would be totally ignorant of God and of His will. They would live like beasts without any consciousness of God or His holy will. But God graciously gives them, through creation, such a knowledge that they still may know Him and what He has willed for them.

This knowledge of God, though not saving knowledge in Jesus Christ, is the means God uses to restrain sin in them. Knowing something of God, they retain some knowledge of the truth. Knowing the law of God, they retain some regard for virtue and good order in society — as the Canons of Dort express it in III & IV, 4. And this knowledge which they possess is God’s grace to them. It is grace for different reasons. 1) It is grace because it is an act of grace that such knowledge is given at all. 2) It is grace because this knowledge, though not saving knowledge, gives them a possession which is a good gift of God. 3) It is grace because by means of this knowledge they are restrained in their sin, and are, in fact, enabled to do some good. Hence, general revelation is grace.

Although not specifically mentioned by the proponents of common grace, it seems also as if another question enters the discussion at this point. It appears as if the defenders of common grace also want to connect this grace of God in general revelation with the image of God in man. Our readers will recall how we pointed out in an earlier article that it is often maintained by the defenders of common grace that, apart from common grace, man would have become a beast after the fall. It is common grace that preserves man as man. And because he is still man, he still bears God’s image, though in a corrupted way. And this image, by which man knows God and knows the difference between right and wrong, is preserved in man through the common grace of general revelation.

And so we face three questions, each of which we shall have to examine. 1) What is general revelation? 2) Is this so-called general revelation grace towards the reprobate? 3) Is man still an image-bearer of God?

What Is General Revelation

That God makes Himself known to all men through creation^{*} is surely the teaching of Scripture, especially Romans 1:18ff. Whether it is proper to call this manifestation of God through the things that are made by the term revelation is quite another question.

As far as the term itself is concerned, Scripture utilizes the term in a very precise way.

The Greek term itself, ἀποκαλύπτω in its verb form and ἀποκάλυψις in its noun form, has a very precise meaning. It means, "to uncover that which is hidden." The figure is sometimes used of the unveiling of a painting or the public unveiling of a new piece of sculpture by an artist. A large crowd may be gathered for the occasion, and at the proper time a work of art, hitherto hidden under a large sheet, is withdrawn for all to see.

Now it is clear already from the term itself that such "revelation" or unveiling implies the ability on the part of the audience to see what is unveiled. If among the throng there are fifty blind people, it is obvious that, as far as the unveiling is concerned, there is no "revelation" of the work of art to these blind folk. The work of art may be unveiled, but the blind are unable to see it.

So it is when Scripture uses this term in connection with God's revelation of Himself or in connection with God's revelation of Jesus Christ or the work of salvation which He has performed through Christ. God uncovers the greatness of His glory and unveils the riches of His grace in Jesus Christ. But there is no real revelation if there are blind people present.

And Scripture very sharply makes this distinction. It does so on the grounds that the fall of man which resulted in the total depravity of the human race makes it spiritually impossible for the totally depraved sinner to "see" the revelation of God or the truth of the gospel.

Jesus makes this very clear when He explains to His disciples why He speaks in parables (Matt. 13:11-16). While the wicked must hear the parables because "they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand," to the disciples "is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," while "to them it is not given." And the

^{*} We leave out of consideration here the idea that history belongs to general revelation. While in a certain sense this can be said to be true, it is not immediately relevant to our discussion.

disciples know because, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

God's work of revelation, therefore, implies the subjective spiritual work of grace in the hearts of the elect by means of which they are given the spiritual ability to see that revelation. They are blind as the others by nature. But when revelation takes place, this very work of revelation includes the subjective and inner work of the Holy Spirit giving eyes to see and ears to hear. This inner and enlightening work of the Holy Spirit is always implied in Scripture's use of the term.

The term "revelation," therefore, includes in it various ideas according to Scripture.

In the first place, "revelation" is always particular. Whenever Scripture speaks of God's revelation of Himself, or of His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, or of His revelation of the mysteries of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ, this is always particular and never general. It is always a work of God performed for His elect people and never embraces the reprobate.

This is sharply set forth in many passages of Scripture. In Matthew 11:25-27 we read: "At that time Jesus answered and said, 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. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."⁹

In the second place, because the term is used in a particular sense, the term always carries with it the connotation of grace. Revelation is always a work of grace, not general or common grace, but particular grace. Revelation is a part of the work of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is not incorrect or an exaggeration to say that the Bible never once speaks of general revelation.

⁹ This same truth is found in Luke 10:21-22. That that revelation is particular and not general is evident from many other passages. See, e.g., Matthew 16:17, 1 Corinthians 2:10, Ephesians 3:5, Philippians 3:15, 1 Peter 1:12, Galatians 1:16. In fact, whether the verb form or the noun form is used, when "revelation" refers to God's work of making Himself known, the term is always used particularly, i.e., as a work of God for the elect. The reader can consult any Concordance on the matter.

Apparently the defenders of common grace are aware of this, for they themselves always connect revelation with grace. They understand that revelation and grace do indeed always belong together. That is, when general revelation is spoken of, it is always spoken of in the context of grace. The trouble is that, because they maintain that revelation itself is general, they wrongly conclude that grace also is general. But the point is that grace can never be separated from revelation.

In the third place, because revelation includes the subjective work of God by means of which a man, spiritually blind by nature, is enabled to see what God has revealed, revelation is ascribed to the work of God the Holy Spirit. This is true, e.g., in I Corinthians 2:10: "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And we must not forget that this is in contrast with what Paul says in verse 14 of the same chapter: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

This same emphasis is clearly found in Ephesians 1:17, 18: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."¹⁰

In every use of the word in Scripture, revelation is connected to God's gracious work of salvation for the elect. It is not used in connection with the wicked. There is no such thing in Scripture as general revelation in the sense in which it is spoken of in connection with common grace.

Romans 1:18-25

The question may be asked at this point: What about Romans 1:18ff.?

Dr. Abraham Kuyper, as well as others, appealed to this passage in support of the doctrine of the inward restraint of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who hold to this position appealed especially to the

¹⁰ The interested reader may pursue this matter further by studying such texts as Ephesians 3:3, Romans 16:25, Galatians 1:12, Revelation 1:1, etc.

expressions "Wherefore God also gave them up ..." (v.24) and "For this cause God gave them up ..." (v. 26). They argue that if God gave these idolaters up, He had, prior to giving them up, restrained them.

Now, on the surface, this will not do. In the first place, God's act of giving up the wicked to their vile affections does not imply that, prior to giving them up, God had indeed restrained them. Such a conclusion is invalid on the very face of it. But, in the second place, if indeed God had restrained them prior to giving them up, surely anyone can see that the text makes no mention of the fact that such restraint was accomplished by an inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.¹¹

But however that may be, the text makes no mention whatsoever of any kind of grace of God towards these wicked; nor does it speak of any kind of revelation of God in grace.

The text does use the word "reveal": "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven ..." (v. 18). But notice, this is not the revelation of grace and kindness, but of wrath. And we ought to take note of the fact that this statement in verse 18 is really the theme of the entire passage which ends with the end of the chapter. The Holy Spirit is talking about the revelation of the wrath of God from heaven in the entire section.

The reason why God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon these ungodly is said to be that "they hold the truth in unrighteousness." The word "hold" is, in the Greek, κατέχω, which means literally, "to have down" and can be translated, "suppress, hold under."

The idea is then that these wicked people suppress or hold under the truth. They deny it. They refuse to let it enter their consciousness. They do all in their power to keep it from being taught and believed.

Now it ought to be clear that if the wicked suppress the truth, they know that truth. One cannot suppress what he does not know.¹² And the apostle goes on to explain how it is that they know this truth.

¹¹ In our previous article we pointed out that we had no objection to the idea of the restraint of sin as long as that restraint was outward by means of God's providence.

¹² This same idea, now in the case of the unbelieving Jews, is expressed in Jesus' words from Matthew 13, which we quoted earlier: "*Seeing they see....*" There is, therefore, a certain *formal* knowledge of the truth which the wicked suppress. But revelation always gives *saving* knowledge.

One must remember that Paul is speaking here of the heathen who live outside the sphere of the preaching of the gospel. He is talking about the people of the Roman empire who in his day were characterized by all the sins which the chapter goes on to describe in such vivid detail. And in speaking of those outside the preaching of the gospel, he is speaking of all in heathendom from his day to the present who have not the preaching of the gospel.

How is it that these who have never heard the gospel nevertheless know the truth?

The answer is very clear.

We ought to note at the outset that in explaining this idea the apostle does not use the word “reveal.” The wicked do not know the truth by revelation in the biblical sense of that term. The apostle uses here the word “manifest”: “That which may be known of God is *manifest* in them.” The Greek has here φανερόν ἐστιν. The word φανερόν is the adjective of the verb φανερώω. It is clear, therefore, that the Scriptures make a distinction between revelation and manifestation, and that Romans 1 is not referring to the former, but to the latter.¹³

However that may be, God does manifest Himself outside Scripture and Christ to those who have no knowledge of Scripture. Concerning that manifestation of God, the text in Romans 1 teaches the following.

1) This manifestation of God to those outside the sphere of revelation is the means by which all men without exception know the truth, the truth which they suppress in unrighteousness.

2) The truth is manifest in the wicked because God shows it to them (v. 19). That is, God Himself is determined to show Himself to the wicked so that they may truly know His truth.

3) This manifestation is “from the creation” and is understood by the wicked “through the things that are made.” That is, the creation itself, created by God, is the means by which God shows Himself to the wicked outside the gospel. It is evident in the creation that God is the

¹³. We are not interested in a controversy over the use of terminology for its own sake. But it is my conviction that to use the biblical concept of revelation to describe God’s manifestation to the heathen is a mistake which has had serious consequences in the history of Reformed thought. As we mentioned earlier, just because revelation, when it refers to God’s work of making Himself known in Christ, is part and parcel of grace, the conclusion has been made that “general revelation” is also somehow grace.

Creator and that He has formed all things and still upholds all things by the Word of His power.¹⁴ The trees and flowers, rain and sunshine, rivers and oceans, monkeys and ants -- all manifest God as the Creator.

4) What is manifested by God in His works in creation is "his eternal power and Godhead" (v. 20). Not all that may be known of God is clearly shown in creation. Basically two things are shown: God's eternal power and His Godhead. If one thinks about it, what Scripture has in mind here is this. In creation is manifested the great truth that God alone is God and that He alone must be served and worshiped. These fundamental truths are known to everyone. The lowliest pagan, the most uncivilized heathen, the natives in the darkest jungles of remote ocean islands -- all know, through the things that are made, that God is God and that He alone is to be worshiped and served. No one can escape that knowledge. God Himself sees to it that that is known by every person alive.

This does not include, of course, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. It might be well at this point to make a slight digression. The knowledge of God through Jesus Christ is the only knowledge of God by which men can be saved. The wicked who have a certain knowledge of God do not have such knowledge as will save them. There is only one name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, and that is the name of God in Christ. Never can salvation come through God's manifestation in creation.

It has been argued that this is cruel and unfair since God does not give pagan man sufficient knowledge to be saved. And this objection seems to be strengthened by the fact that the apostle adds: "So that they may be without excuse." The question then is: How can they be without excuse if they have insufficient knowledge to be saved? But it must be remembered that fallen man was created by God good and upright, able in all things to know and love God. The fact that this is no longer possible and that He needs knowledge in Christ to be saved does not detract from his responsibility. That man fell is *his* fault, not God's.

¹⁴ While our present interest is not in the theory of evolution, a theory which denies God's creative work, it is clear, also from this passage, that to deny creation in the interests of evolutionary theory is to deny that God makes Himself known to the wicked through creation. The whole truth of Romans 1:18ff. rests upon a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3.

That pagan man can never be saved with the knowledge that he possesses is not injustice on God's part, but is the result of man's own consummate folly.¹⁵

5) This truth the wicked suppress. They know it. They cannot deny it. They are confronted with it. But in their sin they will have none of it. They hate it because they hate God. They not only make every effort to deny it, but they also suppress it in their own consciousness.

6) Yet God reveals all His power and Godhead to them "so that they may be without excuse." In the Greek, this appears as a purpose clause. It is a definition of God's purpose in making Himself known to all men. Very clearly this means that God has His own sovereign purpose in making Himself known. In the judgment day, no one in all the world will be able to say that the reason why he did not worship and serve God was because he was ignorant of Him. God will tell him: You knew. You knew Me. I told you of Myself. You have no excuse. When I now send you to everlasting hell, I do so justly. And every wicked man will have to admit, before the great white throne of Christ, that indeed that is true.

7) The text goes on to say that this suppression of the truth is the explanation for their idolatry. Twice over the apostle makes this clear. In verse 21 he says: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." And in verses 22, 23 he adds: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." And once more, in verse 25 the apostle says, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than¹⁶ the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."

¹⁵ This important truth implies the truth of original guilt. Man is responsible, not only for his own sin, but also for the sin which Adam committed in Paradise in eating of the forbidden tree. All men are guilty for this sin, and man's total depravity is his fault, for which he is accountable before God. This is the clear teaching of Romans 5:12-14, and this truth is maintained by all the historic Reformed and Presbyterian creeds. It is, as a matter of fact, the great dividing point between the Reformed faith and all forms of Arminianism. Scripture is clear on the doctrine that total depravity is the just punishment of God upon the human race which is guilty in Adam for Adam's sin. See a clear statement of this truth in Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 4.

¹⁶ The Greek here can be better translated "rather than."

This is very clear language, and its repetition emphasizes how important it is. When the pagans worship idols of every sort, this idol worship is not ignorance. So often it is presented as such. The wicked, so it is said, worship idols because they do not know any better. They have not the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so they do not know that they must worship God, nor do they know how they can do this. Sometimes it is even added that the wicked *long* to worship the true God, but they do not know how to do this, and so they worship idols as an expression of their desire to worship God. Such notions are flatly contradicted by the apostle. Their idolatry is deliberate.

The wicked know the truth full well. They know it beyond denial. But they suppress it. And the way they suppress it is by changing God's glory into a creaturely image and thus changing the truth into a lie. Note here the all-important word "change." They deliberately and consciously, with malice aforethought, willfully and in rebellion against God, *change* His glory into a creature, and that creature they worship. They profess to be wise, but they are fools. They seek in every way possible to destroy God and to suppress that which they know about Him. This is their dreadful sin and the depths of their depravity.

8) Hence the wrath of God is upon them. And that wrath of God upon them is especially revealed, according to the apostle, in giving them over to the terrible sin of homosexuality. We ought to note that. God punishes sin with sin. And He, in His holy wrath, punishes idolatry with homosexuality. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (v. 24). And again, "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature . . ." (vv. 26ff.).

One need only read the rest of the chapter to see what are the dreadful consequences of man's suppression of the truth of God.

But in this passage there is no mention at all either of any general revelation or of any grace of God revealed in so-called general revelation. It is clear to anyone who reads the passage, that there is, therefore, no restraint of sin in this general revelation at all.

Romans 2:14, 15

The same general truth is taught in Romans 2:14, 15, although here from the viewpoint of the law of God.

We will not enter into this passage in any kind of detail. We wish to point out only a few things.

1) It must be remembered that this passage is written particularly in the context of the Roman Empire. Pagan Rome had developed a vast system of jurisprudence, a system which has even become the basis for Western legal theory. The question which the apostle is answering is: How was this possible? After all, the Romans had not the gospel of Jesus Christ. How could they develop such an intricate and elaborate system of law?

2) The apostle is not saying that these same Romans have not discovered and codified laws which reflect the law of God and which are important for the survival of society. Indeed this is the case. But it must also be remembered that this same Rome is the nation that gave itself over to every form of idolatry and was judged by God with every form of sexual vice including homosexuality. They, therefore, have not the law in the sense in which Israel had it, but they do the things contained in the law (v. 14).

3) This doing of the law does not mean that they kept the law of God perfectly or in any sense as a duty and obligation to be obedient to the God of heaven and earth. They do the things contained in the law because they are able to see that this is for their own advantage. Laws against murder and theft are codified and enforced. To do anything different would result in the dissolution of society and the fall of the empire. It does not take grace, not even common grace, to understand this. Anyone can see that.

4) How do they know the law? The apostle says that they "show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (v. 15). Notice, the apostle does not say that they show *the law written in their hearts*. This is true only of those who are saved by grace. But they show *the work* of the law written in their hearts. That is, God testifies through their conscience the work of the law. He testifies of what is in keeping with His law and what is contrary to His law. Every heathen knows this. It is implied in the fact that all men not only know that God is God, but they know too that God alone must be served.

5) This also takes place through God's manifestation of Himself in creation. After all, when God created all things, He imbedded in the creation His own law. It is woven into the warp and woof of creation.

It is part of man's obligation which he knows by virtue of his own creatureliness and the created character of the creation within which he lives. He cannot escape knowing that the creation clearly shows that murder and theft, adultery and fornication are wrong. Creation itself shows that God alone must be served. And God so impresses this truth upon man's conscience that they accuse or else excuse one another.

6) But again, there is no mention of grace, even and especially a grace shown through some gracious revelation of God. It is, in fact, the way in which the wicked become accountable in the judgment.

The Confessions

There are two articles in the Reformed confessions which deal with these matters we have been discussing. They too have been appealed to repeatedly in support of common grace and the restraint of sin through what is called general revelation.

The first is in Canons III & IV, 4: "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God."¹⁷

The second article is Belgic Confession, Article 14. We quote here the pertinent part. "And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts, which he had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse."

In support of the doctrine of the restraint of sin, appeal is made to the fact that the Belgic Confession speaks of man retaining a few remains of the excellent gifts which he lost because of the fall; and that

¹⁷ We have quoted the entire article. This was not done by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 when it adopted the idea of the restraint of sin through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all men. Mysteriously and inexcusably, the quotation was ended just before the words, "But so far is this light of nature...."

the Canons speak of glimmerings of natural light which fallen man retains, by which he has some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil. And further, that, because of these glimmerings, he discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment.

It is clear that both articles refer directly to the passages in Romans 1 and 2 which we discussed above. Both use the same language in some respects, and both creeds specifically refer to the fact that God continues to give fallen man some remnants of His excellent gifts that he might be without excuse.

Both articles speak of natural light, the Belgic by referring to remnants of excellent gifts, and the Canons by referring to glimmerings of natural light.

What are these remnants of natural light? Very obviously, the creeds refer to the fact that, even after man fell, man did not become a beast or animal — as Dr. Abraham Kuyper (and others) insist would have happened if it had not been for common grace. He remained a man. His natural light (in distinction from spiritual light) are those gifts which guarantee that he is still a man. Man is still rational because he retains a mind. He is still moral because he retains a will. He is still a creature with a soul, which soul shall endure beyond death so that he may stand in the judgment and be justly and righteously punished for his sin.

These gifts of natural light are, according to the creeds, the means by which he still has some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil. It is because he has natural light in a measure that he is still able to have some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. If he lacked these he would no longer be man.

But they are, after all, only glimmerings and remnants. Even as far as the natural light which man continues to possess is concerned, man has only bits and pieces. That is, the fall was so devastating in its consequences that even man's natural powers of mind and will which he retained are remnants and glimmerings. They are the few scraps a seamstress has left over when her dress is completed, essentially worthless. They are the sputterings of a candle in comparison with the light of the sun. Man's natural powers of soul were far greater before he fell than after God visited him with death.

But these glimmerings and remnants are enough to hold man

accountable before God. They are enough to give man some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil. And so man still is responsible for what he does. If he had not these glimmerings, he would not be accountable before God for his idolatry and sin. But now he is.

But if you should inquire whether this is grace, the creeds make no mention at all of such grace. And if you should think that these glimmerings restrain sin, the creeds are quite emphatic that they do not. Man's regard for virtue and good order in society and his efforts to maintain an orderly external deportment are for his own selfish benefit, for he is able to see that society would sink into chaos, and life would be impossible, if God's law were not externally observed.

The Canons are quite insistent on making the point. All these glimmerings are not only insufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, but man is even incapable of using this natural light aright in things natural and civil. He suppresses the truth, renders it holy polluted, holds it in unrighteousness, and corrupts it in every way possible. And so he becomes inexcusable before God.

The Image of God in Man

We turn now to our final question concerning the image of God in man.

It is not our purpose to enter into this question in detail, for it rightly belongs to a study which would include the history of the doctrine over the centuries and a careful exegetical and theological analysis of what has proved to be a very difficult subject. We are only concerned about the question insofar as it touches on the subject of common grace and the restraint of sin.

It is our judgment that much of the discussion concerning the image of God has gone astray because of the failure of theologians to define the image according to biblical principles. Many theologians have included in the image many elements which Scripture itself does not include.

Louis Berkhof, who may be considered representative of many in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, includes many elements in the image which do not properly belong there. After correctly emphasizing that the image of God includes true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, he goes on to say: "But the image of God is not to be restricted

to the original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness which was lost by sin, but also includes elements which belong to the natural constitution of man."¹⁸ In this list are included intellectual power, natural affections, moral freedom, spirituality, and immortality.¹⁹

It is our judgment that this is a mistake.

The key passages which define the image of God in man clearly limit this image to true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:22-24: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts: and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." And in Colossians 3:10 he writes: "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

Although these passages refer to the renewal of the elect in Jesus Christ, they specifically mention that these elements are elements of the image. The elect are *renewed* after all. They are given what was lost in Adam. Restored in them is what Adam possessed, but lost because of his sin. And the elements that are mentioned are limited to knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

It is true that man continues to be a rational and moral being. It is also true that only a rational and moral being is able to bear the image of God. No tree or hippopotamus, no dog or thistle is able to be an image bearer. Only man can bear that image. And only he can bear it because he is created with a soul, i.e., with a mind, a will, and affections. But to include that which belongs to the nature and essence of man as man in the image is to broaden the image beyond that which Scripture sanctions.

It is such a broadening of the image which has led to all kinds of trouble. Because man retains his rationality and morality, be they only remnants, man retains the image of God in a measure. And if he retains the image of God, he remains like God in certain respects even though fallen. And it is easy to make the jump from saying that man even in his fallen state, because he is still image bearer, is still under grace, is less than as bad as he can be, is capable of doing good things. And so the

¹⁸ Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 205.

retention of the image becomes the avenue to introduce common grace as a restraining inner influence in fallen and unregenerate man.

But if the image is truly lost in the fall in its entirety, as Scripture teaches, then man is truly depraved, incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Then he is not the object of grace, but of wrath. And grace comes to him only through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then we can understand what the Belgic Confession states in Article 14: "We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will, agreeable to the will of God. But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death."

This same truth is echoed by the Canons in III & IV, 1: "Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy; but revolting from God by the instigation of the devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections."

Two passages of Scripture are quoted to prove that man retained the image after the fall. The first is Genesis 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." The second is James 3:9: "Therewith (that is, with the tongue) bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."

Murderers are to be killed because they shed the blood of a man who was created after God's image, and violations of the ninth commandment are such dreadful sins (especially when hypocritically a man blesses God and curses his fellow man) because man was made in God's image.

These texts are referred to as proof that man is still image bearer.

However, a careful scrutiny of the texts and the contexts in which they are found will clearly show that the reference is to the original creation of man by God. Man is unique in God's world. He alone among all creatures was originally created as image-bearer of God. That unique character of man remains even though he fell. The image does not remain in the sense that man still bears the image, but it remains in the sense that he is still unique and still capable of being an image-bearer because he is rational and moral.

There is an important point here. Even fallen man is image-bearer because of his rationality and morality. But fallen man has become image-bearer of Satan, for the wicked are of their father the devil whose works they do. But the elect are destined in God's grace to be renewed after the image of Christ. And as renewed in the image of Christ, they are renewed to bear the image of their Father in heaven with whom they will dwell in glory.

Conclusion

The whole concept of general revelation ought to be abandoned by Reformed theology. While God manifests Himself to all, He does so that He may be vindicated in His justice and righteousness when the wicked are punished. To the elect God reveals Himself in Christ. This is grace. Other than that great grace of God in Christ, there is no grace.

And so we can find no proof of an inner restraint of sin in this whole concept, and Reformed theology finds such notions contrary to all that belongs to Scripture.

We must still treat Article 2 of the Belgic Confession which speaks of the fact that God may be known "by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity...." But this must wait for another article. ▲

An Introduction to Henry Danhof's "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace"

David J. Engelsma

With the next issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, I will begin publishing my translation of Henry Danhof's printed lecture, "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace."¹ There will likely be three installments. In this issue, I introduce Danhof's booklet — and Danhof — to the readers of this *Journal*.

Henry Danhof, at the time a minister in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), gave the lecture at a conference of Christian Reformed ministers in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1919. Evidently, the conference of ministers was held in connection with a meeting of a Grand Rapids classis of the CRC.² Danhof was a substitute for the scheduled speaker, Rev. Johannes Groen, who was sick. From Danhof the ministers heard quite a different speech than they would have heard from Groen.

¹ H. Danhof, *De Idee van het Genadeverbond* (Grand Rapids: Van Noord Book and Publishing Company, 1920). The booklet is 42 pages. To my knowledge, it has never before been translated into English.

² Referring to the discussion that followed Danhof's lecture, Jan Karel Van Baalen speaks of a statement made by Danhof at "a classical gathering." See Jan Karel Van Baalen, *De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Doopersch? (The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptist?)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1922), p. 47. James D. Bratt says that Danhof made the remark to which Van Baalen refers "in the question-and-answer session at the classical meeting after delivering 'De Idee van het Genadeverbond.'" See James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 265.

Controversial Lecture

As the title indicates, Danhof's address was a penetrating study of the fundamental idea of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace. At the same time, and as an aspect of the idea of the covenant of grace, the lecture investigated the relationship between the church and the world. This led the speaker to consider and pass judgment on the apparent good done by the ungodly.

The speech was controversial.

In response to Danhof's rejection of the popular notion that the life of unregenerated mankind is "full of all kinds of virtues," a Christian Reformed minister put the question to Danhof, how we then must view the marriage of two unbelievers. Danhof's response is reported to have been that "the marriage between two non-Christians can be nothing other than bestiality and the kind of love which devils have for each other."³

This response with its condemnation of all the apparently noble deeds of the pagans infuriated Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen, as well, undoubtedly, as the other Christian Reformed ministers who shared Van Baalen's esteem for the "good" in the unholy world. Three years later, in a polemical work against Danhof and Herman Hoeksema concerning the doctrine of common grace, Van Baalen recalled Danhof's statement with not one but two exclamation marks and called it "nonsense."

At the end of this polemical work, *De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Doopersch? (The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptist?)*, Van Baalen put several questions to Danhof and Hoeksema. He intended these questions to expose their false doctrine. The very first was how Danhof viewed the marriage of Hector and Andromache: "May we ask Rev. Danhof whether he will be so good as to make clear to us what there is in the love between Hector and his wife, as sung by Homer, that is devilish or bestial?"⁴

³ Van Baalen, *Loochening*, p. 47; cf. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, pp. 111, 265.

⁴ Van Baalen, *Loochening*, p. 87. Van Baalen quoted the touching conversation between Hector and Andromache from Book 6 of Homer's *The Iliad*. Danhof's "bestial" and "devilish" was strong language. But Van Baalen's indignation at this strong language should not obscure the fact that the issue was whether the love between Hector and Andromache is sinful. If it is sinful — *only* sinful — it is devilish, for sin originates in the devil. If it is sinful

Historically Significant Address

Danhof's speech, delivered, it must be remembered, to an influential group of Christian Reformed ministers, was significant in the history of the CRC. Danhof gave the speech in 1919 when the CRC was in the throes of a struggle which would fundamentally determine the future of that Reformed denomination. The issue in that struggle was the relationship between the CRC and the world of the ungodly. Danhof and Hoeksema contended for the spiritual separation of the church from the world. The theological term that expressed this separation and warfare was "antithesis."

Another group, among whom was Jan Karel Van Baalen, fought as vehemently for the church's openness to the world — accommodation; cooperation; and reception, within limits, of course. The deceptive watchword of this party was "Americanization." The word was deceptive because that which this party sought was not conformity to the innocent ways of America — language and clothes — but conformity to

— *only* sinful — it is worse than bestial, for beasts cannot sin in their mating. That the love of Hector and Andromache is sinful, the passage itself from which Van Baalen took his quotation makes plain. The immediate context of Hector and Andromache's expressions of love for each other is Hector's advice to the women of Troy to worship the goddess Athena ("Queen Athena, goddess divine, savior of our city!"); Hector's affirmation that his burning desire is his own glory ("to win credit for my father and myself"); and Hector's prayer to all the gods that his son will bring glory to himself and to his father ("O Zeus and all ye heavenly gods!"). See Homer's *The Iliad*, tr. W. H. D. Rouse, Mentor Book (New York: The New American Library, 1950), pp. 74-83.

Everything that issues from such an idolatrous, self-seeking heart is sin, including marital and family life. The Heidelberg Catechism passes judgment upon the love of Hector and Andromache that it is sin: "But what are good works? Only those which proceed from a true faith and are performed ... to His glory ..." (Q. 91). Romans 1:18ff. condemns the life of such pagans as Hector and Andromache: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

For all the vigor of his terminology, therefore, Danhof was only pronouncing the biblical, Reformed judgment upon Hector and Andromache.

Why was this offensive to Van Baalen? Why could he be fulsome in his praise of Zeus-worshiping Hector and violent in his condemnation of Henry Danhof, who worshiped the true God? How, two years later, could Van Baalen and the entire Christian Reformed synod expel Danhof from their fellowship as a deposed minister, while keeping Hector and Andromache in good repute within the church? Already in the early 1920s there was a diseased love of pagan culture in the CRC. This did not bode well for its future.

the corrupt ways of the world: the higher critical doctrines regarding the Holy Scriptures of European unbelief, as well as other distinctly un-Reformed teachings; the principles and practices of the ungodly labor unions; fellowship with the works of darkness in worldly amusements.⁵

The doctrine by which the church would relate positively to the world was Abraham Kuyper's and, especially, Herman Bavinck's doctrine of common grace.

⁵ For a helpful (and highly readable!) analysis of this critically important struggle in the 1920s for the soul and future of the CRC, see Bratt, **Dutch Calvinism**, pp. 93-119. These two chapters are titled, "Forming the Battle Lines, 1919-1920" and "The Resolution, 1921-1928." Bratt characterizes Danhof and Hoeksema as the "Antitheticals." The party of friendly relations with the world he describes as "positive Calvinists," a description that may tip Bratt's own hand. Hoeksema called this party "the latitudinarian party in the churches, a group of men . . . who opposed the antithesis, stood for a 'broader' view of the Christian's life and calling in the world, and strove to bridge the gap between the world and the Church" (*The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, 1947, pp. 15, 16). The "positive Calvinists" attacked "otherworldliness . . . and a disregard for God's general grace and revelation" and advocated the church's fulfillment of its "cultural mandate." Such "positive Calvinists" supposed, no doubt sincerely, that the CRC was called to solve the world's problems. As though this were a real possibility! But this, he said, cannot be done "if only men think like the Reformed."

One may disagree with Bratt's conclusion that, although the "Antitheticals" went down to defeat in the common grace decision of 1924, the "progressive Calvinists" also "came to grief." The decision of the CRC on common grace spelled the victory of the "progressive Calvinists." In time, Hoeksema's prophecy that common grace, "nothing other than the theory for conformity to the world," would "bring a real tidal wave of worldliness over the churches" was sure to be fulfilled. The compromising "Confessionalist/Pietist" party (to use Bratt's label), who gave the victory to the "progressive Calvinists" and who exercised church power for the next 25 years, merely delayed the full manifestation of the victory of the "progressive Calvinists" in 1924. In terms of Hoeksema's figure of the "tidal wave," the Louis Berkhofs and H. J. Kuipers spent the next 25 years sticking their fingers in various holes that the adoption of common grace had opened up in the Christian Reformed dike. In the early 1950s, the dike itself began to collapse.

Hoeksema's analysis of the leading figures in Bratt's "Confessionalist/Pietist" party — L. Berkhof, S. Volbeda, Y. P. De Jong, and H. J. Kuiper—is found in *The Protestant Reformed Churches*, pp. 16-26. About this treatment, Bratt remarks that Hoeksema "has especially good insight into the instincts and vacillations of the Confessionalist party" (*Dutch Calvinism*, p. 266).

The first ecclesiastical skirmish in this war was the synodical condemnation in 1922 of seminary professor Ralph Janssen's views on the Bible as modernism.⁶ The apparent triumph of the antithetical position was misleading and short-lived. For a scant two years later the decisive battle was fought on the Christian Reformed synod of Kalamazoo, Michigan. By its adoption of the "Three Points of Common Grace," the CRC destroyed the antithesis in that church and established openness to the world as its official policy. In this decision, the synod was reacting, in part, against the well-remembered address by Henry Danhof, "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace."⁷

Danhof's lecture has also been significant for the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). These are the churches that came into existence as a separate denomination as the result of the CRC's rejection of the antithesis in 1924 and discipline, in 1925, of officebearers who opposed the doctrine of common grace. In his lecture, Danhof developed the reality of the covenant of grace as fellowship that has become central to the theology and practice of the PRC. Some have suggested that Danhof's conception of the covenant was formative of Protestant Reformed covenant theology.

Profound Statement of the Covenant

Apart from its historical significance, Danhof's treatise on the covenant is important in its own right as a unique, profound, thorough statement of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. For Danhof, the covenant of grace is central in the life of the believer: "The idea of the covenant of grace concerns the deepest and most intimate relation

⁶ On the history of the "Janssen case" in the CRC and its relation to the assault on Herman Hoeksema by the advocates of common grace, see Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches*, pp. 17-26. For an indepth study of the relationship between the views of Ralph Janssen and the doctrine of common grace, see the unpublished master's thesis of Herman Hanko, "A Study of the Relation between the Views of Prof. R. Janssen and Common Grace" (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1988). Copies of this thesis are available from the bookstore of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

⁷ For the history of this "common grace" controversy, see Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches*, pp. 11-290; on the doctrinal issues of the controversy, see pp. 293-410.

between God and man. The real covenant-relation governs every other relation."

The relationship with God that is the covenant consists of friendship: "The covenant causes God and man to live together as friends. In this the covenant-idea is completely realized" (Dutch: "*komt ... ten volle tot haar recht*").

The ultimate origin of the covenant as a relationship of friendship is the triune life of God.

The covenant rests in the holy Trinity. God is the God of the covenant. He is such, not merely according to the counsel of His will in His relation to the creature but first of all in Himself, by virtue of His own nature. The "inner life of God" is a covenant of friendship among Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.... The absolute covenant-idea lies hidden in the family life of the holy Trinity.

At its core, the history of revelation is the development of the covenant of grace. "The beginning of the realization of the covenant-idea we find already in the earthly paradise. The relationship between God and man was one of friendship already in the state of rectitude." Man's fall did not annul the covenant of God.

God wills the covenant. Therefore, according to God's good pleasure, Christ, God's Companion, stood behind Adam when he became apostate and in Him the Lord's covenant of friendship with man was firmly established. God realizes His covenant of friendship with man by grace in Christ . . . so that he becomes God's covenant companion and friend everlastingly.

The present history of the world centers in the covenant of God with His people in Christ. "According to God's decree, all things work together for the realization of this idea of the covenant of grace.... The history of all things is the development of the covenant of friendship of our God."

In connection with the development of the covenant in history, Danhof proposes and expands on what he calls the "organic connection of our race." This organic connection of the race is the means "for the realization of His covenant. That realization everywhere follows the organic lines.... God created man organic and in organic connection."

The conceptions of an "organic connection" of all people and of

"organic development" were of great importance to Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema in the common grace struggle of the early 1920s. In their **Van Zonde en Genade (Of Sin and Grace)**, Danhof and Hoeksema explained the development of sin in terms of the organic connection of the human race: "All human individuals, in their organic solidarity, have communion in the root-sin of their organic head...."⁸

This emphasis on the "organic" so exasperated their antagonist, Jan Karel Van Baalen, that he angrily charged that all that Danhof and Hoeksema did was chant, "organic, ORGANIC, ORGANIC": "Yes indeed. But calling out, 'organic, ORGANIC, ORGANIC'!! is not the same as an explanation how we must conceive that organic development (of sin --- DJE)."⁹

Within the organic, natural solidarity of the elect church and the reprobate world, God's regenerating Spirit creates and maintains the "absolute antithesis" between them. This is an essential element in Danhof's treatise on the covenant. "The idea of the 'absolute antithesis' must, in my view, be placed prominently on the foreground in our world-view." Antithesis is an aspect of the covenant inasmuch as "also in practice must the covenant idea always determine our relation to everything that surrounds us, but especially in relation to the world in a moral sense." As God's friends, elect believers are "of the party of the living God." As such, they cannot be friends of God's enemies, the unregenerated, ungodly world.

⁸ H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, *Van Zonde en Genade* (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.), p. 202.

⁹ Jan Karel Van Baalen, *Nieuwigheid en Dwaling: De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie (Innovation and Error: The Denial of Common Grace)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1923), pp. 63, 64; cf. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism*, p. 111. Bratt too has difficulty with the "Antitheticals" use of "organic": "It is difficult to interpret their obsession with the point because they put it to so many different uses...." Perhaps. But one thing is certainly clear from this "obsession": long before it was theologically fashionable to do so, the fathers of the Reformed theology held in the PRC insisted on the natural solidarity of the human race, specifically of the elect people of God with the reprobate ungodly. Indeed, they stressed that the church lives in natural solidarity with the entire created world. At the very foundation of this theology, therefore, is rejection of anabaptistic world-flight. The antithesis does not, indeed *cannot*, mean physical separation from unbelievers or ascetic withdrawal from the creation and its ordinances.

Danhof's study includes a knowledgeable survey of the history of the dogma of the covenant. His conclusion is that "in the dogma-historical sense, the doctrine of the covenant dates from the time of the Reformation. And it is almost exclusively a plant from Reformed soil." Nevertheless, "the covenant-idea is no Reformed fancy or subtlety, but the most beautiful fruit of the theology of the entire Christian Church."

Appropriately, Danhof concludes his masterpiece on the covenant with its eschatological implications. The antithesis will climax in the future in the persecution of the friends of Christ by the Antichrist. The greatest of all spiritual conflicts is impending. It will concern the covenant.

The enemy will turn the temporal might of the political rulers over the bodies and goods of the children of men against the friends of Christ.... Therefore we have to prepare ourselves. Also the faint-hearted among us. For the sake of the covenant of our God. There is no escape from the steel sword of our enemies.

But the covenant friend of God has hope:

Nevertheless, because it is the cause of God for which we contend, we can trust in the Lord God. He will accomplish it. His cause will triumph. And strengthened by His grace, we will not fail to obtain the crown. Redeemed from all the might of the enemy, and more than conquerors, we enter into the joy of our Lord and into the everlasting covenant of friendship of our God.

Stormy Ministry of the Author

The subsequent ministry of Henry Danhof was stormy. He and his consistory, the First CRC of Kalamazoo, Michigan, were deposed and thus put out of the CRC by Classis Grand Rapids West of the CRC in January, 1925. In 1926, Danhof and his congregation separated from those who were organizing as the PRC. For the rest of his active ministry, Danhof was pastor of the independent Protestant First CRC of Kalamazoo.¹⁰

By his ecclesiastical independency, Henry Danhof very definitely sinned against the covenant of friendship in its important manifestation as a federation of churches.

¹⁰ This sad history is related in Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches*, pp. 268-287.

In 1945, Danhof and his congregation returned to the CRC.¹¹

Already in 1946, Danhof came again to the attention of the synod of the CRC. With seventeen other members of the Grace CRC of Kalamazoo, Danhof protested against a decision of the consistory of the Grace church. The decision of the consistory was that Danhof and the others cease

the practice of our social group (Danhof and his supporters — DJE) of convening in one of our own private homes and entertaining one another socially, by asking and answering questions about Biblical, religious and spiritual matters.

Synod upheld the consistory, judging that

the Consistory was justified in its decision to condemn this practice in view of the following considerations: 1) The social character of these gatherings was obviously a camouflage for a Bible Study Group, comprised of dissident members, many of whom were openly critical of the doctrinal position of the Christian Reformed Church. 2) The leader of the group, the Rev. H. Danhof, had made himself guilty, by means of his public utterances, of resisting the adjustment of the Grace Church to the Christian Reformed denomination, and also of undermining the teaching of its pastor.

Synod added that if Danhof and the others would not stop this practice the consistory should "declare the membership of the protestants in the Grace Christian Reformed Church terminated."¹²

Evidently, Danhof's membership in the CRC was thus "terminated." For the latest Christian Reformed yearbook containing such information does not list Henry Danhof as a deceased minister of the CRC.¹³

¹¹ See the "Acts of Synod 1946 of the CRC," Art. 88: "A statement of the Stated Clerk of Classis Kalamazoo informing Synod 'that the union between the Protestant First Christian Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed denomination had been accomplished on November 1, 1945, on the basis approved by Classis at its February 21, 1945, meeting in agreement with the advice of the Synodical examiners of Classes Zeeland, Holland and Grand Rapids South.'"

¹² See the "Acts of Synod 1948 of the CRC," Art. 114, pp. 71-74.

¹³ The "Acts of Synod 1985 of the CRC."

This personal history may be the reason why Henry Danhof never fulfilled the promise that he showed in "The Idea of the Covenant of Grace." With the exception of several booklets and one book that he co-authored with Herman Hoeksema during the common grace controversy, Danhof did not publish after his "Idea of the Covenant of Grace."¹⁴ What writing he did seems to have taken the form of filling the Sunday bulletins of the Protestant First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo with his thoughts on various theological, philosophical, and ecclesiastical subjects.¹⁵

Danhof failed to carry out what he proposed in his lecture on the covenant. In the "Foreword," having noted the breadth of his subject, he declared, "I hope, the Lord willing, to devote my powers to related

¹⁴ The three booklets are *"Niet Doopersch maar Gereformeerd: Voorloopig Bescheid aan Ds. Jan Karel Van Baalen betreffende de Loochening der Gemeene Gratie"* ("Not Anabaptistic but Reformed: A Provisional Answer to Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen concerning the Denial of Common Grace") (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., n.d.); *"Langs Zuivere Banen: een Wederwoord aan Bezwaarde Broederen"* ("Along Straight Paths: A Reply to Aggrieved Brothers") (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.); and *"Om Recht en Waarheid: een Woord van Toelichting en Leiding"* ("For the Sake of Justice and Truth: A Word of Explanation and Direction") (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.). The book is *Van Zonde en Genade (Of Sin and Grace)* (Kalamazoo, MI: Dalm Printing Co., n.d.).

¹⁵ These must rank as the strangest church bulletins in the history of the Reformed churches, perhaps, in the history of Protestantism. There is almost nothing in them of congregational events and church news. Front and back, the four pages of the typical bulletin are crammed with Danhof's exposition and comment on all kinds of topics. Take the bulletin of Sunday, March 8, 1931 as an example. Page 1 (the front cover of the bulletin!) is devoted to "Some Unsolved Problems of Philosophy"; page 2 is full of a treatment of *"Het Overblijfsel Behouden"* ("The Remnant Preserved"); page 3, from top to bottom, explains *"De Proloog van Johannes"* ("The Prologue of John"); and more than two thirds of page 4, the back of the bulletin, sets forth a "Brief Exposition of Our Doctrine." Less than one third of the back cover is permitted to contain

subjects in the future. We must preserve that which we possess by adding to that which has been obtained."

This duty has fallen to the ministers in the PRC.

I will take the liberty in my translation to shorten some of Danhof's long paragraphs. In other respects, the translation that follows is intended to be faithful to the original words of Henry Danhof. ▲

all of the church news for the week under the heading, "Meetings." In the midst of the listing of meetings, and under that heading, appears the line, lost in the welter of philosophy, theology, and meetings, "Born to Mr. and Mrs. P. Van den Berg, Jr., a son." Let a pastor try this with the church bulletin today! A complete set of these bulletins is held in the library of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. One who would learn something of Danhof's theological development after 1926 must peruse these bulletins, although occasionally a printed sermon or set of sermons would appear as an "appendix" to certain bulletins. Some of these printed sermons are available.

Book Reviews

A Pathway into the Holy Scripture, Ed. by Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. Pp. viii+344. \$24.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The Holy Scriptures continue to come under attack by today's evangelicals. One is reminded of the words of Theodore Beza, spoken to the king of Navarre, which, although meant to refer to the church of Christ in the world, can

also be applied to the Word of God: "Sire, it is truly the lot of the Church of God, for which I speak, to endure blows and not to strike them. But may it please you to remember that it is an anvil which has worn out many hammers." This book adds to the attacks made against Scripture.

The book contains revised versions of papers given at the Jubilee meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the

birth of the English reformer, William Tyndale. These papers are meant to commemorate Tyndale's work of translating Scripture into the English language and are intended to honor this noble reformer who gave his life for the cause of an English rendition of God's Word. Tyndale would turn over in his grave if he could read this book; we are thankful that he is in heaven.

What prompted Tyndale to work at his translation and what finally resulted in his martyrdom was his firm belief that Scripture is God's very Word. The authors of these papers do not believe that. The evidences in the book are many.

— The authors are committed to higher critical views of Scripture. See, e.g., pp. 7, 52, 237.

— Blomberg pleads for an evangelical liberation theology (p. 66) and for a less egalitarian interpretation of "women passages."

— In treating of Paul's quotations from the Old Testament, Rosner does not seem to understand that these quotations need not be literal because the Holy Spirit can and may interpret His own writings.

— Thiselton repudiates Lindsell's books and claims that that authority of Scripture lies in its ability to save, not in the book itself — as if the book itself can

save apart from its divine authority which is rooted in the Bible's infallible inspiration.

— Thiselton also claims, perhaps with some justification, that Carl Henry, James Packer, and Sinclair Ferguson are moving away from Warfield's position on infallibility. (Warfield was a staunch defender of infallibility.)

— Thiselton also scornfully says that Scripture does not have the accuracy of a photograph (p. 116), in an obvious jab at those who hold to infallibility. Whether the comparison is warranted or not, Scripture does indeed have more accuracy than a photograph, for it is God's very Word.

— Van Hoozer is blunt. In the only chapter on the doctrine of inspiration, he says that verbal inspiration "does not require that every thing in Scripture be treated as 'absolute' assertions, only that what is said is taken to be divinely intended" (p. 156).

— Cameron insists that Scripture is to be treated as any other book, even though inspired (pp. 245, 246). We dissent. Scripture is to be treated in all respects as the very Word of God which gives to Scripture a place unique to itself and different from any other book.

The book has other interesting features about it. In two chap-

ters on the relation between Biblical Theology and Systematics, it becomes clear that Biblical Theology inevitably leads to Dispensationalism. In dealing with the historic creeds of the church, Bray makes bold to say that these creeds are inadequate for the church today because of their time-bound character. Noble, in conscious disagreement with the reformers, claims that, while Scripture is indeed the final authority in matters of faith, it is not the sole authority. Among other sources of authority he includes prophecy.

In an interesting section on "Scripture and Criticism" Cameron makes a scathing and justified criticism of conservative defenses of Scripture. He points out that, because conservatives attempted to defend their position on infallibility on rational grounds, conservatives lost the debate. The section is worth quoting.

That obstacle (the obstacle of higher criticism, H.H.), of course, was surmounted in the course of the century. From an evangelical perspective, it makes a dispiriting story; since as the century progressed most conservatives — including Evangelicals — gave up in some measure their commitment to the traditional position. They generally did so in order, as they saw it, to engage their opponents more effectively. But

what began as an *ad hominem* debating ploy had the unintended effect of withdrawing the conservatives from their commitment to the relevance of doctrine to the debate. That is, in their concern to engage the 'critics' on the merits of their historical-critical arguments, the conservatives unwittingly evacuated their own distinctive position. They engaged in detailed historical discussion as they sought to establish the unreasonableness of critical reconstructions. Sometimes they succeeded, sometimes they did not; but the net result of their tactical decision to abandon the defence of distinctive theological warrants for their view of Holy Scripture was the collapse of their position. What began as apologetics was transformed, for many, into hermeneutics; in place of maintaining the traditional view of inspiration and infallibility they entered vigorous historical argument for conservative conclusions on particular issues. This metamorphosis went largely undetected until, by the end of the century, the remaining conservatives found themselves marooned in a new consensus in which appeal to dogmatic or traditional considerations was no longer possible, and in which their attempts at historical-critical defense of particular positions no longer carried any weight. As Harvey observes, to "enter the lists of the debate and to attempt to vindicate the truth of the sacred narrative," it was nec-

essary "to pay a costly price ... to accept the general canons and criteria of just those one desired to refute. This," he continues, "was fatal to the traditionalist's cause, because he could no longer appeal to the eye of faith or to any special warrants. The arguments had to stand or fall on their own merits" (pp. 244, 245).

How true this is!

The doctrine of infallible inspiration, long held by the church, was sacrificed on the altar of scholarship. As Cameron observes, conservatives wanted to meet the higher critics on their own ground, on a battlefield of their choosing. In permitting the enemy to choose its own battlefield, the conservatives lost the war. And the result is that it is almost impossible to find today a Seminary which holds uncompromisingly to the truth of Scripture.

The church has always maintained that Scripture is self-authenticating. I.e., Scripture gives testimony itself to its divine origin and inspiration. This is the sole ground for our defense of this truth. Scripture is the sole and final authority for all our faith — including the divine origin of Scripture itself. If the believer is asked why he holds to the divine origin of Scripture, he answers: Scripture itself says so.

The argument against this claim of the believer is then raised that he argues in a circle. He claims that Scripture is divinely inspired and proves it by claiming that the Scriptures cannot lie because they are divinely inspired. And so the argument of the believer is scorned as a *petitio*.

But such is not in fact the case. We ought to be clear on the point, for it is of vital concern.

The whole argument is the argument of faith. The child of God *believes* that Scripture is the Word of God. He believes this by the power of faith. And this puts the battle where it ought to be. The battle is not between one group which claims that Scripture is of human origin and offers considerable proof for it, and another group which claims that Scripture is of divine origin and offers his own body of extra-biblical proof for it. This reduces the argument to mere intellectual argumentation. Who has the best arguments? Who can come with the best proof? Whose proof will carry the day?

The debate is not one of mere intellectual argumentation, but of *faith*. It is a battle between faith and unbelief. It is a spiritual battle between those who give witness to the cause of God and those who oppose God and His cause.

Unbelief is not mere igno-

rance, but hatred of God and His Word. Faith humbly bows before God in joyful and willing worship. Unbelief does all in its power to destroy God's truth; faith reaches out to appropriate that truth in the joy of salvation in Christ.

Let us pursue this line of thought a bit more.

The unbeliever cannot and will not be persuaded of the truth no matter what the argumentation. Jesus makes this as clear as crystal in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man in hell wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back from heaven to give testimony to his brothers concerning the life hereafter. Abraham dismisses this request with the simple statement: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." But this does not satisfy the rich man. He wants something more than Scripture: "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Then comes the devastating reply: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets (Scripture), neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Faith is the gift of God which God gives to His people so that they come, by its power, to know Christ personally and savingly. Faith puts the believer in living

communion with Christ, marries the believer to Christ. Faith banishes all unbelief, all hatred of God, all enmity against God. Faith clings to Christ.

There is sense to all this, marvelous sense which arises out of the power of faith.

The truth can be illustrated in different ways.

I am married to my wife and know her. If I am separated from her for a long time and she sends me a letter, I know with absolute certainty that it is written by her. If someone should ask me for proof, I do not marshal all kinds of intellectual arguments to prove it. I say: There is no proof which can convince me that this letter is written by someone else. I know her. I know what she talks about. I know how she writes. I know that what she writes about are things which only she can know and about which only she can write. I know that this letter is from her.

So it is with the believer. He responds to the critic with the words: I know this book is from Christ. He writes about things which He wants to tell me. He writes as only He can write. It is His penmanship, His style, His letter to me. He writes to me because I am His bride and every page breathes His love for me. The Bible is self-authenticating.

Another illustration can be found of a different kind. If the authorship of a book, any book, is in question in the courts — perhaps because of matters of royalties, the courts will accept the fact that on the very first page the book says it was written by Mr. Foote, e.g. It takes an enormous amount of proof to overthrow the simple claim of the title page. Only if it can be shown beyond doubt that the name on the title page is a forgery can the courts accept the fact that the book was, after all, not written by the one whose name appears in it.

God's name appears on every page on Holy Scripture. God claims to have authored this book. God cannot lie. What proof can possibly be found which will overthrow such proof? Denials of the divine origin of Scripture are not rooted in lack of proof — or proof to the contrary. They arise out of unbelief — foolish, wicked unbelief. The "proof" is adequate, for the book itself claims to be written by God.

When we are given faith, we believe what the Scriptures say. Faith is a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed in His Word — including His testimony that He authored Scripture.

While some interesting and

enlightening observations can be found in the book, it will hardly do to serve as a "pathway into the Holy Scriptures." ♦

Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought, by John M. Frame. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1995. 463pp. \$24.99 (cloth)/\$19.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

In commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Cornelius Van Til, Professor John Frame has written what must be the definitive single-volume analysis of his mentor's thought. Frame is a sympathetic analyst. He acknowledges Van Til as "the major theological influence upon me" and lauds him as "the most important Christian thinker of the twentieth century."

Indebtedness and admiration do not, however, blunt Frame's critical faculty. He recognizes Van Til's weaknesses, e.g., his lack of clarity in teaching and writing; his related failure to define terms; and his heavy-handed, take-no-prisoners conduct in the controversy with Gordon H. Clark. Frame sufficiently differs with Van Til in the area of apologetics as to leave an outsider wondering whether cer-

tain "*gnesio*-Van Tilians" might not charge Frame with apologetical apostasy.

The value of Frame's magisterial study is that it presents the whole of Van Til's thought in a systematic manner, making the distinctions, venturing the definitions, and offering the careful explanations of difficulties that are lacking in Van Til's own writings. Van Til becomes intelligible.

Frame devotes some 240 pages to Van Til's theology, including his doctrines of the Trinity, the sovereignty of God, revelation, the antithesis, and common grace, before treating of Van Til's "apologetics proper." He concludes with some observations on Van Til's successors and influence.

Of greatest interest is Frame's explanation, defense, and criticism of Van Til's presuppositionalist apologetics. Van Til "believed that God's revelation has absolute authority (and thus a certain priority) over all human thought" (p. 135). With this, Van Til urged the reality of the antithesis between believer and unbeliever. Spiritually, believer and unbeliever have nothing in common. The unregenerated sinner is totally depraved. Depravity affects the sinner's mind so that he can know nothing truly. It is senseless to reason with him, appealing

to his mind and attempting to prove the verities of the Christian faith to him on his own grounds. Worse, this approach is the acknowledgment of his autonomy.

The trouble is that Van Til, rather than consistently holding the Reformed, biblical doctrine of total depravity, compromises the doctrine by his "limiting concept," common grace. Common grace is fundamental to Van Til's theology and apologetic. There is a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit "'deep down' in the heart of the unbeliever" that produces knowledge of God in him. This is the "point of contact" in the natural man for the practice of Reformed apologetics (p. 206).

This work of grace in the unbeliever occurs with and through the revelation that God gives of Himself in creation, according to Romans 1:18ff. — "general revelation." There is grace in the revelation spoken of in Romans 1:18ff., according to Van Til, so that the knowledge of God that the ungodly has from creation can serve the revelation in Scripture. At least, it can serve as a positive point of contact for the Reformed defender of the faith or evangelist: "all men know the true God through natural revelation, to which special revelation adds supplementary content" (p. 248; cf. pp. 116-119).

But this is nothing other than the natural theology of semi-Pelagian Rome. There is no point of contact in the natural man for the gospel, whether the gospel is being defended or proclaimed. The unregenerated sinner is dead spiritually. The gospel finds nothing in the unbeliever, appeals to nothing in the unbeliever, attaches to nothing in the unbeliever, builds on nothing in the unbeliever. In the unbeliever whom God has chosen to salvation the gospel *creates* its contact by the regenerating Spirit. We call this contact faith, and faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

The knowledge of God that the pagan has from creation is at once held under in unrighteousness. Not for one split second does, or can, the unregenerated sinner use this knowledge rightly. The sole purpose of God with this knowledge is to render the pagan inexcusable. This knowledge, turned as it is immediately into the lie of idolatry, is never a *point of contact*, but always a *point of conflict*. It rages against the gospel; the gospel wars against it. There is no room in the inn for Christ.

The Reformed criticism, therefore, of the apologetics of Van Til is not at all that this apologetics is presuppositional and antithetical, or even that it is too presuppositional and antithetical. Rather,

the criticism must be that Van Til's apologetics is not presuppositional and antithetical enough. Van Til has compromised Reformed apologetics by the semi-Pelagian notion of common grace.

Frame, however, is favorable toward Van Til's weakening of his own antithetical stance by means of the "limiting concept" of common grace. The vehemently antithetical Van Til is troublesome to Frame. In this connection, Frame shows himself soft on Arminianism:

Arminianism ... (has) much in common with the Reformed faith at the deepest level.... I am confident that Reformed believers are, in general, of one heart with their Arminian brothers and sisters (p. 212).

That Van Til holds, or claims to hold, both the antithesis and its opposite, common grace, points up the contradictory nature of Van Til's theology. This is the significance of "limiting concept" in Van Til's thought. Every doctrine is contradicted by another doctrine that is its "limiting concept." The "limiting concept," in reality, does not limit, but contradicts. Not some, but "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory" (cited in Frame, p. 159). "Apparently" is misleading. For there is

no possibility of reconciling the contradictions. Nor does Van Til make any effort to demonstrate the real harmony of the apparent contradictions.

There is no difference between Van Til's theology in this fundamental respect and the neo-orthodox "theology of paradox" that Van Til castigated as the new modernism.

Contradictory thought makes knowledge impossible. A theology of contradiction makes the knowledge of God impossible.

Frame recognizes the gravity of the problem in Van Til.

Once we allow that Scripture contains contradictory teachings, we must also admit that anything at all may be validly deduced from Scripture. Indeed, if Scripture contains even one contradiction, it implicitly teaches everything, and therefore nothing. The presence of contradictions in Scripture would entirely invalidate the statement of the Westminster Confession that the counsel of God is to be found in the "good and necessary consequences" of Scripture as well as in Scripture's explicit statements. If there are contradictions in Scripture, then everything, and therefore nothing, is a "good and necessary consequence." ... apparent contradiction poses the same problems as real contradiction for the logical analysis of Scripture.... If we are to draw

logical inferences from Scripture, as the Westminster Confession prescribes, will we not find ourselves in the same bind, deducing nonsense from apparently contradictory premises? ... if "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory," then *any* logical deduction from scriptural premises would seem to be ruled out. Since there are apparent contradictions not only in the doctrine of the Trinity, but also in the doctrine of the divine attributes and the doctrine of God's overall relation to the world, how can we draw any logical inferences at all from biblical teaching? (p. 160)

Fair enough, although Frame ignores the implications of the charge, or admission, that "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory" for one's doctrine of Scripture. If the entirety of Scripture is contradictions, can Scripture be divine revelation? Can the Word of God be essentially apparent contradictions throughout?

Frame tries to mitigate the seriousness of Van Til's view of Scripture by observing that, in fact, Van Til is usually quite logical in his theological work. But this only suggests that, in accordance with his view of truth, Van Til himself is paradoxical: affirming one thing, namely, the contradictory nature of all truth, he proceeds on

the basis of its opposite, namely, that truth is logical.

This paradoxical position enables Van Til to inhabit the best of all possible theological worlds. When teaching, he can be logical to a point (and how else can one *teach*?). But when someone challenges one of his teachings, e.g., that the predestinating God also loves all men and sincerely desires to save all, he can readily take refuge in the "apparent contradiction."

Frame too opts for the paradoxical nature of truth. He does so in a statement that ranks with the classic examples of paradox: "revelation presents apparent contradictions to our minds, while also overwhelming us with its own logical unity" (p. 175).

Say what?

For Van Til and Frame, the first and fundamental contradiction is the biblical doctrine of God as Trinity. Frame defends Van Til's controversial statement that God is one person as well as three persons. Frame's defense compounds the confusion. For Frame proposes that "it is also orthodox to say that God is one substance and three substances."

It is surely not orthodox to say this, but heterodox. Orthodoxy for Presbyterians is determined by the Westminster Confes-

sion of Faith, and the Confession clearly says, "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance ..." (2.3). But to say this creates mass trinitarian confusion. Now we have a purportedly Presbyterian doctrine of the Trinity that teaches that God is one person and three persons, as well as one being and three beings.

Frame thinks that such a formulation is "valuable in curbing human intellectual pride." In fact, such contradiction amounts to nonsense. It makes mockery of the sanctified mind of the Christian, reduces theological affirmation to meaninglessness, and destroys faith's knowledge of God in His trinitarian life.

The source of this bad theology is "the idea of the apparently contradictory" (pp. 65-71).

I challenge any practitioner of Reformed apologetics, whether presuppositionalist or evidentialist, to explain, defend, and promote such a doctrine of the Trinity to an unbeliever, cultist, or heretic: one person and three persons; one substance and three substances. Will he not say that the defender of the faith is mad? ♦

Sermons on Galatians, by John Calvin. Audubon, New Jersey: Old Paths Publications, 1995. xxx+

923pp. \$30 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

To the library of every student of John Calvin may now be added Calvin's 46 sermons on Galatians. Calvin preached this series in 1557, 1558. These sermons were taken down by the competent scribe, Denis Raguénier. T. H. L. Parker remarks that the Galatians sermons were among those "taken down by Raguénier when he had become thoroughly experienced in his task" (*Calvin's Preaching*, Westminster, 1992, p. 71).

Arthur Golding translated the sermons into English in 1574. It is this translation that Old Paths has republished. About Golding as a translator of Calvin, Parker observes that he "stands out in the quality and bulk of his work.... Golding writes a strong, energetic prose, keeping close enough to the original to do justice to Calvin's own style" (*Calvin's Preaching*, pp. 72, 73).

The Old Paths edition is the first English edition of the sermons on Galatians since 1574. For all practical purposes, therefore, the sermons are now available to us for the first time.

Although this edition is a reprint of the old Golding translation, complete and unabridged, it

is not a facsimile. The text of the sermons has been newly typeset and edited to give contemporary spelling and forms of letters. This is, of course, more expensive than merely reproducing the old text. But it makes the book far more attractive and useful to the modern reader. The old English letters and spelling are offputting to even the motivated reader.

In addition, publisher Ernie Springer has had antiquated words and phrases explained in modern terms in brackets following the archaic words. Where the 22nd sermon on Galatians 3:21-25 originally had Calvin saying, "God was fain for a time to weeld them like little babes," the new edition has "God was fain (*willing*) for a time to weeld (*handle*) them like little babes."

Calvin's sermons on Galatians are distinct from his commentary on the same book. The sermons are explanation of the Scriptures for the congregation at worship in the form of proclamation. The explanation in the sermons is fuller and more careful. There is also lively and pointed application.

A taste of it — hear Calvin preaching on Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ..."

Seeing then that our Lord Jesus Christ is he out of whom we must draw all things that we have need of; now we see why Saint Paul saith he will not seek any glory but in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And why? For inasmuch as he suffered so painful and bitter a death, yea and was set against God's justice for us, and took all our cursedness upon him: therefore was he given unto us to be our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, strength, and all that ever we want. But first of all we must learn what we be, to the intent to beat down all our own glorying, and to settle ourselves upon our Lord Jesus Christ. For we see many men burst with pride, and they wot (*know*) not why. There is nothing but wind and smoke in all the things which they surmise of themselves. Howbeit the very cause why they seek not Jesus Christ, is for want of due examination of themselves: and such are the Hypocrites, and the Counterfeiters, and those that are puffed up with overweening (*high opinion*) of their own works. Therefore (as I have touched already) it behooveth us to look to our own state, and to see how wretched we be till our Lord Jesus Christ pity us. That is the way to prepare us to come unto him. And that shall serve for one point (pp. 902, 903).

At \$30, this book is a bargain. ♦

Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation, by Donald G. Bloesch. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994. 384pp. \$24.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is volume two of evangelical theologian Donald G. Bloesch's projected seven-volume systematic theology. The first volume, *A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology*, was prolegomena (see the review in *PRTJ*, April, 1994, pp. 69, 70). This volume presents Bloesch's doctrine of Scripture.

It is a thoroughly neo-orthodox, or Barthian, doctrine of Scripture, although Bloesch strives mightily at the impossible task of bringing this unbelieving view of Scripture into some connection with the Reformation, particularly the Reformed, orthodoxy.

Scripture is not the written Word of God by the wonder of inspiration. Rather, "the Bible contains (my emphasis — DJE) the perfect Word of God in the imperfect words of human beings" (p. 115). But even this is misleading. For Bloesch, as for Barth, the relation between the Bible and the Word of God is that the Bible is "the channel" by which some "Word of God" that is altogether apart from and above the Bible may now and again break into one's

life and into our world (see pp. 119, 120).

Inspiration was merely guidance of the biblical writers so that their writings are "compelling witness to revelation" (p. 119). For this reason these writings may be said to be divine. But these writings are also a human word. To deny this is "heresy" (p. 97). As a human word, the Bible is fallible, that is, filled with errors. These errors are not only factual, historical, and scientific but also theological and ethical.

Inspiration does not guarantee that the Bible is inerrant in the sense of being exempt from human misconceptions and limitations — even in the areas of ethics and theology. Nor does it imply that the Bible is free from textual and linguistic errors (pp. 121, 122).

Bloesch is not afraid to point out the errors. Psalm 139:22 ("I hate them with perfect hatred") is an instance of "contradictory theological assertions in the Bible," since Jesus tells us to love our enemies. The solution is that in Psalm 139 the Psalmist "may well be expressing a personal frustration rather than a divine imperative" (p. 111). One could as well opt to explain the "contradiction" by suggesting that in Matthew 5 Jesus may well be expressing per-

sonal sentimentality rather than a divine imperative.

Another alleged error is the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke inasmuch as they "obviously conflict" (p. 110).

If Bloesch must speak of Scripture's "inerrancy," he will not mean by it that "the Bible is true in the sense of being fully accurate in everything it reports." Scripture's truthfulness rather means only that its "central claims" are true and that "its overall witness" is reliable and dependable (p. 299). To which, the obvious question is, "What is Bloesch's ground for saying that Scripture's 'central claims' are true? His own personal feelings? The opinion of a majority of neo-orthodox scholars?" One thing the ground is *not*, and that is Scripture itself. For, first, according to Bloesch Scripture can and does err. As a fallible book, it can be mistaken also in any declaration it might make as to the truthfulness of its "central claims." Second, if Scripture is to be the ground, the declaration that Scripture makes is not that its *central claims* are true, but that *everything it teaches* is true (cf. John 10:35; II Tim. 3:14-17).

Similarly, when Bloesch states that the truthfulness of the Bible is "its fundamental agreement with God's own interpreta-

tion of his redeeming action ... in Jesus Christ" (p. 299), the response must be, "Where is 'God's own interpretation of his redeeming action' to be found? What and where is this other standard of truth by which Scripture itself is to be judged and its truthfulness determined? Is it altogether outside the Bible in the minds of theologians or in a mystical revelation? If it is within the Bible, as a kind of infallible core, show us specifically — books, chapters, and verses. Or, is not this infallible, ultimate standard, which performs the important work of showing parts of the Bible to be true and parts to be erroneous, capable of being made known to the laity? Is it, perhaps, the secret knowledge of theologians, particularly the Barthian scholars?"

Bloesch will not admit Scripture's own claim to be the authoritative Word of God, *as a book*, in its entirety, by the inspiration of it, *as a book*, in its entirety, by the Holy Spirit (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:19-21). To dismiss this claim as an invention of B. B. Warfield and as a pet notion of "sectarian fundamentalists," as Bloesch does, is theologically irresponsible.

One glaring, destructive implication of neo-orthodoxy's doctrine of Scripture is its acknowledgment that large and important

sections of Scripture that present themselves as historical and have always been understood by the church to be historical are, in fact, mythical. This is, today, a vital issue for evangelical and Reformed churches.

Bloesch defends myth in Scripture. Indeed, he speaks of Scripture as myth. The "mythical elements" that are undeniably present in the Bible are couched in "mythopoetic" language (p. 259). "The first eleven chapters in Genesis are probably saga, but the remainder are likely saga history" (p. 264). In a footnote, Bloesch informs us that "saga history ... is roughly the same as narrated history, but with the probable addition of legendary elements" (p. 356). Nothing in the entire book of Genesis, therefore, is dependable history. "Saga" for Bloesch is the same as "myth" in its denial that the stories were real events in history that actually took place as described.

Bloesch quotes the church father, Origen, on the historicity of Genesis 3 with approval: "... these are figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not through actual events" (p. 266). Also the events in the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in the gospels are mythical (pp. 267ff.).

Nevertheless, these same events are historical inasmuch as "the stories may have a firm anchor in history" (p. 269). "*May* have"! Christianity *may* be grounded in real events and actual deeds of God in earthly history, none of which we know since none of them are made known to us in Scripture.

At the same time, mythical and historical. This is the language of "paradox," that is, the language of sheer contradiction. For Bloesch, as for neo-orthodoxy generally, the theology of the Bible (or, better, the theology by means of the Bible) is a theology of contradiction. He rejects the law of non-contradiction, the rule that "two opinions cannot both be true, when one denies what the other affirms" (p. 301). There can never be "a comprehensive, rational system of truth" (p. 301). Indeed, the Bible itself does not contain such a harmonious body of teachings.

Truth is not propositional. Of course not, for the Bible is not an inspired book. Truth is rather the encounter: "The knowledge of God ... can break into our lives from the beyond and become ours if only for a moment, but then we must seek for it again and again" (pp. 53, 54).

Denial of the inspiration of Scripture and, with this, of the historicity of the events recorded

in Scripture is theological liberalism, the old liberalism of Schleiermacher and his disciples, drawing from the Enlightenment. And liberalism's doubt and criticism of the Holy Scriptures are unbelief. Against this unbelief regarding Scripture, the faith of orthodoxy, particularly Reformed orthodoxy, defiantly and confidently affirms, "I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word" (Heid. Cat., Q. 21).

Bloesch's volume shows that liberalism's profound doubt and hostile criticism of God's Word are deeply entrenched in evangelicalism. So deep does this doubt run that Bloesch is open to every kind of higher criticism of Scripture — literary, redaction, source, genre, form — and contends for an open canon (pp. 177, 151).

This doubt and criticism must radically affect every doctrine of Bloesch's evangelical theology. We intend to take note of it. ♦

Paul's Letter to the Philippians, by Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995) xlvii + 497pp., \$34.99. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The New International Commentary on the New Testament, of which this volume is a part, is, on

the whole, a helpful set of commentaries on the New Testament which ministers and laymen alike will want to have in their libraries. Because the commentaries are written by different men, the volumes are not of uniform quality; but, in general, they are excellent helps in the study of Scripture.

This volume on Philipians is no exception. The author has written the commentary in such a way that it is useful to laymen and ministers alike. Most of the more technical material (i.e., material which refers directly to the original language of the New Testament) is put into the footnotes so that the body of the text is, for the most part, easy to read and understand. In fact, the footnotes constitute no less than one third of the book.

A commentary on Philipians was originally prepared for this set by Jac. J. Müller, and this volume is a replacement for that older volume, now out of print. It is more extensive than the older volume, contains much new material, and is in general better. Those who have already the older volume will want to add this book also to their collection.

One aspect of the book which is somewhat troubling, though not unexpected, is its commitment to literary criticism. The author be-

gins on this note by calling attention to the fact that Paul's letter to the Philipians can be classified according to various types of correspondence then in vogue in the ancient world. And his approach to the epistle is this literary viewpoint. Hence, much of the commentary is a literary analysis of the book within the framework of his classification.

While there are certain good aspects to such a literary analysis of Paul's letter, the commentary falls short in more specific analysis of the divine truth revealed in this part of sacred Scripture. The "blurb" which accompanied the book speaks of its "equal concern to the letter's theological and spiritual relevance." Nevertheless, I found this latter to be in short supply. More emphasis is placed on what the blurb calls the "scholarly insights that resolve many of the formal and structural issues that have long puzzled New Testament scholars."

An important principle of Hermeneutics is here at stake. Many students of the Scriptures give themselves to literary and historical criticism in the explanation of Scripture, justifying this approach on the basis of Scripture's "human element." They claim to hold to the fact that Scripture is indeed the Word of God. But when

Scripture is in fact treated and their position put into practice, one discovers that far more attention is paid to the "human element" than to the "divine element," to the "human factor" than to the "divine factor."

Apart now from the question of whether it is proper and sound to ascribe to Scripture such a human element or factor, the fact is that, when the actual work is done of interpreting Scripture, the human element receives the weight of emphasis. The divine factor is overlooked, forgotten, or ignored.

While this book is by no means the worst example of this error, it remains a fact that insufficient emphasis is placed upon answers to this fundamentally important question: What is the Spirit saying to the church? What is God revealing concerning Himself and His works in this important epistle? Would that the author had paid more attention to this question. ♦

Covenant and Election, by J. Van Genderen. Tr. C. Pronk. Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada/Pella, Iowa, U. S. A.: Inheritance Publications, 1995. 110 pp. \$9.25 (U. S.); \$11.95 (CN) (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

In the context of vigorous

controversy within Reformed churches over the covenant of God with the children of believers, Dr. J. Van Genderen defends that covenant conception which refuses to allow election to "dominate" the covenant. Dr. Van Genderen, *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (Christian Reformed Churches) professor at Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, holds that God establishes His covenant by promise equally with all physical children of believers. He addresses the promise at baptism alike to all: "I will be your God, and you will be my child." The promise, however, is conditional, depending for its fulfillment upon the faith of the child. The demand of faith as a condition accompanies the promise.

The Dutch Reformed theologian is critical of the covenant conception that permits God's eternal election to govern the covenant. According to this view, the electing God addresses the promise of the covenant to the elect children only. The power of the promise brings the elect children, and them only, into the fellowship of the covenant. "The danger is that by letting eternal election dominate everything, the significance of the covenant of grace is greatly diminished" (p. 53).

Two theologians whose cov-

enant views Van Genderen criticizes are G. H. Kersten and Herman Hoeksema. Kersten, of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* (Reformed Congregations), influenced the Reformed Congregations to make six pronouncements on the covenant in 1931. The first was that "the covenant of grace is dominated by election to salvation; that therefore the essence of the covenant concerns only the elect of God and not the natural seed" (cited by Van Genderen, pp. 10, 11).

Hoeksema's theology produced the doctrine of the covenant that the Protestant Reformed Churches set forth as that of the Reformed creeds in their *Declaration of Principles* in 1951.

The covenant, for Hoeksema, is not an agreement, but a living relationship of friendship between God and those whom He has chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord. The children of the congregation must receive baptism as a sign of the covenant, but the covenant promises are only meant for the elect, for they are the children of the promise. Whereas the sign and seal of the covenant is a savour of life unto life for the children of the promise, it is at the same time a savour of death unto death for the reprobate who tread upon the covenant of Jehovah.... Theology here is so dominated by the idea of election that we have to speak of an election-system

whereby the doctrine of the covenant is seriously deformed (p. 24).

Van Genderen's doctrine of the covenant makes plain that the only alternative to "domination" of the covenant by the electing God is "domination" of the covenant by the will of the covenant child. God makes His gracious promise to all the children alike; the promise is sealed to all equally by baptism; God is even "willing to give" all the children the faith that He demands (p. 70). The fulfillment of the promise, however, the actual union of the child with God by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart, depends not upon the electing, promising God but upon the child's performance of the condition of faith.

This implies, first, that no infant is ever brought into living union with Christ in his or her infancy, since infants cannot fulfill the condition. Whereas Canons I/17 assures believing parents that they have no reason to doubt the election and salvation of their children who die in infancy, Van Genderen's covenant doctrine casts doubt on the salvation and, presumably, the election of every child of believers who dies in infancy.

In addition, Van Genderen's doctrine makes the child's work of faith decisive for the efficacy of the

promise and, thus, for the child's own salvation.

As far as the mediation of salvation in a covenantal way is concerned, it is the Lord our God who takes the initiative as the One Who establishes the covenant of grace. But there is also the appropriation of the covenant by us. This is an essential part! To say it with Van der Schuit, "In the way of the covenant of grace the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to the heart that seeks God. It finds the way upward because it is drawn from above" (p. 67).

Van Genderen will acknowledge that the Lord God takes the initiative in establishing the covenant. He will not say that it is the Lord God who also realizes the covenant in the heart of every child who is united to Christ by a true faith. Rather, "there is the *appropriation* of the covenant by us" (my emphasis — DJE). This "appropriation of the covenant by us" is "essential." God takes the initiative in making the promise to all the baptized babies. But this promise accomplishes and makes certain absolutely nothing as regards salvation. The salvation of the baby depends on the baby's "appropriation of the covenant." This is precisely the heresy that the Canons of Dordt condemned as Pelagianism:

The Synod rejects the errors of those ... who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace. For these, while they feign that they present this distinction, in a sound sense, seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors (II, Rejection of Errors/6).

Van Genderen's quotation from Van der Schuit, another minister in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*, is damning to Van Genderen's covenant doctrine. God merely takes the initiative to establish the covenant with the child, whereas the child must appropriate the covenant, so that "the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to the heart that seeks God." Is this indeed the "mediation of salvation" in the covenant, that the Holy Spirit "reveals the Mediator to the

heart that seeks God"? Where is the heart of a child, or of anyone else, that seeks God before the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to that heart? Where did this heart that seeks God come from? For "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11).

The truth is that the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to the naturally rebellious hearts of some children of believers, thus regenerating these hearts, in distinction from the hearts of other children that are no worse. There is one reason for the discrimination. This reason is the covenant promise effecting the gracious purpose of sovereign, eternal election.

G. H. Kersten was right when he wrote that

those who say that the covenant of grace is not governed by election teach a new doctrine which emasculates the covenant. All that is left of the covenant, in this view, is an offer of salvation on condition of faith and repentance. "But," says Kersten, "faith and repentance are not conditions of the covenant; rather, they are benefits which flow out of the covenant" (cited by Van Genderen, p. 12).

Although he is still constrained to confess election, Van Genderen does not wholeheartedly love the doctrine. Deep-down he

is afraid of it. Election is a dangerous element in theology. It must be watched closely and guarded carefully, lest it work evil on the gospel, especially the precious truth of the responsibility of man. It is so often "abstract." It "easily tends to a false passiveness.... It can also lead to carelessness ..." (p. 62). If election is allowed to have a prominent place in the gospel of the covenant, it will detract from "the full validity of the promise and the reality of the covenant" (p. 34).

Fear of the doctrine of election characterizes much that comes out of the Reformed Netherlands of late. Berkouwer's *Divine Election* (Eerdmans, 1960) was an extended warning about the dark shadow cast over the gospel by the doctrine of the decree of predestination as taught by the Canons of Dordt. Election accompanied by reprobation threatens assurance. H. Venema, theologian of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"), was so impressed by the dangers of eternal election that he transformed the divine decree into a mere historical event (see his *Uitverkiezing? Jazeker! Maar hoe?*, Kampen: Uitgeverij Van den Berg, 1992). Now the theologian of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* chimes in.

Where in the Netherlands is

there any longer the heartfelt, bold love of sovereign, eternal predestination so evident in the Canons of Dordt? Perfect love would cast out fear.

Rejection of election as governing the covenant requires Van Genderen to deny that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace (pp. 19-21, 56). Here he acknowledges disagreement with the Westminster Larger Catechism. In Question 31 the Larger Catechism confesses that "the covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed." The sole reason for denying that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace is that this necessarily implies that the covenant is established only with those who are in Christ, that is, the elect.

The price paid for the privilege of extending the covenant more widely than the elect is high. Christ is no longer the representative of all the members of the covenant of grace, obtaining for them the right to belong to the covenant of grace and, on this basis, uniting them to Himself by His regenerating Spirit. The covenant of grace is headless! In the covenant of grace, it is every man for himself and by himself. This is the implication of Van Genderen's explanation of the actual realization of

the covenant in the hearts of the children. It is not the Head of the covenant who both initiates the establishment of the covenant and consummates the covenant in all the children who are His by divine election. Rather, each individual child "appropriates" the covenant for himself or herself.

Denial that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace violently conflicts with the teaching of Romans 5:12-21. There is, according to this passage, similarity between the position of Adam and the position of Christ in that just as Adam was "federal," or covenant, head of the entire human race in the covenant given with creation before the fall so Christ is "federal," or covenant, Head of the new, elect race in the covenant of grace. Christ is legal representative of "many." This is His relation to them in the covenant of grace. And this is Headship. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (v. 19). Such is the fundamental importance of this truth that to deny it, whether as regards Adam or as regards Christ, is to destroy the Christian gospel.

Van Genderen is unable to find the Headship of Christ in the covenant of grace in the Canons of Dordt, II, 8:

It is remarkable that this forceful upholding of the covenant as a covenant of grace has not led to a system limiting it to the elect. Christ is referred to as Surety and Mediator of the covenant rather than Head of the covenant. Covenant and election are not the same thing (p. 56).

What is truly remarkable is that the Dutch theologian cannot see Christ's covenant Headship in the article. This is one of the few articles in the "Three Forms of Unity" that explicitly mention the covenant of grace. The article describes the substitutionary death of Christ that redeemed the elect, earned for them the gift of faith, and made certain their fellowship with Christ as "confirmation of the covenant." The cross was covenant business conducted by the representative of the members of the covenant of grace in their stead and on their behalf. In keeping with the whole of the second head of doctrine of the Canons, the article determines the members of the new covenant by election: "... all those and those only who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to him by the Father."

Significantly, in the rejection of errors attached to this second head, there is sharp warning against a view of the covenant that makes faith a "condition" to mem-

bership in the covenant (Canons, II, Rejection of Errors/3, 4).

The issue at stake in the controversy in the Reformed churches between a covenant governed by the electing God and a covenant governed by the appropriating child is not whether covenant and election are "the same thing" (p. 56). No one thinks that covenant and election are the same thing. Election is the eternal decree of God in Christ appointing some to salvation in distinction from others. The covenant of grace is the relationship between God and His people in history. But the issue is whether membership in the covenant of grace as living communion with God is determined by election, yes or no. With this, the issue is whether election determines who they are to whom God promises covenant fellowship and blessings and who they are in whose hearts God fulfills the covenant promise.

Every conception of the covenant that cuts covenant loose from election is dashed on the rock of Romans 9. The very purpose of the Holy Spirit in this chapter is to distinguish children of the flesh from children of promise among the physical children of believers according to God's eternal predestination (vv. 6ff.). By promise, God establishes His covenant with the elect children of Abraham, and

with no others. With this agrees Galatians 3 which addresses the covenant promise to Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ, and to those who are Christ's (vv. 16, 29).

Refusal to view the covenant as governed by election results in grievous injury to the promise of God, that is, to the promising God Himself. For on this view the promise is addressed by God to all children of believers without exception. God promises every child, the one who eventually perishes as well as the one who finally inherits glory, that He will be the child's God and that the child will be God's son and heir. Van Genderen readily acknowledges that God makes this promise to every child "in mercy."

One implication is that the promise of God is the oddest promise that ever was. For it does not include the good that is promised. Whereas the value of men's promises is that they guarantee and bestow the good that is promised, e.g., the lifelong fidelity vowed at a wedding, God's covenant promise does not include the covenant communion with Himself and salvation that it speaks of. Obviously not! For many receive the promise who never enjoy the good that is promised! The good spoken of is not included in the promise but is rather produced from the demanded

condition of faith.

Another implication is that the promise does not include the means by which the promised good is received, namely, faith. Obviously not! For many receive the promise who never have faith. Van Genderen goes so far as to say that God "is willing" to give faith to all. To this, the question at once is, "Why then does He not give faith to all?" Van Genderen leaves this question unanswered. Fact is, for Van Genderen, faith is the condition that the child himself must provide in order that the promise may be fulfilled in the actual bestowal of salvation.

Yet another implication is that Van Genderen is dead wrong when he astoundingly affirms that "on the basis of God's promise we may expect that He will also do what He says" (p. 69). The truth is that on Van Genderen's doctrine of the covenant we can expect that God will *not* do what He says. He promises to be Esau's God and to have Esau for His son, and, lo, Esau is eternally damned. In reality, God's promise assures *nothing*. That which assures something is the child's fulfilling the condition of faith.

If the covenant is not governed by election, a Reformed theologian can say about the promise what Van Genderen does indeed

daringly say: "Where faith is lacking, the promise is useless" (p. 65). The promise of God is "useless"! To use the comparable language of Romans 9:6, where man does not fulfill the condition of faith, the Word of God is of none effect!

Despite Van Genderen's strong objection to a doctrine of the covenant that is "dominated" by election, he admits that this has been a prominent view in the Reformed tradition. This was the view of Herman Bavinck and of Abraham Kuyper (pp. 25-29). The second part of the book, "Covenant Theology — Past and Present," which gives a brief history of the dogma of the covenant, acknowledges that "the doctrine of election has greatly influenced the doctrine of the covenants" (p. 92). Van Genderen suggests that this was "a result of the ... attempt to prevent Arminian ideas from corrupting the covenant doctrine" (p. 92).

Yes. ♦

Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva, by Robert M. Kingdon. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995. 214pp. \$15 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Robert Kingdon is a leading

Calvin scholar. He is presently working on a notable project, supervising a team of scholars in transcribing the twenty-one volumes of the Register of the Consistory of Geneva for the period of Calvin's ministry from 1542-1564.

Out of this work with what we would call the consistory minutes of the church of which Calvin was the pastor comes this study of divorce and remarriage in the Reformed church of Geneva while Calvin was president of the consistory.

Kingdon sees the worth of the book both in its treatment of the development of divorce in Protestantism and in its account of the workings of the consistory in Geneva under Calvin's direction.

In the main, the book is a study — a fascinating study — of several cases of adultery brought before the Geneva consistory. Although the consistory always worked hard for reconciliation and, in one of the cases, virtually forced reconciliation upon the married couple, the outcome often was divorce with the right of remarriage for the "innocent party." One of these cases involved Calvin's brother Antoine, who with his wife and children was living in Calvin's home when the offenses took place.

In one instance, that of the

Italian convert to the Reformation, Galeazzo Caracciolo, Calvin and the consistory approved divorce and subsequent remarriage on the ground of religious desertion. Allegedly, Caracciolo's Roman Catholic wife had deserted him. In fact, upon his conversion, Caracciolo had left *her*, and their children, to affiliate with the Reformed Church in Switzerland. In effect, Calvin approved divorce and remarriage on the ground of a *believer's* abandonment of his unbelieving (Roman Catholic) wife. Appeal was made to I Corinthians 7:15. But this turns the text on its head. For I Corinthians 7:15 speaks of the unbeliever's desertion of the believer, not of the believer's desertion of the unbeliever. Even then, there is simply no mention of the right of the deserted believer to divorce the deserting mate, much less of a right to remarry.

Understandably, Rome used such incidents to blacken the Reformation:

Catholic polemicists ... were by this time frequently claiming that people turned Protestant and fled to places like Geneva solely to escape wives they no longer wanted and in the hope of a new sexual partner (pp. 155, 156).

Calvin was sensitive to the

charge, first urging Caracciolo to remain celibate and then sending the Italian off to others for the advice that resulted in his remarriage.

Kingdon himself is more than dubious about the expedient of grounding Caracciolo's remarriage in I Corinthians 7:12-15. He calls it "an audacious and dangerous argument" (p. 156).

The Reformation, particularly the Calvin Reformation, broke with the Christian tradition of indissoluble marriage. Although Calvin and the Geneva consistory wanted to restrict remarriage to the "innocent party," it became evident already then that also the remarriage of the guilty party had to be allowed (pp. 89, 90).

Kingdon believes that "the modern explosion in divorce ... (in) the twentieth century ... began in the sixteenth century ... with the Protestant Reformation," with the consistory of Geneva playing a leading role (p. 180).

As to the judgment that ought to be passed upon the Reformation's opening of the floodgates of divorce and remarriage, Kingdon is ambivalent. On the one hand, he likes to recognize that some marriages "simply fail, and can become painful and destructive to everyone involved. In all decency they should be ended"

(pp. 183, 184).

On the other hand:

There also can be no doubt ... that the dissolution of a marriage can be enormously destructive, often to innocent parties in no way involved in the marriage's failure, most obviously children, often other relatives. This sad reality is one of the reasons Protestant authorities, despite their willingness to make divorce possible, continued to make it difficult. These are still problems that

anyone affected by an unhappy marriage must face (p. 184).

Ambivalence is not enough. The teaching of the Reformers allowing for divorce as the breaking of the marriage bond and for a subsequent remarriage is the scandal of the Reformation. Protestants must confess it. They must then take another, good, hard look, not at unhappy marriages among them, but at the teaching of the Word of God on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. ▲

Book Notices

The Church Of Rome At The Bar Of History, by William Webster. Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth, Publishers, 1995. Pp. x+243. \$28.95 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

With Evangelicals moving closer to Rome, this book is an important one. Written by a layman, it compares all the main teachings of Rome with both Scripture and history. In the treatment of history, Mr. Webster is interested in examining the question whether Rome's preposterous claims are genuinely supported by the history of the church. This is

an important question, for Rome itself claims legitimacy for its position on the grounds of history; i.e., it maintains that all its views have the stamp of history's approval.

Proceeding from the truth of the infallibility of Scripture to its sole authority, the book examines such questions as the authority of tradition, the notion of clerical ordination as held by Rome, the doctrines involved in Rome's Mariology and Mariolatry, the sacramental system of the Romish Church, and the doctrine of justification alone without works. In every respect the book finds Rome's

claims spurious. They do not agree with the canon of Scripture and they do not stand the test of the history of the church.

Important in the book is voluminous quotes from the church fathers from Clement of Rome through Luther and Calvin. And of great value is a lengthy appendix composed exclusively of quotes from important Papal documents such as the Papal Bull, *Unam Sanctam*, the decisions of Vatican I and Vatican II, The Decrees of the Council of Trent, etc.

Those who are interested in the important differences between apostate Rome and Protestantism will want to read this book and have it in their library for reference. It will be a valuable addition. ♦

The Gospel According To John (Revised), by Leon Morris. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995. Pp. xxii+824. \$42.00. (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This is a fine commentary on ***The Gospel According to John***. It is part of the New International Commentary on the New Testament series Eerdmans is publishing and is a revision of an earlier commentary on John by the same

author.

The commentary is extensive and well researched. It is written in easy to read paragraph form with the comments on the Greek text in footnotes. This makes it a valuable tool for the preacher and scholar as well as useful for those who have no knowledge of the Greek.

In his comments on chapters 6 and 10 Morris stresses the impossibility of man saving himself and the necessity of what he calls the "divine initiative" in the salvation of sinners.

At some points one would have expected a more thorough explanation of the text.

The Commentary is enhanced by two indices: the first is a General index (subject and persons), the second is an index of Scripture passages cited in the commentary.

If the reader can afford only one commentary on John he should purchase Calvin's. If the reader can afford two commentaries on John, he should purchase Calvin's and William Hendricksen's. If he can afford three he should purchase also this commentary by Morris.

▲

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