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In This Issue

Featured in this issue are several appendixes by the Rev. Ronald Hanko to his thorough analysis of the erroneous teachings of Christian Reconstructionism (hereafter, CR) which appeared in the previous issue of the *Journal*. Among other matters, Rev. Hanko argues convincingly on the basis of sacred Scripture that CR needs a foundation in common grace to maintain what Hanko calls its disjunction between the church of Christ and the kingdom of God, according to which disjunction CR regards the kingdom as broader in scope than the church.

Two fine articles by students of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary are also featured. Senior Seminarian Garrett J. Eriks presents a careful study of the controversy between Erasmus and Martin Luther concerning the will of man. The former defended the notion that man is endowed with a free-will and cooperates with God in his own salvation. Eriks nicely lays out how Luther responded in his book, *Bondage of the Will*, showing the inconsistencies and absurdities characterizing Erasmus' position. The fundamental doctrine at stake in the controversy, according to Luther, is the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. If man by means of his free-will cooperates in any way in his own salvation, God is not sovereign, God is not God, Luther maintained.

Second-year Seminarian Angus Stewart, a member of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, and preparing for the ministry there, writes on *The Decline and Fall of New England Congregationalism*. Stewart points out that New England was settled by godly Congregational pilgrims in the sixteenth century. During the seventeenth century New England was graced by America's greatest philosopher-theologian, Jonathan Edwards, and had experienced the Great Awakening. Yet already in the nineteenth and certainly by the beginning of the twentieth century New England Congregationalism was apostate. Stewart asks, "How can we account for this great spiritual fall?" Stewart gives a good, plausible answer to the question by carefully tracing, "... the decline and fall of New England Congregationalism from the pilgrim settlers, through Jonathan Edwards, to the demise and death of the distinctively 'New England Theology' in the end of the nineteenth century."

Our prayer is that these contributions will serve to advance the cause of God's church and truth.

Robert D. Decker

APPENDIX I

Christian Reconstructionism, the Kingdom and Common Grace

Rev. Ron Hanko

The doctrine of common grace is essential to Christian Reconstructionism (CR) and dominion theology because there is no other explanation and possibility of the desired “Christianization” of society and culture — no other, that is, unless one posits a kind of end-times universalism according to which all men without exception are actually saved as part of this “Christianizing” process. We give here a number of quotations from the CR writers and a few from those more recent Reformed writers who all found their doctrine of the kingdom on the erroneous doctrine of common grace. Both, in suggesting that the kingdom is broader than the church, appeal to common grace.

There is no agreement among the following writers on the nature of this “common grace.” Some identify it especially with the preaching of the gospel. For them the grace that subdues all things to the dominion of the godly comes especially through and in connection with the gospel. Others, like Abraham Kuyper, identify it especially with natural gifts and find in these a mitigation of the curse and restraining of man’s depravity that is sufficient to promise future earthly dominion. Most of the CR writers tend to identify common grace or blessing with law. Law, then, is the way of future prosperity, earthly dominion, and the fulfilling of the “cultural mandate.” In every case, however, common grace is foundational.

Notice in that connection that there is explicitly or implicitly in a number of these quotations a denial of the particular character of Christ’s work. As we point out in another appendix, one cannot have a universal mediatorial rule of Christ without denying the particular character of that mediatorial work. Nor can one have a universal

mediatorial rule without also a universal priesthood, with all that that entails.

This emphasis on a universal mediatorial rule of Christ is closely connected with the doctrine of common grace. Always one must explain how “grace” or blessing can be shown to the ungodly, and ultimately that answer can be found only in the cross and the mediatorial work of Christ. Thus CR and those who follow its teaching are “forced” to speak of Christ as a universal mediator in some sense.

Notice, finally, that this same doctrine of common grace is also, for some, the justification for cooperation with Charismatics, Romans Catholics, and even the heathen. This, too, follows from the CR view of the kingdom. Since it is the kingdom that is the ultimate goal of history, and since the church is only a means to that end, differences between churches, even between believer and unbeliever, are of relatively lesser importance, and common grace then justifies a certain amount of cooperation not only with other Christians, but even with the ungodly.

In the Noachic covenantal episode, we also witness the objectivity of God’s relationship with man: the world was judged in history for its sin. The rainbow, which signifies God’s covenant mercy, is established with Noah and all that are with him, and with their seed (Gen. 9:12). This indicates that the world will be protected from God’s curse through the instrumentality of the Church (the people of God). This covenant is only made indirectly with unbelievers, who benefit from God’s protection only as they are not opposed to God’s people. Because of God’s love for His people, He preserves the orderly universe (Gen. 8:20-22). His enemies serve His people: common grace (Gen. 9:10b).¹

* * * * *

10. Opposed as international Christians are to *all* departures from God’s most holy will, we do recognize that the various non-Christian * movements are not all equally bad and that there are areas in which, by

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, Tyler, TX, p. 188. Notice Gentry’s emphasis: the world is to “be protected from God’s curse through the instrumentality of the Church”; the covenant is made, though indirectly, with unbelievers, and they benefit from God’s protection; it is even possible that they not be opposed to God’s church. This is all common grace according to Gentry and the explanation of how “He (and the church with Him) shall have dominion” in history and over society in general.

God's common grace, we may cooperate with non-Christians in seeking to realize our Christian objectives. Hence we will gladly cooperate with orthodox Jews and Moslems against all shades of atheism, and with Catholics against all those who are avowedly anti-Christian. At the same time, we will not compromise our own distinctively Christian views in any areas. If in following the commandments of our God, e.g., in moving against communism and/or pornography, we are offered the support of concerned Jews, Moslems, and Catholics, we will willingly welcome and utilize such support.²

Everybody's going to benefit. Whether they're Protestant Christians or Catholic Christians or Jews or whatever they be, everyone will benefit from having a Christian culture. Where Christian principles reign supreme, where people in places of leadership recognize the supremacy of God, there will be more freedom, more prosperity, more security for every law-abiding American.³

A restructuring of Van Til's interpretation of common grace was basic to the development of the Christian Reconstructionist perspective. Unlike Van Til, this version of Van Til's philosophy is eschatologically optimistic (Van Til was an amillennialist, RH).⁴

Slavery, then, is a byproduct of the rebellion of man, but in proper form and administered by covenantally faithful people, it is a means for restraining and even rolling back the efforts of the Fall and of the curse, by 'common grace' discipline and by 'special grace' evangelism.⁵

2. Francis Nigel Lee, "The Christian Manifesto of 1984," *Christianity and Civilization III: Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Geneva Divinity School, 1983, p. 10. Here and in the following quotation the doctrine of common grace justifies cooperation with anyone who will further CR aims.

3. Joe Morecraft, "God and Politics: On Earth as It Is in Heaven," P.B.S., Dec. 23, 1987, quoted in Kevin Reed, *The Antinomian Streak in the Reconstructionist Movement*, Presbyterian Heritage, 1988, p. 7.

4. Gary North and David Chilton, "Apologetics and Strategy," *Christianity and Civilization III: Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Geneva Divinity School, 1983, pp. 114, 115.

5. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, ICE, 1984, p. 88. We make no comment on this ludicrous quotation (though Jordan is by no means the only one who teaches this), other than to point out its assumption that common grace is a fundamental premise of dominion theology.

* * * * *

Law is a means of grace: common grace to those who are perishing, special grace to those who are elect.... But if the effects of the law are common in cursing, then the effects of the law are also common in grace. This is why we need a doctrine of common grace. This doctrine gives meaning to the doctrine of common curse, and vice versa. The law of God restrains men in their evil ways, whether regenerate or unregenerate. The law of God restrains 'the old man' or old sin nature in Christians. Law's restraint is a true blessing for all men. In fact, it is even a temporary blessing for Satan and his demons.... The laws of God offer a source of order, power, and dominion. Some men use this common grace to their ultimate destruction, while others use it to their eternal benefit. It is nonetheless common, despite its differing effects on the eternal state of men.⁶

* * * * *

Special grace leads to a commitment to the law; the commitment to God's law permits God to reduce the common curse element of natural law, leaving proportionately more common grace — the reign of *beneficent common law*. The curse of nature can be steadily reduced, but only if men conform themselves to revealed law or to the works of the law in their hearts. The blessing comes in the form of a more productive, less scarcity-dominated nature.⁷

* * * * *

God's law is the main form of common grace. It is written in the hearts of believers, we read in Hebrews, chapters eight and ten, but the work of the law is written in the heart of every man. Thus the work of the law is universal — common. This access to God's law is the foundation of the fulfilling of the dominion covenant to subdue the earth

6. Gary North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," Appendix C in David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, Dominion Press, 1987, pp. 629, 630. The essay referred to here is really only a reworking of chapter 6 of North's book, *Dominion and Common Grace*, from which we also quote below. That chapter of his book is entitled "Sustaining Common Grace." In both the book and essay North defines "common grace" as "crumbs from the table" or "crumbs for the dogs." North's views are interesting in that, having repudiated the common grace views both of Van Til and of the Christian Reformed Church (its notorious "three points"), he nevertheless pleads his own version of common grace as foundational to his views of the kingdom. Like Kant's god, he throws it out the front door only to bring it in again by the back door.

7. North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," p. 642.

(Gen. 1:28).... God's promises of external blessings are conditional to man's fulfilment of external laws. The reason why men can gain the blessings is because the knowledge of the work of the law is common. This is why there can be outward cooperation between Christians and non-Christians for certain earthly ends.⁸

Once again, we see that history has meaning. God has a purpose. He grants favors to rebels, but not because he is favorable to them. He respects His Son, and His Son died for the whole world (John 3:15) (sic). He died to save the world, meaning to give it time, life, and external blessings. He did not die to offer a hypothetical promise of regeneration to 'vessels of wrath' (Romans 9:22), but He died to become a savior in the same sense as that described in the first part of I Timothy 4:10 — not a special savior, but a sustaining, restraining savior.⁹

This is why a theology that is orthodox must include a doctrine of common grace that is intimately related to biblical law. Law does not save men's souls, but partial obedience to it does save their bodies and their culture. Christ is the saviour of all, especially those who are the elect (I Tim. 4:10).¹⁰

To say that the penal sanctions of the Old Testament are 'too severe' for a period of 'common grace' is to overlook at least two important points: (1) Israel of old enjoyed God's common grace (at least as defined in Gen. 8:22), and was *still* required to enforce his law, and (2) God's political law serve to *preserve* the outward order and justice of a civilization, and thus are a sign of God's 'common grace' rather than detracting from common grace.¹¹

As we grow in grace, we become a blessing to the world around us,

8. North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," p. 647.

9. North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," p. 632. A good example here of how the doctrine of common grace and a universal mediatorial rule undermine the doctrine of particular atonement.

10. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, Dominion Press, 1987, p. 173. The subtitle of this book, "The Biblical Basis for Progress" shows clearly the necessity of common grace in North's theology.

11. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, ICE, 1991, p. 334. Bahnsen is saying that political laws are the *common grace* that preserves order and justice in a civilization.

and the world, in terms of its relations to us, is blessed or cursed.¹²

The Church in her individual members must address herself to the task of maximizing the gifts of common grace as far as possible, in order to serve the kingdom of God and fulfil every purpose of God for her. In so doing, the church will, firstly, manifest the kingdom of God on earth.... This is simply to say that the church, besides being a manifestation of the kingdom herself, is also to manifest it in every part of the society in which she moves.... Secondly, by maximizing the gifts of common grace, the church through her individual members will already be bringing to fruition that task which it will be her occupation to discharge for all eternity, namely, to bring all into the sphere of her sovereign Lord's dominion.¹³

It is an error of American Protestantism, ever since the days of the Puritans, to limit religion to faith. Faith finds its light in the Bible while the other areas of human life are guided by the light "common to all."¹⁴

No church is an end in itself. It is God's medium for proclaiming grace for all of life.¹⁵

12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Ross House, CA, 1994, vol. II, p. 814. Like North, Rushdoony rejects common grace, but brings it back in by speaking of a general blessing of God for all, and what he calls "earlier grace." He rejects only the name, therefore, not the concept.

13. Raymond O. Zorn, *Christ Triumphant*, Banner of Truth, 1997, p. 211. Zorn is not CR, and is, in fact, very critical of theonomy. Nevertheless, he is one of those who sees the kingdom of God as something broader than the church, and roots his consequent views of the church's calling with respect to that kingdom in common grace.

14. Bernard Zylstra, *Challenge and Response*, CLA, 1960, p. 13. Zylstra is also not CR. He was connected with the old AACCS (Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies, now the ICS, Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada) movement in the USA and Canada, a movement whose philosophy was uncannily like that of CR. In fact, not only the philosophy, but the language of the two movements is so similar one wonders if there has not been some borrowing on one side or the other.

15. Zylstra, *Challenge and Response*, pp. 14, 15. Note the emphasis on the fact that the church is only a means, and just as in CR, a means to a kingdom that is much broader than the church. He says, for example, that "the body of Christ has the responsibility of putting the *principles of the Kingdom* into practice" (p. 15), a kingdom which is defined in the "Foreword" as the "all-embracing cosmic Rule which is directed to the consummation of the Father's works" (p. 2).

Now Calvinism has been the first movement of which we can say with some historical justification that it has seen the universal implications of the gospel ... we may say that in the so-called Kuyparian tradition (the reference here is to Kuypers's common grace, RH) the recreative power of Christ has made a major breakthrough in western civilization with respect to understanding man's cultural mandate.¹⁶

And for our relation *to the world*: the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.¹⁷

It was now clearly seen (in the light of common grace, RH), that the history of mankind is not so much an aphoristic spectacle of cruel passions, as a coherent process with the Cross at its centre; a process in which every nation has its special task, and the knowledge of which may be a fountain of blessing for every people.¹⁸

Common grace in some form or other is one of the foundation stones, therefore, not only of CR but of all those who make the same disjunction between church and kingdom, who define the kingdom in

16. Hendrick Hart, *The Challenge of Our Age*: quoted in Herman Hanko, *The Christian's Social Calling and the Second Coming of Christ*, South Holland PRC, 1970, pp. 12, 13. Hart was also an AACS man and he has the same view of church and kingdom as does CR. He says, for example:

Learning to live biblically in a secular world means learning to give full and active support to christian education, christian political action, christian labor activity, christian everything; and learning to understand the church institute as the organization which is called upon to promote each support concretely and authoritatively in the name of Christ (Hanko, p. 6).

17. Abraham Kuypers, Sr., *Calvinism*, Revell, p. 3. Here, of course, we come to the "father" of common grace theory. While Kuypers was far from CR at many points, one can, nevertheless, see in his writings on common grace some of the seeds of CR.

18. Kuypers, *Calvinism*, p. 165.

terms of civilization and culture, and who see the calling of the church as bent in that direction. For this reason also we repudiate the notions of CR.

APPENDIX II

The Nature of the Visible Church

We have mentioned several times in this paper the new definition given by CR of the visible church. It distinguishes between the visible church in the sense of institute and the visible church as the “community of faith.” This distinction is developed in most detail in R. J. Rushdoony’s *Systematic Theology*¹⁹ and in Stephen Perks’ recent book *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*.

The following analysis of Perks’ book illustrates what we are talking about.²⁰ He begins, as we have already noted, by distinguishing two aspects of the visible church. To the visible church, according to him, belong both the institutional church, and what he calls “the body of Christ, the company of the regenerate,”²¹ or, with reference to the Westminster Confession of Faith (XXV, 2), “all those throughout the world who profess faith in Christ.”²²

Throughout the book Perks identifies these two aspects of the visible church as “Church” and “CHURCH,” the former referring to the institutional church and the latter to the body of believers. The latter, as is evident from the fact that it is written with capital letters, is the visible church in the highest sense of the word, and the primary meaning of the word *ecclesia*²³ in Scripture.

This all sounds right and good until one realises what Perks is actually saying. Indeed, it is easy to miss Perks’ point if one does not

19. Cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology* (Ross House, 1994), pp. 669-784.

20. What follows is the substance of a book review published in the *British Reformed Journal*, issue 24, October-December, 1998.

21. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 24.

22. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 25.

23. The Greek word translated “church” in the English New Testament.

have some knowledge of CR teaching and aims or does not read him critically and carefully, especially because he claims that his definition of the CHURCH is simply that of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Perks does not deny that Church and CHURCH are "the same ... but viewed from different perspectives."²⁴ Nevertheless, he makes a sharp disjunction between them. In redefining the visible church primarily in terms of believers themselves, Perks considers them to be the CHURCH apart from their institutional connections. The CHURCH, in other words, does not necessarily exist in and through and in connection with the institutional church.

The CHURCH may certainly be conceived of apart from the institutional organisation precisely because Christ so conceived of it. (John) Murray's definition — i.e., the strict identification of the body of Christ as coterminous in every respect with the institutional Church— severely limits the body of Christ in its mission and function in the world. Indeed, it cuts the body of Christ off almost totally from the cultural mandate.²⁵

Thus the CHURCH visible and militant is the body of Christians wherever they are and in whatever they are doing: the Christian teacher, business man, house-wife, mother, parent, barmaid, butcher, baker, candlestick maker, at work, at play, at prayer, at home, etc.²⁶

This body of believers, as CHURCH, has an entirely different function from the institutional church:

We have seen that the CHURCH'S service in the world, its calling as Christ's body on earth, proclaiming and working to establish his kingdom, is to be outward-oriented, positive, comprehensive (involving all spheres of life and culture both personally and nationally), and thoroughly biblical in orientation and practice. Yet we have also seen that this biblical function of the CHURCH has been distorted and overturned by a clergy-centred, inward-looking perspective that puts the institutional Church at the centre of the Christian life instead of the kingdom of God. The calling and function of the body of Christ on earth has thus been neglected.²⁷

24. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 12.

25. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 33.

26. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 28, 29.

27. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 81.

In fulfilling that function the *CHURCH* is involved in every area of social and political life. Thus, for example, believers involved in politics are the *CHURCH* involved in politics:

It would be wrong for the Church as an institution to seek to do the work of the magistrate. There is a biblical separation of powers here. Some members of the body of Christ, however, are called to be magistrates and they must exercise their vocation as Christians and as ambassadors of Christ.... The members of the body of Christ who are not magistrates will also exercise political influence via their votes at elections and via any other form of political action they may take. The body of Christ (that is, the *CHURCH*, RH) will thus be involved — as a group of responsible citizens in areas where the institutional Church may not go.²⁸

This, of course, is sheer confusion. Believers, living and working in the world, do not cease to be *members* of the church, representing it and working for it also in politics. But it cannot be said that they, in that capacity, *are* the *CHURCH* — no more than all the American expatriates living and working in various places around the world *are* *AMERICA*, even though they do not cease to be Americans and to represent their country no matter where they live and what they do.

It is here, too, that Perks is out of step with the Westminster Confession of Faith, though he quotes from it, for while the Confession does define the visible church as composed of “all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children” (XXV, 2), the Confession makes it clear that this “body of believers” does not exist apart from the institutional church.

It is unto that “catholic visible Church” that Christ has given “the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God” (XXV, 3). It is, in the world, identified with the institutional church, which has the calling to fulfill that ministry and to administer the ordinances. And, what is even more significant, that visible, catholic church, according to the Confession is made up of “particular Churches.” They, not believers, are the “members thereof” (XXV, 4).

That same connection is made in the Belgic Confession, which insists that membership in the institutional church is necessary for

28. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 34, 35.

salvation, that is, for membership in the body of Christ. The body of Christ does not exist and is not found in the world apart from the institutional church. In fact, as far as our calling is concerned, the Belgic Confession identifies the two (Art. XXVIII).

That Perks does not want the confessional view of the church is clear from his rejection of John Murray's description of the church. Murray, cited by Perks, says:

It is all-important to bear in mind that the church of God is an institution. It may *never* be conceived of apart from the *organization* of the people of God visibly expressed and in discharge of the *ordinances* instituted by Christ.²⁹

Perks calls this unfortunate, inconsistent, reductionist, and unbiblical, and denies that Jesus ever spoke of His CHURCH in this "constricted sense."³⁰ And so, in the interest of his CR presuppositions, he goes on with his rejection of Murray's views:

By identifying the body of Christ as strictly coterminous with the institutional Church Murray leaves the CHURCH — i.e., the body of Christ — helpless to affect and preserve the culture in which it lives by a "hands on" encounter with and in that culture, thereby denying to the community of faith the means of bringing the whole of society into conformity with the whole counsel of God's word. It is as if the CHURCH and society were the crews of two different ships. The most that the CHURCH can do is to bellow from its own ship to the ship of culture information about how the ship of culture should steer away from the rocks that threaten to destroy it. But the CHURCH can never get into the ship of culture and do the steering.³¹

It is in this connection that Perks de-emphasises the institute church. In fact, he finds it "hardly mentioned in Scripture":

The primary emphasis of the New Testament is on the kingdom of God, not the institutional Church. Indeed, the gospels hardly speak

29. John Murray, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 237ff., cited in Perks, p. 30.

30. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 30.

31. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 34.

directly and specifically of the institutional Church at all and with the exception of Mt. 18:15-20 Jesus in his ministry on earth did not give detailed teaching on this aspect of the Christian life, leaving it to the apostles to work out later; and even the apostles, at least in Scripture, did not go into any great detail, giving only general principles, and thus much freedom, for the Church to build upon.... The institutional Church simply was not the focus of Jesus' teaching during his earthly ministry, nor is it the primary focus of the Bible generally.³²

Strangely enough, though, Perks admits that the majority of references to the church in the New Testament are to the institutional church: "Of the 112 occurrences of *ekklhsia* (*ecclesia*, RH) in the New Testament the vast majority refer to a particular assembly or local congregation of believers (the visible institutional Church)." Nevertheless, these references are simply "narrative, descriptive, and vocative uses of the term that have little bearing on the development of a detailed ecclesiology."³³

Perks is saying that even though most of the references in Scripture are to the institutional church, we can learn little or nothing from them about the nature of the church. It would seem to us, however, that the sheer number of references to the institutional church says something at least about its importance, and that it is far more important than Perks makes out.

Having redefined the visible church, Perks also redefines its calling and function. While admitting that the calling of the institutional church has to do especially with "the maintenance and practise of the Christian public religious cultus,"³⁴ i.e., with preaching, sacraments, discipline, and worship, he insists that calling is limited and relatively unimportant and that it is not the calling of the visible CHURCH in its most important manifestation:

The task of teaching in the institutional Church is a function of the ordained ministry. It is not the central activity or focus of the CHURCH'S calling, and neither is any other activity that may take place in the

32. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 73.

33. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, footnote 52, p. 73.

34. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 12.

Church.... It [the Church] has sought primarily its own increase and in so doing has failed Christ by failing to fulfil its vitally important, but limited, role of equipping the saints for service and dominion in the world.³⁵

That institutional "Church," of course, is not the CHURCH in the highest and broadest sense, nor its calling the calling of the CHURCH in Perks' mind. The calling of the CHURCH is defined in terms of the calling of individual believers, rather than in terms of the institutional church's calling to preach the gospel, administer sacraments and conduct public worship. So Perks says, anyway:

The Church as an institution is limited in its field of operation, God-ordained and essential though that field is. The body of Christ, the CHURCH considered as the people of God, the community of faith, has a much wider brief, however. Its calling is to take dominion over the whole earth in the name of Christ, to possess his inheritance (Ps. 2:7-12; Rev. 11:15), which is the CHURCH'S inheritance also by adoption into the household and family of God through union with Christ.³⁶

* * * * *

It is vitally important that the CHURCH should not be reduced to the institutional Church, therefore, if the body of Christ is to claim the world for Christ and bring all things into conformity with God's word.³⁷

The most important aspect of the church, then, in relation to the kingdom is not the institutional church. According to Perks, the CHURCH as the body of believers living their lives in the world is far more important, though even it is only one means among others for the coming of the kingdom. In relation to that CHURCH and its calling to take dominion in every area of life and establish the kingdom of God, the institutional church has its only role, the very limited role of training believers for their service in the world and preparing them for fulfilling their dominion mandate:

The institutional Church is not the kingdom of God, it is merely one element of the kingdom, though a vitally important one, namely, the

35. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 83.

36. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 35, 36.

37. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 37

training and equipping arm of the kingdom. It is there to prepare and fully equip the CHURCH for its task in the world.³⁸

* * * * *

But the Church (again, the institutional Church; RH), through its ministry, must equip the saints — i.e., the CHURCH in the widest sense as the body of Christ — for action and service in the political realm by teaching the biblical principles of civil government and civic responsibility set down in God's word.³⁹

Perks refers to the belief that the church is the goal of God's work in history as "ecclesiomania" and idolatry. The idea that the institutional church and its work of preaching of the gospel and administering the ordinances are important in themselves produces what he calls "ghetto churches, impotent and irrelevant," or "Protestant monasteries, little enclaves of spirituality retreating from the battlefield."⁴⁰

Until the institutional church realises that it is only a training ground, and until the CHURCH sees that its real calling is to take dominion over the earth, "it will be boredom, irrelevance and stupidity in the Church 'mummy factory' as usual."⁴¹ Thus he arrogantly writes off the ordinary work, life, fellowship, ordinances, and worship of the institutional church, and the whole institutional life of those churches that are not interested in his plan for earthly dominion.

His view of the church also allows him and all those who hold these views to ignore denominational boundaries and distinctives in their seeking of the kingdom and to cooperate with other "Christians" over a very wide spectrum in seeking to establish this kingdom. Denominational differences, differences of doctrine, government, and worship, mean little, since the visible CHURCH is not to be defined first of all in terms of congregations or denominations, but in terms of believers and their calling in the world.

Because Perks redefines the nature and calling of the church, it is not surprising that he also goes wrong in what he says about church government. In his opinion the kind of church government a congrega-

38. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 84.

39. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 63.

40. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 67, 68, 83.

41. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 84.

tion has makes little difference as long as it is godly (p. 40). Indeed, as Perks himself says;

... the principles of Church government set forth in this essay, however, can be applied, in the main, to Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches (p. 40).

This follows inevitably from Perks' devaluation of the institutional church. If the institutional church has but a very limited role in history and is but the means to an end, surely the whole subject of church government matters little.

All this, obviously, is built on CR presuppositions, i.e., (1) that the kingdom is something other than the church; (2) that it is a transformed culture;⁴² and (3) that the church is only a means, a training ground, for the establishment of such a kingdom. Starting from these presuppositions Perks, and others with him, of necessity: (1) trivialize the institutional church, whose calling is centered in the preaching of the gospel; (2) redefine the visible church in terms of the body of believers as they live their lives in the world; and (3) see the calling of that "church" primarily in terms of fulfilling the cultural mandate. This is not Reformed.

We do not dispute the fact that the body of believers can be and is called "church" in Scripture. But it is the *body* of believers that is the church, and then that body as it is organized under the authority of Christ its head, an authority that is established in and through the offices. That body, so organized, is given the particular responsibility for preaching the gospel and so gathering of the church as the body of Christ. An individual believer carrying out his calling in the world, in politics or elsewhere, is not the church, though he represents it and is himself a member of it. He, apart from the institutional church, is no more the church than an American living and working in the UK *is* America.

We dispute, therefore, the CR assumption that the institutional church is of relatively minor importance in Scripture. Not only do most

42. Perks puts it very bluntly. He says: "We must seek to be positive and affect our culture for good, claim it for Christ and transform it by his word into 'heaven on earth'— i.e., into a culture in which God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven" (*The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 69).

of the references to the church in the NT, as Perks himself admits, have to do with the institute church, but each of Paul's major Epistles is addressed to a local congregation, a part of the institute church. One of them, Philippians, specifically mentions the "bishops and deacons" of the church (1:1), the offices that among other things give "institutional form" to the church.

We dispute also the idea that the body of believers manifests itself apart from the institutional church. Reformed theology has always insisted that the two are so joined together in this world that it is (under all ordinary circumstances) impossible to be a member of the body of Christ without being a member of the church institute (cf. Acts 2:47 and Heb. 10:25).

Especially we dispute the assertion that believers as members of the church have a "wider brief" than that of the church as institution. We are convinced that the "brief" of believers, as they live their lives in the world and fulfill their God-given calling, concerns the church especially. This is not to deny that Christians must be in the world and must live there as Christians. No Reformed man has ever denied this. We do not believe in world-flight.

Nevertheless, Christians live in the world as members of the church, not only representing both the body of Christ and the local institution, but also at the same time living *for* it. Their goal and purpose in all they do must be the gathering, preservation, and glorification of the church. Their purpose may not be any different than that of God Himself, who has set the church at the very center of all His purpose and good pleasure, and who has made the church the body of His Son.

Perhaps no passage emphasizes this so strongly as I Timothy 3:15. In spite of Sandlin's explicit statement to the contrary, I Timothy 3:15 says that the institutional church, the church in which we are called to behave ourselves properly, is the "repository of truth and the end of God's dealings."⁴³ If it is the end of God's dealings, it must be also of ours.

This, we might add, is essential for maintaining a proper Reformed world and life view. If the kingdom is something other than the church, and the church only one means among many for the coming of

43. Sandlin, *A Postmillennial Primer*, pp. 43, 44.

that kingdom, then it is difficult to see that the ordinary work of the vast majority of believers has much relevance for the coming of the kingdom. What do sweeping streets, emptying rubbish, and changing tires have to do, after all, with the Christianizing of culture? Must one work out a Christian philosophy of tires?

On CR grounds one is forced into the position of saying (as Rushdoony says) that economics is a barometer of a sound eschatology⁴⁴ and that political action is necessary.⁴⁵ Thus one adopts, in spite of a lot of pious talk to the contrary, what is essentially a Romish world and life view — that some callings are more holy and necessary than others, and that one can serve God and His kingdom better in certain callings and not so well in others.

The Reformed view, which sees the church as central to all, gives meaning and purpose to every calling. Living as a Christian in his own place and calling, whatever it may be, each Christian seeks and is used for the gathering, preservation, and final glory of the church. CR derides this as “mere salvationism,” but it is salvation, after all, which is the ultimate purpose of God in predestination, the reason for Christ’s coming into the world, and the goal of the Spirit’s work when He is poured out.

Soli Deo gloria in ecclesia (Eph. 3:21).

APPENDIX III

Related Issues

Gradualism

CR speaks often of the fact that the kingdom comes gradually or progressively in history.⁴⁶ This gradualism is, to our minds, simply an excuse for the fact that CR has *nothing* to show regarding dominion and an earthly kingdom for the past 2000 years of church history.⁴⁷ All talk

44. R. J. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, Chalcedon, 1997, p. 34.

45. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, p. 30. Cf. also Perks.

46. Sandlin, *A Post-millennial Primer*, pp. 87, 88.

47. It is intriguing (though perhaps impossible of proof as far as a connection is concerned) that modern post-millennialism with its “gradual-

of a progressive realization of the kingdom and the kingdom promises in that context is empty rhetoric.

Indeed, if the CR principle of gradualism is applied to the OT and the history of Israel, the original theocracy of which the expected millennial kingdom is supposed to be the realization, one sees over the sweep of OT history the loss of territory and sovereignty. What God gave them they always and inevitably squandered and lost.

What is more, the principle of "gradualism" when viewed against the background of the history of the CR movement is nothing more than an enormous joke. The story of the gradual development of the "kingdom" in the history of the CR movement is the story of divided and ruined churches, disenchanted members, closed schools, political failure and impotency, in-fighting and division, defection and apostasy, heresy (cf. most recently Chilton's hyper-preterism) and tyranny.⁴⁸

Also, in spite of all their talk, the fact of the matter is that CR itself does not believe in such a progressive fulfilment of the promise of the kingdom and dominion. Thus their constant harping on the unfaithfulness of the church and *the failure of God's people to inherit because they have not fulfilled their dominion mandate*. The overwhelming message of the movement is that God's people have not had dominion, have not inherited, have not been victorious, and all because they have not been faithful. Possession in principle is *not* dominion as far as the actualities of CR are concerned. In fact, if possession in principle is enough, then they have *no quarrel at all* with the amillennialists and with all the churches they slander.

And when we speak of them slandering the church, we mean exactly that. They say without hesitation that the church has been a

ism," and "optimistic progressivism," has its roots in the same era as Darwinian evolutionism, with its gradualism and optimism, and is connected with men who were weak on the biblical doctrine of creation (Warfield, Charles Hodge, Chalmers, etc.). Perhaps, in light of gradualism's failure to produce any results, this is the reason why CR, like evolutionism, has in part adopted a kind of "hopeful monster" or catastrophic explanation of the coming of the kingdom. North, for example, prophesied the collapse of Western civilization first in connection with the AIDS epidemic (*Remnant Review*, XIV, 6, March 20, 1987) and lately (since that egg did not hatch) in connection with the Y2K computer bug.

48. E.g., Diane Winston, "Followers Exodus Drains Tyler Church," *Dallas Times Herald*, December 23, 1987.

failure, has surrendered to the devil, is schizophrenic, hopeless, Phari-
saical, etc. insofar as it only preaches the gospel, promotes holiness, etc.

We would add that to say that God's people and the church have
failed is to say that Christ as King has failed. If He reigns, then He reigns
also in and through the church and always has. Anything less is an
admission that Christ is "the loser in history."⁴⁹

Christ's Universal Mediatorial Kingship

Another important issue is that of Christ's supposedly universal
mediatorial kingship. In CR this universal mediatorial kingship is
fundamental to the Christian civilization that is the fulfillment of the
kingdom of Christ in history. Indeed, if this kingdom involves the
salvation of civilizations and nations and the "Christianizing" of every
area of human society, then it must relate to Christ's mediatorial work.

This is, however, as we have seen, a denial of what Scripture
teaches about mediation. That Christ is Mediator means, according to
Turretin, that "he exercises the office of Mediator to establish a union
between God and men, separated from each other on account of sin."
This is also the teaching of Scripture in I Timothy 2:5, 6 and Hebrews
9:15. Mediation results in salvation, not in dominion and the Christian-
izing of society!

Also, insofar as Christ's mediatorial office includes not only His
kingly function but also His priestly function, it is impossible to say that
Christ is universal mediatorial king without also saying that in some
sense He is a universal mediatorial priest. His kingly mediatorial
function rests on the priestly function. He is king because He is also
priest. He rules in God's name over those for whom He died, as His
superscription testifies. If, then, He is the mediatorial priest of all in
some sense, there are only two alternatives, the Arminian denial of
limited atonement, or the "low Calvinist" half-way house that insists on
a particular atonement side by side with a cross that is nevertheless
intended for all and has blessings for all.⁵⁰ If He rules as Mediator over

49. Cf. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*,
ICE, 1988, p. 167

50. That there is in CR an inevitable tendency to deny a strictly particular
atonement can be seen in the quotation from Gary North on page 28, where he
says: "He died to save the world, meaning to give it time, life, and external

the kingdoms of this world, He rules them as priest-king. Then His priestly work has application to them as well, that is, there is broader reference to the atonement of Christ than just to the elect.

Also, if His kingship has application to this present world and to the Christianizing of society, so does His prophetic office, for it is through the prophetic office that He makes Himself known as king and establishes His rule. But then one no longer has a gospel that is strictly particular. It is, in that case, a gospel that is for all society, the instrument for saving and delivering civilization in general and its institutions.

In speaking of Christ's victory, CR teaches "there are institutions and nations in the sphere of society that can be 'saved' by the efficacious power of Christ the King." But this is wrong. The only nation that is saved is the church. The only institution that is saved is the church. "The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet. 3:10). The victory of the gospel in the non-elect is in their hardening and condemnation. To teach otherwise is to deny the particularity of the cross and of grace.

We believe in a universal *providential* rule of Christ over all things. This is simply part of the standard Reformed distinction between Christ's rule of power and His rule of grace. We also believe that His mediatorial work (in every respect) touches the ungodly. That is, they come into contact with it. We even believe that this must be so for God's purpose to be accomplished. We do not, cannot, believe that Christ rules *as Mediator* over all. As Turretin says:

First, the church is the primary work of the Holy Trinity, the object of Christ's mediation and the subject of the application of his benefits. For he came into the world and performed the mediatorial office for no other reason than to acquire a church for himself and call it (when acquired) into a participation of his grace and glory.⁵¹

blessings. He did not die to offer a hypothetical promise of regeneration to 'vessels of wrath' (Romans 9:22), but He died to become a savior in the same sense as that described in the first part of I Timothy 4:10 — not a special savior, but a sustaining, restraining savior."

51. Turretin, *Institutes*, XVIII, 1, vol. III, p. 1. Two things are noteworthy here: (1) the emphasis on the primacy of the church, and (2) the fact that the church alone is considered to be the object of Christ's *mediation*.

Kingdom and Theocracy

Another issue that comes up in the debate with CR is the whole matter of the OT theocracy. The CR view, of course, is that the Jewish theocracy is fulfilled in the NT in a Christian nation or civilization. This is not only a concession to Dispensationalism but *is* implicit Dispensationalism (and a kind of Israelitism, "British" or otherwise). The Reformed view (over against Dispensationalism) is that not only Israel as the church, but also Israel as a theocratic kingdom is completely fulfilled in the church of the NT. Even if a Christian nation or civilization were established, therefore, it would not be the fulfillment of the OT theocracy. The church and it alone would remain that fulfillment.

This is the plain teaching of the Word. I Peter 2:9 identifies the church, built on the cornerstone Jesus Christ, as that holy nation of God: so does Revelation 7 with its vision of the church ordered and sealed according to tribes. Philippians 3:20 speaks of our "commonwealth"⁵² and says that it is "in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:27 says that *our* "polity"⁵³ must be as becometh the gospel. Not only that, but all the passages that speak of the church in terms of a city or country (on earth or glorified) imply that the church is the complete fulfillment and realization of the OT theocracy (Acts 15:14-17; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 11:10, 14-16; I Pet. 2:4-8; Rev. 21, 22).

Here again we have the support of the older Reformed theologians:

1. The forensic or judicial law concerning the civil government of the people of God under the Old Testament and contained in a body of precepts concerning the form of that political rule. There were various ends of it. (1) The good order (*eutaxia*) and legitimate constitution of the Jewish polity, which should be a true theocracy (*theokratia*), as Josephus calls it. (2) The distinguishing of that state and nation from all other people and states and that that polity might be the seat of the church and the place for the manifestation of God. (3) The vindication of the moral and ceremonial law from contempt, and so the enforcer of respect

52. This is probably the closest word we have in English to express the sense of the Greek word *politeuma*.

53. A verb form of the same word used in Philippians 3:20.

and obligation towards both. (4) The adumbration of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.⁵⁴

* * * * *

The first difference (between the OT and NT) then is, that though, in old time, the Lord was pleased to direct the thoughts of his people, and raise their minds to the heavenly inheritance, yet, that their hope of it might be the better maintained, he held it forth, and, in a manner, gave a foretaste of it under earthly blessings, whereas the gift of future life, now more clearly and lucidly revealed by the gospel, leads our minds directly to meditate upon it, the inferior mode of exercise formerly employed in regard to the Jews now being laid aside.... We maintain that, in the earthly possession which the Israelites enjoyed, they beheld, as in a mirror, the future inheritance which they believed to be reserved for them in heaven.⁵⁵

* * * * *

In this way are to be understood the many passages in Job (Job xviii. 17) and Isaiah, to the effect, That the righteous shall inherit the earth, that the wicked shall be driven out of it, that Jerusalem will abound in all kinds of riches, and Sion overflow with every species of abundance. In strict propriety, all these things obviously apply not to the land of our pilgrimage, nor to the earthly Jerusalem, but to the true country, the heavenly city of believers, in which the Lord hath commanded blessing and life for evermore (Ps. cxxxiii. 3).⁵⁶

Even Abraham Kuyper, Sr., for all his notions of common grace, says:

All this, however, is no *theocracy*. A theocracy was only found in Israel, because in Israel, God intervened immediately. For both by *Urim* and *Thummim* and by *Prophecy*; both by His saving miracles and by His chastising judgments, He held in His own hand the jurisdiction and the leadership of the people.⁵⁷

This quotation is important not only because it repudiates the CR notions of a NT theocracy, but because it shows clearly the true nature of a theocracy and the fact there is not even the possibility of such in the

54. Turretin, *Institutes*, XI, 26, vol. II, pp. 165, 166.

55. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xix, 1, vol. I, p. 388.

56. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xix, 2, vol. I, p. 389.

57. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, pp. 107, 108.

NT. A theocracy involves *direct* divine intervention and rule, and is not just a matter of bringing civilization under the rule of biblical law.

The Kingdom and Heaven

We have noticed in our study a tendency in CR to deny the heavenly hope of believers altogether. This, too, we believe, follows directly from their teachings on the kingdom.

For example, one prominent CR author, David Chilton, has recently advocated a kind of hyper-preterism,⁵⁸ according to which he sees not only the prophecies of Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation as having been fulfilled already, but also the prophecies of the final resurrection. He has been teaching, in other words, that "the resurrection is past already" (II Tim. 2:17, 18). In connection with that verse his heresy is also referred to as the Hymenaeian heresy.

Others do not go as far, but nevertheless head in that direction by denying that heaven is the final home of the saints. Perks is a good illustration. He openly denies that heaven is the eternal dwelling of believers.⁵⁹ It is not entirely clear what he means, but he repudiates the desire to "go to heaven" and talk of "life in heaven" as an unbiblical and pagan idea of the afterlife (this in spite of Matt. 5:12; 7:21; Jn. 14:2, 3; II Cor. 5:1; Heb. 10:34; I Pet. 1:4 and a host of other passages).

Though it does not seem that he actually denies the existence of heaven, he says:

From the way some Christians talk it seems they expect to inherit 'heaven.' They will be sorely disappointed. It's all going to be down here in the nitty-gritty of physical life. So you had better get used to it down here where for mankind life is lived.⁶⁰

The Christian's inheritance is usually seen, if it is considered at all, as some kind of nebulous ethereal place where the believer goes when

58. Preterism is the belief that the NT prophecies of Matthew 24 and Revelation have for the most part been completely fulfilled already in the destruction of Jerusalem and other historical events relating to the time of the apostles and the early church.

59. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, footnote 28, pp. 27 and 28, and pp. 69 and 70.

60. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 69.

he dies ("heaven," the "Christian" version of the pagan concept of the Elysian Fields). Not so! The believer's inheritance is the earth. It is the kingdoms of this world that are to become the kingdoms of God and over which Christ will rule forever (Rev. 11:15).⁶¹

Obviously, it is not a large step from Perks' notions of "heaven on earth"⁶² to a denial of any heavenly inheritance for believers. Indeed, though Perks himself does not deny it, it is not a large step from his denial of a heavenly inheritance, to a denial of the final resurrection, as in the teaching of David Chilton. In CR the kingdom of heaven is really not the kingdom *of heaven* at all! Though they will admit that it comes from heaven, it is this present world, Christianized, delivered at least in part from the curse, and brought under dominion to the saints. ●

61. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 70.

62. See page 16, footnote 42.

Luther and Erasmus: The Controversy Concerning the Bondage of the Will

Garrett J. Eriks

Introduction

At the time of the Reformation, many hoped Martin Luther and Erasmus could unite against the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther himself was tempted to unite with Erasmus because Erasmus was a great Renaissance scholar who studied the classics and the Greek New Testament. Examining the Roman Catholic Church, Erasmus was infuriated with the abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, especially those of the clergy. These abuses are vividly described in the satire of his book, *The Praise of Folly*. Erasmus called for reform in the Roman Catholic Church. Erasmus could have been a great help to the Reformation, so it seemed, by using the Renaissance in the service of the Reformation.

But a great chasm separated these two men. Luther loved the truth of God's Word as that was revealed to him through his own struggles with the assurance of salvation. Therefore Luther wanted true reformation in the church, which would be a reformation in doctrine and practice. Erasmus cared little about a right knowledge of truth. He simply wanted moral reform in the Roman Catholic Church. He did not want to leave the church, but remained supportive of the Pope.

This fundamental difference points out another difference between the two men. Martin Luther was bound by the Word of God. Therefore the content of the Scripture was of utmost importance to him. But Erasmus did not hold to this same high view of Scripture. Erasmus was a Renaissance rationalist who placed reason above Scripture. Therefore the truth of Scripture was not that important to him.

The two men could not have fellowship with each other, for the

two movements which they represented were antithetical to each other. The fundamental differences came out especially in the debate over the freedom of the will.

From 1517 on, the chasm between Luther and Erasmus grew. The more Luther learned about Erasmus, the less he wanted anything to do with him. Melancthon tried to play the mediator between Luther and Erasmus with no success. But many hated Erasmus because he was so outspoken against the church. These haters of Erasmus tried to discredit him by associating him with Luther, who was outside the church by this time. Erasmus continued to deny this unity, saying he did not know much about the writings of Luther. But as Luther took a stronger stand against the doctrinal abuses of Rome, Erasmus was forced either to agree with Luther or to dissociate himself from Luther. Erasmus chose the latter.

Many factors came together which finally caused Erasmus to wield his pen against Luther. Erasmus was under constant pressure from the Pope and later the king of England to refute the views of Luther. When Luther became more outspoken against Erasmus, Erasmus finally decided to write against him. On September 1, 1524, Erasmus published his treatise *On the Freedom of the Will*. In December of 1525, Luther responded with *The Bondage of the Will*.

Packer and Johnston call *The Bondage of the Will* "the greatest piece of theological writing that ever came from Luther's pen."¹ Although Erasmus writes with eloquence, his writing cannot compare with that of Luther the theologian. Erasmus writes as one who cares little about the subject, while Luther writes with passion and conviction, giving glory to God. In his work, Luther defends the heart of the gospel over against the Pelagian error as defended by Erasmus. This controversy is of utmost importance.

In this paper, I will summarize both sides of the controversy, looking at what each taught and defended. Secondly, I will examine the biblical approach of each man. Finally, the main issues will be pointed out and the implications of the controversy will be drawn out for the church today.

1. Packer, J.I. and Johnston, O.R., "Historical and Theological Introduction," in *The Bondage of the Will*, by Martin Luther (Grand Rapids: Revel, 1996) p. 40.

Erasmus *On the Freedom of the Will*

Erasmus defines free-will or free choice as "a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation or turn away from them."² By this, Erasmus means that man has voluntary or free power of himself to choose the way which leads to salvation apart from the grace of God.

Erasmus attempts to answer the question how man is saved: Is it the work of God or the work of man according to his free will? Erasmus answers that it is not one or the other. Salvation does not have to be one or the other, for God and man cooperate. On the one hand, Erasmus defines free-will, saying man can choose freely by himself, but on the other hand, he wants to retain the necessity of grace for salvation. Those who do good works by free-will do not attain the end they desire unless aided by God's grace.³ Therefore, in regard to salvation, man cooperates with God. Both must play their part in order for a man to be saved. Erasmus expresses it this way: "Those who support free choice nonetheless admit that a soul which is obstinate in evil cannot be softened into true repentance without the help of heavenly grace."⁴ Also, attributing all things to divine grace, Erasmus states,

And the upshot of it is that we should not arrogate anything to ourselves but attribute all things we have received to divine grace ... that our will might be *synergos* (fellow-worker) with grace although grace is itself sufficient for all things and has no need of the assistance of any human will."⁵

In his work *On the Freedom of the Will*, Erasmus defends this synergistic view of salvation. According to Erasmus, God and man, nature and grace, cooperate together in the salvation of a man. With this view of salvation, Erasmus tries to steer clear of outright Pelagianism and denies the necessity of human action which Martin Luther defends.

On the basis of an apocryphal passage (Ecclesiasticus 15:14-17),

2. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, found in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, tr. and ed. E. Gordon Rupp, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, MCMLXIX) p. 47.

3. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 66.

4. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 73.

5. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 80, 81.

Erasmus begins his defense with the origin of free-will. Erasmus says that Adam, as he was created, had a free-will to choose good or to turn to evil.⁶ In Paradise, man's will was free and upright to choose. Adam did not depend upon the grace of God, but chose to do all things voluntarily. The question which follows is, "What happened to the will when Adam sinned; does man still retain this free-will?" Erasmus would answer, "Yes." Erasmus says that the will is born out of a man's reason. In the fall, man's reason was obscured but was not extinguished. Therefore the will, by which we choose, is depraved so that it cannot change its ways. The will serves sin. But this is qualified. Man's ability to choose freely or voluntarily is not hindered.

By this depravity of the will, Erasmus does not mean that man can do no good. Because of the fall, the will is "inclined" to evil, but can still do good.⁷ Notice, he says the will is only "inclined" to evil. Therefore the will can freely or voluntarily choose between good and evil. This is what he says in his definition: free-will is "a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation." Not only does the human will have power, although a little power, but the will has power by which a man merits salvation.

This free choice of man is necessary according to Erasmus in order for there to be sin. In order for a man to be guilty of sin, he must be able to know the difference between good and evil, and he must be able to choose between doing good and doing evil.⁸ A man is responsible only if he has the ability to choose good or evil. If the free-will of man is taken away, Erasmus says that man ceases to be a man.

For this freedom of the will, Erasmus claims to find much support in Scripture. According to Erasmus, when Scripture speaks of "choosing," it implies that man can freely choose. Also, whenever the Scripture uses commands, threats, exhortations, blessings, and cursings, it follows that man is capable of choosing whether or not he will obey.

Erasmus defines the work of man's will by which he can freely choose after the fall. Here he makes distinctions in his idea of a "threefold kind of law" which is made up of the "law of nature, law of

6. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 47.

7. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 51.

8. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 50.

works, and law of faith."⁹ First, this law of nature is in all men. By this law of nature, men do good by doing to others what they would want others to do to them. Having this law of nature, all men have a knowledge of God. By this law of nature, the will can choose good, but the will in this condition is useless for salvation. Therefore more is needed. The law of works is man's choice when he hears the threats of punishment which God gives. When a man hears these threats, he either continues to forsake God, or he desires God's grace. When a man desires God's grace, he then receives the law of faith which cures the sinful inclinations of his reason. A man has this law of faith only by divine grace.

In connection with this threefold kind of law, Erasmus distinguishes between three graces of God.¹⁰ First, in all men, even in those who remain in sin, a grace is implanted by God. But this grace is infected by sin. This grace arouses men by a certain knowledge of God to seek Him. The second grace is peculiar grace which arouses the sinner to repent. This does not involve the abolishing of sin or justification. But rather, a man becomes "a candidate for the highest grace."¹¹ By this grace offered to all men, God invites all, and the sinner must come desiring God's grace. This grace helps the will to desire God. The final grace is the concluding grace which completes what was started. This is saving grace only for those who come by their free-will. Man begins on the path to salvation, after which God completes what man started. Along with man's natural abilities according to his will, God works by His grace. This is the *synergos*, or cooperation, which Erasmus defends.

Erasmus defends the free-will of man with a view to meriting salvation. This brings us to the heart of the matter. Erasmus begins with the premise that a man merits salvation. In order for a man to merit salvation, he cannot be completely carried by God, but he must have a free-will by which he chooses God voluntarily. Therefore, Erasmus concludes that by the exercise of his free-will, man merits salvation with God. When man obeys, God imputes this to his merit. Therefore Erasmus says, "This surely goes to show that it is not wrong to say that

9. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 49.

10. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 52.

11. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 52.

man does something...."¹² Concerning the merit of man's works, Erasmus distinguishes with the Scholastics between *congruent* and *condign* merit. The former is that which a man performs by his own strength, making him a "fit subject for the gift of internal grace."¹³ This work of man removed the barrier which keeps God from giving grace. The barrier removed is man's unworthiness for grace, which God gives only to those who are fit for it. With the gift of grace, man can do works which before he could not do. God rewards these gifts with salvation. Therefore, with the help or aid of the grace of God, a man merits eternal salvation.

Although he says a man merits salvation, Erasmus wants to say that salvation is by God's grace. In order to hold both the free-will of man and the grace of God in salvation, Erasmus tries to show the two are not opposed to each other. He says, "It is not wrong to say that man does something yet attributes the sum of all he does to God as the author."¹⁴ Explaining the relationship between grace and free-will, Erasmus says that the grace of God and the free-will of man, as two causes, come together in one action "in such a way, however, that grace is the principle cause and the will secondary, which can do nothing apart from the principle cause since the principle is sufficient in itself."¹⁵ Therefore, in regard to salvation, God and man work together. Man has a free-will, but this will cannot attain salvation of itself. The will needs a boost from grace in order to merit eternal life.

Erasmus uses many pictures to describe the relationship between works and grace. He calls grace an "advisor," "helper," and "architect."¹⁶ Just as the builder of a house needs the architect to show him what to do and to set him straight when he does something wrong, so also man needs the assistance of God to help him where he is lacking. The free-will of man is aided by a necessary helper: grace. Therefore Erasmus says, "as we show a boy an apple and he runs for it ... so God knocks at our soul with His grace and we willingly embrace it."¹⁷ In this

12. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 84.

13. Packer and Johnston, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 49.

14. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 84.

15. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 90.

16. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 85.

17. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 80.

example, we are like a boy who cannot walk. The boy wants the apple, but he needs his father to assist him in obtaining the apple. So also, we need the assistance of God's grace. Man has a free-will by which he can seek after God, but this is not enough for him to merit salvation. By embracing God's grace with his free-will, man merits God's grace so that by his free-will and the help of God's grace he merits eternal life. This is a summary of what Erasmus defends.

Erasmus also deals with the relationship of God's foreknowledge and man's free-will. On the one hand, God does what he wills, but, on the other hand, God's will does not impose anything on man's will, for then man's will would not be free or voluntary. Therefore God's foreknowledge is not determinative, but He simply knows what man will choose. Men deserve punishment from eternity simply because God knows they will not choose the good, but will choose the evil. Man can resist the ordained will of God.¹⁸ The only thing man cannot resist is when God wills in miracles. When God performs some "supernatural" work, this cannot be resisted by men. For example, when Jesus performed a miracle, the man whose sight returned could not refuse to be healed. According to Erasmus, because man's will is free, God's will and foreknowledge depend on man's will except when He performs miracles.

This is a summary of what Erasmus taught in his treatise *On the Freedom of the Will*. In response to this treatise, Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will*. We turn to this book of Luther.

Luther's Arguments Against Erasmus

Martin Luther gives a thorough defense of the sovereign grace of God over against the "semi-Pelagianism" of Erasmus by going through much of Erasmus' *On the Freedom of the Will* phrase by phrase. Against the cooperating work of salvation defended by Erasmus, Luther attacks Erasmus at the very heart of the issue. Luther's thesis is that "free-will is a nonentity, a thing consisting of name alone" because man is a slave to sin.¹⁹ Therefore salvation is the sovereign work of God alone.

In the "Diatribes," Luther says, Erasmus makes no sense. It seems Erasmus speaks out of both sides of his mouth. On the one hand, he says

18. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 69.

19. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, (Grand Rapids: Revel, 1996) p. 271.

that man's will cannot will any good, yet on the other hand, he says man has a free-will.²⁰ Other contradictions also exist in Erasmus' thought. Erasmus says that man has the power to choose good, but he also says that man needs grace to do good. Opposing Erasmus, Luther rightly points out that if there is free-will, there is no need for grace.²¹ Because of these contradictions in Erasmus, Luther says Erasmus "argues like a man drunk or asleep, blurting out between snores, 'Yes,' 'No.'"²² Not only does this view of Erasmus not make sense, but this is not what Scripture says concerning the will of man and the grace of God.

According to Luther, Erasmus does not prove his point, namely, the idea that man with his free-will cooperates in salvation with God. Throughout his work, Luther shows that Erasmus supports and agrees with the Pelagians. In fact, Erasmus' view is more despicable than Pelagianism because he is not honest and because the grace of God is cheapened. Only a small work is needed in order for a man to merit the grace of God.

Because Erasmus does not take up the question of what man can actually do of himself as fallen in Adam, Luther takes up the question of the ability of man. Here, Luther comes to the heart of his critique of the Diatribe in which he denies free-will and shows that God must be and is sovereign in salvation. Luther's arguments follow two lines: first, he shows that man is enslaved to sin and does not have a free-will; secondly, he shows that the truth of God's sovereign rule, by which He accomplishes His will according to His counsel, is opposed to free-will.

First, Luther successfully defends the thesis that there is no such entity as free-will because the will is enslaved to sin. Luther often says there is no such thing as free-will. The will of man without the grace of God "is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondsman of evil since it cannot turn itself to good."²³ The free-will lost its freedom in the fall so that now the will is a slave to sin. This means the will can will no good. Therefore man does and wills sin "necessarily."²⁴ Luther further describes the condition of man's will when he explains

20. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 154.

21. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 145.

22. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 146.

23. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 104.

24. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 148.

a passage from Ezekiel: "It cannot but fall into a worse condition, and add to its sins despair and impenitence unless God comes straightway to its help and calls it back and raises it up by the word of His promise."²⁵

Luther makes a crucial distinction in explaining what he means when he says man sins "necessarily." This does not mean "compulsion." A man without the Spirit is not forced, kicking and screaming, to sin but voluntarily does evil.²⁶ Nevertheless, because man is enslaved to sin, his will cannot change itself. He only wills or chooses to sin of himself. He cannot change this willingness of his: he wills and desires evil. Man is wholly evil, thinking nothing but evil thoughts. Therefore there is no free-will.

Because this is the condition of man, he cannot merit eternal life. The enslaved will cannot merit anything with God because it can do no good. The only thing which man deserves is eternal punishment. By this, Luther also shows that there is no free-will.

In connection with man's merit, Luther describes the true biblical uses of the law. The purpose of the law of God is not to show men how they can merit salvation, but the law is given so that men might see their sinfulness and their own unworthiness. The law condemns the works of man, for when he judges himself according to the law, man sees that he can do no good. Therefore, he is driven to the cross. The law also serves as a guide for what the believer should do. But the law does not say anything about the ability of man to obey it.

Not only should the idea of free-will be rejected because man is enslaved to sin, but also because of who God is and the relationship between God and man. A man cannot act independently of God. Analyzing what Erasmus said, Luther says that God is not God, but He is an idol, because the freedom of man rules.²⁷ Everything depends on man for salvation. Therefore man can merit salvation apart from God. A God that depends on man is not God.

Denying this horrible view of Erasmus, Luther proclaims the sovereignty of God in salvation. Because God is sovereign in all things and especially in salvation, there is no free-will.

25. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 168, 169.

26. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 102.

27. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 199.

Luther begins with the fact that God alone has a free-will. This means only God can will or not will the law, gospel, sin, and death. God does not act out of necessity, but freely. He alone is independent in all He decrees and does. Therefore man cannot have a free-will by which he acts independently of God, because God is immutable, omnipotent, and sovereign over all. Luther says that God is omnipotent, knowing all. Therefore we do nothing of ourselves.²⁸ We can only act according to God's infallible, immutable counsel.

The great error of free-willism is that it ascribes divinity to man's free-will.²⁹ God is not God anymore. If man has a free-will, this implies God is not omnipotent, controlling all of our actions. Free-will also implies that God makes mistakes and changes. Man must then fix the mistakes. Over against this, Luther says there can be no free-will because we are under the "mastery of God."³⁰ We can do nothing apart from God by our own strength because we are enslaved to sin.

Luther also understands the difficulties which follow from saying that God is sovereign so that all things happen necessarily. Luther states: "If God foreknows a thing, it necessarily happens."³¹ The problem between God's foreknowledge and man's freedom cannot be completely solved. God sovereignly decrees all things that happen, and they happen as He has decreed them necessarily. Does this mean that when a man sins, he sins because God has decreed that sin? Luther would answer, Yes. But God does not act contrary to what man is. Man cannot will good, but he only seeks after sinful lusts. The nature of man is corrupted, so that he is turned from God. But God works in men and in Satan according to what they are. The sinner is still under the control of the omnipotent God, "which means, since they are evil and perverted themselves, that when they are impelled to action by this movement of Divine omnipotence they do only that which is perverted or evil."³² When God works in evil men, evil results. But God is not evil. He is good. He does not do evil, but He uses evil instruments. The sin is the fault of those evil instruments and not the fault of God.

28. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 216, 217.

29. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 140.

30. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 137.

31. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 215.

32. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 203.

Luther asks himself the question, Why then did God let Adam fall so all men have his sin? The sovereignty of God must not be questioned, because God's will is beyond any earthly standard. Nothing is equal to God and His will. Answering the question above, Luther replies, "What God wills is not right because He ought or was bound, so to will, on the contrary, what takes place must be right because He so wills it."³³ This is the hidden mystery of God's absolute sovereignty over all things.

God is sovereign over all things. He is sovereign in salvation. Is salvation a work of God and man? Luther answers negatively. God alone saves. Therefore salvation cannot be based on the merits of men's works. Man's obedience does not obtain salvation, according to Luther. Some become the sons of God "not by carnal birth, nor by zeal for the law, nor by any other human effort, but only by being born of God."³⁴ Grace does not come by our own effort, but by the grace of Jesus Christ. To deny grace is to deny Jesus Christ. For Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Free-will says that *it* is the way, the truth, and the life. Therefore free-will denies Jesus Christ. This is a serious error.

God saves by His grace and Spirit in such away that the will is turned by Him. Only when the will is changed can it will and desire the good. Luther describes a struggle between God and Satan. Erasmus says man stands between God and Satan, who are as spectators waiting for man to make his choice. But Luther compares this struggle to a horse having two riders. "If God rides, it wills and goes where God goes.... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan goes."³⁵ The horse does not have the choice of which rider it wants. We have Satan riding us until God throws him off. In the same way, we are enslaved to sin until God breaks the power of sin. The salvation of a man depends upon the free work of God, who alone is sovereign and able to save men. Therefore this work in the will by God is a radical change whereby the willing of the soul is freed from sin. This beautiful truth stands over against Erasmus' grace, which gives man a booster shot in what he can do of himself.

This truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation is comforting to us. When man trusts in himself, he has no comfort that he is saved.

33. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 209.

34. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 303.

35. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 103.

Because man is enslaved to sin and because God is the sovereign, controlling all things according to His sovereign, immutable will, there is no free-will. The free-will of man does not save him. God alone saves.

The Battle of the Biblical Texts

The battle begins with the fundamental difference separating Luther and Erasmus in regard to the doctrine of Scripture. Erasmus defends the obscurity of Scripture. Basically, Erasmus says man cannot know with certainty many of the things in Scripture. Some things in God's Word are plain, while many are not. He applies the obscurity of Scripture to the controversy concerning the freedom of the will. In the camp of the hidden things of God, which include the hour of our death and when the last judgment will occur, Erasmus places "whether our will accomplishes anything in things pertaining to salvation."³⁶ Because Scripture is unclear about these things, what one believes about these matters is not important. Erasmus did not want controversy, but he wanted peace. For him, the discussion of the hidden things is worthless because it causes the church to lose her love and unity.

Against this idea of the obscurity of Scripture, Luther defends the perspicuity of Scripture. Luther defines perspicuity as being twofold.³⁷ The external word itself is clear, as that which God has written for His people. But man cannot understand this word of himself. Therefore Scripture is clear to God's people only by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

The authority of Scripture is found in God Himself. God's Word must not be measured by man, for this leads to paradoxes, of which Erasmus is a case in point. By saying Scripture is paradoxical, Erasmus denies the authority of God's Word.

Luther does not deny that some passages are difficult to understand. This is not because the Word is unclear or because the work of the Holy Spirit is weak. Rather, we do not understand some passages because of our own weakness.

If Scripture is obscure, then this opposes what God is doing in revelation. Scripture is light which reveals the truth. If it is obscure, then why did God give it to us? According to Luther, not even the

36. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 39.

37. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 73.

difficult to understand doctrines such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the unpardonable sin are obscure. Therefore the issue of the freedom of the will is not obscure. If the Scripture is unclear about the doctrine of the will of man, then this doctrine is not from Scripture.³⁸

Because Scripture is clear, Luther strongly attacks Erasmus on this fundamental point. Luther says, "The Scriptures are perfectly clear in their teaching, and that by their help such a defense of our position may be made that our adversaries cannot resist."³⁹ This is what Luther hoped to show to Erasmus. The teaching of Scripture is fundamental. On this point of perspicuity, Luther has Erasmus by the horns. Erasmus says Scripture is not clear on this matter of the freedom of the will, yet he appeals to the church fathers for support. The church fathers base their doctrine of the free-will on Scripture. On the basis of the perspicuity of Scripture, Luther challenges Erasmus to find even one passage that supports his view of free-will. Luther emphasizes that not one can be found.⁴⁰

Luther also attacks Erasmus when he says what one believes concerning the freedom of the will does not matter. Luther sums up Erasmus' position this way: "In a word, what you say comes to this: that you do not think it matters a scrap what any one believes anywhere, as long as the world is at peace."⁴¹ Erasmus says the knowledge of free-will is useless and non-essential. Over against this, Luther says, "then neither God, Christ, Gospel, faith, nor anything else even of Judaism, let alone Christianity, is left!"⁴² Positively, Luther says about the importance of the truth: "I hold that a solemn and vital truth, of eternal consequences, is at stake in the discussion."⁴³ Luther was willing to defend the truth even to death because of its importance as that which is taught in Scripture.

A word must also be said about the differing views of the interpretation of Scripture. Erasmus was not an exegete. He was a great scholar of the languages, but this did not make him an able exegete. Erasmus does not rely on the Word of God of itself, but he turns to the

38. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 129.

39. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 133.

40. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 144.

41. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 69.

42. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 75.

43. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 90.

church fathers and to reason for the interpretation of Scripture. In regard to the passage out of Ecclesiasticas which Erasmus uses, Luther says the dispute there is not over the teaching of Scripture, but over human reason. Erasmus generalizes from a particular case, saying that since a passage mentions willing, this must mean a man has a free-will.⁴⁴ In this regard, Luther also says that Erasmus "fashions and refashions the words of God as he pleases."⁴⁵ Erasmus was concerned not with what God says in His Word, but with what he wanted God to say.

Not only does Erasmus use his own reason to interpret Scripture, but following in the Roman Catholic tradition he goes back to the church fathers. His work is filled with many quotes from the church fathers' interpretation of different passages. The idea is that the church alone has the authority to interpret Scripture. Erasmus goes so far in this that Luther accuses Erasmus of placing the fathers above the inspired apostle Paul.⁴⁶

In contrast to Erasmus, Luther interprets Scripture with Scripture. Seeing the Word of God as inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luther also trusts in the work of the Holy Spirit to interpret that Word. One of the fundamental points of Reformed hermeneutics is that Scripture interprets Scripture. Luther follows this. When Luther deals with a passage, he does not take it out of context as Erasmus does. Instead, he examines the context and checks other passages which use the same words.

Also, Luther does not add figures or devise implications as Erasmus does. But rather, Luther sticks to the simple and plain meaning of Scripture. He says, "Everywhere we should stick to just the simple, natural meaning of the words, as yielded by the rules of grammar and the habits of speech that God has created among men."⁴⁷ In the controversy over the bondage of the will, both the formal and material principles of the Reformation were at stake.

Now we must examine some of the important passages for each man. This is a difficult task because they both refer to so many passages. We must content ourselves with looking at those which are fundamental for the main points of the controversy.

44. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 153.

45. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 194.

46. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 223.

47. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 192.

Showing the weakness of his view of Scripture, Erasmus begins with a passage from an apocryphal book: Ecclesiasticus 15:14-17. Erasmus uses this passage to show the origin of the free will and that the will continues to be free after the fall.

Following this passage, Erasmus looks at many passages from the Old Testament to prove that man has a free-will. He turns to Genesis 4:6, 7, which records God speaking to Cain after he offered his displeasing sacrifice to God. Verse 7 says, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Erasmus says that God sets before Cain a reward if he chooses the good. But if he chooses the evil, he will be punished. This implies that Cain has a will which can overcome evil and do the good.⁴⁸

From here, Erasmus looks at different passages using the word "choose." He says Scripture uses the word "choose" because man can freely choose. This is the only way it makes sense.

Erasmus also looks at many passages which use the word "if" in the Old Testament and also the commands of the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 1:19,20 and 21:12 use the words "if ... then." These conditions in Scripture imply that a man can do these things. Deuteronomy 30:14 is an example of a command. In this passage, Israel is commanded to love God with all their heart and soul. This command was given because Moses and the people had it in them to obey. Erasmus comes to these conclusions by implication.

Using a plethora of New Testament texts, Erasmus tries to support the idea of the freedom of the will. Once again, Erasmus appeals to those texts which speak of conditions. John 14:15 says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Also, in John 15:7 we read, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." These passages imply that man is able to fulfill the conditions by his free-will.

Remarkably, Erasmus identifies Paul as "the champion of free choice."⁴⁹ Referring to passages in which Paul exhorts and commands, Erasmus says that this implies the ability to obey. An example is I Corinthians 9:24,25: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man

48. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, p. 54.

49. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 61.

that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." Man is able to obey this command because he has a free-will.

These texts can be placed together because Luther responds to them as a whole. Luther does treat many of these texts separately, but often comes back to the same point. Luther's response to Genesis 4:7 applies to all of the commands and conditions to which Erasmus refers: "Man is shown, not what he can do, but what he ought to do."⁵⁰ Similarly, Luther responds to Deuteronomy 30:19: "It is from this passage that I derive my answer to you: that by the words of the law man is admonished and taught, not what he can do, but what he ought to do; that is, that he may know sin, not that he may believe that he has any strength."⁵¹ The exhortations and commands of the New Testament given through the apostle Paul are not written to show what we can do, but rather, after the gospel is preached, they encourage those justified and saved to live in the Spirit.

From these passages, Erasmus also taught that man merited salvation by his obedience or a man merited punishment by his disobedience, all of which was based on man's ability according to his free-will. Erasmus jumps from reward to merit. He does this in the conditional phrases of Scripture especially. But Luther says that merit is not proved from reward. God uses rewards in Scripture to exhort us and threaten us so that the godly persevere. Rewards are not that which a man merits.

The heart of the battle of the biblical texts is found in their treatment of passages from the book of Romans, especially Romans 9. Here, Erasmus treats Romans 9 as a passage which seems to oppose the freedom of the will but does not.

Erasmus begins his treatment of Romans 9 by considering the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He treats this in connection with what Romans 9:18 says, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will, he hardeneth." To interpret this passage, Erasmus turns to Jerome, who says, "God hardens when he does not at once punish the sinner and has mercy as soon as he invites repentance by means of afflictions."⁵² God's hardening and mercy are the results

50. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 138.

51. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, 158.

52. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, p. 65.

of what man does. God has mercy "on those who recognize the goodness of God and repent...."⁵³ Also, this hardening is not something which God does, but something which Pharaoh did by not repenting. God was longsuffering to Pharaoh, not punishing him immediately, during which Pharaoh hardened his heart. God simply gave the occasion for the hardening of his heart. Therefore the blame can be placed on Pharaoh.

Although Erasmus claims to take the literal meaning of the passage, Luther is outraged at this interpretation. Luther objects:

To put it in a word: the result of your exegetical license is that by your new, unheard-of grammar everything is thrown topsy-turvy. When God says: 'I will harden the heart of Pharaoh,' you change the persons, and take it thus: 'Pharaoh hardens himself by my long-suffering'! 'God hardens our hearts' means: 'we harden ourselves while God postpones punishment.'⁵⁴

Showing the absurdity of what Erasmus says, Luther says that this view means that God shows mercy when He sends Israel into captivity because then they are invited to repent; but when Israel is brought back from captivity, He hardens them by giving them the opportunity of hardening in His longsuffering. This is "topsy-turvy."

Positively, Luther explains this hardening of the heart of Pharaoh. God does this, therefore Pharaoh's heart is necessarily hardened. But God does not do something which is opposed to the nature of Pharaoh. Pharaoh is enslaved to sin. When he hears the word of God through Moses which irritates his evil will, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. Luther explains it this way:

As soon as God presents to it from without something that naturally irritates and offends it, Pharaoh cannot escape the acting of the divine omnipotence and the perversion and villainy of his own will. So God's hardening of Pharaoh is wrought thus: God presents from without to his villainous heart that which by nature he hates. At the same time, He continues by omnipotent action to move within him the evil will which He finds there. Pharaoh by reason of the villainy of his will, cannot but hate what opposes him, and trust to his own strength; and he grows so

53. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, p. 65.

54. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 195.

obstinate that he will not listen nor reflect, but is swept along in the grip of Satan like a raging madman.⁵⁵

In his consideration of Jacob and Esau in Romans 9, Erasmus denies that this passage speaks of predestination. Erasmus says God does not hate anybody from eternity. But God's wrath and fury against sin are revealed on Esau because He knows the sins he will commit. In this connection, when Romans 9 speaks of God as the potter making a vessel of honor and dishonor, Erasmus says that God does this because of their belief and unbelief. Erasmus is trying to deny the necessity of the fulfillment of God's decree in order to support the freedom of the will.

Once again, Luther objects. Luther defends the necessity of consequence to what God decrees. Luther says, "If God foreknows a thing, it necessarily takes place."⁵⁶ Therefore, in regard to Jacob and Esau, they did not attain their positions by their own free-will. Romans 9 emphasizes that they were not yet born and that they had not yet done good or evil. Without any works of obedience or disobedience, the one was master and the other was the servant. Jacob was rewarded not on the basis of anything he had done. Jacob was loved and Esau was hated even before the world began. Jacob loved God because God loved him. Therefore the source of salvation is not the free-will of man, but God's eternal decree. Paul is not the great champion of the freedom of the will.

In defense of the literal meaning of Romans 9:21-23, Luther shows that these verses oppose free-will as well. Luther examines the passage in the context of what Paul is saying. The emphasis in the earlier verses is not man, but what God does. He is sovereign in salvation. Here also, the emphasis is the potter. God is sovereign, almighty, and free. Man is enslaved to sin and acts out of necessity according to all God decrees. Luther shows that this is the emphasis of Romans 9 with sound exegetical work.

After refuting the texts to which Erasmus refers, Luther continues to show that Scripture denies the freedom of the will and teaches the sovereignty of God in salvation. He begins with Romans 1:18 which says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in

55. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 206.

56. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 222.

unrighteousness." Luther says this means all men are ungodly and are unrighteous. Therefore, all deserve the wrath of God. The best a man can do is evil. Referring to Romans 3:9, Luther proves the same thing. Both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. They will and do nothing but evil. Man has no power to seek after good because there is none that doeth good (Ps. 14:3). Therefore, men are "ignorant of and despise God! Here is unbelief, disobedience, sacrilege, blasphemy towards God, cruelty and mercilessness towards one's neighbors and love of self in all things of God and man."⁵⁷ Luther's conclusion to the matter is this: man is enslaved to sin.

Man cannot obtain salvation by his works. Romans 3:20 says that by the works of the law no man can be justified in God's sight. It is impossible for a man to merit salvation by his works. Salvation must be the sovereign work of God.

Luther thunders against free-will in connection with Romans 3:21-16 which proclaims salvation by grace alone through faith.⁵⁸ Free-will is opposed to faith. These are two different ways of salvation. Luther shows that a man cannot be saved by his works, therefore it must be by faith in Jesus Christ. Justification is free, of grace, and without works because man possesses no worthiness for it.

Finally, we notice that Luther points out the comprehensive terms of the apostle Paul to show that there is no free-will in man. All are sinners. There is none that is righteous, and none that doeth good. Paul uses many others also. Therefore, justification and salvation are without works and without the law.

Over against the idea of free-will stands the clear teaching of Scripture. Luther clearly exegetes God's Word to show this. In summary, the truth of predestination denies the free-will of man. Because salvation is by grace and faith, salvation is not by works. Faith and grace are of no avail if salvation is by the works of man. Also, the only thing the law works is wrath. The law displays the unworthiness, sinfulness, and guilt of man. As children of Adam we can do no good. Luther argues along these lines to show that a free-will does not exist in man. Salvation is by grace alone.

57. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 282.

58. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 289.

The Main Issues and Implications of Each View

Luther is not interested in abstract theological concepts. He does not take up this debate with Erasmus on a purely intellectual level. The main issue is salvation: how does God save? Luther himself defines the issue on which the debate hinges:

So it is not irreligious, idle, or superfluous, but in the highest degree wholesome and necessary, for a Christian to know whether or not his will has anything to do in matters pertaining to salvation.... This is the hinge on which our discussion turns, the crucial issue between us.⁵⁹

Luther finds it necessary to investigate from Scripture what ability the will of man has and how this is related to God and His grace. If one does not know this, he does not know Christianity. Luther brings this against Erasmus because he shows no interest in the truth regarding how it is that some are saved.

Although the broad issue of the debate is how God saves, the specific issue is the sovereignty of God in salvation. The main issue for Luther is that man does not have a free-will by which he merits eternal life, but God sovereignly saves those whom He has chosen.

Luther is pursuing the question, "Is God, God?" This means, is God the omnipotent who reigns over all and who sovereignly saves, or does He depend on man? If God depends on man for anything, then He is not God. Therefore Luther asks the question of himself: Who will try to reform his life, believe, and love God? His answer, "Nobody."⁶⁰ No man can do this of himself. He needs God. "The elect, who fear God, will be reformed by the Holy Spirit; the rest will perish unreformed."⁶¹ Luther defends this truth so vigorously because it is the heart of the gospel. God is the sovereign God of salvation. If salvation depends on the works of man, he cannot be saved.

Certain implications necessarily follow from the views of salvation defended by both men. First, we must consider the implications which show the falsehood of Erasmus' view of salvation.

When Erasmus speaks of merit, he is really speaking as a Pelagian. This was offensive to Erasmus because he specifically claimed that he

59. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 78.

60. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 99.

61. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 99.

was not a Pelagian. But Luther rightly points out that Erasmus says man merits salvation. According to the idea of merit, man performs an act separate from God, which act is the basis of salvation. He deserves a reward. This is opposed to grace. Therefore, if merit is at all involved, man saves himself. This makes Erasmus no different from the Pelagians except that the Pelagians are honest. Pelagians honestly confess that man merits eternal life. Erasmus tries to give the appearance that he is against the Pelagians although he really is a Pelagian.⁶² Packer and Johnston make this analysis:

Erasmus had supposed that by stressing the smallness of the power which man can exercise, and of the merit which he can gain in his own strength, he was softening the offence of his Pelagian principles and moving closer to the Augustinian position, which denies all merit and ascribes salvation wholly to God.⁶³

According to Luther, Erasmus does not succeed in moving closer to the Augustinian position. Instead, he cheapens the purchase of God's grace. Luther says:

This hypocrisy of theirs results in their valuing and seeking to purchase the grace of God at a much cheaper rate than the Pelagians. The latter assert that it is not by a feeble something within us that we obtain grace, but by efforts and works that are complete, entire, perfect, many and mighty; but our friends here tell us that it is by something very small, almost nothing, that we merit grace.⁶⁴

The Pelagians base salvation upon works; men work for their own righteousness. But Erasmus has cheapened the price which must be paid for salvation. Because only a small work of man is needed to merit salvation, God is not so great and mighty. Man only needs to choose God and choose the good. God's character is tarnished with the teaching of Erasmus. This semi-Pelagianism is worse than Pelagianism, for little is required to earn salvation. As Packer and Johnston say, "that is to belittle salvation and to insult God."⁶⁵

62. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 293.

63. Packer and Johnston, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 49.

64. Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*, pp. 293, 294.

65. Packer and Johnston, *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 50.

Another implication of the synergistic view of salvation held to by Erasmus is that God is not God. Because salvation depends upon the free-will of man according to Erasmus, man ascribes divinity to himself. God is not God because He depends upon man. Man himself determines whether or not he will be saved. Therefore the study of soteriology is not the study of what God does in salvation, but soteriology is a study of what man does with God to deserve eternal life.

This means God's grace is not irresistible, but man can reject the grace of God. Man then has more power than God. God watches passively to see what man will do.

Finally, a serious implication of the view of Erasmus is that he denies salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone. In his *Diatribes*, Erasmus rarely mentions Jesus Christ. This shows something is wrong. This does follow from what Erasmus says. The emphasis for Erasmus is what man must do to be saved and not on what God has done in Jesus Christ. Therefore Jesus Christ is not the only way of salvation and is not that important.

Over against the implications of Erasmus' view are the orthodox implications of Luther's view. God is sovereign in salvation. God elects His people, He sent Jesus Christ, and reveals Jesus Christ only to His people. It is God who turns the enslaved wills of His people so that they seek after Him. Salvation does not depend upon the work of man in any sense.

The basis of salvation is Jesus Christ alone. Because man is enslaved to sin, He must be turned from that sin. He must be saved from that sin through the satisfaction of the justice of God. A man needs the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to be saved. A man needs the new life of Jesus Christ in order to inherit eternal life. The merits of man do not save because he merits nothing with God. A man needs the merits of Jesus Christ for eternal life. A man needs faith by which he is united to Christ.

The source of this salvation is election. God saves only those whom He elects. Those who receive that new life of Christ are those whom God has chosen. God is sovereign in salvation.

Because God is sovereign in salvation, His grace cannot be resisted. Erasmus says that the reason some do not believe is because they reject the grace which God has given to them. Luther implies that God does not show grace to all men. Instead, He saves and shows favor

only to those who are His children. In them, God of necessity, efficaciously accomplishes His purpose.

Because man cannot merit eternal life, saving faith is not a work of man by which he merits anything with God. Works do not justify a man. Salvation is the work of God alone in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift of God whereby we are united to Jesus Christ and receive the new life found in Him. Even the knowledge and confidence as the activity of faith are the gifts of faith.

Finally, only with this view of salvation that God is sovereign can a man have comfort that he will be saved. Because God is sovereign in salvation and because His counsel is immutable, we cannot fall from the grace of God. He preserves those who are His children. Erasmus could not have this comfort because he held that man determines his own salvation.

The Importance of This Controversy Today

Although this controversy happened almost five hundred years ago, it is significant for the church today. The error of "semi-Pelagianism" is still alive in the church today. Much of the church world sides with Erasmus today, even among those who claim to be "Reformed." If a "Reformed" or Lutheran church denies what Luther says and sides with Erasmus, they despise the reformation of the church in the sixteenth century. They might as well go back to the Roman Catholic Church.

This controversy is important today because many deny that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. A man can worship heathen gods and be saved. This follows from making works the basis of salvation. Over against this error, Martin Luther proclaimed the sovereignty of God in salvation. He proclaimed Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. We must do the same.

The error of Pelagianism attacks the church in many different forms. We have seen that in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The sovereignty of God in salvation has been attacked by the errors of common grace and a conditional covenant. Over against these errors, some in the church world have remained steadfast by the grace of God. God does not love all. Nor does He show favor to all men in the preaching of gospel. Erasmus himself said that God showed grace to all men and God does not hate any man. The Arminians said the same

thing at the time of the Synod of Dordt. Yet, men who defend common grace claim to be Reformed. They are not.

Also, in this synergistic view of salvation, we see the principles of the bilateral, conditional covenant view which is in many "Reformed" churches. If God and man work together in salvation, then the covenant must be a pact in which both God and man must hold up each one's end of the agreement. Over against this we must proclaim the sovereignty of God in salvation especially in regard to the covenant. The covenant is not conditional and bilateral. God works unconditionally and unilaterally in the covenant of grace.

Finally, we must apply the truth of the sovereignty of God defended by Luther to ourselves. We could say there is a Pelagian in all of us. We know God sovereignly saves, but we often show by our practice that we proudly want to sneak a few of our works in the back door. We must depend upon God for all things.

May this truth which Martin Luther defended, the truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation, be preserved in the church.

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The Decline and Fall of New England Congregationalism

Angus Stewart

INTRODUCTION

Of the various parts of God's earth, New England would appear to have been one of the most favored. Settled in the sixteenth century by godly Congregationalist pilgrims, it had complete freedom from the oppressive Church of England, and liberty to worship according to the dictates of conscience, in the light of the Scriptures. In the next century it was graced with America's greatest philosopher-theologian, Jonathan Edwards, and had experienced the Great Awakening. Indeed, New England had several revivals, varying in extent, both in the preceding and succeeding centuries.

Yet by the beginning of the twentieth century and even before, New England Congregationalism was apostate. How can we account for this great spiritual fall? This essay seeks to trace the decline and fall of New England Congregationalism, from the pilgrim settlers, through Jonathan Edwards, to the demise and death of the distinctively "New England Theology," in the end of the nineteenth century.

"THE CITY SET ON A HILL"

Foundations

At daybreak, November 9, 1620, the Mayflower, carrying one hundred and forty-four persons, made landfall off the tip of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Of the 105 passengers which boarded the ship in Plymouth, England, only 35 were actually pilgrims. The rest were either

"indentured servants or persons of particular skills likely to be useful in the new colony."¹ The people compacted themselves in a civil covenant under the rule of God, and a church covenant was formed of those who desired to be gathered in the name of Christ. The "holy experiment" had begun; "the city set on a hill" was being built.

Covenanting was to prove the norm in the churches. The church in Salem at its organization declared,

We covenant with the Lord and with one another, and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth.²

It was felt that a more extensive statement was not required, and, at the time, no suitable confession was readily available. The emphasis on the Bible, rather than on confessional orthodoxy, was in accord with the ideas of John Robinson, the leader of the English Separatists in Leiden, whose ideas many of the pilgrims brought with them.³

Despite the many, extreme hardships in the New World, including a very harsh first winter, the little colony survived and grew. Through immigration and expansion, other colonies were soon established, including those in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. By 1630, one thousand Puritans had arrived in New England, and over the next decade eighteen thousand Englishmen settled there.⁴ The Congregationalists (or Independents) and the Puritans, both being experientialist Calvinist groups, were doctrinally homogenous, though they differed in their views of the Church of England. Gradually, the proximity to their Congregational brethren, and the physical distance to the Established Church in England, led to the Puritans' severing their old ties and forging new ones: they became Separatists.⁵

In May 1631, the Massachusetts General Court decreed to limit

1. Hugh Brogan, *Longman History of the United States*, (Great Britain: Book Club Associates, 1985), p. 36.

2. Quoted in Peter Y. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620-1847*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), p. 84.

3. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, pp. 81-82.

4. Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America: Religion and Life in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), pp. 15-16.

5. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, pp. 83-84.

the franchise to the Congregationalist churches. This enactment was characteristic of the Massachusetts and New Haven colonies, but not those in Plymouth or Connecticut. Nevertheless it did serve to repress Anglican sympathizers. Congregationalism, unofficially but essentially, became the next thing to a state church in New England.⁶ As Williston Walker observes,

All late coming bodies of Christians, not violently out of sympathy with the views of the founders, would organize themselves after the pattern with which the founders had connected the franchise, and which was in so many respects attractive to the advanced Puritan.⁷

By 1639, of the approximately thirty-three churches of New England, only two had pastors inclined to Presbyterianism.⁸

Early Threats

The first significant threat to the New England way of church life came in the celebrated Roger Williams. Much lauded by later democratic America, as a martyr for freedom, the erratic and outspoken Williams was the nemesis of the New England clergy. Theologically, his significance lies in his radical separatism. He advocated complete separation between church and state, and held to a "pure church" of "visible saints," which was to separate from all "worldly" sister churches. He denied paedobaptism, since, for him, baptism was a sign and confession of God's grace in conversion.⁹ He was, in short, an Anabaptist.

In 1635, Williams was expelled to Rhode Island, where he remained a Baptist only a few weeks, before coming to the opinion that Christianity was broader than denominations. Rhode Island, though, more or less officially Congregationalist, became a center for the

6. The other New England states, Maine and Vermont, were later settled largely by expansion from the existing colonies and so were also Congregationalist.

7. Williston Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 114.

8. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, p. 116.

9. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, p. 132.

disaffected and the mainstay of the Baptists. Sadly, the Baptists were largely of the "General" variety, with their heresy of universal atonement. These Baptists made converts in the rest of New England.¹⁰

While Williams had been a loose cannon right from the start, the next "troubler of Israel" was, in the beginning, perceived as a warm-hearted and pious "mother in Israel." Mrs. Hutchinson, at first, merely comforted and exhorted women, but she was a charismatic and magnetic figure, and soon men were found in her audience ... and heresies in her orations. She was an Antinomian; sanctification did not involve obedience to God's law. For her, the evidence of justification was an immediate revelation by the indwelling Spirit. Those who responded that the justified sinner must keep the law out of thankfulness, Mrs. Hutchinson decried as legalists who were reimposing the covenant of works.

Mrs. Hutchinson had significant connections, including the governor, Henry Vane, as well as significant followers in the churches of Boston, where she lived. The legal machinery of Boston proved unable to resolve the matter and, since it had now become a concern for the whole colony, a synod was called. Delegates from the churches of both Massachusetts and Connecticut met in Boston for nearly three weeks in September 1637. Eighty-two errors were ascribed to the Hutchinson view and, six months later, she was banished and found her way to Rhode Island.

One of the most significant aspects of the Hutchinson controversy was what it revealed of Boston itself. The delegates from the Boston church had objected to synod's resolution and some had even walked out. Fifty-eight individuals who signed a protest against synod's decision later refused to express contrition and were disarmed, and some also were disenfranchised. With that, opposition in Boston was silenced, but it was a work of civil authority more than grace.¹¹

An even more subjective tendency was seen in the emergence of the Quakers. With their *inner light*, they made God's revelation in the Scriptures redundant and derogated the intrinsic worth of Christ's

10. Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 56-60.

11. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, pp. 138-145.

atonement.¹² The New England magistrate sought, at first, to repress the most obnoxious Quakers with the death penalty. Between 1659 and 1661, four individuals were executed for repeatedly denouncing Massachusetts' civil and church powers.¹³ However, in 1677 punishment was reduced to whipping. Soon after the accession of William and Mary to the throne of England (1688), a new charter was granted to the New England colonies, giving freedom of religion to all Protestants, including the Quakers.¹⁴

These three instances of radical doctrine indicate that seventeenth century New England was not an idyllic, homogeneous society.¹⁵ Furthermore, the immigrants over this period included "fugitives from justice, soldiers of fortune and men seeking wealth" rather than God.¹⁶ Perhaps, the biggest problem of all for the New England Puritans was the second and third generations: they were mostly unconverted. The spiritual zeal of many of the first settlers, enflamed as it was by their persecutions in the Old World, was largely unknown to their children. For many, the Protestant work ethic (to use Weber's phrase) had degenerated into greed. For others, the rough frontier life, coupled with the perils of the Indian wars, resulted in a deprived religious education.

12. Frank A. Lawrence, *The Decline of Calvinism in New England before Jonathan Edwards*, unpublished Masters thesis for Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, 1951, pp. 89-90.

13. In a letter dated March 25, 1669, John Owen wrote to the New Englanders,

We only make it our hearty request that you would trust God, with his truth and ways, so far as to suspend all rigorous proceedings, in corporal restraints and punishments, on persons that dissent from you, and practise the principles of dissent, without danger or disturbance to the civil peace of the place (quoted in William Orme, *The Life of John Owen*, [Gospel Mission Press: Choteau, Montana, repr. n.d.], pp. 153-154).

14. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, pp. 147-148.

15. In keeping with the subjective tendency of Puritanism, the three movements were experientialist.

16. Lawrence, *The Decline of Calvinism in New England before Jonathan Edwards*, p. 90.

"The Half-way Covenant"

New England's spiritual declension was particularly evident in the refusal of the majority of parents to present their children for baptism. There was widespread alarm, and various remedies were considered. Two important Puritan ideals were involved, and both were firmly rooted in the founding of the colonies: the church-in-society or "holy commonwealth" model, and the pure church principle. Those strongly supportive of the "holy commonwealth" idea insisted that the church must maintain her influence in the civil order and so were more favorable to lowering church membership requirements. Others contended fiercely for the Congregational view of the "gathered church" consisting of those who had responded to the call of Christ. The church was forced to make a decision. It was the former view that was to win out.

John Cotton championed the position that unconverted persons professing adherence to the fundamental articles of Christianity and not living in notorious sin could have their children baptized. Though not in God's covenant of grace inwardly, they nevertheless partook of its blessings externally. They were, so to speak, halfway in the covenant. The profane practice of the "Half-Way Covenant" (as it was later known) spread, but not all agreed with it, and so a synod was called.¹⁷

The Cambridge Synod of 1648 hesitated and formulated no definite statement. It did, however, officially approve the *doctrinal* parts of the Westminster Standards (1643-47), while allowing individuals and congregations to formulate their own creeds should they so desire.¹⁸ Deliberately rejecting Westminster's Presbyterian government, the delegates drafted their church polity: the *Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline*. Two points need to be noted here: first, the *Cambridge Platform* allowed for churches without elders, and, second, it ascribed only *advisory* authority to the broader assemblies. Thus, as David Engelsma observes,

[It] denies the kingship of Christ over the church in its two basic respects: rule over the congregation by a body of elders and authority

17. A similar practice was introduced in many Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century (John Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949], p. 87).

18. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, p. 104.

over the united congregations in prescribed areas by an authoritative synod.¹⁹

In 1650, only one third of the New England churches had elders. Many ministers were pleased at this, for it gave them greater ruling power.²⁰ One scholar has produced detailed evidence of a lordly spirit amongst the pastors, and a corresponding lack of respect for them amongst the people.²¹ Evidences of rebellious congregations are not wanting either, and the weak inter-church polity of the *Cambridge Platform*, in many instances, proved impotent.²²

The controversy regarding baptism continued. Although several ministers, like Increase Mather, and many godly laymen protested strongly against the Half-Way Covenant, it continued to gain support. Then, at the synod of 1662, the church at large placed her rubber stamp of approval on the Half-Way Covenant. The world had entered the church through the baptismal font. The theological debate was not, of course, laid to rest. Rather, the lines of demarcation had been greatly sharpened, and the anti-synodalists continued to write and preach against the Half-Way Covenant. Synod's decision did not help stop the declension in the "holy commonwealth." One eighteenth century historian wrote,

A little after 1660 there began to appear a Decay; and this increased to 1670, when it grew very visible and threatening, and was gradually complained of and bewailed by the Pious among them; and yet more in 1680, when but few of the first generation remained.²³

Even worse portrayals were presented at the "Reforming Synod" of 1679-1680 in Boston. By now the Half-Way Covenant was no longer

19. David J. Engelsma, "The *Cambridge Platform*: A Reformed Option? (A Review Article)," *PRTJ*, XXIX, 1, 53 (November, 1995).

20. David Harlan, *The Clergy and the Great Awakening in New England*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), p. 44.

21. Harlan, *The Clergy and the Great Awakening in New England*, pp. 31-47.

22. Harlan, *The Clergy and the Great Awakening in New England*, pp. 31-32.

23. Quoted in De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, p. 123.

the issue; that struggle had already been lost. The problem was the spiritual deadness and moral laxity of the church.²⁴ For a time, much repentance was evident in the New England churches, but it soon passed. Synod had made the mistake of seeking to deal with symptoms, rather than the church's actual disease.

The most positive step taken by the synod was the adoption of the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658, which was the Westminster Confession as modified by the English Independents. Again, weakness, even in this, is evident. First, the guarded expressions of Savoy regarding the role of the civil powers in church affairs were dropped to give the magistrates more authority in doctrinal questions. Second, the chapter on baptism was altered to allow for the Half-Way Covenant.²⁵

The Half-Way Covenant had not been properly dealt with. Instead, it was tolerated, approved, and even permitted confessionally. Reformation was required, but the church was blind to it. She had now committed herself to a vicious practice which would work in the church as a cancer.

"Stoddardeanism" and Further Decline

Still the baptismal question refused to go away. The Half-Way Covenant was a compromise, and, like all compromises, was unstable. Soon, for example, in Boston, no type of commitment at all was required of those presenting children for baptism.²⁶ Discipline was now even more difficult, and a moralistic strain can be detected in the preaching. As P. Y. De Jong puts it, "The Christian came to be more and more identified with the decent, industrious and prosperous citizen."²⁷

Also the serious theological objection was raised: If a non-professing member is permitted to have his children baptized, why should he be refused admission to Christ's other sacrament, the Lord's Table? Soon a prominent minister arose who accepted this reasoning:

24. For a summary of the evils that synod identified and the recommendations she made, see Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, p. 187.

25. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, p. 190.

26. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, p. 127.

27. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, p. 124.

the formidable Solomon Stoddard of Northampton (1643-1729), the so-called Pope of Western Massachusetts.

For Stoddard, the outwardly moral but unregenerate church member was permitted, nay *commanded*, to come to Communion. Stoddard himself said that his first experience of salvation had occurred at the sacrament, and so the Lord's Table was also presented as a *converting ordinance*. Stoddard had first expressed his views publicly at the Reforming Synod in 1679, but it was not until 1700 that he went into print with them in his book, *Instituted Churches*. By 1704, he was setting it forth fully to his congregation. He did not go without opposition. Increase Mather wrote against his views; but, by 1709, Mather was satisfied with Stoddard's explanation.²⁸ However, it ought not be thought that Stoddard denied the necessity of regeneration. On the contrary, he was strongly evangelistic and even "developed" the Puritan doctrine of preparation/"seeking."²⁹

Eventually Stoddardeanism, as it was called, was widely accepted in the churches, especially in the west. Demoralized ministers saw in it a means of maintaining the church's influence in the colonies, and unregenerate members supported its introduction. Church attendance continued to decline; the preaching of the Word was diluted; the downward spiral continued.

Increasingly, the ideological world of New England was changing. The liberal humanism of Grotius, the materialism of Hobbes, the new mechanics of Newton, and the empiricism of Locke were discussed in America. This is not to say that all who came across these new ideas accepted them, though some, of course, did. Rather, they provided new ways of looking at the world; raised new questions; and questioned old ways. The spirit of New England was beginning to sigh under the old Puritan regime. The sovereignty of God, the depravity of man, and the atoning death of Jesus Christ no longer gripped the colonists. The strict Puritan lifestyle was unappealing to many, and those itching ears in the pews (or in the house or field) were very open to new ideas. For the vast majority still wishing to retain some religion, there was the softer, less doctrinal, more humane, religion of the English Latitudinarians, like

28. See John H. Gerstner's "Introduction" to Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*, (Ligonier, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, repr. 1993), p. vii.

29. See Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*.

Jeremy Taylor, John Tillotson, Daniel Whitby, and Samuel Clarke.³⁰ More and more a hazy type of Christianity began to appear and the essential dignity and liberty of man became almost a religious principle. "Arminianism" was increasing and things were looking bleak for New England.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

On July 8, 1731, a young minister preached the Public Lecture at Boston. His text was I Corinthians 1: 29-31: "That no flesh should glory in his presence...." The address was entitled, "God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him in the Whole of it."³¹ In the second point of his application, near the end of his sermon, the young man explicitly attacked the Arminianism of his day:

Hence those doctrines and schemes of divinity that are in any respect opposite to such absolute and universal dependence on God, derogate from his glory, and thwart the design of our redemption.³²

The preacher was Solomon Stoddard's successor in Northampton, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).

This profoundly Trinitarian and Calvinistic sermon caused quite a stir, but the godly were greatly encouraged. Next month, the sermon was published by two of those in the audience, who included in their preface these words:

We cannot therefore but express our great thankfulness, that the great Head of the church is pleased still to raise up from among the children

30. Frank Hugh Foster, "New England Theology," in Samuel Macauley Jackson, *et. al.*, eds., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. VIII, (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1910), p. 131.

31. Contained in Edward Hickman ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. II, (Great Britain: BOT, repr. 1974), pp. 3-7.

32. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:6.

of his people, for the supply of the churches, those who assert and maintain these evangelical principles.³³

Jonathan Edwards was now introduced to the wider New England world.

This high praise was not to be the last Edwards was to receive. B. B. Warfield's appraisal encapsulates the man: "Jonathan Edwards, saint and metaphysician, revivalist and theologian, stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America."³⁴ Very much a product of the New England Puritan world, Edwards nevertheless transcended it. If the preceding history is necessary to place him and help understand him, the succeeding century is a veritable mystery without him.

Edwards' Philosophy

For all his voluminous writings, Edwards is an elusive thinker, and evaluations vary widely. Despite all his greatness, he had serious weaknesses. On a more prosaic level, one dictionary speaks of him as "a hardline Calvinist divine, with a bent for philosophy."³⁵ For a proper evaluation we need to get beyond the eulogies and engage in serious analysis. To that end the second prong in the last quotation provides an excellent point of entry: we must consider Edwards' philosophy.

Edwards' position could be summarized as sensationalist-ideal-ist-occasionalist. The first he came to largely through John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which he read at the age of fourteen. This book brought him more pleasure "than the most greedy miser finds, when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold, from some newly discovered treasure."³⁶ Though not agreeing with Locke on several points, Edwards did accept Locke's basic position that seeing is a sensation on the retina, which produces ideas. John Gerstner explains

33. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:2.

34. Benjamin B. Warfield, "Edwards and the New England Theology," *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. IX, (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1981), p. 515. For several other tributes to Edwards, see the quotations in Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, (Great Britain: BOT, 1987), pp. xv-xvii.

35. Anthony Flew ed., *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, (London: Pan Books, 1979), p. 102.

36. Edward Hickman ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. I, (Great Britain: BOT, repr. 1974), p. xvii.

Edwards' joy in Locke's work: "It is as if Edwards had been scanning the heavens through a telescope and Locke came along and explained how the telescope worked."³⁷ Newton also played a role:

From his first reading of the *Principia*, the *Optics* [both by Newton] and the *Essay* [of Locke], he seems never to have doubted but that modern science's distinctive policy toward reality, primally exemplified in these works, was simply right.³⁸

However, while Locke with his *sensations* of color, roughness, coldness etc., denied the reality of any underlying *substance*, Edwards reasoned that since the sensations were only known in ideas, it is the *idea* which is reality. Edwards, like Berkeley, through Locke, arrived independently at idealism.³⁹

One support which Edwards offers for his idealism involves atoms, which, in Newtonian science, were considered the *indivisible* building blocks of the world. Since atoms resist penetration or "fracture," Edwards argued that their primary characteristic is *solidity*. For Edwards, unlike Newton, resistance implied *activity*, a putting forth of effort. But since atoms (by their very definition as indivisible) can withstand an infinite fracturing force, they must have an infinite resistance.

Since only God has infinite power, the resistance or solidity or substance of all atoms, and hence all things, is, as it were, God. Moreover, since atoms and resistance (which includes motion and the relation of all atoms) are merely the creative power of God, the whole physical universe is nothing but the acting Deity.⁴⁰ Edwards goes one step further: since all matter is spirit or ideas, and ideas can only be known by minds, and the only One capable of thinking the whole universe is God, then the universe itself is an expression of the divine

37. John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. I, (Powhatan, Virginia: Berea Publications, 1991), p. 41.

38. Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 23.

39. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. I, pp. 42-43.

40. Allen C. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), p. 30.

mind.⁴¹ Thus when Edwards preached at the Public Lecture that "all is in a mere, and most absolute, and divine dependence on the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," not all *heard* and *understood* all that he *said* and *meant*.⁴²

In the third component of our philosophical portrayal of Edwards — his occasionalism — we have, as it were, the bond which unites the other two seemingly disparate elements. After all, if the universe is only an idea, an expression of the divine mind, how can the scientific method be utilized? Here Edwards, like Malebranche, posits his occasionalism. The world is external to both God and us; and God communicates His ideas to us as we examine the world. Yet, this is not a mere mechanical construction. For Edwards, God's actions in this world are strikingly immediate. As we look at an object, God, by His sovereign constitution, simultaneously produces the idea of it in our minds.⁴³

While some secular thinkers sought to turn the modern science against the God of the Bible, and many Christian theologians were troubled and sought some form of compromise, Edwards saw no problem at all. Instead, with some sharp philosophical tinkering of his own, there was a perfect harmony between the Scriptures and the new ideas.⁴⁴ As Jenson astutely remarks, "For Edwards, Newton and more problematically Locke were sheer theological inspirations."⁴⁵

Edwards' Apologetics

Much has been written on Edwards' apologetics: Was he an

41. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 31.

42. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:6.

43. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 31.

44. Cf. Gerstner: "Edwards was confident that sound philosophy and theology cohere" (Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. I, p. 83).

45. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 23. Though positing a more substantial dependence on Locke, Perry Miller also recognizes Edwards' originality in fusing his own philosophical system (*Jonathan Edwards*, [Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1959], pp. 48-49).

evidentialist or a presuppositionalist?⁴⁶ This question labors under at least four difficulties. First, the clear lines that are now drawn were not firmly entrenched in the eighteenth century. Second, Edwards writes for different audiences at different times and can be quoted out of context. For example, a presuppositionalist must recognize that Edwards' treatment of "The insufficiency of reason as a substitute for revelation," is an argument against the Deists.⁴⁷ Third, the sheer volume of Edwards' writings, in the light of the first two points, gives vast scope for different interpretations. Fourth, as a Calvinist, Edwards' views on general revelation and the noetic effects of sin are similar to those that undergird the presuppositionalist position.⁴⁸

The *locus classicus* for Edwards as an evidentialist is found in his *Freedom of the Will*:

We first ascend, and prove *a posteriori*, or from effects, that there must be an eternal cause; and then secondly, prove by argumentation, not intuition, this being must be necessarily existent; and then thirdly, from the proved necessity of his existence, we may descend, and prove many of his perfections *a priori*.⁴⁹

Similarly, in his notes on "The Mind," Edwards, in number 54, entitled "Reasoning," fuses to the cosmological argument, those also from *design* and *motion*.⁵⁰ Edwards adds another argument, more peculiarly his own, from the impossibility of the existence of nothing.⁵¹ Edwards averred,

The arguments by which we prove the being of God, if handled closely

46. For a recent example, see Scott Oliphant, "Jonathan Edwards: Reformed Apologist," *WTJ*, 57, 165-186 (1995).

47. Contained in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:479-485.

48. Regarding Van Til, there is the additional question, concerning his claim to be in the line of true presuppositional Reformed apologetics.

49. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:16.

50. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:ccxxvi.

51. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:16; cf. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. I, pp. 120-121, 129.

and distinctly, so as to show their clear and demonstrative evidence, must be metaphysically treated.⁵²

Regarding the relation between reason and revelation, Edwards writes,

Great part of Tindal's arguing, in his *Christianity as old as the Creation*, proceeds on this ground, That since reason is to judge whether there be any revelation, or whether any pretended revelation be really such; therefore reason, *without* revelation, or *undirected* by revelation, must be the judge concerning each doctrine and proposition contained in that pretended revelation. This is an unreasonable way of arguing.⁵³

It is evident from the quotation that Edwards denies the apodosis, that reason is to test every doctrine within that revelation, *independent of its prior acceptance of the revelation as a whole*. Yet it is equally evident that he grants the protasis: reason *is* to judge the claims of a proposed revelation.⁵⁴

However, Edwards also believes that *full conviction* can only be wrought by the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Persons of an ordinary degree of knowledge are capable, without a long and subtle train of reasoning, to see the divine excellency of the things of religion: they are capable of being taught by the Spirit of God, as well as learned men. The evidence, that is this way obtained, is vastly better and more satisfying, than all that can be obtained by the arguings of those that are most learned, and greatest masters of reason.⁵⁵

Edwards not only gives reason such an exalted role regarding the existence of God and the divinity of the Scriptures, but he makes an

52. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:85. It is clear what type of answer Edwards was expecting to the "apologetics" questions he put to his students. The first reads; "How does it appear that something has existed from eternity?" (Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:690).

53. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:479; italics Edwards'.

54. Edwards' remarks succeeding this quotation support this contention. For a different understanding of Edwards' statement, see Oliphant, "Jonathan Edwards: Reformed Apologist," *WTJ*, 176-177.

55. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:17.

astounding claim concerning the Trinity of divine persons in the Godhead:

I think that it is within the reach of naked reason to perceive certainly that there are three distinct in God, each of which is the same [God], three that must be distinct; and that there are not nor can be any more distinct, really and truly distinct, but three, either distinct persons or properties or anything else; and that of these three, one is (more properly than anything else) begotten of the other, and that the third proceeds alike from both, and that the first neither is begotten nor proceeds.⁵⁶

Edwards' Theology

Sadly, Edwards' "rationalism" influenced his theology. Occasionally we see the intrepid Edwards boldly going where angels fear to tread. Calvin and Turretin, for example, when stating that they cannot fully explain why a righteous Adam should choose to sin, both say that we must remain sober and go only as far as the Scriptures.⁵⁷ Edwards was not satisfied, and posited "confirming grace," "sufficient grace" and several other subtle distinctions. Gerstner paints Edwards here as a great horse, stuck in the mud, whose struggles to get out serve only to sink him deeper.⁵⁸

Not only his rationalism, but his idealism-occasionalism led to problems.⁵⁹ In 1758, Edwards' *Original Sin* was published. In this work

56. Thomas A. Schafer ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. XIII, "The 'Miscellanies,'" (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 257; italics mine. For similar remarkable statements of Edwards concerning reason and the Trinity, see David J. Engelsma, *Trinity and Covenant*, unpublished Master's thesis for Calvin Theological Seminary, 1994, pp. 88-89.

57. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I:XV:viii; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. James T. Dennison, Jr., vol. I, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, repr. 1992), pp. 606-611.

58. John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1987), p. 37. For a fuller treatment, see John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. II, (Powhatan, Virginia: Berea Publications, 1992), pp. 303-322.

59. Glen T. Miller: Edwards' idealism "informs his theology throughout his life" (*The Rise of Evangelical Calvinism: A Study in Jonathan Edwards*, unpublished Doctoral thesis for Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1971, p. v).

he valiantly seeks to defend the truth against heresy, particularly that of Dr. Taylor of Norwich, England. However, Edwards' presentation of our unity with Adam is defective. In Edwards' idealism there is no underlying substance or identity of consciousness in a person; instead, God wills his successive moments.⁶⁰ But if a person *is*, by the mere constitution of God, why cannot God constitute the whole of humanity in Adam? Thus, for Edwards, man is guilty in Adam, not primarily through immediate, or even mediate, imputation, but because Adam's apostasy is truly and properly his.⁶¹ This is a radical doctrine, striking at the heart of Adam's covenant headship. As Gerstner observes, "It eliminated any vestige of representationism or federalism."⁶²

However, Edwards also falls back on occasions in *Original Sin*, upon imputation language. After all, he has to, for he goes on to exegete Romans 5: 12ff.⁶³ Furthermore, Edwards sets forth the orthodox doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to His people.⁶⁴

In 1754, with *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards made his famous defense of the bound will. However, this work is not without serious philosophical and theological problems either.⁶⁵ First, it is built upon a modified Lockean psychology, which not all will accept. Second, the intellectualists (those who hold to the primacy of the understanding)

60. Underlying this is Edwards' view of continuous creation.

61. Commenting on Edwards' view of mankind's unity in Adam, William Cunningham pronounces, "This idea has no sanction from Scripture, and is indeed quite unintelligible as a supposed description of an actual reality" (*Historical Theology*, vol. I, [London: BOT, repr. 1960], p. 514).

62. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. II, p. 331.

63. Charles Hodge, who opposes Edwards' theory of our identity with Adam, points out that Edwards also teaches *both* immediate and mediate imputation in *Original Sin* (*Systematic Theology*, vol. II, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1986], pp. 207-208, 217-220).

64. For example, in his famous sermons on "Justification by Faith Alone," in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1:622-654.

65. Curiously, Edwards' father, Timothy, who was also a Congregational minister, chose for his Master's thesis at Harvard College, the question, "Whether or not indifference is of the essence of free will." He answered, of course, in the negative (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, pp. 17-18).

will hardly accept Edwards' voluntarist position (primacy of the will). Third, it repeatedly appeals to "common sense," a notoriously varying entity. Fourth, it depends upon an acceptance of Edwards' occasionalism. Fifth, Edwards seems to present persons as having a "steady-state" character. In reality, the holy and sinful desires of a Christian fluctuate. Sixth, Edwards does not define "nature" or "motives" and how they work. Seventh, Edwards merely *states* his definitions of terms at the outset. These are open to challenges.⁶⁶

Theologically there are several objections, and these have been often presented, especially by the Old School Presbyterians.⁶⁷ First, the emphasis on the voluntary tended to present sin more as an *act* and less as a *disposition*. Second, the distinction between *natural* and *moral* ability was open to misunderstanding. Edwards taught that all men had the faculties to believe, as rational moral creatures, but they had not the will; though they could *naturally* believe in Christ, *morally* they were unable.⁶⁸ Edwards' doctrine appears very similar to Amyraut's. Of the French heretic, Schaff writes,

He also makes a distinction between natural ability and moral ability, or the power to believe and the willingness to believe; man possesses the former, but not the latter, in consequence of inherent depravity.⁶⁹

The extent of the atonement was not something which Edwards wrote much upon, though there are passing references to it in his works. For example, Gerstner quotes the following from an unpublished sermon on Revelation 14: 3: "He [i.e., Christ] has died for them [i.e., those who go to heaven] and not for the world."⁷⁰ However, it is strange, considering Edwards' conscious opposition to Arminianism and his

66. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, pp. 72-83.

67. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 207. Though, there have been many famous Calvinists, like Thomas Chalmers, who rated it very highly.

68. Charles Hodge, for example, sees this distinction as "unscriptural" and "dangerous" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. II, pp. 265-267).

69. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. I, (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1983), p. 481.

70. Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, p. 58.

vast literary output, that he did not produce a lengthy, reasoned defense of the particularity of Christ's sacrifice.

Most surprising is his writing a commendatory preface to Joseph Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* (1750), containing, as it did, the heresy of governmental atonement. "Perhaps," someone might say, "Edwards had not read the book." Impossible. Edwards "commonly spent thirteen hours, every day, in his study" and was a voracious and intense reader.⁷¹ It cannot be argued, either, that Bellamy's presentation of the governmental theory was obscure. It was not; Bellamy gave over a dozen pages to it, and made many references to it throughout the book.⁷² Edwards even sent Bellamy's book to John Erskine, the Scottish Presbyterian.⁷³

To conclude this brief evaluation of the controversial aspects of Edwards' theology, we must also point out that his idealism is evident in his treatment of the Trinity,⁷⁴ and in his famous work, *Concerning the End for which God Created the World* (1765).⁷⁵ His definition of virtue as "benevolence to being in general" is informed by his philosophical outlook.⁷⁶ Furthermore it has been a matter of inquiry if Edwards was tainted with Pantheism or Panentheism.⁷⁷ Gerstner himself grants that Edwards "was pantheistic by implication and panentheistic by intention," though "he did not believe that God is all in the sense of possessing identity with all being."⁷⁸ It is no wonder that in the prefaces

71. Quoted by Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, p. 137.

72. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, pp. 132-135, cf. pp. 296-297, nn. 102, 106, 109, 115, 117.

73. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:cxxiii.

74. See, for example, Schafer ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. XIII, pp. 256-263.

75. Contained in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:94-121. See John H. Gerstner, "An Outline of the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards, Part II," *Bib Sac*, 133, 101-102 (1976).

76. *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765) is in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:122-142. Gerstner defends Edwards' work from the many charges made against it (*The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. III, [Powhatan, Virginia: Berea Publications, 1993], pp. 259-303).

77. See Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 100-107.

78. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 104, 107.

to Edwards' books we often find references to his being too philosophical, metaphysical, and abstruse.⁷⁹

A question arises here concerning the creeds. In a letter to John Erskine dated July 5, 1750, after his ejection from the pastorate at Northampton, he states that "there would be no difficulty" in his "subscribing to the *substance* of the *Westminster Confession*."⁸⁰ Edwards goes on to say that he sees the "presbyterian government" as "most agreeable to the word of God." Therefore it is clear that the propositions in the Confession, with which he is not in complete accord, are not merely church political but doctrinal. Regarding confessional subscription, Edwards does not see it as a necessity. It is sufficient that the congregation is content that the minister soundly confesses the faith.⁸¹

W. G. T. Shedd, then a New England Congregationalist, observed in 1858 that his denomination was not sufficiently confessional in its stance.⁸² He probably exaggerates the importance of confessions to the New England fathers, but he is certainly correct when he observes that the tendency of Congregationalism's "highly republican system [is] to call out rigorous and independent thinking."⁸³ His recommendation must be taken seriously: "The *theorizing* spirit of the individual divine needs, therefore, to be both aided and guided by symbols."⁸⁴ Without doubt, Edwards' inquisitive and speculative genius would have been better served had he theologized with a greater conscious dependence upon the historic confessions of the church.

It is important to note also, that although Northampton "apparently had elders from its beginning," Stoddard's last elder died on the very day that he did. In fact, "the office of elder was virtually defunct

79. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:94, 532.

80. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:cxxi; italics mine.

81. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. III, pp. 410-411.

82. W. G. T. Shedd, "Symbols and Congregationalism," in his *Theological Essays & Orthodoxy & Heterodoxy*, (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, repr. 1981), pp. 319-353.

83. Shedd, "Symbols and Congregationalism," in his *Theological Essays & Orthodoxy & Heterodoxy*, p. 345.

84. Shedd, "Symbols and Congregationalism," in his *Theological Essays & Orthodoxy & Heterodoxy*, p. 346; italics Shedd's.

throughout Edwards' ministry." This was partly due to Edwards' error in viewing them as civil, rather than ecclesiastical, officers.⁸⁵ This weakness in Northampton's church polity only served to limit the rule of Christ through elders in the supervision of the pastor's dogmatic enterprise.⁸⁶

Edwards' Revivalism

Considering his religious idealism, the accusations of Pantheism, and his emphasis on the Christian's affections, it is not surprising that a mystical strain can be detected in Edwards' writings.⁸⁷ Neither was this out of keeping with his New England heritage, which placed great emphasis on Christian experience.⁸⁸ Similarly, in his evangelical Calvinism, Edwards stood as a direct descendant of the preparationist-revivalist tradition.⁸⁹ Edwards' doctrine of "seeking" is clearly presented in John Gerstner's *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist*, and here, again, there are problems.⁹⁰ For example, Gerstner writes,

He would not usually call upon them [unbelievers] to believe and be saved ... because that was not in the realm of their ability, but called them to *seek* to be enabled to believe and be saved because that was in the realm of their ability.⁹¹

85. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. III, p. 409.

86. In tracing the decline of New England congregationalism, this paper naturally emphasizes the weaknesses of Edwards' ecclesiology. This is not to deny Edwards' many rich insights in this area (cf. Thomas A. Schafer, "Jonathan Edwards' Conception of the Church," *Church History*, XXIV, pp. 51-66 [March, 1955]).

87. Edwards gave his approbation to his wife's mystical experiences. Also he failed to condemn all the faintings and cryings out which accompanied the revival (cf. Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the time of Edwards & Whitefield*, [Great Britain: BOT, repr. 1976], pp. 226-230).

88. Cotton Mather even had several conversations with angels in his study (Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, p. 89).

89. Miller, *The Rise of Evangelical Calvinism: A Study in Jonathan Edwards*, p. iv.

90. John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist*, (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, repr. 1995).

91. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist*, p. 95; italics Gerstner's.

Gerstner notes that although Edwards preached predestination and perseverance, he set forth the marks of grace as so exacting, and the deceitfulness of sin and the devil as so unfathomable, "that assurance became a relatively rare thing." Thus, Gerstner states, "It has been said that none of his followers claimed to have it, but rather remained dubious to the end of their lives."⁹²

Edwards' emphasis on experience and the ability of the will in choosing good affected his view of the children of Christian parents. Though a Paedobaptist, Edwards was known to address these children as "young snakes."⁹³ Contra Calvin, Edwards claimed that most elect children would be regenerated, not in infancy, but in later life, with a conversion experience. Edwards offers two reasons for his position. First, otherwise most of the elect would never experience their sinful natures *alone*. Following this line of reasoning, Edwards argued that ministers who were converted in their infancy would be at a disadvantage in counseling their congregation, for they would not understand the conversion experiences that their parishioners would undergo. Second, Edwards argues that regenerated infants would never know a deep religious experience of their deliverance from sin and misery.⁹⁴ God's covenant relationship with believers *and their seed*, in the line of continued generations, was being buried.

Like his predecessor, Edwards emphasized the danger of damnation and used the most vivid and powerful imagery.⁹⁵ However, unlike Stoddard, Edwards had an additional philosophical rationale: his sensationalism.⁹⁶ This affected his view of preaching. Thus Edwards states,

The main benefit that is obtained by preaching, is by *impression* made

92. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist*, p. 192.

93. Cf. Gerstner's chapter, "Preaching to Young Vipers," *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist*, pp. 34-39.

94. Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, vol. III, p. 433.

95. Wilson H. Kimnach, "The Brazen Trumpet: Jonathan Edwards' Conception of the Sermon," in Charles Angoff ed., *Jonathan Edwards: His Life and Influence*, (USA: Associated University Presses, 1975), pp. 37-38.

96. John H. Gerstner, "An Outline of the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards, Part I," *Bib Sac*, 133, 3 (1976).

upon the mind in the time of it, and not by any effect that arises afterwards by a remembrance of what was delivered.⁹⁷

Although his delivery was unemotional and he merely read his manuscript, his preaching sparked revivals; first, in 1734-35 during his sermons on *Justification by Faith Alone*, and second, in the Great Awakening of 1740-41.⁹⁸ Again, in themselves, the revivals were not a totally new phenomenon. Stoddard, for example, had several "harvests," as he called them, in Northampton,⁹⁹ and Edwards' father was a noted revivalist.¹⁰⁰ Yet in the geographical extent, duration, and excesses, the revivals did go beyond former experiences.

Edwards was critical of many evil practices and carnal attitudes which became associated with the revivals. In Part IV of his *Thoughts on the Revival* (1742), he inveighs against "spiritual" pride, immediate revelations of the Spirit, rash judgments upon the spiritual state of others, spurious "Christian" experiences, lay preaching, and disorderly singing.¹⁰¹ Some ministers invaded the provinces of others; other ministers were charged with being unconverted; conventicles were established. In some churches, hymns were introduced and women began to pray aloud in mixed assemblies.¹⁰²

Faintings and cryings out were commonplace, especially at the preaching of George Whitefield. Whitefield encouraged these things as a mark of the Spirit's working; and Edwards was only slightly more cautious. Edwards held that the revivals could not be condemned on this account, since Scripture did not forbid these things. "The design of

97. Quoted in Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards: His Life and Influence*, p. 42; italics mine.

98. For the latter, see especially, his famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:7-12).

99. In 1672, 1682, 1695, 1711 and 1717. Interestingly, Edwards stressed the continuity of his work with that of Stoddard (Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:347).

100. De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, p. 140; Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards: His Life and Influence*, p. 33.

101. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:397-420.

102. For other criticisms, see Allen Baird, "The 'Great Awakening,' Was it?" *British Reformed Journal*, 19, 4-10 (July-Sept. 1997); De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, pp. 140-144.

Scripture is to teach us divinity and not physic and anatomy," he asserted.¹⁰³ He goes further and tells us that when these bodily contortions occur under the "preaching [of] important truths of God's word urged by proper arguments and motives," he rejoices in them, and "blesses God for them *as such*."¹⁰⁴

Setting aside the "irregularities," Edwards viewed the revivals as a wonderful work of God, at least on a par with God's work in creation.¹⁰⁵ Edwards was postmillennial, and he saw in the revivals God's hand in ushering in the New Age. "The latter day glory," he thought, "is probably to begin in America" (which he identifies as the "isles" of Isaiah 60: 9), and in New England no less!¹⁰⁶

So powerful an influence had the revivals upon him that they affected his perspective, not just on the future, but on church history. In his *History of Redemption* (1774), Edwards writes,

From the fall of man, to our day, the work of redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable communications of the Spirit of God. Though there be a more constant influence of God's Spirit always in some degree attending the ordinances; yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work, always have been by remarkable effusions, at special seasons of mercy, as may fully appear hereafter in our further prosecution of our subject.¹⁰⁷

Thus, Genesis 4: 26: "Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD," refers to the first revival.¹⁰⁸ The Reformed and covenantal view of church history had been overthrown.

In keeping with the postmillennial hopes and catholicity in his work, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit and Visible Union of*

103. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:368.

104. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:394; italics mine. Though Edwards would denounce the Pelagianism and "enthusiasm" of the modern Charismatics, they have some grounds for appealing to him in support of some of their physical aberrations.

105. C. C. Goen ed., *The Great Awakening*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 344.

106. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:381-383.

107. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:539.

108. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:539.

God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth (1747),¹⁰⁹ Edwards has kind remarks for August Franke, the German Pietist.¹¹⁰ He even approves of John Wesley "so far as he is familiar with his work."¹¹¹

However, Edwards' postmillennial hopes were in vain. The Great Awakening petered out; disorder had been introduced to the churches; Arminianism had prospered on the revivalist soil; and Baptist notions spread. To top it all, in less than a decade after the Great Awakening, the people of Northampton, supposedly the town most gifted with the gracious visitation of God, unceremoniously deposed Edwards. Perhaps the greatest irony is that Edwards was actually deposed *for reformation!* For some time he had been considering Stoddard's Half-Way Covenant. In 1749 the controversy started when he published a work opposing it: *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*.¹¹² Within a year he was gone. What does this indicate concerning the spirit of revival and the Spirit of Reformation?

"THE NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY"

Before his death in 1758, Edwards had helped to sharpen the distinctions between the various "schools of thought" within New England Congregationalism. In his defense of the revivals, though also opposing the fanaticism of Davenport and Croswell, his most serious opposition was from Charles Chauncey (1705-1787), minister of Boston First Church. In his famous work, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (1743), Chauncey decried the experientialism of the revivals as essentially irrational and thus repugnant to the orderliness of the Christian faith. Instead, he stressed the means of grace and the instituted church.

For all this, Chauncey was not orthodox. With his optimism regarding human ability and his giving reason the highest place in the

109. Contained in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:278-312.

110. Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:600.

111. Gerstner, *Evangelist*, p. 92.

112. Contained in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:431-478.

Christian life, he was, in Edwardsean terminology, an Arminian. Though he never explicitly repudiated the authority of the Bible, he was later to deny the *eternality* of the punishment of the wicked. For Chauncey, the duration of the suffering was proportionate to their sins in the body before death.

Another indication of the downward trend in New England Congregationalism is seen in Experience Mayhew's book, *Grace Defended* (1744). Though professing to hold election and reprobation, Mayhew denied that the best deeds of the regenerate are sins and taught that diligent attendance upon the means of grace was a condition to receiving regeneration.¹¹³

By now many "Strict Congregational" or "Separatist" churches had been formed by pro-revival enthusiasts. Attaching high regard to religious experiences and visions, and lacking an educated ministry, they were soon torn apart by internal divisions. While many churches gradually died out, others joined the growing Baptist movement.

New England Congregationalism was now divided into two camps: the New Lights — pro-revivalist and anti-Half-Way Covenant — and the Old Lights. This latter group itself was divided, containing implicit Universalists and Unitarians, as well as more orthodox Calvinists, who held to the Half-Way Covenant.

It was these New Lights who were the heirs of Jonathan Edwards; and what a legacy he left them! The two leading first generation Edwardseans, Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), both received part of their training in Edwards' home and were Edwards' closest friends. Two important "New Divinity" men (as they were also called) proceeded from his loins, his son Jonathan Edwards Jr. (1745-1801) and his grandson Timothy Dwight (1752-1817).

Edwards was recognized as a theologian of the first order. His key ideas on the will, original sin, and virtue furnished matter for dogmatic reflection for the next century, and those who differed from Edwards' conclusions had to provide good reasons for so doing. Edwards was understood as having furthered theological science, and his successors sought to develop and perfect his system. Furthermore, as Foster notes, Edwards "did much to instill his spirit, the spirit of unfettered, rational

113. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, pp. 270-271.

inquiry, into the next generation of ministers.”¹¹⁴ His rigorous habits of study and disinterestedness in “worldly affairs” were presented as a model.¹¹⁵ Edwards not only provided a theological agenda for the New Divinity men — to be pursued with scholarly intensity. His revivalism furnished the Edwardseans with a program for the transformation of New England society, and his postmillennial vision supplied the necessary encouragement.¹¹⁶

Thus, the “New England Theology” can be properly viewed as consisting of “logical” developments of, or subtle revolts from, Edwards’ theology, with each thinker having his own theological emphasis or doctrinal aberration, and each successive generation moving farther from the truth. Through it all, Edwards’ influence, his achievements, his ideas are always there, even though the steady drift of “Consistent Calvinism” was to Arminianism (and beyond). Only a broad outline of the major players and movements in the tragedy need to be presented here.

Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins

As already noted, Bellamy’s significance lies chiefly in his introducing (with Edwards’ imprimatur) the Grotian view of the atonement into the New England Theology. In connection with his treatment of the *moral* government of God, the “harsher” aspects of election and reprobation were softened. In his struggles with the justice of God in condemning mankind for the sin of Adam, he stressed man’s culpability in his *actual* sins. In his preaching, he emphasized natural ability more than moral inability; more of the, “You should” and less of the, “You cannot.”

During the 1750s and 60s, Bellamy strayed into what can only be called New England moralism, and soon he was to be found encouraging men to enlist in the American Revolution (1775-1783). Armed with Edwards’ notion of virtue, Bellamy sought to infuse Republicanism with religious meaning — benevolence, God’s universal providence,

114. Foster, “New England Theology,” p. 133.

115. Joseph A. Comforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement*, (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), pp. 36-37.

116. Cf. Steven R. Pointer, “Seeing the Glory,” *Christian History*, XVIII, No. 1, 28-30 (1999).

law, morality.¹¹⁷ Although a key player in New England Theology, his influence declined with his old age, in his last decade. Nevertheless, sixty young ministers had trained under his tutelage, including John Smalley (1734-1820) and Jonathan Edwards Jr.¹¹⁸ His *True Religion Delineated* was, next to Edwards' writings, the most important work in the early New England Theology.

From Samuel Hopkins the Edwardseans derived two of their sobriquets. While others referred to his followers (with more or less disdain) as "Hopkinsians" or "Hopkintonians," Hopkins liked to define himself as a "Consistent Calvinist." Hopkins' first book had a high-Calvinist-sounding title, *Sin through the Divine Interposition an Advantage to the Universe* (1759). It was an abstract work on a subject that needs to be treated with much care and wisdom. Many were repulsed by his presentation of Calvinism.

Hopkins also taught that the use of the means of grace by the unregenerate only served to make them more guilty. By many he was seen to discourage church attendance and to slight the Holy Spirit's use of the means which He ordained. Another of Hopkins' idiosyncrasies was his insistence that all Christians should be willing to be damned for God's glory.

For all Hopkins' "Consistent Calvinism," he held that somehow God's sovereign decree includes man's freedom, whereby he possesses the ability to repent.¹¹⁹ Bellamy's governmental theory of the atonement is taken a step further, in that Hopkins completely overthrew the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. Hopkins also denied original sin: "there is strictly speaking, no other sin but actual sin."¹²⁰

Like Bellamy, Hopkins "developed" not only the doctrinal ideas of Edwards, but also his experientialism. The subjective side of New England Puritanism had been boosted by the revivals, and the questioned was raised: If an act of the will and a conversion experience are

117. Mark R. Valeri, *Joseph Bellamy: Conversion, Social Ethics, and Politics in the thought of an Eighteenth-Century Calvinist*, unpublished Doctoral thesis for Princeton University (1985), pp. 180-185.

118. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 91.

119. Foster, "New England Theology," p. 134.

120. Quoted in De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, p. 167.

required of a Christian, how should we regard children of believers? Hopkins, with his voluntaristic outlook, latched upon the faith *of the parents*, rather than the objective promise of God, as the grounds for baptism. Hopkins, like Bellamy, used his revivalist activism to attack social evils. With Edwards, Hopkins identified the essence of sin as selfishness and defined virtue as "disinterested benevolence," but he made major modifications.¹²¹ He applied his theory to slavery and denounced it so vehemently that he was dismissed from one church and emptied another.¹²² However, unlike Bellamy, the American Revolution fell under his disapprobation. The reason ... it dampened revivals!¹²³

Hopkins' key ideas were included in his book *The System of Doctrine* (1793). Now the New Divinity men had a "systematic theology," and this, with Edwards' and Bellamy's works, was to be the core diet of the succeeding generations.

The Second and Third Generation "Edwardseans"

The second generation New Divinity movement also contained many "close reasoners," but of them all it was Jonathan Edwards Jr. whose mind was the sharpest.¹²⁴ Sadly, he carried this with him into the pulpit, and his philosophical and metaphysical preaching was not always intelligible to lesser mortals, and only served to empty the church.¹²⁵ His fondness for conceiving of God as moral governor, allied to his great fears of the revolutionary ideas and the general looseness in morals at that time, brought out in him a legalistic strain.¹²⁶

121. Comforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement*, pp. 110, 117-123.

122. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 91.

123. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 126. Hopkins' heterodox doctrines spread farther than New England. One of the reasons adduced by Classis Hackensack for its secession from the Reformed Church in America in 1822 was the presence of "Hopkinsian" views in the mother church (Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 109).

124. Interestingly, Edwards the Younger was trained under both Bellamy and Hopkins.

125. Robert L. Ferm, *Jonathan Edwards the Younger: 1745-1801*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 85-87.

126. Ferm, *Jonathan Edwards the Younger: 1745-1801*, pp. 63-65.

Whereas Edwards the Younger (as he was known) was of a conservative bent and did not make any further significant doctrinal deviations, his contemporary Nathaniel Emmons (1745-1840), was probably the boldest of the New Divinity men. A key doctrine for Emmons was the sole causality of God. Regarding Adam's fall, he averred, "a divine energy took hold of his heart and led him to sin." This did not happen only to Adam; Emmons even applies Philippians 2:13 to the ungodly. God, he says, "works in them ... both to will and to do of his good pleasure; or, produces those moral exercises in their hearts, in which moral depravity properly and essentially exists."¹²⁷

Although God works in Adam's sin and ours in the same way (i.e., as author), the relationship between Adam's sin and mankind, in Emmons is very weak. For Emmons, not only are we not guilty in Adam, but we cannot even receive from him a depraved nature ... for the simple reason that we do not have one. "There is no morally corrupt nature distinct from free voluntary exercises."¹²⁸ Emmons found himself, with Samuel Spring (1746-1819), at the head of a minority party within the Consistent Calvinists: the "Exercisers." The opposing faction, led by Hopkins and John Smalley, the "Tasters," would speak of a depraved nature, which had an inclination (or taste) for the good or evil.

In the last half of the eighteenth century, as the Consistent Calvinists sought to be "higher" than Calvinism, while at the same time denying basic orthodox doctrines, their theology became more and more twisted and deformed. The Old Calvinists largely remained quiet and produced few thinkers or works of note. Thus the way was clear for further apostasy amongst the Arminians. With the American Revolution (1775-1783), the winds of the spirit of the age were blowing their way too. As Richard Mosier put it, "the 'Revolutionary' could no more admit a sovereign God, than he would a sovereign king."¹²⁹

By 1805 they were so advanced in their heresy and were suffi-

127. Quoted in Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 111.

128. Quoted in Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 111. Emmons trained eighty-seven ministers (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 92).

129. Quoted in C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1964), p. 25.

ciently strong to have a Unitarian, Henry Ware, appointed as Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard College. It was never to be regained for orthodoxy. In 1819 George Bancroft brought Hegelianism to Harvard from Berlin, and the Unitarians were at the forefront of the elitist Transcendentalist movement.¹³⁰ Through this period, the popular preaching and writing of the extremely capable William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) brought additional prestige and acceptability to the Unitarians. The Unitarians and Universalists effectively joined hands. "The Universalists," it was said, "believed that God was too good to damn them, while the Unitarians held that men were too good to be damned."¹³¹ Their differences, being more social than theological, were easily overcome.¹³²

A split in Congregationalism resulted. From 1817 to 1840, almost one hundred churches went over to Unitarianism. Only one succumbed in Connecticut. Several were lost in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and western Massachusetts. However, it was the older towns of eastern Massachusetts where most damage was sustained. Boston was hit particularly badly; of its fourteen Congregational Churches in 1800, all but two became Unitarian.¹³³ Worse still, some with unitarian leanings remained in the Congregational Church.

In response to the loss of Harvard, the Old Calvinists and the New Divinity men banded together and founded Andover Theological Seminary in 1808. In a compromise move, the Professorship of Theology went to a pupil of Nathaniel Emmons, Leonard Woods (1774-1854), and

130. Ralph Waldo Emerson, though, was too radical even for the Unitarians, and resigned his pastorate in 1832.

131. Quoted in Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Day*, (Great Britain: Penguin, 1961), p. 239.

132. Interestingly, the New England Unitarians played a significant role in the establishment of government schools in the United States. It was a Unitarian from Massachusetts, Horace Mann (1796-1859), who became "the father of American public education." Right from the beginning, "this New England Unitarian layman ... more than any other shaped the moral ethos of public schools" (Martin E. Marty, "Hell Disappeared. No One Noticed. A Civic Argument," *Harvard Theological Review*, 78:3-4, 391 [1985]).

133. Walker, *The History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, pp. 343-344.

that of Biblical Literature went to Moses Stuart (1780-1852), who was of the Old Calvinist camp.

However, the face of "Consistent Calvinism" had changed, largely through the influence of Edwards' grandson, Timothy Dwight, who was President of Yale. Dwight began to profess uncertainty regarding metaphysical matters, like the will and causality. Instead, he spoke of *intuition*, more in line with the Scottish Common-Sense Philosophy, so important in orthodox Presbyterian circles.¹³⁴ Through Edwards' grandson, the Edwardseans were largely disinherited of the key Edwards heritage: his view of the will.¹³⁵

The Revivalist Legacy and "The New Haven Theology"

Edwards' revivalist legacy remained, and at Yale, under Dwight's preaching, several revivals broke out in the early 1800s, with the greatest one coming under Asahel Nettleton (1783-1843) in 1820. Revivals occurred in many parts of New England,¹³⁶ and even farther abroad, in the South and in the West, where the famous camp meetings issued in the most gruesome bodily effects — jerking, running, barking, etc.

New England had learned one lesson from the Great Awakening, and the visions and faintings were severely limited. However, with the decline in the orthodoxy of the preached word, the rampant individualism of the revivals resulted in the usurpation of the church's work by all sorts of "societies."¹³⁷ The preaching was increasingly modified to

134. Dwight, with his key role at Yale, was instrumental in forging the Plan of Union (1801) between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The purpose of the Plan was to pool the combined Calvinistic strength of the two denominations in evangelizing the West, which was then opening up to expansion. This union led to a breakdown in discipline. Greater loss was sustained by the Presbyterians, who were more orthodox.

135. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, pp. 227-229.

136. For example, Guelzo mentions many revivals under various Edwardsean ministers, from 1781 to 1821 (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 92).

137. See, for example, Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, p. 169.

appeal to the modern democratic ideas — everybody had to have a free choice.¹³⁸

It was in the fusion of Jacksonian America and the New England Theology that revivalism was to reach its culmination. The egg laid nearly a century earlier finally hatched, and out popped a fast-talking, free-willist revivalist: Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875). From 1824 to 1831, Finney's "new measures" brought great revivals in New York State.

In an 1827 Conference in New Lebanon, New York, he had been forbidden by the two leading New England revivalists, Nettleton and Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), from entering their territory.¹³⁹ However, Beecher was more liberal in his theological views than Nettleton. In 1831, when Nettleton was in very poor health, Beecher reneged and invited Finney to his pulpit in Boston. Finney was to spew forth his Pelagianism for over a quarter of a century in New England.

As Finney was destroying the churches with his heretical preaching, the supposedly Edwardsean, Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858), also a revivalist, was inculcating his false doctrine, dubbed "New Haven Theology," at Yale Divinity School (established 1822). For human responsibility, Taylor argued, "power to the contrary" is required. Infants do not have souls and therefore cannot be damned, and all virtue (not sin!) ultimately can be reduced to self-love.¹⁴⁰

Moses Stuart sided with Taylor, and Leonard Woods, though opposing Taylor, had not the theological capability to refute him. "Taylorism" had now infiltrated all the theological schools, and it disseminated its views through the various quarterly periodicals it controlled.¹⁴¹

After Taylor, the New England Theology, now in its New Haven

138. Democracy, as Arthur C. McGiffert observes, "demands a God with whom man may cooperate, not one to whom they must submit" (quoted in Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, p. 170).

139. It was Beecher's daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe, who, in keeping with her father's opposition to slavery, wrote the famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

140. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, pp. 256-257; Foster, "New England Theology," p. 137.

141. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, pp. 272-273.

form, managed to continue for a few more years, producing important thinkers like the great liberal Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), the church historian George Park Fisher (1827-1909), and its last great systematizer, Edwards Amasa Park (1808-1900). With Park, the New England Theology died, but the Congregational Church in New England had died some years ago. The land of the pilgrims, of the Mathers, of Stoddard, and of Edwards had become a "waste howling wilderness" again.

CONCLUSION

Although this treatment of the decline and fall of New England Congregationalism has been brief, and many aspects of this history cry out for further treatment, there is much merit in presenting an overall picture of the period. We have been able to identify the main points of departure from the faith, and to trace a general decline through all the stages of the church, culminating in the rank apostasy of the New Haven Theology.

In accordance with Frank Lawrence's basic thesis, we have seen that "the tide of Liberalism was edging in long before the time of Jonathan Edwards."¹⁴² Contrary to popular opinion, not all the first settlers were pilgrims, and many of their children did not seek the heavenly country either. Vast numbers of the successive immigrants desired worldly gain and not Christ. These problems could have been successfully dealt with, without the peculiar state and church relationship then existing and without the compromise of the Half-Way Covenant and the resulting loss of discipline. At this point, Christ's covenant with the seed of believers was profaned. This was a decided movement towards the world and the breaking down of the antithesis. It was also a loss of true paedobaptism and, hence, a step towards the Anabaptism and individualism inherent in Congregationalism.¹⁴³ Disturbing throughout the whole period is the lack of true confessionalism and the emphasis on experience.

These last two problems help us to understand Jonathan Edwards. Though an ardent Calvinist, he was not truly Reformed. His soteriology

142. Lawrence, *The Decline of Calvinism in New England before Jonathan Edwards*, p. 92.

143. De Jong also makes this point (*The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*).

tended towards individualism and experientialism, with its emphasis on the *immediacy* of the work of the Spirit. His ecclesiology was weak regarding confessions, elders, and baptism. The “normal” work of the Spirit of the covenant in sovereignly bestowing grace through the ordained means — the preaching and the sacraments — week in and week out, was played down in favor of an “outpouring-of-the-Spirit” model.¹⁴⁴ There is some truth in Bushnell’s critique of Edwards:

The attention he had bestowed on the will gave a still more intense form of individualism, probably to his teachings.... It makes nothing of the family, and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace. It takes every man as if he had existed alone, presumes that he is unreconciled to God until he has undergone some sudden and explosive experience, in adult years, or after the age of reason; demands that experience, and only when it is reached, allows the subject to be an heir of life.¹⁴⁵

The revivals resulted and they wrought havoc.

Edwards’ rationalistic tendency and idealist philosophy modified the Reformed view of the bondage of the will, original sin, and virtue. None of this is to deny his theological genius (though admittedly some of the luster is removed) or the intrinsic value of many of his works; it is merely to reiterate the fears expressed by many Old School Presbyterians.

B. B. Warfield opines, “It was in his sermons that Edwards’ studies bore richest fruit.”¹⁴⁶ To this we should add the high quality of

144. Interestingly, the *Savoy Declaration*, Congregationalism’s modification of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, omitted the latter’s treatment of the means of grace:

Unto this catholick visible church Christ hath given the *ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God*, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world; and doth by his own presence and Spirit *make them effectual thereunto* (XXV:3; italics mine).

145. Quoted in Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate*, p. 276; italics Bushnell’s.

146. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, p. 523.

his scriptural exegesis, and stress that much of his writings are sound and that they make highly stimulating reading. His intense devotion to his studies and his earnest longings for greater conformity to Christ are worthy of emulation.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Edwards deserves particular commendation for his valiant stand for the glorious doctrines of grace, in a time when the flood of Arminianism threatened to overwhelm the Congregational Churches.

However, Edwards' very greatness was to prove a weakness for the New Divinity men. As George Gordon realized, "Edwards' size and passion win even for his errors a kind of consecration."¹⁴⁸ Edwards was unable to finish his projected summa, *A Rational Account of the Main Doctrines of the Christian Religion Attempted*.¹⁴⁹ His system was never completed and presented as a harmonious whole, with every part in its proper place. Thus the Edwardseans, working within Edwards' works almost as one would a confession, did not have the full picture. They sought to draft a perfected theological system from Edwards' ideas, and it could not be done. Idealist flaws were in the original, and as the New Divinity men faced new theological problems, Edwards' theology was drastically deformed.¹⁵⁰ There was not only a change in emphasis, but also in substance. The New England Theology was a maimed Calvinism, a provincial monstrosity. Aberrations like Taylor and Finney resulted; it could not long continue; the writing was on the wall.

The decline and fall of Congregationalism in New England is a tragedy — great men, noble hopes, powerful movements, passionate theological debates and disputes, and finally ... apostasy. How is the gold become dim! How are the mighty fallen!

147. See, for example, Edwards' famous "Resolutions," Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I:xx-xxii.

148. George A. Gordon, *Humanism in New England Theology*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), p. 13.

149. Gerstner reproduces Edwards' outline for this work (*Rational Biblical Theology*, vol. III, pp. 564-565).

150. It ought also be pointed out that Edwards' successors did not share his idealist philosophy.

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Book Reviews

A Book of Reformed Prayers, ed. Howard L. Rice and Lamar Williamson, Jr. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. xviii + 254 pages. \$15 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Well, yes and no.

A book of prayers? Yes.

A book of *Reformed* prayers?

No.

More precisely, a book of *Reformed* prayers? Yes and no. In the sections of sixteenth and seventeenth century prayers, mostly yes. In the section of eighteenth century prayers, occasionally. In the section of nineteenth century prayers, rarely. In the sections of twentieth and twenty-first century prayers, no.

The seven chapters of the book correspond to these centuries with a final chapter on "Contemporary Liturgies."

The sixteenth and seventeenth century men reverence the true God, humble themselves on account of their sin, approach God through the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ, and pray according to the will of God revealed in Scripture. The first prayer in the book is that of Oecolampadius:

Heavenly Father, merciful and everlasting God, we acknowledge and confess before Thy Divine Majesty that we are poor miserable sinners, conceived and brought forth in sin and corruption. We are prone to all evil. We cannot, without Thee, do anything that is good.... But, O Lord, we repent and are sorry

from our hearts that we have so displeased Thee. We condemn ourselves and our misdoings.... Be pleased, therefore, to have mercy upon us, O most gracious God and Father. Forgive us all our sins, through the holy sufferings of Thy dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Knox's "Prayer Used in the Assemblies of the Church" could open the next synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches:

....Give unto us, O Lord, that presently are assembled in thy Name, such abundance of thy holy Spirit, that we may see those things that shall be expedient for the advancement of thy glory, in the midst of this perverse and stubborn generation. Give us grace, O Lord, that universally amongst ourselves, we may agree in the unity of true doctrine. Preserve us from damnable errors, and grant unto us such purity and cleanness of life, that we be not slanderous to thy blessed Evangel....

The nineteenth century features Friedrich Schleiermacher, who believed only in his own religious experience; Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose prayer acknowledges neither God, sin, nor Christ, but rather mystic union with deity

on a lovely morning; and Dwight L. Moody, Pelagian to the core, who boldly informs God that "Jesus needs me" (thus giving the lie to the popular wisdom that men who are Pelagian in theology are Calvinist in prayer), although he has the courtesy to add that he also needs Jesus.

A ray of light in the gathering gloom of the nineteenth century is the somber H. F. Kohlbrugge with his lively consciousness of sin:

....O Lord God, we confess before thee our terrible trespasses and great sins. O, who are we that thou shouldst think of us and visit us with thy Word? There is nothing in us but wrong, sin, and rebellion against thy holy will. Deal with us according to thy great mercy, that we not deceive ourselves and travel the path to hell.

Leading inexorably to the departure of the nineteenth century and thus to the catastrophe of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are the experiential prayers of the eighteenth century. Not God and His truth but the spiritual condition of the soul of the one praying is the main thing. And the all-important experience is not the pardon of sins, but warmth and self-surrender. Gerhard Terstee-

gen is representative.

Let Thy love so warm our souls,
O Lord, that we may gladly
surrender ourselves with all we
are and have unto Thee. Let
Thy love fall as fire from heaven
upon the altar of our hearts;
teach us to guard it heedfully
by continual devotion and quietness of mind, and to cherish with anxious care every spark of its holy flame....

By the twentieth century fading faith has been lost (or, taken away). Modernists Henry van Dyke, Woodrow Wilson, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Harry Emerson Fosdick pray for the only thing they know: earthly peace and earthly justice in this world. The first line of Rauschenbusch's contribution says it all: "O God, we thank you for this earth, our home."

The prayers of the twenty-first century, by men and women who stand, however tenuously, in the Reformed tradition, become direct and all-out assault upon the triune, true, and living God revealed in the Bible. They are the prayers of unbelief, and unbelief is at war with God. Kikanza Nuri Robins calls upon "Mother God." Chris Glaser beseeches God to save impenitent homosexuals and to bless the practice of homosexual-

ity. Patricia Baxter lashes out in prayer against those who oppose the ordination of women and petitions God, a thinly veiled Sophia, for the liberation of women.

It's all very well wanting liberation, but then the expectations of our world come crashing onto your sacred vision, saying, You are only a woman, you should not represent me in the sanctuary; you are only a woman, do not expect to be a part of major decisions; you are only a woman, a wonderful provider in the home.... Why do so many use your name in vain, holding women in poverty and men in bondage to male authority? Bring sapiential authority into our midst, O wise one.

James Costen makes use of prayer to magnify Mohandas (Gandhi), Malcolm (X), Martin (Luther King, Jr.), and (Nelson) Mandela, putting them in the same category with Moses (mediator of the old covenant) and identifying their revolutionary movements with the exodus of Israel from Egypt.

As though to demonstrate that there is no limit to the blasphemy that prayer can utter, Litumba Tukadi-Kuetu indulges himself in ecological, pantheistic syncretism. Jesus, prays Litumba, "You are the *Tshinkunku* tree

around which our hunters gather to confess sins to each other."

The selection reflects on the editors. These are the men who, in their introduction to the 18th century, casually damn the honored and honorable Reformed practice of Psalms-singing. Speaking of Isaac Watts, they remark that he "liberated Reformed Christians from their slavery to the Psalter" (p. 49).

"Liberated" from dreadful "slavery" to the Psalms into the glorious "freedom" of the *Tshinkunku* tree! ■

The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, vol. 1: *Biblical and Practical Perspectives on Calvinism*; vol. 2: *Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995. 521pp. \$16.99 per volume; \$29.99 the set (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

In 1989 a number of prominent, nominally evangelical theologians and philosophers published a vigorous defense of Arminianism, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock, Grand Rap-

ids: Zondervan). In defending traditional Arminianism, the authors frankly acknowledged that the implication of the theology of free-will is the rejection of the Christian God. The God of Arminianism is always responding to man in history and is, therefore, always in the process of becoming. The book expressly rejected God as omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, and sovereign.

The authors suffered no timidity in assailing Calvinism. Enthusiastically, they resurrected all the old slanders against Calvinism. Editor Clark Pinnock lamented "how morally loathsome the doctrine of double predestination is." In a chapter, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election," William G. MacDonald charged that the God of Calvinism's doctrine of predestination (that is, the God of Romans 9) is a "potentate like the Muslim God, who loves most to impose his will."

The review of this work in the *Standard Bearer* (Dec. 1, 1989, pp. 115, 116) concluded, "It will be very interesting to see who among the Reformed and Presbyterians will have the courage to take up the challenge of this 'Goliath' and present the case for Calvinism." The two companion volumes, *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will* play David to

The Grace of God, The Will of Man. As the title shows, the two-volume answer challenges the beast of Arminianism in its lair—the will of man—in agreement with Luther’s decisive condemnation of the theology of free-will in his *The Bondage of the Will*.

Volume one demonstrates the foundation of the theology of divine sovereignty by exegesis of Scripture, as well as showing the practical application of this theology to the life of the church and believer. Included are chapters on “The Sovereignty of God: Case Studies of the Old Testament”; “Divine Election in the Gospel of John”; “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation?”; “Are There Two Wills in God?”; “The Meaning of Foreknowledge”; “Does Divine Sovereignty Make a Difference in Everyday Life?”; “Prayer and Evangelism under God’s Sovereignty”; and others.

Contributors to the first volume include Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr.; Thomas R. Schreiner; John Piper; Jerry Bridges; Edmund P. Clowney; and others.

The second volume addresses various theological, philosophical, and historical issues in the controversy between the theology of grace and the theology of man’s own will. These include “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice:

Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” by Richard A. Muller; “Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards on the Bondage of the Will,” by John H. Gerstner; “John Wesley’s Contention with Calvinism: Interactions Then and Now,” by Thomas J. Nettles; “The Place of Effectual Calling and Grace in a Calvinist Soteriology,” by Bruce A. Ware; “The Love of God: Universal and Particular,” by J. I. Packer; “Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?,” by J. A. Crabtree; “God, Freedom, and Evil in Calvinist Thinking,” by John S. Feinberg; and others.

The books are encouraging. The truth of divine sovereignty still has some defenders. They are in strategic, sometimes surprising places. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, proves by sound interpretation of several Old Testament passages that the Old Testament teaches “the sovereign freedom of God in his dealings with man” (p. 25). He exposes the Arminian explanation of the passages as a reading into the passages of a “wrongheaded” system of biblical interpretation.

Thomas R. Schreiner, of Bethel Theological Seminary, shows by careful work with the text itself that Romans 9 teaches

election of individuals to salvation. Schreiner is refuting the contemporary exegesis that explains Romans 9 as only the choice of Israel as a body unto a certain service of God in history.

Jerry Bridges, of *The Navigators*, has a fine little piece in the section of volume one that applies Calvinism's confession of God's sovereignty to the life of the saint. By an observant reading of Isaiah 5:27, he extends God's absolute sovereignty to a shoelace.

Outstanding are the articles in volume two by Richard A. Muller, of Calvin Theological Seminary, and John H. Gerstner, for many years professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

With impeccable, impressive, and irresistible scholarship, Muller establishes that Arminius' doctrine of predestination was that of a universal will of salvation dependent upon the (foreseen) free-will of the sinner. It was not a moderating of Beza's allegedly scholastic supralapsarianism. Consistent with conditional predestination, God's calling by the gospel, for Arminius, was the gracious offer of salvation to all alike on the condition of faith.

Faith must intervene between the universal love of God for the world and the application or effecting of the promise of sal-

vation. All human beings are, therefore, genuinely offered the promise of salvation on the condition of repentance and faith—so that even those who do not ultimately believe “may be admonished of their duty, and may be invited and incited to faith and conversion” (vol. 2, p. 262).

At the heart of Arminius' doctrine of salvation lay the error of two contradictory wills in God. With one will, He wills the salvation of all alike. With the other will, which has finally taken into account men's acceptance or rejection of the offered salvation by their free-will, God wills the salvation only of some.

From the Reformed perspective, there is a far deeper problem in the Arminian contention that God wills the salvation of all people and that the salvation of some relates only to the acceptance or the rejection of God's grace. The Reformed of the seventeenth century noted this problem as the untenable hypothesis of contradictory wills in God: Arminian theology claimed that God antecedently wills the salvation of all people but consequently wills not the salvation of all, but only of some, on the grounds of certain conditions (vol. 2, p. 273).

Thus, “the Arminian God ... is

either ineffectual or self-contradictory" (p. 278).

Muller judges, correctly, that this theology of Arminius is "the basis of much Protestant soteriology" today. But this theology is "little more than the recrudescence of the late medieval semi-Pelagianism against which the Reformers struggled. It (*sic*) tenets are inimical to the Pauline and Augustinian foundation of Reformed Protestantism" (vol. 2, p. 277).

In contrast to Arminian theology, Muller outlines the corresponding doctrine of Reformed theology. The one electing decree of God is particular and unconditional. There is no contradictory will in God for the salvation of all. Quoting the Reformed theologian Riissen, who represents the Reformed consensus, Muller charges the notion of contradictory wills in God with folly.

Who ... would be so foolish as to attribute such wills to God? According to this doctrine God genuinely wills that which he knows will never happen, indeed, what he wills not to bring about (vol. 2, p. 274).

There are legitimate distinctions regarding God's will: One is that between the will of decree and the will of precept. Another is that

between the hidden will and the revealed will. But these do not involve positing two contradictory wills in God.

Muller's superb analysis of the issue between Arminian free-willism and the (Calvinist) gospel of the sovereign will of God confronts all would-be defenders of Reformed theology with a glaring piece of unfinished business. This is the widespread acceptance among professedly Calvinistic theologians, churches, and organizations of the theology of the "well-meant offer of the gospel." By this is meant, precisely, the teaching of universal grace in the preaching of the gospel. Whereas in the decree of election God is gracious only to some, in the gospel He is gracious to all without exception. On the theology of the "well-meant offer," God sincerely desires to save many whom He does not sincerely desire to save in the decree of election.

How does the theology of the "well-meant offer" differ from Arminius' theology of a "prevenient grace of God ... offered to all and ... not irresistible" (vol. 2, p. 261)? How does the theology of the "well-meant offer" with its fundamental, admitted tenet of two contradictory wills in God differ from the two-wills-doctrine of Arminianism?

Before God on whose behalf

all good theology is done and at the bar of sound, honest, theological scholarship, it is intolerable that Reformed theologians studiously avoid this issue by silence or glibly dismiss it with the slogan, "hyper-Calvinism!"

John H. Gerstner contributes a learned, informative, historical chapter on the views of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards on the bondage of the will. All five of these worthies (I include the historian himself) agree that the will of the fallen sinner is enslaved to Satan and sin. They agree also that this truth is basic to the gospel of salvation by grace, as indeed it is.

Gerstner gets off a memorable description of Luther:

Among our four champions of an enslaved will that only grace can liberate, Luther is clearly the least lucid though perhaps the most fervent. While the others elucidate and answer problems raised against this central doctrine, Luther swallows them all, God having given him a strong stomach. Grace is necessary and grace is sovereign and that is that (vol. 2, pp. 285, 286).

In the end, does not every one who knows salvation from sin in the blood of Christ come down

with Luther? "Grace is necessary and grace is sovereign and that is that"!

There are three weaknesses in this extended defense of God's sovereignty in salvation that no review may ignore. First, there is a prevailing sentiment that Arminianism, although defective, is yet a valid form of the gospel. The introduction presents Calvinist theology as merely "the most satisfying approach ... to the doctrines of grace" (vol. 1, p. 17).

Robert W. Yarbrough concedes that "modified Arminianism ... concurs substantially" with Reformed theology. Regardless of the differences, Yarbrough pleads for tolerance of Arminianism in view of the supposedly greater threat to the gospel today from liberal modernisms and postmodernisms (vol. 1, pp. 60, 61). Arminianism is not seen, and condemned, as "another gospel, which is not another" (Gal. 1: 6, 7).

The tolerance shown Arminian theology in this defense of Calvinism stands in stark contrast with the hatred and contempt displayed toward Calvinism by the defenders of Arminianism in Pinnock's *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*.

A second weakness is the conviction of many of the writers

that God loves all humans without exception and desires to save all. It is not evident in a majority of the writers that their zeal for election outstrips their zeal for the notion of a will of God for the salvation of all without exception.

Running throughout both volumes is the theme of two contradictory wills in God. This is the very teaching that Richard Muller both charges as false, foolish doctrine against the Arminians and exposes as opposed to the Reformed tradition.

The doctrine of a desire of God for the salvation of all and, therefore, the notion of two contradictory wills in God are laid down by the editors as axiomatic already in the introduction. "God chooses only some to be saved, and yet there is also a true sense in which he desires the salvation of all" (vol. 1, p. 17).

John Piper devotes an entire chapter, the fifth in volume 1, to arguing that God has both a will of election and a will to save all and that this self-contradiction does not disclose Him as the God of utter confusion. Piper "affirm(s) with John 3:16 and I Timothy 2:4 that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men" (p. 130). This love of John 3:16 is necessarily God's love of *agapee*, the love

that gave the only-begotten Son in the incarnation and cross. This, according to Piper, is the will of God for the salvation of all. This is a contradiction indeed: God gave Christ for some only, but God gave Christ for all without exception. And this, says Piper, is Calvinism's understanding of the "offer of salvation to all" (p. 127).

J.I. Packer agrees: "God in the gospel expresses a bona fide wish that all may hear, and that all who hear may believe and be saved (I Tim. 2:3-6; cf. 4:9-10)" (vol. 2, p. 419).

The doctrine of a love of God for all in the gospel and of a desire of God for the salvation of all is Arminianism's teaching of universal, resistible grace in the gospel. It is this as such. It is this on its very face. It is also the abandonment of the sovereignty of God. The God of a loving desire to save everybody is a God of an unfulfilled, frustrated will. He will be eternally unhappy, so long as one of those whom He loves and desires to be with Him in heaven remains in hell. This is not the God of the Bible, who does all His pleasure.

The third weakness is the refusal of almost all the writers to confess, defend, and explain reprobation. Indeed, there is almost complete refusal to *mention* it. One

would gather from these books that the Reformed tradition, Reformed theologians, and the Reformed creeds know nothing of an eternal decree appointing those not chosen in the decree unto eternal perdition.

Donald J. Westblade does insist that Scripture teaches reprobation, but he is an exception (vol. 1, p. 84). J. I. Packer forthrightly eschews the doctrine of reprobation. With appeal to Anglican Article 17, he recommends "bypassing debates about reprobation." What he intends is the virtual denial of reprobation (vol. 2, p. 417). But Calvin taught us that election cannot be maintained in the church if reprobation is not known and confessed. And the Canons of Dordt rightly present reprobation as one decree with election (I/6). An election that "bypasses" reprobation is not biblical election. How can theologians defend the sovereignty of God in salvation against the Arminian assault without biblical election?

This third weakness accounts for the other two.

Together, the three weaknesses vitiate the books' defense of sovereign grace. ■

Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, by Roland DeVaux. Grand

Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997. Pp. xxiv-592. \$30.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

As a source book on the life, institutions, and social customs of ancient Israel, this book is a vast storehouse of information. It was first published in the French in two volumes, and has been translated by John McHugh. The book combines material from Scripture, archeology, ancient writings, and Jewish sources. With a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew language, the author is able to provide some interesting translations of obscure Hebrew words, such as those used in Hebrew measurements. The result is a source book of great value for our knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The author provides an extensive introduction to the nomadic nature of life in ancient Israel and then traces in detail the development of Israel's most important institutions — family, civil, military, and religious — and their influence on the nations' life and history. It opens new insights into the understanding of God's Word.

The disappointing element is the deep commitment of the author to higher critical studies. The evidence of this commitment pervades the book and colors a

great deal of it. A few illustrations will demonstrate what I mean.

The author questions the figures of Israel in Numbers because they are "impossible" (p. 65). Such erroneous information in Scripture appears often and is to be explained by the fact that writers engaged in extensive editorial work on ancient manuscripts and altered information for ulterior motives (p. 227).

The historicity of many biblical accounts is questioned. The life of Saul as described in Scripture is really two accounts woven together by two authors, one of whom was favorable to the monarchy, and the other unfavorable.

The author denies that Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 are Messianic even though the New Testament applies them to Christ (pp. 109, 110).

Again, DeVaux claims that many descriptions of events were not contemporary or nearly contemporary with the events, but were written much later, sometimes centuries later (p. 214).

DeVaux holds to the Documentary Theory of the Pentateuch (the theory that the five books of Moses were actually composed much later than Moses from different sources and with much editorial comment. This theory has been ably and thoroughly refuted

by H.C. Leupold's "Exposition of Genesis."). He claims that the Passover Feast, the institution of which is recorded in the Pentateuch, dates back to early Israel, before the Exodus, when the people were nomadic; and it was taken over from an old Arab feast of fecundity (pp. 290, 291, 489, 490).

It is too bad that such a valuable book has to be spoiled by higher criticism; but, if one can filter out such higher criticism, one will find the book a useful tool for understanding the Old Testament in its historical setting.

One other criticism of the book needs to be made. It is very poorly bound for such a valuable book. I treated it with care, but before I was half finished reading it for this review, the cover had already come off. ■

In Remembrance and Hope: The ministry and vision of Howard G. Hageman, by Gregg A. Mast. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998. Pp. 252. \$18.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The Reformed Churches in America have published a series of books on different aspects of the history of that denomination.

Donald J. Bruggink is the general editor, and especially some of the books have been extremely valuable. I refer, e.g., to Gerald F. DeJong's book, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies*. The series is entitled, *The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*; this volume is number 27.

The book contains two short biographies of Howard Hageman, the first one written by Dr. Hageman's wife. From the second biography we learn that Hageman was deeply influenced by the Mercersburg theology, which he also admired. J.W. Nevin and Philip Schaff are probably the best known proponents of this theology, and there can be no question about it that Hageman was deeply influenced by it.

The Mercersburg Theology was developed in the seminary of the German Reformed Church in Mercersburg, PA. It actively engaged in ecumenical activities and was in some respects heretical. Hageman was especially influenced by the ideas of worship promoted in the Mercersburg Seminary.

Howard Hageman was a graduate of New Brunswick Seminary, served as minister for 28 years in an RCA congregation in Newark, NJ, and spent the rest of

his active life as professor of the seminary from which he graduated.

The book is a kind of "Festschrift." It contains chapters on such subjects as Hageman's high view of preaching and the ministry, and his own power as a minister; his view on the Lord's Supper, particularly from a liturgical viewpoint; his lifelong preoccupation with the subject of worship, an interest sparked by the Mercersburg theologians and carried over into an emphasis on the ecumenicity of worship, which was so influential in Presbyterian and Reformed churches; his great gifts as a musician, gifts which he employed in writing about and teaching proper church music; and his work and influences in missions.

Appropriately, because Hageman's primary interest was in the area of liturgy, three of his lectures on this subject are included in the book. ■

The Reformed Family Worldwide: A Survey of Reformed Churches, Theological schools, and International Organizations. Edited by Jean-Jacques Bauswein and Lukas Vischer. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999. xii + 740 pages. \$35.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Russell Dykstra.]

Have you ever wanted to know what Reformed churches are in Hungary? Or Russia? Or what is the size of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? Have you ever heard the name of a Reformed denomination for the first time and wondered about its background and history? Or perhaps you wanted to get the connections straight between the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and those in the United States. Or which seminary is in Apeldoorn and which in Kampen (the Netherlands). Then you will find *The Reformed Family Worldwide* both interesting and useful.

This new work is the fruit of an ambitious and monumental effort of the editors to compile information on all the Reformed churches and seminaries in the world. The initial search for the various Reformed churches was itself a large undertaking resulting in a list of 750 "communities," as they put it, and over 500 theological schools worldwide. Then it was necessary to gather the information on each of these, check for accuracy, and get it into print before the statistics became too old and outdated. Quite a project!

The result is well worth the effort, however. The book is a veritable gold mine of information on the "Reformed family worldwide."

The book opens with thirty-three pages of introductory material by Editor Vischer on "The Reformed Tradition and its Multiple Facets." The first question that requires answer is "What is included in the term 'Reformed'?" Obviously there have been many divisions among the Protestants that came out of the Reformation of Calvin, and they have adopted a variety of names, not merely "Reformed." In the narrowest sense, Reformed describes the Protestant Reformation in the line of Calvin (in distinction from that of Luther) as it developed on the continent of Europe. It would comprise especially those who call themselves Reformed and hold to the three Reformed creeds – the Heidelberg Catechism, the (Belgic) Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dordrecht. This would distinguish the Reformed from the Presbyterian churches which developed in Scotland and England.

A broader definition of Reformed would include all the Reformed and the Presbyterian churches. The editors take an even broader view and include all the "streams of the Reformed tradition (Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Evangelical, and United)" (p. vii). While this detracts from the work in that many of the churches included in the

survey have departed far from the historic Reformed faith and tradition, it is also of interest to see how the various branches have developed.

The introductory section is a succinct history of the Reformed tradition, particularly how it came into focus and then divided manyfold. The editors rightly identify the distinguishing doctrines of the Reformed tradition – predestination and the covenant (p. 9). They correctly identify the Presbyterian form of church government as the one that Reformed churches maintained was the biblical form (p. 9). The introduction proceeds to demonstrate the sharpening of the Reformed faith by the Canons of Dordrecht in 1618-19, and the confirming of the Reformed tradition in the adoption of the Westminster Confession of Faith in England.

However, thereafter the history is a sad account of fragmentation on the continent and in Great Britain. All too often the cause was a departure from the Reformed faith. Sometimes the offshoot is a true reformation – a forming again of the church according to the Word of God. But just as frequently, the new shoot was itself either a forsaking of the Reformed faith, or a split over non-essential matters. These splinter groups continued their separate existences in the New

World of the Americas, and wherever mission work was done by the respective churches.

The last section of the introductory chapter is the least helpful, and a bit disappointing. Entitled “The Reformed Heritage,” it attempts to set forth what characterizes Reformed churches today. It is disappointing that the editors have so dreadfully watered down the Reformed heritage. It is disheartening to think that some who call themselves Reformed would have such a vitiated confession. Some of what is specified is on target – that Christ is the only Savior, and that all glory belongs to God, for instance. But absent is the emphasis on the covenant (though it is mentioned at least) and predestination (it is not). What remains is a list of beliefs to which nearly any church in the world could give assent. The Reformed believer who knows the Belgic Confession of Faith on “the Marks of the True Church, and wherein she differs from the false Church” (Art. 29) will cringe at this allegedly Reformed view of the church: “Now, the church is the place where God’s liberating word is announced and can be responded to. There is no way to determine the borderlines of the true church” (p. 28). Or consider the concluding description of the current state

of Christian discipline in the Reformed churches, in the editors' view: "For the majority, especially in the secularized countries of the West, discipline is left to the interaction of members of the congregation" (p. 29).

Instead of the doctrines of sovereign grace that one would rightly expect in the list of Reformed distinctives, what is now part of the Reformed heritage, or pushing to become part of it, are such causes as human rights, solidarity with the Jews, women's rights, and ecology – quite unknown to Calvin and the historic Reformed faith.

This description of the Reformed heritage indicates the breadth of the churches included in the survey.

In spite of this extremely wide application of the term "Reformed," the book is a rich source of information. The information is easy to find. The 749 churches surveyed are listed according to the country, first of all. Within each country, the individual churches (denominations) are normally listed according to the date of formation. When this is not the case, the churches are listed alphabetically, and it is so noted.

Where the countries have many interrelated churches with numerous splits, the editors often

include helpful charts showing the historical development. It may surprise many from the (Dutch) Reformed tradition to know that these charts are normally of Presbyterian churches – their history is far more complicated and, sad to say, contains more divisions, than even the Reformed churches.

Most churches listed have a brief description and/or history, then the statistics are listed, including total membership and the number of communicant members, congregations, missionaries (home and foreign), and ordained ministers, elders, and deacons. Also recorded is whether women are ordained to office; the church organization; creeds; the language spoken; type of baptism practiced; relations with other churches and membership in other organizations. Even the periodicals associated with the churches are listed.

Another large section of the book lists the theological schools with Reformed training (529) according to the country and the city.

To top it off, the book includes information on eight international Reformed organizations, a chapter on "Unions, Union Negotiations, and Dialogues with Churches of Different Confessional Background," and a set of nineteen maps covering the globe.

Some of the information can

become quickly outdated. Misinformation is another real possibility. The book includes a form in the back which can be filled out and mailed to the editors, so that both of these can be corrected for the next edition.

In my opinion, domestic and foreign mission committees, and committees which have or seek to have contact with other Reformed churches, must obtain this survey. For anyone else, perhaps not a must, but it certainly is fascinating. Let's see. A Waldensian Church in Italy!?! Established in ■

Far From Rome, Near to God: Testimonies of Fifty Converted Roman Catholic Priests. Edited by Richard Bennett and Martin Buckingham. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997. xvi + 362 pages. \$11.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Russell Dykstra.]

Countless books that expose the errors of Rome have been written over the centuries, but the most devastating criticisms come from those who were once Roman Catholic. Men who themselves served as priests in the Roman Catholic Church know firsthand the real character of that false church. Such is the case with *Far From Rome, Near to God*. In it

fifty converted Roman Catholic priests give a brief history of their lives as priests and tell how God led them out of the bondage of Rome.

This is not the first time that former Roman Catholic priests have exposed the evils of Rome. Luther and many of his contemporaries described the life of the monks and priests in the Romish church and condemned her false doctrine. Subsequently, Rome claimed that she had reformed, and many of the evils had been removed. This assertion was disproved by other converted priests such as Charles Chiniquy, who wrote *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* in 1885.

However, today the claim is trumpeted that Rome really has changed, especially since Vatican II, which met in 1962-5. Some of the evidence for this supposed change includes the fact that the mass is spoken in the vernacular, that Rome encourages her people to read and study the Bible, and that there are obvious attempts by Rome to show herself friendly to some Protestant churches. This book is particularly valuable therefore, since the great majority of these former priests are twentieth century men, a number of whom left the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II.

Both of the editors who compiled these accounts are active in organizations that help converted Roman Catholics. One is himself a converted priest, if the Richard Peter Bennett of chapter 50 is the same as the editor.

Fifty men write of their experiences. Herein lies its strength and its weakness. It presents a multitude of witnesses against Rome who testify from a great variety of experiences. That is its strength. On the other hand, the accounts, of necessity brief, tend to be quite light, rarely plunging into deep theological waters. This is also a book that one does not read for any great length of time, both because the chapters contain some repetition and because the accounts tend to blur after an extended period of reading.

The chapters (each one written by a different converted priest) vary in character and value. Some have the flavor of an evangelistic tract intended to assure the reader that the converted priest has no regrets and is far better off spiritually for having left the Roman Catholic Church. This has value in itself because of the Roman Catholic propaganda that follows a converted priest to discredit him and portray him as a man in misery consequent to his defection.

Other chapters are more in-

formative and instructive on the true character of the Roman Catholic Church and her errors. Still others reveal the pain and the deep spiritual struggle endured by those who managed to escape the bondage of Rome.

The men come from a wide variety of countries, including Canada, the USA, Mexico, Spain, Ireland, and even the heart of Roman Catholicism, Italy. Their reasons for entering the priesthood were varied. Many came from very devout Catholic families where parents encouraged it. Some desired a more spiritual life and sought it in the monastery. Others desired to be missionaries. Probably the most common reason cited was the longing for the assurance of salvation, coupled with the conviction that a priest's salvation is certain.

Nearly all the men explained what led them to leave the Roman Catholic Church. For most it was a gradual process of coming to the conviction that they had to leave, although often God used a striking event to stir them into action. There is an evident longing in these men to help other Roman Catholics see the light and come out of Rome. Some tried to maintain their membership to that end, preaching, holding Bible studies, witnessing to the members. This is ultimately

impossible. As one man reflected, "to remain Roman Catholic, I now see, is to be living a compromised life" (p. 69).

Some of these priests came out as a result of meeting a converted priest. Others met Protestant preachers and began to debate them. This led to two important discoveries. First, these preachers were not the demons that the Romish church had portrayed them to be, and second, the priests could not prove the doctrines of Rome.

However, for all the men, the Bible played a significant part in their conversion. By one means or another, they were brought into circumstances that allowed (or forced) them to read and study the Bible. They soon discovered that the teachings of the church of Rome not only could not be supported by Scripture, they were contrary to Scripture.

One of the few disappointing elements of the book was that so few of the converted priests seemed to arrive at the complete, i.e., Reformed knowledge and understanding of the truth. A goodly number became Baptist ministers. Of most, their final theological resting place is not known. One of the men in the book I have met personally, and have a good appreciation for his grasp of the doctrines of grace.

The value of the book is that it sets forth the current teaching and practice of Rome, not as Rome tries to portray them to the world, but as they really are. The burning question this book answers is, has Rome changed? Is twentieth century Rome different from the medieval Rome with all its corruptions which Luther and the other Reformers repudiated? Let the book inform us.

One of the main institutions of the pre-Reformation church was the monastery. A number of the men describe the life of the monastery as they experienced it. Reading their accounts almost transports one back to the Middle Ages. One converted monk describes the long hours devoted to reciting prayers and constant repetition of Psalms, eating meals in total silence, and doing penance. "These penances consist of standing with the arms outstretched to form a cross, kissing the sandalled feet of the monks, receiving a blow to the face from the monks, and, at the end of the meal, lying prostrate before the entrance to the refectory so that the departing monks must step over one's body. These and other penances, are supposed to gain one merit in heaven and increase one's 'spiritual bank account'" (p. 36.)

Twentieth century monks

still scourge themselves with whips and chains. And one man writes from experience that "the worst humiliation included licking an area of the floor clean with our tongues" (p. 297). Displaying acute discernment, he points out the inevitable failure of the monastery to accomplish the goal of making the monks more holy. Why? "Because the priest or monk takes his sinful human nature with him into the cell" (p. 297).

A key ingredient to the whole system of Rome is authority. The authority of the pope is supreme and unquestioned. It is a mortal sin to doubt the teaching of the church. In the words of one these men (Herman Hegger), "the pronouncements of the Roman Catholic Church are the highest and ultimate source of the knowledge of God's revelation" (p. 300).

That doctrine of the Romish church has a withering effect on the study of the Bible among its members, because, as Hegger points out, it

reduces the Bible to a second-rate book in Roman Catholic eyes. *No papal admonitions to believers to read their Bibles often can alter that fact.* A Roman Catholic, therefore, can never devote himself fully to meditating upon the Bible. The deeper meanings of the divine

Word, which he is convinced he must infer from it, are always surrounded by a multitude of questions. If the Church has made some pronouncement on the matter, the Roman Catholic must relinquish his own conviction as to what the Scriptures say and conform to the view of the Church (p. 300, emphasis mine, RJD).

This doctrine of Rome has eternal consequences for her members, as he points out. "Protestants wonder how it is possible for Roman Catholic scholars to study the Scriptures without discovering the pure gospel. The answer lies in the simple fact that the mind of the Roman Catholic is not free; it is ever under the threat of fire unquenchable should it deviate from Rome" (p. 301). Another man confessed that when he left the monastery, of three important books he owned – *The Glories of Mary* by Alphonse de Liguori, *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, and the Roman Catholic New Testament – the first two were worn out from use, while the New Testament was like new (pp. 30-31). Even the papal promise of a three-year indulgence to the Catholic who would read the Bible at least a quarter of an hour was not sufficient to induce serious study, since Roman Catholics can

obtain indulgences in other, easier ways (seven years, for example, for making the sign of the cross with holy water).

The accounts of these men convict the Romish church of idolatry, and of deception. One man reports his surprise when he first discovered a Roman Catholic catechism that had dropped the second commandment from the ten. Since then he has found this to be common in Roman Catholic catechisms (p. 70). Another confronted a pagan in Cuba with the question of how the pagan could believe that a plaster idol could help him. "He replied that the idol was not expected to help him; it only represented the power in heaven which could. What horrified me about the reply was that it was almost word-for-word the explanation Roman Catholics give for rendering honor to the statues of saints" (p. 59).

Many of the men decried Rome's false doctrine of transubstantiation. Former priest Lehmann exposes Rome's teaching about sacraments being the conveyers of grace. "The grace of salvation is taught as something that can be 'poured' into one's soul through the specially devised channels of the seven sacraments. These in turn are supposed to act as conduits from the great reservoir of grace

over which the Pope in Rome has sole monopoly" (p. 332). The utter futility of this he describes from his own experience – he brought the mass to a condemned criminal on the day of his execution – the best he could do, and never brought the gospel. In anguish he confesses, "I had nothing of any real worth to give him, it all seemed empty and pathetic."

Has Rome changed? Not on any of the doctrines discussed above, nor, as the accounts of these men demonstrate, on Mary, on meriting salvation (and thus on justification by faith only), on the infallibility of the Pope, on the depravity of natural man, or on any of her central doctrines. But do not take my word for it. Listen to the answer of converted priest S. Gargiulo:

Some evangelicals think that times have changed and that it is now possible to hold a dialogue and to collaborate with the Roman Catholic Church to achieve Christian unity. This is a deception of Satan. The doctrines of this ecclesiastical organization have in no way changed. In fact they are now adding new errors to the old ones, and in particular they are working towards bringing in all the other religions [a claim he then proves from a Vatican II document] (p. 275).

More than one of these converts from Rome are convinced that Rome *cannot* change. Her doctrines are too deeply ingrained. Changing the central doctrines would result in the destruction of the sacerdotal system and the hierarchy of the church.

If the book accomplishes nothing more than to debunk the notion that Rome has changed, it has substantial value. But it does more. For example, it shows why Rome allows charismatics in her midst (seeking to draw this movement within her camp). From this book one can learn the striking difference between how Romish churches present themselves in

countries like the USA (friendly and enlightened), as compared to the way Roman Catholic Churches appear in countries like Italy where Rome has dominated for centuries (superstitious, vengeful, and downright ungodly). In addition, the stories demonstrate the cruel vengeance of Rome against converted priests when Rome is able to manifest it.

All this and more are revealed in these accounts. In this age of false ecumenism between the so-called evangelicals and Rome, the Banner of Truth does the Protestant world a favor by printing this book. ■

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