

Protestant *Reformed* Theological *Journal*

in this issue:

<i>Editor's Notes</i>	1
<i>The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture</i> David J. Engelsma	2
<i>The Doctrine of Eternal Justification (2)</i> John P. Marcus	47
<i>A Presbyterian View of Covenant Children (2)</i> Mark L. Shand	70
<i>Book Reviews</i>	95

PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Published twice annually by the faculty of the Protestant
Reformed Theological Seminary:

Robert D. Decker, Editor (decker@prca.org)

Russell J. Dykstra, Book Review Editor (dykstra@prca.org)

David J. Engelsma (engelsma@prca.org)

Barrett L. Gritters (gritters@prca.org)



The Protestant Reformed Theological Journal is published by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary twice each year, in April and November, and mailed to subscribers free of charge. Those who wish to receive the *Journal* should write the editor, at the seminary address. Those who wish to reprint an article appearing in the *Journal* should secure the permission of the editor. Books for review should be sent to the book review editor, also at the address of the school.

Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary
4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418
USA

EDITOR'S NOTES

What are the alternatives? Is it common grace and thus a correct, Reformed, biblical, confessional worldview? Does God have two decrees: one concerning the Christians calling to make this world a better place (common grace for all men) and another for the Christian's sojourn to the new creation (special grace for the elect only)? Is it common grace, or anabaptistic world flight? How does the error of postmillennialism relate to these questions? For answers to these and more, see David J. Engelsma's "The Reformed Worldview on behalf of a Godly Culture."

The Rev. Mark L. Shand and Seminarian John P. Marcus contribute conclusions to their excellent presentations.

In our next issue we are planning to include an exposition of James 2:14-26 and an article dealing with the 80th question and answer (the "popish mass") of the Heidelberg Catechism.

May God bless the work of this Journal for the edification of many.

RDD

The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture

David J. Engelsma

Introduction

In the course of a public debate in September 2003 over common grace and culture, Dr. Richard J. Mouw charged that members of the Protestant Reformed Churches are not as active in society as Christians should be.¹ Mouw's charge, although milder in tone, was essentially the charge that the Reformed community has been making against members of the Protestant Reformed Churches since the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924. Because the Protestant Reformed Churches deny a common grace of God as taught by the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper and as adopted as dogma by the Christian Reformed Church, the members of these churches are unable to live a full, active earthly life in every sphere of creation.² The harsher expression of Dr. Mouw's charge against the Protestant Reformed people is: "Anabaptists!" Members of the Protestant

1. The topic of the debate was "Is the Doctrine of Common Grace Reformed?" Mouw answered the question in the affirmative. Answering the question in the negative was the present writer. The debate, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was occasioned by the publication of Mouw's book, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) and by a series of editorials by the present writer in the Reformed periodical, the *Standard Bearer*, responding to the book. These editorials have been published as *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard J. Mouw's He Shines in All That's Fair* (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2003). Audio and video copies of the debate are available from The Evangelism Society, Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, 1535 Cambridge Ave., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

2. Kuyper propounded the doctrine of a common grace of God as a fundamental tenet of Calvinism in his Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898. These speeches were published as *Lectures on*

Reformed Churches are accused of world-flight. They are the equivalent in the Reformed community of the Amish or Hutterites. Since full, active life in the world arises out of a worldview, or world-and-life view, the charge is that the Protestant Reformed Churches do not have a worldview.

The thinking that prevails in the Reformed churches is simply this: no common grace, no worldview.

Underlying the charge that the Protestant Reformed Churches have no worldview and, therefore, are guilty of world-flight is the assumption that the only possible worldview for Reformed Christians, if not for all Christians, is the worldview of common grace. This was certainly Kuyper's contention in his Stone Lectures at Princeton and in his three volumes on common grace, *De Gemeene Gratie*. This is the position of Richard Mouw in *He Shines in All That's Fair*. This is also the thinking, widely, in evangelical circles today. Writing in the August 2004 issue of *Christianity*

Calvinism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953). Kuyper developed his doctrine of common grace extensively in a three-volume work, *De Gemeene Gratie* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1902-1904). This work has not been translated into English. The Christian Reformed Church adopted the doctrine of a common grace of God as official church dogma at its synod of 1924 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. These decisions describing and adopting common grace are found in the original Dutch in the *Acta der Synode 1924 van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 145-147. An English translation of the 1924 "Acts of Synod" of the Christian Reformed Church by Henry De Mots has been published by the Archives of the Christian Reformed Church: *1924 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church Held from 18 June until 8 July 1924 in Kalamazoo, MI, USA* (Grand Rapids: Archives of the Christian Reformed Church, 2000). Evidently, the publisher of the English translation took care that the pages of the translation should correspond exactly to the pages of the Dutch original. The decisions adopting common grace in this English translation are also found on pages 145-147. More readily available is Herman Hoeksema's English translation of the Christian Reformed Church's decisions on common grace in his and Herman Hanko's *Ready to Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* (Grandville, MI: RFPA, 1997), pp. 63, 101, 125).

Today, influential evangelical Charles Colson begins his “Back Page” article this way:

Some weeks ago I exhorted a gathering of pastors to engage today’s cultural battles, particularly to support the Federal Marriage Amendment. Afterward, the pastors had many questions—but they were also confused. One asked: “But won’t engaging the culture this way interfere with fulfilling the Great Commission? Isn’t this our job—to win people to Christ?” That people still raise this question surprised me. “Of course we’re called to fulfill the Great Commission,” I replied. “But we’re also called to fulfill the *cultural* commission.” Christians are agents of God’s *saving grace*—bringing others to Christ, I explained—but we are also agents of his *common grace*: sustaining and renewing his creation, defending the created institutions of family and society, critiquing false worldviews.³

The worldview of common grace dreamed up by Abraham Kuyper a little more than one hundred years ago holds that, alongside His purpose of saving a church in Jesus Christ, God has another purpose with creation and history, namely, the development of a good, godly, and God-glorifying culture. God accomplishes this cultural purpose with creation and history by bestowing a certain grace upon unregenerate, unbelieving people. This common, cultural grace of God works wonders in the ungodly. It restrains sin in them so that they are no longer totally depraved, as otherwise they would be. It enables these godless, Christ-less men and women to perform deeds in everyday, earthly life that are truly good, and please God. It empowers the wicked to build a culture, an entire way of life of a society, or a nation, that glorifies God.

God is supposed to give this cultural grace also to His regenerated people. Hence, it is called common grace. It is a grace of God that is common to elect and reprobate, believer and unbeliever, alike. According to the proponents of the theory, the believer lives his life in the world by the power of common grace.

3. Charles Colson, “Reclaiming Occupied Territory,” *Christianity Today* (Aug. 2004): 64.

And with it he must cooperate with unbelievers in carrying out their mutual task of building a good, God-glorifying culture.

Kuyper and his contemporary disciples propose the worldview of common grace as the basis of the entire earthly life of the Christian. Regarding his life with God in worship, prayer, Bible study, and witnessing, the Christian lives and works by the special, saving grace of God, which is particular, that is, not shared by the unbeliever. But with regard to his everyday, earthly life of job, citizen of a country, and neighbor in society, he is called to live and work by common grace. "The third fundamental relation" of the Calvinist, in addition to those he sustains to God and to man, according to Kuyper, is "the relation which you bear *to the world*." This relation is based on, and controlled by, "a *common grace*" of God.⁴

Although the common grace worldview is certainly a worldview and although it is a worldview adopted and defended by many Reformed people, it is not the Reformed worldview. The alternatives are not the common grace worldview, or no worldview at all, that is, world-flight. Particularly for Reformed, or Calvinistic, Christians, the alternatives are the common grace worldview, or the worldview of particular, sovereign grace, that is, the worldview of the Reformed confessions.

The issue is not merely theoretical. After one hundred years, the worldview of common grace has proved to be a colossal failure. It has not produced a godly culture anywhere. On the contrary, it has been a Trojan horse, or more fittingly a bridge, to let the depraved world into the churches, into the lives of professing Reformed Christians, and especially into the Christian schools.

During the same century, other Reformed saints have embraced and practiced the genuinely Reformed worldview of the Reformed creeds, even though these Reformed believers never

4. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, pp. 28, 30. Cf. Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 268-270: "The doctrine of common grace ... provided him [Kuyper] with the only sound solution to the problem of Christianity and culture, and supplied an incentive and justification for active Christian pursuit of cultural renewal."

spoke of worldview and though many of them were ignorant of the term “worldview.” They had the genuinely Reformed worldview in their hearts. This worldview sent these Reformed Christians into the world, in every sphere of creation, vigorously to live earthly life to the glory of God, while guarding them against worldliness. It is time that this genuinely Reformed worldview be spelled out and defended.

There is another reason for this apology for the Reformed worldview. We are privileged to live at the time—the end of the ages!—when the worldview of autonomous, sovereign Man (spell “Man” with a capital “M” for “Man” who has made himself god) ruthlessly eradicates every vestige of Christianity from Western civilization and cajoles or coerces all of human life into the worship and service of Man. This worldview and its powerful development are evident in the legalizing of the murder of the unborn and the half-born and in the sanctioning by society and state of the perversions of sodomy and lesbianism. As prophesied by Daniel 7:25, in its rebellion against God this worldview thinks to change every law of God the creator, including the fundamental laws revealed in nature itself. The worldview of deified Man has no fixed principles, except the fixed principle that whatever pleases godless Man is right.

Andrew HOFFECKER and Gary Scott Smith are right in stating, “one theme dominates the Western mind since the Enlightenment—autonomy. Autonomy has replaced the Judeo-Christian God as the single most important worldview issue.”⁵

Against this aggressive worldview of the sovereignty of Man stands, and alone can stand, the Christian gospel and worldview of the sovereignty of the triune God in Jesus Christ.

There is indeed a “culture war,” as Robert Bork,⁶ J.

5. *Building a Christian World View*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffecker, associate ed. Gary Scott Smith, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), p. xvi.

6. Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

Budziszewski,⁷ Charles Colson,⁸ and others have told us, and a “culture war” is a clash of worldviews. These worldviews are not those of the Democratic and Republican parties. Nor are they the worldviews of political liberals and political conservatives. But they are the worldview of the spirit of antichrist, which is already in the world and will produce the man of lawlessness, according to the apostle in II Thessalonians 2, and the worldview that sees all things in light of the truth that God is God and that frames the life of the godly man and woman accordingly.

This latter, which alone is able to resist and demolish the worldview of autonomous Man, is emphatically not the worldview of common grace. The history of the past one hundred years has proved that the supposedly Christian worldview of common grace is powerless before the juggernaut of the worldview of autonomous Man. By its teachings of a grace of God in the world of the ungodly and of a grand cultural project of the Spirit of God among the unregenerate, the worldview of common grace has opened up churches, schools, and individuals to the mind and practices of the worldview of sovereign Man. This is fatal.

The worldview that invincibly withstands the force of the worldview of sovereign Man, and demolishes it, is the worldview of particular grace, that is, the worldview of the Reformed faith.

Worldview

By worldview, or world-and-life-view, is meant a comprehensive, unified view of all creation and history in light either of the knowledge of the triune, one, true, and living God revealed in Jesus Christ, or in light of the unbelieving rejection of this God. This view of all things determines how one lives the whole of his or her earthly life in the world. The power of worldview is that it frames one’s entire life.

This understanding of worldview is in basic agreement with the definition of the worldview scholars. James Orr states that

7. J. Budziszewski, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man* (Dallas, TX: Spence, 1999).

8. Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999).

worldview denotes “the widest view which the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology.”⁹ James Sire describes a worldview as a “set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world.”¹⁰ In his recent examination of the common grace worldview of Abraham Kuyper, Peter S. Heslam defines worldview as a “set of beliefs that underlie and shape all human thought and action.”¹¹

The Reformed worldview is that comprehensive, unified view of all creation and history inherent in the Reformed faith. The Reformed faith is the body of biblical truths recovered and developed by the sixteenth century Reformation of the church especially by the theological work of John Calvin. This faith is officially and authoritatively expressed in the Reformed creeds, the Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dordt) and the Westminster Standards (Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger Catechism, and Westminster Shorter Catechism).

In these creeds, there is no doctrine of a common grace of God, much less of a grand purpose of God in history to create a good culture by reprobate, ungodly men and women. The common grace worldview, which by this time is a sacred cow in Reformed circles, has no basis in the Reformed creeds—absolutely none. This all by itself is fatal to the worldview of common grace. Such an important aspect of Calvinism as its worldview surely must have some basis in Calvinism’s confessions. But all such basis in the confessions is lacking. The only mention of “common grace” in the Reformed confessions attributes the teaching to the Arminians

9. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 3.

10. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 16.

11. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, pp. 88, 89.

as an essential element of their heresy of universalizing the grace of God.¹²

In their fundamental doctrines, the Reformed confessions demolish the foundations of the worldview of common grace. God has no attitude of grace toward the reprobate ungodly, who are outside of Jesus Christ in time and in eternity, but an attitude of wrath: "The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not this gospel."¹³ The unregenerate have no ability to perform good works, whether by nature or by common grace, but, as totally depraved, are wholly incapable of any good: "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God."¹⁴ As even the secular scholars are well aware, rather than teaching a grace common to all men without exception, the Reformed confessions teach particular, discriminating grace, grace that has its origin in election: "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ."¹⁵

The Reformed faith, which is authoritatively defined in the Reformed confessions, not in Abraham Kuyper's *Lectures on*

12. Canons of Dordt, III, IV, Rejection of Errors/5: "The Synod [of Dordt] rejects the errors of those . . . who teach that the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, namely, the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself. And that in this way God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since He applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion" ("The Three Forms of Unity," Grandville, MI: Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1999), p. 64.

13. Canons of Dordt, I/4, in "The Three Forms of Unity," p. 49.

14. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 8, in "The Three Forms of Unity," p. 4.

15. Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.1, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), p. 624.

Calvinism, has a worldview. It has its own unique worldview. Kuyper was right when he asserted that Calvinism is not “a religion confined to the closet, the cell, or the church”¹⁶ and when he denied that “Calvinism represents an exclusively ecclesiastical and dogmatic movement.”¹⁷ But there was nothing profound, or novel, about these observations by the Dutch theologian. Calvinism is the pure Christianity of the Bible, and Christianity, obviously, is not confined to closet, cell, or church. One needs only to read the book of Proverbs and Ephesians 4-6.

A worldview is made up of the following basic elements. First, every worldview is grounded in a certain belief concerning God and, in light of this fundamental belief about God, in beliefs about man, the world, the purpose of human life, and the goal of all things. Belief about God is the vantage point from which worldview views the world. This vantage point is the unquestioned starting point for worldview. The issue for worldview is theological: “Who is God?”

Second, a worldview lays claim to all of reality, to all of human life. This is true of the worldview of the Roman Catholic Church, of the worldview of Leninist/ Marxist communism, and of the worldview of autonomous Man, now reigning in the West.

Third, a worldview authorizes and urges men and women to live earthly life in all its aspects energetically, enthusiastically, joyously, and hopefully, as a good, honorable, useful life. That is, earthly life is good inasmuch as it is lived according to the adopted worldview.

Fourth, worldview has a positive regard for culture and for the use and enjoyment of the products of culture. By “culture,” a notoriously difficult concept to pin down in a brief statement, we may understand simply man’s work with creation, whether by mind or body; man’s development of the creation, including a man or woman’s own gifts and abilities; man’s production of various inventions, to make human life easier or more enjoyable; and

16. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 53.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

man's ordering of his society. Mozart's composition of a symphony is culture. The discovery of anesthetics, especially for use by dentists, is culture. The ordering of the United States politically by the founding fathers is culture. But so also are the farmer's cultivation of his field, the wife's care of her home, and the child's learning to read, culture.

The Reformed worldview, inherent in the faith set forth in the ecumenical and Reformation creeds, is characterized by all these elements of worldview. The vantage point of the Reformed worldview is the God-given faith that receives Holy Scripture as God's own revelation of Himself, of His plan for creation and history, and of His will for His elect, redeemed, and regenerated people in the world.

Second, the Reformed worldview imperiously claims all of created reality. All things are ours because we are Christ's and Christ is God's (I Cor. 3:22, 23). Since God has given all things to the risen Christ Jesus, Abraham Kuyper's famed statement, that Christ claims every square inch of the creation, is true.

Third, the Reformed worldview sends its disciples into all of earthly life. It instructs the Reformed Christians that their earthly life is a holy calling. In the world, in every human ordinance, they must serve their God. Jesus prayed, not that God would take Jesus' disciples "out of the world," but that in the world God would "keep them from the evil" (John 17:15).

Fourth, the Reformed worldview does not despise, reject, or even fear culture, that is, all kinds of human activity upon creation and its resources. The Reformed worldview requires that we hate, despise, and reject the corrupt culture of ungodly people, as is the command of I John 2:15-17: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Living the Reformed, Christian worldview, one hates and rejects a concert of music by avowed lesbians crooning the pleasures of same-sex lust; a movie blasphemously depicting the sufferings of

the Christ; and the dishonest business practices that defraud customers, investors, and creditors.

But the Reformed worldview calls Reformed believers enthusiastically to fulfill the mandate of Genesis 1:28, subduing the earth, having dominion, and that aspect of the mandate that many of its noisy proponents tend to ignore and even reject: being fruitful and multiplying.

The Reformed worldview insists on obedience to the *purpose* of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28: serving and glorifying the true God, the creator of the world and all things in it. The cultural mandate is not merely the command to rule and develop creation. The cultural mandate is the divine charge to rule and develop the earthly creation in the service and to the glory of God. Without this purpose, and in defiance of this purpose, there is no fulfillment of the cultural mandate. This is conveniently overlooked by many who stress the cultural mandate on behalf of a Christian worldview. The reprobate, ungodly man or woman does not, will not, and cannot fulfill the mandate of Genesis 1:28, because he or she cannot subdue, rule, and develop creation in the service of God and to the glory of God. God is not in all his or her thoughts. Therefore, he or she will not seek God (Psalm 10:4). Because he does not seek God in his cultural activities, even the plowing of the wicked is sin (Prov. 21:4). The ungodly subdue the earth and have dominion in the service of the devil and his kingdom. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father ye will do” (John 8:44).

The only fulfillment of the cultural mandate is by the Christian, who works with the creation and lives in the ordinances of creation by faith in Christ, in obedience to the law governing human life, and to the glory of God.

The Reformed Worldview

What now is the Reformed worldview?

The Reformed view of all created reality is determined and shaped by the Reformed faith’s knowledge of the Godhead of the triune, one, true, living God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ in the gospel of Holy Scripture. James Orr rightly said “the fundamental postulate [of the Christian worldview] is a personal, holy, self-

revealed God.”¹⁸ “There be gods many and lords many, but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him” (I Cor. 8:5, 6). This God is truly God, so that His people must serve Him in all their life. Indeed, all things do serve Him, willingly or unwillingly. The truth of the sovereign God of Scripture establishes the Reformed worldview and distinguishes it from all other worldviews

The Reformed worldview sees the world as created by this God for the purpose of His own glory in His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. As the handiwork of the good God, the creation—the universe—is good. The fall into sin did not make the creation evil. The fall corrupted the human race (Rom. 3:9-13). It brought the curse of decay and death on the earthly creation (Gen. 3:17, 18). “But every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused,” the apostle writes in I Timothy 4:4. The basis of the goodness of every creature is its creation by God.

Having created all things, God continues to uphold His creation, care for it, and govern it by His providence. Providence is power; it is not grace. “Providence [is] the almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures.”¹⁹ Providence keeps creation in existence after the fall. Providence maintains man as a human, not allowing him to become a beast or a devil. Providence preserves the ordinances of creation in which humans live their earthly lives: marriage, family, government, and labor. Divine power does all this, not divine grace.

On the basis of the doctrine of creation, which includes providence, the Reformed Christian may freely live in and work with creation, using and enjoying all the various creatures. This is the teaching of the apostle in I Timothy 4:1ff. The heretical doctrine that the Christian life consists of abstinence from marriage and foods is refuted by the truth of God’s creation of all

18. James Orr, *Christian View of God and the World*, p. 9.

19. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 10, in “The Three Forms of Unity,” p. 7.

things: "which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (v. 3).

But it may not be overlooked, as many enthusiastic advocates of worldview do overlook, that God made all things and now upholds and governs all things for the sake of His glory in Jesus Christ. "All things were created by him [Jesus Christ], and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell"(Col. 1:16-19).

A culture vaguely characterized by "Judeo-Christian principles" does not satisfy a Reformed Christian. It certainly does not please God. God demands, and God realizes, a culture characterized by the Spirit of the risen Christ, a Christian culture, a life in and work with creation that openly honors Jesus Christ as Lord.

In the light of Scripture and on the basis of the Reformed confessions, the Reformed worldview views the human race as fallen from its original righteousness by the disobedience of Adam (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12ff.). Apart from Jesus Christ, all humans are totally depraved, in bondage to sin, spiritually dead, and rebels against God and His Christ (Eph. 2:1-3; Canons of Dordt, III, IV/1-5). As divine punishment, death now destroys every man, woman, and child, and the curse lies heavy on a groaning creation (Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 6:23; 8:19-22).

All possibility of a good, godly culture from fallen, unregenerate humans is cut off. The hope of unbelieving humanity that by dint of its own efforts and with the help of the natural process of evolution the race and its earthly home will become a world of peace and prosperity is illusory. The just God curses the guilty sinner and his culture. This is the message of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity." This is also the message of history.

Knowledge of the fall of the human race into sin and willing servitude of Satan warns Reformed Christians that they must expect opposition and warfare as they devote their lives to the service of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The ungodly hate

them. The culture of the ungodly opposes the culture of the godly. In Jesus Christ, "light is come into the world" in the holy lives of the saints, and the men and women of darkness hate the light (John 3:19, 20).

The Reformed worldview understands that, carrying out His original purpose with creation, God redeems an elect church out of the fallen race by the atoning death of Jesus Christ. The work of redemption includes the renewal of the elect by the grace of the Spirit of Christ so that they love, obey, and serve God. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28. This is the possibility of good, God-pleasing culture.

In a book that is widely regarded as a classic on the relation of Christ and culture, H. Richard Niebuhr contended that Christ is the "transformer of culture." "The movement of life . . . issuing from Jesus Christ is an upward movement, the rising of men's souls and deeds and thoughts in a mighty surge of adoration and glorification of the One who draws them to himself. This is what human culture can be—a transformed human life in and to the glory of God."²⁰ Niebuhr was right. What Niebuhr ignored was that Christ is the transformer of culture *in the lives and deeds of His elect, renewed people*—*exclusively* in the lives of His elect, renewed people. Niebuhr ignored this, because Niebuhr denied predestination. Ignoring this, Niebuhr was profoundly wrong in his assertion that Christ is the transformer of culture. Christ is not, and never will be, the transformer of the general culture of the human race universally.

Because God's purpose with the redemption of the new human race, made up of the elect in all nations, is not only their salvation, but also His glory by their lives, God sends the regenerated saints into all the ordinances and spheres of earthly life, to live, work, and play to the praise of God.

The Christian life is not withdrawal from creation and abstinence from the use and enjoyment of the creatures as much as possible. World-flight is forbidden. World-flight is sin. The will

20. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, Harper & Row [Harper Torchbooks], 1975), pp. 195, 196.

of Christ for those whom the Father has given Him is not that they go out of the world, even if this were possible, but that in the world they be kept from evil (John 17:15). Paul condemns the religious theory and practice of world-flight as the “doctrine of devils” (I Tim. 4:1). In his searing indictment of asceticism and world-flight in I Timothy 4:1ff., the apostle exposes the root of this erroneous notion of the nature of the life of the Christian in the world. World-flight supposes that material reality is inherently evil, thus denying the biblical doctrine of creation. In addition, world-flight misunderstands the will of God for the Christian life: *in* the world, but not *of* the world. The purpose of God is that the light of His own truth and holiness shine the more brightly in stark contrast with the darkness of the falsehood and depravity of the wicked world.

The Reformed worldview, convinced of the goodness of creation and obedient to the will of God, calls every Reformed believer and child of believers to a full, active earthly life, in home and family; usually in marriage; in the schools; in labor and business; in the church; and in the state. At the same time, this worldview frees the Reformed Christian to use and enjoy the various creatures, to benefit from the cultural products of the ungodly that are usable, to work with and develop all aspects of creation, and to develop his or her own natural and spiritual abilities—all in the service of the Lord Christ and to the glory of the triune God.

This was the message of the Reformation, which saw all of earthly life as a “vocation,” a sacred calling. This is the teaching of the practical parts of all the New Testament epistles, for example, Ephesians 4-6 and I Peter 2:11-5:14. “Occupy till I come” is the charge of the Lord Jesus to His disciples in the time between His departure to a far country and His return to conduct the judgment of His servants, “how much every man had gained by trading” (Luke 19:11-27).

World-flight is a perennial threat to Christians in every age. It is especially a threat when, as in our day, the visible church becomes thoroughly worldly. Then especially, the more godly, spiritual people are tempted physically to flee society. Against this temptation, the true church must warn. But world-flight has

never been, and is not now, the doctrine and practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The implication, or hidden agenda, of the denial of common grace is not world-flight.

The charge against the Protestant Reformed denial of common grace that it results in world-flight, "Anabaptistic" world-flight, is false. This charge has been leveled against the Protestant Reformed Churches from the very beginning of their history in the common grace controversy in the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1920s. A favorite tactic of the Christian Reformed opponents of Herman Hoeksema was smearing him as a modern Anabaptist advocate of world-flight. In 1922 Christian Reformed theologian Jan Karel Van Baalen warned the Christian Reformed Church that, in the controversy over common grace, she stood "on the eve of the most important struggle that she has yet known. That is the struggle between *Calvinism and Anabaptism*."²¹ Van Baalen charged that "the denial of common grace is Anabaptist."²²

Hoeksema regarded the charge as mere "mud-slinging." He repudiated it.

Where have you ever heard us defending that we must leave off the various institutions of society, that we may occupy no government position, that we may carry on no war? Exactly the opposite is our conception. We exactly will *not* to go out of the world. It is exactly our purpose to abandon no single sphere of life. We have exactly called God's people to occupy the whole of life. However, it is our will that this people of the Lord, which is His covenant people, in no single sphere of life shall forsake or deny its God. That people is called, in every sphere, to live out of grace, out of the one grace by which they are implanted into Christ and love God, so that they keep His commandments.

21. Jan Karel Van Baalen, *De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Doopersch?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1922), p. 9 (the translation of the Dutch is mine; the emphasis is the author's). The title in English would be *The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptist?*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Hoeksema added:

Therefore, “world-flight” is not applicable to us, as you yourself will now agree, brother [Van Baalen]. If “world” is understood in the sense of “nature,” then you see very well that we do not separate nature and grace but want to live out of grace everywhere. And if “world” is understood in the evil sense, then we do not take to flight, but rather fight the good fight to the end, so that no one may take our crown.²³

In a much later work, Hoeksema described his own worldview, which he called “life-view,” more fully.

And this people of God have their own life-view with regard to every sphere of life and every institution of the world. The home is an institution existing primarily for the perpetuation of God’s covenant in the world. The school is an institution for the purpose of instructing the covenant children according to the principles of Holy Writ for every sphere of life. Society, with business and industry, art and science, and all things that exist, must ... be controlled by the principles of the Word of God and be made subservient to the idea of God’s kingdom in the world. In a word, they have a new life-view. They are members of God’s covenant, His friends in the world, subjects of His kingdom. And, in principle at least, they want to live the life of that kingdom also in the present world.²⁴

The lives of the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches give the lie to the charge that their denial of common grace fosters

23. H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd: Voorloopig Bescheid aan Ds. Jan Karel Van Baalen betreffende de Loochening der Gemeene Gratie* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Printing Co., n.d.), pp. 67, 68 (the translation of the Dutch is mine). The title in English would be *Not Anabaptist but Reformed: A Provisional Answer to Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen concerning the Denial of Common Grace*.

24. Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), p. 211.

world-flight. Protestant Reformed people do not ride in buggies pulled by horses; do not dress the women in black; do not live in communes; do not abstain from good food and drink or any other lawful earthly pleasure; do not reject modern technology; do not avoid education; do not forbid involvement in civil government; do not prohibit working in the various professions. In short, the Protestant Reformed Churches do not conceive the Christian life as sitting “*met een boekje in een hoekje*” (‘with a little [religious] book in a little corner’). On the contrary, by the Word of God these Churches call all their members to a full, rich, active, holy earthly life in all the ordinances and every sphere of creation. This call is part of Christ’s redemption of His people.

It is another important aspect of the Reformed worldview that it promises victory to Reformed Christians and their obedient lives in the world. Every worldview encourages its disciples with the prospect of future victory. Every one who lives and fights for the Reformed worldview will live and reign with Jesus Christ in the new world (Heid. Cat., Q. 32). The cause of the Reformed faith, which is simply the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, will conquer all the rival kingdoms of man and establish itself triumphantly in all creation (Psalm 72; Dan. 2:1-45; Rev. 21, 22). The creation itself will be renewed as a new heaven and new earth in which the righteousness preached and practiced by the Reformed faith shall dwell (Rom. 8:19-22; II Pet. 3:13).

The Reformed worldview, which must do battle and endure reproach throughout the present age, will have this perfect victory, not *in* history, but as the *goal* of history, in the day of Jesus Christ. Already in this age, the Reformed worldview is victorious in the pure worship, sound confession, and holy life of the true church, as in the faithfulness of believers and their children to Jesus Christ their Lord. This is a spiritual victory.

But this worldview does not delude its confessors and practitioners with the promise of a carnal victory within history. The Reformed faith has always condemned as illusory the “Jewish dream” of a golden age in history during which the world is “Christianized” and Reformed politicians in Amsterdam; or Presbyterian theologians in Vallecito, California, Tyler, Texas, or

Moscow, Idaho; or Reformational philosophers in Toronto, Ontario, Canada rule mankind. The Second Helvetic Confession expresses the Reformed conviction concerning the teaching of a carnal victory of the kingdom of Christ in history.

We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matt. Chs. 24 and 25, and Luke, ch. 18, and apostolic teaching in II Thess., ch. 2, and II Tim., chs. 3 and 4, present something quite different.²⁵

The Reformed faith maintains an amillennial eschatology. The same chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession that condemns the notion of a golden age as nothing but “Jewish dreams” also warns Reformed Christians of apostasy, persecution, and the coming of Antichrist in the future.

And from heaven the same Christ will return in judgment, when wickedness will then be at its greatest in the world and when the Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, will fill up all things with superstition and impiety and will cruelly lay waste the Church with bloodshed and flames (Dan., ch. 11). But Christ will come again to claim his own, and by his coming to destroy the Antichrist, and to judge the living and the dead (Acts. 17:31).²⁶

The worldview of common grace intoxicates those who inhale its vapors with the giddy prospect of an earthly triumph of the kingdom of God by the creation of a good, godly culture in history. Charles Colson thinks that the cooperation of evangelicals and Roman Catholics in building a culture informed by a biblical worldview can yet, by the power of common grace, win the culture wars and redeem the culture. In the face of the pessimism that

25. “The Second Helvetic Confession, 1566,” Chapter XI, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 245, 246.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

concludes that evangelicals have lost the culture war, Colson is optimistic.

The new millennium is a time for Christians to celebrate, to raise our confidence, to blow trumpets, and to fly the flag high. This is the time to make a compelling case that Christianity offers the most rational and realistic hope for both personal redemption and social renewal.²⁷

Richard Mouw is more cautious about the possibilities of culture building common grace. But he too urges the worldview of common grace among all churches and professing Christians in the hope of accomplishing great, good, and godly things in the life of society. An aggressive exercise of “common grace ministries” will promote “the welfare, the shalom, of the larger human community.”²⁸ In this way Christians are agents of one of God’s “Kingdom goals” in history.²⁹

Abraham Kuyper, sober amillennialist though he was in his dogmatics, became a delirious postmillennialist in his advocacy of the worldview of common grace. The cooperation of believers and unbelievers in building a good culture by common grace will result in the “Christianizing” of nations, if not of the world. The task of the “church as organism” is nothing less than “the transformation of human society by bringing it into harmony with the insights provided by the Christian faith. ... Kuyper aimed ... to encourage ... the Christianization of society.... The Christianization of society would involve bringing all aspects of human life into conformity with Christian principles.”³⁰

The hope of the common grace worldview, an incipient postmillennialism, is vain. The kingdom of Christ is spiritual, not carnal. Its victory in history is a spiritual victory in the gathering and preservation of the church and in the salvation of the elect,

27. Colson, *How Now Shall We Live?*, pp. 302-307.

28. Mouw, *He Shines*, p. 84.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

30. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, pp. 134, 135.

which includes their holy lives in all the ordinances and spheres of creation. The perfection of its victory, when all enemies will be destroyed and the saints will reign with Christ over the renewed creation—the true “golden age”—awaits the end of history at the coming of Jesus Christ. This reality, and not a postmillennial dream, is the prospect of victory that sustains and encourages those who are committed to the Reformed worldview.³¹

In the Reformed worldview described above, what is lacking, so that a Reformed Christian is hindered from a full, active life in every sphere of creation?

What about this worldview, which is nothing other than the faith and life of the Christian religion, deserves the harsh charge, “world-flight!”?

What are Christians called to do in the world, that they are prohibited from doing by this worldview?

As the worldview inherent in the Reformed faith, a hallmark of which is predestination, as all the world knows, this worldview is a worldview, not of common grace, but of particular grace. It is a worldview in harmony with, based on, and empowered by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ bestowed on elect believers and their children, and on them alone. This worldview has distinctive features.

Biblical

The Reformed worldview is biblical, not philosophical, speculative, or emotional. The common grace worldview in Kuyper’s *Lectures on Calvinism* is highly philosophical and speculative. It lacks all biblical foundation and exposition. Indeed, there is hardly any mention of Scripture. Kuyper spun the worldview of common grace out of his fertile mind, a mind bent on political power and influence in the Netherlands.

31. For a refutation of the postmillennial hope especially of Christian Reconstruction, but also of the expectation of the common grace worldview that it will “Christianize” societies and nations, and a defense of the hope of victory of (Reformed) amillennialism, see David J. Engelsma, *Christ’s Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism* (Redlands, CA: The Reformed Witness, 2001).

In Mouw's *He Shines in All That's Fair*, the common grace worldview is emotional, as well as philosophical and speculative. Its source is not the teaching of Scripture, but the feelings of Richard Mouw: his approval of many of the works of the ungodly; his empathy for the suffering and rejoicing wicked; and his longing to cooperate with "decent" unbelievers in creating a culture of justice and peace.³²

Particularly with regard to its fundamental tenet of the building of a good, even godly, culture by a grace of God shared by Christian and non-Christian, the common grace worldview is plainly, egregiously, absurdly unbiblical. The Bible does not teach a culture-forming work of God in the world of the ungodly. The Bible does not know a work of grace in the society of men and women who hate God and His Son Jesus Christ resulting in a culture that is good and pleases God.

On the contrary.

God destroyed the world of the ungodly with all their impressive Cainite culture in the flood (Gen. 4:16-24; 6-8).

The great cultural work of mankind after the flood was the Tower of Babel. This grand achievement of the seed of the serpent, God hated and ruined (Gen. 11:1-9).

Great civilizations and impressive cultures appeared in the time of the Old Testament and are recognized in Old Testament Scripture: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Tyre, and others. The prophets did not admire them, but condemned them for their idolatry and unrighteousness. Think of the Nebuchadnezzar's great image representing four mighty world-powers and splendid civilizations in Daniel 2. God's little stone—the kingdom of Messiah—demolishes the four world-kingdoms. Against highly civilized Tyre, the prophet pronounced the divine woe in Ezekiel 26-28.

The only culture Jehovah approved in the time of the Old Testament was that of Israel, insofar as it was godly, and that national and societal way of life was the product of saving grace.

32. For a critique of the "real reasons" for the common grace worldview as presented in Mouw's *He Shines*, see Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard J. Mouw's He Shines in All That's Fair*.

Where in the New Testament is there a hint, even so much as a hint, of a positive cultural work of God by His grace among ungodly men and women, or of a calling of the church to cooperate with unbelievers in building a good, God-pleasing culture? About the idolatrous civilizations of Greece and Rome, the “glory that was Greece,” over which Reformed college professors sigh and swoon, Romans 1:18ff. states that the wrath of God fell on them, giving the people over to a reprobate mind, so that they were full of perverse sexual desires and practiced sodomy and lesbianism.

In Revelation 18, the last apostle recognizes the marvelous civilization and remarkable culture of humanity at the end of time—a “mighty city” of wealth and luxury, of industry and trade, of music and inventions. He recognizes this civilization and culture, calls on the reader of the Revelation 18 to recognize it, and then pronounces the destruction of Babylon the great, and rejoices over its destruction.

God is not pleased to build a culture by means of the ungodly. He is pleased to destroy the culture of the ungodly.

One culture, and one culture only, pleases God: the godly way of life, spiritual and earthly, of the holy nation, the city of God, that is, the church. This pleases Him, because this way of life is His own work by the Spirit and grace of Jesus Christ. The reality of this culture, the manner of the building of this culture, and the way of life of this culture are the biblical teaching about the sanctified life of the church and about the holy life of believers and their children in the world.

Mighty Grace

A second distinctive feature of the Reformed worldview of particular grace is its requirement that believers and their children live their earthly lives in the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and of the mighty grace that has its source in the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God. The Christian works on the farm or in the factory, runs a business, studies at school, does research, plays or listens to music, and eats and drinks by the same grace that empowers him to worship, confess, pray, and witness to his neighbor. The only power and possibility of an earthly life that

pleases God and contributes to good culture is the life of the risen Jesus Christ, which is received through faith in Him. The urgent exhortation of the Bible is: “Live out of Christ! Walk in His Spirit! Do all in the name of Jesus Christ!”

The Christian does not and may not carry out his worldview, or pursue his cultural task, by the power of some other grace, by some common grace. This, however, is what the common grace worldview teaches. Abraham Kuyper wrote: “And thus now it is one and the same man who enjoys God’s common grace in the life of society and God’s particular grace in the holy sphere.”³³ At church we live by the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and saving grace; throughout the week, we live and work by the power of another grace, “common grace.” To propose another power, another grace, than the power of God’s grace in Christ for the Christian’s life in society is attempted murder of the Christian life, nothing less.

Their attempting to live and work in the world by common grace goes a long way towards explaining why those who practice the common grace worldview invariably become thoroughly worldly. They are attempting to live by a wrong and wholly inadequate power, as though a soldier would go to war with a squirt gun, rather than a machine gun, or would clothe himself with a nightgown, rather than armor. They are vulnerable to the destructive influence of the wicked world.

Neither Scripture nor the Reformed confessions attribute the calling of Christians to live a full earthly life, or the power to carry out this calling, to a common grace of God, but to the saving grace

33. Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, vol. 2, p. 634. The translation of the Dutch is mine. In his treatment of the covenant with Noah, which Kuyper regarded as one of the main biblical bases of his theory of common grace, if not the main basis in Scripture, Kuyper did not merely distinguish, but separated—compartmentalized—our “spiritual life of our soul” from “our external existence in the world and on earth” (“*het geestelijk leven van onze ziel*” from “*ons uitwendig bestaan in de wereld en op de aarde*”). The former we live by special grace; the latter we live by common grace (*De Gemeene Gratie*, vol. 1, p. 19).

of Jesus Christ. It is as those who have learned Christ and who are renewed by the Spirit of Christ, so that they are new men and women in Christ, that the Ephesian Christians are truthful with the neighbors; labor faithfully at some earthly vocation; are kind to each other; avoid sexual filth; abstain from drunkenness and its debauchery; honor marriage and the family; and are active in the sphere of labor and business, whether as employer or employee (Eph. 4:17-6:9).

In the explanation of the law of God and of the model prayer that is the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Catechism certainly calls the Reformed believer to live a full, active life in the world. This life includes right public worship at church; submission to the civil magistrates; honorable behavior in marriage and the family; honest dealings in business; and upright conduct with all one's neighbors in society. By this life, one seeks and promotes the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ (Heid. Cat., Lord's Days 32-52). This calling is grounded, not in some original purpose of God with mankind to create a good culture, or "Christianize" society, but in the redemption of the cross of Christ. The power of this earthly life in all its aspects is not a common grace of God that the godly share with the ungodly, but the regenerating grace of the Spirit of Christ. "Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image."³⁴

Honoring Jesus Christ

The honoring of Jesus Christ in confession and practice is a third distinctive feature of the genuinely Reformed worldview. The Reformed worldview confesses that the one purpose of God with all things is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, our dear Savior, and the Lord over all. The Reformed worldview demands a life lived in subjection to and service of Him. Basic to the Reformed worldview is the confession that God made all things for Jesus Christ, that all things cohere in Jesus Christ, and that Jesus

34. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, in "The Three Forms of Unity," p. 19.

Christ must have the preeminence in all things. Jesus Christ, the head of the church, is the one purpose of God with creation and history. In raising Jesus Christ from the dead, God has exalted Him to a position of prominence over all things (Col. 1:13-20).

Whatever worldview ignores Jesus Christ, whatever worldview does not ascribe this centrality, this preeminence, to Jesus Christ, is false. Whatever culture, however decent and humane it may be, does not confess and obey Jesus Christ as Lord of the culture is cursed.

The common grace worldview ignores Jesus Christ. It leaves Jesus Christ out of the fine culture it is building with the help of those who deny Jesus Christ. The common grace worldview ignores Jesus Christ and leaves Him out of its culture *by its own frank admission*. According to the worldview of common grace, God has a cultural purpose with creation and history altogether apart from His saving purpose in Jesus Christ. God has two distinct purposes with creation and history. One is the redemption of a church by the saving grace of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The other is the development of good culture by reprobate, unregenerate men and women, with the help of Christians, as the original purpose of God with creation. God realizes this purpose by His common grace. This cultural purpose has nothing to do with Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen head of the church. He is certainly not the source, foundation, life, lord, and goal of this culture.

Abraham Kuyper, who is the father of the common grace worldview, wrote that “there is beside the great work of God in *special* grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common* grace.” This “totally other work” is the gracious activity of God in heathens and idolaters “to consummate the world’s development.” God takes “delight in that high human development” of heathens and idolaters. For by this cultural development of humanity “all the glory of God’s image can mirror itself.”

Common grace, according to Kuyper, achieves “a purpose of its own” in history. “Independently [of Jesus Christ as head of the redeemed church and of His saving grace],” common grace brings about “the full emergence of what God had in mind when he

planted those nuclei of higher development in our race.” By the independent working of common grace, “humanity arrives at its goal, it lifts itself up from its sunken state, it gradually reaches a higher level. The fundamental creation ordinance given before the fall, that humans would achieve dominion over all of nature thanks to ‘common grace,’ is still realized *after* the fall. Only in this way, in the light of the Word of God, can the history of our race, the long unfolding of the centuries as well as the high significance of the world’s development, make substantial sense to us.”³⁵

Richard Mouw’s recent defense and expansion of Kuyper’s worldview of common grace likewise asserts that God pursues a cultural purpose in history that is separate from His saving purpose in Jesus Christ. Mouw speaks of “multiple divine purposes.” “As God unfolds his plan for his creation, he is interested in more than one thing. Alongside of God’s clear concern about the eternal destiny of individuals are his designs for the larger creation.”³⁶

Positing two, independent purposes of God with creation and history is dualism. Dualism is the destruction of worldview! By definition, worldview sees all of created reality whole. Worldview is a comprehensive, unified view of history and the world. The advocates of the worldview of common grace do not have a worldview, but worldviews. One is the worldview of God’s work of glorifying Himself by the redemption of a church by the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The other is the worldview of God’s work

35. Abraham Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 176-179.

36. Mouw, *He Shines*, p. 50. In an intriguing theological move, designed to establish a cultural purpose of God independent of His purpose with Jesus Christ, Mouw grounds the purpose of God to develop a godly culture in an infralapsarian arrangement of the divine decrees. On Mouw’s conception of the eternal counsel, Jesus Christ is ignored by God in one of His two great purposes with the creation, the human race, and history. If this were the implication of infralapsarianism, it would be reason to condemn infralapsarianism out of hand. Jesus Christ is first in the counsel of God, however the order of the decrees is viewed.

of glorifying Himself by the development of good, godly culture by the ungodly by the common grace of God.

Still worse, the common grace worldview teaches a great purpose of God with, and a marvelous work of God in, history that has nothing to do with Jesus Christ, the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God. And if this worldview ignores Jesus Christ, it denies Him. It denies Him with regard to its worldview. Nothing less than this is the damning Reformed indictment of the worldview of common grace: It denies Jesus Christ with regard to what is proposed as one of the great purposes of God with history and with regard to what is advanced as the foundation of all human life in the world.

Kuyper struggled with these two weaknesses of his theory of common grace, its inherent dualism and the separation of God's work of cultural development from Jesus Christ. He tried to solve his problems by uniting both the work of redemption and the cultural work of common grace in the person of the eternal Son of God. "Holy Scripture repeatedly tells us of the intertwinement of the life of special grace with that of common grace but simultaneously discloses that the point at which the two come together is not Christ's birth in Bethlehem but his eternal existence as the *Eternal Word*."³⁷ "The work of creation and the work of redemption—and to that extent also the work of common and of special grace—find a higher unity in Christ only because the eternal Son of God is behind both starting points."³⁸ In support of this attempt to overcome both the dualism and the ignoring of Jesus Christ that characterize the worldview of common grace, Kuyper appealed to Colossians 1:13ff.

Kuyper's attempt failed. It merely thrust the dualism back into the person of the eternal Son. Now the eternal Son of God has two independent purposes with, and works in, history. Besides, Colossians 1:13ff. does not make the person of the eternal Son of God the beginning and goal of all creation, the one purpose of God with the existence and movement of all things in history, and the

37. Kuyper, "Common Grace," p. 183.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185.

one who must have preeminence in all things. The one who has this importance with regard to creation, all things, and history is the dear Son of God, into whose kingdom elect believers have been translated (v. 13); in whom we have redemption through His blood (v. 14); who is the firstborn of every creature, which cannot be said of the eternal person of the Son (v. 15); who is the head of the church (v. 18); and who is the firstborn from the dead (v. 18). This is not the person of the eternal Son, although Jesus Christ's person is the eternal Son, but the *man* born of Mary, suffered under Pilate, and raised bodily on the third day. *Him* God has honored with such incomparable honor. *Him* the Reformed worldview honors. And *Him* the common grace worldview denies.

Righteous

A fourth distinctive feature of the Reformed worldview is its insistence that the norm, or standard, of all of everyday, earthly life, in all the ordinances and spheres of creation, is the law of God as clearly revealed in Scripture. God's law in Scripture governs sexual conduct; marriage; the family; life in the church; labor; business; medicine; relations with the neighbor; and the behavior of the Christian towards the state.

Reformed, Christian life is not lawless. It is not ruled by man's own will. It is not governed by the current thinking and practices of the depraved world, which contraband are then smuggled into Reformed churches as the cargo of "general revelation."

The worldview of common grace opens up the individuals, churches, and schools that embrace it to the world's lawlessness. In the name of common grace, they approve feminism and egalitarianism; divorce and remarriage for any and every reason; the rebellion of "servants" against their "masters" in the realm of labor; Sabbath desecration; the enjoyment of Hollywood's vilest and most violent, even blasphemous, movies; and now homosexuality, at least in a "committed relationship." Acceptance of the wicked world's "wisdom" and ways by those who hold the worldview of common grace is inevitable. For the common grace worldview posits the gracious operation of the Spirit in the un-

godly world and therefore also a great deal of truth and righteousness.³⁹

39. The flooding of those circles espousing and promoting the worldview of common grace with the lawlessness of the ungodly world, by virtue of the theory of common grace underlying the worldview, is by this time massive and pervasive. Witness the decadence of Abraham Kuyper's Free University of Amsterdam, and the death of his Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN). I mention several concrete instances in the Christian Reformed Church in North America and in its college, Calvin College, certainly centers of the worldview of common grace. Common grace played a powerful, if not decisive, role in the approval of the evolutionary theory of origins by the Christian Reformed Church in 1991 (see David J. Engelsma, "Creation and Science ... and Common Grace," the *Standard Bearer*, 67, no. 10, Feb. 15, 1991: 221-223, and no. 11, March 1, 1991: pp. 245-247). Evolutionary theory is lawlessness of thought. Evolutionary theory results in lawlessness, indeed savagery, of behavior. Although the decision of the Christian Reformed Church in 1990 opening the offices of minister and elder to women and rejecting the husband's headship in marriage did not mention common grace, it was in fact the openness to the world worked by common grace over many years that made feminism irresistibly attractive to that Church. Christian Reformed theologian Harry Boonstra acknowledges in a recent book that Calvin College's enthusiastic endorsement of the vilest and most violent of Hollywood's movies as standard fare for its students roots in the college's common grace worldview. "The college often emphasized the doctrine of common grace, especially in the approach to culture and learning.... One could learn from ... *On the Waterfront* and.... *A Clockwork Orange*" (Harry Boonstra, *Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, p. 104). In 2002, Calvin College sponsored a concert on campus by the notorious lesbian singing troop, the Indigo Girls. When some complained, the college administration publicly defended the college's having avowed lesbians crooning to a packed house of students of the virtues and pleasures of lesbian love. The basis of the defense was common grace (see Cathy Guiles, "Calvin Debates Common Grace in Music," *Calvin College Chimes*, Oct. 4, 2002:3). Prominent Christian Reformed theologian Lewis B. Smedes has publicly urged the Christian Reformed Church to accept and approve "homosexual people who live faithfully in covenanted partnerships," that is, as Smedes

Antithetical

In sharp contrast to the conforming mentality of the worldview of common grace, the Reformed worldview is antithetical—unashamedly, boldly, urgently antithetical. This is a fifth distinctive feature of the genuinely Reformed worldview. Two radically different groups of people, hostile to each other, live in the closest proximity. They develop two fundamentally different cultures in the same spheres of creation. One group confesses the sovereignty of the triune God and Father of Jesus Christ and willingly submit to the Lordship of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The other rebels against God and His Messiah. The Reformed worldview calls Christians to be separate from those who deny Jesus Christ and thus the one, true God.

Is any truth clearer, or more emphatic, in Scripture than the antithesis?

God Himself set the history of the human race on its way with the word of Genesis 3:15, dividing the race into two antagonistic families: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and

himself put it, homosexual “marriage” (see Lewis B. Smedes, “Like the Wideness of the Sea,” *Perspectives*, May 1999, pp. 8-12). In a book defending homosexual activity and relationships (the foreword of which is a hearty recommendation of the book and its message by Christian Reformed philosopher and theologian Hendrik Hart), a theologian of what formerly was the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), Pim Pronk, points the way that the Christian Reformed Church will likely follow in approving homosexual “committed relations.” This way is the grounding of the decision of the goodness of homosexual relations, not on the Bible, but on “general revelation.” This is the way the Christian Reformed Church has already gone in its decisions approving theistic evolution and women in church office with the concomitant denial of the headship of the husband in marriage. And “general revelation” in these contexts is the code phrase for the latest thinking and behavior of ungodly society, which thinking and behavior are attributed to the gracious working of God in the world of the ungodly, that is, common grace (Pim Pronk, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation regarding Homosexuality*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, especially pp. 265-325).

between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Old Testament Israel must dwell in safety alone (Deut. 33:28). It is no different for the New Testament church and child of God.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (II Cor. 6:14-18).

So overpowering is this truth of the antithesis everywhere in Scripture that it frustrated the strenuous efforts of H. Richard Niebuhr to gainsay it. In his acclaimed study of the relation between Christ and culture, Niebuhr searched for evidence in the Christian tradition and in Scripture that Christ, the *transformer* of culture, is not *against* culture. Again and again, he was forced to admit, honest scholar that he was, that his champions of "Christ-as-transformer-of-culture" taught Christ as the foe of culture.

Niebuhr liked to claim Augustine as a "Christian who set before men the vision of universal concord and peace in a culture in which all human actions had been reordered by the gracious action of God in drawing all men to Himself, and in which all men were active in works directed toward and thus reflecting the love and glory of God." But Niebuhr was forced to acknowledge that Augustine "did not develop his thought in this direction. He did not actually look forward with hope to the realization of the great eschatological possibility...—the redemption of the created and corrupted human world and the transformation of mankind in all its cultural activity." Due largely to "his predestinarian form of the doctrine of election, Augustine[']s ... vision [is that] of two cities, composed of different individuals, forever separate. Here is a dualism more radical than that of Paul and Luther."

“Calvin,” alas, “is very much like Augustine.” There are in this Reformer ideas that led Niebuhr to hope that Calvin might have taught “the transformation of mankind in all its nature and culture into a kingdom of God in which the laws of the kingdom have been written upon the inward parts.” But this is not, in fact, the cultural doctrine of Calvin.

To the eternal over-againstness of God and man, Calvin adds the dualism of temporal and eternal existence, and the other dualism of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell. Though Calvinism has been marked by the influence of the eschatological hope of transformation by Christ and by its consequent pressing toward the realization of the promise, this element in it has always been accompanied by a separatist and repressive note, even more markedly than in Lutheranism.

Niebuhr was compelled to fall back on the minor, and heretical, figure of F. D. Maurice.⁴⁰

The Bible proved to be as unhelpful for Niebuhr’s thesis as Augustine and Calvin. Christ as transformer of culture “is most clearly indicated in the Gospel of John.” But, added Niebuhr immediately, “the close relation of this work to the First Letter of John at once suggests, it is accompanied there also by a separatist note.” Misunderstanding the “universalistic statements” in the gospel according to John, Niebuhr thought that John seems “to look forward to the complete transformation of human life and work.” However, Niebuhr recognized that “such universalistic statements ... are balanced in the Gospel by sayings that voice the sense of the world’s opposition to Christ and of his concern for the few.” Niebuhr concluded by agreeing with the analysis of another scholar: “The Fourth Gospel ... is ... the most exclusive of the New Testament writings. It draws a sharp division between the Church of Christ and the outlying world, which is regarded as merely foreign or hostile.”⁴¹

40. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, pp. 206-229.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-205.

The worldview of the Bible is antithetical, and the antithesis is grounded in divine predestination. Whatever worldview fails to reckon with the antithesis, weakens the antithesis, or denies the antithesis is false.

The antithesis that is basic to the biblical worldview for the church and Christian in the New Testament is spiritual. It is the separation and warfare between faith and unbelief. The believer thinks God's thoughts after Him; God is not in all the unbeliever's thoughts. The believer does all to the glory of God; the unbeliever lives for self, humanity, and sin. The believer trusts in God in Jesus Christ for salvation and, indeed, all things; the unbeliever trusts in the arm of human flesh, or frankly despairs. The believer obeys God in love; the unbeliever either tramples the commandments of God underfoot, or outwardly observes the laws of God out of self-interest.

The antithesis between the seed of the woman—Jesus Christ and those who are His by divine election—and the seed of the serpent—those who are Satan's progeny according to divine reprobation—in the New Testament age is not physical. The antithesis certainly must, and does, come to physical expression. The Christian does not worship with the pagans or with the false church (I Cor. 10:14-22). He may not date and marry an unbeliever (I Cor. 7:39). He may not cultivate friendship with an unbeliever (II Cor. 6:14-18). He may not cooperate with unbelievers in ungodly enterprises, for example, building an earthly kingdom of God apart from Jesus Christ, the pardon of sins, and lives of holiness (II Chron. 19:2). Reformed parents educate the children of the covenant in their own schools, where the instruction is based on Scripture and the Reformed confessions and where the law of God rules the speech and conduct of all the students (Eph. 6:4).

But it is not the nature of the antithesis that it consists of, and requires, physical separation of the church from the ungodly world and of the believer and his children from unbelievers and their children. The antithesis is not world-flight. The Reformed Christian may live fully and freely in every ordinance and sphere of creation, for example, marriage, labor, and the state. He may develop and exercise all his natural gifts, for example, scholarship, building houses, making music, or playing ball. He may associate

with the ungodly in everyday, earthly life, for example, neighborhood, labor, and state. He may cooperate with the ungodly in all kinds of earthly activities, for example, business and the defense of the nation. He may use and enjoy all the cultural products of the ungodly that are not so defiled and defiling as to be intrinsically unclean. He may enjoy and learn from the world's great literature. He may enjoy classical music. He may avail himself of the computer. He may benefit from advances in medicine.

All of this earthly activity of the Reformed Christian, including association with the ungodly and use of their inventions, is due to the truths of creation and providence. By virtue of God's creation of all things, "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused" (I Tim. 4:4; cf. I Cor. 10:26). Life in the ordinances and spheres of creation, which is the will of God for His redeemed people, necessarily involves physical contact and cooperation in earthly affairs with the ungodly (I Cor. 5:10). Christians and non-Christians have all things earthly in common, because of creation and providence.

What they do not have in common is grace. Therefore, although they share earthly life, they live this earthly life in two radically different ways, the one to the glory of God and the other in defiance of God. Knowing that the thinking and practices of the ungodly world are not the fruit of grace, the Christian is always on his guard against the ignorance and licentiousness of the ungodly with whom he associates and cooperates (Eph. 4:18, 19).

The worldview of common grace breaks down the antithesis. It is a breach in the spiritual wall, a bridge over the spiritual moat, between the church and the world, between the believer and the unbeliever, between Christ and Belial. Through the breach and over the bridge of common grace, the godless thinking and unholy practices of the wicked world pour into the lives of the people, the churches, and the schools where the worldview of common grace reigns. Abraham Kuyper proposed the worldview of common grace as a bridge between the church and the world by which the church could influence the world. Kuyper forgot something about bridges. They allow two-way traffic.

After some one hundred years, since the invention of the common grace worldview by Kuyper and his colleague Herman

Bavinck,⁴² the worldview of common grace has proved to be a failure. It has not “Christianized” the Netherlands. It has not “Christianized” the United States. It has not “Christianized” Grand Rapids, Michigan. On the contrary, it has made the people, churches, and schools that advocate and practice it thoroughly worldly.

The deleterious effect of the worldview of common grace on its proponents is being recognized of late by some who have not historically been involved in the controversy over common grace and who therefore cannot be accused of having an ax to grind. James D. Bratt speaks of a “basic ambiguity in his [Kuyper’s] thought. On the one hand, Kuyper preached religious antithesis: the life-principles of Christians and unbelievers were diametrically opposed, the spiritual qualities of their respective actions were inevitably antagonistic.... Later in his career ... Kuyper resurrected the doctrine of common grace: that God gave to humanity grace which, while not ‘saving,’ enabled them to attain much virtue and truth ... and that cooperation between Christians and unbelievers was therefore possible and necessary.”⁴³ “Basic ambiguity” regarding the antithesis is fatal to the antithesis.

Writing in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Presbyterian theologian William D. Dennison judges that “Dutch neo-Calvinism,” whose father is Abraham Kuyper, whose project is to “transform and reclaim the post-enlightenment culture for the Lordship of Jesus Christ,” and whose worldview is that of common grace, “has become more a child of the Enlightenment

42. For Bavinck’s significant contribution to the worldview of common grace, see Herman Bavinck, *De Algemeene Genade* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, n.d.). The work has been translated into English by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen in the *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989):38-65.

43. James D. Bratt, “The Dutch Schools,” in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 146. Bratt’s description both of the antithesis and of the theory of culture-building common grace is accurate.

and modernity than a movement preserving historic orthodox Calvinism.”⁴⁴

Sean Michael Lucas sees the same worldliness (he calls it “secularization”) where the common grace worldview dominates. He attributes this worldliness to the doctrine of common grace.

Although Kuyper himself used language of the antithesis, his later followers, particularly in the United States and Canada, more often emphasized the other two intellectual contributions of the Kuyperian vision: common grace and the ordering structures of sphere sovereignty. As common grace came to override Kuyper’s emphasis upon the difference that the *palingenesis* [regeneration] made—with its two kinds of people and two kinds of science—the secularization of the sacred not only became a possibility, but actually happened at places such as the Free University of Amsterdam. As a result, American neo-Calvinists continue to worry that their institutions committed to Kuyper’s ideals could follow Free University’s path, and such concern is warranted. . . . As modern Kuyperians attempted to transform culture by obeying God’s law in every human sphere and by cooperating with God’s common grace, the temptation became the identification of social “progress” . . . with God’s activity. As the sacred was secularized, or as things common were identified with the continued unfolding of redemptive history, the public positions that Kuyperians held looked suspiciously like moderate-to-liberal American politics granted divine sanction.⁴⁵

44. William D. Dennison, “Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation: An Introductory Essay,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (June 1999): 284.

45. Sean Michael Lucas, “Southern-Fried Kuyper? Robert Lewis Dabney, Abraham Kuyper, and the Limitations of Public Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 198, 199. Lucas illustrates his charge against neo-Calvinism’s common grace worldview from the now defunct magazine, the *Reformed Journal*. The list of causes by which that group thought to “Christianize” North America is a brief for the platform of the far left wing of the Democratic party.

Pilgrimage

By no means the least significant of the distinctive features of the Reformed worldview is that it keeps before the Christian that he is a pilgrim on the earth and that his life, including his cultural life, is a pilgrimage. The Reformed worldview has a perspective on earthly life that pays attention to the “cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 11. “These all died in faith ... and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country ... that is, an heavenly” (Heb. 11:13-16). Active as we are, may be, and ought to be in earthly life, we may never forget that our life is a pilgrimage to the celestial city.

The common grace worldview destroys this truth about the Christian and his life. This worldview makes the “Christianizing” of society, the building of a grand and good culture, and the improvement of the world as a form of the kingdom of God the main thing for the Christian. It tends to fix one’s heart on this life. It tends to make cultural achievements the goal of the Christian life.

The worldview of common grace also obscures Scripture’s warning that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12). The church in the world is always a church “under the cross.” Why would unbelievers hate and persecute those with whom they share the grace of God? How can there be tribulation for Christians at the hands of unbelievers when both are cooperating by the common grace of God to fulfill one of God’s great purposes with creation and history? More to the point, why would non-Christians kill, or even ridicule, professing Christians who are ready to adopt the current thinking and practices of the non-Christians (as “general revelation”), who studiously avoid naming the name of Jesus Christ (since the common grace worldview and enterprise have nothing to do with Him), and who refrain from condemning the unbelief and unrighteousness of the non-Christians (because the lives of the non-Christians are good, true, and beautiful by the power of common grace)?

But Christ warns that all who lose their hope of His return and of heaven, because they are wrapped up in this earthly life with its

cares and disappointments, but also with its pleasures and successes, will perish in the coming conflagration, as the worldly contemporaries of Noah perished in the flood (Matt. 24:37-41). Christ also pronounces His woe upon professing disciples of whom all men speak well (Luke 6:26).

The worldview of common grace is not only false. It is also spiritually dangerous in the extreme.

Ordinary

The last distinctive feature of the Reformed worldview is that it presents the life—the *cultural* life—of the Christian as mainly ordinary, unnoticed, and insignificant according to human standards. In God's mind, this "ordinary" life of the Christian is amazing, a wonder of His grace in Jesus Christ that has brought life out of death, purity out of filth, and freedom out of slavery.

There is room in the Reformed worldview for the artist, the doctor or nurse, the official of civil government, the successful businessman, the lawyer, the godly man or woman who has impact on society. The Reformed worldview welcomes a Martin Luther, a John Calvin, a J. S. Bach, and (his philosophy of common grace aside) an Abraham Kuyper. But these high profile positions do not constitute the cultural life envisioned by the Reformed worldview. They do not even touch the essence of godly culture as the Reformed worldview conceives it. To suppose so is elitism: the foolish thinking of the ungodly world that fawns over talent, power, riches, and success.

Usually, those who practice the Reformed worldview are lowly people, men and women of no-account, the weak, the base, and despised, for God has chosen such. God has chosen the nobodies to confound the wise, the mighty, and the somebodies, not only in salvation, but also *in the matter of culture*. His purpose is that no flesh should glory in His presence over *culture*, as no flesh should glory in His presence over salvation (I Cor. 1:26-31).

Godly Culture

The Reformed worldview is not mere intellectual theory. A conviction of the heart, it expresses itself in a life. This life is

godly culture, the fulfillment of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, as renewed in Matthew 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

This is the contour of a godly culture, as marked out by Scripture, the Christian tradition, and the Reformed confessions. First and foremost, one is a lively, faithful member of a Reformed church that clearly shows the marks of the true church. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession defines the marks as the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and the exercise of church discipline upon impenitent sinners.

It is astounding, and significant, that much of the writing about worldview and godly culture ignores church membership—church membership *in a true institute*. In fact, leading worldview scholars disparage church membership, if they do not hold church membership in contempt. Prominent theorists of a "Reformational worldview" at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario, Canada have themselves abandoned membership in a Reformed church to affiliate with the United Church of Canada, which has so apostatized as to be a false church. Charles Colson encourages the union of evangelicals and Roman Catholics in the movement known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together so that together they can fight the culture war. Not only does this movement imperil the church membership of evangelical Protestants by approving Rome as a true church. It also minimizes the importance of church membership by making church membership secondary to the building of a good culture.⁴⁶

But membership in the true church is the primary expression in one's life of the Reformed worldview, as the right worship of the

46. *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1995). Shrewdly, Colson appeals to Abraham Kuyper's politico-religious alliance with Roman Catholics to "Christianize" the Netherlands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: "Kuyper forged a coalition of fellow Calvinists and Dutch Roman Catholics led by Hermanus Schaepman. Together, they helped bring moral and social reform to the Netherlands" (p. 39).

triune God in Jesus Christ is the beginning of all godly culture. The very word *culture*, like *cult*, denotes worship.

In addition, it is the church, the true instituted church, that is the powerhouse of the Reformed worldview and the source of the good culture of a godly life in all the ordinances and spheres of creation. Not the schools! Not the man-made organizations, like Evangelicals and Catholics Together! The church has the means of grace, the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. Jesus Christ inscribes the blueprint of the Christian and Reformed worldview on the hearts of men, women, boys, and girls by the pure preaching of the doctrine of the gospel by the church.

One who lives the Reformed worldview marries in the Lord Jesus and lives faithfully with wife or husband until death parts them. Fundamental to the covenant and kingdom of God and to godly culture is the family, and basic to the family is marriage.

When I see that the great enthusiasts for worldview, culture, and the kingdom of God tolerate and practice divorce and remarriage at the same lawless rate and on the same lawless basis as does secular society, I conclude that these enthusiasts are not serious about godly culture and the kingdom of God.

And when the well-known proponents of a "Reformational worldview," Hendrik Hart and James Olthuis, write in defense of homosexuality, including homosexual "marriage," I conclude that their "Reformational worldview" is the same godless, lawless, pagan worldview, upon which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, that the apostle condemns in Romans 1:18ff. Hart has written a fervent recommendation of homosexual Pim Pronk's advocacy of homosexuality, *Against Nature?*⁴⁷ Olthuis teaches that homosexual "marriages" are not only permitted, but also recommended. A committed, loving homosexual relation is a "sign of God's abundant grace, a token of God's future in a fallen world."⁴⁸

47. Hendrik Hart, "Foreword," in Pim Pronk, *Against Nature?*, pp. vii-xxi.

48. Cited in William D. Dennison, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation," p. 287.

The Reformed worldview honors marriage and the family, to say nothing of basic Christian sexual ethics. It calls the single to the chastity of abstinence and locates the sexual relationship exclusively in the lifelong bond of marriage of husband and wife.⁴⁹

The wife and mother works in the home, caring for her family and managing the household. No position and work are esteemed more highly for the believing woman by the Reformed worldview than those of wife and mother. With the steel in its backbone that derives from basing the life of Christians on the wisdom of God in Scripture, rather than on the wisdom of society, the Reformed worldview resists the strong pressures of feminism. Christian mothers may not ship their children to the day care centers so that they can pursue careers. They may not ship their children to the day care centers so that they can make ends meet. Rather, they must shrink their ends, or have their husbands get help from the deacons. God calls mothers in His covenant to seek the kingdom of Christ by rearing God's children (I Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:4, 5).⁵⁰

The husband and father is called to work diligently at his job, whether farmer, or mechanic, or laborer in a factory (which was the occupation of some of the most godly and most culturally productive men in the kingdom of Christ I have known), or employer, or college professor, in the service of the Lord Christ (Eph. 6:5-9). To the utmost of his ability, he must support his family, as well as other forms and activities of the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 4:28; II Thess. 3:6-12). This is not merely a necessity of earthly life. It is godly culture.

Of vital importance to worldview is the instruction of the covenant, baptized children in the Reformed faith and life by the

49. For the doctrine of marriage that is basic to the traditional Christian worldview, see David J. Engelsma, *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ & the Church: The Covenant-Bond in Scripture and History*, rev.ed. (Grandville, MI: RFPA, 1998).

50. A treatment of the chief cultural calling of the Christian woman that does not run scared before the feminist furies of our day, but fears Him who is able to cast both soul and body into hell is *Far Above Rubies: Today's Virtuous Woman*, ed. Herman Hanko (Grand Rapids: RFPA, 1992).

parents. Those gripped by the Reformed worldview regard children as a blessing. They are determined to hand the worldview down to their children and grandchildren. It is anathema to them that their children be ignorant of the worldview they regard as true, or that the children be educated in another, false worldview. Education of the children in the truth of the word of God—the Reformed faith—is the command of God to believing parents: “He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them [the praises of the LORD, His strength, and His wonderful works] known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born” (Ps. 78:4-6). God wills that the right worldview be passed on from generation to generation, for He is a covenant God, saving His people in the line of generations.

This instruction of children takes place in the home and in the true church, which feeds Christ’s lambs, as well as His sheep (John 21:15). But it must also take place in good Christian schools. Especially in the Christian schools is all the teaching about worldview—about a comprehensive view of all things created, in light of God the creator of all and Jesus Christ the lord over all and on the basis of the Bible and the Reformed confessions. How objectionable, and often ruinous to children and young people of the covenant, is the instruction of the state schools, which teach the worldview of deified Man! How objectionable, and increasingly harmful to Reformed children and young people, is the instruction of the Christian schools committed to the world-conforming worldview of common grace!⁵¹

And then there are observance of the Sabbath, submission to civil government, care of aged parents, love to the neighbor, sitting loose to riches and things, and all the other aspects of the Christian life as prescribed by the gospel of the Scriptures.

The ordinary life of every child of God is godly culture.

51. The importance of truly Reformed education in good Christian schools is developed in David J. Engelsma, *Reformed Education: The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant*, rev. ed. (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2000). Chapter 3 is titled, “Reformed Education and Culture.”

The godliness in everyday, earthly life of many Reformed Christians in a locality may very well influence a certain city, or even a certain nation. Good! There is a powerful witness to truth and righteousness. More likely, especially in our day, when the forces of darkness are angry and aggressive, the godliness of the Reformed worldview, advantageous though it obviously is, will arouse hatred, scorn, and persecution. This too is good. The war of the ages is raging, as rage it must in the last days, and in the war we expect opposition.

What matters is that the godly life that springs from the Reformed worldview works out the salvation of the elect believers and their children, testifies against the godless world, and glorifies God in Jesus Christ.

The godly life in the world of elect believers and their children is the beginning of the culture that Christ will perfect in all the renewed creation at His coming, when the Reformed worldview triumphs in the new heaven and the new earth. That will be a culture produced and lived by the power of the particular, saving grace of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the source of which is election, as even the most ardent defenders of the worldview of common grace admit.

The culture of Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who alone fulfills the cultural mandate, will fill the new world after the destruction of that which Abraham Kuyper regarded as the finest flowering of the worldview of common grace. Kuyper taught, and presumably his modern disciples agree, that the fullest and most glorious development of culture by the common grace of God will be the kingdom of the Antichrist at the end.

The closing scene in the drama of common grace can be enacted only through the appearance on stage of the man of sin.... "Common grace" ... leads to the most powerful manifestation of sin in history.... At the moment of its destruction Babylon—that is, the world power which evolved from human life—will exhibit not the image of a barbarous horde nor the image of coarse bestiality but, on the contrary, a picture of the highest development of which human life is capable. It will display the most refined forms, the most magnificent unfolding of wealth and splendor, the fullest

brilliance of all that makes life dazzling and glorious. From this we know that “common grace” will continue to function to the end. Only when common grace has spurred the full emergence of all the powers inherent in human life will “the man of sin” find the level terrain needed to expand this power.⁵²

Common grace produces the beast!

The common grace worldview is busy building the culture of Antichrist!

The proponents of the common grace worldview who are alive at that time will be hard-pressed to resist the temptation to regard that glorious development of culture as the kingdom of God in its finest form. If they do resist (God being gracious with His grace in Christ Jesus), they will, at long last, join with us defenders of the Reformed worldview of particular grace in rejoicing over the utter and final destruction of the worldview and culture of common grace as damnable in the judgment of God.

With us, they will then enter a world of new heaven and new earth that always had Jesus Christ as its goal (Col. 1:19, 20), a world in which Jesus Christ is preeminent (Col. 1:18), a world that Jesus Christ has redeemed (John 3:16), a world that was always groaning under the curse of the culture of the ungodly and longing for the glorious liberty that Jesus Christ would give (Rom. 8:19-22), and a world in which the righteousness of Jesus Christ dwells (II Pet. 3:13).

They will then notice that the only works performed by humans in history that are allowed into the new world are the works of the saints. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13). ●

52. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” pp. 180, 181.

The Doctrine of Eternal Justification in Light of the Westminster Tradition (2)

John Marcus

Reasons for the rejection of the *decree that justifies*

What are some of the reasons that Westminster and many Presbyterians after that era rejected the *decree that justifies*? No doubt the reasons are many and complex. We may categorize the reasons for rejecting the doctrine as follows: 1) the doctrine has been abused; 2) the doctrine is irrational; and, 3) the doctrine is unscriptural.

1) The doctrine has been abused

Based on the foregoing discussion, we may surmise that the Westminster Assembly rejected the doctrine of eternal justification in large part because of its close association with those who were Antinomian in doctrine and life. Flavel indicates that the doctrine of eternal justification is the “radical and most prolific Error, from which most of the rest are spawned and procreated.”¹ It may be true that godless people take hold of the doctrine of eternal justification and from it hatch a whole brood of errors. However, that, in itself, does not prove it to be erroneous. The same thing has been argued with respect to the biblical doctrine of election.

On the other hand, not all who hold the doctrine of eternal justification are considered heretics by these Presbyterians. Both Flavel and Burgess indicate that there are orthodox men who hold to the doctrine of eternal justification. After describing the

1. Electronic file: (Flavel_John-Planelogia_a_succinct_and_seasonable-Wing-F1175-899_15-plto249.pdf.from Early English Books Online, 318.

doctrine of eternal justification according to the orthodox theologians, along with the proper qualification that they hold with the doctrine, Flavel indicates that their proper qualifications of the doctrine have kept the orthodox out of trouble. Nevertheless, he says that...

the want of distinguishing, (as they [the orthodox holders of the doctrine of eternal justification, JPM] according to Scripture have distinguished) hath led the Antinomians into this first Error about Justification, and that Error hath led them into most of the other Errors.²

John Flavel is indicating that as long as there is a proper scriptural balance in setting forth the doctrine, the other errors of the Antinomians he considers will not naturally spring forth.

Anthony Burgess, like Flavel, sees that not all who hold to eternal justification have gone awry. He says that...

Some orthodox and learned Divines doe hold a justification of the elect in Christ their head, before they do believe, yet so, as they acknowledge also a necessity of a personall justification by faith, applying this righteousness to the person justified.³

Burgess is making a point not far off from Flavel's: there are orthodox men who hold to eternal justification. Burgess also raises the important point that it is necessary to hold to a personal justification by faith, which the orthodox in fact do. Many of the Antinomians did not hold to such a justification by faith. Flavel indicates that as a consequence of holding to eternal justification, the Antinomians held that "Believers are not bound to confess their Sins, or pray for the Pardon of them."⁴ The reasoning went, if all our sins are forgiven in eternity, then it is wrong to seek forgiveness for what is already forgiven.

2. Flavel, 332.

3. Electronic file: Anthony Burgess_1-153.pdf. in Puritan Bookshelf CD collection, 178.

4. Flavel, 355.

It cannot be denied that the doctrine of a *decree that justifies* has been abused. This however should not ultimately determine whether a doctrine is rejected or not. The ungodly will abuse whatever doctrine suits their ungodly life. But the abuse of a doctrine ought to give some pause to theologians. The question ought to be asked, can this doctrine be made sharper in order to avoid its being abused? If not, so be it. Ultimately it is Scripture's presentation that must hold sway. But then we must strive to understand Scripture properly in light of its whole organism.

2) The doctrine is irrational

Another criticism leveled against eternal justification (i.e., the *decree that justifies*) is that the doctrine is irrational. In the first place, many theologians make the point that the doctrine of eternal justification confuses the will and purpose of God in eternity with its execution in time. These theologians would recognize the immutability of the decree; but, at the same time, they insist that a *decree to justify* is not itself the act of justification — that is, it is not a *decree that justifies*. For example, Brakel admits that God did have an eternal purpose to justify the elect; nevertheless, he maintains that “The purpose [*to justify*, JPM] is not the equivalent of justification, for a purpose differs from its execution....”⁵ Similarly, Turretin says,

the decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another — as the will to save and sanctify is one thing; salvation and sanctification itself another.⁶

The same assertion could be multiplied in theologians of times past and present.

Secondly, connected with the above, many of the theologians who charge the doctrine of eternal justification with being irrational contend that justification is not an immanent act with God, but

5. Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 2, tr., Bart Elshout (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Ligonier, PA, 1993), 376.

6. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, tr. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1994), 683.

rather a transient act. These men contend that justification must be a transient act because justification is a change in the state of the person that is a sinner, who is himself guilty before God. Some who contend for eternal justification make the point that, since justification is an immanent act of God, it must be eternal, since to say otherwise would make God changeable. In response to this idea, Anthony Burgess makes the following point about God's act of justification:

We must not therefore apprehend of God, as having a new will to doe a thing in time, which he had not from eternity...but his will was from all eternity, that such a thing be in time accomplished by his wisdom. As for example, in Creation, God did not then begin to have a will to create: but he had a will from all eternity, that the world should exist in time; and thus it is in justification and sanctification; not that these effects are from eternity, but Gods will is....⁷

So, God's willing to justify (that is, to change the state of man from guilty to innocent) in time does not change God's disposition or His eternal will. Rather, it is God's willing a change. So, Burgess says, "There is not change made in God, but the alteration is in the creature."⁸ In this regard, Burgess provides a significant definition and discussion of an immanent action in God; he says,

*An immanent action is that which abides in God, so that it works no reall effect without: As when God doth merely know or understand a thing; but a transient action, is when a positive change is made thereby in a creature, as in Creation etc. So that we may conclude of all Gods actions which do relate to believers, only *predestination* is an immanent act of God, and all the rest, justification, regeneration, glorification, are transient acts; for predestination though it be an act of God choosing such an one to happiness, yet it doth not work any reall change or positive effect in a man, unless we understand it *virtually*, for it is the cause of all those *transient actions* that are wrought in time.⁹*

7. Burgess, 167.

8. Burgess, 167.

9. Burgess, 167-168 (emphasis his).

Burgess continues with one more distinction between God's immanent and transient acts: "An immanent action is from eternity, as the same with Gods essence, but a transient action is the same with the effect produced."¹⁰ That being the case, Burgess says,

it is a perpetuall mistake in the Antinomian, to confound Gods *decree* and *purpose* to justifie, with *justification*, God's *immanent* action from all eternity, with that *transient*, which is done in time.¹¹

In connection with this, Burgess points to the absurdity of one who would hold that other transient acts of God, such as sanctification and glorification, are also immanent.¹²

In connection with the justifying act of God, Brakel speaks of it as having both an active and a passive aspect. He understands justification as "the pronouncement of a sentence, not only concerning man, but also addressed to man."¹³ And if justification is a sentence addressed to the sinner, then it must occur in time. Because justification is a single act, he contends that "wherever there is active justification there will also be passive justification, and vice versa...."¹⁴ He appears to be saying that justification could not be in eternity because there were no passive recipients. Flavel argues similarly, saying that God's intention by itself "makes no change on our state, till that time come."¹⁵ He uses the analogy of a prince who has the intention to pardon, which intention is not carried out until some later point in time.¹⁶ The intention to pardon the criminal does not automatically acquit the criminal. The criminal does not change his legal status until the intention of the prince is carried out. Therefore, if justification is a change in our state then it must happen in time.

10. Burgess, 168.

11. Burgess, 168 (emphasis his).

12. Burgess, 169.

13. Brakel, 376.

14. Brakel, 376.

15. Flavel, 334.

16. Flavel, 334.

Thirdly, eternal justification is said to be irrational inasmuch as the person who is the subject of justification does not exist in eternity. Says Flavel,

It is Irrational to imagine that Men are actually justified, before they have a Being, by an immanent Act or decree of God.¹⁷

He continues by asserting,

That which is not, can neither be condemned nor justified: but before the Creation, or before Man's particular Conception, he was not, and therefore could not in his own person be the Subject of Justification.¹⁸

Flavel goes through a logical chain of reasoning to show that such is the case. He says that justification requires sin, but sin did not exist in eternity, and so on. Then, he concludes that one of two things must be true: "Either the Elect must exist from Eternity, or be justified in time."¹⁹ Brakel argues similarly. He says that actual justification "cannot occur unless man, having sinned, exists and believes in Christ."²⁰ And, Turretin says,

The nature of the thing itself proves this. For since justification or remission of sins necessarily involves a deliverance from the obligation to punishment which sins deserved and no one can obtain it without faith and repentance, it is evident that such a justification could not have been made from eternity, but only in time — when the man actually believes and repents.²¹

Brakel also makes the point that God's purpose to justify is never said to be the act of justification.²² If the act of justification is in eternity, then why not sanctification, or creation for that matter?

17. Flavel, 332.

18. Flavel, 333.

19. Flavel, 333.

20. Brakel, 377.

21. Turretin, 683.

22. Brakel, 380.

All of our salvation truly springs from God's decree of election; but this does not mean that all the elect are currently saved. The same can be said of justification; all our justification has its source in God's loving election of us in Christ. But this does not mean that every elect person is justified from the moment of their conception. Some have not yet been regenerated.

3) The doctrine is unscriptural

While the arguments against eternal justification based on the abuse of the doctrine or the apparent irrationality of it have some weight, ultimately Scripture must be the deciding factor as to the truth or falsity of a doctrine. What then are the scriptural reasons for rejecting eternal justification? In general, the argument is that Scripture presents justification as occurring in time.

Firstly, those who reject eternal justification argue that, at times, justification is spoken of in Scripture as an act in the *future*. Flavel points to Romans 4:23-24 as one example:

²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

²⁴ But for us also, to whom it *shall be* imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Brakel makes the same point and gives the example of 2 Chronicles 7:14, which says, "...then *will* I hear from heaven, and *will* forgive their sin."²³ The fact that Scripture speaks of something that God will accomplish in the future indicates that it is not already accomplished. This would seem to argue against eternal justification.

A *second* objection to eternal justification according to Scripture, related to the first objection, is the presentation of justification to come *after* repentance and turning. Says Burgess,

If the Scripture limits this privilege of Justification and pardon only to those subjects that are so and so qualified, then till they be thus furnished, they cannot enjoy those privileges.²⁴

23. Brakel, 382.

24. Burgess, 171.

In this connection, Burgess points to the following passages:

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The point is that sins were not blotted out before God had worked repentance. The reception of forgiveness and the cleansing from unrighteousness follow, in time, a turning from darkness and a confession of sins that God works in us.

A *third* objection to eternal justification from Scripture entails the contradiction of holding that elect unbelievers are under wrath and condemnation and yet justified at the same time. Regarding this objection, Burgess points out that “Scripture speaks of a *state of wrath and condemnation that all are in before they be justified or pardoned*.”²⁵ He concludes from this that believers were thus not justified from eternity. Burgess and Flavel both point to John 3:18 as proof that the elect were indeed under wrath and condemnation:

John 3:18 He that believeth on him *is* not condemned: but he that believeth not *is condemned* already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.²⁶

While it might be argued that this passage is inconclusive as to whether the elect are included in it, Ephesians 2:3, 12, 13 is definitely talking about the elect:

³ Among whom also *we* all had our conversation in times past in the

25. Burgess, 170.

26. KJV, John 3:18, emphasis mine, JPM.

lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and *were by nature the children of wrath*, even as others.

¹² That at that time *ye were without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

¹³ But *now* in Christ Jesus *ye who sometimes were far off* are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ²⁷

Burgess, Flavel, and Brakel all point to this text in Ephesians. Brakel also points to Romans 5:10:

For if, when *we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.²⁸

The question that these men are getting at is, How can it be true that we are justified in God's sight and yet, at one and the same time, be also enemies of God, condemned, without Christ, and without God in the world?

In response to the above assertions regarding the end possibility of being justified and being without Christ at the same time, some who assert eternal justification bring an objection from Romans 8:33: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." The idea of this objection is, if none can charge God's elect, then it must be that God has already justified them and that in eternity. But Flavel answers,

God hath not actually discharged them as they are Elect, but as they are justified Elect: for so runs that Text, and clears itself in the very next words, *It is God that justifieth*. When God hath actually justified an Elect Person, none can charge him.²⁹

Burgess also rejects the objection from Romans 8:33. He says,

27. KJV, Ephesians 2:3, 12, 13, emphasis mine, JPM.

28. KJV, Romans 5:10, emphasis mine, JPM.

29. Flavel, 337.

The Apostle doth not speak here of election *antecedentèr*, antecedently to his other graces, which flow from that in time, but *executivè*, as it is executed and compleated in those that are elected. Therefore by the elect he meaneth those elect that believe, that are holy, that are conformable to the image of God, that do love him, as the context sheweth;³⁰

He makes a good case that the elect being spoken of are those who are now experiencing the graces of God; those who have been called, justified, and have been glorified in principle. Therefore, Romans 8:33 does not argue that all the elect are justified before God in eternity.

A *fourth* objection to eternal justification according to Scripture lies in Romans 8:30.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Burgess calls this the “adamantine chain” and says, “From this chain...is an infallible Argument against the Opponent.”³¹ His reasons run as follows: Firstly, none are called from eternity; therefore the justification that follows calling is not in eternity. Secondly, if a man is justified from all eternity, then so is he glorified. But no one teaches eternal glorification, therefore the text is not teaching eternal justification. Thirdly, the text *is* teaching that all these graces flow out of predestination, which he calls the “maternall mercy” and the “fountain and head from which all others flow.”³²

Brakel also points to the place of justification in the order of salvation: *whom he called, them he also justified* (Rom 8:30).³³ Thus, justification occurs after being called. Also, Turretin urges that the justification of which Romans 8:30 speaks is that which

30. Burgess, 186.

31. Burgess, 187.

32. Burgess, 187.

33. Brakel, 380.

occurs by means of faith.³⁴ Flavel says much the same as Brakel and Turretin.³⁵

The rejection of eternal justification was due to a simple line of reasoning: The doctrine has been horribly abused. It does not make logical sense. And Scripture does not teach it. Therefore, these men would be done with it.

Our response to the rejection of eternal justification

1) The charge of abuse

Without considering all the arguments in favor of eternal justification, we might be tempted to dismiss the doctrine of eternal justification. Certainly there were those who abused the doctrine. This, however, is not a valid reason to reject a doctrine. No Reformed person would argue that we must reject the doctrine of election simply because some abused the doctrine and lived lascivious lives. Similarly, no one should reject eternal justification for that reason.

2) The charge of irrationality

Is the doctrine of eternal justification irrational? In the first place, it seems reasonable to distinguish God's decree in eternity from His accomplishing that decree in time. No one argues that God's decree to create is also a decree that creates. Neither is it argued that God's decree to sanctify and glorify is also a decree that sanctifies and glorifies. But then, why should the case be different with justification? It would seem more reasonable to make all of our salvation eternal and not simply election and justification.

Gill responds to the distinction of the decree and purpose in eternity versus the actual accomplishment in time. He does so by asserting that justification is wholly an immanent act of God, that is, it is not transient; sanctification and glorification, on the other hand, are transient acts. Says Gill,

[I]t may be answered, that as God's decree and will to elect men to

34. Turretin, 683.

35. Flavel, 337.

everlasting life and salvation, is his election of them; and his will not to impute sin to them, is the non-imputation of it; and his will to impute the righteousness of Christ unto them, is the imputation of it to them; so his decree, or will to justify them, is the justification of them, as that is an immanent act in God; which has its complete essence in his will, as election has; is entirely within himself, and not transient on an external subject, producing any real, physical, inherent change in it, as sanctification is and does; and therefore the case is not alike: it is one thing for God to will to act an act of grace concerning men, another thing to will to work a work of grace in them; in the former case, the will of God is his act of justification; in the latter it is not his act of sanctification; wherefore, though the will of God to justify, is justification itself, that being a complete act in his eternal mind, without men; yet his will to sanctify, is not sanctification, because that is a work wrought in men, and not only requires the actual existence of them but an exertion of powerful and efficacious grace upon them: was justification, as the papists say, by an infusion of inherent righteousness in men, there would be some strength in the objection; but this is not the case, and therefore there is none in it.³⁶

Gill says that sanctification does produce a “real, physical, inherent change,” whereas justification does not. Rather, with regard to justification, he says that “the will of God to justify, is justification itself.” But is not justification an act in time wrought in the consciences of believers? These kinds of questions are what make this subject confusing. Gill is not absolutely convincing on this point. Burgess’ definition of an immanent act as “that which abides in God, so that it works no real effect without”³⁷ goes against Gill’s assertion that justification is an immanent act; for justification does have a real effect in time in the conscience of the sinner.

The solution to this problem of immanent versus transient is to realize that justification in time and justification in eternity are distinct, though not separate, entities or aspects. Gill says as much.

36. John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Book 2, chapter 5 Electronic Edition (The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc. 2000), 444.

37. Burgess, 167.

Speaking of justification by faith versus justification before faith, Gill says the following:

It is affirmed, that those various passages of scripture, where we are said to be justified through faith, and by faith, have no other tendency than to show that faith is something prerequisite to justification, which cannot be said if justification was from eternity. To which the answer is, that those scriptures which speak of justification, through and by faith, do not militate against, nor disprove justification before faith; for though justification by and before faith differ, yet they are not opposite and contradictory. They differ, the one being an immanent act in God; all which sort of acts are eternal, and so before faith; the other being a transient declarative act, terminating on the conscience of the believer; and so is by and through faith, and follows it. But then these do not contradict each other, the one being a declaration and manifestation of the other.³⁸

Gill clearly distinguishes between justification by faith and justification before faith. He does not separate them, but he certainly distinguishes them. If we observe this distinction, much of the difficulty falls away. Justification by faith has its source in eternity and its basis in the satisfaction of Christ. Therefore, justification by faith flows out of the justification which is before faith. The problem of the Antinomians is that they did not distinguish justification *by* faith and justification *before* faith; they held only to a justification before faith, which justification was simply manifested in the course of time by faith. This lack of distinction is what led to other errors, such as the belief that sinners are not bound to confess their sins. The Antinomians taught that sins were already forgiven in eternity and, therefore, believers had no sin. If justification is a constant reality, as the Antinomians conceived of it, then logically it would be absurd to seek forgiveness. Thus, it appears that justification in eternity and justification in time ought to be distinguished but not separated. Justification by faith is the transient result of justification in eternity.

38. Gill, 445.

The above covers the contention that eternal justification is a confusion between God's will and its execution in time. As long as the distinction between justification in eternity (before faith) and justification by faith in time is maintained, we see no problem with asserting eternal justification; indeed we embrace it. However, if the distinction is erased, as it appears the Antinomians maintained, then there appears to be the danger of denying that we ought even to pray for the forgiveness of sins.

Another objection against the doctrine of eternal justification is that those who are the subjects of justification did not yet exist in eternity; therefore they could not have been justified in eternity. Again, the controversy here seems to hinge on the distinction between justification before faith and justification by faith. Of course, justification by faith cannot occur without subjects who are exercising their God-given faith. But as regards eternal justification, it is not strictly necessary for the elect to have a physical, actual being to be justified. Gill makes a significant point comparing election of those who do not yet exist with justification of those who do not yet exist. He says,

Election gives a being in Christ, a kind of subsistence in him; though not an "esse actu," an actual being, yet at least an "esse representativum," a representative being; even such an one as that they are capable of having grants of grace made to them in Christ, and of being blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and that before the world began....

We agree with Gill's distinction, for this also agrees with Scripture, which indicates that we received grace before the world began:

2 Timothy 1:9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

This grace given to us in eternity included our justification in eternity. Gill's distinction between our *esse actu* and our *esse*

representativum also applies to our justification in eternity. Since election concerned our *esse representativum*, so also does our justification in eternity concern our *esse representativum*. But if such is the case, then we are not eternally justified in our *esse actu*. Holding this distinction, we are back to Flavel's assertion that "It is Irrational to imagine that Men are actually justified, before they have a Being, by an immanent Act or decree of God."³⁹ Considering Gill's distinction between the *esse actu* and the *esse representativum*, it seems most reasonable to hold to the position that we are not actually justified in eternity. In light of Gill's distinction, it is not surprising that he should say that he "carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual...."⁴⁰ This does not appear to be any different than the Westminster distinction between the *decree to justify* and actual justification in time.

3) The charge that eternal justification is unscriptural

In general, there is one objection drawn from Scripture against the doctrine of eternal justification, namely, that Scripture presents justification as occurring in time. As with the previous discussion, it would appear that much of the difficulty melts away if we distinguish between a justification in eternity and a justification by faith that occurs in time. The problem is that some of the Antinomians appeared to hold to a justification only in eternity. Against the Antinomian idea, we ought to maintain that justification has both eternal and temporal aspects.

In the first place, the examples in Scripture that are presented by the Presbyterians denying eternal justification generally refer to justification in time. We discussed the fact that Scripture refers to a justification that will happen in the future. Significantly, Flavel points to Romans 4:23-24, which speaks of the righteousness that "shall be imputed" to us. The tense is future and therefore

39. Flavel, 332.

40. Gill Sermon #8 "Truth Defended, being an Answer to an Anonymous pamphlet, entitled, 'Some Doctrines in the Supralapsarian Scheme impartially examined by the Word of God.'" Electronic Edition on CD (The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc. 2000), 29.

indicates, not a justification that occurred in eternity, but one that would occur at a future time. These texts, however, pose no problem with regard to the doctrine of eternal justification, because eternal justification does not exclude the truth of a subjective justification in time.

Secondly, other passages to which opponents of eternal justification appeal refer to justification occurring *after* repentance (e.g., Acts 3:19 "Repent...that your sins may be blotted out...") Of course, *after* does not mean *because of* or *on the basis of*. Nevertheless, *after* repentance does mean *following* repentance in time. But the orthodox who hold to eternal justification also embrace these passages and do not deny justification by faith in time. These opponents (of the *decree that justifies*) especially feared the denial of justification *in time*. This is why the opponents of eternal justification multiply passages that prove a justification in time. They are especially concerned to maintain justification by faith and in time. But the orthodox who hold to eternal justification do not deny justification in time. Therefore, those Scriptures that assert a justification in time and by faith do not pose any problem for us.

Thirdly, those who oppose eternal justification point to the passages that speak of a state of wrath and condemnation that the elect were under when they were outside of Christ. Burgess, Flavel, and Brakel all point to Ephesians 2:3, which teaches that we "were by nature children of wrath" at some point in time. Also Romans 5:10 teaches that "we were enemies" before we were reconciled to God. The argument against eternal justification is that it could not be possible to be at the same time both justified and under wrath. Therefore, say the opponents of eternal justification, the doctrine cannot be correct. The objection amounts to this: we cannot be under wrath (not justified) and also justified at one and the same time. As was the case above, a proper distinction between eternal justification and justification by faith in time answers the quandary. As regards our situation in *history*, we were enemies to God and unjustified. But as regards God's purpose in eternity, we were eternally justified.

In the fourth place, those who object to eternal justification

point to the order presented in Romans 8:29-30. What about those who use this text in support of the doctrine of eternal justification? Kersten, who espouses eternal justification, stresses the fact that the verbs are not future. He says,

We may not distort this text as if it said that God had decreed to justify by faith in time those whom He had predestinated. It is undeniable that Paul in these words is speaking of the benefits that the Father had given to His own in Christ from eternity. Surely, he did not write, "they shall be glorified," but, "*Them He also glorified.*" Although the full glorification of the Church of God awaits the last day, yet it is already glorified in its Head Christ, and this has taken place before.⁴¹

The fact that the verbs are aorist as opposed to future would seem to give some weight to Kersten's argument. But Kersten does not discuss the part of the text that says "them he also called." The question that must be asked is this: Are all the elect already called? If this text is going to be used to support eternal justification, then this must be explained.

It may be said that if the text is speaking of eternal justification, then it is also speaking of eternal calling and eternal glorification. It is true that all our salvation has its source in God's immutable decree, and we would not object to speaking of all our salvation this way. But then, justification ought not be singled out as eternal and the other parts of our salvation not so referred to. That is to say, if justification is eternal, then so are calling and glorification.

However, as regards Romans 8:29-30, the aorist need not be taken as strictly a past tense. Although the indicative aorist often has a past tense meaning, such is not always the case.⁴² Rather, according to Daniel Wallace, the aorist...

normally views the action as a *whole* taking no interest in the internal workings of the action. It describes the action in summary

41. G.H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, tr., J.R. Beeke and J.C. Weststrate (Eerdmans, 1983), 419-420.

42. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan Publishing House Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 555.

fashion, without focusing on the beginning or end of the action specifically. This is by far the most common use of the aorist, especially with the indicative mood.⁴³

Therefore, in Romans 8:29-30, we need not consider that the events spoken of are past events. Rather, the aorist simply refers to events as a whole, each of which is brought to pass in its entirety as a result of predestination. It will always be the case that those whom God predestines will end up glorified.

Lastly, the meaning of Romans 8:30 must be rooted in the context. Romans 8:28, as well as the context following Romans 8:30, is giving comfort to “those who are the called according to his purpose.” The comfort for the believer is that if he is one of the called ones (κλητοί), then it is certain he will be justified, and ultimately glorified. That glorification is now ours in principle, but will certainly be complete because nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussion we may conclude the following. In the first place, the Westminster divines, in formulating their statement concerning eternal justification, may have been influenced by Arminian doctrine. This is evident from the fact that Arminian theology was definitely present in that day. Supporting the idea that the Presbyterian theology was muddled by Arminian doctrine, Bavinck indicates about Continental theology in general that,

Under the influence of Socinianism and Remonstrantism, Cartesianism and Amyraldianism, there developed the neonomian representation of the order of redemption which made forgiveness of sins and eternal life dependent on faith and obedience which man had to perform in accordance with the new law of the gospel.⁴⁴

43. Wallace, 557.

44. H. Bavinck, “BAVINCK ON FAITH AND JUSTIFICATION,” translator unknown, from *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. IV (4th ed.; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1930), Sect. 471, pp. 182-186.

Similarly, Bavinck says that...

under the influence of Remonstrantism and Salmurian theology, and of Pietism and Rationalism, the understanding of this actual justification gradually became that man had to believe and repent first, that thereafter God in heaven, in "the court of heaven," sitting in judgment, acquitted the believer because of his faith in Christ.⁴⁵

Thus, according to Bavinck, the Arminians did have an influence on theology. This reaction would have taken place not only on the continent, but also in the Presbyterian stream of theology. This influence caused theologians to stress a gospel-law that required faith and obedience in order to obtain justification. In addition, this neonomian tendency stressed justification as something that occurred only in time. This would tend to minimize God's eternal decrees and put election out of the picture.

In the second place, the Westminster divines appear to be reacting against both Nomists and Antinomians. The Antinomians rejected a justification by faith in time and instead held that justification by faith was not a justification at all, but rather only a recognition of what was true in prior history. The worst Antinomians held to pantheistic ideas. Bavinck describes those Antinomians who said, "Faith is nothing but a renouncing of the error that God is angry and a realization that God is eternal love."⁴⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising to find Westminster reacting against those who were truly heretics.

Sinclair Ferguson notes that the Westminster divines were more concerned about the thoroughgoing Antinomians than they were about men like Twisse.⁴⁷ Twisse was especially concerned to resist Arminian tendencies. As a result, he tended to stress eternal justification, but not in the same way that the pantheistic Antinomians did. Bavinck refers to the development of Anti-neonomianism, which stressed that justification preceded faith;

45. Bavinck, sect. 475, pp. 198-207.

46. Bavinck, sect. 475.

47. Sinclair Ferguson, *Notes from Lecture on Westminster Standards* (Grand Rapids, MI May 23, 2003).

Twisse would fit this category.⁴⁸ But even as there was an Antineonomian reaction against a gospel-law, there was also an Antinomian reaction to the same “legal” teachers; these would be the Anne Hutchinson types.

Thus, on the one hand, Arminian Nomists sought to minimize election and stressed justification, which was only by faith and in time. On the other hand, the Antinomians stressed that justification was exclusively eternal, to the exclusion of justification by faith. In the middle were those who sought to hold on to both an eternal aspect to justification and a justification in time. Bavinck says of this group that they...

saw in eternal justification only the beginning, the principle, and the ground of justification as it occurred in time; they were moved to acknowledge it only by their desire to keep the gospel of grace pure and to protect it against any blending with the law; therefore they only granted the terminology a subordinate place.⁴⁹

The terminology was not the important thing. Rather, what is important is that justification is rooted in eternity; that is, in election. With this emphasis we agree. Although Bavinck asserts that the foundation of justification lies in election, nevertheless he does not consider this a proper reason to speak of “eternal justification or of a justification from eternity.”⁵⁰ The reasons Bavinck gives are not unlike those we have discussed previously. After giving his reasons, he asserts...

Reformed theologians were virtually unanimous in their opposition to it [i.e., justification in eternity, JPM], and distinguished the eternal decree of justification and the execution thereof in time.⁵¹

In light of the above discussion, it is evident that two extremes, that of Nomism and Antinomism, caused the Westminster

48. Bavinck, sect. 471.

49. Bavinck, sect. 471.

50. Bavinck, sect. 475.

51. Bavinck, sect. 475.

divines to choose a middle way. So Westminster chose the way that stressed both the foundation of justification in the eternal decree and its execution in time in the subjective justification of the believer. Since it is difficult for us to distinguish between a *decree to justify* and a *decree that justifies*, we are content to let the language of the Westminster stand. However, if we are going to hold to a *decree to justify*, it is necessary to qualify it against Arminian doctrine. Because it is not difficult to qualify the doctrine of a *decree to justify*, we do not object to the language of Westminster. On the other hand, neither does the doctrine of a *decree that justifies* cause us concern, as long as it is properly qualified so as not to exclude justification in time and by faith. Admittedly, the danger today is the tendency from the Arminian camp to minimize the decrees of God, but the correct approach is not overreaction; rather the correct approach is to hold a right balance and to make proper distinctions and qualifications.

In the third place, in light of Gill's position concerning his avoidance of calling justification in eternity "actual," it would appear that he understood a *decree to justify* as being synonymous with a *decree that justifies*. This may also have been Hoeksema's understanding of the Westminster Confession. Hoeksema points to Chapter 11, Article 4 as teaching eternal justification. He says,

it is plain that, according to the Westminster Confession, justification is eternal, and also that believers are justified in Christ in the fulness of time through His death and resurrection.⁵²

Either Hoeksema grossly misunderstood this article in the Westminster Confession, or he thought that a *decree to justify* was virtually synonymous with a *decree that justifies*. We consider that, as long as our justification 1) has its source in the immutable and absolute decree of God, 2) has its objective basis in Christ's satisfaction on the cross, and 3) has its subjective realization in the elect by faith, we cannot see why any should object to the presentation of the doctrine as a *decree to justify*. While the various

52. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1966), 499.

aspects of justification ought to be distinguished, they may not be separated. It must be maintained that the decree is irrevocable. If the decree is irrevocable, then those who are the subjects of each aspect of justification will be the same group of elect persons; that is, the subjects of God's *decree to justify*, the subjects of Christ's atoning work, those who enjoy justification in time, and those who will hear the declaration of that justification on the judgment day, will be one and the same group of people.

Although not repudiating the term "eternal justification," the Synod of Utrecht in 1905 also held that there were three aspects to our justification. The full decision of Utrecht reads as follows:

In regard to the second point, eternal justification, Synod declares:

that the term itself does not occur in our Confessional Standards but that it is not for this reason to be disapproved, any more than we would be justified in disapproving the term Covenant of Works and similar terms which have been adopted through theological usage;

that it is incorrect to say that our Confessional Standards know only of a justification by and through faith, since both God's Word (Rom. 4:25) and our Confession (Art. XX) speak explicitly of an objective justification sealed by the resurrection of Christ, which in point of time precedes the subjective justification;

that, moreover, as far as the matter itself is concerned, all our Churches sincerely believe and confess that Christ from eternity in the Counsel of Peace undertook to be the Surety of His people; taking their guilt upon Himself as also that afterward He by His suffering and death on Calvary actually paid the ransom for us, reconciling us to God while we were yet enemies; but that on the basis of God's Word and in harmony with our Confession it must be maintained with equal firmness that we personally become partakers of this benefit only by a sincere faith.⁵³

The eternal suretyship of Christ treats of the *decree to justify*. The article also refers to an objective justification sealed by the resurrection of Christ. And it refers to the necessity of holding to

53. Conclusion of Utrecht 1905, in *Acts of Synod of the CRC 1942*, Supplement XVII, pp. 352-354.

a subjective justification by which we become partakers of this benefit by a sincere faith. We concur with Utrecht's declaration.

Lastly, some caution is in order when we speak of eternal justification. We must not interpret eternal justification as meaning that the elect are subjectively justified as soon as they are born. Nor must we take our *objective* justification at the cross to encompass our *subjective* justification. Both our objective and subjective justification arise out of our eternal justification; but each of these aspects must be distinguished. The mistake of the Antinomians was their belief that they were justified as soon as they had being.

If the various aspects of justification are not adequately distinguished; and if eternity is not viewed as being wholly separate from time, problems are likely to arise. Eternity ought to be understood as wholly separate from time. Eternity is not simply time prior to creation, including historical time, and extending beyond it. Rather, eternity is outside of time. Thus, we cannot say that since we were justified in eternity in God's decree, therefore we were justified at every point in the history of our lives. Such a misunderstanding could have repercussions in doctrine and practice. What we desire to guard against is the idea that we need not be justified in time because we were already justified either in eternity or at the cross. This were to slight the Scriptures that stress our subjective justification by faith in time.

Was all the debate in the Presbyterian tradition (as well as the Continental) simply over words? Undoubtedly there has been some talking past one another. This paper has sought to demonstrate that there were nevertheless important issues at stake in the use of various terminology regarding our justification. To speak of eternal justification is not wrong, but it must be qualified so that both the objective and subjective aspects of justification are maintained in proper balance with the eternal aspect. At the same time, it must be vigorously maintained that our justification has its source in eternity.

God's justification of us is wholly a work of grace. This grace began with God's election of us before the foundation of the world, and comes to us in time. This grace must ever be magnified. ●

A Presbyterian View of Covenant Children (2)

Mark L. Shand

The problems created by the half-way covenant and the Great Revival were not confined to the congregational churches of New England. There were very strong links between those churches and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and so the problems generated in the congregational churches in New England flowed into Presbyterian churches throughout North America.¹

Schenck identifies the problems in these terms:

The disproportionate reliance upon revivals as the only hope of the church and the proclamation of the Gospel from the pulpit as almost the only means of conversion, amounted to a practical subversion of Presbyterian doctrine, an overshadowing of God's covenant promise.²

He attributes these problems and their continuance in Presbyterian churches to the demise of the Reformed doctrine of covenant succession by the impact of the Great Awakening and the resultant revivalism, with its excessive and almost exclusive emphasis on a

1. The impact of the congregational churches is highlighted by the decision of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1788 to adopt its own *Directory for Public Worship* in lieu of the one approved by the Westminster Assembly. The differences between the American *Directory* and the earlier one of Westminster were significant. The whole section relating to the administration of baptism was much abbreviated. The detail found in the Directory of the Westminster Assembly disappeared. Gone were the references which thanked God for bringing children into the bosom of the church to be partakers of the inestimable benefits purchased by Christ.

2. Lewis Beven Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 316.

conscious religious experience of conviction and conversion as the essential evidence of genuine salvation.³

As is often the case, in attempting to rid itself of the effects of the half-way covenant and the revivalist mentality of a conscious religious experience, the Presbyterian Church in the United States embraced an equally pernicious error. The church began to consider baptized children as though they were out of the church and in the process jettisoned the truth that God gathers His people in the lines of generations. Atwater identifies the problem:

We are sure it is no exaggeration, when we say, that in a considerable portion of our evangelical churches there is no recognition, no consciousness of any relation being held by baptized children, prior to conscious and professed conversion, other than that of outsiders of the Church, in common with the whole world lying in wickedness — at least that portion of the world which, having the light of the gospel, heeds it not.... When ever they see their way clear to profess their faith, and come to the Lord's table, it is regarded as joining the Church, just as if they had never belonged to it. No difference is put between them and the unbaptized, in the apprehensions, the procedures, the whole practical life of the Church, except that the latter, in joining its fellowship, receive the initiatory rite, which they have never received before. One great evil of this inadequate system is, that while it makes infant baptism a seal of Christian teaching and training, to be given to the child, it always, in some degree, and often wholly, prevents such instruction and nurture, or frustrates their efficacy. And this, in our opinion, is among the most formidable barriers to the growth and prevalence of pure religion in the rising generation.... The abolition of the abuses of the doctrine of infant church membership has been accomplished in a manner and in circumstances which have led to the forgetting, ignoring, or disowning of that precious truth itself, and the loss of not a little of the sanctifying influence and fruits of holiness that cluster upon it. The consciousness and recognition of the church

3. Robert S. Rayburn, "The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture and Covenant Succession," *Presbyterian*, vol. 22, 1996, p. 81.

membership of baptized children have widely disappeared from the doctrinal and practical life of those churches.⁴

Charles Hodge, Lyman Atwater, Samuel Miller, Ashbal Green, and J.W. Alexander opposed these developments. Hodge suggested that a system of religion had developed in the church which resulted in believing parents expecting that their children would grow and develop like other children, unconverted, out of the church, and out of the covenant with God. He described this thinking and approach as "*the source of an incalculable evil.*"⁵ But other influential figures, in the form of the Southern Presbyterians John Henley Thornwell and Robert L. Dabney, did not share those views. They contended, "baptized covenant children were to be presumed unsaved until they gave evidence of their new birth."⁶

Theological justification for this position was engineered by a fallacious conception of the covenant of grace and consequently of infant baptism. Thornwell and Dabney maintained that there were two aspects or sides to the covenant of grace: the one external and the other internal; the external aspect being referable to a purely legal relationship, while the internal concerned the covenant as a communion of life.⁷

Their conception of the external or legal aspect of the covenant was that the covenant was a compact or an agreement between two parties, with mutual conditions and stipulations. In that respect, they considered the covenant to be a purely objective arrangement. The determining factor as regards this legal aspect of the covenant was the existence of the relationship that had been established, and not the attitude that the parties assumed with respect to that relationship. As Schenck describes it:

4. Lyman H. Atwater, "Children of the Church and Sealing Ordinances," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, vol. XXIX, no. 1 (January 1857), Art. 1, p. 11.

5. Charles Hodge, *Essays and Reviews*, p. 316.

6. Rayburn, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 286, 287.

It was thought to be possible for one not to meet the requirements of the covenant, not to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet to be in covenant relation with God. In this sense, the covenant was not made with men in the quality of believers, or as the true children of God. In this broader aspect the covenant was conceived as including many in which the covenant promises were never realized. Children of believers entered the covenant as a legal relationship, but this did not mean that they were also at once in the covenant as a "communion of life." It did not even mean that the covenant relation would ever come to its full realization in their lives. In other words, it was believed that persons who were presumably unregenerate and unconverted could be in the covenant as a legal agreement.⁸

Infant baptism was considered to be part of this external or legal covenant, and so, although Thornwell and Dabney acknowledged the necessity of infant baptism, it did not signify to them anything more than that a child had been brought into a legal relationship with God. They acknowledged baptism to be a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace in its full spiritual significance. However, they made a distinction between the significance of baptism for an adult, as opposed to that for a child. Baptism in the case of a child was considered only to be a sign of the spiritual blessings that he may receive in later years, provided he believed. For adults who made a profession of their faith, baptism was viewed as spiritual renewal and an ingrafting into Christ.

The conception of the covenant of grace and of infant baptism was novel in that it did not accord with the Westminster Standards, nor did it accord with the Reformed tradition.

These differing conceptions of the covenant of grace and infant baptism came into sharp focus in the Presbyterian Church in the United States in the course of a proposed revision of their *Book of Discipline*. The General Assembly committed the work for revising the *Book of Discipline* to a Committee under the leadership of Thornwell. Thornwell prepared a draft of the revision in which he proposed changes to the relationship that existed between baptized members and the church. The existing *Book of*

8. Schenck, *op cit.*, p. 85.

Discipline provided that all baptized persons were “members of the church” and as such were “subject to its government and discipline.”⁹ In lieu of that provision, Thornwell’s revision proposed that baptized members be said to be “under [the church’s] government and training.” He also proposed to add at the end of that paragraph: “only those, however, who have made profession of faith in Christ are proper subjects of judicial prosecution.”¹⁰ The outworking of Thornwell’s covenant theology was beginning to manifest itself. The proposed revision highlighted the difference of opinions that existed within the church over the place of covenant children. Those who supported the proposed change contended that the two classes of baptized members, namely children and adults, could not be viewed in the same way, being related to the church in significantly different ways.

Ultimately, three views emerged during the course of the debate. The first sought to support the existing wording of the *Book of Discipline*: “All baptized persons are members of the Church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at the years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of Church members.” The second, while acknowledging that baptized persons were in some sense members of the church, nonetheless regarded them as only under its tutelage and care, but not its government or discipline. The third position was a compromise position, which advocated that while all baptized persons were members of the church, and under its care and government, yet the proper subjects of judicial process were those who had professed their faith in Christ.

Thornwell did not cavil with the proposition that the baptized children of believers were members of the church. He acknowledged that they were *bona fide* members of the church.¹¹ However, he denied that, as such, they were subject to the formal discipline of the church. He contended that to discipline covenant children who had not made a profession of faith was a meaningless exercise.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

10. *Ibid.*

11. James Henley Thornwell, *The Works of James Henley Thornwell* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974), vol. 4, p. 326.

To those who profess no faith in Christ it is as unmeaning and absurd to dispense the spiritual censures of the Church, as it would be to tie a dead man to the whipping post and chastise him with rods. The possession or non-possession of faith divides the Church into two classes so widely apart, that it is simply ridiculous to think of treating them in the same way. The great end which the Church is to aim at, in reference to the former, is their edification, their growth in grace, their continued progress in Divine life. What it primarily seeks, in relation to the latter, is their conversion to God. One class is already alive, and are to be dealt with as living men; the other is dead, and the whole scope of spiritual effort is to bring them to Him who can quicken the dead.¹²

In pursuing his argument, Thornwell posed these questions, “What is the real relation of baptized children of believers to the church?” and “What is the significance or what is the value of their membership?” To those questions, he responded:

They are under the inspection and government of the Church, and are to be taught to read and repeat the catechism, the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. They are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they are come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord’s body, they ought to be informed it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord’s Supper.... They are to be brought into the Church as a school in which they are to be trained for Christ; and they are kept as pupils until they have learned the lesson they were set to acquire.... Elders and all the faithful followers in Christ are to bring to bear every proper influence in leading them to recognize their solemn obligations to the Saviour. The thing to be aimed at is, as we have said, *their conversion*, and whatever power is exerted must be exerted with reference to that end.¹³ [Emphasis MLS)

He argued further:

12. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

Now, we maintain ... that the profession or non-profession of faith makes such a difference in the ecclesiastical status of church members, that it would be absurd to apply indiscriminately to both classes the same form of discipline; that the mode of judicial prosecution is proper for believers, but altogether inconsistent with *the status of avowed unbelievers*.... The two classes of which the church consists are not equally related to the idea of the Church. The class of professors pertains to its essence; that of non-professors is *an accidental result of the mode of organization*.¹⁴ [Emphasis MLS]

Speaking of baptized covenant children, Thornwell opined:

...it is clear that while they are in the Church by external union, *in the spirit and temper of their minds, they belong to the world*. Like Esau, they neither understand nor prize their birthright. *Of the world and in the Church* — this expresses precisely their status, and determines the mode in which the Church should deal with them. As in the Church, and in the Church as heirs of promises which they have *not yet embraced*, they are to be trained to a proper sense of their privileges, to be instructed in a knowledge of their duty, and induced and persuaded by every lawful influence to accept the grace which has been signified and freely offered in their baptism. They have been *externally consecrated to God*, and the Church is to seek that they may be likewise inwardly sanctified. Her peculiar obligations to teach and to persuade them grow out of their visible connection with her. They are born unto her as children, and as children, the great duty she owes to them is to educate them. *But in heart and spirit they are of the world*. In this respect, how is she to treat them? Precisely as she treats all other impenitent and unbelieving men — she is to exercise the power of the keys, and shut them out from the communion of the saints. She is to debar them from all the privileges of the inner sanctuary. She is to exclude them from their inheritance until they show themselves meet to possess it.¹⁵ [Emphasis MLS]

Thornwell sought to fortify his views by asking,

14. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 340, 341.

Are they not then slaves of sin and the Devil, existing in a free Commonwealth for the purpose of being educated to the liberty of the saints? Should they not, then, be carefully instructed to their true character as slaves, in every other respect, until they are prepared for their heritage of liberty? ...But, until they come to Him, it distinctly teaches [speaking of the New Book of Discipline] that they are to be dealt with as the Church deals with the *enemies of God*. She makes no difference between Jews and Gentiles, when both put themselves in the same attitude of rebellion against Him. She turns the key upon them and leaves them without.¹⁶

Dabney spoke in similar language:

When our standards say, "All baptized persons are members of the Church," this by no means implies their title to all sealing ordinances, suffrage and office. They are *minor citizens in the ecclesiastical commonwealth*, under tutelage, training, and instruction, and government; heirs, *if they will exercise the graces obligatory on them*, of all the ultimate franchises of the Church, but not allowed to enjoy them until qualified.¹⁷ [Emphasis MLS]

But all these baptized members are the "charge" of the pastor and session; and it is the duty of these "overseers" to provide for them, and to see that they enjoy the public and social instruction of the gospel.... As to the ecclesiastical control or restraint over these *unregenerate members*, I remark, first, that the rule of morals should be the same as that imposed on communicating members, save that the former are not to be forced, nor even permitted, without spiritual qualification, to take part in sealing ordinances and church powers. But as to their neglect of these, they should be constantly taught that their disqualification is their fault, and not their misfortune merely; a sinful exercise of their free agency, a subject for personal and present repentance; a voluntary neglect and rejection of saving graces, the sincere offer whereof was sealed

16. *Ibid.*, p. 348.

17. Robert Lewis Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 6th ed. (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1927), p. 794.

to them in their baptism. And for this their sin of heart, the Church utters a continuous, a sad and affectionate, yet a righteous censure, in keeping them *in the state of minor members*.¹⁸ [Emphasis MLS]

Dabney's conception of the place of covenant children is made abundantly clear when in response to the question, "What are the benefits then that accrue from baptism?" he responds:

The benefits of infant baptism, and of this form of membership for the children of God's believing people, are great.... This relation to the Church, and this discipline, are, first, in exact harmony with the great fact of experience, that the children of God's people are the great hope of the Church's increase. This being a fact, it is obviously wisdom to organize the church with reference to it, so as to provide every proper means for training for working up this the most hopeful material of Zion's increase.¹⁹

The proposed revision of the *Book of Discipline* was presented to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1859. The amendments were opposed by Charles Hodge. Hodge contended:

...while the true Church, or body of Christ,... consists of the true people of God, yet by divine ordinance the children of believers are to be regarded and treated as included within its pale, and consecrated to God in Baptism, and therefore, in the sight of men, all baptized persons, in the language of our Book, are members of the Church, and under its watch and care. This, of course, does not imply that they are all to be admitted to the Lord's table, any more than that they are to be admitted to the ministry or eldership. God has prescribed the qualifications which the Church is to require of those whom she receives to full communion or to office. Still, baptized persons are members of the visible Church, until they renounce their birthright, or are excommunicated, and consequently subject to its government or discipline.²⁰

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 795, 796.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 798.

20. Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), pp. 102, 103.

His views were supported by Lyman Atwater. Atwater contended:

Our standards surely set forth nothing less than this: they direct that baptized children be taught and trained to believe, feel, act, and live as becomes those who are the Lord's; not merely that it is wrong and perilous to be otherwise, which is true of all, whether within or without the Church, but that such a course is inconsistent with their position as members of the Church.²¹

In light of the strong opposition to the proposed changes, the General Assembly referred the matter again to the Committee for further consideration. Before the matter could be resolved, the Civil War intervened and the church was split between the North and the South. In the North, the *Revised Book of Discipline* was considered by the General Assembly in 1863. The original wording of the Book of Discipline was retained without modification.

The church in the South, at its General Assembly in 1861, appointed a committee again to consider the matter. Thornwell was the chairman of that committee, but the committee never met under his chairmanship, due to his death in 1862.

The issue was not finally settled in the South until 1879, when the Church Order was changed to reflect the twofold distinction in discipline. Consequently, the views of Thornwell and Dabney became the established position of the Presbyterian church in the South.

The result of this divergence of views was confusion. These issues spread beyond the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Presbyterians became divided on the subject. For example, William Cunningham adopted views that equated with those of Thornwell and Dabney. Writing against sacramentalist baptismal regeneration, Cunningham opines:

There is a great difficulty felt, — a difficulty which Scripture does not afford us adequate materials for removing, in laying down any distinct and definite doctrine as to the bearing and efficacy of

21. Atwater, p. 23.

baptism in the case of infants, to whom alone, ordinarily, we see it administered.... And yet is quite plain to anyone who is capable of reflecting upon the subject, that it is adult baptism alone which embodies and brings out the full idea of the ordinance, and should be regarded as the primary type of it, — that from which mainly and principally we should form our conceptions of what baptism is and means, and was intended to accomplish.²²

That while believers are warranted to improve the baptism of their children in the way of confirming their faith in the salvation of those of them who die in infancy, and in the way of encouraging themselves in a hearty and hopeful discharge of parental duty towards those of them who survive infancy, neither parents nor children, when the children come to be proper subjects of instruction, should regard the fact that they have been baptized, as affording of itself even the slightest presumption that they have been regenerated; that nothing should ever be regarded as furnishing any evidence of regeneration, except the appropriate proofs of an actual renovation of the moral nature, exhibited in each case individually; and that, *until these proofs appear, every one, whether baptized or not, should be treated and dealt with in all respects as if he were unregenerate, and still needed to be born again of the word of God through the belief of the truth.*²³ [Emphasis MLS]

However, within the Free Church of Scotland, Cunningham's contemporary and fellow professor at the Free Church College, James Buchanan, adopted quite another view.²⁴

This unsatisfactory state continues to the present day.²⁵

22. William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1967), p. 246.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

24. James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 116-118.

25. The confusion has even extended to the questioning of whether covenant children can be regenerated in the womb, despite explicit scriptural examples. It has led to a fundamental misconception of the relationship between regeneration and total depravity as regards covenant children, the contention being that a covenant child who is regenerated in the womb cannot be said to be born totally depraved.

However, now the majority of Presbyterians are ignorant of the issues, and the view of Thornwell holds sway. Instead of the Reformed covenant idea of education, namely that the children of believers should be brought up under Christian influence and so should never know a time when love for God was not an active principle within their heart and soul, there had developed an assumption that covenant children were born the enemies of God and must await the crisis of conversion.²⁶ The result is that the sacrament of baptism has in effect become a bare ritual, without any real meaning or significance.

This view is fundamentally similar to the position of those who deny paedo-baptism. Baptists regard their children as those who are outside of the precincts of the church and the communion of the saints. As such, they regard their children as worldlings, heathens, or pagans, until they experience a conscious, inward, regenerating change, of which they can give a credible account. Until they are able to give such a credible profession, they count them as those who are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God in the world."

As noted, this view can be traced back to the influence of the half-way covenant and the revivalist movement of the eighteenth century.²⁷ It is also apparent that this view stems from Thornwell's fundamentally erroneous view of the covenant of grace and of covenant succession. Interestingly, the current ascendancy of

26. Schenck, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

27. Both Schenck and Rayburn account for the modern eclipse of the Reformed doctrine of covenant succession by the dramatic impact of the Great Awakening and the resultant revivalism, with its exclusive emphasis upon a conscious experience of conviction and conversion. Rayburn concludes, "Yet Thornwell's views more nearly approximate the unstudied opinion of most evangelical Presbyterians today, not because they intend to follow Thornwell against Calvin, but because of the compatibility of his views with that of the revivalist thought and practice which thoroughly penetrated conservative Presbyterian thought and life in the 19th and 20th centuries, displacing the historic Presbyterian viewpoint." *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

Thornwell's view over that espoused by Charles Hodge has been occasioned by Hodge's erroneous view of the covenant.²⁸

The covenant of grace is not a compact or agreement between God and man. It is a relationship of friendship between the triune God and His chosen people in Jesus Christ, the elect.²⁹ This relationship of friendship is of God's mercy and grace. He establishes the covenant; He maintains the covenant; and He will perfect the covenant. In Genesis 17:7, he says to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant."

With whom did God establish His covenant? "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and *thy seed after thee in their generations* for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to *thy seed after thee*."³⁰ It was not only with Abraham, but also with his seed. That truth was confirmed again in the New Testament: "the promise is unto you, and to your children ... even as many as the Lord our God shall call."³¹

The children of believers are included in the covenant, *as children*. This occurs at their conception and birth.³² God is their

28. Hodge's conception of the covenant was founded upon a contractual relationship between God and man. In his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge addresses the meaning of *berith* and *diathke*. Referring to *berith* he notes, "there can be no doubt that according to its prevailing usage in the Old Testament it means a mutual contract between two or more parties." After referring to instances of its use in the Old Testament, Hodge concludes, "There is therefore no room to doubt that the word *berith* when used of transactions between man and man means a mutual compact. We have no right to give it any other sense when used of transactions between God and man."

29. It is beyond the scope of this paper to embark upon an analysis of the covenant. Cf. John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1988); Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971).

30. Genesis 17:7.

31. Acts 2:39.

32. David J. Engelsma, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers* (The Evangelism Committee, Protestant Reformed Church, South Holland, 1996), p. 9.

God and they are His people. As covenant children, they are called to love and obey the Lord; that is required of them as children, not simply when they come to years of discretion. They have a perfect right to baptism — not only a right to it, but God requires it. He requires that His covenant children should bear the sign and seal of His covenant. They are members of His church.

This accords with baptism's Old Testament counterpart, namely circumcision, which symbolized faith and regeneration. Paul makes that plain in Colossians 2:11, 12. "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Clearly, the spiritual import of baptism — the outward sign and seal of the Spirit's inner baptismal work — is tantamount to circumcision. By the authority of Jesus Christ and the apostles, the New Testament church administers baptism in lieu of circumcision. It does so with the understanding that the spiritual significance of baptism as a sign is essentially the same as that of circumcision, namely, a covenantal sign of the Spirit's cleansing from sin's defilement.

Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament.³³ According to the direction of God, covenant male infants were to receive the sign of circumcision on the eighth day of life.³⁴ The application of the sign did not require any cognition on the part of the child.

The seriousness with which God viewed this sign is indicated by Genesis 17:14: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."³⁵

33. "And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you" (Gen. 17:11).

34. "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed" (Gen. 17:12).

35. Cf. Exodus 4:24-26. "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp

In the Old Testament, infants were clearly regarded as part of the covenant community. Moses in Deuteronomy 29:9-13 commands Israel who are on the threshold of entering into Canaan:

Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do. Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

The important place that children occupy in the covenant is evident from Jesus Christ's command to His disciples, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."³⁶ Careful provision is made for children. Paul issues these injunctions: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord ... and, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."³⁷

But still the question remains, "What are we to understand by the inclusion of children in the covenant?" What are we to understand by the Westminster Confession of Faith's statement that baptism is "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace," even with respect to covenant children?

It is indisputable that not every child of believing parents who receives the sign of baptism is saved. Esau received the sign of circumcision, but he was unregenerate. Therefore, it would be

stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision."

36. Luke 18:16.

37. Ephesians 6:1 ff.

improper to presume that every child of believing parents is regenerate and elect. That is simply not true, according to the Word of God.

Is it that the covenant, so far as children are concerned, is simply a provision of God whereby they are privileged above other children, in that they grow up in homes where God is honored and where they are taught the things of God?

Such a view does not do justice to the Word of God or to the Reformed creeds. It creates a distinction between adults and children as regards the covenant that is not found in Scripture. This is essentially the view that Thornwell imposed upon the covenant so far as the children of believers were concerned. As covenant children, the blessing of the covenant to them was confined to the enhanced opportunity they received to be instructed and brought up in the things of God.

God does not merely place the children of believers in a more "spiritually" advantageous position than the children of unbelievers whereby they have a greater opportunity to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. One might ask, in any event, How is that any benefit for one who is dead in trespasses and sin? Rather, He *establishes* His covenant with the children of believers, so that He is their God. Isn't that what Genesis 17:7 states? "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and *thy seed after thee in their generations* for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*"

God promises to establish a relationship of fellowship and friendship with the children of believers. He does that in and through Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the church ought not to regard them as heathens, or even as heathens with an edge over other heathens.³⁸

But how does that view accord with the indisputable truth that not all covenant children are saved? The answer is that although all the children of believing parents are in the sphere of the covenant and therefore receive the sign of the covenant and are brought up in covenant homes, the covenant of God, the relation-

38. Engelsma, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

ship of fellowship and friendship in Jesus Christ, is established only with the elect children.³⁹ The promise of the covenant is for the elect children alone. The covenant does not extend to all of the natural seed of believing parents.

This is the truth taught in Romans 9. There Paul expresses concern that so many of the physical seed of Abraham perished despite God's promise to Abraham to establish His covenant with him and with his seed. Paul's concern is not so much that his brethren perished, but his real concern was that it might appear "as though the Word of God hath taken none effect."⁴⁰ In other words, that the promises of God had failed and that the covenant lay in tatters. But having broached the subject, Paul then reveals that the promises of God have not failed in any respect. How so? "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children of God: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."⁴¹ Not all the physical seed of Abraham were those to whom the covenant promises were given. Abraham had two kinds of children, children determined according to the predestinating hand of God: children of the flesh, such as Esau, and children of the promise, such as Jacob. The line of election and reprobation cuts right through the midst of the visible manifestation of the covenant "and makes separation, always and again separating between Israel according to the flesh and Israel according to the promise."⁴²

The covenant promises of God are not directed to all of the physical seed of believers. From among the children of believers come the true children of God, those to whom the covenant promises belong. In every last one of them, the sign and seal of baptism is effectual.

John Murray is on target when he states:

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.

40. Romans 9:6.

41. Romans 9:6b-8.

42. Hoeksema, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

The baptism of children, then, means that the grace of God takes hold of children at a very early age, even from the womb. That is to say, in other words, we must not exclude the operations of God's efficacious and saving grace from the sphere or realm of earliest infancy. It is this truth our Lord gave his most insistent and emphatic testimony when He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." We would not, of course, be misunderstood when we assert this principle. We do not say that the operations of God's saving grace are present in the heart of every infant. The fact is only too apparent that multitudes grow up to years of discretion and intelligence and show that the saving grace of God did not take hold of their hearts and minds in the days of their infancy.... But it is nevertheless true ... that the grace of God is operative in the realm of the infant heart and mind. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise."⁴³

Why then baptize all of the children of believers, if not all of them are actually embraced by the covenant? Why treat them all as covenant children, when it is known that some are reprobate? The answer is, God commands it. They are to be treated as covenant children because God causes His covenant to run in the line of continued generations. In other words, from the children of believers, God draws His children. But we are not privy to the identity of those among the children of believers who are in reality God's children. Therefore, we are to treat all of the children of believers as the children of God, until they demonstrate otherwise.

Isn't this really presumptive regeneration⁴⁴ dressed up in a slightly different manner? The answer is, no. There is no presumption made concerning regeneration. This view simply recognizes that God has promised to draw His children from the

43. John Murray, "Why We Baptize Infants," *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, vol. 11, 1997, p. 165.

44. Presumptive regeneration, which was fostered by the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper, maintains that the basis for infant baptism is an assumption made by both the church and parents that all the natural children of believing parents are regenerated.

line of continued generations and, therefore, those who are born into such lines are to be raised and treated as the children of God. It is quite another thing to presume that they are all, or indeed that any individual in particular is, a true child of God.

In order to foster and nurture His true children, God requires us to deal with all the children of believers as though they are covenant children, notwithstanding that it may not be true with respect to all. This is done for the sake of the elect. It is because of His love for the elect that God requires all of the children of believers to be raised in the truth. Election determines the approach that the church and parents are to adopt with respect to covenant children.

The presence of the reprobate among covenant children does not preclude Reformed believers from viewing and treating their children as children of God. The purpose of God is that the approach to covenant children is not determined by the ungodly reprobate seed, but by the elect seed. "Approaching the baptized children as elect, regenerated children is not a presumption that must function as the basis for their baptism, but the manner of rearing them that arises from faith in the covenant promises."⁴⁵

This organic view of the covenant is illustrated by a farmer who plants his field with wheat. As the wheat grows, so too do the weeds. Even if eventually there are more weeds than grain in the field, the farmer views and deals with his field as a wheat field. His view of the field as a wheat field dictates his approach. He cultivates, waters, and fertilizes the field for the sake of the wheat. Although the weeds will receive the same treatment, nonetheless, the farmer persists because of the wheat. He does not allow the presence of the weeds to deter his care of the wheat. Nor does the presence of the weeds lead him to doubt the existence of the wheat. Nor does the possible presence of the reprobate among the children of believers deter parents or the church from viewing and treating them as the children of God.

45. David J. Engelsma, "The Approach to Covenant Children (6)," *Standard Bearer*, vol. 67, (15 January, 1991), p. 174.

An Important Issue

We return to the question posed at the beginning, “Does it matter?” Does it matter what view we take of our covenant children? Does it matter so far as the church is concerned? Does it matter from the perspective of the ministry? Absolutely. The view that is taken of covenant children has significant practical implications attached to it for both parents and the church alike. As John Murray writes:

What a blessed thought and hope and confidence is extended to believing parents when in baptism they commit their children to the regenerating and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit and to the purging efficacy of the blood of Christ, so that, if perchance the Lord is pleased to remove them in infancy, they — believing parents — can plead and rest upon the promises of the Covenant of Grace on their behalf.... We should appreciate the preciousness of these truths for the reason that children do not need to grow up to the years of discretion and intelligence before they become the Lord’s. Just as children are sinful before they come to the years of discretion and understanding, so by the sovereign grace of God they do not need to grow up before they become partakers of saving grace. They may grow up not only in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but also in His favor and sanctifying grace. They may in their tenderest years be introduced into the family and household of the heavenly father.⁴⁶

The view that one takes of covenant children clearly dictates the approach of the church and the parents toward their upbringing. Viewing our children as the children of God demands that parents train their children in the ways of the Lord. But not only must they train them in those ways, they must approach them as those who are regenerate in their teaching and discipline.

Our children must be taught to understand that their feelings, acts, habits, and manners must accord with the will of God. The expectation and the anticipation of parents must be that their

46. John Murray, “Why We Baptize Infants,” *The Presbyterian Guardian*, vol. 5, 1938.

children will conduct themselves as the children of God. They must be addressed in those terms, and not simply from a perspective of the law of God. Covenant children are to be approached as true, spiritual friends of God. There must be a recognition that children are empowered by the Spirit to love God and the neighbor.

Not only do parents need to bear such matters in mind, but so too does the church. Children need to be nurtured and cared for by the church. Jesus Christ was not joking when He commanded Peter, "*Feed my lambs.*" Failure to nurture and care for our covenant youth through the preaching and through catechetical instruction is a dereliction of duty on the part of the church, and in particular the minister of the Word. The minister must recognize that when he addresses the congregation as "Beloved in Jesus Christ," he is addressing also the covenant children. If such issues are not clear in the mind of the minister, how is he able properly to minister to such children? "Are these little ones living plants or are they poisonous weeds? If [a minister] cannot answer the question, how shall he go to work? The question lies at the very threshold of the pastor's office...."⁴⁷

Elders need to care spiritually for covenant children. The church also needs to busy itself with discipline of covenant children in cases where they show a deliberate and willful disregard for the law of God.

This is a far cry from the approach that flows from the position adopted by Thornwell. His approach demands a different view of the congregation. Consequently, that is why ministers who adopt a similar position today address their congregations as "friends" or some similar term, but not as "beloved in Jesus Christ."

Thornwell's approach demands that children be treated as spiritual strangers and outcasts. There can be no sense of parents and their children serving the Lord together. Parents cannot say with Joshua, "*as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*" Children cannot be addressed as those who love God and who seek

47. E.V. Gerhart, "The Efficacy of Baptism," *Mercersburg Review* (January, 1859), vol. X, Art. 1, p. 6.

to live their lives out of thankfulness of heart to God. Rather, the emphasis has to be placed upon the requirements of the law — a law which they have no desire to keep because they are apparently unregenerate. The heavy demands of the law are brought to bear, without the gospel.

Covenant children are taught that they are lost sinners under the wrath of God and that their only hope is that one day they may be born again. They are evangelized. In this approach, there is a real danger that parents and the church alike are calling common that which God Himself has cleansed.

Under that view, how can children be encouraged to pray? How can one who is unregenerate pray? How can a child be encouraged to recite the Lord's prayer? How can children be encouraged to participate in worship? How can they sing the psalms? How can a child be exhorted to keep the fifth commandment? It is beyond the unregenerate child. Consequently, order in the home arises either through natural love of parents or fear of discipline, but it does not arise out of love for God.

The effect of such teaching can be spiritually numbing. Children raised under such a regime are often confused as to their state before God. Taught that they are unregenerate and hell deserving sinners, they seek assurance of their salvation, but such assurance often proves elusive. They conclude that their conversion experiences are insufficient, and so they are repeatedly caused to doubt their salvation. What a spiritually debilitating condition.

Does this mean that covenant children ought not be encouraged to seek conversion? This is an important issue for both ministers and parents alike. Should ministers preach that covenant children need to be converted? Should parents pray for such a thing? Should children be urgently called to conversion?

The answer is yes. Jesus says in Matthew 18:3, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Covenant children must be recipients of the gift of faith. That faith must live within them. They must know of true repentance. They must be converted, turned to God as their heavenly Father.

Therefore, covenant children are to be called to repent of

their sins and to turn from them. They must know of heartfelt sorrow for sin and they must experience true faith in Jesus Christ. That is the calling of both minister and parents. Covenant children must not be allowed to coast along as though they have no need to consider their state before God.

It is imperative that the doctrine of covenant children be rightly understood for the spiritual life of the church. The track record of the Presbyterian church since the mid-nineteenth century has not been overly encouraging. Without a proper view of covenant children, the church will drive her children into the world.

Presbyterian churches need to give careful attention to their standards and to the Word of God. The inroads made by false conceptions of the covenant and consequently of infant baptism need to be addressed urgently.

The value of a biblical understanding of covenant children is of the greatest comfort to parents, the church, and to children themselves.

APPENDIX

Alexander, Archibald. (1772-1851) Presbyterian theologian and educator born in Lexington, Virginia. Ordained in 1794 and early in 1807 became the minister of Pine Street Church, Philadelphia, one of the largest congregations in the United States. In 1812, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church established Princeton Theological Seminary, and Alexander was appointed its first professor.

Bullinger, Heinrich. (1504-1575) Swiss Reformer. Succeeded Zwingli as the pastor of Zurich following the death of Zwingli at the battle of Cappel in 1531. Exercised considerable influence with Reformed churches throughout Europe.

Bushnell, Horace. (1802-1876) A Congregationalist minister and theologian who was born in Connecticut. In 1847, he wrote the first of his three major works, *Christian Nurture*, in which he advanced the proposition that conversion should be educative, rather than spontaneous or sudden.

Calvin, John. (1509-1564) Genevan Reformer and the great systematic theologian of the Reformation.

Cunningham, William. (1805-1861) Scottish theologian; one of the leaders in the Disruption of 1843 and the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland. Professor and principal of the Free Church College.

Dabney, Robert Lewis. (1820-1898) Southern Presbyterian. Young contemporary of John Henley Thornwell. Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

Edwards, Jonathan. (1703-1758) Congregationalist minister in New England. Renowned for his involvement in the revivalist movement known as “the Great Awakening.”

Hodge, Charles. (1797-1878) Leading American Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century. Graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1819. Studied under Archibald Alexander. He was appointed to the Faculty at Princeton in 1820 and remained there for the rest of his life, except for two years’ study in Germany and France. Taught over 3,000 students during his half-century of instruction.

Knox, John. (1515-1572) Scottish Reformer. Studied under Calvin in Geneva. Instrumental in the compilation of the Scots Confession 1560.

Murray, John. (1898-1975) Scottish Presbyterian theologian. Initially taught at Princeton Theological Seminary and then moved to the newly formed Westminster Theological Seminary. Of particular significance was his rejection of the classical dual covenant concept.

Rayburn, Robert. Minister of Faith Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Tacoma, Washington.

Thornwell, James Henley. (1812-1862) Southern Presbyterian. Professor of didactic and polemic theology at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina.

Turretin, Francis. (1623-1687) Professor of theology at the Academy in Geneva. His *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* were utilized as the standard text for many Presbyterian seminaries in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Ursinus, Zacharias. Professor in Heidelberg University. Co-author, with Caspar Olevianus, of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Vermigli, Peter Martyr. (1499-1562) Born in Italy but forced to flee, so much of his reformatory work was undertaken in Switzerland and Germany.

Witsius, Herman. (1636-1708) Professor of Divinity in the Universities of Franeker, Utrecht, and Leyden.

Zwingli, Ulrich. (1484-1531) Swiss Reformer, based in Zurich.

●

Book Reviews

The Virgin Birth: A Biblical Study of the Deity of Jesus Christ, by Robert Gromacki. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002 (second edition). 240 pp. \$13.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

"The question of Christ's deity and His virgin birth are not mere academic matters, but eternal life and death issues" (p. 192), writes Robert Gromacki. His revised and updated *The Virgin Birth* sustains his thesis.

In the first chapter, Gromacki sets forth the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which he rightly sees as the "basis" or presupposition of the virgin birth (part 1). In part 2, he demonstrates that Christ in His "Person" is the eternal Son by arguments from various passages in the Old Testament (ch. 2) and the New Testament (ch. 3), as well as by Christ's personal claims (ch. 4) and titles (ch. 5). Having established the doctrines of the Trinity and the Deity of Christ, Gromacki explores the "nature" of the virgin birth (part

3) by examining the testimonies of Luke (ch. 6), Matthew (ch. 7), and the church fathers (ch. 8). He refutes seven "erroneous concepts" of the virgin birth, including those urged in the service of mariolatry (ch. 9), and considers its "physical implications" (ch. 10). In the "results" of the virgin birth (part 4), Gromacki discusses Christ's real (ch. 11) and sinless (ch. 13) humanity and His being one divine person with two natures (ch. 12), as set forth in the orthodox creeds (ch. 14). In his analysis of the "purpose" of the virgin birth (part 5), he looks at the necessity of the incarnation (ch. 15), Isaiah 7:14 (ch. 16), and Christ's genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 (ch. 17). Finally, Gromacki considers various "denials" of the virgin birth—ancient and modern unbelief (ch. 18), alleged analogies with pagan myths (ch. 19), and the silence of many New Testament books (ch. 20)—in part 6.

Gromacki's book is very well laid out and covers the relevant material. He is certainly

correct that the virgin birth is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. He observes, "Since Luke included the record of the virgin birth, he must have regarded it as one 'of those things which are most surely believed among us' [Luke 1:1]" (p. 83).

The book has several weaknesses, however, including premillennialism (p. 37) and the popular misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 24:1 (p. 90). Gromacki is no expert on the creeds. He dates the *Athanasian Creed* in the fourth century (p. 23). Worse, he cites *Westminster Confession* 2:3 on the Holy Trinity and adds that this was "also adopted in the Canon (sic) of the Synod of Dort by the Reformed Church" (p. 24). However, the *Canons of Dort* (1618-1619) were written almost 30 years before the

Westminster Confession (1647).

More seriously, he teaches: "What occurred [at Christ's death] was the *separation of the divine person with His divine nature* and His human immaterial nature (soul and spirit) *from the human body*" (p. 135; italics mine). Aside from Gromacki's trichotomy, this is simply an old Anabaptist error regarding the hypostatic union between Christ's divine and human natures. *Belgic Confession* 19 rightly states that even after Christ's death "the divine nature always remained united with the human, even when he lay in the grave. And the Godhead did not cease to be in him, any more than it did when he was an infant, though it did not so clearly manifest itself for a while." ■

The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries, ed. David VanDrunen. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2004. Pp. xiii + 311 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

strates that the Westminster seminaries in Pennsylvania and in California are gravely ill and that the ailment is precisely their failure to hold the pattern of sound doctrine. Basic to the failure is the low esteem for systematic theology at the seminaries.

The book is a collection of

The title of this book is puzzling. The content demon-

essays by prominent Presbyterian theologians in honor of Robert B. Strimple. Dr. Strimple taught theology at the Westminster seminaries from 1969 to his retirement in 2001. Although by all accounts Dr. Strimple was an excellent teacher, the brief report of his ministerial career seems to indicate a distinct weakness of the Westminster seminaries. There is no mention of Strimple's ever having served as a pastor in the congregations. A man goes straight from his academic training to the seminary. This is detrimental to the work of training men to be preachers and pastors. The Reformed churches have always wisely insisted that a seminary professor must first have worked as a preacher and pastor and that he must have proved himself capable in the work. Only such a man can carry out the great work of the seminary: training men to preach. It is not the great task of a seminary to prepare men to be theological scholars.

All of the essays treat the subject of systematic theology as taught, or not taught, at the Westminster seminaries. For this reason, the book is of some interest and importance for the wider Reformed community.

Among the essays are "Professor John Murray at Westminster Theological Seminary," by Edmund P. Clowney; "What God Hath Joined Together: Westminster and the Uneasy Union of Biblical and Systematic Theology," by Michael S. Horton; "Systematic Theology and Apologetics at the Westminster Seminaries," by John M. Frame; "Westminster Seminary, the Doctrine of Justification, and the Reformed Confessions," by Robert Godfrey; "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology," by R. Scott Clark; "A *System* of Theology? The Centrality of Covenant for Westminster Systematics," by David VanDrunen; "The Whole Counsel of God: Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," by John R. Muether; and "Reflections on Westminster Theology and Homiletics," by Jay E. Adams.

The pattern of sound doctrine is seriously distorted at Westminster. W. Robert Godfrey charges long-time theology professor Norman Shepherd with having taught justification by faith and works for a long time. Yet Shepherd was defended by a majority of the faculty and by much of the board

of Westminster in Pennsylvania. They never condemned his doctrine (pp. 136-140).

A major reason for the controversy over justification at Westminster, according to Godfrey, was weakness at the seminary regarding "the role and content of the confessions in the life of the Reformed churches" (p. 140). Following the lead given by Prof. Klaas Schilder, theologians at Westminster approve a "sympathetic-critical" attitude towards the creeds (p. 141). In their teaching, Westminster theologians permit themselves to be critical of the confessions, although sympathetically so. The creeds do not function at Westminster as binding authorities upon the teachers for everything that is taught.

Evidence of a relaxed attitude towards the creeds is Derke P. Bergsma's description of the creeds as merely "abiding testimonies to a Reformed . . . understanding of the biblical faith" (p. 252). Refusal to regard the creeds as authoritative formulations of biblical truth, which fully agree with the Word of God, explains Bergsma's sarcastic criticism of those supporters of the seminaries who require scrupulous fidelity to the orthodox Reformed faith from

the professors. Significantly, as an instance of such concern for orthodoxy, which Bergsma disparages, Bergsma mentions "the interpretation of the Genesis creation account" (p. 249).

Godfrey quotes John Frame as having written that during his student days at Westminster he "perceived a 'relative absence . . . of a confessional or traditional focus'" in the instruction (p. 141). This is bad enough. What is even worse is that Frame added that in his own teaching he sought to "improve" on the formulations in the creeds.

Hand-in-hand with a critical attitude towards the confessions at Westminster goes a dislike for, if not antagonism to, systematic theology—oddly enough the other element featured in the book's title. Jay E. Adams is severe in his criticism of the Westminster seminaries on this count. And a fundamentally important count this is. Biblical theology has gained the ascendancy over systematic theology. One result has been the loss of good, exegetical preaching on the part of the students. "In the two Westminsters there came to be an ascendancy of biblical theology over systematic theology that was detrimen-

tal to good, solid preaching" (pp. 265, 266). Adams insists, rightly, that systematic theology, not biblical theology, serves good preaching.

The other result of minimizing systematic Reformed theology, solidly based on the creeds, if not phasing it out altogether, is, as Godfrey contends, the certain arising of heretical teaching and the toleration of heresy when it appears.

John R. Muether writes on the strange relation between the Westminster seminaries and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). The seminaries are independent organizations. Bergsma is mistaken when he claims that the seminaries are "part of the church, Christ's body in the world" (p. 253). Whatever an independent seminary may be, it is exactly not "part of the church." By its own decision, it is independent of the church, the instituted body of Christ in the world. Muether notes that this independency played a powerful role in the Shepherd controversy. The seminary was not answerable to the church. It played to public opinion. Admittedly many officebearers and members of the OPC supported, and still do support, Shepherd.

Readers of this journal will have special interest in Clark's article, "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology" (pp. 149-179). The article is a vigorous defense of the well-meant offer and a vehement denunciation of Herman Hoeksema and the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches for their rejection of the well-meant offer. "Janus" in the title of the article is borrowed from Hoeksema's assertion that Reformed theologians like R. Scott Clark resemble nothing so much as the old two-faced head of the Roman idol, Janus. Now they show a Calvinistic face of sovereign, particular, irresistible grace; now they display the Arminian face of universal, resistible (saving) grace.

Clark reminds his readers that the Westminster seminaries, the OPC, and Prof. Clark believe, confess, and teach that God in Christ loves every human without exception to whom the gospel comes, wills the salvation of all without exception with one of His two contradictory wills, and with this universal will of salvation extends His resistible, saving grace in the preaching of the gospel to all hearers alike, those who perish

as well as those who are saved.

Much of Clark's proof for the well-meant offer, especially from the Canons (which offer slim pickings for a theology of universal, resistible saving grace in the gospel), confuses the issue. This is not a problem for the Westminster theologian, committed as he is to the "paradox," that is, sheer contradiction that irrational faith accepts in sublime ignorance.

The issue in the controversy over the well-meant offer is not promiscuous, indiscriminate preaching; the serious external call of God to all who hear the preaching, to repent and believe; its being pleasing to God that those who are called should come; or the announcement to all that God promises salvation to every one who comes in true faith. All of this is Reformed orthodoxy. The Protestant Reformed Churches teach and practice this.

The issue, rather, is this. Does God love every human to whom the gospel comes, indeed, love every one with a love revealed in the gospel and a love that desires his salvation? And does God, in this love and with this desire, extend His grace to all hearers alike, which is then resisted by some and accepted

by others? And further: Does anyone really believe that this doctrine is part of the system of doctrine confessed in the Westminster Standards and in the Three Forms of Unity? A universal, resistible, saving grace of God in the preaching of the gospel, whose source is a will of God for the salvation of all without exception?

Clark descends from confusion and false doctrine into foolishness when he lumps Hoeksema's theology of the preaching of the gospel, namely, particular, efficacious grace in the preaching of the gospel, with the Arminian theology of preaching. I propose a simple test for Clark and all those who share his theology of preaching. Compare the well-meant offer with the Arminians' conception of preaching as that conception was stated by them at Dordt in Articles 8-10 of "The Opinion of the Remonstrants regarding the third and fourth articles, concerning the grace of God and the conversion of man." And then compare Hoeksema's theology of preaching with the Reformed doctrine of preaching as outlined and condemned by the Arminians in the same articles of this "Opinion."

The "Janus-head" theology

is alive and well in the Westminster seminaries and in the OPC. But we notice one curious thing of late: less and

less of the Calvinistic face is seen, and more and more of the Arminian face. ■

The Kingdom Is Always Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch, by Christopher H. Evans. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004). Pp. xxx+348 (paper). \$25.00. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The gospel of salvation through the atoning death of God's eternal Son, Jesus Christ, has been pushed aside by liberal theology to make room for a social gospel, which has become the content of the preaching of much of the church world in this country. Usually considered to be the "father of the social gospel," Walter Rauschenbusch changed fundamentally the thinking of American theology to turn it in the direction of a social emphasis: that is, a gospel that proclaimed that the salvation of men was in social betterment rather than in the atoning death of Christ. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published in 1907, not only pushed Rauschenbusch to the pinnacle

of fame, but had, on theology, a powerful impact that remains to the present. That makes the book here under review an important one, for it not only details the life of Walter Rauschenbusch, but also lays bare the spiritual and theological poverty of the social gospel.

Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was born of a rather dysfunctional family in Rochester, New York. The family originally lived in Westphalia, Germany, were Lutherans with roots in the German Pietistic Movement, but moved to this country, where Augustus, Walter's father, was sent as a Lutheran missionary. Augustus was from a line of five generations of Lutheran ministers and had been influenced in his studies by the church historian Augustus Neander and the teachings of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Soon after coming to this country, Augustus turned Baptist and was, after a few years, appointed professor in Rochester Theological Seminary.

Father and mother were estranged, and the mother moved with her children back to Germany, where she lived with her children for two years. The father followed after two years and was reunited with his wife and family, but the family rarely saw him, for he traveled about Europe doing research on Anabaptism. The family returned to the States in 1869, but the estrangement remained.

Walter, in his youth and under the influence of the tension in his home, was a rebellious son. Yet, in his second year in high school, he was baptized. After his graduation in 1879, his father took him to Germany, where he studied four years. Upon his return, he studied in Rochester Theological Seminary, where his father taught. While the influences in the Seminary were predominantly conservative and even mildly Calvinistic, Walter was deeply impressed with the writings of liberal theologians, whom he read with growing interest. The teachings that God loved the whole of humanity, that God was very sad at man's misery, and that God's love opened a new way to enter a new and spiritual life appealed to him.

It is worthy of the notice of today's preachers who promote a social gospel from once conservative pulpits that Rauschenbusch, even while in Seminary, saw that a universal love of God and a desire of God to save necessarily implied a denial of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Walter wrote a paper in which he rejected the idea of Christ's sacrifice as a penal substitute, a paper that caused some concern in the Seminary.

Upon graduation, Walter took a pulpit in New York City alongside of a teeming tenement section of New York known as "Hell's Kitchen."

By the time Walter was ordained, liberalism was already gaining some adherents, though chiefly among the intelligentsia. This liberalism had social overtones. It taught that capitalism was the cause of social, economic, and cultural problems and that the solution to the social problems of the age was a change in the system, along with intense social work, especially among the poor. The gospel became a proclamation of "dogoodism," and salvation was interpreted as economic deliverance from the crushing heel of a capitalistic system in which

the rich became richer at the expense of the poor.

Rauschenbusch devoted much of his work in New York to easing the burden of the poor in Hell's Kitchen and to preaching a "gospel" intended to move his congregation to concentrate on such a task as he defined. He formed an association with two or three other pastors in the area to summon other churches in the crusade against poverty. It is of considerable interest that his thinking was heavily influenced during his ministry by such men as John Wesley, Dwight L. Moody, and J. Hudson Taylor. He worked with Ira Sankey on a hymn book in the German language to be used in German-speaking churches.

By the late 1880s Walter had lost most of his hearing, and seriously considered resigning from his pastorate. But by this time his fame was growing and his congregation was completely under his sway. He was persuaded to continue his ministry, which he did until he finally accepted an appointment to become professor of German in Rochester Theological Seminary. He died in 1918 from colon cancer.

Walter increasingly despised the church, speaking of

"the institutional church [as] a necessary evil" (123). He had very little use for the Reformation and particularly for Calvinism. He became enmeshed in social thinking and saw Christianity in social terms only.

But in his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch showed that such a social gospel as he proclaimed included an entire theology. The theology was based on the brotherhood of all men and a universal love of God for all men. It was a denial not only of the reality of sin and the substitutionary atonement of Christ, but also of Christ's divinity, His resurrection from the dead, and His sovereign rule from God's right hand.

Because Christ's suffering had no atoning value, Rauschenbusch identified the suffering of the poor as the same as Christ's suffering. Christ Himself was primarily a social reformer who suffered for His insistence on attempting to change culture by love. Walter believed that America, if it became socialist, could become the center of God's plan to redeem the world.

But most interesting of all is Rauschenbusch's view of the kingdom of Christ. He lost in-

terest completely in a heavenly kingdom and increasingly interpreted the kingdom as earthly. He had great optimism for the future and was convinced that the power of love would one day win the battle against all social ills, and a very pleasant kingdom of peace and prosperity would be ushered in here in this world. That optimism received a blow that sent liberals reeling when World War I broke out and threw the world into turmoil. It was especially crushing to Rauschenbusch because the chief cause of the tragedy of World War I was Germany. Walter's deep admiration for German culture disappeared in the smoke of the artillery of the war.

The book is well worth reading if one wants to learn of the spiritual and theological poverty of the social gospel. It is a denial of all God's truth, including the power of the cross

to save, sovereign and eternal election and reprobation, the horror on man's fall into sin (which the social gospel claims can be fixed with the band-aid of social betterment, rather than the power of the cross of the Son of God), and the basic truths that God's people hold dear.

The idea of an earthly kingdom is rampant in our day. Abraham's Kuyper's view of common grace has been carried out by many into such heretical visions of the future as the ones Rauschenbusch held. Post-millennialism, while disavowing in word liberal theology, is only an inch or two away from the outright liberalism of Rauschenbusch and his followers, for they all share the same view of the kingdom: it is of this earth, earthy.

God's people look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell. ■

Doctrine according to Godliness: A Primer of Reformed Doctrine. Ronald Hanko. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 2004. xiii + 338 pages. \$28.95 (Hard cover). [Reviewed by Russell Dykstra.]

Doctrine according to Godliness is a significant publication by the Reformed Free Publishing Association. I would describe it as a Reformed Dogmatics for the common man. As such it complements the other solid doctrinal and biblical stud-

ies published by the RFPA. It is a valuable book, with the potential for benefiting the broader Reformed church world and beyond. *Doctrine according to Godliness* sets forth the truth of Scripture, that is to say, the Reformed doctrine, in a clear and logical form, and it does so in a manner that is not intimidating. This is doctrine in a form that every believer can grasp, can understand and embrace.

The book consists of a series of nearly 240 different topics, from "General Revelation" to "The Covenant of Grace" to "Heavenly Glory." The topics are divided under six headings, roughly corresponding to the six divisions commonly used in Reformed theology: 1. God and His Word; 2. Man and His World; 3. Christ and His Work; 4. The Covenant and Salvation; 5. The Church and the Sacraments; 6. The Return of Christ and the Last Things.

Each section is, for the most part, a self-contained discussion of a particular doctrine. The sections are brief — under a page and a half. To place together in one book that many brief selections is difficult to do. This effort succeeds very well, producing an interesting, united whole. It is that because

of the many commendable features of the book.

First of all, the book is well written. Hanko's evident abilities as a writer enabled him to avoid the danger of "sameness," that is, producing numerous brief articles that follow the same pattern, and soon all begin to read the same. He has a knack for drawing the reader into the topic immediately so that, though one may have intended to stop "after this one," a glance at the next section leads to reading another, and then a few more. In addition, the author uses a variety of methods to explain the various doctrines, and he writes a conclusion appropriate to the doctrine treated.

The genuine earnestness in the message, together with a winsome spirit, add to the pleasure of reading this book. Rev. Ron Hanko is a pastor with twenty-five years of experience, who also served as a missionary for many of those years. He writes to the people. He asks the reader, also those who may disagree, to consider carefully what he writes. He obviously has the heartfelt desire that others will have the same convictions about the truth.

A second notable feature of the book is the capable and

copious use of Scripture. Rev. Hanko is unashamedly committed to the infallibly inspired Scriptures. Each and every section is based on Scripture. Hanko weaves Scripture into the discussion naturally. One never has the feeling that he is simply “proof-texting.” Hanko consciously employs the Reformation principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. As one example, consider his use of the words of Jesus to demonstrate that evolution is incompatible with Scripture (86).

If you believe that man “evolved,” then consider what Jesus says in Matthew 19:4, 5: “Have you not read [in Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:24] that he which made them in the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” Jesus obviously believed the first two chapters of Genesis to be true. Should not we believe them also?

But all those commendable features of the book would be of no account if the doctrinal content of the book were poor. It is, after all, a book of doctrine. In

fact, the doctrinal substance is the best feature of the book—it is of the highest quality of theological, Reformed writings. Hanko is an able and knowledgeable theologian with a thorough understanding of Reformed theology. He not only knows the doctrines, he knows the topics that are debated, and he addresses controversy, though, again, not in a manner that intimidates the reader.

The doctrines are clearly and concisely expressed. Terms are defined, or carefully described. Notice how the difficult term “God’s simplicity” is introduced (56).

In books of theology, you will sometimes read of an attribute called God’s “simplicity.” The word is confusing, and since it is not found in Scripture, it might be better to use a different word—perhaps “perfection.” In any case, what we are talking about when we speak of God’s simplicity is part of his oneness—that he is *one* in all his attributes and works. There is no disharmony, no conflict, no contradiction among his works or attributes. They are all one. God is perfect and without weakness or flaw in any way.

As the above quotation also indicates, the treatment of the doctrines is fresh. This freshness is partly due to the fact that the application of the doctrine is so apt. Consider how Hanks demonstrates the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in a section entitled "The Trinity and the Family" (pp. 59-60). It begins, "Nothing shows the importance of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity so much as its connection to family life. It is the foundation of the family and of our various callings in the family." After supporting that assertion from Scripture, he continues:

This has many practical implications. For one thing, it explains the deterioration of the family and of family values today. Created to be a reflection of God's own trinitarian family life, the family cannot prosper apart from him.

Moreover, the Trinity is where we learn to live as families. That we go to God to learn about family life does not only mean that we go to his Word in the Bible. It also means that we go to him as Father to learn about being fathers (and mothers) to our children. It means that we

bring our children to his holy child Jesus to learn about their calling as children. It means that we go to him as Holy Spirit to learn about peace, unity, love, fellowship, and all the other blessings of family life. Only the Spirit can teach us these things. He is the source of these blessings.

Hanks is at pains to demonstrate the interrelatedness of various Reformed dogmas. He does this in the various discussions as he shows how the one doctrine affects others. He also does this in the combinations of doctrines. For instance, there are six related discussions on the doctrine of justification (pp. 197-204). They are entitled: "Justification"; "Justification by Faith"; "Justification and Election"; "Justification and the Atonement"; "Adoption" [which Hanks regards as "the first and greatest of the benefits of justification, (p. 202)]; and "Peace." This is most beneficial for the believer, for it helps him to know not only the given doctrine, but also how it fits together with other cardinal truths.

Since the book contains much application of the truth to practical matters, Hanks takes

clear stands on some concrete issues. This will mean that not everyone will agree with every implication that he brings out. My own disagreements were few and far between. However, I did have a few. At least twice Hanks asserts that Isaac was told that Esau was a reprobate (pp. 70, 271). Although Isaac was told that the elder would serve the younger, and that two manner of peoples were represented in the womb of Rebekah, I doubt that these covenant parents had such a burden laid upon them, namely, that their firstborn son was explicitly labeled a reprobate. That does not take away from the statement of Romans 9 that God (always) hated Esau. But the Old Testament narrative (Genesis 25) does not record that *those* words were spoken to Isaac and Rebekah.

In addition, can we know with such certainty that Ham was reprobate (p. 271)? Not he directly, but his son Canaan was cursed, though granted, Ham is presented in a most unfavorable light in Genesis 9. Yet Ham was one of the eight souls of whom the Bible records that they were saved by water (1 Pet. 3:30).

And finally, Hanks maintains, on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:11-14, that Eve's fall was the

reason that she must be in submission in the church (p. 110). I'll have to think about that some more. 1 Timothy 2:11-14 certainly teaches that the woman is to be in subjection in the church. Actually, two reasons are given for that subjection, and one has nothing to do with the fall, but rather with her creation. It seems to me that the reference to Eve's fall might serve a somewhat different purpose. It demonstrates that exactly when Eve usurped the authority of her husband in answering the serpent, she fell into sin.

Three other criticisms I have of the book as published. First, the index is too limited to be of any real value, being only an index to words in the headings, and not of the body of the work. I hope that a more complete reference will be made for the next printing. Second, and this is admittedly picky, but what is the point of the odd numeration of the page numbers in the table of contents (007, 008, 024, etc.)? It makes the book resemble a sort of home computer publishing endeavor and serves no useful purpose that I can see. Third, there is some overlap of treatment in the doctrine of the covenant. Fourteen sections are devoted to the doctrine of the

covenant. However, the doctrine is treated in three different sections. It is unavoidable, then, that some repetition of material is found in these various sections.

However, these are relatively minor matters, and this book is highly recommended to all our readers. I know personally that it is already being read with enjoyment and profit by readers young and old, and by some who are not so quick to pick up a book, let alone a book on doctrine. *Doctrine according to Godliness* is an excellent

resource for the ministers and elders who teach catechism. They can gain ideas and insights as to how to introduce specific truths, and how to apply them concretely to the youths. Societies could profitably use it for study. Evangelism committees could be guided by the content and style of the book in their promotion of the truth. And, above all, any and all believers who take it up to read will be edified, encouraged, and comforted by the precious knowledge of the truth. ■

Reformed Dogmatics. Herman Hoeksema. Second Edition. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, Volume I, 2004. xxi + 621 pages. \$55.00 (Cloth). [Reviewed by Russell J. Dykstra.]

In Reformed circles, Herman Hoeksema is well known as a clear, exegetical, Reformed theologian. His *Reformed Dogmatics* is the most concise expression of his theology. The original work was published in 1966, a year after Hoeksema died. The original preface, written by the author's

son Homer C. Hoeksema, points out that the *Dogmatics* is the fruit of more than thirty years of teaching and writing in the area of dogmatics.

Reprinted several times, the first edition has been out of print for some time. This newest printing is a second edition, having gone through no little revision. The publishers divided the lengthy work into two volumes, of which the second is due to come out early in 2005.

The publishers explain some of the changes made in this second edition.

In this second edition, a concerted effort has been expended to improve the readability without changing the meaning and substance of Hoeksema's work.... Editorial changes and improvements have been made only to the form of the book, leaving its essence and unique perspective identical with that of the first edition.

Specific changes include: the addition of many Scripture references; movement of all Scripture references from footnotes into the body of the text; more complete footnoting of works cited; and English translations of all the words and paragraphs in foreign languages (not only Greek and Hebrew terms, but the lengthy quotations from Dutch, German, and Latin writings).

Not everyone will agree that it was necessary to make *Reformed Dogmatics* more readable. Nonetheless, the majority of readers will find some of the changes most welcome, especially the excellent translations of the quotations of the Dutch, Greek, and Latin, to say nothing of the Hebrew and Greek terms.

Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* is a solid

work of theology. This theologian's strengths are evident especially in three areas. First, Herman Hoeksema is exegetical in his development of the doctrine. In this work, Hoeksema is at pains to demonstrate that the doctrine is squarely based on exegesis of Scripture. Secondly, Hoeksema is faithful to the Reformed confessions. Consciously and deliberately he takes his stance within the bounds of the Reformed confessions with which he agrees, and seeks to lift these Reformed doctrines to a higher state of development and clarity. Thirdly, Herman Hoeksema is nothing if not clear. He has a gift for making plain for the reader the difficult doctrines. These three qualities make *Reformed Dogmatics* a tremendously valuable work, for theologians as well as for all Reformed believers.

The republication of Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* is long overdue. It is good that this significant work is once again readily available. ■

We and Our Children: The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism. Herman Hanko. Second Edition. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 2004. xviii + 165 pages. \$15.95 (Paper). [Reviewed by Russell J. Dykstra.]

We and Our Children, first published by the RFPA in 1981, was a compilation of a series of articles in the Protestant Reformed Theological Journal. In those articles, Professor Herman Hanko answered a book entitled *Children of Abraham?* by David Kingdon. Kingdon rejected infant baptism from the standpoint of a Reformed Baptist. Thus *We and Our Children* analyzed and refuted the arguments of Kingdon's book, and then set forth the Reformed position.

This second edition of *We and Our Children* is an extensive revision of the first. As the author informs us, entire sections of the book have been rewritten. In my judgment, the first edition was a powerful defense of the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. The revision is even better.

Although this second edition does not focus exclusively on Kingdon's book, the main focus is still the position of the

Reformed Baptist. A major strength of the book, therefore, is that it refutes the strongest case that can be made for the Baptist position. The strongest position is not the premil-dispensational view that posits that the old and new covenants are two entirely different covenants, established with two different peoples, and thus having two different signs. That children of Abraham are included in the old covenant as indicated by the circumcision of babies, means nothing for the new covenant, according to them, because the new covenant is radically different from the old.

The Reformed Baptists agree with the Reformed that the covenants of the old and new dispensation are essentially the same covenant. In some ways this position is, therefore, much more credible, because it embraces the unity of God's covenant of grace. Nonetheless, Hanko's purpose is to demonstrate that this position of the Reformed Baptist is inconsistent, and ultimately untenable.

The major revisions came in the first two chapters of the first edition ("An Implicit Dispensationalism," and, "The Unity of Dispensations"). In the new edition, these were ex-

panded to five chapters ("The Intermediate Position of the Reformed Baptist," "Two Dispensations?," "One Church," "One Covenant," and, "One Sign"). This distinct treatment of the various elements in the argument is an improvement over the first edition. The presentation is clear and the arguments well grounded in Scripture.

A major part of the argument concerns the place of children in the covenant. This book is crystal clear on that issue. It is exceedingly helpful in discussing the idea of the organism

of the covenant. With this biblical presentation of the covenant as eternal, as unconditional, and as established by God only with those who are in Christ (the elect), it lays to rest the arguments of the Baptists. It is Hanks' position that any other view of the covenant will not consistently and effectively defend the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. In my judgment, he has made his case.

The book is clear and well written, and thus profitable for theologian and layman alike. ■

Contributors for this issue are:

Robert D. Decker, professor of Practical Theological and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

Russell J. Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

David J. Engelsma, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

Herman C. Hanko, professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

John P. Marcus, senior seminarian in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

Mark L. Shand, pastor of the Winnaleah congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Angus Stewart, missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches, currently laboring in Northern Ireland.

PROTESTANT REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Wyoming, Michigan 49418-9142

ISSN 1070-8138