

Protestant Reformed Theological Journal

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PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

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Editor's Notes

This is the last issue under my editorship. I plan to retire at the end of June 2006. My successor in the department of Practical Theology is the Rev. Barrett L. Gritters. Appointed to this position by the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 2003, Prof. Gritters expects to receive the Master of Theology Degree from Calvin Theological Seminary in May of this year. This degree, along with nearly twenty years pastoral experience in two large congregations in West Michigan, will serve Prof. Gritters, the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, and the Protestant Reformed Churches well.

A great deal of work goes into the publication of this Journal. Hence we would be remiss if we were to omit an expression of our deep appreciation to the faculty secretary, Judi Doezema, for her expertise in typesetting each issue, and to her husband, Donald Doezema, for his careful proofreading of each issue. It will be difficult indeed to replace these two dedicated servants of our Lord.

A new Editor will be introduced in the upcoming issue next fall.

R.D.D.

A Brief Study of Jeremiah 3 on Divorce

David J. Engelsma

Introduction

In their zealous defense of remarriage after divorce, especially on the ground of adultery, some appeal to Jeremiah 3. Their argument is that the prophet teaches that Jehovah Himself divorced the nation of Israel for her adultery, thus dissolving His marriage to her. Jehovah was then at liberty to take another wife, the New Testament church. The basis of the argument is verse eight of Jeremiah 3: “And I saw when for all the causes whereby back-sliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce....”

The argument has its apparent force. Jehovah did divorce His Old Testament wife. What is lawful for God as the divine husband must be lawful also for human husbands and, by implication, for wives as well.

God has made earthly marriage the outstanding symbol of His own covenant relation with His chosen people. Jeremiah 3 represents God’s covenant with Israel as a marriage. In this marriage, God was the aggrieved husband—the “innocent party.” Israel was the adulterous wife, who “hast played the harlot with many lovers” (v. 1). Among other Old Testament passages, Ezekiel 16 also portrays God’s covenant with His Old Testament people as a marriage. Addressing Jerusalem, God said, “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine” (Ezek. 16:8). Ephesians 5:22-33 teaches that God’s covenant with the New Testament church is the mystery reflected by, and the reality of, the earthly marriages of Christians. In Christ, God is married to the church. He is her husband; she is His wife.

Therefore, God’s dealings in His covenant are the pattern for

the behavior of Christian husbands and wives in earthly marriage. If He divorced His covenant people, as Jeremiah 3 certainly says He did, Christian husbands and wives may likewise divorce their marriage companions. At the very least, they may divorce on the ground of the adultery of their wife or husband. To this point, the argument is sound.

But the argument goes further. It maintains either that the adultery itself dissolves the marriage, or that the divorce on the ground of adultery dissolves the marriage. Those who insist on the right of remarriage after divorce on the ground of adultery are never clear, whether the adultery or the divorce dissolves the bond. This ambiguity is significant, if not deliberate. In any case, so goes the argument for remarriage on the basis of Jeremiah 3, one who divorces on the ground of adultery is at liberty to remarry. The assumption on which this argument in favor of remarriage rests is that God's divorce of Israel dissolved the marriage, so that God could freely marry the New Testament church.

Although he does not refer to Jeremiah 3, Gary North makes a case for remarriage after divorce based on God's divorce of Israel and supposed remarriage to the church.

God divorced Israel when Israel revolted by crucifying Christ. This was the last straw. Israel had committed spiritual adultery repeatedly, from the golden calf forward. God soon remarried; He gained a new bride, the Church. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom of the Church, not of Israel. The legal basis of this marriage was a prior divorce. If God had not lawfully cast off Israel, the Church could not legitimately be called God's bride. God is not a bigamist. Divorce and remarriage: without both of these covenantal actions on God's part, there could be neither Church nor salvation in New Testament times.¹

The appeal to Jeremiah 3 in support of the right of remarriage, especially after a divorce on the ground of adultery, is found

1. Gary North, "Editor's Introduction," in Ray Sutton, *Second Chance: Biblical Principles of Divorce and Remarriage* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), xii.

also in Reformed churches. Not infrequently, Reformed laymen will point to Jeremiah 3 as posing a difficulty for the position that the marriage bond is unbreakable even in the case of divorce on the ground of adultery.

The appeal to Jeremiah 3 in defense of remarriage is groundless. The chapter lends no support whatever to the doctrine and practice of remarriage after a divorce on the ground of adultery. On the contrary, this passage in the Old Testament is conclusive proof that earthly marriage, like its spiritual counterpart—the covenant of God in Jesus Christ with His chosen people—is indissoluble. Even adultery does not dissolve the relationship. Man cannot and God will not dissolve the bond. In the case of earthly marriage, of course, the indissolubility applies to the God-intended time of marriage: as long as the two married persons live. God dissolves every earthly marriage by the death of one of the marriage companions (I Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2, 3).

The Divine Divorce

God did indeed divorce Old Testament Israel. Jehovah declares this in verse eight with two strong expressions: “put her away” and “[gave] her a bill of divorce.” The reference is to Israel of the ten tribes, who by the time of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry were already in exile in Assyria. Both expressions describe the divine divorce of Israel as effecting separation. As marriage is a union consisting of the intimate sharing of life, divorce is separation. God “put” (Hebrew: ‘sent’) His wife, Israel, away. He sent her away from His presence, out of their home, and far from His fellowship. He will not live with her anymore. She may not live with Him.

God made this separation a formal, legal matter. He gave her a “bill of divorce.” The forceful Hebrew has ‘a bill of cutting off.’ God cut Israel off from His communion with all the benefits of this communion for the wife. That the separation was realized, enforced, and publicized in a legal document indicates the seriousness of the marital rift. This was no ordinary lovers’ spat. This was not even an instance, serious enough, of a husband’s or wife’s staying away overnight, or asking the other to leave for a night, before things are worked out the next day. All of Israel’s

rights and privileges as wife were suspended in law. Implied is that Israel had neither the holiness nor the righteousness that are required for living with God. The filthy adulteress could not live with the holy God. The guilty adulteress might not live with the just God. Now there was no easy way back to God's fellowship for Israel—or for God. All of the charges and demands of the divorce decree with regard to the unfaithful wife must be met and satisfied.

The historical reality of the divorce was the exile of the ten tribes in Assyria. God sent Israel away from His presence in the land of Canaan. He cut the nation off from His covenant fellowship in the land of promise. The banishment from His fellowship was righteous judgment—a “bill of divorce.”

The Lawful Ground

The ground for the divorce was the adultery of God's wife, indeed, repeated acts of adultery. This is expressed in the divorce decree: “For all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce” (v. 8). Israel had “played the harlot with many lovers” (v. 1). “As a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD” (v. 20). Israel was unfaithful in the most intimate aspect of her relationship with Jehovah.

In addition, Israel refused to repent of her adultery and to return to her husband. God's charge against Israel throughout the passage, that she carried on impenitently in her adulteries, proves that the Authorized Version's translation of the last part of verse one is correct: “Yet return again to me.” The verb is an imperative. Grammatically, the verb form could also be rendered as a question, “And you would return to me?” or, “Would you return to me?”² Translating the last part of verse one as a question would

2. See J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 187. Thompson thinks that the imperative, which is “possible grammatically,” is “out of harmony with the whole tenor of the passage. The question at issue is whether Israel, who has sinned so deeply, may lightly decide to return to Yahweh as though nothing had happened” (p. 192). On the contrary, nothing in the passage suggests that Israel had decided to return to Jehovah, whether lightly or seriously.

imply that Israel was inclined to return to God. But the context makes plain that Israel had not the slightest desire to return to God. In verse seven, God explicitly charges Israel with refusal to repent: "I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not." Israel was brazen: "Thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed" (v. 3).

After the divorce, as before the divorce, Israel had no interest in returning to Jehovah. Therefore, the LORD must call his divorced wife to come back: "Turn, O backsliding children" (v. 14). The same verb occurs in verse fourteen that is found at the end of verse one, and in verse fourteen there can be no question that it expresses a summons.

Besides, translating the last part of verse one as a question, "Would you return again to me?" leaves an impression that conflicts with the main thought of the entire passage. The impression is then that Israel desired to return, but Jehovah discouraged the returning. The main thought of the passage is the very opposite. Jehovah desired the return of His wife, but she was unwilling. Again and again, God called to Israel in the person of a wounded, loving husband, "Turn! Return!"

Israel's impenitence was an important aspect of the ground of the divorce. God did not divorce Israel simply on the ground of adultery. He divorced the nation on the ground of her continuing impenitently in adultery. Israel's impenitence also magnified the grace of God in maintaining the marriage and in eventually restoring Israel to His fellowship in the covenant. The maintenance of the marriage and the restoration of its communion were not due to anything in Israel, including Israel's repentance, but only to the faithfulness of God to His marriage vow.

The ground of the divorce was adultery. It was a lawful ground simply because the righteous God, who is the source and standard of all justice, made it the ground of His divorce of His wife.

The spiritual reality of Israel's adulteries was her worship and service of other gods. Jeremiah 3:6 indicates the reality when it charges that Israel "played the harlot" on "every high mountain and under every green tree." In these places the Israelites built their altars to the idols and carried out their idolatrous ceremonies. The "many lovers" of both Israel and Judah are identified in

verse nine as “stones and ... stocks,” that is, idols.

It should not be overlooked that Israel’s spiritual adultery included physical adultery. Worship of the idols permitted, incited, and called forth adultery, fornication, and homosexual acts on those high mountains and under those green trees. The same is true of the worship of idols by the false and apostatizing churches today. The gods they create by their corruption of the truth of the gospel encourage sex outside of marriage, divorce and remarriage, and even homosexual practice. Because holy marriage is the symbol of the covenant, departure from the covenant and its worship of the one true God is always marked by gross transgression of the seventh commandment. Always, the “acts of synod” of an apostatizing denomination advertise the departure from God by decisions that solemnly approve the depraved sexual behavior of the idolatrous culture to which the churches have succumbed. Thus, the faithless churches enthusiastically participate in the destruction of holy marriage.

On the ground of Israel’s idolatry, God officially suspended the communion of the covenant of grace.

Jeremiah 3 does indeed teach that God, the divine husband, divorced His wife on the ground of her spiritual adultery.

The Bond Yet Unbroken

What Jeremiah 3 does *not* teach is that the divorce annulled, or dissolved, the marriage. Much less does the chapter teach that the divorce opened up the way for God to take another wife, namely, the New Testament church. Rather, the passage clearly teaches that, although God divorced Israel, He maintained the marriage with His wife. The divorce temporarily suspended the fellowship—the life together—of the union, but it did not abrogate the bond of union itself. In the later language of the Christian church’s doctrine of marriage, God’s divorce of Israel was only a “separation of bed and board,” not a “dissolving of the bond.”³ God did not renounce His love for His wife, did not re-

3. *Divortium a mensa et thoro*, in distinction from *divortium a vinculo* (see Roderick Phillips, *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 3-5).

nege on His marital vow to her, and did not give up His will to have her in the communion of the marriage.

That God's divorce of Israel in no wise intended, or effected, the dissolving of the marriage was evident in the very fact of the divorce itself. The penalty for adultery in the Old Testament was not divorce, not even divorce by a formal decree, but death. God prescribed death for an adulterous wife. "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel" (Deut. 22:22).

Death was also the punishment of spiritual adultery, that is, idolatry. "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you . . . Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God" (Deut. 13:6-10).

But God did not put His own adulterous, idolatrous wife to death. He only divorced her. And the reason, as Jeremiah 3 makes abundantly plain, is that He still loved His wife and was determined to have her. He was merciful to His wife and would forgive her: "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever" (v. 12). The mercy of Jehovah would not unjustly ignore the death penalty that He prescribed and that His faithless wife deserved. But He would Himself suffer the death penalty in Jesus Christ.

The first verse of Jeremiah 3 proves, in a striking, indeed, startling way, that God was still married to divorced Israel. To Israel who had "played the harlot with many lovers" and whom God had already divorced, according to verse eight, God called, "Yet return again to me." This was a call to His wife, as verse one

makes plain: "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD." Whereas it was not permitted in Israel for a wife divorced from her husband and remarried to another man to return to her first husband, God called His wife back to Himself, even though she had committed adultery with many companions and even though God had divorced her. Divorced Israel remained the wife of the LORD.

What is striking, even startling, about this insistence on the maintenance of the marriage and on Israel's return to her rightful husband is the contrast between God's marriage to Israel and a law governing the earthly marriages of the Israelites. Verse one refers to the law concerning divorce and remarriage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 forbade a husband who had divorced his wife, on some other ground than her adultery, to take her back, if a second husband divorced her, or died.⁴ God, however, will take His wife back, even though she gave herself to many lovers and despite the fact that He had given her a bill of divorce.

This deliberate contrast in Jeremiah 3:1 between the law that Moses laid down for Israelites in Deuteronomy 24 and God's own behavior towards His wife points out that the New Testament church must not determine her marriage doctrine and practice from Deuteronomy 24. The law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was merely Moses' tolerance of deviation from God's original ordinance of marriage on the part of hard-hearted Israelite men. It was a stop-gap measure, somewhat to protect vulnerable women, who otherwise would have been passed around like property. This was Christ's analysis of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and indictment of the kind of people for whom the law was necessary, in Matthew 19:8:

4. For a full explanation of this controversial and widely misunderstood law, see David J. Engelsma, *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ & the Church: The Covenant-Bond in Scripture and History* (Grandville, MI: RFPA, rev. ed. 1998), 96-102.

"Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives."

Deuteronomy 24 does not reveal the truth about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It reveals the wickedness in marriage of hard-hearted, that is, unbelieving, men. The truth about marriage, already in the Old Testament, is revealed in Jeremiah 3:1: Even though He must divorce an unfaithful wife, God maintained the marriage and called His wife back to Himself.

Verse fourteen of Jeremiah 3 is decisive, and explicit, regarding the question whether God divorced an original wife so as to annul the marriage and open the way for Himself to marry another. Addressing faithless, divorced Israel, Jehovah exclaimed, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." Although His wife was unfaithful, although she committed adultery with numerous lovers, although she was as yet impenitent, and although God had divorced her, God was still her husband, and she was still His wife. The bill of divorce did not touch, much less dissolve, the marriage bond: "I am married unto you." Indeed, the fact of the marriage is the reason why God called Israel back, as it is the reason why she ought to come back, to live with Him: "*for* I am married unto you."

The Return of the Wife

Even though it is not the main interest of this brief study, I note that the call of God to His unfaithful wife, to return, is effectual. Israel would return to Jehovah. Israel would return because Jehovah would efficaciously draw the elect of the ten tribes back to Himself. This is the teaching of the prophet in verses fourteen through sixteen: "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land...."

The restoration of Israel of the ten tribes to communion of life with Jehovah her God in the marriage of the covenant would take place chiefly in the return of Judah from Babylon. Elect

Israelites would join the remnant of Judah in returning to Canaan—to their home and to their husband. “In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers” (v. 18). This return would not only be physical. It would also be spiritual. By the power of the love of God expressed in the call to return, the elect members of the ten tribes of Israel would “acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ... have not obeyed my voice” (v. 13). The only way back to the bosom of the husband for the adulterous wife is repentance.

God made plain that the restoration of Israel to the fellowship of the marriage covenant would not be a national revival, or even a mass conversion of Jews. Rather, God would take Israel “one of a city, and two of a family” (v. 14). In the elect of the nation, even though they are few in number, Israel would be restored.

The reunion of the elect of the ten tribes and the elect of Judah would again manifest the oneness of God’s marriage companion. Because of the historical schism in Israel at the time of Rehoboam, which division persisted in Jeremiah’s day, Jeremiah 3 speaks of two women, “backsliding Israel” and “her treacherous sister Judah” (vv. 6, 7). But it is a mistake to speak of God’s “two wives” in the chapter. Nor does the chapter do so. God had only one wife in the Old Testament. This wife was Israel, the nation made up of both the northern and the southern kingdoms. They belonged together. God would bring them together. The figure in Jeremiah 3 of marriage breaks down at the point of the historical division of the nation. If we were of a mind foolishly to pursue the figure, we would have to speak of the ten tribes as half of God’s wife, Judah being the other half. Or, a little less foolishly, we would regard the ten tribes as one form of God’s one wife, Judah being the other form.

However this may be, Jeremiah 3 gives no support to those eager to promote remarriage after divorce. The chapter gives no support to those who like to argue for the right of remarriage of the “innocent party,” that is, the husband or wife whose marriage companion has committed adultery and who has divorced the un-

faithful wife or husband on the ground of her or his adultery. The chapter gives no support to the notion underlying the position that the “innocent party” may remarry, namely, that adultery dissolves the marriage bond. Israel’s adultery did not dissolve her marriage to Jehovah. Jehovah’s “bill of divorce” regarding Israel on the ground of her repeated adulteries did not dissolve the marriage bond. Jehovah was still her husband; Israel was still His wife. The wife could, and would, return to the communion of life of the marriage.

Appeal to Jeremiah 3 in support of remarriage after a divorce on the ground of adultery is utterly mistaken.

The Heresy of Jehovah’s Remarriage

Not only is appeal to Jeremiah 3 in support of remarriage mistaken. The appeal implies heresy. For the appeal to Jeremiah 3 in support of remarriage holds that God abrogated His covenant with Israel. His word of promise failed. His love towards Israel cooled. His will to save Israel changed. The reason for this defeat and failure of Jehovah was Israel’s disobedience.

Appeal to Jeremiah 3 in support of remarriage implies the denial of the sovereignty of God’s grace in the realizing of His covenant and the saving of His covenant people in the Old Testament.

Scripture exposes this denial of God’s sovereignty in His covenantal dealings with Old Testament Israel as erroneous. With regard to God’s word of covenant promise, that is, the vow God took in marrying Israel, the apostle declares, “not as though the word of God hath taken none effect” (Rom. 9:6). The perishing of the majority of Israelites and, indeed, of the nation do not indicate the failure of the promise or the abrogation of the covenant. For the true Israel of God always was the elect in Christ among them, and in these elect, with whom the covenant was established by unconditional promise, the covenant is fulfilled (Rom. 9:6ff.).

Psalms 106:45 contradicts the heretical doctrine, that God dissolved His covenant with Israel because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. The conclusion of the long list of Israel’s grievous sins in the covenant, running from verse six through verse forty-three, is not that Jehovah finally forgot His covenant. Rather, verse forty-five

declares: “[Nevertheless] he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.” Jehovah kept His covenant despite Israel’s appalling wickedness. He kept His covenant because the covenant did not depend upon Israel, but only upon His own steadfast covenant love.

As this brief study has demonstrated, Jeremiah 3 itself, the chapter appealed to by defenders of remarriage, affirms God’s maintenance of His covenant with Israel—with Israel of the ten tribes—despite Israel’s unfaithfulness in the covenant. “I am married unto you, and I will take you” (v. 14). In the old covenant, God was gracious.

And His grace was sovereign.

God, No Bigamist

Adding to the heresy of the appeal to Jeremiah 3 in support of remarriage after divorce on the ground of adultery is the common notion on the part of those who make the appeal that God, having rid Himself of His first wife—Israel—was then free to take a second—the New Testament church.

According to this notion, God has had two wives!

God is the original divorcing and remarrying husband!

The notion is blasphemy!

The church is not a second wife of God, whether after Israel or alongside Israel. The church is the fulfillment and reality of Old Testament Israel.

The truth that the church is the spiritual reality of Old Testament Israel is widely overlooked today in the discussions between progressive dispensationalists and covenant theologians. Progressive dispensationalism tries to accommodate premillennial dispensationalism somewhat to covenant theology’s affirmation of the oneness of Israel and the church, while holding on to traditional dispensationalism’s insistence on the difference between the two peoples. The covenant theologians in this ecumenical discussion exert themselves to allow for significant difference between Israel and the church, while still maintaining a unity of the people of God.

Alarming, this discussion sometimes involves viewing the church as “superseding” Israel. The progressive dispensationalists

describe at least some of their covenant partners in the discussion as holding “supersessionism.” Evidently, some who deny dispensationalism’s teaching that national Israel has a separate future as the kingdom people of God alongside the church present the relation between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church as the church’s superseding Israel. Progressive dispensationalist Robert L. Saucy describes covenant theology as the “idea of a continuity of Old Testament Israel with the church in the sense that the church assumes the place of a ‘new Israel.’” Against the doctrine of the oneness of Israel and the church, he contends that “for Paul, the historic Israel . . . could not be *superseded* by a new people of God.” In this connection, Saucy criticizes those who teach a “transfer” to the church of promises originally made to Israel. Covenant theology is the view of the church “as a ‘new Israel’ taking the place of historical Israel in God’s salvation plan for the world.” With covenant theology in mind, Saucy declares that “Israel itself is never portrayed as a type in the strict sense of being *superseded* by an antitype.”⁵

Genuinely Reformed, covenant theology does not teach “supersessionism.” The church does not “replace” Israel. The church does not “take the place of” Israel. Nothing rightly belonging to Israel is highhandedly “transferred” to the upstart church.

The church *is* Israel—grown-up, mature, spiritual Israel—as the apostles teach in I Peter 2:9, Galatians 6:16, Romans 2:28, 29, and many other places. For the church is the people, nation, and body of which Jesus Christ is savior, king, and head. And that which made Israel, Israel, that is, the people, nation, and congregation of God in the Old Testament, was Jesus Christ in the midst of her by divine promise. The Jews in the middle east, and elsewhere, today, are not, and never will be, the reality of Old Testa-

5. Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 201-206 (emphasis added). See also *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

ment Israel, except insofar as some of them are brought into the church, where alone anyone can share in the reality of Israel. To the church belong all the promises made to Old Testament Israel. They are the church's promises. For they are all "yea" and "amen" in Christ (II Cor. 1:19, 20).

As the true Israel of God, the church is God's one and only wife. Jehovah God does not have two wives, as premillennial dispensationalism, both traditional and progressive, necessarily teaches. Since the Old Testament teaches that Israel was the wife of God and since the New Testament teaches that the church is the wife of God in Jesus Christ and since dispensationalism teaches that Israel and the church are two different peoples, dispensationalism holds that God has two wives. For dispensationalism, God is the original bigamist.

Neither does God have two wives successively, as is the position of those who appeal to Jeremiah in support of the teaching that divorce on the ground of adultery annuls the marriage so that the "innocent party"—God Himself in Jeremiah 3—may remarry. God did not divorce and remarry. God did not divorce Old Testament Israel and remarry the New Testament church. He did divorce His unfaithful wife, Israel. But He maintained the marriage with Israel, which He had established by a solemn, unconditional vow. On the basis of the cross and in the way of Israel's repentance, God brought His wife back. By the Spirit of the crucified and exalted Jesus Christ, in the fullness of time the young lady grew up, to become the lovely bride who is the faithful New Testament church.

Truth for Christian Marriage

Because God Himself has patterned the earthly marriage of Christians after His own spiritual marriage (the covenant of grace), we can derive important truths concerning earthly marriage in the church from Jeremiah 3.

First, marriage is a lifelong bond, which is not dissolved by the adultery, or even the repeated adulteries, of one of the marriage companions.

Second, divorce is permissible, sometimes even necessary, in the case of adultery, especially when one's wife or husband con-

tinues impenitently in adultery. Adultery is a lawful ground for divorce. The New Testament bears this out in Matthew 5:31, 32 and Matthew 19:9.

Third, divorce—divorce in the sense of a legal decree—effects separation, but the separation is not the dissolving of the marriage. This truth is of fundamental importance in the current debate, such as it is, in Reformed churches concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Many dismiss, out-of-hand, the teaching that biblical divorce, that is, divorce on the ground of adultery, does not dissolve the marriage bond, but only effects legal suspension of the life together of the married couple. The attitude towards this teaching borders on contempt. Any theologian or church that does not recognize that divorce in the Bible refers to the dissolving of the marriage, so that the “innocent party” at least, may freely remarry is regarded as ridiculous. But the Bible explicitly teaches a full, legal divorce that does *not* dissolve the marriage. The Bible teaches such a divorce in Jeremiah 3. God gave Israel a “bill of divorce,” but He remained married to divorced Israel (Jer. 3:8, 14). Though lacerated, the marriage was intact.

Fourth, an important practical reason for recognizing that adultery, or divorce on the ground of adultery, does not dissolve the marriage bond, so as to permit remarriage, is to leave the way open for reconciliation. In addition to being sinful, remarriage after a divorce is easy and ugly. Reconciliation is difficult and beautiful. Where children are involved, reconciliation is also beneficial for the covenant children.

Fifth, the believing husband or wife whose marriage has been deeply troubled by the adultery of his or her marriage companion is moved by the example of Jehovah God Himself, in Jeremiah 3, to be merciful to the offending wife or husband, as Jehovah God has been merciful to His wife.

“Although you have played the harlot with another lover, or played the lover with a harlot, yet return again to me.”

“Yet return again to me.”

“Even though I have given you ‘a bill of divorce’ on the ground of adultery.”

“For I am married unto you.” ●

Clear and Present Danger: An Overview of Luther's Demonology

Ronald Cammenga

Introduction

Some may argue that Martin Luther had a lifelong obsession with the devil. Such would be an extreme view. But to insist that Luther was profoundly conscious of the devil, his workings and his power, is to do justice to the facts. Behind Luther's reformatory work was the deep-seated conviction that the devil was in no small way responsible for the declension of the church. Luther did not conceive of his battles as a reformer primarily in terms of physical opponents, like the pope, heretics, fanatics, or wicked rulers. He was, instead, convinced that his battle was "not against flesh and blood..." (Eph. 6:12), but against the devil and demonic hosts.

Luther's battle with the devil, however, was not only a battle that took place in the scholarly and ecclesiastical arenas. More fundamentally, his battle with the devil was a personal battle within himself. Behind his struggles with various doubts, fears, and sins he saw the devil as tempter seeking to derail not merely the work of reformation, but his own personal salvation. Luther's battle with the devil took place on both these fronts.

Luther never produced what could be called a systematic theology. His demonology must be gleaned, therefore, from his numerous references to the devil scattered throughout his writings. References can be found in his exegetical works, his lectures, sermons, and commentaries especially. Not to be neglected is Luther's hymnody, which provided a unique genre for expressing his views concerning the devil. Luther's writings of a more personal nature detail his own inner struggles against "the Prince of Darkness grim." Luther did not content himself with a descrip-

tion of the spiritual opponent of God and the church. He also set forth the remedies to Satan's assaults, as he sought to arm himself and all believers against the wiles of the craftiest of all enemies.

What becomes abundantly plain from an examination of his writings is that Luther's conception of the devil was no abstract theological matter for him. Luther viewed the devil as "a clear and present danger"¹ both for the church as a whole and for the believer personally. This "clear and present danger" was not the clear and present danger of some fictional techno-thriller, but the clear and present danger of a real enemy, confronted close at hand, and with whom church and believer alike are involved in a life and death struggle. For, "No matter how well known it may be or how carefully learned, the devil, our adversary, who prowls around and seeks to devour us (I Pet. 5:8), is not dead."² Of this clear and present danger Luther sang in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The opening stanza of the familiar English rendition of Luther's great Reformation song is:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.³

Luther's demonology: who the devil is

There can be no question that Luther was influenced by the popular demonology of his day. Kostlin and Hay write:

1. Martin Luther, "Preface to Galatians," *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-), vol. 26, p. 3.

2. *LW*, vol. 26, p. 3.

3. *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976), hymn #444.

We here recognize in Luther very plainly the power of the conceptions of the devil then prevalent among the masses, and derived in part by tradition from the heathen world, under the influence of which he spent the years of his youth....⁴

Carleton Cunningham, in his essay "The Devil and the Religious Controversies of Sixteenth-Century France," describes the beliefs about the devil, demons, witchcraft, and the occult that permeated European society in the sixteenth century, as well as the impact these beliefs had on the Protestant reformers.⁵ Clearly, Luther was in this respect, as in so many others, a child of his times.

Although decidedly influenced by the popular beliefs of his day, Luther nevertheless strove to ground his teachings concerning the devil in Holy Scripture. Even his own experiences with the devil, the close encounters that he frequently very vividly described, were experiences, in Luther's judgment, that mirrored the testimony of Scripture. Luther did not simply uncritically adopt the standard medieval lore and superstitions relating to the devil and demons. But in this whole area, as in every other, he grounded his teaching in the only and ultimate authority of Scripture. Hence, there was a sifting by Luther that resulted in discarding the chaff of pure superstition and retaining the kernel of truth according to the Word of God, as that truth also rang true to his own experience. Althaus is right when he remarks:

Luther presents a doctrine about the devil on the authority of the Holy Scriptures and in continuity with ecclesiastical tradition. What he says about the devil, however, and the way in which he says it, goes far beyond Biblicism and traditionalism. He does not merely develop further a piece of theological and popular tradition; rather, on the basis of his own experience, he bears witness to the reality and the terribleness of the power of the devil. He does this in utter seriousness and with deep personal conviction. It is not simply to construe this part of his theology as something inherited from the Middle

4. Julius Kostlin and Charles E. Hay, *The Theology of Luther in its Historical Development and Inner Harmony*, vol. 2, p. 335.

5. Carleton Cunningham, "The Devil and the Religious Controversies of Sixteenth-Century France," in *Essays in History*, vol. 35 (1993).

Ages, even though some of its specific details are determined by the traditional belief in devils and demons. Luther takes the devil much more seriously than the Middle Ages did.⁶

Oberman agrees.

This *new* belief in the Devil is such an integral part of the Reformation discovery that if the reality of the powers inimical to God is not grasped, the incarnation of Christ, as well as the justification and temptation of the sinner are reduced to ideas of the mind rather than experiences of faith. That is what Luther's battle against the Devil meant to convey. Centuries separate Luther from a modern world which has renounced and long since exorcized the Devil, thus finding it hard to see the difference between this kind of religion and medieval witchcraft. But Luther distinguishes sharply between faith and superstition. He understood the hellish fears of his time, then discovered in the Scriptures the true thrust and threat of Satan and experienced himself the Devil's trials and temptations. Consequently he, unlike any theologian before or after him, was able to disperse the fog of witches' Sabbath and sorcery and show the adversary for what he really was: violent toward God, man, and the world. To make light of the Devil is to distort faith.⁷

Following Scripture's testimony, Luther viewed the devil as an angel created by God. Although he expressed uncertainty with regard to the day on which God created the angels, Luther conjectured that they were likely created on either the second or the third day.⁸ Originally, the devil was a good creature. Not only was he a good creature of God, but originally the devil, known personally as Lucifer, occupied a very high position in the angelic realm. From that glorious position, on account of the sin of

6. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, translated by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 161.

7. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 104.

8. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 150.

pride, the devil fell.⁹ Since his fall, Satan has exerted himself against God and man, Christ and the church. Allied with the devil are the demonic hosts that fell away from God under Satan's leadership and now stand in subservience to him. Luther's view was that the devil is absolutely depraved, that is, depraved without any possibility of remedy. He opposed the notion of Origin that even the devil would ultimately be saved and united with God.¹⁰

It was the devil, without question in the mind of Luther, who was the instigator of the temptation of Adam and Eve in paradise. He was the tempter. Although it was a real serpent that tempted Eve, clearly the rational-moral being speaking through the serpent was Satan himself.¹¹ That the devil tempted Eve to sin presupposes that at that point he was himself already a fallen, sinful creature.¹² Certainly, Eve should have known this. And she did know it. For this reason, Luther faulted Eve for carrying on polite conversation with the enemy of God.

With what great unconcern Eve listens to the serpent! We do not talk so intimately with a puppy that has been raised in the home and has been made accustomed to it—or with a chick.¹³

In the fall of man, the devil revealed his true personality. He is a liar and murderer from the beginning, as Jesus pointed out to the scribes and Pharisees in John 8:44. Luther could very vividly describe the devil's appearance and personality, accentuating his animosity towards God and good.

“Moreover, let us note that on the body of Satan there are shaggy and detestable hypocrites, because a shaggy skin is a mendacious skin. But a natural skin should not be rough. Furthermore, the red

9. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 343.

10. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 397.

11. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 145 and p. 185.

12. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 145.

13. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 171.

color pertains to homicides. These two portents—namely, falsehood and homicide—are in the church and the body of the devil.¹⁴

The reality of the devil's involvement in the world and the affairs of men

Luther was convinced, both on the basis of Scripture's testimony and his own experience, that the devil and his hosts exhibit a real presence and exert an equally real influence on the world of human experience. Luther believed that there were male and female demons.¹⁵ He believed that there were goblins and ghosts, specters and poltergeists, hags and witches.¹⁶ All of these not only had contact with the world of humans, but were able also, in negative and harmful ways, to impact the lives of men, women, and children. Haile observes,

Devils were in evidence everywhere. Luther's sermons and private remarks are brimful of tales about that grim, mocking demon, a helpful but ever insolent servant. He was held responsible for pretty much every trivial inconvenience and monstrous evil in the world, from the sulphur taste clinging to certain beers, to the crazy carryings-on of the radical sects and the unspeakable perversions of the papacy.¹⁷

"And though this world, with devils filled..."¹⁸ was not just a hypothetical possibility with Luther. It was the sober reality.

In the light of Scripture, Luther rejected at least two false notions respecting demons that were prevalent in his day. One of the lively debates of the day was whether ghosts were spirits of the dead haunting the earth, or demons. Even though at one time Luther

14. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 375.

15. *LW*, vol. 16, p. 297.

16. *LW*, vol. 16, p. 297; vol. 21, p. 272; vol. 54, pp. 241, 258, 332, 475.

17. H.G. Hail, *Luther: A Biography* (London: Sheldon Press, 1981), p. 186.

18. "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," *Psalter Hymnal*, hymn #444.

expressed the desire, after he died, to return to earth as a ghost in order to pester the priests and monks,¹⁹ in fact he repudiated the belief that ghosts are the spirits of the dead. After a man dies, he is cut off from the earth and contact with the earth; his soul goes either to heaven or to hell.²⁰ Luther also rejected a popular superstition of his day that sexual union between a devil and a human being was possible, resulting even in offspring. Luther dismissed this notion as silly and contrary to the laws of creation.²¹

However, Luther did believe that the devil and his demons made their presence known in everyday life in a multitude of ways. He saw the influence of the devil in the blowing of evil winds and the devastation of storms.²² The devil was behind sickness, the plague, and other misfortunes that overtook human beings.

I believe that in all grave illnesses the devil is present as the author and cause. First, he is the author of death. Second, Peter says in Acts that those who were oppressed by the devil were healed by Christ. Moreover, Christ cured not only the oppressed but also the paralytics, the blind, etc. Generally speaking, therefore, I think that all dangerous diseases are blows of the devil. For this, however, he employs the instruments of nature.²³

In one place Luther recalled events of his childhood.

When I was a boy, there were many witches who cast spells upon cattle and upon people, especially upon children. They also damaged the crops through storms and hail, which they caused by their sorcery.²⁴

He goes on to express his conviction that now that the gospel has

19. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 151.

20. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 446ff., On the controversy over whether ghosts are demons or the spirits of the dead, cf. Cunningham, "The Devil and the Religious Controversies of Sixteenth-Century France," p. 37ff.

21. *LW*, vol. 2, p. 11.

22. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 82.

23. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 53.

24. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 90.

been restored, such incidents are greatly diminished "... because the Gospel drives the devil and all his illusions from their seat of power."²⁵

In his own life, Luther often experienced intense wrestlings with the devil. In some instances, Luther undoubtedly went too far in identifying what he considered the devil's shenanigans. Nevertheless, there is in Luther a keen awareness of the devil and his activities that contrasts sharply, not only with the modern mind, but with the thinking of many Christians. Raise the prospect today of the devil's real influence and involvement in the affairs of men, and the response is incredulity. How can any right thinking person living in our modern scientific age really consider it possible that evil spirits are involved in the world of humans? Not so Luther.

Many of Luther's encounters with the devil were, fittingly, in the darkness of night. He complained that frequently the devil came to harass him after he had retired for the evening. In one place he lamented that he slept at night not only with his wife, Kate, in the bed, but with the devil lying next to him as well.²⁶ In his *Table Talk*, Luther related the devil's unsettling vexation of a fellow minister who sought Luther's advice in dealing with the situation. According to Luther "...Satan disturbed his peace with nocturnal tumults and the smashing of all the utensils in his house. Satan hurled pots and dishes close to his head, so that they broke in pieces, and Satan annoyed him by laughing outloud...." This had lasted for a whole year. Luther did not dismiss his fellow pastor's experience as ridiculous, but gave him advice for chasing the devil away.

Don't give in to that robber! Suffer the outward things and the minor damage that comes from the breaking of pots, for it can't harm you in body and soul, as you have found, for the angel of the Lord is with you. Let Satan play with the pots. Meanwhile pray to God with your wife and children [and say], 'Be off, Satan! I'm lord in this house, not you. By divine authority I'm head of this household, and I have a call from heaven to be pastor of this church. I have testi-

25. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 90.

26. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 90.

mony from heaven and earth, and this is what I rely on. You enter this house as a thief and robber. You are a murderer and a scoundrel. Why don't you stay in heaven? Who invited you to come here?" In this way you should sing him his litany and his legend and let him play as long as he pleases.²⁷

One of Luther's own notable close encounters with the devil took place during his confinement at the Wartburg. "I was often pestered [by the devil] when I was imprisoned in my Patmos, high up in the fortress in the kingdom of the birds."²⁸ Well known is the alleged incident involving the inkwell. So viciously did the devil assault Luther while he was in the process of translating the Scriptures into German that Luther is reported to have thrown his inkwell at the tempter. Although the authenticity of this incident is disputed, it is in keeping with Luther's sense of the real presence of the devil in his life. Luther lived his life, not only in the presence of God, but under the constant gaze of the devil. Never was he far from Luther, never totally out of the picture. For Luther, the devil was always "a clear and present danger."

Luther's view of his reformatory work as battle with the devil

Beyond his personal wrestlings with the devil, Luther viewed his work as a reformer (pastor, professor, and theologian) as conflict with the devil. His assault on the errors in the church consisted ultimately of warfare with the devil. And in his reformatory work he experienced opposition as attacks perpetrated, in the final analysis, by the devil. The recovery of the gospel had, in Luther's judgment, provoked the devil to a more frenzied attack against the church than at any previous time in history.

It is a general thing that men are more wicked where the Gospel is preached than where it is not preached. This comes from the fact that where God and His Word are, the devil is angry and cannot stand a loss in his kingdom. ...when the light of God's Word is turned on again and he is revealed and exposed, then he rages and raves and becomes rabid and insane. He cannot stand it but becomes furious

27. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 280.

28. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 280.

and rouses his followers also. While they used to be pious people, he now inflames them to all kinds of sin, avarice, jealousy, hatred, heresy, and commonly practiced vices without number. He has awakened. And where the Word of God is active, there he bestirs himself the most.²⁹

And again:

For the devil cannot do otherwise than attack this doctrine vehemently, with might and with craft; nor does he rest as long as he sees even a spark of it remaining. We, too, merely because we preach the Gospel purely, suffer all sorts of evils both on the right hand and on the left from the world, the devil, and his apostles.³⁰

Luther saw the devil and the devil's direct influence in the heretics and fanatics of his day. He regarded the Anabaptists as "possessed by the devil and ... seditious and bloodthirsty men."³¹ He viewed the antinomians as under the devil's influence, and their teaching as a "poisoned dart" of the devil.³² He regarded those who differed with him over the sacraments, especially Zwingli, as instruments of Satan.³³ It was the devil who roused the peasants in their revolt against the oppression of their lords. One particularly ominous devil was the Turk, by which Luther meant the advancing hordes of Islam. He spoke frequently of two unholy triumvirates. The first was the familiar triumvirate of sin, hell, and the devil. The second, less familiar to twenty-first century Christians was the pope, the Turk, and the devil. "Consequently, the Turk, the pope, and countless other devils must come from Italy, Spain, and all the corners of the earth, to vex, afflict, and kill us because of our unspeakable and disgraceful contempt."³⁴

But chief among the devils Luther engaged was the devil of

29. *LW*, vol. 13, p. 408.

30. *LW*, vol. 26, p. 13.

31. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 88.

32. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 43; vol. 5, p. 42.

33. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 22.

34. *LW*, vol. 2, p. 353.

Roman Catholicism. For Luther, it was the devil who animated the Roman Catholic Church of his day. All of the errors, every heresy, the multitude of abominable practices, the immorality and avarice of clergy and laity alike, were inspired by the devil. He regarded the churches as "truly schools of the devil."³⁵ He regarded the Roman Catholic Church as a chapel of the devil. "For it is the devil's rule to build a chapel next to a church and temple of Christ, that is, to appropriate the works and examples of the fathers, (and) disfigure them...."³⁶ His judgment was, "The papacy is a congregation of demons and of the worst people.... All its assemblages are of the devil. Therefore let us shun them, lest we become sharers in their plague."³⁷ The gospel exorcises all the Roman devils: pilgrimage-devils, bull-devils, brotherhood-devils, saint-devils, mass-devils, purgatory devils, monastery-devils, priest-devils, heresy-devils, and pope-devils.³⁸ Frequently, Luther refers to the Romish clergy as "devil's priests"³⁹ and "the devil's retinue."⁴⁰

There were two aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice that were particularly devilish to Luther. The first of these was Rome's attack on marriage by insisting on the celibacy of her clergy.

What need is there of saying more? Such was the devil's raging against holy matrimony, God's creation, that the papists compelled men to forswear married life; they established orders with their celibate life; and they declared the life of married people detestable in comparison with their celibacy.⁴¹

Repeatedly, Luther used Paul's language in I Timothy 4:1 and referred to Rome's insistence on celibacy as a "doctrine of demons."⁴² Luther's considered judgment was that:

35. *LW*, vol. 3, pp. 227 and 362.

36. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 237.

37. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 396.

38. *LW*, vol. 41, p. 150.

39. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 122; vol. 36, p. 160.

40. *LW*, vol. 36, p. 158.

41. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 239.

42. *LW*, vol. 1, pp. 134, 135, 240 for instance.

... the estate of marriage does not set well with the devil, because it is God's good will and work. This is why the devil has contrived to have so much shouted and written in the world against the institution of marriage, to frighten men away from this godly life and entangle them in a web of fornication and secret sins.⁴³

The insistence on celibacy was not merely a human commandment; it was also a commandment of the devil.⁴⁴ Expressing utter disdain, with a bluntness that is so characteristic of his writing, he asserted: "But the pope declares: 'No one can be a servant of the church unless he remains celibate.' This is what he teaches in his canons, which have dropped from the devil's behind."⁴⁵

Especially devilish to Luther, however, was the teaching of Rome that permeated the fabric of the Romish church, namely, the doctrine of meritorious good works, or works righteousness. He called Rome's promotion of such things as pilgrimages, entrance into a cloister, or fleeing into the wilderness "the devil's lies and deadly venom."⁴⁶ He urged his followers:

Therefore may the stumbling block of the cross never be taken away, which is what would happen if we were to preach what the ruler of this world (John 14:30) and his members would like to hear, namely, the righteousness of works; then we would have the devil friendly to us, the world on our side, and the pope and the princes kindly disposed toward us.⁴⁷

Luther frequently referred to those who worked in order to merit their salvation as the "devil's martyrs." In one place he said, "This must be applied to all the self-righteous, who toil and deprive themselves of food and drink and exhaust their strength in a matter that is of no consequence. They are the devil's mar-

43. *LW*, vol. 45, p. 37.

44. *LW*, vol. 39, p. 292.

45. *LW*, vol. 22, p. 434.

46. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 62.

47. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 45.

tyrs. They work harder to get to hell than we to heaven.”⁴⁸ In another place he wrote, “Therefore the workers of the Law are very rightly called ‘martyrs of the devil,’ if I may use the common expression. They earn hell by greater toil and trouble than that by which the martyrs of Christ earn heaven.”⁴⁹ And again: “... the martyrs of the devil suffer more than those of God.”⁵⁰ Luther took note of the irony of it all: “It is a double and just penalty to be tortured and plagued here on earth with the austere but vain sanctity with which the devil’s martyrs torture themselves, and then later to be the devil’s own forever.”⁵¹ From this point of view, Luther referred to the devil as “the holy devil,”⁵² as well as “God’s ape,”⁵³ that is, from the point of view of his promotion of works righteousness as God’s own holiness. It was this lie and murderous deception that pervaded the church of Luther’s day. From this grievous error, the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, received through faith, delivered men. For Luther, it was the gospel and only the gospel that exorcised the devil of works righteousness.

The devil of works righteousness was particularly evident to Luther in monasticism.

Moreover, as Satan acted then, so he does now. It is God’s command that we should believe the Gospel about His Son and thus be saved. This is the true wisdom, as Christ also says (John 17:3): “This is eternal life, that they know Thee, the true God, and Him, whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ.” This wisdom the monk disregards and turns to other things. He puts on his cowl, girds himself with a rope, assumes the vow of celibacy, etc.; and he imagines that in this way he will please God and be saved. This high and mighty wisdom, which makes an effort at the veneration and worship of God, was planted by Satan and by original sin into this wretched nature, so that often men

48. *LW*, vol. 17, p. 110.

49. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 8.

50. *LW*, vol. 28, p. 311.

51. *LW*, vol. 23, p. 359.

52. *LW*, vol. 2, p. 4.

53. *LW*, vol. 41, p. 168.

have disregarded the Word which God set before them for their salvation, that they might turn to their own thoughts.⁵⁴

In another place, Luther remarked:

A barefooted friar with his rope and his wooden shoes belongs in the same category. He fasts much, babbles and gobbles, observes his monastic rules, does not lie down without his cowl, lets the lice devour him, and imagines that he will go straight to heaven—and not he alone; but he presumes that by virtue of his good works and the merits of his order he can draw others up with him. But this is not traveling the way to heaven. No, it is hastening straight to hell in sheer blindness and in the devil's deception.⁵⁵

The monastic ideal of extraordinary service to God was, according to Luther, the greatest of delusions.

But if anyone preaches: "I will retire from the world and become a Carthusian monk in order to serve God, I will become a hermit"—thus the world has sought righteousness and the service of God in vows, cowls, and tonsures—he is serving the devil, not God.⁵⁶

Luther's view of the Roman papacy as an institution of the devil

Luther reserved his harshest devil rhetoric, however, for the Roman papacy. Both the institution of the papacy and the popes personally, Luther regarded as especially devilish. "The pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, yes, the entire ulcerous growth, and the devil are one and the same thing; for the papacy is of the devil."⁵⁷ As an institution, the papacy was a contrivance of the devil.

54. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 161.

55. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 36.

56. *LW*, vol. 23, p. 24.

57. *LW*, vol. 23, p. 193.

The Holy Spirit appointed several bishops in one city, but each one of you is over several cities, and a simple pope wants to be bishop over all the cities of the world; by whose command or authority? By the devil's own, who through you opposes the Holy Spirit and that which he has instituted.⁵⁸

The popes were guilty of connivance with the devil, not chiefly on account of their worldliness, idolatry, and immorality. Their complicity with Satan was seen especially in their rejection of the true gospel brought to light through the Reformation and their persecution of those who maintained the pure gospel.

The pope and his gang have lived shamefully and have practiced idolatry, but now they are also encumbering themselves with the sin of refusing to hear and to tolerate the message of the forgiveness of sin; they even crown this sin with blasphemy and persecution. This is truly the sin of Antichrist, yes, of the devil himself.⁵⁹

Luther made no bones about associating the pope with the devil. He called the pope the "devil's bridegroom," and the church of which he is the head the "devil's whore."⁶⁰ Luther faulted the papacy for the perversion of the gospel, accusing the pope of "throw(ing) the dear Gospel into a manure pile and a puddle."⁶¹ The title that befits the pope is "vicar of the devil."⁶² Because the pope threatened with excommunication from the church all who disobeyed his laws, "it is the devil himself who is speaking in the person of the pope and in all such papal decrees."⁶³ It was Luther's judgment that "he who wants to hear God speak should read Holy Scripture. He who wants to hear the devil speak should read the pope's decretals and bulls."⁶⁴ And further, "the pope made all the

58. *LW*, vol. 36, p. 156.

59. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 285.

60. *LW*, vol. 22, p. 450.

61. *LW*, vol. 21, p. 165.

62. *LW*, vol. 26, p. 408; vol. 41, p. 357.

63. *LW*, vol. 26, p. 87.

64. *LW*, vol. 41, p. 332.

kings and princes of the world beholden to him and exceedingly lavish, not only with their properties and wealth but also with their bodies. But in return for such great favors he led them astray and gained them for the devil.”⁶⁵ The pope was “the devil’s swine” who “has fallen snout and all” into the devil’s snare.⁶⁶

The believer’s personal struggles with the devil

Concerned as he was to engage the devil without, Luther was equally concerned to expose and confront the devil in his assaults upon the believer personally. Similarly, his perception of the devil’s manifestation in apostate Rome did not blind his eye to Satan’s presence in the true church of Jesus Christ. As far as Luther was concerned, there was nothing so characteristically Christian as warfare with the devil. Oberman is correct in his opinion that,

There is no way to grasp Luther’s milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the Devil: without a recognition of Satan’s power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ—and Luther’s faith becomes a confused delusion in keeping with the tenor of his time.⁶⁷

Luther’s discussion of the believer’s personal struggles with the devil and his many temptations was seldom a discussion in the abstract. Rather, Luther treated the believer’s conflict with Satan as that conflict took shape in everyday life in the world, in virtually every area of earthly life, by every child of God no matter what his or her calling in life may have been. Not only did he view Satan’s temptations as common to all believers, so that all believers experienced fundamentally the same spiritual warfare and faced the same sorts of dangers, but what becomes plain from his writings is that Luther consistently identified himself with

65. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 210.

66. *LW*, vol. 36, p. 201.

67. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, p. 104.

every believer in his own wrestlings with the Prince of Darkness. Luther was not superior because he was Luther, and therefore in some way immune to the devil's machinations. But Luther was a man among men, weak, fallible, prone to evil, given to impatience and despair, no less vulnerable to Satan's devices than any other child of God.

What especially exposed the believer to the devil's temptations was the weakness of his own sinful, depraved nature. This was the enemy within the gate, the devil within every child of God.

For the devil goes to work with might and main to impede and obstruct the Gospel; he uses every obstacle at his disposal. Besides, he enjoys the advantage of having as an ally within our own hearts that great piece of Adam, who is too lazy by nature, too sluggish, and too tired to engage in a battle like this and always draws us back, thus making it especially hard and unpleasant to keep on contending with opposition and obstacles of so many kinds and to fight to the finish.⁶⁸

This is "the tyranny of Satan, to whom this wretched nature has been subjected because of sin."⁶⁹ In his inimitable way, Luther referred to the corrupt nature of the saints as "the devil's yeast."⁷⁰

Luther saw one of the greatest temptations of the devil faced by the believer to be pride. "If the angels fell because of the pride they took in the greatness and excellence of their gifts, it will also be the ruin of human beings...."⁷¹ Closely associated with pride was the disunity in the church that often accompanied it, believers setting themselves up against their fellow believers. "That is the devil's joy and delight," Luther contended. "He strives for nothing else than to destroy love among Christians and to create utter hatred and envy. For he knows very well that Christendom is built and preserved by love."⁷² It was the devil of pride and disunity that reared its ugly head in the reformation movement

68. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 383.

69. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 142.

70. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 233.

71. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 257.

72. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 246.

and threatened to undo it. Luther complained, "The devil is a murderer and liar or seducer (John 8:44), and he has proved this sufficiently among us and is again beginning to prove it by means of new spirits and factions."⁷³

Luther warned often against the sins of the flesh with which the devil threatened the saints. Fornication was an especially powerful temptation of the devil. "It is an evil raging which cannot be easily restrained, because it is blind and deaf and is simply a fury and a madness inspired by the devil."⁷⁴ Reflecting on Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife, Luther commented, "Therefore the devil comes and tempts him on the right after he could not conquer and overthrow him on the left with toils, slavery, and exile."⁷⁵

Another of Satan's attacks on the holy life of the people of God was riches and the lust of the things of this earth. Luther spoke of those who lived for this life and riches as those who were "in the devil's exile."⁷⁶ He faulted the pope and many of the clergy for having succumbed to this arrow shot from the devil's bow.

An ever-present danger was rebellion and lawlessness, the pride that manifested itself in a refusal to submit to those whom God had placed in positions of authority over the Christian. Luther praised the example of Abraham's servant, Eliezer, who was a faithful and obedient servant of his master. He contrasted Eliezer's spirit with the spirit of the day.

Our age has no example to equal this one. But everybody is complaining about the malevolence and the unheard-of insolence of domestics who do not serve their masters but give them orders. The Holy Spirit does not approve of such servants; they are an abomination in the sight of God and slaves of the devil, whom they serve and obey.⁷⁷

73. *LW*, vol. 20, p. 314.

74. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 79.

75. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 74.

76. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 207.

77. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 283.

Reflecting further on the pervasive lawlessness of his own day, Luther said:

... there is the freedom of the flesh, which is chiefly prevalent in the world. Those who have this obey neither God nor the laws but do what they please. This is the freedom which the rabble pursues to-day; so do the fanatical spirits, who want to be free in their own opinions and actions, in order that they may teach and do with impunity what they imagine to be right. This is a demonic freedom, by which the devil sets the wicked free to sin against God and man.⁷⁸

In his tract *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, Luther was especially severe in his rebuke of the lawlessness of the peasants. "I think there is not a devil left in hell; they have all gone into the peasants," he judged. He added, "... they are doing the devil's work."⁷⁹ And again:

See what a mighty prince the devil is, how he has the world in his hands and can throw everything into confusion, when he can so quickly catch so many thousands of peasants, deceive them, blind them, harden them, and throw them into revolt, and do with them whatever his raging fury undertakes.⁸⁰

Luther saw the duty of the magistrates as God's own commission to them, as the duty to resist this attack of the devil.

Such men must be checked and punished with fire, sword, the wheel, imprisonment, and punishments of every kind by means of which the devil is repressed in unruly and insubordinate men; for otherwise impunity from all crimes would rush in like a deluge in all its might.⁸¹

78. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 4.

79. *LW*, vol. 46, p. 49 and 52.

80. *LW*, vol. 46, p. 51.

81. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 191.

Trials, especially severe trials or the accumulation of trials, made the Christian particularly susceptible to the assaults of Satan. In this respect, the devil “likes to fish in troubled waters.”⁸² Luther knew how prone the believer is at such times to the devil’s temptations.

... if the devil notices that you have the Word and are confident that your life is pleasing and acceptable to God on account of the Word, he will not rest but will put in your way trials and afflictions of every kind even in the most trivial matters. You will experience faithlessness on the part of the household, the hatred of your neighbors, and the death of your children⁸³ or of your wife. All these things will happen in order that your faith may be exercised.⁸⁴

In another place, Luther cautioned:

... after we have set foot on the way, have ventured forth and begun to believe, then it is necessary that we become sure, keep our feet on the ground, and not be drawn back or be frightened away. For here again the devil tries to conjure up his phantoms, to cause heart-ache, and to cast all sorts of stumbling blocks into our way, in order to lead us beside and off the right way, to keep us from pursuing the right course.⁸⁵

An especially grievous assault of Satan was his tempting of the child of God to doubt. Luther considered doubt to be peculiarly demonic. Just as at the beginning, when Satan cast doubt in the mind of Eve concerning the Word of God, so he continually tempts the believer to doubt and to fear.

82. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 127.

83. Luther himself experienced this. Two of his children died young. On August 3, 1528 Luther’s eight-month-old daughter, Elizabeth died. On September 20, 1542, after a brief illness, Luther’s thirteen-year-old daughter, Magdalene, whom he affectionately called Lena, died in Luther’s arms. Lena’s death had a profound effect on Luther and for a time brought him to the brink of despair.

84. *LW*, vol. 5, p. 5.

85. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 46.

For the devil has no other dart with which to gain mastery over us than the picture of an unmerciful and angry God. If that shot hits the heart, no man is staunch enough to bear it. Therefore Christ always contends against this and arms us with the weapons of defense by assuring us that He Himself vouches for the Father's love.⁸⁶

Throughout his life, Luther wrestled with doubt and fear. Doubt and fear precipitated his entrance into the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. In the monastery, he struggled with doubt. He tells us that he would have died from despair if his mentor, Staupitz, had not delivered him.

Staupitz used to comfort me with these words: "Why do you torture yourself with these speculations? Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (I John 3:8) and make you sure about predestination. And for this reason He says to you: 'You are My sheep because you hear My voice' (cf. John 10:27). 'No one shall snatch you out of My hands'" (cf. v. 28).⁸⁷

Relating his own struggles and the means of God to his deliverance, Luther gave counsel to believers struggling with doubt and fear.

In the world, on the other hand, nothing but hatred, persecution, temptation, and all sorts of adversity continue; and a Christian must finally become weary and dejected. I myself have often experienced this when the devil, through the agency of the world and my conscience, put me to the test so severely that I did not know where to turn. And since the devil does not cease, or desist from, frightening and wearying us with thoughts of sin and death, the Holy Spirit will not stop fortifying our hearts against this and inspiring us with a courage that will overcome it all and cause us to say with the prophet David in Ps. 118:17: "I shall not die, but I shall live, even though I

86. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 157.

87. *LW*, vol. 5, p. 48.

feel a thousand deaths. I will still stand justified and holy before God, even though I felt burdened with the sin of the whole world. I will still be saved and go to heaven, even if you opened your hellish jaws much wider. My Lord Christ is not my enemy, neither is the Father or the Holy Spirit; for They all co-operate in affording me the comfort which the Father sends, the Son prays for, and the Holy Spirit Himself brings.”⁸⁸

**Victory in the battle with the devil:
assured because of God’s sovereignty**

Luther did not content himself with vividly describing the devil and detailing the Christian’s lifelong battle with the devil. He also held forth the believer’s victory and the means to his victory over the devil. The Christian has and must live in the assurance that he has the victory over his dread foe. And the Christian must avail himself of the means that God has provided for defeating the devil’s onslaughts.

The foundation stone of this assurance for the believer is the truth of the sovereignty of God, the absolute sovereignty of God. God exercises his sovereignty over the devil and over all the activities of the devil. The devil does not rage outside of the sovereign control of God; he is not a power in the world alongside of the power of God. Even the devil and the demons of hell are subservient to God and the saving purposes of God with respect to His people. From this point of view the devil is God’s devil. Kostlin and Hay are correct in their assessment of Luther’s view.

The entire sphere of human life and the world in general appears to Luther involved in a conflict being waged between the devils, on the one hand, and God and His angels on the other—a conflict, moreover, in which God Himself already has the devil in His power, and permits the latter to ply his arts only in so far as may accord with and serve the divine purposes.⁸⁹

88. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 116.

89. Kostlin and Hay, *The Theology of Luther*, p. 331.

And again:

In their rage, moreover, they [the devils, RC] are not only held in check by their triumphant opponents, God and His angels, the latter far exceeding them in understanding, power, and even number; but they are compelled by their very rage, against their will, themselves to serve God and further His purposes. He uses them in accomplishing His "strange work." What they do, He does, since He, by withdrawing His hand purposely, allows them to do it.⁹⁰

Althaus agrees with the assessment of Kostlin and Hay.

Satan and his evil work are also subject to God's almighty activity. This means that the devil must still serve God's will for men and for the world in spite of the fact that his will and activity are directed against God. God keeps him in his service and uses him for his own work. He uses him primarily as the tool of his wrath. What God's wrath does and what Satan does frequently appear to be one and the same.⁹¹

Kramm is, therefore, wide of the mark in his insistence that Luther's teaching regarding the real power of the devil and his view of the sovereignty of God are contradictory. "Sometimes it sounds in Luther's sermons and hymns as if the world were a battlefield between two equal powers, a good God and an evil god called Devil...." According to Kramm, "Luther does not try to bridge the gulf" between these two realities.⁹² In reality Luther holds to the sovereignty of God over the devil in such a way that, although as a rational, moral creature the devil acts freely, nevertheless everything he does he does according to God's will and in order to fulfill God's purposes.

The comfort of God's people in their battle with the devil rests in God's sovereign rule over the devil. It is the comfort, first of

90. Kostlin and Hay, *The Theology of Luther*, p. 335.

91. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, p. 165.

92. H.H. Kramm, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (London: James Clarke and Co., 1947), p. 41.

all, that God's power is greater than the devil's. God is God; the devil is not God. Because God's power is greater than that of the devil, the Christian need not fear the devil's ravings. "Although sin makes itself felt, death bares its teeth, and the devil frightens us, still there is far more grace to prevail over all sin, far more life to prevail over death, and far more God to prevail over all devils."⁹³ "The will of God stands firm, however, and what the Lord wills is finally carried out, even though Satan and all the gates of hell resist it."⁹⁴ Commenting on John 15:1, Jesus' teaching that He is the true vine and His Father the husbandman, Luther writes:

But since God Himself calls Christ His true Vine, let the world, the devil, and hell call us what they please. If they hurl us into the ovens or into hell, it shall not harm us; for here is God, who has a stronger and more forceful language and voice than the world and the devil. He will outshout them and compel them to let us be with Christ and remain His true and fruitful vine branches.⁹⁵

But God's power is not simply greater than that of the devil. In His sovereign power God actually uses the devil so that in everything that he does he is accomplishing the purposes of God. God sends the devil; God uses the devil; the devil is God's pawn and puppet. "Hence rascals and wrong are a good thing too."⁹⁶ It was God who permitted Satan to tempt Eve and who used Satan to bring about the fall of the race. In the fall of man, God was engineering His own divine purposes.⁹⁷ Because of God's sovereignty, the devil and the world may actually be of greater service to the Christian than the blessed angels or pious saints.⁹⁸ It is God Himself who troubles us in various ways through the devil.⁹⁹

93. *LW*, vol. 14, p. 27.

94. *LW*, vol. 20, p. 48.

95. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 200.

96. *LW*, vol. 30, p. 104.

97. *LW*, vol. 1, pp. 144 and 145.

98. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 198.

99. *LW*, vol. 3, p. 329.

The ungodly smugly attribute to the devil the ills that befall them; in doing so, they sin by not seeing the hand of God.¹⁰⁰ "In all trials and afflictions man should first of all run to God; he should realize and accept the fact that everything is sent by God, whether it comes from the devil or from man."¹⁰¹

One of the chief purposes of God with the devil is His use of Satan as the instrument of His wrath.

In like manner, we today, when we are afflicted by war with the Turks, by the plague, and by famine, or are harassed in other ways by the devil, all complain about the greatness of our misfortunes. But you would hear no one say: "We have sinned. We have done evil. Lord God, have mercy upon us; be mindful of Thy mercy, which is of old" (cf. Ps. 51:4; 25:6). We do not turn to God, who punishes us.¹⁰²

Even in connection with the uprising of the peasants, which Luther condemned, he admonished his readers to consider that through the upheavals of the peasant revolt "God may, perhaps, have thus aroused the devil as a punishment upon all Germany."¹⁰³ God uses the devil, often, as the instrument of His punishment of sinful men. "In the same way the Lord also commands the devil and the flesh to tempt and overwhelm the man who has deserved it in the eyes of the Lord because of his wickedness."¹⁰⁴

Because God is sovereign, the believer ought not to fear the devil nor doubt his own or the church's final salvation. The devil does God's bidding and realizes God's purposes, which purposes are always saving in relation to His own. Victory is assured!

Victory over the devil grounded in Christ's saving work

The believer rests in God's sovereignty, that the sovereign will of God aims at both his temporal and eternal welfare, because of

100. *LW*, vol. 3, p. 265.

101. *LW*, vol. 14, p. 140.

102. *LW*, vol. 5, p. 170.

103. *LW*, vol. 46, p. 52.

104. *LW*, vol. 25, p. 160.

Christ's saving work. The assurance of victory over the devil is grounded in Jesus Christ. About this, Luther was very explicit.

In Christ we have victory over the devil and against the power of the devil. The power of the devil is death, sin, and an evil conscience. Through these he reigns. He also has shields and weapons. He terrifies hearts with death and inclines the will to sin wherever he desires. From all these we have not only been delivered, but we even have victory. He who has overcome the world has also overcome the devil.¹⁰⁵

This was the purpose of the incarnation: the defeat of Satan.

The devil's work is to crush us under his feet and, because of our sin, to dispatch us from life into death. For this reason the Epistle to the Hebrews calls Satan the originator of death (Heb. 2:14). To bring to naught this work of Satan, Christ came.¹⁰⁶

... keeping in mind that the Son of God was sent into the flesh to free us from sin, death, and the tyranny of Satan.¹⁰⁷

Christ is the devil's spoiler. Comparing Christ to Abraham in his spoiling of the kings of the Canaanites (Gen. 14), Luther said: "He took the devil by surprise, retrieved the plunder, and deprived the robber of his spoils. Thus, whoever believes in Him has the promise of eternal deliverance from sin, death, and the devil."¹⁰⁸ Christ is the "devil's devil."¹⁰⁹

Likewise, if the devil whips me, I have a stronger devil, who will whip him in turn. And when the more powerful devil battles and conquers the powerful one, I am set free.... For Christ is my devil against the devil, that I might be a son of God....¹¹⁰

105. *LW*, vol. 30, p. 246.

106. *LW*, vol. 13, p. 135.

107. *LW*, vol. 2, p. 48.

108. *LW*, vol. 13, p. 21.

109. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 117.

110. *LW*, vol. 26, p. 164.

Luther held forth the believer's victory in Christ in the second stanza of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.¹¹¹

Victory over the devil enjoyed by faith

The believer's victory over the devil that is grounded in the finished work of Christ is enjoyed by faith. Justification by faith was no merely dogmatic truth for Luther. For justification by faith means deliverance from the devil by faith. Through faith the believer is freed from Satan's tyranny, from the devil's temptations, and from the misery and death that attend servitude to the god of this world. True and saving faith—that is the victory over the devil, for "The pope and the devil have a faith, too, but it is only a 'historical faith.'"¹¹² "To those who have faith, however, this stingy and paltry phrase 'Believe in Christ' is the power of God (Rom. 1:16), by which they overcome sin, death, and the devil, and obtain salvation."¹¹³ Commenting on I Peter 5:9, Luther wrote:

Thus St. Peter has given us adequate instruction as to how we should fight against the devil. This does not require much running to and fro or any work you can do; it requires only that you cling to the Word through faith. When the devil comes and wants to drive you into melancholy because of your sin, just take hold of the Word of

111. *Psalter Hymnal*, hymn #444.

112. *LW*, vol. 22, p. 369.

113. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 56.

God, which promises forgiveness of sins, and rely on it. Then the devil will soon desist.¹¹⁴

In another place Luther extolled faith as the victory over the devil in these words:

The curse has been taken away by Christ, and a blessing will be bestowed on all who receive Him and believe in His name. The remarkable blessing is this, that after being freed from sin, from death, and from the tyranny of the devil, we are in the company of the angels of God and have become partakers of eternal life.¹¹⁵

As always, the contrast to faith for Luther is the biblical contrast of works. In the way of works, trusting in one's works, relying on the merit of one's own works, there cannot be victory over the devil. The man who relies on his own works, or the works of any other, is doomed to defeat at the hands of the devil.

But how do I approach this Savior and Redeemer? By means of cowls or monastic orders and rules? No! Just cling to the Son in faith. He conquered death and the devil, and He slit the devil's belly open.¹¹⁶

To the accusations the devil brings to the mind of the child of God, Luther recommended the answer of faith.

Little is gained against the devil with a lengthy disputation; but a brief word and reply such as this is effective: "I am a Christian, of the same flesh and blood as my Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You settle with Him, devil!" Such a retort would soon make him depart.¹¹⁷

In another place, Luther gave the same advice.

114. *LW*, vol. 30, p. 142.

115. *LW*, vol. 2, p. 261.

116. *LW*, vol. 22, p. 356.

117. *LW*, vol. 22, p. 106.

Thus the believer can raise himself up through faith alone and gain a comfort that is sure and firm; and he need not grow pale at the sight of sin, death, the devil, or any evil. The more the devil attacks him with all his force and tries to overwhelm him with all the terrors of the world, the more hope he acquires in the very midst of all these terrors and says: "Mr. Devil, do not rage so. Just take it easy! For there is One who is called Christ. In Him I believe. He has abrogated the Law, damned sin, abolished death, and destroyed hell. And He is your devil, you devil, because He has captured and conquered you, so that you cannot harm me any longer or anyone else who believes in Him." The devil cannot overcome this faith, but he is overcome by it.¹¹⁸

Victory over the devil worked by means of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer

The believer is not left defenseless against the attacks of the devil. In his goodness God has provided believers with the means to arm themselves against him. Luther has the Christian sing of his divine armament in his hymn, "God the Father with Us Be."

God the Father with us be, Let us not fall to badness;
Make us from all sinning free, And help us die in gladness.
'Gainst the devil well us ware, And keep our faith from failing,
Our hope in thee from quailing. Our hearts upon thee staying.
Let us wholly trust thy care, With all good Christians sharing,
Escape the devil's snaring, Him with God's weapons daring.¹¹⁹

Chief among these means, in Luther's view, is the Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God. Notwithstanding the devil's attempt to subvert the Word of God, and thus disarm the church and the Christian, God has faithfully preserved His Word.

Although the Antichrist in Rome and the devil frightfully mutilated and perverted all that is divine in the church, God nevertheless

118. *LW*, vol. 26, p. 162.

119. *LW*, vol. 53, p. 270.

miraculously preserved Holy Scripture—even though it was darkened and dimmed under the pope’s accursed rule—and passed it down to our day.¹²⁰

So often Christians “see only groanings, tears, troubles, and oppression of the poor; we see the devil’s behind; we do not see the face of God. But let us believe, hope, wait, pray; let us listen to the Word and cling to it.”¹²¹ In this respect, believers must learn from the examples of the saints of the Old Testament. “David was a very saintly man and most ardent in his worship of God. But how quickly he is driven to adultery, murder, and blasphemy! For to be asleep with regard to the Word of God is to open the window to the devil.”¹²² Over and over again, Luther pointed the saints to the Word as the means to overcome the devil. “In the Word, therefore, there is a most powerful kingdom against death, sin, the devil, and all their tyranny, with power to save, to set free, and to defend for eternal salvation.”¹²³ Of the power of the Word, Luther sang in his “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” In the familiar English version of his well-known Reformation hymn, he speaks at the end of the third stanza of “One little Word” that fells the devil, and goes on in stanza four to sing:

That Word above all earthly powers—
No thanks to them—abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill,
God’s truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.¹²⁴

120. *LW*, vol. 22, p. 102.

121. *LW*, vol. 8, p. 47.

122. *LW*, vol. 4, p. 391.

123. *LW*, vol. 8, p. 244.

124. *Psalter Hymnal*, hymn #444.

Luther faulted the fanatics who belittled the Word, exalting above the Word their own mystical experiences. Such subjective experiences do not arm against Satan, but are themselves a means of Satan to draw the believer away from the Word.

But you must not imitate the fanatics and say: "Well, if the oral Word does not help [in the battle against Satan, RC], then I will retire into my chamber, speculate, and gape until the Father draws me and touches my heart." Away with your thoughts! Don't ever do that! The devil has his hand in that. Even if all your meditations were as sweet as sugar, they are still of the devil.¹²⁵

Only in the Word does the believer hear Christ. And Christ alone is our defense against the devil.

And how do I hear Him [Christ, RC]? How am I instructed by Him? A schismatic spirit withdraws into some nook, gapes, neither reads nor listens, but waits for God to speak to him. He waits for the Spirit to appear, and he says: "Oh, this is what it means to be taught by God!" Yes, the devil is standing on your head! No, to be taught by God Himself means to heed the Word of Christ, to learn from Him, and then to feel convinced that it is God's Word. This is hearing God Himself.¹²⁶

That which arms the believer against the devil, of course, is the pure Word of God, the truth of God's Word. This spiritual lesson is taught from the fall of Adam and Eve.

All this is useful, that we may learn, as Peter says (I Peter 5:9), to stand undaunted and to resist the tempter while holding on to the Word with a firm faith and closing our ears so as not to grant admittance to what is foreign to the Word. For truly, these afflictions of Eve and Adam are lessons for us, in order that we may not have the same experiences by being drawn away from the Word and from faith.¹²⁷

125. *LW*, vol. 23, p. 88.

126. *LW*, vol. 23, p. 97.

127. *LW*, vol. 1, p. 158.

Where God's Word is proclaimed, there is God and the power of God to strengthen the saints in their struggles with the Evil One.

I think everyone knows that "God's house" means where He dwells, and that He dwells where His Word is, be it in the field, in church, or on the sea. On the other hand, where His Word is absent, He is absent, nor is His house there; but there the devil dwells, though it be a church of gold blessed by all the bishops.¹²⁸

Because of the necessity of the Word in the spiritual warfare against the devil, parents must see to it that their children are taught the Word of God. Luther bemoaned the fact that the universities and the schools of the monasteries were "asses' stalls and devil's training centers."¹²⁹ For this reason, Luther was very vocal, not only in his call for the reformation of the church, but also in his call for the reformation of the schools. But it was not only the schools with which Luther was piqued. He was also upset by parents who did not make the training of their children in the Word of God the priority, but rather equipped them for some earthly vocation.

No one nowadays is bringing up his children in the knowledge of good literature, much less of sacred literature, but only in the ways of making a living. All these are efforts by Satan for suppressing the Gospel in our territories, and that without the might of tyrants or the deceit of heretics.¹³⁰

Subordinate to the Word, but closely connected to it in the mind of Luther, were the sacraments. Especially do the sacraments work assurance in the believer, dispelling the doubts and fears instilled by Satan. Not only was this the function of the sacraments at the time they are administered, but Luther insisted that this was the power of the sacraments throughout the life of the believer.

When the devil wants to make us pious, he emphasizes the importance of our life at the expense of faith; or when he has something

128. *LW*, vol. 14, p. 103.

129. *LW*, vol. 45, p. 352.

130. *LW*, vol. 27, p. 123.

special in mind and wants to make you clever and smart, he appeals to your reason in opposition to doctrine, just as he did in the case of the heretic Arius and to others. But if you cling to the Lord Christ's life and say: "I am not baptized on my or on any other man's life but solely on my Christ," he can gain nothing.¹³¹

To those who doubted their salvation, Luther gave the assurance:

When I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it is just as if I were saying: "I am snatching you from the hands of the devil and bringing you to God, and I am doing this truly and in fact."¹³²

Accordingly, one ought not to succumb to the devil's temptations to doubt and to fear.

Therefore when the devil assails you with them, you should only say: "I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ about whom I have no doubt that He was made flesh, suffered, and died for me. Into His death I have been baptized." This answer will make the trial disappear, and Satan will turn his back.¹³³

Besides the public means of grace, Word and sacraments, God has given to His people the gift of prayer. For the believer personally, defense against the devil's wiles is to be found in prayer. On the one hand, the believer's struggle with the devil has the good effect of motivating the believer to pray. "When the devil drives us on and the world afflicts us, then the more fiercely we are urged, the more ardently we pray...."¹³⁴ On the other hand, prayer is the surest remedy to Satan's assaults. "If you intend to do any fighting, fight with prayers. After all, there is no other way by which we can more sharply assail Satan and cause him to totter than with our prayers...."¹³⁵ It is the prayers of believers

131. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 296.

132. *LW*, vol. 5, p. 141.

133. *LW*, vol. 5, p. 48.

134. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 370.

135. *LW*, vol. 20, p. 139.

that rout the devil. "When the devil hears that cry, he is much concerned about fleeing, just as enemies and those who lie in ambush flee at the voice of those who watch over the city."¹³⁶ Luther's advice to all Christians was:

Cultivate the habit of falling asleep with the Lord's Prayer on your lips every evening when you go to bed and again every morning when you get up. And if occasion, place, and time permit, pray before you do anything else. In this way you get ahead of the devil by surprise and without warning, whether you are ready or not, before he catches up with you and makes you wait. For it is better to pray now, when you are half-ready, than later, when you are not ready at all, and to begin to pray only to spite and vex the devil, even if you find it most difficult and inconvenient to do so.¹³⁷

Besides the prayers of the saints individually, there is also strength in the prayers of the church collectively. "No man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The church and the ministry of the Word were instituted for this purpose, that hand may be joined together and one may help another. If the prayer of one doesn't help, the prayer of another will."¹³⁸

Often prayer takes the form of singing, and song is yet another effective means to put the devil to flight. Luther loved to sing and was strengthened in his own battles with the devil through song. And he recommended the same to believers. "When the saints rejoice in the spirit and sing 'The Lord is my Strength and my Song' (Ps. 118:14), then the devil is far away, and murmuring and impatience cease. But when the barrier has been trodden down, the rascal comes."¹³⁹ He expressed his delight at singing in the congregation. "I really like it when we sing loudly in church.... The devil cannot bear to hear that. He has to get several miles away."¹⁴⁰

136. *LW*, vol. 11, p. 509.

137. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 387.

138. *LW*, vol. 54, p. 78.

139. *LW*, vol. 7, p. 127.

140. Quoted by Haile, *Luther: A Biography*, p. 195 as found in *Tischreden* (Weimar: Bohlau, 1906-61), vol. 5, p. 92.

Victory over the devil finally achieved in glory hereafter

Although the church has the victory over the devil in principle on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ, and although God arms the church with the means here and now to ward off his assaults, nevertheless the final victory over the devil is achieved only in glory hereafter. The first stage of this final victory is achieved at the moment of the believer's death. This is the pleasing prospect of death for those who die in Jesus Christ.

In this way Christ tells His disciples never to think about what may happen to them but to lift their thoughts far beyond all this. They are not to consider how angrily the old dragon and the lion—the devil and the world—open their jaws, show their teeth, and sharpen their claws. No, they are to lift their thoughts far beyond this, in the knowledge that the battle has already been won, that these fierce jaws, this showing of teeth, this tearing and killing, are much too late. These are to be their thoughts when they feel anxiety and distress, when they lie on their deathbeds, or when they are condemned to die by fire or sword, no matter how God summons them. In this way they can be victorious over the devil and death.¹⁴¹

Although the initial stage of the Christian's victory over the devil takes place at death, the final stage of his victory awaits the end of time and the glorious return of the Savior, Christ Jesus.

No matter when or how God ordains that we die, whether in bed or in the fire, in the water, by rope or by sword, the devil, death's master and butcher, will surely see to killing us and carrying out his trade, so that we will not be able to choose or select a mode of death. But no matter how he executes us, it shall not harm us. He may give us a bitter potion, such as is administered to put people to sleep and make them insensitive, but we will wake up again and come forth on that Day, when the trumpet will sound. That the devil shall not prevent, because even now we are more than halfway out of death in Christ, and he will not be able to hold back this poor belly and bag of maggots either.¹⁴²

141. *LW*, vol. 24, p. 415.

142. *LW*, vol. 28, p. 110.

Conclusion

Throughout his many writings, Luther developed a very comprehensive demonology. He covered every important aspect of the teaching of Holy Scripture regarding the devil and the demons. He treated Satan's origins in his good creation by God, Satan's fall and his taking with him in his fall a host of other angels, the devil's deception of Adam and Eve in Paradise, his subsequent tyranny over the human race, his many-sided assaults on believers and the church, God's sovereign rule over Satan and use of Satan for His own purposes, Christ's victory over Satan, the believer's enjoyment of that victory through faith in Christ, the means provided by God for the believer's battle with the devil, and the Christian's final victory over Satan in the glory of everlasting life. Indeed, Luther did not neglect any significant aspect of the biblical revelation as concerns the devil and the demons.

What distinguished Luther's demonology was his effort to be explicitly biblical. No doubt Luther exhibits, in certain respects, the influence of the popular superstitions of his day. He attributed to the devil a degree of involvement in the everyday affairs of humans with which twenty-first century Christians might not agree. But this concerns the details of Luther's demonology, not so much the essence of his teaching. In developing the essence of his teaching, Luther strove to conform to the standard of Holy Scripture. As in all his theology, so with his demonology, Luther honored the sole authority of Scripture. On the basis of Scripture, he rejected many of the superstitious notions about the devil and demons popular in his day, as well as a number of false teachings endorsed by the church. Scripture alone was the rule.

Luther applied the standard of Scripture to his own experience. He spoke and wrote often of his own struggles personally with the devil. He identified with the struggles of the rest of God's people against the "Prince of Darkness grim." Luther never elevated his experience above Scripture, much less substituted experience for the Word of God. But he gave Christian experience, including his own experience, its rightful place. He viewed experience as illustrative of the Bible's teaching. What the Bible taught was confirmed by his own experience. What was true of the Bible's

teaching generally, was also true of the Bible's teaching regarding the devil and the demons.

What stands out in Luther's demonology is his pastoral approach. Luther did not content himself to develop merely a theology of demons that was formally correct. His concern was the over-arching concern of a pastor for his sheep. His concern was the help, comfort, instruction, encouragement, and exhortation of the people of God in order to equip the saints in their life-and-death struggle with the enemy of all enemies. His concern was to impress upon them the reality of the "clear and present danger" that the devil and his hosts pose. And his concern was to strengthen God's people in the assurance of victory over this great enemy by faith in Jesus Christ.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little Word shall fell him.¹⁴³ ●

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A Review Article

Herman Hanko

Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond, by Paul M. Elliott. Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2005. Pp. 479. \$19.95 (paper).

The author, himself a ruling elder in an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation (OPC), writes with passion and conviction concerning the doctrinal decline in his own denomination. Coming through all he writes is his sorrow that his church, with its rich heritage, is now, unless it repents, a Neo-Liberal congregation. That is indeed a serious charge. The 400+ pages of the book are intended to prove the charge.

The spiritual father of the OPC was J. Gresham Machen, a professor in Princeton Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, who left the Presbyterian Church in the USA because of liberalism present in the denomination and because of the failure of the denomination to deal with and discipline heretics. Machen, with a few others, started Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the late twenties, and the OPC was formed in the early thirties. Elliott is fearful that the OPC is following the same downward slide that was present in the PCUSA and that forced the departure from the denomination of Machen and others. Their motive was to preserve the truth of Scripture and maintain the great heritage of Princeton Seminary and its professors: the Hodges, Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and other great Presbyterian theologians. It appears to Elliott that something of the same history of separation will have to be repeated in the OPC if that great heritage is to be preserved.

For Machen and his followers the climax to apostasy in the PCUSA came with the "Auburn Affirmation." The "Auburn Affirmation," signed by almost 2,000 ministers and ruling elders, denied fundamental doctrines of the faith of the Westminster Confessions — doctrines such as the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the propitiatory sacrifice on the cross. When

the church in its highest judicatory refused to condemn this statement of belief and to discipline those who had signed it, Machen and his followers were compelled by their conscience to leave the denomination.

The story of the decline of the OPC, says Elliott, is patterned after the apostasy in its parent denomination. Hence Elliott accuses the OPC of Neo-Liberalism, that is, the same liberalism as was evident in the parent church with certain, more modern, characteristics.

Elliott points the finger directly at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) as being the main reason for the apostasy in the OPC. He charges the faculty of the Seminary not only with condoning false doctrine since the mid-seventies, but also with allowing the Seminary to teach an entire generation of ministers the serious errors with which he deals.

The blurb on the back cover reads in part:

Ironically, the principal cause of the decline and fall of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is the false doctrine taught by the faculty of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, an institution that Machen had founded in 1929 to counter the Modernism of Princeton Seminary. The teaching of Westminster Seminary, uncorrected by its faculty, administration, benefactors, or the churches in which its graduates serve, is the cancer that has infected the whole denomination and spread far beyond it.

In support of his contention, Elliott discusses especially three cases that reached the highest governing bodies of the church: the Shepherd Case, the Evolution Case, and the Kinnaird Case. His story of these three cases makes for fascinating but chilling reading. If this happened in the OPC, it can happen in any denomination.

In dealing with the case of Dr. Norman Shepherd, the author follows closely and leans heavily on the work of O. Palmer Robertson's book, *The Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2003). The book was written in 1983, but was not published until 2003. It is a startling exposé of the entire Shepherd case, which began in the late seventies and continued for

many years after. The teachings of Norman Shepherd, while he was professor of Systematics in WTS, are summarized by Elliott:

- * Justification is by both faith and works.
- * Baptism is necessary for salvation, and salvation takes place at baptism.
- * Good works are necessary for an individual to maintain his state of justification.
- * Justification is not a single judicial act of God at conversion based solely on the imputed righteousness of Christ and received by faith alone, but rather is a process culminating in the evaluation of the individual's works at the Last Judgment.
- * It is possible for a person to lose his justification (128).

Although many objections were brought against these teachings of Shepherd, the OPC was unable to discipline him at any level of the church courts. His supporters were powerful and influential men, both among the faculty of WTS and the church at large. His chief supporters were John Frame, Richard Gaffin, and Cornelius VanTil (130).

The story of the political maneuvering that was involved in gaining Shepherd's exoneration is enough to make anyone concerned for the Headship of Christ in the church to weep. Shepherd was finally forced to resign from the faculty of WTS because of the bad publicity the Seminary was receiving, but his views were never officially condemned. The result was that serious errors were introduced into the churches, for Shepherd's students filled many OPC pulpits and many pulpits in other denominations.

One element in Elliott's description of the Shepherd case came as a surprise to me. Elliott claims that Shepherd and his supporters hold to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. In describing the views of Richard Gaffin, who was Shepherd's most influential defender, Elliott writes:

...Gaffin asserts that baptism, not regeneration apart from works by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the point of transition from death to life (154, 155).

Another case that involved the same heresy was the so-called

Kinnaird case. John O. Kinnaird was a ruling elder in an OPC congregation and a man of considerable standing in the denomination. He was charged with heresy by members of his own congregation, a heresy similar to the error of Norman Shepherd. This case also wound its way through the courts of the church. Those who charged Kinnaird with heresy were upheld in their charge by their presbytery, but Richard Gaffin, contrary to church rules, persuaded the presbytery to reconsider, and he succeeded in getting the presbytery to alter its original decision. The case went to the General Assembly, which upheld the final decision of the presbytery. Once again, the OPC was incapable of condemning heretics within the church, and Kinnaird was exonerated. In the course of the conflict Shepherd's original views were somewhat developed and the errors involved in the teaching of justification by faith and works became clearer. These views soon became known as the Federal Vision, and Elliott deals at length with this serious error. By failing to condemn it, the OPC has drifted into what Elliott calls Neo-liberalism.

One very striking feature of Elliott's analysis of both the Shepherd and Kinnaird cases is his failure to point to the fact that Shepherd himself admitted that he was compelled to take the position that he did because of his commitment to a conditional covenant. In other words, the error of justification by faith and works is a necessary consequence of holding to a conditional covenant. The name Federal Vision indicates the relation between justification by faith and works and the covenant, for the word "Federal" refers specifically to "Federal theology" or "Covenant theology." Why should Elliott have omitted this important aspect of the whole controversy, an aspect of which he was surely aware?

In order to maintain a position that justification is by faith and works, it was necessary to redefine justification. Gaffin, for example, defined justification as a lifelong process and an infusion of righteousness, thus, a work barely distinguishable from sanctification. This view of justification was not new. It was held by the Roman Catholic church for centuries prior to the Reformation and was the view of justification from which Luther had to free himself before he could set forth his doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Kinnaird frequently defined justification as taking place only at the end of time, when all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and are judged for their works. In discussing Kinnaird's view, Elliott says,

In the evidence that the committee had examined, Kinnaird had stated that God's "not guilty" verdict is based *not only* on the imputed righteousness of Christ at conversion *but also* on His forensic, analytical judgment of the individual's personal righteousness on the Last Day. This is by definition, justification by faith-plus-works [*italics original*] (224).

...the committee supported Kinnaird's misinterpretation of *Romans* 2:13 as saying that personal righteousness through law-keeping is required in order to stand in the Last Judgment (224).

There are other causes for the doctrinal decline into neo-Liberalism present in the OPC, according to the author.

One major reason is the replacement of Systematic Theology with Biblical Theology. In his excellent critique of Biblical Theology, the author writes:

...The modern Biblical Theology movement does not take the Bible "as it comes" nor does it adhere faithfully to these five principles [principles just previously listed that are the basis of all biblical interpretation, HH]. As a result, it builds from Scripture an artificial system, actually multiple systems. One of the the principal dangers of the Biblical Theology movement is that it focuses on the study of "theologies" in the plural — a "theology of Moses" — a "theology of David" — of Isaiah — of Matthew — of Paul — of James — and so on. Thus we have, in the writings of Richard Gaffin, N. T. Wright, and the Federal Visionist, studies of the "theology of Paul" in semi-isolation from the rest of Scripture. This is a reflection of religious academia's embracing the postmodern concept of "truth" as a product of the individual functioning within a "historical community of interpretation." This leads quite naturally to the false notion that Paul's "truth" can be different from that of James or Matthew or John, or even Jesus.

A companion danger of the modern Biblical Theology movement is that it relegates the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's primary and comprehensive authorship of *all* of Scripture, through His supernatu-

ral inspiration of the words themselves, to secondary status. Though proponents of the movement deny it, their handling of Scripture constantly demonstrates that human rather than divine authorship has become their primary focus, and that they primarily view the Biblical writers as functioning within a “historical community of interpretation” (163, 164).

Another consequence of biblical theology has been the assertion that revelation is only event — that is, that God reveals Himself only in the events of sacred history. The interpretation of these events by the biblical writers was the fruit of their own reflection on the events in the light of their times, and we have the same calling today to interpret revelation events in the light of our times (166).

Although the two cases of Shepherd and Kinnaird receive the bulk of attention, Elliott finds a deeper reason for the apostasy in the OPC. That deeper reason is a faulty doctrine of Scripture.

This faulty doctrine of Scripture came to clear manifestation in connection with the dispute in the OPC over the truth of creation. Some within the OPC were teaching various forms of theistic evolution. Specific cases came before the church’s assemblies. But in every case the church failed to condemn the heresies and those who taught them.

What is of particular interest to us is the fact that a “new” view of Hermeneutics was adopted by the church. It was called a “Hermeneutics of Trust.” This constitutes another kind of Hermeneutics, which can be added to the long list of those views developed by higher critics: *Sitz im Leben*, Form Criticism, Historical Criticism, Eschatological Hermeneutics — to name but a few. Now we have also Hermeneutics of Trust.

The term first came up in a committee report that was entrusted with the responsibility of advising the church on the creation vs. evolution debate. Concerning this report, the author writes (the emphases are all his):

There was no acknowledgement of the fact that only one interpretation can possibly be right.

Note carefully the principle of Biblical interpretation that this

official committee of the OPC has endorsed: *Men of the church can all be said to embrace the same "doctrine," even if they differ radically on the meaning of its words, even if they differ radically on the principles and methods of interpretation used to arrive at the meaning of those words, and even if they arrive at conclusions that are mutually exclusive. Furthermore, no one has the right to say that the position he holds is the truth, to the exclusion of all others. Men holding widely varying views about the meaning of the words of Scripture — as we have seen throughout this book, even diametrically opposing views — can all fit under the same "big tent" as long as they can recite the words of the Confession together.*

The OPC Report calls this radical departure from sound principles of interpretation a "hermeneutic of trust" (245).

The result of this "hermeneutic of trust" is that any view of creation is acceptable in the church as faithful to Scripture and the Westminster Confessions.

Now it is obvious that behind such a view of Scripture lies some more fundamental and basic assumptions. I have already mentioned one of them: that the revelation of God is in the *events* of Scripture, but not in the *interpretation* of those events. The interpretation of those events is conditioned by the man who made them: Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Malachi, etc. Their interpretation was, in fact, determined in large measure by the time in which they lived, the culture in which they were brought up, the world views current in their day, and the influences that shaped and formed their perspective on all things.

I use the word "perspective" deliberately, because this view of Scripture is called "perspectivalism." In every age since the Scriptures were penned, many in the church have come to Scripture to study and interpret the "events" recorded in Scripture. But they have come to Scripture with their own perspective, which includes all the elements that conditioned the writers of Scripture to interpret Scripture the way they did. So in every age each interpreter in the church must interpret the events recorded in Scripture from his own "perspective," determined by his own personality, culture, etc.

In addition to that, each person has a perspective unique to

himself. Thus no single individual can possibly have a complete and accurate interpretation of Scripture alone. The truth is gained only through a community of scholars who come with many perspectives and who, as a community, discover truth. However, the truth “discovered” in any given age is only the truth *for that time*. In future generations, other scholars will have to discover the truth for a new generation. Thus truth is robbed of its objectivity and becomes a relative matter.

An example is found in the very debate over creation and evolution. While the doctrine of creation in six days by the Word of God may have been the “perspective” of the biblical writers, today scholars have to deal with science, which has discovered that the creation is very old. And so the perspective one has as he approaches the “event” of creation is formed by the discoveries of science. And, because not all interpreters of Scripture have a complete understanding of all that is involved, a multitude of perspectives will give truth for our age. Five hundred years from now, that truth, examined from different perspectives, will perhaps have to be altered significantly.

A hermeneutic of trust means, therefore, that within the church all interpreters of Scripture must trust other exegetes. They must trust that each interpreter is genuinely interested in discovering truth, that all have a measure of truth in their own unique perspective, even though one perspective may flatly contradict another, and that through the efforts of all, truth *for our time* is discovered. In fact, the committee that proposed this approach (though the approach is far older than the OPC, as Elliott points out on pages 245, 246) claims that this new hermeneutic is responsible for the peace that the OPC has enjoyed.

The OPC has experienced doctrinal controversies through its history, and some of them have been serious enough to prompt individuals and churches to leave. But none of them escalated into a confessional crisis. The OPC ... has cultivated a community of interpretation that has sustained confessional integrity among its ministerial membership without imposing over-exacting standards of confessional subscription ... (247, where Elliott quotes from the report of the committee on evolutionism).

The author quotes the report further where it “credits Westminster Theological Seminary with a vital role in maintaining this artificial unity.”

The most important factor in establishing and maintaining this community of interpretation has been the function of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia as the OPC’s *de facto* denominational seminary. In training the vast majority of the early ministerial membership of the OPC, Westminster Seminary did not devote excessive attention to the days of creation nor to the Westminster Standards. But what WTS accomplished that averted a creation or confessional crisis was *inducting Orthodox Presbyterian ministerial candidates into a culture of interpretation*. The effect was to cultivate a hermeneutic of trust within the church, as ministers had confidence in the training of their colleagues, even if they differed in their views. Westminster performed that function ably... (248).

That came from the committee itself.

A hermeneutics of trust is a hermeneutics in which Bible interpretation is every man for himself and all have the truth, no matter what they teach.

Elliott lays the blame at the feet of Vern Poythress (formerly professor of Hermeneutics in WTS) and John Frame (formerly professor of Theology in WTS). It is my judgment, although Elliott does not mention this, that Cornelius VanTil must also shoulder part of the blame, if not most of it. His view was a “theology of paradox,” according to which one could hold to contradictory statements (such as “God loves all men and wills to save them” and “God loves only His elect and wills to save them”) and maintain both as truth. Further, VanTil argued, on the basis of knowledge by analogy, that the knowledge that God has in Himself of Himself and His works is essentially different from the knowledge we have of God and His works, because our knowledge is only “analogous” to God’s knowledge. This view of VanTil is the parent that produces the child of a hermeneutic of trust and perspectivalism.

Elliott is correct in his analysis of the sad situation in the OPC. He fails, however, to mention that the controversy over creation

vs. evolution is of old standing. Charles Hodge already, while in Princeton, left the door open to a reinterpretation of Genesis 1, and J. Gresham Machen refused to condemn various theories of evolution being taught in the church on the grounds that the matter was not a subject for theology, but only for science. Not only a man, but also a church, reaps what it sows.

What is so sad about the whole story of the decline of the OPC is that these gross errors were approved by the church, either by official decisions of the highest judicatories, or by the silence of good men. There is no reason to rejoice over the fall of the OPC; there is only cause for weeping. There are many solid and faithful people of God in that denomination. But whatever may be the reason, good men refused to stand up and oppose obvious false doctrine. Now it is too late.

The interest of Elliott's book is in large measure the lesson that what happened and is happening in the OPC could happen in any denomination, including our own, when good men, either out of cowardice, indifference, or ignorance refuse to oppose false doctrine.

May God enable us to be faithful and give us courage to defend His truth. ●

No Other Gods ... No Other Name

Robert D. Decker

Introduction

In this essay we offer a brief critique of the Religions of the World. We are interested in the biblical/Reformed answer to the question: How must these religions be viewed in relationship with Christianity? This fundamental question implies several more questions. Answers are needed to the following if we are to succeed in giving the correct answer to the fundamental question: Are there elements of good in these religions? Are there remnants of truth in them? Do these religions contain elements of the truth that are not to be found in the Christian religion, but are unique to Islam, Buddhism, or one of the Chinese religions? Are these religions to be understood to be valid expressions of their adherents' response to God's revelation of Himself in the creation? Are the world's religions merely different paths leading to the same God and the salvation He has provided in Jesus Christ?

Any reader who has any knowledge at all of the Holy Bible will recognize from the title of this essay how the author will answer these questions. The first half of the title is taken from the first commandment of God's Law: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:2). The second half of the title is taken from the apostle Peter's explanation of the healing of the lame man who lay at the gate of the temple: "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.... Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12).

Based on those passages and many more from Scripture, it is our fundamental thesis that there is only one, true, and living God. He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — three distinct persons united in one divine being. This is the true God who in

His amazing love has established His covenant of friendship with those whom He has chosen in and given to Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ crucified and raised God has revealed Himself to His elect as their God and Father. This revelation is preserved in the sacred Scriptures, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These Scriptures are, therefore, infallible and the absolute rule for the faith and life of the people of God. All other gods are idols, products of the sinful imagination and hands of totally depraved men.

This essay will consist of two main sections. In the first we shall present a summary of the various views regarding the World's Religions and how they are related (according to those espousing these views) to the Christian Religion. In the second section we shall present the exclusive and unique claim of the Christian Religion. This latter position is the firm conviction of the author and the theological seminary and churches in which he is privileged to serve his Lord and Savior.

A Summary of the Various Views of World Religions

COMMON GRACE

The late Johannes Vos, long-time professor of Biblical Literature at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania and prior to that a missionary to Manchuria and China, was convinced that, "It is obvious that no religion is wholly false. There are elements of truth in all religions, even though as systems they must be regarded as false. How can this fact be explained?"¹ Vos rejects what was once the popular answer to his question, the evolutionary theory of religion. According to this theory the religions developed from the most primitive superstitious belief in magic to animism to polytheism to monotheism. Writes Vos,

If we do not accept the evolutionary theory, we must seek another explanation of the good features in the false religions. The Christian

1. Johannes Vos, *A Christian Introduction to the Religions of the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 23. (The popularity of Vos' view of the World Religions among Presbyterian and Reformed people is evident from the fact that this little volume was first printed in 1965, and the 1977 printing marked the 6th printing).

explanation is that these good features are products of God's *common grace*. "Common grace" means God's grace given to all people of the world, apart from salvation in the Christian sense. This "common grace" does not save people's souls, but it does have an influence for good on the human level, and it has a restraining effect upon sin and evil. This results in the good features of the various false religious systems of the world.²

Vos qualifies what we have just quoted by writing,

Moreover, the good in the false religious systems is only a *relative* good. It is not good in the highest sense. Buddhism and Christianity, for example, both teach that it is wrong to steal. As to the formal statement that stealing is wrong, Buddhism and Christianity are identical. But if we go a step further and ask *why* stealing is wrong, the two religions diverge. Christianity teaches that stealing is wrong because it is contrary to the will of God; Buddhism has no such insight.³

Vos continues by making a distinction between the "relative good" of common grace as he sees it and good "in the highest sense." Good in the highest sense must: 1) be required by the will of God, 2) be done to God's glory, and 3) be done by faith.⁴

This is precisely where Vos is in error. Neither the Bible nor the Reformed confessions teaches a "relative good" and a "good in the highest sense." The Bible knows of only one kind of good. Good is that which, "proceeds from a true faith, is performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as is founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men."⁵ This is an accurate summary of Scripture's teaching, "... whatsoever is not of [out of, RDD] faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). In the same Epistle, chapter 8, verse 7, we read, "Because the carnal mind ['mind of the flesh,' RDD] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the

2. *Ibid*, p. 23.

3. *Ibid*, p. 23, 24.

4. *Ibid*, p. 24.

5. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 91.

law of God, neither indeed can be.” It is plain that the natural man who lacks the gift of faith in Christ Jesus is not able to be subject to God’s law. He lacks the ability. This sobering truth is reflected as well in the Catechism.⁶

Unless one is prepared to say that the teachings and practices of the World Religions proceed from a true faith, and this writer is certainly not prepared to say that, there are no “good elements” whatsoever in them. These religions proceed out of the imaginations of totally depraved men in every respect: in every detail of their doctrine and in every detail of their worship and in every detail of their practice.

GENERAL REVELATION

Johan H. Bavinck served as missionary in Indonesia from 1919 to 1939. From 1939 until his death in 1965 he was professor of Missions at the Free University in Amsterdam. He is the author of the excellent book *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, a book still used as the textbook of the Principles of Missions Course at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. Also Bavinck is convinced that there are elements of good in the World Religions. According to Bavinck this is to be attributed, not so much to God’s so-called “common grace,” but to God’s revelation of Himself to all mankind by means of His creation (what is commonly called God’s general revelation).

In another book, published posthumously and not nearly as good as his *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, Bavinck contends that the Christian Faith and the other World Religions have something in common. There are certain similarities between them. In fact, Bavinck is quite emphatic on this point,

... of course they have [something in common, RDD]! A Christian who is accustomed to pray cannot help recognizing that the Moslem whom he sees praying is doing something similar. And seeing a Hindu bowing down before his god stirs the Christian, because he himself has learned to bow his head before the God who appeared to us in

6. *Ibid*, Q. 5, 6, 7, 8. See also the Belgic Confession, Art. 14 and the Canons of Dordt, III & IV, Articles 3 and 4 (all of Article 4!!).

Jesus Christ. Indeed, he cannot deny that our Christian faith and those other religions have something in common, that there are certain similarities between them. The word *other* actually puts it very clearly: the Christian faith is also a religion. When we list the great world religions, we must mention the Christian faith alongside the others.⁷

The above contention is, we are convinced, a very serious error, a fatal compromise that leads ultimately to what we will describe a bit later in this essay, viz., “Religious Inclusiveness.” It might even be validly argued that Bavinck’s assertion that Christianity has something in common with the world’s great religions leads to “Pluralism,” a view that we will describe and critique as well.

Having said this, we must also point out, in fairness to Bavinck, that he acknowledges that there are radical differences between Christianity and the other religions. The other religions pour different content than does Christianity into such concepts as sin, salvation, God, Allah, *et. al.* These radical differences result in what Bavinck calls a “deep gulf” between Christianity and the other religions.⁸

Bavinck then proceeds to define and describe the concept, religion. Religion, according to Bavinck, is man’s response to God’s revelation. This response is in one of two forms: either in faith or in unbelief. In either case, however, religion is always man’s response to God’s revelation.⁹ Religion, moreover, is always, according to Bavinck, a communal response to God’s revelation. What he means is this, religion has a social aspect and it affects all aspects of culture and human endeavor.

Given Bavinck’s definition of religion, we are not surprised to discover that he does not want to attempt to classify the various religions of the world as, e.g., primitive religions, religions based

7. J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque: A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and other Religions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), p. 13.

8. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.

on reason. Rather than classifying the religions, Bavinck prefers to speak of "Religious Consciousness."¹⁰ This "religious consciousness" is universal, common to all of mankind. Further, this "religious consciousness" consists of what Bavinck calls "the five magnetic points."¹¹ We must deal with these points, Bavinck insists. We cannot evade them. They are rooted in our very existence.

The five magnetic points are, and we give them in Bavinck's own words (all italics are also Bavinck's):

1. The first focus point could be called the sense of cosmic relationship. It means that man feels a relationship with the cosmos. He is but a particle, an atom in the whole of the universe, but he knows that he is akin to the world in which he lives and to which he belongs, and that his life is in intimate relationship with the life of nature. He senses that there is no distance between himself and his environment. The first question man has to face is that of his relation to the cosmos. It can be summarized briefly as the relationship of *I and the cosmos*.

2. The second point is *the religious norm* with which man is confronted. There is something in his inmost being that warns him not to follow his own desires. He has a vague sense that there are certain rules which he must obey. It is the relationship of *I and the norm*.

3. In the third place, man comes face to face with the riddle of his existence. He is conscious that he is an active being — he does things; he is always busy. But on the other hand, he is sometimes overtaken by the strange idea that he is the victim of that indefinable something which he is inclined to call his fate or destiny. He stands between these two, *between action and destiny* and he does not know his exact place. It is the relationship of *I and the riddle of my existence*.

4. The fourth point is man's *craving for salvation*. There seems to be something in man that compels him to believe that the reality with which he has to do every day is not as it should be. There is something wrong with the world; there are deficiencies that hamper him for life. It is very hard to say what these deficiencies are, but it is quite certain that they exist. Nature is not as it should be; it is full of disastrous powers, floods, and volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and

10. *Ibid*, pp. 25-30.

11. *Ibid*, p. 32.

tempests. And not only nature, but also man himself, is not as he ought to be. There is also something wrong in his own existence. That is why we hear that dark and heartbreaking groaning for salvation through all the ages of man's history. Man has that remarkable tendency not to accept reality as it presents itself to him, but he always dreams of a better world in which life will be healthy and safe. It is the relationship of *I and salvation*.

5. And finally there is the fifth point, that of the reality behind reality. The Greek word for truth (*aletheia*) indicates clearly that there is a certain veil that conceals the deepest grounds of reality. That veil must be removed, the fundamental truth must be revealed. We are living in an imaginary world of which we do not see the substance. Behind the curtain of this phenomenal world there must be an invisible counterpart, a world of spiritual beings — demons or gods or whatever they may be. This strange belief is also very fundamental to man's religious intuitions. Even when he is inclined to break with this belief and to become an atheist in the full sense of the word, he is often still overwhelmed by it, as it were. The idea that there is a *Supreme Power* to which he himself is related, is apparently something that he can never get rid of. It is the relationship of *I and the Supreme Power*.¹²

Bavinck is convinced that these five questions with which every person has to wrestle and which determine how he lives really come down to this: "... as one all-inclusive question: 'Who am I, small mortal man, in the midst of all these powerful realities with which I am confronted and with which my life is most intimately related?' This very simple question reveals all the problems of religion in a nutshell."¹³

At this point again we are forced to take issue with Bavinck. The "one, all inclusive, simple question" that confronts every man is not what Bavinck says it is. The one, all inclusive, simple question that confronts every man is, "What are you going to do with Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of the one, true, and living God?"

Bavinck next moves to his view of "General Revelation," based

12. *Ibid*, pp. 32, 33.

13. *Ibid*, p. 113.

on his exegesis of Romans 1:18-32. Indispensable to Bavinck's exegesis of this passage is his translation of the verb *katechoo* in verse 18. The AV translation of this verse is, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (*katechontoon*) the truth in unrighteousness." According to Bavinck, *katechoo* ought to be translated "repress." The ungodly (understand, the adherents to the world religions) repress God's truth revealed to them in creation. Not only so, but Muslims, Hindus, *et. al.* replace that truth of God revealed to them with their own conceptions of the truth. And, what is more, they repress and then exchange the truth of God with their own versions and conceptions of the truth unintentionally, contends Bavinck.

Hence, Bavinck argues, when Buddha received his great new insight into world and life, and when Muhammed received, at the hands of angels, the Quran from Allah's throne, God was touching them and wrestling with them. God was seeking them. But these men repressed God's revelation and exchanged it with their own versions and conceptions. This explains the good remnants of truth that are found in these religions. This repression and exchanging explain the similarities to be found between the world's religions and Christianity. And this provides, too, points of contact for missionaries of the gospel to use to try to reach these peoples with the gospel of our Lord Jesus.¹⁴ What is Bavinck's conclusion? This, "Every religion contains, somehow, the silent work of God."¹⁵

We beg to differ with Bavinck on several points.

1. The revelation of which Romans 1:18-31 speaks is a revelation of the wrath of God. Standing over the entire passage is the sobering statement, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18). This is not the saving love of God that is revealed from heaven to those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. It's the wrath of God!

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-127; especially pp. 118, 119, 122, 124, 126.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

2. These ungodly hold under, hinder, and in this sense suppress the truth. And they do this in unrighteousness. They do not merely repress and exchange the truth. They deny and reject the truth of God.

3. Why do they do this? "Because that which may be known of God is manifest (*phaneron*) in them; for God hath shown (*ephaneroosen*) it unto them" (v. 19). What did God manifest to them "from the creation of the world"? "The

4. invisible things of him [God, RDD] ... even his eternal power and Godhead." Why did God manifest His eternal power and Godhead to them? "... so that they are without excuse." We note that this last clause, "so that they are without excuse," appears in the Greek as "*eis to einai autous anapologeetous*." We are well aware of the fact that most of the "giants" among the scholars of the Greek language take the position that this is one of the rare instances of *eis* with the articular infinitive and accusative expressing result, not purpose.¹⁶ The latter usage is much more common in the New Testament. The point, however, is that it makes no difference whether one regards the clause as result (conceived result) or as purpose. In either case, God does not manifest Himself in love, savingly, if you will, to the ungodly who hold the truth in unrighteousness. God's intent is that they be left without excuse.

5. The ungodly "knew God," but they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful: but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened [note the passive voice of the verb, 'was darkened,' RDD]. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (vv. 21-23). The ungodly change the glory of God into idols of their own foolish, sin-darkened minds and hearts. God gives them over to all this foolish-

16. Cf., e.g., A. T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* and his monumental work, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*; also, H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey's *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*.

ness of “changing the truth of God into a lie” (v. 25). And they are left without excuse.

6. No good is to be found outside of God’s grace and love in Christ Jesus. That God reveals to His chosen in Christ. The gospel is always, “By grace through faith are ye saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2: 8). Apart from that grace and faith, all are dead in trespasses and sins. The world’s religions are false on every count. They are idolatrous corruptions and rejections of the truth and glory of God. And they are this intentionally!

INCLUSIVISM

Very simply put, “Inclusivism” may be defined as that position which maintains that Jesus Christ is the only and authoritative revelation of the one, true, and living God, but that God in Christ is present in a saving way in the non-Christian religions of the world.¹⁷

While Inclusivism is not an exclusively Roman Catholic teaching, its most able spokesman is the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner.

Rahner was born in Germany in 1904 and after becoming a Jesuit priest, he distinguished himself as one of the church’s most influential theologians in the years before and after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). He wrote extensively and his works were collated into twenty volumes under the title *Theological Reflections*. To the extent that he paid attention to non-Christian religions at all, he was more interested in general facts about their traditions than he was in the details of their belief systems. In this sense he was much like other Western theologians such as Karl Barth, Hans Kung, or Carl F. H. Henry.

One very practical theological issue dominates Rahner’s theology of religions. What about all the people, both before and after Christ, who have had no opportunity to hear of the grace of the one true God? ...The majority of humankind up to and perhaps including the present generation has not had opportunity to hear an intelligent

17. James F. Lewis and William G. Travis, *Religious Traditions of the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), p. 368.

presentation of the Gospel of grace. Rahner regards it as “senseless” and cruel to hold that all people outside of Christ are so evil and rebellious that “the offer of grace ought not be made” to them somehow. “It is impossible to think” that the personal guilt of man is so great that it would render ineffective the grace of God. “We have no really conclusive reason for thinking so pessimistically of men.”¹⁸

Compounding the “problem,” in Rahner’s thinking, is the “steady loss of Christian influence in areas once strongly held by the church.... An additional problem is that, due to the general failure of Christianity...,” the world’s other religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, *et. al.*) are rapidly expanding and, “invading lands where Christianity was the established religion.”¹⁹ Rahner does not think that Christianity has failed, nor does he think that its claim to uniqueness and absoluteness is to be given up. He understands “the success of Christianity as a complex reality having two basic forms: explicit and anonymous.”²⁰

“Explicit Christianity” is to be found on the historical and descriptive levels. Explicit Christianity comes to manifestation in the instituted church. It consists of believers and their children, saved by grace through faith in Jesus. (We good Protestant Reformed folk would say it thus. Rahner is Roman Catholic and describes the church in the Roman Catholic sense.)²¹

Lewis and Travis sum Rahner’s view of “Anonymous Christianity” as follows:

“Anonymous” or implicit Christianity is different from explicit Christianity. This term, which he first used in 1960, is at the heart of the theology which has become a central part of late-twentieth-century Catholic orthodoxy. Without ever having heard the name of Jesus, people from all religions, whether polytheists, atheists, or pantheists, can experience the grace of God in Christ and thus become anonymous Christians enjoying saving faith. This saving faith comes only through a Christ they do not know, yet can be enjoyed even when the

18. *Ibid*, p. 368.

19. *Ibid*, pp. 368, 369.

20. *Ibid*, p. 369.

21. *Ibid*, p. 369.

person is not conscious of any of the realities that make him or her a Christian. Rahner believes that the anonymous Christian, being non-official and possessing a low degree of membership in the church, must still move toward a more explicit faith when given an opportunity, and that the church should continue its missionary mandate. However, even if the details of the Gospel should fail to be presented, the individual would still have saving faith.²²

Two axioms or propositions lie at the heart of Rahner's theology of religions. According to Lewis and Travis' description of these axioms (well documented from Rahner's own writings),

The first is that salvation is in Christ and Christ alone. This axiom drives Rahner to attempt to construct a theology of religions based on the central doctrines of the Catholic faith in its most modern expressions. The second is that God wills all the world to be saved. Rahner's theology is an attempt to bring these two axioms to bear upon each other and universally upon humankind in its various religious traditions. Outside of Christ there is no salvation, yet the possibility of salvation must, on unambiguous Christian grounds, extend to all humanity.

Rahner takes it as a given of both Catholic theology and Scripture that God wills all the world to be saved and has set in motion the necessary means to accomplish that end. "God desires the salvation of everyone.... It is a salvation really intended for all those millions upon millions of people who lived perhaps a million years before Christ – and also for those who have lived after Christ – in nations, cultures and epochs of a very wide range which were still completely shut off from the viewpoint of those living in the light of the New Testament."²³

These then are Rahner's two axioms: Salvation is to be found in Christ alone, and God desires the salvation of all humankind.²⁴

The all-important question now becomes, "How does the person untouched by explicit Christianity become an anonymous

22. *Ibid*, p. 369.

23. *Ibid*, p. 370.

24. For a more detailed examination of Rahner's axioms in terms of his Christology and Anthropology, see *ibid*, pp. 370-375.

Christian?"²⁵ How is the universal salvation available only in Christ appropriated by the adherents of the non-Christian religions? In practical and simple terms, one becomes an anonymous Christian enjoying God's saving grace in Christ when one loves his neighbor as that love is described in Matthew 25. Rahner argues that,

The capacity to love another is grace-given and hence an experience of God and Christ. "Love does not find its full realization out of its own resources but from the radical unity it has with the love of God in Jesus Christ. It implies a unity of the love of God and the love of the neighbor, in which the love of neighbor is the love of God and so has an absolute quality, even if this lacks thematic expression." The salvation of non-Christians presupposes only that they "are of good will, even when this good will has absolutely nothing to do with Jesus Christ."²⁶

Where does the Reformed Christian begin in his critique of "Inclusivism"? Lewis and Travis ask,

Can there be rational interreligious dialogue if one follows the inclusivist path of Karl Rahner? It does seem that there can be. How can it be rationally maintained that a religion that denies God's existence (as in the case of many Theravada Buddhists today) nonetheless believes in him, and that one which rejects Christ's physical death (most Muslims) nonetheless accepts him?²⁷

In addition to this somewhat mild criticism of Inclusivism, the Bible plainly teaches that God does not save all humankind. There is a resurrection of life and there is a resurrection of damnation (John 5:28, 29). In the extended metaphor of Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus' gracious judgment of the sheep (God's elect in Christ) is, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (v. 34). Jesus' judgment of the goats (the ungodly reprobate) is, "Depart from

25. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

me, ye cursed; into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41). God has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and God has compassion on whom He will have compassion. God loves Jacob and hates Esau before they were born or had done any good or evil. God raises up a Pharaoh to show His power and that God's name might be declared throughout all the earth. To those who object to this truth comes the powerful rebuke (also to Rahner, who asserts that it is "cruel" to think that many will perish), "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (cf. Rom. 9:1-29).

This biblical teaching is reflected in a profoundly beautiful way in the Reformed confessions.²⁸

The world's religions are from beginning to end and in all their main themes and details of teaching, ritual, and practice idolatrous denials of God and His Christ. They are false religions, which have other gods before them than the one true God and saviors with other names than the Name of Jesus.

THE VIEWS OF VARIOUS EVANGELICAL SCHOLARS

Gerald R. McDermott

Gerald R. McDermott believes and attempts to argue for the proposition that God's people learned from traditions outside of Israel and the church. (Israel, it should be understood, is the typical theocracy and, therefore, the church in the Old Testament era.) McDermott contends that Christianity has always borrowed from other faith traditions and that doctrine develops sometimes by the use of pagan traditions.²⁹

28. See, Heidelberg Catechism Q. 20, 54; Belgic Confession Articles 16, 37; the whole of, but especially the First Head of Doctrine, "OF DIVINE PREDESTINATION" of the Canons of Dordrecht 1618 and 1619.

29. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., editor, *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), pp. 18-23. Gerald R. McDermott is Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia. For a more detailed discussion of these views, see his book, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation, and Religious Traditions* (Downer's Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000).

McDermott explains his position as follows,

If there is no new revelation behind or beyond the Triune God, there is, nevertheless, new development in the history of revelation as Christ makes himself *more fully known by the progressive illumination of the Holy Spirit* [emphasis mine, RDD]. What begins as an act of translation becomes a discovery of a new dimension of Jesus Christ. The attempt to transmit faith in Christ across linguistic and religious frontiers reveals that the Spirit of Christ has unveiled meaning and significance never known before. In this unveiling, there are new glimpses of the Trinity's glory.³⁰

McDermott uses the following to illustrate his point,

Even human sacrifice and idol worship were hints of the Father's sacrifice of the Son and the incarnation. While each of these pagan practices pictured divine realities in distorted (and sometimes horrific) fashion, they nevertheless contained enough truth to point truly to aspects of God's Triune identity. Furthermore, they were not merely human insights but developments (albeit twisted and broken) of original perceptions granted by Jesus Christ himself.... My claim is that among non-Christian religions there are scattered promises of God in Christ and that these promises are revealed types planted there by the Triune God.³¹

The last section of his chapter is McDermott's affirmative answer to the question, "Can Christians Learn from Non-Christian Religions?"³² We will let McDermott speak for himself,

Theravadin Buddhists may be able to show us dimensions of the fallen ego that will shed greater light on what Paul meant by "the old man." Philosophical Daoists may have insights into nonaction that can help Christians better understand "waiting on God." Confucius's portrayal of virtue may open new understanding of radical discipleship, and the Quran's attention to the world's "signs" of God's reality can enrich our belief that the cosmos is the theater of God's glory.

30. Stackhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

31. *Ibid*, pp. 28, 29.

32. *Ibid*, pp. 32-35.

The Spirit of Jesus has revealed to the church in the last two centuries implications of the gospel for slavery and women that were not seen by most in the church in the first eighteen centuries of its history. We now believe that the Spirit gave the church understanding of what was implicit in the gospel but remained hidden for centuries. [One cannot help but remark that this paragraph, though commonly held by most evangelicals, is simply dead wrong! The Bible never did and does not now either explicitly or implicitly condemn slavery. Nor does the Bible implicitly allow women to serve in the special threefold office of Christ, RDD]. There is no reason to think that there is not more truth and understanding of Christ and the history of redemption yet to be illuminated by his Spirit, perhaps with the aid of insights from other religions.

Of course, the Christian doctrine of objective revelation (having been finalized with the closure of the biblical canon) puts limits on what we can expect. “New truths” are new understandings of God’s redemption in Jesus Christ—ideas that Christians in the history of the church did not think of, or at least ideas that did not survive in written form, rather than ideas that go beyond what could possibly be suggested by Scripture. The history of revelation is a history of Jesus Christ’s ever expanding work of redemption. Since the only truth they ever suggest has come through Jesus’ revealed types, non-Christian religions can provide insight only into the anti-type—Jesus’ work of redemption.

Finally, the Spirit can use non-Christian religions to induce repentance and awareness of God’s judgment. Gavin D’Costa and others who have worked in missions warn that those of other religions can show Christians—if they are open to it—the poverty of their own commitment. Christians may also see or hear God in the encounter. According to D’Costa, there is always a moment in missions when the Christian realizes that the evangelized may already implicitly or explicitly know God and that from this person the Christian may learn and hear God’s word, as Peter learned from Cornelius’s religious experience and heard God’s Word through him.³³

Even given the paragraph concerning the “limits on what we can expect,” McDermott denies the truth of the sufficiency of Holy

33. *Ibid*, pp. 34, 35.

Scripture as the only rule of faith. He teaches that there is a revelation of Christ in the non-Christian religions and an ongoing or ever expanding revelation beyond the Bible.

In direct opposition to McDermott's position, the Reformed Christian confesses and believes that the Word of God was divinely inspired and that,

... those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures; nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden to add unto or take away anything from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been ... for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule....³⁴

The world religions are false. They do not agree with the infallible rule of the inspired, infallible Holy Scriptures. These religions must be rejected and their adherents must be called to repentance from their erroneous teachings, rituals, and practices. Their adherents must be commanded to believe in Jesus. There is no other Name than Jesus whereby we must be saved!

Amos Yong

In his contribution to the book edited by Stackhouse, chapter 2, titled: "Discerning the Spirit(s) in the World of Religions," Amos Yong presents what he calls "a Pneumatological Theology of Religions."³⁵ Yong assures us,

34. The Belgic Confession, Articles 3 and 7.

35. Stackhouse, Editor, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-61. Amos Yong is Assistant Professor of Theology at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota.

I certainly am not an exclusivist if one means by this label a person who believes not only that salvation is dependent in an ontological sense on the person and work of Christ but also that one has to cognitively recognize that dependence. I am also not a pluralist who would deny both the latter epistemic conditional as well as the former ontological premise. Perhaps I am close to the inclusivist position that affirms the decisive importance of the saving work of Christ without insisting that persons must hear the gospel and verbally confess Christ to be saved.³⁶

Yong then proceeds to describe what he means by “a Pneumatological Theology of Religions,

My goal ... is to develop a theology of religions that proceeds from a pneumatological starting point. The primary questions that emerge, then, are who is the Holy Spirit and what is his function—that is, what has he done, what is he doing, and what will he do? I propose to explore the notion that the Holy Spirit is God present and active: the power of God in creation, re-creation, and final creation.³⁷

Yong develops his theology of religions within the framework of three “basic axioms” or “theses.” These axioms are,

Thesis 1: God is universally present and active by the Spirit....

Thesis 2: God’s Spirit is the life—breath of the *imago Dei* in every human being and presupposition of all human relationships and communities....

Thesis 3: The religions of the world, like everything else that exists, are providentially sustained by the Spirit for divine purposes.³⁸

Yong “shows his colors,” as it were, in his explanation of that third thesis. Writes he,

36. *Ibid*, p. 38 (Yong mentions the following as holding this position: C. S. Lewis, John Wesley, Norman Anderson, Clark Pinnock, and John Sanders. Cf. note “2,” p. 38).

37. *Ibid*, p. 39 (For Yong’s exploration of these three categories see pp. 39-44).

38. *Ibid*, pp. 47-48.

Unless one is prepared to say that all forms and expressions of human culture are anti-theistic, one cannot arbitrarily separate out one dimension of culture—the religious aspect—and so label it, as previous generations of theologians have, as either a solely human effort to reach God or as demonic. Rather, all human endeavors reflect either God's permissive or active will toward ultimately divine purposes centered around the full revelation of Jesus Christ and the impending kingdom of God. This should be no different with regard to the religions. As Clark Pinnock has observed, "It would seem strange if the Spirit excused himself from the very arena of culture where people search for meaning. If God is reaching out to sinners, it is hard to comprehend why he would not do so in the sphere of religion." In short, a pneumatological approach to the religions enables an inclusive methodology and hermeneutic rather than a monological one that assumes in an a priori sense that the religions lie beyond the pale of divine presence and activity. I submit that this inclusiveness represents the latent power of a pneumatological (read: trinitarian) theology to overcome the traditional impasses that have hindered developments in *theologia religionum*.³⁹

This is terribly wrong. Consider, if Yong be correct in his conclusion, there is no need for Christ and His cross. No need for Christ there is, because there is no sin, no fallen nature of man, no total depravity. All people, according to Yong, bear God's image, and the Holy Spirit is at work in all.

One finds similar conclusions throughout this entire book. Miriam Adeney writes,

Classic Christian teaching on human nature affirms that humans are created in God's image and that humans are sinners. Religions reflect these polarized truths. On the one hand, religions contain patterns of wisdom, beauty, and caring, results of God's gift of creativity in his image. Therefore, I can learn from non-Christian religions. From Buddhism, for example, I have learned sensitivity to suffering, paradox, and ambiguity. From Confucianists, I have learned the importance of courtesy and the glory of the extended family. Primal religionists remind me that the transcendent supernatural breathes

39. *Ibid*, pp. 48, 49.

mystery immanently in every part of life, calling forth our awe and our ceremony. Jews encourage me to wrestle with God's world, and even with God himself. Mystics of various traditions inspire me to cultivate spiritual passion. Religious social activists, including Muslims, spur me to sacrifice for justice and righteousness.⁴⁰

Stanley J. Grenz reaches the following conclusion in his chapter on "The Universality of the 'Jesus-Story.'" Note the careful and therefore deceptive language in the quotation that follows (the emphasis is mine):

At the heart of the specifically Christian theological vision is the acknowledgment of God as the Triune one. Christians declare that the only true God is none other than the Triune God, the eternal community of the three trinitarian persons. The Christian vision speaks of humankind, in turn, as created in God's image. The divine design is that humans mirror within creation what God is like in God's own eternal reality. Moreover, Christians declare that the goal of human existence has been revealed *most completely* in Jesus Christ, the Son, who in his life, death, and resurrection modeled the divine principle of life, namely, life in intimate fellowship with his heavenly Father by the Holy Spirit who indwelt him, and consequently life in fellowship with and for the sake of others and indeed with and for all creation.

Viewed from this perspective, evangelical adherence to the finality of Christ means that Jesus is the vehicle through whom humans come to the *fullest* understanding of who God is and what God is like. The incarnate life of Jesus reveals the *truest* vision of the nature of God, namely, that God is the Triune one and hence inherently social. When coupled with the biblical teaching of humankind created in the divine image, the Christian vision of God as Triune provides the transcendent basis for human life-in-community, which *all belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster*. This vision looks to the divine life or, more particularly, to the narrative of the Triune God at work in the world as the basis for understanding what it means to be human persons-in-com-

40. *Ibid*, p. 68. See also "Sulayman's Way," pp. 82, 83. This "Way" is a compromised, syncretistic position. Jesus is the only way to the Father. Islam is a lie.

munity. Just as God is a plurality-in-unity, so also to be human means to be persons-in-community. This theocentric perspective leads to a vision of human society as the forging of the multiplicity of individuals into a higher unity (as is reflected so well in the motto of the United States: *e pluribus unum*, ("one out of many")).⁴¹

Note what Grenz says, "the goal of human existence has been revealed *most completely* in Jesus Christ.... Jesus is the vehicle through whom humans come to the *fullest* understanding of who God is.... The incarnate life of Jesus reveals the *truest* vision of the nature of God ... which all belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster."

But let us not fail to note what Grenz does *not* say! He does not say that Jesus is the *only* revelation of who God is and what God is like. He does not say that Christianity provides the *only* vision of who God is. Grenz, therefore, teaches rank universalism. All belief systems in their own way and according to their own understanding seek to foster the Christian vision.

Gerald J. Pillay asserts, "... Christianity is explained as the crowning glory and the fulfillment of all human religious quests.... But adherents of other religions claim the same for their religion as well, and there is no independent or cosmic vantage point from which we human beings can adjudicate the matter. For us there is no God's-eye view."⁴²

Our response to this assertion is, O yes there is for us a "God's-eye view." It's a sacred book of God-breathed writings called the Bible!

A little later in his chapter Pillay makes this frightening statement,

Peaceful coexistence is a task and a responsibility for human beings everywhere, and religions have a special contribution to make in achieving it. All the world religions can and must be open to learn from each other the ways of peace, how to counter the arrogance that

41. *Ibid*, pp. 109, 110.

42. *Ibid*. p. 115.

believers lapse into, how to enter real relationships with others based on mutual respect and trust. Religious coexistence is part and parcel of multicultural coexistence in an international global society.⁴³

Pillay continues by approving Mahatma Gandhi's teaching that there is no need for believers to convert to other religions, because all religions are valid pathways to God.⁴⁴

Pillay's conclusion is, "Other religions have the responsibility to explain their claim to universality as well. Christian theology is not required to pass judgment; it cannot. It is called only to be faithful to the task of bringing the Word to speech so that *all* may hear the gospel."⁴⁵

That conclusion cannot stand in the light of I John 4: 1-6. This Scripture tells us we need to test the spirits whether they are of God, because there are many false prophets in the world. Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. They are of the world; we Christians are of God. He who knows God hears us, and he that is not of God does not hear us. This is the way we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. There is only one way to God and that way is Jesus Christ.

To cite no more, Paul J. Griffiths, advocates what he calls, "open inclusivism," by which he means the need to acknowledge that there is "alien truth" in the world's religions, truth that Christians do not already know and therefore need to learn.⁴⁶

PLURALISM

Without a doubt John Hick is the most ardent advocate of a "Pluralistic" view of the religions of the world.⁴⁷ Hick (1922-) was born in England and educated at Edinburgh, Oxford, and Cam-

43. *Ibid*, p. 122.

44. *Ibid*, p. 122.

45. *Ibid*, p. 135.

46. *Ibid*, pp. 163-169; cf. especially the first paragraph on p. 168.

47. For a more detailed and well-documented summary of the Pluralism of John Hicks, see: Lewis and Travis, *Religious Traditions of the World*, pp. 355-367.

bridge. He was a Presbyterian minister in England, then taught at Cornell, Princeton Theological Seminary, Cambridge, the University of Birmingham (England), and Claremont Graduate School in California.⁴⁸

Hick emphatically rejects both "exclusivism" (our position, cf. below) and "inclusivism" (as described above). Hick takes the position that the world religions are true and equally valid in reaching liberation, freedom, or salvation. Christianity is not the one, only way to salvation. Christianity is not absolute, unique, final, normative, or exclusively true in contrast to other religions. The world's religions (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) all have the same general goal. In short, all religions save, according to Hick.⁴⁹

Lewis and Travis get right to the heart of the grievous error of Hick's Pluralism when they observe,

Hick cannot accept claims about the absoluteness and finality of Christ and the Christian faith.... Hick is ready to give up the usual marks of Christian uniqueness: claims that the Godhead is triune, Christ is divine and salvation from sin is by the atoning death of a Savior. He recognizes that the linchpin of Christian claims to uniqueness is the Incarnation. Belief in the uniqueness of Jesus as God incarnate and its concomitant, the absoluteness of Christianity, is doubtless an ancient belief of the church that, in his view, must be given up on the grounds both of biblical scholarship and a revised and more appropriate theological interpretation.... Furthermore, the term "Son of God" cannot be taken literally but only mythically and certainly not factually. The "real meaning" of the Incarnation is not that God fathered Jesus in a literal way with the Holy Spirit acting as male parent. Rather he is the Son of God in the sense that he is "the saving point of contact" with God. There is something absolute about him which we discover when we experience the presence of God through obedience to Christ. He serves functionally as our point of contact just as other religions have their own points of contact with God.

48. Roger Eastman, Editor, *The Ways of Religion: An Introduction to the Major Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 530.

49. Lewis and Travis, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-356.

One can affirm salvation in Christ in this way without denying salvation through others who have a similar function.⁵⁰

For the rest we will allow Hick to speak for himself in his autobiographical Epilogue to Roger Eastman's book, *The Ways of Religion*:

Clearly, such a pluralist conception requires a rethinking of the traditional formulations of incarnation, trinity and atonement. For if Jesus was literally God (the Son) incarnate, this being the one and only time when God became directly present on earth, it follows that Christianity is the only religion to have been founded by God in person; and this singles it out as having a uniquely central, normative, final status among the religions of the world, constituting it a more effective context of salvation than any other. Thus the superiority of Christianity becomes an *a priori* dogma, excluding any true religious pluralism. This dogma ... must mean that it has produced more or better saints per million of population, and has had better social, political and economic effects than any other religion.... The great world religions appear to me to constitute, in their different ways, more or less equally effective—and, alas, at the same time more or less equally ineffective—contexts of human transformation from self-centeredness to a new orientation centered in the divine Reality.... It therefore appears to me that the Christian pluralist should see the idea of divine incarnation as a metaphorical rather than a literal idea.... Such a Christology does not require a traditional form of Trinitarian theology, or a satisfaction or penal-substitutionary concept of redemption. These Christian themes can now be identified as metaphorical or mythological ... I am not set in judgment over the other great world faiths, but can explore, often with great fascination and profit, other ways in which other human beings know the one ultimate divine Reality. Because our traditions represent different limited ways of conceiving, experiencing and responding to that Reality, I sometimes come to see through others' eyes what are to me exciting new glimpses of the Transcendent as reflected in the meaning and possibilities of our human existence....⁵¹

50. *Ibid*, p. 356.

51. Eastman, *op. cit.*, pp. 534, 535.

It ought to be obvious to any Christian that Hick strips the Christian faith as infallibly revealed in the sacred Scriptures of all its content, meaning, and significance. This is sheer unbelief, for “every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world” (I John 4:3).

Biblical/Reformed Exclusivism

Leslie Newbigin is regarded by most scholars of the world's religions and comparative religion as the authority and spokesman for the exclusive claims of Christianity. But even he falls short of the truth, for he believes that it is possible for someone to be saved outside of Jesus Christ.⁵² With this we take leave of Newbigin and proceed to present what we believe to be a biblical and Reformed Exclusivism.

BIBLICAL EXCLUSIVISM

We believe with all our hearts the Bible's clear claim to inspiration by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, its infallibility, and its absolute authority for the faith and life of the Christian. Concerning itself the Bible says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Every word of the Holy Scriptures was given by inspiration of God, breathed by God. This is why the Bible contains no errors. This is why the Bible is profitable or useful for doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness. Nothing else is profitable for these matters. Only Scripture contains what we must believe and how we must live our lives in the service of God.

The inspired apostle Peter echoes the same truth. The apostle tells us that he and his colleagues do not come with cunningly

52. Lewis and Travis, *op. cit.*, p. 394. For a pretty well documented summary of Newbigin's view on this subject, see pp. 382- 385 of Lewis and Travis.

devised fables (myths) and we do well to take heed to the more sure word of prophecy they bring because, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet. 1:20-21). The writings contained in the Bible are not the private opinions of the men who wrote them. These holy men from God spoke and wrote as moved by the Holy Spirit.

These holy, inspired, infallible, authoritative Scriptures begin by informing us (Genesis 1 and 2):

1. that God created the heavens and the earth,
2. that God created the heavens and the earth by His word: “And God said ... and there was.”
3. that God did this in six days marked off by evening and morning and that He rested on the seventh day.

In the light of such passages as John 1 and Colossians 1, we learn that God created all things by and for Jesus Christ, so that all things consist in Him. After the fall of the human race into sin (Gen. 3), God put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, promising to destroy the latter and save the former. That happened at the cross of Jesus and in the power of His resurrection from the dead. The seed of the woman can be traced from Adam all the way to Christ and all who are in Him by faith (Gal. 3).

This Lord Jesus says, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.... No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6: 37, 44). In that same account of the Gospel, Jesus reveals Himself as the “door of the sheep ... by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10: 7-9). Further, the Savior tells us, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (v. 14). As the Good Shepherd, and in obedience to the will of His Father, Jesus tells us that He lays down His life (the cross) and takes it again (His resurrection from death) for the sake of those sheep. He gives to all of His sheep eternal life so that they never perish, and no one will ever pluck them out

of His hand (v. 28). Jesus reveals Himself thus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

By means of His atoning death, as sealed in His resurrection from the dead, Jesus saves all those predestinated to be conformed to His image before the foundation of the world. This Jesus is Lord over all things for the sake of His church. His resurrection is the victory over sin, death, and the grave. For this reason Jesus alone is worthy to open the seals of God's eternal decree concerning the things that must shortly come to pass (Eph. 1, 2; I Cor. 15; Rev. 5, 6).

REFORMED EXCLUSIVISM

This great truth of Scripture is reflected in the Reformed confessions. Our only comfort in life and in death is that we are not our own but belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all of our sins. Only those engrafted into Christ by a true faith are saved. Only Jesus saves us from our sins, and we find all things necessary for our salvation in Him. By His resurrection Jesus overcame death, makes us partakers of His righteousness, and raises us up to new life, and assures us of our blessed resurrection. The faith by which we know and are convinced of all this proceeds from the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and confirms it by the use of the sacraments (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 1, 7, 11, 17, 25). There are many more references in the Catechism that could be cited. We let the above suffice.

Likewise, the Belgic Confession of Faith teaches that there is one only God, who is made known to us by His infallible Word. The one only God is one in Essence and three in Persons. Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are true and eternal God. We are saved by the sovereign, particular grace of this God through the satisfaction Christ made for us on the cross. All this wonderful salvation will be perfected when Jesus returns in the Last Judgment (Articles: 1-7; 8-11; 13-29; 37).

The Canons of Dordrecht, 1618 and 1619, teach the great truths of total depravity, unconditional election in Christ Jesus, limited

or definite atonement of Christ for the elect, the irresistible grace of Christ, and the preservation of the saints.

Can we prove all this? No, we cannot. We must believe it or we perish. If we are going to believe the truth of the Christian faith, the one, only true religion, we must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. "... no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12:3). The Spirit must bear witness with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

What are the implications of this great truth for the other religions of the world? In plain words they are false. "...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). They are false at their root and essence, for they deny and reject the one, only, true, and living God as the Sovereign Creator of all things and the Sovereign Redeemer of His elect church in Jesus Christ. In addition to differences among them in belief, ritual, and practice (e.g., Islam's rejection of the Trinity, Jesus, and the Bible), there is a common thread running through all of the world's religions. That common thread is this: man saves himself. Man attains "salvation" by his own efforts. This they, interestingly enough, share with apostate Christianity: Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Liberalism. The adherents of the world's religions serve idols of their own conception and making and therefore, under the just judgment of God, will come to everlasting ruin (Rom. 1:18-32).

Let us hear and do the last words, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3), and Jesus is the only "... name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12). ●

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Book Reviews

God's Choice: Pope Benedict XVI and the Future of the Catholic Church, by George Weigel. New York: HarperCollins, 2005. 307 pages. \$26.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

From George Weigel, best-selling Roman Catholic author and confidant of popes, comes an insider's account of the recent election of Joseph Ratzinger to the papacy as Benedict XVI and a forecast of the new pope's agenda.

Ratzinger is the "choice" of God of the title.

It is obvious that God's way of choosing a pope for the Roman Catholic Church bears no resemblance to the way in which He chooses pastors for true churches of Jesus Christ. What an intrigue! What a maneuvering! What a behind-the-scene exercise of power-politics! What theater!

Besides, the people have absolutely no say in the appointment of their officebearer.

The result—a new pope—bears still less resemblance to the humble pastor and teacher, who is truly God's choice. The pope is enthroned, crowned, bejeweled, decked out in the garb of an oriental potentate, wor-

shipped as a deity, and acclaimed in blasphemous language appropriate to his usurpation of the prerogatives of the Godhead. All the powerful among the Gentiles paid court to Benedict at his installation, recognizing him, as they did, as one of their own. "He sat on a ... portable throne.... The successor of Peter would receive the powerful, as the world understood power" (156).

In keeping with his great carnal power, the new pope has an ambitious agenda. He intends to re-convert Europe to Roman Catholicism, and thus "revive" those dying survivors of the old Roman empire. As a major political force on the international scene, he intends aggressively to push Roman Catholic interests everywhere in the world by a tightened Vatican diplomacy. He will busy himself and the Roman Church in interreligious dialogue (not be confused with theological controversy) with Islam.

This tough-minded former head of the old Roman department of the Inquisition, who therefore has the blood of countless thousands of Reformed martyrs on his hands, will also whip the Roman Catholic Church itself into shape. As Weigel said in a recent speech at the January Series of lectures at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the election of Ratzinger meant that Rome is in no mood to cave in to the effete liberal culture, as most Protestant churches are doing. Rome intends to remain Rome, both in her doctrine and in her life.

No Reformed man who recognizes Rome as the false church is in the least surprised by this. In these last days, the false church attracts the Protestant churches that now stand for nothing in particular, except loving everybody, and that are openly taking the last step in their apostasy by renouncing the Reformation's gospel of justification by faith alone as a mistake. It takes the lead in bringing together all the religions of the world. And it prostitutes itself to the Antichrist in unifying the nations.

The first part of *God's*

Choice is a worshipful account of the last days and funeral of Pope John Paul II. Included is a summary of the man's amazing gifts and accomplishments, which resulted in his near-adoration by much of the world. Especially significant was the conversion to a love of this pope, and a warm appreciation of his Church, on the part of most evangelicals. "Evangelical pastors and theologians whose parents unblushingly referred to the Bishop of Rome as the 'Whore of Babylon' came to regard John Paul II as the great Christian witness of the late 20th century" (63).

This idol of Rome, and icon of much of evangelical Protestantism, was a devout worshipper of Mary. In Mary, he trusted for his and his Church's salvation. To Mary, he dedicated his life and ministry—and, less publicly, every nation on whose soil his plane descended. "In traditional Catholic piety, first Saturdays [John Paul died on a first Saturday—DJE] are devoted to the Blessed Virgin, to whom Karol Wojtyla had dedicated his life in his episcopal motto *Totus Tuus* [Entirely Yours]" (76).

Reformed people will help themselves in an understanding

of Rome and the papacy by reading *God's Choice*. The principle is: "Know the enemy."

Immediately afterwards, they should read Luther's

"Against Hanswurst" and "Against the Roman Papacy, An Institution of the Devil" and Book 4, chapters 5-8 of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. ♦

Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response, by Guy Prentiss Waters. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2004. Pp. xii + 273. \$16.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The Reformed community in North America has needed a clear, incisive critique of the "New Perspective(s) on Paul" (hereafter, NPP). The reason is the influence of the NPP on the spreading movement in the Reformed churches that calls itself the "federal vision." This book supplies the need. Guy Waters, professor at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi, examines the theology of Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, Heikki Raisanen, and N. T. Wright.

Although these theologians have their differences, their doctrine is essentially one and the same. They deny that justification in the writings of Paul is God's forensic act of imputing Christ's righteousness to the guilty sinner by faith alone. They deny, as well, that Christ's

death was God's forensic act of imputing to Christ the guilt of the elect. Justification is rather God's recognition that one belongs to the covenant (for the time being). Justification has to do with membership in the church, rather than with salvation. God's recognition that someone belongs to the covenant is based on his faith as a human work and on his other good works. Insofar as justification does involve one's salvation, it is a transforming, or renewing, work, and not exclusively a legal act. In any case, justification is based on one's faithfulness in the covenant, that is, works.

According to E. P. Sanders, "forgiveness is not a dominant category in Pauline thought" (60). Sanders has written that "Paul did not characteristically

think in terms of sin as transgression which incurs guilt, which is removed by repentance and forgiveness" (74).

This "perspective" on Paul differs radically from that of Luther, Calvin, and the Reformed creeds. Hence, it is a "new perspective" on Paul.

The NPP is dismissive of the Reformation's understanding of guilt, forgiveness, and imputed righteousness in the writings of Paul. Krister Stendahl attributes this understanding to "Luther's unique religious psychology ... and his sensitive conscience" (24).

Basic to this new interpretation of the heart of the gospel as taught by Paul, especially in Romans and Galatians, is the NPP's reading of Paul in the light of Jewish writings from the time of the "second temple." These writings, we are assured by the scholars of the NPP, do not teach salvation by works. The only error of the Jews was that they excluded Gentiles from the covenant. Therefore, Paul cannot have intended to condemn the heresy of meritorious works, or self-righteousness.

This dependence of the proponents of the NPP on extra-

biblical writings, which most Christians, including most ministers, will never see, is the reason why Waters charges the NPP with the grave evil of a new "priesthood of the scholars" and with the equally grave evil of interpreting Scripture, not with Scripture, but with uninspired writings.

Because of the popularity of the Anglican clergyman, N. T. Wright, with North American evangelicals, Waters singles him out. Waters demonstrates that, despite his more orthodox-sounding language, Wright is fully committed to the characteristic teachings of the NPP, particularly the denial of the Reformation's doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The plot to destroy the gospel of grace alone, the heart of which is justification by faith alone, thickens. Waters shows that the source of the NPP is the old Protestant liberalism of Albert Schweitzer, mediated by the more recent Protestant liberal, Rudolph Bultmann. Protestant liberalism despised Paul's juridical theology, because it despised the cross of Christ. It substituted a theology of salvation by mystical union with Christ. In this theology,

the sacrament of baptism accomplishes salvation. Baptism, wrote Schweitzer, "effects redemption" (11).

Waters' examination of the NPP is thorough. He demonstrates the teachings of the movement by quotations and careful summary. He refutes the false teachings by exegesis of Scripture. His indictment is devastating. In addition to criticizing Scripture and subjecting it to the authority of non-canonical writings, the NPP denies justification by faith alone, has no place for the imputation of Adam's transgression, rejects the cross as atonement, and is "semi-Pelagian."

The last chapter should be required reading, not only in every Reformed seminary, but also by every Reformed consistory. The title is, "What's at Stake for Reformed Christianity?" Waters does not content himself with a safe (and even then usually soft) criticism of the NPP out there somewhere in the hinterlands beyond the pale of the reputedly conservative Reformed churches. He recognizes that the theology of the NPP is influencing Reformed men and churches, in part through N. T. Wright, who

is the darling of American evangelicals, including the men of the "federal vision."

Among the reasons why Reformed people find the NPP attractive, according to Waters, are the NPP's stress on covenant, the obsession of many Reformed thinkers with Christianizing culture (Waters mentions the Kuyperian worldview and Christian Reconstruction), and the trend in Reformed theological circles to reject systematic theology (dogmatics) for "biblical theology." What Waters does not mention is the same distaste for sovereign, particular grace on the part of nominally Reformed people that motivates the NPP.

Waters explicitly links the movement in the North American churches known as the "federal vision" with the NPP, specifically regarding the heresy of justification by faith and works.

What theological and practical consequences is the adoption of NPP having within Reformed Christianity? This, sadly, is not a theoretical question. We may point to the writings of Norman Shepherd and the resolutions passed by the session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA),

Monroe, Louisiana (AAPC), on 26 September 2002 (204).

A second point of contact with the NPP [on the part of the “federal vision”] is a functional adherence in both Shepherd and AAPC to a justifying inherent righteousness. That is, faith in its office of justification is conceived *practically* as covenantal faithfulness (209).

Concerning the NPP, with which the “federal vision” is significantly linked, Waters concludes: “What they are *really and increasingly* saying is that Luther and Calvin were mistaken, and that Trent was right” (212). The NPP, with which the “federal vision” is

significantly linked, is “on the path to ... Rome” (211).

In light of this critique, Reformed believers in North America must ask these questions, and press them until they get an answer: “Why are the Reformed seminaries, the church papers, and the pulpits silent about the NPP and the ‘federal vision’?” “Why does N. T. Wright move so easily in Reformed circles in North America?” “And why are those who teach the heresy protected at the highest levels of the churches and, if laymen do bring a charge against them, why are the teachers of the NPP and of the “federal vision” exonerated by the ecclesiastical assemblies?” ♦

Paul: Pioneer For Israel's Messiah, by Jakob VanBruggen. Tr. Ed M. van der Maas. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 2005. Pp. xix + 411. \$19.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

This volume is the English translation of VanBruggen's *Paulus: Pionier voor de Messias van Israel*, which was published in the Netherlands in 2001. Jakob VanBruggen is a Reformed theologian and scholar of considerable repute.

He is the author of numerous books, many of which have been translated into English. He is longtime Professor of New Testament at the Theological University of the Reformed Church (Liberated) in Kampen, the Netherlands.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part, chapters 1-14, treats the life of the apostle Paul. The second part, chapters 15-18, deals with Paul's teaching and his relation to the other apostles. Besides the helpful maps and charts that are included in the body of the text, three appendixes are added after the last chapter: a chronology of Paul's life, a bibliography of Paul's writings, and an excursus on "Jewish Religion and the Law." The book concludes with an extensive bibliography of Pauline literature and some helpful indexes. *Paul: Pioneer For Israel's Messiah* could profitably serve as the textbook for a class on Paul's life and ministry.

As is the case with most of the books that VanBruggen has produced, this book on the life and teachings of the apostle Paul has many noteworthy features. Of the many books that have appeared in recent years on Paul, very few have been written from a conservative Reformed perspective. This book is an exception—refreshingly so. The author does a commendable job of integrating the biographical and chronological information found in the

epistles with the historical material contained in the book of Acts. In certain instances, VanBruggen offers his own unique take on the chronology of events in Paul's life, offering to the reader his reasons for differing from the more traditional view. For example, he makes the crisis reported in Galatians 2:1ff. to have arisen and been resolved at the end of the second missionary journey; he defends a visit to Crete during the third missionary journey, not after the first Roman imprisonment; and he argues that a number of the "prison epistles" were written, not from Rome, but during his incarceration in Caesarea.

One praiseworthy feature of the book is VanBruggen's insistence on the unity between Paul and the other apostles. He dismisses the notion that Paul was a "theological trailblazer," going his own way and doing his own thing. This is an important theme of VanBruggen's work, as the title itself indicates: *Paul: Pioneer For Israel's Messiah*. He rejects the position of those who present Paul "as if he were the founder of Christendom rather than its pioneer" (p. 185). Paul was not a

solo performer, but one who labored in fundamental concert with the other apostles. He argues that it is incorrect to think of Paul "as a solitary beacon that shines its light on deserted shores." Instead, "It is better to compare Paul to a star that does not shine all by itself. He may be a conspicuously bright star, but he, together with the others, constitutes a constellation—the constellation of the apostles" (p. 160). So adamant is VanBruggen in maintaining the unity between Paul and the other apostles that to his mind "it is very much open to question whether it is methodologically possible to speak of something like Paul's theology at all" (p. 170). We would concur, and even insist on what VanBruggen suggests, that there is no distinctly Pauline theology in the New Testament. Specifically, VanBruggen engages those who pit Paul over against James. Do they not conflict, at least to some extent? "At first glance this question seems inescapable. But the fact of the matter is that the sparks that seem to fly are the result of a short circuit of our own making: we simply connect the wrong wires" (p. 186). In reality, there is not

discrepancy between Paul and James.

Despite its commendable features, VanBruggen's *Paul* is somewhat of a disappointment. It is a disappointment because nowhere in the book does VanBruggen interact substantively with the "New Pauline Perspective" (NPP). Any new book on Paul ought to contend with the NPP and the significant impact the NPP has had within Evangelical and Reformed churches. This appears to be VanBruggen's intention in the preface of his book, in which he states that he has "continuously interacted with modern theories about the person and meaning of this sometimes rather mysterious apostle" (p. xv). Despite what we are led to anticipate, the NPP is given but scant attention in the body of the book. E.P. Sanders' and James Dunn's ideas are only referred to in passing (pp. 217, 218). N.T. Wright is referenced in two endnotes (pp. 332, 362), neither of which relates or exposes his heretical views on Paul and justification. Because of his almost blithe indifference towards the NPP, VanBruggen's book on Paul does not measure up to the expectation for a new

release on the life and teaching of the apostle Paul.

More disappointing than his non-engagement of the NPP is another feature of the book. Disconcerting is VanBruggen's contention that in Romans and Galatians particularly, but also in his preaching generally, Paul was not contending against the dread error of legalism but against a Judaism devoid of Christ. He writes:

Paul is not combating formal legalism but rather an incorrect understanding of the grace that has now been revealed. In other words, the dispute is about salvation-historical facts and their implications. In its own time and in its proper function the law was a good gift from God for the well-being of Israel. After Pentecost, however, life under the law has become a lonely venture for those who continue to reject Christ, the protector against the curse of the law. And for the Gentile Christians, the law is no longer a fenced-in enclosure into which they must be brought (p. 243).

And again:

Not until the unbelieving

Jews close themselves off from Christ Jesus does their identity become significantly more important—which is precisely what Paul fights against in this specific period after Pentecost. He thus does not fight against a warped Judaism [that is, legalism, RC] but rather for an acceptance of Messiah Jesus through a true faith. If a Jew thinks that he can ignore Messiah Jesus while under the law, he isolates that law from its true role in salvation history and gives it an inflated value (p. 252).

In line with his position that Paul's detractors were not so much legalists contending for salvation partly on the basis of man's own works of obedience to the law as they were Jews who continued to practice the tenets of Judaism without believing on Jesus Christ as the Messiah, VanBruggen also reassesses Jesus' controversy with the scribes and Pharisees. He sees, of course, that Paul's controversy with the Judaizers and Jesus' controversy with the Jewish leaders of His day were basically the same controversy, as has always been the understanding of the Christian church. To assess Paul's controversy with the Judaizers as not fundamen-

tally a controversy over legalism forces one similarly to reassess Jesus' controversy with the Jews.

In the Gospels Jesus does not appear primarily as someone who is in active opposition to the existing religion. He preaches the kingdom of heaven, and he is not actively opposed to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. It is only when these groups turn against him that a conflict situation develops. The core of the conflict is not what religion should be like, but who Jesus is (p. 324).

This is disconcerting, even alarming! By taking this position with regard to the Judaism of Jesus' day and the Judaizers of Paul's day, VanBruggen has

clearly disassociated himself from the traditional and Reformed understanding of the critical argument of both Romans and Galatians. In both of these epistles, Paul contends sharply against legalism, as Luther, Calvin, and the other reformers to a man were agreed. Not only does VanBruggen depart from the Reformed tradition, but in his reassessment he opens himself up to, if he does not actually play into the hand of, the proponents of the NPP. For this is exactly their position regarding the argument of Romans and Galatians. And it is this argument that facilitates their denial of justification by faith alone.

Recommended—with reservations. ♦

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