

# Protestant *Reformed* Theological *Journal*

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# PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

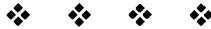
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## Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* contains articles by two faculty members of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS). Each contributes an article dealing with an aspect of the theology of the sixteenth-century reformer John Calvin. Prof. David Engelsma writes concerning John Calvin's doctrine of justification in "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of John Calvin." The men promoting the heresy of the Federal Vision attempt to drive a wedge between the teaching of Calvin on justification and the teaching of Martin Luther. They contend that whereas Luther taught justification by faith alone, Calvin taught justification by faith and works. Prof. Engelsma examines this contention and demonstrates clearly that it is mistaken.

Included in this issue is also an article by Prof. Engelsma informing our readership of an important acquisition that PRTS has made. That acquisition is the "Letis Library." Dr. Theodore Letis was a renowned New Testament text scholar who died unexpectedly in June 2005. At the time of his death, Dr. Letis was the director of the Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies. In God's good providence and through the assistance of a friend of the Protestant Reformed Churches, it has been possible for the seminary to purchase this large and valuable library. The library is presently being processed and incorporated into the existing library. Prof. Engelsma includes in his article a brief history of the seminary library. The library plays a vital part in the life and work of any seminary, and this is certainly the case with the library of PRTS.

These are the last articles from the pen of our beloved colleague in his capacity as Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament at PRTS. Prof. Engelsma accepted the appointment to serve in the seminary in 1988. For twenty years he has labored faithfully in the work of training men for the gospel ministry. During those twenty years he has also written many quality articles for the *Journal*. At the June 2008 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Prof. Engelsma will be declared emeritus. We pray the Lord's richest blessing on our brother and his wife, Ruth, in their retirement. We hope that, even after retiring, he will continue to favor the readers of the *Journal* with an occasional article.

The proponents of the doctrine of common grace have long appealed to John Calvin in support of their teaching. The undersigned examines the accuracy of this appeal to Calvin in an article entitled, "Another Look at Calvin and Common Grace."

From its beginning, the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* intended to publish papers that were produced by the students of PRTS. From time to time we have included such worthy papers in the *Journal*. Included in this issue is a paper by third-year student, Mr. Cory Griess. His paper addresses the very important matter of the public worship of the church. The title of the paper is, "The Regulative Principle: A Confessional Examination."

Besides the feature articles included in this issue, there are also a number of book reviews. These book reviews call attention to recently published theological works and evaluate their contents. It is our desire to make this section a worthwhile part of each issue of the *Journal*.

We continue to send the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* to our subscribers free of charge. So far as I am aware, we are the only theological journal without a subscription fee. And we want to continue our no-subscription fee policy in the future, if we are able. But our resources are a bit stretched on account of the recent hike in postal rates. Especially hard hit are our foreign mailings, the cost for these mailings having tripled as a result of the increase in postage. If you are able and feel so inclined, donations towards the cost of publication of the *Journal* would be greatly appreciated. They can be sent directly to the seminary. Please be sure to designate them for the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*.

There is an important announcement included in this issue of the *Journal* to which I want to call our readers' attention. It is found on p. 158. It concerns the celebration of the birth of John Calvin that the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary is planning for September 2009. It is our hope that as many of our readers as are able will join us on the campus of Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan for this worthwhile celebration.

We pray that this issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* will prove instructive and edifying. It is our prayer that our sovereign God may be glorified and the cause of His truth advanced in the world.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

RLC

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# Another Look at Calvin and Common Grace

Ronald L. Cammenga

## Introduction

Proponents of common grace have long appealed to John Calvin in support of the teaching of common grace. This appeal to Calvin has been made by individuals as well as by church bodies. The argument is advanced that, although admittedly Calvin did not fully develop the teaching that later became known as common grace, the seeds of common grace can be found in his writings. Already at the time of the Reformation, it is argued, Calvin articulated the basic principle of common grace, the notion of a general favor of God towards all men, and in a beginning sort of way made application of this principle to the life of the Christian in the world. All that later Reformed theologians did by way of the development of the teaching of common grace, they did by carrying forward the rudimentary work of Calvin. Until recently, there has been a general consensus among the proponents of common grace that John Calvin was the originator of this teaching.

The attempt to demonstrate that the doctrine of common grace can be traced back to Calvin is understandable. It is understandable in light of the stature that Calvin has in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. If it can be demonstrated that Calvin taught a certain doctrine, at the very least that teaching has a right to the claim that it is historically Reformed. This is simply due to the fact that so much of what came to be regarded as Reformed orthodoxy derives from and depends on Calvin.

The attempt to derive the teaching of common grace from Calvin is understandable from another point of view. Undoubtedly this effort also arises out of Reformed theology's sensitivity to the importance of theological lineage. In distinction from Roman Catholicism and various cults, Reformed theology maintains a view of the organic development of doctrine. What the church teaches today

is only the further unfolding of what, in the main, the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century taught, and before them the early church fathers and the apostles. Development of doctrine is organic development, the acorn sprouting forth and growing into the mighty oak tree. Major doctrines are not at the present late date in human history for the first time discovered and articulated. But the main doctrines of the Reformed faith held in the twenty-first century are the flowering forth of the great doctrines of the Reformation. Because of this view of the development of doctrine, the proponents of the teaching of common grace have been keen to derive the main elements of their teaching from the great reformer John Calvin.

This article will examine the merits of this endeavor. Can it in fact be demonstrated that Calvin was the originator of the teaching of common grace? Did he in his many writings lay the theological foundation upon which the further development of common grace could be built? And would he approve of the later developments and applications of common grace, particularly by nineteenth and twentieth century theologians? Or is the appeal to Calvin strained and wide of the mark? These are the main questions to which we will seek answers.

### **Appeal to Calvin**

No one did more to develop the doctrine of common grace than the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). The crowning achievement of Kuyper's articulating the doctrine was his three-volume work *De Gemeene Gratie*.<sup>1</sup> Although there are surprisingly few references to Calvin throughout the 1,200 plus pages of this work on common grace, Kuyper makes clear that he considers himself dependent on Calvin for his own understanding of the doctrine of common grace. In his view, Calvin gave clear expression to "the profound idea of this 'common grace,'" by means of which he "explain(ed) the fact that the heathen and unbelievers so often

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1902-1905). This set has not been translated from the Dutch into English. All translations of the Dutch are mine.

excelled in great measure in integrity and noble sense.”<sup>2</sup> Calvin “made mention of the restraint of sin” and “first emphatically pointed out [this teaching] upon which the entire doctrine of common grace is based.”<sup>3</sup> Kuyper laments “the sad fact that ‘common grace,’ after being so definitely confessed by Calvin...nevertheless both in the Reformed confessions and in Reformed dogmatics is as good as entirely neglected [after Calvin]....”<sup>4</sup>

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) was Kuyper’s friend and co-laborer, as well as his successor as Professor of Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. Bavinck was as zealous an advocate of common grace as his colleague. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen lauds the contribution of Herman Bavinck to the development of common grace in the Dutch Reformed tradition. In the preface to his translation of Bavinck’s 1894 rectorial address that appeared in the *Calvin Theological Journal*, Van Leeuwen writes:

One of the finest theological fruits of the Dutch Neo-Calvinist revival in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the rehabilitation and elaboration of the Reformed doctrine of common grace, which to a large extent had lain dormant since Calvin. The chief agents of this renewed interest in common grace were Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). While Kuyper produced the most extensive treatment of the topic in his three-volume *De Gemeene Gratie* (1902-1904), Bavinck deserves the credit for first developing the doctrine in a way that laid a theological basis for the broad cultural programs and concerns of the revival. He first broached the subject in his *Catholicity of Christianity and Church* (1888). But that thematic seed germinated to produce a fuller treatment in his rectorial address at Kampen in December 1894, entitled *De Gemeene Genade*....<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 1:6.

<sup>3</sup> Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 1:248.

<sup>4</sup> Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 2:97.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Translator’s Introduction.” This introduction is a preface to Van Leeuwen’s translation of Bavinck’s rectorial address. The translation appears under the title “Common Grace,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1, April 1989. The above quotation appears on p. 35.

Like Kuyper, Bavinck traced the roots of common grace to the reformer from Geneva. He was of the opinion that the doctrine of common grace, which found no place in the Roman Catholic system, “was discovered in the Reformation, notably by Calvin....”<sup>6</sup> It is Calvin “in dependence upon and with an appeal to Scripture [who] comes to distinguish between general and special grace, between the working of the Spirit in all creation and the work of sanctification that belongs only to those who believe.”<sup>7</sup>

On the occasion of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin in 1909, Bavinck wrote an article entitled “Calvin and Common Grace.” In this article he reiterated his view that Calvin taught the doctrine of common grace.

But of even greater significance is it that with Calvin reprobation does not mean the withholding of all grace. Although man through sin has been rendered blind to all the spiritual realities of the kingdom of God, so that a special revelation of God’s fatherly love in Christ and a *specialis illuminatio* by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the sinners here become necessary, nevertheless there exists alongside of these a *generalis gratia* which dispenses to all men various gifts.<sup>8</sup>

According to Bavinck, it was Calvin’s view that “...God immediately after the Fall interposed, in order by His common grace to curb sin and to uphold in being the *universitas rerum*.”<sup>9</sup> In Bavinck’s view, common grace becomes for Calvin the foundation for the Christian life and a reason for the rejection of Roman Catholic monasticism, which was grounded in Rome’s dichotomy between nature and grace.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 39.

<sup>7</sup> Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 51.

<sup>8</sup> Herman Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” trans. Geerhardus Vos and included in *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies* by Emile Doumergue, August Lang, Herman Bavinck, Benjamin B. Warfield (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909), 117.

<sup>9</sup> Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” 118.

<sup>10</sup> Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” 120ff.



Not only in the Netherlands, but also in North America, the defenders of common grace have often appealed to Calvin in an effort to demonstrate the noble bloodlines of the doctrine. This was especially true in Dutch Reformed circles, where the teaching of common grace was hotly debated in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Christian Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) was among those who traced the development of common grace to the sixteenth century reformer.

He [Calvin] firmly maintained that the natural man can *of himself* do no good work whatsoever and strongly insisted on the particular nature of saving grace. He developed alongside of the doctrine of particular grace the doctrine of common grace. This is a grace which is communal, does not pardon nor purify human nature, and does not effect the salvation of sinners. It curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men. Since the days of Calvin the doctrine of common grace was generally recognized in Reformed theology....<sup>11</sup>

H. Henry Meeter (1886-1963), a fellow Christian Reformed churchman with Berkhof, was equally insistent that the roots of common grace go back to John Calvin. Meeter poses the question:

How shall we solve the problem of the bad which the Bible ascribes to unregenerate men and those 'excellent' deeds performed by these same unregenerate and pagan men? And we cannot say of these excellent deeds that they are splendid vices. We cannot call them the products of sin. Sin will not produce such good results.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, repr. 1996), 434.

<sup>12</sup> H. Henry Meeter, *Calvinism: An Interpretation of Its Basic Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 70.

The solution, according to Meeter, is common grace, which Meeter traces back to Calvin.<sup>13</sup>

Yet another Christian Reformed theologian who advanced the position that Calvin is to be credited with being the first to set forth the doctrine of common grace was William Masselink (1897-1973). Masselink's position was that "[t]he works of John Calvin already contained the doctrine of common grace, although it was not yet developed."<sup>14</sup> To Abraham Kuyper "... belongs the credit of gathering the historic material, especially from the works of John Calvin, arranging this material in a system, and showing its practical bearing upon every day life." Kuyper was only "the 'copyist' of John Calvin." In building on Calvin, Kuyper gave "a brilliant example of how the old Reformed theology must be developed."<sup>15</sup>

At the same time that the Dutch Reformed in North America were wrestling over common grace, Presbyterians on this continent began to pay increasing attention to the doctrine. Already before the controversy erupted in the Christian Reformed Church in the 1920s, several Presbyterian theologians wrote concerning common grace. The Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878) devoted a fairly lengthy section—more than twenty pages—in the second volume of his three-volume *Systematic Theology* to a discussion of common grace. However, he made no mention of or direct reference to Calvin in the entire section.<sup>16</sup> In his *Dogmatic Theology*, William G. T. Shedd (1820-1894) made only passing reference to what he considered to be Calvin's distinction between common and special grace, without going into any detail concerning Calvin's view of common grace itself.<sup>17</sup>

Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), the Presbyterian theologian whose roots were in the Dutch Reformed tradition, gave more atten-

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<sup>13</sup> Meeter, *Calvinism*, 69, 71.

<sup>14</sup> William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 187.

<sup>15</sup> Masselink, *General Revelation*, 187f.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, repr. 1970), pp. 654-675.

<sup>17</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 3rd edition, 2003), 361.

tion to the teaching of common grace. In a number of his writings he discusses common grace and develops the various aspects of the doctrine. As is the case with other proponents of common grace, Van Til appeals to Calvin as the source of the doctrine in the churches of the Reformation. "Calvin [may be] called the originator, and Kuyper, the great modern exponent of the doctrine of common grace...."<sup>18</sup> He speaks of the necessity that "any doctrine of common grace that is to be held by Reformed men" must not only be in accord with "the main body of Reformed doctrine," but also with "Calvin's doctrine of common grace."<sup>19</sup> Kuyper and Bavinck, in Van Til's view, are only the "great modern exponents of Calvin's views...."<sup>20</sup>

John Murray (1898-1975), Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary and later at Westminster Theological Seminary, was an ardent defender of common grace. He too considered John Calvin to be the first great champion of the doctrine.

In this field of inquiry no name deserves more credit than that of the renowned reformer, John Calvin. No one was more deeply persuaded of the complete depravation of human nature by sin and of the consequent inability of unaided human nature to bring forth anything good, and so he explained the existence of good outside the sphere of God's special and saving grace by the presence of a grace that is common to all, yet enjoyed by some in special degree.... On this question Calvin not only opened a new vista but also a new era in theological formulation.<sup>21</sup>

A contemporary Presbyterian proponent of common grace is the Christian Reconstructionist Gary North. In his book *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress*, North grounds the Christian Reconstructionist political and social agenda that aims

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<sup>18</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977), 12.

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1955), 177.

<sup>20</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 182.

<sup>21</sup> John Murray, "Common Grace," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:94.

at Christianizing the world in the teaching of common grace. At the outset he expresses the view that “[t]he concept [of common grace] goes back at least to John Calvin’s writings.”<sup>22</sup> The use that North and the Christian Reconstructionists make of common grace is, in their view, only the outworking of the groundbreaking work done by John Calvin.

Besides the appeal made to Calvin by various individual theologians, at least one church assembly grounded its pronouncements concerning common grace in the teaching of the great church reformer. This appeal to Calvin was made by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. In defense of the “First Point” of common grace, the teaching that there is a favorable attitude of God towards all men and not just towards the elect, and the “Second Point,” the teaching of a restraint of sin in the ungodly, the synod cited three passages out of Calvin’s *Institutes*.<sup>23</sup> Clearly the synod was of the opinion that its definition and description of common grace found support in the theology of John Calvin.

### **Herman Kuiper’s *Calvin on Common Grace***

Although the defenders of common grace have generally appealed to Calvin, the most extensive effort to discover in Calvin support for the teaching was made by the Christian Reformed theologian Herman Kuiper (1889-1963). Kuiper’s work entitled *Calvin on Common Grace*, published in 1928, endures as the only book-length treatment of the subject. In the book, which extends to over 250 pages, Kuiper carefully examines Calvin’s *Institutes* and his commentaries in order to collate the reformer’s teaching on common grace. The book contains a virtual catalogue of citations found in the *Institutes* and in the commentaries that, in Kuiper’s judgment, indicate Calvin’s unqualified support for the teaching of common grace. It is no exaggeration to say that Kuiper finds references to common grace throughout the writings of Calvin. He sees Calvin referring to com-

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<sup>22</sup> Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Acts of Synod 1924 of the Christian Reformed Church*, trans. Henry De Mots (Grand Rapids: Archives of the Christian Reformed Church, 2000), 127 ff.

mon grace often and in many different contexts. Although Kuiper concedes that “Calvin does not employ the term *gratia communis* a single time,” and that “in Calvin’s writings there is not a single one which gives something like a comprehensive view of the whole subject,”<sup>24</sup> he nevertheless is convinced that Calvin “was the first theologian who made a clear-cut distinction between common and saving grace, between the operations of the Spirit of God which are common to mankind at large and the sanctifying work of the same Spirit which is limited to God’s elect.”<sup>25</sup> He regarded Calvin as the “father of Reformed theology” and “the acknowledged discoverer of the doctrine of common grace; all the later theologians who have written on common grace have borrowed largely from him.”<sup>26</sup> In Kuiper’s view,

... Calvin teaches that God bestows grace not merely upon the elect but also upon men who never attain to salvation, yea upon all creatures. Surely he who runs may read that our author [Calvin] holds that all creatures and especially all men are the recipients of countless favors, be it that the great majority remain strangers to that divine grace which makes men participants of life eternal.<sup>27</sup>

A careful assessment of Kuiper’s book, however, raises serious questions about his argument that Calvin is the father of common grace. Altogether apart from the anachronistic consideration—that common grace was not an issue in Calvin’s day, and was not therefore a matter to which he addressed himself forthrightly—there are other concerns. In spite of the extended argument and the array of citations from Calvin’s *Institutes* and commentaries, in the end Kuiper’s argument that there can be found in Calvin convincing support for the teaching of common grace is strained, at best, and a failure, at worst.

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<sup>24</sup> Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, Goes, Netherlands and Smitter Book Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1928), 177.

<sup>25</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 177.

For one thing, over and over again Kuiper relies on what he judges to be implications of what Calvin teaches. Repeatedly he speaks of what a passage in Calvin “implies,” or, “seems to imply.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, he speaks of the “inference” that can be drawn from Calvin, or the “inference that lies at hand.”<sup>29</sup> He speaks of what Calvin has written as “suggesting”<sup>30</sup> the idea of common grace or providing “some reason to think”<sup>31</sup> that Calvin had common grace in mind, or that he “seems to intimate”<sup>32</sup> the teaching of common grace.

It is one thing to draw legitimate implications from a theologian’s express teaching. But that the main support regarding a position he is alleged to have held relies so heavily on implications and inferences, rather than on his express teaching, certainly makes suspect an appeal to that theologian for support. In the absence of express teaching, the supposed implications and inferences cannot be considered decisive. Besides, implications validly drawn are one thing; arguments from silence are quite another. Too often the implications that Kuiper draws are in reality arguments from silence.<sup>33</sup>

In the second place, what further weakens the support for common grace that Kuiper finds in Calvin is his frequent confusion of gifts and grace. This confusion appears often in the long list of citations that Kuiper assembles from Calvin. Over and over again he calls attention to statements in Calvin that make reference to God’s bestowing good gifts upon reprobate ungodly men. From these citations, Kuiper draws the unwarranted conclusion that Calvin taught common grace. The underlying assumption that Kuiper makes is that gifts presuppose grace. If God bestows good gifts on the wicked, this implies that He must also be gracious to them. Divine grace is the

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<sup>28</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 3, 6, 8, 18, 29, and many others.

<sup>29</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 13, 18, and others.

<sup>30</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 20, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 172.

<sup>33</sup> Instances of this would be Kuiper’s contention that Calvin’s comments on Ephesians 1:22 imply that as the Head of the church, Christ is the administrator of common grace (*Calvin on Common Grace*, 166), or that the apostle’s command in I Timothy 4:3 that meats are to be received with thanksgiving imply that the very worst men are fed by God’s blessing (*Calvin on Common Grace*, 168).

source out of which the gifts proceed. So goes the argument.

... God dispenses certain gifts of grace which are common to the elect and non-elect. And these latter gifts are called common grace.<sup>34</sup>

Each individual must regard the intellectual endowments which are granted him as an evidence of God's peculiar grace shown him personally. And it is to be regarded a manifestation of God's special grace when some receive more excellent gifts than the bulk of humanity. In all these instances God grants grace indiscriminately to believers and non-believers....<sup>35</sup>

... the inference lies at hand that God sometimes bestows these excellent gifts on men who remain strangers to saving grace.<sup>36</sup>

... the inference lies at hand that he [Calvin] would have us consider all men recipients of such divine gifts, that is, of grace.<sup>37</sup>

But that Calvin teaches that God bestows good gifts on the reprobate wicked does not necessarily imply, much less require, the teaching of common grace. The fact that God bestows good gifts on those other than the elect in Christ is not at all the issue. Rather the issue is whether God's act of bestowing good gifts proceeds from an attitude of favor on God's part. No one can possibly dispute that Calvin, in line with Scripture, teaches that it is God who gives to the reprobate wicked their life and breath and every earthly thing. This is simply what is included in a robust, which is to say, biblical, confession of the truth of God's providence. It is quite another thing to teach that behind the good gifts of God stands a certain love and grace of God towards the reprobate wicked who are the recipients of

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<sup>34</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 179.

<sup>35</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 16.

his gifts. Calvin taught the former. That he taught the former is no proof that he taught the latter.

In the third place, Kuiper's appeal to Calvin in support of the teaching of common grace is weakened by the fact that his argument often begs the question. Kuiper contends that many times when Calvin teaches that God loves only the elect in Christ, he is referring not to God's love absolutely, but only to his salvific love.

Calvin sometimes declares that God loves only the elect believers who are one with Christ. (See e.g. II, 2, 32) At first sight such declarations appear to be flat contradictions of what he teaches in other passages to the effect that God also loves men who do not belong to the circle of the elect. (See e.g. II, 16, 3 and 4; Gen. 9, 6; Ps. 78, 17; 92, 10-12; Is. 27, 4; 48, 14; Lament. 3, 33; Jon. 1, 13-14; Mal. 1, 2-6; Mark 10, 21; 2 Pet. 3, 9) A little study of the context of these passages will, however, soon make it clear to us that Calvin has reference to the redeeming love of God with which He embraces only the elect when he declares that God loves no man apart from Christ, and that he speaks in the other passages of a more general and a lesser love with which God favors non-elect men. Besides, there need be no cause for wonder that Calvin sometimes writes as though only the elect are the object of God's love. For that love which God manifests towards the believers exclusively so far surpasses the love which God bestows on non-elect men that, when the two are compared, it hardly seems proper to term the latter love.<sup>38</sup>

Kuiper grants that Calvin very often speaks of God's love for only the elect in Christ. He cites, although he does not quote, a number of passages from the *Institutes* and commentaries. His explanation is that in these passages Calvin is referring to the saving love of God for the elect alone, not to the general love of God for all men. But this begs the question. This presumes exactly what must be demonstrated, namely, that Calvin makes such a distinction with respect to the love of God. Kuiper presupposes that Calvin consciously distin-

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<sup>38</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 215.



guishes between the love of God in these two senses, and that, depending on his purpose and the context in which he is writing, refers to the one and not to the other. But this is the very thing that needs proving, whether in fact Calvin makes such a clear-cut distinction, so that when he speaks of God's love only for the elect in Christ, this does not take away from the fact that he believes that God in another sense loves all men. The fact is that in the passages that Kuiper cites, it does not appear that Calvin would allow such a distinction. Rather, it seems that he precludes the possibility of making such a distinction in as much as he affirms that God loves only His elect people in Christ. God loves "none but his children";<sup>39</sup> God has "clearly manifested the greatness of his love towards the children of Abraham...";<sup>40</sup> and Scripture "expresses the incredible warmth of love which the Lord bears towards his people...."<sup>41</sup> To contend that Calvin is referring only to God's saving love for the elect, in distinction from which He also maintains a certain love for those who are not His elect, does not do justice to the force of Calvin's statements. It qualifies Calvin in a way in which Calvin did not qualify himself.

In the fourth place, Kuiper hardly does justice to the many times that Calvin repudiates any notion of a gracious attitude of God towards the ungodly. Kuiper does refer to especially two such statements in Calvin. In dealing with Calvin's commentary on the prophecy of Isaiah, Kuiper quotes Calvin's comments on Isaiah 65:20.

'Here it must also be observed that blessings of soul or of body are found only in the Kingdom of Christ, that is, in the Church, outside of which there is nothing but curse. Hence it follows that all those who are strangers

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<sup>39</sup> John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, repr. 1957), 2:399.

<sup>40</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, repr. 1963), 3:242.

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 2:250.

to that kingdom are wretched and unhappy; and however flourishing and vigorous they may seem, they are nevertheless in the sight of God rotten and loathsome corpses.’

Kuiper’s response to what Calvin writes here is that “[i]t must be admitted that this statement taken by itself would seem to indicate that Calvin leaves no room for common grace.”<sup>42</sup> That is all that Kuiper says in response to what is in Calvin, the alleged father of common grace, a repudiation of common grace. In a similar vein Kuiper later writes:

In explaining [Galatians] 5,22 Calvin states that all virtues, all proper and well-regulated affections, proceed from the Spirit, that is, from the grace of God and the renovation which we derive from Christ. Paul here says, as it were, that nothing but what is evil comes from man and that there is no good except it come from the Holy Spirit. For although illustrious examples of gentleness, faithfulness, temperance and generosity have often been seen in unregenerate men, yet it is certain that these were but deceptive masks. Curius and Fabricius were distinguished for courage, Cato for temperance, Scipio for kindness and generosity, Fabius for patience; but it was only in the sight of men and with respect to the valuation placed upon them as members of civil society, that they were thus distinguished. But in the sight of God nothing is pure, but what proceeds from the Fountain of all purity.

To which Kuiper’s response is:

Here Calvin seems to contradict flatly what he has elsewhere taught concerning the virtues of the heathen as products of the grace of the Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

In fact, Calvin does not merely “seem” to contradict the notion of a grace of God towards the ungodly; he does actually contradict it. The “seeming” contradiction in Kuiper’s mind arises out of his misread-

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<sup>42</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 165.

ing of Calvin, a misreading that mistakenly attributes to Calvin the teaching of common grace. Then there is in Calvin not “seeming” contradiction, but very real contradiction.

There are many passages in Calvin, besides those quoted by Kuiper, in which he flatly contradicts the teaching of common grace. Commenting on Psalm 1:1, Calvin says:

The greater part of mankind being accustomed to deride the conduct of the saints as mere simplicity, and to regard their labour as entirely thrown away, it was of importance that the righteous should be confirmed in the way of holiness, by the consideration of the miserable condition of all men without the blessing of God, and the conviction that God is favourable to none but those who zealously devote themselves to the study of divine truth.<sup>44</sup>

Calvin also has some significant things to say regarding any possible favor on the part of God towards the ungodly in his comments on Psalm 73. In connection with verse 3 of the Psalm he says:

In the same way, the prosperity of the wicked is taken as an encouragement to commit sin; for we are ready to imagine, that, since God grants them so much of the good things of this life, they are the objects of his approbation and favour.<sup>45</sup>

Calvin explicitly rejects the thinking that God’s good gifts bestowed on the wicked are an indication of His favor towards them, which is exactly the teaching of common grace. In connection with verse 17 of the same Psalm he cautions:

If, on the contrary, we do not perceive any punishment inflicted on them [the ungodly] in this world, let us beware of thinking that they have escaped, or that they are

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<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, repr. 1963), 1:2.

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 3:126.

the objects of the Divine favour and approbation; but let us rather suspend our judgment, since the end or the last day has not yet arrived.<sup>46</sup>

Calvin insists that in evaluating the prosperity of the ungodly, we must beware of the thinking that concludes that “they are the objects of the Divine favour....” He could hardly be clearer in his rejection of the thinking of common grace.

In connection with his comments on Psalm 92:11, Calvin exhorts the children of God:

When staggered in our faith at any time by the prosperity of the wicked, we should learn by his [the psalmist’s] example to rise in our contemplations to a God in heaven, and the conviction will immediately follow in our minds that his enemies cannot long continue to triumph.<sup>47</sup>

It happens, says Calvin, that the believer staggers in his faith at the prosperity of the wicked. Especially is he susceptible to staggering spiritually when the prosperity of the wicked is coupled with the believer’s own experience of distress, loss, and persecution. He staggers in his faith because he supposes that God is favorable to the wicked, the prosperity of the wicked being the evidence of God’s favor toward them. But when the believer is inclined thus to stagger, Calvin exhorts, he must never lose sight of the fact that the wicked are God’s enemies, and that those who are God’s enemies “cannot long continue to triumph.”

Kuiper offers an explanation for what he considers to be a clear contradiction in Calvin’s teaching, that whereas sometimes Calvin insists that God is gracious only to the elect in Christ, at other times he speaks of God’s grace for the non-elect.

To be sure, we do come across a number of contradictions which are more apparent than real. And in so far as we meet with real contradictions, these are contradic-

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<sup>46</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 3:143.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 3:502.

tions which bear the character of paradoxes which Calvin himself acknowledges, paradoxes which, in our author's view, are involved in the teaching of the Scriptures which he sought to expound.<sup>48</sup>

A bit later, Kuiper writes:

With regard to these contradictions we readily acknowledge that they are not merely seeming contradictions. They are real contradictions. We may as well try to budge a mountain of solid granite with our finger as endeavor to harmonize these declarations. There is nothing left for us but to agree that Calvin's writings contain irreconcilable paradoxes.<sup>49</sup>

Paradox—this is Kuiper's explanation for the contradictions he perceives in Calvin. Calvin, whose "logical mind" Kuiper praises at the beginning of his book, a "logical mind [that] could not put up with a dualism between nature and grace....," could rest in flatly contradictory statements with regard to God's attitude toward reprobate wicked men. It is not, says Kuiper, that Calvin spoke imprecisely or unadvisedly at times. It is not that Calvin did not always express himself in a consistent manner over the span of years of his active ministry and throughout his voluminous writings. But Calvin spoke paradoxically. He was content to maintain what he knew to be contradictory positions and deliberately held these contradictory positions in tension with each other, according to Kuiper. One wonders how satisfying, even to Kuiper, this explanation could have been. It certainly does not seem possible that this would have been satisfying to John Calvin.

But what raises further doubts about the strength of the support for the teaching of common grace that Kuiper finds in Calvin is the question of how such a doctrine squares with the overall teaching of Calvin. The issue is not merely what Calvin says in a particular place and in a given context. But the greater issue is the overall teaching of Calvin. The question is: Does the teaching of common

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<sup>48</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 215.

<sup>49</sup> Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 223.

grace fit comfortably within the contours of the main teachings of Calvin? That issue Kuiper does not face in his book *Calvin on Common Grace*. How, for instance, can the teaching of common grace be squared with Calvin's insistence on the sovereignty of grace? How can it be squared with his insistence on sovereign predestination, the will of God that makes distinction between men from eternity and for eternity? How can it be squared with the immutability of God? How can it be squared with the total depravity of man? How can it be squared with a definite atonement, the scope of which and the benefits of which are for the elect alone? These important issues are not addressed in any significant way by Kuiper in his overview of Calvin's teaching. Because he does not fit his view of Calvin's teaching on common grace into the larger scheme of Calvin's overarching theology, Kuiper's argument that Calvin teaches common grace is exaggerated and forced. In the end, it raises more questions than it answers.

### **The Contemporary Assessment**

A number of contemporary scholars, some of them proponents of the teaching of common grace, acknowledge the slender support for the doctrine that can be found in the great reformer John Calvin. It may even be said that there is an emerging consensus that the teaching of common grace, at least the common grace of Abraham Kuyper and of Reformed theology after Kuyper, cannot be rooted securely in the teaching of Calvin. And there is growing recognition of the fact that the main tenets of Calvin's theology are at odds with various aspects of the teaching of common grace.

Hendrikus Berkhof (1914-1995) has been a very influential contemporary theologian in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, serving for many years as a Professor of Theology at the University of Leiden. Assessing the theology of Abraham Kuyper, Berkhof has written that "[i]n theology—*apart from his broad development of the doctrine of common grace*—Kuyper closely followed the Calvinistic tradition, even in its scholastic form."<sup>50</sup> Notice that it is Berkhof's

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<sup>50</sup> Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 109. The italics in the quotation are mine.

judgment that in his development of the doctrine of common grace, Kuyper was not strictly following the Calvinistic tradition, that is, he was not following Calvin. Kuyper's development of common grace was not a flowering forth of seeds planted by Calvin, nor an outworking of principles clearly articulated by Calvin.

In 1898 Dr. Abraham Kuyper lectured at Princeton Theological Seminary under the auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation. His six lectures—the “Stone Lectures,” as they are commonly referred to—were subsequently published in book form under the title *Lectures on Calvinism*.<sup>51</sup> The centennial of the Stone Lectures brought a spate of articles and books reflecting on Kuyper's lectures, as well as his contributions to Reformed theology generally. One of these books was *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*, by Peter S. Heslam. Regarding the Stone Lectures, Heslam notes that “[a]lthough the doctrine of election, or predestination as Kuyper preferred to call it, is often considered to be the most characteristic element of Calvinistic theology, Kuyper gave no special attention to it in his exposition of Calvinism in the Stone Lectures.”<sup>52</sup> What received emphasis in the Stone Lectures was the doctrine of common grace and the application of the doctrine of common grace.

The theologians at Princeton Seminary would have been familiar with the traditional teachings of the Reformed faith. Kuyper aimed to challenge them to regard these teachings not as dogmas to be defended, preserved, and contained within the confines of the institutional church, but as dynamic principles which, once released into the world, had the power to transform it.

To which he immediately adds:

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<sup>51</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., repr. 1975).

<sup>52</sup> Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 116.

The one exception to this pattern was the doctrine of common grace, which was not normally considered one of the essential or fundamental doctrines of Calvinism, and does not occupy a prominent position in Calvin's theology. In arguing for the centrality of this doctrine in the Calvinistic worldview, Kuyper was making explicit an element that was implicit in Calvin's thought.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout his book, Heslam minimizes, and even brings into question, the strength of the support that Kuyper found for his teaching of common grace in Calvin.

Although Calvin's ideas thus provided Kuyper with a solution to the problem of the value of non-Christian science, they did not do so by means of a fully fledged doctrine of common grace, as Kuyper's appeal to Calvin implies.<sup>54</sup>

Thus the doctrine of common grace, which is not a major element in traditional Calvinistic theology, became, under the influence of Kuyper's objectives, a doctrine of overriding and central importance. His insistence on the centrality of this doctrine in the Calvinistic worldview was an attempt to make explicit an element that was implicit in Calvin's thought, and to give systematic expression to an aspect of Calvin's theology that had none of the coherence Kuyper ascribed to it.<sup>55</sup>

This partly accounts for the fact that some of the severest criticisms to be unleashed against Kuyper's program from within Reformed circles were that he had broken with traditional Calvinism [in his development of common grace], despite his assurances that he aimed to modernize only the *application* of Calvin's theology, not its contents. The result of this modernization may justifiably be called 'neo-Calvinism' and cannot be taken as an accurate and reliable guide to the theology of John Calvin.<sup>56</sup>

James D. Bratt indicates the same sort of uneasiness over

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<sup>53</sup> Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 140.

<sup>54</sup> Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 178.

<sup>55</sup> Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 259.

<sup>56</sup> Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 260.



Kuyper's appeal to Calvin and the early Reformed tradition in support of his teaching of common grace.

Kuyper's farthest-reaching work in this vein was doubtless his elaboration of the Reformed doctrine of common grace. His conservative opponents complained that his was more 'invention' than elaboration, for Kuyper by his own admission greatly expanded and systematized what earlier Reformed theologians had left as hints and pieces.<sup>57</sup>

Richard J. Mouw is an enthusiastic contemporary proponent of common grace. In the fall of 2000, Mouw presented the annual Stob Lectures on the campus of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. His lectures were later published as *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace*. Mouw argues that "[i]t is certainly possible to find comments in his [Calvin's] writings that could encourage the development of a doctrine of common grace."<sup>58</sup> In spite of this, it is Mouw's opinion that the opponents of common grace "can legitimately claim nonetheless to be working within the general contours of Calvin's thought."<sup>59</sup>

David R. Van Drunen, Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California, has recently voiced the judgment that:

Common grace is a doctrine in Kuyper's theology that finds no exact precedent in the Reformed tradition. Although earlier Reformed theologians spoke of God's sustaining the world in general and his preservation and blessing of civil society in particular, they did not use common grace as a distinct and organizing category.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 165.

<sup>58</sup> Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 15.

<sup>59</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> David M. Van Drunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 42, November 2007, 299.

If Kuyper's common grace theology finds no exact precedent in the Reformed tradition, then his attempt, as well as later theologians' determined attempts, to trace the teaching back to the great reformer of Geneva is certainly discredited.

## Conclusion

The effort to establish a clear line of development of the doctrine of common grace from John Calvin to Abraham Kuyper and the contemporary proponents of the doctrine of common grace is unsuccessful. It must be admitted, of course, that from time to time Calvin does speak of a "peculiar grace" of God towards the ungodly, a "peculiar grace" of God that accounts especially for the outstanding natural abilities that certain ungodly persons possess, and the noble virtues that they frequently exhibit. Along with this is Calvin's confusion sometimes of providence and grace. What Calvin at times describes as a fruit of the grace of God working in the heathen is really a fruit of God's providence. Calvin did not always carefully distinguish these two things, and thus did not always clearly distinguish between gifts and grace. "Evidence clearly testifies," says Calvin, "to a universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature implanted in men." In this, he goes on to say, "every man ought to recognize...the peculiar grace of God."<sup>61</sup> And a bit later he writes:

Some men excel in keenness; others are superior in judgment; still others have a readier wit to learn this or that art. In this variety God commends his grace to us, lest anyone should claim as his own what flowed from the sheer bounty of God.<sup>62</sup>

But that Calvin expressed himself somewhat ambiguously and imprecisely at times is not yet to say that Calvin intentionally established the foundation for the doctrine of common grace, laying

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<sup>61</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2.2.14.

<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.17.

the groundwork on which later theologians would erect the imposing structure of common grace. He did not. One cannot find in Calvin a love of God for all men in general, a love that includes also the reprobate wicked. One cannot find in Calvin a grace of God that mitigates the depravity of the natural man. One cannot find in Calvin a grace of God for mankind generally resulting in the creation of a God-glorifying culture. One cannot find in Calvin a grace of God towards all men that is the basis for friendship between and cooperation of the believer and the unbeliever, the church and the world. This is not John Calvin. But this is Abraham Kuyper, the father of common grace in the Reformed churches. Kuyper and those who followed him cannot legitimately appeal to Calvin for support of their doctrine of common grace. On the contrary, Calvin may be rightly appealed to in opposition to the teaching of common grace. Indeed, Calvin may be appealed to in order to establish common grace's fundamental break with the Reformed tradition.

It is undoubtedly the case that those on both sides of the issue of common grace will continue to claim authority for their respective positions in John Calvin. And there will continue to be disagreement over whether or not support for the teaching can be derived from Calvin. This state of affairs is not likely to change. What ought to be clear, however, is that the strong support for common grace that is sometimes alleged in Calvin is lacking. And what ought to be clear is that the common grace of Abraham Kuyper and his disciples cannot justifiably be considered to be the explicit setting forth of that which was implicit in Calvin. Calvin would not only have been uneasy with various aspects of Kuyper's common grace, he would have repudiated them. For, according to Calvin, "Those most certainly are the farthest from glorifying the grace of God, who declare that it is indeed common to all men...."<sup>63</sup> ●

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<sup>63</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God and the Secret Providence of God*, transl. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, repr. 1987), 30.

# The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of John Calvin

David J. Engelsma

## Introduction

Calvin's doctrine of justification has become a controversial subject in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Advocates of the theology of the "Federal [Covenant] Vision" contend that Calvin, unlike Martin Luther, taught justification by faith and works.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Luther rigorously excluded all human works from the righteousness with which the elect sinner is justified before God, Calvin included some works of the sinner himself, specifically the good works he himself does by the sanctifying Spirit of Jesus Christ within him. Justification by faith alone is a typically Lutheran doctrine. It is distinctively Reformed to preach and practice justification by faith and the works of faith. So we are told.

The men of the Federal Vision derive their doctrine of justification by faith and works from their conception of the covenant of grace, particularly God's extension of His covenant to the baptized children of believing parents. The theology of the Federal Vision stands or falls with its understanding of the promise to believing Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant,

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<sup>1</sup> For the account of their theology, particularly their denial of justification by faith alone, by the men of the Federal Vision themselves, see Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000); John Barach, Steve Wilkins, Douglas Wilson, and others, *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004); and *The Federal Vision*, ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, LA.: Athanasius Press, 2004). For the Reformed criticism of the theology of the Federal Vision, in light of the biblical doctrine of the covenant (which is the fundamental issue in the controversy), see my *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005).

to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). This covenant promise is confirmed and renewed to the New Testament believer in Acts 2:39, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Is the "seed of Abraham" every physical descendant of Abraham, or is this "seed" Jesus Christ and all the children of believing parents who are "in Christ" by faith according to divine election from eternity? Galatians 3:16, 29 answers this question. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ"; "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." According to the apostle, the seed of Abraham in Genesis 17:7 is Jesus Christ, as the head and mediator of the covenant of grace, and all those, but only those, who are Christ's because God gave them to Christ in the eternal decree of election.

The apostle's answer, however, is not to the satisfaction of the men of the Federal Vision. Their answer is that the seed of Abraham are all the physical, circumcised descendants of Abraham without exception and, by implication, all the physical, baptized children of believers without exception.

The answer to the question concerning the identity of Abraham's seed determines one's view of the covenant of God with the children, whether conditional, that is, depending upon the child and his work, or unconditional, that is, depending upon the will and work of the promising God.

The men of the Federal Vision teach a gracious covenant with every baptized child of believing parents. God loves every baptized child; God graciously promises the covenant and covenant salvation to every baptized child; God actually establishes the covenant with every baptized child alike, uniting every child to Christ so that the life of Christ becomes the possession of every child; God bestows upon every child alike many of the blessings of the covenant, including justification. But the child's continuing in the covenant, as his or her eternal salvation in the covenant, depends squarely upon the child's performance of conditions. The conditions are the child's faith and obedience. Failure to perform the conditions results in the

frustration of the covenant promise, the annulling of the covenant, separation from Christ, the loss of the covenant blessings, and apostasy unto damnation. According to the men of the Federal Vision, this happens often.

Out of this covenant doctrine comes the rejection of justification by faith alone in the theology of the Federal Vision. Since the covenant is conditioned on faith as a human work and on the good works that faith performs, and since justification is the chief covenant blessing, justification also must be conditioned on faith as a human work and on the good works of faith. If covenant salvation is partly the work of the member of the covenant, so also must the righteousness of justification consist in part of the sinner's own works, namely, faith itself as a condition/work and the good works that faith produces.

In keeping with the covenantal nature of their theology, the men of the Federal Vision base their contention that Calvin taught justification by faith and works on their understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant. Examining Calvin's commentaries and sermons, they conclude that Calvin taught a conditional covenant with all the physical descendants of Abraham without exception. From this reading of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, they conclude that Calvin differed from Luther in teaching that the righteousness of the justifying verdict of God the judge includes the good works of the justified sinner himself.

Even though much of Reformed scholarship rolls over and plays dead before this contention, it is a novel, shocking theory. That John Calvin taught justification by faith and works would have surprised Albertus Pighius and the theologians at the Council of Trent.

Peter A. Lillback has devoted a book to this contention. The Presbyterian theologian lays the groundwork for his impending conclusion that Calvin taught justification by faith and works in a confusing, but utterly erroneous contrast between Luther's doctrine of justification and the Reformed doctrine.

Luther's hermeneutical rule was "summarily to cut off every reference to the law and the works of the law in this conjunction [that is, as the quotation of Luther im-

mediately preceding states in so many words, ‘this article of justification’].” The Reformed hermeneutic discussed works in the context of justification because the covenant had two parts. Justification was the first blessing of the covenant while the second was the law of love engendered by the Holy Spirit. Faith was the condition of the first part of the covenant, and love or obedience was the condition of the second part. For Luther, grace and law were opposed. For the Reformed, the grace of the Holy Spirit resulted in the gift of love which was seen as the completion of all of the law. For Luther, it was “faith alone”; for the Reformed it was “faith working by love.”<sup>2</sup>

Lillback pursues his thesis: “Luther’s understanding of justification by faith alone had no room for inherent righteousness, while Calvin’s view required it as an inseparable but subordinate righteousness.”<sup>3</sup>

As the conclusion of his study of Calvin’s doctrine of the covenant, Lillback proposes Calvin’s disagreement with Luther over justification by faith alone in that Calvin agreed with the medieval “Schoolmen,” that is, with the Roman Catholic theology of justification, that God accepts the good works of the sinner in justification.

[Calvin disagrees with Luther] over the matter of the relationship of good works to justification, and the related matter of the acceptance of man’s works before God.... What is particularly important to remember at this point is that Calvin’s development of the idea of the acceptance of men’s works by God was expressed in terms of the covenant. The works were not seen as meritorious, but rather, God has promised to reward works with spiritual gifts, and this promise of the law is realized by the gracious gifts of the covenant. God in covenant has liberally forgiven the sin in men’s works, and actually enabled those works by His Spirit. This idea he readily admits is the common doctrine of the Schoolmen, except they developed

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<sup>2</sup> Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

their idea of the covenant of acceptance in terms of merit, instead of justification righteousness and its subordinate righteousness of the Holy Spirit. Here one sees Calvin as the historical bridge between the medieval Schoolmen's covenant doctrine and that of the later Calvinistic federal theologians. Calvin simply excises the medieval doctrine of merit from the covenant of acceptance and replaces it with the Reformation's justification by faith alone. Consequently, Calvin occupies a middle ground between the Schoolmen and Luther on the issue of the acceptance of good works in relationship to justification. Luther and Calvin are in full agreement against the scholastics regarding the issue of the unique instrumentality of faith and the non-meritorious character of all of human standing before God. On the other hand, Calvin, in agreement with the Schoolmen and contrary to Luther, accepts the fact that God can by covenant receive the works of man. Calvin's doctrine of the acceptance of men's works by God is therefore an intermediate position between Luther and the medieval tradition.<sup>4</sup>

It is not my purpose in this essay either to offer a critique of Lillback's book or to criticize his exposition of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, much less to refute the theology of the Federal Vision. All of these things, I have done, or am doing, elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> My purpose here is to demonstrate both that Calvin taught justification by

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 307, 308.

<sup>5</sup> I offer a critique of Lillback's book as the review article, "The Recent Bondage of John Calvin: A Critique of Peter A. Lillback's *The Binding of God*," in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 35, no. 1 (Nov. 2001): 47-58. My criticism of Lillback's presentation of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is appearing in the series of articles in the *Standard Bearer*, "The Covenant Doctrine of Sovereign Grace, or the Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands." The first installment treating of Peter A. Lillback's understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant ran in the November 15, 2007 issue of the *Standard Bearer* (vol. 84, no. 4, pp. 83-86). For my exposure and refutation of the theology of the Federal Vision with respect to its doctrine of salvation, particularly covenant salvation, see my *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*.



faith alone—exactly the same doctrine of justification as that taught by Martin Luther—and that Calvin ascribed to the doctrine of justification by faith alone the same fundamental importance that Luther did.

Although this doctrine of justification in the theology of Calvin can certainly be found in his commentaries and sermons, the authoritative source of Calvin's doctrine of justification is his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in its final, 1559 edition. Calvin himself demanded that his doctrine be determined and learned from the *Institutes*. There Calvin deliberately, carefully, clearly, and decisively formulated the great truths of the Christian religion. The commentaries and sermons can often support and shed light on the theology in the *Institutes*. But to roam about in the voluminous commentaries and sermons for stray statements on justification while ignoring the pointed, explicit, full, clear, authoritative doctrine in the *Institutes* is akin to the philosopher's theorizing about the number of teeth in a horse's mouth in light of the metaphysics of "horsiness" rather than simply opening the beast's mouth and counting them.

### **The Place of Justification in the *Institutes***

We should, if only briefly (because our consuming interest is not the structure of Calvin's treatment of Christian doctrine, as is the case with the scholars, who busy themselves endlessly with such minor matters, but the content of the doctrine), take note of Calvin's placement of his treatment of justification in the *Institutes*. Justification is not found where we might expect it. Calvin treats justification in the third book of the *Institutes*, which concerns the Holy Spirit and "the way in which we receive the grace of Christ," or soteriology. This, of course, is where justification belongs.

But Calvin's explanation of justification follows his treatment of the Christian life of sanctification. Calvin calls this aspect of the work of salvation—sanctification—"repentance" and "newness of life."<sup>6</sup>

The only reason Calvin gives for treating sanctification be-

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<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.3.1.

fore justification is that “actual holiness of life is not separated from free imputation of righteousness.”<sup>7</sup>

In a footnote, editor McNeill speaks of a “surprising order” and refers to Niesel’s suggestion that Calvin followed this order in order to forestall the Roman Catholic objection to the Reformed doctrine of justification, that it disparaged, or even denied, a life of holiness. Without denying Niesel’s explanation of Calvin’s treating sanctification before justification, I suggest another possibility. Calvin recognized that in the work of salvation there is a sense in which sanctification, or “newness of life,” does precede justification. Regeneration, or union with Christ, which makes us new creatures in Christ and thus holy, precedes the conscious activity of faith and justification in the forum of the believer’s consciousness.

### **Justification by Faith**

The doctrine of justification by faith has the same fundamental importance for Calvin that it has for Luther. Calvin opens his treatment of the doctrine by calling the truth of justification “the main hinge on which religion turns.”<sup>8</sup> Although Calvin has chosen to treat sanctification before justification, justification is the first of the gifts we receive by partaking of Christ. Justification is the “foundation on which to establish your salvation...[and] on which to build piety toward God.”<sup>9</sup>

Justification is a strictly legal act of God as judge in which He forgives the believer’s sins and reckons him righteous. Justification, says Calvin, means “nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused.”<sup>10</sup> But there is also a positive aspect to the act of justification: in justification, the believer is “reckoned righteous in God’s judgment.”<sup>11</sup>

Calvin combines the two aspects in his definition of justification: “[Justification] consists in the remission of sins and the im-

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.3.

<sup>11</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.2.

putation of Christ's righteousness."<sup>12</sup> Both aspects are also found in the more full definition of justification that Calvin offers later: "We define justification as follows: the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by his grace, while, cleansed by Christ's blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat."<sup>13</sup>

Basic to the right understanding of justification is that it is an act of God as our judge, and that we consider ourselves as standing before the awesome majesty and righteousness of God. According to Calvin, "the basis of this whole discussion" is that in justification we are "concerned with the justice not of a human court but of a heavenly tribunal."<sup>14</sup> There, not even the perfect righteousness of a mere man can stand the test of the awesome righteousness of God. Calvin quotes Job 15:15, 16, in his own translation: "Behold, among his saints none is faithful, and the heavens are not pure in his sight. How much more abominable and unprofitable is man, who drinks iniquity like water?" With reference to Psalm 130:3, "If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand?" Calvin warns against trusting in "the integrity of works" to "satisfy the divine judgment."

This consciousness of the divine righteousness will effect a humility that utterly renounces all righteousness in oneself. Calvin is here applying to justification the all-important knowledge of God that is a great theme of the *Institutes*.

The trouble with all those who insist on bringing a few of their own good works into the courtroom of justification (or condemnation!) is that they do not know God.

The biblical basis of the doctrine of justification as a legal act includes Galatians 3:8, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith...." Calvin also appeals to Romans 3:26 and Romans 4:5. In these passages from Romans, the apostle says that "God justifies the impious person who has faith in Christ."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.8.

<sup>14</sup> *Inst.*, 3.12.1.

<sup>15</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.3.

Justification is not at all an act of God that *makes* us righteous in the sense of making us good, godly people. It is fundamental to the truth of justification that justification be sharply distinguished from sanctification. This sharp distinction is necessary in order to exclude our own good works from the act of justification and our own obedience to the law from the righteousness of justification. The Roman Catholic heresy of justification by faith and works depends on the explanation of justification as partly the renewal, the change for the better, of the sinner's actual, spiritual condition. Likewise, the heresy now spreading in the Reformed churches that teaches justification by works explains justification as partly forgiveness and partly inner, spiritual renewal.

Already in the original, 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, treating of "Christian Freedom," Calvin had written, "[The question in justification is not] how we may become righteous, but how, being unrighteous and unworthy, we may be reckoned righteous." Immediately, he added, "If consciences wish to attain any certainty in this matter, they ought to give no place to the law."<sup>16</sup> Calvin was as adamant as Luther that in the matter of justification there is absolutely no place for the law as the demand and rule of good works.

Calvin freely acknowledges that justification and sanctification are inseparable saving acts of God. "Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption [Rom. 8:15], by whose power he remakes them to his own image." Nevertheless, they are distinct saving acts of God that must not be confused. Calvin uses the example of the brightness and the heat of the sun. They cannot be separated. Nevertheless, the earth is not "warmed by its light, or lighted by its heat."<sup>17</sup>

### **Faith an Instrument**

That justification is "by faith" does not mean that the faith of the sinner is a work that merits, or that God counts worthy of, or that distinguishes one person from another regarding receiving,

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<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), VI, A, 2, 177.

<sup>17</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.6.

righteousness. Rather, faith is the instrument by which the sinner receives the righteousness of another, namely, Jesus Christ, by imputation. Already in Calvin's day, the subtle error had to be combated that makes faith a work of the sinner that itself deserves, whether inherently or by "gracious" divine decision, the judgment of righteousness. The righteousness of justification does not *depend* upon faith.

Some fifty years after Calvin's death, this would be the clever error by which the Arminians corrupted justification by faith alone in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The Canons of the Synod of Dordt describe this "new and strange justification of man before God" when they condemn the error of those

who teach that the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.<sup>18</sup>

Making justification *depend* on the faith of the child and thus presenting the faith of the child as a work that renders the child worthy of righteousness, or that distinguishes one baptized child from another with regard to receiving righteousness, is the error of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). Teaching a gracious, conditional covenant with all the baptized children alike, that is, a covenant that depends upon the child's faith, these churches teach justification *on the basis* of faith. This was clearly expressed by the Canadian Reformed ("liberated") theologian, Dr. Jack De Jong. De Jong was responding to my defense of an unconditional covenant promise to the elect children alone. I had quoted Romans 4:16: the covenant promise is "sure to all the seed." De Jong wrote, "[Engelsma] must have strange glasses on, for Romans 4:16 says: 'That is why it *depends* on

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<sup>18</sup> Canons of Dordt, II, Rejection of Errors/4, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 165.

faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his (Abraham's) descendants.'" De Jong immediately added, "Paul stresses the *condition* of the covenant: the call to faith!"<sup>19</sup>

But Romans 4:16 does not say that the covenant promise "depends" on faith. Rather, the text says that the covenant promise is "*of* faith," or '*out of* faith,' exactly as the translation of the Authorized Version renders it (Greek: *ek pisteos*). Faith is the source of the fulfillment of the covenant promise inasmuch as faith is union with Christ. Neither in Romans 4:16, nor anywhere else, does the Bible teach that righteousness with God, or the covenant promise, *depends* upon faith, or is *because* of faith. This would mean that faith is another work of man by which man makes himself worthy of righteousness and salvation. Faith then is merely a form of obedience to the law.

According to what follows in Romans 4:16, to teach that the covenant promise *depends* on faith is to deny the gospel of grace, for the apostle adds, "that it might be by grace." The covenant promise is "out of faith," not through the law, "that it might be by (literally, 'according to') grace." The clear and necessary implication is that if the covenant promise with its righteousness *depends* upon faith, as another human work of compliance with the law, the covenant promise with its righteousness is not "according to grace."

Naturally, the theology of the Federal Vision, which is the development of the conditional covenant doctrine of the "liberated" churches, also teaches justification by faith in the sense of justification *on the basis of faith*. Faith for the men of the Federal Vision is the condition that members of the covenant must perform in order to be worthy of righteousness. Norman Shepherd has written:

Thus, the promises made to Abraham had to be believed if they were to be fulfilled. We must not discount faith as a condition to be met for the fulfillment of promise. In fact, Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham's faith was so significant that it was credited to him as righteousness! If so, then righteousness was a condition to be met, and faith met that condition.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See my *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, 95. The emphasis on "depends" is mine. De Jong himself emphasized "condition."

<sup>20</sup> Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*, 15.

For Shepherd and the other men of the Federal Vision, the righteousness of justification is not a divine gift, but a condition to be met by man. Faith itself—the human activity of believing—is one’s righteousness with God, not the obedience of Christ. And upon the performance of the condition of faith, the fulfillment of the promise depends. In the language of Dordt, this doctrine is a “new and strange justification of man before God.”

Calvin inveighs against this very corruption of the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith. He denies that faith justifies by some “intrinsic power.” Rather, faith is only “a kind of vessel” to receive the righteousness of Christ. Calvin continues: “faith...is only the instrument for receiving righteousness.”<sup>21</sup> Calvin declares, “We say that faith justifies, not because it merits righteousness for us by its own worth, but because it is an instrument whereby we obtain free the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> The instrumental function of faith in justification Calvin expresses when he insists that in the matter of justification faith is “merely passive”: “As regards justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God’s favor but receiving from Christ that which we lack.”<sup>23</sup>

Wendel remarks, correctly, that for Calvin “faith is nothing in itself. It acquires its value only by its content; that is, by Jesus Christ.” Wendel adds that “what matters to Calvin is evidently not that instrument, but the Christ and his work.”<sup>24</sup>

How radically different is much Reformed theology today! What evidently matters to the theologians is not Christ and His work, but (I cannot say, “instrument,” for the theologians do not regard faith as an instrument, but as a condition the baptized children must fulfill) the *condition*—the *all-important* condition—that man must perform.

Taking its lead from Calvin, although basing its doctrine on “Paul,” the Belgic Confession teaches that faith—the faith that is joined with justification in the phrase, “justified by faith”—is “mere-

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<sup>21</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.7.

<sup>22</sup> *Inst.*, 3.18.8.

<sup>23</sup> *Inst.*, 3.13.5.

<sup>24</sup> Francois Wendel, Calvin: *The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, tr. Philip Mairet (London: William Collins Sons, 1965), 262.

ly” an instrument: “We do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness...faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him [Jesus Christ] in all his benefits.”<sup>25</sup>

### **By Faith Alone**

Not only was Calvin one with Luther in viewing justification as a strictly legal act of God and in regarding justification as the “cornerstone of the gospel,” but Calvin was also in full agreement with Luther that justification is by faith *alone*.

This was the issue at the Reformation in the controversy with Rome. This is still the issue today for the genuinely Protestant church, not only in the continuing controversy with Rome, but also in the controversy with apostatizing Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This is the issue in the controversy of faithful Reformed churches with the theology of the Federal Vision.

Justification by faith alone!

With appeal to Romans 3:28, the crucial text in the controversy, Calvin affirms that “man is justified by faith alone.”<sup>26</sup>

Romans 3:28 reads: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Luther highlighted the importance of the text in the controversy over justification, and enraged his Roman Catholic enemies, by “inserting” the word “alone” in his translation of the Bible into German: “*der mensch gerecht werde ohne des gesetzes werke, allein durch den glauben.*” In fact, the “insertion” of the word “*allein*” (“alone”) perfectly captures the sense of the text and, therefore, is no insertion at all. That a man is justified “without the deeds of the law” means that a man is justified by faith *alone*.

Calvin’s affirmation of justification by faith *alone*, with appeal to Romans 3:28, indicates, not only his deliberate, complete alignment of himself with Luther in the article of justification, but also his confession of the fundamental doctrine of the Reformation in precisely that form of the expression of the doctrine that safeguards the truth of it against all misunderstanding and against all error.

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<sup>25</sup> Belgic Confession, Art. 22, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 408.

<sup>26</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.19.



Vigorously defending justification by faith alone against various attacks on it by the Roman Catholic adversaries of the doctrine, Calvin declares, “We say that man...stripped of all help from works...is justified by faith alone.”<sup>27</sup>

As this quotation indicates, justification by faith alone means, negatively, that all works of the justified sinner are excluded from consideration when God the judge justifies him. Already in the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin had written, “utterly no account is taken of works [in justification].” He pointed out the profound spiritual and theological reasons for the guilty sinner’s “utter” repudiation of all his works when he added, “We should, when justification is being discussed, embrace God’s mercy alone, turn our attention from ourselves, and look only to Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

The works that are, and must be, excluded from justification, according to Calvin, are not only ceremonial works but also the good works that faith produces by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Rome argued then, as it does today, that “deeds of the law” and “works of the law” in the Pauline teaching on justification refer only to ceremonial works such as circumcision. “They [the Roman Catholic theologians] prate that the ceremonial works of the law are excluded, not the moral works.”<sup>29</sup> The purpose of this argument is to establish that the good works done by believers in obedience to the ten commandments—“moral works”—*are* part of their righteousness with God in justification so that believers are justified by faith and by the good works of faith.

This is the doctrine of the men of the Federal Vision. Their explanation of the “deeds of the law” excluded by the apostle from justification in Romans 3:28 is the same as Rome’s, except that the men of the Federal Vision would also exclude works done with the intention of meriting by them. But with Rome they emphatically deny that the apostle excludes all the works of the believer from his justification. Therefore, unlike Calvin, they take issue with Luther’s translation of Romans 3:28 by means of the word “alone.”

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<sup>27</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.8.

<sup>28</sup> *1536 Inst.*, VI, A, 2, 176, 177.

<sup>29</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.19.

Norman Shepherd sides with Rome against Luther, Calvin, and the Reformation.

Luther inserted the word “alone” into his translation of Romans 3:28 to make it read “For we hold that one is justified by faith *alone* apart from works of the law.” This is the origin of the dogmatic formula, justification by faith alone. However, his insertion actually distorts Paul’s meaning.<sup>30</sup>

For Shepherd, as for the Roman Catholic Church, the distortion is that, whereas Paul teaches justification by faith and by the good works faith produces, Luther’s translation makes the apostle exclude all the works of the believer from justification.

Calvin calls Rome’s explanation of Romans 3:28, referring “deeds of the law” to only some of the believer’s works, not all, an “ingenious subterfuge.” So “utterly silly” an explanation of Paul’s exclusion of “deeds of the law” from justification is this that “even schoolboys would hoot at such impudence.”<sup>31</sup>

With Calvin’s encouragement, I interrupt the writing of this article to “hoot” at Rome and at the men of the Federal Vision.

I continue.

Calvin’s refutation of the Roman interpretation of “deeds of the law” and “works of the law” in Paul is devastating. Calvin appeals to Galatians 3:10, 12: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them.” Calvin belabors the obvious, as was necessary in the sixteenth century and as is necessary again today:

Unless they have gone mad they will not say that life was promised to keepers of ceremonies or the curse announced only to those who transgress the ceremonies. If these passages are to be understood of the moral law, there is no

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<sup>30</sup> Norman Shepherd, “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 87.

<sup>31</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.19.

doubt that moral works are also excluded from the power of justifying. These arguments which Paul uses look to the same end: “Since through the law comes knowledge of sin” [Rom. 3:20], therefore not righteousness. Because “the law works wrath” [Rom. 4:15], hence not righteousness.<sup>32</sup>

Not only ceremonial works, the works of unregenerated persons, and works done by regenerated persons in order to merit, but also the truly good works of regenerated believers, which are the fruits of faith, are excluded from justification. “The Sophists,” writes Calvin, introduce their heresy by explaining the works that Scripture excludes from justification as “those which men not yet reborn do only according to the letter by the effort of their own free will, apart from Christ’s grace.” They insist, however, that men are justified “by both faith and works provided they are not his own works but the gifts of Christ and the fruit of regeneration.”

To this sophistry, modern as well as ancient, Calvin responds: “All works are excluded, whatever title may grace them.” Again: “Not even spiritual works come into account when the power of justifying is ascribed to faith.”<sup>33</sup>

There are especially two reasons why our good works are, and must be, excluded. First, even one sinful deed among many good deeds would damn a man, if justification were by the good works of the saints. Calvin maintains that in the judgment of justification, the man himself and his whole life are judged as a single unit. If the judgment is based on works, one evil work—just one—would result in condemnation. Calvin questions—denies really—“whether [a man] is reckoned righteous even on account of many good works if he is in some part indeed found guilty of transgression.”<sup>34</sup>

The second reason why our good works are excluded is that all our good works are imperfect and, therefore, incapable of satisfying the divine righteousness. This is the reason given by the Heidelberg Catechism: “But why can not our good works be the whole or

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.14.

<sup>34</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.9.

part of our righteousness before God? Because the righteousness which can stand before the judgment-seat of God must be perfect throughout, and wholly conformable to the divine law; whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.”<sup>35</sup>

In this connection, Calvin teaches a truth about our good works that is not sufficiently noticed by us: in justification, not only must our wicked deeds be forgiven and not only must we ourselves be justified, but also our good works, indeed, our very best works, must be justified. “We can deservedly say that by faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified.”<sup>36</sup> This truth is simply devastating to the theory that our works justify. On the contrary, our good works themselves *need* justifying.

If the good works of believers cannot justify, the works of the unbeliever are certainly unworthy. In the course of his treatment of justification, Calvin carries on a fascinating discussion of the apparently good works of the unregenerate. He recognizes the difference between decent and profligate heathens and unbelievers, between a Titus and a Caligula or a Nero. But this difference is only “the dead image” of the difference between true righteousness and unrighteousness. The apparently good works of the ungodly are only “outward images of virtue,” “external and feigned righteousness,” and “images of virtues.”<sup>37</sup> The apparently good works of the heathens are not to be reckoned as virtue any more “than the vices.” All such works are “sin,” because they do not “look to the goal.”<sup>38</sup> They are “not at all good,” despite the fact that these works are “beautiful and comely to the sight, and even sweet to the taste.” Apart from reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ, all the apparently good deeds of unbelievers are “accursed” and “surely deserving condemnation.”<sup>39</sup>

Those professing Calvinists who are committed to the notion that the ungodly are able to perform truly good works by virtue of a common grace of God, and who are quick to brand those who deny

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<sup>35</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 62, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 327.

<sup>36</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.10.

<sup>37</sup> *Inst.*, 3.14.2.

<sup>38</sup> *Inst.*, 3.14.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Inst.*, 3.14.4.

that the ungodly can do good works as “hyper-Calvinists,” would do well to read this section of the *Institutes* carefully.

In his defense of justification by faith alone, Calvin had two foes in his sights, both of whom taught justification by faith and by the good works faith produces. One was the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin referred to Rome variously as the “scholastics,” the “sophists,” the “Sorbonnists,” and the “papists.” Let Reformed and Presbyterian people note well that Calvin thought that the issue of justification by faith alone, that is, justification altogether apart from the good works of the justified, was the “principal point of the dispute that we have with the papists.”<sup>40</sup> According to this judgment, which is correct, the men of the Federal Vision have no fundamental dispute with Rome and no fundamental reason for not joining the Roman Catholic Church, confessing the sin of their fathers in breaking communion with Rome over the false doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Calvin also opposed a Protestant heretic. This was the Lutheran Osiander. Andrew Osiander (d. 1552) was an ill-tempered Lutheran theologian whom Calvin met and disliked for his crude talk at table at the conference at Worms, which was intended to reunite Rome and the Reform, during Calvin’s exile in Strasbourg. Osiander went astray on a number of doctrines, including limiting Christ’s work in justification to His divine nature and teaching that the believer receives the “essence” of God.

Calvin concentrates on Osiander’s error regarding justification. Osiander taught that in justification the sinner not only is forgiven but also actually becomes righteous by the infusion of grace. For the Lutheran—already at that early date an apostate from the gospel proclaimed by Luther—“to be justified is not only to be reconciled to God through free pardon but also to be made righteous, and righteousness is not a free imputation but the holiness and uprightness that the essence of God, dwelling in us, inspires.”<sup>41</sup> Justification is not strictly a legal act, a verdict from the heavenly bench, but a confusion of forgiveness and sanctification.

Against Osiander, Calvin resolutely maintains that “there is

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<sup>40</sup> *Inst.*, 3.14.11.

<sup>41</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.6.

in justification no place for works.”<sup>42</sup> Calvin also charges Osiander’s doctrine, as also the doctrine of all who teach justification by works, with destroying assurance of salvation. “For faith totters if it pays attention to works, since no one, even of the most holy, will find there anything on which to rely.”<sup>43</sup>

All those who introduce works into justification are “the Pharisees of our day.”<sup>44</sup> Such are the Roman Catholic theologians. Such are the men of the Federal Vision. And on the testimony of our Lord in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Pharisees are not justified: “I tell you, this man [the publican apart from all works] went down to his house justified *rather than the other* [the Pharisee with his works]” (Luke 18:14).

### Arguments against Justification by Faith Alone

Calvin considers and refutes the main arguments raised against justification by faith alone by the Roman Catholic defenders of justification by faith and works. We should note these arguments and Calvin’s refutation of them because these are the same arguments raised today by the men of the Federal Vision. The basic objection to justification by faith alone is always that the doctrine is destructive of a holy life of good works. This was the objection raised against the doctrine as taught by the apostle himself: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1).

Paul A. Rainbow raises this objection against the Reformation’s doctrine of justification by faith alone in his recent book, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification*. As an honest scholar, Rainbow freely acknowledges that Calvin, like Luther, taught justification by faith alone, excluding all human works of any kind whatever from justification. But Rainbow condemns the Reformers’ doctrine of justification by faith alone, along with the doctrine of justification in the Lutheran and Reformed confessions: “The Reformers...were deadly wrong to bar Christian obedience from the Article of Justification.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.11.

<sup>44</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.7.

<sup>45</sup> Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obe-*

The “wrongness” of the Reformers’ doctrine of justification by faith alone was “deadly” because the doctrine is “antinomian”: “The doctrine of *sola fide* [by faith alone] lends itself to antinomianism, and antinomianism provides grist for loose living.”<sup>46</sup>

Rainbow corrects the Reformers’ doctrine of justification in the interest of promoting holiness of life. He does this by teaching a future justification of sinners in the final judgment that is “based on deeds produced by God’s grace,” in addition to Christ’s vicarious law-keeping.<sup>47</sup> “Justification remains to be concluded at the final judgment, [and] our increase in sanctity precedes that event and supplies one aspect of the basis for a favorable verdict (Rom. 8:1-2). What will weigh with the judge in that day is our faith operative in deeds of love wrought through God’s Spirit (Gal. 5:5-6).”<sup>48</sup>

In support of his teaching of a future justification based in part on the sinner’s own good works, Rainbow appeals to Romans 2:13: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” Rainbow explains the text as teaching what is actually the case: some men will be justified by their doing of the law. “This sentence [is] a prediction that some will indeed be justified in the day of judgment (v. 16) and not, as it is often understood to be, an abstract or hypothetical statement of a lofty standard, void of any real human instances.... The unambiguous ground on which justification will proceed [is] performance of what the law requires.”<sup>49</sup>

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*dience in Justification* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 211.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 197. Rainbow recognizes the Orthodox Presbyterian theologian Richard Gaffin as a kindred spirit, teaching a future justification based on the good works of the sinner. “Richard Gaffin has been paraphrased as holding that ‘initial justification is contingent upon final justification,’ and is quoted as calling for clarification of ‘the nature of justification within the already/not-yet structure of New Testament eschatology, at the same time ensuring that commensurate attention is given to the eschatological nature of sanctification and the present work of the Holy Spirit.’ These observations, brief as they are, seem to be on the right track” (Ibid., 208, 209). The New Perspective on Paul also interprets Romans 2:13 as teaching, not only

Rainbow candidly acknowledges that his doctrine of a justification of the sinner, whether present or future, that is based in part on the sinner's own works would have been anathema to the Reformers:

My formulation of good works in Paul as a sub-condition for final justification would have been anathema to Luther and Calvin.... They had no room for a closing event of justification rendering the initial one anything other than final in itself, nor would they admit personal holiness as a genuine condition, or works as an instrument further to faith, for culminative justification and entrance into eternal life.<sup>50</sup>

The difference of the Reformers with Paul Rainbow over justification begins with their interpretation of Romans 2:13. Having read the rest of the book of Romans, particularly Romans three through five, which denies that a sinner is or can be justified by his own works and declares that the justification of elect sinners is by faith in Jesus Christ alone, whether now or in the final judgment, Calvin explains Romans 2:13 as teaching, not what is possible, but what is required of those who desire to justify themselves by their obedience to the law. Because this text is a favorite of the men of the Federal Vision, who explain it just as does Paul Rainbow, it is worthwhile to quote Calvin's explanation at length.

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a real possibility, but also a necessity: men must be justified by their doing of the law. A leading spokesman of the New Perspective, and a theologian held in high esteem by the men of the Federal Vision and by other Reformed theologians, N. T. Wright, has written this in explanation of Romans 2:13: "The first mention of justification in Romans is a mention of justification by works—apparently with Paul's approval (2:13...). The right way to understand this, I believe, is to see that Paul is talking about the final justification.... The point is: who will be vindicated, resurrected, shown to be the covenant people, on the last day? Paul's answer... is that those who will be vindicated on the last day are those in whose hearts and lives God will have written his law, his Torah" (N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, 126, 127).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 210.



The sense of this verse, therefore, is that if righteousness is sought by the law, the law must be fulfilled, for the righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works. Those who misinterpret this passage for the purpose of building up justification by works deserve universal contempt. It is, therefore, improper and irrelevant to introduce here lengthy discussions on justification to solve so futile an argument. The apostle urges here on the Jews only the judgment of the law which he had mentioned, which is that they cannot be justified by the law unless they fulfil it, and that if they transgress it, a curse is instantly pronounced upon them. We do not deny that absolute righteousness is prescribed in the law, but since all men are convicted of offence, we assert the necessity of seeking for another righteousness. Indeed, we can prove from this passage that no one is justified by works. If only those who fulfil the law are justified by the law, it follows that no one is justified, for no one can be found who can boast of having fulfilled the law.<sup>51</sup>

Against Rome, Rainbow, and the men of the Federal Vision and with Paul in Romans 6:2, Calvin denies that justification by faith alone is antinomian. Paul's refutation is, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Calvin's is the same: "Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify." "We are justified not without works yet not through works."<sup>52</sup>

Closely related to the objection that justification destroys a life of good works is the objection that, at the very least, justification *stifles* zeal for holiness. Calvin replies, with appeal to Romans 12:1, "There is no greater incentive to a holy life than the free mercy of God in justification."<sup>53</sup>

Rome appeals to all the promises especially in the Old Testament that promise salvation to those who keep the law. One such passage is Deuteronomy 7:12, 13: "If ye hearken to these judgments,

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<sup>51</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, tr. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 47. See also *Inst.*, 3.17.13.

<sup>52</sup> *Inst.*, 3.16.1.

<sup>53</sup> *Inst.*, 3. 16.3.

and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee.” Calvin’s response is twofold. First, no one keeps the law, for it must be kept perfectly. Therefore, justification is, and must be, by faith alone. Having justified the believer, God sanctifies him and then rewards the good works in His grace.<sup>54</sup>

Second, the promises in the Old Testament that have a conditional form do not express the “reason” for the promise and its fulfillment, but rather identify the object of the promise. “The fulfillment of the Lord’s mercy does not depend upon believers’ works.” Good works are not the “foundation” of our standing before God.<sup>55</sup>

An especially potent argument against justification by faith alone, apparently, which Rome and those who are one with Rome push hard, is the appeal to James 2:21, 25, where James says of both Abraham and Rahab that they were justified by works. Calvin refutes the argument by denying that James can contradict Paul, because “the Spirit is not in conflict with himself.” James understands both the word “faith” and the word “justify” “in another sense than Paul takes [them].” By justification, James does not have in mind the “imputation” of righteousness, as Paul clearly does in Romans and Galatians, but the “declaration,” that is, demonstration, of imputed righteousness by good works.<sup>56</sup>

Rome argues against justification by faith alone on the basis of the biblical teaching that God will reward the good works of His people. Calvin answers that the reward will be a reward of grace, not merit. Calvin explains that our good works, which are all defiled with sin, are themselves justified by faith alone. Besides, they are God’s own work in us by His Holy Spirit.<sup>57</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism makes Calvin’s response to this Roman Catholic argument against justification by faith alone confessional for Reformed Christians: “How is it that our good works merit nothing, while yet it is God’s will to reward them in this life and in that which is to come? The reward comes not of merit, but of grace.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.3.

<sup>55</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.6.

<sup>56</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.11, 12.

<sup>57</sup> *Inst.*, 3.18.1-7.

<sup>58</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 63, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 327.

Closely related to the argument against gracious justification on the basis of Scripture's teaching that God will reward the good works of His people is the argument based on Scripture's teaching that God will conduct the final judgment according to the works of all men, believers as well as unbelievers. This is the main argument against justification by faith alone of Paul A. Rainbow in *The Way of Salvation*. The final judgment will be a public act of justification, closely related to the justification of believers in time. But this final justification will be based on the believer's works, so that his righteousness in the coming justification will consist partly of Christ's obedience for him and partly of his own obedience.

This is one of the chief arguments for the doctrine of justification by faith and works on the part of the men of the Federal Vision. Their argument is that the Bible's teaching that God will conduct the final judgment *according to* works means that the public justification of believers will be *on the basis of* their own good works. Having established that the justification of the final judgment will be based on works, and therefore will be a justification by faith and by works, the men of the Federal Vision conclude that also justification in time must be by faith and by the works of faith.

It was in the form of this argument that the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church officially approved the teaching of justification by faith and works as taught by a proponent of the Federal Vision.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The 2003 General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church upheld John Kinnaid against charges of heresy. Among the teachings of Kinnaid that the General Assembly thus approved were the following. "These good works are a required condition if we would stand in the Day of Judgment and they are supplied by God to all His people.... Who are these people who thus benefit—who stand on the Day of Judgment? They are those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." "On the Day of Judgement [sic] I will hear God declare me to be righteous. As to the reason for that, it is not because of the works, even though it will be in accord with the works. The reason will be: first, because it [God's declaration that John Kinnaid is righteous] will be true because God will have changed me so that I am really and personally righteous. After all, we will be crowned with righteousness. This is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in my sanctification in this life" (see John W. Robbins, *A Companion to the Cur-*

Calvin considers the appeal of Rome to such texts as Matthew 16:27, II Corinthians 5:10, and Romans 2:9, 10. "Of this sort are these: 'Everyone will receive the things done in his body...whether...good or bad' [II Cor. 5:10]. 'Glory and honor...to the doer of good; hardship and tribulation upon every evildoer's soul' [Rom. 2:10, 9]."<sup>60</sup>

Calvin refutes this argument by noting that the order at the final judgment, good works followed by the judgment of eternal life, is an "order of sequence," not of "cause." By their good works, which God brings to light at the final judgment, elect believers "prove themselves sons." By no means does judgment according to works teach that "believers are themselves the authors of their own salvation, or that salvation stems from their own works."<sup>61</sup>

Calvin might have observed that Rome, like the men of the Federal Vision today, could benefit from an elementary grammar course in prepositions. "By means of" is not the same as "on account of," as in the phrase, "(justification) by means of faith." Nor is "according to" the same as "on the basis of," as in the phrase, "(final judgment) according to works."

In addition, Calvin reminds his readers that "the Kingdom of Heaven is not servants' wages but sons' inheritance," with appeal to Ephesians 1:18.<sup>62</sup> The parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1ff.) proves that our works do not earn heaven.<sup>63</sup>

The purpose of the promised reward of the good works of the elect at the final judgment is simply to encourage the Christian, whose life in the world is always difficult. "Nothing is clearer than that a reward is promised for good works to relieve the weakness of our flesh by some comfort but not to puff up our hearts with vainglory."<sup>64</sup>

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*rent Justification Controversy*, Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2003, 53-58 and Paul M. Elliott, "The Kinnaird Case and Its Aftermath," in *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond*, Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2005, 175-237).

<sup>60</sup> *Inst.*, 3.18.1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Inst.*, 3.18.2.

<sup>63</sup> *Inst.*, 3.18.3.

<sup>64</sup> *Inst.*, 3.18.4.

### The Obedience of Christ

Not only does justification by faith alone mean, negatively, that all the works of the justified sinner are excluded. Justification by faith alone has also a positive meaning. The only obedience that constitutes the righteousness of the guilty sinner is that of Christ, particularly the obedience of His atoning death. Calvin, therefore, charges Osiander with making “mockery” of Christ: “Whoever wraps up two kinds of righteousness in order that miserable souls may not repose wholly in God’s mere mercy, crowns Christ in mockery with a wreath of thorns [Mark 15:17, etc.].”<sup>65</sup>

The righteousness of justification is “Christ’s obedience,” which is “reckoned to us as if it were our own.” Here Calvin uses (without approving it, I trust) the allegorical exegesis of Ambrose concerning Jacob’s clothing himself in Esau’s raiment, to receive the blessing, as an example of our being clothed with Christ’s righteousness, to receive the divine blessing.<sup>66</sup>

Corresponding to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us in the act of justification, and the basis of it, is God’s imputation to Christ of the guilt of our sins in Christ’s death on the cross. Commenting on II Corinthians 5:21 (“he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”), Calvin writes:

Do you observe that, according to Paul, there is no return to favor with God, except what is founded on the sacrifice of Christ alone?...How are we righteous in the sight of God? It is assuredly in the same respect in which Christ was a sinner. For he assumed...our place, that he might be a criminal in our room, and might be dealt with as a sinner, not for his own offences, but for those of others... and might endure the punishment that was due to us—not to himself. It is in the same manner, assuredly, that we

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<sup>65</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.12.

<sup>66</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.23.

are now *righteous in him*—not in respect of our rendering satisfaction to the justice of God by our own works, but because we are judged of in connection with Christ’s righteousness, which we have put on by faith, that it might become ours.<sup>67</sup>

“We are now *righteous in him*—not in respect of our rendering satisfaction to the justice of God by our own works,” but in respect of Christ’s rendering satisfaction to the justice of God by His work for us and in our stead. Christ’s “satisfaction to the justice of God” becomes ours by faith only. Our guilt was imputed to Him; His righteousness is imputed to us. So, Calvin.

Such is the relation between justification by faith alone and the death of Christ that if, on the contrary, righteousness come by the law even in the smallest part, Christ died in vain (Gal. 2:21). Those who deny justification by faith alone, whether Pharisee, Roman Catholic theologian, or man of the Federal Vision, deny the cross of Christ, and have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

### **Justifying Faith and Works**

If our works are not at all the means by which we are justified, if they contribute absolutely nothing to our righteousness with God the judge, if they are not the ground of our acceptance with God now or in the day of judgment, what is the proper relation of faith and good works?

Negatively, the good works of the saints are no part of the divine act of justification, nor are they the “cause” of our justification, or indeed of our salvation. To drive this point home, Calvin allows himself the use of the four-fold cause proposed by the “philosophers.” The “efficient” cause of salvation is the mercy of the Father in election; the “material” cause is the obedience of Christ; the “instrumental” cause is faith; and the “final” cause is the praise of God.<sup>68</sup> In no sense whatever are works the cause of justification

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<sup>67</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, tr. John Pringle, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 241, 242.

<sup>68</sup> *Inst.*, 3.14.17.

or salvation: “every particle of our salvation stands thus outside of us.”<sup>69</sup>

The exclusion of good works from justification and from the cause of our salvation, however, neither rules good works out, nor minimizes them in the life of the justified child of God. This is not the place to draw out at large Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification and his glorious description of the Christian life. I have done this elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> I limit myself here to Calvin’s explanation of the relation of good works to justifying faith in his treatment of justification by faith, as he wards off the perennial charge that justification by faith alone is antinomian.

Good works will always accompany justification by faith because faith’s union with and partaking of Christ give us a “double grace.” The first is justification. The second is “that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.”<sup>71</sup> “Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond.”<sup>72</sup>

Since God always sanctifies the believer, good works in one’s life serve in a secondary and subordinate way to confirm faith. Good works are “testimonies of God dwelling and ruling in us.”<sup>73</sup> As already noted in connection with Calvin’s harmony of Paul and James, Calvin sees good works as a “declaration” and “proof” of genuine, justifying faith.

Regarding the incentive and motive for doing good works—one’s zeal for good works—Calvin declares that grateful love for free forgiveness on the basis of God’s gracious gift of Jesus Christ is a powerful motivation to avoid sin and to please God, indeed the most powerful incentive.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See my article, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life,” in *The Sixteenth-Century Reformation of the Church*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2007), 139-148.

<sup>71</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.1.

<sup>72</sup> *Inst.*, 3.16.1.

<sup>73</sup> *Inst.*, 3.14.18.

Indeed, if men have to be aroused, no one can put sharper spurs to them than those derived from the end of our redemption and calling. Such spurs the Word of the Lord employs when it teaches that it would bespeak our too impious ingratitude for us not to reciprocate the love of him “who first loved us” [I John 4:19].<sup>74</sup>

Calvin turns the tables on those who urge justification by faith and the works of faith in order to ensure a life of good works. These include the Pharisees, the Roman Catholic theologians, Paul A. Rainbow, and the men of the Federal Vision. All seek to incite Christians to a holy life by the motivation of accomplishing themselves the righteousness with God upon which their legal standing with God, their salvation, and their eternal destiny depend. Necessarily, they also instill the motivation of stark terror. But Calvin condemns works done out of such motives as “slavish and coerced observances of the law,” which God forbids.<sup>75</sup>

This is the great irony. Teaching justification by works ostensibly on behalf of a more zealous Christian life of good works, the false teachers of justification by works destroy all good works, and the very possibility of good works. The Belgic Confession passes exactly this devastating indictment upon the doctrine of justification by faith and works when it declares, “Without it [the doctrine of justification by faith alone realized by the Holy Spirit in a ‘justifying faith’] they would never do any thing out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.”<sup>76</sup>

### **Necessity of Justification by Faith Alone**

Finally, Calvin insists on the necessity of justification by faith alone. The necessity is that without it there is no salvation for the sinner. Righteousness with God is the foundation upon which salvation and eternal life depend, and there is righteousness for the guilty sinner only by faith in Jesus Christ. Justification by faith alone is, as was said earlier, “the main hinge on which religion turns.”<sup>77</sup> Who-

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<sup>74</sup> *Inst.*, 3.16.2.

<sup>75</sup> *Inst.*, 3.16.3.

<sup>76</sup> Belgic Confession, Art. 24, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 410, 411.

<sup>77</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.1.



ever is not justified by faith alone perishes. “As iniquity is abominable to God, so no sinner can find favor in his eyes in so far as he is a sinner and so long as he is reckoned as such.”<sup>78</sup>

This necessity of justification by faith alone establishes the necessity of the preaching and defense of the doctrine by the true church.

The gospel-truth of justification by faith alone is necessary for the peace of the believer. I have already quoted Calvin’s response to Osiander, that Osiander’s doctrine of justification by works makes faith “totter” in the sense of destroying assurance of salvation. Remarkably similar is Calvin’s response to the Roman Catholic theologians who argued against justification by faith alone on the basis of their understanding of James 2. Confronted with their objection, Calvin immediately responds to this effect: “Go ahead then! Establish works-righteousness from James! But know this: You take away ‘all certainty of righteousness.’ You evidently ‘do not much care about imparting...peace to consciences.’ No peace remains for any sinner.” Calvin adds: By establishing justification by works, you “snuff out the light of truth.”<sup>79</sup>

Above all, justification by faith alone is necessary because it magnifies the righteousness of God in the obedience of Jesus Christ. Calvin’s great concern in the controversy is that of the apostle in Romans 10:3, 4: Those who go about to “establish their own righteousness” do not submit “themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

Here, indeed, [in the matter of justification] we are especially to note two things: namely that the Lord’s glory should stand undiminished and, so to speak, in good repair and that our consciences in the presence of his judgment should have peaceful rest and serene tranquility.... Do you see that the righteousness of God is not sufficiently set forth unless he alone be esteemed righteous, and communicate the free gift of righteousness to the un-

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<sup>78</sup> *Inst.*, 3.11.2.

<sup>79</sup> *Inst.*, 3.17.11.

deserving? For this reason he wills that “every mouth be stopped and all the world be rendered accountable to him” [Rom. 3:19]. For, so long as man has anything to say in his own defense, he detracts somewhat from God’s glory.... Why do we attempt, to our great harm, to filch from the Lord even a particle of the thanks we owe to his free kindness?<sup>80</sup>

## Summary

John Calvin was in complete agreement with Martin Luther that justification is by faith alone, apart from any and all works of the sinner himself, whether produced in his own power (an impossibility) or in the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Calvin explained and defended the doctrine of justification more thoroughly and systematically than did Luther.

Calvin set forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone, according to his understanding of the biblical teaching, clearly and definitively in the 1559 edition of his *Institutes*.

Calvin agreed with Luther also in his regard for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luther regarded the doctrine as the article of a standing or falling church. Calvin called it the “hinge on which all religion turns” and the “cornerstone of the gospel.”

According to the judgment both of Luther and Calvin, those today who are teaching justification by faith and works—the men of the Federal Vision, proponents of the New Perspective on Paul, and others within nominally conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches—are heretics, subverting the gospel of grace, causing their churches to apostatize from Christ, and leading men and women to eternal damnation.

Calvin knew very well that Romans 2:13 is a crucially important text in the controversy over justification. He rejected the interpretation of the text that explains it as teaching that some humans—regenerated believers—in fact are, or will be, justified by doing the law. Calvin explained the text as teaching, not what in fact is or can be the case, but what a man is required to do, if he is to be justified by the law: Do the law! Do the law *perfectly*! Do the law *by perfectly loving God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and*

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<sup>80</sup> *Inst.*, 3.13.1.

*perfectly loving your neighbor!* The only right, wise, and saving reaction to Romans 2:13 is to despair of justification by obedience to the law and to fly to the righteousness of God in the crucified Jesus Christ in order to be justified by faith alone.<sup>81</sup>

Calvin was no antinomian. Nor is the Reformed church that is guided in its understanding of the gospel by Calvin antinomian. There never was a theologian who was less antinomian than Calvin, as there is no church less antinomian than the Reformed church that preaches justification by faith alone, that is, by grace alone. But Calvin did not respond to the slander, or fear, as the case may be, of antinomianism by compromising the truth of justification and with it the gospel of grace. Nor, of course, did Paul.

Those today who suggest that Calvin taught justification by faith and by the good works of faith and, therefore, that Calvin dif-

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<sup>81</sup> Romans 2:13 has become, rightly, the crucial text in the controversy in the Reformed churches between those defending and those opposing the Reformation's and the Reformed confessions' doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is significant, therefore, that Orthodox Presbyterian theologian Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., recognizing full well the importance of Romans 2:13 in the present controversy ("the intensive attention that Romans 2:13 is currently receiving") allows for, indeed himself adopts, the interpretation of Romans 2:13 that explains the text as teaching what is actually the case now and what actually will be the case at the final judgment: "the doers of the law shall be justified." Gaffin has written: "The positive outcome in view in Romans 2:5ff., at least in verses 5-11, if not verses 12-13 as well, is best seen as describing what will be true of Christians at the final judgment." Gaffin rejects "the hypothetical view, the view that Paul is speaking of what is true in principle but is not in fact realized." This was, of course, the view of Calvin. See Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Paternoster, 2006), 79-111. Compare the interpretation of the text by Herman Hoeksema: "But now a question that some might ask arises in the mind of the apostle. They might say, 'But we have the law.' So the Jew reasoned. 'God gave me the law, and the fact that God gave me the law is proof that I am righteous.' The apostle takes this excuse away and says, 'Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified' [v. 13]" (Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans*, ed. David J. Engelsma, Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002, 77).

ferred from Luther in respect to this fundamental doctrine of the Reformation are utterly and inexcusably mistaken. At best, the allegation is ignorance. At worst, it is lying.

The right way to determine Calvin's doctrine of justification is to read his treatment of the doctrine in his *Institutes*, not by scouring his sermons and commentaries for the stray, unguarded comment. Much less is his doctrine of justification to be inferred from a theologian's dubious understanding of Calvin's covenant doctrine, as gathered from Calvin's commentaries and sermons.

To put the finest point on it, the men of the Federal Vision are wrong in their understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant (for Calvin the covenant was governed by election), wrong in their contention that Calvin taught justification by works (he damned the doctrine), and wrong in their argument that since Calvin taught a gracious, conditional covenant with all men alike he must have held conditional justification, that is, justification by the works of the covenant member (Calvin held neither the premise nor the conclusion).

But there is something to their logic: If a conditional covenant, then justification by works. It is this logic that is convincing the churches in which they spread their theology, since the churches embrace a conditional covenant. Such is the power of the logic that if Calvin did *not* teach justification by faith and works, he could not have taught a gracious, conditional covenant with all alike. And, as this article demonstrates, Calvin did not teach justification by faith and works. ●

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# The Regulative Principle: A Confessional Examination

Cory Griess

## Introduction

Worship has always been a major issue in the church. The question of proper worship has divided churches in the past and continues to be a divisive issue today. At the time of the Reformation, the right worship of God was one of the greatest issues that faced the church. Calvin believed that the question of worship was the greatest question in the Reformation. Indeed, for Calvin, a proper understanding of worship was the central piece to the Christian religion.

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, a knowledge first of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained.<sup>1</sup>

Worship is perhaps an issue just as important in today's church world, but it is so for a very different reason than it was for Calvin. For much of the evangelical church of our postmodern world, worship is important because it is viewed as a form of marketing to draw crowds into the church. Often worship in the contemporary church is a means to an end. It is seen as a way to do evangelism. Because of this, the church often has a worship "strategy," rather than a worship "principle." But if worship is the body of Jesus Christ meeting the God of heaven and earth face to face, is not worship something more than what makes us feel good?

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, "On the Necessity of Reforming the Church," *Selected Works of John Calvin*, vol. 1, ed. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 126.

In this paper I will deal with the question, “How does God desire to be worshiped?” How one answers this question should determine his view of what has been called the regulative principle of worship. I will deal with the confessional view of the regulative principle as it came out of the Reformation and especially the work of John Calvin. I will then show how the confessions make a distinction between elements and circumstances. Then I will show that there are two extremes that must be avoided in answering how God desires to be worshiped. In doing so, I will try to present a balanced Reformed and Presbyterian view of the regulative principle of worship.

### **The Necessity of a Regulative Principle**

Why did Calvin view worship as such an important issue? For Calvin, worship was such a major issue because it is in worship that theology and practice come together. One’s understanding of God is reflected in the way one worships God. For Calvin, the people who gather to worship their God are engaging in an act of applied theology. They are knowing and exalting God, publicly, as the body of Jesus Christ. “Worship for the Christian should be an expression of God’s heart back to God. We ought to reflect back to God how wonderful He is. It is impossible, therefore, to worship God by human invention.”<sup>2</sup> For Calvin, and for the Reformed tradition after him, worship is the central issue of the church because in worship the church is not just creating an experience for herself, she is extolling, and thus giving expression to what God has revealed concerning Himself. One’s worship reflects one’s God, and one’s God reflects one’s worship.

Besides this, for Calvin, worship was the highest expression of Christianity. In worship, the goal of all of God’s work in His covenant with His people is met. In worship, God Himself abides with His people. “After the covenant of grace has flowed to us from that fountain...let us know and be fully persuaded that wherever the faithful who worship him purely and in due form according to the appointment of his Word, are assembled together to engage in the sol-

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew McMahon, “The Regulative Principle of the Church.” *Puritan’s Mind*, 11 Dec. 2007 <http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/McMahonRegulativePrinciple.htm>, 1.

emn acts of religious worship, he is graciously present, and presides in the midst of them.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, if worship is not properly understood and not properly carried out, the people of God are held back from the great benefit of their faith.

This is why in the Reformation the church saw they must let God determine how He is to be worshiped. We do not know God or His will except He reveal Himself, and thus His revelation must determine how we approach Him in worship. We must approach Him knowing who He is, and we must reflect His essence and attributes in the way we approach Him.

The idea of a regulative principle often sounds intimidating, cold, academic, and lifeless. The word “regulative” itself is something frightening to our postmodern world. Perhaps, at times, the Reformed church is guilty of making this principle of worship such, and to her disgrace. Perhaps, sometimes, the Reformed church is guilty of not having a thrill in her heart when she comes before her God. But I contend, with the Reformed church, that if one understands the regulative principle properly, one understands God properly—and there is nothing more thrilling than knowing the infinite God. The regulative principle is a covenantal principle. It is a relational principle. It is a liberating principle. It is a principle that enables the church to approach God in a way that brings her into closest communion with God. It allows the church to keep herself from the self-interest that keeps God at a great distance from her. It allows her to know that the gift of worship that she brings to her King and Friend is a gift that comes out of a heart knowing Him as He is, and allows her to exalt Him and adore Him with a thrill in her heart. It is a principle that gives her the confidence that her God is thrilled by what she brings, spurring her to come back the same way and with a greater thrill in her heart than the time before.

This, fundamentally, is what many in the contemporary church<sup>4</sup> do not understand. The contemporary church often clamors for nothing but excitement. “Suppose you come home from work with a bouquet of roses for your wife,” they will teach. “Your wife

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 4. Calvin’s Commentaries, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 122.

<sup>4</sup> Here I focus specifically on the Emergent Church movement.

in surprise will naturally ask what the occasion is.” “Perhaps you respond,” they will say, “that you bought the roses because it was your duty. Your wife will not want your roses anymore because you did not give them to her from your heart.”<sup>5</sup> This, the contemporary church says, is what “traditional” worship is like to God. It is cold, merely dutiful, and all God wants is for us to be excited to give Him the gift of worship.

The Reformed church responds with the Word of God that “Yes, God wants you to worship Him with a thrill in your heart. But imagine if you came home to your wife and brought her a gift that you were very excited about. You knew that that gift was one that you would love to get. You run up to your wife, gift in hand, excited as you wait for her to rip off the wrapping paper. But, to your shock, your wife’s reaction to your gift is a dull nod and perhaps a fake smile. After the shock you realize that what you had done was give your wife a gift based more on what you wanted than what she wanted. And perhaps your wife begins to tell you so, explaining that the reason you did not know what she wanted is because, as it seems to her, you have not been interested in really knowing her. You have not spent time with her, talking with her, knowing who she is, and so you come to find out your gift-giving displayed your dereliction and self-interest more than your love for your wife.”

Excitement without knowledge and understanding of God is not what God is looking for. One wonders if God looks down on much “worship” given to Him and says, “Well, I am glad you are having a good time, but you do not know me, you do not discover who I am in My Word, and, frankly, the gifts you bring are not what I want, they are what you want.” The goal of the regulative principle is to be the road to lead the people of God to lively, deep, knowledgeable, thrilling, dutiful, exciting exaltation of their King and Friend.

### **The Regulative Principle**

The regulative principle is the principle regarding how God is to be worshiped. It says that God is to be worshiped no other way than He has commanded in His Word. What is not commanded is

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<sup>5</sup> Rob Bell, “Sunday,” *Nooma 004* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), DVD 2:00-11:00 (my summary of the argument).



forbidden. What is commanded must be done. There was a principle of worship that came out of the Reformation that was established by the Lutheran and Anglican traditions that is to be distinguished from the regulative principle. This principle (called the “normative principle”) said that God governs His worship by His Word, but only in the sense that whatever is not expressly forbidden by the Word is implicitly approved. God does not regulate His worship by positively commanding all that is to be included in worship, only by negatively condemning the things He does not want. Whatever is not expressly forbidden is allowed.

The Reformed, however, took the positive view. Knowing well the sovereignty of God over all of life, the Reformed principle forbids whatever is not commanded. This principle is clearly set forth in the Reformation creeds and is based on passages such as Leviticus 10:1-3. In this passage Nadab and Abihu, who legitimately held the office of priest as sons of Aaron, offer strange or “unauthorized” fire before God. The job of the priests was to bring the people before the Lord, just as worship is coming into the presence of God. God had given the priests commandments regarding how this must be done, and Nadab and Abihu neglected the Lord’s commands. As a result God rained fire down upon them and consumed them. But notice that when God gives the ground for avenging His justice upon Nadab and Abihu, He does not say that they had done something He had forbidden. Rather, God says that Nadab and Abihu “offered strange fire before the LORD, *which he commanded them not.*” It was not that Nadab and Abihu had done something that God had commanded them not to do, but rather that they did something without express commandment. God had given the positive commands. It was not the case that the priests could say that whatever God had not commanded must be allowed in coming before Him, but rather that whatever God had not commanded was to be viewed as prohibited. The priests knew this, and so, when they did something God had not commanded, they were destroyed.

The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth this regulative principle in its explanation of the second commandment. Question and answer 96 says, “What does God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship him in any other

way than he has commanded in his Word.”<sup>6</sup> The second commandment, which forbids the worship of God through idols, points out that all worship that is not commanded by God is worship corrupted by idolatry. This points out the close connection between one’s understanding of God and worship. To worship God in a way inconsistent with what He has revealed in His Word, and thus inconsistent with God Himself, is idolatry, according to the Catechism. This is true because if one’s worship is not governed by God’s Word and thus by the very essence of God Himself, then it is governed by us. Worship becomes an expression of who we are rather than an expression of who *God is*. Thus, we end up extolling ourselves.

The Regulative Principle of Worship is God’s ordained law for worship. Many say there should be no law for worship, we should be free in our worship, that way our worship is led by the Spirit. However, these people have in reality established their own law for worship just as much as the one who follows the Regulative Principle of Worship. There is no neutrality in the way in which we approach God in worship. Either we approach the living God according to His revealed Word, or we approach him according to our revealed word. Someone’s word is going to expressly guide us in worship. The only question is whose word will guide us, God’s, or man’s?<sup>7</sup>

The attributes of God and the worship He requires are closely connected. Thus, to deviate from God’s Word is to dismiss who God is.

Ursinus calls this form of idolatry “will-worship,” after the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:23. There the word the apostle uses is ἐθελοθρησκία, which means “self-made religion,” or “do-it-yourself-religion.”<sup>8</sup> Ursinus makes the connection between do-it-yourself-

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<sup>6</sup> *Three Forms of Unity*, 3rd ed. (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2002), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Price, “Foundation for Reformation: The Regulative Principle of Worship,” Still Waters Revival Books, 11 Dec. 2007 <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/REFORMATION-RPW-GP.htm>, 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 168.

religion and idolatry. Speaking of the idolatry condemned in the second commandment, Ursinus says there are two types of idolatry. The first is blatant and palpable, in which one actually bows before a false god. The second is the idolizing of our own will with respect to worship. This idolatry “is more subtle and refined, as when the true God is supposed to be worshiped, whilst the kind of worship which is paid unto him is false, which is the case when any one imagines that he is worshiping or honoring God by the performance of any work not prescribed by the divine law. This will-worship is condemned in every part of Scripture.”<sup>9</sup>

The second commandment also points out that God is to be worshiped with His Word. This comes out in the Catechism’s further explanation of the second commandment. Question and Answer 98 says that the second commandment teaches positively that the central principle in worship is that it is centered on the Word of God. “We must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word.”<sup>10</sup>

The Word must be central in our worship because it is the word of Christ, who is the head of the church. That Word teaches Christ, glorifies Christ as the revelation of God, and is spoken by Christ Himself. That Word leads us in all our life—would it not also rightly lead is in worship? The Word, not our desires or emotions,<sup>11</sup> must be our guide, says the Catechism. But let the Word be not only our *guide*, but also the *substance* of our worship, the Catechism says; for as the Word of Christ, it exalts Christ. “The effect of every form of contemporary worship, if not the avowed purpose, is to marginalize the Word, to give less and less time and prominence to the reading and preaching of the Word, and, finally, to drive the Word out of the service altogether.”<sup>12</sup> This was the effect of the images that Rome

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<sup>9</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 517-518.

<sup>10</sup> *Three Forms of Unity*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> This is not to diminish the importance of emotions and the experience of worship. However, emotions and experience ought not guide us. The Word must guide our emotions and experience that follow.

<sup>12</sup> David J. Engelsma, “The Basis of the Regulative Principle of Wor-

introduced into worship, and it is the effect when things are added to the worship service today that are not according to the Word and are not saturated with the Word.

The Puritan and Presbyterian confessions agree with the Heidelberg Catechism. The Westminster Confession of Faith expounds the regulative principle of worship in chapter 21, paragraph 1.

The Light of Nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship over all, is good, and doeth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

There are two distinct ideas in Westminster's statement. First, the Confession says that the light of nature shows that there is a God. The power and evident lordship of this God, and the fact that He bestows good things to all, clearly shows to all that He is to be worshiped. It is evident to all, the Confession says, that God is Lord of all. He has created all things. And even through the light of nature one can know that He is sovereign over all things. This God is to be served. This, too, one can know from the light of nature. If He is there, and we exist, then we must exist for Him, since He created us.

Second, the Confession draws a parallel between the nature of God and the worship of God, and does so in a way that is profound. Since even in the light of nature it may be known that God is powerful and Lord of all, it is logical to conclude that God is Lord also of the way in which He is worshiped. With this, the Confession shows

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ship." *Reformed Worship* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Joel Beeke and Sinclair Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 141.

how inexcusable is a desire to govern worship by one's own will. One must set himself against not only the Holy Scriptures, but the light of nature, in deliberate rebellion, by worshiping God according to one's own will—i.e., according to the Confession, even one who does not have the Holy Spirit and the infallible Word of God can conclude that God is Lord over the way in which He is worshiped.

The great Reformation principle of the sovereignty of God stands behind the Confession. Since God is sovereign over all things, ruling all things through Jesus Christ, He also rules over the way in which He is worshiped. After all, the worship of God is entering into God's house. If God is Lord over all things that happen in His world, surely God takes great interest in and is Lord over what happens in His own home.

Therefore the Confession concludes that God has revealed to us His will in worship in the same way that He reveals His will to us concerning all areas of life—in His Word. He may not be worshiped according to our imaginations or desires, but only in the way He has revealed. This is because our imaginations and desires would pervert the worship of God, as the Confession brings out.

The Confession shows that there is a close connection between the inventions of our imaginations and the “suggestions of Satan.” One perhaps would ask the Confession: “How could the suggestions of Satan himself enter into the public worship of God?” The Confession answers, “Only as those suggestions are taken up by men whose imaginations are influenced by, and run parallel to, Satan's suggestions.” This too is a Reformation principle—we are prone to adopt Satan's suggestions.

This tendency in man is really the starting point for John Calvin's own view of worship. Calvin believed that the center of fallen man's depravity is that we have a tendency to be idolaters. All humans, even Christians after they have been redeemed, have this tendency yet in their old natures. “The mind of man, I say, is like a work place of idolatry,” and “...every one of us is, even from his mother's womb, a master craftsmen of idols.”<sup>14</sup> Man cannot trust

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in: Robert Godfrey, “Calvin and the Worship of God,” *Evan-gelium* 5.1 (2007). 11 Dec. 2007 <http://www.wscal.edu/faculty/wscwritings/07.04.php, 2>.

his own desires and imaginations in worship, because, above all, man tends to idolize himself. Calvin recognized that the great danger in worship was man's desire to please himself rather than God in worship. "Nor can it be doubted but that, under the pretense of holy zeal, superstitious men give way to the indulgences of the flesh; and Satan baits his fictitious modes of worship with such attractions that they are willingly and eagerly caught hold of and obstinately retained."<sup>15</sup> Calvin concludes, in his exposition of the second commandment, that God "wholly calls us back and withdraws us from petty carnal observances, which our stupid minds, crassly conceiving of God, are wont to devise. And then he makes us conform to his lawful worship, that is, a spiritual worship established by himself."<sup>16</sup> If such is the nature of man, and if God is sovereign over all, and if worship is so serious that it is the pinnacle of the covenant of grace, then the regulative principle is not an imposition upon worship, but rather arises organically out of the very nature of God and His relation to His people.

## Elements

When the Westminster Confession speaks of worshipping God in no other way than He has revealed in His Word, the Confession is speaking of the *elements* of worship. The Reformed faith has made a distinction between the *elements* and the *circumstances* in worship. The elements are the events that make up a worship service. The circumstances are the aids that attend the elements of worship. The Westminster Confession applies the regulative principle specifically to the elements. This is proved by the fact that later in the same chapter the Confession expounds what it means to worship God as revealed in His Word. After teaching concerning who it is that we are to worship, and teaching concerning prayer in Reformed worship in contrast to Rome, in paragraphs 2-4 of chapter 21 (the principle itself is set forth in paragraph 1 of chapter 21), the Confession goes on to expound the elements of New Testament worship:

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<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in a Harmony*, vol. 3. Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 346.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2.8.17.

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience to God, with understanding and reverence, singing of Psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration of and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Confession, these are the elements ordained by God in the New Testament to be used in public worship.

The Heidelberg Catechism applies the principle in the same way the Westminster Confession does here. The Heidelberg Catechism also applies the regulative principle directly to the elements of the worship service in distinction from the circumstances. After stating the regulative principle in its explanation of the second commandment, the Catechism goes on to give the practical end of that principle in its explanation of the fourth commandment.

What doth God require in the fourth commandment? First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, *diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor*; as becomes a Christian (emphasis mine).<sup>18</sup>

The Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism agree on the elements. They both include the reading/preaching of the Word, the sacraments, singing, and prayer. The Heidelberg places both singing and prayer under the title “publicly calling upon the Lord.” Following Calvin, the Catechism sees singing as an aspect of prayer: “As for public prayers, there are two kinds. The ones with the Word

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<sup>17</sup> Beeke, Ferguson, *Confessions*, 143.

<sup>18</sup> Beeke, Ferguson, *Confessions*, 148.

alone, and the others with singing.”<sup>19</sup> The only difference between the confessional statements is that the Catechism adds the collecting of alms, which is clearly mandated by Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

The elements are all mandated by the New Testament and can be seen as the basic elements of worship in the New Testament church. This is why they make up the substance of the regulative principle of worship. It is true that:

There is no New Testament book of Leviticus with an explicit manual on the conduct of worship. But there are a host of texts in the New Testament that provide sufficient guidance on proper elements of worship, either from apostolic *teaching* (such as an explicit command from Paul in his letters), or from apostolic *example*<sup>21</sup> (the way for instance that Luke might describe worship during the missionary journeys of Paul) (emphasis mine).<sup>22</sup>

All the elements mentioned in the confessions were part of the worship of God in the synagogue in the Old Testament.<sup>23</sup> This

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in: Godfrey, *Calvin and Worship*, 10. Quote taken from the preface to the Genevan Psalter, 1545, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Proved below.

<sup>21</sup> This is a key point that needs to be properly understood for two reasons, as I will make plain later in the paper. John Frame says that NT example is not good enough to set down the elements of worship. I believe he is wrong. On the other side, there are some who try to argue that there ought to be no instruments in worship because of the example of the synagogue and the early church. An important point in this regard, however, is that proponents of this view never take into account that the only way we know they had no instruments is by extra-biblical sources. The New Testament never records the fact that there were no instruments. Therefore, if one takes this position, he had better also figure out by those same sources how long they worshiped, how many songs they sang, etc., and follow suit. The issue here is what is an element and what is a circumstance. I will discuss this later in the paper.

<sup>22</sup> Daryl G. Hart, and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 149.

<sup>23</sup> John Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Puritan Reprints, 2006), 27.



carried into the New Testament, where Jesus Christ and the apostles approved of synagogue worship. It is precisely because these elements were the common elements in the synagogue, and thus in the New Testament church, that they are directly taught by the apostles. Acts 2:42 provides the basic outline for the elements of New Testament worship. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” This verse is a commentary on the spiritual lives of those who had been converted under Peter’s preaching at Pentecost. After they were converted, these Christians were brought into the church. In the life and fellowship of the church, they were taught in apostolic doctrine and were brought into the unity and fellowship of the organized body of Christ.

This record provides the key elements for worship—the same elements that are taken up in the Reformed confessions. Calvin concludes, based on this text, “No assembly of the Church should be held, without the word being preached, prayers being offered, the Lord’s Supper administered, and alms given.”<sup>24</sup> Calvin accentuates the importance of the elements given in this text by adding that they are the marks of the true church. “Wherefore, Luke doth not in vain reckon up these four things, when as he will describe unto us the well-ordered state of the Church. And we must endeavor to keep and observe this order, if we will be truly judged to be the Church before God and the angels.”<sup>25</sup> These elements, explicitly stated by the Holy Spirit, are not to be neglected and are not to be added to. What is not given here is forbidden. Thus, for Calvin, to add to these elements, and, more particularly, to take away from the central element of continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, is to show the marks of the false church.<sup>26</sup> As Gordon concludes, so do we: “It is not difficult

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.44.

<sup>25</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, vol. 18, Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 128.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin’s connecting here the true worship and the marks of the church is powerful. In fact, in reading Calvin’s comments on the passage one gets the sense that it was the issue of worship that gave birth to the marks of the true church as set forth in the Belgic Confession. Calvin comments further. “Yea, he expresseth in this place four marks whereby the

to conclude that the elements...are the ministry of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, spoken and sung prayers and praises, and collections for the relief of the saints.”<sup>27</sup>

The reading and exposition of Scripture was practiced in the Jewish synagogues. Jesus Himself read and expounded Scripture concerning Himself in public worship in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-21). The New Testament Christians continued the practice of preaching the gospel of Christ from the Old Testament in public worship (Acts 13:14-25). The reading and exposition of Scripture is clearly mandated in the New Testament in the Pastoral Epistles, where the apostle exhorts particularly young Timothy to “command and teach” the things the apostle prescribed (I Tim. 4:11). Timothy is to “preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4:2). There can be no doubt, given the church’s practice of preaching and teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, that these references refer to preaching in the public worship service.

Prayer as an element is also part of the New Testament witness. Besides the direct command of Acts 2:24, in Acts 4:23-31 the apostles held a worship service after their release from prison, in which prayer was a main element. In I Timothy 2:1, where the apostle is giving direction regarding the pastor’s responsibility as he leads his congregation in worship, Paul says, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.” In I Corinthians 14 prayer is a part of the worship of the New Testament church. Notable here is that this is public prayer that the congregation offers together.

Singing was a part of the synagogue tradition (though it is not clear if they sang the Psalms or recited them).<sup>28</sup> Besides this, the apostle Paul mandates singing in the worship service in Colossians

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true and natural face of the Church may be judged. Do we then seek the true Church of Christ? The image thereof is lively depainted and set forth unto us in this place. And he beginneth with doctrine which is, as it were, the soul of the Church.”

<sup>27</sup> Hart and Muether, *Reverence and Awe*, 149.

<sup>28</sup> Girardeau, *Instruments*, 27. Ironically, Girardeau says they did not sing. One cannot help but ask—then are tunes elements?

3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. It is possible that some New Testament hymns are in fact bound up in the scriptural record. It has long been surmised that Ephesians 5:14: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” was an early hymn sung on the occasion of baptism. Admittedly, this reference and the others that are commonly referred to are theories that cannot be fully proven. Nevertheless, it is clear that the people of God sang in public worship in the New Testament church.

The sacraments received a place in the worship service of the New Testament church. In the text that is generally referred to, to prove the early Christian practice of gathering on the first day of the week rather than the last, there is also mention made of what went on in the service itself. “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” They came together specifically to break bread. The sacrament was part of the essential function of the gathering, along with the preaching of the Word.

The offering finds support in Acts 2:42. The “fellowship” in verse 42 included offerings on behalf of the poor in the midst as the next verses explain. The principle here is that there was provision made for the members in the church by the members of the church. The principle is not that everyone must be equal in terms of wealth (though this is an optional way of provision), but the principle is that all must be provided for. Nevertheless, the point is that the receiving of gifts was part of the worship in the New Testament church. Besides this, there is even clearer warrant in I Corinthians 16:1-2: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” The collections were to be taken on the first day of the week, which, as we have seen, was the day of worship. This command, coupled with Romans 12:10-13, provides strong evidence. “In honor preferring one another...” “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.” If collections were to be taken on the first day of the week, and if Paul expressly commands distribution to the necessity of the saints, we

can safely conclude that offerings were a regular part of the worship service.

The early church saw that these elements of worship were the prescribed elements for worship before God. For at least the first three centuries, the church worshiped according to the witness of Scripture. An example of this is in the record of a service recorded by Justin Martyr.

On the day called the Feast of the Sun, all who live in towns or in the country assemble in one place and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read as time permits. Then, when the reader has ended, the President encourages and instructs the people to practice the truths contained in the Scripture selections. Thereafter, we all stand up and offer prayers together; and as I mentioned before, when we have concluded this prayer, bread and wine and water are brought. Then the President likewise offers up prayers and thanksgiving according to his ability, and the people cry aloud saying, Amen. Each one then receives a portion and share of the elements over which thanks have been given; and which are also carried and ministered by the deacons to those absent.<sup>29</sup>

The scriptural record, witness of the early church, and the Reformation church all testify to the main elements of worship. Because the elements are expressly given by command and example, the regulative principle applies to the elements of worship.

### **Circumstances**

The Reformed confessions rightly see that it is impossible to govern worship to the very detail. The Lord God did intend to give liberty to the church. However, this area of liberty must be clearly distinguished from the elements of worship. The *what* in worship is strictly governed by God. This is the witness of the church in its inception and through the ages, as has been shown. The confessions provide the dis-

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in: Dr. K Deddens, *Where Everything Points to Him* (Caledonia, MI: Inheritance Publications, 1993), 19.

inction by using the term “circumstances” to refer to *how* the elements are carried out in a worship service. Such a principle is implied in the Belgic Confession, Article 32. Belgic Confession, Article 32, adds to the discussion of the regulative principle the balancing notion that not *every detail* in worship is commanded by God.

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted. And therefore we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever.<sup>30</sup>

This article teaches us two things. It teaches us that the church has liberty with respect to worship, and it teaches that the ordinances the church makes in her liberty must remain matters of liberty.

First, it teaches that the church has power to make decisions and ordinances regarding the way the elements of worship are carried out. This is why the church has made the distinction between elements and circumstances. God specifically demands what elements must be included in the worship of His name, but He does not expressly command the way in which those elements are carried out. These circumstances attending the elements are governed by the principles of the Word and the nature of God Himself, but not by specific commands. Thus, the church has liberty to determine how she will implement the elements of the worship service. The issue of worship comes up in Article 32 because the article is about the power of the church to establish ordinances for the sake of order and discipline in the church. The church must make ordinances governing her life and circumstances that affect her worship. She is given power to do so. This power is a necessary power. It is the liberty of the church.

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<sup>30</sup> *Three Forms of Unity*, 42-43.

Second, recognizing that there is potential in this power for abuse, especially in regard to worship, the Belgic Confession states, “And therefore we reject all human inventions and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any matter whatever.”<sup>31</sup> The point here is that the church has the duty and power to make ecclesiastical laws. But she must do even this in a way that is *consistent with the Scriptures*. Especially this must be true with respect to worship. The danger is that the church “teaches for doctrines the commandments of men”<sup>32</sup> and vainly worships the Lord. She must not command anything in the worship of God that contradicts what is demanded. In her ecclesiastical laws she must not make commandments that change the elements of worship. God has Himself declared what is to be done in the worship of His name. If the church oversteps her authority and begins to demand things that are contrary to the Word of God, she binds the consciences of men. In light of Article 32 of the Belgic Confession, if the church in her authority oversteps the scriptural demands for worship she binds men to commit idolatry.

The statement in the Confession also intends to keep the church from representing her ecclesiastical laws of liberty as *God’s specific commands*. Certainly, the church needs to make ecclesiastical laws for the sake of decency and order in the church and to keep unity with respect to *circumstances* in the worship service, but she may not bind a man’s conscience in these things. They are circumstantial, not demanded by God. To do so is also to force her members to commit idolatry. The way in which the elements are carried out are not expressly commanded by God. To lead people to think they are is to bind their consciences to the laws of men. Ursinus speaks to this principle, still in connection with the second commandment.

There are ecclesiastical or ceremonial ordinances prescribed by men, which include the determinations of circumstance necessary or useful for the maintenance of the first table.... They neither constitute the worship of God, nor bind men’s consciences, nor is the observance

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<sup>31</sup> *Three Forms of Unity*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 15:9.

of them necessary, except when a neglect of them would be the occasion for offense. So it is not the worship of God, but a thing indifferent, and not binding upon men's consciences....<sup>33</sup>

The apostolic command that things be done “decently and in order”<sup>34</sup> requires that the church make ecclesiastical laws with respect to circumstances in the worship of God to which the Scripture does not speak. Calvin speaks to this in the *Institutes*, carefully distinguishing between elements that must be represented to the people as the explicit command of God and circumstances that may not ever be represented to the people as the explicit command of God. There can be no doubt that his comments are the inspiration for Article 32 of the Belgic Confession.

Nor can Paul's requirement—that ‘all things be done decently and in order’—be met unless order itself and decorum be established through the addition of observances that form, as it were, a bond of union. But in these observances one thing must be guarded against. They are not to be considered necessary for salvation and thus bind consciences by scruples; nor are they to be associated with the worship of God, and piety thus be lodged in them.<sup>35</sup>

He adds a strong application two sections later, stating that, “it will be fitting to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, or for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide all will be safe.”<sup>36</sup> So concerned was Calvin that the right understanding and practice of the worship of God be maintained! So concerned was Calvin that a proper understanding of the differences between elements and circumstances be understood! Circumstances must never be thought laws of God, lest consciences be bound and an idol be

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<sup>33</sup> Ursinus, *Commentary*, 520.

<sup>34</sup> I Corinthians 14:40.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.10.27.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.10.30.

made. So concerned was Calvin about this, coming from the Roman Catholic tradition that was rife with idolatry, that Calvin thought it best for the people of God that circumstances be changed, and not infrequently.

The fact that for Calvin, Ursinus, and the Belgic Confession there are circumstances that must not bind the consciences of men, and that are changeable, means they saw that there were judgments that needed to be made in worship that were not governed by the regulative principle. The Reformed tradition and Confessions see the necessary distinction between, and spiritual implications of, the elements and circumstances of worship.

The Westminster Confession most clearly provides the distinction between elements and circumstances in the first chapter, paragraph 6.

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church common to human actions and societies which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.<sup>37</sup>

The teaching found in paragraph 6 comes in the Confession's discussion of the Word of God. The Word of God is sufficient, say the Westminster divines, to guide us in all things. Included in all things is worship. Either Scripture sets down the rule or, by good and necessary consequence, the way to live before the face of God may be determined. There are two qualifications. First, the Confession

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<sup>37</sup> G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 9-10.



acknowledges that there must be divine illumination to take the principles of the Word of God and apply them to faith and life. An unbeliever can approach the Word of God and read the commandment that says “Thou shalt not kill,” and though it takes illumination from the Spirit to keep this commandment, one may naturally deduce that the Bible says it is wrong to kill. However, there are many things in life that the Scripture does not speak to directly. For the ability properly to discern how to handle these many issues and decisions in life, it takes the Spirit of God, combined with the principles of the Word, to know how to live properly before the face of God.

Second, in the area of worship, which is strictly governed by God, there are things that the Word does not speak to, and we must not try to find a divine command for each of these circumstances. A circumstance, as defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary*, is “a condition or fact attending an event and having some bearing on it.”<sup>38</sup> It is not the thing itself, but something that is related to the thing, and that thus affects it. Traditionally, circumstances that the Westminster Confession describes have been such things as the place of meeting for the worship service, the time of day when the meeting is to be held, the length of the service, etc.

### **Applying the principle**

In the discussion of circumstances and elements there has been much division. Some see two types of circumstances, applying the regulative principle to some, leaving liberty in others. Others have applied the idea contained here in the Confession so loosely that there is not even a concept of elements left. Some have, in my judgment, been more balanced.

John Girardeau applies the term “circumstances” quite strictly, commendably attempting to follow the Westminster Catechism as closely as possible. In doing so, he says there are two types of circumstances. The one type the Catechism brings up here. The other type is governed by the regulative principle.

With his eye set against instrumental accompaniment, Girardeau says that the circumstances “are defined to be such as are

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<sup>38</sup> “Circumstance,” *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Dell Publishing, 2001).

common to human actions and societies...circumstances common to human actions are not and cannot be peculiar to church actions.”

<sup>39</sup>The point Girardeau makes in this regard is that circumstances are limited to things that human societies do in normal function, totally separate from anything religious. He takes the word “society” to refer to a gathering of any sort—political gatherings, social gatherings, etc. Since it is common to any human gathering to appoint a place to gather, thus it is a circumstance of the church gathering to appoint a place to gather. Because it is common to any human gathering to appoint a time to gather, so it is common to a church gathering to appoint a time to gather. In this way Girardeau makes a sharp distinction between circumstances that attend any human gathering and circumstances that particularly attend the gathering for the worship of God (such as instrumental accompaniment). He concludes, “Will it seriously be maintained that instrumental music is such a circumstance [meaning a circumstance that attends human gatherings and thus one in the area of liberty]? Is it common to human societies? As instrumental music is not a circumstance common to all societies, it is not one of the circumstances specified in the Confession of faith.”<sup>40</sup>

Girardeau then deals with an objection. Perhaps it will be suggested that, no, instrumental accompaniment is not common to all human societies, but the “light of nature”<sup>41</sup> suggests that a Christian gathering will have circumstances attending it that are peculiar to a Christian gathering. Just like a Masonic gathering may have circumstances peculiar to it since it is a Masonic gathering, so a Christian gathering may have circumstances attending it that are peculiar to a Christian gathering, and the Westminster Confession intends to give liberty in these areas. Girardeau responds, “The Confession defines the circumstances in question to be common to human actions, and therefore common to the human actions of all societies.

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<sup>39</sup> Girardeau, *Instruments*, 107.

<sup>40</sup> Girardeau, *Instruments*, 108.

<sup>41</sup> Westminster Confession chapter 1 paragraph 6: “and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church common to human actions and societies which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence....”

But the action of singing praise in the worship of God cannot belong to all societies as such. If that action does not belong to them, no circumstances attending it can belong to them.... If the action of singing praise belonged alike to the church and all societies there might be some plausibility in the pleas that the Church may determine the circumstances which attend it as done by herself.”<sup>42</sup> His point is that the Confession does not leave circumstances peculiar to the life of the church as an issue of liberty. Girardeau sees a distinction in circumstances here. There are circumstances peculiar to the elements and circumstances common to all human gatherings. The Confession intends that all circumstances regarding the peculiar acts specific to Christian worship be expressly commanded by God in Scripture.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the regulative principle applies not only to the elements of worship, but to the circumstances attending the elements of worship. The only circumstances given to the liberty of the church are circumstances common to the very nature of human gatherings. Only prescribed circumstances that are not common to human societies are allowed. Thus, since instruments in worship are not expressly commanded in the NT, they are forbidden. “We are forbidden to introduce anything into the worship of God which is not prescribed. Here is a circumstance which is neither *necessary* nor *prescribed* [emphasis mine]. It cannot therefore, be among the circumstances legitimated by the Confession.”<sup>44</sup>

This application of the regulative principle to circumstances attending the elements is too strict. If we take Girardeau’s interpretation to its logical conclusion it becomes impossible to apply consistently. Girardeau argues that the only circumstances left to liberty are those that all human societies perform. Let us apply this principle. After all, not only is it not common to human societies to sing praise to God in their gatherings, neither is it common to human societies to pray to God in their gatherings. Thus, any circumstance attending prayer must be explicitly prescribed in Scripture to be valid. Anything else is Judaizing. It is not necessary to close one’s eyes in

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<sup>42</sup> Girardeau, *Instruments*, 108-109.

<sup>43</sup> Girardeau would have us notice that the Confession says “some circumstances” not “all circumstances.”

<sup>44</sup> Girardeau, *Instruments*, 109.

prayer, and there is in fact no biblical prescription to close one's eyes in prayer. There are a number of biblical references that refer to lifting one's eyes up to God in prayer. Would we not have to conclude then that closing one's eyes in prayer is not prescribed and is therefore forbidden?

It is not common to human societies to perform any of the elements of Christian worship—therefore Girardeau's argument would necessarily imply that every element in worship must have every circumstance attending it clearly mandated by Scripture. Giving alms to the Lord is not something common to human societies. When alms are received, it is not necessary that the collection plate be passed from person to person. It is not inherent to the idea of giving alms that a collection plate be passed. Yes, it must be collected, but one could place the plate at the front of the church and have everyone place his alms there during the service. What is not expressly commanded is forbidden. Therefore, we must find out what they did in the synagogues and in the New Testament church to determine the circumstances regarding the collection of alms lest we be guilty of adding to the Word of God.

Girardeau's argument taken to its conclusion proves impossible to carry out. He only applies his own argument to instruments in worship, but if he would apply it to other things, the absurdity would come to light. Therefore, when he charges anyone who has accompaniment in worship with "adding to the counsel of God which is set down in his Word," then he must face seriously his own charge with respect to the other elements of worship.

What does the Westminster Confession mean here by circumstances? Actually, it is possible that Girardeau is correct in his interpretation of circumstances here in Westminster, chapter 1, paragraph 6. It may be true that the Confession points only to things such as time and place of meeting—things common to human societies. This is why many Presbyterians have looked to other parts of the Confession to speak to the circumstances *attending the elements* of the service. If this part of the Confession applies only to circumstances common to human societies,<sup>45</sup> then what about the other cir-

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<sup>45</sup> However, I am still not entirely convinced that Girardeau is correct in his reasoning even regarding the circumstances common to human soci-

cumstances that peculiarly attend Christian worship? Must it be that Girardeau is correct, that these circumstances then must be governed by the regulative principle and thus only what is expressly commanded be allowed? But this seems impossible, as we have seen, because the circumstances surrounding the elements are not expressly commanded in Scripture.

This has led many (Presbyterians in particular) to add a third term to the issue of worship—"Form." The distinctions would then be three: elements, circumstances, and forms. The issue of forms speaks to the circumstances connected to the elements of worship. The form answers the specific question, "How do we preach, pray, sing, and give alms?" The elements are the *what*. The circumstances are the *when* and *to what extent*. The form is the *how*.

For advocates of this view, proof for this third distinction is found in two places in the Westminster Confession. First, in the beginning of the paragraph that lays down the regulative principle:

The Light of Nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship over all, is good, and doeth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.<sup>46</sup>

How must the elements of worship be carried out? This "how" is governed by general principles, according to the Confession. The elements (which are referred to in the next sentence in the paragraph) must be carried out with fear, love, praise, trust, calling, and with all the heart, soul, and might.

The dimension of worship that is suggested by the Confession here is its *form*, or the "how" of the preaching, praying, and singing in worship. The Scriptures do not provide specific forms for public worship as the directory

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eties. I grant that singing worship to God is not a circumstance common to human societies. But it is something common to human societies to sing. And in singing it is common to human societies to accompany their singing with an instrument.

<sup>46</sup> Beeke, Ferguson, *Confessions*, 141.

for worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church states, ‘The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given his church a large measure of liberty in this matter.’ Yet the Directory hastens to add, this is a liberty that is to be used wisely: ‘It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God’s Word and the Spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in good order, and that God’s people should serve him with reverence and the beauty of holiness.’ So the church must design its form of worship to enable it to be conducted, ‘properly and in an orderly manner.’”<sup>47</sup>

Further proof for the form of worship is found in the Westminster Larger Catechism Question and Answer 186. “What rule has God given for our direction in the duty of prayer? The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in the duty of prayer, but the special rule of direction is in that *form* [emphasis mine] of prayer which our savior taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer.”<sup>48</sup> The whole of the Word governs our form of prayer, but there is one specific form of prayer in Scripture that must especially teach us. We do not need to pray the Lord’s Prayer every time we pray. But this form of prayer that the Lord used to teach prayer is useful in learning the pattern, or form, of prayer. “Similarly the Scriptures instruct us that Psalms are appropriate *forms* of song.”<sup>49</sup> The general teachings of Scripture with respect to the form of the carrying out of the elements govern the forms of preaching, praying, singing, sacraments, and almsgiving. The specific circumstances regarding these elements are not mandated in Scripture, and since the elements must be carried out, we must follow the principles of the Word as to the form of the elements. The regulative principle governs the elements only. Some circumstances that are common to human societies are not governed by the Word at all (time and place of meeting); some circumstances that are directly connected to the elements (form) are governed by

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<sup>47</sup> Hart, Meuther, *Reverence and Awe*, 151-152.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in: Hart, Meuther, *Reverence and Awe*, 152.

<sup>49</sup> Hart, Meuther, *Reverence and Awe*, 152.

general teachings of Scripture.<sup>50</sup>

This is basically the same argument Engelsma makes with respect to the Dutch tradition, only he does not distinguish between circumstance and form since there is no article in the Dutch standards parallel to Westminster 1.6. Engelsma argues that the regulative principle applies only to the elements in worship. The elements that are laid down in the Confession are elements that must be in the worship service. No worship service may be conducted without them. But as to the way in which these elements are carried out, there is liberty in application of the principles of Scripture.

Generally, the regulative principle applies to the *content*, or *elements*, of the public service of worship. The function of the regulative principle is to prescribe the *elements* of the public worship of the church. The regulative principle limits the church to these prescribed spiritual activities as the means of communing with God, praising God, and being edified ourselves.... The regulative principle does not stipulate that there must be an express biblical command for everything that goes on in a worship service. Such things may include what the minister wears; whether to stand or sit to pray and sing; how the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are distributed; whether the singing is accompanied by an organ, begun with a pitch-pipe, or led by a precentor; and the like.<sup>51</sup>

The reason for this is that this is the way the Confession applies the principle, as was seen earlier, and also because the New Testament clearly lays out the elements in New Testament worship, whereas it does not clearly prescribe the way in which those elements are to be used.

The church has liberty to apply the standards of God's Word

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<sup>50</sup> For an excellent study of these principles as found in Calvin's general understanding of worship see: Godfrey, "Calvin and the Worship of God," *Evangelium*, 5.1 (2007). 11 Dec. 2007, <<http://www.wscal.edu/faculty/wscwritings/07.04.php>>.

<sup>51</sup> David J. Engelsma, "The Regulative Principle of Worship Applied," *Reformed Worship* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 14.

as reflective of the nature of God Himself in the way she carried out the elements. The Belgic Confession's article on the power of the church that was mentioned earlier "claims this liberty for the Reformed Church. In the context of the worship of God, the Confession states that 'it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church.'"<sup>52</sup> The church must decide many things about its worship, but everything must be subject to the fact that the elements of worship are commanded by God.

Thus, she may choose to have a piano, or an organ, or a guitar, or a harp lead her people in singing—as long as that instrument does not become an element of the worship of the church.<sup>53</sup> It may not have its own place. It may be in the church only to carry out the element. Likewise, the church must decide what tunes to sing, but the tunes that she sings must not become an element of the worship itself. Even the tune, as Calvin believed, "is to carry the text, and not to distract attention from it."<sup>54</sup> It must not distract from the element; it must aid the element. If one wishes to introduce into the church interpretive dance as a form of worship, the response is that it is not an element of worship that is prescribed by God, and it is impossible that interpretive dance function simply as circumstance. *It is the elements that guard the church from idolatry and profane worship, not the circumstances.*

This position stands up also under the charge of its being "Lutheran." The charge has been leveled that if the regulative principle applies only to elements, then one is in effect saying that whatever is not forbidden (in the realm of circumstances) is allowable. This is the Lutheran view of worship—whatever is not forbidden is allowed. The argument fails first of all in that the charge can be turned around

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<sup>52</sup> Engelsma, "Applied," 15.

<sup>53</sup> Depending on the culture, the instrument could quickly become a distraction rather than an aid in singing and thus become an element. In a third world country where no one has a piano, a piano would perhaps be more distracting than a guitar. The point is that the instrument may not become a distraction and an element in itself. The instrument is there to carry out the element.

<sup>54</sup> John Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 35.



on the accusers. If there are circumstances not “common to human societies,” not governed by the regulative principle in one’s worship, then the accuser is doing nothing different—and, as has been shown, indeed there are. One cannot get around the fact that there are things beyond things “common to human societies” that require judgment to be made.

Second, the elements themselves guard the circumstances. What can one add to the worship service to carry out the elements that does not itself become an element? Very little. The circumstances are not prescribed by God, but the elements themselves restrict the circumstances. The Lutheran view of worship does not govern the elements, and in doing so it does not govern the circumstances. It says that whatever is not forbidden is allowed—regarding the elements. And because the position does not govern the elements, any circumstance may become an element. Thus, there is no reason why liturgical dance or burning of incense ought to be restricted from the worship of the church. This is clearly not the position set forth by the majority of conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. It does not seem possible legitimately and consistently to apply the regulative principle in any other way than as the confessions do—to the elements.

This does not mean that the Word of God has nothing to say about circumstances attending the elements (i.e., forms).<sup>55</sup> As was argued above with respect to “form,” there are principles in Scripture that govern how we sing, how we pray, how we preach, etc., though there is no specific mandate clearly laid down regarding them. These principles are primarily the nature of worship and the character of God Himself! Thus, when the church does not know God, her “form” or “circumstances” do not reflect God, and quickly become elements in themselves.

John Frame resists the regulative principle that is applied to the elements in the creeds. He does so in that he does not see the regulative principle as applicatory to the elements or the circumstances. He does wish to maintain the regulative principle as a principle; however, he says the regulative principle functions merely as

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<sup>55</sup> As was mentioned, for an excellent discussion of this in the worship of Calvin, see: Godfrey, “Calvin and the Worship of God.”

a broad umbrella-like category that has no direct bearing on worship any more than it does (as he believes) on any other part of life. “My point is that Scripture functions the same way in the area of worship services that it functions in any other area of human life: we seek to find out what God says, and we apply His prescriptions to specific situations by the use of godly wisdom, itself subject to the Word. In other words, the regulative principle for worship is the same as the regulative principle for human life.”<sup>56</sup> There is no inherent problem with Frame’s understanding here. One would expect him then to say that, since the Scriptures clearly mandate certain elements to be included in public worship, we must follow them, much as Scripture requires certain specific things of a father or of a pastor.

Rather, Frame rejects the idea that there are elements in worship altogether. “I object to the accretions to the regulative principle inherent in the traditional [Reformed] view.”<sup>57</sup> Frame rejects the Reformed view because he believes not only that there is no biblical prescription regarding circumstances, but also that there is no biblical prescription regarding elements in New Testament worship. “The claim that God provides a list of elements specific to each particular form of worship will not withstand exegetical scrutiny.” Frame goes on to argue that we really do not know all that occurred in connection with worship in the temple. There are some things we know, but we do not know all of what took place. Besides this, there certainly is no express divine sanction for what took place in the synagogue. Frame then says that the practice in the synagogue must have been approved by God since Jesus worshiped in the synagogue, but he does not see this as divine prescription for the elements involved. “As for the synagogue, Scripture contains no hint of divine requirement for the elements of its meetings. We should presume that God approved of the synagogue.... But Scripture gives us nothing like a list of elements for this particular kind of service, either by precept, example, or inference.”<sup>58</sup> Frame uses this same argument with respect to wor-

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<sup>56</sup> John M. Frame, “A Fresh Look at the Regulative Principle,” *Third Millennium Ministries*, 11 Dec. 2007 [http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh\\_frame/Frame.Ethics2005.AFreshLookattheRegulativePrinciple.pdf](http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/Frame.Ethics2005.AFreshLookattheRegulativePrinciple.pdf), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Frame, “Fresh Look,” 9.

<sup>58</sup> Frame, “Fresh Look,” 12.

ship in the New Testament apostolic church in the next paragraph.

At this point it becomes clear that Frame does not regard the “precept, example, or inference” of the New Testament apostolic witness to be normative for the church. The New Testament prescribes certain elements, and all the traditional elements were clearly practiced by the church, as has been already pointed out.

G.I. Williamson is correct in his critique of Frame when he says the central issue here is whether or not apostolic example is normative for the church: “In his recent book entitled *Worship in Spirit and Truth* Professor John Frame also expresses approval of liturgical dancing. (The shift here is clearly one of definition [definition of the regulative principle]. The Westminster Assembly understood apostolic example to be one of the ways in which we come to know what Jesus *commanded*).”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, John Frame takes his lack of respect for apostolic example (and command) so far that he says there is no command in the Bible for having a sermon in the worship service, and it may be that there is no teaching in a worship service at all.<sup>60</sup>

Frame wants to keep the regulative principle broad and loose, and so he rejects the distinction between elements and circumstances. However, in arguing his position he actually proves the validity of the

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<sup>59</sup> G. I. Williamson, “The Regulative Principle of Worship: A Paper Presented at the 2001 International Conference of Reformed Churches,” *First Reformed Presbyterian Church*, 11 Dec. 2007 <[http://www.reformed-prescambidge.com/articles/ICRC\\_RPW\\_Final.pdf](http://www.reformed-prescambidge.com/articles/ICRC_RPW_Final.pdf)>, footnote 37, p. 76.

Those who decry instruments in worship will at this point say that the New Testament church did not use instruments, therefore that practice should be seen as prescribed. However, the Scriptures never testify to this fact. And even if they did not use instruments, there is absolutely no evidence that the New Testament apostolic church did not use them because *instruments were a type of the Holy Spirit poured out* (as Girardeau argues). It is because of this that an instrument in the service of an element is a circumstance not laid down by NT example. If one says that the NT example has no instruments in the worship because we know this from other sources, then one must find out if the NT example includes passing the offering plate, closing one’s eyes in worship, etc., by those same sources.

<sup>60</sup> John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), 114.

distinction. “God never rules His people by giving them exhaustive lists of things they must do, and forbidding them to do anything else. Rather, He teaches them in general terms what pleases Him, and then He allows them to work out the specifics through their own godly wisdom, in line with the broader principles of His Word.”<sup>61</sup> Frame is partly right. He should have said that God teaches His people *specifically* what pleases Him and then allows them to work out the questions of how to carry out those specific things through their own godly wisdom in line with the principles of His Word (i.e., elements/circumstances).

In a footnote to the above statement Frame proves the distinction that he is trying to refute. A.T. Gordon had responded to Frame’s view of worship, and in a footnote Frame interacts with Gordon. “Gordon thinks I am here trying to slip one by him! Have I ‘forgotten the instructions regarding the tabernacle?’ No, but note my term ‘exhaustive.’ The directions for the tabernacle, elaborate as they were, were not exhaustive. God didn’t tell the artisans precisely what tree to use, or precisely what shape to make the noses of the cherubim, etc. He gave them general directions and let them work out the specifics according to their godly wisdom.”<sup>62</sup>

He gave them general directions! When one reads Exodus 25-31 and 36-39, one does not get the impression that God gave them general directions—especially not the general directions Frame advocates as the regulative principle of worship. He gave them *specific* directions and then allowed them to do what was necessary to carry out His specific commands according to their godly wisdom. This is exactly what the confessional view of the regulative principle is! This is why the church distinguishes between elements and circumstances! God gives specific commands as to what must be in the worship service, and the circumstances (or forms) are governed by the Word as an expression of his own character.

I conclude, with Williamson, that Frame does not take into account the biblical witness as regards the elements of worship. He makes even elements, circumstances, and thus ends up with a regula-

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<sup>61</sup> Frame, “Fresh Look,” 15.

<sup>62</sup> Frame, “Fresh Look,” footnote 28, p. 22.

tive principle that is not only not confessional but also does not do justice to the example of the Apostolic church.

## Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the regulative principle is necessary for the church because the principle is essentially grounded in the knowledge of the character of God and in the knowledge of our own depravity. I have tried to present the confessional explanation of the regulative principle and I have attempted to show how the Confession's own interpretation of the principle steers the church between an overzealous application that is necessarily inconsistent, and an explanation that is too loose and general given the testimony of New Testament revelation.

In conclusion, I would like to go back to the history of Nadab and Abihu, which history is rightly referred to often in this discussion. But now I return there to point out the essence of true worship as opposed to worship that is repugnant to the God of grace. It is certainly true that Nadab and Abihu were guilty of breaking the regulative principle of worship in that they did not do what God had commanded them to do in a formal sense. They offered strange fire before the Lord. But materially, there was something deeper going on in their offering of strange fire that led to their destruction. Nadab and Abihu were to offer incense upon fire that was taken from the altar of burnt offerings. The incense was to represent the prayers of the people as those prayers rose before the Lord. The reason why the incense had to be offered upon fire taken from the altar of burnt offerings was that the sacrifice offered there was the offering for sin. Nothing was to enter God's presence for which blood had not been spilled. Even the prayers of the people came up out of the atoning blood sacrifice, and were in fact to be prayers of thankfulness for that blood. In offering strange fire, Nadab and Abihu despised the blood sacrifice. In effect, they came into the presence of the Lord without Christ. They did not know themselves in deep need of the sacrificial blood on their behalf, and they dared come in their own righteousness before God as they brought the prayers of the people.

It is apt that we be warned, "A church's holding to the regulative principle does not guarantee acceptable worship. The church

must *practice* her worship in Spirit and Truth.” That Spirit and Truth are the Spirit of *Christ* and the Truth of *Christ*. He is the reason for our worship, the reason for the thrill in our hearts, and the reason for our submission to God’s will for worship. He alone is the reason for our bold endeavor to enter the presence of God in spite of our unworthiness. Let us let Him be the way, motive, and power behind our worship. Knowing Him as that great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, let us hold fast our profession and enter boldly, beholding and worshipping our spotless risen Christ from Sunday to Sunday as we publicly manifest ourselves as the worshipping people of God.

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# Acquisition of the “Letis Library”

David J. Engelsma

The library is an important part of a Reformed theological seminary. In the library, ready at hand, is the knowledge that professors and students need for their work. The library contains the helps—dictionaries; lexicons; biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical encyclopedias; and other works—necessary for lectures, making sermons, writing papers and articles, and the general study of the word of God.

## Once upon a Time—No Library at All

It was a serious weakness of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in years gone by that it had virtually no library at all. In part because of the cramped space in the basement of the old First Protestant Reformed Church building, the “library” consisted of a couple of shelves along the west wall of the single, narrow classroom. Lording it over the small collection of books was a multi-volume, red-bound set of a history of the popes, of all theological things. I doubt that anyone ever cracked a volume of this centerpiece of the “library.”

Time and again, when a book was needed in the classes taught by Prof. Herman Hoeksema, Hoeksema would send me out of the classroom, across the driveway, to his upstairs study in his home to fetch the desired volume. More than once I would return for further instructions concerning the exact location of the book in his large library, and repeat the trek to his study. (In the interests of “full disclosure,” I now reveal that I would often dawdle in Hoeksema’s study, not in order to whittle away the time spent in the class, but in order to admire the vast study and the huge library of books, as well as to note the contents of the library for my own benefit in time to come.)

Of course, there was no convenient place in the cold, dark recesses of the basement of First Church for the seminarian to study after classes were finished for the day. He would have to do his assignments, prepare his papers, and make his sermons for practice

preaching at home, where he would often find that his own budding library would not support his work. The superb library of Calvin College and Seminary, a few blocks away, was a godsend.

### **Better Today**

It is different today.

The spacious seminary building on Ivanrest Avenue in Grandville, Michigan includes a large and growing library. Among the many volumes, to my huge delight, is the apparently indestructible and still imposing red-bound, forty-volume set on the history of the popes over which I idly ran my eyes for three years on the corner of Fuller and Franklin in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Once in awhile, as I walk through the stacks, my eye falls on the massive set. It evokes good memories, as does the original building of First Protestant Reformed Church, when one happens to drive by it. But the history of the popes is no longer the centerpiece. I doubt that the students know it is there. Now the set is surrounded, and obscured, I am happy to report, by thousands of volumes on all the branches of theology and by many lexicons and encyclopedias.

Increasingly, the library supports the work of the seminary.

Along the west and south walls of the library are many comfortable carrels, or spaces for study, for the seminarians. A short hallway running east of the library opens on four studies for the professors. With a few strides, all can avail themselves of the theological knowledge and the various helps that are necessary for the work.

### **Acquisition of the Letis Library**

To the library has recently been added a valuable collection of more than five thousand volumes. In the good providence of God, the long-standing relationship of one of the professors with the owner of the books and the generous help of a friend of the Protestant Reformed Churches, who is himself not a member of these Churches, enabled the seminary to acquire the library of Dr. Theodore Letis.

Dr. Letis was a church historian. His field was the historiography of biblical criticism. At the time of his death a few years ago at a relatively young age, he was Director of the Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies. The specific area



of Dr. Letis' scholarly work was the Greek text of the New Testament, particularly the text used by the translators of the Authorized, or King James, Version. His scholarship was also the commitment of his heart. Dr. Letis was convinced that the Greek text underlying the English translation of the New Testament of the Authorized Version, the *Textus Receptus* (Received Text), or, as Dr. Letis preferred to call it, the "Ecclesiastical Text," is the authentic text of inspired New Testament Scripture.

A powerful, if not decisive, argument in favor of this Greek text, which was used not only by the Authorized Version but also by all the Reformation Bibles, including Luther's translation of the Bible into German, is that of providential preservation. The "Ecclesiastical Text" is the Greek text that God preserved for the use of His church from the earliest post-apostolic time to the present day.

Concerning the two Greek manuscripts that are the basis of the majority of modern English versions in the New Testament, both were discovered only in the nineteenth century. Codex Vaticanus (B) resides in the pope's library in Rome. Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) was found in a wastepaper basket in a monastery on Mt. Sinai.

Letis vigorously condemned the critical text of Westcott and Hort, which is based on these recently discovered manuscripts, as corrupt. But this is the Greek text that is used by almost all the modern English versions of the Bible, including the New International Version. Dr. Letis contended that the many serious weaknesses of the modern English versions are due in part to the use of the faulty Greek text of the New Testament.

Letis devoted his short life and brief career to continuing the noble work with the text of the New Testament carried on by John Burgon and Edward Freer Hills before him. Letis wrote his thesis for the M. T. S. degree at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia on "Edward Freer Hills's Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text." Letis earned his doctorate at the University of Edinburgh. His dissertation was, "From Sacred Text to Religious Text: An Intellectual History of the Impact of New Testament Text Criticism and Dogma in English Christianity—1690-1881." He wrote, edited, and contributed to several books and pamphlets, including *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate, A New Hearing*

for the *Authorized Version*, and “The Protestant Dogmaticians and the Late Princeton School on the Status of the Sacred *Apographa*.” These are available from the Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 5151 - 52nd St., S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49512.

Theodore Letis’ great interest is reflected, of course, in the contents of his library. The library contains many valuable works on the Greek text of the New Testament, particularly the “Ecclesiastical,” or “Traditional Text.” This makes the library especially worthwhile for the Protestant Reformed Churches and their seminary, inasmuch as the Protestant Reformed Churches are one of very few English-speaking Reformed denominations that have always used, and still do use, the Authorized Version in their worship services, in the homes and Christian schools of the members of the Churches, and in their seminary.

### **Bibliophilia**

By no means, however, is the worth of the Letis library limited to the volumes on the text of the New Testament. Among the approximately five thousand books are many important Reformed, Lutheran, and Puritan theological works, some of which the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary did not possess. These include a multi-volume set, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, by Steinmetz, Hendrix, and others; Francis Bevan’s *The Life of William Farel* (dating from the 1800s); and numerous books on Luther and his theology.

There are many other important theological works, including Harnack’s seven volumes on *The History of Dogma*; a book on *The History of Orthodox Theology Since 1453*; Dollinger’s four-volume *History of the Christian Church* (1840); and the multi-volume set, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, by Tierney, Farr, and others.

Nevertheless, the outstanding worth of the library is the section consisting of works on the Greek text of the New Testament. These include works by Burgon, Conybeare, Hills, Hort, Hoskier, Kenyon, Lake, Metzger, Miller, Scrivener, Tischendorf, and Westcott. I mention F. Chase’s *The Syriac Element in the Codex Bezae* (1893) and F. Scrivener’s two volumes, *Criticism of the New Testament* (1894).

There are a number of books on the English Bible and its history.

### **Antiquarian Books**

The library contains a goodly number of antiquarian and rare books. I mention some of them, in no particular order, although pride of place certainly goes to Beza's *New Testament in Greek and Latin* (1580). Antiquarian and rare books include a *Harmony of the Four Gospels in Greek according to the Text of Tischendorf*; two volumes by Hoskier, *Concerning the Genesis of the Versions of the New Testament* and *New and Complete Edition of the Latin Gospel Codex (USSER.2)*; R. P. Richardo Simone, *Historia Critica Veteris Testamenti* (1581); William Sherlock, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1691); Daniel Whitby's two volumes, *Commentary on the New Testament* (1718); A. Alexander, *The Canon of the Old Testament and New Testament Ascertained* (1855); H. Hammond's *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the New Testament* (1671); and F. Turretin's *Institutes* in Latin, dating from 1688.

In addition, there are many journals and copies of articles and books that are hard to access.

Not least, the library contains many files containing the research, notes, unpublished articles, and outlines of projects of Dr. Letis. In time to come, these will prove valuable to young scholars who may give themselves to the unfinished work of Burgon, Hills, and Letis.

### **Odd Volumes**

Every library contains the odd volumes. Letis' library is no exception. One book is titled, *Old Edinburgh Taverns*. There is no section of the library of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary into which this book can be put. Perhaps some Scot will read this article and make an offer for the book.

There are numerous books by feminists and about feminism. No doubt, we can sell these books for a good price to many Protestant, and even Reformed, seminaries today. These are all the seminaries teaching women to become ministers, teaching all the students that women may and should become officebearers in the churches,

and advocating voting by women at the congregational meetings of the congregations. Otherwise, these books go into the dumpster.

### **Work with the Greek Text**

The faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary have recommended to the Theological School Committee, the committee of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches that governs the seminary on behalf of synod, that the books and other materials on the Greek text of the New Testament, with the seminary library's current holdings on the subject, become a special, separate part of the seminary library. This would enable and encourage our own professors and students, but also scholars in other churches who have an interest in and concern for the subject, to pursue their study of the authentic Greek text of inspired Scripture at our library.

It is hoped that a professor or seminarian will find this section of the library of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary useful in his special study and defense of the "Ecclesiastical," or "Traditional," "Text"—the Greek text of the New Testament of the Authorized Version.

"Bring...the books...[and] the parchments" (II Tim. 4:13).

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## Book Reviews

*The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from All the Psalms*, by Richard P. Belcher, Jr. Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd., 2006. 288 pp. £11.99; US \$19.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Every truly Reformed preacher will appreciate the thesis of this book and Belcher's effort at demonstrating it.

Every true Christian who understands that the Scriptures reveal Christ, and who studies the Scriptures to see what they reveal of Christ, will also benefit from reading this book.

In Belcher's own words, the "basic thesis of this book is that all the psalms, either directly or indirectly, relate to the person and/or work of Christ" (p. 195).

In chapter 3, Belcher argues his thesis on the basis of Jesus' own words in Luke 24:26-27, 44-47. To the two disciples traveling to Emmaus, and later to the eleven, Jesus indicated that the Old Testament Scriptures point to Him. In verse 44 He explicitly states that the psalms speak of Him. It follows that when preaching from the psalms, the preacher is obligated to preach Christ.

Belcher's point is clear enough with regard to the di-

rectly messianic psalms. Yet a preacher who is influenced by higher critical scholarship can go astray in understanding and preaching the psalms. In chapter 2, Belcher points out the weaknesses of various approaches that do not proceed from the principle that the psalms reveal Christ.

Belcher concretely demonstrates his thesis in chapters 4-9 by examining various psalms. He divides the psalms into two basic categories—indirect messianic psalms and direct messianic psalms. The former group he subdivides into three categories—psalms of orientation, which give expression to the happiness of the psalmist as he enjoys life with God (chapter 4); psalms of disorientation, which speak of the suffering and death that is a consequence of life apart from God (chapter 5); and psalms of new orientation, which express gratitude for blessings restored after a time of crisis (chapter 6). The direct messianic psalms he treats in two chapters—the roy-

al psalms (chapter 7) and those psalms considered to be more directly messianic (chapter 8).

In each of these chapters, Belcher gives the general characteristic of that category of psalm, and lists the psalms that fall into that category. Then he takes a more in-depth look at representative psalms from each category—analyzing the psalm’s structure, making pertinent remarks as to the occasion of its writing, dealing with key exegetical issues in the psalm, and commenting extensively on how the psalm relates to the person and work of Christ.

The book’s conclusion (chapter 9) is essentially an overview of the whole book—the argument in a nutshell.

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Belcher’s thesis is, of course, correct. The book is recommended for preachers, partly because it holds before us the need to preach Christ from all the Scriptures.

His treatment of the various psalms is theologically sound and helpful to a true understanding of them.

Commendable features of this book include Belcher’s commitment to the historical/grammatical/spiritual method

of exegesis—although he does not actually use that term. He finds fault with other methods of exegesis, including the historical/critical, literary/critical, and historical/grammatical methods (chapter 2). Regarding the latter, it should be noted that Belcher certainly encourages the exegete to understand the psalm’s historical context and to study its grammar; but his criticism is that this method does not require the exegete to find Christ in every psalm. Add to this the “spiritual” aspect (properly understood), and the exegete will find the true meaning of any psalm.

Another commendable feature, following from the first, is Belcher’s understanding of the unity of the Old and New Testaments. To understand how a psalm reveals Christ, one must know the complete revelation of God in the Scriptures and pay particularly close attention to New Testament quotes of the psalms, with any notable changes in wording. As an example, Belcher directs the reader to grapple with the fact that Psalm 68:18 says “thou hast received gifts for men,” while Ephesians 4:8 quotes it as “he gave gifts unto men.”

Belcher is a Reformed covenantal theologian. For him, to understand the person and work of Christ as revealed in the psalms helps one to understand the doctrine of God's covenant. In his brief expositions of various psalms, he relates their teachings to the covenant.

One might wonder if this proper insistence on preaching Christ from the psalms comes at a cost—the cost of preaching the psalms experientially. Not so. Belcher sets forth the need to do that too—in fact, at times one can preach Christ from a psalm only when first one has understood the experience that the psalmist is relating.

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To group the psalms into categories is helpful for understanding the psalter as a whole; yet not all psalms fit nicely into categories. Perhaps this is why Belcher includes over 120 psalms in the categories he has created, but makes no reference to the others. Certainly the exegete can himself apply the approach of Belcher's book to those others, but this reader wishes some broad statement could be said about them as well, or at least a reason be given why they are overlooked.

Throughout the book, Belcher suggests that we think of the psalms as prayers of Christ. This is helpful. Clearly, Christ uttered the prayers recorded in Psalm 22:1 and Psalm 31:5. The exegete does well to ask in what way the experience of the psalmist was the experience of Christ Himself, and in that connection, whether Christ prayed the prayer that the psalmist prayed.

But I take exception to the way in which Belcher applies this to the penitential psalms. As an example, Belcher says in treating Psalm 51:

How can Jesus, who is without sin (Heb. 4:15), pray this psalm of confession? Jesus can pray Psalm 51 as our representative and priest before God.... Because Jesus is our substitute and takes our place it is appropriate for him to confess our sins as he bears them in his sacrificial death. In being 'answerable for our guilt' Christ vicariously confessed and repented in our behalf (p. 87).

The question is not whether Psalm 51 reveals Christ, and whether Christ must be preached from the psalm; the question is whether this can be

called a prayer of Christ as our high priest. I say not. It might be a different matter if David were confessing the sins of Israel, and interceding on her behalf. But in Psalm 51 David makes personal supplication for the mercies of God, acknowledging the sinful deeds he had committed in his own person. Christ prays for us as high priest, but is not guilty of any actual sin. Furthermore, in Psalm 51:5 David traces his sin to its source in his sinful nature: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This, certainly, Christ cannot say, even as our high priest.

The way to preach Christ in the penitential psalms is not that of putting these prayers in Christ's mouth in the first person singular or plural. Rather, it is

first to demonstrate that the basis for the psalmist's prayer was the atoning death of the Messiah who would come. Consciously the psalmist based his petitions on God's promise to send the Messiah, and on the work that the Messiah would do, as typified by the temple ceremonies (Ps. 51:16-19). Second, the way to preach Christ in the penitential psalms is to note that the request for forgiveness and for all God's mercies indicate that the psalmist himself was an object of grace; his heart was renewed by God's grace; and Christ dwelt in him by a true and living faith.

This being my only substantial criticism of Belcher's book, I highly recommend it to any who desire help in knowing how to find Christ in the Psalms. ■



*A Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, by John F. Brug. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005. Pp. 671. \$43.50 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-0-8100-1691-5. [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

*A Commentary on Psalms 73-150*, by John F. Brug. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005. Pp. 520. \$41.50 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-0-8100-1711-3. [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

The author of this two-volume set of commentaries on the book of Psalms is Dr. John Brug, Professor of Systematic Theology and Old Testament at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Dr. Brug's commentary on Psalms stands in the tradition of conservative Lutheran scholarship. That is certainly a praiseworthy feature of the commentary. One will not find in it higher-critical views of Scripture, but instead a commitment to Scripture's divine, infallible, verbal inspiration. Neither will one find in the commentary a mass of scholarly minutiae assembled to impress the reader, but which is altogether unedifying to the church and the individual believer. There is a glut of such commentaries on the religious book market today. Instead the reader will be gladdened to discover careful exegesis and application of the original text of Psalms that aims to build up the people of God. From the outset, Dr.

Brug expresses the purpose of his commentary: "Less detailed and technical than the major academic commentaries on Psalms, this commentary focuses on the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew text as the foundation for a pastor's teaching and preaching on Psalms" (p. 7).

One of the most commendable features of the commentary is the detailed "Introduction" to the book of Psalms that makes up nearly the first one hundred pages of volume one. In this introduction, Dr. Brug covers a wide range of topics, such as: the nature of the book of Psalms, different types of Psalms, the headings of the Psalms, the writing of the Psalms, Davidic authorship of many of the Psalms, the collection and arrangement of the Psalms, the canonicity of the Psalms, the poetry of the Psalms, distinctive features of the grammar and vocabulary of the Psalms, the music of the Psalms, and the history of the Psalms.

The introduction concludes with a very worthwhile treatment of “Luther and the Psalms.” I cannot refrain from including some of the quotations from Luther on the book of Psalms that Dr. Brug cites in this section of his introduction.

Every Christian ought to know the Psalms as well as he knows his five fingers. Then the four evangelists will also be understood properly.

What is the Psalter but prayer and praise to God, that is, a book of hymns? ... In this book the dear Holy Spirit supplies us with words and thoughts for our prayers and petitions to our heavenly Father.

The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchriridion or handbook.

Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanks-

giving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant gardens, yes, as into heaven itself. There you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of fair and happy thoughts toward God, because of his blessings. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath of God! So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for your fear or hope, and no Cicero or other orator so portray them.

The Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself or find or wish for anything better. In a word, if you would see the holy Christian Church painted in living color and

shape, comprehended in one little picture, then take up the Psalter. There you have a fine, bright mirror that will show you what Christendom is.

In this part of the introduction, Dr. Brug also recounts the role that the book of Psalms played in Luther's rediscovery of the gospel, as well as in the Reformation more broadly. Luther earned the Doctor of Theology degree from the University of Wittenberg on October 19, 1512. Shortly thereafter, he was called upon to lecture in the university on Holy Scripture. He commenced his task by preparing a series of lectures on the book of Psalms. Many scholars contend that it was in the course of preparing these lectures that Luther came to understand the evangelical meaning of the term "righteousness." Later he indicated that as he worked through the first thirty psalms, he regarded "the righteousness of God" as God's punitive righteousness, according to which he punishes the guilty sinner. But when he came to Psalm 31:1 and David's prayer, "Deliver me in thy righteousness," he became convinced that God's righteousness must have

another meaning. When Luther eventually turned his attention to Paul's epistle to the Romans and focused especially on Romans 1:16, 17, it became clear to him that the righteousness of God is the justifying righteousness of God that is imputed to sinners through faith in Jesus Christ. It was Luther's study of the book of Psalms that played a critical role in his arriving at a proper understanding of the gospel, and played a critical role, therefore, in restoring the truth of the gospel to the church.

One special class of psalms is the imprecatory psalms. The imprecatory psalms contain curses over the wicked and prayers for God's judgment on the psalmist's enemies. Psalm 137:8, 9 serves as an example of an imprecatory psalm: "O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." Many higher critics dismiss the imprecatory psalms as remnants of a less-developed stage of religion that through the process of time has evolved and that the contemporary church has outgrown. They claim that such prayers and

desires are no longer proper for New Testament believers. This is decidedly not the position that Dr. Brug assumes in his commentary. Rather, he defends the imprecatory psalms and their place in the canon of the Old Testament.

These curses are part of God's inspired Word. It is true that Scripture sometimes reports improper statements made by believers in moments of distress. For example, not all of the statements made by Job and his friends in the book of Job were proper. However, the curses in the psalms do not fall into this category, because Scripture itself shows that they were proper prayers (p. 22).

Dr. Brug goes on to point out that if the believer and church today cannot pray the prayers of the imprecatory psalms, there is something seriously amiss. He also suggests some reasons for the neglect of the imprecatory psalms in the contemporary church. Among those reasons, he includes the following:

Perhaps another reason for the comparative neglect of the imprecatory psalms in

the modern, Western church is that we have by and large led a pampered, sheltered existence. We have experienced freedom from persecution unprecedented in the history of the church. It is hard to pray imprecatory prayers from padded pews. If we had seen God's temple burned to the ground and its priests slaughtered by Babylonian soldiers, if we had seen our loved ones dragged away to face a horrible death before lions and a savage crowd in the arena, if our Bibles had been burned, our churches demolished, and our pastors sent to a frozen death in a faraway gulag, perhaps then our hearts would be one with the saints who pray, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:10) (p. 27).

As far as the format of the commentary is concerned, each section begins with the Hebrew text that is explained in that section, followed by Dr. Brug's own literal translation. In this connection, Dr. Brug's suggestion should be noted that "[t]hose who use [the commentary] are encouraged to translate and study

the Hebrew text on their own before turning to the commentary” (p. 7). That is a very worthwhile reminder to preachers for the use of all commentaries. Following the translation is a section entitled “Translation Notes.” This section includes identification of forms and grammatical constructions, as well as key word studies. Often the more significant word studies are highlighted and are set apart from the body of the text. After the “Translation Notes” and word studies comes the main part of the interpretation of each text under the heading, “Application.”

This commentary on Psalms is written from a conservative, evangelical viewpoint. Dr. Brug offers careful explana-

tion of the text, coupled with insightful applications. Although directed to pastors, the commentary will also be very useful to anyone interested in the message of the book of Psalms, whether as a part of individual Bible study or group Bible study. Seminary professors who teach the book of Psalms and exegesis classes that deal with texts from the Psalms will benefit from the commentary, as will also seminary students who are studying this important genre of Old Testament literature.

The two volumes can be purchased on-line directly from the publisher, Northwestern Publishing House, at their home page. ■

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***Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical***, by Robert Duncan Culver. Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications (Mentor), 2005. Pp. xviii + 1258. \$49.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

Published when its author was 88 years old, this new systematic theology is the fruit of a lifelong teaching and preaching career. It is clearly Dr. Robert Culver’s magnum opus. The volume is billed as a systematic theology “in the classic evangelical

and Reformed stream of Christian understanding.... Within the group of recent conservative systematic theologies this one stands high as a demonstration of the biblical rationality of the Reformed faith” (J. I. Packer, slip jacket). In many respects

the book lives up to this billing. Additionally, it is clearly written and well organized, making it a pleasure to read. A praiseworthy feature of his *Systematic Theology* is that Dr. Culver takes a traditional approach to the study of dogmatics, dividing the main subjects of systematic theology into seven loci: theology, anthropology, hamartiology, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. His treatment of the topics subsumed under each of these main loci is, for the most part, thoroughgoing and stimulating. The book is nicely formatted, with the sections within chapters marked off by bold-faced headings. Even though the type font is small and the pages are filled top to bottom and margin to margin, the book is very readable.

What adds to the value of Dr. Culver's *Systematic Theology* is that besides being a textbook of systematic theology, it is also a historical theology. This, to a large extent, accounts for the bulk of the volume. The main doctrines of the Christian faith are consistently treated in the context of their historical development, with many references to sources from the early church, the medieval church, the Ref-

ormation and post-Reformation periods. Thus the student of theology is grounded in the Christian tradition.

Along the way, Dr. Culver interacts with various theological traditions: Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic. Luther and Calvin, Melancthon and Turretin are often quoted. The views and insights of various Reformed, Presbyterian, and Calvinistic Baptist theologians are frequently referenced: Bavinck, Berkhof, Berkouwer, Boettner, Buswell, Dabney, Gill, the Hodges, Machen, Owen, Shedd, Strong, Thornwell, Vos, Warfield, to name some. Dr. Culver takes on the liberal and neo-orthodox theologians, the likes of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Niebuhr, Pannenberg, Schleiermacher, Thieliicke, and Tillich. And he interacts with more contemporary theologians, such as Bloesch, Clark, Erickson, Geisler, Hendriksen, Jewett, Metzger, Morris, Murray, Packer, Reymond, Sproul, Stott, and Zuck. The breadth of Dr. Culver's citations and references adds considerably to the value of his *Systematic Theology*.

In many respects, Dr. Culver presents a conservative,

evangelical theology, buttressed by solid biblical exegesis. From the outset, he defends the study of systematic theology itself and the endeavor of the theologian to systematize the biblical revelation. This comes out in his description of systematic theology and the task of the theologian.

When what the church teaches is announced as it emerges portion by portion from the Bible the discourse is properly called exposition. The process of exploring the texts and bringing out the meaning in preparation for exposition is exegesis. Particular teachings are doctrines. These doctrines are believed and confessed regularly by Christians in their gatherings for worship, in classes and groups as well as privately to their neighbours. When these doctrines are organized into some logically coherent arrangement there is systematic theology. As shall become evident, *systematic theology* is more than logical arrangement of biblical doctrines, but it must not ever be less if it is rightly to claim the title, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*.... Sustained study of doctrines of the Word of God cannot avoid organized,

coherent arrangement of the doctrines, nor should it.... If new believers are to be instructed, false doctrines exposed, described and corrected, and if the teachings of the Bible are to be seen in their wholeness, then something not in the written book called the Bible but written in human nature must be brought to it. We call it orderly arrangement or system (p. 5).

Dr. Culver goes on to promote the study of systematic theology in the academy setting, defending at the same time an educated ministry. He convincingly argues that ministers must be prepared for their work in the church by formal theological training, training that thoroughly grounds them in systematic theology (pp. 8ff.).

Fundamental to the viewpoint of any dogmatics is its author's view of Holy Scripture. Dr. Culver affirms the classic Christian view of the Bible. He assures his readers of his orthodox view of Scripture before he takes up any of the other topics of systematic theology. "[T]he Bible is the only source of theology, and judges all the proposed findings of the other resources..." (p. xvi). He adds, "I endorse ple-

nary, verbal inspiration, i.e., the words of Scripture though in human language and written freely by men are also fully the words of God. The words of Scripture, not merely the ideas, are God's words, without error in original documents, true and of divine authority" (p. xvi). And he asserts the sufficiency of Scripture: "In the present time, long after the close of the ages of revelation, our only access to those words [of God] is the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament, the source of our theology" (p. xv). In this connection, it is plain that Dr. Culver has a high regard for the King James translation of the Bible. Although he does not quote from the A.V. exclusively, he does frequently.

Accompanying his high view of Scripture is Dr. Culver's appreciation for the confessional heritage of the church, and particularly the Reformed confessions. The creeds are not snubbed in the theological enterprise, but are consulted and appreciated. Sprinkled liberally throughout his *Systematic Theology* are many creedal references, particularly references to the Westminster Standards and the Heidelberg Catechism. This

is commendable. Too much contemporary theologizing divorces itself from the confessions.

As for the content of his *Systematic Theology*, Dr. Culver's treatment of theology is sound, emphasizing classic Christian trinitarianism, along with the Calvinistic emphasis on the sovereignty of God. His treatment of anthropology and hamartiology is also quite sound. He insists on the solidarity of the race in Adam, and thus the consequences of his fall for all mankind (original sin), although he stresses the organic connection of the race to Adam, not his federal (representative) headship. His treatment of christology is basically sound as well, including a vigorous defense of the virgin birth and the vicarious, substitutionary character of the atonement. His treatment of soteriology is solid, including an emphasis on the traditional understanding of the *ordo salutis*, with all of salvation grounded in eternal election. In this connection, Dr. Culver rejects the Arminian conception of election based on foreknowledge. His treatment of ecclesiology, in the main, also follows the historic Calvinistic line. However, his treatment of eschatology, although biblical



in certain respects, seriously diverges in other important ways. Dr. Culver's significant aberration is his advocacy of historic (not dispensational) premillennialism. Prior to his treatment of eschatology, he gives a number of indications of his premillennial leanings, particularly in his treatment of the relation of the New Testament church to Old Testament Israel. But it is in his section on eschatology where, as one would expect, he develops his premillennial conception of the last things.

And that brings me to the negative criticisms of Dr. Culver's *Systematic Theology*. As I indicated at the beginning of this review, Dr. Culver's dogmatics is hailed by some as being in the "classic evangelical and Reformed stream of Christian understanding...." This assessment, however, is not completely accurate in certain significant respects. It is confessionally Reformed to insist on sovereign predestination, double predestination, including both election and reprobation. Dr. Culver is soft on reprobation, scarcely mentioning it, let alone thoroughly discussing it. It is confessionally Reformed to maintain a literal creation account.

Dr. Culver makes allowances for theistic evolution. He argues that "[i]nsistence that the six days of creation in Genesis 1 must be interpreted as six literal, twenty-four hour days as we know days and nights, evenings and mornings, has not by any means been characteristic of all the great teachers or of the church of the past" (p. 162). And he goes on to attempt "to convince the reluctant reader that God's word of creation does not necessarily mean immediate, instantaneous creation" (p. 162). It is confessionally Reformed to view the doctrines of Scripture from the perspective of the covenant. Reformed theologians are covenant theologians. Dr. Culver rejects the effort to construe all the doctrines of Scripture in relation to the overarching doctrine of the covenant, and faults Reformed theologians who have attempted to do this. He is critical of the fact that "early in the scholastic age of Protestant theology, the covenant idea became pervasively imbedded in Protestant creeds and theologies especially of the Reformed" (p. 295). His judgment is that although "[t]here is great merit to the framework of covenant in many loci of theology... [y]et I think we do well to

think of God's purposes for mankind in paradise and in His eternal counsels under other biblical categories" (p. 296). It is confessionally Reformed to maintain infant baptism. But Dr. Culver's commitment to infant baptism is half-hearted and his defense of the practice is weak, to say the least. He agrees with Francois Wendel, whose judgment was that "infant baptism was useful to the church and for the piety of the faithful, while frankly acknowledging that one cannot find an acceptable basis for it in Scripture" (p. 987). It is confessionally Reformed to maintain that the order and government of the church is prescribed in Scripture. Dr. Culver maintains that "[t]he New Testament provides no specific command or teaching providing details of how the Christian ἐκκλησία should be governed" (p. 939). It is confessionally Reformed to be amillennial. Dr. Culver is an avowed premillennialist. The result is that although Dr. Culver's *Systematic Theology* is in the main Reformed, it is not consistently so. This is both a drawback and a disappointment.

One other negative criticism. In one place Dr. Culver cites the Protestant Reformed

theologian Herman Hoeksema. Unfortunately, he misreads and misunderstands Hoeksema in the reference that he makes to him. In this particular section of his *Systematic Theology*, Dr. Culver expresses his disagreement with the view that describes Adam's relation to God in paradise in terms of a covenant of works. We appreciate his difficulties with the teaching of a covenant of works. However, it is at this point that he makes reference to Hoeksema's treatment of this subject in *The Triple Knowledge*:

Some of those who prefer the 'covenant of works' framework do acknowledge that the Genesis record does not present the subject of God's purposes in and for mankind in the framework of a covenant. Herman Hoeksema has no direct comment at all on the last half of Answer 6 [of the Heidelberg Catechism], rather a long chapter on a so-called Covenant of Works, of which the Catechism says nothing. He admits the Covenant of Works framework to be an innovation of post-Reformation scholastic theology, making no effort to trace the innovation back to the prime Reformers (p. 296).

Herman Hoeksema did not prefer the covenant of works framework, nor did he reluctantly acknowledge that the Genesis record does not speak of a covenant of works, as is the implication of Dr. Culver's remarks. In fact Hoeksema argued vigorously against the doctrine of the covenant of works. He contended that it had no biblical basis and that it was an imposition and aberration that must be expunged from Reformed theology. This misreading of Hoeksema ought to be corrected in any future republication of Dr. Culver's *Systematic Theology*.

Notwithstanding these negative criticisms, Reformed ministers, professors, and seminary students are encouraged to add this new systematic theology to their libraries. For the size

of the volume, it is reasonably priced. It contains a wealth of information and gathers under one cover an array of resources. The value of the book is enhanced by an extensive bibliography, Scripture index, and general subject index.

Dr. Robert Culver is now retired. Before retirement he held professorships at Grace Theological Seminary (Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew), Wheaton College and Graduate School (Associate Professor of Bible and Theology), and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Professor and Chairman of Theology). He has also served as a special or visiting lecturer at theological schools in Canada and the United States, Jordan, Hong Kong, France, the Netherlands, and Argentina. ■

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***The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources***, by Nicolaas H. Gootjes. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. Pp. 229. \$29.99 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-8010-3235-6. [Reviewed by Ronald L. Cammenga.]

The Belgic Confession is one of three gem stones in the confessional crown of Reformed churches around the world. Published in 1561, it is the oldest and

arguably the most comprehensive of the Three Forms of Unity. Unique features set it apart from the Heidelberg Catechism, published in 1563, and the Can-

ons of Dordrecht, published in 1618-1619: its breadth, covering all the main doctrines of the Reformed faith; its polemic not only against Roman Catholicism, but also against Anabaptism; its comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of Holy Scripture; its extensive development of the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity and humanity of Christ; its penetrating consideration of the offices and marks of the true church, including the responsibility of the Christian to belong to the instituted church in the world; its teaching concerning the civil magistracy, pointing out both the calling of government and the Christian's duty towards the government.

More than any other confession, the Belgic Confession is peculiarly the heritage of the Dutch Reformed churches, written as it was out of the experience of Reformed believers in the Lowlands in the troubling days of the sixteenth century. These were days of persecution, severe persecution, for Reformed believers in the Lowlands. These were the days of the Inquisition, the days of the rule of the ruthless Roman Catholic tyrant Philip II and his cold-blooded general, the Duke of Alva. The church histo-

rian Philip Schaff writes of this period:

The number of Protestants who were executed by the Spaniards in a single province and a single reign, far exceeded that of the primitive martyrs in the space of three centuries, and of the Roman empire.... The number of Protestant martyrs in Holland under one reign was one hundred thousand" (*Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, p. 503).

Guido de Brès, the author of the Belgic Confession, was an itinerant Reformed minister of the Reformed churches in the Lowlands during these days. De Brès often preached secretly for fear of the authorities. More than once he was forced to flee for his life, and often he was just a step ahead of his enemies, who were intent on his apprehension. Finally, in 1567, de Brès and his co-laborer, Peregrin de la Grange, were captured as they were fleeing the city of Valenciennes in what is now northern France. On May 30, 1567, at the age of forty-seven, de Brès suffered martyrdom by hanging. His body was burned and his ashes scattered over the waters of the Schelde River. The faith

to which he gave expression in the Belgic Confession of Faith was not only the faith by which he lived; it was also the faith for which he died. The Belgic Confession is a martyr's confession, and all who embrace the faith therein confessed must be willing to make the same sacrifice. This history emphasizes that the Reformed confessions are not to be regarded as cold, objective statements of dogma. Rather they endear themselves to us as the living and warm confession of God's people amidst the struggles of the church militant.

Dr. Gootjes shows that, from the beginning, de Brès intended his confession to be, not merely a personal confession of faith, but a corporate confession of faith, the confession of the Reformed churches of the Lowlands. Before he published his confession, de Brès submitted the confession to a number of other ministers for their suggestions for change and improvement. When the Belgic Confession was finally published in the autumn of 1561, its original title was: "Confession of Faith. Made with one accord for the faithful wandering in the Low Countries who desire to live according to the purity of the Gos-

pel of our Lord Jesus Christ." From the time of its initial publication, the Belgic Confession was the confession not just of an individual, but of the Reformed churches. Still today, what the Reformed churches regard as the fundamentals of the faith are expressed in the Belgic Confession of Faith. Reformed churches who no longer embrace the doctrines articulated in the Belgic Confession of Faith, show by that very fact that they have departed from the Reformed faith.

We are indebted to Dr. Gootjes for the first comprehensive study of the history and sources of the Belgic Confession in the English language. Given the age and cherished place that this confession has had in Reformed churches over the centuries, it is surprising that this is so. But until now, no such thorough treatment of the background of this creed has been available in English. This book ably fills the void.

In the book, Dr. Gootjes treats such subjects as: the early history of the Belgic Confession; de Brès' authorship of the Confession; the influence of Calvin and Beza on the formulation of the creed; the authority of the Belgic Confession in the Dutch

Reformed churches specifically, beginning already with the Synod of Antwerp in 1565; the revision of the Confession in 1566; the role of the Belgic Confession in the Arminian controversy; and the various translations of the Confession.

The value of *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* is enhanced by two noteworthy features. First, the book is enhanced by its extensive documentation. Besides the careful documentation in the body of the text, Dr. Gootjes provides the reader with a wealth of information in the many footnotes that supplement the text. The information in the footnotes indicates many possibilities for further study on a number of topics related to the Belgic Confession. Second, the value of the book is enhanced by an extensive bibliography. The bibliography identifies sources related to the Belgic Confession that will be helpful to any serious student of the Belgic Confession interested in further study.

One suggestion for improving the usefulness of the book would be an English translation of the ten foreign language

documents that are included as appendices. The book is directed to an English-speaking audience. If the appendices were translated into English, this target audience would be better served.

*The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* is part of the series *Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought*, published by Baker Academic, edited by Dr. Richard A. Muller of Calvin Theological Seminary. We are indebted to Dr. Gootjes for this latest addition to the volumes published in this series. The book is highly recommended to every Reformed pastor who references the Belgic Confession in his teaching and writing, as well as every Reformed seminary student concerned to learn the background and history of this Reformed creed. And although written for a more scholarly audience, the informed layman can read this volume with great profit.

Dr. Nicolaas H. Gootjes is Professor of Dogmatics at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. ■

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***Redeemed With Judgment: Sermons on Isaiah (Vol. 1)***, by Homer C. Hoeksema. Jenison, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association. Pp xviii-446. \$32.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-916206-97-0. [Reviewed by William A. Langerak.]

Few sermons should be published. Not even great sermons should readily find their way into book form. It is not an issue of quality. Even poor sermons have been used by the Lord to sustain His church in this dry and thirsty land. The problem is that they are...sermons. And, like a sermon that is read when it is delivered, there simply is something about putting it into print afterwards that seems to transform that lively, life-giving feast into mere leftovers. There are, of course, exceptions. I believe this book is one of them.

*Redeemed With Judgment* consists of 49 sermons on the first 39 chapters of Isaiah—the title comes from the thematic third sermon on chapter 1:27. It is the first volume of some 125 sermons that Homer C. Hoeksema preached on Isaiah over a period of thirty years, mostly in Protestant Reformed churches, while Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the denominational seminary, a position he was appointed to in 1959. It would be wrong to say these sermons were

his legacy. However, due to their quality, popularity, incredible number of people and churches who heard them, and regularity with which he preached them, Hoeksema and his sermons on Isaiah were inseparably identified. Publishing them was not his choice. Rather, HCH (as familiarly known to distinguish him from his father and denominational patriarch, Herman or HH) had wanted to write a commentary on Isaiah, but his death in 1989 prevented it.

Putting these sermons into print has been a long process—tape recordings had to be procured literally from one end of the United States to the other, transcribed, and then meticulously edited. Much of this work was done capably by his son, Mark Hoeksema, who also provided the preface, introduction, and helpful editorial comments. I cannot speak to what has been lost in the transformation of these sermons from spoken to written word, since I was just a boy when they were preached. I do remember that when HCH came

to fill in at our church, which was frequently during one extended period between ministers, we could always expect to hear a rousing Isaiah sermon by this man with a gnarly voice, wavy white hair, and hand that shook as he wiped his brow (I was also fairly convinced it was how Isaiah looked, albeit with sandals and a robe). But, regardless of the extent to which any liveliness of preaching may have been dulled by publication, this book of sermons has considerable value.

First, each sermon is a model of Reformed expository preaching (particularly on both prophetic and historical passages) that current or future Reformed ministers, and elders as overseers, could study profitably. They are the fruit of decades of dedicated toil by a gifted, thoroughly Reformed theologian, and avid student of Old Testament history at the height of his exegetical and theological powers. Throughout, HCH uses the time-tested method of thematic homiletics, whereby the main theme of each text is determined, then developed by arranging the material under two or three related thoughts. The sermons are masterpieces of sound exegesis,

especially considering the many difficult texts that are tackled. Concisely and systematically, he breaks down the various components of each text, treats all the main thoughts, defines important or difficult words and concepts, shows the various textual connections and relationships, explains the meaning in light of the historical and theological context, and applies it spiritually to the covenant people today in understandable language and vivid illustrations as required.

Second, this volume would be a profitable commentary to supplement the study of Isaiah, or even a devotional for officebearers and lay-people alike to read daily, one sermon at a time. Even though each sermon concentrates upon the main verse(s) of any particular passage, the other verses are usually brought in and explained contextually. The result is a rather complete exposition of each chapter, which if lacking any usefulness of a detailed commentary on every phrase, has the benefit of making perfectly plain the main thought in each chapter to the people of God, without clutter and jargon.

It is a distinctively Reformed commentary that will



build up the believer in sound doctrine. Such commentaries on Isaiah are rare. Rarer still are those that faithfully examine the prophecy from an amillennial and covenantal perspective, which Hoeksema does. Where applicable, which is often in this eschatologically important prophecy, he weighs in against pre- and post-millennial error, and instead points out the rich, blessed fulfillment of the prophecies in the establishment of Christ's spiritual kingdom in the New Testament church and new creation. As regards the covenant, he remonstrates against the conditional contract view, and demonstrates its failure to explain adequately the historical reality without being Arminian. Valuable is Hoeksema's consistent application instead, of the covenant as an everlasting, unconditional bond of friendship God graciously establishes with His chosen in Jesus Christ. Also prominent throughout is his development of the organic idea of the covenant, i.e., the distinction between physical and spiritual Israel, or as Paul put it in Romans 9:6-8, between those of *Israel (children of the flesh)* and *Israel (children of the promise)*, elected by God in eternity, and

with whom He establishes and maintains His covenant by separating and redeeming them with judgment.

If anyone imagines that because they are thoroughly doctrinal these sermons are dry and abstract, he would be mistaken. Though now simply words on paper that lack the dynamism of the living voice, they always speak to the heart, and at times are moving. For one, the doctrines themselves are precious. In his expositions, the absolute sovereignty, righteousness, justice, and holiness of God are exalted, His gracious salvation praised, His everlasting covenant extolled, while man is brought low to repentance and sorrow of heart. The sermons are also intensely practical. Any suggestion should be dispelled that since he preached election, irresistible grace, justification without works, and an unconditional covenant, therefore Hoeksema was an antinomian who refused to preach the demands of the law. The admonitions are brought, they are contemporary, sharp, and pointed. He had a gift, not only for faithfully interpreting the historical context and doctrinal instruction, but also for applying it to the life and culture

of today's church in a way that even little boys could understand and thus become men. Thus, the believing reader, as Israel of old, is brought in each sermon before

God Himself, the cross of Jesus Christ, built up spiritually in the faith, and also redeemed by judgment. ■

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***Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought***, ed. W. Andrew Hoffercker. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2007. Pp. xvi + 424. \$34 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

A “worldview,” according to this ambitious, learned, and helpful book, is “a comprehensive, unifying perspective in terms of which we interpret the cosmos and live our lives” (xii).

The book examines the prevailing worldview of ten more or less distinct periods of Western civilization and culture. It begins with the worldview of the Greeks and concludes with that of the modernists and post-modernists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The title speaks of “revolutions” because of the profound changes of worldview from epoch to epoch.

The purpose of the volume is to provide upper-level undergraduates and graduate students “a Christian framework for all that they [have] learned” before they conclude their studies (xii). The purpose is a worthy

one. A Reformed seminary might well include a course in worldview the last semester of the final year of every seminarian. This book would serve well as one of the texts for the course.

The book follows up on two earlier books on worldview edited by Hoffercker and Gary Scott Smith, *Building a Christian World View*, volumes one and two. *The Protestant Reformed Theological Journal (PRTJ)*, which has had a lively interest in the Christian worldview for a long time, reviewed both of these earlier volumes. The review of volume one is found in the *PRTJ* 22, no. 1 (November, 1988): 55-62. The review of volume two is found in the *PRTJ* 23, no. 1 (November, 1989): 48-50.

Overall, *Revolutions in Worldview* gives a thorough, pointed description of the mind and spirit of the age of each of

the epochs covered. It traces the development of basic aspects of worldview from period to period, as well as indicating the radical changes. The book also critiques the various worldviews from the perspective of the Christian faith.

Scott Amos rightly contrasts the worldview of the Reformation with the worldviews both of the Renaissance and of the medieval church. The worldview of the Reformation was God-centered, proclaiming the “power, majesty, and holiness of God.” The mind of the Renaissance, in contrast, “with its highly optimistic view of human ability,” was man-centered. The medieval church was also man-centered by virtue of its esteem of the reason of the natural man, its doctrine of free will, and its embrace of Greek philosophy (207). In an earlier chapter, “Christianity from the Early Fathers to Charlemagne,” Richard C. Gamble had demonstrated that “the idea of free will entered into Christian doctrine [in Pelagianism and Arminianism] by the apologist’s [Justin’s] marriage of Greek philosophy and Christianity” (108).

Andrew Hofferger points out that the heart of Kant’s

philosophy was the “autonomy of human reason,” which was fundamental to the worldview of the Enlightenment (265).

In the last chapter, “Philosophy among the Ruins: The Twentieth Century and Beyond,” Michael W. Payne analyzes and illuminates the murky minds of modernism and postmodernism, including Wittgenstein’s language philosophy. Postmodern man has given up on objective reality altogether. One’s own thinking and feeling are all. Payne ends his analysis, and the book, this way:

The Christian worldview provides such a philosophy of “fact” and “interpretation”—a place where subject and object can dwell without falling prey to the idolatry that results from pursuing one extreme or the other. We live in a world created by God, and he knows his world exhaustively. Within God’s creation, we can know truthfully without knowing exhaustively. We can pursue meaning, truth, and value, with humility, in a way that honors the Creator of all meaning, truth, and value.... The Christian worldview is not one option among a plethora of options, each of

which will satisfy the human need for clarity and truth. The Christian worldview is true. As such, it makes the world intelligible and reveals the many half-truths in the aberrant worldviews with which it competes (356).

Making the book a delight, as well as instructive, are the many fascinating quotations of the framers of worldview down the ages. Chrysostom demanded a fearless church discipline of impenitent sinners, of which many evangelical and Reformed churches today know nothing. The church father's call for discipline explains why—why discipline, and why the evangelical ignorance of this mark of a true church.

Though a captain, or a governor, nay, even one adorned with the imperial crown approach the table of the Lord unworthily, prevent him; you have greater authority than he.... Beware lest you excite the Lord to wrath, and give a sword instead of food. In addition, if a new Judas should approach the communion, prevent him. Fear God, not man. If you fear man, he will treat you with scorn; if you fear God, you will ap-

pear venerable even to men (132).

The mind of the skeptical Scot, David Hume, was not only unbelieving. It was also strange. It preferred books of mathematics over books of theology.

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion (250).

Nietzsche defined truth this way:

Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people (350).

This is a madman's con-

voluted way of expressing what Pilate was affirming in the question to Jesus—the truth: “What is truth?” It is a raving rebel’s way of putting philosophically what the serpent hissed: “Yea, hath God said?”

The weakness of the book is its failure to propose the one Christian worldview based on Scripture as the inspired word of God and effected by the gospel and Spirit of Jesus Christ. This should have been the concluding chapter. There is repeated reference to the Christian worldview. But there is no thorough, careful description of it. This is a serious weakness, especially in a book that intends to send Christian graduates, armed with the Christian worldview, into a hostile world.

What are the fundamental elements of the Christian worldview in all epochs? What is the place of the Bible in this worldview, and what is this Bible? What is the power that frames the Christian worldview, and then moves a man or a woman to live it? Exactly how does Jesus Christ figure into the Christian—the *Christian*, not merely “godly”—worldview? Is the law of God basic to the Christian worldview? What rela-

tion do the Christian worldview and those whose earthly lives are controlled by this worldview sustain and maintain to the other worldviews and those who live according to them? What is the truly Christian “culture” that results from the Christian worldview? And might the Christian worldview demand Christian education—good Christian schools from kindergarten through university?

Believing that it is better to light a candle, no matter how feeble its light, than to curse the darkness, the present reviewer has made an attempt to describe the Christian, indeed the *Reformed* Christian, worldview with respect to its fundamental elements. The description appeared as the article, “The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture,” in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (April 2005): 2-46. It was published as a booklet under the same title by the Faith Protestant Reformed Evangelism Society, 7194 - 20th Ave., Jenison, MI 49428.

*Revolutions in Worldview* does recommend the distinctively “Reformed worldview.” But its description of the Reformed worldview as viewing

“all reality in terms of the majesty and lordship of God and his redemptive purposes” is hopelessly vague and far, far too brief (xiii).

In view of the authors’ commitment to the Reformed worldview it is nothing less than astonishing that there is only the briefest mention of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. The cultural program of the two Dutch theologians receives no treatment at all. Indeed, *Revolutions in Worldview* has to be the only contemporary evangelical

and Reformed work devoted to worldview that, so far as I could tell, does not even mention “common grace,” much less make this spurious grace of God—rather than Jesus Christ—the heart and soul, the ground and goal, the be-all and end-all of a Christian worldview. This is another reason for an enthusiastic recommendation of the book.

There is a helpful glossary of all the terms and names that loom large in the discussion of worldview. ■

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***B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought***, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson. P&R Publishers, 2007. Pp. xv+265. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

In an introduction by Mark A. Noll, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921), professor in Princeton Seminary from 1887 to his death, is introduced to the readers of this fine volume with the words:

As one of the last great expositors of orthodox and classical Calvinism in the modern world, B. B. Warfield faced a double burden. It was obvious in nearly all his work that he was trying to present the doctrines of sovereign grace and gra-

cious sovereignty with faithfulness to the traditions of high Calvinist theology that he had learned at Princeton Theological Seminary from Charles Hodge and, even in his own household through the influence of his grandfather, Robert Breckinridge. But it was also obvious that Warfield was trying to articulate those doctrines as exactly what his contemporaries needed for both a proper foundation of Christian piety and a proper framework of Christian thinking.

On page 4, Mark Noll adds:

He was, in the strictest sense of the terms, a polemical and a conserving theologian. Despite comprehensive learning, he never attempted a full theological statement, primarily because he found Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* generally satisfactory for himself and his students. Because he was content with the positions of the Westminster Confessional and Catechism, he devoted an enormous amount of patient writing to explicating traditional Calvinism....

And a bit later, Noll introduces what is to become an important part of the book.

...He gave himself wholeheartedly to Princeton's deeply ingrained commitment to theology as a scientific task (with "science" defined in conventional terms). In so doing, he thus shared fully in Princeton's equally long-standing confidence in a philosophy of common-sense.

Many of the book's essays rotate around the subject of

the influence of common sense philosophy in Warfield's writings.

Warfield lived during a crucial period in the history of Presbyterianism in America. Although his birth predates the Civil War, his work was performed after the conclusion of the War, which had brought about the split between Northern and Southern Presbyterianism. Further, in the years prior to Warfield's work, the Presbyterian Church had been split between Old School and New School Presbyterianism, had developed separately for a while, and then had reunited. The history had created tensions in the church. In general, the differences between Old School and New School Presbyterianism centered in the traditional and conservative wing of the church represented by the Old School and the more liberal and evangelical yearnings of the New School that struggled to make Presbyterianism more adapted to American mores.

The first essay in the book, written by Bradley J. Gundlach, demonstrates the influence that Robert Jefferson Breckenridge, Warfield's maternal grandfather, had on Warfield. RJB was a man one would like

to meet and get to know better. He fought for old-school polity and doctrine in the 1880s, felt betrayed by Princeton (Charles Hodge included), and left an indelible impression on his grandson. The chapter opens the door to the times: to an understanding of the old-school/new-school rivalry, to the importance of the great Thornwell/Miller debates over the character of the office of elder, and to many internal struggles in early Presbyterianism.

The debate over the question of the influence of common sense philosophy on Princeton theologians in general and on Warfield in particular has long been a subject of disagreement; it occupies a major part of this book.

Common sense philosophy originated in Scotland in the eighteenth century and claimed as its chief proponent Thomas Reid. It taught, briefly, that the ordinary ideas people adopted about the world around them were true and belonged to the common sense and reason of mankind. "Common sense" was true to reality and put the uneducated on a par with the philosopher. It was rather widely believed to be true, especially because people in general were

weary of the esoteric and obscure reasonings of many who called themselves philosophers. This philosophical system had influence on early American political theory, and, it cannot be doubted, some influence on the theologians of Princeton Theological School. Whether the influence was good or bad is debated in this book. The issue centered in the question whether the influence of common sense philosophy made Princeton's theologians rationalists. After all, commitment to common sense realism was a commitment to a rationalistic philosophy.

Paul Kjos Helseth argues in chapter 2 that the charge of rationalism brought against the Princeton theologians is false. He argues this on the basis of the fact that "the soul [is] a single unit that acts in all its functions... as a single substance" (56), and therefore "the Princeton theologians were not cold, calculating rationalists whose confidence in the mind led them to ignore the import of the subjective and the centrality of experience in religious epistemology" (56).

But this defense of Helseth is hardly the point. The point is rather: Did the Princeton theologians, because of their



commitment to common sense philosophy, establish truth on the basis of reason?

There is some evidence in the same chapter that indeed the Princeton theologians did establish truth on rational grounds. Nor did they mean by this simply that the truth is not irrational—as some theologians of a later time asserted.<sup>1</sup> According to Helseth himself, the Princeton theologians taught that all men have faith, although only the elect have saving faith. The “faith” that all men possess is an intellectual belief in the truth that God has revealed in the creation (62, 63). “If it is indeed true that ‘no man exists, or ever has existed or ever will exist, who has not faith...’—and the author insists that this is Warfield’s position (along with the other Princeton theologians). Warfield argued this faith in the unregenerate produced a true knowledge of God, even though it was seriously flawed. He appealed to Augustine as teaching the same thing, and to Calvin’s doctrine of *sensus divinitatis* (knowledge of the divine) as an example. Common sense philosophy held that all men and any

man could know truth simply on the basis of his sense perceptions of the world about him and his innate common sense. Princeton theologians called this universal knowledge of the truth held by all men “faith” that was acquired through general revelation.

Warfield did not put sufficient emphasis on Paul’s statement in Romans 1:16: “They hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness.” Rather, Warfield believed that “supernatural revelation... ‘supplements’ and ‘completes’ the truth manifested in general revelation” (66). Warfield’s position is, therefore, characterized as follows.

While Warfield acknowledged that rational arguments can of themselves produce nothing more than ‘historical faith,’” he nonetheless insisted that “historical faith” is “of no little use in the world” because what the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not to work “a ready-made faith, rooted in nothing and clinging without reason to its object,” but “to give to a faith which naturally grows out of the proper grounds of faith, that peculiar quality which makes it saving faith” (75).

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Van Til, for example, who taught in Westminster in the nineteenth century.

Raymond D. Cannata,

in his chapter entitled “Warfield and the Doctrine of Scripture,” writes:

Because Warfield, a classic common sense realist, held to certain universal features of rationality shared by all humans, he believed that evidences were a useful and legitimate preparation for the special grace of the gift of faith (103).

But then he adds:

But he was also a solid “high” Calvinist, so for him this never meant that one could *rationaly compel* anyone to faith or *prove* that the Bible is the Word of God. But he did believe that evidences could and should be mustered as secondary causes, under God’s supervision, to illustrate that the Bible is trustworthy, and thus prepare the way for the gracious miracle of saving faith (103).

Other statements from Warfield quoted in the book substantiate this. In Chapter 5, Helseth writes, partially quoting Warfield, “Christians must have an attitude ‘of eager hospitality toward the researches of the world.’ Warfield argued, not so

that they can determine when a reconstruction of religious thinking is in order, but so they can ‘*reason* [emphasis in the book] the world into acceptance of the truth’” (118). And use was made of such statements as: Because the believer “can thread his way through the labyrinths of the world’s thought..., he will build up the temple of truth, whence-soever he quarries the stones” (112). Or, “Christians must have an attitude ‘of eager hospitality toward the researches of the world’” (118).

It is quite obvious that the question of the relation between truth as discovered by unregenerate men and the truth of the Scriptures is important for Apologetics. One whole chapter is devoted to this problem. In the course of it, Helseth writes:

When Warfield’s solution to the problem of the relationship between Christianity and culture is seen in this light, it becomes clear that assimilating modern learning to Christian truth does not merely sustain the task of apologetics; it *constitutes* [emphasis belongs to the author] the task of apologetics. We must conclude, therefore, that the “men of

the palingenesis [regenerated men] ought to engage in the life of the mind not to argue the unregenerate into the kingdom of God, but to establish the integrity of “the Christian view of the world” by urging their stronger and purer thought [note the comparative language: Christian truth is only comparatively stronger and purer than truth found in the world. It is a matter of degree] continuously, and in all its details, upon the attention of men.” In so doing, they bring the “thinking world” into subjection to the gospel of Christ, and *thereby lay the groundwork for the Spirit to work saving faith where he sovereignly chooses, that is, to “give to a faith which naturally grows out of the proper grounds of faith, that peculiar quality which makes it saving faith”* [emphasis mine] (121, 122).

What then is the conclusion of the matter? First, the Princeton theologians were not, strictly speaking, rationalists, if by rationalism is meant that the truth of Scripture was grounded in reason rather than the Word of God. However, second, man’s reason was given a remarkable role in discovering truth, a role

that reminds us of later defenders of common grace. Following closely in the path laid out by the Princeton theologians, advocates of common grace found an operation of common grace in the unregenerate, which enabled the wicked to know God in God’s general revelation and set forth truth in some limited way.<sup>2</sup> This ability to know the truth through God’s grace is preparatory for the reception of saving grace.

So the Princeton theologians understood that “truth” could be found in unregenerate men. Such a view underlies Charles Hodge’s repeated appeal to the universality of fundamental truths of Scripture, such as, for example, the immortality of the soul. Hodge claimed that even the darkest heathen has a sense of the truth that the soul is immortal.

The Princeton theologians perhaps never argued a truth of Scripture on the basis of

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, although many examples can be found, William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Com., 1953). Herman Bavinck even uses much the same language in his *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 44-60.

unregenerated reason, but they did make this truth, possessed of all men, a preparatory truth, paving the way for the acceptance of biblical truth. In this way the antithesis is seriously breached. The antithesis is not only between good and evil moral conduct; it is also between the truth and the lie. It is an absolute antithesis. The truth can be known only through the wonder of regeneration; all knowledge of the wicked is the lie.

There is implicit in the thinking of the Princeton theologians a rejection of the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:16, to which I have already alluded. Paul points out that the wrath of God is upon the wicked because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. To suppress the truth means, of course, that they know something about the truth. They cannot help but know something about it, because God shows it to them through the things that are made. He manifests it in (note the preposition) them. And God does that in order that the wicked may be without excuse. They suppress that truth and thus not only drive it from their consciousness, but flatly deny it. In fact, they do worse. Consciously and deliberately, they change the

glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man. This is a far cry from accepting, believing, and promoting truth in such a way that it is preparatory to faith in the truth of Scripture.

Furthermore, Princeton theologians maintained that truth found in the minds of unbelievers can be and ought to be used by believers as corroborating evidence of the truth of Scripture. It is this crack in the door that has led the Princeton theologians to accept the possibility of some sort of theistic evolution. Warfield already, and Machen following him, did not want to talk about this subject very much, because, as they put it, the question of evolutionism belongs to science. But if truth can be found in the science of wicked men, the door is open to evolutionary theory to help explain the creation truth of Scripture. Such reasoning may not be rationalism, but it is about as close to rationalism as one can get.

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Other subjects are also discussed in the book. Two chapters are devoted to Warfield's doctrine of inspiration. It has been alleged that Warfield's commitment to common sense

realism determined his view of inspiration and inerrancy. That is, in full awareness that Warfield held to a high Calvinism in his doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, those who attack this doctrine claim Warfield's promotion of it was rationalistic because it was rooted in common sense realistic philosophy.

Moises Silva, in a chapter with the title *Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy*, points out that there can be found in the writings of the Princeton divines some very interesting quotes that would lead one to suppose that their view of inerrancy left much to be desired. Silva offers two quotes from A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield's book *Inspiration*.<sup>3</sup> They are as follows, as quoted by Silva:

It is not merely in the matter of verbal expression or literary composition that the personal idiosyncrasies of each author are freely manifested..., but the very substance of what they write is evidently for the most part the product of their own mental and spiritual activities.... [Each

author of Scripture] gave evidence of his own special limitations of knowledge and mental power, and of his personal defects as well as of his powers (77).

And again:

[The Scriptures] are written in human languages, whose words, inflections, constructions and idioms bear everywhere indelible traces of error. The record itself furnishes evidence that the writers were in large measure dependent for their knowledge upon sources and methods in themselves fallible, and that their personal knowledge and judgments were in many matters hesitating and defective, or even wrong (77).

Yet, I think Silva is correct when he calls what is taught concerning biblical "inaccuracies" in these quotations "nuances." He later calls attention to the fact that Warfield distinguished "between official teaching and personal opinion" (79).

[Such a distinction] seems, in general, a reasonable one. No one is likely to assert infallibility for the apostles in aught else than in their official

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<sup>3</sup> The quotes are from the book *Inspiration*, originally published in 1881, but reprinted by Baker Book House in 1979.

teaching. And whatever they may be shown to have held apart from their official teaching, may readily be looked upon with only that respect which we certainly must accord to the opinions of men of such exceptional intellectual and spiritual insight.... A presumption may be held to lie also that [Paul] shared the ordinary opinions of his day in certain matters lying outside the scope of his teachings, as, for example, with reference to the form of the earth, or its relation to the sun; and it is not inconceivable that the form of his language, when incidentally adverting to such matters, might occasionally play into the hands of such a presumption (79, 80).

The more current appeal to the sun and the moon standing still at the prayer of Joshua (Josh. 10:12-14) as proof of mistakes in Scripture is effectively answered by Silva, who points out that meteorologists today use the same language, and Scripture is not speaking in the context of lessons in astronomy (100).

Silva in the chapter he wrote and Raymond D. Canata in his chapter, *Warfield and the Doctrine of Scripture*, show convincingly that the Princeton

theologians were faithful to the Westminster Confession in their doctrine of Scripture. There is no evidence that their view was in anyway affected by their commitment to common sense realism.

At the same time, however, some of their seemingly ambiguous writings can be ascribed, in my judgment, to the Princeton men's reliance on the distinction between a human factor and a divine factor in inspiration (sometimes called a distinction between the human author and the divine Author). They can hardly be faulted for this, since that distinction was commonly held by Reformed and Presbyterian theologians who were concerned about maintaining the truth that the men who were the different instruments of inspiration were men who revealed in their writings different gifts, abilities, and personalities, as well as the fact that they lived in different eras in the world's history. The distinction, however, is not found in Scripture, has opened the door to many attacks on Scripture, and ought to be abandoned.

\* \* \* \*

Three other teachings of the Princeton theologians in general, and Warfield in particular, can be briefly mentioned.

In Chapter 7, Stephen J. Nichols discusses the pressing question of whether Warfield was a Fundamentalist. Nichols grants that Warfield did agree with Fundamentalism in some respects, but that he differed sharply from Fundamentalism in its premillennial doctrines, its dispensationalism, and its evolutionism (174). Concerning the latter, Nichols writes:

While not agreeing with social Darwinism, both Warfield and Machen to differing degrees accepted biological evolution, seeing it not in conflict with the biblical account of creation or with creedal and orthodox Christianity (174).<sup>4</sup>

I agree with those who assert that Warfield's rejection of the Arminianism of Fundamentalism is connected to (probably as the cause of) Warfield's rejection of Revivalism and "Holiness Teaching" and his lack of respect for confessions (175, 176).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this, as well as on other aspects of Princeton Theology, see *The Princeton Theology: 1812-1921*, edited and compiled by Mark A. Noll (Baker Book House, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Nichols turns the relation

Second, Chapter 8, written by Gary L. W. Johnson, deals with the fascinating subject of the controversy between B. B. Warfield and Charles Augustus Briggs. Briggs was without doubt a heretic and was largely responsible for bringing liberalism into the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the church of the Princeton theologians. He rejected Warfield's views on inerrancy, a rejection that was the heart of the controversy. He accused the Princeton theologians for not being "scholarly" (203, 204). This latter charge is interesting, because Briggs based his charge on the fact that in their doctrine of Scripture the Princeton theologians did not follow their own commitment to "truly scientific methods" (200). On the grounds of truly scientific methods, Briggs repudiated the doctrine of inerrancy; but, sad to say, the lack of discipline that finally brought down the PCUS made it possible for Briggs to stay in the church. From one point of view, Briggs was right. Princeton had committed itself to scientific examination of the Scriptures and

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around and claims that Warfield's rejection of Revivalism was the cause of his rejection of Arminianism (175). But this is doubtful.



its truth. That Princeton limited sharply what it meant by “scientific,” while Briggs stretched the term to its limits, does not alter the cogency of Briggs’ criticism.

In a sharp section of the book, Gary Johnson castigates Peter Enns, presently professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, for teaching the same ideas as Briggs taught in the days of Warfield (224-234). The conclusion is obvious that as the failure to discipline Briggs brought down the PCUS, so the failure to discipline Enns will have the same effect on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Finally, Johnson points out, strikingly, that Briggs’ view of justification was much the same as the view of Norman Shepherd and those who hold to the Federal Vision. He writes:

...Briggs also held a very peculiar view on justification that bears, in some ways, a striking resemblance to what is today being advocated in the so-called “New Perspective on Paul.” Part of the controversy, especially among those evangelicals who identify with

the Reformers’ understanding of *sola fide*, is that the New Perspective advocates categorically claim that the Reformers were wrong on this issue. Justification, as argued by N.T. Wright, for example, is twofold: *initial* (by faith through grace) and *final* or eschatological (by maintaining covenantal fidelity). This has also manifested itself in the teachings of Norman Shepherd and in the representatives of what is called the Federal Vision who want to define “faith” as “faithful obedience.” Briggs, as previously stated, found the Westminster divines’ emphasis on the covenant of works “too scholastic.” He also rejected the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s active and passive obedience, something we find frequently in the followers of Norman Shepherd in the Federal Vision (234, 235).

*B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought* is fascinating reading, gives insights into Princetonian Presbyterianism, and is made relevant to controversies creating havoc in today’s Presbyterian and Reformed churches. ■



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***Christianity and its Competitors: the New Faces of Old Heresy***, by James McGoldrick. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006. Pp. 206. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Dr. James McGoldrick, professor of church history in Greenville Presbyterian Seminary, has written a book in which he is concerned to demonstrate that modern heresies are really nothing new, but are adaptations of ancient heresies. Although it is a short book for such a meaty subject, the author is generally successful.

The ancient Ebionite heresy, an offshoot of Judaism, he characterizes as legalism and finds such legalism today in “the rigidly controlled rituals of Russian Orthodoxy” (22, 23), the legalism found in the development of Roman Catholic hierarchy, the Pelagianism of the Roman Catholic Church, and the legalism of fundamentalism of more recent times (29, 30). It might be that the point is stretched here a bit.

Montanism was also an ancient heresy, to which the great church father Tertullian committed himself in later life. Its chief characteristic was its doctrine of ongoing revelation. McGoldrick finds this heresy reappearing in Roman Catholicism, with its doctrine of the infallibility of papal doctrine, and in mod-

ern Pentecostalism. He mentions specifically Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, Jim Jones, David Koresh (of the Waco, Texas debacle), Marshall Applewaite (the leader of a group who committed suicide to catch a spaceship attached to the Hall-Bopp comet), modern evangelicals who speak of doing something under divine guidance (“the Spirit put it into my heart to do so and so”), Mormons, and Christian Scientists.

The author’s emphasis on the supreme authority of Scripture as revelation is refreshing and sorely needed in our day.

Arianism, the rationalistic and humanistic denial of the divinity of Christ, reappears, in the author’s judgment, in all forms of modern Rationalism and Socinianism, although the treatment here is short.

McGoldrick’s treatment of Augustine and his battle with Pelagianism is worth the price of the book. He correctly assesses the decisions of the Council of Orange (529). Frequently these decisions are characterized as a victory of Augustinianism. They were not. They were compro-

mises that opened the door to Roman Catholic Pelagianism. McGoldrick points out as well that Rome's recent attempts to sound evangelical are nothing but deception, for Rome has not abandoned its fundamental denial of sovereign grace (131ff.). Arminianism in the Lowlands and in England, resulting in the Synod of Dordt and the Westminster Assembly, is also treated under more modern heresies that have their roots in Pelagianism. And an extensive treatment of Baptist history points out that also within the ranks of Baptist

theology the battle between orthodoxy and Arminianism was fought out. A very brief history of Wesleyanism and Methodism is also included in this section.

Modernism and Humanism are correctly said to be rooted in Pelagianism, for Pelagianism in all its forms ends in Modernism and Humanism. He is right: Arminianism is incipient Modernism.

The book ends with two chapters on the sole authority of Scripture, one of which chapters is written by the Baptist Geoffrey Thomas. ■

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***Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets,*** by Christopher R. Seitz. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. Pp. 264. \$22.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

The key word in the subtitle is "toward." Do not pick up this book thinking that it is a new introduction to the prophets. In the book, Seitz points out the deficiencies of recent introductions to the prophets, and argues what such a work should include.

In part one, "The Overreach of History—Figuring the Prophets Out," Seitz argues that Christian expositors prior to the 1800s generally focused on the prophet's message and its mean-

ing for God's people throughout history. In the last two centuries, that focus has changed: more emphasis is placed on the prophet himself and his message for his immediate audience, at the expense of its meaning for the church today. Seitz's contention is that scholars should return to examining the message of the prophets not only in light of their own history, but also as God's Word to us today.

This trend that Seitz

notes is in fact the effect of a higher critical approach to examining and introducing the prophets. This approach questions, and at times doubts, whether the prophet was indeed the person we think him to be (is not Isaiah's prophecy really the work of two, or even three, different men?). Scholars used higher critical methods to argue that the prophets lived and prophesied at different times than previously thought. That some prophets say substantially the same thing as others indicates that they knew each other, and heard each other's prophecies; the one quotes the other.

Seitz notes that this approach fails to emphasize—in fact, it undermines—that the prophets spoke by inspiration. Second, it overlooks any New Testament fulfillment and relevance of the prophetic word. To find this fulfillment and relevance is really the main burden of the exegete; the investigation of the man, the times in which he prophesied, and his original audience, must serve to help answer this main question. Third, it does not reckon with the order in which the prophecies are included in the canon of Scripture. Seitz's point is not that those

who write introductions to the prophets must treat the prophecies in sequential order, but that such authors must still wrestle with the question why the prophecies are included in the canon in a certain order.

Part two, "Time in Association—Reading the Twelve," is Seitz's attempt to point us to the right way to introduce the prophets, dealing more particularly with the Minor Prophets. First, he includes a chapter (6) in which he speaks both appreciatively and critically of the efforts of Gerhard von Rad to help us understand the prophets. In chapter 7 he gives his explanation of why the Minor Prophets appear in the Scriptures in the order in which they do. In chapter 8 he treats the exegetical and hermeneutical implications of his approach.

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When I realized that the book was not an introduction to prophecy, but advocated a new approach to such, I read it in the hope of learning something new and valuable. It would not take much to teach me something new in this field; I have never evaluated at any length, nor read evaluations of, the approaches to introductions to prophecy. But what, really, did I learn?

I learned that Seitz sets forth a plausible thesis. Certainly any pastor who believes in divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and who believes that His Word as found in the prophetic books are profitable for us in every respect (II Tim. 3:16f.), can appreciate that he must study and expound the prophets in the conviction that their message is relevant to us today. This was not new to me; but the book reinforced this. This reinforcement was, for me, the value and the one positive benefit of reading this book.

I also learned that to gain that one positive benefit took hard work. I was well through the book before I really had a grasp of what Seitz was trying to say. Partly this is because he kept telling the reader what he was trying to say, what he was hoping to show, and what his point for the moment was, without being all too clear about any of it. So I was never quite sure if he had yet told me what he was trying to say, or if I had to keep reading to find out. To his credit, I finally found some pages in which it was set out clearly enough for me—pages 150-151 and 214-216 particularly.

I learned that I would prefer to read an introduction to the prophets, especially one that proceeds from the viewpoint that Seitz suggests to be correct, rather than read a book that is “toward” a new introduction.

And I learned the more to appreciate book reviewing. At times, the book reviewer gets to savor a feast well before the general public, and the general public is told where to find good food, in the form of a book. Other times a book reviewer has to wade his way through something that he thinks will be of little interest to his audience, and is of little interest to himself, so that he can tell others not to bother reading a particular book. The latter is the case here.

I am not saying that the book is worthless. But unless you are interested in a scholarly investigation into the methodology of writing introductions to the prophets, the book will probably be of no interest to you. Yet its main value you can still appreciate: when preaching on or reading the prophets, ask what God is telling us today, through men who lived and prophesied long ago. ■

*The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spears*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio. Phillipsburg: New Jersey: P&R, 2007. Pp. xxi + 309. \$22.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The book consists of essays by prominent Reformed and Presbyterian theologians on various aspects of the Reformed faith and life in honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spears upon his retirement as professor of systematic theology at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA.

### **Christian and Political Liberty**

In his essay on Christian liberty, D. G. Hart contends that the spiritual freedom of the gospel of grace does not translate into the political aspirations of “neo-Calvinism,” that is, the common grace agenda of the social and political Kuiperians; the theonomists; and the transformation-of-culture program of H. Richard Niebuhr. “The attempt to calculate the progress of the gospel by its temporal or earthly successes [is] to confuse two realms fundamentally distinct” (294). Hart’s challenge, on the basis of the Westminster Confession, to what he calls “the transformationist view that now dominates Reformed Christianity in

North America” is as welcome—and necessary—as it is rare. Challenging the neo-Calvinistic, common grace project of Christianizing North America and the world, Hart can now expect to be dismissed as an “Anabaptist.”

### **Atonement**

Richard C. Gamble gives a historical study of the doctrine of the atonement in the Presbyterian tradition from the Westminster Assembly to John Murray.

### **Covenant**

Against those who contend that the doctrine of the covenant of the Westminster Confession of Faith represents a departure from Calvin, Anthony T. Selvaggio argues that Westminster’s doctrine of the covenant is a genuine development of Calvin’s theology. Although aware of the attack on the system of doctrine of the Westminster Standards by the men of the Federal Vision (Selvaggio is the one contributor who mentions the “Federal Vision”) as the implication of their doctrine of the cov-

enant, Selvaggio says not a word in condemnation of that heresy, nor utters one word in defense of sovereign grace in the covenant against the attack.

### **Sabbath**

Presbyterian Rowland S. Ward stumbles out of the gate in explaining the Lord's Day. He questions the historicity of the six days of the creation week, limited, as historical days are, by one evening and one morning. Thus, he questions the historicity of the whole of Genesis 1, the content of which is historical days. If the six days of the creation week are historically doubtful, so also is the seventh day of Genesis 2 doubtful (to say nothing of the doubt cast on the doctrine of inspiration by this questioning of Scripture's account of the days). But a historical seventh day is the basis of the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day, as it was the basis of the Sabbath of Israel.

Yet even if one does not understand the creation days to be of the same length as our solar days, it is agreed by all that the narrative of God's creation week aims to provide a pattern for human activity (194).

A mere "frame-work hy-

pothesis," literary pattern kind of day did not ground the Sabbath of the fourth commandment of Old Testament. A historical, real day did: "for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:11). Only the dike of a commandment grounded in a real day will hold back the tide of Sabbath desecration now swelling against the walls of all our churches.

Ward is also in error in his claim that, among the Reformed creeds, "only Westminster is explicit that the Lord's Day has a sabbatic character in line with the fourth commandment" (192). In Lord's Day 38, the Heidelberg Catechism identifies the New Testament "day of rest" (German: *Feiertag*), which for the Catechism is unquestionably the first day of the week, as the Sabbath referred to in the fourth commandment.

### **Logic**

C. J. Williams gives a sound, timely defense of logical reasoning in theology. The defense arises from the line in the Westminster Confession of Faith, "or by good and necessary

consequence may be deduced from scripture” (1.6). Williams calls attention to the fundamental issue, with appeal to George Gillespie: “God is entirely consistent with himself” (176). Demonstrating that regard for and use of logic in theology are not the (unfortunate, if not reprehensible) innovation of John Calvin, the Synod of Dordt, or Herman Hoeksema (as passes for shrewd analysis in the Reformed community today), Williams quotes Augustine:

The science of reasoning is of very great service in searching into and unraveling all sorts of questions that come up in Scripture.... The validity of logical sequences is not a thing devised by men, but it is observed and noted by them that they may be able to learn and teach it; for it exists eternally in the reason of things, and has its origin with God (180).

What Williams does not tell us is how the rightful deduction of the whole counsel of God from Scripture by good and necessary consequence is to be harmonized with the high praise and enthusiastic practice of “paradox,” that is, sheer con-

tradition, by many Reformed and Presbyterian theologians today, including some of the writers with Williams of *The Faith Once Delivered*. I wonder, in fact, whether Williams too shouts down the deduction from Scripture’s doctrines of predestination—election and reprobation—and particular, sovereign grace, that God is not gracious in the preaching of the gospel to all hearers, desirous of saving all, as “rationalism,” “scholasticism,” and “hyper-Calvinism.”

### **Christ’s Kingship and the State**

Treating the controversial subject of the relation of Christ as mediatorial king and earthly nations, particularly in the theology of the Scottish Presbyterians—the “Covenanters”—and those influenced by them, David McKay comes to the startling conclusion that “by the twentieth century, Rutherford’s ‘heart and soule of Popery’ had become one of the foundational principles of the churches tracing an unbroken line of descent from him and his fellow Covenanters” (169). McKay refers to the fact that Samuel Rutherford insisted that “the Magistrate as a Magistrate is not the Deputie of Jesus

Christ as Mediator” and declared that the contrary doctrine is “the heart and soule of Popery.” Contemporary Reformed and Presbyterian churches that claim to carry on the tradition of the old Covenanters such as Rutherford, however, affirm that the magistrates are and must view themselves as deputies of Christ the messianic king, submitting to “His mediatorial authority.” “Thus,” writes McKay, “what was once derided as ‘Popery’ has become a defining and distinctive principle of contemporary Covenanters” (136).

### **Double Justification**

R. Scott Clark demonstrates that all the Reformers taught the close relation between justification and sanctification, without confusing these two benefits of salvation. The occasion of Clark’s essay is the charge by modern scholars, including Presbyterian and Reformed theologians, that Calvin differed from Luther in teaching justification by union with Christ, involving sanctification, rather than justification by faith alone. In a footnote, Clark refers to the Presbyterian president of Westminster Seminary, Peter A. Lillback, as one who maintains that Calvin

“held a different doctrine of justification from Luther” (128).

### **Adoption and Assurance**

In an article purporting to show the comfort of Puritan theology, particularly by its doctrine of adoption, Joel R. Beeke in fact exposes the theology of the Puritans, in any case the theology of the Puritans presented in the article, as destructive of the comfort of the believer. Puritan theology made, and makes, the assurance of adoption and salvation impossible, except for a privileged few in God’s family.

Some taught “preparatory grace,” which, in addition to being a heretical doctrine—resistible grace! grace preparing the sinner for salvation that is highly resistible!—confused many church members their life long, whether the grace they experienced was the grace of salvation, or mere “preparatory grace” that left them unsaved, un-adopted, and quite lost.

In addition, the Puritans created an unbelievable category of believers and children of God who, although they on their part “have a childlike love for God,” must live in doubt whether God on His part loves them (83). To this, the spontaneous, indignant



Reformed response is that this god is a worse father than any earthly Christian father with even a modicum of the grace of the Holy Spirit to fulfill his fatherly calling. We earthly fathers, weak as the best of us are, to a man at least assure our children, from day one, by word and deed, that we love them. The god of this Puritan theology could take a lesson from us earthly fathers.

Beeke promotes and defends the typical Puritan doctrine of two classes of believing children of God: the usually small class of specially favored, mostly old children, who have assurance, and the generally large class of second-rate children, who live a long time, sometimes all their wretched life, doubting.

The grievous error in Puritan theology was, and is, its denial that faith is assurance, as well as knowledge, so that even the smallest faith, as a grain of mustard seed, let us say, in the newest convert or youngest covenant child, is assurance of pardon, adoption, the love of God, and everlasting salvation. The Heidelberg Catechism establishes the truth that faith is assurance in Question and Answer 21: "True faith is not only a certain knowledge...*but also an assured*

*confidence...that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."*

Basic to the Puritan error is the fatal doctrine that obtaining the assurance of adoption and, therefore, of salvation, is the work of the sinner himself. Nor were the Puritans averse to portraying the work as heroic spiritual effort over a long period of time. "Years may transpire...before the believer who is adopted by God may know he is adopted" (85). How one lives the Christian life, bears the burdens of life, and endures against Satan, the world, and his own flesh, all the while doubting that God loves him as his heavenly Father, and then for years on end, the Puritans do not tell us. But I can tell the Puritans! These things are utterly impossible without assurance of adoption, the love of God, and salvation. They are hard enough *with* the assurance of adoption.

The Puritan Thomas Manton, who is highly thought of by contemporary disciples of the Puritans, advised the weak, doubting members of his church, "Let us pray ourselves into this relation [of adoption with its as-

surance of God's being one's Father],” ignoring that one who is not assured of God's Fatherhood to him cannot pray. To pray, one must be able to say, “Our Father,” which means also, “My Father.” Perhaps we are able to excuse the Puritan in this matter because he did not have the Heidelberg Catechism as his confession, although he did have the model prayer. But we have a great deal more difficulty excusing the contemporary disciple of the Puritans, who has Questions and Answers 117 and 120 of the Heidelberg Catechism as his creed. Question and Answer 117 teach that one “requisite” of the only prayer that is acceptable to God and that He will hear is that the one who prays is “fully persuaded that He...will for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer.” This is assurance of adoption.

Question and Answer 120 teach that “a childlike reverence for and confidence in God... are the foundation of our prayer, namely, that God is become our Father in Christ.” Where the foundation of prayer is lacking, that is, confidence that God is my Father in Christ, no structure of prayer can be reared up.

Puritanism's dilemma of

doubters praying surfaces today in the execrable preface to their public prayers by disciples of the Puritans, “Let us *try* to pray.”

To belabor the obvious, one who cannot say, “Our Father,” cannot pray.

The Puritan preachers shut believers up to the prospect of *never* receiving assurance of adoption (and salvation) at all. “In fact, since the subjective consciousness of adoption is not essential to eternal life...it is *possible*—though not normative—for a believer to ‘go to heaven without that particular actual assurance, or a particular confidence to address himself to God as his Father’” (85).

How remarkably casually these Puritan preachers, extolled for their “pastoral” sensitivities, shut many believers up to a life of unspeakable torment: doubting whether God is their Father in Christ! living and dying, therefore, in the terror that God hates them and will damn them!

But what if doubt of God's fatherly love expressed in the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ is *sin—grievous* sin?

And what if the reason for this sinful doubt in many was, and is, the Puritan theology and

its preachers, who read God's charge regarding all His dear children in Isaiah 40:1 as though it were, "Distress ye, distress ye, my people, says your God," and were, and are, forever turning the attention of the miserable people upon their own inward experience rather than upon Christ in the gospel, questioning the genuineness of the people's faith, encouraging extraordinary experiences as the ground of assurance, and denying—especially this!—that faith is assurance?

### **Buchanan on Justification**

Carl R. Trueman examines James Buchanan's classic work on justification, *The Doctrine of Justification*. Trueman affirms the fundamental importance of justification by faith alone in Reformed theology. He condemns the effort to drive a wedge between Luther and Calvin on the doctrine.

Any and all attempts to drive a major wedge between the two [confessional Lutheranism and the creedal Reformed faith] on this point, whether as part of a nineteenth-century Tractarian agenda or as part of the tiresome contemporary campaign to find space for explicit or implicit

repudiations of imputation within the Reformed confessional community, are disingenuous at best and without either historical or confessional integrity. Indeed, one might say that as far as the doctrine of justification is concerned, if you are not on the road to Wittenberg and Geneva, then the old proverb is indeed true: all roads lead to Rome (42).

But Trueman is afflicted with the disease of the scholars. This is a deadly disease—deadly to the church. The disease consists of treating false doctrine as merely an academic matter. Afflicted with the scholarly sickness, the Reformed scholar is incapable either of exposing the heretic and his heresy or of sharply condemning them. Even though he himself advertises Buchanan's book on justification as a "tract for the times," presumably the *present* times, in the title of the essay, Trueman never so much as mentions the covenant theology of Norman Shepherd and the Federal (covenant) Vision, which had its origin—and protection—in the very institution at which Trueman is professor of theology—Westminster Theological Seminary—and

which denies justification by faith alone, or the proponents of this false teaching about justification. Indeed, in the entire book, there is only one mention of the Federal (covenant) Vision, now spreading the denial of justification by faith alone throughout the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian community, and this occurs in a passing, non-committal, typically scholarly observation (219).

The title of the book in which Trueman writes, *The Faith Once Delivered*, is taken from Jude 3. The words that immediately precede are, “earnestly contend for” (the faith... once delivered). What follows in Jude is a pitiless exposure of the error *within the churches* and a vehement denunciation of both the error and its teachers.

There is nothing of this in Trueman’s article on justification, although he himself acknowledges the doctrine as fundamental.

Who are they who are “driving a wedge” between the Lutheran and the Reformed doctrine of justification?

Is denial of imputation today by some unnamed theologians merely “tiresome”? Is it not rather wicked, utterly destructive

of the gospel, and an assault on the church of Jesus Christ?

Are there men today who are “tinkering” with justification? Are there professors of theology who are historicizing and relativizing imputation with appeal instead to “union with Christ”? Who are they? In what churches are they ministers? At what prestigious Presbyterian seminaries are they teaching throngs of prospective ministers this fearful doctrine? Which theologians are raising again the very same issues concerning justification that Newman and the other tractarians raised in the nineteenth century, as they fell away from the gospel into the Roman Catholic Church, taking many others with them?

The scholars will never tell us.

They cannot tell us.

They are unable to come down from the lofty, comfortable, and safe heights of their research, historical analysis, and other scholarly pursuits into the dirty and dangerous fray—the fray of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered, the fray on behalf of the gospel of grace, the fray over the welfare and salvation of Jesus Christ’s beloved, blood-bought church.

They suffer from the “malady of the scholars.”

If the gospel is to be defended—and it will be!—and if the church is to be preserved—and she will be!—Christ will use others than the scholars. These are men who not only know the truth, but also love it, so that they are willing to pay the cost of defending it.

### Vital Systematics

The honor of the opening chapter fell to Orthodox Presbyterian theologian Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., evidently the foremost contender in Reformed Christendom today on behalf of the faith once delivered to the saints. Gaffin’s article is oddly titled, “The Vitality of Reformed Systematic Theology.” “Oddly,” because Gaffin damns systematic Reformed theology—creedal Reformed Christianity—with faint praise, while enthusiastically promoting biblical theology. Gaffin laments the “speculative, intellectualistic traces that have marred Reformed systematic theology,” with the penchant that systematic theology has for “proof-texting” (29). A great danger to the Reformed church today is “an overly notional Christianity...a speculative, ex-

cessively cerebral treatment of Christian doctrine” (29).

Gaffin praises Gordon Spykman’s book of biblical doctrine, which is a radical departure from the traditional Reformed dogmatics, not only in method, but also in content. Significantly titled, *Reformational*—not *Reformed*—*Theology*, Spykman’s book of theology “challenges,” not only systematic Reformed theology, but also the Reformed creeds.

What the purpose of the criticism of Reformed systematic theology by the influential Westminster Seminary professor is, the fruits will reveal, and are already revealing. But his chapter in *The Faith Once Delivered* is certainly no stirring, resolute defense of the Reformed creeds and their doctrines, particularly justification by faith alone and the five great doctrines of grace confessed by the Canons of Dort and by the Westminster Confession of Faith, in the face of the all-out attack on the creeds today as “scholastic,” “notional,” and “speculative” by ardent proponents of a “biblical theology” within the very Presbyterian circles where Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. holds forth.

In an “Afterword,” Gaf-

fin informs us that W. Robert Godfrey has taken “decided exception” to Gaffin’s assertion that the theologian may, and indeed ought to, adopt a “sympathetic-critical” stance toward the confessions of the church. In fact, according to Gaffin, this ought to be the Reformed theologian’s “basic stance” (5). Godfrey has reminded Gaffin that “those who have confessed their faith by subscribing a confession are under a moral obligation to uphold that confession.”

Gaffin dismisses Godfrey’s objection as “unsympathetic” and unduly “critical.” Gaffin’s response to Godfrey is an easy, *ad hominem* sidestepping of the issue raised by Godfrey’s objection. This issue is real among Reformed churches today, and deadly serious.

As he himself acknowledges, Gaffin got his “basic stance” toward the Reformed creeds from the Dutch Reformed theologian Klaas Schilder. In the conscious tradition of the “sympathetic-critical” stance toward the Reformed creeds, especially the Canons of Dordt, of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), disciples of Klaas Schilder’s doctrine of a conditional covenant of resist-

ible (saving) grace with all the children of godly parents without exception, Esau as well as Jacob, are openly denying the Reformed doctrine of double predestination—eternal, unconditional election of a definite number unto salvation and equally eternal, unconditional reprobation of the others unto damnation—as authoritatively confessed by the Canons of Dordt. This is the deliberate project of Norman Shepherd and the men of the Federal Vision, as Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. knows better than anyone.

The overthrow of the doctrine of predestination of the Canons is also vigorously prosecuted by theologians in the “liberated” tradition in the Netherlands today, and has been since the very beginning of the “liberation.” This is frankly documented by the “liberated” theologian Erik de Boer, in an article curiously translated and published in the most recent issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, “Unfinished Homework: Charting the Influence of B. Holwerda with Respect to the Doctrine of Election” (*MJT* 18 [2007]: 107-136). With specific reference to the open denial of predestination as confessed by the Canons, de Boer employs the

phrase “sympathetic-critical”: “in sympathetic-critical reflection on the Confession” (131). “Sympathetic-critical reflection” accounts for the attack on the Canons, if it does not justify it.

Let Reformed and Pres-

byterian believers and their children be under no illusion, regardless of their scholars: denial of predestination as confessed by Dordt is the destruction of the “faith once delivered.” ■

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***Missions: The Biblical Motive and Aim***, by John M. L. Young, Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2007 (1962). Pp. x+156. [Reviewed by Barry Gritters.]

1962 is the date of publication of the original ten pamphlets that were combined to make the present publication. This is the first time the ten brochures have been put together under one cover. I am thankful that this has finally happened. Crown and Covenant publishers are to be commended for publishing an older, and Reformed, view of mission. May the work not get lost in the flurry of modern works, but find a place in Reformed seminaries alongside of J.H. Bavinck as one of the standard texts for a beginning missions course. Reformed missionaries will want the book on their list of books to read. Soon.

John M. L. Young was the son of Canadian Presbyterian

missionary parents who served in Korea and Japan. Young was born in Korea on the threshold of the twentieth century and schooled there until college, which he took in Japan. Influenced by talks with Jonathan Goforth, one of the best-known Chinese missionaries, young John aspired to missions from a young age. His lengthy service in the gospel included mission work in Manchuria and other parts of China, a pastorate in the US, the founding of a seminary in Japan, and teaching missions in Covenant College, Tennessee. After he retired from Covenant College, Rev. Young returned to do missions in Japan, where two of his seven children serve as missionaries.

*Missions* is divided into three main sections: The Foundation of Missions, the Confrontation in Missions, and the Destination. One might say: The Basis, the Activity, and the Goal.

Young's definition of missions, from which he develops his principles of missions, is sound.

The work of the triune God, through his church, of sending Christ's ambassadors to all nations to proclaim His whole Word for the salvation of lost men, the establishment of indigenous churches, and the coming of God's kingdom, all for the glory of God (p. 3).

After making what he calls the traditional distinction between missions and evangelism (missions is in lands where the gospel is strange, and evangelism the work of the local church in her vicinity), Young proceeds to the foundational issues in missions.

The Reformed missionary's presuppositions begin with the teaching that man is naturally lost. Because man (the human race) fell in Adam, he lost the image of God, "is at enmity with God...and [is] spiritually dead" (p. 20). Showing his Reformed

and Presbyterian commitments, Young says, "men are not argued into the kingdom of God" they must be "born into it" (p. 24).

But there remain in man rationality, a moral sense, and an ineradicable sense of God. Thus, although natural revelation will never lead the heathen to God, "God consciousness is universally in man." "Paul took advantage of this in Athens when he began his sermon with reference to the unknown God." Therefore, the basic presuppositions of missions include the pagans' God-consciousness: "and so we can speak to them of God." Echoing J.H. Bavinck, Young says, "We do not begin our witness to them in a void, but with the knowledge that God has already spoken to them and is speaking to them" (p. 23).

The second main presupposition is the great power of Christ to save dead sinners. Emphasis in this section includes pointed teaching about God's eternal, gracious election, and the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Young was determined to let election have a prominent place in mission thinking. Repeatedly he turns to the doctrine of election as foundational:



The presupposition of God's election is behind our preaching to spiritually dead men. The doctrine of election, if properly understood, is not a handicap to evangelistic zeal, but rather its stimulus. We preach because we know it is not hopeless. God's elect must hear, and He will save them. The elect are many and exist in all places. Their salvation awaits our coming with the gospel, and it is our responsibility to reach them with it.... (p. 25).

Election preaching belongs on the mission field!

The doctrine of election ought not to be preached to Christians only to comfort and reassure them.... The doctrine of election should be a stimulus to good works and especially to witnessing (p. 25).

For the *commission* of missions, Young treats the question "to whom?" was the commission given, and with great emphasis calls "the officers of the church" to "carry out this missionary commission." This is an emphasis appreciated in our day, when almost all mission work is done by para-church or-

ganizations. "God will sure hold them (the officers of the church) responsible to discharge this responsibility." Although every believer is called to discharge his general offices for Christ by witnessing, praying, and living a Spirit-led holy life, the missionary himself must be an officer of the church who is sent. Others lack the proper supervision and "often incompetence and wasted efforts ensue" (p. 31).

"How many should go?" is a hard question for small denominations where laborers are few and finances limited. Nevertheless, Young is clear: "Going alone is not the biblical example. It has grave defects and limitations. Missionaries need the counsel of fellow ministers and their overall supervision even more on a foreign field than at home. Working alone tends to lead to unorganized and inefficient labor" (pp. 33-35). If Young were writing today, he could have added to his argument opposing missionaries laboring alone.

His second main section, "The Confrontation," treats Communications and Missions, Elencitics, Accommodation and Identification, and the relation between Church and State.

There is a sound exposition of Romans 1 and 10 to teach how faith is worked in God's elect. Then, using the book of Acts, Young lays out the method of teaching and preaching on the mission field. There is strong warning against the temptation of the missionary to promote "easy-believism."

When he explains elenctics ("the refutation of a heathen religion in order to lead an individual to a conviction of his sin against God and to make a confession of Christ his savior," p. 51), Young uses fascinating examples of his experience with Shintoism and Buddhism. Especially here, he reveals his missionary heart and reflects the spirit of the apostle Paul in Romans 9:1-3 and Acts 26:29.

He ends the section on elenctics with an exhortation for special training for the foreign missionary:

The lesson we can learn then from elenctics is that the heathen religions bear out well the truth of God's Word concerning God's revelation of Himself to all men in nature and in man himself. It behooves the missionary of God's special revelation to understand the pagan reli-

gion that he may better be able to expose to the non-Christian his own inner rebellion against the God who has not left Himself without witness to him; praying always that the Holy Spirit will bring the conviction of sin, repentance, and faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that is absolutely essential for salvation (p. 61).

The need for thorough missionary training is given more urgency in the chapter on "Accommodation and Identification." Young defines *accommodation* as unacceptable compromise with the pagan religions, and *identification* as proper living like the people in their daily existence. His helpful motto is, "In religion, separation; in life, identification." The problem for missionaries is sorting out which is which. Young's solution is to lay down good principles by a careful exegesis of Acts 15, I Corinthians 8, and I Corinthians 10.

In this important chapter, Young also offers plenty of practical examples from his own experience and interaction with other missionaries in Asia, and demonstrates how no missionary may enter a foreign culture

without a thorough understanding of its religious history and the relation between its religion and its culture. This Reformed missionary treats the matters of language (translation of words for *God*, *logos* in John 1, sin, and the Japanese lack of a future tense), etiquette, and patriotism's relation to the country's pagan religion. Other books on missions will give more examples, but if one is not convinced by reading this chapter that a thorough preparation for work in a foreign land is necessary, he will not be convinced.

Young laments the damage done to the Christian church in Japan on account of early missionaries' failures to discern, and by their willingness to compromise and accommodate, when separation was called for.

Interesting, but less helpful in this reviewer's judgment, was the chapter on "Church, State, and Missions." Here, Young presents the very specific situation of pre- and post-WWII Japan and the place of the Protestant church there. Nevertheless, the chapter is useful in that principles appear. And he helpfully concludes by quoting the Westminster Confession of Faith's call to church assem-

blies: "Synods and councils ...are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth; unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary..." (XXXI:5), and then raises intriguing questions regarding what the church is permitted or required to communicate to the magistrate—questions not so easily answered in light of church history.

The task of the church is the ministry of the Word, to bring its requirements and their application to the attention of the people. The church, thus, has the right, and in some cases, the duty, to present oral or written petitions to the state on a pertinent issue of religious freedom, to petition against some adverse action, or to protest against a *fait accompli* that compromises the principle of religious liberty (p. 95).

In the final section of the book, Young examines the "Destination" of missions. The chapters are The Church's Mission to the Nations, Developing Self-Governing, Self-Propagating Churches, and Developing the Self-Supporting Church.

In the first, Young gives the reminder that "[t]he prima-

ry mark of a true church is the pure preaching of the gospel”; says, “It should give pause to timid souls, who fearfully insist year after year that their home church must first be established thoroughly before a foreign missionary effort can be launched, to realize what God required of the Antioch church after just one year”; and drives the point home with: “The Holy Spirit ordered its (the church at Antioch) officers to take its two most able preachers and send them out as missionaries” (pp. 103-107).

Even home missionaries will want to discuss Young’s suggestions how to reach people in the community the missionary lives in. They include street preaching, tent evangelism, “English” Bible classes, and children’s meetings.

The chapter entitled “The Church’s Mission to the Nations” also contains a short but sharp criticism of modernism, which has more disciples than one might realize in allegedly evangelical and “Reformed” missions today. In that connection, it raises the perennially interesting question of what material relief missionaries ought to give.

The extent to which the Church in its mission to the nations should become involved in material relief to all needy people is a knotty problem. It is, however, one to which Christian scholars and missionaries ought to give very serious thought today before evangelical churches drift into showing greater pity for men’s physical well-being than for their spiritual, or are pushed by pressure for a display of humanitarian consideration, into an unscriptural emphasis that may well restrict the advance of the gospel, the Church’s immediate objective (p. 115).

In the chapter on “Developing Self-Governing and Self-Propagating Churches,” Missionary Young treats many of the very practical, but vital questions missionaries face when seeking to organize a church. How soon will a convert be baptized? Who will do the baptizing? How much must converts know before baptism? How are elders to be trained? How shall the office-bearers be chosen? How can the missionary avoid developing a dependent spirit in the new believers? May the mission pay men who give their time to as-

sist in the mission in evangelism, instruction, or translating? Who exercises discipline in the unorganized fellowship?

Of great importance for Reformed churches is Rev. Young's insistence that new churches adopt the fully developed Reformed faith as their creed at the time of their organization. There is a new movement to add a "fourth self" to Nevius' classic "Three Self" formula. The "Three Selves" Young is aware of, and is treating: Self-Governing, Self-Propagating, and Self-Supporting. The new movement today promotes a "fourth self," which is "self-theologizing." That is, the new churches and young Christians must be able to develop their own theology and come to the knowledge of the mature Reformed expression of the faith on their own. To this, Young wisely responds with alarm (an anachronism, I am aware):

The history of the origin of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyokai... shows the sad result of an inadequate doctrinal foundation. Back in 1890, Uemura, one of the early Presbyterian pastors, urged them to give up the *Westminster Confession*. He did this on the

grounds that a young church first needed a simple creed and that later, as they grew, they would develop their own confession of faith. Much against the advice of Dr. Hepburn, one of the first Presbyterian missionaries,... the church voted to give up the *Westminster Confession* and take the *Apostles' Creed*, plus a few simple statements in addition, as their total creed. Their expectation was to develop from this simple creed to a comprehensive one. But this never eventuated. We cannot turn our backs on what the Holy Spirit has done through 1,900 years and go forward. God has led men in these confessional statements. He has led them into a deeper and deeper understanding of His truth, His Word, which is not to say that He has led them into an understanding of the total truth. But we cannot go forward by going backward to the beginning and trying to start all over again as if the Holy Spirit had done nothing in the intervening centuries (p. 133).

Young then finishes the sad story of the departure of the new church into pure modernism within the space of seventeen

short years. He concludes: "It is a fatal mistake not to have a clear, strong, biblical confession for faith and life behind the start of a church—it is my firm conviction" (p. 134).

The final chapter, "Developing the Self-Supporting Church," has a balanced approach to financial support of missions. Rev. Young avoids the dogmatism and absolutism that sometimes characterizes these discussions. He also recognizes and warns against many of the dangers that come with well-intentioned but misguided financial support.

\* \* \* \* \*

The lengthy treatment of the contents of the book allows me to be brief in a final analysis.

The great strength of the book is its sound, Reformed ecclesiology and defense of traditional Reformed missions against the social gospel movement of his day. Though one might think the book dated—it was published for the first time in 2007, but written over 40 years ago—the "dating" of the book may be one of its strengths. The reader may well find more similarities than differences between, on the one hand, the social gospel of Young's day and, on the other hand, the mod-

ern "mission-gospel" preached today. "...it is neither education nor modern science that can transform men's lives from sinners to saints.... These not infrequently have a worse effect.... The principles of democratic government and the moral and legal codes of western democracies cannot deliver men from spiritual darkness either.... There is only salvation in the name of Christ and the gospel that bears His name. Only He can break the bondage of sin. It is the faithful preaching of His word that is needed on the mission field today" (p. 26).

The book reflects a good familiarity with, if not a significant dependence upon, J.H. Bavinck's *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, published less than a decade before Young's pamphlets appeared. The reader who is familiar with Bavinck's missiology will find agreement, but a fresh perspective in Young's *Missions*.

The opponent of common grace will not find Young's scattered references to common grace as determinative for his views on missions. Young usually speaks of common grace in the sense of "common goodness," referring to passages like Acts 14:15-17 and Acts 17:16ff. But

he shows the influence of some of his schooling in the Dutch Reformed circles influenced by Abraham Kuyper. Even then, the doctrine does not undermine the development of a sound Reformed work on missions. Young is determined: "Not common grace, but special, supernatural grace is needed to bring men into his kingdom."

Anecdotes from his own experience as a missionary enhance the book. John M.L.

Young is no armchair missiologist. Well-read in the Reformed writings of his day, he had also given his life to the cause of foreign missions. It moves me that two of his children have taken up the work of missions in Japan. Young's own parents, you recall, were missionaries.

The book ought to have a place on the shelf of every Reformed missionary and pastor. ■

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