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THE OLD AND NEW MAN IN SCRIPTURE

--Prof. H. Hanko--

There is evidence that a new interest has appeared among conservative scholars concerning the question of the state of the regenerated child of God who lives in this life and is, therefore, not yet made perfect in glory. The question has several aspects to it, all of which are closely related. One such aspect is the question of what Scripture means by the concepts "old man" and "new man"; and closely related to this, is it possible to speak of the regenerated child of God as still possessing an old man--with the result that he is both an "old man" and a "new man". Another aspect to the question is the meaning of sanctification as this work of grace is wrought in the hearts and lives of the people of God. To what extent is the regenerated child of God sanctified? Is sanctification progressive? Can the child of God expect to attain perfection on this side of the grave? Can he expect, if not perfection, at least consistent and general growth in the life of sanctification? Still a third aspect of this problem is the correct view which a child of God must take of himself. Must he consider himself as a sinner or a saint? Or, perhaps, as a sinning saint? or a saintly sinner?

Two articles especially have brought these questions to the foreground. One article appeared in a recent issue of The Banner of Truth and was written by Donald MacLeod. It is entitled, "Paul's Use of the Term 'The Old man'". The other is a two-article essay written by Anthony Hoekema which appeared in the September and October issues of The Reformed Journal under the title "The Christian's Self-Image".

It is our purpose to review these articles, consider the textual proof for the position which these articles take, and evaluate the whole question in the light of the Word of God.

* * * *

Donald MacLeod has written a very excellent article. In general, I find myself in agreement with the article, especially with the strong emphasis on sovereign grace which characterizes so many of the articles which appear in The Banner of Truth magazine. It is not really my purpose therefore, to criticize

this article as such. The author makes a worthwhile and notable contribution to the discussion of sanctification which is worthy of close attention. And it is hoped that this present article will be a contribution to a discussion of this most important point.

MacLeod's main thesis is that the traditional concept of Paul's term "the old man" is incorrect. He defines this traditional view by stating that usually, in Reformed circles, "the contrast between the old man and the new man" is defined "in terms of the conflict between the believer's corrupt nature and his holy nature". And he finds three elements emphasized in this idea.

(1) the old man is to be equated with indwelling sin; (2) the old man remains in the believer; (3) putting off or crucifying the old man is a life-long process equatable with the Christian duty of mortification. (p. 13.)

This idea, the author maintains, is contrary to Scripture. Although it is better not to go into this matter at this point, I consider the definition of the "old man" offered above ("indwelling sin") to be somewhat inadequate. And perhaps this is part of the difficulty in this matter. It may be true that some theologians have limited the concept "old man" to "indwelling sin", but there are others who give considerably more content to this term than that. (Cf., e.g., Reformed Dogmatics, by H. Hoeksema, pp. 535-546.)

However that may be, (and we shall look more closely at this question in a subsequent article), the author offers as proof for his contention a discussion of three Scriptural passages--the only three passages where the term "old man" is to be found.

The first passage is Colossians 3: 9: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." The point which is made is that the putting off of the old man is described as a work once and for all performed. It is not something which must be continually done. The tense of the verb is aorist, and the action described by this aorist tense is a once-in-a-lifetime deed. This fact, the author says, is

bolstered by the context where Paul speaks of the fact that the believer is dead (vs. 3) and is also risen with Christ (vs. 1). So the author concludes:

Hence, we can maintain that we are daily crucifying the old man only if we are prepared to maintain also that daily and hourly we are rising with Christ; and that our emergence with Him into new-ness of life is not a once-for-all event but a continuous and gradual process. Apart from every other consideration this also founders on Paul's tense: "You arose with Christ." We have, then, the description of the Christian man as one whose present life is determined by three great past events: He died, He put off the old man and He rose with Christ. (p. 14.)

The author finds the same truth taught in Romans 6: 6 where Paul speaks of the fact that our old man has been crucified with Christ. Once again it is pointed out that the aorist tense is used and that the whole context supports the contention that the old man is at one moment forever destroyed. Our being baptized into Christ's death, our being planted into the likeness of His death, our having died with Christ--all these describe the fact "that at some point in the believer's past life there occurred a definite and unrepeatable event which radically altered his relation to sin." (p. 14.)

The third passage where the term "the old man" is used is Ephesians 4: 20. The article points out that there is a difficulty here because the Greek words "put off" and "put on" are infinitives. He suggests three possible uses of these infinitives. The first use is that of giving these infinitives imperative force. But, while this is grammatically possible, the author suggests that they can also be infinitives of result or infinitives in a noun clause. If they are infinitives of result, then the idea is that the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man is the result of learning Christ, of having heard Him and of having been taught by Him. (Cf. vss. 20, 21.) If they are infinitives in a noun clause, then the idea is that these two infinitives tell us what we have heard and learned when we heard and learned Christ, and what we have been taught by Him.

Bearing all this in mind, the author decides on the meaning by comparing this passage with and explaining this passage in the light of Romans 6: 6 and Colossians 3: 9. He insists that this passage must be interpreted in the same way as the others. And there is, in his view, additional proof for this in the fact that the designation of the "old man" given in vss. 17 and 18 and 22 of this chapter cannot possibly be descriptions of the regenerated Christian. His conclusion is therefore, that "it is incorrect to speak of the old man as remaining in the believer." (p. 15.)

This latter interpretation is difficult to accept. The author does not offer any exegesis of the passage as such, but rather simply states that the passage must be explained in the same way as the two passages of Romans 6 :6 and Colossians 3: 9. It seems, however, that regardless of what use one gives to the infinitives, the text states that the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man is something which happens to the believer as believer; and, therefore, happens more than once. A closer look at this passage is therefore, necessary. But we shall save this for the second part of this essay.

In the author's opinion, however, all this is not simply a fine point of Dogmatics; it is a very important point as far as the life and calling of the believer is concerned. The old man is not to be equated with indwelling sin. Even though some may appeal to experience in support of their contention that they still possess this old man, this is an unwarranted appeal because experience may never contradict the Scriptures. It is true that sin remains in the regenerated believer, but this struggle in the life of the believer is not a conflict between the old and new man; it is rather a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5: 17), between "me and sin that dwelleth in me", (Rom. 7:20), between the law of the mind and the law of the members (Rom. 7: 23). The contrast therefore, between the old man and the new man is between the past and the present, between what a man was prior to his regeneration and what he is now as a regenerated saint.

Although this too, we shall return to at a future time, it is interesting to note that an important question arises here. The author seems to suggest in the foregoing that the once-for-all

putting off of the old man is something which takes place at the moment of regeneration. If this is true, then one wonders how it is possible for the apostle Paul to say in Colossians 3: 9, 10 that the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man is something which we have done--"seeing ye have put off the old man. . . and have put on the new man. . . ." The only possible alternative seems to be to interpret regeneration in some Arminian sense--something which I am sure the author does not want to do.

There are however, practical consequences of the position which the author takes. The believer cannot blame the old man for his sin. This has, in the author's opinion (and he is correct), often become an "antinomian convenience" to escape a personal responsibility for sin. It is not the old man who sins, an old man for which the believer is not responsible, but is rather the new man that sins. Hence, sin is a monstrous thing, for sin is committed in union with Christ.

Once again, we may insert at this point the question: Is it really possible for the new man, born in regeneration, to sin? What about what the apostle John says in I John 3: 9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Is this not doing despite to the work of regeneration? to claim that the new man, born of God in regeneration, still sins?

Turning positively to the idea of the new man, the author describes this new man as the child of God who is risen with Christ, who has undergone a transformation which can be equated with the resurrection of Christ from the dead. He is a man with the life of God in his soul who lives in constant union with Christ.

There are, says the author, two important conclusions to this position. The first is that sanctification is definitive. By this he means that sin rages in the believer, but it does not reign in him. The tyranny of Satan has been destroyed. And the second is that sanctification is efficacious and irresistible. God has taken our sanctification out of our hands and has put it in His own hand to work this wonder by sovereign grace.

Holiness is something provided for from the first in God's redemptive plan for each

individual object of His grace. He does not merely exhort us to be holy, nor merely facilitate our sanctification, nor yet merely make some effort to secure it. It is His determinate purpose to sanctify each one embraced by His love. This monergistic emphasis on the divine supernaturalness and consequent inevitableness of sanctification is seen, for example, in John 17: 17, "Sanctify (thou) them through thy truth." Indeed, it pervades the New Testament. . . . In sanctification, no less than in regeneration, grace is irresistible or invincible. In the last analysis God has taken our sanctification out of our own hands and has Himself taken effective steps to make it infallibly sure that we shall be not only called and justified but also glorified. . . . (p. 18.)

We are in complete agreement with the author's two contentions which he makes as conclusions to his well-written article. And, in fact, we find it delightful not only to find one who is interested in these truths of Scripture, but who emphasizes so strongly the doctrines of sovereign grace. We are also convinced that the author's assertion that the "old man" has sometimes been used as an antinomian convenience to dodge the responsibilities of sin is correct. Historically this has, on occasion, happened. And it is not uncommon today.

But whether all this is a direct and necessary conclusion from the author's exegetical arguments is another question. Is it true that Scripture teaches that the believer no longer possesses an "old man"? And must one deny the presence of this old man in the believer in order to maintain the doctrine of the irresistibility of grace in the work of sanctification?--which the author seems to suggest? Or does the author's position and interpretation of Scripture create other problems which are just as serious? some of which problems we have already indicated. Will a careful study of the Scriptural passages referred to permit this interpretation? These are questions which we hope to consider.

Before we enter into a discussion of these matters however, we must make reference to another essay which has recently appeared in the September and October issues of the Reformed Journal. This essay treats the same basic question (and many of the same passages) under the title, "The Christian's Self-Image." It is authored by Dr. Anthony Hoekema who is professor of theology in Calvin Theological Seminary.

Dr. Hoekema is concerned about the fact that the Christian has the wrong kind of self-image. And this essay is written in an earnest effort to make corrections at this key point. He is convinced that the Christian has, generally speaking, too low an estimate of himself from a spiritual point of view; and that, if he would but face the Scripture's description of himself, he would modify this overly low appraisal significantly. He writes:

It is my conviction that the image we in the Reformed community commonly have of ourselves is far more negative than the Scriptures warrant. My main purpose in these articles is to expose the inadequacy of our negative self-images and to show that faith in the victory won by Christ and in transforming power of the Holy Spirit requires of us the cultivation of a positive self-image. The fact of our continuing sinfulness must not be permitted to eclipse the equally important and far more exciting fact of our newness in Christ! (Sept., p. 23.)

After a few passing remarks concerning the relation of this problem to various social ills of the day, particularly, the race problem, the author turns to the matter at hand. He makes the distinction between abhorring our sins and loathing our continuing sinfulness on the one hand and abhorring ourselves and loathing ourselves on the other hand. A discussion of Paul's self-image will show that while Paul (and we should follow his example) condoned the former, he condemned the latter. He finds, after examining various passages, that Paul's self-image was one in which Paul saw himself as a sinner indeed, but that he possessed a very "positive self-image" nonetheless; so much so in fact, that

he does not hesitate to call the church to be imitators of him. To call the saints to be imitators of him requires that the apostle thought his life worthy of emulation.

It is however, to what Dr. Hoekema calls "three exegetical problems" that we turn after only a cursory notice of a large part of this first article. And we hasten to this section because it is here that the author comes to the real heart of his argument.

He calls attention, first of all to that well-known passage in Romans 7: 14-25. This is particularly interesting because he tells us in his discussion of this passage that he changed his mind concerning its interpretation. There was a time when he held to the view that this passage spoke of the regenerated Paul (and therefore, of every regenerated child of God). But, so he informs his readers, he has changed his mind on this matter, in part because of the convincing arguments of Dr. Herman Ridderbos in his book entitled Paulus. He now holds to the view that, while Paul wrote this section after his regeneration, he was describing himself as he was prior to his regeneration. Perhaps it is well to have the passage before us. It reads:

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into

captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me
from the body of this death? I thank God through
Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I
myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the
law of sin.

It is obvious, of course, that if this passage refers to the regenerated Paul (and to the regenerated Christian), it does not present a very pleasing and attractive "self-image". What disturbs us, however, is that the Dr. does not point out to his readers that the interpretation which he now offers as the correct one (that this refers to Paul prior to his regeneration) is not a new idea, but, in fact, a very old one. As a matter of fact it was, while preaching on the book of Romans and on this passage in particular, in his congregation in Amsterdam that Jacobus Arminius first brought suspicion on himself for teaching views which were not Reformed. When he preached on this passage he, already, interpreted this as referring to the natural man apart from grace. It was Plancius, his fellow minister in the congregation who first called attention to his erroneous views. But it was from this point in the career of Arminius that he began to develop extensively his Arminian theology which was so forcibly condemned by the Synod of Dort. If Dr. Hoekema wants to adopt an interpretation proposed by Arminius, he has, of course, every right to do this. But he should acquaint his readers with this note from history, if for no other reason than to assure his readers that he is not following in the footsteps of the heretic condemned by the Great Synod. (For this historical note, cf. Wagenaar, "Van Strijd en Overwinning", G.J.A.Ruys, Utrecht, 1909; pp. 33 ff. Cf. also Hoeksema "Reformed Dogmatics", Reformed Free Publishing Association, p. 534. Concerning this interpretation, Rev. Hoeksema writes: "It is well known, indeed, that many deny that the apostle Paul speaks of himself here as a Christian. It is also noteworthy that in general it is those that try to defend the free will of man and deny the total depravity of the natural man who want to apply what the apostle writes here to the natural man, the unregenerated. Men like Pelagius and Erasmus, Socinus and Arminius, Episcopius and Grotius, and the Remonstrants in general have always attempted to explain this passage as referring to the apostle before his conversion.")

It is easy to see why one who makes this passage refer to Paul in his unregenerate state falls into the error of Arminianism. The passage very forcibly states that Paul willed the good--even if he did not do it. Can this statement be made of an unregenerate man?

Before we get into a detailed discussion of this passage, if such should prove necessary, we ought to take a look at Dr. Hoekema's reasons for changing his mind and accepting the interpretation that he adopts.

At the risk of over-simplifying the matter, we shall only summarize his arguments.

In the first place, he asserts that Paul, in this lengthy passage, is elaborating on what the apostle says in 7: 5: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." The author contends in this verse the apostle is speaking of his condition prior to regeneration; hence, if vss. 14-25 are a further elucidation of vs. 5, this passage also must speak of Paul before he was regenerated.

Secondly, the author points to the fact that there is no mention made in this entire passage of the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the author senses a mood of defeat in this passage, a mood which is at variance with Paul's other writings where he describes the Christian's life.

Fourthly, he calls attention to the words "I myself" in vs. 25 and interprets these emphatic words as referring to Paul as he tried to live out of his own strength and not out of the strength of Christ--a situation characteristic of Paul's life only before his regeneration.

Fifthly, attention is called to "the abrupt change of mood" between this passage and the victorious doxologies of the apostle in chapter 8. This change of mood is possible because it describes two different conditions: unregenerate and regenerate.

And finally, the contention is made that Romans 8:4 contradicts flatly the assertions of Romans 7: 14-25 if this latter passage refers to Paul after his regeneration. And such contradiction will never do.

The conclusion is therefore:

What we have . . . in Romans 7: 14-25 is a vivid description of the inability of a person to serve God in his own strength with only the law to help him. (Sept., p.27.)

Rev. Hoeksema however, in support of the view that this passage refers to Paul in his regenerated state, writes:

(The attempt of Pelagians and Arminians to interpret this passage as referring to the natural man) is vain and impossible. In the first place, such an explanation of the passage certainly does not fit in the context of the chapter, nor in the preceding and following context of the entire letter. In the second place, such an interpretation certainly brings us in direct conflict with the doctrine of Scripture in general, which certainly denies that the natural man has a delight in the law of God, that he hates sin, and that he serves with his mind the law of God. The natural mind is enmity against God, and it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. It certainly does not consent to the law of God, that it is good. In the third place, it is true that the apostle in this passage certainly employs some very strong expressions when he speaks of himself as carnal and sold under sin. But in the light of the context these expressions evidently refer to his members, to the old man of sin that is still within him, while according to the inner man he has a delight in the law of God. And understood in this light, there is nothing in these expressions that also in other places in Scripture is not clearly taught, nor anything that every child of God that knows himself cannot take upon his lips. (Hoeksema, op. cit., p. 534.)

The second passage commented upon is I John 3: 9 which reads: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

In commenting upon this passage, Dr. Hoekema points out that surely this passage must not be so construed that it teaches that the believer no longer sins at all. This would be in direct conflict with I John 2:1 along with 1: 8,9. There can hardly be any disagreement on this point. But what does the text mean positively? The answer is given that "the regenerate person may on occasion fall into sin, but he cannot live in sin." (Sept., p. 28.) He quotes with favor a comment of Kenneth Wuest: "John regards sin in the believer's life, not as habitual, but as extraordinary, as infrequent." (Sept., p. 28).

How is this interpretation arrived at?

The author first of all, points to the fact that the text itself uses present tenses which describe continuous action or habitual action. That is, the kind of sin in the believer which he continues to commit from time to time is not continuous or habitual sin.

Secondly, this stands in contrast with chapter 2: 1 where the aorist tenses are used to describe the kind of sin which the believer does commit. And the aorist in Greek is the tense used to describe "snaphhot action, punctiliar action, momentary action." (Sept., p. 27.)

Thus sin in the believer is not to be considered as something common or even likely; it is not to be expected in his life as a matter of course. This is defeatist language and is an improper self-image.

The first question which comes to mind, quite naturally, is how Dr. Hoekema would explain the words of the Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 114:

But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Or, again, in question and answer 62:

But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?

Because that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin. (Underscoring in both instances is ours.)

Furthermore, the language of Dr. Hoekema comes perilously close to perfectionism; for the perfectionists do not claim that a believer always and actually does attain perfection, but they insist that the believer can attain perfection. If sin is little more than Dr. Hoekema describes it, the conclusion seems to be that the believer stands on the edge of perfection and that, with a little more effort, he can attain this goal. But perfectionism is not simply a theological error; it is also a spiritual error. It must do one of two things--and perhaps both. It must take a very superficial view of sin--especially as sin is rooted in man's nature; or it must make the norm of the believer's life much lower than the Scriptures do. This is conducive to filling the heart and the mind of the child of God with doubts and distresses, especially when he sees in his own life that there is very much sin--that his best works are polluted and defiled by sin.

One other exegetical question is faced in this article. It is not really so much the facing of a specific text and its meaning. It is rather the quotation of Philippians 3: 7,8 in connection with its context as proof that the victory over sin has been won although the battle remains.

Jesus Christ has come, add therefore the decisive victory over sin, the devil, and the flesh has been won. . . . Though the enemy has been decisively defeated, there remain pockets of resistance, there are still guerrilla troops to be defeated, there are still battles to be fought. In one sense we already possess salvation; in another sense we still look forward to our salvation. We already have the new life; we no not yet have perfection. (Sept., p. 28.)

It is in the second article that the author specifically turns to various concepts in Scripture which have to deal with the Christian's self-image; and particularly with the concepts of the old and new man.

His definitions too, we believe, are less than adequate. He offers the following:

Old and new man, it seems to me, ought not to be seen as aspects or sides or parts of the believer, which are both still somehow present in him. Old and new man are two different ways of living--two different life-styles, if you will. (Oct., p.18.)

It is not surprising that Hoekema takes the same position as MacLeod and posits the position that the old man no longer exists for the Christian. But it is entirely out of keeping with the Scriptural data to define this old man and new man as being nothing more than a "life-style". The words themselves (old and new man) suggest far more--even apart from what is said about them in the Scriptures.

In treating the three texts where these terms appear, the author develops his position. In connection with Rom. 6: 6 the author avers that by means of the crucifixion of Christ our "old, God-defying life-style was put to death with (Christ). This means that for us who have been united with Christ in baptism (see vss. 3 and 4), this old life-style is no longer a valid option; we are through with it." (Oct., p. 18.)

Turning to Ephesians 4: 22-24 and Colossians 3: 9,10, noting as Donald MacLeod did, that the tenses are aorists, Hoekema concludes that the putting off of the old way of living (synonymous with the old man) and putting on a new way of living (synonymous with the new man) is a once-for-all event which is never repeated in the life of the Christian.

We read:

Our self-image, therefore, must be of a person who has rejected the old way of living which is called the old man, and has adopted the new way of living which is called the new man....We are to look upon ourselves, therefore, not as partly old man and partly new man, but as new men in

Christ. (Oct., p. 18.)

The rest of the article we may rather quickly pass over, mainly because it is not immediately related to our question. Dr. Hoekema writes concerning the fact that, although the old man is dead forever in the Christian, this does not mean that he is freed from sin. And he points out correctly that, although the Christian is still in the midst of the battle, the battle is carried on and fought "in the atmosphere of victory, not of defeat. (Oct., p 19).

Further, he briefly treats the concept "new creation" or "new creature" as it appears in II Corinthians 5:17 and tells us that this term also surely should give to us a very positive self-image. The concept "life of victory" which is suggested in such passages as Romans 6: 14, Galatians 5: 16-25, Philippians 4: 13 and I John 5: 4 all add to this same general theme. And, finally, the Scriptures teach a "progressive transformation", i.e., a progress in sanctification. But this work of sanctification is, in the words of the article, both the work of God and of man.

This progressive renewal involves our own responsible activity. If I were to ask you who it is that brings our holiness to its goal, you would probably say, God. Yet Paul says that this is what we must do. . . .

Yet, at the same time, this progressive renewal is ultimately the work of God within us. The same transformation which is called our task in Romans 12: 2 is ascribed to God's Holy Spirit in II Corinthians 3: 18.. . . (Oct., p. 20).

Here Hoekema and MacLeod sharply part ways. MacLeod concludes from his position that sanctification is the work of God alone Who has taken it out of our hands and Who performs this work in irresistible grace. From the same position Hoekema arrives at the conclusion that sanctification is the work of man and God. This latter sounds suspiciously like some kind of synergism. And, while it is not the chief point of the article, Hoekema could, at least, have discussed the relation between God's work and man's work if he was at all interested in avoiding the heresy of Arminianism.

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It is evident therefore, that a very real problem arises here. We shall have to postpone a discussion of the issue to a future issue of the Journal, for our space is filled. But the issue is an important one. It involves some key Scriptural concepts and exegesis of some important Scriptural passages. The question involves some fundamental theological concepts and has implications for the life of the believer in the midst of the world. To these matters we shall address ourselves later, the Lord willing.

AS TO THE DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

(5)

--Prof. H. C. Hoeksema--

In Volume IV, Number 2 of this Journal, we began our discussion of the organic inspiration of Holy Scripture. We gave our attention, first of all, to the subject of a so-called human factor and human element in Holy Scripture. In this discussion we began by quoting the views of several Reformed theologians about this subject.

We do well to remind ourselves in this connection that basically there are but two possible positions to take, namely: the position which holds that there is such a human factor in Scripture, and the position which denies the existence of such a human factor and maintains that Holy Scripture is wholly divine, both in its content and in the manner of its production.

As to the former view, there may be differences of degree. There may be those who wish to make the so-called human factor and human element in Holy Scripture very large. And to the extent that they do so, they necessarily make the divine factor and the divine element in Holy Scripture proportionately smaller. The result, practically speaking, is, of course, that Holy Scripture becomes more and more the word of man and less and less the Word of God. The result, too, is necessarily that Holy Scripture becomes more and more subject to criticism and contradiction. On the other hand, there are those who, while they acknowledge the presence of such a human factor and element in Holy Scripture, strive to limit and to minimize the human as much as possible, and to maintain that Scripture is the Word of God. There are some who, while they maintain the existence of such a human factor, nevertheless so emphasize the divine factor and are so fearful of losing the truth that Scripture is the Word of God that they virtually cancel out the reality of this human factor by a doctrine of divine inspiration which so controls and overrules the human factor that it becomes null and void. From a certain point of view, this is a fortunate inconsistency: fortunate, of course, because by it they preserve for themselves Scripture as the Word of God. Nevertheless, they are guilty of an inconsistency. It

would be proper not to speak of any human factor whatsoever. For once they concede the existence of such a human factor, and therefore of a human element in Holy Scripture, as was done in the Janssen controversy (see Journal, Vol. IV, No. 2, pg. 25), they have conceded their entire case for the infallibility and authority of Holy Scripture in principle. In other words, men may differ as to the relative size and significance of the human factor and human element in Scripture, and they may differ as to the degree to which this human factor plays a part in the production of Holy Scripture; but no matter what the degree, and no matter what the relative size and significance of the human factor may be, the principle is the same. Whether the human factor be one percent and the divine factor ninety-nine percent, or whether the human factor be fifty percent and the divine factor fifty percent, the theory of a divine and a human factor in the composition of Scripture in the nature of the case implies that the Bible is a joint product: the product of the combined effort of God and men. It implies that the human writers of Holy Scripture are in some sense co-authors with God. If this is not true, then it no longer makes any sense to speak of a human factor in the production of Holy Scripture. If, on the other hand, it is true, then it must necessarily follow that there is also a human element in Scripture itself, that is, in the content of Scripture. Such a human element in the content of Scripture is, of course, the product of this human factor. And then, to the degree that one concedes a human factor and a human element, he must also be prepared to accept all the consequences, implications, of such a human factor and element. It is our belief that the readiness to concede some kind of human factor and human element in Holy Scripture under the banner of organic inspiration has in the past led and is leading in the present, and will inevitably lead, to the inability to defend and to maintain the truth of the absolute infallibility and the divine authority of Holy Scripture over against those who maintain a critical attitude and position.

In the first place, we call attention to the fact that this is a matter of definition. The term factor comes from the Latin

facere, which means "to do, to make." A factor, therefore, is one who does something, one who makes something. To use the dictionary definition, a factor is "one of the elements that contribute to produce a result; a constituent." It is very plain, therefore, that when we speak of factors in connection with Holy Scripture, we are referring to those elements who contribute to produce the result, the Bible. And if one maintains that there is only a divine factor involved in Holy Scripture, he maintains that only God contributes to produce that result called the Bible. The Word of God, therefore, is the only constituent of that Bible. If, however, he speaks also of a human factor, this can mean but one thing, namely: that man, as well as God, contributes to produce the Bible, and therefore, that the Bible is the word of man as well as the Word of God. By definition, therefore, the view that there is a human factor in Holy Scripture necessarily involves a denial that the Bible is wholly and solely the Word of God.

We also call attention to the fact, in this connection, that the term auctores secundarii is not above reproach. Properly understood, it may perhaps be used for convenience' sake; and we do not mean to suggest by our criticism that any and all who use this terminology have an incorrect view of Holy Scripture and are guilty of heresy. Nevertheless, the danger of this terminology should be evident. If we maintain that God is the Primary Author of Holy Scripture and that men are the secondary authors, the suggestion that Scripture is of dual authorship, or even of multiple authorship, can hardly be avoided. The attempt is made, of course, to avoid the problem of this terminology by employing the modifiers primary and secondary. The fact remains, however, that whether the authors are primary or secondary, they are nevertheless authors. And even if one makes the "primary" very prime, while he greatly minimizes the "secondary," the idea of authorship and of cooperative authorship is nevertheless implied in this terminology. If this stricture is kept clearly in view, the terminology can perhaps be employed in connection with a right understanding of organic inspiration. But we stress again that in using such terminology the danger is by no means imaginary that one leaves the impression that Scripture is of dual

authorship, and that, accordingly, Scripture is of a dual character and dual content as well. In effect, therefore, one is on the same ground with this terminology as with that which speaks of a divine factor and a human factor, as well as of a divine element and a human element in Holy Scripture.

Moreover, if one wishes to maintain the existence of a human factor in Holy Scripture in any real sense, he must be prepared to accept the implications. He must be prepared, particularly, to accept the implication that Scripture is characterized by all the defects of that which is purely human. Otherwise the "human factor" has no reality. It certainly makes no sense to speak of a "human factor" which has exactly been deprived of its reality, of its human character, through the influence of a "divine factor" and divine inspiration. To take refuge in the latter idea is satisfactory neither to those who clamor to maintain a human element in the Bible nor to those who wish to maintain that Scripture is wholly divine and infallible. We repeat: one who wishes to maintain the existence of a human factor in Scripture must maintain, first of all, that that human factor is real, and must not allow it to be deprived of that real human character. But then, secondly, he must be prepared to accept the implications of such a real human factor. And then, thirdly, the implication that Scripture is characterized by all the defects of that which is purely human--human in the realistic sense of the word--is inescapable. And if he accepts this inescapable implication, he has thereby lost the divine Word of God. If he does not wish to accept this implication, then he must no longer hold to a so-called human factor in any real sense.

For as soon as one says "human," he must be prepared to reckon with the fact, the actuality, of sin. Those two, "human" and "sinful," and therefore "human" and "defective," are inseparable. For we are by nature darkness. We have, and can have, no knowledge of God and of the things pertaining to God. But we love the lie. We know not the truth, and we do not want the truth. For we love darkness rather than light. And even when through divine grace we are regenerated, and called out of darkness into His light, there is nevertheless only a small beginning of the new

obedience in us. If, therefore, we say that there is a human factor and element in Holy Scripture, then we must also be prepared to say that there is something defective in Holy Scripture. To this "defective" belong all unintentional untruths and all intentional lies to which we are inclined by nature, or to which we are always exposed. The speakers and the writers who appear in Holy Scripture as witnesses of the divine Word could, then, have heard incorrectly; in fact we may accept it as certain that they did sometimes hear incorrectly. It may be established as a certainty that these witnesses apprehended by no means all of that which God spoke correctly. That which they saw they saw mistakenly; and they also recorded it and presented it incorrectly. Along with this goes the fact that they heard or saw the Word of God with their own defective apperception, frequently the fruit of a very defective development, of wrong customs and life-situations. They saw or heard that Word of God with a consciousness full of incorrect conceptions and preconceived ideas. And in the light of whatever of error and incorrect concepts was already present in their consciousness, they interpreted that Word of God for themselves, and thus they also reproduced it in their writings. As real human beings, they could also have imagined very much, so that they thought that they heard the Word of God while they were nevertheless nothing but the plaything of their own enthusiasm and their own rich and fired up imagination. This also belongs very definitely to the human and defective. But even thus all is not said. They certainly did not retain everything correctly and accurately. For it is a well-known fact that a defective memory belongs very definitely to that which is human and weak. They forgot much. They distorted much. They exaggerated much. They minimized much. There is without the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit--which precisely excludes any human factor--no possible guarantee that John, for example, in his Gospel correctly reproduces that which Jesus actually spoke, or that in the Book of Revelation he correctly reproduces for us that which he saw. Hence, already through these defects of an unintentional character and through these unintentional untruths or inaccuracies which are peculiar to the human writers of Scripture along with all men, the

mirror of divine revelation would be so bent and so distorted and marred that it certainly could not serve to reflect to us the image of the invisible God in Christ.

Let us keep in mind that exactly this is the issue. Holy Scripture--and this is a figure which is employed by Scripture itself--serves as a mirror. Through Scripture we are given "to see in a glass darkly." Now if a mirror is to reflect my image correctly, then it is not only necessary that I stand directly before that mirror; but it is also necessary that the mirror is perfect. It must be flat; it must be without any breaks and flaws; it must be without spots and without distorting ripples. If that mirror is not perfect, it will not correctly reflect my image. But this is much more emphatically true of the means whereby God reveals Himself to us. We must remember that this is the whole significance and purpose of Holy Scripture. The Word of God, and that, too, precisely through the power of the wonder of grace, must break through the darkness of our sin and misery and death if it is to reach us as God's Word. But then those Scriptures, which constitute the mirror in which the image of the invisible God of our salvation in Christ is reflected, must be perfect. Otherwise we shall be unable to behold that image of the invisible God in Christ. And even through these unintentional errors and untruths, and misrepresentations and inaccuracies, which would be peculiar to the human writers of Scripture along with all men, that mirror of divine revelation would certainly be bent and distorted and, therefore, untrustworthy.

But even thus all has not yet been said.

If a real human factor in the production of Holy Scripture is conceded, then there are not only unintentional defects and flaws of hearing and seeing and memory and presentation and imagination which cling to Holy Scripture; there must also be intentional lies and deliberate misrepresentations. For if the holiness of the holy writers consisted only in that they were personally regenerated, and if they were not precisely through divine inspiration guarded against the inclination of their own sinful nature, then that holiness in principle is nevertheless not a guarantee that they did not intentionally distort and do violence to the Word of

God which was revealed to them. For the heart is deceitful above all else: who shall know it? The flesh strives against the spirit, also in the Christian. He understands in principle the things of the Spirit of God; and he has his delight in those things of the Spirit of God also. Nevertheless, he also fails to do that which he wills; and that which he wills not, that he does. This is true of the Christian also, and even especially, with respect to the Word of God. Is not the testimony of church history strong on this score? Is it not true that down through the ages, for various reasons and due to various causes, even the written Word of God frequently has been intentionally distorted in order to maintain one's own view and in order to defend and protect one's own life and in order to justify one's own doings? These very same sinful inclinations were also characteristic, remember, of a John, of a Paul, of a Moses, and of an Isaiah. And they must, then, have played a part also in their writing of the books of Holy Scripture, so that their work is characterized by intentionally false presentations, wrong explanations; by a keeping back of some things and an adding of other things; by distortion; by a softening of the Word at this point and a sharpening of the Word at that point. And if all this is kept in mind, then there remains nothing, certainly, of the accuracy and trustworthiness of the mirror in which God wills to reflect His image. And then it is not true that in the Scriptures we see as in a glass darkly.

Besides, it must not be forgotten that the things which are revealed to us in Holy Scripture are not of the earth, earthy; but they are heavenly, while we, even apart now from sin, are of the earth, earthy. And even as the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God, so the earthly man with his earthly wisdom does not understand the things which are heavenly and from above. Here below we walk as in a valley which is surrounded on every side by high mountains over which we can never see. And besides, in that valley there is darkness. By reason of sin and death, it is pitch black night. If we are to have revelation, if we are to receive knowledge of things heavenly,

knowledge of that which lies beyond the mountains which surround us in this vale of tears, then He Who is able to come down from heaven and yet to be in heaven, Who therefore can speak of those heavenly things which He has heard and seen, must speak to us. But He must also declare those heavenly things to us in earthly language. For heavenly language we certainly do not understand with our earthly ears and earthly understanding. Even that earthly language, however, cannot be the human factor which unites and cooperates with the divine factor in revelation. Also in our own earthly language we would not be able to speak of heavenly things. Also the earthly forms in which are declared and revealed to us the heavenly things can only be from God. Even the very earthly language, and even the specific language which each of the human writers employed, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, can only be from God. Only the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ knows how to make known to us earthly creatures the heavenly things, knows the precise language and the precise forms which are suitable to make known to us those heavenly things. And therefore, too, the human writers did not by any means always understand the things of which they spoke; and not infrequently that which they spoke went far beyond their own consciousness and their own comprehension.

There is much more that can be said about this entire subject of an alleged human factor. One might call attention to the fact that the human writers of Holy Scripture themselves recede entirely into the background as far as the content of Scripture is concerned: so much so that the very identity of many of them is not even known. One might also call attention to the fact that the very distinction between a human factor and a divine factor which is sometimes said to be an aspect of organic inspiration is, after all, contrary to the very idea of organic inspiration, and is itself a more mechanistic view of Scripture than is the view which denies that there are two factors and which insists that Holy Scripture is altogether divine. One might call attention, too, to the fact that this very admission of the existence of a human factor alongside a divine factor has repeatedly involved

its adherents in problems, insoluble problems, with respect to the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures, and has led inevitably to a de-emphasizing and a compromising of the latter. One might also call attention to the fact that this admission of a human factor after all does not enhance one's view of Scripture. Indeed, it is very evident that men spake and men wrote and men taught and men sang and men prophesied and men recorded facts and events, and that, too, with all their individual peculiarities and characters, their differences in talents, their variety of time and place, of history and circumstances. These are simply facts; and the denial of a human factor does not imply the denial of these facts whatsoever. But when we speak even of these phenomena as a human factor, we are missing something important. It is exactly when we see that all these facets of Scripture are included, so to speak, in the "divine factor," the only factor in Holy Scripture, that they come in the embrace of the wonder of infallible inspiration in such a way that "this Word of God was not sent, nor delivered by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," (Belgic Confession, Art. 3) that we can behold something of the manifold riches of that wonder of inspiration. But this is missed when we posit a human factor next to the divine. One might also call attention to the fact that never does Scripture itself posit such an alleged human factor anywhere. Of the two classic passages on inspiration in the New Testament, one--II Timothy 3: 16--does not mention men at all, but speaks of the inspiration of the Scriptures themselves rather than of men; and the other--II Peter 1: 19-21--exactly stresses that "prophecy came not in old time by the will of man."

We conclude this part of our discussion, therefore, by stressing that this entire theory of a human factor and human element is to be rejected, and that we must adhere strictly to the truth that Scripture, the Word of God written, is wholly divine. There is but one "factor" in its production: God in Christ. And there is but one "element" in its content: the Word, the revelation, of the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

Along these same lines we must view the matter of the alleged

time-boundness of the human writers of Holy Scripture. Actually, of course, the entire question of time-boundness becomes under our view a moot question. For it is only when these human writers are a human factor that the question can be of any significance. For if Scripture is wholly divine in its production and its content, then it is established a priori that there is nothing in its content, in its language, in its form, in its peculiar manner of expression, in its concepts, which can at all limit or mar its accuracy and its perfection and its truth. And let me insert the note at this point that from a hermeneutical point of view it is high time that interpreters begin to proceed from this a priori instead of forevermore joining the ranks of the carping critics who proceed from the a priori that Scripture is a human book, subject to all the weaknesses of any other human book. It follows, too, that whether we can comprehend and explain it fully or not, all that is in Scripture serves in the most perfect manner possible as the mirror in which is reflected for us the image of the invisible God of our salvation in Christ. But let me also call attention to the truth that it is a patent fact that the writers of Holy Scripture frequently wrote of things which were entirely beyond the limited horizons of their own times, wrote of things which they themselves, by themselves, could never have written. This is exactly the wonder of revelation, is it not, that they wrote of the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which have never arisen in the heart of man, but which God revealed to them by His Spirit? Did not a Moses write of the distant past, of things far beyond the limited horizons of his own time? How could Moses write of creation, of which no man was an eyewitness? How could Moses write, as he did, of the mighty wonder of God's judgments in the universal Flood? How could Moses, how could any man know the facts which are recorded concerning these things? And if they did know these facts, how would they be able accurately and adequately to express them? But the same is true of the prophets. How could an Isaiah know the things of the future in detail? How, for example, could he know about the rise of Cyrus, and even know the name of Cyrus (Isaiah 45)? And do not forget that a prophet like Isaiah, who

was given to see not only to the dawn of the new dispensation, so that he could write in Isaiah 53 concerning the suffering Savior, but also all the way to the end of time, so that he could write of the destruction of both Old Testament Babylon and of the Babylon of all ages, the final Antichristian Kingdom, and about the destruction of this present world and about the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, indeed saw great and wonderful things which were far beyond his own horizons. And not only was he given to see and to know of these things; he was also able to write and to express them. How was this possible for a "time-bound" creature like Isaiah? In the light of such facts it is simply folly to speak of the timeboundness of the sacred writers. They wrote concerning things which they could not possibly know, about things which they could not possibly understand, and about things which--if they knew and understood them--they could not possibly express adequately and accurately of themselves. And when they prophesied, they were even mystified by their own prophecies and were not even able to understand them as we are able to understand them. And so it is that we read of these prophets in I Peter 1: 10-12: "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

What, then, must we understand by organic inspiration?

In the light of all the preceding, are we not shut up to a view of inspiration which is essentially mechanical? Are we not shut up to a view which makes of the human writers nothing more than stocks and blocks? Must we not conclude that the Holy Spirit used the human writers as less than mere stenographers or amanuenses? Did He not use them as machines, as pens, as type-

writers, as tape-recorders or dictating machines?

By no means! From this point of view, it is simply a self-evident fact that the Holy Spirit did not evade, or by-pass, and did not suppress the personal, individual, rational, moral human natures of the sacred writers. But I would emphasize, too, that we must not be misled into thinking that there is a disjunction between this fact and the truth of divine inspiration. Certainly, in respect to their individuality, their personal characteristics, their style of writing, their time, their characteristics, and also with regard to the precise manner of expression and the words which they employed and the sentences which they penned, the sacred writers were not suppressed. These elements shine forth from every page of Holy Writ. They cannot, and they must not, and they need not be ignored. To ignore them is to miss something of the very wonder and the beauty of the Scriptures and of the marvel of divine inspiration. And I would add to this: with regard to all of these phenomena, there can be no question about it that the sacred writers remained the rational, moral subjects of their writings. When David wrote Psalm 23, that psalm was the expression of his personal faith and confidence: the "my" in "The Lord is my shepherd" must be given its full force. When the apostle Paul wrote a letter such as the very warm and personal letter to the Philippians, that letter was indeed his letter to them. To deny this would not only be sheer folly, but--I say again--it would be to detract from the wonder of inspiration.

But only too often organic inspiration is presented in such a way that it merely means that the Holy Spirit sought out and found men who were suitable for His purpose, and that then He simply used these men with all their individual characteristics, traits, and circumstances, just as He found them, be it then that He was selective in how He used them and in protecting them and preserving them against error. And this, then,--along with the entire two-factor theory--is presented as the whole of the theory of organic inspiration. I submit that this is not organic, but after all very, very mechanical.

No, to understand the true conception of organic inspiration we must broaden our view. We must remember, in the first place,

the truth that all things are the unfolding of the sovereign counsel of the Most High, and that, too, as He Himself executes, unfolds, realizes that counsel. As we stressed at the very beginning of this series of articles, from eternity God conceived of His people as one whole, one great organism, with Christ as the Head, and all the elect as members of His Body. This people He forms for Himself in time, in order that it may show forth His praises. He calls this people into being by the wonder of His grace and causes it to develop as His covenant people organically throughout the history of the world, from Paradise until the fulness of time, from the first advent of Christ till the consummation of all things at the end of this age. And this people of God's covenant develops in antithesis to the world of sin and darkness. It has a battle to fight, a struggle to pass through, much suffering to endure. Its history is not to be interpreted according to evolutionistic principles; nor is to be explained even in part on the basis of and from the principle of a common grace. This people is the wonder-work of God, wrought by His grace in Christ Jesus. From Adam to Christ, and from Christ's coming in the flesh to the end of the world, this people always appears as a wonder-people, always in the world, continually in the midst of tribulation and persecution, but always growing, ever preserved, evermore entering into the fulness of God's covenant, till they shall have attained to the perfect glory the Lord has in store for them according to His eternal counsel. Even as the plant grows from the seed, and as the tree grows from its root, so do God's people develop in the world.

Now, even as the people of God, so is the Bible the wonder-work of God's grace, designed to be a light for His people in the world. It is designed to be a light upon their path and a lamp unto their feet in the midst of the darkness of this present time. And even as the Lord conceived of the whole of His people as an organism in Christ from before the foundation of the world, so He conceived of the fulness of His Word as an organic whole. Hence, even as Christ is the head and the fulness of the body, the church, so He is the very heart and center of the revelation we possess in the written Word. This fact, that Scripture is

an organism--not a mere compilation of books, not a mere anthology --explains, by the way, why it is true that the people of God had --and could say that they had--the Word of God, even long before the canon of Scripture was complete and closed. Adam and Eve had the Word of God, principally and organically entire, when they had only the protevangel. The children of Israel had the Word of God when they had only the Law of Moses. The psalmist of Psalm 119 can speak repeatedly of the Word of God which he possessed and knew and loved, so that he could pen an entire psalm about it--many centuries before the Scriptures were completed. Why? This could never be true if Scripture were a mechanical whole: then one could only have said that he had part of the Word of God. The reason lies in the fact that Scripture is an organic whole, with Christ at the heart of it. Hence, even as the organism of the church has a history and grows organically, so there is an organic growth of God's revelation to His people; and the Bible comes into existence historically.

Moreover, it comes into existence through the operation of the Spirit of Christ working in special organs of the body, both in the old and new dispensations. Also these organs of inspiration--Moses and the prophets, David, Asaph, Matthew and Luke, Mark and John, Paul and Peter, James and Jude--are ordained for this purpose from before the foundation of the world. And as they are ordained from eternity, so in time they are called and prepared to serve as instruments of inspiration, the writers of Holy Scripture. And let it be stressed, they are ordained and prepared not merely as holy men, not merely as regenerated and sanctified saints, but as organs of inspiration. They are ordained and prepared as such organs not merely in general, but in every minute detail of their personalities, their traits of character, their language and style, their circumstances and place in history, their personal experiences--in every detail of all these which must at all enter into their functioning as organs of inspiration and writers of the Word of God. It is very evident that this extends even to the facts of the sins and the deep falls, as well as to all other facets of these organs of

inspiration. It is often pointed out that David would never have written Psalm 23, had he not been the shepherd of his father's flock; and he was from eternity ordained to be that shepherd, in order that he might serve as the instrument of revelation and inspiration in Psalm 23. But do not forget that this also pertains to the fact of David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. It also pertains to his stubborn walking in that sin for a long time, as well as to his conversion therefrom. Otherwise he would never have been able to write Psalm 32 and Psalm 51.

Hence, we must not conceive of these organs of inspiration as a merely human framework or fabric upon which the Holy Spirit works the texture of His revealed Word. We must not conceive of inspiration thus, that in the marketplace of humanity the Holy Spirit discovers men, even children of God, holy men, whom He finds to be suitable for His purposes and whom He then uses for the production of Scripture. On the contrary, they are ordained and prepared, are themselves the wonderwork of God's grace, with their talents and individual characteristics, their circumstances and experiences, their battles and struggles, their sufferings and persecutions, in order that each in his own place and in his own manner might serve to write infallibly the Word of God. And then these organs of inspiration, thus ordained and prepared, are infallibly guided to write the Word of God as it is revealed to them. Only thus can we somewhat understand that amid all the diversity from an external point of view, there is the most complete harmony and organic unity, but also perfection of expression and communication of God's revelation, in Holy Writ.

Summarizing then, we would distinguish the following elements in the truth of organic inspiration:

- 1) Just as God conceived sovereignly and from eternity of His people as an organism in Christ, so He conceived in His eternal counsel of the whole of Scripture as an organism, the written revelation of Himself, with Christ as the heart and center of that entire revelation. Moreover, as God conceived of Scripture eternally, so He Himself brought it, sovereignly, into being in time.

- 2) God from eternity and sovereignly conceived of and

determined upon special organs of Christ's body, organs of inspiration, and ordained all the details of their personality, character, talents, education, mode of thinking, style of writing, personal experiences, and historical experiences in such a way that they were from eternity prepared to be fit instruments of divine inspiration, each in his own place in the organism of Scripture, and to the end that Scripture might be brought into being as the perfect, flawless Word of God written. And again, as He ordained them in eternity, so He realized them in time.

3) Thus, the Holy Spirit, and that, too, as the Spirit of Christ, called these divinely ordained organs of inspiration into existence in time, forming them and preparing them, both naturally and spiritually, for their divinely ordained task.

4) Thus also the same Spirit inspired, moved, illumined, guided, and actually caused these human instruments, thus ordained and prepared and called, to speak and to write infallibly God's own Word.

And what, then, about the objection that this makes the human writers "too passive?" What about the objection that the very term instrument of inspiration tends to make of the human writers stocks and blocks?

These very objections point us to the fact that the key to the understanding of organic inspiration is that grand and fundamental principle of the absolute sovereignty of the God of our salvation. God is sovereign and free, both in His counsel and in the execution of that counsel. God is independent; man is dependent in his very existence, even when that existence is a rational, moral existence. This is true also with respect to inspiration, as is very evident in the above description. And it is my contention that unless we are willing to proceed from the principles of God's sovereignty and of His eternal counsel and His sovereign realization of His own counsel as a working principle, we shall never be able to understand properly any of the work of God's grace, including that of Holy Scripture. Unless we are willing to understand that all that belongs to the production of Holy Scripture, including the human writers them-

selves, is subsumed under the embrace of the absolutely sovereign will and activity of the Most High, we shall never be able to maintain the truth that "Sacra Scriptura Verbum Dei est," but will fall victim to views which are principally synergistic and dualistic.

One may answer these objections by pointing out that they are essentially rationalistic, not Scriptural, even as is the objection that the doctrine of justification makes men careless and profane and even as the objection that the doctrine of sovereign predestination makes men stocks and blocks and is a denial of their rational, moral, responsible nature.

One may also answer these objections by pointing out that Scripture never hesitates to employ language against which these same objectors would be compelled to register this objection. Thus, for example, it speaks of Assyria as the axe wherewith God heweth and the saw which He draweth. It speaks of the king's heart being in the hand of the Lord as rivers of water. It speaks of men as clay in the hands of the Sovereign Potter. It speaks of God's people as being hewn from a rock. So, too, in connection with Scripture's inspiration, it can simply say that God breathed and that the result was Scripture, as though there were no men involved whatsoever. And it can even say that "prophecy came not in old time by the will of man." Would you caution that Scripture must be careful not to make of men stocks and blocks? That would be too brazen and audacious a word of caution!

In the third place, we may make a comparison here between the nature and manner of inspiration and the manner of God's operation in the work of salvation.

We confess that God's grace is irresistible, or efficacious, and that all of the work of salvation as applied to the elect is from beginning to end the work of the sovereign God. What does this mean? When the Almighty regenerates a man, can that man possibly remain a dead sinner? Of course not! When He works saving faith in the elect, is it possible for them not to believe? Absolutely not! When He converts, is it possible for a man not to turn from his evil way? Absolutely impossible! When He

preserves the saint, is it possible for that saint not to persevere? Again, absolutely impossible! Well, then, does all this work of irresistible grace make that man a mere puppet, a machine, a stock and block? By no means! What then? Must we somehow, after all, limit the sovereignty of God? Must we place the responsibility of man in irreconcilable opposition to the sovereignty of God, and say, "Yes, but man is also responsible?" Not at all. But can we say nothing at all about the manner of this work of the Lord our God? Yes, we can. We may say, first of all, that in His sovereign work of grace man is embraced and controlled and motivated and moved and actuated precisely as a rational, moral creature. The Lord of heaven and earth, in His sovereignty over His creatures, always works upon and in those creatures in a way that is in harmony with the nature which He Himself has given them. He operates in a tree in harmony with its tree-nature; He operates in a fish in harmony with its fish-nature; and He also operates in a man in harmony with the human nature which He Himself has given him. Hence, in the second place, in His sovereignty God does not ignore that rational and moral nature of man. No, He sovereignly upholds and governs man in a way that is in harmony with his nature. He does not intervene between that man's nature and his actions. He does not hang the fruit of the act of believing upon the tree of an unbelieving heart. He does not hang the fruits of good works upon the tree of an unregenerate nature. No, in His work of salvation He with absolute sovereignty operates upon, or rather, in that nature itself, in man's heart and mind and will, and changes a man ethically from darkness to light. The result is, both objectively and before the man's own consciousness, that he remains a thinking and willing creature. That man believes, repents, is sorry for sin, pleads for forgiveness, fights against sin, delights in God's commandments, walks in all good works, etc. But the result is, too, that that very man himself will confess: "It is not I, but God working in me to will and to do according to His good pleasure. It is all of sovereign grace, not at all of me. God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all my salvation."

Although we freely concede that the comparison does not hold on every point--chiefly because in inspiration God operates in such a way that the sacred writers write infallibly--yet the manner of God's operation may be said to be fundamentally the same. Nothing is imposed upon the sacred writers. There is no external compulsion without internal impulse. The Spirit employs them in a ways that is formally in harmony with their God-given, rational and moral nature; and He also employs them in a way that is materially in harmony with their nature, that is, with their nature as it was changed from darkness to light by the power of grace; and He also employs them fully in harmony with all their personal and conscious experiences, needs, desires, activities, history, et cetera, which He Himself ordained and realizes.

Mysterious? Indeed! Unfathomable? Beyond a doubt! Can you and I describe exactly what takes place at the point where the Spirit of God touches the heart and mind and will of holy men in such a way that they infallibly write God's Word and yet write it as men? No; but there is no need of it.

If only we believe, and stand in awe of this wonderful work of God, and in unending gratitude hold fast to His infallible Word!
